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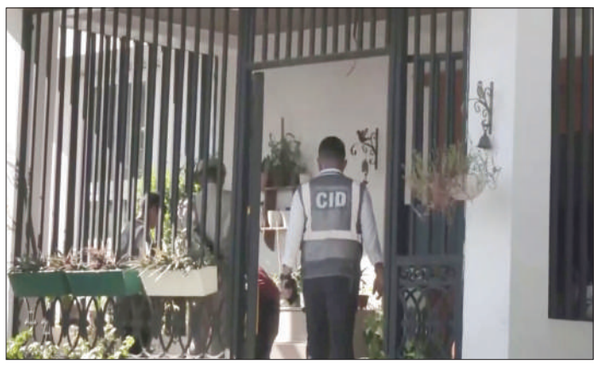
Zubeen's death: SIT conducts search in Shyamkanu house for 2nd day

Witnesses asked to appear within 10 days



GUWAHATI, Sept 26: Assam Police's CID on Friday issued notices to people who were present or aware of the events leading to singer Zubeen Garg's death in Singapore, asking them to appear within 10 days, a senior official said.

He added that the Special Investigating Team (SIT), formed by the CID to probe Garg's death, continued its searches at the residence of North East India Festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta here for the second day.

"Investigation into Garg's death is continuing. Today, we served notices to all persons familiar with the incidents leading to his death. They have to come and give their statements within 10 days," the officer, who did not wish to be named, said.

Besides Mahanta's residence, the houses of Garg's manager Siddhartha Sharma and musician Shekhar Jyoti Goswami were searched on Thursday, the officer said.

Sharma and Goswami were present with the singer when he had died by drowning in the sea on September 19.

Besides those accompanying Garg from Guwahati, members of Assamese community residing in Singapore were also present during the drowning incident while the group was on a yacht trip.

The non-resident Assamese people have also been brought under the purview of the investigation.

The officer further said statements of several artistes and others related to the cultural field were recorded on Friday.

"They had come to the CID office regarding the probe into Garg's death. These statements have been recorded," he said.

The 10-member SIT is being led by Special DGP M P Gupta.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the state government will recommend a CBI inquiry if the SIT investigation is found to be 'unsatisfactory'.

Meanwhile, the state police refuted claims that internet services in the state will be disconnected.

"A fake message claiming that internet *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

BTC polls: BPF wins 1, ahead in 22 seats

Several UPPL candidates set to bite the dust ● Hagrama wins in one of two constituencies he contested

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: The Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) won one seat and was leading in 22 out of the 40 seats of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on Friday, officials said.

The BJP won one seat and was leading in nine, while the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) was ahead in seven seats.

BPF's Ganesh Kachari was declared winner in Suklai Serfang and BJP's Lakhi Das in Nagrijuli, both in Tamulpur district.

Counting of votes began at 8 am but it has been slow as votes have been cast in ballot papers, with the remaining results likely to come in late, an official said.

BPF chief Hagrama Mohilary, who had contested from two constituencies, was leading in Debargaon but trailing in Chirangduar, while the incumbent BTC chief Pramod Boro also contested from two seats - Dotma and Goibari - and was leading in both.

Elections to the 40-member council, comprising the five districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri and Tamulpur, was held on September 22.

In the 12 constituencies of Kokrajhar district, the BPF was leading in nine, UPPL in two and BJP in one, while in Udalguri district, the BPF was ahead in seven seats, UPPL in one and BJP in two.

In Baksa district, which has six seats, the BPF was leading in three, BJP in two and UPPL in one.

In Chirang district, the BPF was ahead in three seats, while both the BJP and UPPL were ahead in two each.

The BJP was ahead in two seats and had won one, while BPF also secured a seat, and UPPL was leading in one in Tamulpur district.

Of the 40 seats in the BTC, 30 are reserved for Scheduled Tribe (ST) candidates, five for non-STs and the remaining five are open to both ST and non-ST candidates.

The alliance partners United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL), BJP and Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) have headed the outgoing Council.

In the last Council polls held in December 2020, the UPPL had won 12 seats, BJP nine and GSP one seat, while the Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF), which had headed the Council for the previous three terms, emerged as the single largest party with 17 seats and Congress secured one seat with its elected member later joining the BJP.

The BPF was then BJP's alliance partner in the state government but the ruling party decided to join hands with the UPPL and the GSP to jointly form the Council. Assam Chief *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

AFSPA extended in parts of Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was on Friday extended for six months in entire Manipur, except the jurisdiction of 13 police stations, in view of the prevailing law and order situation there.

The AFSPA, under which a particular state or some areas are declared "disturbed", has also been extended to nine districts in Nagaland and 21 police station areas in five other districts of the state for six months, according to a notification issued by the Union home ministry.

The law was also extended to Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh and three police station areas, bordering Assam, in Namsai district in the state.

The extension of the disturbed area in the particular areas in the three states will be effective from October 1 for six months.

The AFSPA, often criticised as a draconian law, gives armed forces operating in disturbed areas sweeping powers to search, arrest and open fire if they deem it necessary.

"And whereas, a further review of the law and order situation in the state of Manipur has been undertaken. Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (28 of 1958), the entire State of Manipur, excluding the areas falling under the jurisdiction of the following 13 (thirteen) Police Stations of 5 districts, is declared as 'disturbed area' for a period of six months with effect from 01.10.2025, unless withdrawn earlier," the notification related to Manipur read.

The police station areas where the AFSPA will not be in force in Manipur are: Imphal, Lamphal, City, Singjamei, Patsoi, Wangoi in Imphal West district, Porompat, Heingang, Irilbung in Imphal East district,*(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

GST 2.0 new impetus for economy, oppn criticism reveals 'internal negativity': Scindia

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday maintained that the next generation GST reforms, or GST 2.0, has infused a new impetus in economic activities of the country, increasing purchasing power of consumers and driving up sales of sellers.

He dismissed opposition parties' criticism of the reforms as a manifestation of their 'internal negativity'.

"I visited many shops and interacted with shopkeepers and customers here. There is an atmosphere of positivity everywhere," the Union Minister of Communications and Development of North Eastern Region said at a press conference here.

He maintained that the GST 2.0 reforms has injected a new impetus of growth in economic activities through reduced and simplified taxes.

"As a result, customers have more money in hand to spend and consequently, the sale figures of the sellers have gone up. People of all sections, age have benefited," he claimed.

"These reforms are in line with the Prime Minister's vision of 'Sabka saath, sabka vikash, sabka vishwas, sabkha prayas' of together making the country self-reliant and 'vishwaguru'," Scindia added.

Asked about opposition parties decrying the reforms, the minister said, "The opposition has no other job but to oppose. If it is a good thing, development, progress, they will oppose. The institutional structure of India, they will try and depose, whether it be the Supreme Court of the Election Commission."

Scindia maintained that the 'internal negativity' of the opposition parties has 'now translated into external negative persona'.

"The people of India have rejected them not once or twice, but three times. But that realisation is still to dawn on them. Let them proceed with their negative agenda, we are on our path of development," he added.

The Union Communications minister further said the inauguration of close to 98,000 mobile 4G towers across the country and the Swadeshi 4G network on Saturday will be a golden day for the country.

He claimed that no part of the country will *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

CM reviews arrangements for Zubeen's 13th-day rituals in Jorhat

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday reviewed the arrangements for the 13th-day rituals of singer Zubeen Garg, to be held in Jorhat, where the singer spent his formative years at his family residence.

The arrangements will be finalised in consultation with Zubeen's wife Garima, officials said.

Garg (52) died by drowning in the sea in Singapore on September 19.

His body was cremated at Kamarkuchi, on the outskirts of Guwahati, with full state honours on Monday, amidst a mass outpouring of public grief.

People of Jorhat had urged for the last rites to be performed there, but Zubeen's family had opted for Guwahati or its neighboruing areas due to ill health of the singer's octogenarian father.

The government had said the 13th-day Vedic rituals will be performed in Jorhat and a memorial for the singer-composer will also be built in the eastern Assam town.

"Held a meeting with Jorhat DC and other stakeholders to discuss plans for #BelovedZubeen's rituals to be held in Jorhat and the way ahead in developing his Samadhi in the town which will reflect his life and times in the most fitting manner," Sarma said in a post

on X after a video conference.

The CMO, also in a post on social media, said the 13th-day rituals will be arranged by the state government in Jorhat, where his 'chitabhasma' (ashes) will also be taken.

It said the chief minister reviewed the preparations with Jorhat MLA Hiten Goswami, neighbouring Mariani MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi and the district commissioner through video conference.

State Cultural Affairs Minister Bimal Bora will meet Garima Garg later on Friday to finalise the arrangement, based on which further steps will be taken, the CMO added. *(PTI)*

Shipping Ministry planning new scheme for ship building, repair industry: Sonowal

CHENNAI, Sept 26: The Ministry of Ports and Shipping will come with a National Shipbuilding Mission scheme to manage and operate ship building and repair industry, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Friday.

The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways said currently 5 per cent of India's export and import cargo is carried on Indian-owned/flagged ships, resulting in Rs 6 lakh crore being paid to foreign companies towards sea freight services.

"This new scheme will help our nation to save about ₹ 4.50 lakh crore per year in freight charges and would provide new employment to about 25-30 lakh people," he said, after presenting degrees to students during the 10th convocation of Indian Maritime University here.

The proposal to set up the National Shipbuilding Mission was part of the three-pronged strategy that has been approved by the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said.

The three-pronged strategy is for transforming ship building, ship recycling and creating a robust globally competitive maritime ecosystem, he said.

"This signals the revival and resurgence of the Golden Era of the Maritime Sector of India. For the first time ever in the history of Independent India, a significant financial outlay of ₹ 70,000 crore has been earmarked for the development of the Maritime sector," he said.

Secondly, a revamped ship building financial assistance scheme to address the cost disadvantages of building ships in India, including a credit note for shipbreaking in Indian yards to promote shipbuilding, has been *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Unacceptable, entirely baseless: India on NATO chief's claims

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: India on Friday described as "entirely baseless" NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte's remarks that Prime Minister Narendra Modi dialled Russian President Vladimir Putin and asked for the strategy on Ukraine in view of impact of Washington's punitive tariffs on India for its energy ties with Moscow.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said "speculative or careless" remarks that misrepresent Modi's engagements or suggest conversations that never occurred are "unacceptable".

Strongly justifying India's continued procurement of Russian crude oil, Jaiswal said there cannot be any "double standards" in the matter" against the backdrop of US President Donald Trump's recent remarks that appeared to be critical of the EU and NATO nations for their energy ties with Russia.

Rutte told CNN on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York that Trump's tariffs on India are having a "big impact" on Russia and New Delhi is on the phone with Putin.

"And Narendra Modi is asking him to explain his strategy on Ukraine because India is being hit with tariffs," the NATO chief claimed.

Jaiswal said Rutte's statement is "factually incorrect and entirely baseless."

"At no point has Prime Minister Modi spoken with President Putin in the manner suggested. No such conversation has taken place," he said.

"We expect the leadership of an important institution like NATO to exercise greater responsibility and accuracy in public statements," he added.

Jaiswal said India's energy imports are meant to ensure predictable and affordable energy costs to the Indian consumer.

The MEA spokesperson, strongly justifying India's continued procurement of Russian crude oil, said New Delhi will continue taking all necessary measures to safeguard its national interests and economic security.

Jaiswal also appeared to dismiss the European Union's recent criticism of India's energy ties with Russia EU foreign and security policy chief Kaja Kallas last week said that India's military exercises and its purchase of Russian crude oil "stand in the way of closer ties" between the two sides.

"Because, ultimately, our partnership is not only about trade but also about defending the rules-based international order," she said after unveiling a new strategic agenda to ramp up *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Police arrest Sonam Wangchuk

LEH, Sept 26: Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk was arrested Friday by a police party here, two days after violent protests by supporters of the movement for statehood and extension of Sixth Schedule of Constitution left four persons dead and 90 others injured, officials said.

Wangchuk was taken into custody by the police party led Ladakh DGP S D Singh Jamwal at 2.30 pm, the officials said.

It was not immediately clear aboyt the charges pressed against Wangchuk.

The home ministry had blamed Wangchuk, a senior member of Leh Apex Body (LAB) which along with Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) is spearheading the agitation in support of the demands for the past over five years, for provocation leading to the violence.*(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Over 57 pc in Assam have high levels of triglycerides

Report estimates one-third of India's children have high triglycerides

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: Over a third of India's children aged 5-9 could be having high triglycerides, with Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal and northeastern states showing highest prevalence, according to a government report.

Over 67 per cent of children in West Bengal, 64 per cent in Sikkim, 55 per cent in Nagaland, 57 per cent in Assam and 50 per cent in Jammu Kashmir were estimated to have high levels of triglycerides -- a type of blood fat that is known to increase risk of heart disease in later life.

Kerala and Maharashtra were among the states showing lowest prevalence at 16.6 per cent and 19.1 per cent, respectively.

'Children in India 2025' -- the fourth edition since its start in 2008 -- was released by the Ministry of

Statistics and Programme Implementation during the 29th Conference of Central and State Statistical Organisations (CoCSSO) on September 25 in Chandigarh.

The report "provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the well-being of children in the country," the ministry said in a statement.

Data gathered via government's ministries and departments, such as National Family Health Survey 2019-21 and Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey 2016-18, were compiled.

Prematurity and a low weight at birth was found to be the most common cause of death among newborns in the first 29 days of life -- national prevalence estimated at 48 per cent.

Birth asphyxia (not getting enough oxygen) and trauma during birth, and pneumonia were second and third most common reasons, with a prevalence of 16 per cent and nine per cent.

Authors of the report also classified about five per cent of the country's teenagers as hypertensive -- highest prevalence of 10 per cent seen in Delhi, followed by Uttar Pradesh (8.6 per cent), Manipur (8.3 per cent) and Chhatisgarh (seven *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Bagori range of Kaziranga National Park reopens for tourists

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: The Bagori (western) range of Kaziranga National Park (KNP) was opened for tourists on Friday ahead of Durga Puja festivities, with only jeep safari being allowed on a limited circuit initially, officials said.

The western range, which falls in Nagaon district, was opened so that tourists can visit it during the puja holidays.

Kaziranga Lok Sabha MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa declared the park open by cutting a ceremonial ribbon in the presence of BJP Khumtai MLA Mrinal Saikia, KNP director Sonali Ghosh, Nagaon District Commissioner Devashish Sarma, and senior forest and civil officials.

Before opening the park, tributes were paid to Assam's iconic

singer Zubeen Garg, who died in Singapore on September 19.

The officials said that from Friday, only jeep safari will be allowed on a limited 9-km route till further decision is taken by the authorities.

The central or the Kohora range, which falls under Golaghat district, is likely to open in the second week of October. The elephant safari is scheduled to begin on November 1.

The park was closed for tourists in May. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

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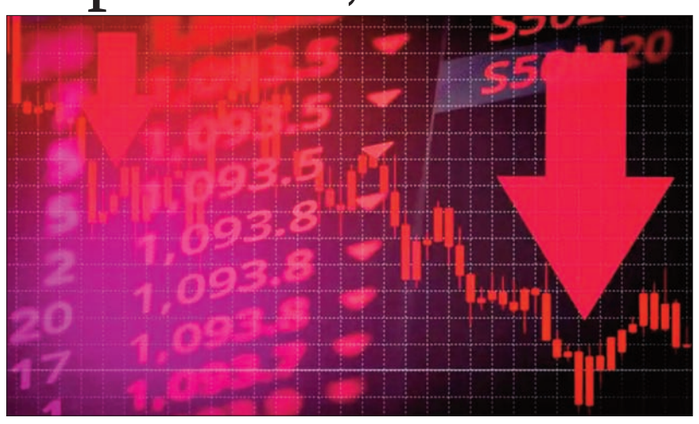
TRUMP TARIFFS ON BRANDED DRUGS

Sensex, Nifty tank nearly 1 pc on selling in pharma, IT shares



MUMBAI, Sept 26: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled nearly 1 per cent on Friday, marking their sixth consecutive day of decline, following heavy selling in pharma and IT shares as US President Donald Trump announced 100 per cent duties on branded drugs from next month.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 733.22 points or 0.90 per cent to settle at a three-week low of 80,426.46. During the day, it dropped 827.27 points or 1 per cent to 80,332.41.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 236.15 points or 0.95 per cent to an over three-week low of 24,654.70. The index has been on a decline since September 19, tanking over 3 per cent in six straight sessions. Sensex has tumbled by 2,587.50 points or 3.16 per cent in six sessions to Friday.

Most pharma shares dropped, dragging the BSE Healthcare index down by 2.14 per cent after Trump's move to impose 100 per cent import tariffs on branded and patented pharmaceutical drugs from October 1. Wockhardt shares tanked 9.4 per cent. Laurus Labs, Biocon, Zydus Life, Glenmark, Sun Pharma and Dr Reddy's also declined.

In his post on social media platform Truth Social, Trump wrote, "Starting October 1st, 2025, we will be imposing a 100% Tariff on any branded or patented Pharmaceutical Product, unless a Company IS BUILDING their Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Plant in America."

The US President further clarified, "IS BUILDING" will be defined as, "breaking ground" and/or "under construction." There will, therefore, be no Tariff on these Pharmaceutical Products if construction has started.

Among Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra, Eternal, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finance, Asian Paints, Sun Pharma, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services and HCL Tech were the biggest laggards.

However, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Motors, ITC and Reliance Industries were the gainers.

"Indian equities ended sharply lower on Friday in a broad-based sell-off after the US announced a steep 100 per cent tariff on imports of branded and patented pharmaceutical products effective October 1. The unexpected move rattled already fragile investor sentiment, which was still digesting the recent hike in H-1B visa fees that triggered heavy selling in IT counters this week.

"Both IT and healthcare stocks bore the brunt of the sell-off, dragging the broader indices lower as investors rushed to reassess earnings outlooks and export growth prospects," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge tanked 2.05 per cent and midcap index lost 1.96 per cent.

All sectoral indices ended lower. Telecommunication dropped the most by 2.69 per cent, followed by BSE Focused IT (2.43 per cent), IT (2.41 per cent), consumer durables (2.34 per cent), teck (2.03 per cent), commodities (1.91 per cent), metal (1.90 per cent), services (1.73 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.70 per cent).

As many as 3,100 stocks declined while 1,041 advanced and 139 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Since last Thursday, the BSE benchmark has lost 2,587.5 points or 3.11 per cent, and the Nifty tumbled 768.9 points or 3 per cent.

"Markets remained under pressure and extended their losing streak for the sixth straight session. The tone was weak from the outset and worsened as the day progressed. The announcement of tariffs on branded drugs weighed heavily on sentiment, adding to recent concerns over visa policy changes," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

"The Indian market experienced a bloodbath, mirroring the rout across Asian markets. Investor sentiment was rattled by a fresh wave of tariffs targeting the pharmaceuticals, dragging pharma stocks deep into the red. Meanwhile, Accenture's weaker guidance and job cuts highlighted slowing IT spending, with AI-driven growth failing to meet expectations, prompting a broad sell-off in tech shares," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng ended significantly lower.

Equity markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. US markets ended lower on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,995.42 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.27 per cent to USD 69.23 a barrel.

On Thursday, the Sensex tanked 555.95 points or 0.68 per cent to settle at 81,159.68. The Nifty tumbled 166.05 points or 0.66 per cent to 24,890.85. (PTI)

MediaTek launches Dimensity 9500

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: MediaTek has announced the launch of its most advanced smartphone chipset to date, the Dimensity 9500, designed to deliver breakthroughs in AI, gaming, imaging and power efficiency for the next generation of flagship 5G devices.

The chipset introduces a third-generation all-big-core CPU architecture with a 4.21GHz ultra-core, three premium cores and four performance cores, paired with four-lane UFS 4.1 storage.

MediaTek claims performance gains of up to 29 per cent in single-core and 16 per cent in multi-core workloads compared to its predecessor, while achieving up to 55 per cent lower power consumption at peak performance.

The platform's cache and memory upgrades, including the industry's first four-channel UFS 4.1 support, double data speeds and accelerate large AI model loading by 40 per cent.

Graphics performance is driven by the Arm G1-Ultra GPU, which offers up to 33 per cent higher peak performance, 42 per cent better efficiency and console-grade features such as raytracing and 120FPS frame interpolation.

MediaTek said its collaborations with studios have enabled support for Mega-Lights in Unreal Engine 5.6 and Nanite in Unreal Engine 5.5 for AAA-level rendering.

The ninth-generation NPU 990 with Generative AI Engine 2.0 doubles compute power, introduces BitNet 1-bit large model processing to reduce power use by 25 per cent, and allows always-on smaller models with 40 per cent lower power draw.

The platform enables faster LLM output, extended text processing and industry-first 4K ultra-high-resolution image generation.

On the imaging front, MediaTek Imagiq 1190 supports RAW-domain preprocessing, up to 200MP capture and cinematic 4K 60FPS portrait video with NPU-assisted focusing.

Connectivity features include AI-enhanced Bluetooth calls, MiraVision adaptive displays, Wi-Fi fast transfer and multi-network intelligence.

Power use in 5G and Wi-Fi is reduced by 10 and 20 per cent respectively, with 5CC carrier aggregation boosting bandwidth by 15 per cent.

MediaTek said the Dimensity 9500 reflects years of investment and ecosystem collaboration, aimed at delivering smarter and more immersive mobile experiences.

Flagship smartphones powered by the new chipset are expected to debut in the fourth quarter of 2025.

Xiaomi rolls out festive discounts on smartphones, TVs, tablets and more

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: Xiaomi India has launched its biggest festive season campaign ahead of Diwali, offering discounts of up to 60 per cent across its range of smartphones, tablets, smart TVs, wearables, powerbanks, air purifiers and other ecosystem products.

The sale, which began on September 22, is live on mi.com, Amazon, Flipkart and retail outlets nationwide, with additional bank offers of up to ₹5,000 and easy finance options including No Cost EMI and zero down payment.

Among the smartphone deals, the Redmi Note 14 Pro+ 5G is available at ₹24,999 against its MRP of ₹34,999, while the Redmi Note 14 Pro 5G, Redmi Note 14, Redmi Note 14 SE, Redmi 15, Redmi A4 5G and Redmi 14C 5G are also offered at reduced prices.

Tablets such as the Xiaomi Pad 7, Xiaomi Pad Pro, Redmi Pad 2 and Redmi Pad SE 4G have received major price cuts, with the Redmi Pad SE 4G dropping from ₹16,999 to ₹7,999.

In the smart TV segment, the Xiaomi CineMagiQLED X Pro Series is now priced at ₹25,999 and the FantastiQLED FX Pro Series at ₹21,999.

Discounts have also been extended to ecosystem products such as the Redmi 4i and Xiaomi Compact Powerbanks, Redmi Buds 5C and 6, Redmi Watch Move and Watch 5 Lite, as well as the Xiaomi Smart Air Purifier 4 Lite and Grooming Kit.

Xiaomi said the campaign aims to make technology more accessible during the festive season by combining innovation with attractive value for customers looking to upgrade or gift smart devices.

Contd. from Page 1...

BTC polls: BPF wins

Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said on Thursday that the NDA will form the next council in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) though cancelling the campaign three days before elections due to the death of singer Zubeen Garg was a 'big setback for the party'.

'The last three days of the campaign were a big setback and this may adversely impact our performance but I am not worried as an NDA partner will form the Council', Sarma said.

Both BPF and UPPL are NDA constituents.

This is the second council poll after a fresh Bodo Accord was signed in New Delhi on January 27, 2020. (PTI)

Witnesses asked to

services across Assam will be disconnected is being circulated by mischief mongers," it said in posts across various social media platforms.

"Please do not believe or spread such misinformation. Action will be taken against those sharing unverified claims, which hurt the citizens. Stay Alert against Fake News!" Assam Police added. *(PTI)*

GST 2.0 new impetus

be left untouched and it will not be only about connecting the people with the internet, but with the world.

The inauguration will be done for 10-12 states simultaneously by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Odisha, with Scindia to attend the programme for Assam which is among the states to be covered.

The union minister also paid his tributes to singer Zubeen Garg, who had died by drowning in Singapore on September 19, and said the nation has lost an icon. (PTI)

AFSPA extended in

Thoubal in Thoubal district and Bishnupur and Nambol in Bishnupur district and Kakching in Kakching district.

Manipur has been under President's rule since February 13 after Chief Minister N Biren Singh, who was heading a BJP-led government, resigned on February 9 following ethnic violence that claimed over 260 lives since May 2023.

The disturbed area declaration was in force in entire Manipur (except Imphal municipality area) since 2004 till early 2022. (PTI)

Shipping Ministry planning

approved with an outlay of ₹ 24,736 crore, he said.

Appealing to the new graduates, he said, new challenges are emerging each day, due to the dynamic global geo-political situation, emergence of artificial intelligence, climate change, quantum jumps in technology within a short span of time.

"You must all face these challenges with determination and continue to up-skill yourself to adapt and emerge victorious in whatever challenging situation you find yourself," he said.

"We want to build a nation that is strong, prosperous, inclusive and respected across the world. For this, the maritime sector has a key role. You must play your role with dedication," he said.

Observing that India had fewer than 1.25 lakh seafarers a decade ago, he said, "Today, that number crossed three lakh. India now ranks among the top three countries globally in supplying the highest number of seafarers."

Sonowal said an India Ship Technology Centre (ISTC) at a cost of ₹ 305 crore will be set up which would be an agency responsible for the overall development of the capabilities of the Indian shipbuilding sector.

"ISTC will be set up at the Visakhapatnam campus of IMU which will be inaugurated today. This marks a new chapter for our nations' Atmanirbharta in ship technology," he said.

The centre would provide a common platform for the shipbuilding industry by providing access to common facilities, skilling of future personnel and providing a productive ecosystem for ship design, research and development, engineering capabilities, he said.

Later, in a social media post, Sonowal said Indian Maritime University is a leading maritime institute of the country and the new graduates are the navigators of India's maritime future.

"Led by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, we are building a world-class maritime ecosystem, creating unprecedented opportunities for our Yuva Shakti. I urge you all to be the ambassadors of India's maritime strength and set sail to build a Viksit and Atmanirbhar Bharat", he said and shared some images of the convocation.

Sonowal also extended his gratitude to Tamil Nadu Minister for Industries TRB Rajaa who was present on the occasion. (PTI)

Unacceptable, entirely baseless

the EU's engagement with New Delhi in several key sectors such as defence, trade.

"On EU comments on Russian oil, I would like to draw your attention to some of the comments made by several leaders including president Trump that the EU, NATO and G7 countries should also look at halting energy imports from Russia," Jaiswal said.

"There cannot be any double standards in the matter," he added.

In August, Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent including a 25 per cent additional duties for its purchase of Russian crude oil.

India described the US action as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable".

In the last few weeks, several Trump administration officials including White House trade advisor Peter Navarro accused India of funding Russia's war in Ukraine by continuing to buy Russian crude oil.

Defending its purchase of Russian crude oil, India has been maintaining that its energy procurement is driven by national interest and market dynamics.

India turned to purchasing Russian oil sold at a discount after Western countries imposed sanctions on Moscow and shunned its supplies over its invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022.

Consequently, from a mere 1.7 per cent share in total oil imports in 2019-20, Russia's share increased to 35.1 per cent in 2024-25, and it is now the biggest oil supplier to India. (PTI)

Police arrest Sonam

Wangchuk, who was leading a hunger strike in support of the demands, however, denied the charges. He denounced the violence and also ended the fortnight-long fast following the violence on Wednesday. (PTI)

Bagori range of

Sarma had earlier said that the park is being reopened for tourists early this year to "enhance their puja celebration experience".

"We invite all to celebrate the season amid the rich biodiversity and natural beauty of Assam's pride, Kaziranga," he said.

The park, famed for its highest population of one-horned rhinoceros, is also home to the tiger, elephant, wild buffalo, four species of deer, and several species of birds, aquatic animals and butterflies. (PTI)

Report estimates one-third

per cent). Over 16 per cent of adolescents in India were estimated to have high triglycerides.

'Education and development', and 'crimes involving children and child protection' were among other aspects that the report compiled data on.

Overall, 63.1 per cent of India's children and adolescents are literate, with 73.1 per cent of those aged seven and above being literate, the report said.

Over 80 per cent of boys aged 7-9, 92 per cent of those aged 10-14 and 91 per cent of those aged 15-19 are literate, while 81.2 per cent of girls aged 7-9, 90 per cent of those aged 10-14 and 86.2 per cent of girls aged 15-19 are literate, it said. (PTI)

Centre clamps raw jute stock limits amidst surging prices, resentment among millers

KOLKATA, Sept 26: Amidst a steep rise in raw jute prices, the government has issued an order capping the maximum stock that traders, balers, and millers can hold, while industry stakeholders believe that the move will boost the supply of the commodity in the short term but may not be effective to stabilise the market in the long run.

The order, issued by the Office of Jute Commissioner under the Ministry of Textiles, allowed balers with presses to hold a maximum of 2,000 quintals of raw jute, other stockists to 300 quintals, and mills to no more than 45 days of consumption at current production rates.

The order comes in the wake of jute prices breaching the Rs 9,000 per quintal mark, with mills struggling to procure the raw material and facing thin arrivals.

"The stock control order may be a deterrent against hoarding at the market level, but it is unwarranted for millers. If a raw jute stock limit is imposed at the early season, we may face difficulties in the rest of the year in ramping up production for jute bags and meeting the government sector's requirements. We do not support stock restrictions on jute mills so early in the season," Indian Jute Mills Association chairman Raghavendra Gupta told PTI.

Traditionally, mills enter the season with 10 lakh bales of stock, but this year they are beginning the critical September–October festival packaging period with historically low reserves, according to millers.

Gupta said millers are in "a vulnerable position with a low stock of the raw material". "On average, millers now have a stock of 25 days, which is roughly 5 lakh bales. Since raw jute was being hoarded at the 'mokam' (marketplace in villages) level, there was hardly any arrival at mills," he said, claiming that import restrictions through land port from Bangladesh and a decline in production have been adding to the woes. Jute Balers' Association committee member Jai Bagra dismissed the allegation of hoarding. He said raw jute production is down by 10-15 per cent this year, and carryover to the current season was estimated to be "not over 18 lakh bales".

The carryover was to the tune of 30 lakh bales in the last year, he said.

"Less production, coupled with less carryover and restrictions on raw jute import from Bangladesh, are reasons why the prices are skyrocketing. There is no hoarding as no one will be able to hoard the commodity when traders are paying through the nose," Bagra told PTI. He said the stock control order might cool off the market to some extent in the short run.

"But the move may not be effective in taming prices in the long run, as crop (raw jute) is expected to be less this year. In the 2024-25 jute year (July-June), the raw material availability was to the tune of 95 to 98 lakh bales, including imports. Moreover, the government's order for jute bags is likely to be steady this year, and demand for raw materials from millers will remain steady."

Former IJMA president Sanjay Kajaria said the new stock control order is aimed at curbing hoarding and speculative trading, but he felt that it might have "limited impact". *(PTI)*

CORRIGENDUM NO. 04 FOR TENDER NOTICE NO.: CON/2025/AUG/05, DATED. 18-08-2025

Corrigendum - 04 for Tender Notice No. CON/2025/AUG/05 has been issued against **Tender No. CE-CON-DK-TN-2025-04**. For details please visit in website **www.ireps.gov.in**.

Chief Engineer/Con-6, N.F. Railway, Maligaon

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Construction Organization
Serving Customers With A Smile

NAME CHANGE

I, Amrita Limbu, have changed my name to Amrita Jaman through Notary Registration No. 3746/2016 before Notary Raj K. Singh.

Henceforth, I shall be known as Amrita Jaman.

Sd/-
Amrita Jaman

LOST

I lost my Registration Certificate bearing Registration no. 15/PR/0026/787106/24.
Joyshree Hazuary,
D/o- Moheswar Hazuary and Kunja Hazuary
Village - Gorjaga
P.O. - Kachu Pukhuri
P.S. - Howraghat
PIN- 782482
Dist - Karbi Anglong, Assam

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

DIRECTORATE-CUM- ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, P.W.D. (R&B), HILLS, ASSAM, DIPHU.

No. ACEH/CS/Solar/68/2025-26/01 Dated. 25/09/2025

PRESS NOTICE INVITING BID

The Directorate-cum-Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D(R&B), Hills, Assam Diphu, on behalf of Governor of Assam invites online bids through the Assam Government e-Procurement Portal from eligible and reputed EPC Contractors for the work- "Design, Engineering, Procurement, Construction, Testing, Commissioning of 42 MW Solar PV Power Plant in Karbi Anglong, Assam. Details may be seen at e-procurement portal website www.assamtenders.gov.in. and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 26/09/2025 to 16/10/2025.The Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam.

Sd/-

Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer,

P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.

No.ACEH/CS/Solar/68/2025-26/01-(A) Dated. 25/09/2025

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Samarth scheme launched in Karbi Anglong

20 training centers set up, KAAC targets skill development for 20,000 youth

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Sept 26: The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, launched the Samarth scheme—Scheme for Capacity Building in the Textile Sector—under the Ministry of Textiles at Sertalin Auditorium, Taralangso.

The programme commenced with a one-minute condolence in memory of legendary Assamese singer Zubeen Garg.

Madhuram Lekthe, Executive Member in charge of Handloom and Fisheries, expressed gratitude to Dr Ronghang for introducing the scheme aimed at driving socio-economic development in the district. He informed that under the Samarth scheme, 20 training centers have been set up across Karbi Anglong, benefiting 2,500 individuals so far. Addressing the gathering, Dr Ronghang reaffirmed KAAC's commitment to the welfare of the people. He announced that to tackle unemployment, the council will provide skill training to 20,000 youths, with the process already in progress. The initiative aims to empower unemployed youth to become self-reliant.

The CEM also highlighted that the Rubber Board has distributed rubber nurseries to 200 aspiring rubber growers this year, further supporting youth livelihood in the district.

Aaranyak hosts human–elephant conflict awareness drive

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: In a bid to reduce Human–Elephant Conflict (HEC) and foster peaceful coexistence between communities and wild elephants, biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, with support from the SBI Foundation, organised a series of community outreach programmes across Udalguri, Baksa, and Tamulpur districts in Assam this month.

The initiative focused on educating local villagers about elephant behaviour and introducing practical methods to mitigate HEC through interactive sessions and community engagement.

On September 13, one such programme was heldi in Udalguri district, attended by 20 villagers. Aaranyak's team presented Gajah Katha—a module designed to build awareness about elephants—and introduced a mitigation set detailing strategies to deal with conflict situations.

Further sessions were conducted on September 16 in Bogribari and Bilpar villages of Baksa district, with 42 participants actively engaging in discussions and demonstrations. Another outreach event took place on September 17 at Khwirw Juli village in Tamulpur district, where 13 villagers took part.

Each session began with open discussions on local experiences with HEC, followed by interactive storytelling and examples that helped villagers connect their everyday challenges with the information presented. Key focus areas included understanding elephant behaviour, reasons behind elephant movement into human settlements, and low-cost, community-driven solutions to reduce conflict.

The outreach efforts were led by Aaranyak's dedicated team members: Rabiya Daimari, Mondeep Basumatari, Abhilasha Boruah, Jiban Chetry, Jaugashar Basumatary, Dipankar Haloi, Bistirna Burhaghohain, Dibakar Nayak, Bikash Tossa, and Rupam Gayari.

These community engagement programmes are part of Aaranyak's broader initiative to strengthen grassroots awareness and encourage cooperative efforts in conservation and conflict resolution.

Hindi Diwas celebrated at Farm Machinery institute

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Sept 26: As per Article 343 of the Constitution of India and the call of the Government of India, the North Eastern Region Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute observed Hindi Rajbhasha Fortnight from 14th September to 26th September.

The valedictory function was held in the institute auditorium, starting with ceremonial lamp lighting by Director P Kamalabai. Messages from Home Minister Amit Shah and Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan were read out.

Women employees paid tribute to late cultural icon Zubeen Garg before cultural performances by children, women, and staff. The event concluded with prize distribution to competition winners.

Namo Yuva run to promote drug-free India

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Sept 26: As part of the ongoing Seva Pakhwada to mark the 75th birthday of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, Karbi Anglong District Committee (BJYM-KADC), with support from the BJP East Karbi Anglong District Committee (BJP-EKADC), organised the 'Namo Yuva Run' under the theme Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan – Drug-Free India.

The half marathon took place on Thursday morning, starting from the Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) stadium and covering routes around Diphu market. Over 100 participants from various age groups took part in the event.

The run was flagged off by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Chief Executive Member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang. A prize distribution ceremony followed the race, where winners were felicitated.

Executive Member of KAAC and in-charge of the Handloom & Textiles Department, Madhuram Lekthe, highlighted that Seva Pakhwada is a 15-day nationwide campaign observed from September 17 (PM Modi's birthday) to October 2 (birth anniversaries of Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri). The campaign includes health camps, cleanliness drives, and awareness activities aimed at fostering civic responsibility and youth involvement.

Speaking at the event, BJP-EKADC president Roland Killing encouraged young people to engage in sports and stay away from narcotic substances. He said that a drug-free society is essential for the progress of the nation's youth and that the Nasha Mukt Bharat campaign is a crucial step in this direction.

BJYM-KADC president Giten Bey said the Namo Yuva Run was organised under the directives of BJP-EKADC as part of the Seva Pakhwada initiative. He also announced the winners of the race.

In the boys' category, Son Engti of Dillai won first prize, followed by Mindar Bey of Hidipi in second place and Kumdha Deuri of Kamrup in third. In the girls' category, Kajir Millikpi took first place, Nilima Enghipi of ITI Diphu came second, and Kajuli Kropi of Dillai secured third place.

Special consolation prizes were awarded to Kainingme Engti (6 years) and Larsi-im Beypi (9 years) for completing the race at such a young age.

Winners received certificates and cash prizes, while all participants were given certificates of participation by the organisers.

Control room for safety Puja celebration

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Sept 26: For the smooth conduct of the upcoming Durga Puja celebrations and in the interest of public safety, the District Administration of Sonitpur has set up a Control Room. Accordingly, the District Disaster Management Authority's Control Room has been made operational with the number 9435371672, and the Police Control Room with the number 7086993898.

In this connection, the District Commissioner of Sonitpur, Ananda Kumar Das, has appealed to all Puja organising committees as well as the general public of the district to extend their cooperation by adhering to the guidelines issued by the District Administration regarding the celebration of the upcoming Durga Puja festival.

AASU holds candle rally demanding justice for Zubeen Garg

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Sept 26: The All Nagaon District Students' Union on Friday organised a candlelight rally demanding justice over the mysterious death of iconic singer Zubeen Garg. The rally, held across the town, was in response to a statewide call by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU).

Hundreds of participants joined the rally, seeking a thorough and impartial investigation into the circumstances surrounding Zubeen Garg's untimely demise. Protesters demanded the immediate arrest of those allegedly involved, directly or indirectly, and called for strong legal action against the culprits.

The student body also raised concerns over possible financial exploitation. They demanded an investigation into the economic dealings of individuals and traders who had taken Zubeen Garg to Singapore for the North East Festival. Protesters called for confiscation of assets and properties of those found guilty of economic offences related to the incident.

The rally was led by AASU's central finance secretary Gauri Shankar Saikia, along with leaders from the Nagaon district unit and several senior citizens of the town. The procession began from the organisation's district office and concluded peacefully.

NABARD organised Cooperative Literacy Camp

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Sept 26: In order to develop Cooperatives as vibrant business enterprises and to make Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS) self-reliant in tune with 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan', the Ministry of Cooperation, Govt of India has initiated the implementation of the 'Central Sector PACS Computerisation Programme' (CSPCP). The implementation of this CSPCP is in advanced stages in Nagaon district.

To sensitise and encourage all the stakeholders to keep up the progress, a special Cooperative Literacy Camp (CLC) was organised by DDM-NABARD, Rajendar Perna at the conference hall of Nagaon DC's office on Thursday last.

The meeting was chaired by the District Commissioner, Debasish Sarma and was attended by the DRCS, ARCSs, Auditors, Supervising Officers, Apex Bank Officer, System Integrator, GPSS Secretaries etc.

During the campaign, DDM, NABARD, Rajendar Perna made a detailed presentation regarding the implementation of CSPCP, including various stages involved in it. He shared that NABARD had earlier taken the initiative to bring most of the StCBs & DCCBs, across India, onto the Core Banking Solution (CBS) platform, which has enabled them to give modern-day technology-based banking facilities to their clients. However, the PACS/ GPSS, which form the vital tier in the Short Term Cooperative Credit Structure

(STCCS) in India, were so far been largely out of the ambit of the technology support. He further informed that, as against the target of digitizing the records/ activities of 42 Gram Panchayat Samabai Samitees (GPSSs) in Nagaon district under the project, so far 35 GPSS have already reached the stage of 'ePACS Only Ready'. He also expressed his gratitude to all the officials, system integrator and the guidance & support received from the DC Sir.

The DRCS, Marami Bhakat suggested that the results could be achieved because of untiring efforts of all the Officials of the Cooperation Dept., DDM-NABARD & the GPSS Secretaries. She also mentioned about the contribution of their women staff members. She suggested all the GPSS officials to enter all the transactions. She also expressed her gratitude to the guidance and support received from the RCS & DC.

In his address, the DC, Debasish Sarma highlighted the efforts and initiatives by Central & State Govt Depts. & institutions like NABARD & Cooperation Dept. in realizing the theme of International Year of Cooperatives, 2025 i.e. 'Cooperatives, Build a Better World'. He suggested that all the issues in Computerisation of remaining GPSS must be resolved, expeditiously, so that they should also become & function as ePACS. He informed the GPSS representatives to provide more benefits to its farmer-members & venture into diversified activities. He also highlighted Govt. of India's priority to triple the Coop. sector's contribution to GDP by 2034, bring 50 crore active members into the Coop. fold, 30 percent increase in the number of Coop. societies and the establishment of at least one Coop. society in every village.

The event concluded with ceremonially distribution of the 'Hand-Over Certificates' to all the successful GPSS in the district, who could achieve 'ePACS Only Ready' stage.

Artists paint tribute to Zubeen Garg on flyover wall

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Sept 26: Following the untimely demise of cultural icon Zubeen Garg, a group of local artists paid tribute by painting two murals of the beloved singer on the wall of the Demow flyover along NH-37.

The artists—Thanu Handique, Dipak Changmai, Parna Dey, Debojit Dowerah, Jadumoni Mech, Nayan Jyoti Gogoi, and Nabajit Changmai—began the artwork on September 22 and completed it by September 24.

Emotional messages such as "Zubeen Da Amar Houk" and "Zubeen Da Punar Janma Louk" were inscribed alongside the portraits. Passersby paused to view the tribute, remembering the iconic artist whose work touched countless lives across Assam.

24x7 emergency control room to safeguard 'Durga Puja'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: In a move aimed at ensuring seamless coordination and swift response during the upcoming Durga Puja celebrations, the District Administration Cachar, under the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), has announced the activation of its District Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC) on a round-the-clock basis.

As per an official order issued by the Office of the District Commissioner-cum-Chairperson, DDMA, Cachar, the control room will remain functional 24x7 from September 28 to October 3, 2025. The arrangement has been made to handle any emergency situation that may arise during the grand festivities, which witness massive public participation across the district.

The District Emergency Operation Centre will be manned by existing staff of DDMA, Cachar, who will work in shifts to ensure continuous monitoring and coordination. Officials have been directed to meticulously maintain records of all messages and communications received and to promptly update the District Commissioner and other concerned authorities as per procedure.

The District Commissioner, Cachar will remain overall in charge of the system.

Cachar Durga puja committees receive govt aid

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: In a major boost to Durga Puja preparations, the Assam Government on Thursday distributed financial assistance to puja committees across Cachar district. At a formal event held at Guru Charan College auditorium in Silchar, the district administration handed over demand drafts of ₹ 10,000 each to 100 Durga Puja committees in the first phase of disbursement.

A total of 1,081 committees in Cachar are set to receive the grant under this initiative.

The programme, aimed at supporting community celebrations while preserving cultural traditions, was attended by Minister for Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, Mines & Minerals, and Barak Valley Development, Kaushik Rai along with Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty. Cachar Deputy Commissioner Mridul Yadav, IAS Additional DC Antara Sen, ACS and GC College Registrar Bidyut Kanti Pal were also present.

Speaking at the event, MLA Dipayan Chakraborty praised CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's inclusive vision, stating that the financial aid ensures that the joy of Durga Puja reaches every town and village across Assam. He highlighted the importance of such support in upholding the dignity of celebrations while promoting social harmony.

Minister Kaushik Rai reiterated the government's commitment to cultural upliftment and said the grants would help ease the burden on puja committees, many of which are facing rising costs.

New Panbazar road overbridge to be inaugurated

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced the inauguration of the newly constructed Road Overbridge (ROB) at Panbazar, Guwahati today. The bridge will be inaugurated by CM Himanta Biswa Sarma in the presence of state dignitaries, the General Manager of NFR, and senior officials from both the Railways and the State Government.

Built at a cost of ₹ 47 crore, the new ROB is 290 metres long and includes a wide carriageway along with 1.5-metre footpaths on both sides. It features modern engineering components such as a 60-metre Bow String Girder and composite girders, ensuring improved vertical and horizontal clearance for train and vehicular movement.

The structure is expected to significantly ease traffic congestion in the busy Panbazar–Paltan Bazar corridor and facilitate smoother movement of trains, including electric locomotives and over-dimensional consignments.

The original Panbazar ROB, constructed in 1965, had become insufficient due to its narrow width, low clearance, and recurring waterlogging—issues that disrupted both road and rail traffic. Recognising the need for upgraded infrastructure, NFR launched the replacement project in March 2024. Despite the challenges of dismantling the old structure and executing a complex build in a dense urban area, the project was completed within 18 months in August 2025.

The commissioning of the new ROB marks a major infrastructure upgrade for Guwahati. It is expected to improve safety and travel time for commuters, enable efficient train operations, support the planned remodelling of Guwahati Railway Station, and enhance multimodal connectivity in the region.

This achievement underlines NFR's commitment to enhancing infrastructure and promoting economic growth across Assam and the Northeast.

Mega Health Camp under Susrusha Setu

HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, Sept 26: A preparatory meeting for the upcoming Mega Health Camp under Assam's flagship Susrusha Setu programme was held on Friday at the office of the Co-District Commissioner, Margherita. The meeting was chaired by Rahul Doley, Co-District Commissioner, Margherita. The review meeting focused on finalising arrangements, inter-departmental coordination, and mobilisation strategies to ensure maximum participation of children below 18 years. The health camp is scheduled to be held on October 7 at Town High School, Margherita.

The Susrusha Setu initiative, launched across all 126 constituencies of Assam, aims to provide free health screening and treatment for over 50 ailments affecting children. Services under the programme will include general health check-ups, nutritional assessments, dental, ENT, and eye care, laboratory investigations, ECGs, AYUSH consultations, and parental counseling. Specialist doctors from medical colleges, district hospitals, and referral centers will be engaged, and serious cases will be referred to higher healthcare institutions. Chairing the meeting, Rahul Doley emphasised the importance of quality healthcare delivery, wide public outreach, and active parental involvement for the benefit of the younger generation.

The meeting was attended by Gyanjyoti Dutta, Circle Officer, Margherita, Assistant Commissioners Pritom Gogoi and Pronamika Konwar; senior health officials, members of the local administration and representatives of tea garden management.

Local women-led venture aims to boost indigenous handloom business and self-reliance

'Pekok House' to promote Karbi traditional wear

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Sept 26: 'The Pekok House' a dedicated store showcasing Karbi traditional costumes, was formally inaugurated on Thursday by Madhuram Lekthe, Executive Member (EM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), in charge of the Handloom & Textiles Department. The store is located in front of the Office of the Assistant Director of Handloom & Textiles at Rongnihang, Diphu.

Appreciating the initiative, EM Lekthe lauded the joint effort by two local women entrepreneurs, Bimola Hansepi and Jirka Hansepi, who established the venture to promote indigenous Karbi attire. He encouraged other local entrepreneurs to take similar steps in preserving and promoting traditional handloom products through self-employment.

Lekthe also informed that KAAC has passed a resolution in its Executive Committee meeting to ban the sale of traditional garments sourced from outside the district in local markets. The Handloom & Textiles Department has been conducting periodic inspections in Diphu to ensure the implementation of this resolution.

'The Pekok House' began as a small-scale initiative and has now grown into a full-fledged business offering a wide range of traditional garments for men, women, and children. Their collection includes popular Karbi outfits such as pini, pekok, seleng, and 'shawls' for women, and choihongthor, traditional jackets, poho, and seleng for men and children.

With its own production unit, the store ensures authenticity and quality in its products. To mark the upcoming Zonal Karbi Youth Festival (ZKYF) from September 28 to October 1 and the Durga Puja festive season, 'The Pekok House' has also announced special offers on its collection.

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THE HILLS TIMES

VOL. II, ISSUE 203, GUWAHATI, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2025

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Happiness is the natural flower of duty.
- Phillips Brooks

Trump's H-1B visa fee hike

Prime Minister Narendra Modi continues to avoid confronting United States President Donald Trump, while the former real-estate developer with business interests worldwide including in India, harasses India with stupidly high tariffs and now by horrendously increasing the H-1B visa fee. Instead, PM Modi's response was as follows: "Our real enemy is 'dependence', we've to be atmanirbhar". Of course, we've have to stop depending on the United States, China and a score of other countries; but we're yet not the economic force we aspire to become. Like the poet said, we have miles to go before we sleep. PM Modi need not remind us of India's Achilles heel every time his "friend" ups the ante against India. President Trump is a tyrant but he also claims to be Prime Minister Modi's friend. With friends like Trump, India doesn't need another enemy to cook our goose. Modi has been avoiding naming President Trump "India's No.1 enemy", paraphrasing the song, "When will Modi ever learn?" What did Prime Minister Modi say? "Greater a nation's dependence on other countries, the greater its risk of failure." For global peace, he said, "we must become Atmanirbhar." Modi on Saturday said India's "real enemy" is its dependence on other countries, stressing the need for self-reliance to ensure national strength and global respect.."

Modi was in his home state Gujarat, Bhavnagar, where he linked the need for Atmanirbharta with "national pride and the future of the country", stating that "the greater the foreign dependence, the greater the nation's failure. For global peace, stability, and prosperity, the country with the world's largest population must become Atmanirbhar." Modi's remarks should strike home. India's "real enemy" at this point time is the Trump-led US administration. Trump has a team of US secretaries who are viscerally anti-India, one of them being his commerce secretary. On last Friday President Trump signed the imposition of a $100,000 fee for H-1B visa applications. Guess what, Indians in America are 70 percent of the H1B visa holders. Trump doesn't care, Trump's secretaries do not care. This is the Trump' administration's way of showing the middle finger to the Modi dispensation. Will Modi react, and how?

The $100,000 fee will be effective September 21. Indians are the hardest hit. And this comes even as businesses in India are reeling from Trump tariffs. Who is "our real enemy" is as plain as the writing on the wall. There is no relief from the sweeping 50% tariffs imposed by the US on Indian imports. Now Indian tech workers would feel the Trump effect while Modi will be fiddling with his newest catchphrases. Trump's reasoning is that he signed the order to overhaul the H-1B visa programme, that the $100,000 fee for applications will "curb overuse". Nobody can argue with that, it's a Trump prerogative. Companies will have to pay $100,000 for the H-1B if they want to hire Indian talent, period.

Trump's wooing of Shehbaz Sharif and Asim Munir has turned Bizarre

By: Sushil Kutty

US President Donald Trump, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Pakistan's Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, the current power troika in the subcontinent. When two of them meet, Trump and Munir, Pakistanis puff up their chests. What happens when Sharif also gets invited to the meeting? Trump, Sharif and Munir were in the Oval Office on Thursday and Pakistanis find themselves on Cloud 9. Without doubt Indians aren't. Trump's climbing tariffs don't seem to bother Pakistan at all, whereas India is bracing to handle Trump's impending tariff hike on pharmaceuticals and kitchen cabinets!

So, Trump is treating unfair which country, India or Pakistan, which appears to be a more strategic partner to the United States than India would ever be, definitely not as long as Trump's adult children have strategic crypto-currency ties with shady crypto-strategists in Pakistan. From photos appearing in the media, Trump, Sharif and Munir sit comfortable, the vibes friendly; Trump seated sunk in his chair, Gen. Munir as if he was in his farmhouse and Shehbaz Sharif as if perched to snap at a morsel coming his way.

Asim Munir was hosted once, for lunch at the White House. This time there's Sharif too. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Trump called Sharif and Munir "great leaders". Trump has also called Prime Minister Narendra Modi "great leader". In world history only North Korean heads of state, the "Kims", have been referred to as "Great leaders". But for Sharif and Munir, it is a sign of thaw in US-Pakistan ties. Sharif at least must have taken the feeling to bed, Munir did it during the American summer. "We have a great leader coming, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, and the Field Marshal. Field Marshal is a very great guy, and so is the Prime Minister, both, and they're coming, and they may be in this room right now," Trump told reporters. The meeting was sweetened by a trade deal between the US and Pakistan. Trump had met Sharif at the UNGA, where Trump nudged escalators and teleprompters with asides. If Trump missed Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he did not reveal with word or gesture. Instead he filled up the gap with a multilateral meeting with leaders of Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia and Turkiye. But Sharif and Munir got special treatment, a different class in their own, President's special guests; what Rubio would have been doing is a mystery cloaked secrecy unless Marco is a closet crypto-genius. Sharif arrived at the White House around 4.52 pm. The Pakistani PM's motorcade was seen leaving the White House around 6.18 pm. An hour-plus, Trump spent in the company of the "Great Leader" from Pakistan. Reports that Sharif was made to wait for half an hour were rubbished. Trump dare not slight Pakistani leaders in these times of Nobel. Trump was just completing his business of the day. Important thing is Sharif and Munir, as also Pakistan, is basking in Trump and USA's attention and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is even avoiding the escalators and teleprompters in the United Nations, unable to lend his voice to the world's top diplomatic body, created by, according to American UN historians, by President Truman and now threatened with extinction by President Donald Trump. Question is will Prime Minister Modi emerge from Trump's shadow and into the limelight?

The US and Pakistan are strategic security partners in South Asia. They were during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Then during the "war on terror". Pakistan continued to support terrorism. Osama bin Laden was hiding in Pakistan. Now Trump's children are hiding in Pakistan. It is the same. Islamabad and Washington exist on "nothing but lies and deceit" is the decent way to describe US-Pakistan ties. Pakistan and the US have signed a new deal. Actually two memorandums of understanding (MoUs), signed in the presence of Sharif and Munir on September 8.One, Pakistan supplying critical minerals and rare earth elements to the US. A US firm will invest $500m in Pakistani minerals. Trump has pledged to work with Pakistan to develop its "massive oil reserves".

US and Pakistan have also agreed to a trade agreement that will allow Washington to help develop Pakistan's oil reserves. All in all a great deal of warmth is flowing between the US and Pakistan. Pakistan is up the creek with a paddle. And India is way down the US creek without a paddle. All Modi has to do is stop buying Russian crude and Trump will be back responding to Modi's hugs like before. Modi even got to meet First Lady Melania. Asim and Sharif haven't so far. But Sharif and Munir have retold Trump's claim that he stopped a nuclear war. With more tariff hikes coming India's way, Prime Minister Modi has to make decisions. (IPA Service)

Origin of Durga Puja

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Durga Puja is an integral part of the religious, cultural, and social life of Hinduism, fostering devotion, joy, and unity in people's hearts for centuries. The origin of this festival is deeply rooted in mythological narratives. According to ancient scriptures, in ancient times, a powerful demon named Mahishasura wreaked havoc across the three worlds, causing distress to all. The gods, rendered helpless by his tyranny, combined their powers to create a supreme force, Goddess Durga. This creation was not a mere event but an extraordinary amalgamation of the divine energies of all gods. The depiction of Goddess Durga with ten arms wielding divine weapons symbolizes her immense power and capability. Through this narrative, the people of Assam regard Durga Puja as a symbol of the triumph of righteousness, the establishment of truth, and societal unity. The glory of the goddess instills profound devotion in people's hearts, fostering hope for liberation from all forms of adversity. The mythological stories associated with the origin of Durga Puja are elaborately described in texts such as the Markandeya Purana, Kalika Purana, and Devi Bhagavata. These scriptures provide a detailed analysis of the goddess's role as the destroyer of evil, symbolizing the victory of light over darkness. In the cultural context of Assam, this festival has blended with local traditions, acquiring a unique form. From villages to cities, the influence of local customs is evident in the celebration methods, making it more diverse and popular. The mythological foundation of Durga Puja has instilled deep reverence and devotion in the minds of Assam's people, spreading messages of peace, prosperity, and unity through this festival. The origin story of this festival signifies not only religious importance but also serves as a symbol of social and cultural unity. In Assam's rural and urban societies, the impact of this festival is profound, inspiring new hope and motivation in people's lives. As a symbolic representation of Goddess Durga's power, this festival unites people from all sections of society, creating a harmonious environment.

The historical background of Durga Puja is ancient and diverse. The roots of this festival are deeply embedded in the mythological and tantric traditions of Hinduism. According to the Puranas, the worship of Goddess Durga was first initiated in autumn by King Suratha and a merchant named Samadhi. This event is elaborately described in the Markandeya Purana, where Sage Medhas details the glory of the goddess. Additionally, the Kalika Purana mentions the concept of Akal Bodhan, where Lord Rama worshipped the goddess in autumn before slaying Ravana. This concept of Akal Bodhan adds deeper historical significance to Durga Puja. Autumn falls during Dakshinayan, a time when gods are believed to be in slumber. Lord Rama's act of awakening and worshipping the goddess during this period led to the festival being called Akal Bodhan. Through this narrative, Sharadiya Durga Puja has gained a special place, profoundly impacting Assam's religious and cultural life. In Assam, the festival's practice has merged with local traditions, giving it a distinctive form. For instance, slight variations in worship practices, such as Kachari Puja, temple rituals, or other local customs, are observed in different regions of Assam, adding to its unique beauty. From a historical perspective, it is believed that the festival's practice began during the Mughal era. Initially prevalent among farmers who worshipped the goddess for societal protection and prosperity, over time, it became a universal celebration, gaining popularity across all sections of society. In Assam, during the Ahom dynasty, Durga Puja became more widespread. The kings organized the festival, fostering a sense of unity among the people. This historical backdrop has deepened the significance of Durga Puja, with its impact clearly visible in Assam's cultural life.

The origin of Goddess Durga's name is elaborately described in the Puranas. The word 'Durga' means 'invincible' or 'destroyer of adversities,' symbolizing the goddess's powerful and unconquerable form. According to the Puranas, the goddess was named Durga after slaying a demon named Durgama. Another interpretation suggests that she is called Durgatinashini because she eliminates the adversities of living beings. Each letter of her name carries profound significance: 'D' signifies the destroyer of demons, 'U' represents the eliminator of obstacles, 'R' denotes the eradicator of diseases, 'G' symbolizes the destroyer of sins, and 'A' indicates the vanquisher of fear and enemies. This interpretation highlights the goddess's all-encompassing power. In Assam's cultural context, this name evokes deep reverence and devotion. The goddess's ten arms represent the ten directions, symbolizing her omnipresent power, while her vehicle, the lion, signifies strength and courage. Her three eyes represent fire, the sun, and the moon. These attributes enhance the goddess's majestic form. During her worship in Assam, people pray for the removal of all adversities, and this belief creates a positive impact on society. The significance of the goddess's three eyes is profound, representing the three main aspects of life—creation, preservation, and destruction. Through these eyes, the goddess oversees everything, working for the welfare of living beings. The people of Assam hold deep reverence for this form of the goddess, which fosters a spiritual awakening in their lives. The goddess's affinity for vermilion is also significant, as its use during the festival symbolizes a woman's fidelity and chastity.

The rituals of Durga Puja involve a unique blend of Vedic and tantric traditions. The festival incorporates both Vedic mantras and tantric chants. Generally, the rituals are performed according to the guidelines in three Puranas—Brihannaradiya Purana, Devi Purana, and Kalika Purana. These texts lend profound significance to each ritual. Beginning with Mahalaya, the festival involves the worship of Goddess Durga along with Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesha, and Kartikeya. The belief in the goddess's arrival on Mahalaya creates a special sense of devotion among people. The presence of Mahishasura's statue alongside the ten-armed goddess at the puja altar symbolizes the triumph of righteousness over evil. Additionally, the statues of Lakshmi and Ganesha are placed on the right, and Saraswati and Kartikeya on the left, representing the goddess's all-encompassing power. In Assam, these rituals blend with local traditions, making the puja more popular and universal. The installation of Navapatrika is a significant ritual, using nine types of leaves and fruits, symbolizing the goddess's deep connection with nature. Each plant is associated with a different form of the goddess, such as the banana plant with Brahmani, taro with Kali, turmeric with Durga, jayanti with Kartiki, bel with Shiva, pomegranate with Raktadantika, colocasia with Chamunda, ashoka with Shokarahita, and rice with Lakshmi. The worship of Navapatrika conveys a message of reverence and conservation of nature. In Assam's rural areas, special rituals are performed during Navapatrika installation, where locals express gratitude toward nature, deepening the spiritual significance of the puja.

During Durga Puja, the worship of the goddess's nine forms over Navratri holds special importance. According to the Puranas, Goddess Durga assumes nine forms during Navratri—Shailputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Katyayani, Kalaratri, Mahagauri, and Siddhidatri. These nine forms symbolize the diverse qualities of feminine power. Each form's worship involves specific mantras and rituals, fostering deep religious sentiments among devotees. In Assam, various rituals are organized in villages and cities during Navratri. From the installation of the sacred pot on Shashti to the immersion on Dashami, each day holds its own significance. On Shashti, the goddess is invoked, and Navapatrika is installed, reflecting reverence for nature. From Saptami to Navami, various forms of the goddess are worshipped, along with homa and fire rituals, creating a spiritual awakening among devotees. In Assam's rural areas, local folk dances and music are organized during the puja, enhancing the festive spirit. Each day of Navratri is associated with specific rituals that highlight the glory of the goddess's different forms, infusing spiritual energy into people's lives and inspiring them to face life's challenges. In Assam, these Navratri rituals allow locals to express their traditional arts and culture, further enhancing the festival's beauty.

Durga Puja is not confined to religious rituals but serves as a medium to unite people from various sections of society. Cultural programs, including folk dances, music, and theatrical performances, showcase local culture, fostering unity from villages to cities. Puja pandals are adorned with colorful flowers, bel leaves, and vines, reflecting nature's beauty in the festival. The style of pandal decoration varies slightly across Assam's regions, showcasing local arts and crafts. These cultural programs generate interest in traditional arts and culture among the younger generation. During the festival, people spend time with family and friends, strengthening social bonds. This cultural aspect of Durga Puja creates a harmonious environment, bringing together people from different castes, religions, and cultures, promoting peace and brotherhood. In Assam's rural areas, these cultural programs promote local folk arts, fostering pride in traditional culture among the younger generation.

The deep connection of Durga Puja with nature is a distinctive feature. The installation of Navapatrika expresses reverence for nature, with plants like banana, taro, pomegranate, bel, rice, ashoka, turmeric, colocasia, and jayanti flowers symbolizing various forms of the goddess. This reflects the inseparable bond between nature and spirituality. In Assam's rural areas, special rituals during Navapatrika installation allow locals to express gratitude toward nature. Puja pandals reflect nature's beauty, enhancing the festive atmosphere. The festival also promotes messages of environmental conservation, raising awareness among the younger generation. This connection with nature deepens the significance of Durga Puja in Assam, reminding people of the integral relationship between life and nature. In rural areas, Navapatrika installation prompts people to reflect on their responsibility toward nature, fostering environmental consciousness.

Vijaya Dashami is an emotional moment of Durga Puja. During the goddess's immersion, devotees experience a mix of joy and sorrow, anticipating her return the following year. The immersion process varies slightly across Assam's regions, with some places immersing the idol in rivers and others following specific rituals. During this time, people pray for the goddess's blessings for peace and prosperity. This emotional aspect of Durga Puja profoundly impacts people's hearts, strengthening unity and harmony in society. The rituals of Vijaya Dashami remind people of the transient nature of life, inspiring them to value every moment. In Assam's rural areas, people gather during immersion to express their reverence and devotion, creating a deep spiritual sentiment.

The social significance of Durga Puja is immense. Beyond religious rituals, it serves as a medium to unite people from different sections of society. In Assam, people set aside their sorrows to participate in the festival with joy. Families, friends, and community members come together, strengthening their relationships. Puja pandals serve as centers of social interaction, where people from various castes, religions, and cultures participate, promoting peace, harmony, and brotherhood. This social aspect of Durga Puja plays a vital role in societal progress and maintaining order. During this time, people create a positive environment, leaving behind negativity. The festival's impact is profound in Assam's rural and urban societies, fostering unity and harmony.

The history of Durga Puja is linked to various historical events. It is believed that the festival's practice began during the Mughal era, initially among farmers who worshipped the goddess for societal protection and prosperity. Over time, it became a universal celebration, gaining popularity across all sections of society. In Assam, during the Ahom dynasty, Durga Puja became more widespread, with kings organizing the festival to foster unity. This historical backdrop lends special significance to Durga Puja in Assam, with royal patronage evident during the Ahom era. The kings used the festival to promote religious and cultural unity, deepening its significance in Assam's cultural life. The festival's practice in different regions of Assam is tied to local traditions, giving it a unique form.

In conclusion, Durga Puja is an inseparable part of Assam's religious, cultural, and social life. The mythological and historical narratives associated with its origin lend it profound significance. The glory of Goddess Durga, the connection with nature through Navapatrika, and cultural programs foster unity and harmony in society. The diversity and beauty of Durga Puja in Assam give it a unique form, spreading joy and devotion in the hearts of millions each year. Through this festival, people pray for peace, prosperity, and success, and the goddess's blessings empower them to face life's challenges. All these aspects establish Durga Puja as an essential part of Assam's cultural and religious life, spreading messages of peace, prosperity, and unity.

Durga Puja in Assam: Celebrating faith in the shadow of climate change

By: Mowsam Hazarika

Durga Puja has long been one of Assam's most cherished celebrations — a festival where faith, art, and community spirit converge. Every year, as the clear blue autumn skies arrive and the monsoon recedes, the state comes alive with colorful pandals, rhythmic dhak beats, and a shared sense of devotion. But in recent years, the timing, mood, and even logistics of Durga Puja in Assam have been increasingly influenced by a new and unsettling factor: climate change.

The Brahmaputra valley, home to one of the most dynamic river systems in the world, has always been sensitive to seasonal variations. Yet, the past decade has witnessed a disturbing shift. Erratic monsoons, delayed retreats of rain, and sudden flash floods have begun disrupting the natural rhythm of life — and Durga Puja has not been spared. What was once considered a festival of clear skies and crisp autumn air now often unfolds under the threat of heavy showers, flooded streets, and unpredictable weather patterns.

• Seasonal Symphony Disrupted

Traditionally, Durga Puja coincides with the retreat of the monsoon and the arrival of Sharad Ritu, the post-monsoon season celebrated in poetry and song. The bright autumn sun and cool breezes have always set the perfect backdrop for the festival. But climate change is altering this seasonal harmony. In several parts of Assam, the monsoon now lingers well into October, bringing heavy rain just when pandal construction and idol transportation are at their peak.

This creates logistical nightmares for organizers. Temporary structures, often made of bamboo and cloth, are vulnerable to rain and wind damage. Many artisans have reported idols being damaged or collapsing due to excessive moisture before they could be installed. In flood-prone districts, such as Barpeta, Dhubri, and Dhemaji, Durga Puja preparations are frequently delayed because roads remain waterlogged and materials cannot be transported in time.

• Economic Challenges for Artisans

One of the worst-affected groups are the kumars, the traditional idol makers. The process of idol-making is highly weather-dependent. Clay idols require sunlight and dry air to harden naturally. Continuous rain leads to cracks, delays, and even total loss of finished idols. For artisans who depend on this seasonal income, such disruptions can be financially devastating.

Climate change has also increased the price of raw materials. Bamboo, hay, and clay often become scarce after floods, raising production costs. Many small idol-making workshops have had to shut down or take loans, making them economically vulnerable.

• Changing Ritual Spaces

Pandals, the heart of Durga Puja celebrations, are also affected. In urban areas like Guwahati, organizers are forced to spend more on waterproofing, drainage arrangements, and stronger structures to withstand sudden storms. Rising temperatures have also made ventilation a bigger concern, with many committees installing coolers and fans to ensure devotees' comfort — further increasing costs and energy consumption.

In rural areas, where budgets are smaller, heavy rain sometimes washes away decorations and even damages electrical systems, forcing committees to cancel cultural programs. This deprives local communities of the social and artistic expressions that are integral to the festival.

• The Environmental Footprint of the Festival

Ironically, while Durga Puja is being affected by climate change, the festival itself has historically contributed to environmental stress. Non-biodegradable idols painted with chemical colors have polluted rivers during immersion, while pandals consume large amounts of electricity for lighting.

In recent years, however, a growing awareness has led to positive changes. Many committees in Assam are switching to eco-friendly idols made with natural clay and organic dyes. Immersions are increasingly being organized in artificial tanks to prevent direct pollution of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Solar-powered lighting and energy-efficient LED installations are also becoming popular, reducing the carbon footprint of the celebrations.

• Health and Safety Concerns

Climate change has also brought new health challenges during Durga Puja. Standing water after unseasonal rain becomes a breeding ground for mosquitoes, leading to spikes in dengue and malaria cases during the festive season. Organizers now have to spend more on sanitation measures, mosquito control, and health awareness campaigns.

• A Cultural and Emotional Impact

Durga Puja is not just a religious ritual; it is a marker of cultural continuity. Families plan their shopping, travel, and social gatherings around this time of year. When climate change disrupts the festival, it impacts not just logistics but also emotions.

In 2022, for instance, several districts of Assam faced heavy rain and floods just before Durga Puja. Many households could not celebrate properly, and some could not afford new clothes or decorations after losing property in the floods. For many, the goddess's arrival — usually a moment of collective joy — was marked by anxiety and loss. This emotional toll is a reminder that climate change is not merely an environmental issue but also a cultural and psychological one.

• Adapting to the New Reality

The good news is that awareness is growing, and Assam's Durga Puja committees are learning to adapt. Organizers now begin preparations earlier to account for weather-related delays. Stronger, rain-proof pandals are being designed. Disaster preparedness measures, including pumps to remove water from pandals, are becoming common.

Community participation is also increasing in climate-conscious initiatives. Awareness campaigns about plastic waste, tree plantation drives, and river-cleaning activities are often launched during Durga Puja, turning the festival into a platform for environmental education.

• A Call for Climate-Resilient Festivities

If climate change continues unchecked, the challenges to Durga Puja will deepen. Rising river levels could force the relocation of immersion sites, heat waves could make open-air pandals unbearable, and more frequent floods could make festival planning impossible in some regions.

This is why integrating climate resilience into festival planning is crucial. Local governments, cultural organizations, and communities must work together to develop infrastructure that can withstand extreme weather. At the same time, celebrations must continue to move toward eco-friendliness — using sustainable materials, minimizing energy use, and ensuring safe waste disposal.

• Conclusion: Faith in the Time of Change

Durga Puja in Assam has survived centuries of political upheavals, social transformations, and economic challenges. Its core message — the triumph of good over evil — feels even more urgent in the age of climate change. The goddess slaying Mahishasura can be seen as a metaphor for humanity's struggle against the destructive forces of environmental degradation.

As Assam celebrates Durga Puja amid rising climate uncertainty, the festival becomes more than a ritual. It becomes a call to action — to protect nature, to adapt with resilience, and to ensure that future generations can also experience the joy of autumn skies, the sound of the dhak, and the sight of the goddess blessing a land in harmony with the environment.

Durga Puja, therefore, is not just about faith but about responsibility — a reminder that honoring the goddess also means honoring the earth she embodies. Only then can the festival continue to shine as a beacon of hope in a changing world.

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Pros and Cons of a Consulting Career

By: Mayank Gupta

A career in consulting offers many attractive benefits, but it also comes with its challenges. As you consider a path in consulting, it's important to weigh both the advantages and drawbacks to determine if it aligns with your career goals, personal values, and lifestyle. In this section, we'll explore the key pros and cons of being a consultant, helping you assess whether consulting is the right fit for you.

Pros of a Consulting Career

Diverse and Exciting Work

One of the most appealing aspects of consulting is the variety of projects you'll work on. As a consultant, you'll tackle different problems in various industries, from healthcare and finance to tech and energy. This variety keeps the work fresh and intellectually stimulating, and you'll never be stuck in a repetitive job. Each project offers a new challenge, which can be incredibly rewarding for those who enjoy problem-solving and strategic thinking.

Rapid Career Growth and Development

Consulting firms are known for fast-tracking career progression. If you perform well, you can be promoted quickly, moving from an entry-level position to managerial roles in just a few years. Consulting provides structured career paths with clear milestones for advancement. You'll also receive excellent training and development opportunities, learning from some of the brightest minds in the industry.

Additionally, consultants are expected to develop a diverse skill set, ranging from technical skills like data analysis to soft skills like client management and leadership. This rapid skill-building makes consulting an excellent option for those seeking professional growth in a short period of time.

High Earning Potential

Consulting firms offer competitive salaries, especially at top-tier firms like McKinsey, BCG, and Bain. As you climb the consulting ladder, your compensation will increase, with significant bonuses and benefits. For many consultants, the financial rewards are a strong motivator to stay in the industry, as top consultants can earn six figures by the time they reach mid-level roles, with partner-level consultants earning millions annually.

Consulting also offers a performance-driven pay structure, meaning the harder you work and the more value you bring to clients, the more you'll earn. For those who thrive in high-performance environments, the potential to earn well above industry standards is an enticing aspect of the career.

Exposure to High-Profile Clients and Industries

As a consultant, you'll have the opportunity to work with top-tier clients, including Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. This exposure not only helps you build a strong professional network but also gives you insight into how leading businesses operate. Working with high-profile clients is a great way to enhance your resume and expand your career opportunities.

Intellectual Stimulation and Problem Solving

Consulting attracts individuals who enjoy solving complex problems. Whether you're working on a strategic market entry plan or optimizing business operations, consulting requires you to think critically and creatively. For those who find intellectual stimulation in complex problem-solving, consulting provides a daily challenge that keeps work exciting and fulfilling.

Cons of a Consulting Career

Long Hours and High Workload

One of the biggest downsides of consulting is the demanding nature of the work. Consultants are often expected to work long hours, including evenings and weekends, to meet client deadlines and deliver results. The pressure to perform at a high level can lead to burnout, especially during busy periods when multiple projects overlap. For many consultants, maintaining a healthy work-life balance can be difficult, and time away from work can be scarce. While the financial rewards can make the long hours more tolerable, the work-life imbalance is something to consider if you value personal time and flexibility.

Travel Demands

Many consulting roles, especially those with top firms, require consultants to travel frequently to meet clients. This can mean being away from home for extended periods, with travel schedules that are often unpredictable. For consultants who enjoy exploring new cities, this can be a perk. However, constant travel can be exhausting, and the time spent away from family and friends can negatively impact personal relationships.

Stress and Pressure to Perform

Consulting is high-stakes, and the pressure to perform at a high level is constant. Consultants are expected to produce high-quality work quickly, often with limited information or tight deadlines. The stress of meeting client expectations, managing multiple projects, and delivering results on time can take a toll on mental and physical health.

The competitive nature of the industry also means that consultants are constantly evaluated on their performance, making it difficult to relax or take time off without worrying about career advancement.

Limited Work-Life Balance

As a result of long hours, travel, and high expectations, maintaining a healthy work-life balance in consulting can be a challenge. Although many firms offer perks like wellness programs, flexible hours, and generous vacation time, it's often difficult to fully disconnect from work due to the demanding nature of the job. This imbalance can lead to burnout over time, especially if the workload becomes overwhelming.

Lack of Control Over Your Schedule

Consultants are often at the mercy of client needs and project deadlines, meaning you have limited control over your daily schedule. Your day could change unexpectedly based on client meetings, project developments, or urgent tasks, which can disrupt personal plans and leave you feeling out of control. While some consultants thrive in this dynamic environment, others find it frustrating and difficult to manage.

Wrapping up

A career in consulting offers tremendous opportunities for personal and professional growth, high earning potential, and intellectual stimulation. However, it's also important to recognize the challenges, such as long hours, high stress, and travel demands. If you're someone who thrives in a high-pressure, fast-paced environment and values career advancement, consulting can be a great fit. But if you're looking for a better work-life balance and more predictable hours, the demands of consulting may outweigh the benefits.

In the next section, we'll explore the future trends in the consulting industry, helping you understand where the profession is headed and what skills will be in demand for future consultants.

IBPS RRB Recruitment 2025 – 13217 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 28/09/2025.
Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 13217 Officer Scale I, II, III & Office Assistant vacancy in Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) through IBPS CRP RRB XIV. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here.
1. Office Assistant (Multipurpose)
No of posts: 7972 posts
2. Officer Scale-I (Assistant Manager)
No of posts: 3907 posts
3. Officer Scale-II (General Banking Officer (Manager))
No of posts: 854 posts
4. Officer Scale-II (Information Technology)
No of posts: 87 posts
5. Officer Scale-II (Chartered Accountant)
No of posts: 69 posts
6. Officer Scale-II (Law)
No of posts: 48 posts
7. Officer Scale-II (Treasury Manager)
No of posts: 16 posts
8. Officer Scale-II (Marketing)
No of posts: 15 posts
9. Officer Scale-II (Agriculture)
No of posts: 50 posts
10. Officer Scale-III
No of posts: 199 posts
Preliminary Exam Center @ Assam: Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Jorhat, Silchar, Tezpur
Single/ Main Exam Center @ Assam: Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Jorhat, Silchar
Assam Gramin Vikash Bank
Office Assistant: 167 posts
Officer Scale-I (Assistant Manager): 185 posts
Officer Scale II (IT): 3 posts
Officer Scale II (CA): 3 posts
Officer Scale II (Law): 2 posts
Nationality / Citizenship
a Citizen of India or a subject of Nepal or
a subject of Bhutan or
a Tibetan Refugee who came over to India before 1st January 1962 with the intention of permanently settling in India or
a person of Indian origin who has migrated from Pakistan, Burma, Sri Lanka, East African countries of Kenya, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika and Zanzibar), Zambia, Malawi, Zaire, Ethiopia and Vietnam with the intention of permanently settling in India, provided that a candidate belonging to categories (ii), (iii), (iv) & (v) above shall be a person in whose favour a certificate of eligibility has been issued by the Government of India.
Language Proficiency
Candidates applying for the posts of Office Assistant in any particular RRB are required to possess proficiency in the local language of the State/ UT in which the RRB is situated to be eligible for interview.
Age Limit (As on 01.09.2025)
Office Assistant (Multipurpose): Between 18 years and 28 years i.e. Candidates should not have been born earlier than 02.09.1997 and later than 01.09.2007 (both dates inclusive).
Officer Scale- I (Assistant Manager): Above 18 years - Below 30 years i.e. Candidates should not have been born earlier than 02.09.1995 and later than 01.09.2007 (both dates inclusive).
Officer Scale- II (Manager): Above 21 years - Below 32 years i.e. Candidates should not have been born earlier than 02.09.1993 and later than 01.09.2004 (both dates inclusive).
Officer Scale- III (Senior Manager): Above 21 years - Below 40 years i.e. Candidates should not have been born earlier than 02.09.1985 and later than 01.09.2004 (both dates inclusive).
Age Relaxation : Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.
OBC/ MOBC: 3 years; # SC/ ST: 5 years; # PWD: 10 years
Educational Qualification
Office Assistant (Multipurpose): Bachelor's degree in any discipline from a recognized University or its equivalent
(a) Proficiency in local language as prescribed by the participating RRB/s
(b) Desirable: Working knowledge of Computer.
Officer Scale-I (Assistant Manager):
Bachelor's degree in any discipline from a recognized University or its equivalent. Preference will be given to the candidates having degree in Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Animal Husbandry, Veterinary Science, Agricultural Engineering, Pisciculture, Agricultural Marketing and Cooperation, Information Technology, Management, Law, Economics or Accountancy;
Proficiency in local language as prescribed by the participating RRB/s.
Desirable: working knowledge of Computer.
Officer Scale-II (General Banking Officer (Manager)): Bachelor's degree in any discipline from a recognized University or its equivalent with a minimum of 50% marks in aggregate. Preference will be given to the candidates having degree in Banking, Finance, Marketing, Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Animal Husbandry, Veterinary Science, Agricultural Engineering, Pisciculture, Agricultural Marketing and Cooperation, Information Technology, Management, Law, Economics and Accountancy. Two years of experience as an officer in a Bank or Financial Institution.
Officer Scale-II (Information Technology): Bachelor's degree from a recognised University in Electronics / Communication / Computer Science / Information Technology or its equivalent with a minimum of 50% marks in aggregate. Desirable: Certificate in ASP, PHP, C++, Java, VB, VC, OCP etc. One year experience (in the relevant field).
Officer Scale-II (Chartered Accountant): Certified Associate (CA) from Institute of Chartered Accountants of of India. One Year experience as a Chartered Accountant.
Officer Scale-II (Law): Degree from a recognised University in Law or its equivalent with a minimum of 50% marks in aggregate. Two years of experience as an advocate or should have worked as Law Officer in Banks or Financial Institutions for a period of not less than two years.
Officer Scale-II (Marketing): MBA in Marketing from a recognized university. One year experience (in the relevant field).
Officer Scale-II (Treasury): Chartered Accountant or MBA in Finance from a recognized university/ institution. One year experience (in the relevant field).
Officer Scale-II (Agriculture): Bachelor's degree in Agriculture/ Horticulture/ Dairy/ Animal Husbandry/ Forestry/ Veterinary Science/ Agricultural Engineering/ Pisciculture from a recognized university or its equivalent with a minimum of 50% marks in aggregate. Two Years of experience (in the relevant field).
Officer Scale-III: Bachelor's degree in any discipline from a recognized University or its equivalent with a minimum of 50% marks in aggregate. Preference will be given to the candidates having Degree/ Diploma in Banking, Finance, Marketing, Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Animal Husbandry, Veterinary Science, Agricultural Engineering, Pisciculture, Agricultural Marketing and Co-operation, Information Technology, Management, Law, Economics and Accountancy. Minimum 5 years' experience as an Officer in a Bank or Financial Institutions.
The online application fee for IBPS RRB 2025 is as mentioned below:

Post	SC/ST/PwBD	Others
Officer (Scale I, II & III)	Rs.175/-	Rs.850/-
Office Assistant (Multipurpose)	Rs.175/-	Rs.850/-

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy by visiting official IBPS Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply online.
Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section.
Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process by clicking "Click Here for New Registration".
In the next stage, click on "Online Application Form" Link and Login.
Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
Make payment of application fee as per your category and submit the form.
At the end, take a print out of the application form.
Starting date of submission of online application: 1st September 2025
Last date of submission of online application: 28th September 2025
Download of call letters for online examination – Preliminary: Nov / Dec 2025
Tentative date of preliminary exam: November / December, 2025
Result of Online exam – Preliminary: December, 2025 / January, 2026
Download of Call letter for Online exam – Main / Single: December 2025/ January, 2026
Online Examination – Main / Single: December, 2025 / February, 2026
Declaration of Result – Main/ Single (For Officers Scale I, II and III): January, 2026

IOCL Pipelines Division Recruitment – 537 Apprentice Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 28/09/2025.
Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Pipelines Division has released a notification for the recruitment of 537 Apprentice Vacancy in various locations of the Pipelines Division across India. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here .
Name of post: Apprentice
No of posts: 537 posts
No of posts @ Assam: 16 posts (Bongaigaon, Guwahati.)
Duration: 12 months from the date of engagement.
Stipend: Rate of stipend payable to apprentices per month shall be as prescribed under Apprentices Act, 1961/1973 / Apprentices Rules 1992 (as amended) and Corporation"s guidelines.
Name of trades/s: Technician Apprentice (Mechanical), Technician Apprentice (Electrical), Technician Apprentice (Telecommunication & Instrumentation), Trade Apprentice (Assistant-Human Resource), Trade Apprentice (Accountant), Data Entry Operator (Fresher Apprentices) & Domestic Data Entry Operator (Skill Certificate Holders).
Age Limit: Minimum 18 years and maximum 24 years as on 31.08.2025 which is the date for reckoning any eligibility criteria.
Age Relaxation: The relaxation of upper age limit for reserved categories are as follows:
SC/ST: 5 years
OBC/ MOBC: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years
PwBD-OBC (Non creamy layer): 13 years
PwBD-SC/ST: 15 years
Educational Qualification:
Technician Apprentice (Mechanical): Three years (or lateral entry after Class-XII (Sc)/ITI admitted in 2nd year of Diploma course) full time Diploma in any of the following disciplines of Engineering:
i) Mechanical Engineering
ii) Automobile Engineering
Technician Apprentice (Electrical): Three years (or lateral entry after Class-XII (Sc)/ITI admitted in 2nd year of Diploma course) full time Diploma in any of the following disciplines of Engineering:
i) Electrical Engineering
ii) Electrical & Electronics Engineering
Technician Apprentice (Telecommunication & Instrumentation): Three years (or lateral entry after Class-XII (Sc)/ITI admitted in 2nd year of Diploma course) full time Diploma in any of the following disciplines of Engineering from a Govt. recognized Institute:
i) Electronics & Communication Engineering
ii) Electronics & Telecommunication Engineering
iii) Electronics & Radio Communication Engineering
iv) Instrumentation & Control Engineering
v) Instrumentation & Process Control Engineering
vi) Electronics Engineering
Trade Apprentice (Assistant-Human Resource): Full Time Bachelor degree (Graduation) from a Govt. recognized Institute/ University.
Trade Apprentice (Accountant): Full Time Bachelor degree (Graduation) in Commerce from a Govt. recognized Institute/University.
Data Entry Operator (Fresher Apprentices): Minimum 12th Pass (but below Graduate).
Domestic Data Entry Operator (Skill Certificate Holders): Minimum 12th Pass (but below Graduate). Additionally, candidates should possess Skill Certificate of 'Domestic Data Entry Operator' for training of less than one year issued by an awarding body recognized under National Skill Qualifications Framework or any other authority recognized by the Central Govt.
Before applying for above apprentices positions, candidates have to first register themselves in online portals of the following agencies of Govt. of India:
a) Trade Apprentice: Data Entry Operator (Fresher Apprentices)/Domestic Data Entry Operator (Skill Certificate Holders) at https://www.apprenticeshipindia.gov.in
b) Technician Apprentice: (Mechanical/Electrical/Telecommunication & Instrumentation) at https://nats.education.gov.in/student_register.php
c) Trade Apprentice: (Assistant-Human Resource/Accountant) at https://nats.education.gov.in/student_register.php
After successful registration with the above agencies, a registration number will be generated and the candidate has to mention this registration number while applying for apprentices positions in Indian Oil Pipelines portal at https://plapps.indianoilpipelines.in/.
Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for IOCL Pipelines Division Recruitment by visiting at official portal of IOCL. They may follow below mentioned steps .
Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
Click on Online Application Form link .
A new webpage will be opened.
Enter all your personal and educational details as required .
Upload your passport sized photograph and signature and other required documents.
At the end click on submit button .
Don't forget to take a print of submitted application form .
Starting Date of Online Application Submission: 29th August 2025
Last Date of Online Application Submission: 28th September 2025

RGIPT Sivasagar Recruitment 2025 – 8 Non-Teaching Posts

Last Date: 30/09/2025.
Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Petroleum Technology (RGIPT) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 8 Non-Teaching posts at the RGIPT Sivasagar Campus. Interested and eligible candidates may apply here.
1. Assistant Registrar
No of posts: 1; Age Limit: 45 years
Essential Qualification and Experience:
a. Master's Degree in any discipline with at least 55% marks or an equivalent grade in a point scale wherever the grading system is followed,
b. 5 years' relevant experience at Pay Level-7/8 or equivalent in supervisory capacity in a government office/ University/ technological institution, or an organization of repute. Experience may include activities related to General Administration, Establishment, Academic, Finance & Accounts, Audit, Stores & Purchase, Procurement, RTI, Legal matters, Training & Placement, etc.
c. Excellent knowledge of noting and drafting in English and Hindi.
d. Experience in handling computerized administration and financial matters.
e. Proficiency in the use of computer applications, i.e., MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc., is a must.
f. Knowledge of English and Hindi typing on a computer.
g. Conversant with Government Rules and Regulations applicable to educational institutes.
h. To assist in preparation of Annual Report, Annual Accounts and Balance sheet.
2. Superintendent (Grade I)
No of posts: 2; Age Limit: 35 years
Essential Qualification and Experience:
a. Masters' Degree in any discipline from a recognized university/institution with at least 55% marks with 3 years' experience at Pay Level- 5 or equivalent position in Central/State Govt./ autonomous bodies/ PSUs, OR
Bachelors' Degree in any discipline from a recognized university/ Institution with at least 55% marks with 5 years' experience at Pay Level- 5 in Central/ State Govt./ autonomous bodies/ PSUs and
b. Proficiency in the use of computer applications i.e., MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.
c. Knowledge of tying in English and Hindi on a computer is a must.
d. Proficiency in noting and drafting in English and Hindi.
e. Conversant with Government Rules and Regulations applicable to educational institutes.
3. Technical Superintendent (Grade I)
No of posts: 2; Age Limit: 35 years
Essential Qualification and Experience:
a. Master's Degree in engineering/ science/ computer science or equivalent qualification in the appropriate field with a minimum of 55% marks in the qualifying Degree from a recognized University/Institute with 3 years' relevant experience at Pay Level-5 or equivalent position in Central/State Govt./ autonomous bodies/ PSUs. OR
Bachelor's Degree (4-years) in Engineering or equivalent qualification in the appropriate field with a minimum of 55% marks in the qualifying Degree from a recognized University/ Institute with 5 years' relevant experience at Pay Level- 5 in Central/ State Govt./ autonomous bodies/ PSUs. OR
Bachelor's Degree in science or equivalent in an appropriate field with a min of 55% marks in the qualifying Degree from a recognized University/ Institute with 5 years' experience at Pay Level- 5 in Central/ State Govt./ autonomous bodies/ PSUs. OR
b. Three years Diploma in Engineering/ Applied Science or equivalent in appropriate field (after 10+2) with a minimum of 55% marks in the qualifying Degree from a recognized University/ Institute with 6 years' of relevant experience at Pay Level- 5 in Central/ State Govt./ autonomous bodies/ PSUs.
4. System Superintendent (Grade-I)
No of posts: 1; Age Limit: 35 years
Essential Qualification and Experience:
Masters' Degree in CSE / IT or MCA or M. Sc. (IT) with a minimum of 55% marks from recognized university/institute with 3 years relevant experience at Pay Level-5 or equivalent in Govt. Organization / reputed educational Institute/ IT company. OR
Bachelor's Degree in CSE / IT engineering or equivalent Degree in an appropriate field with minimum 55% marks from a recognized university/institute with 5 years of relevant experience at Pay Level- 5 or equivalent in Govt. Organization / reputed educational Institute/ IT Company. OR
Diploma in CSE / IT or in an appropriate field with 6 years of relevant experience at Pay Level- 5 or equivalent in Govt. Organization / reputed educational Institute/ IT company.
5. Assistant Grade I
No of posts: 2; Age Limit: 30 years
Essential Qualification and Experience:
For Assistant (General Administration)
a. Bachelor's Degree in any discipline with at least 55% marks from any recognized university/ institute and 1 year relevant of experience, OR Master's Degree in any discipline and
b. Diploma in Computer Application from an institute recognized by the Government.
c. Proficiency in the use of a variety of computer applications i.e., MS Word, Excel etc.
d. Knowledge of English and Hindi typing on a computer is a must
For Assistant (Accounts)
a. B. Com. with at least 55% marks from any recognized university/ institute and 1 year of relevant experience OR M. Com.
b. Diploma in Computer Application from an institute recognized by the Government
c. Proficiency in the use of variety of computer applications i.e., MS Word, Excel etc.
d. Knowledge of English and Hindi typing on computer is must.

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Sharif in US for 80th session of United Nations General Assembly

US President Trump meets Pak PM Sharif, Field Marshal Munir at White House

NEW YORK/ISLAMABAD, Sept 26: US President Donald Trump has met with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir at the White House to discuss bilateral ties.

Trump said a "great leader" was coming while talking to reporters at the White House after signing several executive orders on Thursday.

"In fact, we have a great leader coming, the prime minister of Pakistan coming, and the field marshal (of) Pakistan. Field marshal is a very great guy and so is the prime minister, both. And they're coming," Trump said.

This was the first formal bilateral interaction between Trump and Sharif, coming six years after former premier Imran Khan met Trump during the latter's first term in July 2019.

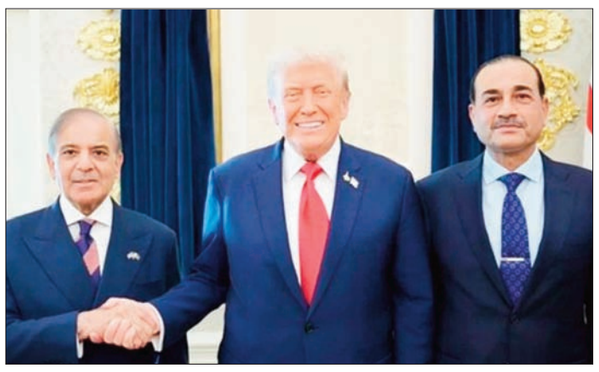
Sharif is in the US for the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly and will address the General Debate from the UNGA podium on Friday.

The meeting was held at the Oval Office in Washington DC, where Vice President J D Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio were also present, according to a statement by the Pakistan Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which added that it was held in a "pleasant atmosphere".

The meeting was closed to the press and was scheduled to start at 4:30 pm (local time) but was delayed by about 30 minutes due to President Trump's engagements. It continued for approximately one hour and 20 minutes.

Post-meeting photos showed both Prime Minister Sharif and Field Marshal Munir exchanging views with Trump. Trump was also all smiles as he flashed his signature thumbs up sign during a group photo.

Sharif met Trump in New York on the margins of the UNGA session on Tuesday when the US president held a multilateral meeting with leaders from Arab nations and others, including Egypt, Indonesia, Qatar, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye.



Earlier, Radio Pakistan reported that the two were "expected to discuss matters of mutual interest as well as regional and global situation".

Sharif arrived at the White House around 4.52 pm and was greeted by senior administration officials.

The Pakistani prime minister's motorcade was seen leaving the White House around 6.18 pm, according to the White House pool.

In his remarks to reporters after signing the executive orders, Trump again said that he has stopped seven wars.

He repeated the claim in his address to world leaders at the UNGA. Pakistan has nominated Trump for the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize, in "recognition of his decisive diplomatic intervention and pivotal leadership during the recent India-Pakistan crisis".

Since May 10, when Trump announced on social media that India and Pakistan had agreed to a "full and immediate" ceasefire after a "long night" of talks mediated by Washington, he has repeated his claim nearly 50 times that he "helped settle" the tensions between India and Pakistan.

India has been consistently maintaining that the understanding on cessation of hostilities with Pakistan was reached following direct talks between the Directors General of Military Operations of the two militaries.

The last Pakistani prime minister to visit the White House was Imran Khan, who met Trump in July 2019 on an "official working visit".

Before him, Sharif's brother and then Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif visited the White House in 2015.

Historically, Pakistan and the US were Cold War allies and for years worked together in defeating the USSR in Afghanistan and later on fighting together against militancy.

But their polices diverged with respect to Afghan Taliban and the US felt betrayed due to Pakistan's alleged ties to the militants. The tipping point was reached when the US in a secret operation killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011.

The two countries have reached a trade agreement that entails a 19 per cent tariff on Pakistani imports and will allow Washington to help develop Pakistan's oil reserves. US goods and services trade with Pakistan totalled an estimated USD 10.1 billion in 2024, up 6.3 per cent (USD 523.0 million) from 2023.

The US' total goods trade (exports plus imports) with Pakistan was an estimated USD 7.2 billion in 2024. US goods exports to Pakistan in 2024 were USD 2.1 billion, up 3.3 per cent (USD 67.2 million) from 2023.

US goods imports from Pakistan in 2024 totalled USD 5.1 billion, up 4.8 per cent (USD 233.9 million) from 2023. The US goods trade deficit with Pakistan was USD 3 billion in 2024, a 5.9 per cent increase (USD 166.7 million) from 2023. *(PTI)*

China launches investigation into Mexico's tariffs on imports from Asia

BEIJING, Sept 26: China has opened an investigation into whether import tariffs being imposed by Mexico are a trade and investment barrier.

Mexico plans to impose taxes as high as 50 per cent on more than 1,400 products from Asia to protect factories at home, which are facing stiff tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on exports to the United States.

A Chinese Commerce Ministry statement posted Thursday said the tariffs would harm the interests of affected countries.

"China believes that, against the backdrop of the current US abuse of tariffs, all countries should jointly oppose all forms of unilateralism and protectionism and must not sacrifice the interests of third parties because of coercion," the statement said.

The Commerce Ministry also announced Thursday that it was launching an anti-dumping investigation into pecans imported from Mexico and the United States.

Mexico has been under pressure from the Trump administration to limit Chinese imports, some of which the US says use Mexico as a backdoor to the American market.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has said that the tariffs are not the result of US pressure.

China will be the most affected as Mexico imported USD 130 billion worth of products from the country in 2024, second only to the what Mexico bought from the United States. Other countries hit will include South Korea, Thailand, India, Philippines and Indonesia.

It's not clear if the investigation into the Mexican tariffs would result in any concrete steps against Mexico.

Under the regulation governing such investigations, a finding that a trade barrier exists can can lead to consultations with the other country, a settlement under a multilateral framework and other appropriate measures. *(AP)*

One of Haiti's leaders says his country is at war with gangs and asks world for help

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Sept 26: One of Haiti's leaders has asked the world to help his troubled Caribbean country fight what he characterised as a war against relentless gang violence and widespread hunger.

Laurent Saint-Cyr, head of Haiti's transitional presidential council, addressed the UN General Assembly in New York on Thursday, saying that immediate action was needed because people were dying daily across Haiti.

"Just a four-hour plane ride from here, a human tragedy is unfolding," he said. "Every day, innocent lives are extinguished. ... Entire neighborhoods are disappearing."

"It's important to say this: Haiti is experiencing war, a war between criminals that want to impose violence as a social order and an armed population that is fighting for human dignity and freedom," Saint-Cyr said.

Violence between the country's gangs and police, as well as with vigilante groups, has left more than 3,100 people dead from January to June, with another 1,189 injured, according to the UN.

The mayhem has displaced more than 1.3 million people across Haiti in recent years, while more than half of Haiti's nearly 12 million inhabitants were expected to experience severe hunger through through the first half of the year.

The refugees settle where they can, such as the shelter found by Kettia Jean Charles and her family in the Delmas 31 low-income area of the capital, Port-au-Prince. No longer as safe as it once was, it's still a refuge compared to the Solino neighbourhood where she ran a beauty salon — now a ghost town after gangsters drove out most remaining locals in November.

"I used to sleep in a bed, had my own business, and my children went to school. Now, I am living this catastrophic life," Charles said.

Charles, 34, is at least seven months pregnant — she's not sure exactly how many weeks — and lives with her husband and three children in a home made of four plastic sheets with a tarp for a roof. She gets some help from relatives nearby and the family fights for the scraps of food provided at the shelter.

"I am asking for help so I can get out of this situation," Charles said as she wiped away tears. "Since I have come here, it has been very humiliating because I have no money, so I have to beg."

Last year, a UN-backed mission led by Kenyan police officers launched operations in Haiti meant to help an understaffed and underfunded local police department fight back against the gangs.

But more than a year has passed, and the mission still has less than 1,000 personnel, far below the 2,500 envisioned, and some USD 112 million in its trust fund — about 14 per cent of the estimated USD 800 million needed a year.

The US and Panama have urged the UN Security Council to authorise a new force of 5,550 in Haiti, a proposal backed by Saint-Cyr.

"It is crucial to mobilise a strong force with a clear mandate and with adequate material, logistical and financial resources," he said.

In the once-thriving neighbourhood of Solino, which had several shops, businesses and even a health clinic, the gangs took everything they could, including electrical wiring, toilets and light fixtures. Nearly every home now has charred and bullet-riddled walls.

"All I dream about now is leaving this camp so that my children can go to school and contribute to society," Charles said. *(AP)*

Trump to put import taxes on pharmaceutical drugs, kitchen cabinets, furniture and heavy trucks

WASHINGTON, Sept 26: President Donald Trump has said that he will put import taxes of 100 per cent on pharmaceutical drugs, 50 per cent on kitchen cabinets and bathroom vanities, 30 per cent on upholstered furniture and 25 per cent on heavy trucks starting on October 1.

The posts on his social media site on Thursday showed that Trump's devotion to tariffs did not end with the trade frameworks and import taxes that were launched in August, a reflection of the president's confidence that taxes will help to reduce the government's budget deficit while increasing domestic manufacturing.

While Trump did not provide a legal justification for the tariffs, he appeared to stretch the bounds of his role as commander-in-chief by stating on Truth Social that the taxes on imported kitchen cabinets and sofas were needed "for National Security and other reasons".

Under the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, the administration launched a Section 232 investigation in April about the impacts on national security from pharmaceutical drug and truck imports. The Commerce Department launched a 232 investigation into timber and lumber in March, though it's unclear whether the furniture

tariffs stem from that.

The tariffs are another dose of uncertainty for the US economy with a solid stock market but a weakening outlook for jobs and elevated inflation. These new taxes on imports could pass through to consumers in the form of higher prices and dampen hiring, a process that economic data suggests is already underway.

"We have begun to see goods prices showing through into higher inflation," Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell warned in a recent news conference, adding that higher costs for goods account for "most" or potentially "all" of the increase in inflation levels this year.

The president has pressured Powell to resign, arguing that the Fed should cut its benchmark interest rates more aggressively because inflation is no longer a concern. Fed officials have stayed cautious on rate cuts because of the uncertainty created by tariffs.

Trump said on Truth Social that the pharmaceutical tariffs would not apply to companies that are building manufacturing plants in the United States, which he defined as either "breaking ground" or being "under construction". It was unclear how the tariffs would apply to companies that already have factories in the US.

In 2024, America imported nearly USD 233 billion in pharmaceutical and medicinal products, according to the Census Bureau. The prospect of prices doubling for some medicines could send shock waves to voters as health care expenses, as well as the costs of Medicare and Medicaid, potentially increase.

The pharmaceutical drug announcement was shocking as Trump has previously suggested that tariffs would be phased in over time so that companies had time to build factories and relocate production. On CNBC in August, Trump said he would start by charging a "small tariff" on pharmaceuticals and raise the rate over a year or more to 150 per cent and even 250 per cent. *(AP)*

Hungary's Orbán tells Trump that dropping Russian energy would bring economy 'to its knees'

BUDAPEST, Sept 26: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said Friday that Hungary will continue to source fossil fuels from Russia despite demands from his ally US President Donald Trump, and that he'd informed the president that dropping Russian energy would be a "disaster" for Hungary's economy.

Hungary remains one of the only countries in Europe to continue purchasing Russian oil and natural gas following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

But Trump, an admirer of the long-serving Hungarian leader, earlier this month called on all NATO countries including Hungary to cease purchasing Russian oil, since he believes the Russia-Ukraine war would end if they did so.

In comments to state radio on Friday, Orbán said he recently told Trump that that dropping Russian energy imports would be an economic "disaster" for Hungary.

"I told the US president ... that if Hungary is cut off from Russian oil and natural gas, immediately, within a minute, Hungarian economic performance will drop by 4 per cent," Orbán said. "It means the Hungarian economy would be on its knees."

Despite three years of efforts by European Union countries to wean off of Russian energy supplies — an effort to deprive President Vladimir Putin of revenue that helps fuel the war in Ukraine — Hungarian officials have insisted that geographical and infrastructural constraints make it nearly impossible to transition to using fossil fuels supplied from the West.

However, other countries in the region, including the similarly landlocked Czech Republic, have managed to fully cease their purchases of Russian oil since Moscow launched its invasion. Slovakia, which neighbours Hungary, has also maintained its Russian energy imports.

Yet despite pressure from the EU and the Trump administration, Orbán, widely considered the EU leader with the closest relationship to the Kremlin, said Friday that when it comes to energy sources, "It is clear what is in Hungary's interest and we will act accordingly."

Hungary and the United States, he said, "are sovereign countries. There is no need for either of us to accept the arguments of the other. America has its arguments and interests, and Hungary does too." *(AP)*

S Korea fires warning shots to repel North Korean vessel breaching sea boundary

SEOUL, Sept 26: South Korea's military said it fired warning shots early Friday to drive away a North Korean merchant ship that briefly crossed the disputed western sea boundary between the rival neighbours.

The ship crossed the Northern Limit Line near the South Korean border island of Baengnyeong around 5 am but retreated after South Korea's military issued an audio warning and fired warning shots, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

There were no immediate reports that North Korean forces returned fire or responded with force.

The response was carried out in accordance with operational procedures and the military remains in a heightened state of readiness to firmly safeguard territorial waters, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

South Korea's military frequently has fired warning shots to repel North Korean patrol or commercial vessels breaching its waters. The poorly marked western sea boundary between the Koreas has been the scene of past skirmishes and attacks, including the North's 2010 shelling of a South Korean island and its alleged torpedoing of a South Korean navy ship, which together killed 50 South Koreans.

During a fiery speech in January 2024, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country does not recognise the Northern Limit Line in the Yellow Sea, which was drawn by the US-led UN Command at the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. North Korea insists on a boundary encroaching deeply into South Korea-controlled waters.

The Koreas exchanged warning shots in 2022 after the South's navy fired at a North Korean merchant ship that crossed the western sea boundary.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula remain high as North Korea continues to dismiss Seoul's calls to resume diplomacy. Relations have soured in recent years as Kim accelerated his weapons programme and deepened alignment with Moscow following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. *(AP)*

Slovenia bans Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu from entering, citing ICC arrest warrant

LJUBLJANA, Sept 26: Slovenia on Thursday said it was banning Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from entering the European Union country to underscore its defence of international law.

The decision was linked to an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court against the Israeli prime minister, Foreign Ministry official Neva Grasic said, according to the official STA news agency.

The EU nation of some 2 million people, which recognised a Palestinian state last year, has been a vocal critic of Israeli actions in Gaza and Thursday's move against Netanyahu was apparently designed to underscore the country's policies.

Slovenia already had barred Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich from entering the country and imposed an arms embargo on Israel.

"All countries that are bound by the international court, including Slovenia, must not recognise the situation resulting from Israel's illegal presence in the occupied Palestinian territory, and must not offer any support in maintaining this situation," she added.

The Slovenian government said on X that the decision sends "a clear message to the state of Israel that Slovenia expects consistent respect for the decisions of international courts and international humanitarian law."

By doing so, Slovenia "confirms its commitment to international law, universal values of human rights and a principled and consistent foreign policy," the government added. *(AP)*

Company found 'no evidence' its Azure platform was used to target or harm people

Microsoft reduces Israel's access to cloud, AI products over reports of mass surveillance in Gaza

WASHINGTON, Sept 26: Microsoft has said it disabled services to a unit within the Israeli military after a company review determined its artificial intelligence and cloud computing products were being used to help carry out mass surveillance of Palestinians.

The action comes after The Associated Press and The Guardian published reports earlier this year revealing how the Israeli Ministry of Defence had been using Microsoft's Azure platform to aid in the war in Gaza and occupation of the West Bank.

Brad Smith, Microsoft's vice chair and president, wrote in a blog post that the company was taking steps to enforce compliance with its terms of service.

An AP investigation in February showed that the Israeli military's use of Microsoft products skyrocketed after a deadly surprise attack by Hamas militants on October 7, 2023. The AP's report cited internal Microsoft data showing the Israelis were using gigabytes of cloud storage and massive amounts of AI-enabled language translation services.

The AP also reported that Israel's military used Microsoft Azure to compile information gathered through mass surveillance, which it transcribes and translates, including phone calls and text messages. That intelligence is then cross-checked with Israel's in-house AI systems for targeting airstrikes.

AP reported that internal Microsoft data showed multiple Azure subscriptions were tied to Unit 8200, an elite cyber warfare unit within the Israeli Army responsible for clandestine operations, collecting signal intelligence and surveillance.

Following AP's report, Microsoft acknowledged in May that it had sold advanced AI and cloud computing services to the Israeli military during the Gaza war and aided in efforts to locate and rescue Israeli hostages. But the company said an internal review found "no evidence" its Azure platform was used to target or harm people.

The Guardian, working in partnership with the Israeli-Palestinian publication +972 Magazine and the Hebrew-language outlet Local Call, reported in August that the commander of Unit 8200 had met directly with Microsoft chairman and CEO Satya Nadella in 2021. The Israeli unit then used Microsoft products to aid in the development of an AI-powered mass surveillance system that was sweeping up, translating and analysing millions of telephone calls per day made by Palestinian civilians. The report also revealed that data from the Israeli surveillance system was being stored at Microsoft cloud data centers in Europe.

Following The Guardian's report, Microsoft commissioned a second review, this time by an outside law firm. While that review is still ongoing, Smith said Thursday the probe had uncovered evidence that its products were being used in violation of its terms of service. However, Smith did not name the specific Israeli unit losing access to Microsoft services.

Microsoft declined to answer detailed questions from AP on Thursday, including whether Unit 8200 was involved. The company would also not answer how it would ensure the Israeli military wouldn't simply shift its mass surveillance operations to any of the hundreds of other Azure subscriptions under its control.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Hossam Nasr, one of more than a dozen Microsoft employees fired or arrested after protests over the company's involvement in the war in Gaza, called Thursday's announcement a "significant and unprecedented win". But, he said, it was not enough.

"Microsoft has only disabled a small subset of services to only one unit in the Israeli military," said Nasr, an organiser with the group No Azure for Apartheid. "The vast majority of Microsoft's contract with the Israeli military remains intact." *(AP)*

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CM Khandu hails Bhupen Hazarika as bridge of unity and cultural harmony

'Bhupen da's songs continue to guide the younger generation towards unity and cultural pride'

ITANAGAR, Sept 26: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Friday paid floral tributes at the 'Statue of Brotherhood', a sculpture of Bharat Ratna awardee Bhupen Hazarika, at Bolung in Lower Dibang Valley district, describing the singer and composer as a "timeless bridge of unity".

Speaking at the centenary celebrations of Hazarika at Roing, the district headquarters, Khandu said the bard's music was never merely entertainment, but a movement to portray the rich culture of the Northeast, spread compassion, and inspire social consciousness.

"Music must be the voice of the voiceless, a force that breaks barriers and inspires. Bhupen da's songs continue to guide the younger generation towards unity and cultural pride, keeping alive the spirit of harmony he championed," the chief minister said in a series of posts on X.

Khandu visited the historic house at Bolung where Hazarika spent his youthful days.

The residence, once belonging to Gora Pertin, a prominent Arunachali leader and cultural advocate, now cared for by the next generation, still carries the echoes of history and the roots that shaped a legend, the chief minister said.

He also inaugurated the Bhupen Hazarika Museum at Roing, dedicated to preserving the bard's priceless works and memories.

The centenary celebrations included the unfurling of 100 commemorative flags, lighting of ceremonial lamps, and unveiling of a photo gallery and exhibition stalls highlighting Hazarika's artistic journey and cultural legacy.

Khandu received a copy of 'Dr Bhupen Hazarika: Untold Stories from Arunachal Pradesh' by Ananta Kumar Nath, a freelance journalist and cultural enthusiast from Jorhat in Assam and praised the work for documenting lesser-known anecdotes of Hazarika's life and his message of harmony and fraternity.

Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, who also attended the celebration, highlighted Hazarika's enduring influence.

"Dr Hazarika was not just a legendary singer and composer, but a visionary who used music to strengthen bonds of unity and friendship across communities. His voice carried the stories of our land and people to audiences worldwide," Mein said in a social media post.

Mein also released the commemorative book 'Arun Bhupen – a commemorative tribute', produced by the government of Arunachal Pradesh, and announced the institution of the Bhupen Hazarika Samannay Award, presented to cultural promoter Hemanta Bengia.

"Being part of this centenary celebration was an honour. We continue to draw inspiration from his ideals and everlasting melodies," he added.

Born on September 8, 1926, Dr Bhupen Hazarika was a singer, composer, lyricist, poet, and filmmaker whose works symbolised the cultural identity of Assam and the Northeast.

Known as the 'Bard of Brahmaputra', he used his music to highlight social issues, humanism, and the spirit of brotherhood.

Honoured with the Bharat Ratna in 2019, his legacy continues to resonate across generations, uniting communities and inspiring a sense of cultural pride and harmony. *(PTI)*

DC Taggu reviews ITI, schools and health centre in Pangin

HT Correspondent

PANGIN, Sept 26: The Deputy Commissioner of Siang district, Tayi Taggu, on Friday conducted a series of inspections covering the Industrial Training Institute (ITI), Pangin, several educational institutions and the Community Health Centre (CHC), Pangin, with a focus on strengthening accountability in the core sectors of education and healthcare.

The Deputy Commissioner first visited the newly established ITI at Pangin, which has recently been made operational.

The institute is set to begin its academic session soon with three vocational courses — Digital Photography, Solar Technician, and Catering & Hospitality Services.

Reviewing the preparedness of the institute, Taggu interacted with the officials and expressed hope that the vocational training will open avenues of skill development and employment for local youth.

In the course of his visit, the Deputy Commissioner also made surprise inspections at the Government Primary School, Bibok, the Government Secondary School, Pangin, and the Government Higher Secondary School, Pangin.

During the checks, instances of teachers remaining absent without prior permission were found.

Expressing concern over the lapses, Taggu instructed the teaching staff to maintain sincerity and commitment in discharging their duties.

He reminded them that the responsibility of shaping the academic future of students rested with them and stressed that improvement in performance was a collective responsibility.

The Deputy Commissioner also interacted with students, advising them to take their studies seriously and to make full use of the facilities and opportunities available to them.

His interaction was aimed at motivating the students to build a strong academic foundation and contribute meaningfully to the society in the future.

The inspection drive further extended to the Community Health Centre at Pangin. Here, too, cases of absenteeism among medical officers came to light.

Taking note of the matter, Taggu directed the medical staff to strictly adhere to punctuality norms and remain present at their designated postings.

He underscored that timely availability of doctors and healthcare workers was essential for the effective delivery of medical services to the public.

Speaking during the inspection, the Deputy Commissioner reiterated that the sectors of education and health are among the top priorities of the district administration.

He assured that regular monitoring will be carried out to prevent negligence and ensure accountability in these key areas.

Taggu emphasised that the administration was committed to providing quality services to the people of Siang district and that dereliction of duty in these vital sectors would not be tolerated.

The inspection tour at Pangin reflected the district administration's focus on consolidating core infrastructure, enforcing discipline among staff, and strengthening service delivery in both schools and health institutions, alongside building capacity in vocational training.

BMS submits 14-point charter of demands to Chief Minister on labour welfare

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Sept 26: The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), Arunachal Pradesh unit, recently submitted a 14-point charter of demands to the chief minister, seeking urgent intervention and welfare measures for workers and the labour community across the state.

Addressing media persons, BMS State President Ringu Chapo said that workers and labourers in Arunachal Pradesh have long faced multiple challenges and grievances which remain unresolved despite repeated appeals to the authorities.

He said the organisation has consistently raised issues through prayers, applications and representations at various levels, but the demands need to be seriously considered by the highest authority.

"We stand for the welfare of the workers' community and always seek government intervention for resolution of their problems. Employees serving in different departments for several years have been contributing to state and national development, yet their genuine grievances are pending," Chapo stated.

BMS Secretary General Donik Taling informed that during National Labour Day celebrations held in different parts of the state, BMS teams submitted memoranda to the chief guests and guests of honour, most of whom were ministers, lawmakers, senior officials and public leaders. He said the occasion was used to highlight the concerns of workers and to press for redressal of their issues at the policy level.

The 14-point charter of demands submitted to the chief minister includes several measures aimed at improving the condition of workers.

The demands are: declaration of September 17 as a holiday to mark National Labour Day; enhancement of honorarium for Anganwadi workers and helpers; increase in remuneration for ASHA workers and ASHA facilitators; enhancement of PM Poshan workers' honorarium from the present ₹2,000 per month to ₹18,000; enhancement of pension and retirement benefits for contingency and casual workers from ₹3,00,000 to ₹10,00,000; payment of minimum wages to cooks and chowkidars serving in residential schools across the districts; regularisation of Anganwadi workers, helpers, ASHA workers and facilitators on a seniority basis as and when posts fall vacant in their respective departments; provision of compulsory accidental death benefits for workers whose deaths occur during duty hours under the Power and Public Health Engineering Departments; implementation of the principle of "same grade pay for same work" for staff in government establishments; creation of WC/MTS posts and regularisation of contractual and contingency workers serving more than 20 years in a department; compulsory engagement of family members of retired contingency workers who did not receive retirement benefits; and the creation of the Arunachal Pradesh Motor Transport Workers Welfare Board.

The BMS leadership reiterated that these measures are vital to ensure justice and dignity for thousands of workers who have been rendering dedicated service in different departments and sectors.

They urged the government to consider the demands sympathetically and implement them at the earliest.

APSCW concludes four-day session on women empowerment

HT Correspondent

NAHARLAGUN, Sept 26: The Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW) concluded its four-day session on women empowerment today, held from September 23 to 26, with active participation from various stakeholders across the state.

Organised under the theme "Women Entrepreneurship, Motherhood and Health, Leadership and Justice, Guidance and Honour" on the occasion of Navratri, the session featured deliberations and discussions on a wide range of issues affecting women and their socio-economic and cultural development.

The final day of the programme showcased young female achievers from diverse sporting disciplines as resource persons.

Notable panelists included renowned bodybuilder and physique athlete Hillang Yajik, rafting and kayaking guide Devi Dada, and MMA fighter Sonam Zomba.

Health awareness drive for construction workers held at Dollungmukh

HT Correspondent

DOLLUNGMUKH, Sept 26: As part of the nationwide health initiative inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Arunachal Pradesh Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board on Friday organised the "Swasth Nari, Sashakt Parivar Abhiyaan" along with an awareness programme at Dollungmukh in Kamle district.

The programme, dedicated to the welfare of construction workers and their families, witnessed participation from labourers engaged in various firms under the Subansiri Lower Hydroelectric Project (SLHEP).

The initiative aimed at extending healthcare services to the doorsteps of workers, while also spreading awareness on nutrition, hygiene, and welfare benefits available through the Board.

Addressing the gathering as chief guest, Bengia Gomo, Deputy General Manager of NHPC, lauded the efforts of the Welfare Board in ensuring accessible healthcare facilities for the labour community.

Describing workers as the backbone of the nation, he thanked them for their invaluable contribution to the Subansiri project, which is regarded as the largest hydroelectric project in India.

"This dream project could not have been accomplished without the dedicated service of the labour community," he said. Gomo also urged workers employed in firms such as PATEL, PES Engineering Pvt. Ltd, SUMA and G Company under NHPC to register with the Board in order to avail a wide range of statutory and non-statutory benefits.

Speaking on the occasion, Koj Kano, Registering Officer of the Board, elaborated on the significance of the "Swasth Nari, Sashakt Parivar Abhiyaan," which is being conducted nationwide from September 17 to October 2 in convergence with Poshan Maah, the month-long campaign on nutrition awareness.

He explained that the drive seeks to improve health outcomes for women, adolescent girls, and children through health screenings, counselling sessions on nutrition and hygiene, strengthening immunisation coverage, and providing access to comprehensive healthcare services. Kano underlined that women's health is central to building stronger families and, in turn, a stronger nation.

Jitu Rigia, OSD of the Board, explained the registration process and highlighted several benefits extended to registered workers, including maternity benefits, educational assistance for children, marriage support, death and accidental benefits, among others.

NDC delegation visits Arunachal village bordering China

ITANAGAR, Sept 26: An 18-member delegation from the National Defence College (NDC) in New Delhi visited Kibithu village in Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district, bordering China, a defence official said on Friday

The delegation consisted of senior military officials, civil service officers and representatives from friendly countries who are pursuing a course in the institute.

During the trip on Thursday, the delegation visited Walong War Memorial and paid homage to the soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice during the Battle of Walong against China in 1962.

The heroic actions of the soldiers in the face of overwhelming odds were remembered with deep respect, inspiring all present with their indomitable courage and spirit of sacrifice, Defence PRO Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said.

The delegation was also briefed on the operational preparedness and high state of readiness of the Indian Army units deployed in the forward areas along the Line of Actual Control.

They appreciated the professionalism, dedication and resilience of the troops operating in the challenging terrain and harsh climatic conditions of the Eastern frontiers, the official said.

The visit not only provided the delegation with valuable insights into the strategic significance of the region but also reinforced the commitment of the Armed Forces towards safeguarding national security and sovereignty, Lt Col Rawat added. *(PTI)*

Cycling competition kicks off World Tourism Day celebrations in Arunachal

'Tourism can open new avenues for growth'

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Sept 26: As a curtain raiser to World Tourism Day 2025, the Department of Tourism, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, on Friday, organised a cycling competition from Donyi Polo Airport, Hollongi, to the DK Convention Centre at IG Park, Itanagar.

The 30-kilometre race was held under the global theme "Tourism and Sustainable Transformation" and drew enthusiastic participation from local youth and cycling enthusiasts.

The event began in the early morning with the reporting and registration of participants at Hollongi Airport.

Before the flag-off, senior officials of the Tourism Department and local officers of the state government briefed the riders on safety measures and underscored the importance of health and fitness.

Medical check-ups were also conducted to ensure readiness of the cyclists.

Chief secretary Manish Kumar Gupta formally flagged off the competition, setting the participants on their journey towards the state capital.

In a show of solidarity and encouragement, Gupta himself took part in the race, riding alongside the youth participants.

His active participation drew cheers from the onlookers and residents of the capital complex who had gathered along the route to witness the event.

Addressing the gathering, Gupta spoke on the importance of tourism for Arunachal Pradesh's economic development. He described the state as the "Switzerland of India" and highlighted its immense potential in cultural, spiritual and adventure tourism.

Emphasising that tourism can open new avenues for growth, he appealed to the people to create opportunities in the sector and extend a warm welcome to visitors.

He also underlined the role of tourism in generating employment and contributing to holistic development of the state.

The route from Hollongi to IG Park was equipped with hydration points, medical support and traffic marshals to ensure smooth and safe conduct of the race.

The competition concluded at IG Park around 7:45 AM when the lead cyclists crossed the finish line.

Tajum Dere secured the first position, completing the race in 50 minutes and 25 seconds, followed by Ahonda Menjo in second place with 51 minutes and 15 seconds, and Laa Tam in third place, finishing in 1 hour, 5 minutes and 15 seconds. The winners received cash prizes of ₹20,000, ₹15,000 and ₹10,000 respectively. All participants were honoured with medals and certificates.

The formal prize distribution ceremony will be held during the main World Tourism Day programme on September 27.

Tourism officials at the event stressed on the sub-theme "Wheels of Change: Pedalling Sustainability, Powering Tourism".

They encouraged cycling not only as a sport but also as an eco-friendly practice that promotes good health, sustainable living and tourism development.

The cycling competition served as the opening event in a series of activities being organised by the Department of Tourism to celebrate World Tourism Day 2025.

With the enthusiastic participation of youth and the community, the programme highlighted the state's commitment to sustainable tourism and reaffirmed Arunachal Pradesh's resolve to promote its natural and cultural wealth through active public engagement.

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'This means a well-established system is already in place'

Bihar's 75 lakh women receive ₹10,000 each as PM launches entrepreneurial scheme ahead of polls

PATNA, Sept 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched Bihar's Mukhya Mantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana, and transferred ₹ 10,000 each to the bank accounts of 75 lakh women.

The ₹ 7,500-crore scheme, an initiative of Bihar's NDA government, is aimed at promoting women's empowerment through self-employment and livelihood opportunities.

The prime minister launched the scheme virtually from Delhi, with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, his deputy Samrat Choudhary, and several Union and state ministers joining it through video conference from Patna. A large number of women of the state also joined it virtually. The launch of the scheme assumes significance ahead of the upcoming assembly polls in the state.

The PM said he was impressed by the vision of the scheme, under which at least one woman from every family will be a beneficiary.

Starting with an initial financial support of ₹ 10,000, up to ₹ 2 lakh would be provided to the beneficiaries depending on the success of their enterprise.

Asserting that the magnitude of the scheme is massive, the PM said that the women of Bihar can now open shops selling groceries, utensils, cosmetics, toys, and stationery. They can also pursue livestock-related businesses such

as cattle rearing and poultry farming, he said, adding that for these ventures, necessary training will be provided. He noted that Bihar already has a robust network of self-help groups, with nearly 11 lakh groups actively functioning.

This means a well-established system is already in place, the PM said. Noting that the central government has opened new sectors for women and daughters across the country, the prime minister highlighted that today, a large number of young women are joining the armed forces and police, and even flying fighter jets.

Affirming that addressing every hardship faced by citizens is the government's responsibility, Modi recalled that during the COVID-19 pandemic, a scheme to provide free foodgrains was launched.

"Now, under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, over 8.5 crore needy individuals in Bihar are receiving free ration... this has significantly improved lives," he said.

"A large portion of Bihar prefers Usna (parboiled) rice. Previously, mothers and sisters were provided with Arwa rice through government ration, and had to exchange it in the market for Usna rice -- often receiving only 10 kg of Usna rice for 20 kg of Arwa rice. The government has now started providing Usna rice directly through the ration system," he added.

Modi said that traditionally, property in India, be it a house, shop or land, was registered in the name of men.

However, with the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, a new provision was introduced to ensure that mothers, sisters and daughters are also named as owners of homes, he said.

The PM said that over 50 lakh PM Awas homes have been constructed in Bihar, and in most of them, women are listed as co-owners.

The PM also virtually interacted with women, who had joined from different district headquarters in large numbers.

Interacting with Putul Devi, a small entrepreneur from Purnea district, who told PM that now she would expand her small sweet shop and would sell 'jalebi' and other popular sweets, the PM, took a veiled dig at opposition leaders and said, "You spoke about selling 'jalebi'... you must be aware of the fact that lot of politics was played on 'jalebi' in the country in the recent past."

The PM was referring to the politics over 'jalebi' during the Haryana assembly polls last year.

Further, speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said, "The NDA government has been working for the overall development of the state. We are improving the conditions of women and empowering them. We have always worked in the interest of the people and will continue to work tirelessly for the development of the state. We stay focused on our work." (PTI)

MiG-21 added many proud moments to military aviation journey: Rajnath

CHANDIGARH, Sept 26: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said the MiG-21 is not only an aircraft or a machine but a national pride, and a testimony to the deep ties between India and Russia.

Noting that the over 60-year-old journey of the MiG-21 is unmatched, he said the mighty machine picked up the burden of the country's security on its wings for decades, and shaped "our confidence and strengthened our strategy".

The defence minister was addressed a gathering at the decommissioning ceremony of the Russian-origin MiG-21 at the Chandigarh Air Force Station here.

The iconic Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21 fighter jets, which have been the backbone of Indian Air Force's (IAF) combat fleet, flew for the last time in Indian skies here on Friday, bringing the curtain down on a 62-year-long journey. The MiG-21 fighter jets have been part of the IAF's combat fleet since the 1960s.

Remembering the valour of the armed forces, Singh said the MiG-21 has a big contribution in their journey of bravery.

"We gathered here for the final operational sortie of MiG-21. Being amongst you, I have emotions of pride and gratitude," Singh said.

"When we are today giving a send-off to MiG 21 from its operational journey, I feel that we are giving a send-off to a chapter which will be written in golden letters in military aviation history," he said.

"MiG-21 is not only an aircraft or a machine but it is also a proof of deep ties between India and Russia," he stated.

The history of military aviation is incredible, he said, adding MiG-21 aircraft added many proud moments in the military aviation journey.

"In the history of the world's military aviation, there has not been any fighter jet which was made in such a big number," he stated.

Over 11,500 MiG 21 aircraft were made worldwide, and of them, 850 fighter jets remained part of the IAF, he said and added, "This number is the testimony of this aircraft's popularity, credibility and multi-dimensional capability".

"MiG-21 has been a witness to many brave works. Its contribution has not been limited to one incident or a war," he said as he recalled its role in the 1971 war with

Pakistan, 1999 Kargil conflict as well as 2019 Balakot air strikes.

Recalling the many occasions when MiG-21 proved its decisive capacity, he said, "From 1971 war to Kargil war, or from Balakot air strikes to Operation Sindoor, there was no such occasion when MiG-21 did not provide tremendous power to our armed forces". "Who can forget the 1971 war? During a war against Pakistan, the day MiG-21 attacked the Dhaka Governor House in adverse conditions, that day the outline of the outcome of the battle was decided," he said.

"Be it any historic mission, MiG-21 always kept the honour of the national flag high. This farewell is of our collective memories and national pride, and of this journey of courage, sacrifice and excellence," he said.

Singh said he was seeing the MiG-21 journey from a different perspective as well.

"This perspective is also giving a glimpse of traditions of ancient India. Our ancient culture teaches that the presence of God is not only in living but also in non-living things," the minister said.

"We consider this land our mother and ourselves its children. You must have seen that when a new house is built, we perform 'puja' before entering it. If we have a new car, we perform 'puja' for it.

"In a few days on Dussehra, we perform 'Shastra puja'. This tradition is not only faith and belief, it is an emotion of our gratitude towards each tool, each system and each instrument which protect and empower us," he said.

"Our civilisation and our culture teach us that respect should not only be given to a human being but also to everything which made some contribution in our lives," Singh said.

"When we give respect to every small and big thing then MiG-21 is our national pride and it has been a shield of our defence and a symbol of our strength and then how can we leave its respect," he stated.

When we gathered here to give farewell to MiG-21, it should not be seen as a formal military ceremony but as an expansion of cultural tradition, he said.

The way we give respect to a soldier on his retirement, the same way, we are today giving respect to this mighty machine which picked up the burden of our security on its wings for decades, he said.

Everybody knows about its valour, he said, adding the aircraft is deeply embedded in its country's emotions and memories

Hailing the role of the aircraft, he said the 60-year-old journey of MiG-21 is unmatched.

"For us this is not a fighter jet but like a family member and with which our attachment is quite deep," he said.

He said the MiG-21 shaped our confidence, strengthened our strategy and helped us in establishing at the global stage. This fighter jet faced each challenge in its journey and proved its capability every time, he asserted.

The minister made it clear that the MiG-21 that were being used till now were 40-year old while those inducted in the 1960s and 1970s were out of service for a long time.

"When there is talk of MiG-21, it is often said that IAF was flying 60-year-old aircraft. I want to clarify an important fact that the MiG-21, which came to the armed forces in the 1960s and 1970s, have already been out of service a long time ago," he said.

MiG 21 aircraft, which we were flying till now, were maximum 40-year-old. The 40-year lifetime for the standards of such aircraft is completely normal, he asserted.

In several countries, such fighter jets are kept active till such time, he said, stressing that MiG-21 had been kept updated technically. (PTI)

PM to unveil rail, telecom projects in Odisha today

BHUBANESWAR, Sept 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Odisha on September 27 during which he will flag off an Amrit Bharat Express, unveil railway projects worth Rs 1,700 crore and BSNL's 'Swadeshi' 4G stack.

From Jharsuguda, he will also announce the expansion of eight IITs, grant super-specialty status to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur and VIMSAR hospital in Sambalpur, launch a national skill development programme and provide aid to 50,000 beneficiaries under the Antyodaya scheme.

This will be the Prime Minister's sixth visit to Odisha in 15 months since the BJP came to power in the state in June, 2024.

Initially, the place for his public meeting was fixed at Berhampur in Ganjam district, but it was later changed to Jharsuguda due to a forecast of heavy rain in southern Odisha on Saturday.

However, according to the mid-day bulletin issued by the IMD on Friday, Jharsuguda, the place where Modi will address a public meeting, is among the nine districts where thunderstorm/lightning with gusty surface wind speed reaching 20-30 kmph gusting to 40 kmph, is likely to occur.

"We have made preparations for holding the PM's event keeping in view the weather conditions," a senior minister, who along with Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, inspected the meeting venue.

Apart from the CM, several cabinet ministers, Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja, DGP YB Khurania and others visited the spot.

"The chief minister, during his visit to the meeting venue on Thursday found certain lapses and directed the authorities to correct them much before the arrival of Modi," a minister said. (PTI)

Abhishek Banerjee hails Calcutta HC order on deportation, slams Centre

KOLKATA, Sept 26: TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Friday hailed Calcutta High Court's order setting aside the Centre's decision to deport two women and their families from West Bengal's Birbhum district to Bangladesh, saying it exposed a "cruel and systematic campaign of harassment aimed at Bengalis".

In a post on X, Banerjee said the "long arm of the law has finally caught up" as the court held the Foreigners Regional Registration Office's (Delhi) detention and deportation order unlawful and directed the "immediate repatriation of six people, including the pregnant woman from Birbhum, who were labelled 'Bangladeshi migrants' and expelled".

The TMC Lok Sabha leader alleged that the episode highlighted a targeted political agenda.

"This judgment lays bare a cruel and systematic campaign of harassment aimed at Bengalis by the Bangla-Birodhi zamindars," he said, vowing to "hold the ones responsible to account, in courts, in public debate and at the polls." He warned that in the 2026 Assembly elections, "the people of Bengal will not tolerate XENOPHOBIA, HUMILIATION, or the POLITICS OF EXCLUSION. Come 2026, those who trafficked in fear and persecution will face a decisive verdict from the electorate."

Reiterating his party's stance, he added that "justice has begun to be served" and that the TMC's resolve to protect the dignity, rights and language of the people of Bengal remains "unshaken".

Banerjee's remarks came in the backdrop of the Calcutta High Court order on Friday quashing the Centre's move to deport two women and their families, terming them "illegal immigrants".

The court directed the central government to ensure that Sonali Bibi, Sweety Bibi and four other deported family members, including three children, are brought back to India within a month. It also dismissed the Centre's plea to grant a temporary stay on the order.

While the BJP is yet to react to the TMC leader's statement, Banerjee's sharp attack indicates that the ruling party in West Bengal plans to make the issue of deportation and alleged targeting of Bengalis a major political plank ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections.

The issue of migrant safety has been a rallying point for the TMC in recent weeks. (PTI)

Pray to Maa Durga that 'Sonar Bangla' glory is restored by new govt post 2026 polls: Shah

KOLKATA, Sept 26: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday inaugurated the Durga Puja pandal of Santosh Mitra Square here, and said he prayed to the goddess that post the 2026 West Bengal assembly polls, there is a new government which restores the state's lost 'Sonar Bangla' glory. Shah said Bengal should once again become safe, peaceful and prosperous, fulfilling the dream of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

"I have prayed to Maa Durga that after this election, a government should be formed that can build a 'Sonar Bangla' (golden Bengal). Our Bengal should once again become safe, prosperous, peaceful and abundant. We should be able to build a Bengal that Kavi Guru Rabindranath Tagore had envisioned," Shah said.

"I also extend my greetings to people of the state and the country

for Durga Puja," Shah said at the inauguration of the pandal of the Santosh Mitra Square Sarbojanin Durgotsab Samity in north Kolkata. The home minister also expressed grief over the recent rain-related deaths in the state, and conveyed condolences to the bereaved families.

"At the beginning of the festivities, we experienced a very sad moment. More than 10 people lost their lives. I pay my homage to all those who died," Shah said. At least 11 people died following torrential rain in the metropolis and adjoining areas on September 23.

Shah described Bengal's Durga Puja festivities as a cultural treasure admired across the globe.

"This nine-day Navratri festival has become famous not only in Bengal and India, but all over the world. This great tradition of Bengal is witnessed with great joy by the whole world. For nine days, everyone in Bengal dedicates themselves to the worship of Shakti," he said.

"May the festival of Durga Puja lead Bengal towards new heights, and through the development of the state, may we be able to realise the dream of a developed India that our leader Narendra Modi ji has envisioned," Shah said.

The home minister also inaugurated the Durga Puja pandal of the BJP-backed Paschim Banga Sanskriti Mancha at the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC) in Salt Lake. The senior BJP leader also paid tribute to educationist and social reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar on his birth anniversary. (PTI)

Manmohan Singh library with 1,200 books encapsulating journey of country, Cong opens

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: Sections dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Indira Gandhi, multiple volumes of "The Encyclopedia of the Congress", as well as the party's poll manifestoes, are part of a library named after former prime minister Manmohan Singh in the Congress headquarters.

The library was inaugurated by Congress Parliamentary Party chief Sonia Gandhi on Friday in the presence of Singh's wife Gursharan Kaur and other members of the family, as well as party president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi.

The library houses about 1,200 books, to begin with, which encapsulate the journey of the country and the Congress.

"Today, on the occasion of Dr. Manmohan Singh ji's birthday, we inaugurated the Dr. Manmohan Singh Research Centre and Library at Indira Bhawan, New Delhi. Dr. Singh's life and work are a beacon of simplicity, honesty, and dedication," Rahul Gandhi said in a post on Facebook. "This centre is not just a tribute to his legacy but a reminder for future generations of what true service to the nation looks like," he said. In a post on X, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "Today on the occasion of the 93rd birth anniversary of Dr Manmohan Singh, the Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party Sonia Gandhi ji inaugurated the Dr Manmohan Singh Research Center and Library in the presence of Gursharan Kaur ji."

Though the Congress had an informal library at its 24, Akbar Road headquarters but this is the first time the party has built a proper library with over 1,200 books, including many rare ones at its new Indira Bhawan headquarters. As one enters the library, what catches the eye is a rare photograph of all the members of the Constituent Assembly who framed India's Constitution, while on the other side is a photograph of Manmohan Singh in his office in 1991, the year he presented his historic budget as the finance minister that ushered in liberalisation.

There are separate sections dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi and India's first prime minister Nehru. There are also separate sections for Singh, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, among others. There are also books on former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao.

The library houses biographies, selected works and selected speeches of many freedom fighters. It also has books on diplomacy and country-specific books on their bilateral ties with India.

An interesting section houses several volumes of "The Encyclopedia of the Indian National Congress" that consists of the entire history of the party since 1885, including commentaries, speeches and minutes of Congress Working Committee meetings. This encyclopedia has been compiled by a librarian from the party's office at 5, Rajendra Prasad Road -- Abdul Moin Zaidi -- and his wife Shahida Gufran Zaidi. There are several books by Zaidi, documenting the 139-year history of the party. The library also has manifestoes of the party from all general elections since 1951-52. It has historic pictures -- from Nehru and VK Krishna Menon walking together to founding leaders of the Congress -- A O Hume, Dadabhai Naoroji and William Wedderburn -- in one frame.

Several books written by P Chidambaram, Shashi Tharoor, Mani Shankar Aiyar, Manish Tewari and Salman Khurshid, are also part of the library. There are also books on leaders of other parties, including former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in the library.

Indira Gandhi Bhawan, designed by Hafeez Contractor, was inaugurated earlier this year. It narrates the tale of the party's 139-year-old history with its walls adorning pictures from the freedom struggle to the party's governance achievements. (PTI)

Mental well-being central to preventing heart disease, says former Union health secy

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: Mental well-being is central to preventing chronic and non-communicable diseases, especially heart disease, former Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said on Friday, underlining that alongside regular exercise and stress management, nurturing mental health early in families and reinforcing it in schools is critical.

Bhushan said life is not a sprint but a marathon, and young people need guidance to build patience, resilience, and balance rather than be pushed into early burnout.

He was delivering the keynote address at the Illness to Wellness Awareness Conference held here on the occasion of World Heart Day 2025.

"Schools can play a transformative role by replacing unhealthy practices with healthier alternatives, fostering mental wellness, and encouraging physical activity.

"If we want to address India's heart health crisis, we need to shift from a curative mindset to cultivating genuine health-seeking behaviour across our families, schools, and communities," Bhushan, who is also the chairperson of the Illness to Wellness Foundation's governing council, said.

The conference, under the theme 'Heart Care – Don't Miss a Beat', saw leading cardiologists, policymakers, and public health professionals advocating to address India's growing heart health crisis, as it emphasised the urgent need for preventive care, lifestyle interventions, mental health integration, digital health solutions, and community awareness.

Anil Rajput, chairperson, advisory council, Illness to Wellness Foundation, said, "World Heart Day reminds us that the heart is truly the seat of life. We are fortunate that

the Government of India has implemented a range of initiatives addressing heart health, ?from the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) to Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and PM-JAY (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana), providing preventive care, early detection, and financial protection for treatment."

Coupled with wellness movements like Fit India, Khelo India, and Har Ghar Yoga, these programmes are promoting physical activity, mental well-being, and healthy lifestyles, according to Rajput. Technology, including telemedicine and AI-driven diagnostics, is further bridging the gap between urban and rural healthcare, ensuring timely and efficient heart care for all citizens, he said. "Supporting these efforts collectively can make a meaningful difference in safeguarding India's heart health," he added.

Experts addressed the rising incidence of sudden cardiac arrests in young adults, the impact of mental stress, pollution, and poor lifestyle choices, and the critical importance of timely preventive screenings. They also highlighted how digital health, wearable technology, and artificial intelligence are transforming cardiac care delivery across India, bridging the urban-rural divide.

Dr Sandeep Bansal, director, Vardhman Mahavir Medical College and Safdarjung Hospital, said, "Cardiovascular disease is no longer a problem of the elderly. ?India is witnessing heart attacks striking far earlier, with nearly 60 per cent of cases occurring below the age of 55. Prevention is the most cost-effective strategy; it costs only a fraction, ?about one-sixth, ?of what treatment demands.

"To achieve real progress, we must strengthen hypertension control, integrate mental health into heart care, and raise awareness right from schools." Bansal said.

Addressing heart disease requires collective effort, strong government policies, private sector participation, and societal acceptance of healthier choices, he said.

Dr K K Talwar, chairman, PSRI Heart Institute, Delhi, added that while genetics play a role in heart disease, lifestyle factors such as stress, work pressure, and job insecurity are equally important.

"Early awareness, adoption of healthy habits, and stress management, ?from families, schools, and workplaces, are essential to prevent cardiovascular events. Regular initiatives like cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training sessions further equip communities to respond effectively in emergencies, helping save lives and promote overall heart health," he said. (PTI)

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'Shift to GST 2.0 with a two-rate structure poses immediate transitional challenges'

Manipur: Market drive conducted on revised GST rates

IMPHAL, Sept 26: Manipur government officials on Friday undertook a drive at key market areas of Imphal to check and raise awareness on the implementation of revised GST rates in the state.

Market drive was conducted by officials of Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution along with DIPR at key commercial areas of Thangal bazaar, Paona market and Khuyathong in Imphal, where most wholesalers and distributors are concentrated, officials said.

During the drive, revised GST rate structures across different categories of stationery items, medicines and FMCG were given while traders and consumers were informed on the "compliance procedures and benefits of the new reforms", they said.

Urging all sections to actively embrace the reforms, the officials also stated that "the shift to GST 2.0 with a two-rate structure poses

immediate transitional challenges".

They called on wholesalers and retailers to maintain proper records, adjust pricing with anti profiteering rules, and pro actively manage inventory, pricing, compliance and communication.

Meanwhile, Officer on Special Duty (Petroleum Oil Lubricant), Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Haobam Bobby told mediapersons that, "Strict monitoring will be carried out against the illegal sale and stocking of petroleum products such as Motor Spirit (petrol) and High Speed Diesel (diesel) without valid licenses.

"As per the Explosives Act, any individual dealing with petroleum products must obtain a license from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO)", he said, adding that "unauthorised persons have been found operating petrol fuel dispensers from their residences and selling fuel illegally.

Haobam cautioned that such practices are extremely dangerous, pose risks of explosion and fire hazards.

Haobam also stated that these activities are clear violations of the Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980, and offenders will face strict penalties under the law.

Haobam also said, "CAF & PD has issued a 15-day deadline to those involved to immediately cease such practices, failing which, legal action will be initiated." *(PTI)*

Warning against selling of fuel illegally

IMPHAL, Sept 26: Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (CAF&PD) Department, Government of Manipur, has given 15 days' time to individuals illegally selling petrol and diesel to stop the practice, warning that legal action will be taken under the Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980, if the practice does not stop.

Officer on Special Duty (Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants), CAF&PD, Haobam Bobby announced the decision at the DIPR auditorium in Imphal on Friday.

He said the move comes after complaints of bulk sale of petrol and high-speed diesel using fuel pump nozzles in areas of Thoubal and Imphal East districts. "Those selling fuel illegally in bulk must stop within 15 days from today (September 26). Failure to comply will invite strict legal action," Bobby warned.

The department will also con-

duct drives against those stocking fuel in bulk to verify whether they possess a 'certificate of safety' issued by the Chief Controller and a 'certificate of tank test' under Rule 126 of the Petroleum Rules, 2002. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas had notified these guidelines on March 13, 2002.

During inspections, officials will verify petrol pumps and home-based dispensing units to check whether they have valid dealership from an Oil Marketing Company (OMC), along with no-objection certificates, environment clearance, fire safety certificates, and explosive licenses from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO).

Bobby further said the crackdown will also target roadside black-market petrol sellers across the state. *(NNN)*

Tripura CM sanctions ₹ 50.65 cr for infrastructure, welfare projects

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Sept 26: In the run-up to the Durga Puja festival, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, realising the importance of various works and in consultation with the state departments, has approved a total of ₹ 50.65 crore.

Saha has given administrative and financial approval for a number of projects.

₹ 12 crore has been approved for sanitation and solid waste management, safe drinking water, water drainage, road construction, maintenance of capital assets, conservation and development of water bodies, street lighting in newly created wards/nagar panchayats, provision of online services, construction of electric crematoriums, etc, in 14 municipalities and 6 nagar panchayats of the state.

₹ 9.37 crore has been approved for maintenance work of various types of fixed assets for the convenience of the public during the upcoming Durga Puja.

₹ 9.28 crore has been approved for the expeditious completion of various pre-approved construction works in six R&D divisions of the state, namely Teliamura, Amarpur, Kumarghat, Kanchanpur, Satchanda, and Shantirbazar.

In Agartala city, administrative approval and expenditure of ₹ 17.38 crore have been sanctioned for the development of Cantonment Road, covering the stretches from Durga Chowmuhani to Lake Chowmuhani, Lake Chowmuhani to Radhanagar, Buddha Mandir to Radhamadhav Unnayan Sangha, and Pragati School to Buddha Mandir.

"On the occasion of the upcoming Durga Puja festival, a total of ₹ 2,310 each has been sanctioned as a festival grant for 11,150 cook-cum-helper workers working under the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Scheme (School MDM), and a total of ₹ 2.58 crore has been sanctioned as bonus and advance for 26 contractual workers under the Primary Education Department (PM-Poshan)," said Saha.

US Consul General calls on Mizoram CM

AIZAWL, Sept 26: US Consul General in Kolkata, Kathy Giles, called on Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Friday and discussed investment opportunities in the northeastern state, an official said.

Diaz informed Lalduhoma that her country is ready to extend help to the Mizoram government if there is any area in which US-based companies can do investment, he said.

In response, Lalduhoma thanked Diaz for her willingness to help Mizoram and informed her that foreign funding projects are being executed with the permission of the Centre, the official said.

The chief minister said that a good relationship between Mizoram and the US is necessary, as the number of Mizos willing to visit the US has been increasing after many people from the Mizo community have settled in the US.

Diaz also met leaders of the Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) on Friday and had a fruitful discussion, according to CYMA general secretary Malsawmliana. *(PTI)*

Zoologists to assess rodent outbreak in Mizoram

AIZAWL, Sept 26: Teams of Zoologists from Pachhunga University College (PUC) in Aizawl will study and assess the current outbreak of rodents, sources in PUC said.

Led by Prof Lalramliana, two teams from the Zoology department of PUC set out on Thursday to visit the affected villages, while one team set out on Friday, the sources said.

The teams will examine and find out the species of the rodents and identify whether they are potential to spread scrub typhus, it said.

According to the findings of experts from PUC and researchers from other countries, rodents carry and spread several diseases and it was confirmed that scrub typhus is largely spread by rats or rodents in Mizoram.

Rodent attacks are currently reported in at least three Mizoram districts, affecting more than 800 jhum farmers. State agriculture department deputy director (Plant Protection) Lalrindiki said that the rodent infestation is linked to the flowering of a particular bamboo species called bambusa tulda (rawthing), locally known as 'Thingtam' famine, which occurs every 46 years and is due in 2025. The rodent infestation has been reported from 45 villages in Mamit district and two in Lunglei district and one in Saitual district, she said.

Lalrindiki said 800 jhum farmers, who mainly grow rice and soybeans, have been affected by the rodent attacks. Out of 2,500 hectares of land under jhum cultivation, about 158 hectares have so far been infested, she said.

Mamit district, which borders Tripura and Bangladesh, is the worst affected, with 769 farmers from 45 villages facing the attacks.

She said that the agriculture department supplied rodenticides or plant protection chemicals to farmers free of cost, and teams from the department have been dispatched to the affected villages to guide farmers and village council leaders on how to use them. Awareness on mass poisoning of rodents is being carried out, and the department is closely monitoring the situation, she said. Thingtam', which recurs in a 48-year cycle, last happened in the state in 1977. Mizoram reported the last rodent attack in 2022, during which at least nine districts were affected. Due to the flowering of Melocanna baccifera, Mizoram experienced a famine-like situation in 2007. However, no one died because of timely financial assistance from the Centre and massive preparation by the state government. *(PTI)*

'NMC has sanctioned proposal for 50 new MBBS seats in AGMC'

AGARTALA, Sept 26: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday said the National Medical Council has almost sanctioned a proposal to introduce 50 more MBBS seats in the Agartala Govt Medical College (AGMC).

Currently, the AGMC has 150 MBBS seats and 115 postgraduate seats in different disciplines. While speaking at a programme, the CM said, "We have approached the National Medical Council (NMC) for the introduction of 50 more MBBS seats in AGMC and the proposal has been almost sanctioned", he said. *(PTI)*

CORRIGENDUM NO. 04 FOR TENDER NOTICE NO.: CON/2025/AUG/05, DATED. 18-08-2025

Corrigendum - 04 for Tender Notice No. CON/2025/AUG/05 has been issued against **Tender No. CE-CON-DK-TN-2025-04**. For details please visit in website **www.ireps.gov.in**.

Chief Engineer/Con-6,
N.F. Railway, Maligaon
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Construction Organization
Serving Customers With A Smile

ENGINEERING WORKS IN TINSUKIA DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: TSK/Engg/52 of 2025, Dated: 23-09-2025; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work; **Item No. 1; Brief Description of Item :** At Tinsukia Division-Provision of cover shed, guard wall, sump arrangement, approach road and drain at RUB (RM 282 and RM 287). **Tender Value:** ₹4,69,16,096/-; **Earnest Money**: ₹3,84,600/-; Date & time of **closing** of tender at **15:00** hrs. and **opening** at **16:00** hrs. on **15-10-2025**. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to **15:00** hrs. on **15-10-2025** in the website **www.ireps.gov.in**

DRM (W), Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Nagaland deputy CM Patton conducts surprise inspection of govt offices

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Sept 26: Continuing his series of surprise inspections in government offices, Nagaland deputy chief minister Y Patton found 12 staff members absent across various departments in Wokha on Friday. Patton conducted surprise checks in the offices of horticulture department, public health engineering department, district planning & machinery department, and land resources department.

During the inspection, one out of 11 staff members of the horticulture department was found absent, PHED reported one absentee from a total strength of 32, planning & machinery office had five absentees out of 14, and the land resources office recorded five absentees from a total of 17 staff.

Patton was accompanied by Wokha deputy commissioner Vineet Kumar, SP Relo Aye, and representatives from Lotha Hoho and Lotha Students' Union, including their respective presidents Mhondamo Ovung and Lirhonthung Kithan.

Dog bite cases in Meghalaya alarming

SHILLONG, Sept 26: Meghalaya reports a staggering 19,000 dog-bite cases annually, with East Khasi Hills accounting for over 5,000 cases and 15 fatalities already this year. Alarmingly, most deaths occur due to the casual approach towards bites or scratches.

This was revealed during a function to observe the World Rabies Day organized by the District Joint Steering Committee for Rabies Elimination, East Khasi Hills, in collaboration with the Health and Veterinary Departments, Shillong Municipal Board, NGOs, and community leaders at Lumparing Sports Club Indoor Hall on Friday.

The event was held under the theme "Act now: You, me and the community", emphasizing the importance of collective action in preventing rabies.

Addressing the function as chief guest, Minister incharge Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Sanbor Shullai urged citizens to vaccinate pets, promptly manage dog-bite wounds, and support stray dog control, emphasizing that rabies is 100% preventable but fatal if neglected. PK Sangma, Additional Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills, highlighted the urgent need for community action to prevent rabies, while Dr RR Marak, District Nodal Officer, NRCP, shared alarming statistics on dog-bite cases and fatalities in Meghalaya. *(NNN)*

Mizoram to introduce common exam for class 9 students from new academic session

AIZAWL, Sept 26: Mizoram Education Minister Dr. Vanlalthlana on Friday said the government will introduce a common exam for class 9 students from the next academic session to improve the education system. Vanlalthlana visited some state-run schools in the state's Mamit district, which share borders with Tripura and Bangladesh.

Addressing teachers and students while visiting the schools, the minister said the Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE) will introduce common examinations in class 9 from the new academic session. He said the purpose of the move was to academically prepare students for national-level entrance exams such as JEE and NEET, while also motivating teachers to enhance their efforts. The minister added that the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) will introduce the Standardized Assessment for Elementary Schools (SAfES). *(PTI)*

Elaborate security arrangements in place for peaceful Durga Puja celebrations in Tripura: DGP

AGARTALA, Sept 26: Tripura Director General of Police (DGP) Anurag Dhankar on Friday said elaborate security arrangements are in place across the state to ensure peaceful Durga puja celebrations.

Durga Puja, the biggest festival in the northeastern state, starts from September 28.

"Altogether 7,750 security personnel will be deployed during the festivities," Dhankar told reporters at a press conference here.

In state capital Agartala, there are over 250 pujas.

Dhankar said as part of foolproof security, police will install 320 CCTV cameras at the strategic locations in addition to the existing cameras.

Puja organisers were also exhorted to install CCTV cameras for crowd management and identify suspicious movement of anti-social elements, if any, he said.

Dhankar said as many as 241 assistance booths will be set up in important locations to assist devotees.

"We are expecting people from rural areas to visit Agartala to join the festivities using trains. Therefore, we will depute security personnel at railway stations", he said.

According to Dhankar, police will strictly enforce noise pollution during the festival season.

"Puja organisers will be allowed to use play music under the permissible limits", he said. *(PTI)*

NOTICE

Application is invited from intending private elephant owners for participating elephant safari for tourist season 2025-26 in Western Range, Bagori, Kaziranga National Park. The elephant owners having all relevant documents like up-to-date ownership certificate, Medical certificate etc. and experienced for ride of tourists shall be eligible to participate in elephant safari. Application form along with terms & conditions (document id: EAWL/elephant safari/ 2025-26/01 dated. 25.09.2025) may be obtain from the respective range office under Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, Bokakhat or freely downloaded from the website(s) https://kaziranga.nptr.in/. The duly filled in application forms will be received in the Western Range. Bagori latest by 3-00 p.m. on 21st October, 2025.

Sd/-
Divisional Forest Officer
Eastern Assam Wildlife Division
Bokakhat.

DIPR /D/ HLT/186/27-Sep-25

Discussions focused on state's research priorities

JICA team visits Kohima to explore research collaboration

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Sept 26: A delegation of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) India office, led by its country head Takuro Takeuchi and representative Saya Ishikawa, visited Kohima to explore research collaboration between the Nagaland Institute of Medical Sciences & Research (NIMSR) and Japanese universities, an official statement said on Friday.

JICA is supporting the establishment of a 400-bed Medical College Hospital at NIMSR through official development assistance, aimed at strengthening tertiary healthcare services and enhancing medical education in Nagaland.

The JICA delegation visited Naga Hospital Authority Kohima, Seikhazou urban primary health centre and NIMSR Kohima and held meetings with Nagaland chief secretary Sentiyanger Imchen and officials at the directorate of health & family welfare.

The discussions focused on the state's research priorities, including stomach cancer, toxicology, elderly care management, infertility, and medicinal plant and biohazard studies, as well as potential faculty and student exchanges.

It was informed that the state will identify the scope and priority areas where such collaboration can take place, based on Nagaland's requirements, so that these can be taken up in subsequent meetings.

State health officials proposed that such collaborations could extend beyond the health sector, to which the JICA delegation said a follow-up visit may take place in January 2026 to advance these initiatives.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
DIRECTOR CUM ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, P.W.D. (R&B), HILLS, ASSAM, DIPHU.

No. ACEH/CS/H&TMI/67/2025-26/01 Dated:25/09/2025

PRESS NOTICE INVITING BID

The Director cum Additional Chief Engineer, P.W.D(R&B), Hills, Assam Diphu, on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from registered contractors of Class-I(A) category for "Construction of Hotel and Tourism Management Institute at Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam" on EPC turnkey basis, Details may be seen at e-procurement portal website www.assamtenders.gov.in. and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 26/09/2025 to 16/10/2025. The Bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam.

Sd/-
Director cum Additional Chief Engineer.
P.W.D.(R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.

MemoNo.ACEH/CS/H&TMI/67/2025-26/01-(A) Dated 25/09/2025

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THERE'S A SPACE FOR ALL KINDS OF FILMS: VARUN DHAWAN ON BO CLASH BETWEEN 'SUNNY SANSKARI' AND 'KANTARA'

MUMBAI, Sept 26: Actor Varun Dhawan says his upcoming film "Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari", which is set to clash with "Kantara: Chapter 1" at the box office, has strong potential to perform well, just like the Rishab Shetty-starrer.

A prequel to Shetty's 2022 National Award-winning film "Kantara", the new Kannada film is set to release in theatres on October 2, alongside "Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari", which also features Dhawan along with Janhvi Kapoor, Sanya Malhotra, and Rohit Saraf.

"'Kantara' is a very big film. The first film was amazing; I loved it myself. But our film is very different from that and there's a space for all kinds of films.

"Our trailer has got a good response from the people; we wish to entertain everyone through our film. People anyways are stressed in life, about finances, etc, and this film will give them joy," Dhawan said on day one of the India Today Conclave here.

The actor said the decision about the release date of the movie was taken by Dharma Productions. "Setting a date is something that is done by the production house and Dharma Productions has been making films for many years. October 2 is such a big date, on that day there's Dussehra and Gandhi Jayanti both, so the business will be much more. I think almost Rs 70 crore worth of business is available to be done in Hindi alone," Dhawan said.

The 38-year-old actor praised his co-stars Malhotra and Kapoor for making the country proud with their professional achievements.

"I'm blessed to have Sanya, she has three films that have won National Awards like 'Jawan', 'Sam Bahadur', and 'Kathal', and Janhvi whose film ('Homebound') is going for the Oscars. The girls have taken such giant strides ahead in our industry," he said.

Dhawan further said the film industry must be lauded for pushing "our women ahead". "There's so much being said about inequality, and that is work-in-progress. We should keep bridging the gap. Here we've two rockstars, Sanya and Janhvi who are representing the country on a global stage." Malhotra and Kapoor praised Dhawan, calling him a supportive co-star.

"I never felt I'm working with a superstar; you made all of us feel so comfortable. I remember we were shooting a song; I'd never shot such a big song, I asked him, 'How to do it, and if there are any tips?' and he gave me some. He wants everyone on the set to do their best job," Malhotra said.

Kapoor, who is teaming up with Dhawan for the second time after their 2023 film, "Bawaal", said the actor has been a "guiding light" in her career. (PTI)

Neeraj Ghaywan told us we cannot take these characters for granted: Ishaan Khatter on 'Homebound'

MUMBAI, Sept 26: Actor Ishaan Khatter says "Homebound cast was tasked with a challenge by director Neeraj Ghaywan: to live his character rather than simply recite his lines, and this set them on an immersive and introspective journey.

The film, directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, explores the friendship of two young men, Chandan (Vishal Jethwa) and Shoaib (Khatter), in North India, whose shared dream of joining the police force is challenged by societal prejudice based on their caste and religion. "But Neeraj made it very clear to me and everybody who worked on this film that we cannot take it for granted... He said these characters will not come to you; you need to walk those miles and bridge the gap. So, his first request to us was, 'You can perform this with craft, you can do a brilliant, impressive performance, but I want you to go beyond that. I want you to try and live these characters," the actor told PTI recalling his conversation with the director.

Khatter, best known for "Beyond the Clouds", "Dhadak", and "Pippa", said working with a director like Ghaywan was something that he desired at this point in his career.

"Very few directors push you that way. I started with a director like that, Majid Majidi, and I immediately knew that Neeraj was going to be a very big gift for me and he was."

"Homebound", which released in theatres on Friday, is inspired by journalist Basharat Peer's The New York Times article "Taking Amrit Home", also titled (A Friendship, a Pandemic and a Death Beside the Highway).

The actor said he instantly connected with Shoaib's character in the film.

"I could feel the simmering anger, his intelligence and understanding of the situation, his deep love for his country and sense of belonging," he said. According to Khatter, the film explores the many layers of privilege and patriarchy, which he believes people will relate to.

"There are so many layers of privileges that you become acutely aware of when you watch this film. Neeraj is a very keen observer of life and society. There are some beautiful scenes in the film that show you the layers and the levels of social capital and standing.

"Even when you think that people will be under the same community, household even, there are still layers of privileges. For example, with Chandan's character, the privilege of just being a son in a patriarchal world, even though they come from the same household."

Khatter said his director told them early on that the only way to portray such layered roles was to live the characters. (PTI)

Miss heartland cinema, like playing characters that are away from me: Bhumi Pednekar

MUMBAI, Sept 26: Actor Bhumi Pednekar, who has appeared in a string of glamorous roles recently such as "The Royals", and "Thank You For Coming", says it's the stories of heartland India that challenge and let her experiment as an actor. Speaking at a session on day one of India Today Conclave 2025 here, Bhumi said she misses stories that are rooted in different places of the country. "As an actor, I miss heartland cinema. My heart is there, and you realise that once you experiment, and I've experimented. I like playing characters that are away from me, I learn a new dialect, and go to a place where there's no hotel and there's challenges in shooting, but those things teach me a lot about life," the actor said. At the same time, Bhumi said she doesn't want to limit herself as an artiste. "I've loved what I've done recently. Like in 'The Royals', I enjoyed a girl that was close to who I'm. I was experimenting with the wardrobe. I don't want to box myself as type A or B, I'm everything. I need to have the ability and the freedom to do whatever I want to," she added.

Pednekar, who started out as an assistant casting director at Yash Raj Films, made her debut in acting with the studio's 2015 movie "Dum Laga Ke Haisha".

Some of her subsequent films were small-town stories including "Toilet: Ek Prem Katha", "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan", "Bala", "Saand Ki Aankh", "Badhaai Do" and "Bhakshak".

The actor, who recently completed ten years in the industry, said she always took on challenging roles.

"I started as a gawky teenager in Yash Raj Films and I had huge dreams, aspirations, I wanted to be a heroine in Hindi film industry, and I've done that. When I started, I was seeking recognition, opportunities, and acceptance, but today I'm seeking purpose and impact. That's how I've evolved as an actor and individual. (PTI)

Lucky I got this opportunity: Bobby Deol on teaming up with Anurag Kashyap on 'Bandar'

MUMBAI, Sept 26 Every actor aspires to play roles that push them to give their best performance and Bobby Deol says he was lucky enough to find one with "Bandar", his upcoming film with acclaimed director Anurag Kashyap.

"Bandar", which marks the maiden collaboration between the actor and the director, recently had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival under the segment of Special Presentations.

The film, said inspired by real-life events, follows the story of a fading star who is accused of rape by his ex-girlfriend. The movie aims to shine a light on systemic injustices, silenced voices in courtrooms, and the harsh realities of a deeply flawed legal framework. "We all dream of playing characters that bring out the best in us, but such opportunities are not easy to come by. The biggest struggle in this industry is to be recognised for one's true capabilities. I feel really lucky to have got this opportunity," Deol told PTI.

Deol, who has been praised for his performances in films and shows such as "Animal", "Ashram" and most recently "The Ba***ds of Bollywood", said he never imagined his films would be screened at a prestigious film festival like TIFF.

"I just wanted to do a good character, which challenged me and was out of my comfort zone. And God has been kind. Love of people has given me that energy to work harder, for my fans. So, I'm excited for that film," said the actor, who went to the TIFF to attend the film's world premiere.

Produced by Nikhil Dwivedi, "Bandar" also stars Sanya Malhotra, Saba Azad, and Sapna Pabbi. (PTI)

Anupam Kher on SRK's first National Award win: Recognition of mainstream cinema

MUMBAI, Sept 26: Cinema veteran Anupam Kher said he was elated to see superstar Shah Rukh Khan win his first National Film Award for best actor, calling the honour long overdue and a recognition for mainstream cinema. At the 71st National Film Awards ceremony held on Wednesday, President Droupadi Murmu presented the award to SRK for his performance in the 2023 blockbuster "Jawan". The best actress award went to Rani Mukerji for her role in "Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway".

"It is a very good thing because it is different from that narrative that you should do a special kind of film (to get a national award). I was very happy to see Karan Johar, Rani Mukerji and Shah Rukh Khan sitting together. It was a star-studded blockbuster National Award this year," Kher told PTI.

Shah Rukh shared best actor honour with Vikrant Massey, who was rewarded for his performance in filmmaker Vidhu Vinod Chopra's "12th Fail". "I am very happy for him, and personally happy that he finally got it after 40 years. You can imagine his disappointment — for 'Swades', he 100 per cent should have got the National Award.

"So many other performances, like 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge', went unrecognised. Each time he must have felt upset. So I am really glad he has finally received it," Kher said.

Kher has worked with Shah Rukh on multiple films, including "Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge", "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", "Mohabbatein", "Veer-Zaara" and "Paheli". The actor said he also called Malayalam superstar Mohanlal to congratulate him on being honoured with Dadasaheb Phalke Award. "I called him up and said, 'Mohanlal, you are the youngest recipient of Dadasaheb Phalke award.' He said, 'yes'. And it is amazing," he said. (PTI)

Diljit Dosanjh, Imtiaz Ali hail International Emmy nods for 'Amar Singh Chamkila'

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: Filmmaker Imtiaz Ali and actor-musician Diljit Dosanjh have expressed joy over the two International Emmy nominations for their film "Amar Singh Chamkila", calling it a recognition of Punjab and its artists.

The Netflix film, based on the life and times of slain Punjabi musician Amar Singh Chamkila, is nominated in the TV Movie/Mini-Series category. Dosanjh has earned a nod in the Best Performance by an Actor category.

The International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences announced the nominations in New York on Thursday night, with the film emerging as the lone Indian entry.

"'Amar Singh Chamkila' is a rare film because it has to do with the scent of the land of Panjab- its music, its socio-politics, its conflict, its aspirations, and its many problems.

"The fact that conflict creates art creates conflict was represented through the life of Amar Singh Chamkila in this film. We are all very happy that we could bring the story of Chamkila, such a unique individual, to the fore. The story of Amarjot and Chamkila is also the story of Panjab," Ali said in a statement.

At the 53rd International Emmy Awards gala, scheduled to be held in New York City on November 24, the film will vie for the TV Movie/Mini-Series award alongside "Herrhausen: The Banker and the Bomb" (Germany), "Lost Boys & Fairies" (United Kingdom) and "Vencer o Morir" (Chile).

Ali, 54, congratulated the film's team, especially lead star Dosanjh, saying the film could not have been made without him.

"I would like to congratulate the team for these nominations, and I would like to congratulate Diljit Dosanjh twice over because he's also nominated in the Best Actor category in the Emmy Awards for this film... Not for a moment on the shoot was he not Chamkila. It was a wonderful grassroot kind of experience shooting in Panjab for 'Amar Singh Chamkila'," he added.

Dosanjh, who has been widely praised for his portrayal of Chamkila, who was gunned down at the age of 27 in 1988 along with his wife Amarjot, said the honour was a tribute to the late musician's legacy.

"I feel truly honoured Amar Singh Chamkila, an artist from Punjab, is being recognized and talked about at a global level on such a prestigious stage like the International Emmys. I am grateful to Imtiaz Ali sir for choosing me for the role," the 41-year-old said.

In the best actor category, Dosanjh will be competing against David Mitchell for "Ludwig" (United Kingdom), Oriol Pla for "Yo, adicto" (Spain), and Diego Vasquez for "One Hundred Years of Solitude" (Colombia).

The film, produced by Mohit Choudhary, Select Media Holdings LLP, Saregama and Window Seat Films, also starred Parineeti Chopra. It featured music by A R Rahman with lyrics by Irshad Kamil. (PTI)

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India eyes best ever show in biggest World Para Athletics Championships

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: Some of the globe's best para athletes, including blade runners, prosthetic jumpers and wheelchair-bound competitors, will showcase their awe-inspiring grit and resilience on the sporting field when the biggest ever World Para Athletics Championships begins here on Saturday.

India, a rising power in para sports, including para athletics, has rolled out top-class facilities for the 12th edition of the showpiece, which will run till October 5 at the iconic Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium.

With 2200 athletes and officials from 104 countries participating in the nine-day showpiece, the New Delhi edition is the biggest in history, with India joining Qatar (2015), UAE (2019) and Japan (2024) as the fourth nation to host the prestigious event.

The para athletes, numbering over 1500, will compete across 186 medal events, 15 more than the 2024 edition in Kobe, Japan.

The championships promise top-class performances as over 100 medallists who altogether won 308 medals in Paris Paralympics, including 112 gold, 96 silver, and 100 bronze, are set to test their mettle on the grandest para athletics stage.

There will be 101 events for men, 84 for women, and one mixed in the championship. World Para Athletics President Paul Fitzgerald said new world records will be made and new champions will be crowned, and praised India for providing top-class facilities for the event.

"This edition will be the largest single event para championships in history and credit to India for hosting this," he said.

"Spectators inside the stadium and a global audience around the world will experience the brilliance of the athletes competing in newly renovated facilities designed to maximise their skill, speed and strength." The centre-piece of the event is the Mondo track laid at the competition venue as well as the warm-up area, considered to be the first instance of the high performance surface at both the arenas.

The track, which is made of two-layered vulcanized rubber, has been widely lauded for its uniform elasticity, shock absorption, and anti-slip qualities, that enhance the performance of athletes and reduce the risk of injury. The warm-up area has also been fitted with LED floodlights so that the athletes can also do practice after sunset or early in the morning.

Top-class fitness centre has also been built beside the warm-up area for the use of athletes before competition. A number of world's best para athletes will vie for the top honours and among them will be 'Blade Jumper' Markus Rehm of Germany, wheelchair racer Catherine Debrunner of Switzerland and fastest para sprinter Petrucio Ferreira of Brazil. Rehm, a four-time Paralympic champion and seven-time world champion in the men's long jump T64, holds a world record that surpasses every Olympic gold medal jump this century. Debrunner, who made headlines with five gold and a silver across six events in the 2024 Paris Paralympics, will compete in five races in New Delhi. (PTI)

The way cricketers push themselves inspired me: Bolt

MUMBAI, Sept 26: Legendary sprinter Usain Bolt says cricket was his inspiration to excel on the track after watching talented cricketers push themselves and give their all on the field.

Bolt, whose name is synonymous with speed and world records, ended his career with eight Olympic gold and 11 World Championships top-podium finishes, something never achieved by any track and field athlete.

"For me, I was a huge cricket fan growing up. So, I watched cricket growing up. Watching all the talent of the cricketers growing up and the way they worked and the way they pushed themselves and the way they carried themselves was something that inspired me at a young age to work hard and to be the best that I could be," said the Jamaican in a "Fireside chat" at the Jamnabai Narsee Campus here on Friday.

Jamaica has produced several legendary cricketers like Michael Holding, Courtney Walsh, Chris Gayle and Jeff Dujon, and they might have had an impact on Bolt.

Asked what would be the three words that describe his road to greatness, Bolt, who holds the 100m world record of 9.58 seconds, said it was all about hard work for him.

"For me, it's as simple as hard work, you know what I mean? It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to the sport. I love track and field, so it's something that I loved growing up and I worked very hard on.

"... and it was a tough road because it's never easy to get to the top, but I really wanted to be the best in the world, so I pushed myself through injuries and doubts and tough times to be one of the best in the world, so it's just dedication," said the 39-year-old Jamaican, who dabbled in a bit of football post retirement in 2017.

Most elite athletes, including Indian javelin star Neeraj Chopra, have said that defending an Olympic gold is tougher than winning it for the first time and Bolt agreed.

"Oh, I think defending. I think it's easier to actually win, but when you're being chased, it's actually harder. So, I think defending the second gold was harder." (PTI)

It's about enjoying the moment and not taking too much pressure: India skipper Harmanpreet

BENGALURU, Sept 26: India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur knows that fans have placed heaps of expectations on her side ahead of the upcoming ICC Women's ODI World Cup at home, and she wants to enjoy the moment without succumbing to the pressure to land a maiden title. India will start their campaign in the tournament with a match against Sri Lanka on September 30 at Guwahati.

"I think leading your country is always a very special moment for any player, but leading your country in ODI World Cup is even more special, and on top of that, it is a home World Cup, so it's even more special," Harmanpreet said during a captains' press meet organised by the ICC. "I mean, it's unbelievable because, you know, when I started playing I never even thought I would get the opportunity to lead my country, it was only in a dream.

"The ODI World Cup is happening after 12 years (at home), and I think it is going to be very amazing for all of us. It's all about enjoying this moment and not taking too much pressure," she added. India will come up against arch-rivals Pakistan at Colombo on October 5, but Harmanpreet wanted to focus on cricket rather than worrying about the political connotations of the match. The recent Indo-Pak contests in the ongoing Asia Cup at the UAE saw some heated moments when some players engaged in over-the-top celebrations and verbal altercations. "Well, we can only control one thing which is playing cricket on the field and we are not thinking of other things. Because as cricketers, we can only control the things we have in our hand. But in other parts, I have zero control and I don't even take those things into my mind.

"We don't even discuss those things in the dressing room. We are only here to play cricket and our focus is only on cricket," she said. Talking about pressure, Australian captain Alyssa Healy will have a rich legacy to live up to. Defending champions Australia have seven trophies in their cabinet, and is that record a millstone around her neck?

"I don't think it's quite in Australian culture to get too complacent about things at any point in time. And I don't think it gets any easier. I think India in their home conditions are going to be really, really tough to beat. "I think this ODI World Cup is going to be one of the strongest ones that I have been a part of. As a skipper, I'm really looking forward to that challenge of going out there and competing against some of the best teams in the world," said Healy. (PTI)

Teenager Jonathan steals limelight with gold, Rashmika claims Silver

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: India's 16-year-old Jonathan Gavin Antony stole the limelight on day two of the ISSF Junior World here by winning the men's 10m air pistol title with a flawless performance.

The young Indian, who had topped qualification with 586-19x, carried his form into the finals, shooting 21 of 24 shots in the 10s to secure gold with a commanding margin of 8.5 points.

Italy's Luca Arrighi took silver with 236.3 (572-21x), while Spain's Lucas Sanchez Tome claimed bronze on 215.1 (573-11x).

The final also witnessed the tournament's first shoot-off, where Iran's Hosein Gohari edged out Italy's Gabriele Aldo Villani for sixth place, after both were tied on 156.8. The Iranian went on to finish fifth with 174.8 (572-12x).

Individual Neutral Athlete Vladislav Makarov (194.3) and Igor Tupitsym (134.9) finished fourth and seventh respectively. India's Chirag Sharma, who had entered the finals second with 578-15x, finished eighth with 115.6.

In the junior women's 10m air pistol final, Individual Neutral Athlete Evelina Shiena delivered a composed performance, leading from start to finish to secure gold with 240.9.

India's Rashmika Sahgal, who had qualified fifth with 573-17x, battled hard but fell short, taking silver with 236.1, 4.8 points behind Evelina.

Iran's Fatemah Shekari, who had qualified eighth with 567-14x, rose to the occasion to secure bronze with 213.8.

Among the other Indian finalists, Vanshika Chaudhary, who had topped qualification with 576-17x, finished fifth after 18 shots with 174.2, while Mohini Singh, the second-best qualifier with 576-12x, was placed sixth with 153.2.

The skeet competition also began with qualification rounds on day two. Asian Championship silver medallist Harmehar Singh Lally led the men's field with an impressive 74 hits out of 75.

He was closely followed by Cyprus's Andreas Pontikis, Finland's Lassi Akseli Matias, and Italy's Marco Coco, all with 73 hits.

India's Jyotiraditya Singh Sisodiya and Atul Singh, along with Czechia's Alex Petrasek, are in the chasing pack with 72 hits each.

In the junior women's skeet, reigning Asian champion Mansi Raghuwanshi topped first qualification with 71 hits from 75 targets. She was followed by USA's Chloe Chaleunsinh with 69 and Italy's world championship silver medallist Arianna Nember with 68.

Individual Neutral Athletes Varvara Zaitseva and Kseniia Shuliak, along with India's Agrima Kanwar, are tied on 67. Olympian Raiza Dhillon is seventh with 65, alongside Yashasvi Rathore, also on 65. (PTI)

Ryder Cup will start with a bang: Bryson DeChambeau in the opening group with fiery Jon Rahm

FARMINGDALE (USA), Sept 26: U.S. captain Keegan Bradley is making sure fans get their money's worth at the Ryder Cup.

It's been 12 years from the time Bethpage Black was announced as the host of this Ryder Cup, two years since Europe celebrated victory in Rome and four days of anticipation that has been building even on a rain-soaked course Thursday. And then Bradley announced Bryson DeChambeau would be smashing away in the opening foursomes session with emotionally charged Justin Thomas. They face Tyrrell Hatton and Jon Rahm, the fiery Spaniard who has never lost in this format. "They're a formidable force," DeChambeau said. "But we want to send a message."

Soon after the four matches were announced, DeChambeau headed to the range and began blasting drives to simulate the 389-yard opening hole, slightly downhill that turns hard to the right over trees, reachable by those who can fly their drive some 365 yards in the air. "That's nothing, right?" DeChambeau said. In his last Ryder Cup, at Whistling Straits in 2021, he drove the green on the first hole and walked 364 yards to the green carrying his putter. European captain Luke Donald has 11 players back from his winning team in Rome. He considers this a new team for a new challenge — Europe hasn't won on the road in 12 years — and he mixed up a few of his pairings.

Rory McIlroy and Tommy Fleetwood are together again. They won both foursomes matches in Rome. But he split up Viktor Hovland and Ludvig Aberg, both with new partners. Bradley said he had DeChambeau and Thomas in mind for a while. DeChambeau hasn't played foursomes in the Ryder Cup since 2018 — he lost matches while paired with Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson in France — and the alternate-shot format requires a measure of conservative play so as not to give away the hole.

DeChambeau is not one to play it safe. He is an entertainer as much as an elite golfer, and Bradley expects him to hit driver off the first tee. "We want him to do what he does, and he got up there today and hammered one right in front of the green," Bradley said. "Bryson thrives under this sort of atmosphere. I can see him walking out there just relishing the moment and relishing the chance to get up there and hit that shot."

Thomas brings so much emotion to these matches that in an informal poll in 2023, most Europeans said he would be the one player who gets under their skin.

Europe countered by sending out the same team that put the first blue point on the board for Europe at Marco Simone. And neither Rahm nor Hatton lack emotion.

"We are facing two fantastic, very accomplished players. It will not be easy," Rahm said. "They are both players that like to get the crowd going. It will be a very energetic match. But I wouldn't say Tyrrell and I are short of energy ourselves. So I think it's going to be a lot of fun for both teams." (AP)

Muddappa set to open 2025 Drag Racing Nationals at MIC

CHENNAI, Sept 26: Bengaluru's Hemanth Muddappa, the undisputed "Drag King" of Indian motorsport, will launch his 2025 campaign at the Madras International Circuit as the MMSC FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship with a double-header here on Saturday.

The 15-time National champion, riding for Mantra Racing with tuner Sharan Pratap, will field his Hayabusa, BMW S1000RR, and Ninja across four premier classes -- unrestricted, 1051–1650cc, 851–1050cc, and 551–850cc.

Familiar rivals including Attaulla Baig, Mujahid Pasha, Aymaan Baig, and Hyderabad's Mohammed Riyaz are expected to provide him stiff opposition.

Muddappa enters the season on the back of a high-profile international triumph. In April, he outpaced 13-time world champion Ricky Gadson of the USA at The Valley Run 2025, clocking 9.477 seconds on his BMW S1000RR -- the fastest time of the event.

Last year, despite racing through injury, the 34-year-old showcased metronomic consistency of 2024 by adding three more National crowns to his tally, taking his championship haul to a record 15 titles.

That performance cemented his status as the most decorated drag racer in the country.

"Every season starts afresh. The challenge is to keep pushing the limits with precision," Muddappa said after beginning practice at MIC on Friday. (PTI)

Bryson DeChambeau, a man of the people, brings his show to Ryder Cup with some bickering to boot

FARMINGDALE (USA), Sept 26: There's one YouTube video of Bryson DeChambeau riding in a golf cart with Adam Sandler — Happy Gilmore, himself — trying to break 50 in a two-man scramble. (They didn't.)

There's another of DeChambeau lofting wedge shots over his house trying to make a hole-in-one on a green in his backyard. (He did, finally.) These videos, part of a steady stream of content delivered to a subscriber base of 2.35 million and growing, might best explain why DeChambeau stands out, even in a field filled with golf's very best at this week's Ryder Cup.

DeChambeau's return to the Ryder Cup marks the latest step in his remarkable evolution from overly analytic, flat cap-wearing know-it-all into golf's man of the people.

It's a journey not even his much-derided and debated departure from the PGA Tour to LIV Golf could derail.

"I couldn't be more excited for the opportunity to hopefully get them riled up," DeChambeau said Thursday of the fans he'll attract at Bethpage Black, which traditionally brings in one of the loudest galleries in golf.

Examples of the energy DeChambeau brings to this event have been evident on the first tee box through the practice rounds.

On Tuesday, he teed up ball after ball and let er rip, seeing how close he could get to the green on the downhill, dogleg-right, 397-yard par-4. On Thursday, he entered the arena-like setting — surrounded by thousands of grandstand seats — stomping his feet and clapping in time to "We Will Rock You" blaring over the loudspeakers, then timing his drive to the start of the sports anthem's guitar solo.

Growing popularity comes with detractors, and a small feud with McIlroyEven with his newfound popularity, DeChambeau is not beloved by everyone, which, in a way, draws even more eyeballs to him on the rare occasions when he steps onto golf's biggest stages.

Ratings for the LIV Tour have been anemic, meaning most people see DeChambeau four times a year — at the majors. They get a rare fifth look this year.

Those majors are DeChambeau's only chance to earn Ryder Cup ranking points. His string of good finishes — one win, two runner-ups and three more top-10s over the past two years — gave him enough to earn an automatic spot on this year's team.

"Making this team was a passion project of mine," he said.

Earlier this week, Golf Channel's Brandel Chamblee, never a fan of LIV, said DeChambeau needs to maximize the opportunities because he "plays most of his golf on a tour where he could mostly be in the witness protection program."

"Nobody watches, he doesn't get any attention," Chamblee said. "So when he does come out, there's a bit of a circus-barker element to it to drum up some interest for himself."

DeChambeau's response: the numbers — specifically his 2.35 million YouTube subscribers — don't lie. But was he upset with the comment?

"I think any time that people can throw stuff at me like that, I enjoy it. I appreciate it," he said. "I think it's good for ultimately the game of golf because it starts to spur conversation on."

DeChambeau is less dependent on growing a following strictly through playing tournament golf. He gears his content toward a younger audience. (AP)

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2026 World Cup mascots include bald eagle Clutch, jaguar Zayu and moose Maple

NEW YORK, Sept 26: Next year's World Cup will have three mascots, a bald eagle Clutch in the U.S., a jaguar Zayu in Mexico and a moose Maple in Canada. FIFA made its announcement Thursday in a news release, less than nine months before the June 11 opener of the tournament, the first World Cup to be played in three nations.

For the 1994 World Cup in the U.S., organizers revealed a dog named Striker as the mascot during a news conference in October 1992 at Hollywood's Mann Chinese Theater. A name-the-mascot campaign included more than 25,000 entries.

Past World Cup mascots also included a lion Willie (England 1966), a boy Juanito (Mexico 1970), two boys Tip and Tap (West Germany 1974), a boy Gauchito (Argentina 1978), an orange Naranjito (Spain 1982), a jalapeño pepper Pique (Mexico 1986), a stick figure Ciao (Italy 1990), a cockerel Footix (France 1998), futuristic creatures Ato, Kaz and Nik (Japan and South Korea 2002), a lion Goleo VI and a soccer ball Pille (Germany 2006), a leopard Zakumi (South Africa 2010), an armadillo Fuleco (Brazil 2014), a wolf Zabivaka (Russia 2018) and a floating keffiyeh La'eeb (Qatar 2022). *(AP)*

Rahul, Sudharsan slam centuries as India A beat Australia A by 5 wickets to seal series

LUCKNOW, Sept 26: KL Rahul and B Sai Sudharsan struck sublime hundreds as India A registered a stunning five-wicket win over Australia A while hunting down a target of 413 to seal the two-match unofficial Test series 1-0 here on Friday.

It was the sixth highest successful run chase in the country's first-class history, and Rahul's form (176 not out, 210 balls, 16x4, 4x6) is an ominous sign for the West Indians ahead of the two-match Test series, starting next month.

The highest chase remains in the name of West Zone when they overhauled South Zone's target of 536 in the 2010 Duleep Trophy final.

Starting the fourth and final day from their overnight 169 for two, India lost Manav Suthar at the total of 189.

But Sudharsan (100, 172 balls) and skipper Dhruv Jurel (56) added 78 runs for the fourth wicket to keep India A in the chase of a daunting 412.

Sudharsan fetched his eighth first-class hundred in 170 balls, vindicating his call-up for the upcoming home Tests against the West Indies.

However, the 23-year-old was dismissed two balls after going past the landmark by Australia off-spinner Corey Rocchiccioli.

But it brought together Rahul and Jurel at the crease and the former pummelled the Aussie bowlers mercilessly in their stand of 115 runs for the fifth wicket.

Rahul, who had retired hurt on 74 on Thursday, brought up his 22nd first-class hundred in 136 balls, and the next 76 runs cascaded in a mere 74 balls as India A closed in on the target briskly.

It was a continuation of the fine form that Rahul displayed against England in the recent five-match Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy while amassing 532 runs at an average of 53.20 with two centuries.

Jurel departed with the team score at 382, but by then the home side was well within sight of a fantastic win, which was completed by Rahul and Nitish Kumar Reddy (16 not out) a few minutes before tea.

Brief scores: Australia A: 420 and 185 all out lost to India A: 194 all out and 413/5 in 91.3 overs (KL Rahul 176 not out, Sai Sudharan 100, Dhruv Jurel 56; Todd Murphy 3/114) by 5 wickets. *(PTI)*

Dropped catches and bad decisions cost Bangladesh, admits Simmons

DUBAI, Sept 26: Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons blamed dropped catches and bad shot-selection for the team's defeat to Pakistan, which ended its hopes for an Asia Cup final berth.

Having Pakistan reeling at 51 for 5, Bangladesh let the game slip when they dropped Shaheen Shah Afridi and Mohammad Nawaz, both of whom went on to play crucial cameos here on Thursday.

Afridi struck two sixes in a 13-ball 19, while Nawaz's brisk 25 off 15 balls (two sixes, one four) lifted Pakistan to a fighting 135 for 8.

"When we dropped Shaheen and Nawaz, that's where the game changed," Simmons said at the post-mach press conference.

"Before that, we were in control. Some of the catches maybe (had something to do with the lights) but I don't think the ones we dropped had anything to do with the lights," he said, referring to Dubai's famous "ring of fire" lighting system, under which fielders often struggle to sight the ball.

At the halfway mark, Bangladesh appeared well-placed to chase down the modest target, but their batters faltered with a string of poor shots.

"It was just bad decisions. All of the teams have that at some point. It was us today. We didn't make the best shot selections," Simmons said bluntly.

The 62-year-old conceded that Bangladesh's lack of depth continues to hurt them when senior players like their captain Litton Das, who missed the last two games due to a side strain, are absent.

"We just chased 169 (against Sri Lanka) two games ago. We are not a team that can lose Tanzid (Hasan) and captain (Litton Das) in one game and just fill (the void) like that.

"We are getting to that stage, we are not there yet. Losing the captain in such good form is a big thing for us.

"We chased 169 on the same wicket, where we made better batting decisions. Batting order doesn't say we batted well or badly. We made bad decisions today."

Despite historically struggling with strike rates compared to the top T20I sides, Simmons insisted the problem lay more in failure to build partnerships than power-hitting.

"The (strike-rate) gap will reduce the more we play at the international level, the guys will know what to do at this level," he said.

"I agree that our strike-rate isn't up there, but we are up there in six-hitting. I don't think it is about our ability to score quickly. We have to bat for longer and put on partnerships," he added. *(PTI)*

Rauf, Farhan plead not guilty in ICC hearing but sanctions likely: Tournament sources

Rauf set to be fined for 'abusive language and aggressive gestures' during the game against India

DUBAI, Sept 26: Pakistan cricketers Haris Rauf and Sahibzada Farhan pleaded not guilty during their ICC hearing for allegedly provocative actions in the Asia Cup game against India here on Friday but sanctions are likely for some of their gestures, according to tournament sources.

It is learnt that Rauf is set to be fined for "abusive language and aggressive gestures" during the game against India on Sunday last.

Farhan, on the other hand, has pleaded not guilty to any code of conduct violation for his gun-fire celebration during the same match, claiming that it is a "traditional way of celebrating in his ethnic Pakhtun tribe" in Pakistan.

The hearing was conducted by match referee Richie Richardson and both the players appeared before him in person even though the responses given by them were in writing.

The two were accused of making provocative gestures by the BCCI in a formal complaint on Wednesday. The bitter neighbours are due to clash in the final of the regional showpiece on Sunday.

While Rauf had mocked the Indian fans in the stands by gesturing about falling planes, Farhan's celebration after his half century in the game was also seen as offensive by the Indian side.

Pakistan too had filed a complaint against India captain Suryakumar Yadav for making political comments after he dedicated his team's win over the arch foes on September 14 to the victims of Pahalgam terror attack and the Indian Armed Forces.

Suryakumar pleaded not guilty to the charge but was apparently told not to make any statement that could be construed as political in the remainder of the tournament.

The ICC is yet to come out with an official statement on the matter.

Tensions between the two sides have been running high starting with India's refusal to do a traditional handshake with Pakistani players at the time of toss and after the games as a gesture of solidarity with the Pahalgam victims.

Twenty six people were killed in the attack that was carried out by Pakistan-backed terrorists in April.

In retaliation, India launched Operation Sindoor in May to destroy terror infrastructure in Pakistan. *(PTI)*

Inaugural BFI Cup in Chennai from Oct 1

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: Aimed at providing upcoming boxers a pathway to the national camp, the Boxing Federation of India will conduct the inaugural BFI Cup in Chennai from October 1 to 7.

The competition, which is set to be conducted in 10 categories for both men and women, will provide the gold and silver-medallists entry to the elite national camp.

"Indian boxing is undoubtedly on the rise and the BFI is committed to an athlete centric approach that is already showing good results," said BFI president Ajay Singh in a media release.

"The BFI Cup is another step in that direction as it will provide many young boxers a chance to make their mark and come in national contention.

"Tournaments like the BFI Cup will provide the top boxers an opportunity to test their preparation and also helps BFI identify fresh talent," he added.

State units or boards which finished inside top-eight in the 8th Elite nationals can send one boxer to the BFI Cup in each category along with the Sports Authority of India's (SAI) National Centre of Excellence (NCOE) in Rohtak, which regularly hosts the youth camps, and host Tamil Nadu.

Apart from this, participants from the last two Elite National Championships will also be allowed to compete, the federation said. Those who competed in the 2024 and 2025 Asian U-22 championships, medallists in any international meet since 2022, medallists from the Goa and Uttarakhand National Games, and medallists from the 6th Youth Nationals will also be eligible to participate. *(PTI)*

Gary Stead returns to NZC as high-performance coach

WELLINGTON, Sept 26: Former BlackCaps head coach Gary Stead has rejoined New Zealand Cricket (NZC) in a new role as high-performance coach, the board announced on Friday. According to an NZC statement, Stead's responsibilities will include "supporting player and coach development, as well as high-performance programmes." This appointment comes less than four months after Stead stepped down as head coach of the New Zealand men's team in June, following a highly successful tenure from 2018 to 2025.

During that period, he guided the team to three major finals in limited-overs cricket -- the 2019 ODI World Cup, the 2021 T20 World Cup, and the 2025 Champions Trophy. He also led New Zealand to victory in the inaugural World Test Championship final (2019–2021), defeating India.

"New Zealand cricket's very much been at my heart for the past 30 odd years and to be able to keep contributing to the game I love is really special," Stead said.

"I'm still passionate about coaching and trying to help people learn and improve. If I can pass on some of my skills and experiences to the wider cricket network and in turn help the BLACKCAPS and WHITE FERNS win on the world stage - than that would be really satisfying," he added. *(PTI)*

Barcelona called him 'a cornerstone of the finest Barça side of all time.'

Busquets to retire at end of MLS season after extraordinary career with Barcelona and Spain

MIAMI, Sept 26: Former Barcelona and Spain midfielder Sergio Busquets is retiring from soccer at the end of his current season with Inter Miami, the Major League Soccer team said Friday.

The 37-year-old Busquets is widely regarded as one of the best defensive midfielders of his generation, forming a storied three-man midfield at Barcelona with Xavi Hernández and Andres Iniesta behind Lionel Messi.

Busquets debuted for Barcelona in 2008 under Pep Guardiola and went on to play 722 matches for the club — putting him third all-time behind Xavi and Messi – while winning nine Spanish league titles and the Champions League three times. What Busquets lacked in speed and scoring, he more than made up for in his tackling, precise passing and ability to provide balance to the team both in defense and going forward.

Barcelona called him "a cornerstone of the finest Barça side of all time." He played 143 games for Spain, winning the World Cup in 2010 and the European Championship in 2012. He was Spain's captain upon retiring from international competition in 2022.

In 2023, Busquets joined Inter Miami where he was reunited with

Messi and other former Barcelona teammates Luis Suárez and Jordi Alba. The team said Busquets has had an "extraordinary career" and is "one of the greatest midfielders in football history."

Former teammates — and rivals — praised him on social media.

"What a privilege it was to play with you all those years, brother," Iniesta wrote on Instagram. "Your way of playing was one of a kind, and we will never forget it."

Former Real Madrid defender Sergio Ramos, Busquets's club rival and his teammate with Spain, recalled their time shared on the field as well as Busquets' "modest and authentic character."

"(You were) a rival most of the time, other times my teammate, (but) you always stood out thanks to your class, vision, and talent," Ramos wrote on X. *(AP)*

Pranavi leads Indian charge in France; Diksha, Avani trailing

DEAUVILLE (FRANCE), Sept 26: Pranavi Urs began the week with a round of one-under 70 and was the best-placed Indian golfer at tied 23rd in the Lacoste Ladies Open de France here.

It was a modest day for the other Indians as Diksha Dagar began the week with a card of one-over 72 to find herself tied 54th, while Avani Prashanth (73) was tied 70th and Tvesa Malik (74) was at tied 82nd.

Pranavi started on the front nine, which was uneventful. Her first birdie of the day came on the 10th, but she immediately dropped a shot on the 11th before gaining one with a birdie on the 12th. She parred the remaining holes.

Diksha started her round on the front nine and dropped shots on the fifth and seventh holes before picking up a stroke on the ninth. On the back nine she struck a birdie on the 12th but finished the day one-over due to a late bogey on the 17th hole. Avani's round included four bogeys and two birdies. Tvesa, on the hand, stumbled to four bogeys and managed one birdie on the first day.

Italian Alessia Nobilio started the week with a bogey-free round of six-under 65 to take the top spot. German Helen Briem finished the day at five-under 66 after making six birdies and one bogey. *(PTI)*

Only result on Sept 28 will matter: Pakistan head coach Hesson on Asia Cup finale against India

DUBAI, Sept 26: They have endured comprehensive defeats against India on back-to-back Sundays in the ongoing Asia Cup but Pakistan head coach Mike Hesson believes that all that matters is the result on coming Sunday when the arch-rivals clash in an Asia Cup final for the first time in 41 years.

India beat Pakistan by seven wickets in a group league game and followed it up with another convincing victory by six wickets in the Super 4s stage.

"We know that we played on the 14th. We played on the 21st. But really, the only match that really counts is the one at the end. And that will be our focus. Trying to play our best game when it counts," Hesson replied to a query about his message to his players ahead of Sunday's final after they comfortably disposed off a meek challenge from Bangladesh by 11 runs here on Thursday.

India and Pakistan have never played the summit clash of the continental event since the inception of the event in 1984 when it used to be only played in Sharjah. Hesson said his side "deserved the opportunity" in this edition.

"So now it's up to us to make the most of it. And I think all the games that have happened up to this point now have been around trying to get yourself in a position to win the trophy. And that's what we've been talking about the whole time," he added.

After steadfastly denying the Indian media so far, Pakistan media manager Naeem Gillani finally made an exception and allowed a question from the travelling group on Thursday.

"Look, my message is we just focus on the cricket and that's certainly what we'll be doing. Those things, you probably know more about than me," he answered to a query as to how the team is reacting to the outside noise and the impending ICC hearings that his players Sahibzada Farhan and Haris Rauf face for provocative gestures during the games against India.

"I deal with the cricket side. In terms of gestures, look, there's always a bit of passion, in terms of when you're in high-pressure games.

"But we will be having our focus on playing a good game and focusing on the cricket, and that's part of my job."

Hesson also doesn't appreciate the notion that his men can't read spinners from the hand and countered this perception saying that one doesn't need to in order to be successful.

"I have heard a number of people say we are not picking the ball from the hand. And I've answered that question before. *(PTI)*

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Associate Editor- Nilomoni Borah **Editor - Rameswar Chauhan**