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## Move to distinguish indigenous Muslims living in state Steps for caste census of indigenous Muslims initiated: CM

GUWAHATI, May 6: The Assam government has initiated preparatory measures to conduct a comprehensive caste census aimed at documenting and distinguishing the indigenous Muslim communities of the state, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

The indigenous Muslim communities of Assam have long been advocating for a caste-based census to assert their distinct socio-cultural identities, the chief minister posted on X.

"Communities such as the Goria, Moria, Deshi, Syed, and Jolha (Julha) Muslims of the Brahmaputra Valley, along with the Kiren and Maimal Muslims of the Barak Valley, have consistently maintained that while Islam is their religion, they also possess unique ethnic, linguistic, and cultural traits that clearly differentiate them from migrant-origin or non-indigenous Muslim populations", he said.

These communities have preserved distinct traditions, dialects, and historical narratives that are deeply rooted in Assam's civilizational heritage and cultural landscape.

In recognition of their long-standing demand, the Government of Assam has initiated preparatory measures to conduct a comprehensive caste



census aimed at documenting and distinguishing these indigenous groups, the CM said.

"The proposed caste enumeration in the upcoming national census is expected to fulfil their decades-old aspiration for formal recognition of their independent identity—distinct from

broader religious classifications and migratory groupings," he said. The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) had taken a decision on April 30 that caste enumeration will be included in the next census exercise. The Congress and other (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Second phase of panchayat polls to be held today, over 91 lakhs to vote in 13 districts

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: The second phase of Panchayat polls is due in Assam on Wednesday and this phase will span 13 districts in central and western Assam, with voting to take place at 12,130 polling booths from 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Around 91.31 lakh voters—comprising 46.30 lakh men, 44.99 lakh women, and 251 individuals in the 'others' category—are eligible to vote.

Voting in the second phase is set for Wednesday across 13 districts: Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Bajali, Nalbari, Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro), Hojai, Nagaon, Morigaon, and Darrang. Polls will be open from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm, with repolling scheduled for May 9 if necessary. The results for both phases will be declared on May 11.

A total of 91,31,127 voters—in-



cluding 46,30,924 men, 44,99,952 women, and 251 others—are eligible to vote in this phase. The election features 29,608 candidates. Already, 1,289 candidates, including 21 Zila Parishad (ZP), 151 Anchalik Parishad (AP), and 1,117 Gaon Panchayat (GP) members, have been elected unopposed. This phase covers 181 ZP, 87 AP, and

10,530 GP constituencies.

In Kamrup district, preparations for the polls are complete. District Commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra announced that logistical and security arrangements have been finalised. Election materials will be dispatched starting at 7 am on May 6 from the Integrated DC Office (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CM Himanta Biswa Sarma intensifies criticism of Gaurav Gogoi over Pakistan visit



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday intensified his criticism of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi over his alleged visit to Pakistan without notifying either the state or central government.

Addressing the media, CM Sarma raised a series of serious concerns regarding Gogoi's activities, stating that the government is currently awaiting official communication before deciding on further action.

According to Sarma, Gogoi stayed in Pakistan for 15 days in a personal capacity. He was initially accompanied by his wife, who returned to India after seven days. Sarma questioned the reasons behind Gogoi's prolonged stay, remarking, "What was he doing in Pakistan while his wife was back in India?"

The Chief Minister also claimed that following his return, Gogoi took around 90 students to the Pakistan Embassy, with some allegedly unaware of their destination. He criticised the Congress party for sending mixed signals, noting that while Gogoi has not publicly confirmed the visit, certain Con-

gress leaders are debating the legality of such travel.

Sarma highlighted internal divisions within the Congress, suggesting that party figures like Bhupen Bora and Ripun Bora are being more critical of Gogoi than the BJP itself.

Raising further concerns, Sarma alleged that members of Gogoi's immediate family hold foreign citizenship, which he said posed questions about national security and accountability. He also referenced a previous incident where Gogoi reportedly lost his passport during a trip to Palestine and filed the report in Israel, implying an attempt to obscure his travel records.

The Chief Minister warned that such actions could lead to the loss of important data and hinted that the matter might be handed over to a central investigative agency. He added that once the relevant documents are received—expected by September 10—he plans to share them with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, leaving further action to parliamentary authorities.

## Assam cabinet hails high-speed corridor decision

GUWAHATI, May 6: The Assam Cabinet has expressed its gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for approving a greenfield high-speed corridor from Mawlyngkhung in Meghalaya to Panchgram in Assam at a cost of ₹ 22,864 crore, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

Of the corridor's total length of 166.80 km, Meghalaya will have 144.80 km, while 22 km will lie in Assam's Cachar district.

This corridor will bring down travel time from Guwahati to Silchar, headquarters of Cachar, to just five hours, Sarma said at a press conference here.

Currently, the time needed to reach Silchar from Guwahati by road is around 12 hours.

This corridor will improve connectivity, logistics and regional development in line with the Prime Minister's vision of Act East and Atmanirbhat Bharat, he said.

The state cabinet also resolved to put on record its gratitude to Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for



their support to the project.

The CM chaired a six-hour cabinet meeting till late on Monday, and briefed the media about the decisions on Tuesday.

The cabinet has approved customised incentives to 12 companies that had signed MoUs during the Advantage Assam 2.0 business summit in February, he said.

These companies will together invest ₹ 7,730 crore and generate employment opportunities for

16,466 people, the CM said.

The Council of Ministers also approved the Assam Thermal Power Generation Promotion Policy 2025 to ensure energy self-sufficiency for the state by 2035.

"This decision will promote private sector participation in thermal power generation and develop 2,000MW thermal power by 2030 and 5,000 MW by 2035", Sarma said.

Assam Power Development Corporation Limited (APDCL) will be

the nodal agency to drive this policy which will have a dedicated single window clearance cell, he added.

In a bid to further strengthen the power sector in the state, the Cabinet approved a targeted subsidy of ₹ 300 crore and tariff subsidy of ₹ 200 crore to APDCL to provide tariff respite to consumers and also to avoid hike in retail tariff during the financial year 2025-26.

The Cabinet also approved release of ₹ 244 crore for acquisition of land for upgradation and renovation of the 220 KV Grid substation of Assam Electricity Grid Corporation Limited (AEGCL) at Sarusajai in Guwahati.

The Cabinet also approved the involvement of 'Jal Mitras' in a re-branded role where they will be involved in monitoring and verification, raising awareness about waste segregation, sanitation activities and others.

In the context of water management, particularly within the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), a Jal Mitra is a local person, often a skilled individual or technician, who is trained to operate and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam okays ₹5L aid for Pahalgam victims

GUWAHATI, May 6: The Assam cabinet has approved ex gratia payment of ₹ five lakh to the next of kin of all 26 persons killed in the Pahalgam terror attack, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

"I had already announced the amount to be paid as a small token to the members of the bereaved families, and the cabinet approved it on Monday night," he said at a press conference here.

The CM chaired a six-hour cabinet meeting till late on Monday, and briefed the media about the decisions on Tuesday.

"A cabinet minister will visit the next of kin of each deceased person and hand over the ex gratia amount along with a letter of condolence from me after May 12," he said.

The results of the two-phased Assam panchayat election will be announced on May 11, and the model code of conduct will be in force till then. (PTI)

## Mock drill in 14 'civil defence districts' of Assam

GUWAHATI, May 6: An extensive mock drill will be carried out across 14 'civil defence districts' of Assam on Wednesday following the directives of the central government, officials said here.

"Civil defence districts" are different from administrative districts. A geographical area having a cantonment or a refinery or a nuclear plant may be designated as a 'civil defence district' depending on the requirement and exigency.

A high-level meeting, chaired by the chief secretary, took place between various agencies and stakeholder departments, a senior official told PTI on Tuesday.

"The chief secretary reviewed the preparedness of the drill according to the guidelines of the central government. We have issued instructions to 14 districts for carrying out the mock drill as per

prescribed steps," he added.

Though he did not share further details, the official said that the mock drill will start at 4 pm and will continue till all the steps are covered.

"The Assam Police's Home Guard and Civil Defence wing will lead the operations in association with various other agencies," he added.

When contacted, Home Guard and Civil Defence Inspector General of Police Arabinda Kalita said agencies like fire services, health department, disaster management, BSNL and DIPR, among others, will take part in the drill.

"We have also informed the Indian Army, and they are also likely to join in the exercise. We will conduct the exercise in Guwahati also," he added.

In connection with the drill, the

Fire & Emergency Services headquarters has issued a communication to all the district centres with specific guidelines.

"In-charges of all F&ES Stations are hereby directed to liaise with the District Controller, various District Authorities, Civil Defence Warden/Volunteers and extend co-operation for smooth conduct of the aforesaid Civil Defence Mock Drill and submit detailed action taken report accordingly," it added.

The primary objectives of the mock drill have been listed as assessing the effectiveness of air raid warning systems, operationalisation of hotline and radio communication links with the Indian Air Force, and testing the functionality of control rooms and shadow control rooms. Training of civilians in the event of a hostile attack, provision of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 43 arrested for 'defending Pakistan' post Pahalgam attack: Sarma

GUWAHATI, May 6: One more person has been apprehended in Assam for "defending Pakistan on Indian soil" following the Pahalgam terror attack, taking the total of arrests to 43 so far, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

Sarma, in a post on X, said the person was held in Barpeta district.

"#Update on crackdown against traitors for defending Pakistan on Indian soil... Total 43 anti-nationals have been put behind BARS for sympathising with Pakistan. No TRAITOR will be SPARED (sic)," he wrote.

Addressing a press conference during the day, the CM said: "Provisions of the NSA (National Security Act) will be clamped on certain people who have been arrested, but

not on all. Some have already apologised and said that they will not do it again." There will be categorisation of the arrested persons, as some are habitual offenders, while others did it for publicity, Sarma said.

"There is another category with Left leanings, who have done it for political reasons. A committee will take the decision on whom NSA will be imposed and it is not going to be a political decision," he added.

Earlier, opposition AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam was arrested on sedition charges for allegedly defending Pakistan and its complicity in the Pahalgam attack.

On Friday, Sarma had warned of stringent action against those who raised "Pakistan Zindabad" slogans in the aftermath of the April 22 attack. (PTI)

## FHASM calls bandh in Assam Hills on May 13 over Article 244(A)

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 6: The Forum for Hills Autonomous State Movement (FHASM), a coalition of political parties and various social, student, and women's organisations, has announced a 24-hour bandh across Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao districts on May 13.

The bandh is being called in protest against the Centre's alleged delay in implementing Article 244(A) of the Constitution, which provides for the creation of an Autonomous State within Assam.

The bandh will begin at 5:00 AM on May 13 and conclude at 5:00 AM on May 14, 2025.

Addressing a press conference at the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) central office in Diphu on Tuesday, ASDC general secretary and former Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Jotson Bey, said the FHASM comprises several groups united for the common cause of securing autonomy.

Member organisations include the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC-James Hanse), ASDC, Karbi Students Association, Karbi Nimso Chingthur Asong, Women Karbi

Students Association, ASDC Youth Front, APHLC Women Central Executive Committee, United Karbi Youth Association (UKYA), Ex-UPDS Welfare Society, and Phuloni Youth Development Committee (PYDC).

Bey said, "Despite five decades of political assurance and repeated memorandums, the legitimate constitutional rights of the indigenous tribal people of the hills remain denied".

He called the bandh a symbolic and democratic protest against the Government of India's inaction on Article 244(A), which was enacted in 1969.

The FHASM reiterated its demand for both the Centre and the Assam government to fulfill their constitutional, moral, and political responsibilities by initiating steps for the implementation of Article 244(A) without further delay.

Bey added that emergency services such as medical, fire, ambulance, electricity, media, and all examination-related activities will be exempt from the bandh.

However, public transport operators, businesses, educational institutions, and offices have been urged to voluntarily support the bandh. The press meet was attended by APHLC president and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'India's life expectancy reaches its highest since inception of Index'

## India ranks 130 out of 193 countries in Human Development Index

NEW DELHI, May 6: India continues its steady rise on the Human Development Index (HDI), ranking 130 out of 193 countries in the 2025 Human Development Report (HDR) released on Tuesday by the UN Development Programme.

Between 2022 and 2023, India improved its HDI ranking from 133 to 130, and its HDI value increased from 0.676 in 2022 to 0.685 in 2023. India remained in the medium human development category, moving closer to the threshold for high human development (HDI = 0.700), the report said.

However, the report also pointed out that inequality reduces India's HDI by 30.7 per cent, one of the highest losses in the region.

While health and education inequality have improved, income and gender disparities remain significant. Female labour force participation and political representation lag, though recent steps such as the constitutional amendment



reserving one-third of legislative seats for women offer promise for transformative change, the report said.

In India, the report said life expectancy increased slightly from 71.7 years to 72.0 years, marking the highest level recorded for the country. While

expected years of schooling remained nearly unchanged, moving from 12.96 to 12.95 years, mean years of schooling saw a notable increase from 6.57 to 6.88 years.

The report lauded India's progress in school education, especially from 1990,

and credited initiatives like the Right to Education Act, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, and the National Education Policy 2020. However, quality and learning outcomes remain areas for continued focus, it said.

Additionally, India's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, measured in 2021 purchasing power parity (PPP), rose from USD 8,475.68 to USD 9,046.76, reflecting ongoing economic growth.

The 2025 HDR, "A Matter of Choice: People and Possibilities in the Age of AI," highlighted the critical role of artificial intelligence in shaping the next chapter of human development—particularly in fast-growing economies like India.

"We congratulate India on its notable progress in the Human Development Index, rising from rank 133 in 2022 to 130 in 2023. This advancement reflects sustained improvements in key dimensions of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Sensex falls 155 pts as investors turn cautious amid India-Pak tensions

**MUMBAI, May 6:** Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower in a range-bound trade on Tuesday due to profit booking, mainly in banking and oil shares, and investors staying on the sideline amid escalating tensions between India and Pakistan.

Snapping its two days of gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 155.77 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 80,641.07. During the day, it dropped 315.81 points or 0.39 per cent to 80,481.03.

The NSE Nifty dipped 81.55 points or 0.33 per cent to 24,379.60.

The trading activity was range bound ahead of the US Federal Reserve's policy decision and concerns over US-China trade negotiations, analysts said.

The Union Home Ministry has directed states and UTs to hold security mock drills in light of the rising Indo-Pak tensions after the Pahalgam terror attack.

Close to 300 'civil defence districts' with sensitive installations like nuclear plants, military bases, refineries, and hydroelectric dams will be covered by mock drills on air-raid warning sirens, civilian training for a 'hostile attack' and cleaning of bunkers and trenches.

Among Sensex firms, Eterna, Tata Motors, State Bank of India, Adani Ports, NTPC, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints, Axis Bank and Sun Pharma were the major losers.

Bharti Airtel, Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle and Maruti were among the gainers.

"The domestic market has been consolidating in recent sessions following the strong recovery, driven by cautious sentiment amid India-Pakistan border tensions. Weak earnings growth for the current quarter has further impacted the market.

"Meanwhile, investors are closely monitoring India's bilateral trade negotiations with the US. Additionally, speculation around the US Federal Reserve is drawing attention, as no rate cuts are expected in the near term, affecting global trends," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.



India's service sector activity accelerated slightly in April largely driven by a quicker increase in new order inflows, which also underpinned a faster expansion in employment, a monthly survey said on Tuesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index reached 58.7 in April, up from 58.5 in March, indicating a sharp and stronger expansion in service sector output.

"Market volatility was further aggravated by escalating geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan, coupled with uncertainty surrounding the US Federal Reserve's upcoming interest rate decision," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

The headline figure was above its long-run average of 54.2. In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. "India services activity rose at a faster pace than last month. New export orders gained momentum after taking a breather in March, accelerating at its fastest pace since July 2024," Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, said.

The overall expansion in output was fuelled by a significant rise in new business intakes, the joint-best in eight months, with many firms noting favourable demand conditions and successful marketing efforts.

Moreover, Indian companies continued to benefit from improved international demand for their services, with Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the US particularly cited as sources of strength. Overall, new export orders expanded at the fastest pace since July 2024. A quicker increase in new order inflows led Indian services companies to increase their workforce numbers for the thirty-fifth consecutive month in April.

Panelists enhanced operational capacity with full- and part-time employees to capitalise on increased client demand, the survey said.

On the pricing front, Indian services firms increased their average selling prices during April, as they sought

to transfer higher cost burdens to clients. "The rate of charge inflation was solid, faster than in March and above its long-run average," the survey said.

"Margins improved as cost pressures eased and prices charged rose at a faster pace," Bhandari said.

On business outlook, service providers expressed optimism regarding activity growth, but they downgraded expectations.

The overall level of business confidence was at its lowest in close to two years. Advertising, demand strength, and productivity gains underpinned upbeat forecasts, which were nevertheless dampened by competition concerns. "Though firms remained optimistic about future growth, their confidence waned slightly," Bhandari noted.

Meanwhile, private sector sales and output ticked higher in April. The HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index rose from 59.5 in March to 59.7 in April.

Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data.

According to the survey, new business volumes across the private sector rose at the fastest pace in eight months, helped by a pick-up in growth across the service economy. The upturn in goods producers was broadly similar to March.

Both manufacturing firms and their services counterparts registered faster expansions in new export orders. At the composite level, the rate of growth was at a nine-month high, the survey noted.

The HSBC India Services PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 service sector companies. (PTI)

Looking ahead, progress on the U.S. trade deal could provide near-term support to the markets, he said. However, ongoing geopolitical concerns and the earnings season are likely to keep investor sentiment cautious in the near term, Khemka added.

The BSE smallcap gauge dropped 2.33 per cent and midcap index declined 2.16 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, realty tanked 3.49 per cent, power (2.64 per cent), services (2.53 per cent), utilities (2.36 per cent), industrials (2 per cent), capital goods (1.71 per cent) and consumer durables (1.59 per cent).

Auto and teck were the only gainers.

In Asian markets, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled higher. South Korean and Japanese markets were closed due to holidays.

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

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 497.79 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 2.76 per cent to USD 61.85 a barrel.

The 30-share BSE benchmark climbed 294.85 points or 0.37 per cent to settle at 80,796.84 on Monday. The Nifty rose by 114.45 points or 0.47 per cent to 24,461.15. (PTI)

human development, particularly in mean years of schooling and national income per capita," said Angela Lusigi, Resident Representative, UNDP India.

Lusigi further said that India's life expectancy reaching its highest level since the inception of the index is a testament to the country's robust recovery from the pandemic and its investments and commitment to long-term human well-being.

India's HDI value has increased by over 53 per cent since 1990, growing faster than the global and South Asian averages.

This progress has been fueled by economic growth and targeted social protection and welfare programmes. Life expectancy rose from 58.6 years in 1990 to 72 years in 2023, the highest recorded since the index began.

National health programmes by successive governments, such as the National Rural Health Mission, Ayushman Bharat, Janani Suraksha Yojana, and Poshan Abhiyaan, have contributed significantly to this achievement.

On the economic front, India's Gross National Income per capita rose over four times, from USD 2167.22 (1990) to USD 9046.76 (2023). "Over the years, India's progress on economic growth and investments in programmes like MGNREGA, Jan Dhan Yojana, and digital inclusion have contributed to poverty reduction. Importantly, 135 million Indians escaped multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21," the report said.

The report said India is also positioning itself as a leader in the global AI landscape. The country has the highest self-reported AI skills penetration and is now retaining more of its homegrown AI talent — 20% of Indian AI researchers remain in the country, up from nearly zero in 2019.

AI is being deployed across sectors, from agriculture to healthcare, and new initiatives are underway to democratise AI access.

A new global UNDP survey also reveals growing optimism about AI, with 70% of people expecting it to boost productivity and 64% believing it will create new job opportunities, particularly among youth.

Globally, the report warned of a slowdown in human development progress — the slowest since 1990. (PTI)

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# Admissions open for 2025 at Amrita International School of Law

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 6:** Admissions are now open for the 2025-26 academic year at Amrita International School of Law, a constituent of the top-ranked Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham. The school is inviting applications for its five-year integrated B.A., LL.B. and B.B.A., LL.B. programmes, which are designed to provide students with a strong foundation in Indian legal education while equipping them with an international perspective.

The programmes aim to nurture globally competent legal professionals through a curriculum that balances core Indian legal principles with optional modules in international law. Students delve into Indian jurisprudence, constitutional law, and civil and criminal procedures, while also gaining exposure to global legal systems — preparing them for careers in courts, law firms, corporate houses, NGOs, or international institutions.

Amrita's legal education philosophy emphasises both academic rigour and ethical grounding. "We're here to shape not just good



lawyers but ethical, globally minded legal professionals," said a faculty member. "Our students are trained to solve real-world problems and lead with purpose — both at home and abroad."

A major highlight of the programme is the 100% placement support offered through the university's Corporate and Industry Relations (CIR) division. Students benefit from structured career guidance, soft skills training, and internship opportunities from the outset. The CIR division leverages strong ties with law firms, corporations, and legal institutions to ensure students are prepared to

transition smoothly from academic life to professional practice.

The law school offers modern infrastructure, moot court training, legal clinics, and research centres to support hands-on learning. Faculty members bring experience from the bar, bench, and academia, contributing to a learning environment that is both student-centric and future-ready.

Prospective students passionate about justice, corporate law, or international legal careers are encouraged to apply and be part of a programme that combines Indian legal expertise with global vision.

Contd. from Page 1...

## India's ranks 130 out of 193

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Globally, the report warned of a slowdown in human development progress — the slowest since 1990. (PTI)

Life expectancy rose from 58.6 years in 1990 to 72 years in 2023, the highest recorded since the index began. National health programmes by successive governments, such as the National Rural Health Mission, Ayushman Bharat, Janani Suraksha Yojana, and Poshan Abhiyaan, have contributed significantly to this achievement.

On the economic front, India's Gross National Income per capita rose over four times, from USD 2167.22 (1990) to USD 9046.76 (2023). "Over the years, India's progress on economic growth and investments in programmes like MGNREGA, Jan Dhan Yojana, and digital inclusion have contributed to poverty reduction. Importantly, 135 million Indians escaped multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21," the report said.

The report said India is also positioning itself as a leader in the global AI landscape. The country has the highest self-reported AI skills penetration and is now retaining more of its homegrown AI talent — 20% of Indian AI researchers remain in the country, up from nearly zero in 2019.

## Gold surges ₹2,400 to ₹99,750/10 gm ahead of US Fed Reserve meeting

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Gold prices surged ₹2,400 to ₹99,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday due to persistent buying by jewellers and stocks, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

On Monday, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had ended at ₹97,350 per 10 grams.

Extending the gains for the third straight day, gold of 99.5 per cent purity jumped ₹2,400 to ₹99,300 per 10 grams on Tuesday. It had closed at ₹96,900 per 10 grams in the previous close.

"Gold prices edged higher as safe-haven demand returned following President Donald Trump's announcement of fresh tariff plans.

"The proposed measures include duties on pharmaceutical imports and a steep 100 per cent tariff on movies produced outside the United States — a move that stoked concerns over renewed trade tensions and their potential impact on global growth," Abans Financial Services' Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said.

As per the Sarafa Association, silver prices also climbed ₹1,800 to ₹98,500 per kg.

According to experts, market participants will be focused on Wednesday's outcome of the US Federal Reserve's FOMC (Federal Open Market Committee) policy meeting and Fed Chair Jerome Powell's commentary on growth and inflation.

Meanwhile, the most traded June contract for gold futures rallied ₹1,951, or 2.06 per cent, to ₹96,600 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

Globally, spot gold sprinted higher by USD 45.65, or 1.37 per cent, to USD 3,379.77 per ounce.

"Gold reclaimed the USD 3,350 level on Tuesday as safe haven flows lent support for precious metals for the second consecutive day amid geopolitical worries stemming from the prolonged Russia-Ukraine war, ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, and fresh tensions between India and Pakistan, which lifted the safe-haven precious metal. (PTI)

## India's services sector growth improves slightly in April on new order inflows

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** India's service sector activity accelerated slightly in April largely driven by a quicker increase in new order inflows, which also underpinned a faster expansion in employment, a monthly survey said on Tuesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index reached 58.7 in April, up from 58.5 in March, indicating a sharp and stronger expansion in service sector output.

The headline figure was above its long-run average of 54.2. In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. "India services activity rose at a faster pace than last month. New export orders gained momentum after taking a breather in March, accelerating at its fastest pace since July 2024," Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, said.

The overall expansion in output was fuelled by a significant rise in new business intakes, the joint-best in eight months, with many firms noting favourable demand conditions and successful marketing efforts.

Moreover, Indian companies continued to benefit from improved international demand for their services, with Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the US particularly cited as sources of strength. Overall, new export orders expanded at the fastest pace since July 2024. A quicker increase in new order inflows led Indian services companies to increase their workforce numbers for the thirty-fifth consecutive month in April.

Panelists enhanced operational capacity with full- and part-time employees to capitalise on increased client demand, the survey said.

On the pricing front, Indian services firms increased their average selling prices during April, as they sought

to transfer higher cost burdens to clients. "The rate of charge inflation was solid, faster than in March and above its long-run average," the survey said.

"Margins improved as cost pressures eased and prices charged rose at a faster pace," Bhandari said.

On business outlook, service providers expressed optimism regarding activity growth, but they downgraded expectations.

The overall level of business confidence was at its lowest in close to two years. Advertising, demand strength, and productivity gains underpinned upbeat forecasts, which were nevertheless dampened by competition concerns. "Though firms remained optimistic about future growth, their confidence waned slightly," Bhandari noted.

Meanwhile, private sector sales and output ticked higher in April. The HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index rose from 59.5 in March to 59.7 in April.

Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data.

According to the survey, new business volumes across the private sector rose at the fastest pace in eight months, helped by a pick-up in growth across the service economy. The upturn in goods producers was broadly similar to March.

Both manufacturing firms and their services counterparts registered faster expansions in new export orders. At the composite level, the rate of growth was at a nine-month high, the survey noted.

The HSBC India Services PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 service sector companies. (PTI)

Looking ahead, progress on the U.S. trade deal could provide near-term support to the markets, he said. However, ongoing geopolitical concerns and the earnings season are likely to keep investor sentiment cautious in the near term, Khemka added.

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The BSE smallcap gauge dropped 2.33 per cent and midcap index declined 2.16 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, realty tanked 3.49 per cent, power (2.64 per cent), services (2.53 per cent), utilities (2.36 per cent), industrials (2 per cent), capital goods (1.71 per cent) and consumer durables (1.59 per cent).

Auto and teck were the only gainers.

In Asian markets, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled higher. South Korean and Japanese markets were closed due to holidays.

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

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 497.79 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 2.76 per cent to USD 61.85 a barrel.

The 30-share BSE benchmark climbed 294.85 points or 0.37 per cent to settle at 80,796.84 on Monday. The Nifty rose by 114.45 points or 0.47 per cent to 24,461.15. (PTI)

## Govt notifies cashless treatment scheme for road accident victims nationwide

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Road accident victims all over India will be entitled for cashless treatment of up to ₹1.5 lakh for the first seven days at designated hospitals, said a notification issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) issued on Tuesday.

According to a gazette notification, the (Cashless Treatment of Road Accident

Victims Scheme, 2025) scheme has come into force with effect from May 5, 2025.

The scheme is aimed at reducing the number of deaths arising from road accidents every year due to delay in timely medical intervention.

"Any person being a victim of a road accident arising out of the use of a motor vehicle, occurring on any road, shall be entitled to cashless treatment

in accordance with the provisions of this scheme," the notification said.

The National Health Authority (NHA) shall be the implementing agency for the programme, in coordination with police, hospitals and State Health Agencies etc.

"The victim shall be entitled to cashless treatment at any designated hospital for an amount up to one lakh fifty thousand rupees per victim for a maximum period of seven days from the date of such accident," it added.

According to the notification, the treatment under this scheme at a hospital, other than a designated hospital, shall be for stabilisation purposes only and shall be as specified by the guidelines.

As per the notification, the State Road Safety Council shall be the nodal agency for implementation of the scheme for that state or Union Territory and would be responsible for coordinating with the National Health Authority for adoption and utilisation of the portal for onboarding of designated hospitals, treatment of victims, payment to the designated hospital on treatment and related mat-

## Corp affairs ministry orders probe against Gensol Engineering, BluSmart

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The corporate affairs ministry has ordered a probe into the affairs of crisis-hit Gensol Engineering and BluSmart Mobility for alleged violations of companies law, according to officials.

Gensol Engineering came under the regulatory scanner for alleged fund diversions and corporate governance lapses after Sebi, in April, passed an order barring the company's promoters Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi from the securities market for various violations.

BluSmart Mobility, which offers ride-hailing services, is promoted by Anmol Singh Jaggi.

The officials on Tuesday said the ministry ordered an investigation against the companies last

week under Section 210 of the Companies Act, 2013.

Under Section 210, the ministry has powers to order a probe into the affairs of a company on various grounds, including in public interest.

Earlier, the ministry had said it would take necessary action in the matter after examining the

## All set for free, fair and transparent panchayat polls today in Nagaon



**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, May 6: With the stage set for the second phase of the panchayat elections, Nagaon district is fully prepared to conduct free, fair, and transparent polls on Wednesday. According to official sources, over 7,564 male and 1,760 female presiding and polling officials have been deployed across the district. They departed for their respective polling stations today from two temporary centres established for the distribution and reception of election materials.

To ensure smooth conduct of the elections, the district police administration has put stringent security measures in place at all polling stations. The administration has pledged to prevent any untoward incidents and maintain law and order throughout the polling process.

A total of 698,874 male, 6,94,001 female, and 87 transgender voters are eligible to exercise their franchise across seven assembly constituencies in the district. Voters will cast

their votes to elect public representatives for 21 Zila Parishad seats, 132 Anchalik Panchayat seats, and 1,411 Gaon Panchayat seats.

In a bid to ensure the elections are conducted smoothly, the district administration has appointed 27 zonal officers in Nagaon, while seven zonal officers each have been deployed in the Raha and Kaliabor co-districts. Furthermore, 120 sector officers are overseeing operations in Nagaon, with 23 and 22 sector officers assigned to Raha and Kaliabor respectively.

Voting will take place at 1,764 polling stations across the district. District Commissioner and District Election Officer Narendra Kr Shah has issued strict instructions to all concerned police stations to remain vigilant and proactive in preventing any disruptions during the polling process.

The administration has appealed to the public to participate peacefully and responsibly in the democratic exercise.

## Memorandum to KA DC opposing panchayat election campaign

**HT Bureau**

DIPHU, May 6: The members of Karbi Nokbe Ahamphang (KNA) and Karbi National Organisation (KNO) jointly submitted a memorandum to the District Commissioner of Karbi Anglong District, Nirola Phangchopi at her official chamber here on Tuesday. The memorandum opposed the conduct of Panchayat election campaigns in sixth scheduled areas in Vothatlangso (Baithalanso) in West Karbi Anglong.

The memorandum submitted by KNA convenor Babusing Ronghang and KNO president Sarmon Hanse and secretary Sangpi Ingipi and other members stated that Panchayat election campaigns and related arrangements are being carried out in Baithalanso area of West Karbi Anglong, which is under the sixth scheduled of the Indian constitution, thereby falling under the jurisdiction of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC). As per constitutional provisions, Panchayat elections cannot be conducted within sixth schedule areas, making the current activities in violation of existing legal and administrative frameworks.

The KNA and KNO have expressed their concern by the assertion from certain quarters that Vothatlangso falls under Nagaon district. The organisations have rejected such claims made by certain sections of society.

The border demarcation was done in the 1970s. Since then, KAAC authority has been exercising administrative control over the area, including the setting up of an Entry Tax Gate far beyond Vothatlangso, further establishing the area's inclusion in Karbi Anglong.

The two organisations have demanded for immediate cancellation of all Panchayat election-related activities in Vothatlangso (Baithalanso) area by the government agencies and to take up necessary steps to uphold and enforce the sixth scheduled provisions and territorial integrity of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

## CPR and disaster management training at Gauhati University

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, May 6: A training programme on Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Disaster Management was organised at Gauhati University by Gauhati University Campus NSS Unit, in collaboration with Civil Defence, Kamrup (Metro) on Tuesday. The session was inaugurated by Ranjan Kr. Kakati, DSW & Programme Coordinator, NSS Cell, Gauhati University. Inaugurating the event Kakati said the involvement of youth can greatly enhance disaster resilience and with proper training and guidance, they can become community leaders and first responders, making a significant difference in saving lives and re-

building stronger societies. The training programme was conducted by Noorjaha Begum, Assistant Controller, Assam Civil Defence who explained different Phases of Disaster Management like Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery and also provided practical knowledge and demonstrations on CPR and essential disaster management techniques. This initiative aims to prepare NSS volunteers to respond effectively in emergency situations, enhancing their capacity to serve the community during crises like fire, earthquakes, flood, natural disasters etc. The vote of thanks was delivered by Rituparna Borah, NSS Programme Officer.

## NFR accelerates infrastructure modernization with completion of 11 ROBs in FY 2024-25

₹ 60.13 Cr project, executed by IRCON International Ltd, was funded entirely by NFR



**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, May 6: The NFR completed construction of 11 ROBs during FY 2024-25 over its divisions, reinforcing its commitment towards replacing level crossings gates (LC gates) with modern, grade-separated structures. These ROBs not only eliminate the risk of ac-

cidents at level crossings but also significantly reduce traffic congestion, improve punctuality of trains and offer uninterrupted movement for road users. With the pace of infrastructure modernization gaining momentum, such projects are playing a pivotal role in transforming transportation networks across the Northeast.

## Mock drill in Karbi Anglong today

# Chief Secretary holds VC with vulnerable districts

**HT Bureau**

DIPHU, May 6: Chief Secretary of Assam, Ravi Kota, held a crucial video conferencing (VC) meeting on Tuesday at 3:30 pm with district administrations of 15 identified vulnerable districts, including Karbi Anglong.

The meeting, convened from Guwahati, was organised in response to rising tensions between India and Pakistan, prompting enhanced emergency preparedness measures across the state, according to a press release from the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR).

The virtual meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioners (DCs), Superintendents of Police (SPs), and senior officials from key departments of the concerned districts. The primary agenda was to strengthen coordination and readiness for wartime or emergency scenarios, ensuring efficient civil defense and administrative response.

In line with directives issued by the Government of India, a nationwide mock drill will be conducted on May 7 (Wednes-



day) to assess the operational readiness of civil defense forces in the event of an airstrike or similar emergencies.

In Karbi Anglong district, the mock drill will commence with the sounding of sirens at 4:00 pm, initiating a series of emergency response simulations involving the

district administration, various line departments, and civil defense personnel. A blackout exercise is also scheduled for 7:00 pm as part of the simulation.

The district administration has urged citizens to cooperate fully and remain calm during the drill, emphasizing the importance of

such preparedness exercises in ensuring public safety and crisis resilience.

These coordinated efforts underscore the state's proactive approach to disaster and emergency management, aiming to safeguard communities through strategic planning and real-time drills.

## DC Dibakar Nath urges early voter turnout

# Dhubri all set for Panchayat polls today



**HT Correspondent**

DHUBRI, May 6: Dhubri district is poised for a major democratic exercise as it readies itself for the Panchayat elections scheduled for, May 7.

District Commissioner Dibakar Nath, while addressing the press, outlined the elaborate preparations and urged voters to cast their votes early to ensure a smooth and peaceful polling process.

"The voting will begin at 7:30 am on May 7. I urge all eligible voters to exercise their democratic rights as early as possible," DC Nath said. "Adequate security arrangements have been made, and confidence-build-

ing measures are in place to ensure peaceful polling and maximum participation."

Polling parties from Dhubri Sadar, Bilasipara CDC, and Golakganj CDC have already departed for their respective polling stations. Teams deployed to the remote char areas, known for their challenging terrain, had left a day earlier and have successfully reached their destinations. To assist in these regions, the administration has activated a dedicated boat cell to facilitate smooth transportation of polling officials and materials.

Highlighting inclusivity, Nath informed that 29 polling stations will be run entirely by women. "We have taken all necessary steps for an inclusive and secure election process," he added.

In total, 1,465 polling stations have been set up across Dhubri to cater to over 10.5 lakh registered voters. Of these, 7,39,400 voters are from Dhubri Sadar, 1,77,324 from CDC Golakganj, and 1,35,728 from CDC Bilasipara. The electorate comprises 5,42,630 male, 5,09,807 female, and 15 transgender voters, underscoring the district's commitment to inclusive governance.

Security remains a top priority, especially in the Indo-Bangladesh border areas where nearly 200 polling stations are located. "We had a coordination meeting with the BSF, and they will provide additional security to ensure smooth conduct in these sensitive zones," the DC noted.

As part of the Election Commission's guidelines, presiding officers have been instructed to initiate verification of the next voter only after the previous voter has entered the polling compartment, to ensure privacy and prevent overcrowding and speedy voting process.

The Panchayat elections will cover all three levels of rural governance: 20 Zilla Parishad constituencies, 10 Anchalik Panchayat segments, and 128 Gaon Panchayats. Dhubri Sadar accounts for the majority with 12 Zilla Parishad, 6 Anchalik, and 88 Gaon Panchayat constituencies.

Political engagement has been intense, with 69 candidates contesting Zilla Parishad seats, 417 candidates in the Anchalik Panchayat race, and a staggering 3,999 candidates vying for positions in the Gaon Panchayats.

With administrative machinery in full swing and security measures robustly enforced, Dhubri is set for a significant electoral event.

## Twelve shops gutted in Jorhat

**HT Correspondent**

JORHAT, May 6: Twelve shops were completely gutted in a devastating fire that broke out in the wee hours of Tuesday at Thana Tinioli near the police station of Mariani town in Titabar co-district of Jorhat district.

According to sources, the fire which broke out in one of the shops spread to the adjoining ones and the blaze which engulfed the area destroyed all the shops. Fire

tenders from Mariani, Titabar, Borholla, Jorhat and Teok were pressed into service and the fire was brought under control after several hours.

The exact cause of fire was yet to be known. Senior police and administration officials visited the spot to take stock of the situation.

People of the locality said that at present there was only one fire tender allotted at the Mariani fire sta-

tion, the number of which should be increased, in view of Mariani town and its adjoining areas undergoing expansion of residential places and commercial establishments in the past few years.

They hoped the Titabar Co-district and Jorhat district administrations would review the fire safety measures and accordingly allot more fire tenders in order to respond promptly to any fire incident.

## GSA holds felicitation programme for meritorious students

**HT correspondent**

GOSSAIGAON, May 6: Gossaigaon Science Academy, a leading private educational institution in the Gossaigaon subdivision, has once again achieved a remarkable record of 100% pass results in both High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Higher Secondary (HS) examinations, continuing its streak of excellence like previous years.

In the recently declared Higher Secondary results, a total of 173 students from the science and arts streams passed with first division. In the science stream, 7 students secured star marks and 64 students passed with first division. In the arts stream, 5 students achieved distinction, 12 students secured star marks, and 73 students passed in the first division.

Additionally, 50 students from the academy appeared for the HSLC examination this year. Among them, 2 students secured distinction, 6 students achieved star marks, and 34 passed with first division.

A felicitation ceremony was also held on Monday at the auditorium of Gossaigaon Science Academy under the guidance of Saddam



Hussain, Director of Gossaigaon Science Academy. Students who performed exceptionally in the Higher Secondary Examination were felicitated during the event. Notable guests at the ceremony included Kokrajhar district in-charge Primary Education Officer Rita Rava and Gossaigaon Block Education Officer Pradeep Kumar Go-yari, among others. The meritorious students were honored with traditional Assamese phulam gamocha and phulam japi.

## Anti-National activities on social media draw attention

**HT Bureau**

DIPHU, May 6: In response to the recent terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22 last the Standing Committee on Information Technology has taken strong cognizance of disturbing activities on various social media platforms that appear to be working against the national interest.

The Committee has observed that certain social media influencers and platforms are allegedly circulating provocative content that could incite violence and disturb public peace. In light of this, the Committee has directed the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to take immediate and appropriate action under the Information Technology Act, 2000 and the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The concerned Ministries have been asked to submit a detailed report on the measures undertaken, including consideration of banning such platforms if necessary. The deadline for submission has been set for May 8 2025, with both physical and digital copies to be sent to comit@sansad.nic.in.

## Gauhati University to host X-RAYDIATE workshop on materials testing

**HT Bureau**

GUWAHATI, May 6: Gauhati University has been organising a special workshop called X-RAYDIATE Materials Characterisation Workshop on May 7 and 8 at its Sophisticated Analytical Instrument Facility (SAIF). The event will focus on modern techniques used to study and test materials like silicon, diamond, quartz, metals and more.

The workshop is being held in partnership with Malvern Analytical, a leading company in scientific instruments. It will explore powerful tools like X-ray Diffraction (XRD) and X-ray Fluorescence (XRF), which help scientists understand the inner structure and elements of different materials.

The event will be inaugurated by Prof Nani Gopal Mahanta, Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University. Experts like Dr Mangesh Mahajan, Mr Brijendra Srivastava and Mr Jitendra Kumar from Malvern Analytical will share insights on how these tools are used in real-life industries and research.

A key moment of the event will be the launch of the SDCOM Desktop XRD, a compact and fast machine that can study materials in just 10 seconds, ideal for both research labs and industries.

This two-day workshop will include both theory and hands-on training, helping students, researchers, and professionals learn how to use these advanced technologies in practical ways.

## State-of-the-art Sainik School in KA

**HT Correspondent**

KHERONI, May 6: A state-of-the-art Sainik School is being constructed at Langvoku, Karbi Anglong, Assam, with an investment of ₹ 335.87 crore. This modern campus will feature a comprehensive range of facilities, including a library, multipurpose hall, hostels, indoor and outdoor sports facilities, academic and administrative buildings, an auditorium, parking, canteen, staff accommodation, a bank with ATM, a shopping complex, an infirmary, and guest house.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Problems are not the problem; coping is the problem.*  
- Virginia Satir

## British PM facing revolt

Conservatives have been the biggest loser in the local council elections in Britain held on last Thursday but it is the looming threat of ultra-rightist forces taking control of the destiny of the Britons that has forced the Labour leaders and its cadres to rebel against their leader Prime Minister Keir Starmer and seek his removal from the office. Long before the final D-day, it had become clear that Nikel Farage's far right Reform Party UK would sweep the local council elections, relegate the Tories and pose a serious existential threat to the Labour Party. Though the Tories are in an introspective mood, the Labour supporters and leaders have started openly accusing Starmer of being incompetent to comprehend the emerging political scenario. Labour losing the parliamentary seat to reform UK has triggered a massive revolt in the Labour Party and its leaders have come out in public with the demand that Starmer must make way for another leader and rehabilitate Jeremy Corbyn and others in the party. For Conservatives, Farage's party would serve the purpose of the alternate forum. But it is not the case with Labour. Its leaders have been scared of the emergence of Farage as the new face of the rightist forces since the 2024 parliamentary election. But it is the victory of Reform Party UK at the recently held Local councils and parliamentary election that has shaken the trust of the Labour leaders into the political acumen of Starmer. They find him more of the nature of liability. His style of functioning has also come under scanner and the Labour leaders have started finding the traces of authoritarianism in him.

These leaders point out that notwithstanding recent surveys and studies showing a severe decline in his image and credibility, Starmer was unwilling to amend his style of functioning. His approach to the economic problems is more akin to the rightist leaders than of progressive and leftist leaders committed to the well being of the working class and middle class. Ever since Starmer took over the office of prime minister, Labour has been losing support. Labour supporters and leaders continued to nurse the feeling that he would change and amend his working style. But it proved to be elusive. The workers and middle-class Britons started keeping away from the general activities of the Labour Party.

Starmer had come to power by sidelining Corbyn. But the working class support base for Corbyn did not approve of his machinations. They were too willing to split the party and keep afloat their ideological flag. But it was at the persuasion of Corbyn, the Left socialists continued to support Starmer. Since the 2024 elections the Left members of the Labour Party were apprehensive of Starmer transforming the basic ideological commitment and character of the party. After the results were announced a slogan "Bring back 'persecuted' Corbyn" has been echoing in the party circle. Len McCluskey, General Secretary of Unite the Union, the largest affiliate and a major donor to labour had already accused Starmer of a "witch hunt" over Jeremy Corbyn. His supporters and allies have stepped up the demand for his reinstatement.

## Indus waters diversion can catch fire and engulf the entire continent

By: Anjan Roy

Water can catch fire easily. When it comes to the Indus waters, we are seeing how combustible it could be—at least verbally for now. It might even be the flashpoint for a wider conflagration, an armed conflict. But there are sobering thoughts as well. It is in India's interest to avoid a wider or long drawn out war, as that can derail India's economic growth. Higher fiscal deficit from a war, or a diversion of funds from the compulsions of economic policy, could deeply hurt the development process.

The best way for India to punish Pakistan would be to start economically starve the country and work towards its ultimate economic bankruptcy, so that the hold of military over the civilian life gets loose. Coming to Indus Water Treaty, putting the water treaty in abeyance was good brownie point but really implementing it could be tricky. And there lies the real sting of setting of the story.

There are now reports that India proposes to stop flows of the Chenab river, using the Baglihar dam. The Chenab is a western river and under the treaty India can make use only limited ways. It is a run-of-the-river project, implying only limited uses. Baglihar has a 900 MW capacity hydroelectric power station. But its storage capacity is limited. Setting aside the tray and diverting its waters, could really be cutting the jugular vein of Pakistan. The country abjectly depends on the use of these waters for its very existence. But the decision could hurt the terrorist state only when the flow of waters into Pakistan is actually arrested. This means India has to have real infrastructure and instruments for achieving this goal. The western rivers of the Indus water system, as also the eastern ones which flow through India, receive huge volumes of waters in the summer months when the glaciers and the upper reaches of the Himalayas witness higher temperature. The melting snows of the Himalayas release the millions of cusecs of waters into the rivers. The Himalayas are geographically described as the third largest soft water storage in the world, the other two being the two polar regions, north pole and the Antarctica. The snows falling and freezing in the winter months, start melting in these hot months over the subcontinent. The Indus water system has six rivers, the eastern ones, Beas, Sutlej and Ravi these go for India. Indus, Jhelum and Chenab fall in the share of Pakistan. The western rivers receive huge waters from the melting Himalayas. But there is little infrastructure available in the upper reaches of these rivers to store the rising waters in the full season. Holding them up could result in devastating floods and pressures at various levels of the cascading flows. These would call for massive infrastructure building requiring hydrological capacities and engineering skills. As far as common knowledge goes there is little such infrastructure available currently to store any significant part of the overall flows. From 1960 onwards, we have not given much of a thought to such a plan of action for storing some parts of the flows in the high water flow seasons. Any such well thought out plan could have made vast difference. Not just for punishing Pakistan, because that could be only a minor part of this strategic thinking. These waters could have made vast difference to the agriculture and farming activities in the northern parts as well as for supply of good drinking water to the households.

Now, that we are seeing what strategic weapon these waters could be, it is time to think of an integrated plan for such a programme. This would need not only technical capabilities and engineering skills, but also vast amounts of money as well. For our edification, we are already seeing how China is building facilities upstream of the multinational Asian rivers to harness and utilise the vast water resources available in the upper reaches of the Himalayas. Much to our horror, China is already working to divert the Brahmaputra river in the upper reaches where it takes a sharp turn in the eastern Himalayas before it enters India. Notwithstanding our objections China is going ahead with its plans for diverting the Tsang po—Brahmaputra's Chinese name—to water its plains and farmlands. Once the project is completed, large parts of India's north east, as well as Bangladesh, would turn into arid deserts. However, China does not pay heed to any of the protestations from other nations. We should take the cue from China and format our own plan of action for the Indus waters system to reap the maximum benefit from these flows. The contest has just begun for the Indus water system. Now that we have committed ourselves to control the flows over the long run, massive efforts need to be put into plan and its execution. Instead of India's blood flowing down the river, as former Pak foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto, is promising for us, we should be in real control. (IPA Service)

## Pakistan paradox: A state in search of a nation

*Pakistan's centralised governance model has alienated its own peripheries. Balochistan is in a near-perpetual state of rebellion. Sindh, especially the urban Mohajir population, harbours deep resentment against Punjabi hegemony. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the now-merged FATA suffer from developmental neglect and the blowback of Pakistan's militant experimentation. Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir remain strategically useful but politically disenfranchised—ruled more as colonial dependencies than federated provinces*

The idea of Pakistan did not emerge organically from the masses of undivided India but was, instead, the cerebral construct of a Cambridge-based intellectual named Chaudhry Rehmat Ali. A Muslim Gujjar from the Gorsi clan, hailing from Balachaur in what now lies in the erstwhile Parliamentary Constituency of Sri Anandpur Sahib, Rehmat Ali published a provocative pamphlet in 1933 titled "Now or Never; Are We to Live or Perish Forever?" It was in this document, written at the age of 36, that he first articulated the framework of a separate Muslim homeland in northwest India. Though initially dismissed as the fanciful musings of a "permanent student," Rehmat Ali's vision would come to define the cartographic destiny of South Asia.

The name Pakistan itself was a geopolitical acronym rather than a spiritual revelation. It was an abbreviation comprising P for Punjab, A for Afghanistan (then NWFP), K for Kashmir, S for Sindh, and Tan from the tail of Baluchistan. An "i" was inserted later to aid pronunciation. Contrary to later nationalist myth-making, the term does not mean "land of the pure"; that interpretation, retrofitted to suit ideological aims, is a case of etymological opportunism.

In Rehmat Ali's pamphlet, one sentence stood out, exposing the imperial rationale behind the partition proposal: "This Muslim Federation of North-West India would provide the bulwark of a buffer state against invasion of India either of ideas or of arms from any quarter." It was a phrase that must have resonated with imperial strategists in London. While Indian leaders remained dismissive of the two-nation theory during the 1930s, one man who came to seriously consider it was Sir Winston Churchill. By the end of 1940, just as the Battle of Britain had concluded, Churchill—now the wartime Prime Minister of the United Kingdom—was actively discussing the Rehmat Ali proposal with his war cabinet colleagues.

Churchill, ever skeptical of the Indian National Congress, found common cause with the Muslim League's separatist ambitions. The Congress had resigned from all provincial ministries in October–November 1939 to protest

Viceroy Linlithgow's unilateral declaration of war on Germany in India's name. This provided Churchill a pretext to cultivate an alternate leadership within India—one that aligned better with British strategic interests. By March 23, 1940, the Pakistan Resolution was formally adopted at Lahore, providing institutional legitimacy to what had once been Rehmat Ali's academic fantasy.

Churchill's fear of a Soviet incursion into British India also shaped this calculus. Until Nazi Germany turned on the Soviet Union in 1941, the two totalitarian regimes were partners under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. A new iteration of the "Great Game" in Central Asia was looming, and the British sought to pre-empt it with a compliant Muslim buffer state on India's northwestern frontier.

Churchill, even as Leader of the Opposition in 1947, played a key role in persuading Muhammad Ali Jinnah to accept a truncated version of his dream—what Jinnah bitterly termed a "moth-eaten Pakistan." This West Pakistan, carved out of Punjab and Sindh, was built not as a homeland for South Asian Muslims but as a geopolitical bulwark for the Anglo-American alliance during the Cold War. It received the fertile lands of West Punjab, the commercial centres of Lahore and Karachi, and a position of strategic privilege. East Pakistan, meanwhile, was left impoverished and politically marginalised. It was never designed to thrive—its pastoral character rendered it dispensable in the larger Cold War matrix. The eventual emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 was, in many ways, a rebellion against the very logic of Pakistan's artificial construct.

Seven decades on, the record speaks for itself. Bangladesh has achieved surprising success—higher economic growth rates,

better human development indices, and relative political stability. Pakistan, conversely, has descended into strategic confusion and institutional decay. The once-vaunted military is now the custodian of a fractured state. As many commentators have noted with irony, Pakistan is perhaps the only country where the army has a country—not the other way around.

The Pakistani military's nuclear arsenal, its first-strike doctrine, and its deep alliances with China and the United States once offered the illusion of strength. It served as Washington's frontline ally in the anti-Soviet Afghan jihad of the 1980s and again during the Global War on Terror from 2001 to 2021. Yet all this to pre-empt it with a compliant Muslim buffer state on India's northwestern frontier.

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Seven decades on, the record speaks for itself. Bangladesh has achieved surprising success—higher economic growth rates,

lition in the world. Even within its Islamic framework, Pakistan has failed to build unity. Shias, Ahmadis, Hazaras, and other sectarian minorities are targeted with impunity. Violent outfits such as Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi thrive, especially in Punjab and Balochistan, under the state's selective patronage or passive complicity.

Regionally, Pakistan's centralised governance model has alienated its own peripheries. Balochistan is in a near-perpetual state of rebellion. Sindh, especially the urban Mohajir population, harbours deep resentment against Punjabi hegemony. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the now-merged FATA suffer from developmental neglect and the blowback of Pakistan's militant experimentation. Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir remain strategically useful but politically disenfranchised—ruled more as colonial dependencies than federated provinces.

Despite calling itself a federation, Pakistan lacks genuine federalism. Power remains entrenched in a unitary structure dominated by the Rawalpindi establishment and bureaucratic elite. Political parties function more as proxies than power centers, and elected governments often serve at the pleasure of the generals. The civilian facade is cosmetic; the real decisions are made behind cantonment walls.

Externally, Pakistan's longstanding ambition of achieving "strategic depth" in Afghanistan has not only failed but backfired spectacularly. The Durand Line, a colonial relic, remains a point of contention with every Afghan regime, including the Taliban. Pashtun tribes straddling both sides reject this artificial boundary. The emergence of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), a civil rights platform demanding justice for extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, underscores the growing unrest within. For India, amplifying

such indigenous dissent can serve as a potent counter-narrative to Pakistan's militarised posture. Economically, Pakistan teeters on the edge. In 2025, its GDP growth is projected at a paltry 2.6 per cent. The economy is heavily dependent on external bailouts from the IMF, Chinese loans under CPEC, and remittances from its diaspora. Military-run conglomerates like the Fauji Foundation and Army Welfare Trust dominate vital sectors, crowding out private entrepreneurship. Tax evasion is rampant, inflation is soaring, the rupee continues to slide, and foreign reserves are evaporating. Even the country's vast black economy cannot rescue it from this quagmire.

Politically, Pakistan resembles less a sovereign republic and more a semi-functional protectorate, dependent on the goodwill of its foreign patrons and the coercive apparatus of its own military. With chronic corruption, divided opposition, and a judiciary increasingly subservient to executive pressure, the country is spiraling into dysfunction.

The question now is not whether Pakistan will change, but whether it can survive in its current form. Its contradictions—ideological, ethnic, institutional, and economic—have deepened beyond the point of easy repair. While collapse is not yet imminent, it is no longer inconceivable. The notion of Pakistan disintegrating, once confined to the realm of speculative fiction, is now discussed in sober strategic circles. For India, this evolving scenario presents both risks and opportunities. A disintegrating Pakistan could unleash chaos, refugee crises, and a scramble for control of nuclear assets. But it also opens a window for strategic recalibration.

By investing in voices of dissent within Pakistan, by challenging its monolithic national narrative, and by exposing the hypocrisies of its ideological claims, India can subtly shape the discourse. The Pakistan Question, then, is not just about its past—it is about its uncertain future. And the time may soon come when that future will no longer be dictated by military doctrine, but by the inexorable collapse of an idea whose time has passed. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

## India's military strategy in the event of conflict with Pakistan after Pahalgam attack

By: Shashanka Das

India's primary objectives would be to deter further terrorism, punish Pakistan for supporting attackers, and neutralize the networks that enable strikes on India. New Delhi would seek to impose "unacceptable" costs on Pakistan's terror infrastructure while reassuring its own public and allies that it can respond decisively. In practical terms this means destroying or disabling terrorist bases and command structures across the border, degrading the sponsor-state's capabilities, and signaling India's resolve. As analysts note, the goal is both coercive and demonstrative—to deter future attacks by showing Pakistan that terrorism will provoke swift military consequences. India will also want to reaffirm its readiness to escalate if needed, without crossing the nuclear threshold.

## Types of Military Operations

• Precision air strikes. India has in the past struck targets in Pakistan-administered territory by air (e.g. the February 2019 Pulwama/Balakot response). Aircraft (including Mirage-2000s, Su-30MKIs, and Rafales) could attack identified terrorist camps or command bunkers across the Line of Control. In 2019 the IAF reported it had struck hideouts of Jaish-e-Mohammad militants. Any future air raid would be carefully planned for maximum precision to minimize civilian collateral damage, but it would carry a clear signal of retaliation. (Pakistan's counter-air response in 2019 showed that such strikes risk aerial combat; in the Balakot episode, Pakistan scrambled jets, engaged in a dogfight and shot down an Indian jet.)

• Special-forces raids (surgical/'covert' strikes). India could send commando teams across the LoC to hit specific terrorist launch pads or safe houses. Such unannounced "surgical strikes"—first used by India in 2016 after Uri—aim to kill militants and destroy infiltration infrastructure while avoiding overt escalation. By design these raids are often carried out under secrecy (many remain officially unacknowledged) to convey a message without forcing a full-blown retaliation. Past examples suggest they are limited in scope: independent analysts later estimated the 2016 raids killed only a handful of militants. Nonetheless, these operations serve India's strategic aim of directly degrading terror networks and punishing Pakistan-backed fighters.

• Conventional ground operations. If

tensions mount, Indian forces on the western border (Punjab/Rajasthan) would be poised for offensive action. Doctrinal plans like the Cold Start concept envisage limited armoured thrusts into Pakistani territory to seize ground or deter attacks. In practice, any large-scale IB incursion risks very dangerous escalation (due to Pakistan's nuclear doctrine). More likely, India would reinforce its border defenses, push infantry and tanks forward along sensitive sectors, and conduct live-fire exercises (as it did in April 2025) to demonstrate readiness. Such moves can also reinforce deterrence on Pakistan's side. As one Indian analyst noted, India's drills in the western deserts were meant to show it can "quickly strike or defend across the international frontier" if needed.

• Naval operations and blockade. The Indian Navy can project power in the Arabian Sea and beyond. For example, in April 2025 India sent its new carrier INS Vikrant and accompanying destroyers eastward off the coast of Pakistan. The Navy also publicly tested anti-ship missiles, describing them as "long-range, precision offensive strikes" practice. In a conflict, India could blockade Pakistani ports (as it did in 1999's Operation Talwar, deploying 30+ ships to choke Karachi). A short-term blockade could squeeze Pakistan's fuel and food imports, but experts warn a prolonged blockade is tantamount to war and likely to draw in China. At minimum, India would use naval air and missile patrols to interdict any arms shipments to Pakistan and to support strikes on maritime targets.

• Cyber and electronic warfare. Modern conflict between India and Pakistan would certainly include cyber operations. India has previously launched cyber-attacks on Pakistani networks (as hinted during the 2019 crisis), and could target Pakistani military communications, power grids, or air defenses in a future war. Threat assessments warn that "cyber attacks and disinformation campaigns" aimed at critical infrastructure are a likely part of the next crisis. Offensive cyber tools allow India to disrupt Pakistan's C3I (command, control, communications and intelligence) without crossing kinetic thresholds. Similarly, electronic warfare (jamming radars and communications) would be used to degrade Pakistan's air defenses during any air or missile raid. (For example, Pakistan claims to have jammed Indian Rafale jets' systems in 2024; India would be vigilant to counter

such tactics.)

In sum, India's operations would be a calibrated mix of visible and covert actions—from public air strikes to stealthy raids and cyber warfare—designed to punish the perpetrators and degrade Pakistan's ability to threaten India again. Decision-makers will weigh each option against the risk of triggering a larger war.

## Force Posture along the LoC and International Border

Immediately after a Pahalgam-style attack, India would move to bolster forces along both the Kashmir front (LoC) and the Punjab/Rajasthan border (International Border). Reports in April 2025 indicate India put its army on high alert nationwide. In Kashmir, troop levels, artillery and surveillance are already extensive; India would likely reinforce forward positions along the LoC and intensify counter-infiltration patrols. The IAF would increase fighter and reconnaissance patrols over Indian and Pakistani Kashmir. For example, one news account noted the IAF flew "increased fighter-bomber and reconnaissance sorties" along the LoC, while Indian troops raised their alert state in response to Pakistani firing.

On the western front, India would mobilize its strike corps and reserve formations. In the April 2025 crisis, the Indian Army quickly conducted large exercises: it flew Mi-17 transport helicopters in helicopter assault drills and held live tank manoeuvres in the Rajasthan deserts. Mechanized infantry and missile units also fired live rounds. Observers commented these showed India's "rapid conventional punch in the west," signaling it could "strike or defend across the international frontier" if ordered. In practice, India has far more troops (India possesses approximately 1.4 million active military personnel compared to Pakistan's fewer than 700,000) and heavier artillery on the western border, giving it an initial conventional advantage. Missile units (e.g. BrahMos launchers, tactical ballistic missiles like Prithvi) would be deployed close to the border. All these steps—helicopter drills, tank exercises, increased air patrols—amount to a credible staging posture aimed at deterring further Pakistani aggression and preparing for limited offensive tasks.

## Use of Air Power and Missile Systems

Air power and missiles would be central to India's response. India would use its combat aircraft to achieve both preci-

sion strikes and air superiority. Newer jets (Rafales, Su-30MKIs, Mirage-2000s, MiG-29UPGs) would be scrambled on high alert. Fighter-bombers could cross into Pakistani airspace to attack identified targets; maritime patrol aircraft (P-8Is) would watch for any seaborne threats. India's AWACS and airborne early-warning systems would monitor Pakistan's fighter movements. In 2019, India's Mirage-2000s carried out the Balakot strike; this time Rafales with Meteor missiles and decoy pods may lead any strike package.

Missiles add a deep-strike and defensive dimension. The navy and army have BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles (surface-to-surface) on ships, submarines and land launchers, capable of hitting coastal or fixed targets in Pakistan. In April 2025 India demonstrated its missile readiness: the Navy reported "successful multiple anti-ship firings" intended to practice "long-range precision offensive strikes". These trials were explicitly described as preparing India to hit high-value targets in Pakistan's maritime zones. On land, units have Prithvi and Prahaar rockets (short-range ballistic missiles) that can target border areas and terrorist camps with conventional warheads. India also fields medium-range Agni missiles, though these are nuclear-capable and would generally be held in reserve.

Defensively, India's S-400 and indigenous Akash air-defense systems would be on alert to intercept any incoming Pakistani missiles or warplanes. Radar and SAM sites along the frontier and on key cities would be manned to guard against surprises. In 2025 both sides possessed roughly 170 nuclear warheads each, so conventional air/missile strikes would be carefully calibrated to avoid triggering that ultimate threshold.

In a pitched fight, analysts expect the battle to center on aircraft, missiles, and drones. Reuters notes India and Pakistan are "closely matched" in these categories, implying dogfights and missile exchanges might occur. India's qualitative edge and sheer numbers give it staying power (the same Reuters report predicts India's larger resources would dominate over a longer conflict). To summarize, India is likely to leverage its air force for strikes on land/sea and its missile forces for high-precision deterrence, while using its growing drone fleet and cyber network to augment situational awareness and strikes if conventional assets are constrained. (...to be continued)

By: Elizabeth Pratt

Women who exercise consistently in midlife have better health-related quality of life. That's according to research published today in the journal PLOS Medicine in which researchers reported that women in their 40s and 50s who consistently adhered to physical activity guidelines had better physical functioning than their peers who didn't consistently exercise.

"Combined with existing evidence, this study contributes to growing evidence of the benefits of maintaining or adopting an active lifestyle in mid-age," the study authors said in a press statement.

"An important public health message is that being active for as many years as possible, even if women start to meet physical activity guidelines in their mid-50s, could have important health benefits in terms of physical health, especially in physical functioning," they added.

#### Details from the study on midlife women and exercise

The researchers from Australia examined data from more than 11,000 women beginning in 1996. The women were born between 1946 and 1951, meaning they were 47 to 52 years of age when the study began.

The participants were categorized into those who met the physical activity guidelines from the World Health Organization consistently over a 15-year period, those who initially did not meet the guidelines but began to meet them at the age of 55, 60 or 65, and those who never met the guidelines.

The quality of life related to the health of the women was assessed using a physical health composite score. This was derived from a survey that asked 36 questions about functional health and wellbeing.

The researchers reported that women who met the physical activity guidelines as well as those who first began meeting these guidelines when they were 55 had a 3 point higher physical health composite score than women who didn't meet the guidelines.

The study authors said that "women should be active throughout mid-age, ideally increasing activity levels to meet the guidelines by age 55, to gain the most benefits for physical health in later life."

#### How much exercise do you need?

The World Health Organization recommends adults should engage in 150 to 300 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity every week.

Alternatively, it is recommended adults should do at least 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity or an equivalent combination of activity of both moderate and vigorous intensity.

Adults should also engage in muscle strengthening activity two or more days each week.

"We have very good evidence that physical activity is one of the best things women can do to keep themselves healthy throughout their lifespan. It doesn't do us any good to live for many years if we are unable to do all the things we need and want to do to enjoy that time. Movement maintains good joint mobility and muscle strength, improves circulation, increases

bone density, and helps prevent major diseases," said Dr. Nicole Yedlinsky, a family medicine and sports medicine physician at The University of Kansas Health System who was not involved in the study.

"When we think about longevity, we don't just want to live longer, we also want to live well," Yedlinsky told Medical News Today. "Quality of life is extraordinarily important. Exercise is fundamentally important to all our body systems: our heart, lungs, brain, gut, joints, bones, and muscles. Regular physical activity is the key piece to minimizing the physiologic decline that normally comes with aging."

#### Easing in to an exercise routine

The researchers found that women who began meeting exercise guidelines at age 55 still received the same benefits as their peers who had been consistently exercising prior to that.

Experts say midlife women, particularly those who are menopausal, should slowly ease in when beginning an exercise routine.

"All the symptoms of menopause can impede a woman's ability to workout. Irregular periods make it hard to know when the best time of day is to work out. Hot flashes and night sweats make the thought of working out and breaking a sweat less desirable. Emotional upheaval including depression and anxiety also prevents trips to the gym or putting on your tennis shoes. Heart palpitations also scare menopausal women from doing any activity that increases the heart rate," said



Dr. Sherry Ross, an OB/GYN and women's health expert at Providence Saint John's Health Center in California who was not involved in the study.

"Starting slowly is recommended for menopausal women who are just starting to become physical active," Ross told Medical News Today. "Getting into a regular routine is the best strategy. If you have any type of bone loss, especially osteoporosis, associated with aging and menopause, I would avoid exercises that may increase the risk of falling or create instability."

#### The challenges of exercising in midlife

While the benefits of physical activity are well established, the study authors note that for many women in this age group life transitions such as marriage, having children, children leaving the family home, retirement, and bereavement can influence activity level.

However, experts say it is important that midlife women take the time to prioritize their own health and quality of life by engaging in regular movement.

"The benefits of consistent exercise in quality of life become more clear when looking at the four functional benefits of many exercises; strength, stamina, flexibility and balance. The loss of

any of these four types of physical capacity are hallmarks of physical infirmity and erosion of quality of life. For people looking forward to enjoying extended work or recreational activities as they age, loss of strength, stamina, flexibility and balance limit the scope of life and are predictors of loss of independent living capacity in older age," said Dr. Charlie Porter, a cardio-oncologist at The University of Kansas Health System who was not involved in the study.

"Middle aged" women are facing many demands from others and get little encouragement from anyone to take time for

their own emotional and physical benefit," Porter told Medical News Today. "This study provides encouragement for women in this stage of life to look at physical exercise for themselves as a way of sustaining and maintaining their own long term health and physical capacity. On an airliner, parents are instructed to put their own oxygen mask on before they put the mask on their children. Starting and staying with an exercise program in the time of life with maximum demands to serve others can be thought of like putting an oxygen mask on before helping others." (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

## Fear of independent women: Indigestion of Hindi literature

By: Privanka Saurabh

The Hindi literature world still cannot digest the real independent and enlightened women. They want a female writer of the kind they want. She should write on soft issues, family, society, some psychology, and man-woman relationships. For them, the synonym of modernity or a modern woman is that she can write boldly. In the name of bold writing, this society praises vulgarity in female writers and bestows them with big words. They do all this in the name of women's freedom.

Those confused women also consider opposing family, opposing culture, and supporting perverted sexuality as bold and modern and keep strutting like puppets in their hands. It is a pity that they do not know that they are puppets; they are made to write whatever they want, and that too by coating them in the syrup of modern, courageous, bold, independent, enlightened words. Writing of slimy literature, destruction, and negativity is what makes them called bold and enlightened.

Even today, enlightened women with independent consciousness are an uncomfortable truth for the Hindi literary world. Women who are masters of their independent intellect, who think, raise questions, and do not fit into the old mold of submissive female writers—they are still not acceptable to the literary community. Even today, they want such female writers who fit into their prescribed mold: those who write on 'soft' issues—family, society, a little psychology, and some light-hearted male-female relationships.

When 'modernity' is mentioned on the platforms of Hindi literature, it too has a set framework. For them, a 'modern' female writer means one who is "bold"—that is, one who serves obscenity in the name of 'bold writing'. One who is incited in the name of 'sexual freedom'—opposition to the family, mockery of culture, and distortion of relationships—is said to be synonymous with modernity.

And this entire trickery is wrapped up with such sweetness that the confused female writers themselves believe this lie to be true. They are filled with pride about how 'bold,' 'independent,' and 'modern' they have become—while they have become mere puppets in the hands of those literary contractors who make them dance according to their convenience. Sadly, they never have the time to raise this question: whether the lesson of freedom that they are being taught, have those male writers taught the same lesson to the women of their homes as well?

The mindset of the literary society is that women's writing should be limited to a hidden realm of tender emotions, beauty, love, separation, or soft porn. If a woman dares to write seriously on geopolitics, religion, philosophy, spirituality, international relations, sociology, politics, education, economics, or policies, she makes them uncomfortable. This unbearable thought gets embedded in their minds: "These are the fields of men." Women should only embellish words—they should not raise deep questions.

Depth of thoughts, sharpness of analysis, and intellectual boldness—all these are still considered 'male bastions' in the Hindi literary scene.

A woman who neither bows down to the desire of any award nor compromises her ideas in the greed of any platform nor is hungry for the favor of any famous critic, a woman who is alert and firm about her thoughts, values, and character—she is still a dangerous presence for the Hindi literary world. Such a woman being the owner of her own conscience and her independence scares them, irritates them, and makes them uncomfortable. They start awarding her with titles like 'arrogant,' 'insensitive,' 'fanatic,' and 'over-intellectual' so that she can be pushed to the margins. But all their ridicule, all their criticism, is just a trivial noise for that woman, who knows that her war is not against the darkness outside but against the darkness within.

Look at this paradox: those who taught women the lesson of 'modernity' in the name of sexuality still apply the same criteria of 'purity,' 'decency,' and 'tradition' to the women of their own homes. For them, 'boldness' is only for the women of the outside world. The women of the house should still remain veiled, should remain silent, and should remain modest.

Women who sell their freedom for obscurity, their modernity for self-deception, and their courage for the pseudo-support of patriarchy—they do not actually become a part of any revolution but rather become the new cherries of that patriarchal literary system.

The harsh truth is that "Women's Liberation" has also become a brand today. It is traded, displayed on stage, and distributed as awards.

In fact, the rebellion of a woman with an independent consciousness is very subtle and invisible. It is not expressed in vulgar language, not in negativity, not in outrageous boldness—but in the depth of thought, in the accurate analysis of issues, and in the honesty of her writing.

When she writes on love, she explains the complexity of compassion. When she writes on politics, she draws a picture of the suffering of the people in the churning of power. When she writes on religion, she breaks the web of superstition and intolerance.

She knows that the true purpose of literature is to reveal the truth—not to become a pawn to power, greed, and the sexual market. Hindi literature will now have to accept that women are not just symbols of "decoration" or "sensitivity." They now ask questions, analyze, break, and create. And most importantly, they no longer want to become pawns of anyone's agenda.

They have become the creators of their own thoughts, their own pens, and their own future. The sooner the literary society understands this change, the better it will be—otherwise only puppets will keep dancing in their world, and women with independent consciousness will keep making new paths for themselves in history.

"When a woman raises her voice, she does not just speak for herself; she challenges the silence of the entire society."

## Abortion is a crime-But only for the poor

By: Anushka Sangari

According to research, 67% of abortions in India are unsafe, and about 8 women die every day from abortion-related complications. In rural belts, abortion continues to be a practice. Sometimes out of sheer necessity, sometimes driven by gender preference, and almost always in the shadows. Hidden from the public eye. It is not just that abortion is abortion. Even an abortion in India has timelines. Different ones' for different things. It is a highly moral and ambiguous battleground. One that has timelines, permissions and prejudices. And the thing is, they keep on shifting based on multiple factors like where you live, who you are, how much you earn, and of course, if the society thinks you're even worth saving.

**General Abortion Timelines**  
In India, under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021, the legal limit for abortion is based on various conditions too.

- Breakdown –
- 1. Up to 20 Weeks of Pregnancy
  - Allowed for all women.
  - Can be performed by a single registered medical practitioner (RMP).
  - Requires a doctor's opinion that the pregnancy can risk the mother's physical or mental health, or if the contraceptive fails (including unmarried women after the 2021 amendment).
- 2. 20-24 Weeks
  - Allowed only for a specific categories of

- women–
- A. Survivors of rape/ incest.
- B. Minors
- C. Women with physical disabilities
- D. Women whose marital status has changed (e.g. widowhood, divorce) during the pregnancy.
- E. Cases of fetal malformation.
  - Requires opinion of two registered medical practitioners (RMPs).
- 3. Beyond 24 Weeks
  - Only in cases of substantial fetal abnormalities.
  - Requires approval by a Medical Board (constituted by state governments), which includes –

- A. A gynecologist
  - B. A pediatrician
  - C. A radiologist or sonologist
  - D. And any other specialists required
- Class disparity in access to abortion
- It indeed is important to know that even though the law was liberalized in 2021, access to abortions still remains unequal, especially for the poor, marginalized, rural, and unmarried women
- What pushes more fear and causes problems is the fact that most doctors are still hesitant to perform abortions after 20 weeks due to the fear of legal repercussions and stigma attached to it. Yet just like with any other facility, abortion too remains one of them, that the rich can choose any time by flying first class to a country that offers abortions.

Such realities make the people often realize that much like any other facility, abortion, even though a right and necessity is an unattainable

factor in a country like India due to the socio-political environment. And in a country with restrictions, there are no safe abortions, only a 100% chance at pushing women into unsafe ones'.

The most recent and comprehensive data on abortions in India indicates that approximately 15.6 million abortions occurred in 2015, which turns out to be around 42,740 abortions per day. Although the latest data is almost ten years old, it still brings out a bleak image.

Even though abortions are legal in India, they are not easily accessible. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that unsafe abortions in India are the leading cause of maternal mortality in the country. Nearly 8 women die daily due to complications caused by the same.

Moral policing and gendered stigma

In India, abortion is not just a choice of medical help, it is also a moral trial. Women who go ahead to seek abortions are often viewed as inhumane, seen as transgressors and not patients. It is a system-both societal and institutional which rarely asks women – WHY? Instead the questions turn into WHO she is.

- Is the woman married?
- Is the woman urban or rural?
- Is she rich or poor?

Moral policing thrives in places like Indian abortion clinics because of their savior complex and selective compassion. Either the crime must be harrowing enough to come on television for her to get an abortion, or she must be a slutt, sleeping around and now not wanting to deal with the consequences. (Courtesy: Youth ki Awaaz)

## Don't rub it - Sip these drinks to help protect your skin

By: Shahnaz Husain

It's hard not to love a sunny day, but we all know the risks associated with prolonged exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays.

As temperatures increase, summer sun can leave your skin dry, tight, and more susceptible to irritation and inflammation.

Drinking something makes sun sense. Certain drinks can help protect against sun damage due to their antioxidant content, which can help combat the effects of UV radiation. Drinking 250 millilitre a day can reduce UV damage by more than 26 per cent.

Staying hydrated during the hot summer months prevents heat-related illnesses like hyperthermia. The skin contains 64 per cent water, and it plays a crucial role in its natural UV protection capabilities.

Hydration goes a long way to help support your skin's ability to heal and protect itself. Avoid drinks with a high sugar or caffeine content – these may counteract your hydration efforts.

Taking a combination of these nutrient-rich drinks on a regular basis can provide you with an extra layer of security that may help avoid a sunburn.

**1. Berry Smoothies**  
Berries, the favourite summer fruits, can offer some protection against UV damage due to their high antioxidant content, which can help neutralise free radicals and reduce oxidative stress on the skin.

Blueberries are rich in powerful antioxidants that fight off free radicals that can damage skin due to sun exposure and stress. Blueberries are even more powerful if they're a wild variety.

Some studies suggest that certain antioxidants, like those found in berries, can help protect against UV damage.

Specifically, berries like blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries are known for their antioxidant properties, which may help protect against the harmful effects of UV radiation.

Try drinking this sun protection smoothie before spending time out in the sun. It is full of antioxidants, healthy fats, omega-3s, and other important nutrients your skin needs to protect itself from sun damage.

Take a glass bowl and put 40 gm Frozen Mulberry, 40 gm Frozen Raspberry, 40 gm Frozen Blueberry, 100 gm Frozen Banana, 40 ml Oat Milk, 30 gm Yoghurt, a few fresh berries for garnishing, banana slices for garnishing, mixed seeds, toasted Almonds, Chia Seeds and Granola for garnish. Put all the ingredients in a blender and blend until very smooth. Make sure all the berries and banana are frozen to get a nice, thick smoothie. Pour the content in a bowl and garnish with slices of bananas and some fresh berries on top. Sprinkle some chia seeds, granola, and toasted almonds for the crunch and some nutty flavour.

While these nutrient-rich, whole foods may support the health of your skin when exposed to UV light, keep in mind that they're not a substitute for sunscreen.

**2. Aloe Vera Juice**  
Did you know that aloe vera is sometimes referred to as the 'burn plant' due to its tendency to treat burns? It has been used for thousands of years in treating burns and easing sunburn symptoms.

Aloe vera juice contains anti-inflammatory properties which help to calm skin conditions from UV rays.

Aloe vera is the most effective component for hydrating the skin dried due to sun expo-

sure. Aloe Vera stimulates skin restoration after sunburn and hydrates and moisturises the skin. It also relieves rashes and irritations on the skin.

Aloe vera also stimulates collagen production to improve elasticity and dryness within the skin.

Aloe vera can be found as a juice or a gel. The juice can be thought of as the sap, as it comes from the leafy part of the aloe plant. The gel, on the other hand, is a thick substance that comes from the inner parts of the plant.

Generally, aloe vera gel can be consumed as a drink, while the juice is often applied topically.

Select pure, unsweetened aloe vera juice and drink moderately.

If you choose to ingest aloe vera, make sure to wash the gel or skin thoroughly to remove all traces of latex. The latex has an unpleasant bitter taste and may cause harmful side effects.

Don't eat aloe vera lotions and gels sold as skin care products. They aren't meant to be ingested and may contain other ingredients that aren't safe to eat.

**3. Watermelon**  
Watermelon can act as a natural sunscreen and skin repair. Watermelons contain an antioxidant called Lycopene, a powerful antioxidant commonly found in red-coloured fruits and which can help act as a natural sunscreen.

Lycopene can eventually act as a natural sunblock, which absorbs both UVA and UVB radiation. If you consume watermelon regularly for a few weeks.

It also helps as an anti-ageing ingredient. Lycopene helps to protect skin cells from harmful sun rays.

It replenishes these cells and helps your skin act as a natural filter while allowing enough sunlight through for vitamin D production. Lycopene can help prevent wrinkles, strengthening the elasticity of skin tissues. When eating watermelon, try to serve it with some oil, such as salad dressing or olive oil, because this increases lycopene absorption.

**4. Cucumber and Mint Infused Water**  
Both cucumber and mint contain antioxidants that can help protect against cell damage caused by free radicals, which can contribute to sun damage. I like to drink this first thing in the morning to kick-start my day.

Cucumber and mint-infused water can offer some benefits for sun protection, primarily through hydration and antioxidant support. Cucumbers possess cooling and hydrating qualities, while mint provides a refreshing flavour and antioxidants, resulting in mild anti-inflammatory effects.

Take 8 cups filtered water, 2 cups thinly sliced cucumber, 2 small lemons, rind removed and discarded, sliced and ½ cup packed fresh mint leaves, torn.

Stir water, cucumber, lemons and mint together in a large pitcher. Cover and chill for at least 4 hours to blend flavours. Strain out solids, if desired.

Take 1 litre of water, a small handful of mint leaves, 1 piece of ginger, a handful of slices of cucumber and a few slices of lime. Add a few slices of lime to a 1-litre bottle. Take a 1 piece of ginger, slice and press down a bit. Add a small handful of mint leaves. Keep refilling the bottle the whole day and drinking with this infusion. This will help you increase your water intake and also drink it 30 minutes before and after each meal. (The author is internationally famous beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)

# Indo-Pak tensions: UNSC members call for de-escalation, ask Pakistan 'tough questions'

UNITED NATIONS, May 6: The UN Security Council discussed rising tensions between India and Pakistan at closed-door consultations, where envoys called for de-escalation and also asked Pakistan "tough questions".

Greece, president of the UNSC for the month of May, had scheduled the meeting on Monday following a request by Pakistan, which is currently a non-permanent member. The meeting comes days after terrorists killed 26 people, mostly tourists, in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgal, triggering outrage in India.

The 15-member UNSC did not issue a statement after the meeting, but Pakistan claimed that its own objectives were "largely served".

Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations Khaled Mohamed Khari of Tunisia briefed the Council on behalf of both departments (DPPA and DPO).

Coming out of the meeting, Khari said there was a call for "dialogue and peaceful resolution of the conflict." He noted that the "situation is volatile."

Ambassador Evangelos Sekeris, a Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations and the current UNSC President, described it as a "productive meeting, helpful".

A Russian diplomat said, "We hope for de-escalation."

Sources here told PTI that members of the 15-nation Security Council raised "tough questions" for Pakistan at its informal session. It was advised to sort out the issues bilaterally with India, they said.

The sources added that there was broad



condemnation of the terrorist attack and recognition of the need for accountability.

Some members specifically brought up targeting of tourists on the basis of their religious faith, the sources said. UNSC members refused to accept the "false flag" narrative and asked whether Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba was likely to be involved.

The closed-door meeting that lasted about an hour and a half did not take place in the UNSC Chamber where Council members sit at the horse-shoe table, but in a consultation room next to it.

Sources added Pakistan's efforts to internationalise the situation also failed. Many members expressed concern that Pakistan's missile tests and nuclear rhetoric were escalatory factors.

Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad told reporters that the coun-

try's objectives were "largely served and achieved" at the meeting.

He said the objectives of the closed consultations included enabling the Council members to have a discussion on the deteriorating security environment and rising tensions between India and Pakistan and to have an exchange of views on how to address the situation, including avoiding confrontation that could have serious consequences and the need for de-escalation.

Ahmad thanked Council members for their engagement and their calls for restraint, de-escalation and dialogue. He said that while Pakistan does not seek confrontation, "we are fully prepared to defend our sovereignty and territorial integrity".

Pakistan also raised the issue of India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960. "Water is life, not a weapon. These rivers sustain over 240 million Pakistanis,"

he said.

Ahmad said at the meeting Pakistan reiterated its "commitment to peaceful, cooperative relations with all our neighbours, including India".

"We remain open to dialogue based on mutual respect and sovereign equality," he added. "In view of the gravity of the situation, the calls for dialogue, de-escalation and peaceful resolution of disputes, such as by the Secretary-General, and what we also heard from the Council members today are most pertinent," Ahmad said.

Before the UNSC meeting, India's former Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin had told PTI that no "consequential outcome" can be expected from "a discussion where a party to the conflict seeks to shape perceptions by using its membership of the Council. India will parry such Pakistani efforts".

Following the meeting, he said, "Pakistan's grandstanding has flopped again today as in the past. As was expected, there was no meaningful response by the Council. Indian diplomacy has yet again successfully parried Pakistani efforts to seek the Security Council's intervention."

Just hours before the closed consultations, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres voiced concern over tensions between India and Pakistan being at "their highest in years". "It pains me to see relations reaching a boiling point," he said. He made these remarks to the press from the UNSC stake-out Monday morning. Guterres said he understands the "raw feelings" following the "awful terror attack" in Pahalgal and reiterated his strong condemnation of that attack. (PTI)

# Israel launches airstrikes on Yemen day after Houthi rebels strike Israeli airport



JERUSALEM, May 6: Israel's military targeted Houthi rebels in Yemen's Red Sea province of Hodeida on Monday with a punishing round of airstrikes, killing at least one person and wounding 35.

The strikes came a day after the Iranian-backed rebels launched a missile that hit Israel's main airport. The rebels' media office said at least six strikes hit the crucial Hodeida port Monday afternoon. Other strikes hit a cement factory in the Bajil district, located 55 kilometers (34 miles) northeast of Hodeida city, the rebels said. The extent of damage at the two facilities wasn't immediately clear.

The Israeli military said more than 20 Israeli fighter planes took part in the operation, dropping more than 50 munitions on dozens of targets. Hodeida residents said they heard explosions at the port, with flames and smoke seen rising over the area. Ambulance sirens were also heard across the city, they said.

"It was very strong," Ahmed Saleh, who lives close to the port, said of the explosions.

In Bajil, fires and thick columns of smoke were seen over the cement factory, which the Houthis said was hit by both US and Israeli strikes. Ambulances also rushed to the area, said resident Khalid Seif.

The Houthi-run health ministry said at least one person was killed and 35 others were wounded in the Israeli strikes on the factory. It said rescuers were still searching for missing people.

On Sunday, the Houthis launched a missile from Yemen that struck an access road near Israel's main airport, briefly halting flights and commuter traffic. Four people were lightly injured. It was the first time a missile struck the grounds of Israel's airport since the start of the war.

The Houthis claimed that the strikes were a joint Israeli-American operation. However, a US defense official said US forces did not participate in the Israeli strikes on Yemen on Monday. The strikes were not part of Operation Rough Rider, which is the ongoing US military operation against the Houthis in Yemen to prevent them from targeting ships in the Red Sea that started March 15. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Separately, the US military launched multiple strikes Monday on Sanaa, another US official said. That official also spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

Nasruddin Amer, head of the Houthi media office, said the Israeli strikes won't deter the rebels, vowing they will respond to the attack.

"The aggressive Zionist-American raids on civilian facilities will not affect our military operations against the Zionist enemy entity," he said on social media. He said the Houthis will escalate their attacks and won't stop targeting shipping routes and Israel until it stops the war in Gaza.

The Houthis have targeted Israel throughout the war in solidarity with Palestinians, raising their profile at home and internationally as the last member of Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance" capable of launching regular attacks on Israel. The US military under President Donald Trump has launched an intensified campaign of daily airstrikes targeting the Houthis since March 15.

Houthi rebels have fired at Israel since the war with Gaza began on Oct. 7, 2023. The missiles have mostly been intercepted, although some have penetrated Israel's missile defense systems, causing damage. Israel has struck back against the rebels in Yemen.

The Israeli military said it targeted the Hodeida port because Houthi rebels were using it to receive weapons and military equipment from Iran. Rebel-held Hodeida, about 145 kilometers (90 miles) southwest of the capital Sanaa, has been key for food shipments into Yemen as its decade-long war continues.

Israel has struck Yemen, and specifically the port city of Hodeida, multiple times. It previously struck Hodeida and its oil infrastructure in July after a Houthi drone attack killed one person and wounded 10 in Tel Aviv. In September, Israel struck Hodeida again, killing at least four people after a rebel missile targeted Israel's Ben Gurion airport as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was arriving back to the country. In December, Israeli strikes killed at least nine people in Hodeida. The Houthis have launched multiple missiles toward Israel in the past week. (AP)

## Pak to increase defence spending by 18 pc in budget: Report

ISLAMABAD, May 6: Pakistan coalition government has endorsed an 18 per cent increase in defence spending to over ₹ 2.5 trillion in the next budget due to tensions with India, according to a media report on Tuesday.

The government is set to unveil the 2025-26 budget in the first week of the next month ahead of the start of the new fiscal year from July 1. India and Pakistan have witnessed heightened tensions since the April 22 terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgal that killed 26 people.

The Express Tribune reported that the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) delegation, led by its chief Bilawal Bhattu Zardari, met with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his economic team to discuss the budget matters on Monday.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led government shared roughly ₹ 17.5 trillion worth of new budget framework with its key ally, the PPP, which agreed to 18 per cent increase in the defence outlay.

There was a consensus between the PML-N and the PPP to increase the defence budget due to the recent wave of tensions with India, the newspaper said, quoting

sources. They said that the PPP backed the proposal to increase the defence budget by 18 per cent to over ₹ 2.5 trillion in the light of the prevailing security threats.

In the current fiscal 2024-25, the government allocated ₹ 2,122 billion for defence spending, reflecting a 14.98 per cent increase over ₹ 1,804 billion budgeted for the outgoing fiscal year 2023-24.

The defence sector expenses are the second biggest component of the annual expenditure after the debt payments. In the current year, ₹ 9,700 billion allocated for debt servicing constitutes the single biggest expense of the country.

"The size of the budget is lower than ₹ 18 trillion, which is less than this year's budget due to steep reduction in the interest expense on the back of an 11 per cent cut in policy rate by the central bank," the newspaper added.

India on April 23 announced a raft of punitive measures against Pakistan, including suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, shutting down of the only operational land border crossing at Attari and downgrading of diplomatic ties in view of cross-border links to the attack. (PTI)

## Threatened by Trump tariffs, Japan walks delicate tightrope between US and China

WASHINGTON, May 6: Just as Japan's top trade negotiator travelled to Washington for another round of tariff talks last week, a bipartisan delegation bearing the name of "Japan-China Friendship" wrapped up a visit to Beijing.

A week earlier, the head of the junior party in Japan's ruling coalition was in Beijing delivering a letter from Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba addressed to Chinese President Xi Jinping. Details of the letter are unknown, but the two sides discussed US tariffs in addition to bilateral issues.

Among all US allies being wooed by Beijing in its tariff stare-down with Washington, Japan stands out. It is a peculiar case not only for its staunch commitment to its alliance with the United States but also for its complicated and uneasy history with the neighbouring Asian giant — particularly the war history from the 20th century that still casts a shadow over the politics of today.

"On one hand, they are neighbours and they are important economic partners. There's a lot that connects Japan and China," said Matthew Goodman, director of the Greenberg Centre for Geoeconomics at the Council on Foreign Relations. "But on the other hand, I think there are limits to how far they're going to lean into China."

While Japan won't walk away from its alliance with the United States, the linchpin of the Asian country's diplomacy and security policies, "it's also true that the tariffs and uncertainty that Trump has created for Japan is really shaking things up in Tokyo," Goodman said. Last month, President Donald Trump announced a 24% tariff on Japanese goods in a sweeping plan to levy duties on about 90 countries. The White House



has since paused the tariffs but a 10% baseline duty on all countries except China, allowing time for negotiations. Still, Trump's 25% tax on aluminum, steel and auto exports have gone into effect for Japan.

The tariff moves, as well as Trump's "America First" agenda, have cast doubts among the Japanese if the United States is still a dependable ally, while China is rallying support from tariff-threatened countries — including Japan.

In Beijing, Japan sees positive signs

When Tetsuo Saito led Japan's Komeito Party delegation to Beijing in late April, China hinted at difficulty in its tariff dispute with the United States, signaling its willingness to improve ties with Tokyo. An unnamed senior Chinese official said his country was "in trouble" when discussing Trump's 145% tariff on Chinese products, according to Japanese reports. (AP)

## Friedrich Merz's bid to become Germany's chancellor fails in parliament in stunning defeat

BERLIN, May 6: In a historic first, conservative leader Friedrich Merz's bid to become Germany's 10th chancellor since World War II failed by six votes in parliament on Tuesday, a stunning defeat as he had been widely expected to win smoothly.

A candidate for chancellor has never failed to win on the first ballot since the end of the war. The loss triggered a stock market slide: the DAX, the index of major German companies, was down 1.8 per cent following the vote. Merz needed a majority of 316 out of 630 votes. He only received 310 votes — well short of the 328 seats held by his coalition, which is also one of the slimmest postwar majorities. Because the vote was held by secret ballot, it was not immediately clear — and might never be known — who had defected from Merz's camp.

Merz's coalition is led by his centre-right Christian Democratic Union and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union. They are joined by the centre-left Social Democrats, outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party. The parties were now to regroup to discuss the next step but it was also unclear how long the process could take.

Merz is seeking to take the helm of the 27-nation European Union's most populous member after Scholz's government collapsed last year and a national election was held in February. Scholz, despite his official farewell on Monday, remains in a caretaker role until a new chancellor takes over.

Germany has the continent's biggest economy and serves as a diplomatic heavyweight. The new chancellor's portfolio would include the war in Ukraine and the Trump administration's trade pol-



icy on top of domestic issues, such as Germany's stagnant economy and the rise of a far-right, anti-immigrant party. "The world is in turmoil. Europe needs a strong Germany," Carsten Linnemann, the secretary-general of the Christian Democrats, told reporters after Merz's loss. He said a second vote should come soon. "We can't wait for days now, we need clarity quickly."

**What's next?** The lower house of parliament — called the Bundestag — has 14 days to elect a candidate with an absolute majority. Merz can run again, but other lawmakers can also throw their hat in the ring. There is no limit to the number of votes that can be held within the two-week period. If Merz or any other candidate fails to get that majority within the 14 days, the constitution allows for the president to appoint the candidate who wins the most votes as chancellor, or to dissolve the Bundestag and hold a new national election.

Johann Wadepuhl, the designated next foreign minister, said he was confident Merz would ultimately prevail. "It is an annoying process, but in a parliamentary

democracy, in a liberal country, this is unfortunately one of the scenarios that you have to be prepared for," he told reporters.

Volker Resing, who wrote the recent biography "Friedrich Merz: His Path to Power," expressed surprise at the turn of events. "It shows how fragile the coalition's situation is and that some lawmakers are prepared to spread uncertainty — that's a warning signal," Resing told The Associated Press.

Resing said that if Merz gets elected in the second round, then everything will be fine and people may soon forget about this hiccup. But "for now everything is wide open," he added. Alice Weidel, co-leader of the far-right, anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party, slammed Merz's failure proof that his coalition has a "weak foundation." AfD is the biggest opposition party in Germany's new parliament after it placed second in national elections in February. Despite its historic gains, it was shut out of coalition talks due to the so-called "firewall" that mainstream German political parties have upheld against cooperating with far-right parties since the end of the war. (AP)

## B'desh court issues new arrest orders against detained Hindu leader

DHAKA, May 6: A Bangladesh court on Tuesday ordered the arrest of detained Hindu leader Chinnoy Krishna Das in four more cases, a day after the court took a similar action against him in a murder case.

Chattogram Metropolitan Magistrate SM Alauddin Mahmud issued the order after a virtual hearing, state-run BSS news agency reported.

A former ISKCON leader, Das, was arrested at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on November 25 last year in a sedition case over al-

leged defamation of the national flag. His bail petition was rejected by a Chattogram court, which sent him to jail the next day.

His arrest sparked widespread protests, with his followers demonstrating in Dhaka and other places.

The four cases on which the court took action on Tuesday include obstruction of police duties at the Kotwali police station and attacks on lawyers and justice seekers, according to Assistant Public Prosecutor Md Raihanul Wazed Chowdhury. (PTI)

## Novelist Percival Everett, playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins among Pulitzer winners in arts

NEW YORK, May 6: Percival Everett's novel "James," his radical re-imagining of "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" from the perspective of the enslaved title character, has won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. "Purpose," Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' drawing-room drama about an accomplished Black family destroying itself from within, won for drama. It also earned six Tony Award nominations last week.

Everett's Pulitzer confirmed the million-selling "James" as the most celebrated and popular US literary novel of 2024, and accelerated the 68-year-old author's remarkable rise after decades of being little known to the general public. Since 2021, he has won the PEN/Jean Stein Award for "Dr. No," was a Pulitzer finalist for "Telephone" and on the Booker shortlist for "The Trees." Before Monday, "James" already had won the National Book Award, the Kirkus Prize and the Carnegie Medal for fiction. His racial and publishing satire "Erasure," released in 2001, was adapted into the Oscar-nominated 2023 film "American Fiction."

The Pulitzer citation called "James" an "accomplished reconsideration" that illustrates "the absurdity of racial supremacy and provide a new take on the search for family and freedom."



Everett said in a statement that he was "shocked and pleased, but mostly shocked. This is a wonderful honor."

"Purpose" was praised in its citation as "a skillful blend of drama and comedy that probes how different generations define heritage." Jacobs-Jenkins had been twice nominated for a drama Pulitzer, for "Everybody" in 2018 and "Gloria" in 2016. He won the Tony Award for best play revival last year for "Appropriate," a work centered on a family reunion in Arkansas where everyone has competing motivations and grievances. He is on the host committee of this year's Met Gala.

Also Monday, Pulitzer officials announced

## Hegseth directs 20% cut to top military leadership positions

WASHINGTON, May 6: Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth on Monday directed the active duty military to shed 20% of its four-star general officers as the Trump administration moves forward with deep cuts that it says will promote efficiency but that critics worry could result in a more politicised force. Hegseth also told the National Guard to shed 20% of its top positions and directed the military to cut an additional 10% of its general and flag officers across the force, which could include any one-star or above or officer of equivalent Navy rank. The cuts are on top of more than a half-dozen top general officers that President Donald Trump or Hegseth have fired since January, including the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. CQ Brown Jr. They also have fired the only two women serving as four-star officers, as well as a disproportionate number of other senior female officers. (AP)

that Jason Roberts won the biography award for "Every Living Thing: The Great and Deadly Race to Know All Life" and Benjamin Nathans' "To the Success of Our Hopeless Cause: The Many Lives of the Soviet Dissident Movement" had been cited for general nonfiction. Two books were announced as history winners, both of them, like "James" and "Purpose," explorations of race in US history and culture: Edda L. Fields-Black's "Combe: Harriet Tubman, The Combahee River Raid, and Black Freedom During the Civil War" and Kathleen DuVal's "Native Nations: A Millennium in North America."

Marie Howe's "New and Selected Poems" won for poetry, and composer-percussionist Susie Ibarra's "Sky Islands," an eight-piece ensemble inspired by the rainforest habitats of Luzon, Philippines, was awarded the Pulitzer for music.

The Pulitzers were announced at a time when the National Endowment for the Arts, which has provided support for thousands of writers and literary organizations, was cutting back funding and pushing staff members to leave. Howe and Everett are both past recipients of NEA creative writing fellowships. (AP)

Direct impact of the Act in Arunachal may be limited due to the state's demographic composition

## 'Waqf Sudhar Janjagaran Abhiyan' interaction in Itanagar



**HT Bureau**  
**ITANAGAR, May 6:** In a landmark initiative under the Waqf Sudhar Janjagaran Abhiyan, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Arunachal Pradesh, on Tuesday hosted the Chief Minister Sambad at the Chief Minister's residence in Itanagar to raise awareness on the reforms introduced through the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.

Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister

Pema Khandu emphasized the importance of the amended Act in ensuring transparency, accountability, and justice in the management of Waqf properties across the nation. He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary leadership, which led to the strengthening of the 1995 Waqf Act to address long-standing issues related to mismanagement and misuse of Waqf resources.

While noting that the direct impact of the Act in Arunachal Pradesh may be limited due to the state's demographic composition, CM Khandu highlighted the historic grievances of the Muslim community, including lack of transparency and gender inclusivity in Waqf governance. He urged the Muslim citizens of the state to engage actively with the reforms and seek clarity through dialogue with Union Minister Kiren Rijiju, who

introduced the Amendment Bill in Parliament.

Reiterating his commitment to communal harmony and inclusive governance, CM Khandu assured the Muslim community of full cooperation and support in ensuring peace, development, and equal opportunity for all communities.

Delivering the keynote address, Tayek Goi, Convener of the Waqf Sudhar Janjagaran Abhiyan, described the event as "historic" and underscored the urgency of Waqf reforms. Citing the Sachar Committee Report (2006) and recent data from the Waqf Assets Management System of India (WASMI), Goi revealed massive gaps between the number of Waqf properties and their actual revenue generation.

He alleged that 60% of Waqf properties were illegally occupied during past administrations and pointed out the drastic underutilization of Waqf assets, which were originally meant to benefit underprivileged Muslims, particularly minority women. Goi hailed the 2025 amendments for introducing women's representation on Waqf Boards and ensuring better governance mechanisms.

The event also witnessed participation from Teli Amita, member of the Abhiyan, State BJP President Kaling Moyong, Media Co-Convener Nima Sangey, and members from the Muslim community, who were felicitated during the programme.

The gathering concluded with a renewed call for transparent management of Waqf properties, enhanced community engagement, and continued efforts toward inclusive growth in Arunachal Pradesh.

## Where the air breathes pure: The clean beauty of Kaisu Village



**HT Bureau**  
**ITANAGAR, May 6:** Nestled in the serene landscapes of Arunachal Pradesh's Namsai district, Kaisu is a small village with a big message — a message of cleanliness, unity, and sustainable living. Home to just 232 residents across 39 households (as per the 2011 Census), Kaisu has made a remarkable name for itself in the state's developmental narrative.

In 2021, Kaisu earned the prestigious Chief Minister's Cleanest Village Award, becoming one of only nine villages across the state to receive this honour. The award, part of a state government initiative, is designed to promote hygiene, environmental consciousness, and community-driven cleanliness. It is a symbol of how even the smallest communities can make a significant impact when driven by shared values and goals.

The recognition was formally presented during the 73rd Republic Day celebrations in Itanagar, where the efforts of Kaisu and other winning villages were celebrated with pride. Though specific details of Kaisu's sanitation projects remain limited, the award stands as a testament to the vil-

lagers' commitment to maintaining a clean and healthy environment.

Kaisu's success is rooted in strong community participation. The villagers have demonstrated how unity, awareness, and responsibility can lead to lasting change. From conducting regular cleanliness drives and awareness campaigns, to involving children and youth in environmental activities, Kaisu has built a culture that respects nature and prioritizes public health.

The visible results—clean surroundings, hygienic practices, and a spirit of cooperation—set Kaisu apart as a model for other rural communities. The village's efforts not only ensure better living conditions but also open doors for rural tourism and instill a deep sense of community pride.

As rural India strives for development that is both inclusive and sustainable, Kaisu village shines as a beacon of inspiration. Its journey reflects the power of grassroots efforts in achieving transformative goals. And in a time when environmental and health concerns loom large, Kaisu's message is clear: Cleanliness is not just a practice—it's a way of life.

## Itanagar Traffic Police crack-down on noisy two-wheelers

**ITANAGAR, May 6:** In a firm move to curb rising noise pollution in the Itanagar Capital Region (ICR), the Itanagar traffic police have intensified enforcement against illegally modified two-wheelers under the ongoing campaign, "Mission Dekha Dekhi".

ICR Superintendent of Police (Traffic), Suresh Gowda, on Monday informed that 78 modified bike silencers—often responsible for excessive noise—have been confiscated and destroyed during the drive. A total of Rs 3.62 lakh has also been collected in fines from violators of traffic norms and noise pollution guidelines.

### 'Mission Dekha Dekhi'



"These modified silencers, which are not only illegal but also a public nuisance, produce noise levels of 100 to 120 decibels, disturbing the peace especially during late nights and early mornings," SP Gowda said.

Residents of the capital region have frequently raised complaints about two-wheelers speeding around at odd hours, creating disturbances and impacting the quality of life.

Though traffic wardens are deployed at key points across the city, SP Gowda acknowledged that they lack the authority to issue challans, limiting their role to observation and reporting.

As per the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, any unauthorized modification of vehicles—including changes to silencers—is strictly prohibited. Noise levels above 85 decibels are considered harmful, and those exceeding 100 decibels contribute significantly to urban noise pollution.

The traffic police have vowed to continue their crackdown, with plans to install more sound level meters and involve local authorities and RTOs for stricter enforcement. Public awareness campaigns are also in the pipeline to educate youth on the health and legal consequences of noise pollution. (Agencies)

## Allegations of irregularities in beneficiary selection under Atmanirbhar schemes



**ITANAGAR, May 6:** Allegations of irregularities have surfaced in the selection of beneficiaries under the Atmanirbhar Krishi Yojana (ANKY) and Atmanirbhar Bagwani Yojana (ANBY) for the 2024-25 cycle in Longding district.

In a letter addressed to the Deputy Commissioner, a panchayat leader along with the Wakka Circle Students' Union (WCSU) has alleged that applicants from several villages, including Wakka, Khanu, Chongkhov, Chop, Kampong, and Kaiho, have been unfairly excluded from receiving benefits under these flagship agricultural schemes.

The WCSU has raised serious concerns over the transparency and fairness of the selection process

and has demanded an immediate review and corrective action from the district administration.

Echoing similar concerns, Rajiv Wangsa, Zilla Parishad Member (ZPM) of Longchan anchal block, also submitted a complaint to the DC, stating that not a single applicant from Longchan circle was selected under the ANBY scheme despite numerous applications. He alleged regional bias, noting that circles such as Kanubari, Longding, Chubam, and Pumaoo received a disproportionate number of selections, while Wakka and Longchan were largely overlooked.

"This outcome contradicts the principles of equality and equity that the schemes aim to uphold,"

Wangsa wrote, urging the decentralization of the selection process. He proposed that circle-level committees, chaired by local officers, be formed to ensure fairer implementation.

Reacting to the allegations, a district official, requesting anonymity, dismissed the claims, attributing the controversy to internal political tensions within the Pongchau-Wakka assembly constituency. The official maintained that the selection process was carried out fairly and in accordance with prescribed guidelines.

As tensions rise, stakeholders across Longding are calling for a transparent inquiry to ensure that these welfare schemes truly benefit those most in need. (Agencies)

## Shortage of workforce, equipment causes project delays in Leparada: DC inspection reveals

**ITANAGAR, May 6:** A recent inspection led by Leparada Deputy Commissioner Atul Tayeng has revealed a critical shortage of manpower and machinery at several ongoing construction sites in the district, resulting in significant delays in project execution. The inspection, conducted on Monday along with a team of officers, focused primarily on works being undertaken by the Rural Works Department (RWD), Basar Division.

One of the key projects reviewed was the construction of the MRL01-Akajan Likabali Bam road to Government Model Degree College, which was found to be lagging far behind schedule. The DC directed the department and the contractor to expedite work and ensure completion by July 2025.

At the NSCBV-Gori residential school project, the team inspected a 20-bedded hostel under construction, which includes a kitchen, dining hall, warden room, and four Type-II quarters (G+1). However, the compound space was found to be overly congested for a residential institution. The DC instructed the District Deputy School Education Officer (DDSE) to look into the issue and resolve it promptly.

The DC also expressed concern over the slow progress of the emporium-crafts centre being built in Basar, urging the implementing agency to adhere strictly to the approved timeline.

Emphasizing the importance of quality control and timely delivery, DC Tayeng directed the Executive Engineer, RWD Basar Division, to provide Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) and architectural drawings to the respective user agencies. He also stressed the need for regular monitoring to ensure accountability and progress. (Agencies)

## Nab three accused in multi-state operation Chimpu Police crack robbery case

**ITANAGAR, May 6:** In a major breakthrough, Chimpu police have successfully solved a heinous robbery and assault case with the arrest of three accused through a meticulously coordinated multi-state operation.

The case, registered under Sections 329(3), 309(6), and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, relates to a brutal attack on Khyoda Taju, a senior citizen and night guard for the ACE pipeline project. The incident occurred on the night of 22 November 2024, when three unidentified assailants violently assaulted Taju and robbed him of his ATM card, cash, and scooter.

The victim, who suffered grievous injuries, was rushed to Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar, for treatment.

Itanagar SP Rohit Rajbir Singh informed that the investigation took off after the recovery of the stolen vehicle from Rajgarh, Assam, which provided the first concrete lead. However, the culprits remained on the run, frequently changing locations to evade arrest.

Realising the gravity of the crime and the vulnerability of the victim, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed under Chimpu PS OC Inspector N Nishant. The team included SI Tate Nabam (Investigating Officer), Head Constables Rili Tabri and Harung Mije, and Constables Bui Nibe, Pura Tamo, T Tasser, D Sora, and Inya Gadi. The operation was conducted under the direct supervision of SDPO Itanagar, Kengo Dirchi.

Using a mix of technical surveillance, human intelligence, and cross-border coordination with the Assam Police, the SIT tracked and apprehended the suspects. The prime accused, Nanu Basumatory, a resident of Rajgarh, Gohpur, was caught at Gohpur railway station on April 27, while traveling from Lakhimpur and the second accused, Rakesh Mili of Milon Nagar,



Gohpur, was arrested from Harmuti railway station on April 29, as he tried to flee to Dekargaon.

Based on leads provided by the two, the third accused, Dharamsha Brahma alias Nana, of Goromari, Gohpur, was nabbed on 1 May from his home village.

All three have confessed to their involvement during preliminary interrogation, SP Singh confirmed. Praising the team's efforts, Singh said, "The swift and professional handling of this sensitive case reflects the Arunachal Pradesh Police's unwavering commitment to justice and the protection of our senior citizens. Crimes against the elderly are particularly heinous, and we will ensure such offenders face the full force of the law."

The arrests mark a significant win for the state police and a message of assurance to the public regarding law enforcement's vigilance and effectiveness. (Agencies)

## Wakro Sisters to perform Carnatic Music Recital at Namsai District Library today

*PWD has been instructed to complete stage construction and venue decoration*

**HT Bureau**  
**ITANAGAR, May 6:** A special Carnatic music recital featuring the renowned Wakro sisters, Ashapmal Dellang and Dehelti Ama, will be held at the District Library in Namsai on May 7, at 11:00 am. The event is being organized by the Lohit Youth Library Network, Tezu, and is expected to draw music lovers and cultural enthusiasts from across the region.

Adding to the significance of the event, Chowna Mein, Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, and Chau Zingnu Namchoom, Hon'ble MLA of Namsai, have graciously consented to attend the programme as guests of honour.

In preparation for the event, the Namsai District Administration has made elaborate arrangements to ensure its smooth conduct. The Deputy Commissioner of Namsai, C.R. Khampa, has issued a detailed order outlining responsibilities assigned to various departments.

The Superintendent of Police,



Namsai, will oversee security arrangements, while Dr K Sarmah, DVO/DPO, has been tasked with protocol duties. Officials from departments such as Health, Food & Civil Supplies, PWD, and the local Library Team have been entrusted with decoration, reception, felicitation, and refreshments.

The PWD has been instructed to

complete stage construction and venue decoration by May 5, while the Power Department has been directed to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply during the event.

Students from Kendriya Vidyalaya and Blooming Buds Public School will contribute to the cultural aspect of the event by participating in the felicitation and

welcome song in traditional attire. Deputy Commissioner Khampa has appointed Additional Deputy Commissioner Nang Kalyani Namchoom as the overall in-charge of the programme.

The musical event aims to promote classical music and celebrate local talent, reflecting the growing cultural engagement in the region.

## BJP ally says delimitation must be based on population, rejects southern states' protest

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** BJP ally and former Union minister Upendra Kushwaha on Tuesday opened a new front in the contentious debate over delimitation, demanding that Lok Sabha seats be increased in proportion to population and rejecting the contention of southern states against the view as wrong.

Addressing a press conference, the Rashtriya Lok Morcha president said the southern region benefited in terms of its share of Lok Sabha seats due to their rising population, while its growth was limited in Hindi-speaking states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

He claimed, "The southern states now want to deny the same benefits to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It is like someone having eaten at a banquet first demanding that those in the queue should not be served the meal."

Asserting that India's Constitution assigns the same electoral value to every vote, he said it is the right of citizens in the Hindi-speaking states to be allocated Lok Sabha seats according to their numbers.

He said, "I will urge the central government not to come under pressure from the southern states and carry out a delimitation exercise on the basis of population."



He said the argument of states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala or Karnataka that increasing the seats of Lok Sabha in proportion to population will amount to punishing them for successfully implementing population control measures is one-sided and unreasonable.

From 1881 to 1951, Kushwaha said, the population in southern India almost doubled and its share in the country's population grew from 22 per cent to 26 per cent in the period. Their overall share was 25 per cent in 1971, the last time

the delimitation was carried out, he added, asserting that his figures are based on official data.

He said a state like Bihar suffered the worst form of colonial oppression, and its share in the national population declined from 10.8 per cent in 1881 to eight per cent in 1951.

With Bihar not a separate region in 1881, Kushwaha might have arrived at his figure from extrapolation.

He questioned the claim of governments in southern states that their policy was behind the decline

in population growth, saying it has more to do with the improvement in socio-economic indicators.

Bihar, a state he hails from, is now also improving in these indicators, and its consequences will be reflected in the declining population growth, he said.

Five southern states, especially the four ruled by the opposition INDIA bloc, have dialled up pressure on the BJP-led NDA government against the population-based delimitation exercise, which is due after 2026 once the census is carried out.

Parties like the DMK, which is in power in Tamil Nadu, had protested in Parliament during the Budget Session as well.

With the issue seen to be a potential flashpoint for regional conflict, the Indira Gandhi government had frozen the total number of Lok Sabha seats during the Emergency for 25 years. The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government followed suit in 2001, putting off delimitation for another 25 years.

Home Minister Amit Shah has assured the southern states that his government will ensure that no injustice is meted out to them when the delimitation exercise begins. (PTI)

## Woman Naxalite killed in encounter in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district

**RAIPUR, May 6:** A woman Naxalite was killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district amid the ongoing massive anti-Naxal operation in the area, a senior police official said on Tuesday.

The gunfight took place on Monday in the forest around Karregutta hills along Chhattisgarh-Telangana border, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj P told PTI.

With this encounter, the bodies of four women Maoists have been recovered in the area since security forces launched the operation, involving some 24,000 personnel from different units, on April 21, he said. A .303 rifle was also recovered from the encounter site on Monday, Sundarraj said.

On April 24, three women Naxalites were killed on Karregutta Hills and a huge cache of weapons, explosives and other materials was recovered.

The ongoing operation, said to be one of the biggest counter-insurgency actions launched in Bastar region, involves personnel of the District Reserve Guard, Bastar Fighters and Special Task Force, all units of the Chhattisgarh police; Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and its elite unit CoBRA, among others.

The operation was launched following inputs about the presence of senior cadres of the 'battalion number 1 -- considered to be the strongest military formation of the Maoists -- and leaders of the Telangana state committee of the Maoists in the area. The densely forested area with a series of hills is said to be the base of the battalion no 1, according to the police.

Intelligence suggests that several senior Maoist cadres have either been killed or seriously injured during the operation, said Sundarraj.

Hundreds of Naxalite hideouts and bunkers have been destroyed so far and a huge cache of explosive materials, detonators, food stock and items of daily use have been seized, he said. (PTI)

## Teacher recruitment exam aspirants protest near Bihar CM's residence

**PATNA, May 6:** Chaos erupted near the official residence of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in Patna on Tuesday when police baton-charged aspirants who had staged a sit-in demanding the release of supplementary results of a teacher recruitment exam.

The demonstrators, demanding the release of the Teacher Recruitment Exam (TRE-3) supplementary result, staged the protest outside the gates of the CM's residence on 1 Anne Marg. The entire area is a high-security zone and no such protest is allowed. A large number of protesters, carrying placards, raised slogans against the state government and the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC), which conducted the exam.

Anu Kumari, Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO), Sachivalay-1, requested the protesters to immediately vacate the area as such activities are restricted there. When the protesters refused to budge, police resorted to baton-charge to disperse the aspirants. The SDPO, however, refused to speak to reporters.

Protesters claimed that several persons were injured in the baton-charge, which the officials denied.

One of the protesting candidates, Kriti Dutta, said they have been protesting in Gardaniyabagh area for the last four months.

"We have approached everybody, from ministers to secretaries and MLAs but none provided us with any solution," she said.

Another candidate said that the education minister had assured them that a letter had been sent to BPSC regarding the issue but nothing has been done so far.

Despite repeated attempts, neither Patna District Magistrate Chandrashekhar Singh nor Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Awakash Kumar were available for their comments on the incident and how the protesters managed to enter the high-security zone. (PTI)

## FIR registered in Mithi river desilting 'scam'; BMC suffered ₹ 65 crore loss: police

**MUMBAI, May 6:** Police on Tuesday registered a case against 13 persons including contractors and civic officials for an alleged Rs 65 crore scam related to desilting of the Mithi river which flows through the city, and conducted searches at seven places.

It is alleged that Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) officials tailored the tender for the desilting contract in such a way that it benefited a particular supplier of machinery needed for the work.

Further, the contractors generated fraudulent bills for transporting sludge out of Mumbai, the police claimed.

A special investigation team (SIT) of officials from the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) registered a First Information Report (FIR) against 13 persons, including five contractors, three middlemen, and two company officials, at Azad Maidan police station, said Deputy Commissioner of Police Sangram-singh Nishandar.



The BMC suffered a loss of more than ₹ 65.54 crore due to the entire scam, he said.

Accused Dipak Mohan and Kishore Menon of Matprop offered 'silt pusher' and multipurpose amphibious pontoon machines to the BMC costing ₹ 3.09 crore. A team of BMC officials visited the plant in Kerala, and subsequently the BMC floated tenders with the exact same specifications, so that any contractor would be required to buy or hire only Matprop machines, as per the investigation.

"We have evidence that when the contractor went to Matprop to

purchase the machine, they directed him to a middleman who offered to rent the machines for two years for ₹ 8 crore, and later settled for ₹ 4 crore," said DCP Nishandar.

Further, the contractors produced nine Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with the owners of land in neighbouring Bhiwandi where they claimed that the sludge removed from the river would be transported and dumped.

But the probe revealed that the signatures of some of the land owners were forged. In some cases, the MoUs were signed with persons who did not own any land.

In one case, the 'land owner' had died 20 years ago. The SIT also found that a piece of land where sludge was supposed to be dumped actually had row-houses on it.

Acute Designs, Kailash Construction Company, N A Construction, Nikhil Construction and JRS Infrastructure are accused of submitting bogus MoUs. (PTI)

## Rahul Gandhi meets Pahalgam terror attack victim Lt Vinay Narwal's kin in Karnal

**CHANDIGARH, May 6:** Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday met the family members of Navy officer Lt Vinay Narwal, who was killed in the terrorist attack in Pahalgam.

Accompanied by senior Congress leader B K Hariprasad, who is the party's Haryana affairs-in-charge, the LoP reached Karnal in Haryana in the afternoon.

Haryana Congress chief Udai Bhan, Congress' Rohtak MP Deepender Singh Hooda and party leader Divyanshu Budhiraja were also present when Gandhi arrived. After paying his tributes to the Naval officer upon reaching his residence, Gandhi spent more than one-and-a-half hours with Narwal's family.

Gandhi did not talk to the reporters who were waiting outside Lt Narwal's house. However, he later said on X, "I met the bereaved family of Lieutenant Vinay Narwal ji, who was martyred in the Pahalgam attack, shared their grief and consoled them. Their courage and bravery even in the face of immense grief is a message for the country - we have to remain united."

"The entire country stands with the families of the martyrs. The government has the full support of the opposition -- the culprits should be punished in such a way that no one dares to raise an eye toward India. Today, along with the victim families, the entire country is waiting for justice."

Speaking to reporters later, Hooda said Gandhi consoled the family. "Rahul Gandhi paid homage to martyr Narwal, talked separately to his family members and offered his condolences." (PTI)

## Gaganyaan mission slated for first quarter of 2027: ISRO chief Narayanan

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The launch of India's maiden human space flight -- Gaganyaan -- has been pushed to the first quarter of 2027, nearly five years later than the original schedule as it races to ace technologies for such complex projects.

The first uncrewed mission of the Gaganyaan project is expected to be launched later this year, which will be followed by two more similar missions in 2026, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman V Narayanan said at a press conference.

"The first crewed mission is targeted for the first quarter of 2027," Narayanan said and added ISRO would send a half-humanoid robot -- Vyommitra -- as part of the uncrewed mission before sending astronauts to low-Earth orbit.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the Gaganyaan project during his Independence Day ad-



dress in 2018 and set a target of 2022 for achieving India's maiden human space flight.

The project has run into several delays, partly due to the Covid pandemic that affected the training of astronauts, and complexities of mastering the crucial technologies

## Kharge writes to PM on caste census Call for adopting Telangana model, dialogue with all parties

**NEW DELHI, May 7:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the government's caste census decision, urging him to draw upon the Telangana model as well as have a dialogue with all political parties soon on this issue.

In his letter to Modi, Kharge has also urged the prime minister to remove the 50 per cent cap on reservation by a constitutional amendment and immediately implement Article 15(5) providing for reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs in private educational institutions.

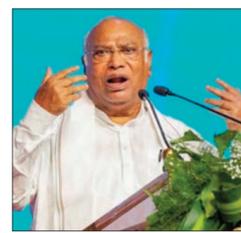
"Conducting any exercise such as the caste census which gives the backward, the oppressed and the marginalized sections of our society their rights cannot and should not be considered divisive in any way," Kharge said.

"Our great nation and our large-hearted people have always come together as one whenever needed, just as we have done after the recent cowardly terrorist attacks in Pahalgam," he said in his letter to Modi dated May 5.

The Congress believes that conducting the caste census in the comprehensive manner is absolutely necessary to ensure social and economic justice and equality of status and opportunity as pledged in the Preamble of our Constitution, Kharge said.

The Congress president recalled that he had also written to the prime minister on April 16, 2023 putting forward the Congress' demand for an up-to-date caste census.

"Regrettably, I never received



any reply to this letter. Unfortunately, your party leaders and yourself went on to attack the Congress and its leadership for raising this legitimate demand which you today acknowledge is in the interests of deeper social justice and empowerment," Kharge said in his letter to the PM.

"You have now announced, without providing any details, that the next Census (that was actually due in 2021) will include caste as a separate category as well," he noted.

Kharge said he has three suggestions to make with the first one being about the design of the census questionnaire.

Caste information has to be collected not for counting purposes but for achieving larger socio-economic objectives, Kharge pointed out.

"The recently-concluded Telangana caste survey was designed and implemented with such goals in mind. The Union Home Ministry must draw upon the Telangana model--both the methodology adopted for finalizing the questionnaire as well as the final set of ques-

tions asked," Kharge said.

Nothing in the report published finally should be concealed so that complete socio-economic data of each caste is made available to provide them their constitutionally enabled rights and the socio-economic progress can be measured from one census to another, he said.

Kharge also pointed out that only the Tamil Nadu reservations law has been protected in the Ninth Schedule of our Constitution since August 1994.

Laws of other states should also be included in the Ninth Schedule of our Constitution, he said.

Moreover, whatever the results of the caste census will be, it is abundantly clear that the arbitrarily imposed 50% ceiling on reservations for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and OBCs must be removed by a Constitutional amendment, Kharge asserted.

The Congress president also called for immediate implementation of Article 15(5).

"Article 15(5) was introduced in the Constitution of India with effect from 20th January 2006. This was subsequently challenged in the Supreme Court. Finally, it was upheld by the Supreme Court after prolonged deliberations on 29 January, 2014 very shortly before the model code of conduct for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections went into effect," he said.

Kharge pointed out that it provides for reservations for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and OBCs in private educational institutions as well. (PTI)

## Providing assistance to Indians on death row in Indonesia: Centre to Delhi HC

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** The Centre on Tuesday informed the Delhi High Court that the Indian embassy in Indonesia was providing assistance, including legal aid, to the three Indians on death row in the foreign country. Justice Sachin Datta was assured by the Centre's counsel that the authorities would continue with the assistance.

The court, hearing a petition by the spouses of three Indians convicted in Indonesia, asked for a status report and posted the hearing on August 4.

Raju Muthukumar, Selvadurai Dinakaran and Govindasamy Vimalkandhan, all hailing from Tamil Nadu, were arrested in July 2024 for allegedly smuggling 106 kilogram of crystal meth aboard the Legend Aquarius cargo vessel. They were awarded the death penalty by Tanjung Balak Karimun District Court, Indonesia on April 25 for violation of narcotics law.

On May 2, the high court directed the Indian con-

sulate in Indonesia to ensure the Indian nationals were given adequate legal aid to pursue remedies.

On Tuesday, the Centre's lawyer said even prior to the directions, the embassy took steps towards availing the legal remedies and adequate assistance to the convicts.

The vice consul of the Indian embassy in Indonesia on his own filed the "intent to appeal" against the conviction of the petitioners' spouses on May 2 as the families were unable to do so, and the appeal would also be filed in a few days, the counsel added.

"The embassy is in the process of engaging a lawyer. In a few days, we will give details. We are in touch with the authorities diplomatically also," the lawyer said.

The Centre's lawyer further revealed that consular access was granted and the embassy was in touch with the Indonesian authorities since July 2024. (PTI)

## Soldier among four killed after passenger bus falls into gorge in J-K's Poonch

**MENDHAR/JAMMU, May 6:** Four passengers including a soldier were killed and 44 others injured when a private bus skidded off the road and plunged into a deep gorge in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Tuesday, officials said.

Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah expressed their grief over the accident.

Abdullah rushed his cabinet colleague and MLA Mendhar Javed Ahmad Rana to the scene to oversee the relief efforts.

The bus was on its way to Mendhar from Ghani village when its driver lost control around 9.20 am and the vehicle rolled down into the gorge, the officials said.

Locals immediately launched a rescue operation and were joined by police, Army and CRPF personnel.

The officials identified the deceased as 45-year-old Mohd Majeed, 55-year-old Shakela Begum and 50-year-old Mohd Haneef of Ghani village and 60-year-old Noor Hussain of Kasblari. Majeed, a soldier posted in Assam, had come to his village on leave.

Hussain and Majeed were found dead on the spot by the rescuers, Begum died on the way to



GMC Hospital Rajouri and Haneef succumbed during treatment at GMC Rajouri, they said, adding the condition of seven more injured persons was stated to be "critical".

Mendhar Block Medical Officer Ashfaq Choudhary said five critically injured persons were referred to the Jammu Government Medical College (GMC) hospital for specialised treatment.

"We have mobilised all the 15 ambulances on getting information about the accident and the injured were shifted from the scene with the active assistance of police, CRPF, Army and local volunteers," the doctor said.

tests have also built from scratch the Environment Control and Life Support System (ECLSS) for the mission, which will involve taking the astronauts to low-Earth orbit of 400 kilometres above the Earth for a few days and getting them back safely.

The ECLSS will help maintain cabin pressure, humidity, temperature, quality of air and personal hygiene management system in the spacecraft during the duration of the mission.

"It is a very complex process. For the first time we undertook this development. I want to say, 90 per cent of the work is completed and we are in the final phase of qualification," Narayanan said.

If successful, India will become only the fourth country after Russia, the US and China to independently launch humans into space.

Narayanan said space docking

experiments comprising two satellites launched by a PSLV rocket in December were successful and ISRO was planning SPADEX-2.

A proposal on this will be presented to the government soon, he said.

He said judicious use of fuel during the ongoing SPADEX mission allowed ISRO to conduct more experiments in orbit that included circumnavigating one satellite around the other in March.

Scientists also demonstrated open and closed loop circumnavigation experiments that are considered as foundational technologies for in-orbit servicing of satellites for extension of mission life.

Narayanan said ISRO was hosting, along with the International Astronautical Federation, the Global Space Exploration Conference (GLEX 2025) from May 7-9, positioning India as a partner in space exploration. (PTI)

Main rebel groups included the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)

## No insurgency in Tripura now, visit tourist spots: CM to people

AGARTALA, May 6: Noting that insurgency has ceased to exist in Tripura, Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday urged the people to visit the state's tourist spots.

After laying the foundation stone for tourism facilities worth ₹ 67 crore at Chabimura in Gomati district, the chief minister said the northeastern state has a rich wealth of tourism from spiritual to eco-tourism and historical structures.

"The tourist footfall at the tourist spots has been increasing with every passing year as the peace prevails in the state. The state which witnessed bloodshed due to the insurgency, has become a terrorist Free State after en masse surrender of banned outfits-NLFT and ATTF," he said.

The northeastern state had witnessed large-scale violence since the 1990s. The main rebel groups included the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF).

"The tourist arrival has increased to 7 lakh during 2024-25 FY from 5 lakh during 2023-24.



This is a big leap in the state's tourism sector. The government is contemplating introducing tourist police to provide safety and security to the tourists be-

cause tourists prefer to travel safely," he said.

Asserting that tourism could be a game changer to boost the socio-economic condition of the rural

people, the chief minister said the government has taken all possible measures to attract the tourists.

Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury highlighted the initiatives taken for the promotion of tourism in the northeastern state.

"Today, the chief minister laid the foundation stone for developing tourism infrastructures worth ₹ 67 crore at Fatik Sagar and Amar Sagar under Asian Development Bank (ADB) funding. There will be one modern cafeteria, boating facility, pathway and 16 cottages with state-of-the-art facilities," he said.

Chowdhury said the Centre has sanctioned ₹ 97.70 crore to build 51 Shakti Peeth at Bandower in Gomati district under the Swadesh Darshan scheme.

"Under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, the Centre has sanctioned ₹ 48 crore to set up an eco-tourism spot at Sachindranagar in West Tripura district. Once the projects are finished, the face of tourism will be changed completely," he said. (PTI)

## 13 IAS officers get new postings in bureaucratic reshuffle in Manipur



IMPHAL, May 6: In a bureaucratic reshuffle in Manipur, 13 IAS officers, including Tourism Director Pooja Elangbam and Thoubal DC A Subash Singh, have been transferred, according to a notification.

Elangbam has been given the charge of the deputy commissioner of Bishnupur district, while L Bikram will replace her as the tourism director.

Bikram was the Bishnupur DC. Singh has been entrusted with the responsibility of the additional secretary of the departments of home and personnel,

besides the charge of institutional finance as its director, the notification said.

Public Health Engineering Department (veterinary) Joint Secretary Hannah Kahmei has been given the responsibility of the Thoubal deputy commissioner, it said.

Director (Institutional Finance) Ranjan Yumnam has been appointed as the additional secretary of the PHE department.

Textiles Joint Secretary Luckysom Ngamsha will assume charge as the director of the Tribal Affairs and Hills department, the notifica-

'Civil defense mock drill in all 8 Tripura districts today'

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 6: Tripura Revenue Secretary Brijesh Pandey on Tuesday said that the Tripura government will hold the Civil Defence Mock Drill across the eight districts of the state on May 7 at 3.30 pm.

Speaking in a press conference on Tuesday, the official said that Civil Defence in India was constituted under the Civil Defence Act, 1968, with the objective of safeguarding life and property and ensuring public safety during hostile attacks and disasters.

"As per the directions of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, a comprehensive Civil Defence Mock Drill will be conducted on 7th May 2025 in all districts of Tripura. The District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) and District Civil Defence Corps will coordinate the drill with active participation from various emergency and disaster response stakeholders. The objective of this mock drill is to assess the preparedness, efficacy, and coordination among civil defence units and allied agencies in responding to hostile attacks and emergencies. The drill will include testing the alert systems, evacuation procedures, public safety measures, and inter-agency coordination," he said.

Manipur Lokayukt secretary Robert Singh Kshetrimayum has been given the additional charge of the secretary of minor irrigation.

ADC Kakching U Chaitanya has been transferred to SDO Waikhong.

The Centre had on February 13 imposed the President's rule in Manipur, where more than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The President's rule has been imposed after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned.

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

Cong MLA urges Tripura Government to revive defunct airport

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 6: Congress MLA Birajit Sinha has called upon the Tripura government to expedite efforts for reviving the long-defunct airport in the Kailashahar subdivision of Unakoti District.

Addressing the media on Monday, Sinha highlighted the historical significance of the airport, stating that it was established during the tenure of former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to improve connectivity between Tripura and other parts of the country. "Despite the country's rapid development, the Kailashahar airport remains non-operational, primarily because heavy aircraft cannot land there," he said.

He further pointed out that the airport was among the 100 selected for revival under the UPA government led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. "Unfortunately, due to the inaction of the then Left Front government in Tripura, no development took place," he alleged.

Sinha informed that a recent survey conducted by the District Magistrate of Unakoti has proposed the acquisition of 74 acres of land to facilitate the airport's revival. "This airport has strategic and historic importance. It was actively used during the India-Pakistan War and the Bangladesh Liberation War," he added.

## 100% exemption of stamp duty and registration Meghalaya rolls-out Vehicle Scrappage Policy 2025

SHILLONG, May 6: The Meghalaya Vehicle Scrappage Policy 2025, which was recently approved by the state cabinet, will ensure reduction in the number of unfit vehicles that will significantly lower pollution levels, protecting the health and well-being of the citizens of the state.

The policy aims to modernize Meghalaya's vehicle fleet by creating an ecosystem by promoting sustainability, road safety, and climate preservation through scrappage incentives. It establishes a robust scrapping ecosystem with Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facilities (RVSFs) to streamline fitness testing, collection, depolluting, and dismantling of End-of-Life Vehicles (ELVs).

Additionally, the vehicle scrapping policy promotes fleet modernization by phasing out unfit, high-emission vehicles through a scientific, eco-friendly process, reducing pollution and enhancing fuel efficiency.

The implementation of this policy will result in tangible benefits across multiple domains. Formalizing the scrapping and recycling industry will create employment opportunities while enhancing efficiency in vehicle disposal and recycling. The policy said there will be 100% exemption of Stamp Duty and Registration, subject to a monetary ceiling of ₹ 10,00,000 besides landbank support to the Registered Vehicle Scrapping Facility to set up collection centers in Meghalaya.

The policy also talked about incentives to ve-



hicle owners where a certificate of deposit (COD) will be issued after successful scrapping of ELVs. The tradeable COD allows owners to avail incentives on new vehicle purchases.

It said owners buying BS VI-compliant or electric vehicles after scrapping their old ones receive a full waiver on RTO registration charges adding up to 25 per cent for non-transport vehicles and 15 per cent for transport vehicles, valid for 8 years (transport) and 15 years (non-transport).

On implementation of the policy, all government vehicles over 15 years old that fail fitness

## Girls outshine boys in Mizoram board class 12 exams

Overall pass percentage increases marginally

AIZAWL, May 6: Girls outshone boys in all three streams while the pass percentage increased marginally as compared to last year in the class 12 board exams, the results of which were announced by the Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE) on Tuesday.

In all the streams -- science, arts and commerce -- girls outperformed boys, securing 82.71 per cent against boys' 79.198 per cent.

The overall pass percentage also increased by 3 per cent when compared to last year.

A total of 12,105 students appeared for the board examinations, with 81.10 per cent of them having successfully cleared the examinations, while 2,197 (18.14 per cent) failing, the MBSE said.

A total of 91 students qualified for compartmental examinations.

Of the 8,658 students who appeared in the arts stream, 80.13



per cent successfully passed the examinations, while 85.63 per cent of 2,798 students passed in the science stream and 74.42 per cent of 649 students passed in the

commerce stream.

A total of 16 students figured in the top 10 list in the arts stream, 15 in the science stream and 10 in the commerce stream. (PTI)

## 11 cadres of several banned outfits in Manipur held



IMPHAL, May 6: Eleven people belonging to various banned outfits were arrested from Manipur's Imphal East, Kakching and Thoubal districts, police said on Tuesday. All these arrests were made on Monday, a senior officer said.

Four cadres of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) were apprehended from Mantripukhri French Colony in Imphal East district, he said. They were involved in "threatening the general public by placing hand grenades at different locations in the valley area", a police statement said.

Two pistols with two magazines and ammunition were recovered from their possession. In a separate operation, security forces also arrested three active members of the same outfit from Keirao Wangkhem and its adjoining area in Imphal East district, the officer said.

Five firearms, ammunition and a wireless communication device were seized from their possession, he said.

A member of the proscribed Peoples Liberation Army was arrested from Sawombung Kabui Khunjaio in Imphal East district for allegedly being involved in extortion activities, police said.

"Two pistols, one hand grenade and a detonator were recovered from his possession," the officer said.

Two active cadres of the banned KCP (Apunba) were arrested from an abandoned house in Wangjing Awang Leikai in Thoubal district, as they were involved in extortion, a local police officer said.

The police apprehended a cadre of the outlawed KCP (Taibanganba) from Angang Ching crossing in Kakching district, he said.

Security forces have been conducting search operations in Manipur since ethnic violence broke out two years ago.

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

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

## Methamphetamine tablets worth ₹ 30 cr seized in Mizoram

AIZAWL, May 6: In a major drug haul, Mizoram Police seized methamphetamine tablets worth ₹ 30.72 crore near the India-Myanmar border in Champhai district, a police officer said on Tuesday.

During patrolling on Sunday evening, police stopped a vehicle on suspicion near Vanzau village and during a thorough search, found 2 lakh tablets

weighing 236 kg concealed in the car, he said.

Two persons, identified as Laltanpuia (30) and Vanropuia (27), both from Champhai's Vengthar locality, have been arrested for transporting the stimulant drug, which is suspected to have been smuggled from Myanmar, he said.

Further investigation is underway, the police officer added. (PTI)

## 524 duplicate voter ID cases detected in Meghalaya



SHILLONG, May 6: In total, 524 cases of dual registration of electors' photo identity cards (EPICs) have been detected in Meghalaya.

Informing this today, chief electoral officer (CEO) of Meghalaya, Dr BDR Tiwari said, "In respect to duplicate EPICs are concerned, there are 524 cases have been detected/identified in Meghalaya. All 524 have been issued with the new EPIC number."

He said this is the matter where the same EPIC number but it has been found in the different states with the same EPIC but with two persons' names so that has been rectified.

Dr Tiwari added that on the initiative of ECI, that exercise has been conducted and they have identified all duplicate EPICs and such persons have been issued with new EPIC numbers.

As far as EPIC-Aadhaar linking is concerned, the CEO said that it is optional till date.

"Since Aadhaar is linked with so many facilities, we are also requesting the voters to link voter's ID card with Aadhaar and they can avail the service through the EROs," he added. (NNN)

## TELLS CPIM TO CLEANSE SINS IN GANGA

## Tripura BJP criticises Congress's 'Save Constitution' campaign



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 6: The Tripura unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on the opposition, accusing the Congress of hypocrisy over its "Save Constitution" campaign and slamming the CPI(M) for alleged recruitment scams during its long tenure in power.

Addressing a press conference, BJP state president and Rajya Sabha MP Rajib Bhattacharya questioned the Congress's credibility in championing constitutional values.

"The Congress, which ruled India for decades, never gave due respect to the architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. They didn't even place his photograph in Parliament, nor did they honor him with the Bharat Ratna during their tenure," Bhattacharya alleged. "Now, the same party is preaching about saving the Constitution. It's nothing but political opportunism."

Bhattacharya also criticized the Congress for the Emergency imposed in 1975 under former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, stating that it was a time when democratic voices were suppressed, political leaders jailed, and journalists silenced.

"Tripura Congress leaders must also explain the circumstances surrounding the imposition of President's Rule in 1993 during the Congress-TUIS regime. At that time, even an advocate was booked under the National Security Act. People haven't forgotten these incidents," he said.

Turning his fire toward the CPI(M), the BJP leader accused the Left party of rampant irregularities in government recruitment during its 25-year rule.

"CPIM leaders are now pointing fingers at us, but they should first reflect on their own record. There were massive recruitment scams under their governance. If anything, they should take a dip in the Ganga to cleanse their political sins," Bhattacharya said. "Unlike them, we follow a transparent recruitment process and distribute offer letters in public, not behind closed doors."

He also took a dig at Leader of the Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury, alleging that the Left has conveniently forgotten its past while raising accusations against the ruling BJP.

**ENGINEERING WORK**  
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. TSK/GSU/01 of 2025; dated 05-05-2025. E-tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Item No.1: Brief Description of item:** At Tinsukia Division: Balance works in upgradation of passenger amenities facilities at Dibrugarh & New Tinsukia Railway stations in connection with Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. **Tender Value:** ₹15,49,63,168.52; **Earnest Money:** ₹9,24,800.00. E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 27-05-2025 and opened at 16:00 hrs. on 27-05-2025. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 27-05-2025 in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)  
GSU/Tinsukia  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
"Serving Customers with a smile"

**INTERLOCKING OF 08 NOS OF MANNED ENGINEERING LC GATES**  
E-Tender No.: SNT-05-LMG-2025-26  
Dated: 03-05-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Name of work:** Interlocking of 08 nos of manned Engineering LC gates with provision of ELB and emergency Sliding Boom of Lumding Division. **Tender Value:** ₹5,83,29,777.37/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹4,41,700/-. **Date & time of closing of tender:** 15:00 hrs. of 27-05-2025 & will be opened at 15:30 hrs. of 27-05-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)  
Assistant DSTE, Works, Lumding  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
"Serving Customers With A Smile"

# SUPERSTAR AND ICON: SRK makes Met Gala debut in Sabyasachi ensemble

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** "I'm Shah Rukh". That was his opening line and also his smashing debut at the Met Gala in an all-black bespoke outfit, complete with crystal chains and a dandy cane, crafted by celebrated designer Sabyasachi.

The star, one of India's most popular faces globally, also struck his signature arms-wide-open pose, and won over the crowd, some who knew him and some who didn't, gathered at the blue carpet dotted with daisies.

"I'm Shah Rukh" is how the 59-year-old superstar responded when one of the members of the foreign press asked him to introduce himself. The line quickly became viral on social media with many fans praising SRK's humility and some criticising international media for their ignorance.

Shah Rukh wore a crystal-studded pendant shaped as the letter 'K' in one of the necklaces around his neck, a nod perhaps to his nickname 'King Khan'. The actor blew kisses to fans as he

made his way around the blue carpet of the starry event, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on Monday night.

For his debut appearance at the Met ball, the actor wore a floor-length elongated coat in Tasmanian superfine wool with monogrammed, Japanese horn buttons. "The coat is hand canvassed, single breasted with a peak collar and wide lapels. Paired with a crepe de chine silk shirt and tailored superfine wool trousers. A pleated satin kamar-bandh completes this bespoke look," Sabyasachi said.

Asked to describe his look on the gala's blue carpet, the actor told reporters it was designer Sabyasachi who conceived it "as an expression of freedom and trying to be resolute and resilient against things that can oppress you". Was Shah Rukh familiar with the Met Gala and its theme "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style", a homage to Black Galas, before he was set to make his debut?

"Honestly, no. In the last 20 days, I got to understand what it (Met Gala) was and being an actor, I thought it (the theme of Black Style) was interesting... The resolve to change things without aggression or anger but have exuberance of art in it... I thought it was marvellous," he said.

While Shah Rukh's appearance generated a lot of buzz among his fans in India, many were not amused that he had to introduce himself.

"Hopefully they go home and Google him and see how POPULAR he really is (sic)"

"Shah deserved better coverage and no one with their 'obvious' takes can convince me otherwise (sic)" said another. A fan asked Shah Rukh and other stars to not attend these international events. Sabyasachi, who also dressed up Alia Bhatt last year for her Met Gala appearance, said his interpretation of the Black Dandy was all about demonstrating Shah Rukh's superstardom on a global stage. (PTI)



## I bring my turban, culture and mother tongue: Diljit Dosanjh on Met Gala debut

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Popular singer-star Diljit Dosanjh honoured his Sikh roots and home state Punjab in his debut at the Met Gala 2025 with a regal white ensemble complete with a kirpan, turban and a layered necklace in a hat tip to the Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.

Diljit, known for songs such as "5 Taara", "Lover", "Peaches", and "GOAT", wore an ivory and gold sherwani along with a tehsat by American-Nepalese designer Prabal Gurung. The musician, who hails from Punjab's Dosanjh village, completed his look with a bejewelled turban adorned with a white 'kalgi' and a lion-headed, jewel-studded kirpan, a cape with the silhouetted map of Punjab and alphabets in the Punjabi script Gurmukhi embroidered on it. His belt bore hand-embroidered traditional Indian motifs like lotus flowers and peacocks.

"Main Hoon Punjab #metgala," Diljit wrote on Instagram, quoting the lines from a song in "Chamkila".

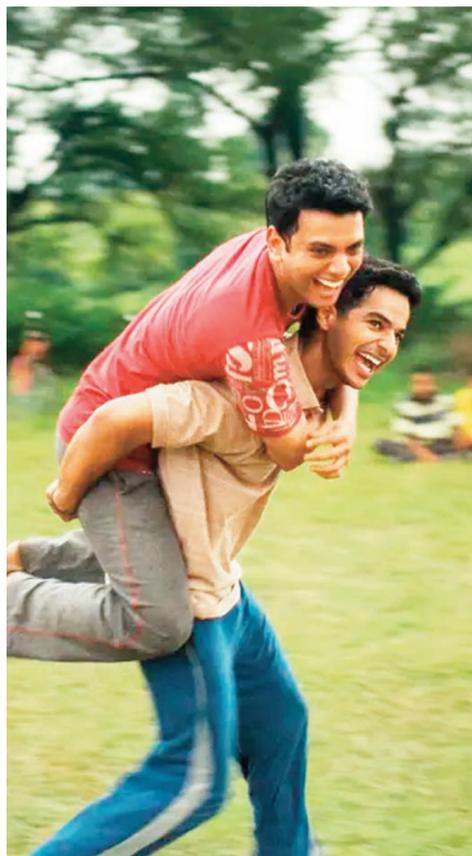
"Inspired by the Theme of Black Dandyism, I bring my turban, my culture and my mother tongue Punjabi to the Met Gala," he said.

Diljit's team shared a series of videos of the Punjabi superstar's appearance at the gala on its official Instagram page.

"HISTORY #diljitosanjh #metgala #diljit," was the caption of one of the posts featuring the singer climbing down the stairs as he leaves the hotel for the Met ball.

A video of the actor twirling his moustache was captioned as: "He wore a Legacy #diljit #metgala #diljitosanjh."

Diljit -- who has emerged as a global artiste from India in the last few years with his Coachella concert and sold-out international music shows -- confirmed his attendance at the Met Gala 2025 on Sunday via social media. (PTI)



## It's a dream, feels surreal: Ishaan Khatter on Martin Scorsese boarding 'Homebound'

**MUMBAI, May 6:** Having Martin Scorsese on board as an executive producer for "Homebound" is a dream-come-true moment, says actor Ishaan Khatter, who knew about the master filmmaker involvement with the Neeraj Ghaywan-directed movie for ten months but kept it a secret. Khatter plays the lead role in the movie, which will have its world premiere in the Un Certain Regard category at the Cannes Film Festival, which kicks off from May 13. "When Mr. Scorsese came on board... I don't know whether I'm allowed to say, I've been sitting on this for 10 months. I can keep a secret. It was a lot of conversation and back and forth, etc. I'm just so proud and grateful that it's come to what it is."

It's a dream, it's surreal. I'm very excited for Cannes. I always wanted to go with my own film. I'm happy my first time is with a movie," the actor told PTI in an interview.

"Homebound" is Ghaywan's second full-length feature film. The director made his debut with "Masaan" in 2015, which also premiered in the same segment at Cannes.

Khatter praised filmmaker Payal Kapadia, who won the prestigious Grand Prix award at the festival last year for her movie "All We Imagine As Light", for bringing back the spotlight on Indian stories at Cannes. "The global spotlight, especially in the entertainment and cinematic industry, is on India in a very beautiful way that it hasn't been for many, many years. Kudos to Payal Kapadia and her film for paving the way, competing in the main competition after 30 years. "She even said in her speech, 'Don't let it be another 30 years before this happens again'. I'm very proud, I believe we're the only Indian film in Cannes this year," the actor said. Khatter's enthusiasm for "Homebound" also stems from the collaborative process with Ghaywan, a director he has long admired. (PTI)

## If implemented, Trump's tariff threat will impact business of Indian films in US: producers

**MUMBAI, May 6:** US President Donald Trump's announcement threatening 100 per cent tariff on movies produced outside and coming to the US will impact the box office business of Indian films and may lead to an increase in ticket prices for Indian films, say producers in India. Though there is little clarity just yet, the fear is that it will impact the foothold for Indian movies screened in the US, according to a section of industry insiders, including Shibaish Sarkar, president of the Producers Guild of India, filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri and exhibitor-distributor Akshay Rathi.

"It is a little early to comment on this because whatever kind of tariff got announced in the last 30 to 45 days is going through various changes and discussions... But if it gets implemented, the first impact I foresee is on the theatrical business of our films in the US market," Sarkar told PTI. Indian films gross around USD 100 million (over Rs 800 crore) at the US box office, he said.

"If this tariff is implemented, exhibitors will increase ticket prices and make it expensive for consumers because of which even footfalls will drop dramatically. If the exhibitors want to absorb the price, they will pass on that loss to producers, so their share will also come down drastically. Either way, there will be an impact on the producer's share from the theatrical point of view," Sarkar explained.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said on Sunday that he has authorised the Department of Commerce and the Office of the US Trade Representative to slap a 100 per cent tariff "on any and all Movies coming into our Country that are produced in Foreign Lands". Agnihotri, known for films such as "The Kashmir Files" and "The Tashkent Files", agreed with Sarkar and said ticket prices of Indian movies will increase in the US if these tariffs come into effect. "The diaspora market, which is price sensitive, became a revenue source for Indian films. Movies such as 'Jawan' and 'Baahubali' did good business outside of India. If ticket prices are doubled (in the US), I don't think anybody will watch them in theatres, especially when the films will be available on Netflix, Amazon, etc. Films such as 'RRR' and 'The Kashmir Files' did great numbers in non-diaspora markets," Agnihotri told PTI. (PTI)

## India is witnessing a cultural revival: folk singer Malini Awasthi

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Folk songs that have been buried for years are now making a comeback just like old traditions, says renowned singer Malini Awasthi, who has worked for years on documenting and popularising the genre in India and beyond.

The Padma Shri awardee, a classically trained musician, is famous for her mastery over folk songs in dialects such as Braj, Bundeli, Awadhi, Bhojpuri and Kashika - a mix of Bhojpuri and Hindi spoken in Varanasi.

She can easily traverse through complicated classical ragas, ghazals and songs in folk traditions like kajri, chaiti, dadra, phaag and sohar.

"I feel very happy that folk songs that were buried for years -- songs that people knew but weren't sung anymore -- are now being listened to around the world... Folk songs are an integral part of our culture and carry the memory of our people. For example, if you go to villages, every wedding has at least 50 different kinds of songs connected to its rituals. "India is witnessing a cultural revival and old traditions are being accepted again and that's true for folk songs as well. Fame, money, work -- that's ok but the satisfaction that you get when your purpose is fulfilled is different," Awasthi told PTI in an interview.

The singer, 58, started at a time when the scene was dominated by vulgar songs, especially in Bhojpuri. And it has taken her four decades to establish an alternate identity as the folk queen of India, she said.

"Our language has given us so

much respect and dignity, and yet, some artists turned it into something vulgar. People who didn't know the depth of the language would judge it based on just these songs. My competition was with a kind of singing where women were more often seen as products.

"But what I was doing was different - I was singing about farming, songs related to sowing and harvesting seasons, about rains and lack of it, songs that children sing when they play, songs about childbirth and festivals. That took time to change." Awasthi, who has sung only a limited number of Bollywood songs despite many offers over the years, said it was hard to resist the temptation.

"Who doesn't like to sing for films? But the strength to say no -- that the lyrics are not good enough, so I won't sing it -- that kind of strength in a singer is rare. Most performers don't think too much. They feel, 'It's just a song and it does not matter how it is shot.' But I drew a line." Growing up in a family of doctors in Kannauj, Uttar Pradesh, Awasthi said she always had a fondness for music and her mother, though not a singer, recognised her talent early.

"And that was such a blessing. She encouraged me a lot -- I was around five or six years old and started learning classical music under the guidance of Ustaad Rahat Ali Khan sahab. There was a beautiful musical atmosphere around.

Her father, a doctor, would often be visited by Bhojpuri-speaking pa-

tients and a young Malini would pick up the dialects from them.

"So when I sing classical music, ghazals -- and especially when I sing folk songs -- it all flows naturally."

Awasthi said she slowly veered towards folk music despite her classical training as she realised that while people loved her rendition of classical songs, she would see their eyes change when she sang folk songs.

She started performing professionally from the age of 19 that gave her a sense of independence from an early age -- whether it was opening her own bank account, earning money or performing with seniors.

"I learned to read audiences: what they liked, what they didn't understand, when they were with you and when they weren't. That was tremendous training," she said, adding that her pace slowed a bit with marriage, kids and responsibilities but she never let the music go. And that's why, she has learned to keep pace with times when it comes to technology.

"If I want the younger generation, glued to phones and screens, to listen to old songs, I have to be tech-friendly. Whether that's social media or uploading songs to YouTube -- I had to evolve."



Awasthi said she never prepared a list for the songs that she performs at concerts. They all are dictated by audience demand.

"Our gurus told us to memorise everything because in times of need, the diary won't help... As I gained experience and could read audiences better, I learned that it's both easier and more challenging to flow with them. That confidence only comes when you have 200-300 songs ready in your memory bank."

"I believe music -- especially folk music -- should flow like a pure, natural stream. It needs a heart and

mind, not a script or a notebook."

What's the next goal for her now? Teaching and documentation of folk is her reply.

"These traditions shouldn't disappear. Yes, they are in books, but we need documentation of 'surs' every year. We teach folk songs... many married women see me performing regularly, and they realise they too can have a career in music and live a life beyond family," said Awasthi.

The singer runs non-profit organisation Sonchiraiya, which is dedicated to promoting and preserving Indian folk and tribal arts.

Awasthi said when she is singing in a foreign country be it South Korea or Spain, she always tries to convey the emotion behind the folk song that she is about to perform through an interpreter and sometimes on her own in English. (PTI)

# India eye final berth as South Africa aim for survival in women's Tri-Series



**COLOMBO, May 6:** India will be eager to bounce back from their loss and confirm their spot in the final when they face a struggling South African side in the women's Tri-series here on Wednesday.

Harmanpreet Kaur and her team saw their eight-match winning streak come to an end on Sunday with a rare defeat to hosts Sri Lanka.

While India are still well-placed to reach the final -- thanks to a superior net run rate

of 0.433 built on dominant performances in their opening two games -- they will look to seal it with a convincing win on Wednesday.

The 'Women in Blue' are perched on top of the points table having earned four points from three outings. They are ahead of second placed Sri Lanka, who also have four points but an inferior NRR of -0.166, while winless South Africa are last although the Proteas women have played a game

behind South Africa pace all-rounder Nadine de Klerk (4.06). Rana's maiden five-wicket haul against South Africa was her highlight performance and she will look to replicate that display.

The bowlers fashioned the wins for India in the first two matches, but their performance dipped in the loss against Sri Lanka. To make matters worse, seam-bowling all-rounder Kashvee Gautam hobbled off the field after bowling just five

overs on Sunday. "Bowling is one area where we need to improve. There were chances today, but we couldn't capitalise on them," skipper Kaur admitted after the loss.

In stark contrast, South Africa have struggled for form, losing eight of their last nine ODIs, including both games in this series.

They put up a strong fight against India in the opener but faltered in the final overs. In their next outing, they were thoroughly outplayed by hosts Sri Lanka.

Both their batting and bowling departments have underperformed. The batters have struggled to rotate the strike, while the bowlers have lacked discipline in line and length, making it difficult to apply pressure or pick up wickets.

Compounding their woes is the struggle to cope with Sri Lanka's extreme heat. Set batter Tazmin Brits suffered cramps during the game against India and had to retire hurt after receiving medical attention -- a turning point that shifted momentum in India's favour.

In their next match, wicket-keeper-batter Karabo Meso was forced to leave the field due to a "heat-related illness", further highlighting the team's difficulties in adapting to the tough playing conditions.

"We always knew that it was going to be tough coming here. The heat was on today and you could see the girls suffering. But that's no excuse," head coach Mandla Mashimbyi had said. (PTI)

## Each participant has a real chance to win Norway Chess, says world No. 8 Anna Muzychuk

**NEW DELHI, May 6:** World number 8 Anna Muzychuk says each participant in the upcoming Norway Chess, including India's Koneru Humpy and Vaishali R., has a real chance of winning the tournament, dubbed the "strongest women's event" by the Ukrainian grandmaster.

Norway Chess is one of the world's premier chess tournaments, bringing together the top male and female players in a distinctive six-player double round-robin format.

"I think it's the strongest women's event if we are looking at the ratings. It will be super tough. Each participant has a real chance to win it. I think it will be exciting, and I am really looking forward to it," Anna said in a press release on Tuesday.

With reigning world champion Ju Wenjin, Indian legend Humpy, along with Lei Tingjie, Vaishali and Sarasadat Khademalsharieh in the fray, Anna, who finished as the runner-up last year in the inaugural edition, expects a strong and unpredictable competition this year.

Anna's dedication towards chess can be testified by a look at her busy calendar. After a remarkable win at the Nicosia Women's Grand Prix in March, the Ukrainian Grandmaster shifted her focus towards the Austria Grand Prix, currently underway. While it would be her final Grand Prix of the ongoing

cycle, the 35-year-old would travel a week later for the highly anticipated 2025 edition of Norway Women's Chess to compete against some of the top talents of the sport.

"It's great to have successes, but you always have to go forward and focus on the next tournaments and next goals," Anna said. Her persistence and relentless passion for the sport came from her upbringing. With her parents being chess coach, Anna and her younger sister Mariya began making their moves on the chessboard at a very young age while growing up in western part of Ukraine.

With chess being immensely popular in the region, Anna and her sister, who is also a grandmaster now, and is competing at the Austria Grand Prix alongside her, had to spend a lot of hours training to keep up with the competition.

"I was born in 1990 when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. It became an independent country a year later, but still all chess traditions were quite developed in our area.

"We had coaches, tournaments and chess was quite popular. There were so many players from our time from where I grew up and we competed together in various tournaments. Many of us went on to become grandmasters, hence our generation was really strong," Anna said. (PTI)

## Bibiano Fernandes announces 23-member squad for SAFF U19 Championship

**ITANAGAR, May 6:** Head coach Bibiano Fernandes announced a 23-member India squad for the SAFF U19 Championship, which will be held in Arunachal Pradesh from May 9-18. The Blue Colts arrived in Itanagar on April 30 with a 25-member probable squad and have been training in the city ahead of the subcontinental tournament, after an initial camp in Bengaluru.

Fernandes said, "We started more than a month back in Bengaluru with around 50 scouted players, who appeared for the trials. I was not surprised when I saw the talent that these boys have. "I was really happy with the quality of scouting conducted to find these players. It has been a long process of building the team from there on."

The 48-year-old, who had won SAFF junior championships on three different occasions, stressed the importance of the acclimatisation period given to the team.

"It was nice of the federation to get us here early to acclimatise to the altitude, the ground, the weather, and everything else. We've also played some practice

matches, both in Bengaluru and in Itanagar, which have really helped us develop as a team," he said. India have been drawn in Group B of the championship, alongside Nepal and Sri Lanka, and begin their campaign on May 9 against the latter, at the Golden Jubilee Stadium.

India's squad: Goalkeepers: Aarush Hari, Aheibam Suraj Singh, Rohit.

Defenders: Ashik Adhikari, Takkellambam Bungson Singh, Jodric Abranches, Malemngamba Singh Thokchom, Mohammed Kaif, Sumit Sharma Brahmachari-mayum, Sohun Utreja, Roshan Singh Thangiam.

Midfielders: Danny Meitei Laishram, Gurnaj Singh Grewal, Md Arbash, Ningthoukhongjam Rishi Singh, Singamayum Shami.

Forwards: Ahongshangbam Samson, Bharat Lairenjam, Chaphamayum Rohen Singh, Omang Dodum, Prashan Jajo, Henneichung Lunkim, Yohaam Benjamin.

Head Coach: Bibiano Fernandes Assistant coach: Shafeeq Hassan M Goalkeeper coach: Dipankar Choudhury. (PTI)

## Sinner returns from doping ban to great fanfare at Italian Open

**ROME, May 6:** Rarely has an athlete been welcomed back from a doping ban with so much fanfare.

Top-ranked tennis player Janik Sinner was treated to a stadium filled with nearly 5,000 fans for his first practice session at the Italian Open on Monday -- the day his three-month banishment from the sport expired.

The training session -- which was shown live on local TV -- came after Sinner was the most celebrated player in a ceremony to honor the Italian teams that swept the Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup last year.

Both trophies were on hand and the Campo Centrale crowd belted out Italy's national anthem. It's the first time that Italy has had a No. 1 player for its home tournament. Still, Sinner was at a loss to explain why he attracts so much attention.

"I don't know. Honestly, I think I'm a simple 23-year-old kid. I'm good at playing tennis but I'm not changing the world," he said. "I always remember that I come from a small town of 2,000 people. Being here in Rome and playing in front of so



many people is a big deal." With a conclave to elect a new pope set to begin just down the road at the Vatican on Wednesday, Sinner's return prompted local headlines that declared "Habemus Sinner" -- a variant of the Latin words "Habemus Papam!" that are announced from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica when a pope is elected.

The scene at the Foro Italico came in sharp contrast to how Sinner felt back in February

when he received a three-month ban in a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency.

"At the start I was a bit confused because I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do," Sinner said. "Then I went home and stayed with my family. I tried to understand better what was really important to me. "I know how many sacrifices I made and my daily routine was always practice, practice, practice. But at that moment I didn't

have any of that. I came to understand that what's important to me are the people by your side. That they give you the strength to move forward and continue smiling." Besides his family in the German-speaking Alto Adige region of northern Italy, Sinner also spent more time with friends at home in Monaco, participated in other sports like cycling, and then only gradually came back to tennis.

"We went about a month without touching (a racket) and then we restarted really softly," Sinner said. "When we started pushing more, blisters developed on my hands. That was something I hadn't experienced in a long time."

The settlement was made after WADA appealed a decision last year by the International Tennis Integrity Agency to fully exonerate Sinner for what it deemed to be an accidental contamination by a banned anabolic steroid in March 2024.

The settlement raised questions, since it conveniently allowed Sinner not to miss any Grand Slams and return at his home tournament. (AP)

## French Open 2025: Iva Jovic and Emilio Nava earn USTA wild-card entries

**ORLANDO (FLORIDA), May 6:** Iva Jovic, a 17-year-old, and Emilio Nava, a 23-year-old, claimed French Open wild-card invitations from the U.S. Tennis Association on Monday by finishing atop the standings based on points earned at tournaments across five weeks.

Jovic will participate in her third consecutive Grand Slam event; she reached the second round at the U.S. Open last September and the Australian Open in January. She is ranked 120th this week.

At Flushing Meadows, Jovic, then 16, became the youngest American to win a women's main-draw match at the U.S. Open since 2000, eliminating 2023 Australian Open semifinalist Magda Linette of Poland.

Nava, currently ranked 137th, earned a spot at the French Open for the second time after qualifying in 2023. He also played in the U.S. Open's main draw in 2022 and 2023. Both Jovic and Nava are from California.

The clay-court French Open starts in Paris on May 25. (AP)

## Milan strikes twice in two minutes to beat Genoa and keep alive Champions League hopes

**GENOA (ITALY), May 6:** AC Milan scored twice in two minutes to beat Genoa 2-1 in Serie A on Monday and keep alive its slim hopes of a place in next year's Champions League.

Genoa substitute Vitorino Ferri scored a minute after taking the field to give his side the lead after 61 minutes. But Rafael Leao levelled 15 minutes later when his powerful shot was deflected into the net, and two minutes later Genoa captain Morten Frendrup put one into his own net.

Although Milan remained in ninth place, it closed the gap on the top four to six points. Juventus was fourth, equal on points with Roma and Lazio below it.

Three rounds remain. Milan's last three games are against Bologna, Roma and bottom club Monza. Genoa has lost its last three games and sits in 13th. (AP)

## The rise of women's soccer has led to more professional options for athletes

**NEW YORK, May 6:** As the popularity of women's soccer grows, so have the opportunities for players looking to make the sport a career.

The National Women's Soccer League was once the lone professional women's league in North America. But others have more recently jumped into the market, including the USL's Super League and the Northern Super League in Canada.

And now it appears lower-tier leagues are forming, too. The NWSL has asked U.S. Soccer to sanction a second-division league that would include at least six teams and possibly launch in 2026. The WPSL Pro also will launch next year as a second-tier league.

"I think this is what progress looks like," said Amanda Vander-vort, president of the USL Super League. "I think the more options there are, whether it's owners, investors, players, or fans, the better it is for everyone. And competition is good for the development of the game."

The Super League sits on the

top tier of women's professional soccer in the United States alongside the NWSL. The eight-team league plays on a fall-to-spring calendar like many international leagues, and is currently in the stretch run of its inaugural season. A ninth team will join next season.

Although the Super League doesn't share the same national profile, level of competition or attendance as the NWSL, the two leagues aren't necessarily built to be rivals. Growing the game is good business.

NWSL Commissioner Jessica Berman believes there's room for everyone. "There are countless examples of players who were unsigned in our league who ended up going to some of those other leagues, who are still able to play the sport of soccer and continue their careers. And maybe there's a world where they find their way back to the NWSL," Berman said. "If they didn't have a place to go and play in the interim, they might not have continued to play." There are signs of the mutually benefi-



cial relationship. The NWSL's Washington Spirit has loaned several players to the Super League's Dallas Trinity this season. The NWSL's Gotham FC played a pair of preseason friendlies against the Super League's Fort Lauderdale United and Tampa Bay Sun.

Jumping into the fray is the Northern Super League, which kicked off last month in Canada. The league has long been a dream of former national team star and co-founder Diana Math-

eson. It has been boosted by Christine Sinclair, international soccer's all-time leading goal scorer. Canada was one of just two countries that played in the 2023 Women's World Cup without a domestic professional league. The other was Haiti.

While a majority of the players in the league are Canadian, 20 other countries are represented, too. The league minimum salary is \$50,000.

"It's a global industry and we're competing with leagues all over

the world, which is the reality. But I think in North America specifically, I think us, the NWSL, Liga MX Femenil in Mexico, also know that we have the opportunity to really build women's soccer in our region," Matheson said. "I think we've got three very competitive tier-one women's pro leagues in our region that can work together to build that landscape."

Liga MX Femenil is the most established of the women's professional leagues in North America outside of the NWSL. It has 18 teams, all associated with men's teams.

"The interest in women's soccer is growing, we are in the conversation now and changing narratives, and that allows us to talk about how much the game has been developing in the country," league President Mariana Gutierrez told The Associated Press last fall.

More options are coming. Should U.S. Soccer sanction the lower-division NWSL league, it will serve to develop players as part of the greater soccer ecosys-

tem, bridging the gap between amateur soccer and the top tier.

Cleveland Soccer Group, which had bid in the latest round of NWSL expansion, pivoted to joining the division 2 WPSL Pro. Cleveland's group, which will also have an ownership stake in the league, will join teams from Atlanta, Dallas, North Carolina, Oklahoma City, Sioux Falls and the San Francisco Bay Area in the league's first season next year.

"Rising demand calls for more options, not fewer," Vandervort said. "And if you look at the landscape today, we still don't have as many options for women to go pro, even with the addition of these leagues, as the men do. If you look across the landscape, across the cities, the communities, the towns, that don't have access to women's pro soccer today, there's a huge gap. So the more women's soccer we have, the greater our sport will become, the more dynamic, the more exciting for fans, the more opportunity for players and coaches and staff, and everyone involved in the game." (AP)

## Sai, Kuldeep have to be in England squad; Arshdeep out of the box pick: MSK Prasad



**NEW DELHI, May 6:** Former India chief selector MSK Prasad feels the presence of Arshdeep Singh, Sai Sudharsan and Kuldeep Yadav is a must in the squad for the five-match Test series in England beginning June 20.

In a recent interview, former India head coach Ravi Shastri too had thrown his weight behind Sudharsan, who is in the middle of a stellar IPL and has experience of playing county cricket.

Speaking to PTI, Prasad, who was in charge of selection committee from 2016 to 2020, also gave his reasons on why Arshdeep and Kuldeep have to be there in the squad.

He would have the in-form Prasad Krishna over Akash Deep among the five pacers to be picked in case the selectors pick a 15-man squad to be announced in the middle of May.

Following the retirement of R Ashwin, Washington Sundar will be his spin bowling all-rounder alongside Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep who the former chief selector sees as a genuine wicket-taker even in pace friendly English conditions.

Whether Rohit Sharma should be part of the squad, it is a decision that Prasad feels should be left to the selection panel led by Ajit Agarkar.

"Sai has to be a part of this England series. Because this is the ideal time as the new WTC cycle is going to begin.

"If Rohit is part of the squad, then he opens alongside Jaiswal and Sai can be the back up opener. I will leave to the selectors to take that call. Sai might get his opportunity as the series progresses," said the former India stumper.

Shubman Gill is expected to bat at three and Virat Kohli, who will need to overcome the outside off-stump demons once again in the UK, will bat at four.

Pant is Prasad's preferred choice of wicket-keeper batter in the squad while K L Rahul has done enough to start as a specialist batter in the middle-order, he said.

"Besides Gill, KL is another all format player for you. Though Shreyas Iyer has done well in white ball cricket I won't pick him for England series.

"Jaddu, Washy and Kuldeep are three spinners for me. Jaddu is automatic pick, Washy as the all-rounder and Kuldeep is a match winner for me. I would not pick Axar Patel for this one," he said.

Though there have been questions over Nitish Reddy's fitness as he is yet to bowl in this IPL, Prasad reckons he will be part of the squad following his exploits in Australia.

"Compared to Australia, Reddy the bowler will be more handy in English conditions," he said.

Talking about the pace department, Prasad said the selectors should include Prasad and Arshdeep, who can swing the ball both ways and give variety to the attack as the sole left-arm fast bowler.

Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj are certainties in the pace department.

"Arshdeep would be my out of the box pick. In English conditions, you need a left arm seamer. This guy is able to move the ball both sides. He's bowling 135s. He's very, very confident today.

"After taking 100 T20 wickets, I think he's smart enough to understand the nuances of the game. He also has county experience," he said.

Prasad added that India have a very good chance of winning their first series in England since 2007. England are a side in transition following the retirement of Stuart Broad and James Anderson. (PTI)

# Dhoni's possible Eden swansong set to overshadow KKR's must-win clash vs CSK

**KOLKATA, May 6:** Mahendra Singh Dhoni's possible final hurrah at the Eden Gardens will be a captivating sub-plot when Kolkata Knight Riders square off against Chennai Super Kings in a must-win clash in front of a crowd expected to be draped in yellow, here on Wednesday.

While five-time champions CSK are already out of the playoff race, Dhoni remains at the helm, and his presence alone is expected to turn Eden yellow, despite the match being on KKR's home turf.

For a city where Dhoni has deep personal ties -- his in-laws live here, and it is where he played much of his junior cricket -- Wednesday could end up being emotionally charged for both the 43-year-old and his fans.

The Eden Gardens has witnessed many of Dhoni's milestones, from his maiden first-class century to two of his six Test hundreds. He has also played club cricket here, including a memorable P Sen Trophy final for Shambhazur Club.

So, when the iconic No.7 walks out on May 7, many will wonder if it's the last time Dhoni plays at this historic venue.

Dhoni, who took responsibility for CSK's narrow two-run loss to RCB in their previous match, is no longer the dominant force he once was.

Despite being in a strong position at 172/2 while chasing 214, CSK fell short in the final over.

Dhoni was dismissed by Yash Dayal off the third ball of the last over, managing 12 runs off 8 balls. He later took the "blame" for the loss.

But for the fans, Dhoni is still an emotion, and a strong one at that.

While it's a do-or-die game for KKR, who must win all their remaining three matches to stay in playoffs contention, the match will be more about celebrating Dhoni's legacy than the result.

KKR currently have 11 points, and win-



ning all three of their remaining games will take them to 17. Even then, qualification could come down to net run-rate and other results.

KKR's remaining fixtures -- against Sunrisers Hyderabad and RCB (both away) -- are tricky. Coming off a thrilling one-run win over Rajasthan Royals, KKR will look to build on that momentum.

Andre Russell's return to form was crucial

in that game, and the Ajinkya Rahane-led KKR will hope that Venkatesh Iyer, who has been under scrutiny for his ₹ 23.75-crore price tag, can also find his rhythm, possibly drawing inspiration from the Jamaican's explosive unbeaten fifty.

Russell's match-up against spinners will be important, especially with CSK likely to use Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin on a surface that offers a bit of grip.

Despite being out of the playoff race, CSK, on the other hand, are unlikely to make it easy for the home team.

With Dhoni still captaining and young players like Ayush Mhatre eager to make a mark, CSK will look to play a fearless brand of cricket.

The biggest positive for CSK this season has been the emergence of 17-year-old Mhatre.

Signed as a replacement for injured skipper Rituraj Gaikwad, Mhatre, who had never played a domestic T20 and went unsold at the mega auction, made an immediate impact with a quick-fire 32 off 15 balls against Mumbai Indians.

But his standout performance came against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, where he struck a brilliant 94 off 48 balls.

While CSK lost that match narrowly, Mhatre's innings under pressure was one of the most impressive by a debutant this season.

**Teams:**  
**Kolkata Knight Riders:** Ajinkya Rahane (c), Rinku Singh, Quinton de Kock (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Rovman Powell, Manish Pandey, Luvnith Sisodia, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Moeen Ali, Ramandeep Singh, Andre Russell, Anrich Nortje, Vaibhav Arora, Mayank Markande, Spencer Johnson, Harshit Rana, Sunil Narine, Varun Chakravarthy and Chetan Sakariya.  
**Chennai Super Kings:** MS Dhoni (c, wk), Shaik Rasheed, Ayush Mhatre, Deepak Hooda, Sam Curran, Ravindra Jadeja, Dewald Brevis, Shivam Dube, Noor Ahmad, Khaleel Ahmed, Matheesha Pathirana, Anshul Kamboj, R Ashwin, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Jamie Overton, Vijay Shankar, Rahul Tripathi, Shreyas Gopal, Devon Conway, Rachin Ravindra, Mukesh Choudhary, Nathan Ellis, C Andre Siddarth, Vansh Bedi.

Match starts at 7.30 PM. (PTI)

## We know how to ignore noise, says KKR coach Pandit on Dhoni farewell buzz

**KOLKATA, May 6:** The frenzy surrounding MS Dhoni possibly playing his last game at Eden Gardens may overshadow Kolkata Knight Riders' crucial IPL contest against Chennai Super Kings, but head coach Chandrakant Pandit said the players know how to "ignore the noise" and stay focussed on the game.

While CSK are already out of contention, defending champions KKR are still hanging by a thread. The Knight Riders, who have 11 points from as many matches, need to win all three of their remaining games to keep their playoff hopes alive.

The match also carries an emotional subplot, with the iconic Dhoni possibly bidding farewell at a venue to which he shares a deep personal connection since childhood. But Pandit asserted that his team remains undeterred by the "noise."

"I think during these kinds of games, every player and every team is always focused on their own game," said Pandit on the eve of their match against CSK.

"I mean, that's sometimes like, if a batter is batting and there is so much noise around and if you ask that batter, probably he will say that 'I didn't hear anything about it.' Pandit said players are capable of shutting out outside noises.

"It was the same case with me when people used to tell

me so much noise around and how you can focus. But sometimes we just ignore that noise automatically. So, obviously when you are focused on the game, it does not matter so much if you ask me," he said.

KKR's batting has faltered repeatedly this season, leaving them in a precarious position with just five wins from 11 matches.

Asked whether the team is feeling the pressure, Pandit said: "Not really (feeling the pressure)."

"I don't want to go back. We always believe that we have the best batting lineup, it unfortunately didn't click. Hope it will do justice in the next three games.

"We know the ability of every individual player. We believe in them. To maintain that, you have to give them a lot of confidence, make sure they believe in themselves." On what he tells the players in must-win situations, Pandit said: "Always better to tell the boys what positives you have done. It helped you to win the game and you got to carry that. The strength that you have, rather than thinking about the next three games."

"Looking at the last two games, yes of course (we are peaking). We look ahead to the other two games, very much confident that we will qualify. This is the beauty of this tournament. Ups and downs will be there in a two-month journey." (PTI)

## AAU students shine in Inter-Agricultural Universities Sports & Games Meet

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, May 6:** Students from Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Jorhat, have brought laurels to both the state and the university by securing Gold and Silver medals in the Table Tennis Men's and Women's categories, respectively, at the ongoing XXII All India Inter-Agricultural Universities Sports & Games Meet, 2024-25. The event is being held at Acharya Narendra Deva University of Agriculture & Technology in Kumarganj, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, with participation from 58 universities nationwide.

The exceptional achievement was met with appreciation from the university's leadership. Dr. B. C. Deka, the Vice Chancellor of AAU, along with Dr B K Medhi, the Director of Students' Welfare, congratulated all the members of the AAU contingent for their outstanding performance. They praised these milestones as a true reflection of the university's commitment to fostering an environment where both education and sports thrive together.

Altogether 30 students from all 9 constituent colleges of AAU in the state participated in the competition, with notable contributions from professors Dr Sainen Gogoi and Dr Dharin Hazarika, who supported the athletes throughout the event.

## Captaincy became too much in the end; stepped down to be happy: Kohli



**BENGALURU, May 6:** The constant pressure of leading India and Royal Challengers Bengaluru for nearly a decade and the relentless scrutiny around his batting "became too much in the end" for Virat Kohli, who says he stepped down from leadership to be in a "happy space".

Kohli resigned as T20 captain after the World Cup in 2021, following which he also relinquished RCB's leadership role. A year later, he quit Test captaincy following the defeat to South Africa.

Kohli said he reached a point in his career where the constant attention became unbearable.

"At one point, it did become tough for me because there was just too much happening in my career. I was captaining India for a period of 7-8 years. I captained RCB for nine years. There were expectations on me

from a batting perspective every game that I played," said Kohli in an 'RCB Bold Diaries' podcast.

"I didn't have this sense that the attention was off me. If it wasn't captaincy, it would be batting. I was exposed to it 24x7. It did get very tough on me, and it did get too much in the end."

Kohli, who also took a month-long break from cricket in 2022 and did not touch a bat during that phase, added that a time had come in his life when he was struggling to be happy in the spotlight.

"That's why I stepped down because I felt like if I've decided I want to be in this place, I need to be happy.

"I need to have a space in my life where I can just come and play my cricket without being judged, without being looked at as what are you going to do

this season and what's going to happen now," said Kohli, who has been with RCB since the inaugural edition of the IPL.

Leading India to the Under-19 World Cup title triumph does not guarantee one a seamless entry into the senior team, and Kohli said it was his determination and the backing of then skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and coach Gary Kirsten, which helped him secure the No. 3 batting spot in the side.

"I was very realistic about my abilities. Because I had seen a lot of other people play. And I did not feel like my game was anywhere close to theirs. The only thing that I had was determination. And if I wanted to make my team win, I was willing to do anything.

"That was the very reason I got chances to play for India initially. And Gary (Kirsten) and MS (Dhoni) made it very clear to me that we are backing you to play at number three."

Kohli said the two encouraged him to play his natural game, knowing that he would always be a fighter on the field.

"This is what you can do for the team. What you represent on the field, your energy, your engagement, is of the biggest value to us. We want you to play that way.

"So, I was never looked at as this outright match winner who can change the game from anywhere. But I had this thing, I'm going to stay in the fight. I'm not going to give up. And that is what they backed."

Kohli feels nervous energy is something that is crucial to success in cricket, and no matter how many runs one scores, it is something that keeps a player in competitive mode.

"What happens when you're young is you feel like, 'if I have scored X amount of runs by the time I'm this age or whatever', things will ease out. It never happens like that.

"And that is the marker actually. When you stop feeling that nervousness or that anticipation of how things are going to unfold is when people say that you're done," he said.

"So that never goes away from you because that very energy is what keeps you engaged to do what you need to do in that moment, in that present moment." (PTI)

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