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'India and Pakistan conflict was always in conventional domain'

Misri pins Trump claim on ceasefire decision

NEW DELHI, May 19: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told a parliamentary committee on Monday that the conflict between India and Pakistan was always in the conventional domain, and there was no nuclear signalling by the neighbouring country, sources said.

The sources said Misri reiterated the government's stand that the decision to stop military actions was taken at a bilateral level, as some opposition members questioned US President Donald Trump's repeated assertions about his administration's role in stopping the conflict.

Some MPs, the sources said, asked if Pakistan used Chinese platforms in the conflict. Misri said it did not matter as India hampered Pakistani air bases. When an



opposition member asked about Trump's several social media posts eyeing "centre-stage" after India and Pakistan decided to stop hostilities, the foreign secretary quipped that the US president did

not take his permission to do so. The committee members also unanimously condemned the trolling of Misri following the stoppage of military actions and praised (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Current tensions between India and Pak soared because of Pahalgam terror attack: Indian envoy

MOSCOW, May 19: The tensions between India and Pakistan soared because of the Pahalgam terror attack, where tourists were shot at point-blank range after their religious affiliation was established, Indian envoy to Russia Vinay Kumar has said, asserting that India had to react to this.

In an interview with the 'Izvestia' daily published on Monday, Kumar also said that India will support an increase in imports of Russian oil to its market.

"First of all, the current tension arose due to the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, where tourists were shot at point-blank range after their religious affiliation was established. Therefore, India had to react to this," Kumar said while responding to a question. "And the ceasefire was the result of India's reaction to the escalation started by Pakistan. It was reached on a bilateral basis when the head of the General Staff of Operations of the Pakistani army called his Indian counterpart," he said.

India carried out precision strikes under 'Operation Sindoor' on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir early



on May 7 in response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people.

Following the Indian action, Pakistan attempted to attack Indian military bases on May 8, 9 and 10. The Indian forces launched a fierce counter-attack on several Pakistani military installations. India and Pakistan reached an understanding on May 10 to end the conflict after four days of intense cross-border drone and missile strikes.

US President Donald Trump, in a post on social media, claimed that the US brokered the

ceasefire between the two countries.

A section of Russian social media had expressed surprise that New Delhi ignored Moscow and preferred Washington's mediation. Kumar said it was Islamabad's initiative. "But India has consistently maintained a policy that Kashmir is a bilateral issue, with no third-party mediation envisaged. That position remains in place," he asserted.

He recalled that several world leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, spoke to their Indian counterparts after the Pahalgam attack.

Responding to a question about the future of Indo-Russian defence cooperation, Kumar expressed confidence that it will further develop. "This has been the case for decades. And lately our relationship has even deepened. We not only buy and sell military equipment, but also engage in the joint development and production of defence products," he said.

"Indian-made equipment, including Brahmos, has repeatedly proved its effectiveness, including in the period from May 7 to May 10. Therefore, I believe (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ex-AASU gen secy Sankar Jyoti Baruah held

DIBRUGARH, May 19: Former AASU general secretary Sankar Jyoti Baruah was arrested on Monday for allegedly assaulting petrol pump workers in Assam's Dibrugarh district, police said.

A case was registered at Dulaijan Police Station, and he was picked up by police for interrogation on Sunday night, a senior officer said. "Baruah has been arrested in connection with a complaint of physical assault of petrol pump workers in Dulaijan. According to reports, he assaulted the workers," the police said.

The case has been registered under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS), the officer said. Last year, Baruah had resigned as the general secretary of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), amid controversy surrounding his personal life and allegations of sexual harassment of a law student. (PTI)

71 'anti-nationals' arrested in Assam

GUWAHATI, May 19: Three more people have been apprehended in Assam for allegedly being involved in "anti-national" activities, following the Pahalgam terror attack, taking the total number of such arrests to 71 so far, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

In a post on X, Sarma said one person each was arrested from Kokrajhar, Goalpara and South Salmara-Mankachar districts. "71 Anti-Nationals are now behind bars! @assampolice is strictly monitoring the digital space," he added.

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

After getting bail in the case, Islam was detained under the National Security Act (NSA). Sarma had, on May 2, threatened to take stringent action against those who raised the 'Pakistan zindabad' slogan in the aftermath of the Jammu and Kashmir terror attack last month. (PTI)

IIT Guwahati researchers develop fluorescent sensor to detect cyanide in water, human cells

GUWAHATI, May 19: A research team of Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati has developed a highly responsive fluorescent sensor that can detect cyanide in water and human cells using only a UV light source, an official statement said on Monday.

The developed sensor changes colour and emits bright fluorescence in the presence of cyanide, contributing to both environmental safety and forensic investigations, the IIT Guwahati statement said. Cyanide is a highly toxic compound widely used in industrial processes, such as manufacturing of synthetic fibres, metal cleaning, plastics, electroplating and gold mining.

Improper disposal of cyanide often leads to its release into the environment, contaminating soil and water sources, and consumption of this contaminated water can disrupt oxygen supply in human body.

Even a small amount can cause severe health effects or death. Therefore, there is a need to develop sensors that can detect even trace amounts of cyanide in various materials, the statement said.

Fluorescent chemosensors are chemicals that light up under light when they in-



teract with specific chemicals. These sensors are popular due to their ease of use, low cost, high sensitivity and potential for use in biological systems.

While many existing sensors work by dimming their light (known as a "turn-off" response) when detecting substances, a "turn-on" response — where the signal brightens instead — is often more effective because it avoids false negatives and improves detection clarity.

The IIT Guwahati research team, led by Prof G Krishnamoorthy of Department of Chemistry, has developed a "turn-on" chemosensor based on a compound called 2-(4'-diethylamino-2'-hydroxyphenyl)-

1H-imidazo-[4,5-b]pyridine, which gives a weak blue fluorescence under UV light, the statement said.

In the presence of cyanide, this fluorescence turns on and shifts to a brighter cyan colour due to a chemical change in the molecule.

This reaction is highly specific to cyanide, especially in a carefully selected solvent system that includes water.

The research team conducted a combination of lab experiments and advanced computational calculations, called DFT calculations, to confirm the sensing mechanism of the developed technology.

"What sets this sensor apart is its versatility. The sensor works not only in lab solutions but also in river and tap water samples, with an accuracy of 75-93 per cent. It can be embedded into paper strips for portable testing and is effective in live cell imaging. In fact, the sensor was used to detect cyanide inside biological cells, showing promise for applications in environmental and forensic investigations," Prof Krishnamoorthy said.

The researchers also demonstrated that this molecular sensor can function like a basic logic gate, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

US announces visa restrictions on travel agencies based in India facilitating illegal immigration

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, May 19: The US said it is imposing visa restrictions on owners, executives, and senior officials of travel agencies in India for knowingly facilitating "illegal immigration" to the United States.

"Mission India's Consular Affairs and Diplomatic Security Service work every day across our Embassy and Consulates to actively identify and target those engaged in facilitating illegal immigration and human smuggling and trafficking operations," the State Department said in a statement on Monday.

The Department of State is "taking steps today to impose visa restrictions on owners, executives, and senior officials of travel agencies based and operating in India for knowingly facilitating illegal immigration to the United States", it said.

The statement added that the US will "continue to take steps to impose visa restrictions against owners, executives, and senior officials of travel agencies to cut off alien smuggling networks".

"Our immigration policy aims not only



to inform foreign nationals about the dangers of illegal immigration to the United States but also to hold accountable individuals who violate our laws, including facilitators of illegal immigration," the State Department said, adding that enforcing US immigration laws and policies is critical to upholding the rule of law and protecting Americans.

It said this visa restriction policy is global and even applies to individuals who otherwise qualify for the Visa Waiver Programme. (PTI)

24 trafficked tea garden workers rescued from Arunachal

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 19: A total of 24 victims of human trafficking under the jurisdiction of Mariani Police Station in the Titabar sub-division of Jorhat district were rescued in two batches from Arunachal Pradesh and reunited with their families by the Jorhat district police in the past few days, an official said.

The victims, all from tea garden areas, were reportedly lured in April with promises of work in Tezpur, but were instead taken to Arunachal Pradesh after being drugged.

They were rescued from Rupa in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh on May 15 and 17, respectively, and brought to the Deberapar Police Outpost.

In an official statement, Jorhat



Superintendent of Police Shwetank Mishra said the incident came to light after Gauri Sahu, wife of one of the victims, Kumar Sahu of Dahingepur Tea Estate, lodged a

complaint at Deberapar Outpost on April 27. She reported that on April 7, a group of workers from the estate had been taken away under (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Govt considering amendments to Atomic Energy Act, nuclear liability law

NEW DELHI, May 19: Government is considering amendments to the laws governing the nuclear power domain, including the sectoral regulator, to allow participation of private sector as India eyes to produce 100 GW atomic energy by 2047.

Government sources said amendments were being considered to the Atomic Energy Act to allow private sector participation and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act to limit the liability on suppliers of equipment to build atomic energy plants.

The government is also considering regulatory reforms and is evaluating the model of Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (INSPACe) which acts as the promoter and regulator for the space sector that

was opened up for private participation in 2020.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced opening up of the nuclear power sector which has been restricted to public sector companies. The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited operates atomic power plants across the country that contribute 8.7 GWe to the country's energy mix.

Sitharaman also announced the Nuclear Energy Mission for research and development of Small Modular Reactors (SMR) with an outlay of Rs 20,000 crore and to operationalise five indigenously developed SMRs by 2033.

The Department of Atomic Energy officials has recently said that the Nuclear Energy Mission aims to leverage private sector participation, streamline regulatory

frameworks, and scale up nuclear power production to meet India's increasing energy demands.

Foreign nuclear power firms had evinced interest in setting up atomic power plants in India after it secured a waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers Group to engage in global nuclear trade. The NSG waiver came after the landmark India-US civil nuclear deal of 2008.

However, the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act of 2010 proved to be an impediment for private sector participation. The private sector termed certain provisions of the law were unacceptable and contradicted the international Convention for Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC). The government (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

People facing 'double attack' of 'skyrocketing inflation', rising taxes, says Congress

NEW DELHI, May 19: The Congress on Monday alleged people were facing the "double attack" of "skyrocketing inflation" and rising taxes, and asked the Narendra Modi-led government to answer how the common people would survive its impact.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh shared on X a media report that claimed the burden of taxation on people had been rising.

"Under the self-proclaimed double-engine government, the people of India are facing a double attack of skyrocketing inflation and rising taxes. Inflation and tax burden have increased continuously in the last 10 years," Ramesh said in a post in Hindi on X.

He claimed expenditure on medical and education had risen 12-15

per cent every year.

"School fees, books, uniforms - everything has become expensive. Banks are charging fees even for small services. There is a tax on car, net banking, even FASTag and GST on essential items like milk, curd and flour!" he said.

Ramesh said incomes had not increased but taxes and expenditure had broken the backs of the people.

"The Modi government should answer how will the common people survive this tax loot and rampant inflation?" Ramesh asked.

The Congress has been attacking the government over its handling of the economy, claiming the issues of rising prices, decreasing private investment, and stagnating wages were hitting the common people hard. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, May 19: India recorded an average of six additional days of dangerously high temperatures for pregnant women each year over the last five years, according to a new study published on Monday.

The study by Climate Central, an independent group of scientists and communicators based in the US, said the number of such days had doubled in 90 per cent of countries and territories. As part of the study, researchers analysed daily temperatures from 2020 to 2024 in 247 countries and territories, and 940 cities, to determine the rise in "pregnancy heat-risk days" -- extremely hot days associated with higher risks of preterm birth and maternal health complications.

India experienced an average of

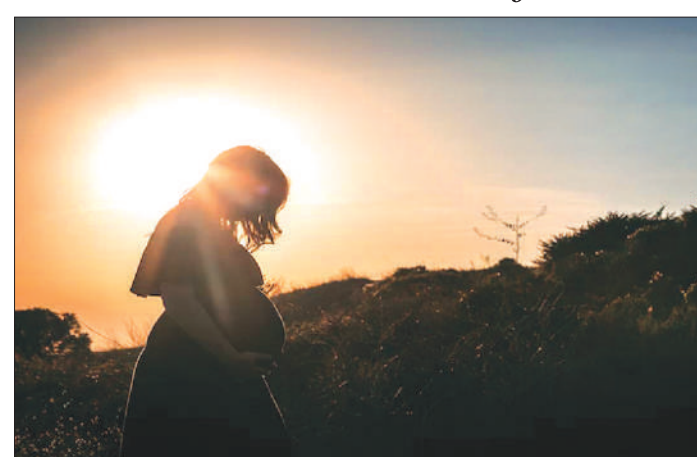
six additional pregnancy heat-risk days each year during this period, the researchers said.

Climate change accounted for nearly a third of the average annual number of pregnancy heat-risk days in India during 2020-2024, adding six out of a total of 19 days, the researchers said in the study.

Sikkim reported the highest number of pregnancy heat-risk days attributed to climate change, with 32. Goa and Kerala recorded 24 and 18 additional days, respectively. Among the cities analysed, Panaji experienced the highest average number of additional pregnancy heat-risk days each year (39) over the past five years.

Thiruvananthapuram followed with 36 such days.

Mumbai reported 26 additional



pregnancy heat-risk days attributed to climate change during 2020-2024. Chennai, Bengaluru and Pune also recorded seven addi-

tional pregnancy heat-risk days attributed to climate change over the past five years.

According to the study, nearly a

third of countries experienced an additional month's worth of dangerous pregnancy heat-risk days each year.

The largest increases were observed in regions with limited access to health care, including the Caribbean, central and South America, the Pacific Islands, southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Research links high temperatures during pregnancy to increased risks of complications such as hypertension, gestational diabetes, hospitalisation, severe maternal morbidity, stillbirth and pre-term birth, which can lead to lifelong health impacts for children.

"Extreme heat is now one of the most pressing threats to pregnant people worldwide, pushing more pregnancies (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Stock markets close lower for 2nd day; IT stocks fall after US rating downgrade

MUMBAI, May 19: Benchmark BSE Sensex dropped by 271 points on Monday, marking the second straight day of losses due to selling in IT and banking stocks and a weak trend in global markets after rating downgrade of the US by Moody's Ratings.

The 30-share BSE barometer declined 271.17 points or 0.33 per cent to settle at 82,059.42. During the day, it dropped 366.02 points or 0.44 per cent to a low of 81,964.57.

The NSE Nifty dipped 74.35 points or 0.30 per cent to 24,945.45.

Among Sensex firms, Eternal, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Asian Paints, HCL Tech and Adani Ports were the laggards.

Power Grid, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, State Bank of India and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers. Among sectors, realty, pharma, and auto shares advanced while IT declined by over a percent.

"Markets languished in negative territory for major part of the trading session as weak Asian and European indices resulted in investors resorting to profit-taking in IT,



capital goods and oil & gas shares," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Also Moody's downgrading US credit rating by a notch over the weekend created some sort of uncertainty amongst investors, Tapse added.

"Indian equity markets extended their losses for a second consecutive day on Monday, dragged down by a combination of weak global cues, sharp selling in IT stocks, and rising volatility," Gau-

rav Garg, Analyst, Lemmon Markets Desk, said.

Investor sentiment took a hit after Moody's downgraded the US sovereign credit rating to 'Aa1', citing the nation's surging USD 36 trillion debt, he said.

"Global markets echoed this nervousness. Asian and European equities traded mostly lower..." Garg added.

The broader market witnessed a mixed performance as the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.75 per cent and midcap index ended up by

0.27 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT declined 1.33 per cent, IT (1.23 per cent), tech (1.07 per cent), oil & gas (0.32 per cent), telecommunication (0.24 per cent) and capital goods (0.16 per cent).

Realty jumped 2.22 per cent, healthcare (0.58 per cent), utilities (0.42 per cent), auto (0.41 per cent), power (0.36 per cent) and financial services (0.32 per cent).

Among Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower while Shanghai's SSE Composite index ended higher.

European markets were trading lower. US markets ended in positive territory on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.41 per cent to USD 65.14 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 8,831.05 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

On Friday, the Sensex declined 200.15 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at 82,330.59. The Nifty dropped 42.30 points or 0.17 per cent to 25,019.80. (PTI)

Rupee climbs 15 paise to settle at 85.42 against US dollar

MUMBAI, May 19: The rupee appreciated 15 paise to settle at 85.42 against the US dollar on Monday, on weak US dollar index and a decline in crude oil prices. Forex traders said global investors were also cautious as global rating agency Moody's downgraded US investment grade rating, leading to a fall in dollar index.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.43 and moved between the intra-day high of 85.35 and the low of 85.61 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.42, registering a gain of 15 paise over its previous closing level.

On Friday, the rupee pared its gains and settled 3 paise lower at 85.57 against the dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias amid persistent weakness in US dollar index and a weak tone in global crude oil prices," Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan said, adding weak domestic equities capped a sharp upside.

"USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.10 to 85.65," he noted.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.86 per cent at 100.22.

The US dollar weakened as Moody's downgraded US credit rating to Aa1 from AAA. Economic data from the US released on Friday too disappointed the markets, Choudhary said.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.78 per

cent to USD 64.90 per barrel in futures trade.

Traders further noted that with Brent hovering around USD 65 per barrel, India, one of the world's largest oil importers, faces the dual challenge of a widening trade deficit and increased dollar demand - factors that could further strain the rupee.

Dilip Parmar, Senior Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, said the rupee gained ground as the greenback softened against a spectrum of leading global currencies.

"In the short run, the USD-INR spot rate is expected to find a support level at 85.25 and encounter resistance around 85.87," he added.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 271.17 points, or 0.33 per cent, to close at 82,059.42, while the Nifty fell 75.35 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 24,944.45.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) purchased equities worth ₹ 8,831.05 crore on a net basis on Friday, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, India's forex reserves jumped by USD 4.553 billion to USD 690,617 billion during the week ended May 9 on the back of a steep increase in gold assets, the RBI said on Friday.

In the preceding week, the overall reserves had dropped by USD 2.065 billion to USD 686,064 billion. The forex reserves had touched an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion at end-September 2024. (PTI)

AU Real Estate buys 446 flats in Noida for ₹ 1468cr in NBCC's e-auction

NEW DELHI, May 19: Realty firm AU Real Estate has acquired 446 flats in bulk through e-auction for ₹ 1,468 crore in a housing project at Noida being developed by state-owned NBCC Ltd and the company will sell these apartments in open market.

As per the direction of the Supreme Court, Amrapali Stalled Projects Investments Reconstruction Establishment (ASPIRE) was formed to complete the stuck projects of the erstwhile Amrapali Group through NBCC (India). The state-owned firm was asked to complete 38,000 flats and hand them over to homebuyers.

Last week, NBCC said in a regulatory filing that the company has sold 446 residential units in housing project 'Aspire Silicon City' at Sector-76, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, through an e-auction at a total sale

value of ₹ 1,467.93 crore.

NBCC had not named the winner of the e-auction.

When contacted, AU Real Estate Director Ashish Agarwal confirmed the "acquisition of selling rights for 446 units at Aspire Silicon Project from NBCC." The total saleable area in this project is 13.85 lakh sq ft.

The reserve price was ₹ 10,500 per sq ft. AU Real Estate has bought at a slightly higher rate.

He said the company will sell these apartments to end-users and investors at a higher price than the acquisition cost.

Agarwal said the company will launch this project soon and will sell these units in a staggered manner.

"We have to pay the total bid amount of ₹ 1,468 crore to NBCC in a staggered manner which is

linked to progress in construction cost," he said, adding that amount has to be paid to NBCC even if the company is unable to sell these units.

The apartments will be allotted to prospective customers.

NBCC is selling apartments in bulk to complete projects and repayment of debt.

This project, spread over 8.5 acres, comprises about 600 units out of which NBCC has sold 446 flats through auction.

NBCC has sold 4,470 units across five projects through e-auction for ₹ 9,700 crore. Earlier, Gaura Group, Mansan Builders and Happy Valley Infra bought flats through the electronic bidding process.

AU Real Estate, which was established in 2022, is developing two projects in Delhi-NCR. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Misri pins Trump claim on

his professional conduct, the sources said. To questions about Turkiye's adversarial stand against India, he said the country had traditionally not been a supporter of India. The meeting of Parliament's Standing Committee on External Affairs, chaired by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, was attended by a number of lawmakers, including the TMC's Abhishek Banerjee, the Congress' Rajeev Shukla and Deepender Hooda, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi, and the BJP's Aparajita Sarangi and Arun Govil.

The meeting comes against the backdrop of the Indian Armed Forces carrying out Operation Sindoor to avenge the Pahalgam attack and the subsequent military actions between the two countries. India and Pakistan reached an understanding on halting all military actions on May 10. (PTI)

Current tensions between India

that our relations in this area will only develop," he said. Asked if India is considering the possibility of increasing imports of Russian oil, Kumar said this issue primarily concerns the market conditions, prices, and logistics.

"Our work includes simplifying this mechanism [of purchases of Russian oil] by concluding shipping agreements, new sea corridors for Indian importers and Russian exporters to consider it reasonable and commercially profitable to continue trade, which was so important for the growth of trade turnover to the level mentioned. So we will continue encouraging further imports of Russian oil to the Indian market," he said.

Some Indian companies have entered into long-term agreements on the import of oil from Russia, the diplomat noted. "So intentions are in place, whereas the market conditions and logistics facilitate the implementation of large volumes," he added. (PTI)

IIT Guwahati researchers develop

a key element in digital electronics, implying that it may have future use in developing smart, sensor-based electronic devices that can detect harmful chemicals like cyanide in real time. The study, published in 'Spectrochimica Acta Part A: Molecular and Biomolecular Spectroscopy', was conducted in collaboration with Prof Bithiah Grace Jaganathan, Department of Bioscience and Bioengineering, IIT Guwahati. Mongoli Brahma was the research scholar involved in the development of this sensor along with other research scholars, Arup Das Kanungo, Minati Das and Sam P Mathew.

As the next step, the research group is working on developing a simple kit for testing a variety of analytes, the statement added. (PTI)

24 trafficked tea garden

the pretext of being offered work on vegetable farms by one Pitka Majhi.

She also stated that the families had lost contact with the workers since their departure.

Following the complaint, a police team led by Sub-Inspector Abdul Rahman launched an investigation. Upon tracing the victims to Rupa, the police facilitated a video call between the missing workers and their families through their employers.

"All of them said they thought they were being taken to Tezpur, but instead they were transported to Arunachal. As a result, the employers in Arunachal were instructed to release the workers belonging to Dahingear Tea Estate. On May 14, eight of the victims were rescued and brought to Deberapar on May 15. They told police they had been exploited — their phones were confiscated, they were occasionally assaulted, and forced to work long hours from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.," the SP said.

The victims also alleged that they were promised a monthly wage of ₹7,000 but were never paid. They further claimed they had been administered intoxicants that rendered them unconscious during the journey to Arunachal Pradesh. Subsequently, police arrested two individuals, Pitka Majhi and Lakshman Dutta, on May 15. Sixteen more victims were rescued on May 16 and brought to Jorhat on May 17. The two arrested — Lakshman Dutta (59) of Sonowal Seuji Gaon under Mariani Police Station, and Pitka Majhi (31) of Dahingear Tea Estate, Borline — are in police custody in connection with the case.

Govt considering amendments

expects the private sector to pitch in with investments to achieve the target of producing 100 GWe nuclear power by 2047. The officials said that around 50 per cent of the 100 GW target is expected to come from Public-Private Partnerships (PPP).

A parliamentary panel has also recommended establishing a robust financial model that includes government incentives, Viability Gap Funding (VGF), and sovereign guarantees to attract both domestic and foreign investments. The Committee had suggested that expediting legislative amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act to encourage private investment in nuclear power generation.

India plans to set up private sector SMRs of 220 MW Bharat Small Reactors (BSR) for captive use. NPCIL had recently invited Request for Proposals from Indian industries for setting up 220 MW BSRs for captive use. (PTI)

India saw six more days of

into high-risk territory, especially in places already struggling with limited healthcare access. Cutting fossil fuel emissions is not just good for the planet, it's a crucial step toward protecting pregnant people and newborns around the world," said Bruce Bekkar, a women's health physician and authority on climate change's dangers to human health.

"Even a single day of extreme heat can raise the risk of serious pregnancy complications," said Kristina Dahl, vice-president for science at Climate Central.

Climate change is increasing extreme heat and stacking the odds against healthy pregnancies worldwide, especially in places where care is already hard to access. The impacts on maternal and infant health are likely to worsen if we do not stop burning fossil fuels and urgently tackle climate change, she said. (PTI)

Delhi Metro ticketing goes live on Uber app

NEW DELHI, May 19: Ride-hailing platform Uber on Monday announced the rollout of metro ticketing on the Uber app, powered by the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), starting with Delhi Metro. Three more cities across India are slated to go live in 2025, Uber said, adding it will soon launch B2B Logistics via the ONDC network, a solution that will allow businesses to request on-demand logistics from Uber's delivery network, without needing their own fleet.

"Uber today announced the rollout of metro ticketing on the Uber app, powered by the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), with Delhi Metro going live as the first launch city. This marks Uber's first integration with India's pioneering digital public infrastructure and a major step forward in making public transport more connected," the company said in a release. This move follows an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2024 during Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi's visit to India, where Uber committed to collaborating with ONDC to advance the reach and impact of India's digital public goods.

"Today's launch is a tangible realisation of that commitment, reinforcing Uber's mission to make urban mobility more inclusive, sustainable, and seamlessly connected," it said. Praveen Neppalli Naga, Chief Technology Officer, Uber, said "India has taken an impressive leap in building population scale technology through its Digital Public Infrastructure like ONDC and we are thrilled to integrate with them to bring metro ticketing to the Uber app, bringing us one step closer to our vision of being a one-stop shop for mobility needs." Vibhor Jain, Acting CEO and COO at ONDC termed Uber joining the ONDC network as a significant step in expanding access to trusted, interoperable digital infrastructure in India. (PTI)

Texmaco aiming to boost EBITDA margin to 12-13pc by FY'26

KOLKATA, May 19: Engineering major Texmaco Rail & Engineering Ltd on Monday said it is targeting an EBITDA margin of 12-13 per cent by March 2026, up from 10.3 per cent in the 2024-25 fiscal, driven by improved operational efficiency and business restructuring initiatives.

The margin in the last two quarters was lower due to a number of factors, a top company official said.

"The company is continuously improving its margin. We are aiming to increase the EBITDA margin level to 12-13 per cent by the year-end. In FY'25, we achieved an EBITDA margin of 10.3 per cent, up from 9.5 per cent from the previous fiscal," Managing Director Sudipta Mukherjee told PTI.

"The margin in the last two quarters was lower due to various factors such as unfavourable product mix, one-time provisioning of ₹ 11 crore, and a ₹ 5-crore expense for a long-term vision study undertaken in Q4," he said.

Mukherjee said the margin performance is expected to improve after the demerger of Kalindree, a loss-making unit under Texmaco EPC, which has been impacting overall financials.

"The demerger process is underway, and we expect it to be effective during the current fiscal," he said.

The company is also in the process of merging Texmaco West Rail Ltd (formerly Jindal Rail & Infrastructure Ltd) with Texmaco Rail & Engineering Ltd. This transaction is currently awaiting approval from the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), and is expected in the second quarter of 2025-26.

Meanwhile, Texmaco reported a 13.5 per cent year-on-year decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 39 crore in the March quarter, impacted by lower margins

and supply constraints, despite higher revenues. Revenue from operations in January-March rose 17.6 per cent to ₹ 1,346 crore from ₹ 1,145 crore a year earlier. The company attributed the sequential drop in profit and margin to a short supply of wheel sets from the Rail Wheel Factory, which disrupted freight car deliveries during the quarter. Texmaco delivered 2,597 freight cars in Q4, down from 2,714 units in Q3.

During the reporting quarter, Texmaco signed two global partnerships — one with European firm Nevomo for high-speed rail technology and another with US-based Trinity Rail — to expand its international footprint and rolling stock manufacturing capabilities. The company is also progressing with the transfer of its Infra-Rail and Green Energy businesses into a wholly owned subsidiary, aimed at streamlining operations and unlocking long-term value.

For the full financial year, Texmaco reported a consolidated profit after tax (PAT) of ₹ 249 crore, up 120.3 per cent from ₹ 113 crore in FY'24. Revenue rose 45.8 per cent year-on-year to ₹ 5,107 crore.

Its order book stood at ₹ 6,766 crore as of March 31, 2025. The company delivered 10,612 freight cars during the year, registering a 51 per cent growth over FY'24.

"The Government of India's long-term goal to increase the railway's share in national logistics from 27 per cent to 45 per cent by 2030 presents significant opportunities for rail manufacturers. Around 1.2 lakh wagons are expected to be delivered by 2025," Mukherjee said.

"With an annual production capacity of 13,000 wagons, Texmaco is ready to capture its fair share of this demand," he added. (PTI)

Dodla Dairy Q4 profit jumps 45 pc to ₹ 68 crore

MUMBAI, May 19: Telangana-based Dodla Dairy on Monday reported a 45.12 per cent annual growth in its consolidated net profit at ₹ 67.96 crore in the quarter ended March 2025.

The company's net profit stood at ₹ 46.83 crore during the corresponding quarter of the preceding fiscal, Dodla Dairy said in a regulatory filing.

Revenue from operations of the company grew by 15.51 per cent during the quarter under review at ₹ 909.62 crore compared to ₹ 787.44 crore during the same period a year ago.

"I am pleased to share that during FY25, the company's profit after tax (PAT) surpassed the ₹ 200 crore milestone, reaching ₹ 259.9 crore, on the back of a topline of ₹ 3,720.1 crore, which grew at a healthy rate of 19 per cent. This robust performance was primarily driven by faster growth in value added products (VAP) and healthy performance in Africa as well as the Orgafed business," Dodla Dairy Managing Director Dodla Sunil Reddy said.

He said the board of directors of the company has approved a dividend of ₹ 2 per share (20 per cent

of the face value).

"Our extensive procurement network and long-term relationships with the farmers underscore the underlying strength of our company. Their contributions have been instrumental to our growth journey. We remain focused on advancing Dodla Dairy's integrated business model through both organic and inorganic growth initiatives. With a continuous focus towards expanding our product reach and portfolio basket, we are confident to achieve accelerated growth in the coming years," he added. (PTI)

Mutual fund assets surge 23% to hit record ₹ 65.74 trillion in FY25

NEW DELHI, May 19: Mutual fund assets surged 23 per cent or over ₹ 12 trillion year-on-year to reach a record of ₹ 65.74 trillion in FY25, propelled by robust net inflows and mark-to-market gains amid buoyant equity and debt markets.

In comparison, the assets under management of the industry stood at ₹ 53.40 trillion in March 2024.

"The asset base expanded partly owing to mark-to-market (MTM) gains, spurred by equity markets clocking positive returns, as reflected in the Nifty 50 TRI and Sensex TRI rising 6 per cent and 5.9 per cent, respectively. Debt markets also contributed positively through MTM gains, supported by favourable yield movements," according to the Association of Mutual Funds in India's (Amfi) annual report released on Monday.

Also, the increase in AUM was attributed to net inflows summing up to ₹ 8.15 trillion during fiscal 2025.

The sharp surge in asset base was also reflected in the growing numbers of investors, mutual funds, with the number of folios reaching an all-time high of 234.5 million and an investor base of about 5.67 crore.

A notable trend in the fiscal was



a 33.4 per cent year-on-year increase in folios of equity-oriented schemes to 16.38 crore. The scheme continued to constitute a lion's share of the folios at 70 per cent.

Also, the folios of hybrid schemes increased by 16 per cent to 1.56 crore, while other schemes, including index funds and exchange-traded funds (ETFs), surged 48.3 per cent to 4.15 crore folios. In contrast, debt-oriented scheme folios declined 3 per cent to 69.5 lakh.

The systematic investment plans (SIPs) were popular among investors as flows into this segment

rose sharply, with yearly contributions rising by 45.24 per cent to ₹ 2.89 trillion in FY25.

This substantial increase, along with MTM gains, saw SIP assets rise 24.6 per cent to ₹ 13.35 trillion, thereby accounting for 20.31 per cent share of the overall MF industry's AUM.

As of March 2025, the industry had a total of 5.34 crore unique investors. Of this, 26 per cent or 1.38 crore were women.

"This represents an increase from 24.2 per cent in March 2024, underscoring the growing financial independence and awareness among women. The rise in literacy

rates and the growing presence of women in the workforce have been instrumental in enhancing their economic contributions and, as a result, women are now emerging as a key participant in the MF investor base," the report said.

Equity-oriented mutual funds saw a record inflow of ₹4.17 trillion, the highest ever in a financial year. The net inflows during the year exceeded twice the net inflows in the previous year. This, combined with valuation gains, propelled the AUM of equity-oriented schemes by 25.4 per cent to ₹ 29.45 trillion at March-end 2025.

The surge in inflow across sub-categories within equity-oriented schemes was partly attributable to the successful launch of new fund offers (NFOs) during the year. A total of 70 NFOs in the equity category were launched in fiscal 2025, collectively mobilising ₹ 85,244 crore, marking an increase from the 58 schemes launched in fiscal 2024, which garnered ₹ 39,297 crore.

Debt MFs registered net inflows of ₹ 1.38 trillion last fiscal against net outflows of ₹ 0.23 trillion in fiscal 2024. The category's AUM jumped 20.5 per cent to ₹15.21 trillion in March 2025 from ₹ 12.62 trillion in March 2024. (PTI)

Landmark life sentence delivered in Margherita for 2018 murder case



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, May 19: In a historic first for the Margherita Sub-Divisional Magistrate Court, Monteswar Dohotia

was sentenced to life imprisonment on Monday for the brutal murder of his uncle, Bimal Dohotia, bringing closure to a seven-year-long legal battle.

The case, registered as Session Case No. 17(M)/2020 under Bordumsa Police Station Case No. 42/2018, stems from the 2018 killing of Bimal Dohotia in 1 No. Mohong Shantipur, under the jurisdiction of Bordumsa Police Station in Margherita district.

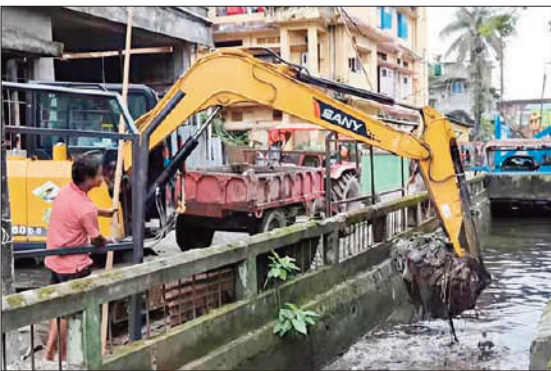
Monteswar Dohotia, son of Phuleswar Dohotia, stood trial for the murder. His co-accused, Pabitra Dohotia, son of Kulai Dohotia, remains absconding since the incident.

Presiding over the trial, Additional Sessions Judge (FTC-1) Anil Kumar Basfor convicted Monteswar under Sections 302/34 of the Indian Penal Code and awarded him a life sentence. This verdict marks the first-ever life imprisonment handed down by this court, setting a significant legal precedent in the region.

The ruling has brought much-needed relief to the bereaved family of Bimal Dohotia, who endured years of emotional and legal turmoil in their quest for justice.

The local community has widely welcomed the judgment, viewing it as a strong deterrent against violent crimes and a reflection of the judiciary's firm commitment to justice.

Massive cleaning drive underway in Kokrajhar to clear drains and canals



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 19: A large-scale cleaning drive is currently underway across Kokrajhar town, focusing on clearing drains and canals to improve sanitation and prevent water-logging ahead of the upcoming monsoon season.

The initiative, spearheaded by the Kokrajhar Municipality Board (KMB) in association with

local authorities, is being carried out with active support from municipal workers, volunteers, and community members. The aim is to ensure a cleaner, healthier environment and to maintain Kokrajhar's reputation as the "City of Peace."

According to officials supervising the operation, the cleaning drive will be conducted in phases, covering all major drains and

water bodies within the town limits. The authorities emphasized that the effort is not just about infrastructure but about fostering a culture of cleanliness and public responsibility.

Civic officials have called on residents to cooperate fully by maintaining cleanliness in their surroundings and refraining from littering or dumping waste into the drainage system. They stressed that community participation is essential to sustain the town's sanitation goals.

Local citizens have warmly welcomed the move, expressing satisfaction with the visible improvements in drainage and sanitation across the town. Many have praised the proactive efforts of the civic body and volunteers for addressing a recurring problem in advance of the rainy season.

₹ 1,000 cr invested in NE waterways in 2 yrs, equal amount in pipeline: Sonowal

These efforts aim to boost cargo and passenger movement

GUWAHATI, May 19: More than ₹ 1,000 crore has been invested in the waterways in the Northeast in the last two years, while another ₹ 1,000 crore will be pumped in to boost the sector, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Monday.

He said efforts were underway to boost cargo and passenger movement, improve last-mile connectivity and promote economic growth in the region.

The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways was speaking after reviewing ongoing projects in Assam and other northeastern states with senior officials of the ministry, Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), Public Works Department (PWD), Indian Port Rail and Ropeway Corporation Limited (IPRCL) and Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL).

"In the last two years, more than ₹ 1,000 crore has been invested, with ₹ 300 crore worth of projects already completed... We are on track to complete the remaining ₹ 700 crore projects by the end of 2025," Sonowal said.

Projects worth an additional ₹ 1,000 crore are on the anvil, targeted for completion by 2026, he said.

"These efforts aim to boost cargo and passenger movement, improve last-mile connectivity, promote economic growth in the Northeast, and align with the broader vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' through sustainable and inclusive transport solutions," he added.

Sonowal said the Union government is actively developing key infrastructure projects along NW2 (Brahmaputra) and NW16 (Barak), including the construc-



tion of passenger vessels of various capacities, terminal facilities and capacity-building initiatives.

He also reviewed progress on the proposed Inland Water Transport (IWT) project at Doyang Lake, and assessed the potential of Noune and Shilloi Lakes in Nagaland for water sports and tourism.

Feasibility studies for IWT development on the Tiawing and Chhimtui rivers in Mizoram, as well as on Umiang Lake and the Ummgo River (NW106) in Meghalaya were also reviewed.

Speaking at the review meet, Sonowal said, "Since 2014, the Modi government has revived the once-neglected mode of

water transport, especially through the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers. Schemes such as Jalvahak are encouraging businesses to adopt this economical, efficient, and eco-friendly mode, reducing pressure on road and rail, and positioning Assam as a key driver in India's journey towards a self-reliant economy by 2047."

Reviewing multiple projects ranging from new infrastructure development for capacity enhancement on national waterways to scaling up skill development initiatives for youth of the region in the maritime sector, the Union minister emphasised the urgency and the need for optimum utilisation of funds.

To further enhance cruise tourism and cargo handling capacity across Brahmaputra and Barak rivers, over ₹ 1,500 crore has been earmarked for key projects scheduled to be completed by 2027-28. These include the construction of modern jetties equipped with onshore facilities at Silghat, Bishwanath Ghat, Neamati Ghat, and Gujjan.

Additionally, a new building for the regional office of the Mercantile Marine Department will be constructed at Fancy Bazar in Guwahati.

Sonowal also noted progress on the proposed water metro services in Guwahati and Dibrugarh, among others, with a ₹ 315-crore investment and two electric catamarans being built by Cochin Shipyard Ltd.

A ₹ 100-crore cruise terminal in Guwahati and a Regional Centre of Excellence (RCoE) in Dibrugarh worth ₹ 120 crore are also in the pipeline.

On Barak River, Sonowal reaffirmed that survey and dredging equipment, and floating terminals at Karimganj and Badarpur projects reflect the government's commitment to making Northeast a hub of India's maritime future.

To ensure consistent navigability along the Brahmaputra, the Dredging Corporation of India (DCI) has been entrusted with maintaining a minimum assured draft of 2.5 metres from the India-Bangladesh border to Pandu under NW2 till 2026-27. For this effort, an additional ₹ 191 crore has been sanctioned.

These measures are a part of the government's broader initiative to integrate Northeast into the country's maritime growth trajectory, Sonowal added. (PTI)

Dhubri erupts in patriotic fervor with massive Tiranga Yatra



HT Correspondent
DHUBRI, May 19: A wave of patriotic fervor swept through the streets of Dhubri on Monday as the Rashtriya Suraksha Nagarik Samaj organized a massive Tiranga Yatra, expressing gratitude to the Indian Army and applauding the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The rally, marked by a striking display of unity, saw participation from individuals of all castes and communities, symbolizing a collective spirit of national

pride. The event's highlight was a 130-meter-long tricolor, carried with reverence and enthusiasm by the participants. Thousands of people, each waving smaller national flags, joined the procession, transforming Dhubri into a vibrant sea of saffron, white, and green.

The Tiranga Yatra began at the Swami Vivekananda statue in Tetultola-More, a prominent town landmark. The march traversed the main streets, with participants chanting patriotic slogans and expressing unwavering support for the Indian Army and the nation. The rally culminated at the same point, leaving behind an electrifying atmosphere of unity and nationalism.

The Rashtriya Suraksha Nagarik Samaj, Dhubri, emphasized the significance of recognizing the sacrifices of the armed forces and acknowledged the leadership that has bolstered national security. The event served as a powerful reminder of India's unity and resilience, transcending barriers of caste and creed.

With its massive turnout and emotionally charged atmosphere, the Tiranga Yatra in Dhubri stands as a resounding testament to the enduring spirit of patriotism and gratitude toward those who safeguard the nation.

₹ 12-cr worth metal scrap extracted from stolen goods recovered from Guwahati dumpyards

GUWAHATI, May 19: Stolen goods turned into metal scrap worth Rs 12 crore have been seized from three dumpyards in Assam's Guwahati, officials said on Monday.

A senior police officer said an investigation was started following a complaint of a scooter theft.

"This led us to one dumpyard, where stolen items were brought and dismantled. We then got clues of two more such dumpyards and started the seizure," she said.

The police started a raid on Sunday evening, which went on throughout the night. It will continue till all the dumpyards are properly scrutinised, the officer said.

"We seized items worth ₹ 12 crore from these dumps. We have recovered 2,000 kg of copper, 7,000 kg of brass, 1,000 kg of mixed iron, 2,500 kg of vehicle parts and AC condensers, and two batteries from these sites," she said.

The owner of the dumpyards is absconding at present, and police have launched a manhunt to nab him, she said.

"Our operation is underway. With the amount of scrap seized, we believe an interstate gang is involved," the officer added. (PTI)

Bodo Bijwng Saan celebrated across Assam

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 19: The 62nd Bodo Bijwng Saan (Bodo Medium Day) was celebrated with enthusiasm and pride across various districts of Assam on Sunday, May 18, commemorating a significant milestone in the history of Bodo-medium education. This day marks the historic introduction of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools on May 18, 1963, a decision initiated under the leadership of then-Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha in the undivided Goalpara district. Since then, the day has been observed annually as a tribute to the language movement and the growth of Bodo education. In Kokrajhar, the district committee of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha organized a day-long celebration at Karigaon High School, beginning with the hoisting of the Sabha flag by Bijuel Kumar Basumatary, President of the Kokrajhar

District Bodo Sahitya Sabha. The event included floral tributes to the martyrs of the Bodo language movement.

An open session featured prominent speakers including Dr. Surath Narzary, President of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar MLA Lawrence Islary, and other dignitaries and community leaders. Dr. Narzary extended his warm wishes to all on this special occasion, emphasizing the invaluable contributions of Bodo leaders and writers who dedicated their efforts toward the development of Bodo-medium education and literature. He highlighted that celebrations were held across the state with scheduled programs in multiple locations. In Chirang, as well as in Udalguri, Baksa, and Karbi Anglong, various committees of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha organized similar events, including discussions focused on the future growth and development of Bodo-medium education.

23 get life term for killing woman on suspicion of practising witchcraft

DIBRUGARH, May 19: A court in Assam's Charaideo district on Monday sentenced 23 people to life imprisonment on Monday for killing a woman on suspicion of practising witchcraft 13 years ago.

Charaideo District and Sessions Judge Abubakkar Siddique pronounced the judgment by convicting 12 men and 11 women for committing the crime, and sentenced them to life imprisonment, besides imposing a fine of ₹ 5,000 each. The court also ordered the convicts to pay a compensation of ₹ 8 lakh to the victim's family.

The 2012 incident had sparked widespread outrage and led to a prolonged trial that lasted 13 years.

The victim was subjected to severe physical torture and eventually set ablaze by a group of people in Jalha village in Charaideo on suspicion of practising witchcraft, police said. (PTI)

Echoing similar sentiments, Jonasing Ronghang, President of Ward No. 4 and the Police Reserve polling station, voiced his disappointment with the state of affairs within the party.

"We have lost faith in the APHLC leadership due to the factionalism that has taken root," Ronghang said.

He elaborated that within the Lumbajong constituency alone, there are three competing groups, and that attending one group's meeting would result in backlash or exclusion from another.

"This is the reality of APHLC now. If we attend Shersing's meeting, Rajen refuses to work with us. If we go to a J.I. Kathar meeting, Rajen again stops us. In such an environment, it is impossible to function as a dedicated party worker," he explained, adding that these are the reasons behind his departure from the party.

The press conference also saw the presence of Rolison Phangcho, Assistant Secretary of the APHLC Lumbajong Central Committee, and Langkai Bey, Secretary of the Mijung Longki Teron polling station. Both leaders confirmed their resignation from the APHLC, marking a significant blow to the party's grassroots organizational strength in the Lumbajong area.

Fissures deepen in APHLC as key grassroots leaders resign from Lumbajong Unit

Grassroots leaders resign citing factionalism and internal divisions

HT Bureau
DIPHU, May 19: The All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) suffered yet another setback as several grassroots leaders from its Lumbajong Member of Autonomous Constituency Committee announced their resignation from the party.

The development was made public during a press conference held at Hotel Hempi, Diphu, on Monday, where the leaders voiced their frustrations over growing factionalism and internal disputes within the party ranks.

Kelvin Tokbi, who served as the Finance Secretary of the APHLC Youth Wing Central Committee, was among the leaders who addressed the media.

Speaking candidly about the disarray within the party, Tokbi said, "We are in a state of confusion. At present, there are three groups operating under the APHLC banner – the Rajen group, the Shersing group, and the J.I. Kathar group. It has become unclear to us whom we should follow or work with."

Tokbi highlighted a series of recent developments that have caused disillusionment among committed members. He noted that both the Rajen and J I Kathar factions have been inde-



pendently conducting meetings and public engagements, while instructions from one faction often directly contradict those from another.

Referring to a recent meeting at the residence of Rajen Timung, Tokbi revealed that attendees were specifically told not to participate in any meetings organized by the Shersing faction.

"This kind of directive only proves that the APHLC is not aiming for electoral victory, but is instead on a path of self-destruction," he remarked.

He further alleged the presence of individuals within the party who are operating as BJP agents and accused the party leadership of pursuing divisive policies.

"Through this platform, we are announcing our decision to step away from the APHLC. We have worked tirelessly for the party since the beginning, with unwavering commitment, but the present circumstances have compelled us to take a break," Tokbi declared.

NOTIFICATION

Coffee Board Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Govt. of India will recruit the following temporary posts for Regional Coffee Research Station, Diphu through walk-in-interview in the following dates:

- 1) Young professional (Entomology) — (1 post). Walk-in-interview on 11.06.2025
- 2) Data Entry Operator — (1 post). Walk-in-interview on 12.06.2025

The details are available in Coffee Board website
www.coffeeboard.gov.in.

The interested candidate may attend the walk-in-interview at Regional Coffee Research Station, Diphu-Manja Road, P.O - Kheroni- 782461 Karbi Anglong District at 10:30 am with all original testimonials.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (PHE), DIPHU RURAL W/S DIVISION DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG

Expression of Interest

No.1 of 2025-26 Date: 19/05/2025

Expression of Interest is invited from registered Contractors/Firms of PHED, KAAC any class for the construction of CSC (Community Sanitary Complex) at different Health Institutions (Govt.) of Karbi Anglong district as per approved drawing and rate (fixed) of the Chief Engineer(PHE), Sanitation, Govt. of Assam. Within 7 (Seven) days from the date of this EO

Nos of CSC = 68Nos (Sixty-Eight) @ Rs.3,00,000/- (Fixed) (Rupees Three Lakh only)

List of CSC is available in the office of the undersigned

Sd/-
Member Secretary, DWSC
Karbi Anglong
cum

Executive Engineer (PHE)
Diphu Rural W/S Division

Memo No. EE/PHE-DIP/R/SBM(G)-1/2025-26/2722

Dated: 9/05/2025

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Impressionism is the newspaper of the soul
- Henri Matisse

Pope Leo XIV has his tasks cut out

The world's attention has been on the Vatican City in Rome for the past few days. The Catholics have made history with the election of Robert Francis Prevost, a 69-year-old American cardinal of Spanish descent. He has taken over as the 267th occupant of the throne of St. Peter. This momentous event, the first time an American has ascended to the papacy in the 2000-year history of the Catholic Church, is a significant milestone. The Pope is the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. He guides about 1.4 billion Catholics worldwide and is the head of Vatican City. Due to his position, the Pope is regarded as one of the world's most powerful people. He has extensive diplomatic, cultural, and spiritual influence. He is considered the successor of St. Peter, the first apostle. He is believed to have the highest teaching authority in faith and morals. What do the global Catholics want from a new pope? Pope Leo will lead a divided Catholic Church of 1.4 billion members, almost the size of India or China. The Church may be losing strength in Europe but is growing rapidly in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. About 40% of all Catholics worldwide are in Latin America, roughly a quarter in Europe, and 16% to 18% in Sub-Saharan Africa.

While his predecessor, Pope Francis, accomplished many things during his 12-year papacy, he left an unfinished agenda and many challenges for the new Pope to address. These, such as divorce and remarriage, LGBTQ Catholics, the role of women, and climate change, are significant and will require careful consideration and action. The new Pope will exercise supreme power in faith, morals, church discipline, and government. He is expected to continue the reforms started by his predecessor, focus on poverty and marginalized people, and build a "bridge" between different groups within the Church. Many watched with interest when Pope Leo appeared on the Vatican balcony. In his first speech, Pontiff spoke to the crowd in Spanish, mentioning "his beloved Diocese of Chiclayo in Peru." This shows that his identity as both an American and a Peruvian will influence his papacy. Many Peruvians remember him as a priest who stood with the country's poorest people. Within the Vatican, he was informally known as the "Latin American Yankee," a nickname that captures his dual identity and capacity to bridge a hemisphere. The crowd cheered when he said, "Peace be with you."

The new Pope has to take several key steps. The new Pontiff has given hints about his priorities as head of the Catholic Church — peace, climate change and technology. But abuse scandals and the role of women will remain important. Like his predecessor, Pope Leo wants to support the poor and marginalized. He would like to continue to open the Vatican and listen to voices outside the church hierarchy. Pope Leo needs to continue these reforms and address the economic issues to maintain the Church's stability and integrity. Church.

Symbolism behind India's military operation codenames

By: Dipak Kurmi

In the grand tapestry of India's post-independence history, military operation codenames stand out as emblematic expressions of national will, strategy, and emotional resilience. These names, though often overlooked in public discourse, are more than bureaucratic tags for logistical undertakings. They are resonant phrases, steeped in symbolism, designed not only to define tactical intent but also to stir national sentiment and forge collective memory. In India's complex security landscape, where every confrontation echoes with historical, political, and emotional undertones, the art of naming operations has emerged as a powerful tool of strategic communication.

From the days of India's nascent statehood to the evolving realities of modern asymmetric warfare, each codename chosen for military, paramilitary, or police actions has conveyed layered meanings. Whether drawn from mythology, nature, Sanskrit lexicon, or culturally loaded metaphors, these names are linguistic reflections of India's values, resolve, and strategic posture. They embody the lived experiences of soldiers and civilians alike, tying battlefield realities to public consciousness and often to the very soul of the nation.

Consider the symbolic weight of recent operations such as 'Operation Sindoor'. Launched in response to the brutal Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 22, 2025, this operation epitomises the emotional and political depth imbued in such naming practices. While the acronym SINDOOR is said to stand for "Strategic Initiative for Neutralising Destructive Opponents with Overwhelming Retaliation," its true power lies in its emotional symbolism. 'Sindoor', the vermilion applied by married Hindu women, is associated with love, honour, and marital sanctity. The operation, as per media reports, was named by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to pay tribute to the widows of those slain in the Pahalgam attack. In doing so, it transformed a military action into an act of justice, vengeance, and national solidarity.

This is not a standalone case. India's military codenaming tradition has long reflected such dual purpose: tactical clarity and emotional narrative. During the First Indo-Pak War of 1947-48, Pakistan launched 'Operation Gulmarg', an infiltration of tribal fighters into Kashmir. India responded with 'Operation Rescue', airlifting troops to save Srinagar. The very name signified a mission not of conquest, but of salvation and defence, subtly framing India's role as a guardian rather than an aggressor.

In 1948, 'Operation Polo' was launched for the integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union. The name, seemingly benign, perhaps deliberately understated the military nature of the mission to avoid alarming the public and international observers. Likewise, 'Operation Vijay' was the chosen title for both the liberation of Goa in 1961 and the Kargil War in 1999. The term 'Vijay' means victory in Sanskrit and Hindi, and its repetition across decades reinforced a sense of continuity, purpose, and inevitable triumph. The 1971 Indo-Pak war, which led to the creation of Bangladesh, saw Indian forces conducting 'Operation Cactus Lily'. The name, combining the rugged resilience of a cactus with the delicate symbolism of a lily, possibly reflected the duality of military strength and humanitarian concern. Similarly, the Indian Air Force launched 'Operation Safed Sagar' during the Kargil War, literally translating to 'White Sea', an evocative metaphor for the snow-covered heights of the conflict zone.

Some operations have drawn directly from Indian mythology and classical language. 'Operation Meghdoot', launched in 1984, enabled India to secure the

Siachen Glacier. The name refers to Kalidasa's ancient poem 'Meghdoot' (Cloud Messenger), combining poetic imagery with strategic depth. Fighting on the world's highest battlefield demanded more than logistics; it required a national mythos to justify the extraordinary commitment. 'Operation Trident' (1971), another example, borrows from Lord Shiva's weapon, the trishul, conveying power, precision, and divinity during a decisive naval assault on Karachi Harbour.

Operations often carry an implicit message to the domestic audience and international community. In 1987, the Indian Peace Keeping Force's (IPKF) engagement in Sri Lanka was named 'Operation Pawan' (wind), suggesting speed, subtlety, and omnipresence. A year later, 'Operation Cactus' rescued the Maldivian government from a coup, again using a metaphor of toughness and resilience. More recently, 'Operation Bandar' — India's retaliatory airstrike in Balakot after the Pulwama attack — invoked the monkey god Hanuman, evoking courage, stealth, and righteous fury.

Beyond war, these codenames also serve humanitarian missions. 'Operation Maitri' (Friendship) during the 2015 Nepal earthquake, 'Operation Ganga' (named after India's sacred river) for evacuations during the Ukraine crisis in 2022, and 'Operation Dost' (Friend) in response to Turkey-Syria's 2023 earthquake, all signal compassion and solidarity. Likewise, 'Operation Kaveri' during the 2023 Sudan crisis invoked the nurturing essence of the Kaveri river, underlining India's role as a protective force for its citizens and friends abroad.

Counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir and other insurgency-prone areas have also been distinctly named. 'Operation Rakshak' (Protector), initiated in the early 1990s, positioned security forces as guardians. More assertively, 'Operation All Out' conveyed a no-holds-barred approach to militancy in Kashmir. These names serve both to inform and to warn — a calculated display of intent.

The psychological dimension of codenames is not to be underestimated. A well-chosen name boosts troop morale, garners public support, and helps define the historical narrative. As military historian Shiv Kunal Verma aptly put it, "Every operation is a story in itself, and the name is its headline — short, striking, and deliberately chosen." It encapsulates the ethos, goals, and sometimes, the geopolitical message the operation seeks to send.

Moreover, naming conventions reflect India's evolving military doctrine — from defensive postures to proactive interventions. The shift is evident in the move from operations with subtle names like 'Polo' and 'Rescue' to assertive ones like 'Bandar' and 'Sindoor'. This transformation parallels India's larger geopolitical evolution — from a cautious post-colonial state to an assertive regional power ready to project its will across borders.

As the world navigates an age of information warfare and media spectacle, naming operations has become part of the narrative strategy. In an era where missiles are live-streamed, and strikes are tweeted in real time, the name becomes the first and often most enduring symbol of the action. It is a lexical missile, carrying with it meaning, emotion, and intent.

India's operation codenames are not incidental but intentional. They are chosen not just for military relevance but for emotional, cultural, and political impact. Each name is a linguistic monument to a moment in history — carrying echoes of strategy, sacrifice, sovereignty, and spirit. In recognising the stories behind these names, we honour the uniformed lives that carry them into action and the values they are sworn to defend. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Big setback for President Trump as Moody's downgrades US economy



publicans to call the bill up again.

During the hearing, Roy fired a warning shot at Republican leaders, saying he opposes the bill as written because it will increase the deficit. "I have to now admonish my colleagues on this side of the aisle. This bill falls profoundly short. It does not do what we say it does with respect to deficits," Roy said. "That's the truth. Deficits will go up in the first half of the 10-year budget window and we all know it's true. And we shouldn't do that. We shouldn't say that we're doing something we're not doing."

"This bill has back-loaded savings and has front-loaded spending," Roy added. "I am a no on this bill unless serious reforms are made today, tomorrow, Sunday. Something needs to change or you're not going to get my support." After the vote tally was read, the HBC chair Jodey Arrington adjourned the hearing.

Negotiations with the GOP holdouts will continue in the coming days. The House Budget Committee announced it would reconvene to take up the bill again on Sunday at 10 PM. "You never know until you ask the question where people stand, which is the reason I called for a vote. You can't accomplish anything in life without having deadlines and decisions," Arrington told reporters afterward. "Today was a deadline and a decision, and it's one of the decision points to get us to the successful passage of the reconciliation

tion bill."

But Smucker told reporters he hopes the legislation can pass committee by Monday, which would keep the House on track to approve the measure by the end of next week. "So, we're working through some remaining issues here. There are just a few outstanding issues. I think everyone will get to yes," Smucker said. In a post on X, the Freedom Caucus said its member will work through the weekend to reach a deal to pass the package.

Prior to Friday's committee meeting, Republican leaders conceded that changes would be needed for the bill to pass through the House, where the party holds a slim majority. In addition to the spending and deficit concerns from the right, a group of blue-state Republicans have called for a higher cap on the state and local tax deduction, or SALT. The house strength is now 220 to 215. With GOP hardliners crossing the aisles it's going to be a tough task for speaker Johnson to get the budget passed.

Across the aisle, Rep. Brendan Boyle, D-Pa., previewed the Republican divisions at the outset of the hearing, vowing that all Democrats would oppose it. "You will hear over the course of this hearing a vigorous debate. And frankly there is a strong divide between Republicans and some other Republicans. There is also a divide between both sets of Republicans and this side of the dais," said Boyle, the top Democrat on the budget panel. "I can speak at least as to why every Democratic member will be voting no on the bill for billions."

What are the factors that drive the US economy and the government's debt burden? Is the US economy driving towards desired objectives? The answer is NO, it appears to be in the same stagnation period that Biden left it in and Trump instead of reducing the debt is only increasing it. And that is because he is not increasing the revenues which can offset the high cost of servicing the debts through increased revenues. Instead Trump wants to resort to tax cuts to increase his popularity base particularly among the super rich who contributed funds to his victory in the 2024 Presidential elections. (IPA Service)

OPERATION SINDOOR

India's military response, political storms, and lessons for national unity

By: Heramba Nath

In the history of independent India, few incidents have brought the nation's attention so forcefully to the crossroads of military might, political discord, and social debates as the recent Operation Sindoor. Launched in retaliation against a deadly terrorist attack on innocent tourists at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir, the operation was a decisive military action aimed at terror camps operating from across the Line of Control. Yet what should have been a moment of collective resolve and national solidarity quickly spiralled into a maelstrom of political controversies, identity-driven narratives, and partisan discord.

This comprehensive article attempts to explore not only the military strategy and outcomes of Operation Sindoor, but also the socio-political debates it triggered. Figures like senior Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, Indian Army's Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, Indian Air Force's Wing Commander Vyomika Singh, and political commentators from across the spectrum became focal points of a drama that laid bare India's fragile political consensus on matters of national security.

The genesis of this controversy lies in the brutal Pahalgam terror attack of April 2025. On a serene evening at the height of Kashmir's tourist season, a group of heavily armed terrorists ambushed a convoy of tourists, killing 13 civilians and injuring several others. The incident shocked the nation and drew widespread condemnation internationally. In response, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government authorised Operation Sindoor — a multi-pronged, cross-border military strike targeting terror infrastructure believed to be directly involved in the attack.

The operation was meticulously planned and executed by India's elite Special Forces units and backed by precision airstrikes from the Indian Air Force. In keeping with modern counterterrorism doctrines, the military aimed to neutralise identified terror camps while ensuring minimal collateral damage. Defence officials later confirmed that several strategic launchpads and arms caches were destroyed in the operation.

Notably, it was conducted without any civilian casualties, a fact that drew international praise and bolstered India's standing as a responsible regional power capable of measured military responses.

In the aftermath, the Indian armed forces sent out their official spokespersons for press briefings — Colonel Sofiya Qureshi of the Indian Army and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh of the Indian Air Force. Their calm, composed, and authoritative briefings quickly drew admiration from citizens and veterans alike. Both women represented the strength and inclusivity of India's armed forces, reflecting the meritocratic culture that has long been the pride of the military institution.

However, what should have been a moment of national unity soon turned contentious. Madhya Pradesh minister Vijay Shah's communal insinuations, suggesting that a Muslim officer was sent "from the terrorists' community" to confront terrorists, sparked widespread outrage. While Shah avoided naming Colonel Qureshi directly, the communal intent was unmistakable and swiftly condemned by civil society, veterans, and even members of his own party.

To compound matters, Samajwadi Party leader Ram Gopal Yadav controversially invoked caste identities by claiming that Wing Commander Singh and Air Marshal A K Bharti were highlighted for political mileage, reducing military valour to caste-based optics. Defence experts and historians responded with sharp rebukes, reaffirming that India's armed forces have long remained above caste, religion, and regional considerations — a rare institution in modern India that unites through merit, discipline, and patriotic duty.

Adding another layer of complexity was senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor's unexpected intervention. While several opposition leaders maintained guarded neutrality or evaded direct comments, Tharoor openly praised Operation Sindoor as a strategically sound and morally justified action. Citing Article 51 of the UN Charter, Tharoor defended India's right to proactive self-defence. His position was no-

table for its emphasis on legality, proportionality, and respect for international norms — positioning him distinctively in a political climate often marked by shrill rhetoric.

Tharoor's stance earned him applause from citizens across the political spectrum but drew veiled criticism from within his own party. Congress communications in-charge Jairam Ramesh remarked cryptically, "There's a difference between being in the Congress and being of the Congress." This highlighted internal divisions within the party, particularly on matters of security, where ideological clarity has increasingly eluded opposition ranks.

Fueling the controversies was the circulation of a manipulated video on social media, purporting to show External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar suggesting that Pakistan was forewarned of the operation. The video was later exposed as a deepfake by independent fact-checkers, but not before Congress leader Rahul Gandhi amplified it on his social media platforms, raising operational security concerns. This incident revealed the double-edged nature of digital technology in contemporary political warfare, where misinformation can rapidly escalate tensions in already fraught situations.

Amidst these political storms, the Indian public overwhelmingly sided with the armed forces and their spokespersons. Social media and public platforms hailed Colonel Qureshi and Wing Commander Singh as emblems of modern India — inclusive, courageous, and professional. Their dignified silence in the face of communal and casteist innuendoes won them even greater admiration, reaffirming public faith in the integrity and secular character of India's military.

The episode also rekindled urgent debates over the politicisation of military operations. Analysts warned that using military actions for partisan gains weakens operational integrity and erodes public trust in institutions. Furthermore, the communalisation and caste-based targeting of individual officers set a dangerous precedent. India's military has historically prided itself on transcending such divisions, and experts argued that safeguarding this

ethos is crucial for national security and social harmony.

Operation Sindoor served as a timely reminder that national security crises demand political unity and maturity. The political establishment, regardless of ideology, must recognise that partisan squabbles during such times compromise the country's strategic interests. In this context, Shashi Tharoor's nuanced and statesmanlike approach was a model of how dissent need not be antagonistic and how patriotism can transcend party lines.

As India moves forward from the military successes of Operation Sindoor, attention must turn to long-term strategies against cross-border terrorism. Diplomatically, India will have to navigate complex geopolitical terrain, balancing regional security with global expectations. Domestically, the imperative is to insulate national security matters from communal and casteist narratives and ensure bipartisan consensus on issues of defence.

Ultimately, the legacy of Operation Sindoor will be defined by both its operational brilliance and the introspection it forces upon India's political and social fabric. The dignified professionalism of Colonel Sofiya Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh will stand as enduring symbols of India's military ethos. At the same time, the political controversies must serve as cautionary lessons against identity-based politics in matters of national security.

India's strength lies in its unity, and episodes like Operation Sindoor underscore the necessity of protecting the secular, inclusive character of its institutions. In times of external threat, the nation must rise above divisions, reaffirming its collective commitment to sovereignty, integrity, and democratic values.

As the dust settles on this operation, it leaves behind crucial lessons — about the need for political restraint, the dangers of misinformation, and the imperative of preserving the armed forces' apolitical character. For India to navigate its security challenges effectively, it must draw strength from its diversity, wisdom from its history, and resolve from its people. (The author can be reached at herambanath222@gmail.com)

Health security vs. Profit motive

By: Nripendra Abhishek Nrip

Medicines are one of the greatest gifts of science, saving countless lives and empowering humanity to fight severe diseases. However, when these very medicines become poisonous weapons in the blind race for profit, they cease to be science and instead turn into mere commerce, a trade where a handful of companies earn billions at the cost of risking people's lives.

Recently, a significant intervention occurred in India when the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) ordered a ban on thirty-five "Fixed-Dose Combination" (FDC) medicines. This decision is not only a bold move but also sets an important precedent for protecting public health. Many of these banned medicines had been widely used for years to treat common ailments such as fever, pain, allergies, and colds. This raises pertinent questions: Was there no scientific evaluation before these drugs were allowed in the market? If there was an evaluation, why are these drugs now considered dangerous? And if there wasn't any evaluation, how were these medicines available for so long?

The answers to these questions reveal the complex realities of drug regulation in India, the efficacy of regulatory agencies, the influence of pharmaceutical companies, and the inherent weaknesses in policymaking.

Fixed-Dose Combination (FDC) drugs are formulations where two or more active pharmaceutical ingredients are combined in a single pill or syrup. Sometimes, FDCs offer therapeutic convenience, particularly for diseases like diabetes, tuberculosis, or HIV/AIDS, where multiple medications are needed simultaneously. However, often pharmaceutical companies exploit FDCs to boost profits. They combine various ingredients without scientific evidence or medical ne-

cessity and aggressively market them.

Many of these FDCs provide no added therapeutic advantage and, worse, sometimes increase the risk of side effects and complications. For example, drugs that mix a painkiller with an antibiotic or a steroid without medical justification are administered to patients, leading not only to deteriorating health but also contributing to the growing problem of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) — now a global health crisis.

The history of FDC drug production and sale in India is riddled with complexities. The drug regulation system is divided between the center and the states. New drugs require approval from the central body (CDSCO), while manufacturing and distribution permissions are granted by state drug controllers.

Pharmaceutical companies often exploit this confused setup by obtaining state approvals without securing central clearance, allowing them to sell their products for years without rigorous scientific vetting. This dual system creates a situation where drugs remain legally available in the market even if they are scientifically unsafe.

Dr. Jyoti Singh believes that individuals who have consumed these banned drugs have suffered lasting impacts on their immune systems. Regular medicines are no longer effective for them, signaling a grave danger for the future. She also asserts that banning these drugs, in reality, serves little tangi-



ble benefit. In her view, nowadays, even "bans" have become a kind of business strategy, a clever ploy through which governments and pharmaceutical companies can earn even more profit.

Earlier, a single pill used to contain three or four active ingredients together, sufficient for treatment. Now, after banning such combinations, patients are required to take three separate pills containing the same ingredients individually, significantly increasing both the cost burden on patients and the profits for companies.

Dr. Singh also points out that the famous drug for gastric issues,

Ranitidine — whose certain chemical components have been linked to cancer, continues to be sold extensively in India, even though it has been completely banned in many developed nations. This suggests that the decisions to ban or regulate drugs are often influenced by political, commercial, and strategic interests rather than purely scientific reasoning. Each country tailors its approach based on its own priorities, needs, and pressures.

In 2016, the Ministry of Health appointed an expert committee (headed by Dr. Chandrakant Kokate) to examine nearly 6,000

FDCs. The committee found that many of them had neither been approved on any sound medical basis nor subjected to adequate evaluation. It recommended an immediate ban on hundreds of FDCs.

Following this, some drugs were banned, but pharmaceutical companies fought lengthy legal battles to stall these bans. Eventually, the Supreme Court ruled that the decision regarding which drugs should be banned must be based on scientific evaluation by CDSCO. The recent order is the outcome of that process. However, it also highlights a critical flaw: as long as there is a long gap between scientific evaluation and regulatory action, unsafe drugs will continue reaching the masses.

Thus, if a medicine is banned only after fifteen to twenty years of use, a crucial question arises: who will compensate for the harm caused in that duration? Will pharmaceutical companies be held accountable? Will the government step forward through public interest litigations to ensure compensa-

tion for affected patients?

There is an urgent need for a transparent system regarding the production, pricing, promotion, and distribution of medicines. Today, pharmaceutical companies heavily influence doctors through medical representatives to push their products. Patients trust their doctors and consume the prescribed medicines without knowing whether they were truly necessary.

If doctors themselves are unaware of a drug's effectiveness, the patient becomes a target of blind experimentation. This is why even ineffective or harmful drugs continue to be sold openly.

The commercialization of healthcare services today worsens this crisis further. In the mad race for profits, not just pharmaceutical companies but pharmacies, hospitals, and even doctors are increasingly drawn into a web of commercial interests. In a country like India, where a large population remains poor and illiterate, the sole aim of medical services should be public welfare, not profit-making.

However, when drug availability in public hospitals declines, forcing people into the expensive private sector, pharmaceutical companies find immense opportunities to maximize their profits — often at the cost of people's health.

Another alarming aspect of this whole situation is the lack of public awareness. Even today, a significant number of people consume medicines without consulting doctors. They purchase Over-The-Counter (OTC) drugs from medical stores where sometimes even the shopkeepers recommend medicines without sufficient knowledge. This practice not only encourages the misuse of medicines but also leads to severe side effects.

To curb this trend, not only stricter laws are needed, but large-scale public awareness campaigns must also be launched. People

must be educated about the dangers of self-medication and the need for proper medical consultation.

On the other hand, pharmaceutical companies argue that before banning any drug, a thorough scientific evaluation should be conducted. Sometimes regulatory bodies, they claim, draw conclusions based on superficial testing, creating uncertainty and confusion in the pharmaceutical industry. This hampers innovation and research as well.

Thus, there is a real need for a regulatory process that is transparent, evidence-based, and fair. Any decision regarding banning a drug should not stem from political pressure or public emotion but should be grounded in solid scientific evidence.

It is also true that India is the largest producer of generic medicines in the world, and Indian-made drugs are considered affordable and accessible globally. However, if issues of quality and safety are ignored in this quest for supremacy, the very image of India as the "Pharmacy of the World" could be jeopardized.

Therefore, India must strengthen its regulatory framework further, not only ensuring rigorous pre-approval evaluations but also maintaining continuous post-market surveillance.

Considering all these factors, it becomes evident that banning dangerous drugs is not merely a matter of issuing government orders. It must be a collective effort encompassing health policy, ethical considerations, scientific scrutiny, and public interest. Until pharmaceutical companies are held accountable, the role of doctors becomes transparent, and the government assumes its responsibilities with seriousness, no regulation can be truly effective, they will remain confined to paper alone. (The author is a Researcher and author based in Saran, Bihar who can be reached at nripendraabhishek@gmail.com)

THE SILENT ARCHITECTS

How teachers build the foundations of the future generation

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Teaching is one of the oldest professions, deeply rooted in the history of human civilization. From the earliest days of formal education to the present, the role of teachers has been fundamental in shaping societies and cultures. However, as we advance into the 21st century, the role of educators is undergoing profound changes. This transformation is driven by technological advancements, shifting societal expectations, and evolving educational philosophies. Understanding the complexities of teaching in this era requires a comprehensive exploration of how educators are adapting to new challenges and opportunities while maintaining their core mission of fostering learning and development.

At the heart of the modern teaching profession is the challenge of integrating technology into education. The digital revolution has brought about unprecedented changes in how information is accessed and processed. The traditional classroom, once a static environment with a chalkboard and textbooks, is now a dynamic space enriched by digital tools and resources. Teachers are tasked with incorporating technology into their teaching methods in ways that enhance learning rather than detract from it. This includes using digital platforms for interactive lessons, integrating multimedia resources, and leveraging educational software to personalize learning experiences. While technology offers tremendous potential for engaging students and providing diverse learning opportunities, it also poses challenges such as ensuring equitable access and preventing digital distractions.

The shift towards a more student-centered approach to education is another significant change in the teaching landscape. Traditional models of education often emphasized rote memorization and standardized testing. In contrast, contemporary educational philosophies advocate for a more holistic approach that focuses on developing critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Teachers are now encouraged to design curricula that not only impart knowledge but also foster students' ability to apply what they have learned in real-world contexts. This approach requires teachers to be more than transmitters of information; they must act as facilitators of learning, guiding students through inquiry-based projects, collaborative activities, and experiential learning opportunities.

One of the most significant aspects of modern teaching is the emphasis on inclusivity and diversity. Classrooms today are more diverse than ever, with students from various cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds coming together in a single learning environment. Teachers are tasked with creating an inclusive atmosphere that respects and values this diversity while addressing the individual needs of each student. This involves implementing differentiated instruction strategies, providing additional support for students with varying abilities, and fostering a classroom culture that celebrates different perspectives and experiences.

By embracing diversity and promoting in-

clusivity, teachers help students develop empathy, cultural competence, and a broader understanding of the world.

The role of teachers has also expanded to encompass a greater focus on students' emotional and social development. The recognition of the importance of mental health in education has led to a greater emphasis on supporting students' well-being. Teachers are increasingly seen as key figures in identifying and addressing mental health issues, providing emotional support, and fostering resilience.

This involves not only creating a safe and supportive classroom environment but also being attentive to signs of distress and knowing how to connect students with appropriate resources and support services. By addressing students' emotional and social needs, teachers help them build the skills necessary to navigate challenges and thrive both academically and personally.

Furthermore, the evolving nature of the workforce and the global economy has shifted the focus of education towards preparing students for future careers. In a rapidly changing job market characterized by technological advancements and shifting industry demands, teachers are tasked with equipping students with skills that go beyond traditional academic subjects.

Critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability are increasingly recognized as essential competencies for success in the modern world. Teachers are integrating these skills into their curricula, designing activities and projects that encourage students to think critically, collaborate effectively, and approach challenges with innovative solutions. This shift requires educators to stay informed about industry trends and workforce requirements, ensuring that their teaching methods align with the needs of the evolving job market.

The role of teachers extends beyond the confines of the classroom and involves collaboration with various stakeholders. Engaging with parents, communities, and local organizations is essential for creating a comprehensive support system for students. Teachers work closely with families to involve them in the educational process, fostering a strong home-school connection that enhances student outcomes. Community partnerships also play a crucial role in providing students with real-world learning experiences and opportunities for personal growth. By collaborating with various stakeholders, teachers help create a supportive and enriched educational environment that extends beyond the classroom.

Professional development is a critical component of the modern teaching profession. As the educational landscape evolves, teachers must engage in continuous learning to stay abreast of new methodologies, technologies, and best practices. Professional development opportunities, whether through workshops, seminars, or advanced degrees, enable teachers to refine their skills, explore innovative teaching approaches, and address emerging challenges in education. Investing in teachers' professional growth not only enhances their

effectiveness but also ultimately benefits students by ensuring they receive high-quality instruction. Professional development also fosters a culture of lifelong learning, which is essential for teachers to remain effective in an ever-changing educational environment.

Despite the evolving nature of their roles, teachers continue to embody timeless qualities that define exceptional educators. Passion for teaching, dedication to students, and a commitment to fostering a love of learning are attributes that remain central to the teaching profession.

Teachers often work tirelessly behind the scenes, making significant personal sacrifices to ensure their students' success. Their impact extends far beyond academic achievement, influencing students' values, self-esteem, and future aspirations. The dedication and resilience of teachers are crucial in navigating the complexities of modern education and in shaping the next generation of learners.

The recognition and support of teachers are essential in acknowledging their invaluable contributions to society. Policymakers, communities, and educational institutions must work together to address the challenges teachers face and support them in their critical role. This includes providing adequate resources, fair compensation, and professional respect. By valuing and supporting teachers, society affirms the importance of their work and ensures that they can continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of students. Investing in education is an investment in the future, and supporting teachers is a fundamental part of that investment.

Looking ahead, the future of teaching promises to be as dynamic and transformative as the present. As we continue to grapple with new technological advancements, societal changes, and educational demands, the role of teachers will undoubtedly evolve. However, the core mission of educators—to inspire, guide, and empower the next generation—will remain steadfast. Teachers will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the future, equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and values they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

In conclusion, the role of teachers in the 21st century is multifaceted and ever-evolving. As educators adapt to new challenges and opportunities, their dedication to fostering students' academic, emotional, and social development remains unwavering. Teachers are at the heart of our educational system, guiding students through an era of transformation and preparing them to become informed, compassionate, and capable individuals. As we look to the future, it is essential to recognize and support the vital contributions of teachers, ensuring they have the resources and respect needed to continue their crucial work. The future of education depends on the continued commitment and excellence of teachers, who are the architects of tomorrow's leaders and innovators. (The writer is CRCC of Nalbari Cluster, Biswanath Education Block, Education Department, Government of Assam. He can be reached at 9954812261, 9864539966 or himangshur1989@gmail.com)

Neuroscience and brain-computer interfaces

By: Satvrat Borah

Neuroscience and brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) represent one of the most exciting and rapidly evolving fields in modern science. This interdisciplinary area combines principles from neuroscience, computer science, engineering, and psychology to create systems that allow direct communication between the brain and external devices. The potential applications of BCIs are vast, ranging from medical therapies to enhancing human capabilities, and they are poised to revolutionize how we interact with technology and understand the human brain.

BCIs have the ability to decode neural activity and translate it into commands that can control computers, prosthetics, or other devices. The human brain is an incredibly complex organ, consisting of billions of neurons that communicate through electrical and chemical signals. These signals generate patterns of activity that can be detected and interpreted using various technologies. Electroencephalography (EEG) is one of the most common methods for recording brain activity. It involves placing electrodes on the scalp to measure electrical fluctuations resulting from neuronal activity. While EEG is non-invasive and relatively easy to use, it has limitations in terms of spatial resolution and the ability to capture deep brain activity. Other techniques, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and invasive methods like electrocorticography (ECoG), offer higher resolution but come with their own challenges, such as cost, portability, and the need for surgical implantation. The development of BCIs has been driven by advances in both hardware and software. On the hardware side, there has been significant progress in creating more sensitive and miniaturized sensors that can accurately capture neural signals. These sensors are often integrated into wearable devices, such as headsets or implants, that can be used in everyday settings. On the software side, machine learning algorithms play a crucial role in analyzing the vast amounts of data generated by these sensors. These algorithms can identify patterns in neural activity that correspond to specific thoughts, intentions, or movements, enabling the BCI to perform tasks based on the user's mental commands. One of the most promising applications of BCIs is in the field of medical rehabilitation. For individuals with severe physical disabilities, such as those caused by spinal cord injuries or neurodegenerative diseases like

amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), BCIs offer a way to regain control over their environment. For example, a person with paralysis could use a BCI to control a robotic arm, allowing them to perform tasks like eating or drinking independently. Similarly, BCIs can be used to restore communication abilities in patients who have lost the ability to speak. By decoding the neural signals associated with speech, researchers have developed systems that can translate these signals into text or synthesized speech, giving a voice to those who would otherwise be unable to communicate.

Deep brain stimulation (DBS), a technique that involves implanting electrodes in specific regions of the brain, has been used for years to treat conditions like Parkinson's disease and epilepsy. BCIs take this concept a step further by enabling real-time monitoring and modulation of brain activity. For example, a BCI could detect the onset of a seizure and deliver a targeted electrical stimulus to prevent it from occurring. Similarly, BCIs are being explored as a treatment for depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions by modulating the activity of brain circuits involved in mood regulation. BCIs have the potential to enhance human capabilities in ways that were once the realm of science fiction. Imagine being able to control your smartphone or computer with just your thoughts, or playing a video game using only your mind. These possibilities are becoming increasingly realistic as BCI technology continues to advance. In the realm of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), BCIs could enable entirely new forms of interaction, allowing users to navigate virtual environments or manipulate digital objects using their thoughts. This could have profound implications for fields like education, entertainment, and even remote work, where immersive experiences could be enhanced by direct brain-computer communication.

The development of BCIs raises important ethical and societal questions. As with any powerful technology, there is the potential for misuse or unintended consequences. For example, the ability to decode a person's thoughts could raise concerns about privacy and mental autonomy. Who owns the data generated by a BCI, and how can it be protected from unauthorized access? There are also questions about equity and access. Will BCIs be available only to those who can afford them, or will they be accessible to all? These issues will need to be carefully considered as BCI technology becomes

more widespread.

Ensuring the safety and reliability of BCIs is another challenge. Invasive BCIs, which require surgical implantation, carry risks such as infection or damage to brain tissue. Even non-invasive BCIs, which are generally safer, must be designed to minimize the risk of errors or misinterpretations of neural signals. For example, a BCI that controls a prosthetic limb must be highly accurate to prevent unintended movements that could cause harm. Long-term use of BCIs could have unknown effects on the brain, and more research is needed to understand the potential risks.

The field of neuroscience and BCIs is advancing at a rapid pace, driven by the collaboration of researchers from diverse disciplines. Governments, private companies, and academic institutions are investing heavily in BCI research, recognizing its potential to transform healthcare, technology, and society as a whole. Companies like Neuralink, founded by Elon Musk, are working on developing high-bandwidth BCIs that could enable seamless communication between humans and machines. Meanwhile, academic researchers are exploring new ways to improve the accuracy, speed, and usability of BCIs, making them more practical for everyday use.

One of the most exciting aspects of BCIs is their potential to deepen our understanding of the human brain. By studying how neural activity correlates with specific thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, researchers can gain insights into the fundamental mechanisms underlying cognition and consciousness. This knowledge could lead to breakthroughs in treating brain disorders, enhancing cognitive abilities, and even answering philosophical questions about the nature of the mind.

Neuroscience and brain-computer interfaces represent a frontier of scientific exploration with immense potential to improve lives and expand human capabilities. From medical applications that restore lost functions to futuristic possibilities like mind-controlled technology, BCIs are poised to reshape our world in profound ways. However, as with any transformative technology, it is essential to address the ethical, societal, and technical challenges that come with it. By doing so, we can ensure that the benefits of BCIs are realized in a way that is safe, equitable, and aligned with our values as a society. The journey to unlocking the full potential of the human brain is just beginning, and the possibilities are as vast as the mind itself.

Trump hopes for ceasefire progress in Russia-Ukraine war in Monday calls with Putin, Zelenskyy

WASHINGTON, May 19: President Donald Trump is hoping separate phone calls Monday with Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will make progress toward a ceasefire in the war in Ukraine. Trump expressed his hopes for a "productive day" Monday — and a ceasefire — in a social media post over the weekend. His effort will also include calls to NATO leaders.

Trump has struggled to end a war that began with Russia's invasion in February 2022, and that makes these conversations a serious test of his reputation as a dealmaker after having claimed he would quickly settle the conflict once he was back in the White House, if not even before he took office.

The Republican president is banking on the idea that his force of personality and personal history with Putin will be enough to break any impasse over a pause in the fighting.

"His sensibilities are that he's got to get on the phone with President Putin, and that is going to clear up some of the logjam and get us to the place that we need to get to," said Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff. "I think it's going to be a very successful call."

Still, there are fears that Trump has an affinity for Putin that could put Ukraine at a disadvantage with any agreements engineered by the



U.S. government.

Bridget Brink said she resigned last month as the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine "because the policy since the beginning of the administration was to put pressure on the victim Ukraine, rather than on the aggressor, Russia."

Brink said the sign that she needed to depart was an Oval Office meeting in February where Trump and his team openly berated Zelenskyy for not being sufficiently deferential to them.

"I believe that peace at any price is not peace at all," Brink said. "It's appeasement and as we know from history, appeasement only leads to more war." Trump's frustration

about the war had been building before his post Saturday on Truth Social about the coming calls, which he said would begin first with Putin at 10 a.m. Monday.

Trump said his discussion with Putin would focus on stopping the "bloodbath" of the war. It also will cover trade, a sign that Trump might be seeking to use financial incentives to broker some kind of agreement after Russia's invasion led to severe sanctions by the United States and its allies that have steadily eroded Moscow's ability to grow. Trump's hope, according to the post, is that "a war that should have never happened will end."

His treasury secretary, Scott

Bessent, said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" that Trump had made it clear that a failure by Putin to negotiate "in good faith" could lead to additional sanctions against Russia. Bessent suggested the sanctions that began during the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden were inadequate because they did not stop Russia's oil revenues, due to concerns that doing so would increase U.S. prices. The United States sought to cap Russia's oil revenues while preserving the country's petroleum exports to limit the damage from the inflation that the war produced.

Putin recently rejected an offer by Zelenskyy to meet in-person in Turkey as an alternative to a 30-day ceasefire urged by Ukraine and its Western allies, including Washington. Those talks ended on Friday after less than two hours, without a ceasefire in place. Still, both countries committed to exchange 1,000 prisoners of war each, with Ukraine's intelligence chief, Kyrylo Budanov, saying on Ukrainian television Saturday that the exchanges could happen as early as this week.

While wrapping up his four-day trip to the Middle East, Trump said on Friday that Putin had not gone to Turkey because Trump himself wasn't there.

"He and I will meet, and I think we'll solve it or maybe not," Trump told reporters after boarding Air

Force One. "At least we'll know. And if we don't solve it, it'll be very interesting."

Zelenskyy met with Trump's vice president, JD Vance, and top diplomat, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, in Rome on Sunday, as well as European leaders, intensifying his efforts before the Monday calls.

The Ukrainian president said on the social media site X that during his talks with the American officials, they discussed the negotiations in Turkey and that "the Russians sent a low level delegation of non-decision-makers." He also said he stressed that Ukraine is engaged in "real diplomacy" to have a ceasefire.

"We have also touched upon the need for sanctions against Russia, bilateral trade, defense cooperation, battlefield situation and upcoming prisoners' exchange," Zelenskyy said. "Pressure is needed against Russia until they are eager to stop the war."

The push came as the Kremlin launched its largest drone barrage against Ukraine since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, firing a total of 273 exploding drones and decoys, Ukraine's air force said Sunday. The attacks targeted the country's Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions.

Witkoff spoke Sunday on ABC's "This Week" and Brink appeared on CBS' "Face the Nation." (AP)

Biden diagnosed with aggressive prostate cancer



WASHINGTON, May 19: Former President Joe Biden has been diagnosed with prostate cancer, his office said Sunday.

The finding came after the 82-year-old reported urinary symptoms, which led doctors to discover a nodule on his prostate. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer on Friday, with the cancer cells having spread to the bone.

"While this represents a more aggressive form of the disease, the cancer appears to be hormone-sensitive which allows for effective management," his office said. "The President and his family are reviewing treatment options with his physicians."

In a post on X on Monday morning, Biden posted a photo of himself and his wife, Jill Biden, and wrote: "Cancer touches us all. Like so many of you, Jill and I have learned that we are strongest in the broken places. Thank you for lifting us up with love and support."

Prostate cancers are graded for aggressiveness using what's known as a Gleason score. The scores range from 6 to 10, with 8, 9 and 10 prostate cancers behaving more aggressively. Biden's office said his score was 9, suggesting his cancer is among the most aggressive.

When prostate cancer spreads to other parts of the body, it often spreads to the bones. Metastasized cancer is much harder to treat than localized cancer because it can be hard for drugs to reach all the tumours and completely root out the disease.

However, when prostate cancers need hormones to grow, as in Biden's case, they can be susceptible to treatment that deprives the tumours of hormones.

Outcomes have improved in recent decades and patients can expect to live with metastatic prostate cancer for four or five years, said Dr. Matthew Smith of Massachusetts General Brigham Cancer Center.

"It's very treatable, but not curable," Smith said. "Most men in this situation would be treated with drugs and would not be advised to have either surgery or radiation therapy."

Many political leaders sent Biden their wishes for his recovery.

President Donald Trump, a longtime political opponent, posted on so-

cial media that he was saddened by the news and "we wish Joe a fast and successful recovery."

Biden's vice president, Kamala Harris, said on social media that she was keeping him in her family's "hearts and prayers during this time."

"Joe is a fighter — and I know he will face this challenge with the same strength, resilience, and optimism that have always defined his life and leadership," Harris wrote.

Former President Barack Obama said his thoughts and prayers were with Biden, his former vice president, lauding his toughness. "Nobody has done more to find breakthrough treatments for cancer in all its forms than Joe, and I am certain he will fight this challenge with his trademark resolve and grace," Obama wrote on social media.

The health of Biden was a dominant concern among voters during his time as president. After a calamitous debate performance in June while seeking reelection, Biden abandoned his bid for a second term. Harris became the nominee and lost to Trump, a Republican who returned to the White House after a four-year hiatus.

But in recent days, Biden rejected concerns about his age despite reporting in the new book "Original Sin" by Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson that aides had shielded the public from the extent of his decline while serving as president.

In February 2023, Biden had a skin lesion removed from his chest that was a basal cell carcinoma, a common form of skin cancer. And in November 2021, he had a polyp removed from his colon that was a benign, but potentially pre-cancerous lesion.

In 2022, Biden made a "cancer moonshot" one of his administration's priorities with the goal of halving the cancer death rate over the next 25 years. The initiative was a continuation of his work as vice president to address a disease that had killed his older son, Beau, who died from brain cancer in 2015.

His father, when announcing the goal to halve the cancer death rate, said this could be an "American moment to prove to ourselves and, quite frankly, the world that we can do really big things." (AP)

Netanyahu acknowledges pressure from allies in decision to resume Gaza aid



TEL AVIV, May 19: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday that his decision to resume aid to Gaza after a weeks-long blockade came after pressure from allies.

In a video statement posted to social media, Netanyahu said that Israel's allies had voiced concern about "images of hunger". Israel's "greatest friends in the world," he said without mentioning specific nationalities, had said there is "one thing we cannot stand. We cannot accept images of hunger, mass hunger."

We cannot stand that. We will not be able to support you". "Therefore to achieve victory, we need to somehow solve the problem," Netanyahu said.

The aid that would be let in would be "minimal," he said without specifying precisely when it would resume.

Israel on Sunday said it would resume aid deliveries into the war-battered territory after a complete halt on imports since early March. Israel has maintained that the blockade on goods — including fuel, food and medicine

— was meant to ramp up pressure on the militant Hamas group in Gaza.

The weeks-long halt on aid deepened and already dire humanitarian crisis and prompted warnings of famine from food experts.

That change in approach came as Israel launched a new offensive during which it plans to seize Gaza, displace hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and secure aid distribution inside the territory.

Israel says these are all ways to push Hamas toward agreeing to a ceasefire deal on Israel's terms. And while the sides continue to negotiate a potential truce, it is not clear how much progress has been made in bridging the remaining sticking points between the sides.

Also on Monday, the Israeli military issued an evacuation order for residents of Gaza's second-largest city, Khan Younis, and nearby towns.

Avichay Adrae, a military spokesperson, posted the order on his social media accounts, saying the entire area "will be considered a dangerous combat zone". (AP)

4 killed, 20 injured in blast in Pakistan's Balochistan province

KARACHI, May 19: A bomb exploded near a market in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, killing four people and injuring 20 others, according to a media report on Monday.

The blast occurred near Jabbar Market in Killa Abdullah district of Balochistan on Sunday, causing extensive damage to the building and triggering widespread panic.

Several shops collapsed, and fires erupted in multiple establishments following the explosion. The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Killa Abdullah Deputy Commissioner Riaz Khan said four people were killed and 20 others injured in the explosion.

He said that the market was located adjacent to the rear wall of the Frontier Corps (FC) Fort. Following the explosion, a brief exchange of gunfire occurred between unidentified assailants and FC personnel.

Law enforcement officials sealed off the area and launched a



comprehensive search and clearance operation.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

The injured included a security guard of tribal elder Haji Faizullah Khan Ghabizai and several bystanders.

The blast came days after four Levies personnel lost their lives in a deadly gun attack by unidentified armed men on a check post in the Nal area of Khuzdar district.

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

Right-wing populists hopeful after first round of Polish presidential election Trump's big bill advances in rare weekend vote as conservative holdouts secure changes

WARSAW (POLAND), May 19: There's a long way to go yet in Poland's presidential election — but Sunday's first round was a good day for candidates on the political right and far right and it flashed a big red warning signal for the moderate government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

Tusk's candidate, liberal Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, and a conservative opponent backed by the national conservative Law and Justice party, Karol Nawrocki, emerged ahead in a pack of 13 candidates.

They were extremely close — Trzaskowski with 31.36 per cent of the votes and Nawrocki with 29.54 per cent, according to final results released Monday morning. Poles now head to a nail-biting second round on June 1, with much resting on the outcome of the runoff.

The race is not only for the presidency, an office with the power to influence for-

eign policy and veto laws. It will also seal the fate of Tusk's efforts to repair the country's relationship with European allies after years of rule by Law and Justice, which was often in conflict with Brussels. Tusk has been trying to reverse changes to the judicial branch that were considered undemocratic by the EU, but his efforts have been largely blocked by outgoing conservative President Andrzej Duda.

Many centrist and progressive voters are also disappointed that Tusk has not delivered on other promises, like liberalizing the restrictive abortion law. He has also been criticised for the heavy handed way he took over control of public media from Law and Justice, and the continued politicisation of taxpayer funded public media.

Trzaskowski and Nawrocki wasted no time at all as they head toward the finish line. They got out on the streets early

Monday to meet with voters. Trzaskowski handed out sweet yeast buns on the streets of Kielce, and Nawrocki distributed donuts and posed for selfies with supporters in Gdansk.

Trzaskowski, who ran and barely lost to incumbent President Andrzej Duda in 2020, was long considered the frontrunner this year. After Sunday's vote he can't be sure of anything.

Nawrocki declared himself "full of energy and enthusiasm on the way to victory" in a statement to the media, adding that "probably all of Poland saw that Rafal Trzaskowski is a candidate who can't cope".

Meanwhile, Trzaskowski vowed to fight until the end. "I will try to convince young people and all those who voted differently that it is worth voting for a normal Poland, not a radical Poland," Trzaskowski said during a press briefing in Skarzynsko-Kamienna. (AP)

WASHINGTON, May 19: Republicans advanced their massive tax cut and border security package out of a key House committee during a rare Sunday night vote as deficit hawks who blocked the measure two days earlier reversed course after gaining commitments on the package's spending cuts.

Speaker Mike Johnson met with Republican lawmakers shortly before the meeting, telling reporters that the changes agreed to were "just some minor modifications. Not a huge thing." Democrats on the panel pressed for more details about the changes that Republicans had agreed to in the private negotiations. But Rep Jodey Arrington, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, said he could not do so.

"Deliberations continue at this very moment," Arrington said. "They will continue into the week, and I suspect right up until the time we put this big, beautiful bill on the floor of the House."

The first time Republicans tried advancing

the bill out of the House Budget Committee, deficit hawks joined with Democratic lawmakers in voting against reporting the measure to the full House. Five Republicans voted no, one on procedural grounds, the other four voicing concerns about the bill's impact on federal budget deficits. On Sunday evening, the four voicing concerns about the bill's impact on the deficit voted present, and the measure passed by a vote of 17-16.

Johnson is looking to put the bill on the House floor before the end of the week.

"This is the vehicle through which we will deliver on the mandate that the American people gave us in the last election," he said on "Fox News Sunday."

The Republicans who criticized the measure noted that the bill's new spending and the tax cuts are front-loaded in the bill, while the measures to offset the cost are back-loaded. For example, they are looking to speed up the new work requirements that Republicans want to enact for able-bodied participants in Medi-

caid. Those requirements would not kick in until 2029 under the current bill.

"We are writing checks we cannot cash, and our children are going to pay the price," said Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, a member of the committee. "Something needs to change, or you're not going to get my support."

Johnson said the start date for the work requirements was designed to give states time to "retool their systems" and to "make sure that all the new laws and all the new safeguards that we're placing can actually be enforced."

Roy was joined in voting no by Reps. Ralph Norman of South Carolina, Josh Brecheen of Oklahoma and Rep. Andrew Clyde of Georgia. Rep. Lloyd Smucker of Pennsylvania switched his vote to no in a procedural step so it could be reconsidered later, saying after the hearing he was confident Republicans would "get this done." Johnson said talks to deal with their concerns were continuing Sunday. (AP)

New pro-European president in Romania puts it back on Western course, but fault lines remain

BUCHAREST (ROMANIA), May 19: An upset presidential election victory in Romania on Sunday by a pro-European Union centrist over a hard-right nationalist eased fears among many in the Balkan nation that their political future was being swept up in the tide of right-wing populism spreading across Europe.

Final results from the presidential race showed Nicusor Dan winning 53.6 per cent of the vote, ahead of the hard-right candidate George Simion, who during the campaign portrayed his movement as championing conservative values like patriotism, sovereignty and the family, and who styled himself as the Romanian analogue to US President Donald Trump.

Sunday's victory for the pro-EU candidate marked a significant comeback in a tense election that many viewed as a geopolitical choice for the former Eastern Bloc country between East or West.

But as Dan, a 55-year-old mathematician, pro-Western reformist and mayor of Bucharest, takes over Romania's presidency, fault lines remain in the country where endemic corruption, inequality and an erosion of trust in traditional institutions and parties have fuelled a broad rejection of the political establishment.

A tense election

Dan's decisive win on Sunday was a major turnaround from the first round of elections on May 4, where Simion — a nationalist who has advocated for uniting Romania with neighbouring Moldova and is banned from entering Ukraine — had nearly double Dan's share of votes to become the clear front-runner for the second round.

Simion's surge to prominence came after Romania's first attempt to hold the presidential election late last year in which far-right outsider Calin Georgescu topped first-round polls. The country's political landscape was upended after a top court voided the ballot, alleging electoral violations and Russian interference. Capitalising on the furor over the annulment of that election, Simion allied with Georgescu, who was banned in March from running in the election redo, and promised to appoint him prime minister if Simion secured the presidency.

While Simion was considered the favourite for the second round, a high voter turnout of 64.7 per cent in Sunday's ballot — more than any Romanian election of the past quarter-century — is thought to have benefited Dan.

Adding to the high turnout were approximately 1.6 million votes from members of Romania's large diaspora, which is primarily concentrated in Western Europe. Estimates



suggest that between 4 and 5 million Romanians live abroad — nearly a quarter of the country's population. Most emigrated after Romania joined the EU in 2007, seeking relief from high unemployment and low wages.

Fault lines remain

After Dan is sworn in as president in the coming days, he will face the challenge of nominating a prime minister who can garner the support necessary to form a government

— a tall order in a country where anger with establishment politicians led to the emergence of figures like Georgescu and Simion.

Yet Dan himself, who rose to prominence as a civic activist fighting against illegal real estate projects and ran independently on a pro-EU ticket to support Ukraine and reaffirm Western ties, is among the critics of Romania's entrenched political elite, and has argued for fiscal reforms and a crackdown on

corruption. Speaking to ecstatic supporters in the early hours of Monday following his victory, he struck a reformist tone, saying Romania was beginning "a new chapter, and it needs every one of you."

"It needs experts to get involved in various public policies, it needs people in civil society, it needs new people in politics," he said.

Cristian Andrei, a Bucharest-based political consultant, says Dan will face a string of immediate challenges, including putting together a new government in what is now a "totally new political landscape."

"He will have to push and show reforms while meeting resistance in the state apparatus and being opposed by the new populist parties that now won 5 million votes," Andrei said. "He will be under pressure to deliver change to an exasperated Romania while trying to unify a divided country."

Romania in the EU and NATO

As a member of the EU and one of the easternmost members of the NATO military alliance, Romania plays a pivotal role in Western security infrastructure — especially since Russia's full-scale invasion of neighbouring Ukraine in February 2022.

After that invasion, NATO bolstered its presence on Europe's eastern flank by sending additional multinational battlegroups to Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia,

and Bucharest has played an increasingly prominent role in the alliance, donating a Patriot missile system to Ukraine and opening an international training hub for F-16 jet pilots from allied countries.

Many observers saw Sunday's vote as crucial to maintaining Romania's place within the network of Western alliances — especially amid fears that the Trump administration is reconsidering its security commitments to the United States' European partners. Siegfried Muresan, a Romanian member of the European Parliament, told The Associated Press on Monday that the election result was a relief for many in Brussels, the EU's de-facto capital, and that Romania is now expected to play an active role in the bloc particularly in security and defence.

"There was an erosion of Romania's credibility in the last year," Muresan said. "That is partly restored now through the clear victory of the pro-European candidate."

Muresan added that Romanians will expect Dan to deliver on promised reforms, but that his clear victory marks a setback for hard-right nationalism.

"People really rallied behind Europe ... and understood the risks which extremists pose," he said. "So much lies now with the new president, who is a unifier, who has campaigned on the basis of facts." (AP)

Namsai authorities continue awareness drive on solid waste management bye-laws

Residents urged to participate in building clean, green communities

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 19: In a continuing effort to enforce the Arunachal Pradesh Solid Waste (Management & Handling) Bye-Laws, 2023 across Namsai township, the District Urban Development Agency (DUDA), Namsai organized another community-level awareness programme today at the Satsang Nagar Community Hall.

The event witnessed active participation from residents of Reliance Colony, Itabhatta, and Satsang Nagar – I, II, and III.

The awareness programme, part of a sustained campaign launched by the urban development authorities, aims to educate local residents about the importance of responsible waste segregation and management in accordance with the newly enacted bye-laws.

The event began with a welcome address by Er Juntum Potom, Assistant Engineer (Urban Development), who explained the objectives of the programme and stressed the importance of civic engagement in achieving the broader goal of a cleaner, healthier township.

Following the welcome remarks, Er Mosum Sema, Executive Engineer (Urban Development) and Member Secretary of DUDA, Namsai, took the stage to deliver a detailed address on the core principles of effective waste management.

She emphasized the critical role of waste segregation at the household level and urged residents to



separate their waste into two distinct categories—wet and dry. She explained that wet waste, such as food scraps and vegetable peels, can be converted into compost or used as livestock feed, while dry waste, which includes plastic, metal, and paper items, should be handed over to the designated DUDA sanitation vehicles for appropriate handling and recycling.

Er Sema also informed the gathering that continuous awareness and cleanliness drives have already been conducted in various colonies within the township and that visible improvements in sanitation levels have been observed. However, she noted with concern that improper disposal practices, such as dumping waste into

drains, continue to hamper efforts to maintain cleanliness and hygiene.

She urged residents to cooperate by disposing of waste responsibly and refraining from actions that clog the drainage systems and contaminate the local environment.

One of the key points highlighted during the programme was

the introduction of a nominal user fee for the door-to-door waste collection service. While no charges have been collected from households so far, Er Sema informed that, in accordance with the Arunachal Pradesh Solid Waste (Management & Handling) Bye-Laws, 2023, the collection of a small fee has now become necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of waste management services in the township.

The programme also featured an address by C R Khampa, Deputy Commissioner of Namsai and Chairman of DUDA, who reiterated the importance of community involvement in managing the town's sanitation systems.

He reminded the participants that waste generation is a daily re-

ality in every household and that proper segregation and disposal of waste must become a routine practice for every family.

Echoing the proverb "Cleanliness is next to Godliness," he encouraged residents to instil a culture of cleanliness in their homes and neighbourhoods.

He further informed that the recently constructed Material Recovery Facility (MRF) in the township will soon be handed over to local women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) for operation and maintenance, empowering local women and promoting decentralized waste processing.

The Deputy Commissioner also announced the appointment of "nuisance detectors"—a mechanism by which fines would be levied on individuals or households found violating the solid waste management bye-laws.

The event was attended by a large number of local residents, stakeholders from the participating colonies, and officers and staff members from the Urban Development Department.

The authorities expressed satisfaction with the level of community interest and reiterated their commitment to building a cleaner and more sustainable urban environment through consistent awareness and enforcement initiatives.

The next round of the awareness campaign is scheduled to be held on May 21, 2025, and will target other residential clusters within the township.

FTI, Arunachal Pradesh students alleged being deprived from basic amenities



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, May 19: The students of the Film and Television Institute (FTI), Arunachal Pradesh, have alleged severe administrative neglect, stating that they are being deprived of the most basic amenities necessary for academic and personal well-being.

In an official statement issued by the first batch of students, they announced an indefinite academic halt beginning May 15, 2025, citing a prolonged lack of response and unfulfilled promises from the institute's administration.

FTI, located at Jote, around 22 kilometres from the Papum Pare district headquarters, is the only film and television institute in the entire northeastern region of India.

Despite this distinction, the students claimed that the ground realities at the campus have been disappointing and far removed from the standards expected of a national-level institution.

According to the students, their decision to suspend academic activities indefinitely has come after months of raising concerns regarding essential academic infrastructure and basic amenities, which have gone unaddressed.

In their statement, the students recalled a prior academic halt in March 2025, following which a meeting was held and written assurances were given by the administration.

However, they alleged that even after those assurances, no visible improvement has been made. They stated that the institute continues to lack clean drinking water, consistent electricity supply, power backup, campus security, properly functioning classrooms, and access to reliable internet serv-

ices.

The promised construction of critical academic facilities such as the Classroom Theatre (CRT) and post-production blocks remains incomplete.

Students reported frequent illness due to unsafe drinking water, persistent internet disruptions that hinder their coursework, and the need to attend classes in unsafe or unfinished facilities.

The students also expressed concern over the lack of institutional identity.

They pointed out that the institute still does not have a formal name, official logo, functional website, or even basic identification cards for students.

They further highlighted that there is no full-time Director on campus and that most administrative functions are either delayed or dysfunctional due to understaffing and poor management.

In the press release, the students stressed that the current academic halt is not symbolic but a direct response to unacceptable learning conditions.

They stated that the environment is physically unsafe, emotionally draining, and academically unsustainable.

They demanded the immediate completion of essential infrastructure, provision of clean drinking water, uninterrupted electricity, operational academic facilities, and a clear system of accountability from the administration.

Until these basic needs are met, the students declared they would not resume academic activities.

The statement also emphasized the importance of dignity in education.

Despite being the third national film institute in India, the students noted the absence of fundamental institutional features such as a logo, identity cards, or a full-time campus director.

They urged concerned stakeholders to take notice and support their call for an academic environment that upholds the rights and dignity of its students.

The release concluded with a powerful assertion that while the institute may exist as a national institution on paper, its current condition reflects neglect in practice.

Presently, the institute has a total of 45 students from various parts of the country, all of whom, according to the release, are unified in their demand for change.

When approached for a comment, Bishnu Halder, the Chief Academic Coordinator of FTI, Arunachal Pradesh, declined to speak on the matter, stating that he is not the appropriate person to address the issue.

Locals urge timely completion of Papunallah-Chimpu-Ganga Market Road Project amid monsoon concerns

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 19: The residents of Jullang Panchayat area, along with regular commuters of the Papunallah-Chimpu-Ganga Market road corridor, have issued an earnest appeal to the executing agency and the Public Works Department (PWD) to expedite and complete the long-delayed road construction project.

The appeal was made in light of the deteriorating condition of certain stretches of the road, which is causing daily hardships, especially with the onset of the monsoon season.

According to an official statement issued by local representatives, while the overall road construction is nearing completion, there remain a few critical segments along the approximately 11-kilometre stretch—from the Papunallah tri-junction to Ganga Market via Chimpu—where the condition of the road remains poor.

The delays are reportedly due to the sluggish progress of culvert construction in key areas, creating bottlenecks and subjecting commuters to "untold sufferings."

"Though a majority of the work appears to be done, there are still a few locations where road conditions are severely hampered by incomplete culvert work," said one of the concerned residents.

"With the rainy season already beginning, road users are facing increased difficulty navigating the route. The patchwork and temporary repairs carried out by the contractor are inadequate, and we fear further degradation unless urgent action is taken."

The residents emphasized the importance of completing the project with a focus on durability and road quality, stressing the need for robust drainage in-



frastructure to prevent waterlogging and further damage during heavy rainfall.

"We urge the PWD and executing agency to work on a war footing and complete the project before the monsoon intensifies," the locals said, "attention must also be given to proper roadside drainage to ensure smooth water runoff."

Responding to the concerns, a representative of the executing agency acknowledged the delays and attributed them to unavoidable challenges such as land issues and the shifting of utility services.

"More than 90% of the work on the Papunallah-Chimpu-Ganga Market road has already been completed. The remaining portions are under active progress," said the contractor.

The official elaborated that there are three specific locations where progress has been slow.

"One such site near HIM International

School has already seen the major components of the culvert work completed, and casting work is expected to begin within days. We are also continuing routine maintenance and repainting to ensure traffic movement is not severely hampered."

Reiterating the agency's commitment to quality, the spokesperson assured that all efforts are being made to minimize disruption and maintain a steady flow of vehicular traffic.

"We are fully committed to handing over a safe and durable road to the public. Ensuring traffic flow and public convenience remains a top priority."

The citizens' appeal serves as a reminder of the vital role infrastructure plays in the day-to-day lives of residents and the urgency with which such public works need to be completed—particularly ahead of the heavy rains that pose further risk to partially completed roadways.

2nd Arunachal Pradesh Battalion NCC concludes 10-day annual training camp

Festival featured traditional dances, rituals, music, and ceremonial offerings



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 19: The 10-day Combined Annual Training Camp (CATC), organized by the 2nd Arunachal Pradesh Battalion of the National Cadet Corps (NCC), concluded with a vibrant and ceremonial valedictory function at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), Tawang.

The camp, held with the objective of instilling discipline, leadership, and a sense of national pride among the youth, witnessed active participation from 340 cadets hailing from East Kameng, West Kameng, and Tawang districts.

The concluding ceremony was graced by Brigadier Bhupal Singh, Commander of the Tawang Brigade, and Kanki Darang, Deputy Commissioner of Tawang, who attended as chief guests.

They were warmly received by Colonel Abhijeet Bhambere, the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Arunachal Pradesh Battalion NCC, along with officers and ranks of the unit.

The camp served as a comprehensive training platform for NCC cadets, offering a blend of physical, cultural, and intellectual activities aimed at holistic development.

During the 10 days, cadets participated in a variety of modules, including structured drills, physical training, athletics, cultural sessions, debate competitions, and leadership exercises.

According to an official statement released by the battalion, the camp's objective was not only to enhance physical endurance and discipline among cadets but also to cultivate teamwork, civic responsibility, and national consciousness.

The culmination of the training saw a spirited cultural programme during the valedictory function, where cadets showcased the rich traditions and ethnic diversity of Arunachal Pradesh through folk dances, musical performances, and thematic presentations.

Medals and trophies were awarded to outstanding cadets who demonstrated excellence in various competitions held throughout the camp.

These included accolades for best performance in drill, athletics, public speaking, and cultural segments. The chief guests praised the cadets' high level of discipline, enthusiasm, and cultural expression, noting that such initiatives go a long way in shaping future leaders of the nation.

Speaking on the occasion, Brigadier Bhupal Singh commended the NCC's continued dedication to youth empowerment and its vital role in fostering patriotic values and social responsibility.

He encouraged the cadets to carry forward the values they learned during the camp into their everyday lives and future careers.

Deputy Commissioner Kanki Darang echoed similar sentiments, appreciating the role of NCC in channeling the energy of young individuals towards constructive pursuits.

He also lauded the collaborative effort of the NCC officers, camp staff, and local support systems in successfully conducting the event.

Colonel Abhijeet Bhambere, in his address, expressed pride in the performance and conduct of the cadets during the 10-day programme.

He thanked all supporting agencies and reiterated the NCC's commitment to nurturing responsible and capable citizens.

The camp's successful conclusion was a testament to the enduring spirit of the NCC and its unwavering mission of nation-building through youth development.

The enthusiastic participation and exemplary conduct of the cadets were widely acknowledged by all present, marking the event as a memorable milestone in the training calendar of the battalion.

12 alleged spies held so far in Punjab, Haryana and UP

CHANDIGARH/LUCKNOW, May 19: At least 12 persons, including a YouTuber, have been nabbed on the charges of spying for Pakistan in the past two weeks from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh with investigations pointing out that they were allegedly part of a Pakistan-linked espionage network operating in north India, police said.

While six of them have been held from Punjab, four were nabbed from neighbouring Haryana.

Among those arrested, two women, including the YouTuber from Haryana, were allegedly in touch with Pakistani officer Ehsan-ur-Rahim alias Danish posted at the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi. On May 13, India expelled the Pakistani official for allegedly indulging in espionage.

Police investigations so far revealed that the accused were allegedly passing on sensitive information to Pakistani Intelligence Operatives (PIOs), officials said, adding that a probe into their financial transactions and forensic analysis of their electronic devices were also underway.

In addition to the arrests made from Punjab and Haryana, an alleged agent of Pakistan's intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was arrested from Uttar Pradesh's Rampur on Sunday by the state's Special Task Force. On May 4, Punjab Police arrested Falaksher Masih and Suraj Masih -- both residents of Ajnala

in Amritsar -- for their alleged role in leaking sensitive information and photographs of Army cantonment areas and air bases in the border district to ISI.

Both were allegedly involved in collecting and transmitting crucial information such as the Army's movements, locations of BSF camps and airports, photographs, and other sensitive data to their handlers in Pakistan, police had said. Two more persons, including a woman, were arrested by the Punjab Police on May 11 for their alleged involvement in espionage activities linked to Pakistani official Danish posted at the High Commission in Delhi.

The accused were identified as 31-year-old Guzala and Yameen Mohamad, both residents of Malerkotla. They were receiving payments through online transactions in exchange for sharing classified information, as per police investigation.

During questioning, Guzala allegedly confessed to having shared the confidential information about activities of the Indian Army with the Pakistani official posted at Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi. Guzala further revealed that she was doing it for money and the accused official had sent her ₹30,000 in two transactions -- ₹10,000 and ₹20,000 -- via UPI (unified payment interface), he added.

Meanwhile, Punjab Police DGP Gaurav Yadav on Monday said that two persons were arrested for allegedly sharing sensitive military



information with Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI.

"On 15th May 2025, credible intelligence inputs indicated that Sukhpreet Singh & Karanbir Singh were engaged in sharing classified details related to #OperationSindoor, including troop movements and key strategic locations in #Punjab, #HimachalPradesh, & #JammuAndKashmir - with #Pakistan's intelligence agency, #ISI," DGP said in a post on X.

The Haryana Police, on May 15, arrested 24-year-old Nauman Ilahi from the Panipat district for allegedly supplying sensitive information to some individuals in Pakistan. Ilahi from Kairana in Uttar Pradesh was also in touch with a Pak-based ISI handler, as per police investigation.

Ilahi worked as a factory security guard and is accused of supplying sensitive information to

Pakistan. He was staying with his sister and brother-in-law at Hali Colony in Panipat.

A day after his arrest, Haryana Police arrested a 25-year-old post-graduate student in Kaithal for allegedly having links with PIOs. Devender Singh, from Kaithal district's Guhla area, was arrested for allegedly uploading photos on social media with weapons.

During further investigation, it was learnt that Singh, who was pursuing a master's degree in political science from a college in Punjab, had gone to Pakistan on pilgrimage in November last year.

During the visit, he allegedly came in contact with Pakistani intelligence operatives and remained in touch with them even after his return. Police have said that Singh has allegedly admitted to sending some photos of Patiala cantonment by clicking pictures from outside.

Haryana Police on May 16 arrested Hissar-based YouTuber Jyoti Malhotra on the charge of passing on sensitive information to PIOs.

Malhotra, who runs a YouTube channel 'Travel with JO', was arrested from New Aggarsain Extension in Hissar. She has been booked under the relevant sections of the Official Secrets Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Haryana Police said.

Jyoti, whose YouTube channel and Instagram accounts have 3.77 lakh subscribers and 1.33 lakh followers respectively, allegedly was in contact with Pakistani staffer Danish. Her YouTube channel account shows some videos on her visit to Pakistan - 'Indian Girl in Pakistan', 'Indian Girl Exploring Lahore', 'Indian Girl at Kataraj Temple' and 'Indian Girl Rides Luxury Bus in Pakistan'.

In 2023, Jyoti came in contact with Danish at the Pakistan High Commission where she went to seek a visa to visit the neighbouring nation, according to an FIR lodged at the Civil Lines police station, Hissar. Hissar Superintendent of Police Shashank Kumar Sawan on Sunday said PIOs were developing Malhotra as an asset. She was allegedly in touch with Danish during the four-day military conflict between India and Pakistan following Operation Sindoor, Sawan said.

Malhotra, who has been taken on a five-day police remand, was directly in touch with PIOs, he said. "This is also (a kind of) war-

fare, in which they try to push their narrative by recruiting influencers," Sawan said. Malhotra was in touch with PIOs, and she visited Pakistan "multiple times" and China once, according to the police. Her financial transactions and travel details are being investigated. On Sunday, Haryana Police said it has arrested a 26-year-old man from the Nuh district on charges of spying for Pakistan.

Armaan was arrested on Saturday for sharing information related to the Indian Army and other military activities with Pakistan through an employee posted at the High Commission of Pakistan in Delhi, police said.

Armaan, who is on a six-day police remand, was allegedly sharing the information for a long time through WhatsApp and social media platforms.

Nuh Police, in a joint operation with a central agency, on Monday arrested a local quack for allegedly spying for Pakistan.

Shahzad was apprehended by the STF Moradabad unit from Uttar Pradesh's Rampur on Sunday following inputs about his alleged involvement in cross-border smuggling and espionage activities for the ISI. The STF said that Shahzad was allegedly passing sensitive information related to national security to his handlers. He travelled to Pakistan several times over the years and was allegedly smuggling cosmetics, clothes, spices, and other items across the border, the agency alleged. (PTI)

Multi-disciplinary team to submit report on Hyderabad fire accident: Minister

HYDERABAD, May 19: The Telangana government has asked five departments, including fire and police, to go into the devastating fire in a building that left 17 people dead and submit a report, state Transport Minister Ponnamb Prabhakar said on Monday.

The officials of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), fire, police, revenue department and the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA) would jointly probe the tragedy and submit a report to the government, Prabhakar, in-charge minister for Hyderabad, told PTI.

The officials are expected to visit the building near the Charnimar on Monday and have already submitted a preliminary report on the incident.

As part of measures to prevent such fire mishaps in future, the government would involve local public representatives to impress upon residents of old buildings to install fire safety measures in the interest of their safety, Prabhakar added.

There are many century-old buildings, including the one that caught fire, at Gulzar Houz and the surrounding areas.

Meanwhile, a team from the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) is scheduled to visit the scene for investigation, a senior police official told PTI.

The official further said a fire accident case was registered in connection with the incident.

Further investigation would proceed as per its findings, he added. A blaze triggered by a suspected short circuit in a building near the iconic Charnimar here on Sunday killed 17 people, including eight children, belonging to an extended family of a jeweller.

The fire broke out at a building in Gulzar Houz here, police said.

"All 17 who were shifted to hospitals were dead," a senior police official told PTI. A narrow staircase was the only escape route for the inmates of the building, but they could not rush out, a Fire Department official said.

The building housed jewellery shops on the ground floor, and people were residing in a flat above, police said, adding that smoke spread and people suffocated.

There were a total of 21 people in the building when the incident occurred, and out of them, 17 who were shifted to different hospitals in an unconscious condition by the fire department they could not survive, while four of them on the upper floors were rescued. (PTI)

Rahul targets Jaishankar again, says his silence 'damning'; it's Pak's language: BJP

NEW DELHI, May 19: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Monday launched a fresh attack on External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, saying his silence on the number of aircraft India "lost" after Pakistan was "informed" about the military action under Operation Sindoor is "damning".

The BJP hit back, accusing Gandhi of speaking the "language of Pakistan" and asking whether the Congress party was truly serious about supporting the nation.

Gandhi had earlier also targeted Jaishankar on the issue, suggesting that the Indian side informed Pakistan ahead of the military strikes on terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

However, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had described Gandhi's claims that Jaishankar acknowledged India having alerted Pakistan before the launch of Operation Sindoor on May 7 as "utter misrepresentation".

"EAM Jaishankar's silence isn't just telling, it's damning. So I'll ask again: How many Indian aircraft did we lose because Pakistan knew?" he asked in a post on X.

"This wasn't a lapse. It was a crime. And the nation deserves the truth," Gandhi also said.

The Congress leader earlier shared an undated video clip of Jaishankar and wrote, "Informing Pakistan at the start of our attack was a crime. EAM has publicly admitted that GOI (Government of India) did it."

"Who authorised it? How many aircraft did our air force lose as a result," the Congress leader asked.

"The external affairs minister had stated that we had warned Pakistan at the start, which is clearly the early phase after Operation Sindoor's commencement," the external publicity (XP) division of the ministry said.

"This is being falsely represented as being before the commencement. This utter misrepresentation of facts is being called out," it said in a brief statement.

Union minister Pralhad Joshi attacked Gandhi saying he misquoted the MEA.

"Rahul Gandhi seems to have learned nothing from his past mistakes. He continues to dis-



respect the Nation's Armed Forces by questioning how many jets were lost despite clear statements from the IAF and MEA confirming there were no asset losses.

"He misquotes the MEA, even though the DGMO clarified in his May 11 briefing that India had made efforts to communicate with its counterparts. Is the Congress party truly serious about supporting the nation? Their actions suggest otherwise," Joshi said in a post on X.

BJP IT Department head Amit Malviya said in a post on X, "Rahul Gandhi's daftness is not merely incidental. It is sinister. Rahul Gandhi must desist from distorting facts. India knows who he truly speaks for," he added.

BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari alleged that the Congress leader's comments mirrored Pakistan's propaganda.

"Rahul Gandhi's ignorance isn't just random it's dangerous," he said, accusing Gandhi of toying a "pro-Pakistan line".

"The deliberate twisting of facts by Rahul Gandhi is not a slip. It's a calculated move to feed a hostile narrative. When India stands united against terror, he chooses to sow confusion and Pakistan celebrates it," he added.

"Rahul isn't clueless. He's complicit. India deserves better than a China-Pak spokesperson as Leader of Opposition," Bhandari said in another post on X.

Chairman of AICC Media and Publicity Department Pawan Khara said Rahul Gandhi has asked some questions on the statement of the external affairs minister. This becomes very important because, in the last week, US President Donald Trump has been repeating in different countries that he mediated to stop the war, he said. Khara said the statement of the external affairs minister is sensitive because it seems that the terrorists must have fled from their hideouts.

"Prime Minister Modi and the Foreign Minister will have to answer why this was done," he asked. "The government should answer how many aircraft did the country lose? What losses did the country suffer? How many terrorists escaped?" he asked.

Khara alleged that the BJP is doing petty politics on issues of national interest and thinks the opposition will remain silent and will not ask questions related to the security of the country.

"We will keep asking questions and if we do not ask, terrorist incidents will continue to take place in the country," he noted.

"We do not know what secrets America and China have about PM Modi, Foreign Minister and BJP leaders, because they never speak in front of America and China. Whenever the PM speaks, it is to give a clean chit," Khara said.

"The entire country and the world knows what China's role was in this war and America itself is boasting about its role in stopping this war, but Jaishankar ji does not speak," the Congress leader said. Khara said Jaishankar himself told the media that they had informed Pakistan before launching the attack.

"Now what does this informing mean? Does the Foreign Minister have so much trust in Pakistan that the terrorists will sit quietly at his command? What is the relationship of the Foreign Minister and why did he inform Pakistan before the attack?"

"In fact, this is not diplomacy but spying. Everyone heard what the foreign minister said -- yet it is being covered up. Was it because of this information that Masood Azhar survived and Hafiz Saeed escaped alive? Doesn't the country have the right to know..." he said. (PTI)

Odisha begins process of identifying undocumented Bangladesh nationals

BHUBANESWAR, May 19: Odisha Law minister Prithviraj Harichandan on Monday said the government has already started the process of identifying Bangladeshis staying illegally in different districts of the state.

The government has issued direction to all district collectors, coastal security agencies and formed a Special Task Force to coordinate the process of identifying the undocumented Bangladeshi immigrants in the state.

"We have already started the process of identifying illegal migrants staying in both urban and rural areas. No foreign national residing without valid legal status will be allowed to stay in Odisha. Different engineering departments of the state government have been asked not to engage any Bangladeshi or foreign national without valid documents. The government has taken a strong stance in this regard," Harichandan told reporters here. In April, Odisha's Panchayati Raj minister Rabi Narayan Naik and Food Supplies minister KC Patra had said that the state would identify all foreign nationals staying in the state illegally.

Naik had said that illegal settlers are being identified from gram panchayat level. Patra said that the government has decided to deny ration cards availed by such persons in a fraudulent manner.

Meanwhile, the Commissionerate of Police, Bhubaneswar-Cuttack on Sunday held a meeting of officers-in-charge of all police stations and discussed the issue of illegal Bangladeshi migrants staying in the twin cities.

Bhubaneswar DCP Jagmohan Meena instructed all police stations to gather detailed data on undocumented foreigners, particularly Bangladeshi nationals, and take appropriate legal action. He also asked the police to investigate how these (illegal settlers) people entered Bhubaneswar, their activities, and whether they possess valid documents. Police sources said that the Special Task Force (STF) of Crime Branch in this regard had arrested 10 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, including six men, three women and a juvenile from Bhubaneswar railway station here in March. (PTI)

'Entire nation in shame': SC orders SIT probe against MP minister over remarks on Col Qureshi

NEW DELHI, May 19: The Supreme Court on Monday pulled up Madhya Pradesh minister Vijay Shah for his remarks on Colonel Sofiya Qureshi and constituted a three-member special investigation team to probe the FIR lodged against him.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N. Kottiswar Singh told the minister that it had seen his videos where he made the remarks and his apology and wondered if "they were crocodile tears or an attempt to wriggle out of the legal proceedings".

"The entire nation was in shame due to the comments... We saw your videos, you were on the verge of using very filthy language but somehow better sense prevailed or you did not find suitable words. You should be shameful. Entire country is proud of

our Army and you made this statement," Justice Surya Kant said. The bench further grilled the minister, "What kind of apology was this? You should have simply admitted your mistake and apologised but you say if you have said this and that... then I apologise. This is not the way to seek apology. The kind of crass comments you made, you should be shameful."

Shah was represented by senior advocates Maninder Singh and Vibha Dutt Mahikha. The top court asked the Madhya Pradesh director general of police to constitute a three-member special investigation team (SIT) headed by an IG rank officer by Tuesday 10 am also comprising a woman officer to probe the FIR registered following an order of the Madhya Pradesh High Court. (PTI)

PM abused Congress, now taking its help for diplomatic delegations: Ramesh

NEW DELHI, May 19: The Congress on Monday dismissed as an "absolute lie" Union minister Kiren Rijju's reported assertion that the government did not ask for names for the all-party diplomatic delegations going abroad, and said it was "cheap politics" to not get the names it selected cleared with the opposition party.

Taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the same prime minister who had abused the Congress publicly in countries such as Australia, the US, South Korea and China, was taking the help of the opposition party in these delegations.

"Why didn't the prime minister pick up the phone and speak to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi? Why didn't he have the courtesy to do that? The fact is that our narrative has been punctured and continues to get punctured because of the politics of polarisation in the country," Ramesh told PTI.

Later, in a post on X, Ramesh said, "After 11 years of abusing and defaming the Opposition -- especially the Congress -- the prime minister is now forced to send all-party delegations overseas. The

truth is that the BJP's poisonous politics at home has cost us hugely abroad. Our sanctimonious diplomacy has fallen flat and India is back to being hyphenated with Pakistan." "That is the real 'new normal'," he added.

The "self-styled Vishwaguru's balloon", which was full of hot air, has been well and truly punctured, Ramesh said. "It is a reflection of his own inadequacies -- now completely exposed -- that the prime minister is now turning towards bipartisanship. But this is only momentary, hypocritical, and opportunistic," he said.

On Saturday, the Congress said it was asked by the government to submit the names of four leaders for the all-party delegations to be sent abroad to explain India's stance on Pakistan-backed terrorism. It nominated Anand Sharma, Gaurav Gogoi, Syed Naseer Hussain, and Amrinder Singh Raja Warring. Of the four, only Sharma has been included in the seven delegations that will be visiting various countries.

Four Congress leaders -- Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari, Amar Singh and Salman Khurshid -- who were not part of the list sent by the Congress have been included in the delegations.

Asked about Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Rijju's reported remarks that the government never asked the Congress for names, Ramesh said to PTI, "That is a lie -- LIE -- absolute lie. He had a conversation in the morning of May 16 with the Congress president and Mr Rahul Gandhi and in pursuance of that conversation the latter wrote to Mr Rijju suggesting four names."

"At no point of time, the Modi government did the Congress the courtesy of saying that, 'look these are the four names we have selected, what do you have to say about them'," he added.

Ramesh also accused the BJP and the prime minister of having played "cheap politics" on the issue. "His (Modi's) image has taken a beating, he is desperate in changing the narrative once again. Our demand is that a prime minister-chaired all-party meeting be held and a special session (of Parliament) be called to reiterate the resolution of February 1994 and give it fresh meaning, as well as take the nation into confidence," the Congress leader said.

He claimed that while India made gains through Operation Sindoor, diplomatically it had been hurt as the narrative changed. (PTI)

Waterlogged roads stall Bengaluru traffic; Home Minister says authorities on job

BENGALURU, May 19: Heavy overnight rains severely affected parts of the city on Monday, leading to water-logged roads, inundated residential areas and traffic pile-up, as the city braces for more spells in the coming days.

Bengaluru received 103 mm of rain in the last 24 hours, according to an IMD bulletin.

The social media was flooded with videos of waterlogged roads from various parts of the IT capital, highlighting how the city collapses when there is rain.

According to Home Minister G Parameshwara, for the last three days, Bengaluru has witnessed heavy rains. "During pre-monsoon, we usually see flooding and inundation. BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) has been on the job of clearing water-logging and uprooted trees and branches from roads. Authorities are on the job," he said.

A picture captured by Bengaluru Corporate Club's official 'X' handle shows a chock-a-block Silk Board -- one of the infamous bottlenecks that slow down traffic in the city -- at 7.20 am, the supposedly non-peak hour, on Monday.

PTI Videos reported that the traffic jam at Silk Board stretched for nearly 10 km. This pre-monsoon season, according to hobby



weather watchers of the city, Bengaluru has been witnessing 15 to 20 cm of rainfall for the last couple of days. Most of them have advocated for work from home, as city roads make commuting almost impossible as well as dangerous, especially with the flooding of underpasses at several places.

One of the worst rain-affected areas in Bengaluru so far was Sai Layout in Horamavu, which falls in the Mahadevapura zone. Earlier, pre-monsoon rain submerged the layout with 4-5 ft of water, leaving streets flooded to knee level.

According to some news reports, the residents have blamed clogged drains and claimed that

despite repeated complaints to the authorities, they were not cleaned. Water entered homes in NC Colony on Tannery Road as well.

Although no injuries have been reported, a tree that was uprooted in the heavy rains in Jayanagar fell on a parked car and a jeep, damaging them. East End Road towards Mount Carmel School Road was also temporarily closed as a tree fell on the stretch.

Waterlogged roads in different parts of the city had made commuting a nightmare for people.

Despite constant traffic alerts by the traffic police about slow-moving traffic in several places, people pushing their stuck cars in knee-

deep water could be spotted at places like Panathur S Cross, upper ramp of Domlr flyover and Koramangala, which are prone to waterlogging. Traffic was also slow near Manyata Tech Park.

Meanwhile, the yellow alert issued on May 18 to some regions in Karnataka, including Bengaluru, remains valid for Monday and Tuesday as well, said India Meteorological Department's Bengaluru centre Director N Puvirasu. Speaking to PTI, he said the department is studying the current pattern of the air circulation and will later issue a weather update. "As per the current pattern of the cyclonic circulation, Karnataka, especially the coastal parts will get heavy rainfall. Bengaluru is also expected to receive heavy rainfall for the next two days," he said. A Yellow alert could possibly result in temporary disruption of electricity in some areas, minor traffic snarls and possible uprooting of weak trees and branches, warned IMD.

On Sunday, IMD had issued a yellow alert for heavy rainfall across 23 districts in Karnataka, including Bengaluru, till Thursday.

The alert warned of moderate to heavy thundershowers, lightning, and gusty winds reaching speeds of 50 - 60 km/h. (PTI)

PM Modi likely to visit Sikkim on May 29

50th anniversary of statehood celebrations

GANGTOK, May 19: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Sikkim on May 29 to take part in the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of its statehood, Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang said.

He said the final confirmation from the Prime Minister's Office about the proposed visit is yet to be received, but all other formalities have already been completed.

"Around 1 lakh people will be present at the Paljor Stadium to greet the PM that day. Earlier, we planned the programme at Manan Kendra, but that place could not accommodate such a large crowd, so we changed the venue," Tamang told reporters on the sidelines of a programme on Sunday.

"The PM wholeheartedly wants to visit the state to greet the people



on the historic occasion. More or less, the confirmation has come. It is a historic occasion for the state as well as the country, which is why the PM will definitely visit," he

said.

A high-level meeting was held on Saturday to review preparations for the PM's proposed visit. It was chaired by Chief Administrator-

cum-Cabinet Secretary VB Pathak along with Chief Secretary R Telang, officials said.

Minute details for the PM visit, including the logistical and security aspects, were discussed in the meeting, they said.

The meeting also deliberated on the cultural programmes that would be held during the PM's visit, and finalised the list of projects for inauguration and foundation stone laying, they added.

Heads of various departments and senior officers of the state government were present in the meeting. Enjoying protectorate status under the Union of India after the country's Independence in 1947, Sikkim became an Indian state on May 16, 1975, following a referendum. (PTI)

Tripura trade organisation welcomes port curbs on imports from Bangladesh

AGARTALA, May 19: An organisation of businessmen and traders in Tripura on Monday welcomed the Centre's decision to impose port restrictions on imports of certain goods from Bangladesh and said the national interest comes first above anything else.

Bangladeshi exporters, who send goods in substantial quantities through land ports, will be the losers in view of the Central government's move, Tripura Chamber of Trade and Business (TCTB) general secretary Rajat Paul said.

The central government had on Saturday imposed port restrictions on the import of a few Bangladeshi goods, such as readymade garments and processed food items, in response to similar curbs placed by Dhaka on certain Indian products last month.

However, the Directorate General



of Foreign Trade (DGFT), in its notification, said the port restrictions will not apply to Bangladeshi goods transiting through India but destined for Nepal and Bhutan.

"We welcome the DGFT restriction on imports of certain goods from Bangladesh because the country's interest comes first above anything else. Bangladeshi exporters, who send substantial goods through land ports, will be the maximum losers, following the

move", Paul said.

He said around 28 cement manufacturing factories are functioning in Bangladesh's Comilla and Brahmanbaria, and supplying huge quantities of the construction material to the northeastern states.

Besides, Bangladeshi traders have started supplying corrugated sheets to the northeastern states, he said, adding, they will not be able to do the same after the curbs imposed by DGFT.

Tripura imported goods worth ₹ 636.72 crore from Bangladesh during the 2022-23 financial year and ₹ 703.67 crore in the 2023-24 fiscal.

The northeastern state's exports stood at only ₹ 121.37 crore in 2022-23 and ₹ 12.31 FY'24.

Tripura shares an 856-km-long border with Bangladesh and has five functional land ports. (PTI)

In a first, Tripura zoo welcomes three tiger cubs

AGARTALA, May 19: The Sepahijala Zoo in Tripura has welcomed three tiger cubs in a cheer for animal lovers.

This is the first time in the history of the state's only zoo, which was set up in 1972, that tiger cubs have been born here, its director Biswajit Das told PTI.

With the birth of the three cubs, the number of big cats in the zoo has grown to five, he said.

"A pair of tigers was brought to the Sepahijala Zoo from West Bengal as part of an animal exchange programme in February last year. On May 11, the tigress gave birth to three cubs," he said.

"The mother and her three cubs are doing well inside the enclosure, while the male tiger has been moved from there as part of precautionary measures," he added.

Eleven CCTV cameras have been installed around the enclosure to monitor the first-time mother and her cubs round the clock, Das said.

Visitors are not being allowed to see the enclosure to ensure that the mother and the cubs don't get disturbed, he said.

"We are giving balanced food to the tigress. Besides supplying fresh meat, we are offering her soup twice or thrice a day so that the cubs get enough milk," he said.

Another tigress had given birth to a stillborn cub in 2014, Das said.

Forest Minister Animesh Debbarma said the birth of these cubs is a positive sign for tiger conservation efforts at the zoo.

"We are making efforts to make Sepahijala Zoo a world-class facility. If the Central Zoo Authority extends a helping hand to train our people and the Centre provides support, we would be able to develop it further," he said. About 1.70 lakh people visited the Sepahijala Zoo in 2024-25. (PTI)

Centre will sanction Organic Fisheries Cluster for Tripura: Union Minister

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 19: Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Rajiv Ranjan Singh, on Sunday announced that Tripura will soon get an Organic Fisheries Cluster, making it the second state after Sikkim to receive such a project.

Foundation Stone was laid for an Integrated Aquapark under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), worth Rs 42.4 crores in Kailashahar, Tripura by Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying and Panchayati Raj in an event held in Agartala, Tripura today.

"Tripura has seen massive development over the last decade under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," said the Union Minister. "PM Modi has pledged to transform

India into a developed nation by 2047, and the Northeast is playing a crucial role in this journey."

He informed that of the 11 Integrated Aqua Parks sanctioned across the country, four are in the Northeast, highlighting the region's growing significance in India's fisheries sector.

Rajiv Ranjan Singh underscored the importance of fisheries in the rural economy, noting that over 3 crore people are engaged in fish production nationwide.

"Agriculture contributes around 4% to the national economy, while the fisheries sector alone contributes nearly 9%," he said, stressing the need for focused development in the sector, especially in states like Tripura.

Citing data, the minister said that India has become the second-largest fish producer globally, with production jumping from 96 lakh tonnes in

2013-14 to 184.02 lakh tonnes in 2023-24. In Tripura alone, inland fish production has risen from 3.7 lakh tonnes in 2013-14 to 6.4 lakh tonnes today, he added.

Singh highlighted the success of organic farming in Tripura and said that the state has tremendous potential for organic fish production.

"Sikkim's Soreng District was the first to receive an Organic Fisheries Cluster. Tripura will be the next," he said.

"Through innovative methods and sustainable practices, Tripura can emerge as a model state in organic fish farming, significantly boosting its rural economy."

The Union Minister also directed the timely completion of the Integrated Aqua Park project, ensuring that local communities can start reaping its benefits at the earliest.

Conrad becomes first CM to visit Tangmang

SHILLONG, May 19: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma visited Tangmang village under the Pynursia sub-division in East Khasi Hills on Saturday, marking the first time a sitting chief minister has set foot in the village.

Tangmang village, known for its over two-century-old heritage, was founded by settlers seeking refuge following a devastating earthquake.

Its name, "Tangmang," meaning "precisely right" or "adequately sufficient," reflects its deep-rooted cultural significance.

Renowned for its breath-taking natural beauty, with cascading waterfalls and rivers flowing into the Bangladeshi plains, Tangmang is also a hub of traditional bamboo craftsmanship and weaving.

During his visit, the Chief Minister was given a warm reception by the residents, who showcased their intricate bamboo and handicraft products, particularly hand-woven mats.

Impressed by the exceptional craftsmanship of the villagers, the Chief Minister directed his officials to procure the village's products in bulk for gifting to visiting dignitaries and high-ranking officials, branding them as unique representations of Meghalaya's artisanal excellence.

"This is a memorable visit," he said. "As a government, we believe that development must be holistic—

while we invest in large infrastructure, we must also implement initiatives that directly uplift people's lives."

Stating that the government is committed to uplift the rural economy through different activities, he said, "Supporting our artisans and weavers is a core vision of the MDA government."

Through various welfare schemes, including support to Self Help Groups (SHGs) and village organizations, we aim to empower local communities and improve livelihoods."

He also announced the establishment of a Handicraft Training Centre in Tangmang village. The center will include modern infrastructure, machinery, and residential facilities for trainees to learn from master craftsmen in the village.

He also encouraged the community to upscale their production, enhance product development, and explore markets beyond the state to maximize their potential.

During the visit, the Chief Minister also held a CM-Connect session, engaging directly with villagers and listening to their concerns. Responding to a request from a local student, he assured that a new building for Tangmang Secondary School will be sanctioned under the Chief Minister's Special Development Fund. (PTI)

Security beefed up in parts of Manipur ahead of Shirui Lily festival

IMPHAL, May 19: Elaborate security arrangements have been made in the 80-km stretch between Manipur's capital Imphal and Ukhrul town to ensure a smooth conduct of the five-day Shirui Lily festival from May 20, police said on Monday. Vehicle checking and patrolling are being conducted along the stretch, a senior officer said.

The security has been beefed up after threats by a few Kuki organisations were given to the Meitei community people who were planning to attend the state-level 5th Shirui Lily festival, he said.

The 5-day programme is held in honour of the state flower Shirui Lily, which is found in the hills of the Tangkhul Naga-majority Ukhrul district. Several officials from Tourism and other departments have already reached venues in the district, he said.

Adequate security arrangements have also been made between the stretch from Yaingangkopki to Litan via Mahadev, where there are a few Kuki villages, the police officer said.

Both central and state forces are in place to ensure security in Ukhrul district, he said, adding that additional deployment would be

made during the festival period from May 20 to May 24.

Tests have also been conducted to determine the range of wireless communication in the hilly areas to ensure immediate reinforcements in case of any requirement, another official said.

Volunteers from the Tangkhul Naga community have also been assisting security forces to ensure the safety of tourists from Imphal.

The Manipur Police had on Sunday said that threats to the Meitei community people, who are planning to attend the festival, are being taken seriously and inquired into promptly.

The police, in a statement, said that precautionary measures are in place to ensure the security of the movement of people attending the Shirui festival. More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups, who are the majority in the hill areas, since May 2023.

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

Civil servants are backbone of governance: Tripura CM

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 19: Chief Minister Manik Saha recently said that public representatives think of many schemes and ways to benefit the public, but ultimately, these are implemented by civil service officials, and it is because of them that people are being benefited.

Saha made this statement after attending the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Civil Service Officers' Institute at Kunjaban, Agartala today.

"We must work properly and go in-depth and understand things. I never thought of becoming a doctor and then being appointed to many posts. I had no such targets. But you have to try, and if you have a desire to work for people, you will reach your destination. Such institutes are located in various parts of the country. Then I asked — why not here in

Tripura? We must think of officers coming from outside the state. If I go outside the state and don't get proper accommodation and other facilities, then I would also want to come back here to Agartala," he said. Saha also recalled that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel once said civil service officials are the steel frame of India.

"The most important matter is relationships. As public representatives, we think of many schemes and how to benefit the public, but ultimately, these are implemented by officials. After our government came to power, we never created pressure on officials, which was there earlier. If such things continue, then only a healthy atmosphere will be created here. People are joining civil services purely for work purposes. Due to transparent policies, talented people are joining

the civil services in Tripura," said Saha. He informed that Tripura currently has 59 IAS officers, 42 IPS officers, 40 IFS officers, 470 TCS officers, 152 TPS officers, and 50 TFS officers.

"Some IAS officers are posted outside the state. When I decided to hold the NEC Plenary session, it was successful due to the efforts of officials. Many Governors have come here and wanted the NEC Plenary to be held again and again in Tripura — and this credit goes to all of you. During last year's flood-like situation, officials worked tirelessly. I believe if we work together, we can solve the basic issues of the people and help them by implementing central and state government projects. All schemes are dependent on the civil service officials, because of whom people get benefits," he added.

Focus on sovereign state, not on dependent one: NSCN-IM

'We must not wait for others or depend on others to develop our country'

IMPHAL, May 19: Senior NSCN-IM leader Rh Raising urged the Nagas to focus on "sovereign state, not on dependent state". He also said that the Naga nation comes from the Naga foundation. The NSCN-IM leader added that the history of the Nagas, the political concept of the Nagas, the identity of the Nagas, the culture of the Nagas and the sovereign state of the Nagas come from the Naga foundation. "It can never come from other foundations. And that if our foundation is betrayed or murdered, we perish", he stated.

Rh Raising is Special Emissary of the Collective Leadership, National Socialist Council of Nagalim-IM. He was speaking on the occasion of the Naga Plebiscite Day observed in Ukhrul on May 16, commemorating the 1951 event. The programme was organised by the All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM), and participated by the United Naga Council (UNC), the Naga Women Union (NWU), the NPMHR and other Naga organisations and leaders.

In his speech, Rh Raising said, "We are looking for our future: While the Nagas were living free and independent, their free existence was interrupted by the British invasion and occupation of a part of Naga country for a period of time. Nevertheless, on the eve of the British departure from British India, the Naga people declared their independence on August 14, 1947". The NSCN-IM leader also said, "The world is well informed of this".

In 1950, the Constituent Assembly of India invited the Nagas to join the Union of India, which was rejected by the Naga National Council (NNC) under the leadership of A. Z. Phizo and his colleagues, the NSCN-IM leader said. "That big no saved the future of the Nagas, the history of the Nagas, the land of the Nagas, the identity of the Nagas, the culture of the Nagas and politics of the Nagas". A plebiscite conducted on May 16, 1951 reaffirmed that decision, he added. It was informed to the United Nations and many countries through their embassies in Delhi, he further added. "History shall ever speak of it", he said.

Contrary to the democratic method, the Government of India tried to subdue the Nagas through military might but to no avail", Rh. Raising alleged. It rather created a horrible human rights situation in Nagalim, which drew the attention of the world, the NSCN-IM leader claimed.

Under its ugly colonial policy, the Government of India imposed the so-called 16th point agreement in 1963 in the stolen name of Naga people's convention, he also said. However, the Naga people had rejected the agreement.

In its incessant attempts to murder the Naga political issue, the government of India dictated the infamous Shillong Accord in 1975. Nevertheless, Rh Raising said, it was also rejected outright and condemned by the Naga National Assembly under the leadership of Isak Chishi Swu and Th. Muivah. "That historic decision saved the future of the Nagas once again. The Nagas see no future in those accords of treason. They are for a principled based solution", he added.

Rh Raising then said the Naga nation comes from the Naga foundation. The history of the Nagas, the political concept of the Nagas, the identity of the Nagas, the culture of the Nagas and the sovereign state of the Nagas come from the Naga foundation, he stated. It can never come from other foundations. "And that if our foundation is betrayed or murdered, we perish", he stated.

The NSCN-IM leader then said Nagas of the past generations focused on the Naga foundation/principle. "They stood firm in the matter of principle. Nagalim for Christ is our foundation and vision as well. Like our fathers, let us also focus on our foundation and stay the course in all weathers", he also stated.

The NSCN-IM leader then said there are a section of people from some quarters who talk of problems, but they never talk of solutions. "They talk of solution, but they never talk of foundation/root of solution. They talk of peace and unity, but they never talk of foundation of peace and unity. They talk of development, but they never talk of politics, the root of development. They should know that development is the flower, politics is the root", the NSCN-IM leader added.

Rh Raising then said, "We are poor and weak in many respects because we don't have a recognized sovereign state as of now". Sovereign state is the power house of developments. Riches don't come from begging bowl, it comes from sovereign power, he stated. Development does not come from charity, it comes from the spirit of self-reliance of a sovereign people, he further said. Man through the power of a sovereign state has become master of the air, master of the ocean and master of the land, he added. "He has turned desert into river and green pasture through the power of a sovereign state. Wars, natural calamities and diseases are combated

through the instrument of a sovereign state. Hungers and thirst are eradicated through it. Rugged mountains and swamp lands are developed into beautiful cities through it. Scholars, scientists, writers, statesmen, administrators, army generals and preachers are the products of quality colleges and universities of a sovereign state. We must not wait for others or depend on others to develop our country. We are the prime factor. We are the master of our destiny. We just need a strong decision for a sovereign state", Rh. Raising further added.

The NSCN-IM leader then said that after forty years of confrontations punctuated with negotiations, the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) signed the Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015. This Framework Agreement stopped fighting, killing, horrible army atrocities and violations of human rights in Nagalim, he claimed. It has turned armed confrontation into political negotiation, guerrilla warfare into mass warfare and enemies into friends, he further claimed.

"It is a bridge between the two people. The Framework Agreement is in the pages of history. It will ever speak of sovereign rights of the Nagas. Declaration of Naga independence on August 14, 1947 is made a recognized political entity by this Framework Agreement stating that 'Nagas have the unique history of independence'. The historic plebiscite conducted on May 16, 1951 was a political step to be recognized by the aggressor-state for legitimacy", Rh. Raising stated. Now, the Framework Agreement has made it a recognized political entity, he stated.

According to Rh. Raising, the Naga national entity was forcibly colonized by India. "The Framework Agreement has made it a recognized entity. It has also recognized the land of the Nagas stating that 'Nagas are the owner of their land - anything on the surface of land and beneath of it belongs to the Nagas'. On the issue of integration, it says, 'integration of all Naga areas is the legitimate right of the Nagas'", he added.

Rh. Raising then said that it has also been mutually agreed 'coexistence of the two entities sharing sovereignty power' based on the doctrine of shared sovereignty and interdependent relationship. He said there will be mutual consultation and cooperation sharing sovereign power as defined in the compe-

tencies. This Framework Agreement will certainly protect the sovereign right of the Nagas and security interest of India. Nagas will view India as partner and vice versa. It will bring the two people closer for a greater and higher cause, he stated.

Raiding then said, "Ours is a people's movement for national independence, where all sections of people are involved. And that NSCN is the national revolutionary front of the Naga people who confront and negotiate with the aggressor-states". He said civil societies are another front who shouts in the street and through memorandums and mass media for the cause. He also said elected leaders speak in their respective platforms for the cause. Rh. Raising said the Church is another front, who prays for the cause. "The historic Framework Agreement is the foundation of solution. We hope and trust that Indian leaders will keep their word. However, if the government of India betrays the historic Framework Agreement, the matter does not end there. The problem cannot be left unsolved. It must be solved sooner or later. National independence movement of a people from bondage to freedom is the course of history no power can stop", the NSCN-IM leader added.

Also speaking on the occasion, ANSAM president Th. Angteshang Maring said, "Today we are commemorating the historic Naga Plebiscite Day, whereby Nagas chose to remain as a free people and Independent Nation". Amongst others, the August 14, 1947 independence declaration, rejection of the Panglong Agreement of 1947, and the May 16, 1951 Plebiscite for Nagalim independence represents Nagas' unique history and national principle on sovereignty, he started. "This historic day marked that Nagalim was never a part of India or Myanmar (erstwhile Burma) as the case may be, either by consent or by conquest and is one of the key foundations for Naga freedom", the ANSAM leader also said.

Amongst others, according to the ANSAM chief, two important agreements were signed between Gol and NSCN, whereby "Nagas' unique history" and sovereignty were officially recognized that has reinforced the significance of celebrating May 16, 1951 plebiscite Day. One of them is the Amsterdam Joint Communiqué of July 11, 2002 which recognizes Nagas' unique history and situations. The other one is the Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015 signed on the foundation of sovereignty. "The Framework Agreement recognizes the sovereignty of Nagas as agreed to enter a new relationship of the two entities based on "Shared Sovereignty", the ANSAM leader added. (NNN)

Sikkim Cricket Ground gets floodlight system

GANGTOK, May 19: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang inaugurated the newly-installed floodlight system at the Sikkim Cricket Ground at Mining in Rangpo.

Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court, Justice Biswanath Somadder, was also present at the programme held on Sunday.

"This facility has been developed with the support of the Sikkim government, whose continued commitment to infrastructure development and public welfare has made this initiative possible," said the CM.

He said it marked a new chapter for cricket in the Himalayan state.

"I am confident that this enhancement in facilities will further energise our budding cricketers and help the sport flourish across the state," he added.

The floodlights are expected to transform the cricket ground into a venue capable of hosting day-night matches and extended training sessions, said an official of the Sikkim Cricket Association (SCA).

On the occasion, an exhibition match was organised, which saw the participation of state ministers and MLAs, among others. (PTI)

REPAIR OF AIR COMPRESSORS

Tender Notice No.: M-TSK-2025-28.
Dated: 15-05-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:
Tender No.: M-TSK-2025-28. **Name of Work:** Repair of air compressors (make, Kirloskar) located at Coaching Depot Dibrugarh, Coaching Depot Tinsukia and ROH Depot New Tinsukia of Tinsukia Division **Tender Value:** ₹27,84,864.72/-
Earnest Money: ₹55,700/- Last date & time for submission of tender at 13:00 hrs. and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 06-06-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.reps.gov.in
Sr. DME, Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

If the choice is between Pakistan and hell, I would prefer hell: Javed Akhtar

NEW DELHI, May 19: Noted lyricist and screenwriter Javed Akhtar, who is often targeted for his views on patriotism and religion, says that if there comes a time he has to choose between Pakistan and hell, he would prefer to go to hell.

Akhtar, 80, was speaking at Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut's book launch on Saturday night in Mumbai.

At the event, the lyricist -- who identifies himself as an atheist -- said extremists from both India and Pakistan shower abuses on him on a daily basis.

"Some day, I'll show you my Twitter (now X) and WhatsApp. I am abused by both sides. I'm not thankful so I'll say there are also people who appreciate what I say, encourage me. But it's true that extremists from both here and there abuse me. This is right. If one of them stops abusing me, it'll be a matter of concern for me."

"One side says 'You are a kaafir (non-believer) and will go to hell. The other side says, 'Jihadi, go to Pakistan'. If the choice is between Pakistan and hell, I would prefer to go to hell," Akhtar said amid a round of applause from the audience.

The award-winning writer further said it's important to have citizens not subscribing to the ideology of any political party.

"That way they can say what they feel is right and what is wrong. There should be no party loyalty. All parties are ours and yet no party is ours. I'm also one of those citizens. If you speak from one side, you'll make the other side unhappy. But if you speak out from different points of view, you make many more people unhappy," he added. Akhtar, who came to Mumbai at the age of 19, credited the city and Maharashtra for all his achievements.

In his last 30 years of living in Mumbai, the veteran poet said he was given police protection four times on threat perception, out of which three times because of



"mullahs".

Last month, Akhtar said in an interview with PTI there is hardly "any warmth today" in India-Pakistan cultural ties, the veteran screenwriter-poet noted while saying that this is not the time to even think about whether Pakistani artists should be allowed to work in India.

His comments came after "Abir Gulaal", a film featuring Pakistani star Fawad Khan, was not allowed to release in theatres in India in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack. (PTI)

INDIE FILMS BRING FAME TO COUNTRY BUT THEY DON'T GET SUPPORT: NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI



NEW DELHI, May 19: Independent films and directors bring fame to India but they don't get enough support once they return home from festival rounds, says actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui, who believes that movies by Anurag Kashyap, Payal Kapadia, and Neeraj Ghaywan have done more to crack the international market than the big Bollywood projects.

According to Siddiqui, indie filmmakers depict characters from the streets and corners of India and reach audiences beyond just the diaspora.

"A lot can happen if such (independent) films are supported. We dismiss them as festival films. They get limited release and the makers of such films don't get any support. But these are the films that bring fame to our country," the actor told PTI in an interview here.

His comments come days ahead of the Cannes Film Festival premiere of Ghaywan's "Homebound" in the Un Certain Regard section on May 21.

Siddiqui, who has travelled to Cannes with eight of his films including Kashyap's much-acclaimed "Gangs of Wasseypur", "The Lunchbox" by Ritesh Batra, and Aseem Ahluwalia's "Miss Lovely", worked with Ghaywan in the second season of web series "Sacred Games".

"Bollywood films are not seen by western audiences typically, these are the films that are watched whether it is Payal Kapadia or Neeraj Ghaywan's movies... These films create an identity for our country because the more local, the more global," he added.

The 51-year-old actor is equally at home with critically-acclaimed films like "Peepli Live", "Monsoon Shootout", and "Manto", as well as commercial hits such as "Badlapur", "Kahaani", and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan".

"In our films, we don't see characters from our society. The characters that you see in our films don't exist in our streets and corners. If you make movies about India, then they earn a name outside because they are real films. The big films, the so-called commercial films, I am sorry, they still have not been able to crack that market but these small filmmakers have already done that." Citing the example of his 2013 film "The Lunchbox", also starring Irrfan and Nimrat Kaur, Siddiqui said many in the western world know about the movie.

"These filmmakers (indie), they may be small because of their budget but they are big filmmakers because of their mind. And these independent filmmakers bring glory to India and they will keep doing that. "If I travel to a small film festival in Florida, people there know about Anurag and we should try and understand why people know him even in a small film festival outside. These people perhaps don't know the big Bollywood directors here but they know about Anurag and today, they know about Payal Kapadia or Ritesh Batra."

As an actor, Siddiqui said he has tried featuring in many indie projects for little or no money because he felt it was important to support this kind of cinema.

"You get the satisfaction as an actor because you can face yourself and say 'I'm doing the kind of films that initially drew me to become an actor'."

"You do other kinds of films for survival and, of course, you should do them because it is important to have a balance. And I am not criticising those movies (commercial films). They are also good movies but you should keep balancing as an actor and director. I have always tried to do that." (PTI)

Bhanushali Studios Ltd, AAZ Films enter joint production deal

NEW DELHI, May 19: Production houses Bhanushali Studios Ltd and AAZ Films on Monday announced that they are joining hands to produce a diverse slate of films.

According to a press release, the films will be jointly produced by Vinod Bhanushali of Bhanushali Studios Ltd and Himanshu Mehra of AAZ Films, with "Sultan" director Ali Abbas Zafar attached as creative producer.

The first film under this partnership is slated to go on floors in June, it added.

"Ali, Himanshu and I have always admired each other's work. When the opportunity to collaborate came up, it felt like the perfect time."

"These films will tell compelling stories and create a strong connect between heartland and urban audiences," Bhanushali, chairman and managing director, Bhanushali Studios Ltd, said in a statement. Mehra said they are excited about this strategic collaboration focused on heartland cinema.

"This partnership opens doors for young, fresh storytellers to bring their vision to the big screen," he said.

"Bhanushali Studios Ltd. and AAZ Films share the same passion for telling impactful, mainstream stories."

This collaboration aims to deliver content that resonates deeply with today's audience," added Zafar.

From heartfelt romances to gripping dramas, the collaboration will span genres designed to engage audiences across the spectrum, the release further stated. (PTI)

Sharmila Tagore, daughter Saba Pataudi reach Cannes ahead of 'Aranyer Din Ratri' screening



NEW DELHI, May 19: Veteran actor Sharmila Tagore on Monday arrived in Cannes with her daughter and jewellery designer Saba Pataudi for the screening of Satyajit Ray's 1970 film "Aranyer Din Ratri".

A 4K restored version of the Bengali-language movie, titled "Days and Nights in the Forest" in English, will be showcased at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival under the Classics section today.

Pataudi shared a series of pictures with her mother on Instagram.

"Cannes 2025! Ma n Me...moments to cherish (sic)" she wrote in the caption.

"Aranyer Din Ratri" is presented and restored by The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project at L'Immaginaire Ritrovata in collaboration with the Film Heritage Foundation (FHF), Janus Films, and the Criterion Collection. The funding was provided by the Golden Globe Foundation.

Tagore, who was part of the ensemble cast of "Aranyer Din Ratri", will attend the screening at the prestigious gala along with co-star Simi

Garewal, producer Purnima Dutta, Margaret Bodde, executive director of The Film Foundation, and FHF founder Shivendra Singh Dungarpur.

The premiere of the film will be presented by renowned Hollywood filmmaker Wes Anderson, a long-time admirer of Ray. "Aranyer Din Ratri", which explores the themes of alienation, class, and modernity, follows the story of four city-bred men who escape to the forests of Palamau for a carefree holiday, only to undergo a journey of self-discovery.

Based on the novel of the same name by author Sunil Gangopadhyay, the movie also featured Soumitra Chatterjee, Subhendu Chatterjee, Samit Bhanja, Robi Ghosh, and Aparna Sen. (PTI)

Love the unparalleled work ethic in 'Mission: Impossible' movies, says Hayley Atwell

NEW DELHI, May 19: Actor Hayley Atwell says starring in two back-to-back "Mission: Impossible" films gave her a firsthand experience of the unparalleled work ethic embodied by the franchise's lead star, Tom Cruise.

The actor, who became globally popular for her role as Peggy Carter in multiple Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) movies, joined the "MI" franchise with its seventh instalment "Dead Reckoning" (2023). Atwell played the character of Grace, a thief with a shady past who becomes an unlikely ally of Cruise's spy agent Ethan Hunt.

She has now reprised the part in the latest chapter "The Final Reckoning", directed by Christopher McQuarrie and co-produced by Cruise. It was released in Indian theatres on Saturday in English, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu.

"It's a kind of an unparalleled work ethic that I love in these movies and something that I will continue to take with me in every job that I do. It's the thing that gives me the most kind of excitement... The challenge, the discipline and the focus that it takes to execute these

films well, all for the sake of delighting the audience," Atwell told PTI in a virtual interview.

When she auditioned for the character, the actor said she realised it was way different from what she had done in Marvel films.

"Chris McQuarrie had seen me in a play, it will be about 13 years ago now... My background is classical theatre. And I'd done a little bit of stunt work before in the Marvel franchise, but this was very different."

"So, when I met Tom and McQ (nickname for McQuarrie) for the screen test for this, there was, of course, the acting and the dialogue scene that I had to learn... We were interpreting it in different ways, trying lots of different things and improvising with the text," the 43-year-old actor said.

It was followed by a fight sequence to test her ability and fitness level, she added.

"It was sort of discovering where my natural skill set was and what interested me. We learned pretty quickly that I loved working with props and knives, a sleight of hand.



She became a thief based on understanding how I like to move my body with props," Atwell said.

It all felt like a "bespoke collaborative process", she said, describing the experience of working with Cruise, who has headlined the franchise since its inception with 1996's "Mission: Impossible", and McQuarrie, who helmed the last four "MI" films.

"They'd said, 'We're not looking for an actor to fit into a character or to fit into the story. We're looking for an actor that we want to work with. And then we'll create the story and the character with them in mind and around them.'"

"This film is an accumulation of all the missions that have gone together in terms of its ambition and what it sets out to achieve emotionally with all the characters," Atwell said.

"The Final Reckoning" takes place two months after the events of "Dead Reckoning" and sees Hunt racing against time to stop the rogue AI known as "The Entity" from gaining total control over the world's digital infrastructure.

According to Atwell, what draws her to a project is not just the story or genre, it's all the people she would work with.

"Every job for me is different, and it's always the people. I've just finished doing a Shakespeare play in London and now I'm promoting a franchise. For me, the variety is the thing that excites me the most as an actor, the opportunity to explore my own range and to push myself, physically and mentally."

The actor, also known for films "Cinderella", "Christopher Robin", "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway" as well as acclaimed stage shows "The Pride" and "Rosmersholm", praised Cruise as an "unparalleled stuntman, movie star and film producer" who cares about his co-stars and the crew.

"(He) wants us all to excel and thrive. So he's looking at ways that he can support us actively doing that," she added.

"The Final Reckoning", which also features Simon Pegg, Esai Morales, Ving Rhames, and Angela Bassett, is presented by Paramount Pictures and Skydance Productions. (PTI)

SINDHU, PRANNOY EYE TURNAROUND AT MALAYSIA MASTERS

KUALA LUMPUR, May 19: Star Indian shuttlers P V Sindhu and H S Prannoy will look to script a turnaround in fortunes when they lead the country's campaign at the USD 475,000 Malaysia Masters Super 500 tournament beginning here on Tuesday.

Both Sindhu and Prannoy have endured a tough phase of late, struggling with form and fitness. The duo lost their respective matches against Indonesia and Denmark in the Sudirman Cup last month — their last competitive outing.

With a two-week break under their belt, the experienced shuttlers

will now be eager to rediscover their rhythm at the Axiata Arena.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu, currently ranked world number 16, will open her campaign against Japan's Natsuki Nidaira, ranked 20th in the world.

Prannoy, who has slipped to world number 35, faces a tough opener against fifth seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan.

In women's singles, 2024 Hylo Open runner-up Malvika Bansod will take on Chiu Pin-Chian of Chinese Taipei, while Unnati Hooda — a semifinalist at the Taipei Open Super 300 — will face compatriot



Lin Hsiang Ti. Aakarshi Kashyap has drawn eighth seed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia.

In men's singles, Sathish Karunakaran, champion at the 2023 Odisha Masters and 2024 Guwahati Masters, will take on top seed Anders Antonsen of Denmark.

World junior championships bronze medallist Ayush Shetty, who reached the Taipei Open semifinals, will face Canada's Brian Yang, while Priyanshu Rajawat opens against Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh.

In mixed doubles, world number

19 Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto will face a qualifier. Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde will begin against fourth-seeded Chinese pair Guo Xin Wa and Chen Fang Hui, while Ashith Surya and Amrutha Pramuthesh meet top seeds Jiang Zhen Bang and Wei Ya Xin.

Sathish will also pair up with Aadya Variyath in mixed doubles to face Malaysia's Roy King Yap and Valeree Siow.

In men's doubles, the pair of Har-iharan Amsakarunan and Ruban Kumar Rethinasabapathi will be in action.

Women's doubles will see Indian

participation from Kavipriya Selvam and Simran Singhi, Vaishnavi Khadkekar and Alisha Khan, as well as Prerana Alvekar and Mrunmayee Deshpande.

In the qualifiers, Kidambi Srikanth, S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian, and Tharun Man-nepalli will vie for spots in the men's singles main draw, while Annol Kharb and Tasnim Mir will aim to qualify in the women's section.

Other Indians featuring in the qualification rounds include Mohit Jaglan and Lakshita Jaglan, and the pair of Shivam Sharma and Poorvisha S Ram. (PTI)

KKR, RCB pick Shivam Shukla and Blessing Muzarabani as replacements



NEW DELHI, May 19: Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bengaluru have picked Shivam Shukla and Blessing Muzarabani as replacements for their injured players, the IPL said on Monday.

Defending champions KKR, who are already out of playoffs reckoning, have signed Shukla as a replacement for Rovman Powell for the remainder of the season.

The West Indian all-rounder needs a surgical intervention of his tonsils. Shukla - a leg-spinner - plays for Madhya Pradesh in do-

mestic cricket and will join KKR for Rs 30 lakh.

RCB, meanwhile, have picked Muzarabani as replacement for Lungisani Ngidi, who will leave the franchise to join the South African team for national duties.

The replacement will be effective from May 26.

Muzarabani - the Zimbabwe pacer - has so far played 70 T20s and has picked 78 wickets. Additionally, he has also represented Zimbabwe in 12 Tests and 55 ODIs. He will join RCB for Rs 75 lakh. (PTI)

Diksha finishes tied-9th at Dutch Ladies; Hitaashee tied-12th

HILVERSUM (NETHERLANDS), May 19: Indian golfer Diksha Dagar came up with steady 71 in the final round to finish tied-9th with an overall score of 4-under 212 in the Dutch Ladies Open, a part of the Ladies European Tour, here.

It was the 24-year-old Diksha's fourth top-10 finish as she produced rounds of 71, 70 and 71 over three days.

Behind Diksha, who has been on the Ladies European Tour (LET) since 2019, were rookies Hitaashee Bakshi (71-73-69) at tied-12th, and Avani Prashanth (77-70-67) at t-19th.

England's Mimi Rhodes continued her sensational rookie season to claim her third LET title. She finished two shots clear of the field at the Goyer Golf & Country Club.

Diksha bogeyed once on the front nine but flourished on the back nine as she birdied the 10th, 12th and 18th holes.



In between, she dropped a bogey on the 16th. Her plan is to get at least one win ahead of her home event, the Hero Indian Open.

Hitaashee, playing her first LET event outside India, had an eagle on the Par-4 eighth besides three birdies and one bogey.

Avani, who began the week with a 77, produced a superb 5-under 67

with five birdies and no bogeys for the joint second-best score of the day.

Tvesa Malik (74-75) missed the cut and Pranavi Urs withdrew due to medical reasons after the first round.

Rhodes' success was a remarkable third win in the last four starts for the 23-year-old, further solidi-

fying her lead at the top of the Order of Merit standings.

Rhodes entered the final round tied at the top alongside Spain's Nuria Iurruiz and Italy's Alessia Nobilio. She had a solid round on the final day, with three birdies on her scorecard for a third straight 69. Two shots behind the winner was fellow rookie Brianna Navarrosa and home favourite Anne van Dam. Rhodes was nine-under as Brianna and Anne Van Dam were 7-under.

Navarrosa had an impressive final bogey-free round, firing six-under par for the last 18 holes.

It's been a memorable week for Anne van Dam, who secured a T2 finish on home soil. Added to the celebrations, it was announcing earlier this week that Van Dam will captain Team Europe at the upcoming Ping Junior Solheim Cup 2026 -- capping off a standout week both on and off the course. (PTI)

Gary Lineker to step down from the BBC after sharing social media post on Zionism

LONDON, May 19: Gary Lineker, the former England soccer player and now a media celebrity, will leave his role as a presenter for the BBC after facing criticism for reposting an Instagram story about Zionism which featured a picture of a rat.

The 64-year-old Lineker, who is the British national broadcaster's highest-paid presenter on about 1.3 million pounds (\$1.7 million) a year, was set to leave flagship soccer highlights show "Match of the Day" at the end of this season but remain with the corporation to front other soccer coverage, including next year's men's World Cup.

However, the BBC said in a statement that Lineker will step down from the BBC after final "Match of the Day" episode next weekend in the wake of his decision to share a post from the group, Palestine Lobby, illustrated with a picture of a rat, titled: "Zionism explained in two minutes."

Rats, linked to disease and dirt, have been used to represent Jews in antisemitic propaganda throughout history, including by the Nazis in 1930s Germany.

"Gary has acknowledged the mistake he made," BBC director-general Tim Davie said. "Accordingly, we have agreed he will step back from further presenting after this season."

Lineker had apologized last week for his conduct, saying he reposted material which he subsequently learned contained "offensive references," adding that he withdrew the post as soon as he became aware of the issue and "would never knowingly share anything antisemitic."

Before Lineker's apology, Davie said the corporation needed people to be the "exemplars of BBC values and follow our social media policies" and that "when someone makes a mistake, it costs us."

"Football has been at the heart of my life for as long as I can remember — both on the pitch and in the studio," Lineker said. "I care deeply about the game, and about the work I've done with the BBC over many years. As I've said, I would never consciously repost anything antisemitic — it goes against everything I stand for." However, I recognize the error and upset that I caused, and re-

iterate how sorry I am. Stepping back now feels like the responsible course of action."

Lineker's openness to reflect his political views on social media have caused growing friction with the BBC regarding its impartiality guidelines. He was temporarily suspended from the corporation in March 2023 over comments he made criticizing the then-Conservative government's new asylum policy. It led to the BBC's rules on social media posts being rewritten to say presenters of high-profile programs outside news had a "responsibility to respect the BBC's impartiality, because of their profile on the BBC."

Lineker was among 500 high-profile figures who signed an open letter in February urging the BBC to re-broadcast a documentary, "Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone," to its streaming service, BBC iPlayer. The documentary was pulled after it emerged its 13-year-old narrator was the son of a Hamas official.

Last week, in an interview with The Daily Telegraph newspaper that came a day after his initial apology,

Lineker spoke out about the conduct of Israel in the war against Hamas in Gaza, saying those who stayed silent about it were "almost complicit." The network has lost something of a national treasure who has become almost as well known a broadcaster as he was a soccer player. Lineker is one of England's greatest players — he scored 48 goals in 80 games for his country and was the leading scorer at the 1986 World Cup in Mexico — who transitioned into being a slick, witty and knowledgeable TV personality and an all-around media darling, with 8.7 million followers on X and 1.2 million followers on Instagram. He has been the main presenter of BBC's "Match of the Day" since 1999 and he used his status as a freelancer to work for other broadcasters such as NBC, Al Jazeera and BT Sport. Lineker, who played his club soccer for Everton, Tottenham and Barcelona, is the co-founder of the hugely successful "Goalhanger" podcasts — the maker of the popular "The Rest is History" series and its spin-offs about politics, soccer, entertainment and money. (AP)

Napoli and Inter title-deciding matches moved to Friday

MILAN, May 19: The two potential title-deciding matches of the Serie A season have been moved to Friday night.

The Italian league's governing body announced on Monday that Napoli's home game against Cagliari and Inter's match at Como will kick off simultaneously at 8:45 p.m. local time (1945 GMT).

Antonio Conte's Napoli has a one-point lead over defending champion Inter Milan heading into the final round.

If both teams finish level at the top of the league, there will have to be a playoff to decide the destination of the title.

Given that very real possibility and that Inter is also in the Champions League final — against Paris Saint-Germain — on May

31, a scheduling issue arose.

The league council met on Monday morning and Italian media reports that the meeting was immediately suspended because of disagreements: with Inter wanting to play the final matches on Thursday and Napoli on Friday, in order to celebrate more fully with its fans.

Discussions eventually got back underway and it was decided to play the Napoli and Inter matches on Friday and the rest of the league games on Sunday.

Conte and Inter coach Simone Inzaghi will not be in their respective dugouts, however. Both were sent off at the end of their team's penultimate matches: a 0-0 draw at Parma for Napoli, and Inter's dramatic 2-2 draw against Lazio. (AP)

Ben Stokes quits alcohol to aid hamstring injury rehabilitation



LONDON, May 19: England's Test captain Ben Stokes has quit drinking alcohol during his ongoing hamstring injury rehabilitation in an effort to be battle-ready for the upcoming Ashes series against traditional rivals Australia.

The flamboyant cricketer said he gave up drinking at the start of the year in the hope abstinence would hasten his recovery from the injury.

The 33-year-old Stokes had surgery on his left hamstring in December after suffering a tear during the third Test against New Zealand, which ruled him out of action for a prolonged period.

"After my first major injury, I remember the shock of it and after the initial adrenaline had stopped I was thinking, 'How has this happened?'" Stokes told the Untapped podcast.

"(I thought) 'We did have a bit of a drink four or five nights ago, could that have played a part?' It wouldn't have helped."

"Then I was like 'OK, I need to start changing what I do.'"

Stokes tore his hamstring in the Hundred last year and then injured it again during the Test tour of New Zealand.

"I don't think I'll ever be completely sober, but I've not had a drink since January 2. I said to myself: 'Not until I finish my injury rehab and get back on the field.'"

Stokes recently unveiled his partnership with zero alcohol spirits company CleanCo, for which he has signed on as an "investor and brand partner."

The English skipper is set to make his comeback on Thursday in England's one-off Test against Zimbabwe at Trent Bridge. (PTI)

Mount cost Man United \$69 million and took Ronaldo's No 7 jersey - then things went wrong

MANCHESTER (ENGLAND), May 19: Mason Mount joined Manchester United as a rising star of English soccer. He was handed Cristiano Ronaldo's iconic jersey and was expected to be part of a bold rebuild of one of the biggest franchises in sport.

Then things went badly wrong. "It has been difficult, but I have learned a lot from these moments," said Mount ahead of United's Europa League final against Tottenham in Bilbao on Wednesday.

A slew of injuries of injuries has limited the midfielder to just 12 Premier League starts in two seasons since his \$69 million move from Chelsea in 2023.

In that time he's had to watch on as United's onfield decline has continued at an alarming rate, with the 20-time English champion certain to end this season with its lowest points total and league position in the Premier League era.

The Europa League, however, presents an unlikely chance to salvage a historically bad campaign with a major trophy and entry into next season's Champions League.

For Mount, who has returned to fitness and form in recent weeks, it is the sort of opportunity he has craved after two years of pain and frustration at Old Trafford.

For United, it is simply a lifeline.

"As a group, we know the situation we are in. We know the league

is not good enough and we have not been good enough in that, but the Europa League is something that we look forward to as a final," Mount said. "We won't forget about what we have done in the league and our league form."

"This is a final. If we can win it, it can be a positive end to a tough season."

ComebackThe final is reward for the long hours of rehab work the 26-year-old Mount has put in at United's Carrington training base to overcome a succession of setbacks including calf and hamstring injuries.

He has made only nine starts across all competitions this season, with three of those coming this month.

"It is not always easy. I have had many days at Carrington sitting on the treatment bed where I want to be training," he said. "I have been in the stand watching games where I want to be playing."

"I give everything to continue my rehab to try to get back and be back as quickly as possible. That was always on my mind."

StrugglesMount's difficulties at United have been in stark contrast to his time at Chelsea, where he was treated as a hero after rising through its academy and providing the assist for Kai Havertz's winning goal in the Champions League final of 2021.

He became a key part of Eng-



land's squad, which was runner up at the Euros that year, and started the final against Italy at Wembley.

It was a measure of how highly United regarded Mount that he was handed the No 7 jersey worn by club greats Eric Cantona, David Beckham and Ronaldo.

But instead of going on to create his own memorable moments with the famous number on his back, Mount has watched as United's plummeting form cost former manager Erik ten Hag his job and left current coach Ruben Amorim to preside over the club's worst campaign in Premier League history.

Massive honorIn recent weeks, however, Mount has shown flashes of the ability that convinced United

to sign him — not least his two goals against Athletic Bilbao in the semifinals of the Europa League.

His second, a shot from just past the halfway line, was befitting of the number he wears.

"I want to score goals, I want to have them moments," he said. "I just haven't had a lot of opportunities to do that, so any time I'm on the pitch I want to show them what I can do. I want to create chances for my teammates and win games and win trophies."

"I always had the end goal in my mind that it would come good and something will happen and I'll get a moment where I'll score a few goals or something will happen."

And where as United has struggled to fill the No 7 jersey since

Ronaldo first left Old Trafford in 2009, Mount remains convinced he can handle the pressure.

"It was a massive, massive honor (to be given it). Obviously I knew before joining what legends have worn the shirt and what it means to the club," he said. "As soon as I knew that there was a possibility of me wearing it, I was never going to turn it down. I always wanted to take that opportunity. It's not been easy up to this point, but I think I'm building."

Europa LeagueThe Europa League final is the chance for United and Tottenham to put their woeful domestic campaigns behind them.

United is 16th in the 20-team standings — one place above Spurs.

But the winner of the final will gain entry to the lucrative Champions League alongside Europe's top teams.

Mount knows the highs and the lows of playing in major finals and is determined to ensure he and his teammates don't blow their big chance.

He went from the top of the world to rock bottom within the space of a few weeks in 2021 — winning the Champions League with Chelsea before losing the European Championship final with England on penalties.

Both experiences left lasting impressions. (AP)

Alcaraz is clear favorite for French Open

ROME, May 19: Carlos Alcaraz is the clear favorite for the French Open. Top-ranked Janik Sinner is back from his doping ban, though, and building himself back up to full strength day by day.

Those were the verdicts after Alcaraz beat Sinner to win the Italian Open a week before Roland Garros starts on Sunday.

Alcaraz's title in Rome boosted his record on clay this season to 15-1.

"On clay right now, you're the best player," Sinner told Alcaraz during the trophy ceremony after the Spaniard's 7-6 (5), 6-1 win Sunday.

Sinner held two set points during the first set against Alcaraz in his first tournament following his three-month suspension.

"The level he has played in this tournament is insane after three months without playing," Alcaraz said. "He's going to be better and better. ... He's going to be a really dangerous player in Paris."

If Alcaraz and Sinner meet again in Paris, it will be in the final, because Alcaraz moved up to No. 2 in the rankings on Monday — meaning they will be on opposite sides of the draw at Roland Garros.

Alcaraz beat Sinner over five sets in the French Open semifinals en route to the title last year. Alcaraz then also defended his Wimbledon title for his fourth Grand Slam trophy.

"It was good to play him before two Grand Slams," Sinner said. "Certainly with my movement I need to understand better where to be at certain moments. That's different on clay from hard courts. There are small things I need to improve."

"Clay is the surface where I have the toughest time. There's no use hiding it," the Italian added.

Indeed, Sinner has won only one of his 19 career titles on clay, in Umag, Croatia, in 2022 — when he beat Alcaraz in the final.

Sinner's three months away from the sport caught up with him when he couldn't put up a fight in the second set against Alcaraz before his home fans at the Foro Italico.

"I certainly need to increase my intensity and hold it for a longer period of time," Sinner said. "I need to play more matches." (AP)

Focus shifts to rebuilding as CSK, RR face off in contest for pride

NEW DELHI, May 19: The contest between laggards Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals holds no significance in the context of the play-offs, but both teams will aim to accelerate their rebuilding process with the MS Dhoni-led side looking to transform itself from a 'dad's army' into a young brigade.

Tuesday's match is last of the 2025 edition for the Royals, who have nothing to savour except finding exceptional talent in Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who forced the cricket world to take note of his unexpected coruscating show. The bad bowling picks at the auction has hurt the Jaipur-based side the most apart from a non-impressive show by the middle order. If they are at number nine in the table out of 10 teams, mostly it has been because of a mediocre show by their bowlers and over dependence on top order batters.

Letting go of Jos Buttler from the squad and not-so-impressive show from Jofra Archer left the Royals with plenty to contend with. The absence of a premier Indian bowler who could put the opposition under the pump has been their biggest bane. If Mumbai Indians were able to revive their fortunes, it was because they had Jasprit Bumrah and Trent Boult. If Gujarat Titans are a force to reckon with, it is because Mohammad Siraj and Prasidh Krishna have done their job, sharing over 30 wickets between them — even on punishing flat Indian tracks.

Royals never had that cushion or luxury. They did cherish a few fiery starts, like the



one on Sunday against Punjab Kings when they scored 70-plus runs in the first five overs, but still found a way to lose the contest. This has been their story this season.

They can only play for pride and end on a high, avoid the wooden spoon by winning Tuesday match against a side that has already gone into transformation process.

The formula of packing the side with and relying on tried-and-tested players has proven outdated, severely hampering Chennai Super King's performance this season.

CSK have expected too much from Rahul

Tripathy and Deepak Hooda. Their India experience might have earned them contracts with the franchise but they could never be the consistent match winners in pressure situations. The rebuilding process has started with the infusion of young blood like Ayush Mhatre, Shaik Rasheed, and Urvil Patel. The 20-year-old Mhatre came close to hitting a century against RCB and also did well against SRH and MI.

Patel is a late entry but he showed his potential with his cameo against KKR. What they have done so far is a trailer for the next

edition. Losing skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad added to the woes of the side. Many hoped that with Dhoni coming back as skipper would change the fortunes of the side but even he could do little with such limited resources. Much was expected from foreign recruits like Devon Conway and Rachin Ravindra but nothing worked for the CSK.

In the past Shane Watson and Dwayne Bravo did wonders for the side but this season none played like them.

At the mini auction CSK will have to sort out their batting combination.

Squads:

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.

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c, wk), Ashok Sharma, Nandre Burger, Tushar Deshpande, Shubham Dubey, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Wanindu Hasaranga, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwen Maphaka, Riyan Parag, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Kunal Singh Rathore, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Maheesh Theekshana, Yuvraj Singh.

Match starts at 7.30 PM. (PTI)

News about India pulling out of Asia Cup is speculative, says BCCI secretary Saikia

NEW DELHI, May 19: The BCCI on Monday termed as "speculative and imaginary" the report which claimed that it has decided to pull out of men's Asia Cup and women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup.

A media report, quoting sources, said that BCCI won't let Indian teams compete in the two Asian Cricket Council (ACC) events at a time when the cricket body is being headed by a Pakistani and just days back the two neighbouring nations were involved in a military conflict. Pakistan's interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, who is also PCB Chairman, holds the position of President in the ACC.

Defending champions India are the hosts for the Men's Asia Cup, to be played in the T20 format, in September while Sri Lanka have been allotted the Women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup.

"Since this morning, it has come to our notice about some news items about BCCI's decision not to participate in the Asia Cup and Women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup, both ACC events. Such news is devoid of any truth as till now, the BCCI has not even discussed



or taken any such steps regarding the ensuing ACC events, leave alone writing anything to the ACC," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia to PTI.

Saikia added that BCCI is focussed on ensuring the smooth conduct of the Indian Premier League (IPL) and the upcoming five-match Test series against England beginning next month.

"At this stage, our prime focus is on the ongoing IPL and the subsequent England series, both men and women. The Asia Cup matter or any other ACC event issue has not come up for discussion at any level, hence any news or report on that is purely speculative and imaginary. (PTI)

Gill is a thinking cricketer, but too early to judge his Test captaincy credentials: Ashish Kapoor

NEW DELHI, May 19: Shubman Gill is a "thinking cricketer" but it is difficult to predict whether he would be able to replicate his T20 captaincy success in the Test format if handed the reins of the Indian team, feels Gujarat Titans assistant coach Ashish Kapoor.

Gill, who led GT to the IPL playoffs this season, is being seen as a potential successor to Rohit Sharma in the traditional format following the latter's recent retirement.

"If you see Shubman as a batsman, or basically as a cricketer, whether he's a good thinker or not, I think he's a good thinker of his own game," Kapoor said at the post-match press conference on Sunday night.

"I've seen him since the Under-16 days. In fact, I've done two camps with him at the NCA. Even back then, he used his brain a lot more than many others his age. And that's a key quality for a captain — to not just think for yourself but for the ten other players as well, and plan how to win matches."

India are set to play five Tests in England starting June 20 in Leeds, with the announcement of the new Test captain expected this week.

Asked how Gill may fare as a red-ball captain if given the opportunity, Kapoor said it is difficult to judge leadership capabilities based on limited experience.

"I'm not an astrologer. We're watching him lead in T20 cricket, but when Dhoni was named captain for the World Cup (in 2007), he hadn't captained anywhere. Nobody knew back then that he'd go on to become one of the world's best captains," said the former India spinner.

"If you had asked someone at that time — even Dhoni himself — what they thought of his captaincy, there would've been no answer. You have to observe a player over a period of time before making any judgment. Shubman hasn't even started yet, so it's very difficult to say."

Kapoor also praised Sai Sudharsan for sticking to the traditional cricketing strokes, which helped him emerge as the top run-getter this IPL season.

"I think they understand the game well themselves. They're smart cricketers, smart kids. Sure, you have to keep telling them sometimes, but he analyses his own game. He wants to attack," Kapoor said.

"If you see even his attacking shots are still boundaries. If he gets that one ball which is short or something, he gets a six. But the rest are proper cricket, attacking shots along the ground."

"He's more aware to play these shots at the start of his innings, the percentage was less last year, which has become better this year."

Delhi Capitals suffered a crushing 10-wicket defeat against GT despite posting a competitive 199 for three but Abhishek Porel believes the team still has a chance to qualify for the playoffs.

"We played good cricket, but we were a little behind in some moments — that's why we couldn't win. But we still have two games left, and if we win both, we still have a chance to qualify," the 22-year-old said.

DC mentor Kevin Pietersen has been working closely with Abhishek, especially on range-hitting. (PTI)

Mental barrier broken, free to push his limits: Gagan Narang on Neeraj breaching 90m mark

NEW DELHI, May 19: The 90-metre "mental barrier" broken, superstar Neeraj Chopra will now strive to push the limits further to attempt tasks that were previously considered out of reach, reckons Olympic medallist shooter Gagan Narang.

Chopra entered the elusive club when he threw the spear at a distance of 90.23 metres at the Doha Diamond League on Friday.

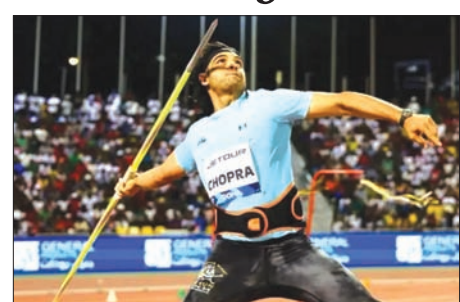
"The monkey is off his back and he is now free to push his limits," Narang told PTI Videos.

"At one limit, that glass ceiling, that mental barrier which probably played on his mind for some time is now broken," Narang said, as the double Olympic medallist Chopra prepares for major events like the upcoming World Championships, in which he will look to defend the title he won two years ago. Chopra, however, finished second to Germany's Julian Weber, who threw 91.06 metres, in Doha.

Narang hailed the achievement as "absolutely phenomenal" and "monumental" for Indian athletics, emphasising its broader significance.

"It's not just about the distance, right? It's about redefining what's possible for Indian sport, especially on the global stage."

"This is the first competition of the season for him. And there are many more competitions lined up. So, while it's important to break that



barrier, I think getting the right score is important at the right time."

He stressed "that confidence is very, very important" for Chopra to build on this milestone.

Narang, who served as India's Chef de Mission at Paris 2024, drew a parallel with his own experience in shooting, where chasing the perfect 600/600 score was both a mental and physical challenge. "You know, I was shooting 597, 598, 599. But that 600 — the world record mark — was not coming. I took it personally. And one and a half months later, I broke that record. That mindset — to go beyond what's seen as the limit — is what we're witnessing with Neeraj now." Even as Chopra continues to set benchmarks in Indian athletics, the widening gap between the 27-year-old and his compatri-

ots is becoming a matter of concern.

Narang, however, dismissed such concerns.

"I don't see a problem at all. There is an outlier in every sport. At some point, someone has to break the glass ceiling — Neeraj has done that." He likened the trajectory to his own shooting career, where early world-beating performances took time to be emulated.

"He's inspired a whole generation. Now others will start chasing that standard. Some may even surpass it in time."

The 2012 London Olympics bronze medallist further expressed his optimism about the proposed shooting league, scheduled to launch in November 2025.

"We've been thinking about a league for a long time. Indian shooters travel to Germany to compete in Bundesliga — now it's time for something of our own," he said.

According to him, the format — which is expected to include junior, youth, and senior players in each team — will be a major boost for Indian shooting.

"It'll allow juniors to learn directly from seniors, and bring international exposure to the grassroots. That knowledge exchange is invaluable." It remains to be seen if the league can directly impact India's Olympic medal count, but Narang is hopeful. (PTI)

Scheffler's fiery celebration at PGA Championship shows desire that burns in world's No. 1 player

CHARLOTTE (USA), May 19: Everything Scottie Scheffler did Sunday was expected. When the pressure was on, he hit the fairways he needed to hit. He landed the approach shots he needed to land. And, of course, he made clutch putts he needed to make. It's what everyone has come to depend on from the world's No. 1 player, a fine-tuned, almost mechanical approach to the game.

It was all expected, even predictable — right up until the celebration.

That's when Scheffler, in a rare display of pure emotion, took off his hat and slammed it into the green on the 18th hole after winning the PGA Championship by five shots over Bryson DeChambeau, Harry English and Davis Riley at Quail Hollow.

He followed with a hard slap of hands with his caddie and a quick hug, reminiscent of a defensive lineman celebrating a quarterback sack or a basketball player enjoying a high-flying dunk.

A short while later Scheffler was asked to hoist the 27-pound Wanamaker Trophy and he thrust it so hard in the air that the top started to fly off. So much for Scottie Scheffler being a robot.

The raw emotion he displayed Sunday reflects the burning competitiveness that resides within his built-for-golf 6-foot-3, 200-pound frame.

When asked afterward if he views himself as having a competitive fire, Scheffler laughed and said, "Yeah."

The calm, even-keeled demeanor on the course has often overshadowed hidden that part of him, that burning fire within that has driven the Texan to greatness.

Scheffler has never been known as being intense, and he never seems to get too high or too low on the spectrum.

Even when he was falsely arrested at last year's PGA Championship at Valhalla, he didn't lash out at the police. He accepted what happened as a misunderstanding in the heat of a very confusing moment — in a situation in which other professional athletes might have fiercely sought to protect their image.

That's why the ferocity with which he spiked his hat on 18, and the intense facial expressions in the moments afterward stood out. Maybe it was the culmination of battling back from puncturing the palm in his right hand while making raviole last Christmas. One thing is for sure, Sunday wasn't par for the course for Scheffler.

"Just a lot of happiness," Scheffler said later of his reaction to the second straight victory. "I think, you know, just maybe

thankful as well. It was a long week. I felt like this was as hard as I battled for a tournament in my career. This was a pretty challenging week."

Scheffler didn't swing the club all that well for the first 2 1/2 days in Charlotte.

But he played the back nine on Saturday and Sunday just about as well as anyone has, with the possible exception of some of Rory McIlroy's exploits here at the Wells Fargo Championship. On Saturday, Scheffler went 5-under par on the final five holes to take control of the tournament and carried a three-shot lead into the final round.

Most probably thought it was over.

But Scheffler struggled with his swing and made three uncharacteristic bogeys on the front nine Sunday, allowing two-time major champion Jon Rahm to pull into a tie at 9 under. It didn't last long.

Scheffler ate a sandwich as he made the turn at 2-over-par for the day, then proceeded to drill his drive down the middle of the fairway on the par-5 10th hole. He followed it with a approach shot to within 40 feet of the cup. He two-putted from there for birdie and never trailed again.

Scheffler really didn't need to do much after that point.

From there, it wasn't a matter of Scheffler running away with the tournament as much as it was others running away from him. Rahm failed to make birdie putts on Nos. 14 and 15 and made a mess of the three closing holes known as the Green Mile to take himself out of contention. Scheffler methodically proceeded to secure the tournament with birdies on 14 and 15.

By the time he walked up the 18th fairway he was leading by six shots before close with a safe bogey on the 18th for the five-shot win.

"The last five holes (Saturday), that's where I really kind of put myself ahead in the tournament," Scheffler said. "I mean, the back nine today was pretty special as well. But (Saturday) the way I finished off that round, I think it was really important for me to have a lead to play with today."

The two-time Masters champion joined Seve Ballesteros as the only players to win each of their first three majors by three or more strokes.

It was also his 15th career PGA Tour win, marking the shortest span between wins 1 and 15 by anyone not named Tiger Woods or Jack Nicklaus.

Scheffler is now halfway to the career Grand Slam with the two he still needs — the U.S. Open and British Open — still to come this year. (AP)

India's Faizan Anwar beats Ghana's Kpakpo in Super Fighter Series

BENGALURU, May 19: India's Faizan Anwar secured a dominant victory over Ghana's Kpakpo Alotey in their 10-round welterweight international professional boxing clash, the main event of the Super Fighter Series 3, here. The Dubai-based Anwar, who is originally from Kolkata, sent the crowd into an applause after every round as Bengaluru witnessed an intense fight hosted by Grassroot Boxing and Crown Boxing. Ukraine's Danylo Honcharu won the WBA Asia Middle-East Super Lightweight title after Ruslan Kamilov of Dagestan retired in Round 3 and a Technical Knock Out was awarded to the Ukrainian.

In other supporting contests, F. Zoramchhana of Mizoram beat the Bengaluru-based Harsh Saroha through a unanimous decision while another Bangalore based pro-boxer, Kamla Roka. (PTI)

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