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Defence secretary meets Modi to apprise him about combat readiness States asked to conduct drills to prepare for any attack

NEW DELHI, May 5: The Union Home Ministry has asked several states to conduct mock drills on May 7 amid rising tensions with Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack, government sources said on Monday.

The measures to be taken during the drill include operationalisation of air raid warning sirens and training of civilians on civil defence aspects to protect themselves in the event of a "hostile attack", they said. The other measures are provisions of crash blackout measures, early camouflaging of vital plants and installations and updation of evacuation plans and their rehearsal.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been holding a series of high-level meetings, including with top defence functionaries, as India weighs its options for countermeasures against the April 22 terror at-



tack which left 26 civilians, mostly tourists, dead.

Modi has vowed to pursue the perpetrators and those part of the conspiracy to the "ends of the earth" to inflict punishment on them "beyond their imagination".

Meanwhile, defence secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh on Monday met Prime Minister Narendra

Modi and is understood to have briefed him about the combat readiness of the armed forces against the backdrop of increasing tensions between India and Pakistan over the Pahalgam terror attack. The meeting came a day after Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal A P Singh met Prime Minister Modi. Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh

K Tripathi had on Saturday apprised the prime minister on the overall situation in the critical sea lanes in the Arabian Sea.

While the Indian Navy is maintaining a high alert in the Arabian Sea in view of Pakistan's naval drills, the frontline fighter jets of the Indian Air Force have been carrying out long-range sorties.

There is no official word on the prime minister's meeting with the defence secretary.

Citing "cross-border linkages" to the April 22 Pahalgam attack that killed 26 civilians, India has promised severe punishment to those involved in the strike.

The prime minister's meetings with Navy Chief Admiral Tripathi, Air Chief Marshal A P Singh and Defence Secretary Singh came amid speculations about India's possible military strikes against Pakistan. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SC seeks fresh report from Manipur on probe into alleged audio clips of ex-CM Biren Singh

NEW DELHI, May 5: The Supreme Court on Monday perused a forensic report on authenticity of leaked audio clips alleging role of former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh in the ethnic violence and asked the state government to file a fresh report pertaining to the probe.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar opened the sealed cover report of the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) submitted by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and asked the law officer to seek instruction from the state officers with regard to investigation in the matter.

"The FSL report has been filed. We need a month to probe it," the law officer said, adding the matter can be taken up by the Manipur High Court now as "peace is prevailing now and the probe can go on".

"Let us keep the petitioners aside and if something wrong has been done then let us look into it rather than protecting anyone," the CJI said.

After perusing the report, the CJI asked the law officer that he will have to speak to the officers about it.

"The solicitor general to take fresh instructions on filing a fresh report after re-examination. Let it be relisted in the week commencing July 21, 2025," the bench ordered. When lawyer Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner Kuki Organisation for Human



Rights Trust (KOHUR), said the probe pertains to the former chief minister and it should be fair, the CJI said. "Now we have the President Rule there... it should not be a problem". He then adjourned the hearing on the plea of KOHUR.

Earlier, the state government had informed the bench that a forensic report on the authenticity of leaked audio clips alleging the role of Singh in the ethnic violence was ready and will be filed.

Singh resigned as the chief minister of Manipur on February 9, amid rumblings within the state BJP and growing demands for a change of leadership. Earlier, the top court sought (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Campaign ends for final phase Panchayat polls

GUWAHATI, May 5: Campaigning for the second and final phase of panchayat elections in Assam ended on Monday, as ruling and opposition parties wooed rural voters with the promise of all-round development.

Polling will be held in 13 districts of central and lower Assam in 12,130 polling stations on May 7. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma led the campaign for the BJP and its allies, addressing back-to-back rallies during campaigning.

Sarma dwelt on various schemes taken up by his government since he assumed power four years back, with focus on initiatives for women, youth and the marginalised sections. He maintained that schemes for free education and the state government's tough stance against social ills like child marriage and drug abuse have been yielding positive results.

Sarma also slammed the previous Congress governments in his campaign speeches, accusing the grand old party of trying to appease the voters with "lungi, dhoti, suta (yarn), blanket and mosquito nets" without actually empowering them. Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and state BJP president Dilip Saikia, among other leaders, also campaigned for the ruling alliance. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Let Rahul Gandhi clarify if Cong MP visiting Pak is okay: Himanta

GUWAHATI, May 5: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday dared Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to clarify in Parliament whether his party's MPs can visit Pakistan, as he continued to target opposition MP Gaurav Gogoi for his alleged links with the neighbouring country.

Sarma maintained that visiting Pakistan is a "big crime" and "stern action" will be taken against Gogoi, backed with evidence of the Congress leader's stay in that country a few years ago.

He also claimed that there is a "deeper story" behind Gogoi's children not being Indian citizens, which will be revealed by September 10.

The Assam CM and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, the deputy leader of Congress in Lok Sabha, over his British wife's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency ISI, with Sarma claiming that the MP had stayed for 15 days in the neighbouring nation without informing the authorities.

On the sidelines of Panchayat election campaign rally, Sarma was asked by reporters whether going to Pakistan is deemed a crime.

"It is a big crime. He not only went to Pakistan but also met a Pakistani army official. Stern action will be taken," the chief minister replied.

Sarma said that he is waiting till September to initiate the next course of action as "papers have to be brought from Pakistan and England. I have to show proof to the people, or else they won't believe me." The chief minister sought to know from Rahul Gandhi his views on whether Congress MPs can visit Pakistan or not.

"I want to hear from Rahul Gandhi whether it is okay to visit Pakistan or not. Let me see if he has the courage to clarify on the floor of Parliament," he said. Sarma had said on Sunday that he will meet Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and ask why the opposition party gave ticket to Gogoi.

In March, the CM had said the

state government may seek help from agencies like Interpol in investigating the alleged interference of Pakistani national Ali Taqueer Sheikh, who is claimed to have links with Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn, in India's internal affairs.

Sheikh, an advisor of the Pakistan Planning Commission and a former colleague of Colburn, was charged under various sections of the Bharatiya NyayaSanhita (BNS) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Sarma also claimed that there is "deeper story" behind the two minor children of Gogoi not being Indian citizens. The BJP leader was retorting to a question by the state Congress on whether his brother, Jayanta Biswa Sarma's, children are British citizens.

Sharing the post, Sarma maintained that it was an acknowledgement that Gogoi's children are not Indian citizens. "And now, even you are forced to admit a critical truth — (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Talking about peace with India treated as crime in Pakistan: CM

GUWAHATI, May 5: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday claimed that talking about peace with India is "treated as a crime" in Pakistan, whereas in India, dialogue is "tolerated, debated and even promoted on mainstream platforms".

"To those in India who continue to preach 'Aman ki Asha' without grasping the ground reality -- understand this: In Pakistan, talking about peace with India is treated as a crime. In India, talking about peace with Pakistan is tolerated, debated -- even promoted on mainstream platforms," Sarma posted on X.

"Romanticising Pakistan while enjoying Indian freedom is not idealism -- it is ignorance at best, hypocrisy at worst and a betrayal of your own motherland," he added.

The chief minister listed how Pakistan handles pro-India voices through surveillance and profiling, censorship and take-downs, legal intimidation, arrests and torture, forced disappearances and social boycott and threats.

Regarding surveillance and profiling, Sarma alleged that every post, tweet, or article with pro-India sentiment is tracked by Pakistan's intelligence agencies, especially the ISI, with students, activists, and jour-

nalists routinely placed on watchlists.

He alleged that Pakistan resorts to censorship and takedowns with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) actively blocking or removing content deemed favourable to India.

"Even hashtags promoting peace or dialogue are erased without explanation," he claimed. Regarding legal intimidation, Sarma alleged that under Pakistan's draconian cybercrime law PECA, people are arrested for expressing anything seen as "pro-India".

Vague charges like "anti-state" and "glorifying the enemy" are used to silence voices of reason, he added.

Citizens have been picked up by intelligence agencies, tortured, and jailed without trial -- often for something as harmless as a poem, a peace appeal, or a balanced article, Sarma alleged.

Regarding forced disappearances, the chief minister alleged that dozens -- especially Baloch, Pashtun, and Sindh activists -- have "vanished without a trace for expressing support for India or challenging Pakistan's military narrative". Families wait for years, with no answers and no justice, he added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Japan's House of Representatives-led team winds up 3-day visit to Assam

GUWAHATI, May 5: A high-level delegation of Japan, led by its Speaker of House of Representatives Nukaga Fukushiro concluded a three-day visit to Assam on Monday, during which they held discussions with the chief minister and visited several places.

State cabinet minister Nandita Garlosa, along with top officials, bid farewell to the delegation at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport here.

"The esteemed Japanese delegation, led by Hon'ble Speaker of the House of Representatives, H.E. Nukaga Fukushiro, concluded their three-day visit to Assam. Hon'ble Minister of Sports and Youth Welfare, Smt. @GorlosaNandita, along with senior officials, bid them farewell at Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport," the Chief Minister's Office said in a post on X.

The over 50-member delegation had reached Guwahati on Saturday evening.

Soon after arrival, Fukushiro and his team had met chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and discussed various issues of mutual interest, and later attended a dinner hosted in their honour by the governor and the Speaker of the Assam assembly.

The delegation had on Sunday visited an upcoming Japan-assisted skill training centre and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati, both at Amingaon, and Tata's proposed semiconductor plant at Jagiroad. This was the fourth high-level delegation visit to the state since Sarma had toured Japan in February, the chief minister said on Sunday.

The Japanese ambassador to India came twice, an industry delegation attended the Advantage Assam business summit, and a team of intellectuals (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Russia fully backs India's fight against terrorism, Putin tells PM Modi in phone call

NEW DELHI, May 5: Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday conveyed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a phone call that Russia fully backs India's fight against terrorism and that the perpetrators of the Pahalgam terror attack must be brought to justice.

A Russian embassy readout said Putin described the terror attack as "barbaric" and that both the leaders emphasised the need for an "uncompromising fight" against terrorism in all its manifestations.

It also said that President Putin accepted the prime minister's invitation for the annual India-Russia summit to be held in India this year.

During the conversation with Modi, Putin "strongly condemned the terror attack in Pahalgam" and conveyed condolences on the loss of innocent lives, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson



Randhir Jaiswal said in a social media post.

The Russian president was among the first world leaders to condemn the April 22 terror attack that killed 26 civilians.

Putin conveyed "deepest condolences on the loss of innocent lives and expressed 'full support' to India in the fight against terrorism, Jaiswal said. "He emphasised that the perpetrators of

the heinous attack and their supporters must be brought to justice," the MEA spokesperson added.

Both leaders reiterated their commitment to deepen the special and privileged strategic partnership between India and Russia.

Modi conveyed his greetings to Putin for the 80th anniversary of the Victory Day and invited him for the annual India-Russia summit to be held in India later this year, Jaiswal said.

The Russian readout said the president once again "expressed his sincere condolences over the death of Indian citizens as a result of the barbaric terrorist attack on April 22 in Pahalgam".

During the conversation, the strategic nature of Russia-India relations as a special privileged partnership was emphasised, it said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Three arrested for killing wild elephants in MNP

GUWAHATI, May 5: Three persons have been arrested for their alleged involvement in the killing of three wild elephants in Assam's Manas National Park, officials said on Monday.

The three accused were arrested from Chirang district and the police seized two single-barrel muzzle-loading guns, cartridges, walkie-talkie sets and poaching gear from their possession.

Following their arrest, the accused led the police to the recovery of two tusks.

The arrested persons have been identified as Jabid Borgoyary, Mahesh Islary and Jaran Basumatary.

The carcasses of three wild elephants, allegedly killed by the poachers, were found near the India-Bhutan border in Palengshi beat area (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP's Sambit Patra meets ex-Manipur CM Biren Singh, party MLAs in Imphal

IMPHAL, May 5: BJP's North East in-charge Sambit Patra on Monday held closed-door meetings with former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh in Imphal. Patra met Singh at the latter's residence in Luwangshangbam in Imphal East district.

"Some BJP MLAs were also present during the closed-door meeting with Singh, which lasted for more than an hour," party sources said.

Patra then met Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh at his residence in Bamon Leikai. The BJP leader also interacted with a few party MLAs at a city hotel.

Two BJP MLAs, who were part of the discussions with Patra at the hotel, said the talks mainly revolved around the law and order situation in Manipur.

"We discussed ways to restore peace in the hills and the valley. We also talked about the role of security forces. He (Patra) listened to us patiently and assured that our



concerns will be notified to the authorities, party MLA Kh Ibomcha told reporters.

BJP MLA Sapam Kunjakshor added: "The discussions were mostly focused on law and order, and restoration of peace and normalcy. There was, however, no discussion on the recent letter by 21 MLAs to PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah about formation of government in Manipur."

Another party legislator, Th Shyankumar, who met Patra, said

once peace is restored in the state, a popular government can be automatically formed.

As there is an ongoing conflict, the Centre seems more focused on bringing back peace first... All the BJP MLAs are part of one family. We had discussions on government formation in Manipur. Presidents' Rule cannot be imposed for long. The assembly has to be dissolved if it exceeds six months, the legislator from Andro constituency said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ANRF to launch 'small business deep-tech innovation' programme: Jitendra Singh

The newly-launched ANRF will help the initiative

NEW DELHI, May 5: In a significant step aimed at boosting innovation, India is set to launch a 'small business deep-tech innovation' programme to empower start-ups and MSMEs to scale breakthrough technologies for real-world applications.

The newly-launched Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) will help the initiative, Union Science and Technology minister Jitendra Singh said on Monday after a review meeting.

Singh called for bold new directions in science-driven growth, including AI-led innovations, deep-tech start-ups and greater infrastructure sharing.

The meeting witnessed the minister focus on the evolving role of the ANRF as well as ongoing national missions such as the geospatial initiative. Abhay Karandikar, the science and technology depart-



ment secretary, newly-appointed ANRF CEO Shivkumar Kalayanaram and other senior officials attended the meeting.

Kalyanaram presented an ambitious vision for the ANRF, promising catalytic funding mechanisms, deep integration with

private industry, and strategic missions modelled on globally successful institutions such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) and Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

Recognising the need to better utilise existing national research

infrastructure, the minister reviewed ANRF's plan to create a 'cloud of research and innovation infrastructure', a digital platform that would offer deep-tech start-ups and academic institutions access to underused scientific equipment and facilities across the country. This move is expected to democratise research capabilities, especially for smaller players who often lack access to high-end lab tools, Singh said.

The minister directed the ANRF to engage with vice-chancellors of universities to raise awareness about its mission and opportunities for collaboration.

Singh also asked the ANRF to explore the possibility of helping medical colleges establish their own medical research parks -- a move that could boost clinical innovation and local biotech entrepreneurship. (PTI)

Sensex rises nearly 295 pts to close at 2025-high on foreign fund inflows, drop in crude prices

MUMBAI, May 5: Benchmark BSE Sensex climbed nearly 295 points to close at an over four-month high on Monday following sustained foreign fund inflows and a sharp correction in global crude oil prices.

Rising for the second in a row, the 30-share BSE barometer gained 294.85 points or 0.37 per cent to settle at 80,796.84, marking its highest close in 2025 so far. During the day, it jumped 547.04 points or 0.67 per cent to 81,049.03.

The NSE Nifty rose 114.45 points or 0.47 per cent to 24,461.15, its highest closing level in 2025.

Among Sensex firms, Adani Ports jumped 6.29 per cent amid reports that Gautam Adani's representatives met with US administration officials to seek the dismissal of criminal charges in a bribery probe. All other listed Adani group stocks, including Adani Enterprises, Adani Ports, Adani Power and Adani Green Energy, ended with sharp gains.

Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Eternal, Power Grid, ITC, Tata Motors, Asian Paints and Hindustan Unilever were also among Sensex gainers.

Among the laggards, Kotak Mahindra Bank tanked 4.57 per cent after the firm reported a 7.57



per cent decline in consolidated net profit to ₹ 4,933 crore for the first three months of FY25, primarily due to elevated stress in the micro-lending book.

State Bank of India, Axis Bank, Titan and IndusInd Bank were among the other losers.

State Bank of India dipped over 1 per cent after it reported an 8.34 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to ₹ 19,600 crore for the January-March quarter compared to ₹ 21,384 crore a year ago, impacted by a decline in net interest margins.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 2,769.81 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Foreign investors injected ₹ 4,223 crore into the country's eq-

uity market in April, as they turned net buyers for the first time in three months amid a blend of favourable global cues and robust domestic fundamentals.

The inflow of foreign capital came last month following a back-to-back net outflow of ₹ 3,973 crore in March, ₹ 34,574 crore in February, and ₹ 78,027 crore in January.

"The market has sustained its positive momentum, though the level of optimism has decreased. Continued foreign inflows and record GST collections in April indicate resilience in economic activity, fostering mild hopefulness. A weak dollar and a decline in oil prices have further bolstered FII sentiment.

"However, the market's momen-

um is moderating, with action shifting from broad-based movements to stock and sector-specific trends based on results," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.45 per cent and smallcap index climbed 1.23 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, services jumped the most 2.99 per cent, followed by oil & gas (1.95 per cent), auto (1.88 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.58 per cent), utilities (1.50 per cent) and energy (1.49 per cent).

Bankex emerged as the only loser. As many as 2,563 stocks advanced while 1,459 declined and 180 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Markets in South Korea, Japan, China and Hong Kong were closed due to holidays.

European markets were trading on a mixed note.

US markets ended significantly higher on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 1.45 per cent to USD 60.40 a barrel.

The 30-share BSE benchmark gauge settled 259.75 points, or 0.32 per cent, higher at 80,501.99 on Friday. The Nifty eked out a marginal gain of 12.50 points, or 0.05 per cent, to settle at 24,346.70. (PTI)

Escalating tensions would weigh on Pakistan's growth: Moody's

NEW DELHI, May 5: Moody's Ratings on Monday said sustained escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan will not have any major economic disruption in the country, but will be a setback for Islamabad as its forex reserves could come under pressure and weigh on growth.

In its commentary titled 'Escalating Pakistan-India tensions would weigh on Pakistan's growth', Moody's said it does not expect major disruptions to India's economic activity because it has minimal economic relations with Pakistan (less than 0.5 per cent of India's total exports in 2024).

On April 22, 26 people were killed after terrorists opened fire on tourists in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir. India has identified five terrorists, including three Pakistani nationals, behind the massacre in Pahalgam and has pledged to take action against the perpetrators of the heinous act.

"Sustained escalation in tensions with India would likely weigh on Pakistan's growth and hamper the government's ongoing fiscal consolidation, setting back Pakistan's progress in achieving macroeconomic stability," Moody's said.

Pakistan's macroeconomic conditions have been improving, with growth gradually rising, inflation declining, and foreign-exchange reserves increasing amid continued progress in the IMF programme.

"A persistent increase in tensions could also impair Pakistan's access to external financing and pressure its foreign-exchange reserves, which remain well below what is required to meet its external debt payment needs for the next few years," Moody's said.

The Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is scheduled to meet Pakistani officials on May 9 to evaluate a fresh USD 1.3 billion funding arrangement for Pakistan under its climate resilience loan programme. It will also assess an ongoing USD 7 billion bailout package.

Sources have said that India will be asking global multilateral agencies, including the IMF, to re-examine funds and loans provided to Pakistan.

Moody's said the macroeconomic conditions in India would be stable, bolstered by moderating but still high levels of growth amid strong public investment and healthy private consumption. "In a scenario

of sustained escalation in localised tensions, we do not expect major disruptions to India's economic activity because it has minimal economic relations with Pakistan. However, higher defence spending would potentially weigh on India's fiscal strength and slow its fiscal consolidation," Moody's said.

Moody's said its geopolitical risk assessment for Pakistan and India accounts for persistent tensions, which have, at times, led to limited military responses.

"We assume that flare-ups will occur periodically, as they have (been) throughout the two sovereigns post-independence... but... it will not lead to an outright, broad-based military conflict," it added.

Moody's has a 'Caa2' rating on Pakistan, which means the debt issued by the sovereign is of poor quality with very high default risks.

Moody's rates India at 'Baa3', which is the lowest investment-grade rating. Citing "cross-border linkages" to the April 22 attack, India has promised severe punishment to those involved in the strike.

Following the deadly terror attack, India and Pakistan's diplomatic relations have deteriorated. India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, which could severely reduce Pakistan's water supply, shut down the only operational land border crossing at Attari and downgraded diplomatic ties.

In response, Pakistan suspended the 1972 Simla peace treaty with India, halted bilateral trade and closed its airspace to Indian airlines.

Last week, India imposed a ban on the import of goods originating from or passing through Pakistan, halted the exchange of mail and parcels, and prohibited the entry of Pakistani ships at Indian ports in fresh punitive measures against Islamabad.

Many global powers, including the US and European Union, have called on both India and Pakistan to de-escalate tensions while unequivocally condemning the terror strike.

India's exports to Pakistan in April-January 2024-25 stood at USD 447.65 million, while imports were meagre USD 0.42 million. These imports were limited to niche items like figs (USD 78,000), Basil and Rosemary herbs (USD 18,856), certain chemicals, and Himalayan pink salt. The imports were USD 2.88 million in 2023-24. (PTI)

PhonePe launches Made-in-India SmartSpeaker

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 5: PhonePe has announced the launch of its next-generation SmartSpeaker, a Made-in-India upgrade to its original device, aimed at supporting the evolving needs of offline merchants.

The development was confirmed through an official company statement issued on Sunday.

The new SmartSpeaker retains key features of its predecessor, such as real-time audio alerts for payment confirmations in 21 languages and a celebrity voice feature, while introducing major improvements in connectivity, power efficiency, and audio clarity.

The device now runs on a 4G network, offers better reliability, charges fully in approximately 75 minutes, and provides over seven days of standby battery life.

Its compact design makes it easier for merchants to place it even in tight counter spaces.

Yuvraj Singh Shekhawat, chief business officer of Merchant Business at PhonePe, said, "We are excited to introduce our next-generation SmartSpeakers, which are Made in India. Manufacturing these devices locally allows greater flexibility in adapting products to the specific needs and preferences of our merchants. With these SmartS-

peakers, we are not only driving financial inclusion for merchants nationwide, especially in underserved areas, but also fostering domestic innovation and ensuring that Indian manufacturers become integral participants in the country's digital transformation."

Originally launched in 2022, PhonePe's SmartSpeaker has become a reliable payment notification solution for offline businesses, helping reduce reliance on app checks or SMS notifications.

The upgraded version continues to build on that foundation while aligning with the government's push for domestic manufacturing and digital enablement.

World Bank ED Parameswaran Iyer to represent India at IMF board

NEW DELHI, May 5: Parameswaran Iyer, Executive Director at the World Bank, has been temporarily entrusted with the responsibility of being India's nominee director on the board of International Monetary Fund (IMF) ahead of a crucial May 9 meeting, sources said.

Iyer's nomination was necessitated to fill a vacancy created with the termination of services of K V Subramanian as the executive director at the IMF, six months ahead of his three-year tenure.

The government's decision assumes significance as the IMF Executive Board will meet on May 9, to take a call on a new USD 1.3 billion loan under a climate resilience loan programme, along with the first review of the ongoing USD 7 billion bailout package for Pakistan.

It is to be noted that India is making efforts to corner Pakistan diplomatically and at various global fora as New Delhi believes its involvement in the Pahalgam terror attack that led to killing of 26 tourists last month.

According to sources, had India not nominated Iyer, the alternate executive director Harischandra Pahath Kumbure Gedara of Sri Lanka would have discharged duties of ED as per the rules of the Washington-based multilateral funding agency. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has terminated Subramanian's services effective April 30, 2025. The reasons for Subramanian's exit have not been officially announced.

According to the sources, Subramanian is learnt to have raised questions about the IMF's datasets, which did not go down well in the corridors of the multilateral agency. In the past too, the IMF has been unhappy with some of the statements made by Subramanian, especially related to India's debt situation.

Besides, the sources said, concerns were raised over an "alleged impropriety" relating to the promotion and publicity of his latest book, 'India@100: Envisioning Tomorrow's Economic Powerhouse'. The executive board of the IMF is composed of 25 directors (executive directors or EDs) elected by the member countries or groups of countries. (PTI)

Airtel Business launches 'Business Name Display' to curb spam and boost caller trust

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 5: Airtel Business has launched a new service called "Business Name Display" (BND), aimed at helping enterprises improve customer engagement and combat the growing issue of spam calls.

The company made the announcement through an official statement released on Sunday.

According to Airtel, BND is the first-of-its-kind solution in India that enables businesses to display their verified brand name on the recipient's mobile screen during outgoing calls.

The initiative is designed to help customers identify legitimate business calls and differentiate them from spam or fraudulent calls, thereby enhancing trust and reducing the chances of critical calls being ignored.

The launch follows the success of Airtel's previous spam control initiatives, including India's first spam-fighting network and a nationwide awareness campaign.

While these efforts led to more people rejecting calls flagged as spam or from unknown numbers, they also caused genuine calls from businesses such as banks, hospitals, food and courier services to go unanswered.

The new BND feature aims to resolve this issue by allowing verified business names to appear with incoming calls, giving recipients the ability to make informed decisions.

Sharat Sinha, director and CEO of Airtel Business, said in the statement, "At Airtel, we are constantly innovating to create a communication experience that is smarter, safer and more

transparent for everyone. With 'Business Name Display', we will be helping businesses establish trust and stand out with every call while simultaneously giving customers the confidence of knowing who is reaching out to them."

The company also reported that the solution was successfully piloted with over 250 businesses across sectors including banking, retail, food delivery, logistics and quick commerce.

During the pilot phase, these businesses used more than 1.5 million phone numbers to make around 12.8 million calls in the past 30 days.

Airtel claims this led to a significant increase in customer engagement.

To activate the BND service, businesses need to register and configure their details through Airtel Business's online portal.

Experts urge stronger response as asthma remains widely undiagnosed

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 5: On the occasion of World Asthma Day, health experts have raised concerns over the widespread underdiagnosis of asthma in India, urging for a more robust national response to the chronic respiratory condition.

According to an official statement, nearly 70% of individuals experiencing severe asthma symptoms remain undiagnosed, while fewer than 2.5% of patients use inhaled corticosteroids daily—the recommended course of treatment.

This year's World Asthma Day, themed "Make Inhaled Treatment Accessible for All" by the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), comes at a time when asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases have become leading contributors to Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) related deaths in the country.

NCDs are responsible for over half of all fatalities across India, making effective asthma management a growing public health priority.

Dr Smitakshi Medhi, Consultant Pulmonologist in Guwahati, highlighted the critical need for timely diagnosis, proper inhaler technique, and consistent adherence to treatment in order to manage asthma effectively.

"The primary goals of asthma management are to control symptoms, reduce dependence on rescue medication, prevent hospitalisations, and preserve lung function—ultimately improving quality of life," she said, "Unfortunately, these areas are often hindered by poor device technique, limited access to care, and a lack of long-term support."

Initiatives such as Cipla's "Breathefree" program, which reportedly reached over one crore people in the 2024-25 financial year alone, are helping to bridge these gaps.

"Breathefree" includes on-ground screening camps, digital educational tools, and instructional videos that aim to improve understanding and use of inhalation therapy.

Contd. from Page 1...

States asked to conduct drills

to avenge the dastardly attack. In a high-level meeting with the top defence brass, Prime Minister Modi on April 29 gave the armed forces "complete operational freedom" to decide on the mode, targets and timing of the response to the Pahalgam terror attack. Modi also emphasised the national resolve to deal a "crushing blow to terrorism". Amid the escalating tensions between the two sides, the Pakistan military has been resorting to "unprovoked firings" using small arms from their posts across the LoC in the last few days.

The Pakistan Army resorted to unprovoked firings on Sunday night as well. "During the night of May 4 and 5, Pakistan Army posts resorted to unprovoked small arms fire across the LoC in areas opposite Kupwara, Baramulla, Poonch, Rajauri, Mendhar, Naushera, Sunderbani, and Akhnoor in Jammu and Kashmir," said a Indian military source. India on April 23 announced a raft of punitive measures against Pakistan including suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, shutting down of the only operation land border crossing at Attari and downgrading of diplomatic ties in view of cross-border links to the attack.

In response, Pakistan shut its airspace to Indian airliners and suspended all trade with India, including through third countries. Pakistan rejected India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty and said any move to stop the flow of water will be seen as an "act of war". (PTI)

SC seeks fresh report

a sealed-cover forensic report from the CFSL on the authenticity of the leaked audio clips alleging Singh's role in the ethnic violence that began in May 2023. KOHUR had sought a court-monitored SIT probe into Singh's alleged role. Bhushan termed the contents of the audio leaks a "very serious matter" and said Singh was purportedly heard saying that Meitei groups were allowed to loot arms and ammunition of the state government. "I have annexed transcripts of tape recordings," he added.

The solicitor general said the petitioner had "ideological inclinations" and there was a report by a committee of three high court judges which stated that there were efforts to keep the "pot boiling". "A truth lab confirmed that 93 per cent it is the voice of the chief minister," Bhushan said, adding "truth labs are far more reliable than the FSL reports."

On November 8 last year, a bench headed by former CJI D Y Chandrachud directed KOHUR to produce material to indicate the authenticity of some of the leaked audio clips. Bhushan had said he would also file a copy of the tape in a CD format. Mehta, however, said the plea could be filed in the high court under Article 226 of the Constitution. More than 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced since the ethnic violence broke out between the Imphal valley-based Meitei and neighbouring hills-based Kuki communities in May 2023. The clashes began after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against an order of the Manipur High Court on the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

Bhushan alleged that the recorded conversation prima facie showed the complicity and involvement of the state machinery in the violence against the Kuki Zo community. He said the clips had "disturbing conversations" and Singh could be heard instigating the violence and protecting the attackers.

KOHUR's plea alleged that Singh was instrumental in "inciting, organising and thereafter centrally orchestrating the large-scale murder, destruction and other forms of violence against the Kuki-dominated areas in Manipur". "Petitioner is praying for a court-monitored investigation by special investigation team into the leaked audio tape clips as there is clear and strong prima facie evidence showing involvement of the highest functionary, i.e., chief minister of a state. The investigation would need to unearth the conspiracy which appears to involve the highest functionary of state," it said. (PTI)

Talking about peace with India

Sarma alleged that Pakistan also resorts to social boycott and threats and those who speak about peace or acknowledge India's achievements are ostracised, branded traitors, and often threatened by extremist elements. The Assam chief minister has been regularly posting against Pakistan on social media since the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22 in which 26 tourists were killed. (PTI)

Let Rahul Gandhi clarify

that the son and daughter of Shri Gaurav Gogoi are not Indian citizens. There is a deeper story behind this — one that the people of Assam and India will come to know by September 10," he said. The Kerala Congress had earlier taken on Sarma on the micro-blogging site recently after he posted that "the minor children of one Member of Parliament from Assam are no longer citizens of India".

"Dear Himanta BS, Are you talking about Dr. S Jaishankar's two children? Or is it Piyush Goyal's children? Hardeep Singh Puri's or Sudha Murthy's?" the opposition party's unit of the southern state asked. "Be specific while making such big allegations against people in your own party," it added. (PTI)

Campaign ends for final phase

The Congress hit back with allegations that the BJP-led government has failed to address core issues like unemployment and price rise. Leader of opposition Debabrata Saikia, participating in different campaign meetings, asserted that people are faced with problems of unemployment, inflation and insecurity.

He alleged that Sarma was taking recourse to various gimmicks and trying to divert attention from the dispensation's failures, while promising commitment for development of rural areas if the Congress wins the panchayat polls. Other Congress leaders, including deputy leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi and state president Bhupen Kumar Borah, also took part in the campaigning.

In the second phase, polling will be held at Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Bajali, Nalbari, Kamrup, Kamrup(Metro), Hojai, Nagaon, Morigaon and Darrang districts. Polling will be held from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm and repoll, if any, on May 9, officials said. The counting of votes for both phases will be held simultaneously on May 11. The total number of voters for the second phase is 91,31,127, comprising 46,30,924 males, 44,99,952 females and 251 others. Altogether, 29,608 candidates are in the fray. The number of Zila Parishad (ZP) constituencies stands at 181, Anchalik Parishads (AP) at 87 and Gaon Panchayat (GP) constituencies at 10,530. As many as 1,289 candidates have won uncontested — 21 ZP members, 151 AP members and 1,117 GP ward members, the officials said. Polling in the first phase was conducted in 14 districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, Sivasagar, Majuli, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dhemajri, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Biswanath, Cachar, Hailakandi and Sribhumi. The rural body polls are not held in seven districts of the state, which are under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and have autonomous council polls. (PTI)

Japan's House of Representatives

were also here for a meeting. Sarma said the state was looking for investment from Japan, and the frequent high-level visits were a positive sign. (PTI)

Russia fully backs India's

These relations are not subject to "external influence" and continue to develop dynamically in all areas, it said. It said Modi congratulated Putin and all the Russian people on the upcoming 80th anniversary of Victory Day. The Modi-Putin phone conversation came days after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke to his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar. Following the call, Jaishankar reiterated India's resolve to bring the "perpetrators, backers and planners" of the attack to justice. On his part, Lavrov called for the "settlement of disagreements between New Delhi and Islamabad by political and diplomatic means on a bilateral basis in accordance with the provisions of the Simla Agreement of 1972 and the Lahore Declaration of 1999," according to the Russian embassy. Soon after the Pahalgam terror attack, India, citing "cross-border linkages" to the strike, promised severe punishment to those involved in it. In a high-level meeting with the top defence brass on April 29, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the armed forces have "complete operational freedom" to decide on the mode, targets and timing of India's response to the terror attack. (PTI)

Three arrested for killing

under the Panbari range in the western part of the park by patrolling forest guards on Friday.

Meanwhile, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told reporters that the state government will constitute an anti-elephant poaching squad on the lines of the anti-rhino poaching team in the state. (PTI)

BJP's Sambit Patra meets

Naga Peoples' Front MLA Awangbou Newmai said it believes in democracy and people's rule. That is our position. The party remains committed to democratic principles, he said.

Earlier in the day, Patra met two Kuki Zo MLAs Vungzigin Valte, who had survived a mob attack on May 4, 2023, and LM Khaute in Churachandpur district. He also met leaders of the Zomi Student Federation (ZSF), who submitted a memorandum to Patra. Patra's visit comes nearly a week after 21 Manipur MLAs wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, urging them to form a "popular government" in the state, which is under President's rule to ensure peace and normalcy. (PTI)

Panchayat elections are being held in two phases on May 2 and 7 in Assam's 27 districts

Aassam oppn leader slams state election panel, police for partisan role in panchayat polls

GUWAHATI, May 5: Leader of the Opposition in Assam Assembly, Debabrata Saikia, on Monday accused the State Election Commission (SEC) of remaining silent on the "blatant violation" of the model code of conduct by the ruling alliance during the ongoing panchayat polls.

Addressing a press conference, Saikia also accused the state police of supporting the ruling front.

"There has been a series of violations by the BJP during the campaign period. We and other opposition parties lodged many complaints. However, the state election commission is completely silent and has not taken any action," he claimed.

Saikia cited instances of ruling party MLAs allegedly offering inclusion of names in government schemes and threatening voters with exclusion if they did not support the BJP in their speeches.

"Despite giving proof and video evidence, SEC has not done anything to maintain a level playing



field. Police are functioning just as the personal force of the BJP," Saikia said.

Saikia asserted that people are fed up with the BJP government

and their "anti-people" policies.

"We are getting a good response from the public, and they want a change in the panchayats. This is a

positive sign for next year's As-

sembly elections," Saikia said.

On Himanta Biswa Sarma's repeated attacks on Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's alleged Pakistan links, Saikia said the CM does not have any other issue to raise in front of the people.

"As the BJP government has failed to fulfil most of its promises, it is trying to divert people's attention. Initially, they tried to polarise by terming Congress as a lungi party, but it did not have any impact. So, now they are trying to divert attention by dragging Gaurav's name," he added.

The Assam CM and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, the Deputy Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha, over his wife's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency ISI.

Panchayat elections are being held in two phases on May 2 and 7 in Assam's 27 districts for the first time after the delimitation of the constituencies. The counting of votes will be held on May 11. (PTI)



Fire at Kahilpara in Guwahati on Monday Morning. HT photo

Frenzied campaigning marks final day ahead of 2nd phase Panchayat Polls in Nagaon



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 5: As the clock ticks down to the second phase of the panchayat elections in Nagaon district, political activity has reached a fever pitch on the final day of campaigning. Both the ruling coalition and opposition parties, along with several independent candidates, are leaving no stone unturned in their bid to woo voters.

The district is witnessing an intense electoral battle across 21 Zila Parishad seats, 132 Anchalik Panchayat seats, and 1,411 Gaon Panchayat seats, with candidates engaging in door-to-door campaigns, public meetings, and roadshows to garner support.

Leading the charge for the ruling coalition are prominent figures such as Rupak Sarma, MLA of Na-

gaon-Batadroba constituency; Shashi Kanta Das, MLA of Raha; Ranjit Kumar Bordoloi, President of Nagaon District BJP; and Moni Madhav Mahanta, President of Nagaon District AGP. Addressing enthusiastic crowds at various locations, Rupak Sarma expressed confidence in the BJP-led coalition's performance, citing the widespread developmental initiatives under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma as a key factor driving voter support.

On the opposition front, the Congress has mounted an aggressive campaign. Senior leaders including Nurul Huda, MLA; Sibamoni Bora, MLA; Prasanta Saikia, President of Nagaon District Congress; and Mrinal Hazarika, Secretary of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, are leading efforts to mobilize voters. They have appealed to the electorate to support Congress candidates, asserting that the BJP-led alliance will face stiff resistance in Nagaon.

Meanwhile, the AIUDF and Rajiv Dal are contesting in select constituencies, with localized campaigns being carried out in areas where they have fielded candidates.

With campaigning now officially concluded, all eyes are set on polling day, as voters prepare to decide the fate of thousands of candidates in what promises to be a closely contested election.



A bale of turtle sits near Jorpukhuri Pond in Guwahati on Monday. HT photo

State Tax department official residence searched

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 5: A team of the CM's Special Vigilance Cell on Monday searched the house of a state Tax department official Bedabrata Saikia, at Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Path, near the earlier Ajanta cinema hall.

According to a source, the team from Guwahati carried out the search for several hours and reportedly took away some papers. Further details are not available. Saikia is reportedly posted at Morigaon.

Sivasagar Senior Citizens new body takes charge

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 5: Sivasagar Senior Citizens Association in a joint meeting of the outgoing and the new committee, presided over by the president Kartick Dutta, took a number of resolutions.

They include demand of re-alignment of Sivasagar Railway lines and improvement of the Sivasagar Rly Station for stoppage of the Delhi bound express trains, construction of a new RCC bridge replacing the British era broken 'skeleton' and a few others.

Earlier, out-going secretary Jogesh Rajkhowa and treasurer Himadri Baruah handed over the files to the new secretary Biman Sensuwa.

Raman Sharma was unanimously elected as the new treasurer.

Prakash Kotoky, executive president, appreciated the good work done by the old committee including the beautiful new office building at a cost of over ₹ 50 lakh.

Deben Baruah, former president,

thanked the outgoing secretary Jogesh Rajkhowa for his outstanding dedication towards the organization. President Kartick Dutta in his speech assured the members



that the committee continues to as vigilant as before in keeping records and financial matters and ₹ 2 lakh donated by The Retired ONGC Employees Association,

would be used in construction of the boundary wall.

He also apprised the members that Jorhat MP Gaurav Gogoi was approached for a grant for construction of a modern conference hall on the first floor and his support for acquiring another piece of government land near the president office building.

The new body of executives decided to hold get together every 1st Saturday of the month from June next.

The meeting also took a resolution to change names for financial transaction in the banks and demanded Postal Authority's attention in opening the ATM inside HPO in Sivasagar.

The meeting expressed serious concern over indifferent attitude of the administration in respecting senior citizens' petitions for removing civic woes.

Lalit Kalita, Pradip Bordoloi, Dilip Saikia, Manoj Kr Borthakur, and many others took part in the discussion.

ECON and ECONOMIA unveiled at Biswanath College: A celebration of creativity and farewell

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 5: The Department of Economics at Biswanath College marked a memorable occasion today with the release of the 3rd issue of ECON, the department's handwritten magazine, and the 4th issue of ECONOMIA, its annual newsletter. The release ceremony, held on the college premises, was a celebration of creativity, reflection, and heartfelt goodbyes.

The event was formally inaugurated by Chinta Mani Sharma, Principal of Biswanath College, and chaired by Karabi Gogoi, Head of the Department of Economics.

In his inaugural address, Sharma applauded the initiative, stating that the publication of departmental magazines plays a vital role in nurturing creativity and artistic expression among students. He lauded the faculty and students for their commitment and encouraged the continuation of such enriching academic traditions.

The event also served as a farewell cere-

mony for the outgoing 6th Semester students. Faculty members including Dr. Khagen Saikia, Rajeswar Boro, Balin Bhuyan, Dr. Mita Hazarika, Antareepa Borah, Manash Jyoti Das, Chandramoni Sharma, Ashomi Kalita, and Minakshi Gohain offered words of encouragement and guidance to the graduating students. They urged them to pursue excellence, take pride in their academic journey, and stay connected with the department as they step into new chapters of their lives.

Karabi Gogoi, in her address, extended her best wishes for the upcoming examinations and emphasized the importance of alumni engagement, urging the students to remain in touch and contribute to the department's future growth.

The programme was hosted by Dixita Nath, and witnessed enthusiastic participation from students across semesters. It concluded with a vote of thanks by Deepranjan Bora, a 4th Semester student, marking the end of a heartwarming and inspiring gathering.

Oath-taking ceremony

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 5: The authority of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Department of Housing & Urban Affairs organized an oath-taking ceremony to the new ad-hoc committee of the Diphu Municipal Board members at Taralango here on Monday.

Notably, the term of the Municipal boards under the KAAC has expired. As per the 15th Executive Meeting of the 13th KAAC, a new ad hoc committee has been constituted by the KAAC. After the oath taking ceremony, Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang said, "There are altogether 22 Municipal boards and town committees under KAAC. There are 2 town committees, Borlangpher and Umlapher. The ad hoc Committees will be guided by the Executive officer for all round development. We have given a sworn in ceremony to them and from today onward they will execute their respective work."

Gaurav seeks apology from Himanta for 'derogatory' remarks against women

GUWAHATI, May 5: Deputy Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi, has slammed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over his alleged derogatory remark against women and demanded an apology from him.

In a post on X, Gogoi said that the allegation of Sarma that women of Assam "compromised" to secure job during Congress tenure was "disgraceful".

"The fact that the chief minister makes this statement at a political rally

during the ongoing panchayat elections marks a new low for the political discourse in Assam," the Congress MP said on Sunday night.

Assamese women are highly respected and empowered in the society, he added.

"From the days of the freedom struggle to the present day, the women have done our society proud.

"The chief minister should be mature enough to apologise," Gogoi demanded.

Sarma, during panchayat election rallies on April 28, had mentioned a witness statement from the report of the Justice (Retd) Biplab Kumar Sharma Commission on irregularities in the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) examinations for 2013 and 2014, when Congress was in power.

He had said the witness' statement maintained that women "had to adopt a wrong path" to get jobs during the Congress regime. (PTI)

7th 'Practical Endocrinology' Conference held in Guwahati

Launched in 2018, the conference has grown remarkably in stature due to its unbiased, evidence-based content



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 5: The 7th edition of the "Practical Endocrinology" conference, the premier event on Diabetes and Endocrinology in Northeast India, was successfully held in Guwahati. The conference brought together leading experts and practitioners to discuss the latest advancements, practical tips, and challenges in the management of Diabetes,

Thyroid disorders, and Obesity.

Launched in 2018, the conference has grown remarkably in stature due to its unbiased, evidence-based content and pragmatic approach. Over the years, it has become a vital platform for knowledge exchange among endocrinologists and general physicians from across the region.

The conference is the brainchild of Dr. Mithun Bhartia, an eminent Endocrinolo-

gist and the only certified Sexologist in Northeast India. Having spent over 12 years in the UK, Dr. Bhartia returned to Assam with a mission to introduce structured medical education and evidence-based treatment protocols to the region. He is currently the President of the Association of Clinical Endocrinologists of India and Co-founder of DTECH, an initiative that focuses on advancing healthcare technology in India.

In his address, Dr. Bhartia highlighted the differences in treatment approaches between the UK and India, emphasizing the need to evolve and adapt global best practices in a way that suits the Indian healthcare landscape.

The conference is widely recognized at the national level for its high scientific standards, offering a unique blend of theoretical knowledge and practical application. It plays a crucial role in upskilling local doctors in the Northeast, empowering them to deliver better care to their communities.

The event was steered by Dr. Banshi Saboo, who served as the Organising Chair, and Dr. Rajkumar Bhartia, Senior Consultant Physician from Guwahati, who acted as the Convenor.

No.KED/NIT-66/2023-24/3711

Dated, Kokrajhar the 5th May, 2025

DETAILS TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender in prescribed form affixing non-refundable Court Fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty Five Paisa) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed "F-2 Form" Documents with validity period of 90 (Ninety) days from the date of receipt of Tender are invited from the Registered Class-I (A, B, C) & Class-II PWD Electrical Contractor under the Adtl. Chief Engineer (Electrical), Chandmari, Guwahati-3, Superintending Engineer, PWD, Guwahati Electrical Circle, Fancy Bazar, Guwahati-1 and the Registered Class-III, PWD, Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar of 2025-26 and having valid Electrical Contractor License for the following electrical works and will be received in the Office of the undersigned up to 2.30 p.m. on 09/05/2025 and will be opened at 3.00 p.m. of the same date. The Contractors or their authorized agents may be present at the time of opening tender.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Approx. Estimated value	Time of Completion	Cost of Tender document (in Rs.)	Earnest Money
1	Installation of A.C. Machine to the Judicial Officers Residential Quarter for (1) Adtl. District & Sessions Judge Qtr. 2 Nos. (2) Civil Judge Asstt. Session Judge Qtr. 2 Nos. (3) CJM Qtr 1 No. (4) Adtl. CJM Qtr. 2 Nos. (5) Secretary, DLSA Qtr. 2 Nos. (6) Judicial Magistrate First Class Qtr. 2 Nos. x 2-4 Nos. in Campus of BGR Township, Dhalgaon in Chirang District, Assam	Rs. 15,73,904.00	90 (Ninety) Days	Rs. 700.00	General 2% (P.C.) of Tender value. 1% of Tender value in case of SC/ST/BC

The Contractors shall be received the Tender Documents forms the Office of the Executive Engineer, PWD Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar during working hour by submitting the cost of Tender Document with a non-refundable fees as indicated in the table above, by Indian crossed Postal Order payable to the undersigned up to 3.00 p.m. Dated 08-05-2025 on application mentioned registration No. etc. No, application for issue of tender document will be received after the deadline as mentioned.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer, PWD,
Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/282

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Even death is not to be feared by one who has lived wisely -Buddha

Call for May 20 strike

The two-months workers' campaign against the new labour codes and privatization of public sector undertakings, that began on March 18, 2025 at the National Convention of workers in New Delhi with a call for an all India workers strike on May 20, has been getting wider support from workers, farmers, employees unions, and federations of various sectors including bank and insurance. Left political parties have also fully supported the strike. Farmers unions are also backing it. Chakka Jam for few hours have also been planned during which road transport and railway movements will be stopped. May Day demonstrations across the country on May 1 were massive, including in New Delhi. During the demonstration, the representatives of Left Parties in several states have also called for Chakka Jam. For example, in Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, the representatives from left parties have announced their support and decided to block the movement of vehicles and trains for two hours to press the 17-point demands of workers. The Left parties in Ranchi have actually decided for larger campaigns, which included media briefings at all district headquarters on May 10, street meetings and pamphlet distribution from May 15 to 19, and torchlight procession across the state on May 19. They would also stop the movement of vehicles and trains from 10 AM to 12 Noon on May 20 and court arrest before the district administration.

The Left parties across the country in all states have various programmes of protests until May 20 all India workers' general strike. The call for two months campaign was given by the National Convention of Workers which was organized by the joint platform of the 10 Central Trade Unions - INTUC, AITUC, HMS, CITU, AIUTUC, TUCC, SEWA, AICCTU, LPP and UTUC - and Independent National Sectoral Federations and association. They adopted a declaration on March 18, 2025 in New Delhi, to launch a two-months campaign immediately against the anti-worker and pro-corporate policies being implemented by the PM Narendra Modi led central government, which included the four controversial labour codes and privatization of public sector undertakings, public sector banks and insurance companies. The declaration has called for all India general strike of workers on May 20 on the day of culmination of the campaign.

Banks and Insurance sector employees' associations have also decided to participate in the campaign and in the general strike of May 20. During a meeting held recently, All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBE), All India Insurance Employees Association (AIEA), National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE), All India LIC Employees Federation (AILCEF), All India Bank Officers Association (AIBOA), Bank Employees Federation of India (BEFI), Indian National Bank Officers Congress (INBOC), and All India National Life Insurance Employees' Federation - AINLIEF (INTUC) have decided for their separate joint campaign. They have decided on a campaign programme that included a joint appeal to the workforce in the entire financial sector to join the general strike of workers on May 20, leaflet distribution, all meeting on May 1 and May 18, joint demonstrations on May 8 and May 19, poster campaign, and rally demonstrations on May 20. In the meantime, several other associations have extended support for the May 20 general strike.

Panchayati Raj: Pioneering rural India's democratic transformation

India's Panchayati Raj system stands as a testament to the nation's commitment to decentralized democracy, embodying Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj—self-governing villages as the bedrock of a vibrant republic. Rooted in ancient traditions and reshaped by modern constitutional mandates, this system has evolved into the world's largest experiment in grassroots governance, with over 250,000 Gram Panchayats empowering millions of elected representatives. While its contributions to rural development and social equity are undeniable, persistent challenges demand urgent reforms to unlock its transformative potential. This article traces the historical evolution of Panchayati Raj, evaluates its role in rural development, and proposes a roadmap for its future, weaving together its triumphs and trials in the quest for inclusive, sustainable governance.

The origins of Panchayati Raj can be traced to ancient India, where the Rigveda (circa 1700 BCE) references sabhas, village assemblies that managed local affairs through collective decision-making. By the Mauryan era (321-185 BCE), village councils of respected elders resolved disputes, allocated resources, and collected taxes. A striking example from Uthiramerur, Tamil Nadu, preserved on a temple inscription, describes a sophisticated sortition process for selecting council members based on land ownership and scriptural knowledge. These early panchayats, though not elected in the modern sense, were consensus-driven, reflecting community trust in local wisdom. However, mediaeval India witnessed a decline in their autonomy as Mughal feudalism and zamindari systems centralized power, relegating panchayats to marginal roles. Despite this, pockets of self-governance persisted, particularly in South India, where village councils retained administrative functions.

The British colonial era further eroded panchayat authority, replacing them with bureaucratic revenue-collection mechanisms. Yet, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw tentative efforts to revive local governance. The Royal Commission on Decentralization (1907) and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) advocated for stronger village institutions, though these remained advisory. The Government of India Act, 1935, introduced provincial autonomy, enabling elected governments to legislate on local self-governance, but inefficiencies persisted, as noted by D.P. Mishra, a minister who criticized local bodies for mismanagement. Gandhi's advocacy for Gram Swaraj during the freedom struggle rekindled interest in panchayats as self-sufficient republics, a vision at odds with Jawaharlal Nehru's preference for centralized state-led development.

Post-independence, India's Constitution included Article 40, urging states to establish village panchayats as units of self-government. The Community Development Programme (1952) sought to engage villagers in development, but its lack of an electoral framework limited its impact. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) marked a pivotal moment, recommending a three-tier Panchayati Raj system: Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. On October 2, 1959, Nehru inaugurated India's first modern panchayat in Nagaur, Rajasthan, symbolically aligning with Gandhi's birthday. Rajasthan's Bagdari village and Andhra Pradesh soon followed, and by the 1960s, many states adopted this system with elections every five years. However, inadequate funding, bureaucratic interference, and irregular elections weakened its efficacy, leaving many panchayats defunct by the 1980s.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 was a watershed, granting constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Effective from April 24, 1993, it mandated a uniform three-tier system for states with populations over 20 lakh, regular five-year elections, and reservations for women (at least one-third of seats), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs). The amendment introduced the Gram Sabha, a village assembly of all registered voters, as the cornerstone of participatory democracy. State Election Commissions (SECs) were established to ensure fair polls, and State Finance Commissions were tasked with recommending fiscal devolution. PRIs were empowered to manage 29 subjects under the Eleventh Schedule, including agriculture, education, and rural development. By 1996, eight states extended the system to tribal areas, adapting it to local contexts. Today, with millions of elected representatives, including nearly 50% women in 21 states with 50% reservation, Panchayati Raj is a vibrant democratic force, with voter turnouts often exceeding 60%.

Gaon Panchayats, the village-level tier, are pivotal in rural development, bridging government policies and rural communities. They address local needs in infrastructure, health, education, sanitation, and employment, ensuring equitable resource distribution. In infrastructure, panchayats maintain rural roads, drainage systems, and community facilities like schools and health centres, fostering economic growth by improving connectivity and supporting agriculture. In education, they coordinate with government agencies to build schools, promote enrollment, and facilitate adult literacy and vocational training, enhancing employability. In health, panchayats drive immunization, sanitation campaigns, and health centre construction, acting as conduits for schemes like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which has improved rural sanitation. Economically, they promote self-help groups and micro-financing, empowering women and marginalized communities, while overseeing programs like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to ensure steady incomes.

The reservation policy has been transformative, amplifying marginalized voices. Women, constituting nearly half of elected representatives, advocate for maternal health, education, and sanitation, fostering inclusive development. SCs and STs also hold significant roles, challenging traditional power structures. However, challenges persist. Financial dependency on state grants limits autonomy, as panchayats struggle to generate local revenue. Capacity building is another hurdle; many representatives, especially women and first-time leaders, lack training to navigate administrative complexities. Social hierarchies, including caste and gender, continue to influence decision-making in some regions, undermining Gram Swaraj. Electoral violence, as seen in West Bengal's 2023 polls where 36 died, highlights intense competition for rural resources, with allegations of ballot tampering and voter intimidation. SECs, though autonomous, face political pressure, necessitating court interventions for fair polls.

To realize the full potential of Panchayati Raj, comprehensive reforms are essential. Financial autonomy must be strengthened through increased fund devolution, local revenue mechanisms, and access to credit, enabling panchayats to prioritize community needs. Capacity-building programs are critical to equip representatives with skills in financial management, project planning, and community mobilization, fostering competent leadership. Social inclusion requires proactive measures to overcome barriers faced by marginalized groups, through targeted training and awareness campaigns, ensuring equitable participation. Accountability and transparency must be bolstered via social audits, citizen charters, and whistleblower protections to curb corruption and build public trust.

Technology offers immense potential to enhance efficiency and engagement. E-governance platforms can streamline processes, enable online budget tracking, and facilitate grievance redressal, promoting transparency and citizen participation. Revitalizing the Gram Sabha is equally crucial, as its ineffectiveness due to low awareness and poor facilitation undermines participatory democracy. Awareness campaigns and improved facilitation can empower villagers to influence development priorities. Inter-departmental coordination is vital to align government programs with local needs, reducing overlaps and maximizing impact through joint planning and monitoring. Finally, integrating sustainability into PRI mandates—through natural resource management, renewable energy, and climate-resilient agriculture—can foster resilient rural economies.

Recent data underscores both progress and gaps. A 2023 Ministry of Panchayati Raj report noted that PRIs implemented over 70% of MGNREGA projects, creating millions of rural jobs, yet only 40% of panchayats have robust financial management systems. The National Institute of Rural Development's 2024 study highlighted that while women's participation has surged, only 25% of female representatives feel adequately trained for their roles. These insights reinforce the need for targeted reforms to bridge systemic gaps.

India's Panchayati Raj system is a remarkable journey from ancient sabhas to a constitutionally empowered framework, embodying the resilience of rural communities. It has empowered millions, particularly women and marginalized groups, to shape their villages' futures, bridging ancient traditions with modern aspirations. Yet, systemic challenges—financial dependency, capacity deficits, social inequities, and accountability gaps—demand urgent attention. By strengthening financial autonomy, enhancing capacity, promoting inclusion, ensuring transparency, leveraging technology, revitalizing Gram Sabhas, improving coordination, and prioritizing sustainability, India can unlock the transformative potential of Panchayati Raj. As the nation navigates its democratic journey, this system remains a beacon of local agency, poised to drive inclusive, sustainable development in rural India, ensuring that progress reaches every corner of the republic. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

Bangladesh: 'humanitarian corridor' for Myanmar

By: Saleem Samad

Political parties from different shades of Right, left, centrists, and Islamists are disturbed to hear from the media that Bangladesh has agreed to establish a 'humanitarian corridor' for the hungry people of war-torn Rakhine State in Myanmar. The media in the country, quoting Foreign Affairs Ministry officials, have published sketchy information on the so-called humanitarian corridor. The Interim Government has yet to spell out details of the plan, which has raised suspicion which is now mixed with conspiracy theories.

The United Nations wants to dispatch food, medical supplies and other essentials to Rakhine, where silent famine persists.

The United Nation Development Program (UNDP) in an assessment report released in November 2024, painted a grave situation in the Rakhine state. It said the people caught in the civil war are experiencing a near famine and proposed that immediate food, medical aid, agriculture inputs, construction materials and other essentials need urgent attention from the international aid agencies.

UNDP report stated that Rakhine is on the verge of an unprecedented disaster due to a combination of interlinked issues. Restrictions on goods entering Rakhine, both internationally and domestically, have led to a severe lack of income, hyperinflation, and significantly reduced domestic food production. Essential services and a social safety net are almost non-existent, leaving an already vulnerable population at risk of collapse in the coming months.

The report shows that Rakhine's economy has become almost dysfunctional. Critical sectors such as trade, agriculture, and construction have halted. Export-oriented, agro-based livelihoods are disappearing as markets become inaccessible due to blockades by the junta.

UN warns that Rakhine faces the imminent threat of acute famine. The worst victims of a lack of food are millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), including Rohingyas.

In the last couple of months, a fresh influx of Rohingya Muslims in Bangladesh has added to the already 1.2 million languishing in overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar, in Southeast Bangladesh.

However, there is no specific assessment of the number of IDPs in Rakhine, as they spread over the forests, hills and banks on the riverfront. The IDPs do not live in permanent shelters. They live in makeshift camps. The worst victims of internal displacement are children, women and elderly persons. They are suffering from severe malnutrition, communicable diseases and the absence of healthcare.

UN wants to address an unfolding humanitarian crisis in Rakhine and said it is only Bangladesh, its immediate neighbor separated by a kilometer-wide Naf River can

save the hungry people, coupled with the absence of healthcare that has jeopardized their lives and living.

UN officials believe that Bangladesh is a trusted country which could extend help in facilitating supplies of food, medical and other essentials.

The United States Army Pacific (US-ARPAC) stationed in Hawaii is supposed to provide logistics and security for the IDPs in Rakhine state.

It is reported that the US military will be deployed for the logistics at the corridor at Silkhali, a small river port. The site has been secured by the Bangladesh Army, a no go for the civilians. The army would only facilitate logistics for the UN operation, said a senior government official, who is privy to the corridor.

UNDP report says that internal rice production is declining due to a lack of supplies of seeds, fertilizers, severe weather, and a rise in the number of IDPs that could no longer engage in agricultural production after the civil war erupted and repeatedly relocating to safer places has further exacerbated the miseries.

The UN estimates that with the near-total halt of trade, over 2 million people are at risk of starvation.

When UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited the camps and had Iftar (food for breaking the fast in Ramadan) with the refugees, he told the Bangladesh authorities that a "humanitarian corridor" needed to be opened to reach the hungry people.

Before leaving Dhaka after a visit to Cox's Bazar Rohingya camps, in mid-March, Guterres said he had discussed with Bangladesh authorities the possibilities of a humanitarian corridor would connect inside Myanmar as a means of creating conditions for Rohingya repatriation to Rakhine with the rebel Arakan Army which has captured except for few places resisted by the Myanmar military troops.

He said it would, however, require the "authorization and the cooperation of the parties to the conflict" in Rakhine, where the Myanmar junta is fighting the rebels, which has further caused frustration, pain and agony for the IDPs. On the other hand, Tariq Rahman, the supreme of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), said from his London office, cautioned the Interim Government that such a decision can only be taken by the parliament.

Presently, there is no parliament, and the upcoming election is scheduled for the first half of 2026, after the Ramadan and Eid holidays. Therefore, the hungry people in Rakhine will have to wait for at least a year until an election is held in Bangladesh and a parliament begins to function.

Meanwhile, top US officials visiting Bangladesh a fortnight ago held secret meetings in Bangladesh with hybrid representatives of the United League of Arakan (ULA), a political wing of AA and Chin National

Front (CNF), the political umbrella of Chin National Army.

The Chin National Army is a Chin ethnic armed organization in Myanmar. The armed wing of the Chin National Front (CNF) was founded on 20 March 1988.

The CNA and ULA are members of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a coalition of opposition groups that aims to establish a federal system in Myanmar or achieve levels of autonomy and peace among the country's various ethnic minorities.

Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest and accused of sedition, is incommunicado. The former senior leaders of her party who could evade arrest and have gone underground safely are earnestly working with the ethnic rebels under the banner of UNFC.

Bangladesh Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain told journalists that the Interim Government agreed in principle with the UN proposal on the corridor, but certain conditions must be met for its implementation.

A day later, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir slammed the interim government for making such a move without consulting the political parties.

"An interim government has no authority to make such a policy decision," reads the statement by President Mohammad Shah Alam and General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB).

The CPB questioned that the West's sudden interest in the Rohingya issue was "part of a broader imperialist conspiracy".

The Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami's Ameer (chief), Shafiqur Rahman said the humanitarian corridor requests that the government make the issue transparent to the nation because it might involve many security issues.

Radical Islamic platform Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh's fiery leader, Secretary General Mamunul Haque, opposing the move, said, "Imperialist powers are trying to implement their agenda by using Bangladesh. As a patriotic force, Hefazat-e-Islam does not support this in any way."

In response to the concerns of the political party leaders regarding the humanitarian corridor being premature, said Shafiqul Alam, press secretary to the Chief Advisor Prof Muhammad Yunus.

To pacify the political parties, the government quickly said nothing had been finalized regarding the corridor. But said that the government would be willing to provide logistic support should there be UN-led humanitarian support to the state of Rakhine, said Khalilur Rahman, the National Security Adviser in charge of Rohingya issues, told French news agency AFP. *(The author is an award-winning independent journalist based in Bangladesh. He could be reached at saleemamad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @saleemamad)*

Next presidential election in Bolivia on Aug 17 will be a stormy one

By: W. T. Whitney Jr.

In advance of presidential elections on August 17, 2025, Bolivia's Supreme Electoral Council on April 17 registered 11 political parties and five electoral coalitions. It will soon announce the final list of presidential candidates. Incumbent President Luis Arce, elected in 2020, candidate for the Movement to Socialism Party (MAS) and former economist minister under President Evo Morales, will head the list. Longtime MAS leader Morales is a presidential candidate, too. The new "Evo, the People" (Evo Pueblo) party held a three-day gathering in Chapare state, Morales's home base, in late March; attendance topped 70,000.

The divisions in Bolivia, along with various social and political instabilities, have put the country's socialist beginnings in a state of vulnerability. Most Bolivians face the prospect of returning to lives of misery, and U.S. intervention is waiting in the wings.

Morales's presidency achieved much. A new constitution established the pluri-national state and gave political rights to indigenous peoples. By nationalizing oil and gas production, the government gained funding for expanded education, healthcare, and support for mothers, children, and the elderly. GDP tripled, poverty fell, wealth inequalities diminished, and international currency reserves accumulated. Morales became a symbol and spokesperson for environmental sustainability.

Then came troubles. They've worsened amid political divisions and destabilization episodes. The selling price for exported natural gas fell, and the country's deposits turned out to be more limited than first thought. (However, discovery of a huge natural gas field was announced in July 2024.) Funding for social programs and for imports of gasoline, diesel fuel, and food went downhill.

Government agencies borrowed from the central bank to maintain programs and access to supplies. The bank drew upon the nation's currency reserves, which have almost disappeared. Dollars, in demand to pay for everyday items, are scarce. Inflation, shortages, and discontent continue.

Old political divisions have also taken on new life. Having accused U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg of conspiring with the opposition, Morales expelled him in 2008, along with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. He expelled USAID in 2013.

Big landowners, oil and gas producers, and their proxies in Bolivia's four eastern states, particularly in Santa Cruz, mounted a rebellion with separatist and racist overtones in 2008. It failed, but not before causing significant social damage and splits.

Separately, sections of the Bolivian Workers Confederation opposed certain government initiatives. Indigenous groups fought against a new government highway passing through a large preserve.

Morales also faced major controversy over the legitimacy of his third presidential term and the fourth one that would have followed his electoral victory in October 2019. But a coup led by right-wing conspirators, including the Santa Cruz rebels of 2008, took down his government in November 2019. Morales escaped to Mexico, while U.S. support enabled the coup against him to succeed.

The coup government named Jeanine Áñez as president and arranged for elections. From exile in Argentina, Morales nominated former economics minister Arce as the MAS presidential candidate in

elections set for Oct. 18, 2020. Arce took 55% of the vote, and his new government jailed Áñez and the other plotters.

Returning from exile, Morales retained administrative control of the MAS party. He urged his loyalists serving in parliament to oppose Arce's policies. He is said to have "pressure[d] Arce by influencing government nominees to reaffirm his political... authority." Morales led a march in 2021 that defied Arce against far-right attacks, but the unity didn't last.

By 2023, Morales was actively seeking re-election, even though a Constitutional Court ruled against another Morales term. He also faced charges of sexual abuse of a minor. Morales abandoned the MAS party completely in 2024 after Arce-supporting Grover Garcia replaced him as party president.

By late 2024, the split between the two former MAS colleagues was profound. In September, Morales marched with supporters from Caracollo in Oruro Department to La Paz, led protests and vigils against Arce's policies, encouraged highway blockades, and carried out a five-day hunger strike.

Ethnic division may be playing a role, with Arce supposedly speaking for Bolivia's mestizo population and Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, representing indigenous peoples.

Destabilization has returned in full force. In June 2024, Gen. Juan José Zúñiga sought to arrest Morales for his presidential ambitions. He later led troops and armoured vehicles in attacking government office buildings in La Paz, in the process demanding freedom for the jailed 2019 coup leaders. In doing so, according to one report, he revealed his right-wing political orientation and longing for U.S. intervention.

Stirring the pot of mutual accusations, the now-imprisoned Gen. Zúñiga recently told an interviewer that, in attacking the government, he and his associates had been following President Arce's instructions to carry out a "self-coup" that would promote discontent in military ranks and ultimately an armed uprising. Zúñiga accused Arce of manipulating the list of potential voters ahead of the upcoming elections.

The overflow of complaints on social media about shortages of basic supplies is also destabilizing. The apparent object is to create panic and generate demand for black-market dollars.

Observer Pablo Meriguet notes refusal by the strongest center-right opposition candidates to unite in a single campaign, specifically veteran politicians Samuel Doria, Manfred Reyes, and Jorge Quiroga. He sees this as improving the electoral prospects of either Arce or Morales. The young senate president and former MAS politician Andrés Rodríguez, also running for president, has confessedly made overtures to right-wing business leaders.

U.S. government officials have long categorized the ascendancy of the MAS government in Bolivia with dangers they perceive from Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. They may regard the upcoming contest as a watershed moment marking disaster for the MAS party and/or worsening chaos; in any case, they would be ready to assist in re-ordering the situation.

Their minds have turned to lithium. According to analyst José A. Amesty Rivera, the "big agro-industrial capitalists and other powerful sectors [in Bolivia] allied with the United States" want Bolivia to control its own lithium deposits. That's because "internal divisions favour easy access to the sought-after mineral." *(IPA Service)*

How do celebrities influence society?



By: Satyabrata Borah

Celebrities wield an extraordinary amount of influence over society, shaping cultural norms, consumer behavior, political discourse, and even individual aspirations. Their visibility, amplified by media platforms, grants them a unique ability to sway public opinion and inspire action, whether intentional or incidental. From fashion trends to social movements, their impact is undeniable, but it is a double-edged sword, carrying both positive and negative consequences. Understanding how celebrities influence society requires examining their roles as trendsetters, role models, advocates, and sometimes unwitting catalysts for societal shifts.

The reach of celebrities is vast, largely due to the proliferation of mass media and social platforms. In earlier decades, Hollywood stars and musicians dominated public attention through films, television, and radio. Today, the internet and social media have democratized fame, creating influencers, YouTubers, and reality TV stars who command audiences rivaling those of traditional celebrities. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X allow celebrities to connect directly with millions, fostering a sense of intimacy that makes their influence more personal and immediate. A single post from someone like Beyoncé or Cristiano Ronaldo can garner millions of likes, shares, and comments within hours, amplifying their message to a global audience. This accessibility enhances their ability to shape public perceptions, as fans often view them as relatable figures rather than distant icons.

One of the most visible ways celebrities influence society is through consumer culture. They are trendsetters, dictating what people wear, eat, and buy. When a celebrity endorses a product, it often sees a surge in demand, a phenomenon known as the “celebrity effect.” For instance, when Kylie Jenner promotes a cosmetic product from her brand, it frequently sells out within minutes. Similarly, when a celebrity is spotted wearing a particular designer or accessory, it can spark a frenzy, with fans rushing to emulate their style. This influence extends beyond fashion and beauty to fitness trends, diets, and even technology. Celebrities like Gwyneth Paltrow, through platforms like Goop, have popularized wellness trends such as clean eating and alternative therapies, often shaping consumer habits despite debates over their scientific validity. The economic impact is staggering—celebrity endorsements drive billions of dollars in sales annually, as brands leverage their star power to capture market share.

Celebrities shape societal values and behaviors by serving as role models, particularly for younger audiences. Fans often look to them for cues on how to live, love, and express themselves. This can have profound effects, both positive and negative. On one hand, celebrities who embody resilience, kindness, or ambition can inspire others to pursue their goals. For example, athletes like Serena Williams have motivated countless individuals to break barriers and strive for excellence, particularly in under-represented communities. On the other hand, the glorified lifestyles of some celebrities—marked by wealth, glamour, and excess—can foster unrealistic expectations. The curated images on social media, often filtered and staged, can lead to feelings of inadequacy among fans, contributing to issues like body dysmorphia or low self-esteem. Studies have shown that heavy exposure to celebrity culture correlates with increased anxiety and dissatisfaction, especially among adolescents who internalize these idealized standards.

Celebrities also play a significant role in shaping public discourse, particularly on social and political issues. Their platforms give them a megaphone to advocate for causes, and many use this power to raise awareness and drive change. For instance, Leonardo DiCaprio has long championed environmental conservation, using his fame to spotlight climate change and fund conservation efforts. Similarly, stars like Oprah Winfrey and Rihanna have addressed issues like racial justice, gender equality, and education, influencing public opinion and inspiring activism. During the Black Lives Matter movement, celebrities amplified messages of justice, encouraging their followers to engage in protests or donate to relevant causes. These efforts can galvanize millions, as fans often trust and emulate the values of their idols. However, celebrity activism is not without criticism. Some argue that it can oversimplify complex issues or center the celebrity rather than the cause itself. When stars speak on topics they are not well-versed in, they risk spreading misinformation or diluting the message, which can undermine genuine advocacy.

The political influence of celebrities is particularly potent, as their endorsements can sway voters and shape electoral outcomes. In the United States, celebrity endorsements have become a staple of political campaigns. When

Taylor Swift endorsed a candidate in the 2018 midterm elections, voter registration spiked, particularly among young people. Similarly, during the 2020 presidential election, celebrities like Cardi B and John Legend used their platforms to encourage civic participation. This influence stems from their ability to reach demographics that traditional political messaging often misses, such as younger or less engaged voters. However, this power can also polarize, as fans may reject celebrities who take stances they disagree with, leading to backlash or “cancel culture.” The political weight of celebrity voices underscores their role as cultural influencers, capable of shifting the needle on public opinion.

Yet, the influence of celebrities is not always intentional. Their actions, even when private, can spark societal trends or controversies. Paparazzi culture and tabloid media thrive on exposing celebrity scandals, which often shape public conversations about morality, relationships, and personal responsibility. For instance, high-profile divorces or legal troubles, like those of Brad Pitt or Kanye West, dominate headlines, prompting discussions about marriage, mental health, or the pressures of fame. These moments can humanize celebrities, but they also feed a voyeuristic culture that scrutinizes their every move. The public’s fascination with celebrity missteps can distract from more pressing societal issues, yet it also reflects how deeply their lives resonate with audiences.

The psychological impact of celebrity influence cannot be overstated. Fans often form parasocial relationships with celebrities, feeling a one-sided bond that mimics friendship or intimacy. This dynamic makes their influence more potent, as fans are more likely to trust and emulate someone they feel connected to. For example, when a celebrity like Demi Lovato speaks openly about mental health struggles, it can destigmatize seeking help and encourage fans to prioritize their well-being. Conversely, when celebrities engage in problematic behavior—such as promoting harmful diets or making insensitive remarks—it can normalize those actions among impressionable audiences. The responsibility of this influence is a topic of debate. Should celebrities be held accountable for the impact of their words and actions, or is it the public’s responsibility to critically evaluate their influence? The answer lies in a shared accountability, where celebrities recognize their reach and society cultivates media literacy to navigate their messages.

The global nature of celebrity influence adds another layer of complexity. In an interconnected world, celebrities transcend borders, shaping cultures far beyond their own. K-pop stars like BTS have not only popularized Korean music but also introduced global audiences to Korean culture, language, and fashion. Similarly, Bollywood actors like Priyanka Chopra have bridged cultural gaps, bringing Indian cinema to Western audiences. This cross-cultural exchange can foster understanding and appreciation, but it can also lead to appropriation or misrepresentation when celebrities engage with cultures carelessly. The global stage amplifies both their positive contributions and their missteps, making their influence a powerful force in shaping multicultural societies.

Celebrities are not omnipotent. Their influence is shaped by the media, their audience, and the cultural context they operate in. The rise of “cancel culture” demonstrates that fans hold celebrities accountable, often demanding apologies or boycotting those who cross ethical lines. This pushback reflects a growing awareness of the power dynamics at play, as audiences recognize their role in amplifying or rejecting celebrity influence. Moreover, not all celebrities wield the same level of influence. A-listers like Beyoncé or Dwayne Johnson have a broader reach than niche influencers, but even smaller-scale celebrities can shape subcultures or local communities. The democratization of fame means that influence is more fragmented, with micro-influencers often holding sway over specific demographics.

The influence of celebrities on society is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon, driven by their visibility, relatability, and platforms. They shape what we buy, how we think, and what we value, often with a single post or public appearance. Their role as trendsetters, advocates, and role models makes them powerful agents of change, capable of inspiring progress or perpetuating harmful norms. Yet, their influence is not unilateral—it is a dialogue, shaped by the audience’s reception and the broader cultural landscape. As society navigates the complexities of celebrity culture, it must balance admiration with critical thinking, recognizing the profound impact of these figures while questioning the messages they amplify. Celebrities, in turn, must wield their influence with care, aware that their actions ripple far beyond their immediate sphere, shaping the world in ways both seen and unseen.

Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Language is not just a tool for communication; it is the soul of thought, the vessel of culture, and the bridge between generations. When a child takes their first steps into the world of learning, they do so through the language they know best—their mother tongue. It is through this language that they learn to express emotions, understand relationships, and make sense of the world. And yet, for millions of children, formal education begins not in this familiar linguistic environment but in a completely alien one, where the language of instruction differs from the language of their home. This disconnect often becomes the silent barrier that undermines the very purpose of education. It is in this context that the case for mother tongue as the medium of instruction emerges not just as a cultural imperative, but as a practical, psychological, and pedagogical necessity.

In the Indian context, where linguistic diversity is as vast as its geography, the debate around the medium of instruction takes on special significance. India is home to hundreds of languages and dialects. Yet, in many urban and even semi-urban areas, English continues to be the dominant language of instruction, while in several others, state languages are imposed on children whose mother tongue may be a tribal or minority language. This results in a fundamental conflict between the language of thought and the language of instruction. Children who enter school with a language unfamiliar to them often find themselves bewildered, unable to follow lessons or engage meaningfully in classroom discussions. This early alienation can have long-lasting effects, leading to a lack of confidence, poor academic performance, and, in many cases, early dropout from school.

The cognitive and psychological benefits of mother tongue-based education are well-established. Studies from around the world have consistently shown that children learn best when they are taught in their mother tongue during the early years of education. This is because the brain processes concepts more efficiently when they are introduced in a language already known to the learner. In contrast, when a new concept is introduced in an unfamiliar language, the child first struggles to decode the language and then attempts to understand the concept, creating a double burden. This not only slows down the learning process but also increases the chances of misinterpretation and rote learning. On the other hand, when the child understands the language of instruction, the mind is free to focus on learning the concept itself.

Moreover, the use of the mother tongue in education nurtures emotional and social development. A child who can interact in class, ask questions, and share ideas in their own language is more likely to feel

included, respected, and confident. This sense of inclusion fosters a positive attitude towards school and learning. It also strengthens the child’s sense of identity and pride in their cultural heritage. In contrast, when children are forced to suppress their native language in favour of another, they may internalize a sense of inferiority regarding their own culture, leading to issues of self-worth and disconnection from their roots. The argument for mother tongue instruction is not a rejection of global or national languages. Rather, it is a call for a more grounded and inclusive approach to education. Multilingualism is a strength, and India is perhaps the best example of how multiple languages can co-exist within a single nation. English and Hindi have their own importance and utility, especially in higher education and in accessing global opportunities. But their place in the education system should not come at the cost of neglecting the mother tongue during the foundational years of learning. Language acquisition is not a zero-sum game. A strong foundation in the first language actually facilitates the learning of second and third languages later in life. The goal should be to create an additive model of language education, where the mother tongue is the base upon which other languages are gradually and effectively introduced.

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India has made a significant step in this direction by recommending the use of the mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, and preferably up to Grade 8. This recommendation is based on pedagogical research and aims to make education more accessible, inclusive, and effective. However, for this policy to succeed, it must be backed by concrete implementation strategies. This includes developing high-quality teaching and learning materials in various regional languages, training teachers to teach effectively in mother tongues, and sensitizing parents and communities about the long-term benefits of mother tongue education.

One of the common challenges faced in implementing mother tongue-based instruction is the perception among parents that English-medium education is superior and necessary for their children’s future success. This perception is not without reason. In many cases, English-medium schools do offer better resources, infrastructure, and opportunities. English is seen as the language of aspiration, upward mobility, and global access. As a result, parents, especially those from marginalized communities, often prefer to send their children to English-medium schools, even if the child struggles to cope. However, it is essential to separate the language of instruction from the quality of education. A good school should be defined by its ability to teach effectively, not merely by the language it uses.

Governments and educational planners

need to address this perception gap by improving the overall quality of mother tongue schools. This includes investing in infrastructure, curriculum development, teacher training, and community outreach. Public awareness campaigns can play a critical role in changing mindsets and highlighting the advantages of early education in the mother tongue. Examples from countries like Finland, Ethiopia, and Papua New Guinea, where mother tongue-based multilingual education has been successfully implemented, can serve as valuable models.

Another important aspect is the availability of textbooks and digital resources in diverse languages. In an age where digital learning is becoming more prominent, the lack of content in regional and tribal languages puts a large section of students at a disadvantage. Government agencies, publishers, and ed-tech companies must work together to ensure that high-quality educational content is available in all mother tongues. This will not only improve learning outcomes but also help preserve and promote linguistic diversity.

Teachers are the backbone of any education system, and their role becomes even more crucial in the context of mother tongue instruction. Many teachers themselves may not have received training in their own language or may be products of English or state-language education systems. Capacity-building programmes must be initiated to train teachers in effective pedagogical methods that are aligned with mother tongue instruction. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to use culturally relevant examples, stories, and references in the classroom, making education more relatable and meaningful to the students. Ultimately, the success of mother tongue-based education depends on a collective effort from policymakers, educators, parents, and communities. It requires a shift in mindset—from viewing language as a barrier to recognizing it as a bridge. Education should be about empowering children to think critically, express creatively, and learn joyfully. For that to happen, we must speak to them in the language they understand best—not just linguistically, but emotionally and culturally.

In conclusion, the mother tongue is the first language of the heart and the mind. It is the foundation upon which all other learning is built. Denying children the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue is denying them the right to an education that is truly meaningful and effective. As we envision a future that is inclusive, equitable, and rooted in local contexts, the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction must not remain a policy on paper but must become a reality in classrooms across the country. Only then can we ensure that education fulfills its true purpose—not just to inform, but to transform. *(The Writer is Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-Magazine SAMPROTIK)*

How do the intestines work?

By: Alex Bell

The intestines work by absorbing nutrients and vitamins. They are part of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Together, the small and large intestines run from the end of the stomach to the anus.

In this article, we describe what the intestines are and what they do, as well as related health problems and their treatments.

What the intestines do

The intestines sit in the abdomen and absorb nutrients and some water. Below, learn about the small and large intestines in more depth:

Small intestine

Food broken down by the stomach moves into the small intestine, which absorbs nutrients and sends them into the bloodstream.

Three major classes of nutrients pass through the small intestine:

- proteins
- lipids, or fats
- carbohydrates

The small intestine consists of three parts:

- The duodenum: This connects to the stomach.

- The jejunum: This, the middle part, absorbs nutrients and water.

- The ileum: This further digests what was once food, called the digestive product, then passes it to the large intestine.

The small intestine also supports the immune system. As an older study, from 2011, suggests, the small intestine’s role in keeping bacteria under control is crucial and requires further investigation.

How long is the small intestine?

The small intestine is roughly 20–25 feet in length, making it the longer section. It has a very high surface area, which is amplified roughly 60–120 times.

The small intestine is not flat or smooth. Instead, the following characteristics help maximize its surface area and capacity for absorption:

- mucosal folds — intricate folds on the intestine’s surface
- villi — tiny, finger-like projections that line the inner wall of the intestine
- microvilli — even smaller, hair-like projections on the villi

Large intestine

The large intestine absorbs water, salt, and other waste material from the digestive product and solidifies the waste into stool, which passes into the rectum.

The large intestine has several several parts, including:

- The cecum: This section receives the digestive product from the small intestine and moves it to the colon.
- The appendix: This is a finger-shaped pocket that joins with the cecum.
- The colon: This is the longest part of the large intestine. It absorbs water and salt and

solidifies liquid waste into stool.

- The rectum: This stores stool until it passes through the anus and out of the body.

Conditions that affect the intestines

Various health issues can affect the intestines. For example, a person may develop:

Constipation

Constipation involves the GI tract struggling to pass stool. It may result from a low fiber or fluid intake, hormonal imbalances, or a lack of mobility. Constipation can also be a side effect of medication.

It is more common in older people than younger people. Eating more fiber, drinking plenty of fluids, and getting regular exercise may help ease constipation. A person might also try over-the-counter fiber supplements and laxatives.

Viral gastroenteritis

Viral gastroenteritis is also called the stomach flu. It results from an infection and can cause cramps, watery diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and a fever. The symptoms may last from a few days to 10 days.

The stomach flu accounts for 19–21 million cases of diarrheal illness annually in the United States.

The key is to maintain hydration and replace electrolytes. To address specific symptoms, such as diarrhea, over-the-counter medications, such as loperamide (Imodium), can help.

Irritable bowel syndrome

This condition, usually called IBS, is characterized by abdominal pain, bloating, and changes in bowel habits. It affects around 25–45 million people in the U.S.

The exact cause is unknown, but the authors of one review observe that specific bacteria tend to be associated with it.

The right treatment depends on the person’s symptoms, but the results of a 2019 review suggest that a holistic approach, including personalized probiotic therapy and diet modifications, may be best.

Celiac disease

Over time, in a person with celiac disease, the gluten in wheat damages the small intestine so that it no longer absorbs nutrients as efficiently. Symptoms vary, from diarrhea and abdominal pain to irritability and depression. Adopting a gluten-free diet is a key element of treatment.

Crohn’s disease

Crohn’s disease causes chronic inflammation in the GI tract. It most commonly affects the end of the small intestine and the junction with the large intestine.

Because the symptoms of this inflammation also stem from many other health issues, a doctor may refer the person to a specialist, called a gastroenterologist, for further testing and a diagnosis.

The frequency and severity of symptoms can vary from person to person. Treatment involves taking medication, including biologic

therapies.

Ulcerative colitis

Ulcerative colitis causes inflammation, ulcers, and scarring of the large intestine. Symptoms include cramp-like abdominal pain and an urgent need to have a bowel movement. To address flare-ups of symptoms, a doctor may prescribe medications: aminosalicylates, corticosteroids, or immunosuppressants. If the symptoms are severe and not responding well to medication, the doctor may recommend surgery.

Colorectal cancer

Depending on where the abnormal cells first form, the doctor may refer to colorectal cancer as bowel, colon, or rectal cancer. Taken as a whole, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in adults in the U.S.

A variety of tests can detect colorectal cancer, including a colonoscopy, a CT scan, and a biopsy. Most early forms of the cancer cause no symptoms, so screening and early intervention are crucial.

Symptoms of colorectal cancer include:

- diarrhea or constipation
- blood in stool, making it look black
- bleeding from the rectum
- a feeling of fullness, pain, or bloating in the abdomen
- fatigue
- unexplained weight loss

The most common treatment is surgery, though the advisability of this depends on the tumor’s size and location and on the stage of the cancer.

Prevention

Not all intestine-related health problems are preventable, but there are several ways to look after the gut, including:

- eating a healthful diet that is rich in protein, fiber, and complex carbohydrates
- staying hydrated
- managing stress levels
- quitting smoking and avoiding second-hand smoke

When to see a doctor

If stomach or gut pain lasts for more than a few days and does not ease with home care, contact a doctor.

Also, a person should receive medical attention if they have:

- a flare-up of symptoms of a known health issue
- a loss of appetite combined with tiredness and fatigue
- blood in stool
- intense, severe pain that lasts hours

Takeaway

Keeping the intestines healthy is crucial, and researchers continue to find new ways of treating related illnesses. It is important to be aware of warning signs, such as bloody stool. Overall, anyone who has a concern about their gut health should consult a doctor. *(Courtesy: Medical News Today)*

Pak threatens nuclear response if India attacks or disrupts water flow

MOSCOW, May 5: Pakistan will respond with "full spectrum of force", including nuclear, if it is attacked or its vital water flow disrupted, Pakistan's ambassador here has warned amid tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad after the Pahalgalam terror attack.

Muhammad Khalid Jamali made the comments during an interview with Russia's state-run TASS news agency on Sunday.

Warning that Pakistan was prepared to respond to any aggression, the ambassador said, "We in Pakistan will use the full spectrum of force, both conventional and nuclear."

Ties between India and Pakistan plummeted following the April 22 Pahalgalam terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir that killed 26 people, mostly tourists.

Jamali reiterated Islamabad's position regarding the Indus Water Treaty, a key agreement between India and Pakistan, which New Delhi suspended last week as a part of its diplomatic response to the terror attack.

"Any attempt to usurp the water of the lower riparian, or to stop it, or to divert it would be an act of war against Pakistan and would be responded to with full force, including nuclear," he said.

The envoy, however, urged de-



escalation, noting the potential danger given that both countries possess nuclear weapons.

"As the two countries are two nuclear powers, there is all the more need to de-escalate the tensions," he said.

Pakistan earlier called for "neutral and credible investigations" into the Kashmir attack. "I think the role of the international community comes in. And in this regard, we expect that powers like China and Russia can participate in those investigations," Jamali said.

"I believe that the root cause of the problem in Jammu and Kashmir is the right to self-determina-

tion for the Kashmiri people, which was promised to them by the international community through various UN Security Council resolutions," he claimed.

"This needs to be addressed for a permanent, sustainable and durable peace," he added.

When asked whether Pakistan was preparing a formal appeal to Russia to take part in the investigation into the terrorist attack, the ambassador said, "We are open [to it]. We want this investigation to be conducted and this blame game to stop. There are incidents from time to time, and without addressing the root causes, Pakistan is blamed for this."

He said Moscow has pointed at the need to address the "root causes" in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

"Similarly, when political disputes fester for a long time, resentment arises and such incidents are likely to occur. It's always very easy to blame and make someone a scapegoat," he said.

Late Sunday evening, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar held a telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov seeking Moscow's help in de-escalating tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

Following the Pahalgalam attack, India, among other punitive actions, announced the suspension of the 1960 Indus Accord, which governs water sharing between the two countries.

Earlier on April 24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed to punish the terrorists involved in the terror attack and their backers.

In a high-level meeting with the top defence brass on April 29, Modi asserted that the armed forces have "complete operational freedom" to decide on the mode, targets and timing of India's response to the terror attack, according to government sources. (PTI)

Pakistan conducts 'training launch' of 'Fatah' surface-to-surface missile

ISLAMABAD, May 5: Pakistan on Monday conducted a successful training launch of the 'Fatah series' surface-to-surface missile with a range of 120 kilometres amid heightened tensions with India following the Pahalgalam terror attack.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the army, said in a statement that a "Fatah Series" was tested as a part of the ongoing exercise "INDUS".

"The launch was aimed at ensuring the operational readiness of troops and validating key technical parameters, including the missile's advanced navigation system and enhanced accuracy," the statement said.

The training launch comes amid tensions between India and Pakistan after terrorists killed 26 people, mostly tourists, in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgalam on April 22.

Following the terror attack, India took a raft of punitive measures, including the suspension of the 1960 Indus Accord, which governs water sharing between the two countries.

Monday's training launch was witnessed by senior officers of the Pakistan Army, as well as officers, scientists and engineers from Pakistan's strategic organisations.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Chief of Army Staff congratulated the participating troops, scientists, and engineers.

They expressed complete confidence in the operational preparedness and technical proficiency of the Pakistan Army to thwart any aggression against the country's territorial integrity. (PTI)

Romania's hard-right candidate to face pro-EU reformist in presidential runoff

BUCHAREST (ROMANIA), May 5: After decisively winning the most votes in Romania's first-round presidential election redo, hard-right nationalist George Simion will face a pro-Western reformist in a pivotal runoff in two weeks that could reshape the European Union and NATO member country's geopolitical direction.

Simion, the 38-year-old leader of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, or AUR, far outpaced all other candidates in the polls with 40.96% of the vote, according to official electoral data, after all votes were counted from Sunday's election. In second place was reformist Bucharest Mayor Nicusor Dan with 20.99%. The runoff will be held on May 18 between the two staunchly anti-establishment candidates but ideological opposites, who have made their political careers railing against Romania's old political class.

Dan, a 55-year-old mathematician and former anti-corruption activist who founded the Save Romania Union party (USR) in 2016, ran on a pro-EU ticket, told the media early Monday that "a difficult second round lies ahead, against an isolationist candidate." "This was a democratic process that Romania needed... this won't be a debate between individuals, it will be a debate between a pro-Western direction for Romania and an anti-Western one," he said. "I call on all Romanians to be part of this battle, and

I am optimistic that we will win."

In third place was the governing coalition's joint candidate, Crin Antonescu, with 20.07%, and behind him Victor Ponta, a former prime minister from 2012-2015, with 13% of the vote, while Elena Lasconi, who came second in last year's first round ballot, only obtained about 2.6%.

Final turnout stood at 9.57 million people — or 53.2% of eligible voters, according to data from the electoral authorities. Last year's election was annulled after the far-right outsider Calin Georgescu topped the first round, following allegations of electoral violations and Russian interference, which Moscow has denied. The election redo took place months after an annulled vote plunged the country into its worst political crisis in decades.

Simion, who came fourth in last year's race and later backed Georgescu, said in a pre-recorded speech aired after polls closed Sunday that, "I am here to restore constitutional order. "I want democracy, I want normalcy, and I have a single objective: to give back to the Romanian people what was taken from them and to place at the center of decision-making the ordinary, honest, dignified people," he said.

After her poor showing in Sunday's vote, Lasconi announced her resignation on Monday as leader of the USR party, saying, "I fought with all my strength against a rot-

Israel plans to capture all of Gaza under new plan, officials say

TEL AVIV, May 5: Israel approved plans on Monday to capture the entire Gaza Strip and remain in the territory for an unspecified amount of time, two Israeli officials said, in a move that if implemented would vastly expand Israel's operations in the Palestinian territory and likely bring fierce international opposition.

Israeli Cabinet ministers approved the plan in an early morning vote, hours after the Israeli military chief said the army was calling up tens of thousands of reserve soldiers.

The new plan, which the officials said was meant to help Israel achieve its war aims of defeating Hamas and freeing hostages held in Gaza, also would push hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to southern Gaza, what would likely exacerbate an already dire humanitarian crisis.

Since a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas collapsed in mid-March, Israel has unleashed fierce strikes on the territory that have killed hundreds. It has captured swathes of territory and now controls roughly 50% of Gaza. Before the truce ended, Israel halted all humanitarian aid into Gaza, including food, fuel and water, setting off what is believed to be the worst humanitarian crisis in nearly 19 months of war. The ban on aid has prompted widespread hunger and shortages have set off looting.

Israel is trying to ratchet up pressure on Hamas

The Israeli officials said the plan included the "capturing of the strip and the holding of territories." The plan would also seek to prevent the militant Hamas group from distributing humanitarian aid, which Israel says strengthens the group's rule in Gaza. It also accuses Hamas of keeping the aid for itself to bolster its capabilities. The plan also included powerful strikes against Hamas targets, the officials said.

The officials said Israel was in touch with several countries about President Donald Trump's plan to take over Gaza and relocate its population, under what Israel has termed "voluntary emigration" yet which has sparked condemnations from Israel's allies in Europe and the Arab world.

One of the officials said the plan would be implemented gradually. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing military plans.

For weeks, Israel has been trying to ratchet up pressure on Hamas and prompt it to show more flexibility in cease-

fire negotiations. But international mediators trying to bring the sides toward a new deal have struggled to do so. Israel's measures do not appear to have moved Hamas away from its negotiating positions.

The previous ceasefire was meant to lead the sides to negotiate an end to the war, but that goal has been a repeated sticking point in talks between Israel and Hamas. Israel says it won't agree to end the war until Hamas is defeated. Hamas meanwhile has demanded an agreement that winds down the war.

Israel wants to prevent Hamas from handling aid

The Israeli officials did not disclose details on how the plan seeks to prevent Hamas from involvement in aid distribution. One said the ministers had approved "the option of aid distribution," without elaborating.

According to an internal memo circulated among aid groups and seen by The Associated Press, Israel told the United Nations that it will use private security companies to control aid distribution in Gaza. The U.N., in a statement Sunday, said it would not participate in the plan as presented to it, saying it violates its core principles.

The memo, sent to aid organizations on Sunday, detailed notes from a meeting between the Israeli defense body in charge of coordinating aid to Gaza, COGAT and the UN.

Under COGAT's plan, all aid will enter Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing, letting approximately 60 trucks enter daily and distributing 20 kilograms of aid parcels directly to people on the day of entry, although their contents were unclear as was how many people will have access to the aid.

The memo said the aid will be distributed at logistics hubs, which will be run by private security companies. The memo said that facial recognition will be used to identify Palestinians at the hubs and SMS alerts will notify people in the area that they can collect aid.

The UN accuses Israel of wanting to control aid as a pressure tactic

The UN said the plan would leave large parts of the population, including the most vulnerable, without supplies. It said the plan "appears designed to reinforce control over life-sustaining items as a pressure tactic — as part of a military strategy." (AP)

Pakistan's civil, military leadership briefs political parties on tensions with India

ISLAMABAD, May 5: The civil and military leadership of Pakistan has briefed the country's political parties on tensions with India in the wake of the Pahalgalam terror attack.

All political parties barring former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party attended the in-camera briefing on Sunday, the Dawn newspaper reported. The political leaders vowed a robust response if India resorted to any "misadventure", the paper quoted a source privy to the briefing as saying.

The briefing was given by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Lt-Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry and Information Minister Attaullah Tarar.

The source said that the political parties were of the view that they stood by the armed forces to foil any attempt by India to spoil regional peace.

Before the briefing, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said the main objective of the huddle was to get feedback from the political forces in light of tensions with India. The participants were also apprised of the preparedness of the armed forces to foil any misadventure by India, the report said. Pakistan People Party (PPP) leaders Raja Pervez Ashraf, Qamar Zaman Kaira, and Shazia Marri; PML-N's Barrister Aqeel and Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Tallal Chaudhry; PM's aide Pervez Khattak; MQM-P's Farooq Sattar; and Kashmiri leader Shah Ghulam Qadir, among others, attended the meeting. Ties between the two neighbouring countries plummeted following the April 22 Pahalgalam terror attack that killed 26 people, mostly tourists.

India announced a raft of punitive measures against Pakistan including suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, shutting down of the only operation land border crossing at Attari and downgrading of diplomatic ties following the terror attack.

India on Saturday imposed a ban on the import of goods coming from or transiting through Pakistan and also the entry of Pakistani ships into its ports even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the country is committed to taking "firm and decisive" action against terrorists and their backers. PM Modi also told the top defence brass that the armed forces have "complete operational freedom" to decide on the mode, targets and timing of India's response to the attack. Pakistan late Saturday ordered that any Indian flag carriers will not be allowed to visit any Pakistani port and also barred Pakistani ships from docking at any Indian port. (PTI)

Tourist boats capsized in sudden storm in southwest China, 10 dead

BEIJING, May 5: Four boats capsized in a sudden storm at a tourist spot in southwestern China, killing 10 people, state media said Monday.

More than 80 people fell into a river when strong winds hit the scenic area in Guizhou province late Sunday afternoon, state broadcaster CCTV said.

The boats capsized after a sudden rain and hail storm on the upper reaches of the Wu River, a tributary of the Yangtze, China's longest river. In one video shared by state media, a man could be seen performing CPR on another person, while one of the vessels drifted upside down.

Initial reports said two tourist boats had capsized, but state media said on Monday that four boats were involved. The other two boats had no passengers, and the seven crew members were able to save themselves, CCTV said.

Guizhou's mountains and rivers are a major

tourism draw, and many Chinese were travelling during a five-day national holiday that ended Monday.

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for all-out efforts to find the missing and care for the injured, the official Xinhua News Agency said on Sunday. Seventy people were sent to a hospital, most with minor injuries.

Noting a recent series of fatal accidents, Xi underscored the importance of strengthening safety at tourist attractions, large public venues and residential communities, as well as for the rush of people returning at the end of major holidays.

CCTV said the capsized boats had a maximum capacity of about 40 people each and were not overloaded.

An eyewitness told state-owned Beijing News the waters were deep but that some people had managed to swim to safety. However, the storm had come suddenly and a thick mist obscured the surface of the river. (AP)

George Simion secures decisive win in first round of Romania's presidential redo

BUCHAREST (ROMANIA), May 5: Hard-right nationalist George Simion secured a decisive win Sunday in the first round of Romania's presidential election redo, nearly complete electoral data showed. The election took place months after an annulled vote plunged the European Union and NATO member country into its worst political crisis in decades.

Simion, the 38-year-old leader of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, or AUR, was far outpacing all other candidates in the polls with 40.5% per cent of the vote, official electoral data shows, after 99% per cent of votes were counted from Sunday's vote.

Far behind in second place was Bucharest Mayor Nicusor Dan with 20.89% per cent, and in third place the governing coalition's joint candidate, Crin

Antonescu, with 20.34% per cent. He conceded defeat after midnight, saying he believes it's an "irreversible result."

Eleven candidates vied for the presidency and a runoff will be held on May 18 between the top two candidates. By the time polls closed, about 9.57 million people — or 53.2% per cent of eligible voters — had cast their ballots, according to the Central Election Bureau, with 973,000 votes cast at polling stations set up in other countries.

The rerun was held after Romania's political landscape was shaken last year when a top court voided the previous election in which the far-right outsider Calin Georgescu topped the first round, following allegations of electoral violations and Russian interference, which Moscow has denied. (AP)

US, Philippine forces cancel ship-sinking drill after World War II-era target prematurely sinks

MANILA, May 5: A World War II-era Philippine navy ship to be used as a target in a combat exercise by American and the Philippine forces accidentally sank Monday hours before the mock assault, prompting the drill to be cancelled, US and Philippine military officials said.

The BRP Miguel Malvar, which was decommissioned by the Philippine navy in 2021, took on water while being towed in rough waters facing the disputed South China Sea and sank about 30 nautical miles (55 kilometers) off the western Philippine province of Zambales. Nobody was onboard when the ship listed then sank, the Philippine military said.

American and Philippine forces would proceed with other live-fire maneuvers off Zambales on Monday despite the premature sinking of the Malvar. The ship was built as a patrol vessel for the US Navy in the 1940s and was transferred to Vietnam's navy before the Philippine military acquired it, Philippine navy Capt John Percie Alcos said.

"It's an 80-year-old dilapidated ship and it wasn't able to withstand the rough seas," Philippine Lt. Col John Paul Salgado told The Associated Press.

The ship-sinking exercise was planned in an offshore area facing the hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal, which has been closely guarded by the Chinese coast guard, navy and suspected militia ships.

The Philippines also claims the fishing atoll, which lies about 220 kilometers west of Zambales. Chinese and the Philippine forces have had increasingly hostile confrontations in the waters and airspace of Scarborough in recent years.

The cancelled ship-sinking drill would have been the third to be staged by the treaty allies in recent years. It was supposed to be one of the highlights of largescale annual military exercises by the United States and the Philippines from April 21 to May 9 with about 14,000 U.S. and Filipino forces participants.

Called Balikatan, Tagalog for shoulder-to-shoulder, the Balikatan drills have increasingly focused on the de-

fense of Philippine sovereignty in the face of China's growing aggression in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety.

Mock battle scenes which have been staged so far, including the retaking of an island from hostile forces, have reflected assurances by the Trump administration, including by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, that the US would abide by its treaty commitment to defend the Philippines in case Filipino forces come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

On Sunday, US, Australian and Philippine forces practiced retaking an island from hostile forces in the coastal town of Balabac in western Palawan province, which faces the South China Sea.

Japanese forces and British marines joined as observers of the combat exercise, which "showcased the growing interoperability and cohesion among partner nations in maintaining regional security," Salgado said.

"What we have seen since Trump returned to the White House is a remarkable level of continuity in the US-Philippines alliance not only in joint military drills, but also on American statements that the alliance is ironclad," said Derek Grossman, a senior defense analyst at RAND Corporation.

"The Trump administration is trying to keep the pressure on China through its support to the Philippines," Grossman said, but added that it's unclear "just how sustainable this commitment will be given that the Trump administration seems less hawkish on China than its predecessors."

China has vehemently opposed such exercises involving U.S. forces in or near the South China Sea or Taiwan, the island democracy, which Beijing claims as a province and has threatened to annex by force if necessary.

U.S. and Philippine military officials, however, have insisted that the combat exercises were not designed with China in mind but serve as a deterrent to acts of aggression in the region. (AP)

80 years after liberation from Nazis, Dutch commemorate victims of war

AMSTERDAM, May 5: Trains came to a halt, cars pulled to the side of the road and no planes arrived or departed in the Netherlands for two minutes on Sunday, as the country went silent to remember victims of war. Thousands of people gathered in Amsterdam to watch as Dutch King Willem-Alexander laid a wreath at a war memorial, 80 years and a day since the country was liberated from Nazi occupation in 1945.

The first speaker at the annual event was 14-year-old Marijn van der Wilk who read a poem he had written about resistance during the war. "They were brothers, sisters, neighbors. Just people, like you or me. In a time when doing good could be life-threatening. And yet they did it," he said during the nationally televised event.

Prime Minister Dick Schoof discussed the grief his family felt over the death of his grandfather, who was executed by Nazi soldiers for his work in the resistance.

"On this day, in the two minutes of silence, that echo sounds extra loud. When we think of all the people who were murdered for who they were. Who died of hunger or exhaustion. Or who fought for peace and freedom. Our peace and freedom," Schoof said.

The national day of commemoration, at which flags fly at half staff from buildings throughout the country, honors military personnel and civilians killed in conflicts around the world since the outbreak of World War II. It is followed Monday by celebrations to mark the country's liberation from Nazi German occupation at the end of the war.

Not every place in the country observed the remembrance. Some predominantly Christian areas honored the dead on Saturday, as to not disrupt the



Sunday sabbath.

In The Hague, a few hundred people gathered for an alternative commemoration. A group of civil servants organized May 4 inclusive, an event to remember all victims of conflict, frustrated with the Dutch government's response to the conflict in Gaza. According to the association's website, the official event is too restrictive. "We commemorate both the victims of the past and the victims of today, regardless of where, by whom or when the war, genocide, persecution or oppression took place. We do not want to exclude anyone, all victims are given

a place."

A few pro-Palestinian slogans could be seen in the crowd in Amsterdam.

Late Sunday evening, two veterans will light a Liberation Fire to kickstart a day of celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the end of German occupation of the Netherlands. Mervyn Kersh, a 100-year-old veteran from Britain, and Nick Janicki, 101, from Canada will light the flame in Wageningen, the central city where German officers signed the official surrender in 1945, organizers said. (AP)

Geothermal energy will power eco-friendly solutions, including fruit, nut, and meat drying, space heating among others

Northeast's first geothermal production well drilled in Arunachal



ITANAGAR, May 5: The Centre for Earth Sciences and Himalayan Studies (CESHS) has successfully drilled Northeast India's first geothermal production well at Dirang in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district, an official said on Monday.

The successful drilling marks a major milestone in the region's quest for sustainable energy and represents a first-of-its-kind initiative in the Northeast, CESHS

geosciences division head Rupankar Rajkhowa said.

He said the achievement follows two years of intensive geochemical and structural surveys of hot springs across western Arunachal Pradesh.

Once operational, geothermal energy will power eco-friendly solutions, including fruit, nut, and meat drying, space heating, and controlled-atmosphere storage systems -- vital technologies for improv-

ing agricultural and living conditions in the high-altitude terrain of the state, he said.

The project is the result of international scientific collaboration between CESHS, the Norwegian Geotechnical Institute (NGI), Oslo, the Icelandic geothermal firm Geotropy ehf, and the drilling team from Guwahati Boring Service (GBS).

Through advanced geochemical analy-

sis, the Dirang region has been identified as a medium-to-high enthalpy geothermal zone, with reservoir temperatures estimated at 115 degrees Celsius, making it highly suitable for direct-use geothermal applications.

Structural and geological mapping in the Dirang area revealed quartzite overlying schist at tectonic contacts near the Main Central Thrust (MCT), consistent with extensional normal faults found elsewhere in the higher and lesser Himalayas. These insights have enabled precision drilling to access the geothermal reservoir with minimal environmental impact.

This breakthrough project is supported by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Rajkhowa added.

With the first production well completed, CESHS plans to scale operations with deeper drilling in Dirang, potentially making it India's first geothermal-powered city for space heating, he added.

"This pioneering development paves the way for a new era of clean energy in the Himalayas," CESHS director Tana Taze said.

"It demonstrates the potential of geothermal resources in transforming regional livelihoods while ensuring environmental sustainability," he added.

The geothermal-powered drying and storage facilities are expected to become operational soon, setting a national precedent for sustainable energy use in mountainous and remote regions.

The CESHS is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Science and Technology of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

Arunachal Govt hikes DA/DR by 2%



HT Bureau ITANAGAR, May 5: In a significant move aimed at supporting government employees and pensioners, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh has announced a 2% increase in Dearness Allowance (DA) and Dearness Relief (DR), raising the current rate from 53% to 55% of the basic pay and pension. The revised rates will take retrospective effect from January 1, 2025.

This enhancement will benefit a wide range of stakeholders including: All India Services (AIS) officers serving or posted under the State Government, Central Government employees on deputation to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, State Government employees and Pensioners and family pensioners.

The total financial implication of this decision is estimated at ₹ 73.22 crore for a 14-month period, with a monthly outlay of ₹ 5.23 crore.

For the four-month arrear period from January to April 2025, the DA component is estimated at ₹ 20.80 crore (₹ 5.20 crore per month) and the DR component at ₹ 0.12 crore (₹ 0.03 crore per month), amounting to a total of ₹ 20.92 crore. The arrears will be paid in cash, offering timely financial relief to employees and pensioners.

Starting May 2025, the revised DA and DR rates will be incorporated into the monthly salary and pension disbursements.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu, while congratulating government employees and pensioners, emphasized that the decision reflects the State Government's unwavering commitment to their welfare and aims to mitigate the financial strain caused by inflation.

He expressed optimism that government employees would reciprocate the gesture by carrying out their responsibilities with greater dedication and sincerity.

Seva Aapke Dwar 2.0 held at GUPS Emphum

Government services delivered to the doorsteps of citizens

HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, May 5: The Seva Aapke Dwar 2.0 initiative was successfully conducted on Monday at Government Upper Primary School (GUPS), Emphum under the Chongkham Circle. The outreach program covered 11 villages: Emphum, Tingwa, Munglang, Embong, Mankao, Inju, Insa, Pankhao, Tissue, Lathoo, and Namgo, with the primary objective of bringing essential government services closer to the citizens.

The programme was inaugurated by Chow Jenia Namchoom, ZPM Chongkham, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. He was accompanied by Deputy Commissioner, Namsai, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Chongkham, Heads of Departments (HoDs), and Gaon Burahs from across the circle.

During the inaugural session, beneficiaries were provided with Soil Health Cards, Scheduled Tribe Certificates (STCs), Birth Certificates, and other cru-



cial documents. A key highlight of the event was the distribution of mobile phones to Anganwadi workers, procured under the MLA-LAD fund, to enhance efficiency in data entry through the POSHAN portal.

In total, 23 government departments participated in the camp, offering a wide spectrum of services under one roof, in-

cluding health check-ups, Aadhaar enrollment, banking services, agricultural support, and social welfare schemes.

The Seva Aapke Dwar 2.0 initiative continues to reflect the government's commitment to accessible and inclusive governance, ensuring that even the remotest villages receive timely and efficient services.

Tawang holds monthly NCORD meeting to strengthen anti-drug initiatives

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 5: The District-Level NCORD (National Committee on Drug Law Enforcement) meeting for Tawang district was convened on Monday at the Deputy Commissioner's Conference Hall, reaffirming the district administration's commitment to a drug-free society.

The meeting was chaired by In-charge Deputy Commissioner Sangey Wangmu Mosobi, and attended by Superintendent of Police DW Thongon, Dy SP Tasso Kato, Superintendent of Narcotics, Tax & Excise Lham Tsering, In-charge DMO Thutan Tsering, along with officers from paramilitary forces, intelligence agencies, and representatives from Market Welfare Committees, Taxi Association, and Hoteliers Association.

In his briefing, SP DW Thongon provided insights from the recently held state-level NCORD meeting chaired by the Chief Secretary. He shared that no new drug abuse or peddling cases have

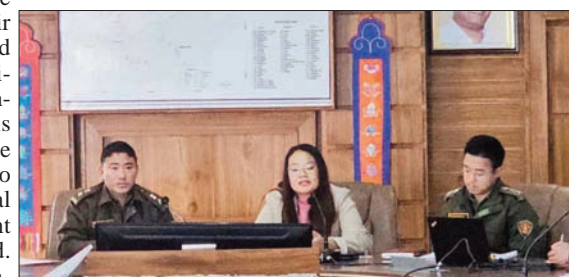
been reported in Tawang since the arrest of a suspected drug peddler last year. He attributed this success to consistent late-night police patrols and vigilant surveillance, urging continued cooperation and prompt reporting of suspicious activities by all stakeholders.

Addressing the gathering, In-charge DC Mosobi lauded the Tawang Police for their proactive approach and emphasized the significance of early intervention. "Prevention is better than cure, and we must remain alert to counter any anti-social activity at its nascent stage," she remarked. She also stressed the importance of timely reporting of anti-drug efforts on appropriate platforms in line with the State Government's vision for a drug-free Arunachal Pradesh.

The In-charge DC also commended

the joint operation by the district police, SSB, and villagers of Kungba (Lungla sub-division) for successfully destroying wild cannabis plantations on May 4, 2025—a significant step in controlling the supply side of narcotics.

The meeting concluded with a productive open discussion, where repre-



sentatives from the Hoteliers Association and other participants raised concerns related to security, tourism, and the importance of community-based efforts to curb the drug menace.

East Siang Police apprehends drug peddler in Ruksin



HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, May 5: In a significant breakthrough under the ongoing Operation Dawn 2.0, the East Siang Police apprehended a drug peddler and seized approximately 7.63 grams of suspected heroin near Ruksin Petrol Pump on Monday.

Acting on credible intelligence, the Anti-Drug Squad (ADS) of East Siang launched a swift operation that led to the arrest of Shri Usman Ali (Ahmed), a resident of the Sawmill area in Pasighat, who was caught red-handed. Ali has reportedly been involved in the illicit sale of narcotics for an extended period.

The operation was led by

Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Ayup Boko, ADS In-charge, and supported by SI K. Dagium, Constables K. Perme and P. Kiger, and Lady Constable K. Atraham. The team conducted the seizure in strict adherence to the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985, in the presence of Circle Officer, Ruksin, acting as Executive Magistrate, and independent witnesses.

From the accused, the following items were recovered: 7.63 grams of suspected heroin, ₹ 600 in cash and one used syringe.

The apprehended individual and seized items were brought to

Ruksin Police Station and handed over to the Officer-in-Charge. A case has been registered under Ruksin PS Case No. 11/2025, U/S 21(a) of the NDPS Act, and investigations are currently underway.

Superintendent of Police, East Siang, Pankaj Lamba commended the ADS team for their efficient action and reiterated the department's zero-tolerance stance against drug-related offenses. He further appealed to the public to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities, emphasizing that community cooperation is essential in making East Siang a drug-free district.

Five-day workshop under ArSRLM begins

Focuses on driving strategic convergence with line departments and promoting sustainable community well-being

HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, May 5: A five-day capacity-building workshop on Food, Nutrition, Health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (FNHW) began from Monday under the Social Inclusion and Social Development (SISD) vertical of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM).

Organised by the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM), the training is being attended by officials from both the District Mission Management Units (DMMUs) and the State Mission Management Unit (SMMU).

The workshop aims to mainstream FNHW interventions into the DAY-NRLM framework and build the capacity of mission staff for effective field-level implementation. It also focuses on driving strategic convergence with line departments and promoting sustainable community well-being.

The training is structured around four core thematic pillars: System Strengthening, Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC), Convergence with Line Departments and Food Enterprise Promotion.

Renowned national-level experts have been engaged to facilitate the workshop. Key resource persons include Devavish Bissawal and Shivangi Karmakar from the National Mission Management Unit, Ministry of Rural



Development, and Nandini Sen, National Resource Person for FNHW from NIRDPR.

In her inaugural address, Sangeeta Yirang, CEO-cum-State Mission Director of ArSRLM, emphasized the strategic importance of the workshop. She encouraged participants to fully engage with the sessions, strengthen their do-

main knowledge, and act as change agents for Self Help Groups (SHGs) at the grassroots.

"This workshop is a stepping stone toward embedding the FNHW agenda within the broader goals of the rural livelihood mission," she said, adding that the initiative will play a vital role in enhancing the quality of life and

nutritional well-being of rural communities in Arunachal Pradesh.

The workshop is expected to serve as a catalyst for integrated development and build long-term capacities for improved community outcomes in health, nutrition, hygiene, and sustainable livelihoods.

Congress, its allies acting like 'fifth column' against Indian armed forces, alleges BJP

When will they (Rafale jets) be put to use: INDIA bloc

NEW DELHI, May 5: The BJP on Monday alleged that the Congress and its allies have become a "fifth column" working to lower the morale of armed forces after Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Rai took a 'toy Rafale' jibe at the government over its response to the Pahalgam terror attack.

BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi sought to draw a parallel between Pakistani army and leaders of INDIA bloc, saying the former is bombarding the Indian armed forces from across the border by violating the ceasefire while opposition leaders are targeting them with their comments from within.

Rai showed a toy plane depicting Rafale fighter aircraft with lemon and chillies hanging from it, and asked the government when it will put them to use against terrorists. He noted that lemon and chillies were tied to the aircraft, a ritual to ward off the evil, following India's acquisition of the fighter planes from France.

"They remain parked with lemon and chillies tied to them. When will they be put to use," he



had asked. Trivedi accused the Congress leader of mocking Hindu religious sentiments, claiming that while the Pakistani army is scared, there is a need to protect the aircraft from the "evil eyes" of the Congress.

Religious practices are respected within the armed forces, he said, noting that they employ religious teachers as well. War cries like "Bolo Bajrangbali ki jai" and "Raja Ram Chandra ki jai" are invoked

by different regiments, he added.

Trivedi said Rai's comments are in a series of disparaging remarks from opposition leaders aimed at demoralising the armed forces.

He said while hardly any Pakistani leader is being quoted in the Indian media for speaking against their army, Indian politicians are being frequently cited in the neighbouring country for their criticism of the government and allegedly lowering the morale of Indian

armed forces.

The BJP leader said the Indian Army is much stronger than its Pakistani counterpart and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shown a determined leadership. Pakistan, however, scores over India when it comes to leaders speaking in one voice, he said.

He mocked the Congress official stand of supporting the government in its action following the Pahalgam terror attack, likening it to Pakistan's pronouncement of supporting peace while promoting terrorism in India behind the scene. The ugly face of the Congress has been unmasked, he alleged.

He said, "The Congress and the INDI Alliance have become like a fifth column."

He reiterated Prime Minister Modi's resolve that the perpetrators of the terror attack and those part of the conspiracy will be pursued till the "ends of the earth" and inflicted a punishment "beyond their imagination".

The previous Congress governments had lost in diplomacy while armed forces won in the battlefield, he said, asserting that the Modi

government will deliver an effective response on both fronts.

He cited former Air Chief Marshal Fali Homi Major's assertion that the Indian Air Force was ready to strike after the 26/11 attack on Mumbai in 2008 by Pakistani terrorists but the then Congress-led UPA government decided against the option.

The BJP leader, also a Rajya Sabha MP, said the UPA government under prime minister Manmohan Singh repeatedly held bilateral talks with Pakistan despite its support to terrorism but the Modi government has made it clear that it will not formally engage with Pakistan.

While opposition leaders have been taking jibes at the government, he noted that Modi as the then Gujarat chief minister had spoken strongly against Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif's "dehati aurat" dig at Singh.

As the then leader of opposition Atal Bihari Vajpayee had spoken robustly in the UN in support of PV Narasimha Rao-led government in the 90s against Pakistan-backed terrorism, he added. (PTI)

Announce timeline, details of caste survey; remove 50 pc cap on reservation: Congress



NEW DELHI, May 5: The Congress on Monday reiterated its demand for the government to announce a timeline and roadmap for the caste survey, remove the 50 per cent cap on reservation and implement Article 15(5) of the Constitution for reservation in private educational institutions.

The chiefs of the opposition party's SC and OBC departments and the Adivasi Congress made the assertions at a press conference at the Congress' 24, Akbar Road, office. AICC OBC Department chairman Anil Jaishid said when Manmohan Singh was prime minister and Arjun Singh education minister, the 93rd Amendment of the Constitution was passed and Article 15(5) added to it.

"It provided reservation in educational institutions for Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs. At that time, this reservation was implemented in government institutions but people of private institutions took it to the court, where the case continued. In January 2014, it was decided that the government could provide reservation to Dalits, tribals and socially and educationally backward classes in private educational institutions," he said.

"Then, general elections were held and a new government came into existence. For the past 11 years, there is a provision in the Constitution that reservation can be given to Dalits, tribals and backward classes in private institutions but a law needs to be made for this," Jaishid said. "It is unfortunate that, till date, the Modi government has not made such a law due to which the deprived and the exploited sections of society are not getting the benefit of education," he said.

Calling the 50 per cent cap on reservation "the biggest obstacle to social justice", AICC SC Department head Rajesh Liloitha said the Congress wanted it to be abolished. "Just like Rahul Gandhi and the Congress forced the government to

conduct a caste census, we will also get this 50 per cent limit on reservation removed," Liloitha said.

The Centre granted 10 per cent reservation to the general caste in the name of EWS (Economically Weaker Sections), which was also approved by the Supreme Court, he said and added this made it clear that the 50 per cent limit could also be crossed.

"If the BJP can do this for the general caste, then why can't it do it for the deprived and the exploited? The Modi government has announced the caste census but our demand is that its complete timeline should be disclosed. Along with this, the entire format of the caste census should be discussed," Liloitha said.

Rahul Gandhi has asserted that till voice of the deprived, exploited and the oppressed is not raised in a strong manner, they cannot get social justice, Liloitha said. "Today, the BJP and Narendra Modi had to bow down before Rahul Gandhi."

Adivasi Congress chairman Vikrant Bhuria said the caste survey would be the "biggest decision" in history.

"When Rahul Gandhi raised the issue of caste census, BJP leaders raised questions. This shows that the BJP and Narendra Modi have never been in favour of a caste census. Earlier, Narendra Modi used to say talking about caste was a sin and part of Urban Naxal thinking and that there were only four castes in the country. But now, Narendra Modi has taken a U-turn because he has realised this is a very big revolution," Bhuria said.

"We want to know what is the roadmap of the BJP government for caste census, what is its timeline and what will be its details?" he asked.

"The demand from the BJP government and Narendra Modi is that we do not want headlines on caste census, we want a timeline and deadline for caste census," he said. Bhuria claimed that the government took the step out of fear.

"We want you to put forward the seriousness of the caste census," he said. The government last week announced that caste enumeration would be included in the forthcoming general census in a "transparent" manner. (PTI)

Army taking measures to bolster cybersecurity infra after website intrusion cases: Sources

NEW DELHI, May 5: Amid attempts to hack and compromise multiple websites, including of Army Welfare Education Society-linked institutions, in the past few days, the army is taking "appropriate and necessary" measures to bolster cybersecurity infrastructure and strengthen digital defence mechanisms, sources said on Monday.

At least two members of the senior management categorically dismissed social media claims that the website of Delhi-based think-tank Manohar Patrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses had been "hacked". Cyberattacks targeting several Indian websites, especially of academic institutions, have been reported in recent days, particularly after the April 22 Pahalgam attack. At least four Army Public Schools (APS), including APS Nagrota and APS Sunjuwan, were targeted by hackers, a source said.

The websites of APS Nagrota and APS Sunjuwan, located in Jammu and Kashmir, were down on Monday evening.

The website of a PSU under the defence ministry was also down. However, there is no official word on the reason for it being down.

Tension between India and Pakistan are on the rise following the Pahalgam attack. On April 25, the Army College of Nursing website was hacked and defaced with graphic visuals. The website was still down on Monday evening.

The landing page had carried a banner with a line on top -- "YOU ARE HACKED !!! TEAM INSANE PK" -- on the day of the hacking. Below it was a disturbing image associated with the April 22 attack. Army Public Schools and the Army College of Nursing are autonomous institutions administered by the Army Welfare Education Society. The Army College of Nursing is located in Jalandhar Cantonment.

In response to these cyberattacks, "appropriate and necessary measures" are being taken to "bolster" cybersecurity infrastructure, "strengthen digital defence" mechanisms to safeguard against further "intrusion attempts", the sources said. (PTI)

Waqf Amendment Act aimed at resolving issues; Cong opposing it to perpetuate vote bank: Yadav

NEW DELHI, May 5: The rights of Muslim groups and individuals to create, manage and regulate Waqf will remain intact, Union Minister Bhubendra Yadav said on Monday, and alleged that the Congress is spreading rumours about the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025.

Addressing a press conference at Delhi BJP office, the Union minister said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has come up with various reforms in the fields of social justice, economic growth, transparency and gender equality.

"The Waqf Amendment Act, 2025 recently passed by Parliament is an important milestone of this progressive journey," he asserted.

The Congress is spreading rumours that the rights of Muslims will end due to the Act, he alleged, adding that it was not for the first time that the Act was amended.

Some issues like transparency and management in Waqf affairs remained unaddressed in the last amendment in 2013, which have been taken care of now by the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025,

he said. "The rights of the Muslim groups and individuals to create, manage and regulate Waqf will remain intact even after the latest amendment," Yadav said.

The latest amendments to the Waqf Act were discussed and consulted in detail when the government referred the subject to the Joint Parliamentary Committee to incorporate all views, he said. The Congress leaders are trying to spread rumours about the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025 but they should be asked if the Waqf Act was so sacrosanct then why their party's governments amended it eight times since 1956, Yadav said.

Later, addressing a gathering of Muslim intellectuals at the Anebdkar International Centre, the senior BJP leader said that the Congress should be asked why they did not computerise the records of Waqf properties as recommended by the Rehman Committee in 2008, and why no judicial system was evolved to settle disputes.

"They should also be asked why they did not talk about rights of the Pasmanda people and

Muslim women and the sin committed by the party to prevent the work for a progressive Muslim society to perpetuate it as a vote bank," Yadav said.

After the Waqf Amendment Act 2013, the Waqf properties doubled in number within a decade, he said.

This 100 per cent increase was beyond anyone's comprehension and gave rise to the talks of correct management of Waqf properties, he said.

"The Union home minister has said that Mutwalli (caretaker) of Waqf will only be a Muslim and they will manage it," he said, rejecting the rumours allegedly spread by the Congress.

The government is not interfering in internal matters or tinkering with the religious freedom granted by the Constitution, Yadav asserted.

The management of Waqf is a "tangled issue" as the encroachments are not being removed, low rents cannot be increased, and records cannot be cleared if someone's property is under dispute, he claimed. (PTI)

Mamata rejects alleged neem wood theft as 'baseless'; condemns attacks on Bengali-speaking people



MURSHIDABAD, May 5: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday rubbished as "baseless and fabricated" the allegations that surplus sacred neem wood from Puri's Jagannath temple was used in crafting the idols of the newly built temple in Digha, even as tensions simmered between both the state over reports of attacks on Bengali-speaking migrant workers.

Banerjee also condemned what she called a "disturbing pattern" of harassment of Bengali-speaking people in Odisha and said she had directed the state DGP to take up the matter with his counterpart in the neighbouring state.

"Why would we use stolen neem wood? We have our sources of neem wood. These allegations are completely baseless and unacceptable," Banerjee said in Murshidabad.

"Why are they so angry just because we have built a Jagannath temple in Digha? Is it a crime to worship Lord Jagannath in West Bengal?" she asked, adding that the backlash was politically motivated.

Her remarks came a day after the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) in Puri questioned a senior servant over the alleged use of surplus sacred wood meant for the 12th-century Puri shrine in crafting idols for the Digha temple.

According to officials, Ramakrushna Dasmohapatra,

secretary of the influential 'Daitapati Nijog', a body of servants traditionally considered the bodyguards of Lord Jagannath, has been summoned for questioning.

Dasmohapatra had reportedly supervised the consecration ceremony of the Digha temple held on April 30, which was attended by the West Bengal Chief Minister herself.

Nearly 56 servants from the Puri temple had participated in the ceremony in Digha, raising eyebrows among temple authorities and drawing criticism from some quarters in Odisha.

Meanwhile, Banerjee expressed grave concern over reports that Bengali-speaking migrant workers from West Bengal were being targeted in Odisha.

"Just like migrant workers from Odisha work peacefully in Bengal, people from Bengal also work in Odisha. I have received disturbing reports that even those merely speaking Bengali are being attacked there. This is deeply condemnable," she said.

"Our DGP will speak with his Odisha counterpart regarding this. We will not tolerate attacks on our people," she asserted.

The Digha temple project, backed by the West Bengal government, has been pitched as a major tourism and religious hub on the Bay of Bengal coast and is seen by many as a cultural counter-narrative to Puri's famed temple, one of the holiest shrines in the Hindu religion.

While the SJTA has not directly accused the West Bengal government of wrongdoing, it has expressed concern over reports that sacred wood left over from the construction of new chariots or temple works in Puri may have been diverted without proper authorisation.

It is alleged that some Puri servants used leftover 'neem' wood from the 2015 'Nabakalebara' (new form) ritual to make the idols for the shrine in Digha.

'Nabakalebara' is a ritual held every 12 or 19 years, during which the wooden bodies of idols — Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath — are changed at the Puri temple. (PTI)

Plea in SC against two shifts for NEET-PG 2025, court seeks Centre's response

NEW DELHI, May 5: The Supreme Court on Monday sought responses from the Centre and others on a petition challenging a notification on holding the NEET-PG 2025 examination in two shifts.

The plea sought a direction for the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) to conduct the examination, scheduled on June 15, in a single shift to ensure a uniform, transparent and fair testing environment for all candidates.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan agreed to hear the plea filed by seven medical practitioners who have also sought a direction to increase the number of test centres across the country for conducting National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Post Graduate (NEET-PG) 2025 in a single shift.

"Issue notice, returnable one week," the bench said. The notices were issued to the NBEMS, the National Medical Council and the Centre, seeking their responses to the plea.

The NBEMS is entrusted with the responsibility of conducting postgraduate and postdoctoral examinations in approved specialties leading to the award of Diplomate of National Board (DNB) and Doctorate of National Board (DrNB) and Fellow of National Board (FNB).

The petitioners have challenged an April 16 notification issued by the NBEMS which notified that NEET-PG 2025 examination would be conducted on June 15 in two-shifts.

Advocates Sukriti Bhatnagar and Abhisht Hela appeared for the petitioners.

"Holding the examination in two shifts has the potential for unfairness due to varying difficulty levels between shifts, the challenges of a transparent and accurate normalisation process and the increased stress and anxiety for candidates," the plea said.

It said the petitioners were seeking directions to con-

duct NEET-PG 2025 in a single shift to "maintain just, fair, reasonable and equitable grounds of competition for all the candidates as a difference of even 0.1 marks in NEET-PG examination can alter the rank of a candidate by hundreds and thousands".

The plea said NEET-PG 2025 covers a wide range of medical specialisations.

It said holding such an extensive examination in two shifts directly violated the rights of the candidates under Article 14 of the Constitution as maintaining just, fair, reasonable and equitable grounds of competition was almost impossible because of a lack of transparency in the moderation and normalization process.

"It also violates Article 21 of the candidates, as the process violates the basic right to fair examination," the plea claimed.

It said NEET-PG 2024 was also conducted in a two-shift format and the results were challenged before the top court due to problems arising out of the format and the subsequent normalization system.

"There is a likelihood that one batch of candidates may face a more difficult question paper than the other batch as happened in the case of NEET-PG 2024, where it was alleged that the question paper in the second shift was easier," the plea said.

It said holding the examination in two shifts introduces variability in difficulty levels and subject-wise question distribution.

The plea said it also creates bigger problems such as moderation, scaling and rationalisation of questions and normalization of marks for candidates of both shifts as the same would benefit aspirants of either of the two shifts.

"This results in violation of the right to equality and makes the whole process vitiated and non-transparent, leaving an itch in the hearts and minds of meritorious candidates," it said. (PTI)

Bench-led by next CJI BR Gavai to hear pleas challenging Waqf (Amendment) Act from May 15: SC

NEW DELHI, May 5: The Supreme Court on Monday said the pleas challenging the Waqf (Amendment) Act's constitutional validity will now be taken up by a bench headed by Chief Justice of India-designate Justice B R Gavai on May 15 as the incumbent CJI will be demitting office on May 13.

As soon as a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan assembled for the hearing, the CJI said, "There are certain aspects which you (Centre) dealt with, but that require clarification. I do not want to reserve any judgment or order at this interim stage. This matter will have to be heard on a reasonably early date and this will not be before me." CJI Khanna will be succeeded by Justice Gavai a day after his superannuation on May 13.

"We have not very deeply gone into the counter affidavit (of the Centre). Yes, you have raised certain

points in regards to registration (of Waqf properties) and have given some disputed figures, that will require some consideration," the CJI said. "We would have loved to pursue your lordship (the CJI) as every contention has an answer. But, we cannot embarrass you because there is no time." Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said while indicating the retirement of the CJI. "It is painful to remind your lordship (about the retirement)," the law officer added.

"No no I am looking forward to it," the CJI responded. The CJI categorically said the Centre's affidavit was exhaustive and it has dealt with most of the issues regarding the concerns expressed on the earlier date.

The CJI said some figures referred to by the Centre and disputed by the other side may have to be dealt with and the case will have to be heard on any reasonably early date. CJI Khanna, however, said it would not

be possible before the bench presided over by him in view of time constraints and posted the pleas for further hearing on May 15 before a bench headed by Justice Gavai, the CJI designate.

Earlier on April 17, the Centre assured the top court that it would neither deny waqf properties, including "waqf by user", nor make any appointments to the central waqf council and boards till May 5.

The assurance of the Centre came when the bench was informed that the waqf law was passed by Parliament with "due deliberations" and it should not be stayed without hearing the government.

The Centre also strongly opposed the apex court's proposal to pass an interim order against the denotification of waqf properties, including "waqf by user", aside from staying a provision allowing the inclusion of non-Muslims in the central waqf councils and boards. (PTI)

Japan backs India's fight against terrorism

NEW DELHI, May 5: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday hosted his Japanese counterpart Gen Nakatani for wide-ranging talks touching upon the scourge of terrorism and ways to expand bilateral defence ties in the wake of China's military posturing in the Indo-Pacific.

Gen Nakatani, whose visit to India comes amid its heightened tensions with Pakistan in the wake of the Pahalgam attack, condemned the terrorist attack and expressed solidarity with India in the fight against terrorism.

In his opening remarks at the delegation-level talks that followed a one-on-one meeting, Singh said, "I would like to thank the government of Japan for their strong expression of solidarity with India in wake of the Pahalgam terrorist attack".

"India shares a Special, Strategic and Global partnership with Japan. During the bilateral meeting we



discussed defence cooperation and regional security," Singh said in a social media post.

"Both sides condemned terrorism in all forms and emphasised the need for enhanced collaboration and joint efforts to counter cross-border threats."

Singh said Nakatani expressed

solidarity with India in the wake of the Pahalgam attack and offered "full support" to India.

It is learnt that the two sides also deliberate on ways to boost India-Japan defence industrial cooperation.

The two ministers also exchanged "views and ideas" on the

current regional and international security situation.

It was the second meeting between the two defence ministers within six months after their maiden interaction in November on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus at Lao PDR.

At that meeting, Singh and Gen Nakatani deliberated on a reciprocal provision of supply and services agreement for greater interoperability between their militaries. The reciprocal supply and services pact, if sealed, would provide for the militaries of the two countries to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies, besides facilitating the scaling up of overall defence cooperation.

It is learnt that the two sides also reviewed the situation in the strategic waters of East and South China Seas where Beijing has been increasing its military posturing. (PTI)

Waqfs to support the welfare and maintenance of women

External affairs MoS highlights key provisions of Waqf(Amendment) Act 2025

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 5: Minister of State for External Affairs & Textiles, Pabitra Margherita, on Monday highlighted the key provisions and significance of the recently passed Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 on Monday.

Describing the Act as a “transformative change” under leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Margherita emphasised that the legislation has been aimed at correcting historical imbalances and ensuring that waqf properties are managed with greater transparency, equitable representation, inclusivity, and accountability to serve the community’s welfare truly.

Highlighting the democratic and consultative approach behind the Act’s passage, Margherita noted that it followed 38 meetings of a 31-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) over 5 months, review of 7,772 petitions, consultations with 284 delegations, analysis of nearly 1 crore online suggestions, and over 25 hours of Parliamentary debate.

“One of the core features of the



reform is inclusivity, with mandatory representation of marginalized Muslim groups—ensuring representation from the Bohra and Aghakhani communities, as well

as from backward class Muslims—in every State and UT Waqf Board. In a historic step, at least two Muslim women will now serve on every Waqf Board and in

the Central Waqf Council, ensuring gender representation and long-overdue recognition,” Margherita said.

Speaking on gender rights, the Minister of State highlighted that family Waqfs would now be required to ensure that daughters, widows, and divorced women receive their rightful legal share before such Waqfs are created. The Amendment further strengthened this by allowing Waqfs to support the welfare and maintenance of these women, making community welfare a living reality.

Focusing on the economic potential of waqf properties, the Minister expressed concern that despite Waqf assets being worth crores, their reported annual income in 2025 was a mere ₹ 126 crore against the ₹ 12,000 crore potential revenue. The Amendment sought to bridge this gap by enforcing accountability, introducing professional oversight, and implementing structural reforms to unlock waqf’s true economic value.

“In a step toward ensuring authenticity, the Act now allows only

individuals who have practiced Islam for at least five years to declare a waqf. The concept of ‘Waqf by user’, where prolonged usage could convert land into Waqf, has been abolished for future cases,” the Minister said.

The Act also ushered in an era of digital governance. All Waqf records would now be centralized on a national digital portal, allowing public access to data on registration, mutation, audit, leases, and litigation. Integration with land records and geotagging would enhance transparency and help eliminate encroachments and misuse, the Minister added.

Calling the legislation “a moral reset”, the Minister of State reiterated that the Act was meant to build a New India where honesty, fairness, and inclusivity guide resource management and governance.

Margherita also reaffirmed the government’s commitment to the development and upliftment of the North Eastern Region, especially Mizoram, describing it as India’s ‘Ahtalakshmi’, in line with the vision of Modi’s Viksit Bharat.

Sikkim may get new airport, will boost tourism: Union minister



GANGTOK, May 5: Union minister Ramdas Athawale said an airport is likely to be built in Sikkim to boost tourism.

Addressing a press conference, Athawale on Sunday said the Centre was committed to the overall progress of the state.

He said Sikkim was excelling remarkably in the tourism sector under the leadership of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang.

Athawale, the Minister of State for Social Justice and Empower-

ment, is on a two-day visit to the state.

He said the whole of the Northeast has made tremendous progress under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi.

The state BJP has been demanding an all-weather international airport in Sikkim to boost tourism.

The state’s lone Pakyong airport often faces low visibility issues, leading to the closure of services for months. (PTI)

Tripura to introduce biometric attendance system in govt-run tribal hostels



AGARTALA, May 5: The Tripura Tribal Welfare department will introduce biometric attendance system in all government-run tribal hostels to closely monitor the presence of students, an official said on Monday.

The Tribal Welfare department runs 164 tribal hostels, while 43 hostels are functioning under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC).

The state government spends Rs 80 crore annually for running these hostels.

“Tribal Welfare minister Bikash Debbarma held a review meeting recently to check the functioning

of tribal hostels. In the meeting, a number of decisions were taken to streamline the system to provide better facilities to the students,” Tribal Welfare department Director Subhashish Das told PTI.

He said the biometric attendance will be introduced in all hostels which function under the direct control of the department.

“The boarders need to use biometric attendance system twice a day - morning and evening. This will not only help the department to maintain transparency in attendance but also check the alleged malpractice in running the hostels,” Das said.

The biometric system will be introduced in TTAADC and NGO-run hostels in the second phase, he said, adding initiatives have been taken to develop a dedicated software for this purpose.

Das said the department which spends ₹ 80 per day per student on food, has proposed the government to increase the food money to ₹ 120 in view of the price rise.

Out of 164 hostels, smart class facilities will be introduced in 100 hostels in the first phase so that the students residing in the hostels can get online classes to be controlled from a centralised mechanism in Agartala, he said.

The department will provide digital library facility with 5G Internet connection to all hostels so that students could get the best possible facilities in their hostel, he said, adding solar lighting system will also be provided to hostels.

Das said steps are being initiated to introduce clean and green awards to hostels at subdivision, district and state level for maintaining cleanliness and greenery.

He said the department has already proposed to the government to appoint superintendent for all the hostels to manage them efficiently. (PTI)

Tripura CM vows to expand blood bank network in Tripura

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 5: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Monday announced that the state government has decided to increase the number of blood banks in the state.

“Currently, there are blood banks in every subdivision and district, and in the coming days, the number of blood banks will be increased further. In the last financial year, 42 thousand units of blood were stored in the blood banks across the state. To save the lives of dying people, the youth should come forward to donate blood voluntarily,” he said.

Saha said this while inaugurating the voluntary blood donation camp organized by the Tripura State Blood Transfusion Board at Pragna Bhawan in Agartala today.

Dr. Saha, who is also the Health Minister of the state, said that 1% of the total population’s blood needs to be stored.

“There is a time limit for storing blood. It cannot be stored for a long time. There is a specific time limit for this. Therefore, blood has to be collected while maintaining a balance between the demand and supply. Blood collection decreases for various



reasons. We try to fill that shortage. I would like to appeal to everyone to donate the surplus blood in our body to save the lives of dying people,” said Dr. Saha.

In this regard, he urged the youth to come forward to donate blood more voluntarily so that there is sufficient blood stock in the blood banks.

The Chief Minister said that in case of road accidents, a lot of blood is needed.

“During surgeries or the delivery of pregnant mothers, blood is required. Therefore, at least 2

units of blood have to be collected before the operation. Also, blood is needed for cancer patients and thalassemia patients. Therefore, it is necessary to always keep a stock of blood. About 15% of the population has negative blood. The Tripura State Blood Transfusion Board is always monitoring the blood stock. Currently, there are blood banks in almost all the districts of the state. In the future, initiatives will be taken to establish a separation unit system with more blood stock. There can be no greater donation than blood donation,” he said.

Heroin seized, three persons arrested in Sikkim's Namchi

GANGTOK, May 5: Police in Namchi district of Sikkim arrested three persons after 815 gm of heroin was seized from their possession on Monday, an official said.

Acting on intelligence inputs, a police team led by Melli SHO Kishore Chhetri apprehended three persons from the Jorethang area and seized the heroin from their possession.

The arrested persons are in police custody and further investigations are underway to uncover potential links to larger drug networks, the officer said. On Sunday night acting on a tip-off, a Singtam police team led by SHO Sher Bahadur Manger apprehended a 39-year-old man from Adarsh Goan area and seized brown-coloured substance suspected to be brown sugar.

Police said that the total recovered quantity was 122.80 gm, packed in 103 small pouches.

Accordingly, a case has been registered under the relevant sections of the NDPS Act, and further investigation is in progress. (PTI)

RESCUED BY AUTHORITIES

Baby sold in Tripura village out of poverty



AGARTALA, May 5: A shocking incident has come to light from Katlamara Primary Health Center under Simna Assembly Constituency in West District, where a newborn baby was allegedly sold by her parents to a couple from the Khowai district of Tripura.

The incident has sparked widespread outrage among locals.

Sources said that the incident occurred on April 30, when Lakshmi Rani Das, wife of Prasenjit Das, gave birth to a girl child at Katlamara PHC.

Allegations soon surfaced that the infant had been sold directly from the hospital premises.

However, in her defense, Lakshmi Rani Das denied “selling” the child, claiming instead that she had “given” her away due to poverty and desperation.

“I didn’t sell out my daughter

but I have given her to another family. I don’t know their names. I believed them and that’s why I have given them. I can’t feed her. My husband is suffering from TB and we don’t have money to raise her,” she told reporters today.

Lakshmi, already a mother to two sons and a daughter, cited dire financial constraints and her husband’s health condition as the reasons behind her decision.

Following a swift investigation, authorities managed to trace the baby to the Khowai area.

She was successfully rescued and has since been shifted to a shelter home, officials confirmed.

Tripura Commission for Protection of Child Right Chairperson Jayanti Debbarma said, “We have recovered the baby and now handed over a government child care home. The baby is fine now.”

NFR launches parcel cargo train between Tripura and Punjab to boost trade

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 5: In a major boost to regional logistics and trade connectivity, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has launched a dedicated Parcel Cargo Express Train (PCET) service between Agartala in Tripura and Sanahwal in Punjab.

This service, aimed at enhancing the transportation of key commodities like rubber and pineapples from the Northeast to larger markets, is expected to significantly support local economies and traders.

NFR officials said that the PCET, bearing train numbers 00832/00833, will operate twice a month, completing a total of 144 round trips over the next six years. Initially, the train will consist of 15 parcel vans and one brake van, with plans to expand to 20 parcel vans after six months in response to growing demand.

“This initiative marks a significant milestone in improving the region’s freight movement. It offers an efficient, timely, and cost-effective logistics solution for farmers and traders in Tripura and nearby areas,” said an NFR official.

The service will be operated by AVG Logistics Ltd.,



which won the lease through a transparent and competitive bidding process. The contract is valued at approximately ₹ 68.95 crore, underlining a strong investment push in the region’s supply chain infrastructure.

NFR officials highlighted that the launch of this cargo train aligns with Indian Railways’ broader vision of promoting parcel train services across the country to meet long-haul freight needs.

Telangana youth scales Manipur’s highest peak to spread message against drug abuse, betting apps

Climbed Mount Iso along with two officers of Assam Rifles



IMPHAL, May 5: A 20-year-old mountaineer from Telangana scaled Manipur’s highest peak Mount Iso also known as Mount Tempu in Senapati district to spread the message against drug abuse and betting apps.

Bhukya Yashwanth, a B Com student in Telangana said in the last 10 days he has climbed Betingchhip (Thaidawr), the highest peak in Tripura, Mount Gorichen in Arunachal Pradesh and also Mount Iso in Manipur.

Asked about the reason for climbing the highest peaks in Manipur and Tripura, he told PTI, “I was deeply affected by thousands of people across the country getting addicted to betting apps causing losses to their hard-earned

money and the rising drug addiction. So, I want to spread the social message against these vices by combining them with my passion for mountaineering.”

Yashwanth said he climbed Mount Iso along with two officers of Assam Rifles.

“The presence of the Assam Rifles officials along with their support, and spirit of camaraderie made the expedition even more memorable and inspiring” Yashwanth added.

Part of my campaign is also to hoist the national tricolour in the highest peak of every state in the country under ‘Har Shikar Par Tiranga’, he said.

Speaking on ascending Mt Iso which is nearly 3,000 metres, Yashwanth said “The terrain was very steep and the

weather condition was quite cold. However, the body warmed up during the ascent and it went fine.”

Yashwanth says he is heading for Mizoram on Tuesday where he will summit its highest peaks. He also plans to complete climbing the highest peaks in all northeastern states in the next few days. Yashwanth who started mountaineering at the age of 16 said he has climbed Mt Kilimanjaro in Africa in 2021.

Of his mission, Yashwanth said “Every summit is a tribute to our Tiranga and to the spirit of India. Let’s choose health, purpose, and integrity over shortcuts and distractions and prevent all vices that destroy not only the self but our families.” (PTI)

Shah Rukh Khan confirmed to walk Met Gala 2025 in Sabyasachi designs



NEW DELHI, May 5: Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan is set to make his debut on the red carpet of the 2025 edition of the Met Gala in an ensemble crafted by fashion designer Sabyasachi.

There were reports that the actor has opted for designs by the celebrity favourite designer for the annual fundraising fashion gala in New York but the collaboration was confirmed by Pooja Dadlani, Shah Rukh's manager on Monday morning.

She shared two Instagram Stories with the logo of Sabyasachi's label with "King Khan" and "King Khan. Bengal Tiger" as captions.

Sabyasachi's official Instagram page later shared the same posts. The brand's Instagram page on Sunday posted a Story with the caption: "Namaste New York." Videos of Shah Rukh arriving in New York on Saturday along with Pooja were doing the rounds on social media. Besides the superstar, Indian actors Diljit Dosanjh and Kiara Advani will also debut at this year's Met Gala. (PTI)

I leave it up to sensible people of Karnataka to decide who is at fault: Sonu Nigam



NEW DELHI, May 5: Popular singer Sonu Nigam in a statement on Monday reiterated his love for the Kannada people but felt compelled to confront the young men who "threatened" him during a live concert over language issues.

His statement comes after the Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce (KFCC) announced a 'non-cooperation' campaign against the singer for his allegedly controversial remark which hurt the sentiments of the Kannadaigas during a recent concert in Bengaluru.

An FIR was also registered at the Avalahalli Police Station in Bengaluru on May 3 against Nigam for reportedly retorting, "Kannada. Kannada. This is the reason behind the incident in Pahalgam," in response to an audience member's request to sing in Kannada last month at a concert in the city.

In the statement posted on Instagram, the singer said he will cooperate with the police authorities of Karnataka in the matter and always "cherish the love" he has received from the people of the state irrespective of the verdict.

"I leave it up to the sensible people of Karnataka to decide who is at fault here. I will accept your verdict gracefully. I fully respect and trust the law agencies and Police of Karnataka and will comply with whatever is expected from me," Nigam wrote.

Regardless of the love he has received from the people of Karnataka, the playback singer said he was not some "young lad" who would take humiliation from anyone.

"I am 51 years old, in the second half of my life and am entitled to take offence for someone as young as my son threatening me directly in front of thousands in the name of language that too Kannada which is my second language when it comes to my work. That too right after my first song of the concert! He provoked a few more. Their own people were embarrassed and were asking them to shut up."

"I told them very politely and lovingly the show has just started, it's my first song and that I will not let them down, but they have to let me continue with the concert the way I have planned. Every artiste has a song list prepared so the musicians and technicians are in sync. But they were hell bent on creating ruckus and threatening me wildly. Tell me who is at fault?" he asked.

As a patriot, Nigam said, he loathes anyone trying to create hate in the name of "language, caste or religion", especially after the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam which claimed the lives of 26 people, including two from Karnataka.

"I had to school them, and I did, and thousands of students and teachers cheered me for it. The matter got over and I sang Kannada for more than an hour. It's all there on social media," he added.

On Saturday, Nigam shared a video on Instagram in which he defended himself after an FIR was filed against him for allegedly offending the sentiments of Kannadigas during the concert. (PTI)

'Tom Cruise will risk his life for the audience' says Simon Pegg

LOS ANGELES, May 5: Actor-writer Simon Pegg says action star Tom Cruise is ready to risk his life for the audience.

"Tom Cruise literally will risk his life for the audience," he told entertainment magazine People.

"I've said, 'You're absolutely nuts' many times to him. But he just cares that much about it," he added.

Cruise is known for his daring stunts especially in "Top Gun" and "Mission: Impossible" franchises.

Pegg and Cruise starred together for the first time in "Mission: Impossible III", which released in 2006. It featured Pegg as Benji Dunn and Cruise in the role of Ethan Matthews Hunt.

The "Hot Fuzz" actor then went on to star in five more installments of the franchise.

Pegg said he witnessed many stunts of his co-star and recalled shooting the famous Burj Khalifa sequence, which featured Cruise scaling the world's tallest building.

"Just leaning out of the window and seeing Tom sort of hanging there, smiling, this big s*** eating grin on his face, like, 'I'm having the best time,'" he said.

Directed by Christopher McQuarrie, the eighth installment of the franchise, titled "Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning", is set to release on May 23. Both the actors are reprising their roles in the film. (PTI)



Trump imposing 100% tariff on imported films may encourage Hollywood to move out of US: Shekhar Kapur

NEW DELHI, May 5: Filmmaker Shekhar Kapur on Monday criticised American President Donald Trump for threatening a 100 percent tariff on films imported to the US, saying the move could backfire and instead push Hollywood filmmakers to leave the country.

In a post Sunday night on his Truth Social platform, Trump said he has authorised the Department of Commerce and the Office of the US Trade Representative to slap a 100 per cent tariff "on any and all Movies coming into our Country that are produced

in Foreign Lands".

Kapur, known for films such as "Mr India", the "Elizabeth" franchise starring Cate Blanchett and "What's Love Got to do with It?", said over "75% of box office" of Hollywood films comes from outside the US. "And significant part of the budget of those films are spent outside the US. President Trump's imposition of 100% tariff on all films imported into the US may encourage Hollywood to move outside the US! Quite the opposite of what he intended. #Hollywood #tariff #DonaldTrump #tariff

fonfilm (sic)" the director wrote on X. Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap simply shared Trump's comments on his Instagram Stories without comment. "The Movie Industry in America is DYING a very fast death," Trump wrote, complaining that other countries "are offering all sorts of incentives to draw" filmmakers and studios away from the US. "This is a concerted effort by other Nations and, therefore, a National Security threat. It is, in addition to everything else, messaging and propaganda!" he added in his post. (PTI)

Paul Feig supports Blake Lively, calls her an 'amazing collaborator'

LOS ANGELES, May 5: Filmmaker Paul Feig defended actor Blake Lively and said he loves working with her and it is frustrating to read the "misconceptions" about her doing rounds on social media.

Lively stars in Feig's film "Another Simple Favour" alongside Anna Kendrick, which began streaming on Amazon Prime Video on May 1. The film is a sequel to 2018's "A Simple Favor".

For a while, there have been rumours about the conflict between Lively and Kendrick. Besides, Lively came to limelight last year after she accused her "It Ends With Us" co-star Justin Baldoni of sexual harassment.

Addressing the feud between Lively and Kendrick, Feig said, "Blake is an amazing collaborator, so when I read people's misconceptions about how movies are made, it's just frustrating for me." "When the gang on the internet gets (up in arms) about something, it's just like, guys, you don't know what you're talking about. I love working with Blake, she's just the best," he told entertainment magazine Esquire.

"Outrage is the most boring emotion humans have these days. When it's towards something meaningful, that's great. But people get outraged at everything. It's like, this is what you're angry about? There's other things to be outraged about, please, go and help make the world a better place," he added. (PTI)

Nicolas Cage says he 'could have died' while training for 'The Surfer'



LOS ANGELES, May 5: Hollywood star Nicolas Cage says he "could have died" while training for his film "The Surfer".

Cage said he had a limited time to practice surfing and recalled taking surf lessons before beginning to film in Australia.

"I have surfed, but every time I've attempted surfing, I've been pounded to smithereens. I surfed down on Sunset Beach. When I was trying to learn, my teacher gave me a shortboard. I said, 'Look, I want a longboard,'" he told Entertainment Weekly in an interview. The actor recalled how longboard wasn't of much help for him as it got pounded in the ocean and even got stuck in the rip tide.

"They said they saw my board, they call it 'tombstone,' like that triangle top. I'm climbing up the leash as I'm somersaulting, and I could have died. Now I have a young kid, I don't know if I want to do it anymore," he said.

Directed by Lorcan Finnegan, "The Surfer" released on May 2.

The film follows Cage's character, who returns to the idyllic beach of his childhood with his son. However, things take a different turn when he gets humiliated by the locals. (PTI)

Rabada eligible to play after completing 'treatment program'

NEW DELHI, May 5: The provisional ban on South African pacer Kagiso Rabada for using a prohibited recreational drug has been lifted after he completed a "substance abuse treatment program" during the suspension, making him available for his IPL franchise Gujarat Titans.

According to a statement from the South African Institute for Drug-Free Sport (SAIDS), Rabada, who has already linked up with the Gujarat Titans after serving his suspension, can now take the field. GT will take on Mumbai Indians in Mumbai on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old was tested during the SA20 league in January and the lifting of suspension also makes him available for the World Test Championship final against Australia next month.

"Mr. Rabada tested positive for a Substance of Abuse and was subsequently notified of the allegation of his doping offence on 1 April 2025. A provisional suspension was imposed and Mr. Rabada returned immediately to South Africa from India," the release stated. "As per the South African Anti-Doping Rules specifically pertaining to Substances of Abuse, the player was offered an opportunity to complete a substance abuse treatment program. "After Mr. Rabada satisfactorily completed two sessions of his treatment program, his provisional suspension ended. The player has effectively served a one-month period of ineligibility and may now resume participation in sport," it added. Cocaine, heroin, MDMA and cannabis fall in the category of 'Substances of Abuse' for which Rabada was sanctioned.

The abuse of such drugs can lead to a maximum of four-year ban but if a sportsperson can prove that the use occurred out-of-competition and is not related to performance enhancement, the suspension could be reduced to three months. (PTI)

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Inter and Barcelona evenly poised, PSG holds a narrow lead over Arsenal



PARIS, May 5: Scoring three away goals should make Inter Milan feel confident heading into the return leg of its Champions League semifinal against Barcelona on Tuesday.

Inter might not think so, considering Barcelona's ability to conjure goals out of nowhere with the world's best young player in the side. Inter was 2-0 up after 21 minutes in the first leg, before 17-year-old Spain star Lamine Yamal scored a stunning goal and Barcelona fought back to draw 3-3 at home in a pulsating contest packed with spectacular goals.

Stopping Yamal is hard enough, but then there's Raphinha — who is merely Barcelona's other Ballon d'Or contender.

With his long-range shooting and speedy attacks through the middle or down the flanks, he is a permanent threat. The Brazilian has 12 goals in the competition, one more than strike partner Robert Lewandowski.

But for all of Barcelona's firepower, the defense remains vulnerable and coach Hansi Flick is under pressure to make the right calls. He kept Wojciech Szczesny in goal, even though No. 1 Marc-André ter Stegen has recovered from a long-term knee injury and played in Saturday's 2-1 win at Valladolid.

Barcelona is looking to win the competition for the sixth time, while Inter seeks a fourth title. Inter won in 2010, beating Barca in a tense semifinal.

Players and coaches have been warning about the damaging effects of a congested calendar.

Look no further than Barcelona and Inter for examples.

Barcelona defender Jules Koundé sustained a left hamstring injury in the first leg and the prolific Lewandowski has been nursing a minor left leg injury for two weeks. Lewandowski has netted 40 goals this season and needs one more goal to hit 100 for Barcelona.

Inter Milan captain Lautaro Martínez also went off injured in the first leg.

Strike partner Marcus Thuram, who scored a superb back-heel flick in the first leg, only returned from a thigh injury last week.

Paris Saint-Germain is hopeful 33-goal top scorer Ousmane Dembélé will be fit to start on Wednesday. The star forward limped off with a minor hamstring pull against Arsenal in the semifinal first leg in London, which PSG won 1-0. Neither side has won the competition, both have lost a final.

PSG reached the semis last season but Arsenal reached this stage for the first time since 2009.

Coach Luis Enrique has transformed PSG into a slick and cohesive unit since Kylian Mbappé's offseason departure to Real Madrid. After falling short with world famous stars, there is genuine belief among PSG fans that this young and vibrant team can finally win the Champions League

having cut ties with the over-hyped Galacticos era.

Much of that is down to Luis Enrique's hard-nosed ability to generate competition for places, with no favorable treatment like in previous years.

However, he rested his main players on Saturday and shrugged off PSG's 2-1 loss at Strasbourg, the club's second straight defeat in Ligue 1 albeit with the league title already won.

He has his eyes on a much bigger prize, but PSG does not carry the same threat without Dembélé.

Arsenal also lost on Saturday, 2-1 at home to Bournemouth.

Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta pledged to use "the frustration, rage and anger" from the Premier League defeat to fire up his players against PSG. He needs more than that. Arsenal was found wanting tactically in the first leg, where PSG dominated the first half and scored when a 26-pass move led to Dembélé's goal. (AP)

Srikanth, young Indian shuttlers eye turnaround in form at Taipei Open

TAIPEI, May 5: Battling an extended run of poor form, Kidambi Srikanth and a host of young Indian shuttlers, including Ayush Shetty and Anupama Upadhyaya, will be eager to deliver strong performances at the USD 240,000 Taipei Open, beginning here on Tuesday.

A former world No. 1, Srikanth has been struggling with injuries and inconsistent form for a considerable period, which has seen him slip to No. 61 in the current BWF World Rankings.

The 32-year-old, a silver-medallist at the 2021 World Championships, has featured in 14 tournaments last season, with a semi-final finish at the Swiss Open in March being the highlight.

This year, Srikanth has played five events so far, with his best showing being a quarter-final finish at the Thailand Masters Super 300 tournament.

Srikanth will look to arrest his slump when he begins his campaign against compatriot Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian, the 2022 World Junior Championships silver-medallist who made headlines by stunning then world No. 2 Anders Antonsen of Denmark at the Swiss Open in March this year.

The 2023 World Junior Championships bronze-medallist Ayush Shetty, 20, who reached the semifinals of the Orleans Masters, opens his campaign against third seed Lee Chia Hao of Chinese

Taipei in this Super 300 event. The 2023 National Games gold-medallist Tharun Manjappalli faces Japan's Shogo Ogawa, while Meiraba Luwang Maisnam will take on seventh-seeded Canadian Brian Yang.

In women's singles, promising youngsters Anupama Upadhyaya and Unnati Hooda will face off in an all-Indian opening-round clash.

Anupama heads into the tournament on the back of a confidence-boosting win over England's Miu Lin Ngan in a Group D match at the Sudirman Cup Finals last week.

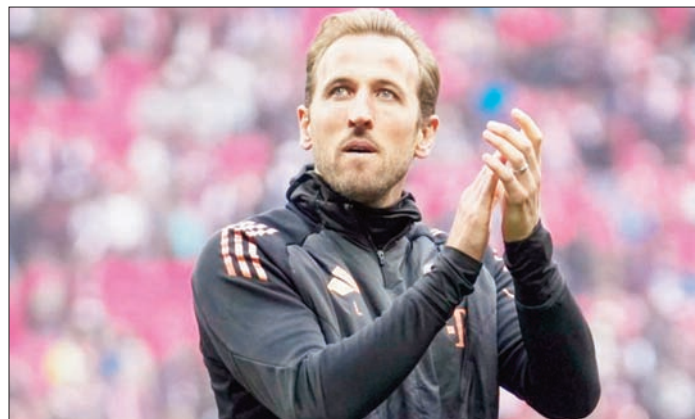
Anmol Kharb and Rakshitha Sree Santhosh Ramraj, two other exciting prospects, will also look to make deep runs in the draw. The 18-year-old Anmol, who was an integral part of the Asian Team gold medal last year, faces a qualifier in her opener, while Rakshitha takes on second seed Sim Yu Jin of Korea.

Aakarshi Kashyap is also in the fray and will open her campaign against Hung Yi-Ting. In women's doubles, Rashmi Ganesh and Sania Sikkandar will be in action as well.

Among others, former national champion Mithun Manjunath, Raghu Mariswamy, Manraj Singh, Aryamann Tandon, Ira Sharma, Shreya Lele, Mansi Singh, and Isharani Baruah will compete in the singles qualification rounds. (PTI)



Harry Kane finally wins his first career title as Bayern Munich becomes Bundesliga champion



BERLIN, May 5: The "curse" has been lifted.

Harry Kane can finally celebrate his first career title after Bayern Munich became Bundesliga champion with a little help from Freiburg on Sunday.

Freiburg drew with second-placed Bayer Leverkusen 2-2 to leave Bayern an unassailable eight points clear of the 2024 champion with two rounds of the German league remaining.

The 31-year-old Kane had never won a title in a career of runner-up finishes and defeats in finals with Bayern, Tottenham and England, leading some to speak of a "curse" against a player considered one of the world's best forwards.

Kane's arrival as Bayern's record signing in 2023 was followed by the club's first trophy-less season since 2012.

Kane was ready to celebrate Saturday when Bayern looked set to win 3-2 in Leipzig. But Yussuf Poulsen equalized with the last kick of the game for Leipzig.

"Next week, Harry!" teammate Thomas Müller wrote on Instagram.

He didn't have to wait that long. Leverkusen played without conviction in Freiburg, knowing that second place was already secured and that it only had a mathematical chance of defending its title with Bayern having a far superior goal difference.

Maximilian Eggestein fired the home team ahead before the break and an own-goal from Piero Hincapié after it put Freiburg firmly in control.

Leverkusen had to wait till the 82nd minute for Florian Wirtz to

pull one back with his team's first shot on target. Jonathan Tah equalized with the next in stoppage time, but it made no difference for the new league champion.

"We are the champions!" Kane sang with teammates in a Munich restaurant, where he and Joshua Kimmich were doused in beer or champagne as they sang Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds."

It's Bayern's record-extending 34th German championship including the first for the club in 1932. Every other title came after the Bundesliga's formation in 1963. Bayern will be presented with the trophy after its home game against Borussia Mönchengladbach next weekend, when Müller will be given what's sure to be an emotional send-off after 25 years at the club. "He's going as a legend," Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann said of Müller's 13 Bundesliga titles.

Freiburg's draw kept it fourth in the final place for Champions League qualification, just a point ahead of a resurgent Borussia Dortmund and two ahead of Leipzig.

Third-placed Eintracht Frankfurt stayed four points clear of Freiburg with a 1-1 draw at Mainz in the late game.

Only the top four teams qualify for Europe's premier club competition.

Earlier, Holstein Kiel boosted its hopes of avoiding the drop with a 3-1 win at Augsburg. It moved Kiel one point behind Heidenheim, which occupies the relegation playoff place. Kiel next plays Freiburg, then Dortmund. (AP)

Mbappé scores twice and Madrid win again to trail Barcelona by 4 points ahead of 'clasico'

MADRID, May 5: Real Madrid survived a late scare but kept pace with leader Barcelona again on Sunday, ahead of their Spanish league "clasico" next weekend.

Kylian Mbappé scored in each half as Madrid held on to beat Celta Vigo 3-2 and remain four points behind the Catalan rival going into next Sunday's match in Barcelona.

"La Liga is in Barcelona's hands, but we'll have more chances if we're able to win," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "It's a great opportunity. We're going to prepare well for Sunday's game, which I'm not saying will be decisive, but almost."

Arda Güler also scored for Madrid, which opened a 3-0 lead early in the second half

but saw Celta get back into the game toward the end of the match at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Celta had a couple of great chances to complete its comeback, including a shot by Pablo Durán that stopped just short of the goal line after a deflection by Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois in the 78th minute. Courtois had to make a couple of saves near the end to secure the win.

"We did very well for an hour, we could have managed the lead a little better, but in the end it was a nice win," Ancelotti said.

Barcelona came from behind to defeat last-placed Valladolid 2-1 on Saturday, when coach Hansi Flick rested most of the team's regular starters ahead of

its Champions League semifinal match at Inter Milan on Tuesday. Barcelona and Inter drew 3-3 in the first leg.

Güler put Madrid ahead with a shot into the top corner in the 33rd, and Mbappé scored in the 39th — also finding the top corner — and in a breakaway in the 48th. The France star hadn't scored in the league since March.

The match appeared under control until Javi Rodríguez pulled the visitors closer in the 69th and Willioti Swedberg scored Celta's second goal in the 76th.

A couple of minutes later, Durán's shot agonizingly stopped just in front of the goal line after the ball picked up some backspin as it struck Courtois.

"It was a shame," Celta striker Borja Iglesias said. "We had our chances. That shot by Pablo almost went in. It wasn't meant to be."

Celta, which was coming off a 3-0 win over Villarreal, stayed in seventh place.

There were a few jeers from the Bernabeu crowd as Madrid struggled to hold on to its lead late in the game.

It was the fourth straight league win for Madrid, which last Saturday lost the Copa del Rey final to Barcelona and last month was eliminated by Arsenal in the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

"We played the last game (against Barcelona) a week ago. It was a very competitive game and we came close to winning," Ancelotti said. "We

don't have to invent a lot of things. We're going to play a serious game. It's very important. We're going to play with all the confidence in the world. Despite all the difficulties, we're there and to be able to fight this match is something nice." He said having Mbappé in the top form will be key.

"He's going to be a very important player in this match due to the fact that Barcelona play with a very high line," Ancelotti said. "His runs in behind are going to be very important and decisive."

Forward Rodrygo was not included in the squad because of illness.

The Basque Country derby ended in a 0-0 draw between Athletic Bilbao and host Real Sociedad. (AP)

Oscar Piastri wins at Miami for 3rd straight F1 victory, 4th win of season for c'ship leader

MIAMI GARDENS (FLORIDA), May 5: The first time Oscar Piastri arrived at the Miami Grand Prix as a Formula 1 driver he was in the slowest car in the field and only narrowly avoided finishing last.

Fast-forward two years and Piastri and McLaren Racing have come full circle.

Piastri maintained his advantage in the F1 championship fight by winning at Miami on Sunday for his fourth win through six races this season. Piastri has won three consecutive F1 races for McLaren Racing, where he and teammate Lando Norris are trying to dethrone four-time defending champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull. McLaren has won Miami the last two years, with Norris on top last season for his first career F1 victory.

"It's just incredible, the hard work that's gone in," Piastri said of McLaren.

"I remember two years ago here in Miami, we were genuinely the slowest team. I think we got lapped twice and to now have won the Grand Prix by over 35 seconds to third is an unbelievable result of the hard work of every single person."

Piastri is the first McLaren driver to win three consecutive F1 races in 28 years; Mika Hakkinen did it with a win in the 1997 season finale and then victories in the first two races of 1998.

He widened his lead over Norris in the driver standings to 16 points, while Verstappen trails Piastri by 32 points.

Norris' win at Miami last season snapped Verstappen's two-year winning streak at the course surrounding Hard Rock Stadium. Norris also won the sprint race on Saturday — Piastri dominated but a late safety car cost him the victory — but Verstappen won the pole in qualifying.

Verstappen, who announced the birth of his first child Friday morning, has been determined to disprove the myth that fatherhood would make him a more conservative driver. It was evident as he darted away at the start and then aggressively held off Norris' challenge for the lead.

The Red Bull and McLaren were side-by-side and Norris was trying to edge ahead of the Dutchman, but he ran off track and lost four spots. Norris said Verstappen forced him off track and there was nothing he could do but try to



avoid running into a wall — but F1 took no action against Verstappen. "What can I say? If I don't go for it, people complain. If I go for it, people complain," Norris said. "You can't win. But it really just how it is with Max — it's crash or their pass."

Verstappen was unapologetic after fading to fourth and insisted he raced within the rules.

"I mean, I had nothing to lose, so I also wanted to have a bit of fun out there," Verstappen said, adding McLaren's strong start to the season is "not frustrating at all." "We are here to win and today we were miles off that, so it doesn't really matter," Verstappen

said. Norris recovered from the early incident and picked his way back toward the front, but not before Piastri took control away from Verstappen on the 14th of 57 laps. McLaren has decided it will allow Piastri and Norris to race each other cleanly without team orders, and Norris was cleared to challenge his Australian teammate for the victory.

In the waning laps, Norris was able to close the gap but could never catch Piastri and settled for second in a 1-2 finish for McLaren. The two held a nearly 40-second advantage over George Russell of Mercedes, who finished third.

Alex Albon of Williams was fifth, Kimi Antonelli of Mercedes was seventh after Ferrari ordered Lewis Hamilton to give his teammate the position in the closing laps. Hamilton was eighth.

Carlos Sainz Jr. was ninth for Williams and Yuki Tsunoda was 10th for Red Bull.

Jack Doohan ran into another car on the opening lap and then crashed on the second lap — a showing that won't quiet chatter the rookie is on the verge of being replaced at Alpine by Franco Colapinto.

There have been media reports in Argentina that Colapinto will replace Doohan at F1's next race, later this month in Italy.

It was dismissed at the start of the Miami weekend by Alpine team principal Oliver Oakes, who indicated "as it is today" the Australian would still be in the seat at Imola.

"I think it was a sponsor from Argentina off-camera giving his view on Franco, when he's going to be in the car. I'm sure there's a lot of people in Argentina who'd like him in the car this Sunday," Oakes said about the speculation. (AP)

Playoff favourites Mumbai Indians, Gujarat Titans face off in high-intensity IPL battle

MUMBAI, May 5: Gujarat Titans' on-song top three will face a stern test against Mumbai Indians' potent bowling attack when the two teams that are favourites to reach the Indian Premier League playoffs clash here on Tuesday.

With the best Net Run Rate among all teams, third-placed MI need two wins from remaining three matches to ensure a direct spot in the final four. The five-time winners will play two of these games at home, where they have won four out of five matches.

GT, who are ranked fourth, have four matches left of which two will be at their home-ground in Ahmedabad where they too have won four out of five times. The Shubman Gill-led side essentially needs two more wins to sail into the playoffs.

The top order trioka of B Sai Sudharsan (504 runs), Jos Buttler (470) and skipper Gill (465) have dominated the tournament like no other, setting up many a wins for the Titans.

But the outcome of Tuesday's contest could be determined by how they perform against arguably the best bowling attack in the competition with Trent Boult (16 wickets), Hardik Pandya (13), Jasprit Bumrah (11) and Deepak Chahar (9) ensuring tough times for opposition batters.

Ever since MI began their winning streak, which has swelled to an impressive six matches on the trot, they have not conceded a total in excess of 200 either at home or away even once.

It is enough to ring alarm bells in the Titans' camp, whose winning formula has largely been based on piling up heavy totals batting first.

But MI will also be wary of Titans' impeccable record while chasing as they have won each of their three games batting second



by heavy margins.

But while GT's top three have dominated the batting charts, the others naturally have not got much time in the middle barring Sherrane Rutherford (201 runs), which means MI's bowlers would look to strike hard and early in order to gain the upper-hand.

Only three seasons ago, Hardik led the Titans to a title win in their maiden appearance but this year, he is at the helm of Mumbai Indians' robust revival after early blips which included a loss to GT in Ahmedabad.

Perhaps no other all-rounder in the tournament has floated through his roles and performed as admirably as Pandya (157 runs, 13 wickets), providing MI with a lot of spunk.

Rohit Sharma's (293 runs) readiness to switch gears in the middle to build long innings and Suryakumar Yadav (475) getting into his elements are indeed the greatest worrying signs for MI's opponent.

Ryan Rickelton (334) has banished a slow start for impressive scores of late while taking pressure off Rohit to attack first up. Will

Jacks is also getting into his rhythm as an all-rounder while Tilak Varma (239) and Naman Dhir (155) provide solidity to that batting line-up.

To their credit, Gujarat Titans' bowlers have also done a splendid job in the absence of Kagiso Rabada, who has linked back after admitting that he served provisional suspension for recreational drug use earlier this year. It is not yet clear whether he can play the upcoming games as the length of his suspension is still not known.

GT's Indian bowlers have performed admirably. Led by Prasidh Krishna, who is topping charts in this IPL with 19 wickets, the attack featuring Mohammed Siraj (14) and R Sai Kishore (12) has managed to deliver for the side quite consistently.

Teams:
Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Robin Minz (wk), Ryan Rickelton (wk), Shri-jith Krishnan (wk), Bevon Jacobs, Tilak Varma, Naman Dhir, Will Jacks, Mitchell Santner, Raj Angad Bawa, Raghu Sharma, Corbin Bosch, Trent Boult, Kam Sharma, Deepak Chahar, Ashwani Kumar, Reece Topley, VS Pannetsa, Arjun Tendulkar, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Jasprit Bumrah.

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), Jos Buttler (wk), Kumar Kushagra (wk), Anuj Rawat (wk), Sherrane Rutherford, Nishant Sidhu, Mahipal Lomror, Washington Sundar, Mohammed Arshad Khan, R Sai Kishore, Jayant Yadav, Karim Janat, B Sai Sudharsan, Dasun Shanaka, Shahrukh Khan, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Manav Suthar, Gerald Coetzee, Gurnoor Singh Brar, Ishant Sharma, Kulwant Khejroliya, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan. Match starts at 7:30pm IST.(PTI)

India extend dominance in white-ball formats, retain top spot in ODIs and T20Is

DUBAI, May 5: India retained their top position in the ODIs and T20Is to extend their dominance in the white-ball formats but slipped a place to fourth spot in the Test format, in which Australia reigned supreme, in the latest ICC annual men's ranking update issued on Monday.

The latest rankings rate all matches played since May 2024 at 100 per cent and those of the previous two years at 50 per cent.

In the ODI rankings, 2023 World Cup finalists India have strengthened their grip at the top on the back of a victorious ICC Champions Trophy campaign, improving their rating points from 122 to 124.

Coming in second place are the runners-up at the Champions Trophy, New Zealand, overtaking their Trans-Tasman rivals Australia, who now occupy the third spot.

Sri Lanka, who enjoyed an excellent run at home in recent months, including ODI series wins against India and Australia, are in fourth place after gaining five rating points, leapfrogging Pakistan (fifth with a gain of one point) and South Africa (sixth with loss of four points) in the process.

Afghanistan also climbed up the ladder - moving to seventh following a four-point improvement - at the expense of former world champions England, who fell to eighth after dropping four points.

West Indies, meanwhile, rose to the ninth spot after gaining five points to surpass Bangladesh, who dropped to 10th with a four-point decline.

In T20Is, the current world champions India are placed at the top, although their lead over the second-placed Australia has reduced from 10 to nine points.

For the first time ever, the annual update features 100 teams in



the global T20I rankings, with the updated list including all sides that have played a minimum of eight T20Is over the past three years.

The original global T20I rankings were launched in 2019 and included 80 sides.

The 2022 edition champions England, sit at number three, with New Zealand, West Indies and South Africa at four, five, and six respectively.

Sri Lanka's surge continues in the shortest format of the game as well, now seventh in the rankings after overtaking Asian rivals Pakistan (8). Bangladesh and Afghanistan follow their fellow Asian teams at ninth and 10th places, respectively.

Ireland also showed improvement, swapping spots with Zimbabwe to sit in the 11th rank.

Reigning World Test Championship holders Australia have retained their top spot in the Test team rankings, though their lead was trimmed from 15 to 13 points

after the annual update. Pat Cummins' side boasts a rating of 126, staying well in front of the chasing pack.

Ben Stokes-led England made a big jump, moving up into the second place while overtaking both South Africa and India.

England's improved position comes on the back of winning three out of their four Test series in the past year. Their rating points climbed to 113, while South Africa (111) and India (105) each slipped one place to third and fourth, respectively.

The rest of the top 10 remains unchanged, with New Zealand holding fifth place, followed by Sri Lanka, Pakistan, West Indies, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe.

Only 10 teams are currently ranked in the Test table. Ireland need to play one more Test in the next 12 months to qualify for a ranking, while Afghanistan must play three more matches to join the list. (PTI)

Zhao Xintong leads 11-6 in final of snooker worlds

SHEFFIELD (UK), May 5: China is edging closer to having its first world snooker champion after Zhao Xintong established an 11-6 lead over Mark Williams at the halfway point of the final at the Crucible Theatre. Zhao needs to get to 18 frames to claim the sport's biggest prize, with the remaining two sessions scheduled for Monday.

The 28-year-old Zhao, a slick left-hander who thrashed seven-time champion Ronnie O'Sullivan 17-7 in the semifinals, was in complete control at 7-1 up after the opening session against Williams - another great of the game who, at age 50, is bidding to become the oldest world champion.

Williams won five of the nine frames in the evening session, including a crucial final frame, to reduce his arrears but Zhao was still in a great position to become just the third player in history to win the worlds after coming through qualification. Zhao is playing as an amateur in Sheffield, England, having only recently returned to competitive action following a 20-month ban for his role in the sport's biggest match-fixing scandal. He was ranked No. 9 in the world when his suspension began after accepting charges of being a party to another player fixing two matches and betting on matches himself. (AP)

Sending Inglis at No. 3 was Iyer's call: Ponting

DHARAMSALA, May 5: Punjab Kings head coach Ricky Ponting revealed it was skipper Shreyas Iyer's tactical call to promote Josh Inglis to number 3 to counter Lucknow Super Giants' tearaway pacer Mayank Yadav.

To everyone's surprise Inglis, who has batted mostly in the middle order this season, walked in during the very first over after opener Priyansh Arya fell cheaply and immediately set the tone for PBKS' innings. The Australian wicketkeeper-batter smashed a 14-ball 30, which included four sixes - three of them coming in successive deliveries off Mayank in the second over.

"It was actually a move that the captain came up with," Ponting told the media after PBKS' 37-run win.

"He thought on that sort of pitch, against that bowling attack, that it would be the right thing to do, if a wicket fell early, to send Inglis in. We felt that Mayank would bowl early on. If you look at the way he bowls, he generally bowls reasonably short. And that's one of Inglis' great strengths, as you saw tonight. Those pull shots were pretty amazing straight away."

Opener Prabhsimran Singh (91 off 48 balls) once again made a significant contribution, while



Iyer (45 off 25 balls) and a collective middle-order effort helped Punjab post a challenging 236 for five.

"It then also allows us to have Iyer, Nehal Wadhara and Shashank Singh through the middle of the innings, which is what we thought would be crucial for us in tonight's game as well," Ponting said.

"It was probably a surprise call for LSG to see Inglis go out at number 3 and it paid off for us tonight. So once we got off to a start, I think we were 70-odd at the end of the powerplay, all the momentum was going with us."

"You see with our batting, you know, we've got someone like Azmatullah Omarzai at No.9. So we bat really, really deep and it allows our top order to play with a lot of freedom. And they did that tonight. And, you know, to bat first and get that sort of total was a great effort."

PBKS have batted with flair this season with their opening pair of Priyansh and Prabhsimran doing extremely well.

"We've just given some really clear direction of the way that we want them to play to understand how important top order partnerships are in this competition. And we know that if Priyansh and Prabh get going together, that they can be ultra destructive." Prabhsimran has established himself at the top of the order over the past couple of seasons after warming the bench during initial years. He has emerged as PBKS' highest run-getter this season with 437 runs in 11 innings at a strike rate of 170.03.

"Priyansh mainly, probably more against the

faster bowlers, and Prabh is as good a hitter or spinner as anybody going around. So they complement each other really well, being left hand, right hand, and one probably being slightly better against the quicks, another against spin. It's a really good combination"

LSG batter Ayush Badoni admitted that losing three wickets in the powerplay proved costly in their defeat to Punjab Kings.

Chasing a target in excess of 200, LSG needed strong performances from their explosive top order, which featured Mitchell Marsh, Nicholas Pooran, and Aiden Markram.

However, Punjab pacer Arshdeep Singh produced a sensational spell with the new ball, removing all three inside the powerplay and reducing LSG to 37 for 3.

"I think we could have controlled 10-15 more runs, but the target was still chaseable. The wicket was very good," Badoni said after the match.

"Our powerplay didn't go well. Had we started better, the result could have gone either way," he added. Coming in at No. 5, Ayush Badoni scored a fighting 74 off 40 balls. Along with Abdul Samad (45), the duo provided LSG a glimmer of hope in the steep chase. (PTI)

Playoff dream still alive, we can definitely turn things around: Pant

DHARAMSALA, May 5: Disappointed but not deflated, Lucknow Super Giants skipper Rishabh Pant is still dreaming of sneaking into the IPL play-offs as he believes his struggling side can turn things around in the remaining three games.

Another poor batting effort by the top order led LSG's 37-run defeat at the hands of Punjab Kings on Sunday.

LSG have 10 points from 11 games and are currently placed seventh in the league table. With a net run-rate of -0.47, merely winning three games might not be enough for Pant and his men to make it to the play-offs. "The dream is still alive. If we can win the next three matches, we can definitely turn around and do amazing things," Pant said at the post match presentation ceremony.

He did concede that 236 was too much to chase and fielding was also below par.

"Definitely too many runs. When you drop crucial catches at the wrong time, it can hurt you badly. We thought it would do more, but we did not pick the length right at the start. But that is part and parcel of the game," he said.

While Mitchell Marsh, Aiden Markram and Nicholas Pooran have failed in the past few games, the skipper defended them.

"It makes sense when your top order is batting well. Every match, you cannot hope for them to come off. It is part of the game, we have to take it deep sometimes. We had too many runs to catch up on and that hurt us badly."

Punjab Kings skipper Shreyas Iyer was expectedly "elated".

"Everyone stepped up at the right time, contribution was immense from everyone," Iyer said after the match, especially



praising Prabhsimran Singh for his 48-ball 91.

"The way he performed, it was exceptional and so pleasing to the eye," he said.

Iyer believes that luck favours the brave and that is precisely what has happened with PBKS this season as they climbed to the second spot in the 10-team league table.


"I was not thinking about stats or what is a good score to defend. We have been lucky, but the luck has been because of the

hard work. Each and every individual knows their roles precisely and the way they executed, it was top-notch."

Iyer, however, wasn't fully happy with his team's fielding effort.

"The only thing we need to correct is the awareness (in the field) and the way we move - that is the only box we have to tick off."

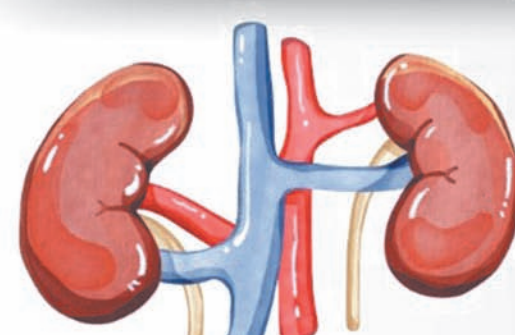

"Just back yourselves and your instincts - that has been working for us, not think too much about stats." (PTI)



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