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Topmost Naxal leader Basavaraju among 27 killed in Chhattisgarh encounter



NARAYANPUR (CHHATTISGARH), May 21: Topmost leader and the backbone of the Naxal movement, Nambala Keshav Rao alias Basavaraju, and 26 other dreaded Maoists were killed by security forces in a fierce encounter in the dense forests of Abhujmad in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh on Wednesday.

Hailing the operation, Prime

Minister Narendra Modi said he was proud of the security forces for the "remarkable success", while Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed it a "landmark achievement" in the battle to eliminate Naxalism.

Police said the gunfight took place in dense forests of Abhujmad on the tri-junction of Narayanpur-Bijapur-Dantewada districts.

The operation was launched two days back following intelligence inputs about the presence of Central Committee and Politburo members of the CPI (Maoists) as well as senior Maad Division cadres and PLGA (Peoples' Liberation Guerrilla Army) members.

So far, bodies of 27 Naxalites and a large number of weapons have been recovered from the spot. A member of the District Reserve Guard (DRG), a unit of Chhattisgarh Police, was also killed in the action while some others sustained injuries, police said.

PM Modi said he was proud of the security forces who killed 27 Maoists in Chhattisgarh.

"Proud of our forces for this remarkable success. Our Government is committed to eliminating the menace of Maoism and ensuring a life of peace and progress for our people," he stated on X. The union home (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta, Police discuss roadmap for new-age crimes

GUWAHATI, May 21: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and senior police officers of the state deliberated on a roadmap to equip the force with necessary expertise and tools to deal with "new-age crimes", officials said.

The fifth conference of SPs at Dergaon in Golaghat on Tuesday also focused on professionalism and future-ready policing.

"Concluded a productive Day 1 at the Conference of SPs at LBP Academy, Dergaon," Sarma, who is also the state's home minister, said in a post on X.

"We deliberated for over 13 hours on a roadmap to equip Assam Police with the right tools and framework to deal with new-age crime, promote smart policing and keep citizen interests foremost. More updates tomorrow!" he said on Tuesday evening. Assam Police, in another post, said it is moving forward on the path of transformation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Guwahati airport witnesses record 65 lakh passengers in 2024-25

GUWAHATI, May 21: The Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International (LGBI) Airport in Guwahati on Wednesday said it has handled more than 65 lakh passengers, including 91,000 international ones, in the 2024-25 financial year.

The Adani Group-controlled airport, in a statement, said that it successfully managed more than 46,000 flights, ensuring smooth operations for passengers during the last fiscal.

"The Airport successfully managed 6.57 million passengers, with 3.26 million domestic arrivals and 3.30 million domestic departures, and 91,594 international passengers," it said.

In the year-ago period, the airport had handled a total of 6.33 million passengers, including around 37,500 international flyers.

In FY'25, a total of 46,418 Aircraft Traffic Movements (ATMs), including 1,009 international ones, were recorded compared to 45,400 flights, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

26/11 attackers were killed but Pahalgam terrorists still free: Cong

NEW DELHI, May 21: The Congress on Wednesday said India got the support of countries following the 26/11 attack as the perpetrators were killed and one was arrested but after the Pahalgam attack, the government is sending diplomatic delegations abroad and preparing a dossier while the terrorists remain at large.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh lashed out at the BJP for its criticism of Rahul Gandhi and said it should instead channel its energies to target Pakistan and China.

"The BJP must answer who gave a clean chit to Mohammad Ali Jinnah and praised him? Jaswant Singh and L K Advani had lauded him and called him a great leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had taken out the Lahore bus yatra and it was none other than Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had gone

to Lahore to break bread with Nawaz Sharif," Ramesh told PTI here.

He also recalled that it was former prime minister Morarji Desai who got Pakistan's highest civilian honour 'Nishan-e-Pakistan'. The BJP must recall that Desai's cabinet had Atal Bihari Vajpayee as the external affairs minister, he added.

Hitting out at the government, Ramesh asked why the terrorists behind the April 22 Pahalgam attack had not been arrested even a month after the incident.

He pointed out that the terrorists who carried out the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks were killed and one was arrested, due to which India got the support of countries across the globe. "Look at the current situation, we are preparing a dossier and sending diplomatic delegations abroad but the terrorists are at large. They must be arrested and interrogated, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam Cabinet approves concert tourism, solar power generation policies

DERGAON, May 21: The Assam Cabinet on Wednesday approved policies for concert tourism and solar power generation, and the upgradation of Khanikar Stadium in Dibrugarh into the largest such facility in the state.

It also gave its nod to provide personal security to individuals with credible threat perceptions against payment of remuneration to the government.

Addressing a press conference at Dergaon in Golaghat district after chairing the Cabinet meet, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "Individuals, facing credible threats, can now apply for personal security, subject to the condition that they must pay a remuneration to the government. This facility will be granted only after a due assessment of the threat perception."

He said the Cabinet has approved a new policy for the Concert Economy.

"Our state was losing out on the Concert Economy to other states, including our neighbour Meghalaya. This policy aims to position Assam as a premier music and entertainment tourism hub to host large-scale concerts and music festivals," Sarma said.

Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Jorhat will be developed as concert tourism hubs under



this policy, he said, adding that the first such programme will be organised in December in Guwahati.

The Cabinet has okayed 'Assam Solar Power Generation Promotion Policy 2025', which aims to generate 3,500 MW capacity by 2030 and attract public and private investments to create 15,000 jobs, the chief minister said.

A proposal for notification to include over 47,000 hectares of land under the 6th addition to Kaziranga National Park has also been green-lighted, Sarma said.

Some of the areas, included originally under the 6th addition, have been kept out, though inclusion of new places has ensured

that the total area of the sanctuary has increased, he added.

The chief minister said that ₹ 209 crore has been approved to upgrade Khanikar Stadium in Dibrugarh from a 5,000 to a 35,000-seat capacity, which will make it the largest stadium in the state.

The council of ministers also gave its nod to a proposal of spending ₹284 crore for the construction of an Assam Assembly building in Dibrugarh, including an MLA hostel and an auditorium with a 1000-seat capacity, he added.

Sarma said that the Cabinet has sanctioned over ₹ 205 crore as the last and final share of investment of the Government of Assam's committed contribution to the expansion of the Numaligarh Refinery Ltd.

"With this, the government of Assam will complete the investment of ₹ 823 crore for NRL's expansion as committed earlier," he added.

Sarma said administrative approval has also been given for the Phase 2 construction and development of residential quarters and associated facilities at the Lachit Barphukan Police Academy, Dergaon, at a cost of ₹ 229.41 crore, which is expected to be completed in two years. (PTI)

Comparing Gaurav's Pak visit with that of BJP stalwarts like equating apples with oranges: Himanta

DERGAON, May 21: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's comparison of his visit to Pakistan with that of BJP stalwarts like L K Advani was like equating "apples with oranges".

Countering Sarma's remarks against his visit to Pakistan, Gogoi had said on Tuesday that many senior BJP leaders, too, had earlier visited the neighbouring nation.

Sarma and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha, alleging that he and his British wife, Elizabeth Colburn, have links to Pakistan's ISI.

The CM on Sunday alleged that Gogoi had visited Pakistan on an invitation from its spy agency ISI, underwent training there, and worked closely with the establish-



ment of the neighbouring nation.

Gogoi has said the central government was fully aware of his visit to Pakistan, adding that he even deposited a copy of his passport and there was nothing to hide about his travel.

Addressing a press conference at Dergaon in Golaghat district on

Wednesday, Sarma said, "Be it Jaswant Singh, L K Advani or Narendra Modi, they went publicly, on government duty."

"He (Gogoi) is such a senior MP, deputy leader of a party, speaks so much about Manipur in Parliament, and someone like him cannot differentiate between apples and oranges," the chief minister said.

Sarma said during discussions between India and Pakistan, the respective prime ministers visit each other's country. "But, when the Indian prime minister goes, he has RAW personnel, Ministry of External Affairs personnel... a whole team of 40-50 people with him. Whatever is said is recorded... Going on national duty and going in a sly manner are different," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Map showing parts of Assam as B'desh's territory dismissed Map claim deserves no attention: Himanta

DERGAON, May 21: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday dismissed a purported map, published by a few individuals in Bangladesh, claiming parts of the northeastern state as the territory of the neighbouring country.

He asserted that Bangladesh is a "small" country and does not deserve "so much attention" as it "cannot match" India in its prowess.

"People can draw and publish such a map. We can also come out with a map showing Bangladesh as part of Assam. Even India and the US can be put together on a map. Just drawing up a map won't make it happen," Sarma said at a press conference in Dergaon in Golaghat district.

He was asked for his response to certain fundamentalists in Bangladesh, purportedly publishing a map of that country with parts of Assam included.

The chief minister said that if 'maulanas' (Muslim religious leaders) from Bangladesh have drawn such a map with Assam as part of their territory, 'purohiths (priests), pandits' of



India can also come out with a map including their Chittagong Port in India.

"A government cannot do it (publish such a map), but the people can," he said.

Sarma also claimed that if Bangladesh attacks the 'Chicken's Neck' corridor in West Bengal's Siliguri, India will strike back at its two narrow strips of land.

"They (Bangladesh) have two 'Chicken Necks', India has one. If they attack ours, we

will attack their two Chicken Necks. Their 'Chicken's Neck' near Meghalaya to Chittagong Port is much smaller than ours and can be choked by throwing even a ring," he said.

Sarma did not specify the second narrow strip of land of Bangladesh, which he referred to as the 'Chicken's Neck' of the neighbouring country.

The Chicken's Neck, known as the Siliguri Corridor, is a narrow strip of land, measuring around 22 km-35 km in width that connects the northeast region with the rest of India.

"We talk about our 'Chicken's Neck' so that we can get tunnel, other schemes from the central government," he added, indicating on development of alternative routes bypassing the Siliguri Corridor.

He asserted that India's strength can be gauged from 'Operation Sindoor' in which India struck terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

"Bangladesh doesn't deserve so much attention. It is a small country and cannot be compared with India," Sarma added. (PTI)

Guwahati waterlogging

Assam govt has approached SC panel over hill cutting in Meghalaya, says Himanta

DERGAON, May 21: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said his government has approached a Supreme Court committee regarding the cutting of hills in neighbouring Meghalaya, which he blamed for recurring waterlogging in Guwahati.

Addressing a press conference at Dergaon in Golaghat district, he said if hill cutting continued in Meghalaya, Guwahati will become "an ocean".

"Be it Guwahati or other big cities, there is no way that artificial floods can be completely prevented. Every year, we fill up more empty plots of land and construct buildings," he said. Blaming hill cutting in adjacent Meghalaya for waterlogging in Guwahati, he said, "Earlier, there was only USTM. Recently, I saw that two more buildings are being built by cutting hills in Meghalaya."

The chief minister had last year held the University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya (USTM), responsible for "flood jihad" against Guwahati,

claiming that the water flowing down from its campus, located on a hill adjacent to the city, leads to massive flooding. Sarma said that an application had been submitted by the state government before an empowered committee of the Supreme Court, urging them to inspect the hills. "In two-three months, we expect a positive result. We have submitted before the empowered committee that if Meghalaya continues cutting hills like this, the entire Guwahati will become an ocean," he added.

The city had witnessed massive waterlogging on Tuesday after a spell of heavy rains the night before, with several localities remaining inundated even after 24 hours. People were seen wading through knee-deep waters in some areas, while the water level reached the chest in some areas. The Gauhati High Court last year criticised Sarma's government, stating that it was "not serious" in solving the perennial waterlogging problem in the city. (PTI)

BJP charts strategy for 2026 polls in Jorhat meet

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 21: Top leaders of the State Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), including Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal, and Union minister of State Pabitra Margherita, discussed strategies and plans for the 2026 Assembly elections at an extended executive meeting held in Jorhat on Wednesday.

The meeting took place at the Jorhat District Sports Association (JDSA) ground.

According to party sources, the chief minister, in his address, referred to the current political scenario, including the BJP's landslide victory in the recent panchayat polls. He congratulated the party workers for their efforts but emphasised that this was not the

time to celebrate. Instead, he urged the party to prepare for a bigger celebration by ensuring victory in the Assembly elections, now just eight months away.

Sarma called for strengthening the party's base in both rural and urban areas. He also urged Ministers, MLAs, and MPs to ensure that party workers and supporters actively engage with the public and spread awareness about the development and welfare initiatives of the BJP-led governments at both the State and Central levels.

He further emphasised the importance of taking feedback from the people about their grievances so the government could take appropriate steps to address them. Additionally, Sarma warned against internal divisions within the party and infighting among

supporters.

As part of the grassroots strategy, he announced that 20 youths would be recruited at each booth level to strengthen the party's presence on the ground.

Speaking to reporters after the programme, Sonowal said the party had reviewed the political scenario following the panchayat polls and discussed the future course of action.

The closed-door meeting, presided over by State BJP president and Darrang-Udalguri MP Dilip Saikia, was attended by Assam Cabinet ministers, MPs, MLAs, BJP Prabhari (in-charge) for Assam Harish Dwivedi, state organising secretary Ravindra Raju, all district BJP presidents, their respective prabharis, and state office-bearers.

Karbi film 'Kangbo Aloti' makes history with UK and China distribution deal

'A momentous occasion for our Karbi Cinema'

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 21: In a historic moment for Karbi and Assamese cinema, the Karbi-language film Kangbo Aloti (The Lost Path), directed by Khanjan Kishore Nath, has secured theatrical and other distribution rights in the United Kingdom (UK) and China.

This groundbreaking achievement comes through collaboration with the London-based UK China Film Colab Distribution Company, marking the first time a Karbi-language film will reach international audiences.

The announcement was made by director Khanjan Kishore Nath during the 78th Festival International du Film, currently being held in Cannes, France, from May 13 to 24.

"We're thrilled to announce that our Karbi-language film has made history! For the first time ever, Kangbo Aloti

(The Lost Path) has secured theatrical and other distribution rights in the UK and China, thanks to our partnership with the London-based UK China Film Colab Distribution Company," director Nath said in a social media post.

He further noted that this milestone represents a significant step forward not only for Karbi cinema but for Assamese cinema as a whole.

"We are taking our story global. We are grateful for this opportunity to share our culture with a broader audience. A huge thank you to UK China Film Colab Distribution Company for believing in our project. We're excited to see our film on global platforms," he added.

Meanwhile, chief executive member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, congratulated the team through a post

on his social media page:

"A momentous occasion for our Karbi Cinema. I extend my warmest congratulations to the entire team behind Kangbo Aloti (The Lost Path) on their historic achievement! Our Karbi-language film is the first to secure theatrical and other distribution rights in the UK and China, thanks to UK China Film Colab. We're taking our story global," Ronghang said.

Producer and actor Ranjit Teron informed that the film has a runtime of 1 hour and 50 minutes and was shot across various locations in the West Karbi Anglong district. He noted that some official work remains, and the film will require a few more months to complete. Renowned actors and actresses from the Karbi film community were involved in the project. Teron shared that (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Interim trade deal with US likely by July 8 India for full exemption from 26 pc additional tariff

NEW DELHI, May 21: India and the US are likely to agree on an interim trade agreement before July 8 with New Delhi pushing for full exemption from the 26 per cent reciprocal tariff on domestic goods, an official said.

The US on April 2 imposed an additional 26 per cent reciprocal tariff on Indian goods but suspended it for 90 days till July 9. However, the 10 per cent baseline tariff imposed by America remains in place. The government official said India's endeavour to protect its sensitive sectors may entail some quota or minimum import price (MIP). Such sectors include agri goods and dairy.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal was in Washington earlier this week to give an impetus to trade talks. He met with US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer and US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick.

In a post on X, Goyal said that he held good discussions with the US Commerce Secretary towards expediting the first tranche of India-US bilateral trade agreement. "Talks are moving positively. Before July 8, we are looking at concluding an interim deal before the first tranche. It will include goods, non-tariff barriers, some areas of services also like digital. We are trying that the 26 per cent additional duty and the 10 per cent baseline tariff should not be there



for India," the official said, adding that India is seeking concessions for its labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and leather.

At present, the Trump administration requires approval from the US Congress to bring tariffs below the MFN (most favoured nation) rates. But the administration has the authority to remove the reciprocal tariffs imposed on a number of countries, including India.

India may look at certain commitments from the US on the duty concessions for its labour-intensive sector in the first tranche of the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA). Both countries have fixed a deadline to conclude the first phase of the pact by fall (September-October) of this year to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030. The minister-

level meetings were followed by the deliberations between chief negotiators of the two countries, which will continue until May 22.

Officials from New Delhi and Washington are looking to take advantage of the 90-day tariff pause window to advance the talks. The US has suspended the additional 26 per cent tariffs on India till July 9. It was announced on April 2 to bridge the widening trade deficit. 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, automo-

biles (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).

The US has on multiple occasions raised concerns over certain non-tariff barriers being faced by American goods in the Indian markets. Whether another round of talks will happen on the proposed pact between the two countries, the official said, "We are trying to finalise things as early as possible."

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

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

Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at 85.59 against US dollar

MUMBAI, May 21: The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day down by 1 paisa at 85.59 against the US dollar on Wednesday, on dollar demand from importers and foreign banks as well as surge in crude oil prices.

Forex traders said market sentiment soured under pressure from rising US Treasury yields and persistent foreign fund outflows. However, positive domestic markets and a weak US dollar index cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.65 and moved between an intra-day high of 85.53 and a low of 85.70 against the greenback. The unit ended the session lower at 85.59, registering a fall of 1 paisa over its previous closing level. On Tuesday, the rupee depreciated 16 paise to close at 85.58 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on importer demand for dollar and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. Elevated crude oil prices may also weigh on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

However, rise in risk appetite in global markets amid easing trade war fears may support the rupee, Choudhary said, adding that USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.40 to 86.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.46 per cent at 99.66.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 1.04 per cent to USD 66.06 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 410.19 points, or 0.51 per cent, to close at 81,596.63, while the Nifty rose 129.55 points, or 0.52 per cent, to 24,813.45. (PTI)

Stock markets snap 3-day decline on buying in banking shares

MUMBAI, May 21: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Wednesday, snapping their three-day falling streak on the back of buying in blue-chips HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank and a firm trend in Asian peers.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 410.19 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 81,596.63 with 24 of its constituents ending higher and six ending lower. During the day, it surged 835.2 points or 1.02 per cent to a high of 82,021.64.

The NSE Nifty climbed 129.55 points or 0.52 per cent to 24,813.45. Among Sensex firms, Bajaj Finserv rose the most by 2.02 per cent. Tata Steel, Sun Pharma, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, Nestle, Tata Motors, Hindustan Unilever and Mahindra & Mahindra also advanced.

IndusInd Bank fell the most by 1.39 per cent. Kotak Mahindra Bank, Power Grid and ITC were among the laggards.

Moody's Ratings said on

Wednesday said India is well-positioned to deal with the negative effects of US tariffs and global trade disruptions as domestic growth drivers and low dependence on exports anchor the economy.

In a note on India, the agency said government initiatives to boost private consumption, expand manufacturing capacity and increase infrastructure spending will help offset the weakening outlook for global demand.

The BSE midcap gauge advanced 0.90 per cent and smallcap index by 0.51 per cent. Among sectoral indices, capital goods (1.65 per cent), realty (1.58 per cent), industrials (1.35 per cent), healthcare (0.93 per cent) and tech (0.81 per cent) were the gainers.

Consumer durables emerged as the only laggard. As many as 2,292 stocks advanced while 1,685 declined and 138 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Among Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE

Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng in settled in the positive territory while Japan's Nikkei 225 index ended lower.

Markets in Europe were trading in the negative territory. US markets ended lower on Tuesday.

"Markets exhibited a broadly positive undertone today; however, overall sentiment remained confined within a narrow range, indicating risk of 'sell on rallies' strategy in the near future amid escalating uncertainty around India-US trade negotiations," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 1.19 per cent to USD 66.16 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹10,016.10 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Sensex tanked 872.98 points or 1.06 per cent to settle at 81,186.44 while Nifty tumbled 261.55 points or 1.05 per cent to 24,683.90. (PTI)

IndiGo posts highest Q4 profit of ₹ 3,068 crore on strong air travel demand

NEW DELHI, May 21: InterGlobe Aviation, the parent of the country's largest airline IndiGo, on Wednesday posted its highest-ever fourth quarter profit after tax of ₹ 3,067.5 crore, mainly helped by strong air travel demand.

The company's profit after tax in the three months ended March 2025 jumped 62 per cent from ₹ 1,894.8 crore in the year-ago period. Its board has recommended a dividend of ₹ 10 per equity share.

In the fourth quarter of the 2024-25 fiscal, IndiGo's capacity increased 21 per cent to 42.1 billion while the number of passengers carried rose 19.6 per cent to 31.9 million, according to a release.

Total income rose to ₹ 23,097.5 crore in the fourth quarter of the 2024-25 financial year from ₹ 18,505.1 crore in the same period a year ago. "Driven by strong

demand for air travel and execution of our strategy, for the financial year ended March 2025, IndiGo reported a healthy net profit of ₹ 72,584 million. Excluding the impact of foreign exchange, IndiGo reported a net profit of ₹ 88,676 million, maintaining similar strong performance to the last year.

"For the quarter ended March 2025, IndiGo reported a net profit of ₹ 30,675 million, the highest fourth quarter ever," the release said.

In the March quarter, IndiGo's passenger ticket revenues climbed 25.4 per cent to ₹ 195,673 million and ancillary revenues increased 25.2 per cent to ₹ 21,525 million compared to the same period a year ago.

At a briefing about the results, IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said the airline carried 118 million passengers in 2024-25. (PTI)

India, EU looking for early harvest trade agreement by July: Official

NEW DELHI, May 21: Negotiations for a proposed trade pact between India and the 27-nation European Union are progressing at a faster pace and both the sides are looking at concluding the talks for an early harvest trade agreement by July this year, a government official said on Wednesday.

The early harvest or an interim trade agreement would include issues such as intellectual property rights (IPRs), government procurement, tariff, and non-tariff barriers, the official said.

An Indian official team from the commerce ministry is visiting Brussels this week for the next round of negotiations on the trade agreement with the European Union (EU). This visit comes in the backdrop of recently-concluded eleventh round of talks between chief negotiators of both the sides on May 16 here in the national capital.

"We are looking for an early harvest. We are trying to do it as early as possible...targeting by July for early harvest," the official added. The two sides have agreed to conclude the agreement in two phases on account of the uncertain



global trade environment, particularly due to the US tariff actions under President Donald Trump.

India has followed the practice of negotiating trade pacts in two phases with Australia.

The early harvest pact would lead to a full fledged free trade agreement.

Besides demanding significant duty cuts in automobiles and medical devices, the EU wants tax reduction in products like wines, spirits, meat, poultry and a strong intellectual property regime. Indian goods' exports to the EU, such

as ready-made garments, pharmaceuticals, steel, petroleum products, and electrical machinery, can become more competitive if the pact gets concluded successfully.

In June 2022, India and the 27-nation EU bloc resumed negotiations for a comprehensive free trade agreement, an investment protection agreement and a pact on geographical indications (GIs) after a gap of over eight years.

It stalled in 2013 due to differences over the level of opening up of the markets.

On February 28, Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and the European Commission President agreed to seal a much-awaited free trade deal by the end of this year.

The India-EU trade pact negotiations cover 23 policy areas or chapters, including Trade in Goods, Trade in Services, Investment, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Technical Barriers to Trade, Trade Remedies, Rules of Origin, Customs and Trade Facilitation, Competition, Trade Defence, Government Procurement, Dispute Settlement, Intellectual Property Rights, Geographical Indications, and Sustainable Development. India's bilateral trade in goods with the EU was USD 137.41 billion in 2023-24 (exports worth USD 75.92 billion and imports worth USD 61.48 billion), making it the largest trading partner for goods.

The EU market accounts for about 17 per cent of India's total exports, while EU's exports to India make up 9 per cent of its total overseas shipments.

In addition, the bilateral trade in services, in 2023, between India and the EU was estimated at USD 51.45 billion. (PTI)

India's track and trace rollout applauded by PMI as key step in combating illicit tobacco trade

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 21: Philip Morris International Inc. (PMI), through its India affiliate IPM India, has welcomed the government's decision to implement a pack-level Track and Trace (T&T) mechanism for tobacco products, calling it a "landmark reform" that could significantly curb illicit trade and modernise enforcement across the industry.

According to an official statement issued by the company, the move—approved under Section 148A of the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Act—aims to enhance transparency, protect revenue, and strengthen supply chain oversight.

Beginning with cigarette packs, the system is expected to introduce unique identification markings that will allow enforcement agencies to easily distinguish tax-paid products from illegal ones.

"This is a visionary step towards a cleaner, more modern, and transparent market," said Navaneel Kar, Managing Director of IPM India.

"With thoughtful execution, India's T&T system can reshape the fight against illicit tobacco trade—boosting public trust, strengthening government revenues, and accelerating the modernization of enforcement practices," he added.

PMI has implemented similar traceability systems in over 140 markets globally, including within the European Union under the Tobacco Products Directive, and in countries such as the United Kingdom, Russia, Jordan, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

According to the company, these efforts have led to

stronger compliance, improved visibility in supply chains, and measurable reductions in illicit trade.

The statement emphasised that the illicit tobacco trade is not only a revenue issue but also a significant public health risk and a threat to lawful businesses.

"Track and Trace is a proven tool for modernizing supply chains and enforcement. It protects consumers, ensures tax collection, and promotes fair competition," it noted.

India's ratification of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, aligned with Article 15 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), further reinforces its global commitment to tackling this challenge.

As one of the largest tobacco markets and a major transit point, India's leadership could have a far-reaching impact on regional and international regulatory standards.

While highlighting the potential of digital T&T systems, PMI also stressed the importance of collaboration among stakeholders.

"Technology alone won't deliver results," the company cautioned, "successful implementation depends on cooperation between governments, industry players, and technology providers."

Looking ahead, the rollout of the T&T mechanism may serve as a foundation for broader supply chain reforms. With continued innovation and strategic partnerships, India is positioned to build what PMI described as "one of the world's most resilient, transparent, and future-ready regulatory ecosystems."

Fraud-hit IndusInd Bank reports ₹ 2,329-cr net loss in Q4, FY25 profit tanks 71 pc

NEW DELHI, May 21: Beleaguered IndusInd Bank on Wednesday reported a consolidated net loss of ₹ 2,329 crore for the March quarter hurt by higher provisioning towards accounting frauds, as its board, suspecting involvement of certain employees, directed the bank to report the matter to investigative agencies and regulatory authorities.

Accounting lapses, fraud in microfinance portfolio as well as balance sheet disclosures have rattled the private sector bank, which had ordered an internal audit review, seen top-level resignations, and is undergoing a forensics probe. The bank had reported a consolidated net profit of ₹ 2,349 crore in the March quarter of 2023-24.

For full fiscal FY2024-25, the net profit plunged 71 per cent to ₹ 2,576 crore. During the Q4 of FY'25, IndusInd Bank made a provisioning of ₹ 2,522 crore, up nearly three-fold from ₹ 950 crore set aside in the corresponding period in FY'24. The bank's interest income during the quarter fell 13 per cent to ₹ 10,634 crore from ₹ 12,199 crore in the March quarter of FY'24. In March, the bank reported a ₹ 1,979 crore accounting lapse in its derivative portfolio, followed by its internal audit review finding ₹ 674 crore incorrectly recorded as interest from

microfinance business, besides a ₹ 595 crore unsubstantiated balances in "other assets" of balance sheet.

On April 29, CEO Sumant Kathalia and Deputy CEO Arun Khurana resigned from the bank, following which IndusInd Board appointed a Committee of Executives to oversee the operations of the bank, till a new MD & CEO assumes charge or a period of 3 months. "... the Bank has taken several measures to understand the root cause of the identified irregularities, ascertain the financial impact and take corrective actions as well as fix accountability..." IndusInd Bank said in a regulatory disclosure. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Topmost Naxal leader Basavaraju

minister said this was for the first time in three decades of India's battle against Naxalism that a general secretary-ranked leader has been neutralised by the security forces.

"A landmark achievement in the battle to eliminate Naxalism. Today, in an operation in Narayanpur, Chhattisgarh, our security forces have neutralised 27 dreaded Maoists, including Nambala Keshav Rao, alias Basavaraju, the general secretary of CPI-Maoist, the topmost leader, and the backbone of the Naxal movement," Shah wrote on X. Applauding the "brave security forces and agencies for this major breakthrough", the home minister said he was glad to share that after the completion of Operation Black Forest, 54 Naxalites have been arrested and 84 others have surrendered in Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and Maharashtra.

"The Modi government is resolved to eliminate Naxalism before the 31st of March 2026," he said. Basavaraju was in his early 70s, officials said.

Hailing from undivided Andhra Pradesh, Basavaraju was the brain behind several major attacks on security forces in Chhattisgarh. He was associated with the banned movement since the 1970s and elevated to the top post in CPI (Maoist) seven years ago, when Naxal activities in their stronghold Bastar region were appearing to be wearing out, officials said.

A resident of Jyannapeta village in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, Basavaraju holds a B.Tech degree from the Regional Engineering College, Warangal, and was seen as an enigmatic leader of the outlawed Naxal outfit. Known by the aliases of Prakash, Krishna, Vijay, Umesh and Kamli, he joined the armed movement as a ground-level organiser. He was considered to have developed expertise in imparting military training and triggering explosives and landmines. Basavaraju's age and looks are still a matter of speculation, with security agencies suggesting he was around 71 years of age. They have only a bundle of old photos from his youth.

Basavaraju carried a reward of Rs 1 crore on his head in Chhattisgarh. The governments of other states, including Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Telangana, have also announced rewards, an official said.

With the latest action, 200 Naxalites have been killed in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh so far this year. Of them, 183 were eliminated in the Bastar division, which includes districts of Bijapur, Narayanpur, Dantewada and Kondagaon. (PTI)

Himanta, Police discuss roadmap

to a citizen-centric force. "The Hon'ble CM's vision, leadership & guidance, has today taken Assam Police forward on the path of transformation from an anti-insurgency oriented force to a citizen-centric service," it said. (PTI)

Guwahati airport witnesses

including 582 to foreign destinations, in the previous year, the statement said. "LGBI Airport has expanded its international route network, introducing direct flights to Paro, Malaysia, and Singapore, contributing to increased international passenger traffic," it added.

The company said the airport launched three new domestic routes -- Guwahati-Ahmedabad, Guwahati-Durgapur and Guwahati-Ziro -- in the last fiscal. "LGBI Airport achieved substantial growth in cargo with 12,893 metric tonnes of cargo handled in FY 24-25, compared to 4,550 MT in FY 23-24, marking an impressive 183.91 per cent increase year-on-year," it said. As LGBI Airport continues to grow, it remains dedicated to delivering outstanding travel experiences and solidifying its position as a premier gateway to the Northeast, the statement said. The LGBI Airport is managed by Adani Airport Holdings Ltd, a subsidiary of Adani Enterprises Ltd. (PTI)

Comparing Gaurav's Pak visit

"He (Gogoi) is trying to justify who else has gone..." the CM said, reiterating that he will reveal all evidence in support of his claim against Gogoi and his Pakistan links on September 10.

"I have been in politics for 25 years, I know when to say what. In January itself, I had fixed September 10 and it won't be preponed or postponed," Sarma asserted. Asked about the possibility of the presence of people like Haryana YouTuber Jyoti Malhotra in Assam, Sarma said "our case is more serious".

"She is a young girl, worked as a spy; it is a different matter. She could not have returned and questioned about the presence of nuclear weapons and Rafale jets. But, our one asked in Parliament where are our nuclear weapons, Rafales and weaponry of the coast guard. If Jyoti is 10, ours is 100," he said, in an apparent reference to Gogoi. The National Investigation Agency, Intelligence Bureau and military intelligence officials have been questioning Malhotra, who was arrested recently on charges of spying for Pakistan. (PTI)

26/11 attackers were killed

that is the real issue," he said. Ramesh's remarks come amid a war of words between the Congress and the BJP over their leaders' statements on the India-Pakistan conflict. The BJP called Congress leader Rahul Gandhi "modern age Mir Jafar" and the opposition party hit back, describing External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar as "new age Jaichand".

The two parties have traded barbs over their remarks on Operation Sindoor and also posted memes on social media, each suggesting that the other has betrayed the nation. The Congress and Rahul Gandhi have attacked Jaishankar, alleging that he forewarned Pakistan about Operation Sindoor. It also asked how many planes India lost and how many terrorists escaped from their camps in Pakistan due to the minister's "warning".

Tensions between India and Pakistan escalated after the Pahalgam attack, which claimed 26 lives. India carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the early hours of May 7, following which Pakistan attempted to attack Indian military bases on May 8, 9 and 10. The Indian side responded strongly to the Pakistani actions.

The 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. (PTI)

Karbi film 'Kangbo Aloti' makes

the story revolves around the recruitment of terrorists in a remote village called Langchingbar in Karbi Anglong, and the intervention of a schoolteacher trying to prevent it.

"This is the gist of the film, and we hope audiences will appreciate it," said Teron.

Grassroots workers are being trained to effectively engage voters in the upcoming elections

UPPL confident of winning 30 seats in upcoming BTC Election: MP Ranagaura Narzary

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, May 21: Ahead of the upcoming Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) elections, the ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) has expressed strong confidence in securing victory in 30 out of 40 constituencies and forming the government independently. This was stated by UPPL Working President and Rajya Sabha MP Ranagaura Narzary during a training and workshop session held in Gossaigaon on Wednesday.

Narzary highlighted the achievements of the UPPL government over the past five years, noting that the party has fostered peace, harmony, and development in the BTC region. He said these efforts have strengthened the party's organizational base and public support. Emphasizing the leadership of BTC Chief Executive Member Pramod Boro, Narzary said the



government's commitment to peace and development has earned the trust of the people. UPPL plans to contest all 40 constituencies on its own, with no intention of forming alliances this election cycle.

Responding to claims made by BPF leader Hagrama Mohilary about returning to power, Narzary

criticized the BPF for their 15-year rule, which he described as a "politics of destruction." He recalled how the BPF failed to form the government after the 2020 BTC elections despite earlier victory claims, dismissing Mohilary's statements as baseless.

Narzary reiterated UPPL's dedi-

cation to the welfare of all communities in the region and outlined the party's detailed development plans. He said grassroots workers are being trained to effectively engage voters in the upcoming elections.

The workshop, organized by the Gossaigaon District Committee of UPPL and led by district president Anindya Basumatary, was attended by key party leaders including MLA Jiran Basumatary, EM Wilson Hasda, Ukil Musahary, MCLA Madhav Chetry, and Reo Reoa Narzary. Over a thousand primary committee workers from BTC constituencies under Gossaigaon and Parbatjhora subdivisions participated.

Narzary concluded by stating that the final decision rests with the people, who will choose the party best suited to bring peace, harmony, and progress to the BTC region.

BTC sets up high-level committee to probe book procurement irregularities

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 21: In response to allegations of irregularities amounting to around Rs 4 crore in the book procurement process within the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Department of Education, the BTC government has constituted a High-Level Committee to investigate the matter.

The committee was formed following recent media reports highlighting potential procurement anomalies. A notification issued by the Principal Secretary of BTC names Sabda Ram Rabha, Standing Counsel of BTC at the Gauhati High Court, as the Chairperson of the committee.

Other members include Dhiraj Saud, ACS and Secretary of BTC (Member Secretary), Sujit Baglari, ACS, Bidhan Das, Registrar of Bodoland University, and Saroj Kr Dora, AFS.

The committee commenced its work on May 20 and is expected to submit its findings within 15 days.

BTC Chief Executive Member Pramod Boro affirmed that the council has taken a firm stance against the alleged irregularities. He emphasized that the committee is adopting a rigorous approach to investigate the issue thoroughly and assured that anyone found guilty will not be spared.

Flood alert issued in Central Assam as NEEPCO opens gates at Khandong Dam

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 21: The NEEPCO has opened seven gates of the Khandong Dam in Dima Hasao, leading to a rise in the water level of the Kopili River.

The gates were opened due to the increased water level in the reservoir of the Kapili Hydro Power Station caused by incessant rains over couple of days. The water level is expected to continue rising, especially with ongoing rainfall in Dima Hasao and Meghalaya.

The rise in water level of the Kapili river has raised concerns about potential flooding in areas along the Kapili river, including Kamrup, Bokuluri, Padumoni, Koloni, Jamunamukh, Kachua, and others.

The Nagaon district administration has issued an alert, urging people living along the Kapili river to remain cautious. Although the rain has subsided in Kamrup, the water level in the Kopili river continues to rise.

According to sources from the Kopili Hydro Power Project, the seven gates of the Khandong Dam are open, and the water flow is currently natural.

Devastating fire guts e-scooty shop in Sivasagar



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 21: A massive fire broke out at an e-scooty showroom in Jaysagar, Sivasagar, causing extensive damage earlier recently. The incident resulted in the destruction of 26 electric scooters, according to the shop owner, Nekib Ahmed.

Ahmed reported that the blaze erupted suddenly with a loud burst while he was attending to a customer. "I was in the middle of a conversation when the fire started. It all happened very quickly," he said.

The cause of the fire remains unknown. However, the shop owner expressed dissatisfaction with the emergency response, alleging that the fire tenders arrived too late to contain the damage effectively.

Authorities are yet to confirm the cause of the incident, and an investigation is expected to follow.

Wai Wai Maker CG Corp Global eyes strategic ventures in Assam

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 21: CG Corp Global, one of South Asia's leading multinational conglomerates, has announced its intent to deepen investments in the state of Assam, focusing on the hospitality, tourism, FMCG, and manufacturing sectors. This announcement follows a meeting between CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and Varun Chaudhary, Managing Director of CG Corp Global, where the two discussed the group's expansion plans and opportunities in the region.

"Assam is fast emerging as a preferred destination for hospitality and F&B. I was pleased to meet Varun Chaudhary and discuss his group's desire to invest in Assam's growth story," said Sarma via social media.

Varun Chaudhary echoed the sentiment, stating, "We are excited about the possibilities Assam offers. With thousands of people already employed by CG Corp Global in Assam—especially through CG Foods and the iconic Wai Wai brand—the state continues to be a vital part of our operations in India and a strategic gateway to the Northeast."

CG Corp Global has a longstanding relationship with Assam through Wai Wai, one of India's most loved noodle brands, and is now looking to expand its footprint in the state through new ventures that contribute to job creation, infrastructure, and the regional economy.

With a presence in over 32 countries, CG Corp Global continues to reinforce its commitment to India's growth and regional development.

Wild elephants invade Tata Electronics Project Site in Jagiroad

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, May 21: A herd of wild elephants descended upon the construction site of the Tata Semiconductor and Assembly Project, currently being developed by Tata Electronics in Jagiroad, early this morning. The incident occurred when the elephants, reportedly in search of food, entered the premises from the nearby Sonakuchi Sanctuary during the early hours.

The herd caused damage to construction materials and temporary shelters erected at the site. The situation was brought under control after teams from the Forest Department and local police arrived and successfully drove the elephants back into the forest.

Locals pointed out that such incidents are not new to the area. Even during the operational period of the paper mills in Jagiroad, wild elephants

would occasionally venture into human settlements. Experts believe that the elephants are being forced out of their natural habitats due to food scarcity, prompting them to descend from the hills into the plains in search of sustenance.

Authorities are monitoring the situation, and efforts are underway to prevent further human-elephant conflict as development in the region progresses.

'Vikshit Krishi Sangkalp Abhiyan' to boost Kharif farming in KA

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 21: In line with similar initiatives across the country, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Karbi Anglong, is set to organize the national campaign "Vikshit Krishi Sangkalp Abhiyan" during the Pre-Kharif season from May 29 to June 12, 2025. The campaign is launched by the Department of Agricultural Research & Education (DARE) / Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (DA & FW), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India.

The initiative aims to create awareness among farmers about region-specific sustainable agricultural technologies related to major

Kharif crops grown in the district. It will promote the use of soil health cards to encourage the judicious application of fertilizers, including micronutrients. Additionally, the campaign will disseminate information on various government schemes and policies beneficial to farmers and gather valuable feedback to align future agricultural research and innovations with local needs.

Five development blocks—Lumbajong, Bokajan, Samelangso, Langsomepi, and Nilip—have been selected for the campaign, where activities will be conducted in multiple villages.

The program will be executed by two expert teams daily, each covering two locations. Each team

will comprise scientists from ICAR institutes, KVK, and Assam Agricultural University's Zonal Research Station, Diphu; field officers from relevant departments; banking officials; and experts from the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM). Each location is expected to reach around 200 farmers daily, with special focus on tribal, aspirational, and geographically challenging areas.

The campaign is expected to benefit farmers by introducing scientific techniques and innovations that will enhance crop production and productivity while reducing cultivation costs. Organizers are optimistic that the campaign will have a positive and lasting impact on agriculture in the region.

Army raises awareness on Anti Terrorism Day at Tinsukia

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, May 21: The Indian Army organized an engaging interactive session on National Anti-Terrorism Day with students, teachers and local residents of Borhat Jatiya Vidyalaya, DK Gaon and Daisajan in Tinsukia on Wednesday.

The event aimed to raise awareness among young minds about the perils of terrorism and violence, and their far-reaching consequences on society and the nation.

A total of 272 individuals, comprising 212 students, 25 teachers, and 35 local residents, actively participated in the event, fostering a sense of community and collective responsibility in the fight against terrorism.

NEFA Tea Industries leads vibrant celebration of International Tea Day in Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, May 21: A spirited celebration of International Tea Day was hosted by NEFA Tea Industries in Margherita on Tuesday, marking the occasion with enthusiasm, unity, and community engagement. The event brought together tea enthusiasts, industry leaders, and local stakeholders to honor the cultural and economic importance of one of the world's most cherished beverages.

Organised by the Federation of Indian Tea Manufacturers Association in collaboration with the Assam Bought Leaf Tea Manufacturers Association, North Bengal Tea Producers Welfare Association, and Nilgiri Bought Leaf Tea Manufacturers Association, the event saw participation from 15 Bought Leaf Tea factories across the Margherita Co-District.

The celebration aimed to promote tea as the second most consumed beverage in the world after water, while highlighting its deep-rooted significance in local livelihoods and the global economy.

The programme was inaugurated by Margherita Co-District Commissioner Parikshit Thoudam (IAS), who highlighted the United Nations' recognition of May 21st as International Tea Day in 2020, noting the growing popularity of tea globally and the rise of innovative tea startups in Assam that are expanding the beverage's reach and variety.

Speaking at the event, Aryan Kumar Choubey, Director of NEFA Tea Industries, shared his pride and vision:

"It's a moment of immense joy to celebrate International Tea Day. Tea is the world's most consumed beverage after water. Our mission is to boost per capita tea consumption in India to 1 kg per year and



make tea a staple in every household."

In a heartwarming community outreach initiative, NEFA Tea Industries distributed free tea and biscuits at multiple locations across Margherita, spreading cheer and encouraging public participation in the celebration.

The event was attended by several notable figures including Sanjeev Kumar Choubey, proprietor of NEFA Tea Industries, his sons Aryan Kumar Choubey and Shriyan Kumar Choubey, both serving as directors, along with Manager Ashok Agarwal and Senior Executive Kamlesh Kumar Dubey. Representatives from the Tirap Regional Small Tea Growers Association, including Bhabesh Medhi and Rudra Bahadur Chetry, also graced the occasion, reinforcing the collaborative spirit of the tea community.

The International Tea Day celebration at NEFA Tea Industries was a vibrant blend of tradition, innovation, and community spirit, reaffirming tea's legacy as a drink that connects people across cultures and continents.

CRPF's Delta Company undertakes Tree Plantation Drive in Baithalangso

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, May 21: In a commendable step towards environmental conservation, the Delta Company of the 128th Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), stationed at Lengey APGCL, carried out a major tree plantation programme in Baithalangso under the leadership of Commandant Yatindra Nath Rai from the Noonmati Headquarters.

The initiative was coordinated and led on the ground by Inspector Rajen Ch Nath, Officer-in-Charge of the Delta Company, who played a pivotal role in organizing the event and ensuring its success.

The plantation drive covered the premises of four middle and primary schools in the Baithalangso area. As part of this green initiative, the CRPF personnel planted approximately 1,500 saplings, including varieties such as neem, betel nut, azhar, nahar, and other fruit-bearing trees. The effort aimed to promote environmental awareness and highlight the importance of afforestation, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions like West Karbi Anglong.

This initiative underscores the CRPF's broader commitment to community welfare and ecological sustainability, fostering a greener future and building stronger ties with the local community.

Haibargaon Railway Station of Assam among 103 redeveloped stations to be inaugurated today

Showcases PM's unwavering focus on transforming grassroots infrastructure



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Thursday is going to virtually inaugurate the redeveloped Haibargaon Railway Station in Assam, marking a momentous occasion for the state and the Northeast region. This event stands out as a landmark in the national

rollout of the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS), as Haibargaon becomes the first railway station in Assam, among 50 stations identified in the state, to be inaugurated under this ambitious scheme. The inauguration is part of a nationwide event covering 103 redeveloped stations, where Haibargaon's inclusion, con-

structed at a project cost of approximately ₹ 15.85 Cr, signals the beginning of a new chapter for rail infrastructure in the region.

Unlike other inaugurations, this day carries special significance as it showcases the PM's unwavering focus on transforming grassroots infrastructure and bridging regional gaps through modern connectivity. The redevelopment of Haibargaon station is symbolic not only of technological and architectural upliftment but also of the government's intent to bring NE India into the fold of rapid national development. It is a proud moment for NFR as well as Assam, as it leads the state's participation in one of the Indian Railways' most ambitious station redevelopment initiatives.

The selection of Haibargaon as the first station to be inaugurated under ABSS in Assam reflects its strategic importance and the successful execution of the project with a clear vision for passenger-centric modernization. With its upgraded amenities, improved accessibility and cultural aesthetics, the station sets a benchmark for the 49 other stations in Assam lined up for redevelopment. As the Prime Minister inaugurates this gateway to a modern rail experience, Haibargaon emerges not just as a station but as a symbol of progress, pride and promise for the people of Assam and the Northeast.

Husband kills wife, lover in Kamrup double murder over illicit affair

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 21: A gruesome double murder shook the Pachanjari area near Kamrup in Nagaon district late last night, after a man allegedly killed his wife and her illicit lover in a fit of rage over an extramarital affair.

According to sources, the accused, Jaykanta Das, who is employed at a company in Guwahati, unexpectedly arrived at his rented home in Pachanjari and caught his wife, Gitarani Das, and her alleged lover, Bhaskar Nath, a TET-qualified teacher, in a compromising situation. In a moment of uncontrollable fury, he attacked both with a rod, fatally injuring them.

Following the incident, Das surrendered at the Kamrup Police Station, where he confessed to the crime.

Senior police officials from Nagaon district headquarters quickly rushed to the scene. Both bodies were sent for post-mortem examinations, and a detailed investigation is currently underway. Jaykanta Das was produced before a local court in Nagaon on Tuesday afternoon and has been remanded to judicial custody.

The accused hails from Debnarikoli, while his deceased wife was originally from Tulsimukh Deorigaon. The other victim, Bhaskar Nath, was a resident of Mangaldai in Darrang district.

The shocking nature of the crime has triggered outrage across the community, with residents condemning the act as both tragic and shameful. A large crowd gathered at the scene, expressing concern over the rising moral degradation in society and calling for greater awareness and community engagement to prevent such violent outcomes in the future.

Community leaders have appealed to the youth to take an active role in promoting values of responsibility, communication, and peaceful conflict resolution through awareness drives and educational programs.

TN's refusal to accept 3-language formula

Children of Tamil Nadu are caught in the political crossfire between NDA government at the Centre and M K Stalin-led INDIA bloc government in the state. The Centre insists on implementation of the three-language formula under New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the state refuses to implement it. It has led to a situation in which children's fundamental right under Right to Education (RTE) is being violated. Supreme Court of India had said on May 9, 2025, that Court can't enforce any state to adopt the NEP. Nevertheless, to enforce implementation of three-language formula, the Centre has frozen release of funds, resulting in delay in Right to Education admissions. Now, Tamil Nadu has moved to Supreme Court against Centre over ₹ 2,151 crore education fund freeze. Tamil Nadu has accused the Union Government of coercive federal over-reach by linking the disbursement of funds to the State's acceptance of the NEP 2020 and the PM SHRI Schools Scheme. "Such coercive tactics are neither legally permissible nor consistent with State legislation, particularly in light of the two-language formula adopted by the State," the suit filed by the state read. Tamil Nadu seeks release of ₹ 2151 crore in education funds under the Samagra Shiksha Scheme (SSS) for 2024-25, with 6 per cent interest on the principal amount. Thus the suits total claim is ₹ 2291.3 crore.

Tamil Nadu has stated in their petition that the Centre's withholding of its "obligatory share" under the SSS has crippled the implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) and the constitutional rights of over 43.94 lakh students, 2.21 lakh teachers and 32,701 school staff in the state. Tamil Nadu says that the Project Approval Board (PAB) of the Ministry of Education, Union of India, had approved ₹ 3,585.99 crore for the state under the SSS in its February 2024 meeting of which ₹ 2,151.59 crore was the Centre's share based on the 60:40 cost-sharing formula. Nevertheless, Centre has not released even a single instalment. The state alleged that the Centre has done this due to state's refusal to fully adopt NEP 2020 and sign an MoU for the PM SHRI Schools scheme. Tamil Nadu has two-language policy - Tamil and English. It has consistently opposed imposition of Hindi since 1968, when a resolution was passed in this regard in the Legislative Assembly of the state. Not only that the Tamil Nadu Tamil Learning Act of 2006 mandates compulsory teaching of Tamil from Class I to X. There is another act called Tamil Nadu Uniform System of School Education Act of 2010.

Nevertheless, these legislations are being undermined by the Centre for imposition of NEP-2020, which is merely a policy and vision statement ... that lacks any executive or legislative force binding on the state. The petition filed by Tamil Nadu says that the Centre has released funds under Samagra Shiksha Scheme to all states except Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal. Only a few days ago on May 16, Tamil Nadu government had urged Union government to released the pending dues of ₹ 2151.59 crore under the SSS, which included ₹ 617 crore for RTE admissions.

The April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack has jolted South Asia back into a state of alarming instability. As the smoke clears from the Indian missile strikes under Operation Sindoor—New Delhi's swift retaliation to the Pakistan-instigated assault—the international community finds itself once again navigating the treacherous waters of Indo-Pak conflict. But beyond condemnations and calls for peace, India must now recalibrate its expectations from its so-called strategic partners—Russia, China, and the United States—each of whom has responded with nuanced, interest-driven diplomacy rather than unequivocal support.

For decades, India has regarded Russia as a time-tested ally—a friend that, as many in Delhi assert, has never acted against Indian interests. From Cold War camaraderie to the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in 1971, Moscow has been a dependable defence partner. However, the evolving regional calculus tells a more complicated story. Russia is currently engaged in the Pakistan Stream gas project, a strategic pipeline stretching from Karachi to Punjab. This initiative signals growing Russia-Pakistan economic engagement, even as Moscow simultaneously stresses peaceful dialogue based on the 1972 Simla Agreement and the 1999 Lahore Declaration, both of which call for bilateral resolution of disputes and the avoidance of nuclear confrontation.

At the United Nations, all five permanent members of the Security Council, including Russia and China, have condemned the Pahalgam attack and grilled Pakistan—currently a non-permanent member of the Council—on its

complicity. While this seems like a diplomatic win for India, the realpolitik that follows paints a more sobering picture. Should the matter escalate within the UN Security Council, China is almost certain to veto any resolution critical of Pakistan. Britain and France may counter with vetoes against any move condemning India. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump's United States remains characteristically erratic. Despite reiterating support for India's fight against terrorism and its right to self-defence, Trump has advised both nations to "figure it out," dismissing their conflict as a "1,500-year-old" feud—a phrase that trivialises the crisis and underscores Washington's reluctance to engage in yet another geopolitical theatre while it remains entangled in wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

Yet, this ambiguity does not come without context. Each of these global powers has experienced the sting of terrorism: America on 9/11, Russia in its restive Caucasus, and China in Xinjiang, where it has occasionally blamed Pakistani-backed extremists. This shared history of victimhood provides moral ground for condemning terrorism. Still, when it comes to actions that transcend statements, national interests dictate caution.

China, perhaps the most diplomatically layered player in this scenario, embodies a paradox. It has publicly called for peace and reaffirmed that India and Pakistan are not only each other's neighbours but also neighbours of China. In keeping with this narrative, it has advocated for an independent investigation into the Pahalgam attack, suggesting an image of neutrality. However, its actions speak louder. To show sol-

idarity with Pakistan—its "iron brother"—and all-weather strategic ally—Beijing has moved troops to Aksai Chin, the Chinese-administered sector of Kashmir claimed by India. This move is not just a military posture but a strategic signal, intertwining the Indo-Pak dispute with the simmering Sino-Indian border tensions.

China's leverage in the region is further amplified by Pakistan's deep-rooted integration into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Since 2015, China has committed over \$46 billion into infrastructure and energy projects in Pakistan, with a significant portion passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir—a region India claims. This includes strategic road and rail networks connecting the deep-sea ports of Gwadar and Karachi with China's Xinjiang province. The resultant enhancement of Pakistan's power generation and logistics capacity comes with increased military interdependence. Over 81% of Pakistan's military imports—from fighter jets to submarines—come from China. Beijing is not only Islamabad's largest arms supplier but also the top defence exporter to India's other neighbours like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, effectively encircling India with Chinese weaponry and economic influence.

This growing asymmetry of influence is most visible in the Indian Ocean, where China's naval presence and trade dominance challenge India's traditional sphere of influence. Even as India builds strategic ties with the US and Quad partners like Japan and Australia, it must contend with

Beijing's regional assertiveness, both on land and at sea.

The United States, under Trump, has taken a more transactional approach. It supports India's right to self-defence and has condemned terrorism. However, it continues to sell F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan, while the President maintains warm personal ties with both Prime Ministers. Trump's flippant comments about the length of the India-Pakistan conflict—calling it perhaps "longer than 1,500 years"—betray a lack of diplomatic sensitivity and a desire to stay disengaged. Given the US's pre-occupations elsewhere and its strategic rivalry with China, Washington's South Asia posture is less about cal-

commitment and more about calibration. Meanwhile, the crisis has deepened with India's revocation of the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty. The treaty, brokered by the World Bank, had allocated 80% of the Indus basin's waters to Pakistan. Delhi's move to suspend its obligations under this accord has prompted an outcry from Islamabad, which has termed it an "act of war," asserting that the waters are lifelines for over 240 million Pakistanis. This marks a new frontier in the conflict—where water, not just land or terrorism, becomes a strategic weapon.

The strategic reverberations of this development have not gone unnoticed. The weaponisation of water could escalate tensions beyond the traditional battlefield and into domains affecting civilian populations and food security. It also opens India to criticism under international humanitarian

law, despite the provocation of terrorism. The UN has already reiterated that targeting civilians is unacceptable, and any punitive action must be within credible and lawful frameworks. This puts India in a tight diplomatic bind: retaliate effectively, but stay within the realm of global legal and moral acceptability.

Against this backdrop, India's geopolitical reality is that while friends support its stance on terrorism, few are willing to sacrifice their strategic equities to back Delhi unequivocally in the event of war. Russia's energy ties with Pakistan, China's military and economic embrace of Islamabad, and America's strategic aloofness together indicate that India stands largely alone in full-scale war efforts. The international consensus remains focused on de-escalation—not justice, not deterrence.

This moment in history, therefore, presents a sobering reality for Indian policymakers. The notion of "strategic autonomy" has never been more tested. India's traditional alliances are evolving into multi-vector partnerships where mutual interests, not moral solidarity, guide action. While Operation Sindoor may have sent a clear message to Pakistan, the international response to the broader conflict underscores an age-old truth in diplomacy: in times of crisis, national interest reigns supreme.

India must now navigate this uncertain landscape with a combination of military preparedness, diplomatic agility, and strategic clarity. As the lines between friend and rival blur, Delhi's biggest challenge may not be Pakistan's provocations, but the faultlines in its web of friendships. *(The writer can be reached at dipakurmigpltd@gmail.com)*

Friends, Foes, and Faultlines

India's diplomatic dilemma after Pahalgam

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

Rising Northeast : Investors Summit 2025 : A review

By: Diganta Barooah

The Rising Northeast: Investors Summit 2025 is being organised by the Ministry of DoNER, Government of India on 23rd and 24th May, 2025 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi to showcase the potential for investments and trade in the Northeast region of India.

The summit presents a unique opportunity to establish and strengthen alliances, partnerships, and collaborations, while gaining valuable insights into the myriad of possibilities available for expanding business and pursuing new investments in the North East region. The event will focus on developing a clear vision for growth in both the manufacturing and services sectors. The summit will also provide investors with a valuable opportunity to participate in the Northeast Region's development as a manufacturing and services hub for ASEAN and BBN, as well as for the markets in eastern India. Additionally, it will serve as a crucial platform for companies to learn about the incentive and policy framework in Northeast India and how to use it to expand their business beyond national borders.

About the Summit

The Ministry of DoNER, Government of India, is organizing the Rising Northeast to showcase the investment and trade potential of the Northeast Region of India. The summit aims to highlight the region's geostrategic advantage, abundant natural resources, skilled workforce, and access to captive markets in the Northeast and neighboring countries.

The Northeast region is an emerging frontier for businesses, and the summit offers an ideal platform for forging alliances, partnerships, and acquiring a clear vision of the opportunities available for expanding businesses, making new investments, setting up green field manufacturing projects and associated activities.

The summit will enable investors to participate in the Northeast Region's transformation as a manufacturing and services hub. It will also provide companies looking to access emerging markets in ASEAN and BBN countries an opportunity to learn about the incentive and policy framework in the Northeast and how to leverage it for venturing beyond borders.

In the run-up to the NEIS 2025, roadshows are being organized in 7 important cities in India to showcase the investment potential of the Northeast region and reach out to potential investors.

The summit promises to become a major platform for networking with industry leaders, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders from the region, offering excellent opportunities for exploring tie-ups, expansions, and MoUs via G2B, B2B meetings on the sidelines of the summit.

Potential investors from diverse sectors are expected to attend the Rising Northeast to explore investment opportunities in NER with an eye on the markets of north-east and ASEAN.

Advantage Northeast

The North-Eastern Region (NER) encompasses a group of eight states, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim,

and Tripura. This region is of immense strategic importance for India as it serves as a gateway to Southeast Asia, with each state sharing a border with at least one Southeast Asian nation. Besides being a melting pot of cultures, the NER is also a global biodiversity hotspot, making it an attractive destination for tourists.

Although the NER covers only 7.98% of India's total geographical region only accounts for 3.78% of the total population. Over 54% of the region's population, particularly in hilly areas, belong to tribal communities and 2011 census, the NER is home to approximately 135 Scheduled Tribe groups out of a total of around 705 in India. Furthermore, the region has abundant natural resources that are yet to be fully explored, which is why it is rapidly emerging as a hub for sustainable manufacturing and service industries.

The northeast region boasts abundant natural resources, agro-horticultural and forest resources, hydroelectric potential, oil and natural gas, and several mineral deposits, making it well-positioned for industrial growth and expansion.

The primary industries in the NER's industrial sector include agriculture, food processing, and mineral extraction, with notable businesses in bamboo, natural gas and oil, plastic, coal, silk, jute, tea, and petroleum sectors.

Key Economic Indicators :

- The Region's GDP at current prices is ₹ 5.75 lakh crore in FY 2021-22
- Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of GDP of North-eastern States grew at 08.17% from FY2015 to FY2022
- Per capita income: The per capita income for the North-eastern region was ₹ 1,11,757 (approximately \$1,490) in the financial year 2019-20.
- Infrastructure: The region has a total of 13640 km of national highways.
- Infrastructure: 3,891 km of state highways, and 2,657 km of major district roads
- The average road density per 100 Sq Km of area is 143.72Km against the national average of 115.30 Km

Focus Sectors of the Summit are :
Agri, Food Processing & Allied Sectors
Textiles, Handloom & Handicrafts
Entertainment and Sports
Education & Skill Development
Healthcare
IT & ITES
Tourism & Hospitality
Energy
Infrastructure and Logistics

Gateway to Southeast Asia :

The Northeast Region (NER) boasts of a strategically advantageous location, providing easy access to both the BBN and ASEAN markets. Sharing 99 percent of its borders, which spans over 5,300 kilometers, with its neighboring countries, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Myanmar, the NER serves as a crucial gateway to the ASEAN region and represents an integral component of India's East Policy.

Abundant Natural Resources :

The Northeast Region (NER) is richly endowed with abundant natural resources, including around 20% of India's oil and gas reserves, 395 million tons of coal, as well as significant deposits of various minerals such as uranium, feldspar, limestone, kaolin, quartz clay, graphite, and dolomite. Additionally, the NER has vast bamboo and timber resources that are instrumental in supporting the needs of various industries. Such a bountiful reserve of resources positions the NER ideally for catering to the requirements of industries in the northeast states, as well as the BBN and ASEAN markets.

India's Green Hub :

The Northeast Region (NER) of India is a veritable oasis of greenery, boasting a forest cover of over 60%. This makes it the country's preeminent "Green Hub," with the distinction of being the most extensive carbon sink, accounting for 28% of India's total estimated carbon stock of 7,124 million tonnes. Its abundant natural resources and vast biodiversity make the NER an idyllic haven for discerning high-end tourists seeking an unexplored and unique travel experience.

Diverse Cultural Heritage :

The natural beauty of the region's rolling hills, winding rivers, and verdant valleys is matched only by its rich ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. With 209 tribes and 192 distinct languages spoken, this area is a melting pot of cultures and identities, resulting in a unique and fascinating composite culture. Investors looking for opportunities in tourism and handicrafts will find an abundance of opportunities in this region, where the rich cultural heritage of its people can be showcased to the world.

Government Incentives :

The government of India and various state governments of India offer a wide range of incentives subsidies, and reimbursements to support business growth in NER. Take advantage of the same to expand your business further in the region.

Skilled Workforce :

With several world class institutions like IIM Shillong, IIT Guwahati, 79 universities, 1001 colleges and 224 standalone institutions, the region produces a skilled workforce that is proficient in English.

Growing Infrastructure :

With multiple Central and State level schemes, the region is undergoing a rapid transformation in terms of infrastructure, including new industrial and technology parks, logistics hubs, cold chains and connectivity infrastructure.

Stable Business Environment :

The Northeastern states of India provide a safe and supportive atmosphere for businesses, thanks to their stable political environment, low crime rates, and favorable government policies. Furthermore, the region is adopting efficient mechanisms to simplify business operations (Ease of doing Business), which makes it an appealing destination for companies seeking growth opportunities.

Access to a mega international market base :

The Northeastern region is poised to benefit from the economic potential of the

BBN and ASEAN countries, with a combined consumer base of over 600 million people. This large consumer base, coupled with increased urbanization in the region, presents a massive opportunity for businesses in the region to tap into the years ahead. The North-eastern Region (NER), which includes the eight States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura, is the easternmost region of India. Since each state has a border with at least one of the five nations to the east of the country, this area serves as a gateway to Southeast Asia and is of great strategic importance.

Furthermore, the NER is widely recognized as one of the most diverse regions in Asia, characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnicities and languages. Each state within NER boasts a unique blend of distinct cultures and traditions.

The Northeast region of India is a well-known biodiversity hotspot that is also home to a rich mix of cultures. In addition, the region is blessed with abundant natural resources that are yet to be fully explored and exploited. The region also holds a significant stake in the country's 'Act East Policy,' which is aimed at promoting economic, political, and cultural ties with Southeast Asia. With a wealth of natural resources, human resources, and potential for agriculture and horticulture, the region is rapidly emerging as a hub for sustainable manufacturing and service industries. Additionally, the region's rich ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity makes it a highly attractive destination for tourists, offering significant potential for growth and development in the tourism sector.

With an area of 2.6 lakh sq. km, the NER accounts for about 7.98 per cent of the total geographical area of India while being home to 3.78 per cent of India's total population. The region is characterised by a mixed topography of hills and plains, with hills occupying 70 per cent of the land area. With a significant tribal population accounting for around 54 per cent of its total population, especially in the hilly areas, the Northeast region of India is unique in its diversity. The region is home to approximately 135 Scheduled Tribe groups out of a total of approximately 705 across India. With plentiful natural resources, agro-horticultural and forest resources, hydroelectric potential, oil and natural gas and mineral deposits, the northeast region is well poised for investment and economic growth.

State Industrial policies :

To attract investments and promote industrial development, 6 of 8 North East states have active industrial policies in place, which includes a range of incentives, subsidies, and support mechanisms for investors. As Sikkim does not have an Industrial Policy, the MSME Policy 2022 for Sikkim has been considered.

Industrial policies of North East States and other Indian states reveals that all the policies compared offer a wide range of subsidies to promote industrial growth. Some of the key highlights of the subsidy offerings include tax incentives, capital subsidies, interest subsidies, and land

Government Initiatives for Skill De-

velopment in NER :

- 72 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra's (PMKK) have been established in NER during the period 2016-20.
- Under NSDC's Skill Saathi programme, over 50,000 people were counselled in the NER for skill development and career opportunities.
- 13.6 lakhs youths have been trained since 2016, of which 7.89 lakhs have been certified.
- To improve the livelihood opportunities of more than 80 thousand traditional arts and handicrafts artisans they have had their skills certified under the PMKVY in the region.
- Leading academic Institutions and universities such as CIPET, IIE, NIELIT, NTTC, CTTC, NIPMER, IIPM and CSIR have been engaged to conduct PMKVY - STT in the NER.
- State Skill Development Missions of NER have been engaged to implement RPL, especially in traditional job roles such as loin loom weavers, two-shaft handloom weavers, jacquard handloom weavers etc.
- Various training centres have been established in the NER under Technical Intern Training Programme, including two at Guwahati (Assam) and one in Pasighat (Arunachal Pradesh).
- Additionally, one of the leading organisations, Learnet Skills Limited (formerly IL&FS Skills Development Corporation Ltd.), has partnered with Oil India under its CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiative to support training 30 candidates at its Guwahati centre.
- Under, DDUGKY programme sponsored by MoRD, 71317 students have been trained during the period of 2015-2022 as on March 2023

Investment opportunities in Education & Skill Development :

Investment opportunities in the Education & Skill Development Sector in NER includes :

Private Schools :

Private schools are in high demand in North East India due to the region's growing population and increasing urbanization. Investment in private schools can range from building new schools to upgrading existing facilities. There is also a growing demand for international schools that offer a globally recognized curriculum.

Higher Education :

The North East region is home to several prominent universities, colleges, and technical institutes. However, the demand for quality higher education surpasses the available supply. To address this issue, investments in higher education can range from establishing new institutions to upgrading existing facilities and promoting research and development.

Vocational Training :

The region is blessed with young people, and there is a need for vocational training to equip them with the necessary skills for employment. Investment in vocational training can range from setting up new training centres to upgrading existing ones and providing training for trainers.

E-Learning :

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of e-learning in North

East India. There is a significant demand for e-learning solutions that provide quality education and access to remote areas. Investment in e-learning can range from developing new platforms to partnering with existing providers.

Skill Development :

The North East region has abundant natural resources, and there is a need for skilled professionals in various sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and healthcare. Investment in skill development can range from setting up new training centres to upgrading existing ones and provides funding for research and development.

Research & Development :

The region presents several opportunities for R&D in various fields, including biodiversity, traditional knowledge systems, renewable energy, agriculture and horticulture, and tourism. R&D in these areas can help promote sustainable development and contribute to the economic growth of the region.

Opportunities from beyond borders :

India attracts nearly 50,000 students from all over the world every year, and a significant number of students from South-east Asian countries contribute to this figure. In the academic year 2020-21, about 540 students chose NER states as their study destination. However, the overall number of students migrating from neighboring Southeast Asian countries to India during the same period was 18,773. This number could increase even further if the NER states develop a robust educational infrastructure to cater to the growing demand. The NER states enjoy excellent connectivity with Southeast Asian nations and share an international land border spanning over 5,562 kilometers. Additionally, the region boasts a rich cultural heritage that aligns with the traditions of countries like Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar. These factors provide an ideal opportunity for investors to develop and promote the region's educational infrastructure. By investing in this sector, the NER can attract a more significant number of foreign students and expand its presence in the global education market.

Medical value tourism potential of North East :

Medical value tourism is a growing industry in India, and the North East region is no exception. The region is blessed with abundant natural beauty and cultural diversity, making it an ideal destination for medical tourists seeking to combine healthcare services with travel and leisure. The North East region's proximity to neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, and Bhutan can attract medical tourists from these countries seeking quality healthcare services at an affordable cost and hence it creates an investment opportunity in

- (1) Medical & Para Medical Education
 - (2) Setting up of Multi-Specialty & Super Speciality Hospitals
 - (3) Healthcare Excellence Centres
- (The author is an Assistant Development Officer, Transformation and Development Department, Government of Assam. He can be reached at 7002699011 or digantabarooah@gmail.com and digantabarooah@yahoo.com)*

The birth of Earth's sixth ocean

By: Satyabrata Borah

The Earth's crust is in constant flux, reshaped by forces deep within its core that have sculpted the planet's surface for billions of years. In East Africa, one of the most remarkable geological transformations in our planet's history is unfolding: the gradual formation of a new ocean. The East African Rift, a massive fracture in the Earth's crust, is tearing the African continent apart, setting the stage for a new body of water that could fundamentally alter the world's geography, climate, ecosystems, and human societies. This process, driven by the relentless movement of tectonic plates, is not only a testament to the dynamic nature of our planet but also a phenomenon that will have far-reaching consequences for millions of years to come. While the full emergence of this sixth ocean is millions of years away, its early signs are already visible, offering a glimpse into the profound changes it will bring to the African continent and the world at large.

The East African Rift (EAR) stretches over 3,000 kilometers, from the Afar Triangle in Ethiopia to Mozambique in the south. It is one of the most active tectonic boundaries on Earth, where the African continent is literally splitting apart. The rift is the result of two tectonic plates—the Nubian Plate, which forms most of Africa, and the Somali Plate, which encompasses the Horn of Africa and parts of the eastern coast—pulling away from each other. This divergence is driven by the upwelling of molten rock from the Earth's mantle, which thins and fractures the crust, creating a rift valley. Over time, this valley will widen, and seawater from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean will flood the region, forming a new ocean basin. The process is extraordinarily slow, with the plates moving apart at a rate of just a few millimeters per year, but over millions of years, this incremental movement will reshape the continent.

To understand the significance of this transformation, it's worth looking at the Earth's geological history. Around 250 million years ago, all the continents were joined together in a supercontinent called Pangea. Over millions of years, tectonic forces broke Pangea apart, creating the continents and oceans we know today. The Atlantic Ocean, for instance, began

forming about 180 million years ago as the Americas drifted away from Africa and Europe. The East African Rift is a modern-day equivalent of this process, where the Somali Plate is drifting eastward, potentially creating a new continent out of the Horn of Africa. The rift's current features—deep valleys, lakes, and volcanic activity—are early indicators of this monumental change. Lakes like Tanganyika, Malawi, and Turkana, which lie within the rift, are precursors to the future ocean, as they occupy the depressed areas where the crust is thinning.

The geological evidence for this transformation is compelling. In 2005, a dramatic event in Ethiopia's afar region underscored the rift's activity. A 60-kilometer-long fissure opened in the Earth's crust over the course of just a few days, reaching widths of up to 8 meters. This event, known as the Dabbahu rift event, was accompanied by volcanic activity and earthquakes, signaling the intense tectonic forces at work. Similar events have occurred elsewhere in the rift, such as in Kenya in 2018, when a massive crack appeared in the ground, splitting roads and displacing communities. These incidents are not isolated; they are part of a long-term process that will eventually lead to the flooding of the rift and the creation of a new ocean. Scientists estimate that this process could take anywhere from 5 to 10 million years, but its impacts are already being felt.

The formation of a new ocean will have profound environmental consequences. The East African Rift is home to some of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems, particularly in its lakes. Lake Tanganyika, for example, hosts over 250 species of cichlid fish, many of which are found nowhere else on Earth. As the rift widens and seawater eventually floods the region, the freshwater ecosystems of these lakes will be transformed. The influx of saline water could lead to the extinction of many endemic species, while creating new habitats for marine life. This shift will also affect the region's climate. A new ocean could alter regional weather patterns, increasing humidity and potentially changing rainfall distribution across East Africa. Such changes could have cascading effects on agriculture, water availability, and ecosystems far beyond the rift itself.



The human implications of this geological transformation are equally significant. The East African Rift cuts through densely populated countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, where millions of people rely on agriculture and pastoralism for their livelihoods. The ongoing tectonic activity, including earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, poses immediate risks to these communities. For instance, in 2002, the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo in the Democratic Republic of Congo displaced thousands of people and destroyed infrastructure. As the rift continues to widen, such events could become more frequent, threatening settlements and agricultural land. Moreover, the eventual flooding of the rift will submerge large areas of land, forcing populations to relocate and potentially leading to social and economic instability.

At the same time, the creation of a new ocean could bring economic opportunities. The emergence of a new coastline could lead to the development of ports, boosting trade and fisheries. Coastal tourism, a major economic driver in places like Kenya and Tanzania, could expand as new beaches and marine environments attract visitors. However, these opportunities come with challenges. The displacement of communities, loss of arable land, and changes in water resources will re-

quire careful planning and international cooperation to mitigate. Governments in the region will need to invest in infrastructure, disaster preparedness, and adaptation strategies to address the long-term impacts of this transformation.

The cultural and historical significance of the East African Rift adds another layer to this story. The rift is often referred to as the "cradle of humanity," as it is home to some of the oldest known fossils of early human ancestors, such as those found in Ethiopia's Afar region and Tanzania's Olduvai Gorge. The geological processes that are now reshaping the region played a critical role in human evolution, as the rift's diverse landscapes provided the environmental conditions that fostered the development of early hominids. As the rift continues to evolve, it will not only shape the physical landscape but also influence the cultural and historical narratives of the region.

From a global perspective, the formation of a new ocean will have far-reaching implications. The reconfiguration of Africa's geography could alter global ocean currents, which play a critical role in regulating the Earth's climate. For example, the Atlantic Ocean's currents, such as the Gulf Stream, have a significant impact on temperatures in Europe and North America. A new ocean in East

Africa could similarly influence regional and global climate patterns, though the exact effects are difficult to predict. Additionally, the emergence of a new continent could reshape geopolitical dynamics, as new trade routes and resource opportunities emerge.

The scientific community is closely monitoring the East African Rift to better understand its progression and impacts. Advances in satellite imagery, GPS, and seismic monitoring have allowed researchers to track the movement of tectonic plates with unprecedented precision. These technologies have revealed that the rift is not only widening but also sinking, creating depressions that will eventually form the ocean floor. Studies of similar rift systems, such as the Red Sea, which began forming millions of years ago as a result of tectonic divergence, provide valuable insights into what the future holds for East Africa.

While the full formation of the sixth ocean is a distant prospect, its early stages are a reminder of the Earth's dynamic nature. The planet is not a static entity but a living system, constantly reshaped by the forces of plate tectonics, volcanism, and erosion. The East African Rift is a window into this process, offering scientists and the public a chance to witness the birth of a new ocean in real time. For the people of East Africa, the challenge will be to adapt to the changes already underway, from increased seismic activity to shifting landscapes. International support, including investment in research, infrastructure, and disaster preparedness, will be crucial to help the region navigate this transformation.

The creation of a new ocean is a humbling reminder of humanity's place in the grand sweep of geological time. While the process will unfold over millions of years, its impacts are already shaping the lives of millions in East Africa. From the loss of land to the creation of new economic opportunities, the effects of this transformation will ripple across the continent and the world. As we continue to study and prepare for these changes, the East African Rift stands as a testament to the Earth's enduring capacity to reshape itself, challenging us to adapt to a planet that is always in motion.

Northeast India's unexplored potential in eco-tourism

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Northeast India is one of the most enchanting yet underexplored regions of the country, known for its stunning natural landscapes, rich biodiversity, and vibrant cultural heritage. Comprising eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim—the region is blessed with an extraordinary variety of flora, fauna, rivers, hills, and forests. Despite these abundant natural assets, Northeast India remains relatively untouched in the mainstream tourism narrative, especially in the domain of eco-tourism. The immense potential of the region in promoting sustainable tourism has yet to be fully recognized and harnessed. With growing awareness about environmental preservation and responsible travel, eco-tourism offers a promising pathway for economic growth, cultural preservation, and ecological sustainability in Northeast India.

Eco-tourism, which revolves around vis-

living root bridges offer unique ecological attractions. These natural wonders are ideal for eco-tourism activities like wildlife safaris, bird watching, trekking, nature photography, and environmental education.

Despite such potential, Northeast India's eco-tourism sector remains largely underdeveloped due to several challenges. Infrastructure inadequacy is a major hurdle, with poor road connectivity, limited air travel options, and scarce accommodation facilities deterring potential tourists. The hilly and difficult terrain, while contributing to the region's charm, also makes infrastructural development more complex and expensive. Many areas are still remote and hard to reach, especially during the monsoon season, which sees heavy rainfall and occasional landslides. Moreover, lack of proper marketing and promotion means that many travelers, both domestic and international, remain unaware of the region's eco-tourism possibilities.

Another significant challenge is the need for sustainable and community-centric

Arunachal Pradesh has begun promoting border tourism, emphasizing the region's picturesque landscapes and rich biodiversity. Despite these initiatives, a more integrated approach involving local stakeholders, environmental experts, and tourism professionals is necessary to realize the full potential of eco-tourism in the region.

The environmental sensitivity of the Northeast demands that eco-tourism development is aligned with sustainability principles. Conservation of biodiversity, protection of endangered species, waste management, and regulation of visitor numbers are crucial aspects to consider. Ecological impact assessments and continuous monitoring should accompany tourism projects to ensure they do not harm fragile ecosystems. Promoting responsible behavior among tourists, such as "leave no trace" ethics, can help preserve natural sites. Additionally, educating tourists about the cultural significance and ecological importance of the destinations they visit can deepen appreciation and foster respect.

The economic benefits of eco-tourism in Northeast India can be transformative for local populations. Many parts of the region suffer from limited industrial development and lack of job opportunities, leading to migration to urban centers. Sustainable tourism can create livelihood opportunities within rural and tribal areas, reducing the need for outward migration. Small-scale enterprises, including guided tours, handicrafts, local cuisine, and eco-lodges, can thrive under eco-tourism, contributing to the socio-economic upliftment of communities. Moreover, tourism revenue can fund community welfare projects, education, and healthcare services, improving overall quality of life.

Digital technology and social media offer new avenues to promote Northeast India's eco-tourism potential. Virtual tours, interactive travel platforms, and online booking systems can make it easier for tourists to discover and plan visits to the region. Documentaries, blogs, and social media influencers showcasing the region's natural beauty and cultural richness can attract a global audience. Local entrepreneurs and tourism operators can leverage these tools to reach niche markets interested in nature-based and cultural tourism.

In conclusion, Northeast India stands at a critical juncture where its unexplored eco-tourism potential can be harnessed for sustainable growth. The region's natural wealth, combined with its rich cultural heritage, provides a unique canvas for eco-tourism that benefits both nature and people. Overcoming infrastructural challenges, fostering community participation, ensuring environmental protection, and adopting modern marketing strategies are essential steps in this journey. With concerted efforts from government, local communities, and private stakeholders, Northeast India can emerge as a premier eco-tourism destination, contributing significantly to the region's economic development and environmental conservation. This not only enriches the lives of local people but also offers travelers an authentic and meaningful connection with nature and culture, helping preserve the pristine beauty and traditions of this extraordinary region for generations to come. (The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9954812261, 9864000260)



iting natural areas with minimal environmental impact and promoting the well-being of local communities, fits perfectly with the ethos of the Northeast. The region's landscapes are still pristine, often untouched by the rapid urbanization seen elsewhere. This ecological richness is matched by its cultural diversity; the Northeast is home to over 200 indigenous communities, each with unique traditions, languages, and ways of life deeply connected to the natural environment. The symbiotic relationship between people and nature here creates a fertile ground for eco-tourism initiatives that respect and preserve both cultural and environmental heritage.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Northeast India is its biodiversity. It hosts several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, many of which are recognized globally for their unique ecosystems. Kaziranga National Park in Assam, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, shelters the world's largest population of the endangered one-horned rhinoceros. Similarly, the Manas National Park, also in Assam, is renowned for its rare and endangered wildlife species, including the Bengal tiger and golden langur. Arunachal Pradesh boasts the Nandapha National Park, one of the largest protected areas in India, home to diverse species such as clouded leopards and red pandas. Meghalaya's dense forests, Meghalaya caves, and

tourism models. Eco-tourism must not become a source of environmental degradation or cultural disruption. Northeast India's indigenous communities have traditionally lived in harmony with nature, relying on sustainable practices that have preserved their environment for generations. However, unregulated tourism can disrupt this balance, leading to pollution, habitat loss, and cultural commodification. Therefore, any eco-tourism initiative must actively involve local communities, empowering them as custodians and beneficiaries of tourism development. Training locals as guides, promoting homestays, and encouraging the sale of local handicrafts and produce can ensure that tourism revenue stays within communities and incentivizes conservation.

Government efforts to promote tourism in the Northeast have increased in recent years. Various schemes focus on improving connectivity, building infrastructure, and promoting the region's unique cultural festivals and natural attractions. The Ministry of Tourism's "Incredible India" campaign has featured Northeast destinations, drawing some attention to the area. State governments have also been proactive in organizing cultural festivals and developing eco-tourism circuits. For example, Nagaland's Hornbill Festival has become a significant tourist draw, showcasing the culture of Naga tribes amidst the scenic hills.

The Earth is burning but are we listening?

By: Zahwa

In India, Summers and hot temperatures set new records every year, and in every upcoming year, they break their own records. If we talk of Rajasthan, last year in Barmer, the temperature was 46.4°C, and this temperature left everyone astonished when in Churu (another district in Rajasthan), the temperature rose to 50.5°C.

Due to this scorching heat, last year till June, there were more than 200 deaths, and 40000 others suffered heat stroke and were admitted to Hospitals. If we talk about real cases, these were the cases which were recorded, which means the count is even higher.

Clearly, our cities have become burning furnaces, and this heat is not limited to cities only. Now the villages have also become hot. It is a pressing issue that no one wants to talk about or find solutions for. Scientists say that due to climate change, these extreme heat events have increased 45 times. There was a time when people used to go to hill stations and mountains to escape from the scorching heat. Shimla, Manali, Nainital, etc. used to be the summer escapes for the people earlier, but today those same mountains are burning. A massive fire in the mountains of Kullu was recorded.

Forest Fire incidents have rapidly increased in mountainous areas like Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, etc. Due to this scorching summer heat, the cases of Forest Fires are very obvious. Not only is it a threat to the people living there, but these burning forests also release a lot of Carbon Dioxide into the air, which makes the environment hotter. We saw the worst case of it this year itself in January in a burning city in the US, Los Angeles. These were just some examples and ills of this increasing heat.

As I mentioned, the mountains have become warmer than usual over the past few years. These are the places where there was no concept of Air Conditioners a few years back, but now people are installing ACs to cool the place. Not only this, the valleys of Kashmir, which are no less than Switzerland, are also facing the wrath of this increasing heat. The snowfall is decreasing, and slowly the glaciers are also melting. And since the snowfall is not occurring, the natural sources of water like lakes, streams and rivers are also drying up.

Who doesn't know Dal Lake? The water level of such an iconic water body is declining. The water crisis is not just the story of Rajasthan; it has become an issue all over India. These were just the conditions of the mountains, so for most of the people living in cities, the conditions of cities are bound to deteriorate. And recently, a huge 400-acre forest with many species of animals was cut down in Hyderabad just to make an IT Park. And due to these heat wave incidents, the ones who most suffer are the construction workers, street vendors, farmers, and traffic police who have to do their work by facing these heat waves all the time.

If we talk of the future, then climate scientists are giving a clear-cut warning that Indian Summers are going to become even more severe in the times to come. By the mid-21st cen-

tury, the frequency of these heat waves may increase four to seven times, and by the end of the century, the frequency of these heat waves will increase 10 times. Now, life-threatening situations will develop here, and in these situations, it is very important to understand the concept of "Wet bulb Temperature".

So the normal temperature just tells us how hot the air is. But wet bulb temperature tells us how hot the air is. And how moist the air is.



That means both humidity and heat are measured together. And the wet bulb temperature is even scarier. Even if the temperature is low, our body will not be able to bear this temperature. And the core temperature of our body will increase. This excess heat will not pass on, and this could result in us suffering from Heat strokes, and even could result in death. In future, many places in India will experience wet-bulb temperatures.

As the country's youth, we should be responsible citizens and think of solutions for these problems. Countries like Singapore are converting themselves into natural wonders. Planting trees along with buildings, creating gardens on rooftops, and creating green corridors across the city is Mandatory.

This works as a natural AC. In fact, the building policies there are such that if the construction of the building has any impact on nature or reduces greenery, then the builder has to grow the same amount of greenery on the roof or the walls of the buildings. In India, we can also do these things. We need to focus on three things to tackle this problem. The first step that we all must immediately understand is that every tree is important. Trees, Parks, Green Belts – all these are not just for decorations. These are lifesavers. Plant trees wherever you find space.

The government should take initiatives to plant trees along the highways for not only shade and climate, but also to act as a Sound Absorber. Society should take initiatives to ensure that in front of each home, or near the house, there are mandatory trees. Lakes, Rivers and Ponds should also be saved. This will not let the wet-bulb temperature rise. Government officials and even commentators should take the initiative to ensure that these builders do not clear any green areas. Change cannot happen in a day or two. It takes place slowly and gradually. And for this, "Not only should the government take initiatives, but the citizens are equally responsible for making a change." (Courtesy: Youth ki Awaaz)

82 killed in Israeli strikes in Gaza as desperately needed aid fails to reach Palestinians

DEIR AL-BALAH (Gaza Strip) May 21: Israeli strikes continued to pound the Gaza Strip Wednesday, despite a surge in international anger at Israel's widening offensive, killing at least 82 people, including several women and a week-old infant, according to the Gaza Health Ministry and area hospitals.

Israel began allowing dozens of humanitarian trucks into Gaza on Tuesday, but the aid has not yet reached Palestinians in desperate need. Jens Laerke, the spokesperson for the UN's humanitarian agency, said no trucks were picked up from the Gaza side of Kerem Shalom, the Israeli border crossing with southern Gaza.

UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said Tuesday evening that although the aid had entered Gaza, aid workers were not able to bring it to distribution points, after the Israeli military forced them to reload the supplies onto separate trucks and workers ran out of time.

The Israeli defence body that oversees humanitarian aid to Gaza said trucks were entering Gaza on Wednesday morning, but it was unclear if that aid would be able to continue deeper into Gaza for distribution. The UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said its staff had waited several



hours to collect aid from the border crossing in order to begin distribution but were unable to do so on Tuesday.

A few dozen Israeli activists opposed to Israel's decision to allow aid into Gaza while Hamas still holds Israeli hostages attempted to block the trucks carrying the aid on Wednesday morning, but were kept back by Israeli police.

Diplomats come under fire in Jenin

A group of diplomats came under fire while visiting Jenin, a city in the Israel-occupied West Bank, according to the Palestinian Authority. The diplomats were on official mission to observe the humani-

manitarian situation in Jenin when shots rang out. The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the shooting.

An aid worker, who did not want to be named for fear of reprisal, said a delegation of about 20 diplomats was being briefed about the situation in Jenin by the Palestinian Authority. The group of regional, European and Western diplomats were standing near the entrance of the Jenin refugee camp when they heard gunshots just before 2 pm, though it was unclear where the shots came from, she said. No one was injured, she added.

Footage shows a number of diplomats giving media interviews

as rapid shots ring out close to the group, forcing them to run for cover. Jenin has been the site of Israel's widespread crackdown against West Bank militants since earlier this year.

On Jan 21 — just two days after its ceasefire deal with Hamas in Gaza — Israeli forces descended on Jenin as they have dozens of times since Hamas' Oct 7, 2023, attack on Israel. The fighting displaced tens of thousands of Palestinians, one of the largest West Bank displacements in years.

International pressure increases against Israel

On Tuesday, the United Kingdom, suspended free trade talks with Israel over its intensifying assault, a step that came a day after the UK, Canada and France promised concrete steps to prompt Israel to halt the war. Separately, European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the bloc was reviewing an EU pact governing trade ties with Israel over its conduct of the war in Gaza.

Israel says it is prepared to stop the war once all the hostages taken by Hamas return home and Hamas is defeated, or is exiled and disarmed. Hamas says it is prepared to release the hostages in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the territory and an end to the war.

Suicide blast on school bus kills 5, including 3 children, in Pak's Balochistan



ISLAMABAD/KARACHI, May 21: At least five people, including three children, were killed and several others injured in a suicide attack on a school bus in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province on Wednesday.

The incident occurred in the Khuzdar district when a bus carrying schoolchildren was targeted, the army said in a statement.

Calling it a "cowardly" and "ghastly" attack, the army said three children and two adults were killed and multiple other children sustained injuries.

In a statement on X, the Interior Ministry said the blast was allegedly carried out through a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Khuzdar Deputy Commissioner Yasir said that 38 people were injured in the blast, which occurred near the Zero Point area, the Dawn newspaper reported.

After the attack, law enforcement agency personnel reached the site to collect evidence for an investigation. Yasir said, adding that preliminary findings indicated that the attack was a suicide blast.

The bodies and those injured were taken to the Combined Military Hospital, from where those with serious injuries will be referred to medical facilities in Quetta and Karachi, he said.

Initial reports indicated that four children were killed in the blast.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the attack and expressed deep sorrow over the killing of innocent children and their teachers, Geo News reported.

He also instructed authorities to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

President Asif Ali Zardari also strongly condemned the attack as a human rights violation and extended condolences to the families of the victims.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also strongly condemned the explosion and said, "The beasts who target innocent children do not deserve any leniency."

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups have previously carried out several attacks targeting CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) projects.

The province has been facing unrest for about two decades due to allegations by the local ethnic Baloch groups and parties that the federal government was exploiting its mineral wealth.

Following the attack, provincial Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti vowed to not only expose every terrorist operating in the province, but also eradicate them completely, the report said.

In a statement, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur also condemned the attack.

"Targeting innocent children is an extremely shameful and cowardly act," said Gandapur. "We stand in complete solidarity with the grieving families, and no words of condemnation are enough for such a horrific incident," he added. (PTI)

UK inflation rises to its highest in over year after domestic bills spike

LONDON, May 21: Inflation in the UK spiked to its highest level for more than a year in April amid a raft of higher domestic bills, such as energy and water, official figures showed Wednesday.

The Office for National Statistics said that its key measure of inflation, as measured by the consumer prices index, rose by 3.5 per cent in the year to April, up from 2.6 per cent in March.

April's rate was the highest since January 2024 and above expectations for a more modest increase to 3.3 per cent.

The scale of the rise was also the largest since October 2022, at the height of the energy crisis in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Economists had anticipated a sizeable increase as April saw hefty annual price rises for an array of household bills, as well as the impact of higher taxes on businesses and a sizeable increase in the minimum wage.

Inflation is widely expected to stay above 3 per cent for the rest of the year, which could rein in expectations of further interest rate reductions from the Bank of England, whose target for inflation is 2 per cent. On Tuesday, the bank's chief economist, Huw Pill, said that borrowing rates have been cut too quickly, in a sign that he's concerned about underlying inflation pressures.

Since it started cutting borrowing costs last August from the 16-year high of 5.25 per cent, the bank has proceeded on a gradual basis by lowering its main interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point every three months. Earlier this month, it reduced it to 4.25 per cent.

Following the latest inflation update, Rob Wood, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said that cuts on a precise quarterly schedule are far from certain. (AP)

Banu Mushtaq wins International Booker Prize for Kannada short story collection 'Heart Lamp'

LONDON, May 21: Writer, activist and lawyer Banu Mushtaq's short story collection 'Heart Lamp' (Hridaya Deepa) has become the first Kannada title to win the coveted International Booker Prize in London.

Mushtaq described her win as a victory for diversity as she collected the prize on Tuesday night at a ceremony at Tate Modern in London along with her translator Deepa Bhashti, who translated the title from Kannada to English.

The winning collection of 12 short stories chronicles the resilience, resistance, wit, and sisterhood of everyday women in patriarchal communities in southern India, vividly brought to life through a rich tradition of oral storytelling. "This book was born from the belief that no story is ever small, that in the tapestry of human experience every thread holds the weight of the whole," said Mushtaq.

"In a world that often tries to divide us, literature remains one of the lost sacred spaces where we can live inside each other's minds, if

only for a few pages," she said. Translator Bhashti added: "What a beautiful win this is for my beautiful language." Lauding Mushtaq's achievement, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said she has raised the flag of Kannada's greatness at the international level.

"Heartiest congratulations to the proud Kannada writer Banu Mushtaq for winning the International Booker Prize for Literature. This is a time to celebrate Kannada, Kannadigas and Karnataka," Siddaramaiah posted on 'X'.

"I wish she would continue to write meaningfully for many more years and spread the vibe of Kannada to the world," Siddaramaiah said.

"On behalf of all Kannadigas, I would also like to congratulate the talented author Deepa Bhashti, who has translated her Booker Prize-winning work 'Hridaya Deepa' into English," he added. While the Booker Prize is the leading literary award in the English-speaking world, the International Booker Prize is awarded annually for a single book, translated into English

and published in the UK or Ireland.

The tales in 'Heart Lamp', the first collection of short stories to win the prize, were written by Mushtaq over a period of over 30 years, from 1990 to 2023. They were selected and curated by Bhashti, who was keen to preserve the multilingual nature of southern India. When the characters use Urdu or Arabic words in conversation, these are left in the original, reproducing the unique rhythms of spoken language.

Max Porter, International Booker Prize 2025 Chair of judges, described the winning title as something genuinely new for English readers.

"A radical translation which ruffles language, to create new textures in a plurality of Englishes. It challenges and expands our understanding of translation," he said.

"This was the book the judges really loved, right from our first reading. It's been a joy to listen to the evolving appreciation of these stories from the different perspectives of the jury." (PTI)

Putin visited Russia's Kursk region for first time since Moscow said it drove out Ukrainian forces

MOSCOW, May 21: President Vladimir Putin visited Russia's Kursk region for the first time since Moscow claimed that it drove Ukrainian forces out of the area last month, the Kremlin said Wednesday. Putin visited the region bordering Ukraine the previous day, according to the Kremlin.

Ukrainian forces made a surprise incursion into Kursk in August 2024 in one of their biggest battlefield successes in the more than three-year war. The incursion was the first time Russian territory was occupied by an invader since World War II and dealt a humiliating blow to the Kremlin. Since the end of 2023, Russia has mostly had the advantage on the battlefield, with the exception of Kursk. Ukraine, the US and South Korea said that North Korea sent up to 12,000 troops to help the Russian army take back control of Kursk, and Russia said on April 26 that its forces had pushed out the Ukrainian army. Kyiv officials denied the claim. Putin's unannounced visit appeared to be an effort to show

Russia is in control of the conflict even though its full-scale invasion of its neighbour has been slow and costly in terms of casualties and equipment amid recent US and European proposals for a ceasefire that Putin has effectively rejected.

Video broadcast by Russian state media showed that Putin visited Kursk Nuclear Power Plant-2, which is still under construction, and met with selected volunteers behind closed doors. Many of the volunteers wore clothes emblazoned with the Russian flag and the Latin letters Z and V, which are symbols of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. What you are doing now during this difficult situation for this region, for this area, and for the country, will remain with you for the rest of your life as, perhaps, the most meaningful thing with which you were ever involved, Putin said as he drank tea with the volunteers.

Ukraine's surprise thrust into Kursk and its ability to hold land there was a logistical feat, carried out in secrecy, that countered

months of gloomy news from the front about Ukrainian forces being pushed backward by the bigger Russian army. Kyiv's strategy aimed to show that Russia has weaknesses and that the war isn't lost. It also sought to distract Russian forces from their onslaught in the eastern Donetsk region of Ukraine.

The move was fraught with risk. Analysts noted that it could backfire and open a door for Russian advances in Ukraine by further stretching Ukrainian forces that are short-handed along the roughly 1,000-kilometre front line. The incursion didn't significantly change the dynamics of the war. Putin told acting Kursk Gov. Alexander Khinshtein that the Kremlin supported the idea of continuing monthly payments to displaced families that still couldn't return to their homes. Putin said that he would back a proposal to build a museum in the region to celebrate what acting Gov. Alexander Khinshtein described as the heroism of our defenders and the heroism of the region's residents. (AP)

China, Pak, Afghanistan meet in Beijing, decide to expand CPEC

BEIJING/ISLAMABAD, May 21: The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is set to be expanded to Afghanistan with the foreign ministers of the three countries agreeing on it as part of broader efforts to boost "trilateral" cooperation.

The announcement on expansion of CPEC was made following a meeting among Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar and Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Beijing, according to a Pakistani readout.

India has been severely critical of the CPEC as it passes through Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir. New Delhi is also opposed to China's Belt and Road initiative as the project includes the CPEC.

The trilateral meeting took place days after the interim Taliban government recently warmed up to India. The meeting between the foreign ministers of the three countries was held also in the backdrop of Islamabad's persistent criticism of the interim Taliban government for failing to crackdown on militant groups operating from Afghan soil waging a war against Pakistan.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning in her media briefing in Beijing termed as "unofficial" the meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, and Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Amir Khan Muttaqi.

The three countries for a long time had a trilateral

foreign ministers' mechanism which has not been convened for some time amid growing differences between Islamabad and Kabul over forcible repatriation of thousands of Afghan refugees by Pakistan.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry press release on the trilateral meeting quoted Wang as saying that China supports Afghanistan and Pakistan in safeguarding their sovereignty, security and national dignity.

The three sides should deepen cooperation in jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative, promote the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, and strengthen the construction of regional interconnection networks, it said.

The three countries should oppose all forms of terrorism, carry out law enforcement and security cooperation, work together to combat terrorist forces of mutual concern, and be vigilant against external forces interfering in the internal affairs of countries in the region, the press release said.

The trilateral meeting was held on the concluding day of Dar's three day visit to Beijing, the first high-level interaction after India launched Operation Sindoor targeting terror sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) on May 7 in response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people.

"Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan stand together for regional peace, stability, and development," Dar said in a post on X after the meeting and shared a photo of the three leaders together. (AP)

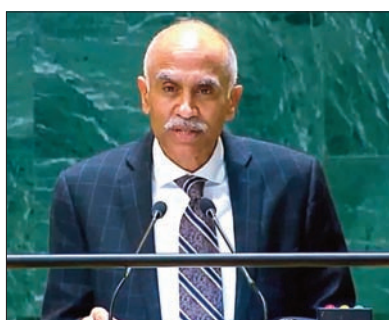
At UN, India calls maritime, anti-terror strategy vital to national security amid Indo-Pacific shifts

UNITED NATIONS, May 21: India told the UN Security Council that it views maritime security and countering terrorism as central to its national security and economic interests as it continues to evolve its strategy in response to new threats and geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific region.

"India, having a long coastline, extensive seafarer community, and capable maritime forces, is actively pursuing its role as a responsible maritime power to safeguard its interests and address emerging threats," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said Tuesday.

He was addressing the UNSC high-level open debate on 'Maintenance of international peace and security: Strengthening Maritime Security through International Cooperation for Global Stability' presided over by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis under Greece's Presidency of the Council for the month of May.

"India views maritime security and countering terrorism as central to its national security and economic interests. Its approach balances robust defence capabilities, regional diplomacy, international cooperation and domestic infrastructure



development. It continues to evolve its strategy in response to new threats and geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific region," Harish said. India underlined that maritime security is a cornerstone of economic growth as critical trade routes, energy supplies, and geopolitical interests are tied to the oceans.

Harish said that India's maritime security strategy is broad and multifaceted, addressing both traditional threats from state actors and non-traditional threats from piracy, contraband smuggling, illegal human migration, unreported and unregulated fishing, maritime incidents, hybrid threats and maritime terrorism.

He further said that India is committed to promoting a free, open and rules-based

maritime order in accordance with the principles of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Furthering this objective, India is undertaking capacity-building efforts to tackle contemporary security challenges and strengthen maritime combat, strategy, and governance, he said.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, addressing the high-level debate, said the discussion underscores that the basic condition to preserve maritime security is the respect by all countries of the UN Charter and international law as reflected in UNCLOS.

Guterres said that over the years, the Security Council has sought to address a range of threats that undermine maritime security and global peace - from piracy, armed robbery, trafficking and organised crime to destructive acts against shipping, offshore installations and critical infrastructure and terrorism in the maritime domain. These, he said, pose significant threats to international security, global trade and economic stability. Voicing concern that no region is spared, Guterres said the problem is getting worse. He said that after a modest global decrease in reported piracy and armed robbery incidents in 2024, the first quarter of 2025

saw a sharp upward reversal.

According to the International Maritime Organisation, reported incidents rose by nearly half, 47.5 per cent, compared to the same period in 2024. Guterres noted that incidents in Asia nearly doubled, especially in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore.

In the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, at-

tacks by the Houthis on commercial vessels have disrupted global trade and increased tensions in an already volatile region. The Gulf of Aden and the Mediterranean Sea "remain treacherously active routes" for migrant smuggling and the trafficking of weapons and human beings. Heroin from Afghanistan continues to reach East Africa through the Indian

Ocean. Cocaine moves through the coasts of the Western Hemisphere and across the Atlantic Ocean to West Africa and European ports. "Cyber-attacks are a fast-emerging security threat for ports and shipping companies. Facing these and other threats, the world's maritime routes and the people depending on them are sending a clear SOS," Guterres said. (PTI)

No.TECH-213/NIT/KOK (BLDG)/2023-24/601

Dated Kokrajhar the 21/05/2025

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only with a validity period of 180 days, which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors under PWD of all classes of the Assam PWD Building and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 1.30 P.M on 29/05/2025 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.30 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Amount.	Earnest Money (2% for GNL and 1% for ST&SC)	Cost of Tender Document	Time of Completion
1	Construction of Boundary Wall of Senior Citizen Office at Kokrajhar Adabari	Rs. 9,99,952.00	Rs.20,000.00 (2%) and Rs.10,000.00 (1%)	Rs. 500.00	3 (Three) Months

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent upto 1.30 PM on all working days from 21/05/2025 to 29/05/2025 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Bank Draft/ Demand Draft, duly pledged to the Principal Secretary, BTC.

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/435

Sd/- Executive Engineer, P.W.D.
Kokrajhar Dist. & Chirang Dist.
Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar

Yatra was led by the NCC cadets of Higher Secondary School

Tawang unites in patriotic fervor with Grand Tiranga Yatra to honour Indian Armed Forces



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 21: In a stirring display of patriotism and unity, the people of Tawang came together today to participate in a grand Tiranga Yatra, marching from the iconic Giant Buddha statue to the revered Tawang War Memorial. The event drew thousands of participants, including monks and nuns, students, NCC cadets, and members of various political parties, all united in their support for the Indian Armed Forces and national security agencies.

The yatra was led by the NCC cadets of Higher Secondary School, Jang, whose impressive band performance set the tone for the march. The patriotic procession culminated in a powerful gathering at the Tawang War Memorial, where the spirit of national pride soared through cultural performances and tributes to the armed forces.

A patriotic dance by the students of Manjushree Vidyapeeth moved the crowd, fol-

lowed by soul-stirring musical performances by singers Vishal and Rinchin Zomba.

Addressing the emotionally charged gathering, MLA Namgye Tsering expressed profound gratitude to the Indian Armed Forces and border security personnel for their unwavering commitment and sacrifice in the defense of the nation. He paid homage to the martyrs of the recent Pahalgam terrorist attack and lauded the firm and decisive response by the Indian military under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Tsering also acknowledged the support of the monastic community, extending special thanks to Dholey Rinpoche, the Abbot of Sera Je Jamyang Choeckorling Monastery, along with monks and nuns from surrounding monasteries and nunneries.

"The civil-military harmony in Tawang is not only remarkable but also a model for the nation. This unique bonhomie must be cherished and strengthened," said MLA Tsering.

He emphasized that the Tiranga Yatra was more than symbolic—it was a manifestation of Tawang's deep emotional bond with the nation's brave soldiers. He also commended all political parties for setting aside differences and uniting in the interest of the country.

In a gesture of honor and respect, MLA Tsering felicitated the Brigade Commander and Commanding Officers of the Indian Army and paramilitary forces, presenting them with traditional swords draped with khada (ceremonial scarves).

The Tiranga Yatra in Tawang stood as a powerful testament to the unity, patriotism, and enduring support of the people of Tawang towards the Indian Armed Forces.

Youths allege irregularities in contract appointments at Centre for Earth Science and Himalayan Studies; demand inquiry



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 21: A group of unemployed youths, led by social activist Pitam Jomoh, have alleged large-scale irregularities in contractual appointments at the Centre for Earth Science and Himalayan Studies (CESHS) under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The group is demanding an independent inquiry and appropriate action.

Addressing the press at the Arunachal Press Club, Jomoh claimed that 34 individuals were appointed to various posts including Group A, B, C, and D categories—such as Account Officer, Technical Officer, Project Scientist, Lower Division Clerk (LDC), and Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS)—without proper advertisement or adherence to recruitment norms. "These appointments were made

in 2022 under the current Director, Tana Tage, without any public notification in local newspapers. Many of the appointees are reportedly the Director's close relatives, which raises serious concerns about nepotism and favoritism," alleged Jomoh.

He further added that all the appointees are drawing salaries from the State Grants-in-Aid under the Arunachal Pradesh State Council for Science and Technology, and that no transparent recruitment process was followed.

In response, Jomoh said written complaints have been submitted to the Chief Minister and the Special Investigation Cell (SIC), now functioning as the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), urging a comprehensive investigation into the matter.

"If the government fails to act and uncover the truth behind these

illegal appointments, we will have no choice but to launch a democratic movement and seek legal redress," warned Jomoh.

Director Responds to Allegations

When contacted by phone, Director Tana Tage, who is currently out of station on official duty, responded to the allegations:

"I was not immediately aware of the latest developments, but I have come across the reports on social media. These are serious allegations, and I will release an official statement after consulting with the Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology," said Tage.

The controversy has sparked significant public interest, with demands for transparency, accountability, and fairness in government recruitment gaining momentum across the state.

Candidates demand immediate deletion of alleged fake voters in IMC Ward No-11

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 21: A group of contesting candidates from Ward No-11 of the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) has raised serious concerns over an alleged large-scale inclusion of ineligible voters in the ward's electoral roll. Addressing a press conference at the Arunachal Press Club on Wednesday, the candidates, led by former IMC Councillor Gora Lotak, demanded immediate deletion of suspicious entries from the voters' list.

Lotak, accompanied by four other aspiring candidates from the ward, stated that multiple petitions and representations have been submitted to the Municipal Electoral Registration Officer (MERO), the Capital Administration, and other concerned authorities. However, they claim that no action has been taken so far, which raises questions about administrative accountability.

"It is alarming that Ward No-11 shows an abnormal surge in the number of voters, many of whom reportedly have no genuine connection with the ward," said Lotak. "This could lead to serious law and order issues and compromises the integrity of the democratic process."

According to preliminary verifications cited by the candidates, many of the newly enlisted voters do not reside within the ward's jurisdiction, nor do they possess valid residential addresses in the area. The group alleges that several of these entries were based

on questionable documentation such as electricity bills, water bills, PRCs, Aadhaar cards, and non-existent household numbers.

"Such rampant fraudulent enrollment sets a dangerous precedent. It undermines not only the electoral process in our ward but may also affect elections in other municipal wards and panchayat constituencies across



Arunachal Pradesh," Lotak warned.

A formal written complaint has already been lodged with the MERO, urging an inquiry and swift action. The group has demanded the cancellation of all allegedly fake enrollments and has asked the authorities to verify documents submitted during voter registration.

The candidates have also issued a warning, stating that if the grievances are not addressed by the time the draft voter list is published, they will be compelled to launch a democratic agitation in protest.

"We want a free and fair election. This cannot happen if the voters' list itself is compromised," they concluded.

Namsai concludes week-long awareness campaign on Solid Waste Bye-Laws

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 21: The week-long awareness programme on the implementation of the Arunachal Pradesh Solid Waste (Management & Handling) Bye-Laws 2023 concluded today at Gandhi Chowk, Namsai Tinali, with enthusiastic participation from residents and shop owners of 2nd Mile, Namsai Tinali, Old Bazaar, and Thana Road areas.

The concluding event began with a welcome address by Er. Juntum Potom, Assistant Engineer (UD), who emphasized the importance of segregating waste into dry and wet categories. He urged citizens not to litter and warned that violators would be fined under the newly implemented bye-laws. He informed that during door-to-door garbage collection, the owner must personally hand over the waste to sanitation workers. Waste found near shops or residences will be considered the responsibility of the occupant, attracting penalties as per law. Er. Potom also announced that a helpline/WhatsApp number will soon be made available for citizens to report any sanitation-related issues or nuisances in their surroundings.

Addressing the gathering, CR Khampa, Deputy Commissioner-cum-Chairman of DUDA, Namsai, urged residents to refrain from dumping garbage into drains and roadsides, especially by travelers. He encouraged people to store waste temporarily in their pockets or bags and dispose of it in dustbins at home or at nearby shops.

Shri Khampa informed that Nuisance Detectors will be appointed to monitor violations and ensure compliance with waste management regulations. A nominal user fee will also be introduced to sustain waste collection operations under the Bye-Laws 2023.

Highlighting the role of the Material Recovery Facility (MRF), he stated that dry waste collected is processed through recycling techniques such as can compression and plastic shredding. He reiterated the importance of proper waste segregation at the source, which aids in effective recycling and reuse.

The Deputy Commissioner further appealed to all citizens to plant trees within their premises or in vacant areas to support the "Clean and Green Namsai" initiative.

The awareness campaign, which began on May 15, witnessed the active participation of all stakeholders from the identified colonies and was supported by officers and staff of the Urban Development Department.

No. DA/BTC/K/Actt-43/2025-26/162 Tender No. DA/BTC/K/e-Tender/2025-26/04 Date 21/05/2025

PRESS NOTICE

The Director of Agriculture, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids through e-Tendering process only from the Firms registered by the Department of Agriculture, Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar for supply of Hybrid/HYV Jackfruit Saplings (Planting Material) for an amount of Rs. 50.00 Lakh (Rupees Fifty Lakh) only against the scheme Distribution of Hybrid/HYV Jackfruit Saplings under Horticulture & Vegetable Crops, SOPD for the year 2025-26.

Details may be seen at www.assamtenders.gov.in and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-
Director of Agriculture,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/423

No. DA/BTC/K/Actt-43/2025-26/164 Tender No. DA/BTC/K/e-Tender/2025-26/06 Date 21/05/2025

PRESS NOTICE

The Director of Agriculture, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids through e-Tendering process only from the Firms registered by the Department of Agriculture, Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar for supply of Sesamum Seeds for an amount of Rs. 40.00 Lakh (Rupees Forty Lakh) only against the scheme Crop Diversification (Cultivation of Sesamum) under Horticulture & Vegetable Crops, SOPD for the year 2025-26.

Details may be seen at www.assamtenders.gov.in and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-
Director of Agriculture,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/417

No. DA/BTC/K/Actt-43/2025-26/163 Tender No. DA/BTC/K/e-Tender/2025-26/05 Date 21/05/2025

PRESS NOTICE

The Director of Agriculture, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids through e-Tendering process only from the Firms registered by the Department of Agriculture, Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar for supply of Cocoa Seedlings (Planting Material) for an amount of Rs. 50.00 Lakh (Rupees Fifty Lakh) only against the scheme Distribution of Cocoa Seedlings under Horticulture & Vegetable Crops, SOPD for the year 2025-26.

Details may be seen at www.assamtenders.gov.in and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-
Director of Agriculture,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/420

Notice for Farmers

It is for general information to all the farmers of Karbi Anglong District that the following scheme under Agriculture Department, Govt. of Assam will be implemented at subsidized rate.

Name of scheme: - Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) 2025-26.

Sl. No	Name of Farm Machinery	Allotment No.	District	Govt. Subsidy
1	Village Level Farm Machinery Bank [VLFMB].	4 (Four) Nos.	Karbi Anglong	95% or maximum 9.50 Lakhs
2	Power Tiller	35 (Thirty Five) Nos.	Karbi Anglong	Maximum 1.25 Lakhs

Interested Farmers/ASG/FPC/SHG are requested to apply in the prescribed format with require documents to the Executive Engineer (Agril), Karbi Anglong Division, Diphu within 31-05-2025.

For detail information, farmers may contact at the office of the Executive Engineer (Agril), Karbi Anglong Division, Diphu.

Contact No. 9954492981

Sd/-
Executive Engineer (Agril.)
Karbi Anglong, Divn:-Diphu

Itinerary is part of a broader strategy to position ICR as a vibrant, sustainable tourism hub DC, ICR unveils 3-Day / 2-Night thematic tourism itinerary to enrich visitor experience

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 21: In a significant move to elevate the tourism appeal of the Itanagar Capital Region (ICR), Deputy Commissioner Sh. Talo Potom, IAS, officially launched a 3-Day / 2-Night Thematic Itinerary under the theme "Adventure - Heritage - Nature - Cultural Experiences".

Curated by Ms. Rechi Lugnya Likha, Tourism Officer, in close collaboration with key tourism stakeholders of ICR, the initiative is aimed at enhancing tourist engagement, extending visitor stays, and promoting the natural and cultural richness of the region through structured and immersive experiences.

Itinerary Highlights:

Day 1 - Cultural Immersion:
Visitors begin their journey with a deep dive into the tribal traditions of the region, exploring vibrant local markets, experiencing indigenous handicrafts, tasting traditional cuisines, and enjoying cultural performances that bring Arunachal's diverse heritage to life.

Day 2 - Adventure & Nature:
Adrenaline meets tranquility with paragliding at Tago, followed by a peaceful village walk and an insightful heritage exploration at Gyekear Sinyi (Ganga



Lake). This day blends outdoor thrills with serene nature-based activities.

Day 3 - Heritage Trail, Jungle Safari & Scenic Drive:

The final day begins with a sunrise trek and forestry trail at Daria Hill Station, complemented by birdwatching and butterfly walks amidst the serene hillscape. The journey concludes with a scenic drive and riverside dining in the picturesque Sopo area, providing a calming and reflective end to the adventure.

A Vision for Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism

Speaking at the launch event, DC Talo Potom emphasized that the itinerary is part of a broader strategy to position ICR

as a vibrant, sustainable tourism hub, while also generating livelihood opportunities for local communities.

"This curated experience reflects our commitment to sustainable and inclusive tourism development. It aligns with Arunachal Pradesh's larger vision of promoting experience-driven tourism while empowering local communities," said DC Potom.

The itinerary serves as a model for destination management, promoting collaborative planning between the government and local tourism stakeholders, and reinforcing the Capital Region's growing appeal as a must-visit destination in Northeast India.

Cong leaders 'belittling' govt's efforts in race to gain popularity in Pak: BJP

NEW DELHI, May 21: The BJP on Wednesday played the Congress over its allegation that the government decided to send multi-party delegations to various countries to divert public attention from "tough questions", saying nationalism has completely vanished in the opposition party.

The ruling BJP also lashed out at other constituents of the opposition INDIA bloc over the recent remarks of some of their leaders on the Indo-Pak conflict, accusing them of "behaving like the Popular Front of Pakistan" at a time when they should have shown solidarity while keeping in mind India's interest.

This came after Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Wednesday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi suddenly thought of sending multi-party delegations to visit different countries to divert attention from the tough questions he is being called to answer, while his image globally has been "shattered". Reacting sharply, BJP national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi accused the Congress leader of "belittling" the government's effort to convey India's strong stand against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism.

"The Congress is forced to make such a statement in frustration as it



is not being able to ask for proof (of Indian military action). Nationalism has completely vanished from the eyes of the Congress," he told a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, when asked about Ramesh's allegations.

"From the statements of Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Jairam Ramesh, it appears that they are trying to outdo each other in the race to gain popularity in Pakistan," the BJP leader charged.

Jairam's remarks are an "insult" to all Members of Parliament (MPs), he alleged.

"They (Congress leaders) are engaged in a PR exercise for Pakistan while diluting the serious efforts of India by calling it diversionary tactics and a PR exercise," the BJP

leader said.

"Your leader either used to go abroad to draw attention (of the foreign forces) towards India or divide India. Every time he went abroad, he made statements to divide the country. It is for the first time that all party leaders (who are part of the delegations) are displaying unity," he said, without naming Rahul Gandhi.

"In some issues, the mindsets of Pakistan and the Congress are the same. Pakistan Army chief promoted as Field Marshal despite losing the war. In Congress also, people become Field Marshal after losing elections," he said.

Trivedi said that all statements of "INDI Alliance" are being quoted in Pakistani media, the Pakistan na-

tional assembly, Pakistan army's briefing and even in the dossiers being prepared by Pakistan against India.

"INDIA Alliance has started behaving like the Popular Front of Pakistan. Just having the name 'India Alliance' does not make you an Indian at heart," he said.

Trivedi urged the Congress and other opposition leaders to rise above partisan politics and refrain from making such remarks when an all-party delegation is going abroad to convey India's strong stand against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. "They should showcase India's solidarity, keep control over their emotions at least for some time, and keep vote bank politics separate from national interest," he said.

Trivedi said the BJP's policy is clear that on such occasions, "we have to rise above party lines and show India's unity on the international platform, whether we are in the opposition or in the government".

"When we were in opposition in 1995, Pakistan was bringing a proposal on Kashmir in Geneva. Our then Leader of opposition Atal Bihari Vajpayee had supported then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao in Geneva and also gave credit to his government," he said. (PTI)

Congress slams government over gaps in MGNREGA implementation

NEW DELHI, May 21: The Congress on Wednesday cited the findings of a new report on MGNREGA to highlight crucial gaps in its implementation and attack the government.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, pointing to the findings of the report by LibTech India, said only seven percent of households get the promised 100 days of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Even as coverage of the scheme rises – perhaps due to the ongoing economic slowdown pushing more families to seek MGNREGS employment – the average of days employment per household has fallen between FY 2023-2024 and FY 2024-2025, he said in a statement.

Ramesh said due to the worsening economic downturn, the budget must make adequate financial provision to realise the vision under MGNREGA.

"MGNREGA wages cannot be set by the arbitrary whims of the government. A Standing Committee must be established to evaluate the need for changes in the wage rate," he said.

The LibTech report points out that employment fell by 7.1 percent in 2024-25, despite an 8.6 percent rise in registered households, under the scheme. It also pointed out that average workdays dropped by 4.3 percent, and 100-day completion households fell by 11.9 percent. Ramesh said the LibTech report documents several crucial gaps in MGNREGA implementation.

"One of the earliest indications of Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's uncaring attitude and shortsightedness was his mockery of MGNREGA on the floor of the Parliament in 2015," he said.

"In the years since, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, MGNREGA has conclusively demonstrated its utility as one of the few social security interventions that the government can execute. From a pre-pandemic total of 6.16 crore households requesting work under the scheme in 2019-20, the numbers jumped by nearly 33 percent to 8.55 crore in 2020-2021. For these crores

of families, MGNREGA was the only lifeline amidst the chaos of the government's unplanned lockdowns," Ramesh said.

He said the LibTech report reveals some concerning data points about the state of the MGNREGA today.

"The MGNREGA budget – ₹ 86,000 crore for FY24-25 – is widely considered inadequate. The People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) had recommended a budget allocation of ₹ 2.64 lakh crore for the MGNREGS for FY 2022-23 itself. The World Bank recommends that at least 1.7 percent of the GDP should be allocated to this programme – current allocations are 0.26 percent of GDP as of 2024-25," he said.

After many years of arbitrary deletion of MGNREGS workers, sustained pressure from civil society and the Opposition parties has finally forced the Modi Government to reinstate deleted job cards, he pointed out.

"However, the pace of additions has to be kept up to undo the damage wreaked upon beneficiaries over the last several years," he noted.

Ramesh said during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, MGNREGS workers from across the country raised these issues at the Jan Sunwai held at Ranka in Jharkhand on February 14, 2024.

Eight months later, these issues continue to persist – a government-created human, economic, and institutional tragedy, he said.

"The Indian National Congress has consistently demanded several key changes to the Union Government's implementation of MGNREGA, and the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj has echoed several of these," he said.

"MGNREGA was envisioned as a demand-driven scheme, with workdays depending on the individuals applying for work rather than government budgets. Especially given the worsening economic downturn, the Budget must make adequate financial provision to realise this vision," Ramesh stressed. (PTI)

ED searches at educational institutions linked to Karnataka Home Minister



BENGALURU, May 21: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is conducting searches at educational institutions linked to Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara at Tumkur and on the outskirts of Bengaluru, official sources said on Wednesday. According to sources, the searches were underway at Sri Siddhartha Medical College and Sri Siddhartha Institute Of Technology in Tumkur and Sri Siddhartha Institute Of Medical Sciences in Nelmangala on the outskirts of Bengaluru. The reasons for the searches are not yet known.

While Chief Minister did not wish to make any comments on ED searches stating he was not aware of it, Congress General Secretary in-charge of Karnataka Ranadeep Singh Surjewala while pointing out that Parameshwara was a tall SC leader said that the raids appear to be a desperate attempt to coverup the corruption of previous BJP governments and stifle the voice of those who champion the voice of the oppressed.

"I don't know...I will check and speak," Siddaramaiah said in response to a question on ED raids.

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said, "I don't know. No way my Home Minister is involved in any such case. He is a decent, simple man...no way Parameshwara is involved in such type of case."

"What is there to do it (searches) on educational institutions. I don't have proper information. I get information and react to it," he said. Surjewala said, Congress government in

the state has given property ownership to 1 Lakh SC/ST families on Tuesday at Hospet. This raid is a frustrated reaction of BJP and Narendra Modi government at the centre he said. He also said that Parameshwara is one of the tallest SC leaders.

"The constant assault on Constitution and leaders of SC/ST and OBC communities across India has become a habitual pattern. The revenge seeking against Parameshwara is part of this sinister design," he said in a post on 'X'. Siddhartha Institute of Technology in Tumkur, run by Parameshwara, was set up 46 years ago in 1979 and Siddhartha Medical College in Tumkur was set up 28 years ago in 1988 in the rural hinterland of Tumkur to light the lamp of education. Surjewala said. He also added, it was indeed surprising that after 46 years of setting up of this institution, Modi government is searching for wrongdoing, while BJP's corruption is being actively investigated by the state's Home ministry and Parameshwara.

"The ED raids appear to be a desperate attempt to coverup the corruption of previous BJP Governments and stifle the voice of those who champion the voice of the oppressed," he said. "Karnataka Congress will carry forward with the 5 Congress guarantees undeterred and will follow up more rigorously the 6th Congress guarantee of giving ownership of 1 Lakh houses to our brothers and sisters of the SC/ST communities. Truth shall win. Satyameva Jayate," he said. (PTI)

Multi-party delegation leaves for Japan

NEW DELHI, May 21: A multi-party delegation led by JD (U) MP Sanjay Jha on Wednesday left for Japan to put across India's views on terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

The delegation will also visit South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore as part of New Delhi's outreach following Operation Sindoor and the subsequent conflict between India and Pakistan.

As many as nine terror camps were hit inside Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir by Indian forces to avenge the Pahalgaon terror attack, which left at least 26 civilians dead.

The delegation led by Jha includes BJP MPs Aparajita Sarangi, Brijlal, Pradhan Barua and Hemang Joshi, Congress leader and former external affairs minister Salman Khurshid, TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee, CPI(M)'s John Brittas, and former ambassador Mohan Kumar.

Another delegation led by Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde will also leave for the UAE, Liberia, Congo and Sierra Leone later in the day.

The government is sending seven multi-party delegations to reach out to the international community on Pakistan's designs and India's response to terror. (PTI)

Congress demands action against Malviya, Goswami for 'defaming' Rahul Gandhi, party

NEW DELHI, May 21: The Congress on Wednesday demanded strict action against BJP IT cell head Amit Malviya and journalist Arnab Goswami, a day after complaints were filed for their alleged defamatory posts against the party and its leader Rahul Gandhi.

Congress general secretary in-charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said multiple complaints have been filed against the duo in different parts of the country, including Delhi and Karnataka.

In a post on X, he said, "The INC has filed criminal complaints against Amit Malviya and Arnab Goswami. These have now been registered and converted into FIRs, Ramesh said in the post.

"Now, this duo will run to the courts to seek protection. We hope that the courts examine the great mischief and harm caused to the nation by the malicious actions of

these two," Ramesh said.

Ramesh had earlier hinted that the Congress was initiating action under civil and criminal laws against two individuals for spreading "lies with malice against the INC and its leadership".

The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) has also filed a complaint against Malviya and Goswami.

In a statement, the IYC Legal Department said it lodged an FIR under non-bailable sections against the BJP IT cell chief and Republic TV's Goswami in Karnataka for a false conspiracy to defame Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and link Congress with Turkiye.

IYC national president Uday Bhanu Chib said the "malicious attempt" to defame the Congress party, spread unrest and undermine national security is a direct attack on democracy.

Central govt employees retiring day before annual pay hike date to get notional increment

NEW DELHI, May 21: Central government employees retiring a day before their annual pay hike date would be eligible to get notional increment for the purpose of calculating the pension admissible to them, an official order said. The move follows a Supreme Court order in this regard.

"It is advised that in pursuance of the above referred order dated 20.02.2025 of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, action may be taken to allow the increment on July 1/January 1 to the Central government employees who retired/are retiring a day before it became due, i.e., on June 30/December 31, and have rendered the requisite qualifying service as on the date of their superannuation with satisfactory work and good conduct for calculating the pension admissible to them," the order issued by the personnel ministry said.

The existing rules allow the employees to choose either July 1 or January 1 as their increment date.

As specifically mentioned in the orders of the apex court, "grant of the notional increment on January 1/July 1 shall be reckoned only for the purpose of calculating the pension admissible, and not for the purpose of calculation of other pensionary benefits," said the order issued on Tuesday. Referring to another Supreme Court directive, the ministry said that "one increment will be payable on and after 01.05.2023".



Enhanced pension for the period prior to April 30, 2023, will not be paid, it said in the order issued to all the Central ministries.

The All India NPS Employees Federation, which is working for the welfare of Central and state government employees, welcomed the decision and expressed its gratitude to the Centre.

The federation's national president Manjeet Singh Patel also requested the government to extend the benefit of the notional increment to the employees who opt for the unified pension scheme under the National Pension System. There are about 48.66 lakh Central government employees. (PTI)

Lion population in Gujarat goes up from 674 to 891 in 5 years; footprint expands too



GANDHINAGAR, May 21: The estimated population of Asiatic lions in Gujarat has increased to 891 from 674 five years ago as per the census conducted this month, officials said on Wednesday.

Not only the count went up by 217, but the animals were found outside the Gir National Park, their traditional habitat, and spread across 11 districts of Saurashtra including non-forested and coastal areas, the officials said.

"Estimated population of Asiatic lions has increased to 891," Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel told reporters here.

As per the last census conducted in June 2020, the population of Asiatic lions, a subspecies only found in Gujarat's Gir area, was estimated at 674.

As per the latest count, there are estimated 196 males, 330 females, 140 sub-adults and 225 cubs, said the Gujarat forest department.

As the population of lions is increasing, their spread in Saurashtra region has also expanded. The big cats were earlier confined to the Gir National Park in Junagadh and Amreli districts, but now they have spread to 11 districts, an official said.

As many as 384 lions were counted in Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary and 507 were found outside its limits, said Jaipal Singh, principal chief conservator of forest.

The areas outside Gir where lions were spotted included sanctuaries like Pania, Mitiyala, Girnar and Barda. Some animals were seen in non-forested areas and coastal areas too.

Seventeen lions were counted in

Barda sanctuary, 15 km from Porbandar.

The highest number of lions recorded in a single pride was 17 in Bhavnagar district, official said.

The 16th Asiatic lion census, a four-day exercise, was conducted from May 10 to 13 in two phases, covering an area of 35,000 square kilometres across 58 talukas of 11 districts.

While the preliminary census was conducted on May 10 and 11, the final count was held on May 12 and 13 with the help of 3,000 volunteers, including regional, zonal and sub-zonal officers, enumerators, assistant enumerators and inspectors, said a forest department release.

The census was conducted through a more accurate method called 'direct beat verification', which provides 100 percent accuracy with almost zero margin of error due to statistical analysis and ease of implementation, said the release.

A lion census is conducted every five years by the state Forest Department.

Volunteers recorded details such as time of observation, direction of movement, sex, age, any other identifying marks on the body and GPS location among others. (PTI)

LOST

I, Menuiti Tokbipi daughter of Kangbura Tokbi resident of Bidya sing Tokbi Village, Langmili, Karbi Anglong lost my original HSLC Marksheet bearing Roll B24-0439 No. 0464.

Congratulations pour in for Banu Mushtaq for winning International Booker Prize

BENGALURU, May 21: Congratulatory messages pour in for writer Banu Mushtaq for winning the International Booker Prize for her Kannada short story collection, with many describing it as a proud moment for all Kannadigas and her work has spread the vibrancy of the language and its literature globally.

Writer, activist and lawyer Mushtaq's short story collection 'Hridaya Deepa' (Heart Lamp) has become the first Kannada title to win the coveted GBP 50,000 International Booker Prize in London.

Mushtaq collected the prize at a ceremony at Tate Modern along with Deepa Bhashti, who translated the title from Kannada to English.

Lauding her feat, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said, she has raised the flag of Kannada's greatness at international level.

"Heartiest congratulations to the proud Kannada writer Banu Mushtaq for winning the International Booker Prize for Literature. This is a time to celebrate Kannada, Kan-



nadigas and Karnataka," Siddaramaiah posted on 'X'.

He said, Banu Mushtaq, who writes while embodying the true values of harmony, secularism, and brotherhood of this land, has raised the flag of Kannada's greatness at the international level and brought respect to us all.

"I wish she would continue to write meaningfully for many more years and spread the vibe of Kan-

nada to the world," the CM said.

"On behalf of all Kannadigas, I would also like to congratulate the talented author Deepa Bhashti, who has translated her Booker Prize-winning work 'Hridaya Deepa' into English," he added.

Union Minister and Former Chief Minister Kumaraswamy heaped praise on the writer on 'X' too.

"This is a proud moment for all

Kannadigas. Heartfelt congratulations to our state's proud author, Banu Mushtaq, who has been awarded the International Booker Literary Prize," he said in his post.

"Congratulations to author Deepa Bhashti also, for translating this Booker Prize-winning work into English. I hope Banu Mushtaq will produce more such great works. May the Kannada literary world be enriched by her and may the flavor of Kannada spread across the world," Kumaraswamy added.

Shortlisted among six worldwide titles, Mushtaq's work appealed to the judges for its "witty, vivid, colloquial, moving and exhorting" style of capturing portraits of family and community tensions.

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar described Mushtaq winning the prize as Karnataka's pride soaring the skies.

"Congratulations to Banu Mushtaq for raising the glory of Kannada literature to the skies! It is a matter of pride that Kannada writer

Avoidable misunderstanding: Sambit Patra on 'concealing' state's name on bus

Security personnel had stopped the bus at Gwaltabi check post, around 25 km from Imphal

IMPHAL, May 21: BJP's North-east-in-charge Sambit Patra has said the incident of security forces in Manipur allegedly stopping a government bus with journalists on board and concealing the state's name on its windshield was an "avoidable misunderstanding", asserting that the "integrity of Manipur is non-negotiable".

Media organisations of Manipur and political parties had on Tuesday criticised the security forces for the alleged incident at Gwaltabi in Imphal East district, as journalists were being taken to cover the 5th state-level tourism festival of 'Shirui Lily'.

The security personnel had stopped the bus at Gwaltabi check post, around 25 km from Imphal, and allegedly forced the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) staff to conceal the state's name written on the top of the vehicle's windshield with a piece of white paper.



Patra, in a video message on X on Tuesday night said: "I would like to congratulate the state of Manipur for conducting the Shirui Lily festival after two years... Since May 17 to May 20, about three to four Manipur state transport buses carrying about 2,000 people have travelled to Ukhrul, where the Shirui

lily festival is being conducted.

"Today (Tuesday), an unfortunate incident has happened, I believe, because of avoidable misunderstanding. I firmly like to reiterate that as far as the integrity of Manipur is concerned, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah... has maintained (it) is something which

is non-negotiable. It's something which we always stand for."

The BJP leader also said that after two years, some sort of festivity has returned to Manipur, which is "something to be celebrated and not to be conspired".

"Anyone who feels this is a conspiracy, I on behalf of BJP, would like to assure that this is not a conspiracy and have faith on us," Patra said.

Meanwhile, reacting to the incident, former chief minister N Biren Singh said those behind the "irresponsible action" should be punished.

"What is this that the state's name cannot be written in Manipur. Whoever is behind such irresponsible actions should be punished. First, know Manipur. I stand with the journalist fraternity and the people of Manipur," he said on X.

Media organisations in Manipur also said because of the "harassment" caused to journalists, they

will observe a 'pen down strike' on Wednesday and boycott all news and information related to the state government.

In a memorandum to the governor, they sought immediate action against those responsible for "causing harassment" to journalists who went to cover the 'Shirui Lily' festival.

"The vehicle cleared at least three checkpoints after routine security checks. However, upon reaching Gwaltabi, personnel from the 4 Mahar Regiment instructed the team to hide the phrase 'Manipur State Transport' printed on the front of the bus."

"The instruction raised concern and confusion among the media professionals, who questioned the logic behind hiding a state's name while operating within the state," the memorandum submitted by the All Manipur Working Journalists Union and Editors Guild Manipur said. (PTI)



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 21: Nagaland's lone Lok Sabha MP on Wednesday S Supongmeren Jamir underscored the importance of accountability, unity and humility among the Naga leaders to foster meaningful change in the state.

Jamir called upon the leaders of tribal hohos (bodies), NGOs, and civil society organisations to actively engage with their assigned responsibilities to ensure development.

He was speaking at a community ambulance distribution programme at 5th Mile, Chumoukedima. Four ambulances were distributed under the MP local area development scheme (MPLADS) during the programme.

Highlighting the challenges of an opposition-less government in Nagaland, Jamir said democracy suffers in such a system and urged civil society organisations and NGOs to play a guiding and watchdog role in such a scenario. Jamir also appealed for a

collective effort to safeguard Naga identity, culture, and rights while resisting external pressures.

Jamir also sought advice from the tribal leaders on issues of the state to be presented in the Parliament.

In his address as the special guest, Dimapur DC Tinojongshi Chang appreciated the MP's initiative in fulfilling a long-standing community need for ambulances, made possible through MPLADS.

Reflecting on his first meeting with the MP during his posting as extra assistant commissioner in 2003, Chang lauded Jamir's consistent humility and commitment to public service.

He described Dimapur as a "mini Nagaland" and called on all communities in the district to live in unity and cooperation.

The four community ambulances were handed over to tribal hohos - Ao Senden Mokochung, Chakhroma Public Organisation Chumoukedima, Eastern Naga Public Union Dimapur and Western Sumi Hoho - during the programme.

Representatives of the recipient organisations lauded the MP for his commitment to grassroots people, calling him a leader who walks the talk. The ambulance distribution was part of a broader initiative to enhance emergency health response and accessibility across the state.

Rio asks depts to assess availability of essential commodities before monsoon season

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 21: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, who is also the chairman of Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA), on Tuesday directed all government departments to assess the availability of essential commodities across the districts before the monsoon season sets in.

Chairing a monsoon preparedness meeting at the CM's conference hall in Nagaland civil secretariat at Kohima, Rio said if there are any complaints from any village or town on shortage of essential commodities the matter has to be reported to the authority. He also instructed the departments to monitor the fair price shops to ensure that consumer rights are protected.

He directed the chief secretary to have a video conference with all the deputy commissioners and update the status of the essential commodities and monsoon preparedness across the districts. Rio further directed the administration and police department for routine road checks to ensure smooth flow of traffic in towns and also on national highways during the monsoon season.

Roads and bridges minister G Kaito Aye requested the disaster management department to allocate a specific amount of funds for emergency response, which can be utilised by any department during the monsoon season. He also called on the NHIDCL and the PWD (roads and bridges) department to identify pocket-wise areas where immediate road restoration and repair is required, adapting restoration strategies and ensuring their effectiveness.

He further requested the mechanical department to update the status of the machinery available for the upcoming monsoon season. PHE minister Jacob Zhimomi cautioned the NHIDCL to instruct the contractors to follow strict protocols during road construction for durability and sustainability of roads.

ANSAM in favour of logical conclusion for Indo-Naga peace process

SENAPATI, May 21: The All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM), in its second presidential council meeting, held recently at the community hall in Kongsakul village hosted by Liangmai Naga Katimai Ruangdi, Manipur (LNKR-M), reaffirmed its stance to extend fullest support towards the ongoing Indo-Naga peace process for logical conclusion in the true spirit of August 3, 2015 Framework Agreement, duly recognizing the Naga national flag and constitution "that is rightfully ours in the negotiated settlement to usher in peace and progress in the north-eastern region". Further, the ANSAM also said it "stands in solidarity with all the 'Naga political prisoners' languishing in the various places in India or Myanmar who are for the cause of the

people. The ANSAM demanded for unconditional release of all the "Naga political prisoners" at the earliest as a confidence building measure. The ANSAM then said it "expects" the leaders in the Government of India to reposition themselves from a "double standard approach" to fairness and justness so as to resolve "this long-standing political issue in Southeast Asia with political will and magnanimity". The ANSAM in its presidential council meeting also unanimously re-asserted its staunch opposition to the arbitrary decision and actions of Government of India on abrogation of Free Movement Regime (FMR) and "imposed border fencing in Naga homeland dividing the people in terms of social, economic, land, familiar etc." The ANSAM had also unanimously

agreed to take up democratic course of actions to register "our sentiment and for a stoppage of the imposed fencing work and reinstatement of FMR". The ANSAM, while asserting its position of staunch opposition to scrapping of FMR and border fencing, once again implored on the Government of India to sincerely engage in the negotiating table to resolve the protracted Indo-Naga political issue. The presidential council meeting, after a three-hour discussion taking into account the incidents and "acts of provocative intrusion happening in and around Naga areas", unanimously reaffirmed its rigid stance to protect the Naga ancestral land and people and shall take appropriate steps to secure the same from any form of aggression. (NNV)

Meghalaya govt nod to crackdown on illegal Bangladeshi, Rohingya migrants

SHILLONG, May 21: The Meghalaya state government has directed all district administrations to crackdown and arrest illegal Bangladeshi and Rohingya migrants in the state.

The direction came a day after the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had instructed all state governments and union territories to constitute Special Task Forces (STFs) in every district to identify and deport illegal Bangladeshi and Rohingya migrants within the next 30 days. Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Meghalaya deputy chief minister in-charge home, Prestone

Tynsong said, "Yes, we are on the job. We have already given direction to all district administrations and deputy commissioners to crack down wherever they suspect or receive inputs (about illegal immigrants), they should be arrested immediately."

Tynsong informed that the district task forces (DTFs) tasked with the job to keep a check on people coming to the state and residing in different districts - are already in place and operational as mandated by the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act (MRSSA), 2016. (NNV)

ILP to be implemented in Dimapur, Chumu, Niuland

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 21: Dimapur DC Tinojongshi Chang on Tuesday informed the non-Naga communities residing in Dimapur, Chumoukedima and Niuland districts that the inner line permit (ILP) will surely be implemented in the three districts this time. The DC held a meeting with the non-Naga communities at his office conference hall today to inform this. The ILP regime is already in force in other districts of the state.

Chang told media persons after the meeting that the state cabinet on May 14 reiterated that the ILP will be implemented in Dimapur, Chumoukedima and Niuland districts.

"Accordingly, we have informed different organisations and communities that the ILP will be implemented in the three districts this time, no matter what," he said.

Chang noted that there was some confusion among the communities that though the government had notified implementation of ILP in the three districts through earlier notifications in 2018, 2019 and 2023, it did not become a reality. "They thought it would be the same again," he said, adding said it had to be kept in abeyance because of Covid and other issues.

"We called them to clarify that this time the ILP in the three districts will definitely be implemented," he said. Asked when it will be implemented, he said a notification will be issued.

He also said the government had decided to set up an ILP enforcement directorate by deploying officials from various departments.

The DC hoped that the district administration would be able to set up an ILP cell after the establishment of the directorate.

Shirui Lily festival-2025 begins showcasing Manipur's rich biodiversity

Governor inaugurates the festival in Ukhrul



IMPHAL, May 21: Governor of Manipur, Ajay Kumar Bhalla, inaugurated the 5th State Level Shirui Lily Festival-2025 at Heritage Ground, Vangayan, Shirui village in Ukhrul district, today.

The five-day festival showcases cultural events, artifacts, games, music and food of Manipur state in general and particularly that of the Tangkhul Naga tribe.

During the inauguration, the Governor released the 75th anniversary souvenir and inspected the various stalls at the venue. He also witnessed spectacular cultural performances shown by different tribes.

In the morning, the Governor scaled the Shirui peak, taking in the serene beauty of the valley below. Amidst this picturesque landscape, the Shirui Lily stood in full bloom, a quiet yet striking emblem of nature's charm.

Addressing the gathering at the inaugural ceremony, the Governor said the Shirui Lily Festival, which is being held in the picturesque district of Ukhrul, is a tribute to the magnificent Shirui Lily- the state flower. He said that, from anywhere else in the planet, but in the Shirui Hills, this rare plant is a living symbol

of Manipur's ecological wealth and natural heritage.

Organised with the dual vision of promoting sustainable eco-tourism and environmental awareness, this festival has grown into one of the most attractive and spectacular events in the state's cultural calendar.

The Governor then highlighted Shirui Lily as a fragile marvel, thriving solely in the unique micro-climate of Shirui hills, making the region exceptional.

More than a botanical treasure, it symbolizes resilience, uniqueness, and ecological balance. The festival serves as a collective reminder to protect this endangered species while celebrating the vibrant Tangkhul Naga culture through traditional dances, music, crafts, and local cuisines, uniting people from all walks of life.

Describing Ukhrul as the crown jewel of Manipur's hill districts, the Governor further said that it is a destination in itself with green hills, forest and deep-rooted traditions. From the track to Shirui peak, to the exploration of Khangkhui caves and visit to Longpi pottery village, Ukhrul truly has something for everyone.

The Governor also said that the festival which has come back after a gap of two years will be a beginning again all over in the years to come and will see more and more visitors. "We have the intent of promoting this festival all across the country and abroad", it added.

The Governor then exuded confidence that the festival will not only entertain and inspire but also ignite people's sense of environmental stewardship and cultural vibes. He also urged the people to forget about the smaller things but to work for a harmonious and peaceful living among all sections of society. Governor wished the festival a grand success. (NNV)

AFFIDAVIT

I, Tashrif Hassan, S/O Hafiz Ali, R/O Kharupetia Ward No.3, P.O. & P.S. Kharupetia, Dist. Darrang, Assam, solemnly affirm that I am a permanent resident of the above address and an Indian citizen by birth. My name appears as Mohammad Tashrif Hassan in my passport and academic records but as Tashrif Hassan in other government documents. I have decided to drop the prefix "Mohammad" and will henceforth be known as Tashrif Hassan for all purposes. This name simplification does not affect my legal obligations. I declare that I shall be known as Tashrif Hassan in all records and legal documents. This affidavit is submitted as evidence to support these facts.

Sd/-
Tashrif Hassan
S/O Hafiz Ali

RENOVATION, UP GRADATION, OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF OLD RETIRING ROOMS & DORMITORY AT GUWAHATI RAILWAY STATION

Tender No.: C-LMG-07-2025; Dated: 16-05-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:
Name of work: Renovation, Up gradation, Operation and Maintenance of Old Retiring Rooms & Dormitory at Guwahati Railway station for a period of 05 (five) years. Advertised Value : ₹29,73,312/- Earnest Money: ₹2,28,900/- E-Tender will be closed at 11:00 hrs. on 06-06-2025. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.irps.gov.in.
Sr. DCM, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a smile"

CONSTRUCTION OF ADDITIONAL PRE SEDIMENTATION TANK

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/41 of 2025; Dated: 16-05-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: SN. 1. Brief Description of Item: Construction of additional Pre sedimentation tank at BRLF pump house and other piping connection work under jurisdiction of Sr.DEN/IV/Lumding. Tender Value: ₹2,34,34,774.70; Earnest Money: ₹2,67,200.00. E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 09-06-2025 and opened at 15:00 hrs. on 10-06-2025. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 09-06-2025 in website <http://www.irps.gov.in>.
DRM/Works, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a smile"

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM					
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER,					
KARBI ANGLONG:: DIPHU (REVENUE & D.M. BRANCH)					
No KGRR-20/2025-26/Tender/ 1			Dated Diphu the 17th May. 2025		
NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION					
Sealed quotations affixing court Fee Stamps of Rs 8.25 (Rupees eight twenty five) Non-refundable are hereby invited from the registered Govt suppliers/reputed firms for supply of the following items in connection with Gratuitous Relief distribution. The Tender shall clearly mention the rate both in words and figures inclusive of taxes. The applicable tax is to be shown separately against each item. The intending quotations must submit with sample along with the rate quoted to the office during office hours within 26/05/2025.					
Items to be supplied					
Sl No	Name of item	Unit	Cost of the item Without Tax	Applicable Tax	Total With Tax
1	Rice (Superfine)	Per Quintal/kg			
2	Masur Dal (small)	Per Quintal/kg			
3	Salt (best quality)	Per packet			
4	Mustard oil (best quality)	Per litre			
5	Rice flakes (chira) fine Quality	Per Kg			
6	Gur, best quality	Per Kg			
7	Baby Food 1)Milk biscuit etc	Per packet			
8	Tarpaulin PVC (tripal) (size 18x24 ft) Best quality	Per piece			
9	Tarpaulin PVC (tripal) (size 24x27 ft) Best quality	Per piece			
10	Tarpaulin PVC (tripal) (size 18x15 ft) Best quality	Per piece			
11	Match box	Per bundle			
12	Candle (big/medium size)	Per packet			
13	Wheat Bran/Rice Bran (fooder)	Per quintal/kg			
14	Soap (medium size). best quality	Per piece			
15	Plastic bucket & Mug (18 L bucket)	Per unit			
16	Cotton Saree (6.50 meter)	Per unit			
17	Peni pekok/(Khonjari Duphriso)	Per unit			
18	Dettol 200 ml	Per unit			
19	Utensil Rice plate non plastic)	Per unit			
20	Bowl (non plastic)	Per unit			
21	Glass (non plastic)	Per dozen			
22	Bleaching powder	Per kg			
23	Sanitary napkin	Per packet			
24	Mosquito Col	Per packet			
25	Phenyl (black)	500 ml			
26	Phenyl (white)	500 ml			
27	Mosquito net (medium Size)	Per unit			
28	Face mask	Per 100 pc			
29	Hand Sanitizer	200 ml			
GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS					
1 The quotation should reach the undersigned on within i.e on 26/05/2025 on or befor 5 pm. only					
2 The tender shall clearly mention the rate both in words and figures inclusive of taxes Applicable tax is to be shown separately against each item					
3 The quotation should contain the following documents-					
a) Copy of PAN Card b) Copy of GST Registration Certificate (Upto dat) c) KAAC Trade License (Upto date)					
4 The bidders should submit sample at the time of submission of quotation					
5 The quoted price must be applied for whole of the year or until next quotation whichever is later					
6 Payment is to be made as and when fund received under the specific head No price escalation/interest to be paid for late payment					
7 Authority has every right to cancel/partially cancel the quotation any time without cost/notice					
8 In case of violation of terms and condition of the quotation document or unsatisfactory supply of materials or of poor quality and below standard, the Authority reserves the right to terminate the contract by giving intimation to the supplier					
9 The decision of the authority in all respect shall be final and binding on all					
District Commissioner -cum-Chairperson					
DDMA, Karbi Anglong Diphu					
Memo No. KGRR-20/2025-26/Tender/1-A			Dated Diphu the 17th May, 2025		

CAREY MULLIGAN IN TALKS TO BOARD NETFLIX'S 'NARNIA' FILM

LOS ANGELES, May 21: Hollywood actor Carey Mulligan, best known for "An Education" and "The Great Gatsby", is in negotiations to join the star cast of Netflix's "Narnia" film.

According to the entertainment news outlet The Hollywood Reporter, Mulligan will star alongside Daniel Craig, Meryl Streep and Emma Mackey in the film. It is directed by Greta Gerwig, and is an adaptation of C.S. Lewis' "The Chronicles of Narnia" fantasy novels.

Gerwig is directing the movie adaptation of the sixth novel in the series, "The Magician's Nephew".

The novel served as a prequel to "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe", exploring two youngsters who, thanks to an uncle's magic dabbling, unleash the White Witch into a turn of the 20th century London.

The 39-year-old actor will reportedly portray the very sick mother of Digory, one of the two kids in the adventure.

Mulligan's latest work is "The Ballad of Wallis Island". The comedy film released in March and was directed by James Griffiths. (PTI)

WE HAVE GIVEN OUR BEST TO 'WAR 2', NOT EASY TO MAKE FILMS OF THIS SCALE: HRITHIK ROSHAN

NEW DELHI, May 21: Superstar Hrithik Roshan, who is reprising his role as RAW agent Major Kabir Dhaliwal in Yash Raj Films's "War 2", says the movie will be an "action spectacle" for the audiences.

Roshan is happy with the response to the teaser of the film, which was unveiled on Tuesday and features Jr NTR as the main antagonist and Kiara Advani opposite him.

"War is a really special franchise for me. So, seeing the appreciation that War 2's teaser is getting, seeing how people are pouring their love for NTR, Kiara, Ayan, for me, and the entire team makes me really happy. It is not easy making films of this scale, and we have given our best to make War 2 an action spectacle for people," the actor said in a statement.

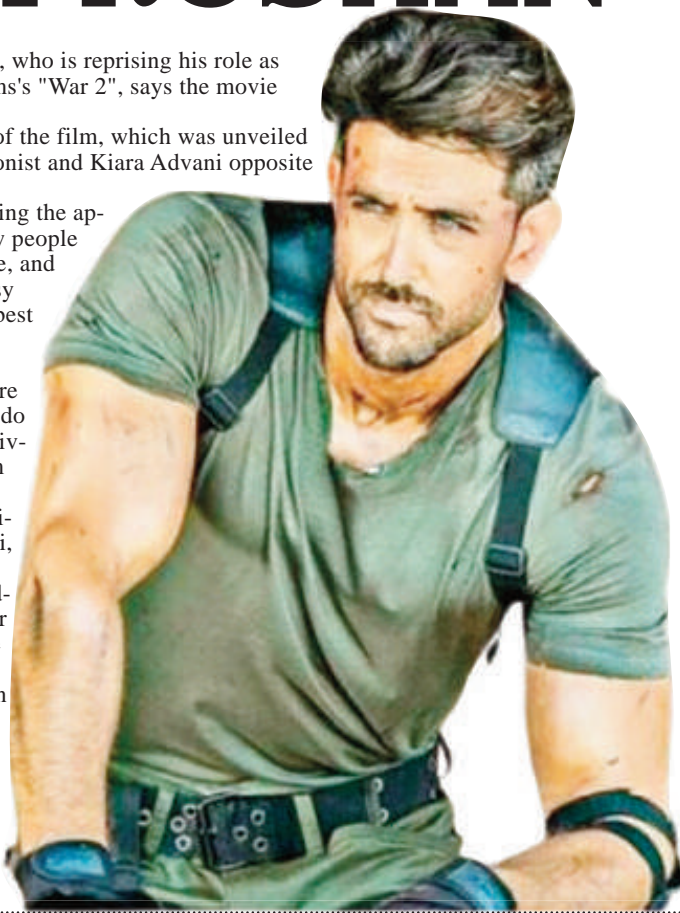
"I have always been a huge fan of the action genre since I was a kid, and I really have fun whenever I do films like War 2. So, for me, I had the best time reliving Kabir—a character that has given me love from all quarters for years now."

The movie, which is the sixth title in YRF's ambitious spy universe, is scheduled for release in Hindi, Tamil & Telugu on August 14, 2025.

"I'm delighted and humbled by the love and feedback that War 2 is getting right from the start of our campaign. I can't wait to see the reaction of people when they see War 2 on the big screen."

Produced by Aditya Chopra and directed by Ayan Mukerji, "War 2" promises to deliver six major action sequences shot across five countries over 150 days.

The YRF Spy Universe also includes Salman Khan's "Tiger" movies and Shah Rukh Khan's "Pathaan". The next instalment in the franchise is "Alpha", starring Alia Bhatt and Sharvari. (PTI)



'ARANYER DIN RATRI' RECEIVES STANDING OVATION AT CANNES 2025 SCREENING

NEW DELHI, May 21: The 4K restored version of Satyajit Ray's classic "Aranyer Din Ratri" received a standing ovation at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, where it was screened under the Cannes Classics section.

Veteran actors Sharmila Tagore and Simi Garewal, who were part of the

filmmaker Wes Anderson, a longtime admirer of Ray who spearheaded its six-year restoration.

The restored version of "Aranyer Din Ratri" is presented and restored by Martin Scorsese's The Film Foundation through its World Cinema Project initiative at L'Imagine



Ritrovata in collaboration with Shivaendra Singh Durgapur's Film Heritage Foundation, Janus Films, and the Criterion Collection.

Also part of the screening were producer Purnima Dutta and Margaret Bodde, executive director of The Film Foundation.

The film, titled "Days and Nights in the Forest" in English, explores themes of alienation, class, and

modernity. It follows the story of four city-bred men who escape to the forests of Palamau (now in Jharkhand) for a carefree holiday, only to undergo a journey of self-discovery.

Tagore last came to Cannes in 2009 as part of the gala jury. Previously, her 1960 film "Devi", also directed by Ray, competed for the Palme d'Or, the festival's top honour. (PTI)

"A little more.... Of moments. Standing ovation. A beautiful celebration of life. Team that made it all possible. Congratulations! @filmheritagefoundation," she captioned the post.

Pataudi also shared pictures of her with her mother, Garewal, as well as film's gala presenter and Hollywood

'Homebound' director Neeraj Ghaywan and team appear for official photocall at Cannes 2025

NEW DELHI, May 21: Filmmaker Neeraj Ghaywan and the team of his second directorial "Homebound" made another appearance at the 78th Cannes Film Festival where the movie is being screened as part of the Un Certain Regard segment.

On Wednesday, Ghaywan as well as the star cast -- Ishaan Khatter, Vishal Jethwa, Janhvi Kapoor -- appeared for the official photocall ahead of the movie's premiere at the Debussy Theatre.

They were joined by producer Karan Johar as well as his Dharma Productions colleagues Apoorva Mehta and Somen Mishra.

While Khatter opted for a brown two-piece suit with a white shirt, Kapoor wore an ensemble by designer Anamika Khanna. Johar chose an all-black suit from late couturier Rohit Bal's label.

"Homebound" marks Ghaywan's second time at the prestigious gala where he brought his directorial debut "Masaan" back in 2015. The critically-acclaimed social drama also premiered in the same section where it won two awards.

The director appeared on the red carpet on Tuesday evening along with the film's cast and Johar.

"From Indian soil to the shores of Cannes - our team Homebound shines moments before the red carpet," Dharma Productions captioned a group photograph of the film's team shared on its official Instagram page on Wednesday morning.

For the red carpet, Khatter was dressed in a deep Bordeaux velvet bandhgala designed by Gaurav Gupta.

Jethwa, also known for films such as "Mardaani 2" and "Salaam Venky", chose a black power suit with jewelled shoulder pads by London-based menswear designer Kaushik Vendra. He completed his look with a golden dragon as a neck piece.

Kapoor, who plays a pivotal role in "Homebound", opted for a rose-coloured custom-made Tarun Tahiliani ensemble featuring a handwoven real tissue skirt and corset, specially crafted in Banarasi.

Johar was dressed in a custom ensemble designed by his friend and celebrity favourite Manish Malhotra.

"Homebound", which is executive produced by Hollywood legend Martin Scorsese, revolves around two childhood friends played by Khatter and Jethwa.

The official synopsis of the film reads: "Two childhood friends from a small North Indian village chase a police job that promises them the dignity they've long been denied. But as they inch closer to their dream, mounting desperation threatens the bond that holds them together."

Socialite Natasha Poonawalla, the wife of film's co-producer Adar Poonawalla, also graced the red carpet. She walked hand-in-hand with Johar, wearing a Dior ensemble.

The Cannes Film Festival will conclude on Saturday. (PTI)



Kartik Aaryan heads to Europe for 'Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri' shoot

NEW DELHI, May 21: Bollywood star Kartik Aaryan is set to start the Europe shoot schedule of his film "Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri".

Directed by Sameer Vidwans, the movie is produced by Karan Johar's Dharma Productions.

The 34-year-old actor shared a video on his Instagram handle on Wednesday.

In the clip, Aaryan is seen wearing a jacket with the snake on the back,

referring to his character in one of his upcoming films, "Nagzilla".

"NaagZilla ka Hoodie pehen ke. Aashiqui vaala guitar leke. Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri shoot karne. Main chala Ray," Aaryan wrote in the caption.

Mrighdeep Singh Lamba of "Fukrey" fame will direct "Nagzilla".

The actor will next be seen in the untitled musical love story directed by Anurag Basu. (PTI)



Don't want animosity between Paresh and Akshay even if 'Hera Pheri 3' doesn't happen: Suniel Shetty

NEW DELHI, May 21: Actor Suniel Shetty, one-third of the iconic trio of the "Hera Pheri" franchise, says he doesn't want any animosity between his co-stars Akshay Kumar and Paresh Rawal after the latter decided to quit the film midway.

Audiences were waiting to see Babu Bhaiya (Rawal), Raju (Kumar), and Shyam (Shetty) return in the third part of the popular comedy franchise, set to be directed by Priyadarshan. "Hera Pheri 3" was yet to be officially announced.

The film's future is now uncertain following Rawal's sudden departure from the project last week. According to reports, Kumar -- who also serves as a producer on "Hera Pheri 3" -- has sued Rawal for his actions.

Shetty said while he is sad about Rawal stepping away from the film, he wouldn't want things to sour between his co-stars.

"I am heartbroken, (but) I believe it all will fall into place... At the same time, I am clueless because I heard (about) it through the media. I hope things can be mended.

And even if the film doesn't happen, I wouldn't want any animosity between Paresh and Akshay," Shetty told PTI in an interview here.

The 63-year-old actor will next be seen in the period drama "Kesari Veer", alongside Sooraj Pancholi and debutante Akanksha Sharma.

In the film, which follows the story of brave warriors who fought to save the Somnath temple from invaders in the 14th century, Shetty plays a warrior named Vegdaji Bhil.

Directed by Prince Dhiman, "Kesari Veer" is produced by Kanubhai Chauhan of Chauhan Studios.

It also marks Shetty's return to the period drama genre, after JP Dutta's "Umrao Jaan" (2006).

Period films are difficult to make, he said, adding producers need to have enough knowledge about the subject.

"He (the producer) has to be clear that he has the right theme that he puts together, because there are too many aspects that go into making a period film.

"Costumes, cinematography, art direction, and background music all are equally important. This is a true team effort. When you don't have a strong team, you don't dare to make a film like this. And, it's an expensive affair," he said.

His other credits in the period drama space include "Border" (1997) and "LOC: Kargil" (2003), both also helmed by Dutta, whom he

called his "favourite director".

"I am someone who doesn't leave opportunities like that. I get excited doing films like that and films in a uniform, so I always look forward to it, but I am glad that I got to do such films in my life," he added.

Suniel, who in an earlier interview said he almost didn't star in "Border" over rumours about Dutta's temper, said he has found a close industry friend in the filmmaker and that the war drama is an important movie in his filmography.

"It would have been my loss completely (if he hadn't done the film), I would have been stupid man on earth but because of what I said, I probably have made the best friend in the world, in JP Dutta. He was also conscious that he shouldn't be saying anything to me.

"But we both realised that we are obsessed with our work, we

get angry, upset, with anybody or anyone around the set, it's purely work-related and it's got nothing to do personally. And today J P ji and I are among the closest friends. He can't do without me, I can't do without him," he said.

This year is also special for Shetty as it marks the silver jubilee of his cult film "Dhadkan", in which he co-starred with Kumar and Shilpa Shetty. Directed by Dharmesh Darshan, the film released on August 11, 2000.

Coincidentally, "Dhadkan" is re-releasing on May 23, the same day as "Kesari Veer".

"I am happy that it's marking 25 years, it's a milestone... If I talk about one romantic film being a non-romantic hero,

doing this one cult romantic film and being there, it excites you. But I am not happy that it's releasing on the same day. I would have loved it if it were a separate day altogether," he added.

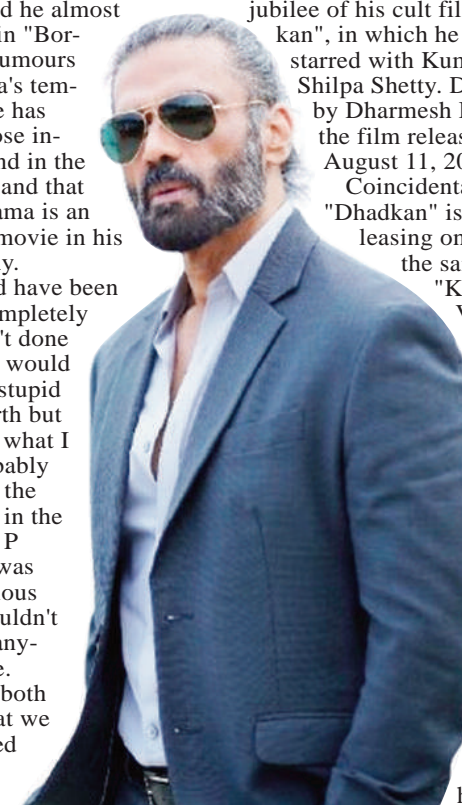
Besides its memorable soundtrack and performances, "Dhadkan" remains alive in pop culture through memes in which Shetty's dialogues feature prominently.

Asked about his reaction to the film's enduring legacy, the actor said memes are a new form of "mimicry" today.

"... It's only when something is immensely popular do people want to do a meme on it because that probably gets them the eyeballs that they would never get otherwise," he said.

Shetty also addressed the recent criticism over his comments on his daughter, actor Athiya Shetty's decision of choosing a natural delivery over cesarean section (C-section). Athiya welcomed daughter Evaaarah with cricketer-husband KL Rahul in March.

"It's (my remarks) been misrepresented... If I am wrong, I have always been ready to say 'sorry' to the world, I have no ego... But, I know how I treat women... I am a responsible citizen of this country. I know what I say," he said. (PTI)



Man United and Tottenham clash in all-English Europa League final looking to salvage season



BILBAO (SPAIN), May 21: Manchester United and Tottenham will meet in an all-English final in the Europa League later on Wednesday, with both clubs hoping to end a dismal season on a high note.

The trophy will offer some relief for the winner, while the loser is likely to face a fresh wave of criticism.

United is unbeaten in the Europa League this season but is down in 16th place in the Premier League, one spot ahead of Tottenham.

Tottenham was beaten in the 2019 Champions League final by Liverpool, and has not lifted a trophy since the 2008 English League Cup. United picked up its last silverware in the 2024 FA Cup.

More than 50,000 English fans were expected in Bilbao. The Basque Country city was filled with supporters from both clubs in the buildup for the final.

Many were without tickets, but the atmosphere outside Athletic Bilbao's San Mames Stadium was mostly peaceful.

There was fan trouble overnight, though, and supporters from both clubs confronted each other on the streets and in bars, with some throwing trash bins, bottles and other objects at each other. Some were seen climbing traffic-light poles and causing damage.

There were also Spanish media reports of confrontations in nearby towns and cities, where many of the fans were staying to avoid overpriced accommodation in Bilbao. There were no reports of serious injuries in the confrontations.

Tottenham has won all three matches it has played against United this season. It is unbeaten in six straight games against its final rival, with the last five under manager Ange Postecoglou.

United and Tottenham have met in just one previous final — the 2009 League Cup when Alex Ferguson's Red Devils won 4-1 on penalties after a 0-0 draw.

Son Heung-min will have a chance to end his title drought, and crown 10 years of service for Tottenham. (AP)

Golf: Diksha leads Indian charge at Jabra Ladies Open



EVIAN-LES-BAINS (FRANCE), May 21: In-form Indian golfer Diksha Dagar will look to build on her top-10 finishes and aim for the title when she tees off at the Ladies European Tour's Jabra Open starting here on Thursday.

Aside from Diksha, the Indian challenge will also include Tvesa Malik, Avani Prashanth and Hitaashee Bakshi.

Pranavi Urs, who injured her wrist during the Dutch Ladies Open and had to withdraw, will rest out this and the next week.

Diksha has moved into the top five of the Order of Merit after finishing tied ninth at the Dutch Ladies Open while Avani is placed 39th in that list after her tied 19th finish at the same event.

Hitaashee also impressed last week as she finished tied 12th in her first LET (Ladies European Tour) appearance this season. Tvesa will be keen to find her rhythm after she failed to make the cut at the Dutch Ladies Open.

Diksha has enjoyed a great season with four Top-10 finishes. In nine starts, she has missed the cut just once and one event in Australia was cancelled.

Diksha is now lying fifth and her best end-of-the-season finish on the LET Order of Merit was third in 2023.

The current leader of the Order of Merit, Mimi Rhodes of England, will look to continue her winning ways as she has already won three of the seven LET events this year. The 23-year-old won her Maiden LET event just earlier this year at the Ford Women's NSW Open before stamping her authority on the field with two more wins at the Jo'burg Ladies Open and the Dutch Ladies Open.

Swiss Star Chiara Tamburlini spent the last week recovering but has had a good season. She will look to continue her display of consistency at the Evian Resort Golf Club.

There are a total of 15 French players who will take part in the tournament. This list of stars includes LET winners Anne-Charlotte Mora, Anne-Lise Caudal, Celine Herbin and Camille Chevalier.

The Jabra Ladies Open also presents players a chance to qualify for the Majors. LET winners this year will automatically qualify for the AIG Women's Open, which is to be held at Royal Portcawl later this year.

Also one player, who finishes in the top 10 (including ties) at the Jabra Ladies Open but has yet to qualify for the Amundi Evian Championship, will be able to secure their entry to the event. (PTI)

Russian wrestler charged with doping

LAUSANNE (SWITZERLAND), May 21: Former Olympic champion wrestler Khadimourat Gatsalov was charged with doping Wednesday as part of the state-backed cheating scheme in Russia.

Gatsalov was a gold medalist at the 2004 Athens Olympics. He beat future UFC champion Daniel Cormier in a semifinals bout in the freestyle 96-kilogram class.

The 42-year-old Russian is being prosecuted using evidence from investigations by Richard McLaren and the World Anti-Doping Agency, including data from the Moscow testing laboratory, the International Testing Agency said.

He tested positive for the banned substance ipamorelin from a sample given in 2015, the ITA said in a statement.

The drug "stimulates the body's release of growth hormone, which, in turn, promotes muscle growth, fat loss and recovery," said the agency based in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Gatsalov's provisional suspension during the prosecution also prevents him working as a coach or official at national or international events, the ITA said.

He won the last of his five world titles in 2013, two years before the positive test. (AP)

Nagal bows out of French Open qualifying

PARIS, May 21: India's top singles player Sumit Nagal bowed out of the French Open singles qualifying following a 2-6 4-6 defeat against lower-ranked Jurij Rodionov in the second round, here Wednesday.

Nagal, ranked 170th, lost to the 225th-ranked Austrian in one hour and 29 minutes at the Roland Garros. He had beaten American Mitchell Krueger in the first round.

Nagal will miss the singles main draw of a Grand Slam after appearing in all four in 2024. After losing the first set and trailing 2-4 in the second, Nagal got an opportunity to bounce back in the seventh game. He grabbed the chance by getting the break back. (PTI)

World C'ships bronze-medallist boxer Simranjit Kaur turns professional

NEW DELHI, May 21: Former World championship bronze medallist Simranjit Kaur has become the latest Indian boxer to turn professional.

The 29-year-old two-time Asian Championship medallist, who represented India in the Tokyo Olympics, decided to take the plunge by signing with former American professional boxer Roy Jones Jr. and Indian professional boxer Mandeep Jangra.



Simranjit, who finished second at the National Championship in the 65kg category in March, is the third Indian boxer to turn professional this year after World championship medallists Nishant Dev and Amit Panghal.

"I am very happy that my career is starting with such a promoter, who has given many star boxers to the world. Mandeep Jangra is already making the country proud in the professional ring and I will also try to get recognition for the country. Roy Jones Jr. is the best promoter and I will definitely take my career forward with him," Simranjit said.

With this move, Simranjit follows in the footsteps of 2008 Olympic bronze medallist Vijender Singh, Vikas Krishan, Sarita Devi and Neeraj Goyat, who also moved to professional boxing after a good run in the amateur circuit. (PTI)

Fans who insulted Vinicius found guilty

MADRID, May 21: Five Valladolid fans who racially insulted Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior in 2022 have been found guilty in the first ruling in Spain that condemns racist insults in a soccer stadium as a hate crime, the league said Wednesday.

A Valladolid court convicted the fans for their insults in a league match, sentencing them to one year in prison plus a fine of up to 1,620 euros (\$1,837). The jail time is suspended on condition they don't commit any offense or visit soccer stadiums hosting official national competitions for three years.

The league called Wednesday's ruling "a firm step towards eradicating racism in sport."

"This judicial decision represents an unprecedented milestone in the fight against racism in sport in Spain," the league said.

Last year, three Valencia fans were handed eight-month prison sentences after pleading guilty to racially insulting Madrid forward Vinicius Junior.

That was the first conviction for racism-related cases in professional soccer in Spain, but it was not based on a hate crime. The Valencia fans were convicted of a crime against moral integrity, with the aggravating circumstance of discrimination based on racist motives.

"The fact that this ruling explicitly refers to hate crimes associated with racist insults reinforces the message that intolerance has no place in football," the league said.

The league first filed the complaint against the Valladolid fans. It was later joined in the case by the player, Real Madrid, and the public prosecutor's office. (AP)



Man City's first Club World Cup opponent Wydad splits with coach weeks before US tournament

MANCHESTER, May 21: Four weeks before facing Manchester City in its opening Club World Cup game in Philadelphia, Wydad coach Rihulani Mokwena has left the Moroccan team.

Wydad said the club and Mokwena "mutually agreed to terminate their contract with immediate effect" in a statement published late Monday.

Wydad did not announce plans to replace the South African coach ahead of traveling to the United States for the revamped 32-team FIFA club tournament that opens June 14.

After facing City on June 18, Wydad stays in Philadelphia to play Juventus, then goes to Washington DC to play Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates.

Wydad's preparation also could be affected by a FIFA ban on registering new players that can be signed in a special transfer window in early June. FIFA typically imposes registration bans on clubs which have unpaid bills for transfer fees or wages.

FIFA will pay \$9.55 million to each of the four African teams

which qualified for the Club World Cup by winning an edition of the continent's Champions League from 2021 to 2024. The total prize fund is \$1 billion, which mostly will go to 12 European teams who qualified.

Wydad won Africa's Champions League in 2022 when coached by Walid Regragui. He left to coach Morocco and within months helped the team to become the first from the continent to reach a World Cup semifinal.

Mokwena's replacement will be the 10th coach in three years at Wydad since Regragui left.

Under Mokwena, Wydad finished third in the Moroccan league and did not qualify for next season's Champions League. Reports in South Africa suggested the coach went several months without being paid.

In a joint statement Monday with Mokwena, Wydad said he "extends his heartfelt thanks to our esteemed president (Hicham Ait Menna) for his visionary leadership and steadfast support."

Mokwena also wished "tremendous success" to Wydad at the Club World Cup. (AP)

Omar Marmoush scores stunning goal as Kevin De Bruyne says goodbye to Man City

MANCHESTER, May 21: Omar Marmoush's stunning long-range strike upstaged Kevin De Bruyne on the Manchester City great's Etihad farewell.

Marmoush let fly from around 30 yards (meters) to put City ahead in its 3-1 win against Bournemouth in the Premier League on Tuesday.

The victory moved Pep Guardiola's team up to third in the standings and left Champions League qualification in its own hands heading into the last round of the season.

"It's really important. To be in the Champions League after what happened (this season) will be really nice," the City manager said. De Bruyne was making his final home appearance for City before leaving the club as a free agent at the end of the season.

After a trophy-laden 10 years, the Belgium international was greeted with a huge banner declaring him "King Kev" and given a standing ovation when he was substituted off in the second half.

But it was Marmoush's goal after 14 minutes that lit up the match as his dipping shot clipped the post before crashing into the top corner.

It was the type of goal that De Bruyne would have been proud of in a career that has seen him score

numerous spectacular strikes of his own.

De Bruyne missed a glorious chance to cap his farewell with a goal when missing an open net from close range — shooting against the bar.

"Terrible, terrible," De Bruyne said of his miss. "There's no excuses. My son is going to be very tough on me today."

Bernardo Silva doubled City's lead in the 38th and substitute Nico Gonzalez added a third in the 89th. Daniel Jebbison pulled one back for Bournemouth in added time in a game that saw both teams reduced to 10 men.

The win saw City bounce back from its FA Cup final loss to Crystal Palace on Saturday. It also means City needs a point in its final game against Fulham on Sunday to all but guarantee Champions League soccer next season, given its superior goal difference to top-five rivals Chelsea and Aston Villa.

After ending the season trophyless for the first time in eight years, City can at least secure the consolation of a place in European club soccer's top competition.

The loss, however, ended Bournemouth's slim hopes of qualifying for Europe.

De Bruyne tribute

De Bruyne was fighting back tears as he addressed the crowd after the match and watched a video montage of tributes from club greats on the stadium's big screen.

He was given a guard of honor by his teammates as he walked to the middle of the field with his wife and three children.

City said it would erect a statue in his honor outside the stadium.

"It means I will always be part of this club," De Bruyne said. "Whenever I come back with family and friends, I will be able to see myself so I will always be here."

City also unveiled a mosaic of De Bruyne at the club's academy and named a road on its campus after him.

The 33-year-old De Bruyne was part of a period of unprecedented success for City, which saw it win 16 major trophies including six Premier League titles and the Champions League.

He waved to the crowd and City fans serenaded him as he left the field in the second half before embracing Guardiola on the touchline.

"There are players that are unique," Guardiola said. "In 10 years there are a lot of games, a lot of titles, a lot of moments. Today summarized how much love was there (for him)."

He is the latest City great to have a mural made in his honor, joining Yaya Toure, Joe Hart, David Silva, Vincent Kompany, Sergio Aguero, Fernandinho and Ilkay Gundogan.

Rodri returns

Rodri returned to action eight months after having surgery on an ACL injury that ruled him out for the majority of the season.

The Ballon d'Or winner came on as a second-half substitute to make his first appearance since being injured against Arsenal on Sept. 22.

His return means he is likely to be available for the Club World Cup in the United States in June and July.

Palace party

There was no hangover for Crystal Palace after Saturday's FA Cup victory over City.

Eddie Nketiah scored twice in a 4-2 win against Wolves.

Just days after Palace's win at Wembley secured its first major trophy, the team kept the party going in front of its home fans at Selhurst Park.

Wolves went ahead through Emmanuel Agbadou, but two goals from Nketiah in the space of five minutes in the first half put the home side in front.

Eberechi Eze — who scored the winning goal in the final — was on target again late on. (AP)

McIlroy set to star in DP World India Championship

NEW DELHI, May 21: Indian golf is set to get a major boost as Grand Slam winner, Rory McIlroy has confirmed his participation in the USD four million inaugural DP World India Championship here later this year.

This will be the Irish world No.2's maiden outing in India.

The championship will take place at the Delhi Golf Club from October 16 to 19.

The 2025 Masters Tournament champion confirmed his status as a global golfing icon when he completed a career Grand Slam in memorable fashion in April, adding the Green Jacket to his four previous Major victories at the 2011 US Open, the US PGA Championship in 2012 and 2014 and The Open in 2014.

Co-sanctioned by the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI), the tournament -- launched by global smart logistics provider DP World and the DP World Tour -- features the largest prize fund ever offered for a DP World Tour event in India.

"I'm excited to not only tee it up in India for the first time but also visit a country that I've always wanted to explore," said McIlroy.

"I'm proud to play in the DP World India Championship. I've always enjoyed playing



a global schedule and as I have previously said, there is tremendous potential to grow golf further in the country. This is a great opportunity, and I can't wait to play in front of the Indian golf fans."

The announcement follows the success of

the 2025 Hero Indian Open, won by Eugenio Chacarra, and further boosts the Tour's momentum in the region.

As the Tour's title partner since 2022, DP World is reaffirming its commitment to golf with this new tournament. It com-

plements its broader sporting footprint in India, which includes partnerships with the Delhi Capitals, and grassroots programmes like the 'Second Life Container' initiative and 'Balls for Birdies' campaign -- both of which involve DP World donating golf balls to help grow the game and make it more accessible.

"We are delighted to welcome Rory McIlroy to the DP World India Championship. Having a player of his calibre underscores the commitment both we and the DP World Tour have to the success of this tournament," said Yuvraj Narayan, Group Deputy CEO and Chief Financial Officer, DP World.

"Rory will capture global attention, increase participation, and position India as a premier destination for golf."

"Our mission to support the growth of golf from the grassroots remains central to our global golf vision and hosting a global icon like Rory in India is a proud milestone in that journey," he added.

The DP World India Championship will be the eighth of nine events in the 'Back 9' phase of the 2025 Race to Dubai, building towards the season-ending DP World Tour Play-Offs and culminating in the DP World Tour Championship in November at Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai. (PTI)

Gujarat Titans eye top-two finish as struggling LSG look to salvage pride

AHMEDABAD, May 21: Former champions Gujarat Titans will aim to extend their winning streak to solidify a top-two finish when they face a struggling Lucknow Super Giants in their Indian Premier League clash here on Thursday.

With 18 points from 12 matches, table-toppers Titans have already booked their place in the playoffs. However, with Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Punjab Kings close behind on 17 points, the race for a top-two spot is still very much alive.

For Gujarat, everything seems to have fallen into place. Their top-order trio of Orange Cap holder B Sai Sudharsan (617 runs), skipper Shubman Gill (601), and Jos Buttler (500), has been in prolific form, laying the foundation for most of the team's victories.

Together, they have racked up 16 half-centuries and a century, dominating the tournament's batting attacks with clinical consistency.

Such top-order dominance, however, has left the middle order largely untested.

Gujarat's bowling unit has been equally formidable. Their Indian pace battery has led the charge, with Prasidh Krishna being the leading wicket-taker this season after snaring 21 wickets. Mohammed Siraj and lanky left-arm spinner R Sai Kishore have chipped in with 15 wickets each.

Adding further firepower to the attack is the return of South African pace ace Kagiso Rabada, who missed most of the season



following a suspension for recreational drug use.

On the other hand, Lucknow Super Giants saw their playoff hopes dashed after a comprehensive defeat to Sunrisers Hyderabad on Monday. The Rishabh Pant-led side, now on a four-match losing streak, has endured a campaign riddled with inconsistency and injuries.

LSG have leaned heavily on their overseas recruits -- Mitchell Marsh, Aiden Markram, and Nicholas Pooran -- for runs.

The lack of noteworthy contributions from Pant, who has endured a woeful season, and the

middle order has compounded their problems.

Injuries to key bowlers further derailed their campaign.

Left-arm pacer Mohsin Khan missed the entire season, while express quick Mayank Yadav, who was retained with high hopes, spent most of it on the sidelines.

Avesh Khan and Akash Deep also struggled with fitness, leaving LSG's bowling attack depleted. Pant acknowledged the devastating impact these absences have had on the team.

"Definitely, it could have been one of our best seasons but coming into the tournament we had a

lot of gaps, injuries and as a team we decided to not talk about that, but it became difficult to fill those gaps for us," he said after their previous game.

To make matters worse, LSG will be without their most successful bowler this season -- spinner Digvesh Rath, who has claimed 14 wickets at an economy of 8.18.

He has been handed a one-match suspension for his on-field altercation with Abhishek Sharma in the previous game, further denting their faltering campaign.

Squads:
Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), Jos Buttler (wk), Kumar Kushagra (wk), Anuj Rawat (wk), Sherfane Rutherford, Nishant Sidhu, Mahipal Lomror, Washington Sundar, Mohammed Arshad Khan, R Sai Kishore, Jayant Yadav, Karim Janat, B Sai Sudharsan, Dasun Shanaka, Shahrukh Khan, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Manav Suthar, Gerald Coetzee, Gurnoor Singh Brar, Ishant Sharma, Kulwant Khejroliya, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan.

Lucknow Super Giants: Rishabh Pant (wk/captain), Aiden Markram, Mitchell Marsh, Nicholas Pooran, Ayush Badoni, Abdul Samad, David Miller, Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Akash Deep, Ravi Bishnoi, Prince Yadav, Shahbaz Ahmed, Matthew Breetzke, Himmat Singh, Shamar Joseph, Manimaran Siddharth, Aryan Juyal, RS Hangargekar, Yuvraj Chaudhary, Akash Maharaaj Singh, Arshin Kulkarni.

Match starts at 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

England prepares for India with its first test match against Zimbabwe in 22 years

NOTTINGHAM, May 21: For England, it's little more than a warm-up match ahead of much sterner examinations to come.

For Zimbabwe, it means everything. Trent Bridge in Nottingham will host a four-day test match -- something of a rarity for the usual five-day format but perhaps a sign of the future -- from Thursday when England and Zimbabwe meet for the first time at international level in 18 years since a Twenty20 World Cup match in Cape Town.

You need to go back four more years -- to Chester-le-Street in 2003 when Jimmy Anderson, a 20-year-old with highlights in his hair, was playing in his first series -- for the last test match between the teams.

Zimbabwe's return to English soil continues the African nation's gradual reintegration to test cricket after two decades of political interference, poor governance and sanctions that resulted in the team being exiled from test cricket for around six years.

The Zimbabweans didn't play a test from 2005-11. From 2022-24, they played just four tests. But between December last year and August this year, they'll have played in 10 tests, with two-match series against South Africa and New Zealand to come this summer.

Zimbabwe still isn't part of the World Test Championship but, in the bigger picture, progress is being made. Zimbabwe Cricket will receive a touring fee from the England and Wales Cricket Board for being the first test opponent of the summer, ECB chief executive Richard Gould confirmed last year while speaking about the "huge responsibility" to maintain the strength of bilateral cricket.

Zimbabwe isn't expected to offer much resistance to England, having slumped to a 138-run defeat to a Professional County Club Select XI in Leicester last week. Before that, however, it did earn a first test victory since 2021 -- beating in Bangladesh on the way to sharing the series 1-1.

Debut for Cook
While Zimbabwe's view is very much about the present, England's sights will be on the future.

Ahead this summer is a five-test series against India and then an Ashes tour Down Under. For England, it doesn't get much bigger than that, so the match against Zimbabwe will be important preparation, especially for a bowling department at the start of a new



era following the test retirements of Stuart Broad (in 2023) and Anderson (last year).

For the Zimbabwe test, England will give a debut to Sam Cook, fellow pacer Josh Tongue is returning to the team after a two-year absence, and Gus Atkinson is about to start his second summer of test cricket. There are as many question marks about the only specialist spinner in the team, Shoaib Bashir, and the fitness of allrounder Ben Stokes, returning after a hamstring tear to regain the captaincy.

Then there's the batting lineup where opener Zak Crawley and No. 3 Ollie Pope have been retained despite continued speculation about their worthiness in the team. There's the welcome sight of a return for wicketkeeper Jamie Smith after missing the tour of New Zealand in November and December while on paternity leave.

England is No. 2 in the test rankings but coach Brendon McCullum said "there's a lot of meat on the bone for us" in the next stage of the so-called "Bazball" era.

"When we took on a project like this, it was not about necessarily settling on good," McCullum said. "I think now's the time, working from a strong base, to be able to shoot for the stars and say, Where can we take this team? What can we achieve?"

The scheduling of a four-day test might be a blow to test purists but England home matches have rarely reached Day 5 under the leadership of McCullum and Stokes since 2022.

As for the Zimbabweans, they'll take whatever top-flight games they can on the long road back to cricket relevancy. (AP)

Pakistan recalls fast bowler Hasan Ali for T20 series against Bangladesh

ISLAMABAD, May 21: Pakistan has recalled fast bowler Hasan Ali for this month's Twenty20 home matches against Bangladesh but overlooked senior batters Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam for the third successive series.

Hasan played just one T20 international in nearly three years when he returned with expensive figures of 0-42 in three overs against Ireland in Dublin in 2024.

However, the right-arm fast bowler has forced his way back into the squad with a rich haul of 15 wickets in the Pakistan Super League while representing the Karachi Kings.

Rizwan and Babar were dropped for the last two series in Zimbabwe and New Zealand as Pakistan continued to reshape its top-order ahead of next year's T20 World Cup.

Rizwan scored 367 runs at a strike rate of 139.54 in the PSL this season as his franchise, the Multan Sultans, suffered nine defeats in 10 games.

Babar's Peshawar Zalmi also missed out on the playoffs for the first time in PSL history as he finished the season with 288 runs and a strike rate of 128.57.

Salman Ali Agha, who was appointed captain ahead of the T20 series in Australia last year, will continue to lead the side with Shadab Khan as his deputy. (AP)

It's going to be a tough England tour for India: Rathour

NEW DELHI, May 21: Former batting coach Vikram Rathour is expecting a tough England tour for a young Indian side that is now without three stalwarts, who left the Test arena in quick succession.

First it was veteran spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and then skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli too walked into the sunset, leaving a huge gap.

Shubman Gill will most likely be India's new Test skipper and will have a new-look top and middle order.

The five-match series will begin on June 20 at Leeds, marking the start of a new World Test Championship cycle.

"It's going to be a tough tour. It's not going to be an easy tour because the seniors have retired a lot. So, the young team is leaving. There could be a new captain. So, all these things will add a little bit of pressure," said Rathour, who spoke after Rajasthan Royals' win over Chennai Super Kings on Tuesday.

"But also it's an opportunity to showcase your talent and your ability."

Rathour, who shared a good rapport with all top Indian batters during his stint, said the fans must respect the decision taken by the senior players.

"All three of them were phenomenal cricketers who retired. So, I would have loved for them to carry on. But it's, again, a very, very personal decision. I'm close to all three of them.

"So, you know, I would have, as I said, I would have loved to see them play more. But, again, it's a very, very personal decision, I think. And if



they've taken this decision, we should respect that," he said.

Rathour, who is the batting coach of RR, was expectedly effusive in his praise for their find of the season, the 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who played a key role in the team signing off with a win against CSK.

Instead of an extravagant approach, he took some time and waited before unleashing his shots on Tuesday.

"We've been working with him for quite some time now, maybe three to four months now. We've seen all these aspects, but it's great to see when he's doing that in a game, in pressure situ-

ations, in a big game like even today. You're right, the ball was doing a bit when he went in, hardly got any balls, didn't get on strike too much in the power play," Rathour said.

"The kind of maturity he showed, the kind of temperament he showed, really good for him. And these kind of experiences will definitely make him a better player in coming time."

Rathour rued that despite having a strong batting unit at their disposal, they lost winnable games and also blamed poor fielding for their misery. They managed to avoid last-place finish and believe that the worst is over.

"I don't think we fielded very well throughout the tournament. Bowling did let us down a few times where you let them score too many runs, 10, 15 extra runs mostly every game."

"And then again, with batting also, batting was our strength. We had retained five batters in the squad, and that is, I believe, our strength. And, you know, we got terrific starts at times," he said.

"We got ourselves into the positions where we should have finished the games, but unfortunately couldn't do that. It hurts. It was a little disappointing, but it also gives you a lot of hope for the coming season because I think this was the worst that is over."

Apart from Suryavanshi, Rathour also picked out Dhruv Jurel for special praise.

"He's (Jurel) got great temperament, that kid. He's got great technique as well as a batsman." (PTI)

Indian junior women's hockey team to take part in 4-nation tourney

BENGALURU, May 21: The Indian junior women's hockey team on Wednesday departed for a four-nation tournament in Rosario, Argentina to be played from May 25 till June 2.

The friendly tournament, part of the team's preparation for this year's FIH Hockey Junior Women's World Cup in Chile, will feature hosts Argentina, Uruguay and Chile besides India.

The Indians will play two matches against each of the participating nations. The tournament aims to help the team evaluate its performance, test combinations and refine strategies ahead of the World Cup in December.

The Indian squad, coached by Tushar Khandker, will be led by goalkeeper Nidhi, while forward Hina Bano will serve as vice-captain.

In the first round of fixtures, India will open their campaign against Chile on May 25, followed by matches against Uruguay (May 26) and Argentina (May 28). (PTI)

Malaysia Masters: Prannoy, Karunakaran, Srikanth register wins; Sindhu exits

KUALA LUMPUR, May 21: India's male shuttlers, led by the experienced duo of H S Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth, were off to a brilliant start but it was curtains for double Olympic-medallist PV Sindhu as she bowed out with a first-round loss at the Malaysia Masters badminton tournament here on Wednesday. Prannoy and Srikanth were joined by Satish Karunakaran in the second round of the event.

Taking the court first, Prannoy stunned fifth seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan 19-21 21-17 21-16 in a hard-fought contest that lasted one hour and 22 minutes. The Indian will play Yushi Tanaka of Japan in the second round.

Karunakaran also registered an upset by stunning third seed Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei 21-13 21-14 in just 39 minutes. He will next face Christo Popov of France.

Ayush Shetty also progressed after getting past Brian Yang of Canada 20-22 21-10 21-8. Later, former world no.1 Srikanth stunned a higher-ranked opponent in sixth seed Lu

Guang Zu of China 23-21 13-21 21-11 in a 57-minute showdown to progress.

But Sindhu's poor form continued as she failed to get past the opening hurdle of the Super 500 tournament, losing 11-21 21-14 15-21 against Nguyen Thuy Linh of Vietnam.

The Indian mixed doubles duo of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto also moved into the second round with a 21-18 15-21 21-14 win over the Indonesian pair of Adnan Maulana and Indah Cahya Sari Jamil, but all other Indian pairs suffered defeats.

Ashith Surya and Amrutha Pramuthesh were no match for top seeds Jiang Zheng Bang and Wei Yaxin, as they lost 10-21 12-21 in the opening round of the mixed doubles event.

Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde too lost 10-21 14-21 to fourth seeds Guo Xin Wa and Chen Fang Hui of China.

The pairing of Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath was shown the door by Indonesia's Verrell Yustin Mulia and Lisa Ayu Kusumawati 15-21 16-21. (PTI)

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