

**6** WORLD  
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- BRICS must defend multilateral trading system amid tariff volatility: Jaishankar
- Pak military pleaded for cessation of fighting during Operation Sindoor: India
- Curfew relaxed for 4 hours in violence-hit Leh town, situation peaceful: Officials
- Rahul, Lalu want to secure voting rights for infiltrators: Shah

## Hagrama-led BPF sweeps BTC polls with 28 seats

NDA to form next council in BTR: Himanta  
 ● UPPL president Pramod Boro accepts defeat



**HT Correspondent**  
**GUWAHATI/KOKRAJHAR, Sept 27:** The Bodoland People's Front (BPF), led by former BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary, secured a decisive mandate in the recently concluded Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) elections, winning 28 of the 40 seats and emerging as the clear majority party.

outgoing council, won seven and five seats respectively, down from their previous tallies of 12 and nine. The elections, held on September 22 across the five districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri and Tamulpur, recorded a voter turnout of over 78 per cent from an electorate of 26,58,153, comprising 13,23,536 males, 13,34,600 females, and 17 people of other genders.

Of the 40 seats, 30 were reserved for Scheduled Tribe candidates, five for non-STs, and five were open to both ST and non-ST candidates. The BPF achieved sweeping victories in several districts. In Kokrajhar, the party won 11 out of 12 constituencies, leaving the UPPL with only one seat in Srirampur. In Udalguri, BPF claimed seven seats, the BJP two and the UPPL one.

In Chirang, the BPF secured five seats and the UPPL two, while in Tamulpur both BPF and BJP won two seats each and the UPPL one.

In Baksa, the BPF won three seats, the UPPL two, and the BJP one. Hagrama Mohilary retained his Debagana seat but lost (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Don't test public patience, CM warns Shyamkanu, Siddharth

Lookout notices issued against NE fest organiser, manager in Zubeen's death case ● Bank accounts of NE fest organiser frozen

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday that lookout notices have been issued against North East India Festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta and Zubeen Garg's manager Siddharth Sharma in the singer's death case.

Garg went to perform in the North East India Festival in Singapore where he died by drowning in the sea on September 19. A large section of the people of Assam has been demanding a thorough investigation into his death.

On Facebook Live, Sarma said Mahanta and Sharma must come to Guwahati and make their statements on October 6, failing which the police will intensify a search operation for them.

"We want justice for Zubeen. From the stuff out in public forums and police probe so far, Mahanta, Sharma and a few others have to answer for a lot. Through this Facebook Live, I want to tell Mahanta and Sharma, do not test public patience," he said.

The CM said that lookout notices have been



issued against the two so that they cannot leave the country.

"On October six, we want you two in Assam. As the Durga Puja is there, we don't want them to come right now. But after that, they cannot

escape by giving statements on Facebook or writing open letters on social media," he said. Sarma was apparently referring to Mahanta's video statement through Facebook and Sharma's open letter on the same social media platform, claiming innocence in any incident leading to Garg's death by drowning in the sea in Singapore on September 19.

The chief minister maintained that if they are truly innocent, they must have the courage to come and present their points.

"You will be punished only as per the law. If the law finds you innocent, it will be so. But the government won't sit silent if you try to evade the law," he added.

Sarma, who also holds the Home department, said the state police have a proven record of tracking down those who try to escape, be it rapists or poachers, and they will find the two if they do not come out in response to the notices. "If they do not want to present themselves before the CID (which (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Scindia calls on Zubeen's bereaved family

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday visited the residence of singer Zubeen Garg here to offer condolences to the bereaved family members.

Scindia, before winding up his two-day visit to the city, met Garg's father, wife and other relatives at their Kahilipara home. "Paid my heartfelt condolences to the family of Zubeen Garg ji in Guwahati," the minister said in a post on Facebook.

He also paid floral tribute to the singer-composer, who had died by drowning in the sea in Singapore on September 19.

Scindia had also paid tributes to the singer in the morning at a programme to mark the simultaneous nationwide launch of BSNL's 'Swadeshi' 4G stack. (PTI)

## PM inaugurates indigenous 4G network from Odisha

4G rollout will connect remote regions: Scindia

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the indigenous 4G network on Saturday at a central event in Jharsuguda, Odisha, marking a historic milestone in Bharat's digital journey.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma joined the event virtually from Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati, alongside Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and other dignitaries, including Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran.

The launch coincides with BSNL's silver jubilee celebrations and ensures that all mobile towers, optical fiber, and related telecom equipment are now manufactured entirely in India.

Speaking at the programme,



Minister Scindia said that with the inauguration, India has become the fifth country in the world to manufacture its own telecom equipment, joining the ranks of Denmark, Sweden, China, and South Korea. He described the development as a transformation of India from a

service and consumer-oriented nation to a hub of production, innovation, entrepreneurship, and exports.

Chief Minister Sarma highlighted Prime Minister Modi's vision of building a self-reliant India through (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 13th day rituals of Zubeen Garg to be held at Jorhat Stadium on Oct 1

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, Sept 27:** Assam Minister for Cultural Affairs, Industries, Commerce, and Public Enterprises Bimal Borah on Saturday announced that the 13th day mangala anusthan (religious rituals) of legendary singer Zubeen Garg will be organised at Jorhat Stadium on October 1.

The programme will begin at 8 am and continue till sunset, allowing thousands of fans and well-wishers to pay their final respects to the iconic artiste.

Addressing the press at the convention centre at Cinnamara, the Minister said that after discussions with eminent citizens and representatives of various organisations, a 48-member steering committee has been constituted to ensure smooth conduct of the rituals.

As part of the observance, a pot



containing the ashes of Zubeen Garg's mortal remains will be placed at the venue for the public to offer their last respects.

A large portrait of the late singer will also be displayed for people to pay floral tributes.

Borah informed that the programme will commence with Vedic rituals, followed by nam prasanga, gayan bayan, and dihanaam. An all-religion prayer meet will also be held, signifying the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## BPF part of NDA, claims Himanta after BTC polls

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Claiming that the BPF is a part of the BJP-led NDA, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said he met its chief Hagrama Mohilary and congratulated him for winning the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) elections.

The BPF swept the BTC polls by winning 28 of the 40 seats. On the other hand, the UPPL and the BJP, who had jointly run the administration for the last five years but contested the elections separately, finished far behind with seven and five seats, respectively.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme, Sarma said, "I congratulate Mohilary and the BPF on their victory in the BTC polls. BPF is also part of NDA, and now all 40 seats of BTC are held by NDA constituents.

"Mohilary came to meet me at 4 am after he and his party won the BTC polls. He will remain with the NDA... There is absolutely no problem with the alliance, and we

will continue to work together."

Sarma claimed that the election results would have been different had the "unfortunate death of Zubeen Garg not happened".

"We refrained from any election-related outreach during the last three days before the polls, and prioritised Zubeen's death over the elections," he said.

The BJP lost by very slim margins in some constituencies and would have won at least 10 to 11 seats, he said.

Sarma said the BJP's vote share has increased considerably.

Attacking the Congress, which failed to win a single seat in the elections, he said the people have already realised that its leader is "a Pakistani agent", in an apparent reference to Gaurav Gogoi.

"When I make public the SIT report, investigating his alleged links with certain people in Pakistan, people will fully realise who the Congress has sent to lead their party in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## GU to rename Centre for Performing Arts after Zubeen

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** The Gauhati University has decided to rename its Centre for Performing Arts and Culture after popular singer Zubeen Garg.

The varsity has also decided to install his statue on the campus.

"To pay tribute and preserve the timeless creations of popular singer and heartthrob of the youth Zubeen Garg, Gauhati University has accepted four proposals," the varsity said in a post on X on Friday.

It has decided to name its Centre for Performing Arts and Culture after the cultural icon of the state, who died by drowning in the sea in Singapore on September 19.

A statue of the deceased singer-composer will also be installed in front of the centre.

The university has also decided to publish a coffee table book containing biographical accounts of Garg's life and creative journey. To inspire (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Outgoing BTC chief congratulates Bodoland People's Front for winning council polls

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Outgoing Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) chief Pramod Boro of the United People's Party Liberation (UPPL) on Saturday congratulated BPF for winning the council polls and promised to cooperate and work together for the welfare of the region.

"I congratulate BPF chief Hagrama Mohilary and others from his party on winning the polls. I assure full cooperation for the development of the Bodoland Territorial Region," Boro said at Tamulpur after the announcement of the election results.

He also expressed his gratitude to the people of the five BTR districts for ensuring that the polls passed off peacefully without any untoward incident.

Boro said he and his party respect the mandate given by the people of BTR in favour of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF). He urged the BPF to take up the



remaining clauses of the Bodo Peace Accord, signed in January 2020, for implementation.

Boro also urged both the central and state governments to ensure that all the clauses of the accord are fully implemented.

"We came to power for the first time five years ago and worked wholeheartedly for the people of BTR. We worked towards estab-

lishing peace, security, harmony and development of the region," he said.

The UPPL chief said they will analyse the causes of the party's defeat and work towards correcting it by keeping "our aims and objectives in mind".

"We will continue to work to realise the aspirations of the people for which (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 104 turtles released in waterbody in Assam's wildlife sanctuary

**MORIGAON, Sept 27:** A total of 104 turtles of three different species were released in a waterbody in the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam's Morigaon district on Saturday, an official said.

The turtles, released in Hadug Beel in Mayong division, are of black soft shell, Indian tent and Ganges soft shell species.

The Hadug Beel is known for rich diversity of species like turtle, fish and other aquatic wildlife due to the high protection measures adopted by the authority in recent past.

The beel or waterbody is perennial in nature and connected to the inlet and outlet water channel of the sanctuary, linking rivers like Brahmaputra, Pokoriya and Kolang during the flood season.

The turtle hatchlings were brought from Haigrim Madhab temple in Hajo in Kamrup district by a team from the state zoo in Guwahati. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Explorative Study of Insects and Spiders of the Woodland Habitat of Kaziranga National Park & Tiger Reserve'

### KNP records 283 species of native insects and spiders: Report

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve, famed for its rhinos, elephants and tigers, has recorded 283 species of native insects and spiders, according to the first survey of its kind released on Saturday.

Of the total, 254 species are insects and 29 are spiders, making the study a vital step towards understanding Kaziranga's often-overlooked biodiversity and its implications for combating climate change, officials said.

According to the survey, there are 85 species of butterflies and moths, 40 species of ants, bees and wasps, along with 35 species of beetles.

The report, titled 'Explorative Study of Insects and Spiders of the Woodland Habitat of Kaziranga National Park & Tiger Reserve', documented an impressive diversity of species in the woodland track of Pan-



bari Reserve Forest under Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, a park official said.

The survey was conducted and published by entomologists from Corbett

Foundation with the support of the forest staff of Kaziranga National Park.

The findings highlight the urgent need to take insect conservation seri-

ously, especially as climate change threatens to accelerate species loss.

The survey reveals the park's often-overlooked microfaunal richness and establishes a vital baseline for future research and conservation, officials added.

Globally, nearly 40 per cent of insect species are in decline due to habitat loss, deforestation, and climate change.

The study pointed out that while Kaziranga is celebrated for its megafauna, its resilience depends just as much on the small pollinators, soil aerators, and natural pest-controllers that keep the ecosystem functioning.

These insects and spiders are vital ecological indicators of a healthy environment, essential for seed dispersal, soil health, and plant regeneration, forming the very foundation of the food web that (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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# Chief Minister inaugurates new road over bridge at Panbazar

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, inaugurated a 290-metre-long Road Over Bridge (ROB) at Panbazar in Guwahati on Saturday.

Constructed by the Northeast Frontier Railway at a cost of ₹ 47 crore, the new bridge is expected to significantly ease traffic congestion in the city and enhance railway operations.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including Jayanta Mallabarua, Minister, Government of Assam; Bijuli Kalita Medhi, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha); Siddhartha Bhattacharya, MLA; Mri-gan Sarania, Mayor, Guwahati Municipal Corporation; Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager, NF Railway; Samir Lohani, Divisional Railway Manager, Lumding; along with senior officials from the Railways and State Government.

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister highlighted that the new ROB will enable faster movement of electric trains, ease road congestion, and support ongoing development at Guwahati Railway



Station.

He also emphasised key regional railway initiatives, including the redevelopment of 50 stations under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme in Assam, rapid electrification, and the construction of a new double line with a bridge at Saraighat.

He noted that double line projects between Lumding-Furkating and Furkating-New Tinsukia, sanctioned by the Ministry of Railways, will significantly enhance

connectivity to Delhi and Kolkata.

Sarma also acknowledged the historic rail connectivity extended to Mizoram under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and expressed gratitude to the Northeast Frontier Railway and Indian Railways for transforming the region's rail infrastructure.

The new Panbazar ROB features a 7.5-metre-wide carriageway, a 1.5-metre-wide footpath, and is supported by 41 foundation piles. Advanced engineering ele-

ments, including a 60-metre Bow String Girder and composite girders, ensure improved vertical and horizontal clearances for transportation.

The structure allows smooth movement of trains, including electric locomotives and over-dimensional consignments, while reducing congestion along the Panbazar-Paltan Bazar corridor.

The previous Panbazar ROB, constructed in 1965, had become inadequate due to narrow width, low clearance, and frequent water-logging, which caused traffic bottlenecks and disrupted train operations.

To meet growing transport needs, the NFR initiated the replacement project in March 2024, completing it successfully within 18 months by August 2025.

With this commissioning, Guwahati gains a vital infrastructure asset that ensures safer, faster, and more reliable connectivity.

The new Panbazar ROB is set to benefit road users, facilitate efficient train operations, support the re-modelling of Guwahati Railway Station, and strengthen multi-modal transport in the city.

# CM Khandu calls for promoting sustainable tourism in Northeast

**ITANAGAR, Sept 27:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday called for promoting sustainable and inclusive tourism in the Northeast, highlighting the region's natural beauty and cultural wealth. He said tourism in the region is not just about destinations, but about experiencing traditions, heritage, and harmony with nature.

"On this #WorldTourismDay, we celebrate the unmatched beauty and cultural richness of Arunachal Pradesh and the Northeast," Khandu said in a post on X.

"Let us work together to promote sustainable and

inclusive tourism that empowers communities and inspires the world," he added.

Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein said tourism is more than just journeys, it is about creating bridges of understanding, fostering sustainability, and leaving a positive impact in the places a person visits.

"On this #WorldTourismDay, we celebrate the spirit of travel that connects cultures, sustains communities, and inspires new possibilities," he said.

"Let us travel responsibly, preserve our natural and cultural treasures, and ensure that the joy of discovery is passed on to generations to come," he said. (PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Don't test public patience

is probing the case), they can approach the court," the chief minister maintained, asking Mahanta and Sharma not to seek measures such as anticipatory bail. Sarma affirmed that as the chief minister, he will see to it that Garg gets justice. He added that Mahanta's bank accounts and credit cards have been frozen so that "he cannot remain outside for long". Sarma said the government is in the process of getting Garg's autopsy report from Singapore.

The report of the second post-mortem examination conducted at Gauhati Medical College and Hospital here is also "ready", the CM said.

Sarma said he has written to the Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court on Friday for setting up a judicial commission headed by a sitting judge to ensure transparency in the police investigation.

"I have told Union Home Minister Amit Shah today that we will hand over the case to CBI the day it seems that the Assam Police is not being able to get justice for Zubeen," he added.

On his photographs with Mahanta, Sarma said that being a public figure, he gets pictures clicked with innumerable people. "We will rise above personal relations to ensure justice for Zubeen," he asserted.

Sarma also urged the people to maintain restraint and not to spread or fall for rumours, and asked them to share with the police any credible information they may have.

He also called on the public not to indulge in "anti-government politics in the name of Zubeen in an attempt to turn Assam into Nepal". Nepal recently witnessed a nationwide agitation triggered by a social media ban by the K P Sharma Oli dispensation in the neighbouring country.

"This is Zubeen's Assam. We cite the example of Lachit Borpuhan, kings Prithu and Bhagadutta, Bhupen Hazarika, not of Nepal," Sarma said. On the arrest of some people who had taken to the streets demanding justice for Zubeen, he cited names of two such persons - Ajay Phukan, a Congress leader against whom Garg had purportedly cautioned his fans from dealing with, and Victor Das, who was accused of assaulting a woman. "My earnest appeal is that don't try to make Assam into Nepal. Violence cannot bring justice. Law will ensure justice and as chief minister, I can assure it," he added.

Sarma also shared his personal fondness for Garg, mentioning how the singer had lent his voice and composed music for songs penned by the chief minister's deceased father.

"I have been a witness to many important events of Zubeen Garg's life. I am no less a fan than anyone of him," the CM added. (PTI)

## Hagrama-led BPF

Chirangduar to former BPF colleague Khampa Borgoyary, now in the UPPL. Outgoing BTC chief Pramod Boro won Goimari but was defeated in Dotma by BPF's Prakash Basumatary. Other notable winners included former minister Rihon Daimari from Bhaibrakunda and former AGP minister Rekharani Das Boro, now in the BJP, from Baganpara.

The BPF had previously emerged as the single largest party in the 2020 BTC elections with 17 seats, but the UPPL, BJP and Gana Suraksha Party (GSP) had formed the outgoing council.

The 2025 elections mark the second council polls following the fresh Bodo Accord signed in New Delhi on January 27, 2020. Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma confirmed that the NDA will form the next council in the Bodoland Territorial Region, noting that the cancellation of campaign events three days before elections due to the demise of singer Zubeen Garg had been a setback for the BJP.

UPPL president Pramod Boro, while acknowledging the outcome, extended his congratulations to the BPF and its elected members.

"The 5th BTR Elections 2025 have concluded. The people of BTR have spoken, and although the results are contrary to our expectations, I accept their verdict with humility. I extend my congratulations to all winning candidates and reiterate UPPL's continued commitment to carrying forward the aspirations of BTR," he said. With this emphatic victory, the BPF is poised to return to power and form the next BTC council with a clear majority, restoring its dominant presence in the region. (With inputs from PTI)

## 13th day rituals

inclusive and unifying legacy of the artiste. The Minister added that people from several districts are expected to attend the ceremony, reflecting the widespread grief and admiration for the singer who held a special place in the cultural fabric of Assam.

It may be recalled that after the demise of Zubeen Garg, there was a strong demand from fans, well-wishers and several organisations for the body to be brought to Jorhat so that the last rites could be performed there.

Many had also called for the establishment of the singer's main samadhi sthal in the town, underlining Jorhat's deep emotional bond with him.

Meanwhile, in a separate development, the Central Puja Coordination Committee, Jorhat, has decided that Durga Puja organising committees in and around the town will also pay tribute to the late singer.

Ahijit Bhattacharyya, General Secretary of the Committee, told this newspaper that portraits of Zubeen Garg will be installed at various puja mandaps, where devotees will offer shradhdhanjali during the festivities. He further informed that puja organisers have been requested not to play loud popular songs during the immersion of idols on Dashami.

Instead, they have been advised to use devotional music accompanied by the traditional beats of dhak and dola. The move, Bhattacharyya said, is both a mark of respect to Zubeen Garg and a gesture of solemnity befitting the occasion.

The combined initiatives of the State Government, local organisations, and the community highlight the magnitude of loss felt across Assam at the passing of Zubeen Garg, and underscore the cultural icon's unparalleled place in the hearts of the people.

## 4G rollout will connect

the use of indigenous products. He said that 92,633 new 4G towers have been installed across the country and emphasized that the indigenous network will soon be upgraded to 5G, with 6G planned by 2030.

Sarma added that BSNL will set up data centers in five locations across India, including Guwahati, with construction already underway near Borjhar Airport.

These centers will generate local employment opportunities and allow youth in Assam to work within the state. He also noted the realisation of a 5G lab at Gauhati University and highlighted efforts to indigenise semiconductor manufacturing in Assam, positioning the state as a major technology hub.

Minister Scindia said the 4G rollout will connect remote and difficult-to-reach regions, including insurgency-affected areas, border regions, islands, and hilly terrains, ensuring that every village is digitally linked to markets, healthcare, and essential services.

He called telecom connectivity a 'jeevan setu' (life bridge) and asserted that India is set to lead globally in 5G network deployment.

The Prime Minister, chief minister, and union minister also paid tributes to the late singer Zubeen Garg at the beginning of the event.

On the occasion of BSNL's 25th anniversary, a commemorative booklet titled Sanchar Charika was released. The event was attended by senior officials, MPs, and leaders from BSNL and the Tata Group.

Sarma said the indigenous 4G network demonstrates India's technological self-reliance and strengthens the country's position in innovation, production, and digital connectivity, reflecting the vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat.' (With inputs from PTI)

## BPF part of NDA

Assam," he said. He said the SIT report will be discussed in the cabinet meeting on October 4, and after that, "we will take necessary steps". (PTI)

## GU to rename

young artistes, a new category of 'Zubeen's Songs' will be added to the singing competition during the university's inter-college youth festival, the varsity added. (PTI)

## Outgoing BTC chief

the UPPL was formed and will always be with them', Boro added. Hagrama Mohilary-led BPF swept the BTC polls in Assam, winning 28 of the 40 seats, officials said.

UPPL and BJP, alliance partners in the outgoing council, finished a distant second and third with seven and five seats respectively, down from their previous tally of 12 and nine.

Boro, who had contested from two seats, won the Goimari seat but lost in Dotma to BPF's Prakash Basumatary. (PTI)

## 104 turtles released

where these were kept in quarantine under supervision of veterinarians, the official said. These were released at the waterbody in a joint effort of the Kamrup district administration, the committee of Haigrib Madhab temple and the Forest Department for in situ conservation of these rare species. (PTI)

## KNP records 283

sustains Kaziranga's iconic wildlife, according to the report. Shifting rainfall patterns and rising temperatures are already altering habitats in Northeast India, and this study serves as a timely reminder that protecting insects and spiders is critical not only for biodiversity but also for building climate-resilient ecosystems, the official said. (PTI)

## Godawari Power & Ispat to conduct internal inquiry

**NEW DELHI, Sept 27:** Godawari Power & Ispat Ltd (GPIL) on Saturday said it is conducting an internal inquiry into six deaths "in an incident" at its plant in Chhattisgarh.

Four officials and two workers were killed in an accident inside a furnace at a private steel plant in Chhattisgarh's capital Raipur on Friday, while six others, including a general manager, suffered injuries, according to police.

An internal inquiry is being conducted for a thorough investigation and GPIL is committed to taking all necessary measures to prevent recurrence of such incident in future, the company said in an exchange filing on Saturday.

Till the completion of internal inquiry and due diligence to determine the root cause of the incident and till the resetting of the refractory lining in the travel grate of the pellet plant, operations of the iron ore pellet plant will be closed, it said.

The management of GPIL deeply mourns the deaths, it said.

However, the manufacturing activities of other plants of our company such as another pellet plant DRI (direct reduced iron), SMS (steel melting shop), etc, are running uninterrupted and unaffected, the company added. (PTI)

## IDBI Bank launches Retail Loan Utsav across 310 branches

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** IDBI Bank has rolled out a special initiative titled 'Retail Loan Utsav' to mark the upcoming festive season, offering exclusive benefits across a wide spectrum of retail loans.

The campaign, which runs from September 22 to October 4, 2025, is aimed at reinforcing the Bank's brand philosophy of 'Bank Aisa Dost Jaisa' by providing customers with attractive and customer-friendly financial solutions.

The 'Retail Loan Utsav' covers a comprehensive range of products including housing loans, auto loans, education loans, loans against property and personal loans, catering to the diverse aspirations of Indian households who often take key lifestyle and financial decisions during the festive period.

To ensure wider reach and customer participation, the Bank has identified 310 select branches to lead the campaign, spanning 156 districts across 29 states.

Speaking on the launch, Sumit Phakka, deputy managing director of IDBI Bank, said the initiative represents a meaningful effort to engage with customers at a time when they look forward to new beginnings. "The Retail Loan Utsav is a key initiative to strengthen our engagement with customers during the festive season. By offering customized loan features, attractive terms, and seamless processing, we aim to provide a truly rewarding and delightful experience for our customers as they celebrate new beginnings," he said. The campaign reflects the Bank's continued focus on customer-centric services while aligning with the festive spirit of joy, aspirations and financial empowerment.

## US tariffs pose major risk to India's growth: Crisil Intelligence

**KOLKATA, Sept 27:** High tariffs imposed by the United States on Indian goods pose a major risk to the country's growth, Crisil Intelligence said in its September report.

The tariffs will impact both Indian goods exports and investments, the report added.

However, domestic consumption, driven by benign inflation and rate cuts, is expected to support growth, it said.

The country's GDP rose to a five-quarter high of 7.8 per cent in the first quarter of fiscal 2025-26, up from 7.4 per cent in the similar quarter in the previous year.

Nominal GDP growth, however, slowed to 8.8 per cent from 10.8 per cent during the same period, it added.

The report said consumer price index (CPI) inflation is likely to soften to 3.5 per cent in the current fiscal from 4.6 per cent in the previous year.

Healthy agricultural growth is expected to keep food inflation under check, though the impact of excess rain was yet to be fully assessed.



Lower crude prices and benign global commodity prices are expected to contain non-food inflation, the report added.

On the monetary policy, the report said the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to implement one more rate cut this fiscal, followed by a pause.

The central bank's monetary policy committee had cut the repo rate by 100 basis points between February and June 2025 and is now awaiting the full transmission of past cuts. (PTI)

## TCI opens one of its largest warehouses in Kolkata

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Transport Corporation of India Limited (TCI), one of the country's leading multimodal logistics and supply chain solutions providers, has announced the inauguration of one of its largest warehouses in Kolkata.

Located at CGTA Nagar, the new facility covers about three lakh square feet on 10.5 acres of land and is designed to function as a major logistics hub for Eastern and Northeastern India while also facilitating cross-border trade with Bhutan, Bangladesh and Southeast Asia.

The warehouse is equipped to cater to a diverse set of industries including automotive, e-commerce, FMCG, retail, textiles and cold-chain solutions. Manoj Kumar Tripathi, CEO of TCI Supply Chain Solutions, said the opening of the facility underlines the growing economic activity in the region, supported by positive policies of the state governments and enhanced connectivity with the Northeast through strategic infrastructure investments by the Government of India.

"This state-of-the-art facility will have modern features that prioritise sustainability and will help serve a diverse range of industries, supporting their operations across Eastern and Northeastern India as well as the country's neighbourhood. It has a futuristic design and is one of the most eco-conscious facilities of its kind, thus also making it an optimum choice for the industry to make their supply chains relatively greener," he said.

Tripathi further recalled TCI's long association with the city, noting that the company was established in Kolkata in 1958 by its founder, Prabhu Dayal Agarwal, and has since grown into one of India's largest multimodal logistics players. The newly launched warehouse has been built with a strong focus on sustainability and efficiency.

## OPPO unveils Reno14 5G Diwali Edition

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Smartphone brand OPPO has launched the Reno14 5G Diwali Edition, bringing an exclusive festive-themed device to Indian customers.

The special edition introduces India's first heat-sensitive colour-changing technology, alongside a cultural design inspired by mandalas, peacocks and Diwali motifs.

Priced at ₹39,999 for the 8GB + 256GB variant, the phone is available at a festive offer price of ₹36,999 through retail outlets, OPPO e-store, Flipkart and Amazon.

Speaking on the launch, Goldee Patnaik, Head - PR and Communications, OPPO India, said the Diwali Edition was crafted to reflect the spirit of the festival.

"This special edition draws inspiration from India's rich cultural heritage — from the sacred mandala to the vibrant peacock — and pairs it with the magic of the industry's first heat-sensitive colour-changing design, creating a device as celebratory as the season itself," he said.

The phone's design blends In-

dian cultural motifs with festive symbolism.

The mandala, peacock and flame-like accents embody harmony, prosperity and the light of diyas, all rendered in a black-and-gold palette.

Black symbolises the darkness of Amavasya, while gold represents the radiance of Diwali lamps.

The new GlowShift Technology enables the back panel to shift from black to gold with body heat.

Built with a nine-layer lamination technique, the colour transformation is triggered between 28°C and 35°C, tested to last over 10,000 cycles.

The Reno14 5G Diwali Edition features a 6.59-inch 1.5K AMOLED display with a 120Hz refresh rate, aerospace-grade aluminium frame, Corning Gorilla® Glass 7i, and IP66/68/69 protection.

The device is 7.42mm thin, weighs 187g, and comes with All-Round Armour architecture for enhanced durability.

Powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 8350 chipset, the phone offers up to 20% higher performance and 30% better efficiency.

It houses a 6000mAh battery with 80W SUPERVOOC fast charging, ensuring two days of usage.

For imaging, the device boasts a 50MP main sensor, 50MP telephoto lens with 3.5x optical zoom, 8MP ultra-wide lens, and a 50MP selfie camera.

OPPO's Hypertone Imaging Engine supports 4K HDR video recording at 60fps across all lenses, while AI-powered tools such as AI Recompose, AI Best Face and AI Eraser enhance image quality.

To mark the festive launch, OPPO has announced several offers including no-cost EMI options up to 6 months, instant cashback up to ₹3,000 on select bank cards, zero down payment schemes for up to 8 months, an exchange bonus of up to ₹3,000, three months of Google One 2TB Cloud plus Gemini Advanced, and six months of premium OTT access with Jio ₹1199 plan.

Customers purchasing OPPO phones also stand a chance to win prizes such as cash rewards up to ₹10 lakh, OPPO products, extended warranties and reward points.

## Chakma-Hajong communities unite for justice and dignity

### Thousands rally to demand permanent, peaceful resolution to decades-old issue

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Sept 27:** A historic moment unfolded on Saturday last at the Diyun General Ground as thousands of Chakma and Hajong people gathered to participate in the 'Referendum for the Final Resolution of the Chakma-Hajong Issue'. Organised by the Joint Action Committee (JAC), an umbrella body comprising eight community-based organisations, including student groups, the event marked a powerful, people-led call for justice, peace, and dignity. The referendum represents the beginning of a community-driven movement to seek a permanent, peaceful, and time-bound resolution to a long-standing issue that has left generations in uncertainty.

Addressing the massive gathering, JAC Chairman Mahendra Chakma stated, "This referendum is not just an event, it is the voice of a community." He emphasised that the objective was to establish beyond doubt that the Chakma and Hajong communities seek a final and honourable solution, to awaken mass consciousness, and to promote dialogue and reconciliation with neighbouring tribes.

The event saw rare unity across



political and community lines. Among the prominent attendees were current MLA Nikh Kamin, former MLAs Samlung Mossang and K G Singpho (also the Chief of the Singpho community), respected Nocte leader Mulin Agan, and veteran public leader T N N Innao Singpho. Sharing the stage, Nikh Kamin said he considered it destiny to represent the Chakma-Hajong areas and assured the crowd of his unwavering support, regardless of political office. He lauded the presence of indigenous

community members, saying it reflected the deep bonds of love and respect between communities.

K G Singpho recounted the history of the Chakma settlement in the region, noting that the land was given to them in perpetuity out of a sense of tribal brotherhood. He said the Chakmas share cultural and religious ties with the local tribes, especially the Singphos. Former MLA Samlung Mossang called the referendum a truly historic event, as it was the first time the Chakma and Hajong commu-

nities had come together under one banner for such a significant cause. Mulin Agan of the Nocte community noted that unresolved issues concerning the Chakmas and Hajongs affect not only them but neighbouring tribes as well, and hoped for a time-bound resolution.

In his address, JAC Chairman Mahendra Chakma placed on record the communities' deep respect for the people of Arunachal Pradesh, the State Government, and India's democratic institutions. He expressed gratitude to the Gov-

ernment of India and the Arunachal government for providing refuge to their parents and forefathers during 1964-69 after they were displaced by religious persecution and the construction of the Kaptai Dam in East Pakistan. "For over six decades, we have lived peacefully, contributing to the development of the state," he said. However, he also highlighted that their rights have been systematically denied, especially since the Assam Agitation politicised their status. Despite Supreme Court directions and repeated efforts to integrate, the communities continue to face discrimination.

"We approach this issue not with confrontation, but with a spirit of dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect," Mahendra Chakma added. "Our aspirations are simple and constitutional — to live with dignity, equality, and security as rightful citizens of India and respected residents of Arunachal Pradesh."

The Diyun referendum stands as a watershed moment — a peaceful yet firm declaration by the Chakma and Hajong communities that their long wait for justice must end.

## BPF returns with strong mandate, UPPL pockets lone seat

### BPF secures majority, wins 4 of 5 Gossaigaon seats



**HT Correspondent**

**GOSSAIGAON, Sept 27:** Defeating the BJP-UPPL alliance, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) has returned to power in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) with a clear majority, winning 28 constituencies overall. In the Gossaigaon subdivision, BPF clinched victory in four out of five constituencies, while the UPPL managed to win just one.

In the 2 No Guma constituency, BPF's Entaj Ali defeated BJP candidate and Executive Member Sajal Kumar Singh by a margin of 7,642 votes. Ali secured 24,178 votes, Singh got 16,536. Congress candidate Abu Bakkar Ali received 3,066 votes, and UPPL's Mushida Begum secured 5,571 votes.

In the 4 No Jamduar constituency, BPF's William Narzary won with 14,484 votes, beating UPPL's Charanjit Basumatary, who polled 13,184 votes — a margin of 1,280 votes.

In 5 No Sarabil (ST), BPF's Mrityunjoy Narzary secured 17,016 votes. UPPL's Raju Kumar Narzary received 13,385, while BJP's Gosai Basumatary got 13,212. The BPF candidate won by 3,631 votes.

In Kachugaon, BPF MLA Rabin Narzary polled 19,799 votes, defeating UPPL's Ukil Mushahary, who secured 13,693. BJP's Maheswar Basumatary polled 9,888. Narzary won by a margin of 6,105 votes.

UPPL's only win in the subdivision came from the 3 No Srirampur constituency, where Wilson Hasda defeated BPF's Mokslesur Rahman by 2,602 votes. Hasda polled 20,372 votes, while Rahman received 17,770.

In the 2020 BTC elections, Congress's Sajal Kumar Singh had won in Srirampur and UPPL's Ukil Mushahary in Kachugaon. Both lost in this election as voters shifted their support.

## Durga Puja pandal adopts 'Operation Sindoor' theme

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Sept 27:** The Theatrepara Malipaty Durga Puja Samity, one of the most popular Durga Pujas in Dibrugarh, has adopted the theme "Operation Sindoor" for this year's celebrations.

The pandal features immersive light and sound effects, with live characters recreating scenes connected to the theme, which is dedicated to the Indian Armed Forces. Known for drawing large crowds during the three-day festivities, this puja continues to be a major attraction in the town.

Started in 1980 by a group of dedicated local businessmen, the puja has grown in scale and popularity over the decades. This year marks its 45th edition.

"This year, our theme is 'Operation Sindoor' and we dedicate it to the Indian Armed Forces. We are expecting a huge turnout, and all necessary arrangements for

crowd management have been put in place," said Aman Chirani, an active member of the puja committee. He further added, "We are using eco-friendly materials throughout the pandal and have avoided anything harmful to the environment."

The puja was officially inaugurated on Saturday by officials from the Armed Forces. The pandal remains open to the public.

Meanwhile, the Sri Sri Kalibari committee is celebrating its 115th Durga Puja this year.

"We are marking our 115th Durga Puja with traditional fervour. As part of our celebrations, we distributed clothes to 300 beneficiaries today," said Mainak Patra, secretary of the Sri Sri Kalibari committee. Several other puja committees across Dibrugarh have also adopted eco-friendly themes this year to attract visitors while promoting environmental awareness.

## Rongkimi church holds angling competition for new building fund

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Sept 27:** The Rongkimi Presbyterian Church in Diphu organised its 1st Prize Money Angling Competition at the fishery of Herbert Kro, Sedeng Terang village, along the Diphu-Manja Road to raise funds for constructing a new church building.

A total of 149 anglers took part in the five-hour event from 10 am to 3 pm. The first catch was made by Binod Basumatary of Birla, earning him a cash prize of ₹ 5,000. The biggest catch and first prize went to Jitu Hazarika of Diphu, who caught a fish weighing 1.65 kg and received ₹ 50,000. The second prize of ₹ 25,000 was awarded to Simeon Engti for a 1.45 kg catch, while Rev S Ronghang of Umrangso, NC Hills, won third prize with an 800-gram fish and ₹ 15,000.

## BJMM East KA marks Seva Pakhwada

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Sept 27:** As part of the nationwide Seva Pakhwada initiative and to commemorate the 75th birthday of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Mahila Morcha (BJMM), East Karbi Anglong District Committee, organised a special programme at the BJP-EKADC office (Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan) near ARTC&S First Gate, Diphu-Manja Road on Saturday. The event was graced by chief guest MP Amarsing Tisso, along with prominent leaders including BJP-EKADC General Secretary Mri-noy Teron, BJMM EKADC President Miniki Engtipi, Vice President Lizen Beypi, and State Secretary BJMM Newlybon Teronpi.

## Awareness meeting on 'Child Protection and Women's Safety'

**HT Correspondent**

**BOKAJAN, Sept 27:** An awareness meeting on key social issues such as child marriage, child labour, women harassment, and human trafficking was held at the Khatkhati Bazar Community Hall on Thursday. The programme was organised under the initiative of the National Legal Services Authority and the Bokajan Sub-Division Administration, with support from the District Legal Services Authority and the District Child Protection Office.

Sub-Divisional Officer (Civil) Kakumoni Saikia, District Child Protection Officer, Assistant LADC Robert Tanti, President of the Citizens' Association at

the police station level Suresh Singh, Child Helpline Officer Karon Jyoti Baruah, Senior Citizens' Association President Deuram Mes, and Tilabasti village headman Pawan Bongru were present at the meeting.

Speaking to the media, SDO (C) Kakumoni Saikia said the meeting aimed to raise awareness about serious social issues affecting vulnerable groups, and also informed attendees about legal aid and welfare schemes available for weaker sections of society. She emphasised the importance of using toll-free child protection helpline numbers and said such initiatives will continue in the future to further educate and support the public.

## Nandita Gorlosa distributes financial aid to Durga Puja committees

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Minister for Sports and Youth Welfare, Nandita Gorlosa, on Friday distributed financial assistance to Durga Puja committees across Dima Hasao district. Each of the 51 committees received a cheque of ₹ 10,000 during a ceremonial event held at the Conference Hall of the Deputy Commissioner's office in Haflong.

The distribution ceremony witnessed the presence of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) Executive Members Donphainon Thaoson and Probita Johori, District Commissioner Munindra Nath Ngatey, ACS, and NCHAC Principal Secretary Partha Jahari. The dignitaries jointly handed over the cheques to representatives of the puja committees.

In her address, Minister Gorlosa emphasised the need for peaceful and disciplined celebrations during the upcoming Durga Puja festivities. She also assured that any puja committee whose name was inadvertently left out of the initial list would receive the same financial support through the MLA fund.

Adding to the minister's announcement, EM Donphainon



Thaoson shared that, like in previous years, each puja committee will also receive an additional ₹ 10,000 from Chief Executive Member (CEM) Debolal Gorlosa. Moreover, committees within Thaoson's Haflong constituency will be given another ₹ 10,000 as support from his personal initiative.

The event saw participation from presidents and general secretaries of Durga Puja committees from various parts of the district, including Haflong, Maibang, Umrangso, and Harangajao.

## Lack of festival spirit marks Durga puja beginning

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Sept 27:** As Durga Puja celebrations begin today, there is noticeably less festive enthusiasm in Demow this year. The sudden demise of beloved cultural icon Zubeen Garg has cast a shadow over the festivities, leaving the people subdued.

Despite the start of the festival with the unveiling of the Goddess Durga idol on Maha Shashthi, the markets and shops, especially cloth stores, are witnessing fewer customers than usual. The usual excitement and vibrancy that accompany Durga Puja are missing, reflecting the somber mood in the area.

## Awareness drive against child marriage

**HT Correspondent**

**DHUBRI, Sept 27:** The Dhubri District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) on Friday took a proactive step in the fight against child marriage by organising a crucial awareness meeting at the Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Dhubri.

The initiative is part of a statewide effort to eradicate this social evil. The event began with a heartfelt gesture, as the gathering paid tribute to the late artist Zubeen Garg by garlanding his portrait. Advocate and Legal Advisor of the Dhubri DLSA, Mahua Das attended the meeting as the chief guest and delivered a powerful address on the devastating impact of child marriage.

"Child marriage is a crime that fundamentally violates the rights of children," Das stated, emphasising that it severely hinders the physical, mental, educational, and economic development of children, effectively "darkening their future life."

Advocate Das highlighted the often-fatal consequences, noting that in many economically poor families, marrying off daughters at an early age frequently results in the death of the girl child during childbirth. She stressed that curbing this menace requires "special vigilance" and called upon the media to play a leading role in raising awareness.

The DLSA official assured the students that the authority is not only dedicated to creating awareness but is also taking "strict action against those who promote and facilitate child marriage."

## GU rejects wild allegations of political activist

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Sept 27:** Gauhati University on Saturday strongly condemned the baseless allegations made by political activist Dulu Ahmed in a recent Facebook post, which has also been circulated by a few other users. The University clarified that the statements are not only false and derogatory, but also stem from wild imaginations that border on the absurd, depicting a disturbed sense of judgement.

The administration has noted with concern that such brazen and outlandish allegations reflect the frustration of an individual intent on maligning the image of Assam's premier university. Gauhati University reaffirmed that all works and activities are carried out strictly in accordance with the prevailing University statutes and the rules and regulations of the Government of Assam.

Utpal Sarma, Registrar of Gauhati University, said "The allegations circulated on social media are entirely unsubstantiated and aimed at discrediting the reputation of Gauhati University and its leadership. These acts, built on laughable claims and wild imagination, are self-defeating and reflect the frustration of a political activist resorting to baseless attacks. We categorically dismiss such claims and reassure all stakeholders that the University functions with complete transparency and accountability. Necessary legal steps are being taken to safeguard the integrity of this institution."

The University administration has confirmed that legal action is being initiated against the concerned individual for spreading false and damaging content. It has also appealed to the public not to be misled by such frivolous and malicious social media posts, and reiterated its commitment to upholding the highest standards of academic and administrative integrity.

## Educationist Pranab Gogoi passes away at 73



**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Sept 27:** Pranab Gogoi, a respected educationist and social worker from Margherita, passed away on Friday night at the age of 73 while undergoing treatment in Guwahati. His death has cast a pall of gloom over the entire Margherita region.

Gogoi held several prominent positions throughout his life, including Principal (i/c) of Margherita College, former President of the Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha central executive committee, Chief Advisor of the Me-Dam-Me-Phi Celebration Committee of Margherita Subdivision, and was serving as the President of the Margherita College Governing Body at the time of his passing.

His mortal remains were brought to his residence at Makum Pathar in Margherita on Saturday morning, where hundreds of admirers and locals paid their last respects. The body was then taken to Margherita College and Chao Cheng Ren at New Colony for public tribute. The final rites were conducted at the Segunbari public crematorium in the presence of numerous well-wishers.

In 2025, Gogoi was honoured with the 'Jati Mahiruha' award by the Me-Dam-Me-Phi Celebration Committee in recognition of his outstanding contributions to education and society.

Various organisations and individuals, including Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma, Margherita College, Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha, local teachers' and students' associations, journalists, and cultural bodies expressed deep sorrow over his demise and extended heartfelt condolences to his bereaved family.

## Tourism event highlights sustainable transformation and local participation

# Karbi Anglong celebrates World Tourism Day

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Sept 27:** The Tourism Department of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) marked World Tourism Day on Saturday with a range of activities centered on the theme "Tourism and sustainable transformation." The celebrations included a half marathon, the launch of the Karbi Anglong tourism website, and an inter-district quiz competition involving participants from across Assam and beyond.

The day began with a half marathon from Langvoku waterfall picnic spot to Kollajan, organised by an event management group from Kolkata. The race saw

170 participants, including many from other states, some of whom camped overnight at Langvoku with support from local hosts providing tents, food, and indigenous cuisine.

At Matipung's Sarsing Teron Memorial Town Hall, the new Karbi Anglong tourism website was launched by Executive Member Ritesh Engli alongside dignitaries from Assam Tourism Development Corporation and the Ministry of Tourism. Engli highlighted the introduction of homestay facilities in Umswai valley and encouraged youth involvement in local tourism ventures.

Assam Tourism Development Corpo-

ration Managing Director Padmapani Bora spoke on balancing economic growth with environmental and social sustainability. He noted existing homestay clusters in Amri and assured efforts to expand tourism infrastructure in Karbi Anglong.

The day concluded with a quiz competition on Assam tourism development, where Saiyan Mazumdar and Biswayan Bhattacharyee from Guwahati won first prize. Second and third prizes were awarded to teams from Jorhat and Guwahati respectively. Executive Member Engli presented the cash prizes and certificates.



# Maha Shashthi: The Dawn of the Divine

By: Dipak Kurmi

The calendar of Bengal, steeped in centuries of ritual and poetry, reaches its crescendo with the autumnal festival of Durga Puja, a celebration that fuses devotion, community, and art in a manner unparalleled elsewhere. While the five days of festivities are marked by grandeur and ritual intricacy, it is Maha Shashthi, the sixth day of the lunar calendar during the bright fortnight of Ashwin, that heralds the official commencement of the worship of Maa Durga. Though the preceding days of Mahalaya, with its invocation of the goddess through soul-stirring recitations from the Chandi, sets the spiritual tone, it is on Shashthi that the goddess is ritually awakened and invoked to descend into the material world, marking the beginning of five days of unbroken festivity, ritual theatre, and cultural expression.

Maha Shashthi's significance lies not merely in chronology but in symbolism. It is on this day that the goddess Durga, who had been invoked from her celestial abode, is ritually welcomed into the earthly domain. The ritual of Bodhon, literally meaning invocation or awakening, is at the heart of this transition. Traditionally performed in the evening, the Bodhon ritual marks the unveiling of the idol, symbolically awakening the goddess who has arrived at her paternal home for her annual sojourn. The idol, until then covered with a veil, is revealed amidst conch-shells, ululation, the deep resonance of dhak drums, and the rhythmic chanting of mantras. This unveiling is not just the commencement of festivities; it is the act through which art, sculpture, music, and spirituality converge, announcing to the community that Durga is now among her devotees.

The mythology that underpins this ritual enriches its meaning. According to the Devi Mahatmya,

Durga is invoked by the collective energies of the gods to vanquish Mahishasura, the buffalo demon whose tyranny had thrown heaven and earth into chaos. Her descent is thus not merely a familial visit to her father's home but a cosmic act of protection, where the forces of good are strengthened to triumph over evil. Maha Shashthi, then, is the threshold of that narrative, the opening chapter of the drama of divine victory. The Bodhon becomes a symbolic awakening of divine power within the human world, a call to align the community's moral and spiritual energies with the goddess's might.

The rituals of Maha Shashthi carry layers of cultural inheritance. Traditionally, the Bodhon involves the invocation of the goddess into a branch of the bel tree, representing her maternal energy, accompanied by offerings of water, fruits, flowers, and incense. In many regions, the Kola Bou or Nabapatrika is introduced on this day, though in Bengal it is often ritually bathed in the early hours of Saptami. Yet Shashthi itself is inseparable from its association with Shashthi, the folk goddess of fertility and children, whose blessing is invoked in many households. The resonance between Durga as the universal mother and Shashthi as the guardian of fertility deepens the maternal symbolism of the day.

Beyond the ritual, Maha Shashthi is a deeply communal experience. Streets begin to swell with anticipation, pandals, many of which have been months in preparation, finally come alive with dazzling illumination, elaborate themes, and the vibrant interplay of sound and colour. The unveiling of the idol is often coupled with cultural performances—songs, recitations, and dance—that weave together devotion and artistry. The air becomes electric with the resonance of the dhak, whose beat has become synonymous with Durga Puja itself. For diasporic commu-



nities, whether in London, New Jersey, or Singapore, the Bodhon on Maha Shashthi connects them across oceans to the rhythms of Bengal, anchoring them to a cultural calendar that transcends geography.

Historically, the prominence of Maha Shashthi grew with the evolution of community or barowari pujas in Bengal during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While Durga Puja had long been observed as a private, aristocratic ritual among zamindar families, it was the rise of community celebrations that transformed it into a collective cultural phenomenon. In this transformation, Maha Shashthi became the official public curtain-raiser, the day on which the larger community could finally share in the spectacle of the goddess's presence. Writers such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and later Rabindranath Tagore infused Durga Puja with layers of nationalist sentiment, equating the goddess with the motherland itself.

Within that symbolic framework, Maha Shashthi became the invocation not just of divine power but also of collective cultural and political aspiration.

In contemporary times, Maha Shashthi continues to evolve, absorbing the spirit of modernity while retaining its ritual core. In Kolkata and across Bengal, the unveiling of the idol is often broadcast live, accompanied by cultural programmes that blend traditional devotional songs with contemporary performances. Social media has amplified this collective unveiling, allowing the diaspora to participate virtually in the Bodhon even if they are thousands of miles away. For many, posting images of the first glimpse of the idol on Shashthi has become a ritual of its own, one that reaffirms belonging to a shared cultural rhythm. Yet, in the midst of lights, screens, and global participation, the essential gesture remains the same—the act of calling upon the goddess to awaken and dwell among her chil-

dren. The sensory atmosphere of Maha Shashthi is inseparable from its emotional landscape. For devotees, the moment of Bodhon is suffused with a sense of intimacy, as if the mother herself has stepped into the household. It is a moment where the divine feels close, tender, and protective, where mythology collapses into lived experience. The deep red of hibiscus flowers, the fragrance of incense, the rhythmic swirl of conch-shells—all these elements fold into memory, becoming a sensory archive that devotees carry across lifetimes. Children, hearing the dhak for the first time, link sound to joy; elders, with eyes moist at the goddess's unveiling, connect the present to the past. In these shared moments, Maha Shashthi renews the bonds of community across generations.

It is also worth noting that Maha Shashthi resonates beyond Hindu Bengal. In Assam, Tripura, Odisha, and among Bengali communities elsewhere, the rituals

have acquired local adaptations, blending with regional folk traditions. In Assam, for example, the goddess is invoked with local instruments and songs, adding a distinctive regional cadence to the celebration. In Tripura, tribal cultural performances are often integrated into the Shashthi festivities, demonstrating how the invocation of Durga is also the invocation of regional identity. Even in metropolitan centres like Delhi or Mumbai, Maha Shashthi serves as a cultural anchor for migrant Bengali communities, offering continuity amid the dislocation of urban life.

At a philosophical level, Maha Shashthi carries a timeless metaphor. The act of awakening the goddess from her dormant state is a symbolic reminder of the latent power within the human spirit. Just as the idol is unveiled, so too are the inner energies of courage, compassion, and resilience invoked. The goddess's descent is not merely a mythological narrative but a psychological allegory for awakening the higher self to confront the demons of fear, injustice, and despair. In this sense, Maha Shashthi transcends its ritualistic specificity to become a universal metaphor for renewal and empowerment.

The day also gestures toward the cyclical nature of time. Each year, the goddess arrives, is welcomed, worshipped, and then bid farewell at Dashami. The Shashthi Bodhon is the beginning of that cycle, the dawn of a drama whose conclusion is already inscribed in the ritual calendar. The joy of unveiling is tinged with the foreknowledge of departure, an awareness that heightens the intensity of devotion and celebration. In that sense, Maha Shashthi is not only about beginnings but also about the temporality of life itself—about the beauty of moments that must pass, and the necessity of embracing them fully while they last.

In the contemporary globalised world, where cultures often fragment under the weight of speed and dispersal, Maha Shashthi remains a festival of pause and collective gathering. It binds not just families but entire neighbourhoods, cities, and diasporic communities into a single rhythm of anticipation, invocation, and joy. In every unveiling of the idol, there is also an unveiling of memory, tradition, and shared belonging. The Bodhon is therefore not only the awakening of a goddess but also the awakening of community, of cultural identity, and of the timeless human longing for the presence of the divine.

As the dhak beats swell and the veil is lifted from the goddess's visage on Maha Shashthi, a moment of silence often precedes the eruption of joy. That silence is profound—it is the stillness of anticipation before the surge of festivity, the pause before the unfolding of the sacred theatre of Durga Puja. In that silence lies the essence of Maha Shashthi: a threshold between absence and presence, between longing and fulfilment, between the world as it was and the world as it will be for the five days that follow. It is a reminder that life, like devotion, is made meaningful by such thresholds, where time itself feels consecrated.

Thus, Maha Shashthi, with its Bodhon and its unveiling, is far more than a date on the ritual calendar. It is the dawn of the divine, the moment when myth enters life, when communities rediscover their bonds, and when art and devotion merge into a singular cultural experience. It is a celebration that, in its ritual precision and expansive symbolism, continues to define the heart of Durga Puja, ensuring that each year, in Bengal and beyond, the goddess awakens not only in clay and scripture but in the very spirit of her devotees. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

## Goddess Durga - The divine embodiment of power

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Goddess Durga is a supremely sacred and powerful spiritual symbol in Hinduism, whose form beautifully expresses the beauty of creation, the depth of life, and the infinite potential of power. She is not only a divine mother but also the embodiment of the universal energy of creation, preservation, and destruction. Through her worship, devotees gain the courage, strength, and protection needed to face life's challenges. The form of Goddess Durga is vast and imbued with profound philosophical significance. Every aspect of her iconography, weapons, posture, and symbols holds meanings connected to various facets of life. Her presence dispels fear from the hearts of devotees and inspires them to remain steadfast on the path of truth. Through her form, devotees discover their inner strength and forge a deep connection with various aspects of life. Each dimension of her worship is infused with spiritual depth and life lessons, teaching devotees to achieve a balance of peace and strength in every situation. The power of Goddess Durga is not confined to mythological tales; it pervades every sphere of life. Through her worship, devotees experience strength and courage in every aspect of their existence.

The form of Goddess Durga is profoundly glorious and multifaceted as a spiritual symbol. She is often depicted with ten arms, each holding various weapons. These ten arms symbolize different aspects of life. Each weapon represents a specific power, signifying the struggle against malevolent forces. The trident in her hand symbolizes the harmony of righteousness, wisdom, and strength. Her sword represents the power to dispel the darkness of ignorance. Her bow and arrow signify unwavering focus toward a goal. Her vehicle, the lion, symbolizes courage, strength, and dominance. The lion's symbolic presence reflects the goddess's invincible power and resolute stand for truth. The serene expression on her face, the piercing gaze of her eyes, and her steady posture symbolize the union of peace and strength in every life situation. Each aspect of her form holds profound philosophical significance. Her ten-armed form signifies that her power permeates every sphere of life. Her presence removes fear from devotees' minds and inspires them to face life's challenges. Through this form, devotees connect with various aspects of life and discover their inner strength. This depth in her form motivates devotees to remain steadfast in life's struggles and progress on the path of righteousness. Each aspect of her form uniquely expresses the beauty, strength, and spirituality of life. Through her form, devotees uncover profound truths of life and learn to achieve a balance of peace and strength in every situation.

According to mythological narratives, when the demon Mahishasura's tyranny caused the three worlds to tremble, Goddess Durga was created through the combined energies of all the gods. This narrative reveals a profound truth: the true source of power lies in collective effort and unity. Goddess Durga waged an intense nine-day battle against Mahishasura and ultimately defeated him. This nine-day battle is a symbolic representation of life's struggles. Each day of life is akin to facing a new challenge. Through this battle, devotees are taught that with patience, courage, and perseverance, any obstacle can be overcome. The goddess's victory over Mahishasura proves that steadfastness on the path of truth and righteousness always leads to triumph. Every aspect of this narrative is imbued with profound philosophical significance. It inspires devotees to remain resolute in life's struggles and trust in their own strength. This battle is not merely a mythological event but a profound lesson connected to every struggle in life.

Through the worship of Goddess Durga, devotees attain a unique balance of strength, courage, and peace in life. A significant aspect of her worship is the

Navratri festival, during which her various forms are venerated over nine days. These nine days symbolize different aspects of life. Through the worship of a specific form of the goddess each day, devotees forge a deep connection with various facets of life. The first three days are dedicated to her power aspect, symbolizing the destruction of malevolent forces. The next three days are devoted to her Lakshmi form, representing prosperity and good fortune. The final three days focus on her Saraswati form, symbolizing knowledge and wisdom. Through this nine-day festival, devotees learn to maintain balance in life. They learn to harmonize strength, prosperity, and knowledge. Each day of Navratri allows devotees to discover their inner strength and gain inspiration to face life's challenges. Through this festival, a profound spiritual connection is established between devotees and the various aspects of the goddess's power. Through the worship of Mother Durga, devotees learn to achieve a balance of peace and strength in every aspect of life. Each day of the festival reveals a new dimension of the goddess's power, guiding devotees toward profound truths of life.

The philosophical significance of Goddess Durga is deeply profound and multidimensional. Her form embodies a unique harmony of creation, preservation, and destruction—the three fundamental aspects of life. Creation gives birth to new possibilities, preservation maintains life's balance, and destruction brings an end to malevolent forces. Through these three aspects of the goddess, the profound meaning of life's cycle is revealed. Her power enables devotees to realize that every situation in life has a specific purpose. Her destructive power clarifies that the end of old and malevolent forces is inevitable, paving the way for new creation. Her preservative power underscores the importance of maintaining balance in life. Through the philosophical significance of Goddess Durga, devotees gain a deeper understanding of every aspect of life. Her worship teaches them to achieve a balance of strength, courage, and wisdom. This philosophical significance is a profound life lesson, inspiring devotees to face every situation with patience and peace. Through the influence of her philosophical significance, devotees connect with various aspects of life and learn to harmonize strength, courage, and wisdom.

The influence of Goddess Durga's power is profoundly evident in every aspect of a devotee's life. Devotees overcome their inner fears and gain courage and confidence. Through her power, they are inspired to face life's challenges. A special aspect of her form is her maternal role, through which she protects and guides devotees. This maternal form brings a sense of peace to their lives. Through her power, devotees learn to remain steadfast on the path of truth and righteousness in every situation. The influence of her power is reflected in every aspect of a devotee's life. Through her worship, devotees establish a profound spiritual connection, inspiring them to achieve a balance of peace and strength in every situation. Her power profoundly impacts every facet of a devotee's life, motivating them to face challenges and discover their inner strength.

In conclusion, through the worship of Goddess Durga, devotees discover their inner strength. A profound spiritual connection is established with her power, teaching devotees to maintain balance in every aspect of life. Through her worship, they uncover profound truths of life and learn to harmonize strength, courage, and wisdom. The influence of her power is evident in every facet of a devotee's life. Through her worship, devotees are inspired to face life's challenges and discover their inner strength. The profound impact of her power is reflected in every aspect of their lives. Through her worship, devotees uncover the deeper truths of life and learn to achieve a balance of strength, courage, and wisdom.

## Adoration of Goddess Durga in the Dimasa Kingdom

By: Zahid Ahmed Tapadar

The Dimasa-Kachari tribe, part of the greater Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group, is one of the oldest inhabitants of this region. They are identified as descendants of the great warrior Ghatotkocha of the Mahabharata, who ruled the north-eastern part of the Indian subcontinent for centuries. The rise, transformation, and gradual expansion and shifting of the Dimasa kingdom to the southwest occupy a special place in medieval history.

No historical materials of the Dimasas are available until the late eleventh century. Ancient history is inferred only by following folklore and legend. There are various scattered records of the formation of kingdoms in the 13th-14th centuries AD in Kamrup, Shadia and Dimapur in present-day Nagaland respectively.

In 1536, the Dimasa king Dersongpha was defeated and killed in a battle with the mighty Ahoms. The Dimasas abandoned the Dhanshiri Valley and entered northern Cachar, marking the beginning of the Dimasa kingdom's expansion centered around Maibang. During this period, the influence of Brahmanical culture began to affect the Dimasa dynasty. In 1540, the Dimasa king adopted a Hindu name for the first time. Following the adoption of the name Nirbhay Narayana by Madan Kumar of the Hasenghah dynasty, all subsequent Dimasa kings recognized this practice as a traditional legacy of the royal family.

This renaming was a significant event in the cultural assimilation of the Dimasa community. It was during the reign in Maibang that the Dimasa people underwent a transformation in their religious practices. The first example of the official language of Dimasa kingdom is the language of the script engraved on 12 July 1576 at the newly built 'Singhadwar' (Palace Gate) in the capital KirtipurMaibang during the coronation of King Meghanararyana. The practice of language, literature, culture and art began at Maibang during the reign of Dimasa king Meghanararyana [1576-1583 AD], a contemporary of the Ahom king Chukhampha.

Durga Puja is a royal worship. According to descriptions in the Shri Shri Chandi and Markandeya Puranas, the first recorded worship of Goddess Durga was performed by King Surathin the spring to seek the blessings of Goddess Durga as per the instruction of Rishi Medhas.

Although no written evidence of the worship of Goddess Durga was found during the early period of the Dimasa kingdom, stone idols of Goddess Durga have been discovered in various parts of the then Dimasa kingdom. Professor Sudhanshu Sekhar Tunga has mentioned some information about the introduction of Durga Puja in the Heramba or Dimasa royal family during the 13th century in his article "Aryanisation in North-East India." He writes, "King Vikramadityapha, who was a contemporary of the Ahom King Sukapha, made a golden image of the Goddess Thakurani (Durga) and worshipped her with full royal devotion as early as 1250 AD. This is probably the first instance of Durga Puja celebrated by any Hinduized people east of Bengal."

Indeed, it was Maharaja Suradarpa Narayana [1708-1720 AD] who established a seat for Goddess Durga. Durga Puja by making idols started on a widespread basis in the kingdom of Dimasa during the reign of Suradarpa. The royal family probably worshipped the idol of the lion-bearing goddess Dashabhuj. There is a

mythical tradition in the imagination of the idol of the goddess in the Dimasa kingdom.

The Durga Puja of the Dimasa royal family was a splendid occasion. According to the list of religious expenditures of Maharaja Govinda Chandra Narayana, we see that Rs. 750 was spent on Basant Durga Puja and Rs. 4,250 on Sharadiya Durga Puja. However, there is no detailed information about the protocols followed during the royal Durga puja or the roles of the royal family. But the substantial expenditures on the Durga worship provide insight into the grandeur of the festival. Additionally, several royal letters from that time mention the goddess Durga, supporting her esteemed position in the Dimasa kingdom. Following the traditional custom of letter writing at that time, the name of the goddess was invoked at the top of letters. Maharaja Krishna Chandra Narayana began a letter written in 1206 Bengali era with:

"SatsatiShri Durga choronarbindomakorondosanandito  
Mottomodhutratoj manas shri shrijugto  
Koilkokattadhikarin..."

The first written example of the worship of Goddess Durga is found in the poetry of Chandramohan Burman, the 'national poet' of South Assam. The poet Chandramohan, a contemporary of the last two Dimasa kings, Krishna Chandra Narayana and Govinda Chandra Narayana, describes the history of the Dimasa kingdom and mentions the worship of Goddess Durga in the melodious rhythm of the Bengali language -

'EthayherombodesheSubhodhorporaja  
Ashwinerprotima gori kore Durga puja.  
Sei kale Rancheandhipujenripobor  
Mesh Mohish bolideynirontor.'

We also find references to the practice of human sacrifice in the worship of the goddess Durga in Chandramohan's poetry:

'Purbarporkaulikrajyabyabohar ache.  
Ashtamitorbolidey devi kache  
Ei heturakhe look nijuktokoria  
Samanya projakeanetaradhoria.'

During the reign of Suradarpa Narayana, in preparation for the animal sacrifice on the Ash-tami day of the Sharadiya Durga Puja, the king's entourage imprisoned an astute Brahmin named Bhuvaneshwar Bachaspati to ensure the proper chanting of mantras. While exposing the mistake of the priest in reciting the puja mantra Bhuvaneshwar dramatically captured the attention of the Raajmata Chandraprabha Devi. He was then released and eventually became a royal scholar in the royal court of Maharaja Suradarpa Narayana. Maharaja Suradarpa Narayana stopped the practice of human sacrifice in the kingdom of Dimasa to prevent such occurrences of Brahmin killing in the future. To remove such obstacles in worshipping the goddess, arrangements for the recitation of Puranas were made during that time.

Maharaja Suradarpa Narayana not only patronized the worship of the goddess but also composed some devotional songs. A Shakta song composed by him in the pre-Ramprasad era -

'Dinodayamoe naam tomar.  
Shuniya bhorasahoiyacheamar.  
Puja jopotokichunahikoamar.  
Tobejodikripa koro mohimatomar.'

Amitokumotiatigatinaaar.  
Bhorosakariyachikebolshrichorontomar.'

Many kings of the Dimasa dynasty composed hymns and Vaishnava verse in the contemporary Bengali language, enriching the literary genre of medievaltime. MaharajaRamachandradhaway Narayana [1728-1735 AD] continued that trend influenced by the Krittivasi Ramayana, he praises Goddess Durga in these lines -

'Joy Devi Bhagoboti Himalaya Nandini.  
Okalekorila puja Eam roghumoni.'

Maharaja Ram Chandra Dhway prayed for the help of Goddess Durga against external threats:

'Tran koro go janoni,bipodeporiyachi.  
Bhoktinahijanimago! shoktinahisthir  
Kebolhoiyachiamijagotebahir.  
Sommokheshomonerbhoy - jorjorshorir hoy  
Hridayedhorichirangapodosonkorir  
Pronotikoria bole Ramchandra nripo.'

Maharaja Krishna Chandra believed that Goddess Durga is the possessor of all powers. So he wrote:

'Nam tomarRonchandimaworoner-  
jaanochohndhi.  
Rakhiyachoherebmeswarmawokori nana  
shondhi.  
Choudikearnanyomodhyemawotomar-  
naamtijage.  
Krishna Chandra Maharaj tomarchoron-  
maage.'

Maharaja Krishna Chandra's reign was marked by significant events. In efforts to protect the Dimasa kingdom from the invasions of powerful Mughal forces, he had to flee from the capital Khaspur and seek refuge in the Barail hills. In his sorrowful verses, he conveyed the hardships and misfortunes he faced while seeking the goddess's blessings:

'Tumi ma bosiyaroailaiShreegolar hate.  
Sonarchondayagela, shuniyaporaniphate.  
Rajyogelo, bhumigelo, tahenaahesomri.  
Chandi puja oilo bad, ei se dukh-e mori.'

The last king of the Dimasa, Govinda Chandra Narayana [1813-1830 AD], was a renownedpoet, composing numerous lyrics devoted to Goddess Durga. Even in the darkest of hours, he maintained hope through his hymns:

'Jay Durge!Tobo podokomoleminotiprochur  
Sudaesinurprotibindukritorakbijoritodyo-  
oti...'

The patronage of Goddess Durga by the Dimasa royal family has significantly contributed to the cultural and spiritual landscape of the region, showcasing the deep reverence they held for the goddess and her vital role in their lives. The synthesis of politics, devotion, and cultural expression forms a remarkable chapter in the history of the Dimasa community, emphasizing the enduring legacy of their faith and artistic contributions. With the patronage of the Dimasa kings, several scholars including Brahmamukhor Chandra, Deeparam Singha and Dwij Sachipothave left behind a rich legacy that reflects the cultural heritage of the Dimasa people.

# 'KARBI YOUTH FESTIVAL – A mega winter festival of Karbis'

By: Dilip Rongpi

There are no races or tribes in the world without festivals. If there is any existence then it will certainly be a rare case. The Karbis or the Mikirs are a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group in Northeast India. They have their own culture and rich language with other traditional festivals. This tribe has been celebrating its traditional festival since the day of the beginning of the civilization history by taking the chance of time, environment and convenience. Festivals which are being celebrated by the Karbis are basically based on agriculture like most festivals celebrated by races, ethnic group of India are also based on agriculture. Before the beginning of the farming activities on the hills or plateau, after having harvested crops and brought them home in the process of welcoming as Lakhimi to put them in the granary, the Karbis people enjoy relaxation time and perform festivals in between these two interval times. The Karbis celebrate the Hacha Kekam soon after the beginning of Magh Bihu of the Assamese festival that falls in January. Following the Magh Bihu, February the second month of the English new year comes with invitation to the very lovely and enthusiastic festival of Karbi young boys and girls which is called the Karbi Youth Festival or Karbi Riso Nimso Rong Aje in Karbi. In the early part of 1970s, the old style of fashion was still performed in dances and songs by the young boys and girls of the tribes where they meet at any place of open field in the village in accordance with the convenience of time, opportunity and social need. However, by the time of the festival's celebration, there is a logic behind performing such songs and dances. This kind of logic is solely believed to be spiritual. The Chomangkan (death festival) is generally observed by a family of anyone of the deceased persons in a village involving all relatives and friends due to emancipation of the departed souls. To complete the entire process of observation, the preparation takes a full month. It is an expensive event in the Karbi society yet the observation of chomangkan is not only confined in a particular village but also many men, women, young boys and girls from different villages are also invited to participate the death ceremony in a cordial manner. The Nimso Kirung (a traditional dance performed by the Karbi Youth by interlocking hands together during the Chomangkan festival), Chong chingnang (a shield dance) and a dirge singer sings a funeral song throughout the day and night.

Besides that the youth perform the Ritong Chingdi dance before beginning of agricultural activities on the hills in keeping with the auspicious occasion of Botor kekur (Monsoon prayer). After that as stated before, the youth collected crops from the field of golden crops and the grain was stored in the granary which was followed by a community feast at the courtyard of a village headman where all youth and villagers gather together with joy and happiness. On that particular day the young boys and

girls sing a hymn welcoming the grain in the granary and they perform the Hacha Kekam with great delight.

In response to the changing demands, those dances and songs gradually occupy the open stage in lieu of the courtyard of a village headman or any open field in a village. It has been a long time coming that these valuable songs and dances must not be allowed to wash away by the storm of ultra modern for which a group of cultured Karbi youth are committed to actively working to preserve their rich culture. As a result of timely thinking, those enthusiastic youth had formed a platform by naming the Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) in 1974 at Diphu Karbi club which is situated in the heart of Diphu town and it was held for the first time in the premises of the club itself. The effort of the farsighted leaders perceived for the first time has not gone in vain. The elders also accompanied the youth to carry forward it. The festival mainly focuses on all traditional games like Hambi kepathu (a game that is used the seed of hicker bean) Kengdong dang kedam (walking with stilts) and Bathali Ke-up (a native bow shooting) in addition to folktales and folksongs. It is being celebrated once in a year in different parts of Karbi Anglong and west Karbi Anglong considering time and convenience of organisers after the first ever celebration. In the course of time of the grand success of celebrating this festival and in the interest of well management, the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) was founded on January 30, 1977 with the same group of leaders who had animated this mega event. Under the initiative of Karbi cultural society and Karbi societal front ranking leaders, a resolute decision was taken to celebrate the festival from 16th to 19th February, 1994 at Karbi people's Hall, Taralango, Diphu every year which is marked the month of Karbi New Year. On the basis of this historic decision of great Karbi leaders, the festival is celebrated in the month of February every year involving all Karbi young boys and girls, elders at Karbi people's Hall, Taralango, Diphu.

The colourful Fagun (the eleventh month of the Assamese calendar) that falls in the month of February blows with the end of a cloth into the heart of Karbi young boys and girls to remind them to be ready for celebration of the festival. The playful young boys and girls are counting the days of beginning of the festival which is generally begun from the fortnight of February and they are almost plunged into the sea of joy for celebrating the much-awaited Karbi youth Festival where they would participate in dancing and singing in different forms at Taralango, Diphu. In this context, it is worth to be mentioned that artists especially young boys and girls who are going to participate in different events scheduled for competition items in the festival begin their rehearsal from the first week of January with a view to showing their excellent performances and this is done in every KCS Zonal committee other than Karbi Anglong and west Karbi Anglong where the Karbi population is found in Assam.



During the rehearsal period the young artists are busy in learning how to play the flute, a musical pipe, a jews-harp and how to beat drums etc. On the other hand the public are also helping the rehearsal group in the form of cash or kind in order to encourage the young artists. However, it is done only in the respective zonal committee.

The overall renovation works are started at Karbi people's Hall, Taralango which is an extensive area of 331.23 acre land before the commencement of the much-awaited festival. Taralango becomes a lovely place in the course of preparing the mega event as the artists and officials from different departments work actively for construction and repairing works in order to decorate the entire area of Taralango. The statue of Karbi legendary figure or a teacher of Karbi folksong Rangina Sarpo has been installed in front of the Karbi Cultural Society central committee office situated at Taralango, Diphu. Both the open stages of Sing Mirjeng and Longmirjeng have been named after his dear discipline whose names were Sing Mirjeng and Longmirjeng. Rangina Sarpo has also been witnessing the festival with great excitement. In fact, it was the craftsman's touch of the famous craftsman of Assam Mr. Biren Singha who has animated the life of Rangina Sarpo in the form of a big statue and actually Rangina Sarpo was a great teacher of Karbi folksong and folkstories. The Sing Mirjeng open stage is located on the right hand side of Rangina Sarpo while the Longmirjeng open stage is located on the left hand side of him which is very near to the statue. Towards the west direction which is a distance of 40 mtrs. approx. from the statue is the Semson Sing Engti Memorial stage who was a great Karbi leader as well as an architect of Karbi Anglong district. These three open stages have also borne its own significance.

Falksong and folkdance competitions were performed on the open stage of Mirjeng duo brothers who were the dear disciple of Rangina Sarpo. On the other hand Semson Sing Engti Memorial open stage presents modern song, rock music, fashion show etc. in a manner of modern standard competition. Further, the entire area of the Karbi people's Hall is filled with traditional materials market, General Market,

Book fair, Govt. and Non-Govt. exhibition stalls, food items market etc. are held with attraction to visitors. After all, during these four special days artists, tourists, visitors, buyers, sellers and cultural activists made a congested road due to a sea of people. It is to be noted that overall these activities are properly monitored by the Karbi Cultural Society, Central Committee, Diphu situated in the heart of Karbi people's Hall, Taralango. In addition to these cultural programmes along with competition items come to an end after completion of four days uninterrupted programme of the festival. On the cultural night of fourth day of the festival, a colourful cultural programme is held in which different caste, race, tribes, artists performed different cultural items – including Bihu dance, Jhumur dance, Bagorumba, Tiwa dance, Nepali dance, Bengali dance etc. that reverberate the resounded tune in all direction of the sky-air of Taralango that has become the luminous night in an exclusive form.

The Karbi Youth Festival which is celebrated at Taralango with union of different cultures is not only for the youth of Karbi young boys and girls but also all inhabitants as well as different communities who have been living in the hills of undivided Karbi Anglong, has become the heart of the people and be it the symbol of affection, brotherhood and unity between each other.

The responsibility of Zonal Committee in promoting the tribe's culture:

The people of the world have their own culture and literature. No people exist without culture and literature. A tribe is recognized by its unique culture which acts as its symbolic emblem. If our culture is lost, the tribe is lost. The new generation has to think over the matter seriously. The culture, legend, religion, traditional attire of the Karbis are in danger of being lost and in order to promote and preserve the Karbi culture, a section of the enlightened Karbi leaders had formed the "Karbi Riso Nimso Rong Aje" meaning "Karbi Youth Festival (KYF) in 1974 at Karbi Club Diphu. This platform has given the maximum benefit to the Karbi community. The Karbi Community faced a lot of crisis in traditional instrument, songs, dance, and dress etc. 50 years ago. The youth were ashamed of wearing their own traditional dress, they preferred

to wear the dresses of other community including speaking of the other language. But the Karbi Community was lucky enough at this critical juncture to have such visionary Karbi leaders who had founded the Karbi Youth Festival (KYF). It is time has come to think deeply about the development of our culture especially the educated Karbi youth. The Karbi Youth Festival was formed and celebrated at several places before its permanent venue was established at Karbi People's Hall, Taralango, Diphu. But there is no mark of evidence after the celebration of the Karbi Youth Festival. So, the Karbi Cultural Society thinks of the change of its ways how to celebrate the festival smoothly.

In this way, the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) had decided to form zonal committee in different parts of Karbi Anglong in 1992. Before the formation of zonal committee, the festival has been participated by clubs. Since the club is not the branch of Karbi cultural society, the tribe's culture was facing problem to move ahead. The Karbi Youth Festival held at Dengjirso aklam Hamren in 1992 was the first ever participation from each KCS zonal committee and the first edition of the Zonal Karbi Youth Festival was celebrated in the entire Karbi Anglong in 1993 that was a historic event. Keeping in full swing celebration of the festival every year, the Karbi youth Festival has permanently been celebrated at Karbi people's Hall Taralango since 1994 and the 51st edition of KYF was also celebrated in this year in February 2025.

The members of zonal committee have come to know very well about the pros and cons of the KCS that how much they had to struggle for promotion of culture at the grass level. Once a situation has compelled the enthusiastic cultural activists to involve in groupism activities among themselves at the KCS, central committee level including the members of zonal committee for which the Karbi Youth Festival has become a dying cultural festival due to the influence of mud-slinging politics. This is happened due to division of the leaders of Karbi Cultural Society in the year 2000. But the matter was thoroughly discussed in the KCS, central committee repeatedly by involving the zonal committee members also and as a result of the constant effort, it has

been possible to merge into one entity.

The crisis of unity once again emerges in the fold of cultural activists due to the emergence of Karbi Jutang Chingthur Amei (KJCA) that was founded on 09/01/2010. But the Karbi Cultural Society has persistently approached to the prominent members of Karbi Jutang chingthur Amei (KJCA) for unification into one cultural platform. In the wake of the repeated persuasion, the KJCA also agreed to the proposal of unification in the interest of greater Karbi Society. Despite many efforts for unification, some zonal committees have expressed their unwillingness to align with the Karbi Jutang Chingthur Amei. But the members of Karbi Cultural Society, Central Committee strongly adopted a decision which later all zonal committee had accepted the holistic decision of KCS, Central Committee based on the situation prevailed in the fragmented society of Karbi community. The arena of Karbi Youth Festival is such a platform where all people like educated, illiterate, rich, poor, lame, disability, widow, orphan etc. can meet happily without identifying their beliefs and political ideology. This is the reason why each zonal committee has to give importance to the decision taken by the KCS, Central Committee.

If we assess the problem of Karbi Society consciously, we are bound to feel pity for society in respect of their culture, language and tradition what situation would come in the coming days as we the Karbi people are a minority community in the broader context of India's population or in Assam. Despite a small number of Karbi population, they are fragmented into several beliefs rejecting their age-old traditions and marching towards disunity which is a very harmful for society. When a man converts his/her religion, it is definitely happened changing his/her way of performing rite. If such a practice is going on, one day the entire legacy passed down from ancestral society of Karbi community may get vanished through changing of the age-old tradition. This will be a very dangerous perception for the community. Everybody knows that a community is identified on the basis of their literature and riddles. If we lose our culture and literature, we will lose our community. In this con-

text, everyone should weigh the matter with deep deliberation because a man can not be identified by means of his/her religion. It has been observed that the Karbi community is changed in the face of tradition soon after changing of his/her religion. Religion cannot protect the life of any

community though there may be many religious believers in different religion. The Karbi has become a dying culture every moment. In view of all this situation, the zonal committee members have to work hard in order to promote the cultural organisation. Farther they have to uphold the responsibility of enriching the Karbi culture and literature, there has been a downward trend of promoting our literature instead of adopting an ascending attitude. In order to promote the tribe's culture, legend, literature each zonal committee has to work together with villagers, village headman etc. Because the core of literature and culture especially folksong, folklore, legends are merely found in villages.

We can expect the long-term existence of Karbi culture if our cultural activists who are working at the zonal committee level and they work whole-heartedly for the purpose. Or else what will happen our culture? The outcome may come as stated above. So the cultural activists working at the jurisdiction of zonal committee level must not identify themselves on the basis of religious beliefs, traditions values, arts, social behaviour, language etc. Instead cohesiveness among the Karbi people is to be ensured prudently. We cannot underestimate the essence of politics in the field of culture too. But the exercise of politics should be in a certain periphery so that negative impact must not reach out in the sphere of culture. Now I would personally like to appeal to the members of zonal committee to judge the matter of culture and literature deliberately and must not mingle with politics.

If the zonal committee members are unstained, the members of KCS, central committee would also be free from dirt image. It is the need of the hour that appeals to all section of the Karbi community.

## Assam's Hill Tribes: Tradition and Tomorrow

By: Debakshi Bora

Nestled amidst the rugged landscapes of Assam, the hill tribal communities burn patches of the forest to prepare the land for jhum cultivation. This practice has been sustained for generations. However, what once fed the entire village is now struggling to survive against the pressure of population growth, diminishing forest cover and a changing economy. The hills of Assam, comprising the Karbis, Dimas Kacharis, Garos, Kukis, and several smaller groups, form a significant part of the state's cultural and economic fabric. Concentrated predominantly in two districts, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, the hill tribal communities face a dilemma in holding on to their traditional ways while finding their place in a rapidly modernising world.

While Assam's overall poverty has declined from approximately 37% in 2013-14 to 14.5% in 2022-23, the hill areas with predominantly hill ST have lagged behind with a poverty ratio of 44.7% relative to other spatial categories, according to the Assam Human Development Report. Moreover, the hill areas of this state face unique challenges due to rugged terrain, extensive forest cover, peculiar agro-climatic conditions, distinct socio-cultural features, and typical institutional arrangements. This can also limit the scope and opportunities available to people through their various choices. But we cannot overlook the potential and opportunities that can be harnessed in the hilly regions. This article discusses both the challenges and the future economic potential of the hill tribes of Assam.

For decades, Jhuming, or shifting cultivation, has been practised on high altitudes and contin-

ues to be the mainstay of farming communities. However, the period of the Jhum cycle has declined rapidly, from 10-15 years to 4-7 years, due to increased population pressure. This short Jhum cycle cannot replenish its lost fertility, and production from this type of cultivation has decreased. The decline in the area under jhum cultivation over the years has been accompanied by a gradual shift among nomadic tribal communities towards more settled agricultural practices. Moreover, the new generation is also showing less interest in shifting cultivation, as they are more inclined to engage in non-farm activities.

On the other hand, the practice of such cultivation involves clearing forests, which contributes to deforestation and loss of biodiversity. The removal of vegetation exposes soil to erosion. However, shifting cultivation still dominates large areas, and efforts to transition farmers towards more sustainable livelihoods have seen only limited success. The techno-economic feasibility and socio-economic acceptability of these alternatives remain subjects of much debate.

Traditionally, land among the hills was held communally by a tribe, and user rights to land were distributed to families according to customary norms by the traditional authority. With the progress of settled urbanisation and cultivation, individual holdings began to emerge in many parts. Although these developments have not been accompanied by the establishment of proper land records and formal land settlements, the evolution of landholding rights into full property rights remains incomplete. This limitation reduces the ability to use land as collateral in financial transactions, restricting its potential economic utility. While the transition

to alternatives of jhum, such as plantation and horticulture, requires an infusion of investment, the lack of progress toward a document-based property rights regime can hinder the inflow of investment, especially in the form of bank credit. This scenario creates an obstacle to the growth of the agriculturally dependent economy in the hills.

The economy of the Hill tribes of Assam has gradually diversified and shifted from agriculture towards an industrial and service sector, albeit at a slower rate. The majority of the tribal workers in this region were employed as agricultural labourers instead of working on their own land. Besides, people in this region are currently involved in other plantation crops, including rubber and broom grass in Karbi Anglong district, as well as several varieties of tropical and temperate crops. There is also an excellent potential for rubber and coffee plantations in the Dima Hasao district. The hill tribes are also engaged in other allied activities, including livestock, integrated fish farming, and duck cum fish culture. Pineapple, apple, banana and oranges are the main fruits cultivated in the hill district.

However, industries in the hill districts remain meagre. A few industries have grown here, based on local raw materials such as tea, chemicals, fertilisers, plywood, pulp and paper, cement, and thermal power generating units. However, large-scale industrialisation is yet to take off.

The hilly region is blessed with an abundance of natural resources, presenting an excellent opportunity for the growth of such industries. Cottage industries based on forest raw materials can provide a vital fallback. Handloom can serve as a substantial source of livelihood, particularly



for rural tribal women in this region. Moreover, migration has also become a lifeline. The people, including both unskilled and semi-skilled workers, have increasingly migrated towards urban areas to earn their livelihood from urban industrial pursuits. This slow but steady shift away from agriculture is reshaping tribal livelihoods.

Moreover, the presence of ethnic cultural diversity and rich biodiversity is one of the most attractive aspects of this region, which attracts tourists from different areas. As such, this region presents an excellent opportunity for tourism sector development, which can play a positive role in improving the livelihoods of the communities. Being surrounded by forests, the hill districts of Assam also have a valuable her-

itage of herbal medicine. If this knowledge of medicinal plants can be appropriately documented, it will provide an excellent opportunity for the native people of this region to earn a living. Apart from this, there is a fantastic potential for the export of exotic and ornamental plants, such as orchids, anthurium, lily, and many other flowers.

Despite their rich natural resources, they continue to face deprivation. Poor healthcare, inadequate education, and limited connectivity restrict their fundamental freedoms, keeping them poorer than other groups. To break this cycle, this region needs focused attention; only then can the state move closer to Sustainable Development and ensure that no community is left behind.

# BRICS must defend multilateral trading system amid tariff volatility: Jaishankar



NEW YORK, Sept 27: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has called on BRICS to defend the multilateral trading system amid increasing protectionism

and tariff volatility during a meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers here on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session.

"When multilateralism is under stress, BRICS has stood firm as a strong voice of reason and constructive change," Jaishankar said in a social media post.

"In a turbulent world, BRICS must reinforce the message of peacebuilding, dialogue, diplomacy and adherence to international law," he said.

"As rising protectionism, tariff volatility and non-tariff barriers impact trade flows, BRICS must defend the multilateral trading system," he said.

Jaishankar's remarks come weeks after the US slapped 50 per cent tariffs on India, including an additional 25 per cent penalty for its purchase of Russian oil, among the highest in the world.

The external affairs minister also called on the bloc to amplify its collective call for a comprehensive reform of the principal organs of the United Nations, especially the UN Security Council.

"Technology and innovation will define the next phase of BRICS cooperation," he added.

Talking about India's upcoming chairmanship of the grouping in 2026, Jaishankar

said it will focus on food and energy security, climate change and sustainable development through digital transformation, startups, innovation and strengthened development partnerships.

Jaishankar also met his counterparts from Sierra Leone, Romania, Cuba, Austria, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Russia, Uruguay, Colombia, Antigua and Barbuda, among others, on the margins of the UN General Assembly session. He also met with the UAE's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and the two leaders exchanged perspectives on bilateral cooperation.

Jaishankar said he had a "lively discussion" with Austrian Foreign Minister Beate Meinl-Reisinger on the geopolitics of the day and the choices before India and Europe.

The external affairs minister had a "great meeting" with IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) ministers. "IBSA made a strong call for the transformative reform of the UNSC," he said.

With his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, Jaishankar had a "useful discussion" on bilateral ties, the Ukraine conflict and developments in West Asia.

The external affairs minister also chaired the India-CELAC Foreign Min-

isters' Meeting along with his Colombian counterpart, Rosa Yolanda Villavicencio.

"We agreed to strengthen our existing broad-based cooperation in fields such as agriculture, trade, health, digital, HADR and capacity building," Jaishankar said.

"Also to explore emerging areas such as AI, technology, critical minerals, space and renewables," he added.

The minister said India and CELAC also agreed on the urgent need to "reform multilateral institutions to better represent the Voice of the Global South". (PTI)

No degree of drama and no level of lies can conceal the facts

## Pak military pleaded for cessation of fighting during Operation Sindoor: India

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 27: Pakistan's military "pleaded" for a cessation of fighting during Operation Sindoor in May, India has said in a hard-hitting response from the United Nations General Assembly, asserting that there is "no room for any third party" to intervene in issues between New Delhi and Islamabad.

"This assembly witnessed absurd theatrics in the morning from the prime minister of Pakistan, who once again glorified terrorism that is so central to their foreign policy," First Secretary in India's Permanent Mission to the UN Petal Gahlot said, delivering India's Right of Reply in the UN General Assembly on Friday.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif advanced a "bizarre" account of the recent conflict when India had launched Operation Sindoor targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in retaliation for the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 civilians, she said.

The Resistance Front (TRF), an offshoot of Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), had claimed responsibility.

India said, "Till May 9, Pakistan was threatening more attacks on India. But on May 10, its military pleaded with us directly for a cessation of the fighting. The intervening event was the destruction caused to multiple Pakistani airbases by Indian forces. The pictures of that damage are, of course, publicly accessible."

India slammed Pakistan after Sharif said his country "won the war" during the recent conflict with India, referred to the "cease-

fire" facilitated by US President Donald Trump and raised the issue of Kashmir in his address to the UN General Assembly on Friday morning.

Sharif had also said that the Pakistani forces had repulsed India's attacks and claimed that seven Indian jets were turned to "scrap and dust".

In a sharp retort, India said that "if destroyed runways and burnt-out hangars look like victory, as the prime minister claimed, Pakistan is welcome to enjoy it".

Gahlot said in the UNGA hall that "we saw many pictures of terrorists slain in Bahawalpur and Muridke terror complexes by Indian forces during Operation Sindoor".

"When senior Pakistani military and civilian officials publicly glorify and pay homage to such notorious terrorists, can there be any doubt about the proclivities of this regime," she said.

Following Operation Sindoor, a viral photograph showed Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist Hafiz Abdul Rauf leading prayers for those killed in strikes on the LeT's headquarters in Muridke, with the funeral being attended by members of the Pakistan Army.

India further said that there is no room for any third party intervention in matters between New Delhi and Islamabad.

"India and Pakistan have long agreed that any outstanding issue between them will be addressed bilaterally. There is no room for any third party in that regard," Gahlot said.

Sharif had claimed that while Pakistan was in a "position of strength", it agreed to a ceasefire facilitated by Trump's "bold and



visionary leadership" and thanked the American leader and his team for "their active role in bringing about the ceasefire".

India has consistently maintained 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.

Gahlot highlighted at the UN General Assembly that it was Pakistan that had in the UN Security Council on April 25 "shielded" "The Resistance Front", from the responsibility of carrying out the barbaric massacre of tourists in Jammu and Kashmir.

"No degree of drama and no level of lies can conceal the facts," she said. Following the Pahalgam attack, the 15-nation UN Security Council had on April 25 issued a press statement in which the members had underlined the need to hold perpetrators, organis-

ers, financiers and sponsors of the reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice.

However, the press statement did not mention TRF as the group responsible for the attack after Pakistan managed to get the name removed.

"We have exercised the right to defend our people against such actions and have brought the organisers and perpetrators to justice," she said.

She accused Pakistan of "deploying and exporting terrorism" and said it has no shame in advancing the most ludicrous narratives to that end.

"Let us recall that it sheltered Osama bin Laden for a decade, even while pretending to partner in the war against terrorism. Its ministers have just recently acknowledged that they have been operating terrorist camps for decades," she said.

She underscored that where terrorism is concerned, India is making it clear that there will be no distinction between the terrorists and their sponsors.

"Both will be held accountable. Nor will we allow terrorism to be practised under the cover of nuclear blackmail. India will never bow to such threats. India's message to the world is clear; there must be zero-tolerance for terrorism," Gahlot said.

Responding to Sharif's remarks that his country stands ready for a "composite, comprehensive and result-oriented" dialogue with India on all outstanding issues, Gahlot said if he is indeed sincere, the pathway is clear. (PTI)

## Airstrikes, shooting kill at least 38 people in Gaza as Israel ignores demands for ceasefire

DEIR AL-BALAH, Sept 27: Israeli strikes and gunfire killed at least 38 people across Gaza, health officials said, as international pressure grows for a ceasefire but Israel's leader remains defiant about continuing the war.

Strikes in central and northern Gaza killed people in their homes in the early hours of Saturday morning, including nine from the same family in a house in the Nu-seirat refugee camp, according to health staff at the Al-Awda hospital where the bodies were brought.

The attacks came hours after a defiant Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told fellow world leaders at the UN General Assembly Friday that his nation "must finish the job" against Hamas in Gaza.

Netanyahu's words, aimed as much at his increasingly divided domestic audience as the global one, began after dozens of delegates from multiple nations walked out of the UN General Assembly hall en masse Friday morning as he began speaking.

International pressure on Israel to end the war is increasing, as is Israel's isolation, with a growing list of countries deciding recently to recognize Palestinian statehood

— something Israel rejects.

Countries have been lobbying US President Donald Trump to press Israel for a ceasefire. On Friday, Trump told reporters on the White House lawn that he believes the US is close to achieving a deal on easing fighting in Gaza that "will get the hostages back" and "end the war."

Trump and Netanyahu are scheduled to meet Monday, and Trump said on social media Friday that "very inspired and productive discussions" and "intense negotiations" about Gaza are ongoing with countries in the region.

Yet, Israel is pressing ahead with another major ground operation in Gaza City, which experts say is experiencing famine. More than 300,000 people have fled, but up to 700,000 are still there, many because they can't afford to relocate.

The strikes Saturday morning demolished a house in Gaza City's Tufah neighborhood, killing at least 11 people, more than half of them women and children, according to the Al-Ahly Hospital where the bodies were brought. Four other people were killed when an airstrike hit their homes in the Shati refugee camp, according to Shifa hospital. (AP)

## Danish defence ministry reports renewed drone sightings at military facilities

COPENHAGEN (DENMARK), Sept 27: The Danish defence ministry said Saturday that "drones have been observed at several of Danish defence facilities" overnight Friday into Saturday. The renewed drone sightings come after there were several drone sightings in the Nordic country earlier this week, with some of them temporarily shutting down Danish airports.

The Danish defence ministry did not say where exactly the drones were seen, but several local media reported that one or more were seen near or above the military Karup Air Base.

Danish public broadcaster DR reported that there were drones in the air both inside and outside the fence of the air base at around 8 pm, quoting Simon Skelkjer, the duty manager at the Central and West Jutland Police.

DR said that for a period of time the airspace was closed to civil air traffic, but that did not have much practical significance as there is



currently no civil aviation in Karup.

The repeated unexplained drone activity, including over four Danish airports overnight Wednesday into Thursday and a similar incident at Copenhagen Airport, has raised concerns about security in northern Europe amid suspected growing Russian aggression.

The Copenhagen drones grounded flights in the Danish capital for hours on Monday night.

The goal of the flyovers is to sow fear and division, Danish Minister of Justice Peter Hummelgaard said

Thursday, adding that the country will seek additional ways to neutralise drones, including proposing legislation to allow infrastructure owners to shoot them down.

For the upcoming European Union summit next week, the Danish defence ministry confirmed on X that the country's government had accepted an offer from Sweden to "lend Denmark a military anti-drone capability," without giving further details. In neighbouring Germany, several drones were reported in the northern German state of Schleswig-Holstein, which borders Denmark, from Thursday into Friday night.

The state's interior minister, Sabine Stützerlin-Waack, said that "the police force are currently significantly stepping up their drone defence measures, also in coordination with other northern German states," German news agency dpa reported. She did not provide any further details, citing the ongoing investigations. (AP)

WASHINGTON, Sept 27: Naturepedic, a mattress and furniture company based outside Cleveland, has been planning to introduce an upscale upholstered headboard late this year or early in 2026.

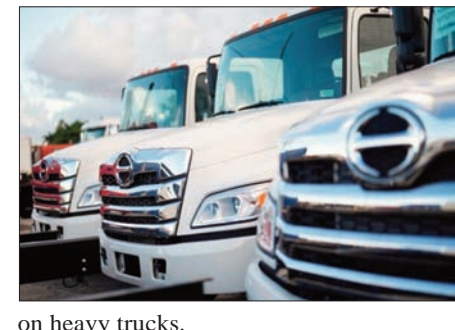
But President Donald Trump has thrown those plans into disarray. On Thursday night, the president announced on social media that he was slapping a 30 per cent tax on imported upholstered furniture. Naturepedic ships its headboards from India and Vietnam.

So what is the company to do?

"Do we continue forth ... and hope for the best?" asked Arin Schultz, Naturepedic's chief growth officer. "Or do we feel like we're priced out and drop it altogether?" And if Naturepedic decides to continue with the rollout, "do we eat the cost or pass it on to customers?"

Across the United States, lots of executives were asking themselves similar questions as they came to work on Friday morning.

Upholstered furniture, after all, wasn't the only import in Trump's crosshairs Thursday night. In addition, the president posted on his Truth Social platform, he's imposing import taxes — tariffs — of 100 per cent on pharmaceutical drugs, 50 per cent on kitchen cabinets and bathroom vanities and 25 per cent



on heavy trucks.

And he's not waiting around to do it. The tariffs, he said, would take effect on Wednesday.

Trump also raised eyebrows by justifying the levy on vanities and sofas as necessary for national security. "It's hard to see how a kitchen cabinet industry is essential to winning the next war," said Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Thursday's social media barrage was just the latest in Trump's push to upend American trade policy, which for decades pushed for lower trade barriers around the world.

In place of an open market, Trump has built a tariff wall around the US economy, slapping

double-digit taxes on imports from almost every country on earth and targeting products (steel, aluminium, autos) with specific taxes of their own.

Trump says the tariffs will protect US industries from foreign competition, encourage companies to bring production to the United States and raise money for the US Treasury.

They certainly have become a moneymaker for the federal government. Since fiscal year 2025 began last Oct. 1, the US Treasury has collected USD 172 billion in customs duties, up by USD 96 billion (or 126 per cent) from the same period in fiscal 2024. Still, tariffs account for less than 4 per cent of federal revenue.

Businesses, lawyers and trade analysts are still wondering what to make of Trump's Thursday night tariffs. "We've only seen the President's Truth Social posts," said Dan McCarthy, principal in McCarthy Consulting and a former official with the Office of the US Trade Representative in the Biden administration. "We need to see the details."

For example, Naturepedic isn't sure whether the 30 per cent levy on upholstered furniture will be stacked atop a separate and earlier 50 per cent tariff on goods from India. (AP)

## Pak says defence pact with Saudi 'formalised' relationship that was 'transactional'

ISLAMABAD, Sept 27: Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has said that the recently signed strategic mutual defence pact with Saudi Arabia has "formalised" a relationship between the two countries that was previously "a bit transactional".

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia last week signed the "Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement" in Riyadh, pledging that any attack on either country would be treated as an "act of aggression against both."

Previously, Asif had suggested that Pakistan's nuclear capabilities could be made available to Riyadh under the new framework. However, in a subsequent interview, the minister denied that nuclear weapons were part of the accord, saying they were "not on the radar".

"It is not a reaction to what happened in Qatar because this was being negotiated for quite some time. So, it's not a reaction; perhaps it must have sped it up a bit, but that is all. It was already in the offing," Asif said in response to a question by journalist Mehdi Hasan during an interview with Zetoo, Dawn newspaper reported.

Hasan had asked Asif whether the pact was a reaction to the Israeli bombing of Qatar?

Hasan then pointed out that Pakistan was the only nuclear power in the Muslim world, noting that Saudi Arabia had expressed interest in being the second. He also pointed out that Asif had previously stated that nuclear weapons "were not on the radar" for this pact.

"Is Saudi Arabia protected by Pakistan's nuclear umbrella per this agreement or not?" he asked.

"We have had a very long defence relationship with Saudi Arabia, spanning five or six decades. We had a military presence over there, perhaps more than four or five thousand at the peak, and we still have a military presence over there. I think we have just formalised that relationship, which was previously a bit transactional," Asif responded.

"Formalised with or without the nukes?" Hasan probed. However, the minister declined to go into the details.

"I will refrain from going into the details, but it's a defence pact and defence pacts are normally not discussed publicly," he said.

Hasan then pointed out that journalist Bob Woodward, in his 2024 book "War", had quoted Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman telling a US senator that he could "just buy" a bomb from Pakistan.

"I think that is just sensationalised [...] No, I don't believe that quote," the minister replied. (PTI)

## Hungrier, poorer and more anxious Iran awaits 'snapback' of UN sanctions over its nuclear programme

'The Trump administration appears to think it has a stronger hand post-strikes, and it can wait for Iran to come back to the table'

DUBAI, Sept 27: As Iran's ailing economy braced Saturday for the reimposition of United Nations sanctions over its nuclear programme, it is ordinary people who increasingly find themselves priced out of the food they need to survive and worried about their futures.

Iran's rial currency already sits at a record low, increasing pressure on food prices and making daily life that much more challenging. That includes meat, rice and other staples of the Iranian dinner table.

Meanwhile, people worry about a new round of fighting between Iran and Israel — as well as potentially the United States — as missile sites struck during the 12-day war in June now appear to be being rebuilt.

Activists fear a rising wave of repression within the Islamic Republic, which already has reportedly executed more people this year than over the past three decades.

Sina, the father of a 12-year-old boy who spoke on condition that only his first name be used for fear of repercussions, said the country has never faced such a challenging time, even during the deprivations of the 1980s Iran-Iraq war and the decades of sanctions that came later.

"For as long as I can remember, we've been struggling with economic hardship, and every year it's worse than the last," Sina told The Associated Press. "For my generation, it's always either too late or too early — our dreams are slipping away."

Iran sanctions set to 'snapback' Early Sunday at 0000 GMT (8 pm East-



ern), barring any last-minute diplomatic breakthrough, UN sanctions on Iran will be reimposed through "snapback," as the mechanism is called by the diplomats who negotiated it into Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Snapback was designed to be veto-proof at the UN Security Council, meaning China and Russia cannot stop it alone, as they have other proposed actions against Tehran in the past.

The measure will again freeze Iranian assets abroad, halt arms deals with Tehran, and penalise any development of Iran's ballistic missile programme, among other measures.

France, Germany and the United Kingdom triggered snapback over Iran, further restricting monitoring of its nuclear programme and the deadlock over its negotiations with the US.

record in 2018, during the first term of President Donald Trump's administration.

"The Trump administration appears to think it has a stronger hand post-strikes, and it can wait for Iran to come back to the table," said Kelsey Davenport, a nuclear expert at the Washington-based Arms Control Association. "Given the knowledge Iran has, given the materials that remain in Iran, that's a very dangerous assumption."

Risks also remain for Iran as well, she added: "In the short term, kicking out the IAEA increases the risk of miscalculation. The US or Israel could use the lack of inspections as a pretext for further strikes."

Iran on Saturday recalled its ambassadors to France, Germany and the UK for consultations ahead of the sanctions being reimposed, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Hunger and anxiety grow in Iran The aftermath of the June war drove up food prices in Iran, putting already expensive meat out of reach for poorer families.

Iran's government put overall annual inflation at 34.5 per cent in June, and its Statistical Centre reported that the cost of essential food items rose over 50 per cent over the same period.

But even that doesn't reflect what people see at shops. Pinto beans tripled in price in a year, while butter nearly doubled. Rice, a staple, rose more than 80 per cent on average, hitting 100 per cent for premium varieties. Whole chicken is up 26 per cent, while beer and lamb are up 9 per cent. (AP)

Emphasis laid on sustainable growth and community participation

World Tourism Day celebrated in Tawang



HT Correspondent

TAWANG, Sept 27: The Department of Tourism, Tawang, on Friday joined the global observance of World Tourism Day with a vibrant programme that brought together government officials, stakeholders, and visitors to highlight the importance of sustainable tourism and its role in preserving the cultural and natural wealth of the district.

Deputy Commissioner Tawang, Namgyal Angmo, IAS, in her keynote address, stressed that tourism development should not be measured only by the rise in visitor numbers or expansion of facilities, but also by the quality of services, visitor satisfaction, and the preservation of Tawang's pristine environment, rich culture, and age-old traditions. She urged all stakeholders to promote tourism in a dignified and responsible manner by avoiding the pitfalls of mass tourism and instead encouraging eco-friendly, community-driven initiatives.

Calling for a wider outreach, she highlighted the need to promote rural and un-

explored places such as Jemeithang and Mago, ensuring that even the remotest villages in the district benefit from tourism. "Tourism growth must empower local communities, strengthen traditional livelihoods, and safeguard the future for coming generations," Angmo reiterated. District tourism officer, Tsering Dekey, outlined the initiatives of the district administration in promoting tourism sustainably.

She informed that a refresher-cum-capacity building training for hoteliers, homestay operators, and tourist guides was conducted earlier in the week under the initiative of the DC Tawang, focusing on enhancing service standards, cultural preservation, and visitor experience.

As part of the day's programme, certificates were distributed to participants of the Homestay Owners' Convention who had undergone training earlier this year at DK Convention Hall, Itanagar, as well as to those who recently completed the capacity building course in Tawang.

The initiative reaffirmed the administration's commitment to building skills and

strengthening service delivery in the tourism sector.

Demonstrating an eco-conscious approach, DC Angmo also presided over the distribution of dustbins sponsored by the Mon Hotel Association, Tawang, in an effort to encourage cleanliness and environmental responsibility across tourist hubs and localities.

The day further witnessed the launch of a book titled "Threads of Destiny: The Saga of Mandralgang and Pemachen" by Koncho Teering, Nursing Officer at KDS District Hospital Tawang.

The release of the book added a literary flavour to the celebration, reflecting the importance of local storytelling traditions. The cultural spirit of the Monpa community was highlighted through enthralling performances by the Ketchenga Cultural Troupe, WASV Cultural Troupe, and others, which captivated the audience and showcased the district's vibrant heritage.

An exhibition of traditional Monpa cuisines, organised by the Homestay Owners' Association of Tawang, gave par-

ticipants a unique opportunity to relish authentic local flavours.

The programme was attended by Assistant Commissioner Tawang Sange Norbu, OC SB of District Police Kesang Norbu, Secretary General of Mon Mimang Tsokpa (MMT) Rinchin Norbu, Taxi Union President Tashi Dondup, Hoteliers' Association President Sonam, Homestay Operators' President Lham Ngurup, tour guides, domestic and international tourists, and other dignitaries.

Reflecting on the occasion, DC Namgyal Angmo reminded the gathering that "World Tourism Day is not just a celebration but a reminder of our responsibility to develop tourism in a sustainable manner for our future generations."

The day's events underlined the shared commitment of the administration, the Department of Tourism, and local stakeholders towards developing Tawang as a tourism destination that harmonises growth with sustainability, ensuring long-term benefits for both the community and the environment.

Techi Kaso urges parents to guide children towards a bright future

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Sept 27: Capital Complex MLA and Advisor to the Urban Affairs Minister, Techy Kaso, on Saturday called upon parents to take greater responsibility in guiding their children's future so that they grow up to become good human beings, serve society with dedication, and contribute meaningfully to the all-round development of the state and the nation.

Kaso was addressing the third felicitation programme of the Takam Welfare Society (TWS), organised at a city hotel in Itanagar. Speaking on the occasion, he stressed the need for parents to remain vigilant and supportive in their children's academic and personal growth, warning that the younger generation today faces serious challenges, particularly due to indulgence in substance abuse and the influence of bad company.

"We are passing through a critical time where youths are being damaged due to drug abuse and unhealthy habits. Precious time once lost will never return. Therefore, it is high time that we care for our children's future and guide them in their studies and constructive activities. Alongside education, children can also take advantage of government provisions in the field of games and sports through sports quotas, but for that, they must excel in their chosen discipline," the MLA said.

Addressing the youths directly, Kaso advised them to respect elders, work hard in their studies, and pursue their interests in sports with sincerity.

He also urged them to prepare for competitive examinations and aspire to join the civil services,



which would enable them to serve their community and society in leadership roles. He further emphasised the importance of discipline in the family.

"When a son asks for a motorcycle, parents should give him books instead. When a daughter asks for a mobile phone, encourage her first to learn and gain knowledge, and use digital resources wisely instead of wasting time on unproductive activities," he remarked.

Guest of honour and Deputy Commissioner of Itanagar Capital Complex, Toko Babu, also addressed the gathering.

He motivated the youths to become role models for their families, communities, and the larger society, so that their achievements could inspire others.

On the occasion, Takam Welfare Society President Takam Tatup,

General Secretary Takam Dari Sojik, Education and Literary Secretary Takam Dado Larku, Organising Secretary (Education) Takam Dado Tayo, and Overall In-charge Takam Dado Namta also spoke, sharing their words of encouragement and guidance with the students and youths present.

The highlight of the programme was the felicitation of achievers from the Takam clan.

Certificates of achievement, trophies, and cash awards were presented to students and young talents who excelled in the fields of education, games and sports, and other areas of distinction.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from the community and reinforced the importance of collective responsibility in nurturing the younger generation for a brighter and more progressive future.

Takam Sanjoy condemns Wangchuk's arrest, terms it NDA's 'worst 2025 blunder'

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Sept 27: Former Lok Sabha member and senior social activist Takam Sanjoy has strongly condemned the arrest of renowned climate activist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk, describing the move by the BJP-led NDA government as the "worst blunder of 2025."

Wangchuk was arrested in Leh on September 26 under the stringent National Security Act (NSA), while the Ministry of Home Affairs also cancelled the license of his NGO, the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL), over alleged violations.

Sanjoy termed the action "uncalled for and unconstitutional," accusing the government of suppressing the democratic voice of the people and reflecting what he called the "anti-people attitude of the saffron brigade."

The Ladakh-based climate activist had launched a 35-day hunger strike in Leh on September 10, demanding inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and full-fledged statehood for the Union Territory.

His agitation followed two months of silence from the Union Home Ministry, which had stalled talks on the long-pending demands.

This was Wangchuk's second major protest, after his 21-day "climate fast" in sub-zero temperatures in March 2024, which had ended with women-led relay strikes but failed to produce any breakthrough.

Sanjoy, who is also a former



president of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) and a founding member of the North East Students' Union (NESO), demanded Wangchuk's immediate and unconditional release.

"He is a staunch nationalist. His arrest is an insult to the democratic values of India and to Mahatma Gandhi, who achieved freedom for the nation through peaceful means," Sanjoy said.

He further argued that peaceful agitation for genuine demands is a constitutional right.

"Wangchuk's demand for statehood is genuine, as Union Territories are usually upgraded to meet the democratic aspirations of their people. However, the BJP has shown otherwise by downgrading the statehood of Jammu and Kashmir to a Union Territory, a move

unprecedented in the political history of India," Sanjoy said.

The former MP alleged that the ruling party intends to keep Ladakh under tight control through the Lieutenant Governor's office and hinted at "a hidden agenda to weaken democratic rights of Ladakhis."

Highlighting the environmental importance of the region, Sanjoy said that Wangchuk's concerns are valid since the Himalayas provide nearly 80 percent of India's water supply and face recurring climate disasters.

He cited the 12th Sustainable Mountain Development Summit of the Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI), chaired by former Arunachal Pradesh Chief Secretary Ramesh Negi in Dehradun, where scientists and policymakers stressed coordinated and commu-

nity-driven development for the Himalayan region.

Wangchuk's agitation, supported by the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), has also focused on land rights, cultural preservation, environmental safeguards, and strengthening of local governance since Ladakh's separation from Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 after the abrogation of Article 370.

Sanjoy questioned the use of NSA against Wangchuk, noting that the activist has no record of anti-national activity.

"The NSA, rooted in colonial-era Bengal Regulation III of 1818, empowers detention without trial for up to 12 months. The BJP has taken Bharat back to the pre-independence era by adopting coercive measures worse than the Britishers," he said, adding that such steps will only deepen public distrust.

The arrest has sparked sharp political reactions across the country. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference leader Omar Abdullah and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal have criticised the Centre for what they described as an assault on democracy.

Congress general secretary in-charge of communications Jairam Ramesh also condemned the arrest, saying it was intended to "divert attention from the BJP's failure to maintain law and order in Ladakh."

Calling the episode the "worst blunder of 2025," Sanjoy urged the BJP-led government to "stop disrespecting the Constitution and awaken from its deep slumber."

Army conducts yoga training for combatants in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, Sept 27: A two-week yoga training programme for combatants of the Indian Army's Spear Corps concluded in Arunachal Pradesh's West Siang district on Saturday, a defence official said.

Defence PRO Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said the training, held at Aalo, was meticulously designed to enhance the holistic well-being of soldiers by combining physical endurance with mental resilience through the timeless discipline of yoga.

Under the guidance of trained instructors, the sessions were tailored to address the unique physical and psychological demands faced by soldiers operating in challenging terrain and climatic conditions of the region, the official said. Beyond improving physical fitness, he said the initiative focused on cultivating calmness of mind, emotional balance, and spiritual strength, qualities that are indispensable for effective soldiering under operational stress. The training included posture-based exercises, breathing techniques, and meditation practices.

"These elements not only aided in developing stamina and focus, but also provided soldiers with practical tools to manage stress, recover from fatigue, and sustain readiness during demanding tasks. The enthusiasm and active participation of the troops reflected the relevance of yoga in contemporary military life," the official said. (PTI)

Armymen scale Arunachal's highest peak Mt Gorichen

ITANAGAR, Sept 27: Soldiers of the Indian Army's Spear Corps successfully scaled the 6,488-metre-high Mount Gorichen, the highest scalable peak in Arunachal Pradesh.

The soldiers summited the peak on September 19 despite harsh conditions, Defence spokesman Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said on Saturday.

The expedition was undertaken to promote adventure, build resilience, and highlight the Army's commitment to environmental conservation, he said.

Facing sub-zero temperatures, icy ridges, and rarefied air at high altitude, the soldiers demonstrated "exceptional teamwork and unwavering determination" to reach the top,

described as the "Roof of Arunachal", he added.

General Officer Commanding (GoC) of Spear Corps Lt Gen Abhijit S Pendharkar said, "This expedition is a reflection of the Indian Army's grit and resilience. Our soldiers not only conquered the formidable heights of Gorichen but also set an example in respecting and preserving the environment."

Alongside the climb, the team organised a cleanliness drive on their route.

The initiative, officials said, underlined the importance of sustainable mountaineering practices and preserving India's fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

Mount Gorichen, located in Tawang district near the India-

China border, holds sacred significance for the Monpa tribe, who regard it as the guardian deity of the region.

Known for its treacherous approach and unpredictable weather, the peak has long attracted mountaineers and adventurers, and is seen as a symbol of endurance, spirituality, and natural grandeur in the northeastern state.

The expedition, the spokesperson said, not only showcased the Indian Army's discipline and spirit of adventure but also sent out a message of environmental responsibility.

It stands as both a demonstration of military excellence and a reaffirmation of the Army's ethos of service to the nation and respect for nature. (PTI)

Mass social service drive conducted in Naharlagun



HT Correspondent

NAHARLAGUN, Sept 27: Residents of Lower Rakap Colony and Lower Kongkra Puttu Colony in Naharlagun came together on Saturday to organise a mass social service and cleanliness drive, reaffirming their commitment to maintaining a clean and hygienic township.

The initiative was led by Colony Development Committee President, Talar Phassang, and witnessed enthusiastic participation from local residents, senior citizens, and community leaders.

The programme was sponsored by Ward No 18 Corporator, Kipa Takum, who joined the residents in carrying out the cleanliness and awareness activities across different parts of the colonies.

The drive focused on waste clearance, sanitation awareness, and promoting collective responsibility for the upkeep of public spaces.

Speaking on the occasion, Corporator Kipa Takum and Colony President Talar Phassang jointly appealed to the citizens of Naharlagun to rise above social and economic differences and contribute wholeheartedly to cleanliness movements.

They emphasised that such collective efforts would not only keep the city clean and green but also promote healthier living conditions for all. The leaders further called upon non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to take proactive roles in motivating and mobilising people in their respective areas.

"Every citizen must understand the importance of a clean environment. With unity and cooperation, we can build a healthier, greener, and more sustainable Naharlagun," they stressed.

The social service drive, marked by active public participation, reflected the growing awareness among the residents of the need for community-driven cleanliness initiatives, in line with broader state and national campaigns to improve urban sanitation and public health.

Condolences pour in from across the state

Daporijo mourns passing of pioneer entrepreneur Nete Yamak Kena

HT Correspondent

DAPORIJO, Sept 27: A pall of grief has descended over Daporijo, the headquarters of Upper Subansiri district, following the demise of Nete Yamak Kena, a revered matriarch and one of the region's earliest women entrepreneurs.

She breathed her last earlier this week at Adithya Hospital in Dibrugarh, Assam, after a prolonged illness.

Kena, wife of late Tarik Kena, is remembered as a trailblazer whose pioneering spirit helped shape the socio-economic landscape of Upper Subansiri.

Her entrepreneurial journey began in the 1970s, at a time when civil infrastructure and commercial activity in the newly established district headquarters were still at a nascent stage.

Establishing one of the first major retail outlets in Daporijo, she not only challenged

the traditional barriers faced by women in commerce but also laid the foundation for a budding local economy.

Community elders and officials recall her enterprise as a cornerstone in the district's commercial history.

More than a personal achievement, her venture inspired a generational shift, motivating local women to pursue self-reliance and explore entrepreneurship.

Her name has thus become synonymous with resilience, foresight, and community progress.

Condolences have poured in from across the state.

Among the first to express grief was former Arunachal Pradesh State Information Commissioner Gumjung Haider.

In his condolence message, he stated, "With hearts filled with grief and emotion, I extend my heartfelt condolences on the

passing away of dearest Nete Yamak Kena, wife of Late Tarik Kena, after prolonged illness. She left us for her heavenly abode, leaving behind a void that can never be filled. I offer my final prayers and bid farewell to her."

Kena was regarded as the bedrock of her family and community.

She is survived by one daughter, three sons, and several grandchildren, who have pledged to uphold her enduring legacy of strength, integrity, and service to society.

The people of Daporijo have joined in solidarity with the bereaved family, paying tribute to a woman whose industrious spirit and determination helped chart the course of the modern town.

According to family sources, the last rites and final observances will be performed in Daporijo in the coming days, with details to be announced shortly.



## 'We do not want anyone to have any type of inconvenience during the funeral'

# Curfew relaxed for 4 hours in violence-hit Leh town, situation peaceful: Officials

**LEH, Sept 27:** For the first time since curfew was imposed three days ago in violence-hit Leh town of Ladakh, the restrictions were relaxed Saturday afternoon in a phased manner for a few hours, providing relief to residents who lined up outside shops selling essential commodities.

Police and paramilitary forces intensified patrolling and checking since early this morning to maintain law and order following the detention of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk under the National Security Act (NSA) the previous day, officials said, adding no untoward incident was reported from anywhere during the relaxation period.

The Director General of Police, Ladakh, S D Singh Jamwal, said that curfew was relaxed for a total of four hours.

"We have taken a decision (to ease restrictions). The curfew is relaxed for two hours from 1 PM to 3 PM in the first phase in old city areas, followed by a two-hour relaxation in new areas from 3.30 pm to 5.30 PM," Director General of Police, Ladakh, S D Singh Jamwal told reporters here.

The curfew was clamped in the town on Wednesday evening after widespread violence resulted in the death of four persons and injuries to



90 others during a shutdown called by the Leh Apex Body (LAB) to advance talks with the Centre on the demands for statehood and extension of the Sixth Schedule to Ladakh.

Lt Governor Kavinder Gupta chaired a high-level security review meeting at Raj Bhavan, after which the restrictions were eased.

Officials said police parties on Saturday announced the relaxation in the curfew using the public address systems and, soon after, shops selling essential commodities were opened, witnessing a heavy rush.

People were also seen queuing outside ATM kiosks in good numbers as the police and CRPF personnel kept a vigil, they said, adding the relaxation period passed off peacefully in the old city areas.

Jamwal said Wangchuk is being probed for allegedly having links with Pakistan following last month's arrest of a Pakistani Intelligence Operative who sent videos of his protests across the border.

He described Wangchuk as the "main ring leader" behind Wednesday's violence. On the participation of people in the funeral of four persons who lost their lives in Wednesday's violence, the DGP said that all necessary arrangements have been made to help their relatives take part in their last rites.

"We do not want anyone to have any type of inconvenience during the funeral," he said.

He said the job of the police is to maintain law and order and "we are involved in that".

In a statement issued late Friday

night, the Lt Governor-led administration justified the detention of Wangchuk, saying a series of alleged provocative speeches by him, with references to the Nepal agitation and the Arab Spring, resulted in Wednesday's violence that left four persons dead and scores of others injured.

It said the detention of Wangchuk was "important to restore normalcy" in the peace-loving Leh town and also to prevent him from further acting in a manner "prejudicial to maintenance of public order".

"There was no untoward incident reported from anywhere in Ladakh during the past 24 hours. The restrictions are in place to maintain law and order," an official said.

The official said the patrolling and checking by police and paramilitary forces in the sensitive areas have been intensified, while raids are also underway to nab the absconding rioters, including a councillor who allegedly instigated the violence.

More than 50 persons were detained following the clashes, while strict restrictions under prohibitory orders banning assembly of five or more persons also remained in force in other major towns of the Union Territory, including Kargil. (PTI)

## Rahul, Lalu want to secure voting rights for infiltrators: Shah

**PATNA/ARARIA, Sept 27:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday charged the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and his allies like RJD president Lalu Prasad with trying to "secure voting rights for infiltrators".

Addressing a BJP workers' conclave in Araria district of Bihar, Shah vowed to drive out each and every infiltrator once the NDA retained power in the state, getting a two thirds majority in the upcoming assembly polls.

"Rahul baba took out a Yatra here recently. The purpose was to oppose special intensive revision of electoral rolls by the Election Commission, which wants to remove infiltrators' names from voters' list," said the former BJP president.

The allusion was to the "Voter Adhikar Yatra", which saw Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha, and Prasad's son and heir apparent Tejashwi Yadav covering 1,300 kilometers across 25 districts.

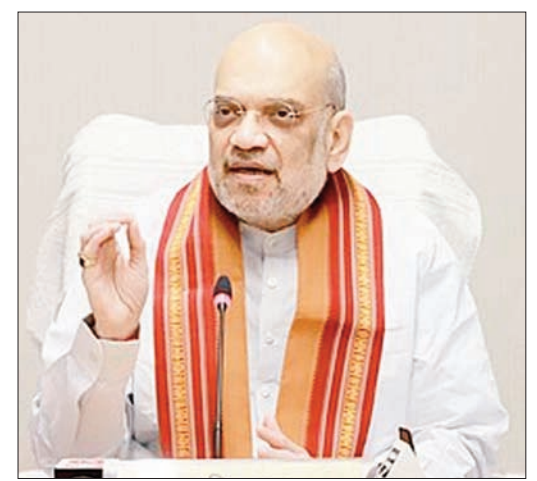
"Rahul baba, Lalu and company want to secure voting rights for infiltrators. I want to ask all you workers from the Seemanchal region, should we allow this," asked Shah, evoking roars of "no" from BJP cadres belonging to the northeastern part of Bihar, which has a significant Muslim population.

"I promise you that each and every infiltrator will be driven out of Bihar if the NDA wins with a two thirds majority, with a tally of 160 plus seats," said the Union home minister, who is widely regarded as the BJP's principal strategist.

The Election Commission is likely to announce the dates for the polls for the 243-seat Bihar assembly soon.

Shah also noted with satisfaction that the party had done well in the region in the last assembly polls, but added: "You must strive to do better this time. Only then the target of 160 plus can be achieved".

He asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government "has not been charged with misappropriation of even 25 paise, in the last 11 years", unlike the



Congress-led UPA which faced serious corruption charges while in power.

Shah said that the Modi government has also been "fulfilling all its promises" like abrogation of Article 370 and construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

"Now, in Bihar too, a big temple of goddess Sita is being built. Another promise that has been fulfilled recently is the airport at Purnea, from where I am going to catch my return flight," said the Union minister, before winding up his two-day tour of the state.

Earlier, Shah had discussed the party's strategy for elections with BJP workers at Bettiah in West Champaran district and Sarairanjan in Samastipur.

He also visited the state BJP headquarters at Patna to give a pep talk to senior leaders of the state.

Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who has been named in the charge of the party for the upcoming assembly polls, BJP national general secretary in charge of Bihar and national general secretary (Organization) B L Santhosh were also present at the party office. (PTI)

## Stance on Sabarimala already made clear; not concerned by protests: NSS general secy

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/KOTTAYAM, Sept 27:** NSS General Secretary G Sukumar Nair on Saturday said he has already indicated his clear stance on the Sabarimala issue and was not concerned about the protests against him.

He was responding to reporters' queries after arriving at the headquarters of the Nair Service Society (NSS) at Perunna in Kottayam district for a meeting of the organisation.

When asked about his recent remarks supporting the LDF government on the Sabarimala issue, Nair said, "Unlike others, I have already clearly indicated my stance—not a political stance—on the matter. So, please don't keep asking about it".

When informed that there were posters and banners in many places against him, he said he "was not concerned".

"Please don't scare me with that. It will give me some publicity," the NSS general secretary said.

Visuals on TV channels showed various posters accusing him of "stabbing the Nair community in the back," similar to Kattappa's act in the iconic Telugu film "Baahubali".

When reporters pointed out that there were protests against his stance, Nair said, "Let the protests come. We can face any protest."

Nair had recently stated in multiple interviews that he trusted the Left government on the Sabarimala issue, which had assured the community that the age-old rituals in the hill shrine would be preserved.

While criticising the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre for "its inaction after the Supreme Court verdict allowing entry of women of all ages into Sabarimala", he also took a swipe at the Congress, saying the party "appeared uninterested in Hindu votes."



Later in the day, when reporters told Leader of Opposition in the state assembly V D Sathesan about Nair's stance and asked whether the Congress party's efforts "to pacify the NSS had failed," he said no such efforts were made.

"We did not make any such efforts. We clearly stated that it was a political decision of ours not to attend the Global Ayyappa Sangamam. There is no change in that stance. The UDF in Kerala took a firm secular stand. We are against both majority and minority communalism. We do not have a policy of appeasement. It is the CPI(M) which has an appeasement policy," Sathesan contended while speaking to reporters in Thiruvananthapuram.

He further said that the CPI(M) was now favouring "majority communalism", while earlier it supported "minority communalism".

The opposition leader also said that the Congress and the UDF were not trying to persuade the NSS general secretary to change his stance.

"They are a community organisation. They are entitled to have their own views. We have no complaint towards anyone's stance. We have not criticised it either. Some organisations attended the conclave, some did not. That was their decision. We do not have a say in the decision-making of the NSS," Sathesan said.

"It is the CPI(M) which changed its stance and not us. We have always stood with the devotees and their interests," he added. (PTI)

## NIA court finds two guilty in 2019 Coimbatore ISIS case

**KOCHI, Sept 27:** A National Investigation Agency (NIA) court here on Saturday found two Coimbatore residents guilty of recruiting and propagating the ideology of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), police said.

The Special Court for Trial of NIA Cases, Kochi convicted Muhammad Azharudeen (27) of Anbu Nagar, Ukkadam, Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, and Shiek Hidayathulla alias Firoz Khan (35) of South Ukkadam.

Judge N Seshadrinathan noted that both were guilty of offences punishable under Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 120B (conspiracy), Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) section 38 (membership of a terrorist organisation) and 39 (supporting a terrorist organisation), and convicted them accordingly.

During the hearing on the sentence, both accused requested the court to take a lenient view, citing their family backgrounds.

"Hidayathulla is remanded to Vyyur High Security Prison for two days halt. For pronouncing sentence, both accused to be produced on September 29 physically," the court ordered. As part of the trial, the court examined 40 witnesses. Azharudeen is also accused in another case related to an explosion in Coimbatore.

Even though there were six persons named as accused in the FIR, NIA filed a charge sheet against two accused in 2019.

The case was registered in 2019 after NIA received information that Azharudeen and his associates were propagating the ideology of the proscribed terrorist organisation ISIS, with the intention of recruiting vulnerable youth for carrying out terrorist attacks in South India, particularly in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

A report filed by NIA at the court earlier stated that Azharudeen was associated with Wahadath-e-Islami, a frontal organisation of Jamaath-e-Islami Hind, and attended various programmes of the organisation. He



became the district leader of Wahadath-e-Islami in Coimbatore during 2013 and started delivering bayans (speeches) at its programmes, including at Rayan Mosque from 2013 onwards.

"The accused Muhammad Azharudeen and Shiek Hidayathulla were radicalised through material accessed online on extreme Salafi Islamic ideology since 2016 onwards and the accused used to watch speeches of radical speakers like Anwar-Al-Awlaki, Abu Bara, Moosa Cerantonio, Zahran Hashim of Sri Lanka and others," the report said.

According to the report, they also downloaded such material to their digital devices and disseminated it among associates. "Azharudeen was in touch with many Sri Lankan individuals and entities through Facebook and other encrypted social media," the NIA said.

The report added that speeches and other materials attributed to the Sri Lankan ISIS leader Zahran Hashim were forensically recovered from the digital devices and social media accounts of the accused. From 2017 onwards until March 2019, they furthered ISIS activities in South India.

NIA said that the accused had visited many places in Kerala since 2017, met their associates at various locations, and conveyed their support to ISIS. (PTI)

## Sonam wangchuk being probed for Pak links: Ladakh Police chief

**LEH, Sept 27:** Ladakh Director General of Police S D Singh Jamwal on Saturday said Sonam Wangchuk is being probed for allegedly having links with Pakistan on the back of last month's arrest of a Pakistani Intelligence Operative who sent videos of his protests across the border.

Jamwal described Wangchuk as the key person behind Wednesday's violence that claimed the lives of four people and injured scores of others. On Friday, Wangchuk was detained under National Security Act and sent to a jail in Jodhpur in Rajasthan.

"What has been found in the investigation (against Wangchuk) cannot be disclosed at this moment. The process is going on and if you

look at his profile and history, it is all available on YouTube. His speech worked as instigation as he talked about the Arab spring and the recent unrest in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

"He had his own agenda. There is a probe of foreign funding, violation of FCRA against him ... We have a PIO with us who was reporting across the border, sending videos of the protests led by Wangchuk. The police chief also cited some of Wangchuk's foreign visits, and termed them as suspicious. "He attended an event by The Dawn in Pakistan and also visited Bangladesh," Jamwal told reporters here.

Wangchuk has been the main face of the agitation spearheaded by the Leh Apex Body and

Kargil Democratic Alliance for statehood and extension of sixth schedule to the Union Territory. Jamwal said Wangchuk tried to hijack the platform and tried to scupper the dialogue between the Centre and Ladakh representatives.

The Centre has invited the leaders for a fresh round of talks on October 6.

Jamwal said Wangchuk continued his hunger strike, despite knowing that an informal meeting between the two sides was going to take place on September 25.

"Just a day before the informal meeting, a deliberate attempt was made to vitiate the peaceful atmosphere through provocative videos and statements which culminated with violence on Wednesday and unfortunate deaths," he said. (PTI)

## Govt's objective is to make people aware of facts in Dharmasthala case: D K Shivakumar

**BENGALURU, Sept 27:** Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Saturday said that the only objective of the government is to make people aware of the facts in connection with the allegations of multiple murders, rapes and burials in Dharmasthala.

He was responding to Dharmasthala temple Dharmadhikari Veerendra Heggade's statement on Friday, where he had expressed his gratitude to the government for constituting the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in the case, due to which the truth is coming out.

"Let the report (SIT probe report) come. I have seen his (Veerendra Heggade) statement in the media. There is no point in speaking on the matter until the final report comes. People may speak politically, but I can't do it being a part of the government. Either home minister or chief minister will make an official statement after the report comes," Shivakumar said in response to a question.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, the objective of the government is to make people aware of the facts.

A controversy erupted after a complainant, later identified as C N Chinnaiah and arrested on charges of perjury, claimed bury-



ing a number of bodies, including those of women with signs of sexual assault, in Dharmasthala over a period of past two decades, with the implications pointing towards the administrators of the local temple.

To a question on reports about the Supreme Court in May, dismissing the writ petition filed by the complainant and those behind him, in connection with their allegations in the Dharmasthala case, Shivakumar said, "I don't want to comment on it now. We are aware that they had approached the Supreme Court, projecting it as a PIL, and the court admonished them and sent them back. They had reportedly even taken a skull to Delhi, we have information about it. Let it (fact) come from the department (SIT probe)." (PTI)

Uddhav seeks farm loan waiver, special legislature session as floods destroy crops in Maha

**MUMBAI, Sept 27:** Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday demanded a complete loan waiver for farmers in Maharashtra after heavy rains and subsequent floods damaged crops in several parts of the state, and also called for a special legislature session to discuss the issue.

Attacking the BJP over the prevailing situation, the former chief minister said he was of the firm belief that the ruling party does not know how to govern.

Heavy rains and swollen rivers have caused large-scale damage in parts of the state, especially Marathwada, since September 20, claiming at least nine lives in the region. Crops on more than 30,000 hectares were washed away due to the floods there, the government has said.

Addressing a press conference here, Thackeray said the farmers have not only lost their crops but heavy rains also washed away the fertile layers of soil in the agricultural fields.

It will take at least three-five years for the farmers to make the farms ready for sowing again, he said.

"Over and above this, the farmers have loans. It is now time to waive farm loan completely. We demand a complete waiver of loan for farmers in the state as heavy rains have damaged their standing crops," Thackeray said.

The state government should announce ₹ 50,000 per hectare of relief to the affected farmers, he said. (PTI)

## 'No one should go through what I had to', says 73-yr-old woman deported from US after 33 years

**CHANDIGARH, Sept 27:** A 73-year-old woman, who was deported from the US recently after spending more than three decades there, on Saturday said no one should go through the ordeal she went through, and expressed her desire to be reunited with her family in America. Kaur, who had unsuccessfully applied for asylum in the US, was deported to India after being detained by immigration authorities in California, her advocate said earlier.

She was detained by immigration authorities in California on September 8 after she went for a routine check-in, triggering protests and concerns among her family and community members.

Kaur reached the US in 1992 as a single mother with two sons. Her asylum case was denied in 2012, but since then, she "faithfully reported" to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in San Francisco every six months for more than 13 years, her daughter-in-law Manji said after her deportation.

Speaking to reporters at her sister's house in Mohali, Kaur, who hails from Pangota village in Tarn Taran district, said, "I used to go there (ICE office) to mark my presence every six months. On September



8, I went there to mark my presence, but they arrested me without specifying anything."

Kaur also said she was sent back without being given the chance to even say goodbye to her close

family members.

"My family sought permission from the concerned authorities to bring me to India, and even showed a flight ticket. But they did not budge," Kaur said.

"I had a work permit, an ID and a licence. I had everything," she rued.

Asked how the immigration authorities treated her, she said with tears in her eyes, "What can I say? No one should go through the ordeal I had to go through." Sharing details, Kaur said that after her detention in San Francisco, she was taken to a room.

"They took my photograph and kept me in the room for the entire night. It was cold, and I couldn't even lie down," said Kaur, who had undergone a double knee replacement surgery.

"I was cuffed and shackled when they took me from San Francisco to Bakersfield," she said.

Asked if she was allowed to take her medicines, Kaur shook her head and said, "All my pleas fell on deaf ears."

"I couldn't even eat the food they gave because I am a vegetarian. They served beef, which I don't eat," Kaur said.

According to Kaur, she was deported along with 132 deportees on board the plane, including 15 Colombian nationals.

Asked if she was cuffed on the plane, Kaur said, "No. There were two good officers on board who did not cuff me, although the other deportees were cuffed and shackled."

"My entire family is settled in the US, including my children, granddaughters and grandsons. When I hear their voice, I cannot speak a word. I looked after them," Kaur said.

Asked if she would like to return to the US, Kaur said, "Definitely. My entire family is out there."

She also held US President Donald Trump solely responsible for the deportation of a large number of Indians in recent months.

"I have been in the US since 1992, but I never saw any such action by the authorities. Nobody was asked to go back," Kaur said.

Following her detention, there were protests in California with demonstrators demanding Kaur's release with placards reading "Hands off our grandma" and "Bring grandma home". (PTI)



# THIS IS JUST THE START, WANT TO WIN MANY MORE NATIONAL AWARDS: RANI MUKERJI

**MUMBAI, Sept 27:** Actor Rani Mukerji is elated to have won her first National Film Award in her nearly three-decade-long career and hopes to win many more in the future. The 46-year-old was speaking at the India Today Conclave on Friday when she was asked if the honour marked the culmination of her journey that began in 1996. "I would like to see it as an eternity. It keeps going, I wouldn't like to say full stop because there's lots more to do, many National Awards to win. Maybe this is just the start," Mukerji said. Mukerji made her screen debut with the Bengali film "Biyer Phool" (1996) and went on to feature in blockbuster Hindi films such as "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", "Ghulam", "Chalte Chalte", "Saathiyaa", "Hum Tum", "Black", "Mardaani" and "Hichki".

She was conferred the Best Actress honour for her performance in "Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway" by President Droupadi Murmu at the 71st National Film Awards ceremony on Tuesday. Directed by Ashima Chibber, the 2023 film tells the story of Debika Chatterjee (Mukerji), an Indian mother in Norway who battles authorities to regain custody of her children after being forcibly separated from them.

At the ceremony, Mukerji was seen wearing a gold chain with her daughter Adira's name embedded on it.

The actor said her nine-year-old daughter was keen to attend the function but was unable to due to protocol.

"She was howling because she wanted to be part of the National Award function and we were told children under 14 are not allowed. I had to tell her she couldn't be with me and she was like, 'It's so unfair because I'm the happiest that you won the award'. "She had also made a painting for me and I said, 'Don't worry, I'll have you with me on this special day'. So, that was my way of having her with me," the actor said.

Mukerji admitted she was "disappointed" when she did not win the award for her portrayal of a deaf and blind young woman in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's "Black" (2005), which also starred Amitabh Bachchan. The film, however, won three awards -- Best Actor for Bachchan, Best Costume Design and Best Feature Film in Hindi. "I gave my all in 'Black', and I was only 25 at that time. There was chatter that I would win and when I didn't, that's when my blinkers came on. I thought, 'Even when you do your best work, it might not always be in your favour'."

"I told myself, don't be disappointed, keep working hard, you need to do better, and I kept doing that," she said.

The actor said her late father, filmmaker Ram Mukerji, was also "heartbroken" when she was overlooked for "Black". (PTI)



# AARON SORKIN'S 'THE SOCIAL NETWORK' FOLLOW-UP GETS TITLE, JEREMY STRONG TO PLAY MARK ZUCKERBERG

**LOS ANGELES, Sept 27:** Filmmaker Aaron Sorkin is officially returning to the world of Facebook with "The Social Reckoning", a follow-up to his Oscar-winning drama "The Social Network".

The film, which will feature a star-studded cast led by Jeremy Strong, Mikey Madison and Jeremy Allen White, will hit American theatres on October 9, 2026. Sony Pictures announced on Friday, according to entertainment news outlet Variety.

The new project, written and directed by Sorkin, will see "Succession" alum Strong take on the role of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

Billed as a "companion piece" to "The Social Network", the film is set nearly two decades after Zuckerberg and his fellow programmers launched the platform that would go on to dominate global communication.

"The Social Reckoning" centres on Frances Haugen (Madison), a Facebook engineer-turned-whistleblower, who joins hands with journalist Jeff Horwitz (White) to expose the company's damaging practices.

Horwitz's investigative



series, published by "The Wall Street Journal" in 2021 under the title "The Facebook Files", uncovered Facebook's awareness of its harmful impact on teenagers and its role in amplifying misinformation that contributed to political unrest and violence.

Madison won the Oscar for best actress earlier this year for her performance in filmmaker Sean Baker's "Anora". White is best known for the hit series "The Bear" and currently stars as American pop star Bruce Springsteen in "Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere".

The cast also includes actor-comedian Bill Burr but his role is not yet known.

Production on the film will begin next month. It is being produced by Sorkin, Todd Black, Peter Rice and Stuart Besser.

Sorkin's earlier work the screenplay for 2010's "The Social Network", directed by David Fincher and starring Jesse Eisenberg and Andrew Garfield. (PTI)

## Actors Bhagyashree, Vaani Kapoor attend Globoil India 2025



**NEW DELHI, Sept 27:** Actors Bhagyashree and Vaani Kapoor were among the notable attendees at the closing ceremony of Globoil India 2025.

The evening featured live music performances by Farid Ahmed and Babbar Mudassar, along with an International Dance and Fashion Show, providing a finale to three days of technical sessions and trade discussions, a press release said.

The 28th Globoil India Summit, organised by Tefla and held from September 24-26, drew over 2,000 delegates from more than 60 countries to discuss market outlooks, policy developments, and sustainability across the edible oil value chain.

Speakers at the summit include YB Datuk Seri Johari Bin Abdul Ghani, Minister of Plantation and Commodities, Malaysia; Dr John Baffes, Senior Economist, World Bank; Mahesh Patel, Chairman & CEO, ETG Group; Jeremy Goon, CEO - FFM Group & CSO - Wilmar International; Sarthak Ahuja, Director, Niam Ventures; and other industry leaders. Globoil, held under the patronage of The Solvent Extractors' Association of India, is a premier international conference and exhibition on vegetable oil, feed and feed ingredients, oilseeds, and oleochemicals. (PTI)

## A blessing that came with story of 'Amar Singh Chamkila': Imtiaz Ali on film's Int Emmy nods

**NEW DELHI, Sept 27:** Filmmaker Imtiaz Ali says the International Emmy nomination for "Amar Singh Chamkila" in two categories has come as a blessing and a reminder that stories rooted in local culture resonate globally. Based on the life of slain Punjabi musician Amar Singh Chamkila, the movie is nominated in the TV Movie/Mini-Series category, while lead star Diljit Dosanjh has earned a nod in the Best Performance by an Actor category.

Ali said he is proud that the film, which premiered on Netflix in 2024 to critical acclaim, has placed India alongside international stalwarts.

"We had just come back from dinner when we got the news... It's like a blessing that has come through with the story of Chamkila to us. Very happy that this film is finding a voice and is being seen... We are very proud that we could bring India to this table where so many international stalwarts are standing," Ali told PTI in an interview. Known for his modern relationship dramas such as "Jab We Met", "Love Aaj Kal", "Highway" and "Tamasha", the 54-year-old director said the recognition for "Chamkila" is a reminder that to be internationally recognised, one has to make a "very local film". "You shouldn't try to speak in a language that is international because there is no such language. You should just

speak in the language that is native to you in terms of cinema. That's a big learning and it feels awesome that this film is so rooted and so placed in Punjab and has been made because of the love that we have received from the people of Punjab," he added.

The film, which also stars Parineeti Chopra, is set against the backdrop of militancy wrecked Punjab in the turbulent 1980s. Chamkila, whose music was controversial, risqué and provocative yet popular, was gunned down in 1988 along with his wife Amarjot.

Ali praised Dosanjh for capturing the "scent" of Chamkila through his performance by setting aside his own stature as a hugely popular singer who performs to packed arenas and stadiums. "It's incredible that for not even a moment, Diljit remembered who he was when he was in those small villages in Punjab and performing in front of hundreds of people and playing Chamkila. At every moment, he thought he was Chamkila.

"When a person watches the film, they are watching Diljit but they would never think that this is a man who goes to Canada and performs to a house full audience. That self-belief was really awesome and God bless him. I know that he has a lot to give to this country, to this world and I will be looking forward to what he does next." (PTI)



## Don't want this time to go away: Rajat Bedi on life after 'Ba\*\*ds of Bollywood'

**MUMBAI, Sept 27:** As Jaraj Saxena, a former star down on his luck in "Ba\*\*ds of Bollywood", actor Rajat Bedi says he was reliving his own struggle of not getting work in the film industry for years but he never imagined that he would have such a comeback.

The Aryan Khan-directed show marks Bedi's return to showbiz after two decades. The actor is best known for "Koi Mil Gaya" and "Jaani Dushman". His last released movie was 2007's "Partner", which featured Salman Khan and Govinda.

"I'm very, very grateful to the Khan family for considering me and getting me into the show, especially building this character around my original life. I'm overwhelmed that it has been received so well. The whole audience is saying, 'What a comeback! Shah Rukh Khan has got you back'," Bedi told PTI in an interview.

The actor, who began his career as an assistant on Shah Rukh's 1995 movie, "Zamaana Deewana", said Jaraj is a favourite character for not just Aryan but also Suhana, Gauri Khan and Shah Rukh Khan.

He is now looking forward to be back as Jaraj in season two of "Ba\*\*ds of Bollywood".

"I know they want to see more of me. And you will get to see more of Jaraj Saxena in season two. The writing is going



on, that will come with a bigger bang. It will happen sometime next year. It will be very exciting."

After the show's premiere on Netflix, Bedi's IMDb ranking skyrocketed to the ninth place on the top ten list of most popular Indian stars from 954.

"Life is looking beautiful. If you ask, 'Is there a line-up of work?', I would say, 'No, I'm still waiting for those calls to come'. But some big producers are considering me for their projects, but till it's not done, it's not done.

"I'm excited now that at least people will look at me optimistically thinking I've done good work, and I was part of a big project. I want to do things and be relevant and live up to people's expectations

now. I'm being loved and appreciated a lot. I'm thinking, what now? I don't want this time to go away," Bedi, who moved back to Mumbai about two years ago from Canada with his family, said.

Bedi said he poured in his own pain to flesh out Jaraj Saxena's character in the show and he has received calls of appreciation from fellow actors from the industry, including Harshvardhan Rane, Angad Bedi.

"People have connected to that pain, and have appreciated it. There are some actors who messaged me because what I've gone through, a lot of actors are going through. They are wanting a film to break through to move forward, and they're seeing that Rajat has stayed patient even

though he didn't get work for 15-20 years in Bollywood. They're like we can also do it," the actor said.

Citing the example of one of the scenes from the show where Bedi talks about his struggle of not getting work in the industry despite approaching many people, he simply said: "It has happened a lot of times." He met director Rakesh Roshan, casting directors Mukesh Chhabra, Abhishek Banerjee and gave numerous screen tests but nothing materialised.

Bedi recalls meeting Salman Khan while the superstar was shooting for the 2021 film "Radhe" and sought his help to get work. "For 'Radhe' they called me for a role through Prabhu Deva sir at Mehboob Studio. Salman bhai was there, and he was like, 'You're not going to do this one as it is not an appropriate role for you'. I was heartbroken.

"I was like, 'Sir, I'm getting a film to do with you and you're saying 'I'll give you something better, wait'. I said, 'Okay, I'm waiting to work with bhai again!'"

Bedi has some good memories too of his time in the industry, especially collaborating with David Dhawan on three films like "Jodi No.1", "Chor Machaaye Shor", and "Partner".

It was during his time in Canada that Bedi received a life-changing phone call for "Ba\*\*ds of Bollywood", and the message was clear: Aryan wanted to meet you to discuss a role. (PTI)

*Haven't yet played complete game, need to bat better under pressure: Morkel*

**DUBAI, Sept 27:** India's bowling coach Morne Morkel believes that the team hasn't yet played that "complete game" and though he doesn't mind winning an "ugly" one, he does expect the batting unit to lift its performance under pressure in the Asia Cup final against Pakistan here on Sunday.

While Indian spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarty have stopped most batting units, including Pakistan, in its tracks, the batting show, barring Abhishek Sharma's pyrotechnics, hasn't exactly been inspiring in pressure cooker scenarios.

"I don't think in this tournament so far, we've played the complete game. After every game there has to be discussions of areas we would like to improve and get better on. So, it's just a general thinking that when put a little bit under pressure, we need to get sharper," Morkel assessed ahead of the high-intensity final on Sunday. Morkel then listed out the areas in batting which warrant improvement.

"If we start with the batting, can we on tough conditions rotate strike a little bit better? Can we protect partnerships a little bit? Because for a new batter walking in here is quite tough to start, but still have that aggressive mindset," he said.

He then spoke about areas of execution in bowling when put under the pump.

"From a bowling point of view, let's talk specifically about the first six or the first 10 overs. How we can improve with our lengths, with our accuracy, with our thinking, with ball in hand. In those middle phases, just sort of our over-sequencing in terms of maybe bringing in an odd yorker. I think the trend has been, because the wicket is slightly on the slower side, to go off-pace but batters are lining that up," he analysed.

He said that the team has enough skills to withstand any pressure associated with the final. (PTI)

## DIFFERENT AS CHALK AND CHEESE ARUNDHATI AND SREE CHARANI FIND COMMON GOAL IN WORLD CUP



**NEW DELHI, Sept 27:** Pacer Arundhati Reddy drew inspiration from legendary Sachin Tendulkar and MS Dhoni during her formative years, while Sri Charani made the transition from athletics to cricket, but now they want to rise above their diverse background and make an impact for India in the Women's ODI World Cup at home, beginning on Tuesday.

India will face Sri Lanka in Guwahati on September 30 to kick off the Women's ODI World Cup.

For 28-year-old Arundhati, inspiration came from India's T20 World Cup win in the inaugural edition in 2007 and then the ODI World Cup triumph in 2011.

"To be honest, the 2007 T20 World Cup that India won inspired me to start playing cricket, but it was the 2011 World Cup at home, with Sachin sir being part of it and everything that happened that

year, that really left a mark on me," Arundhati said on JioHotstar.

"The kid inside me always wanted to play for India and win a World Cup for the country. Now, that I have the chance to play a 50-over World Cup at home, I am truly grateful to God for this opportunity," she said, adding that support in Vizag, where two of India's matches will be held, will be crucial.

Arundhati, who idolised Dhoni, said she initially wanted to be a wicketkeeper.

"I never wanted to be a fast bowler. I always wanted to be a wicketkeeper," she recalled.

"On my first day at coach Ganesh sir's academy, he asked me to bowl, and it all came naturally. A week later, I told my mom I didn't want to keep bowling and wanted to be a wicketkeeper.

"She spoke to him, and he told her that if I stayed there, I would be a medium-pacer.

That's how my journey as a fast bowler began."

She progressed through Hyderabad U-19 and senior teams and admitted there were moments of doubt: "There was a time in my career when I felt like I might never wear the India jersey again, but when I made my comeback and wore the jersey, it felt really special."

Twenty-one-year-old N Shree Charani began playing cricket with her uncle Kishore Reddy's casual sessions at the Rayalseema Thermal Power Station quarters in Kadapa district, starting with plastic bats in Class III and competing against older players.

She gradually shifted from athletics, where she excelled in kho-kho, badminton, and running, to cricket under the guidance of coaches and former Indian selector MSK Prasad.

Charani recalled how her family reacted when she chose cricket.

"My mother accepted my decision to become a cricketer immediately, but my father took about a year to come around.

"Once, when we went to a gold shop in Kadapa, the cashier asked about the kit bag I was carrying. My mom replied, 'She plays cricket, and one day she will play for India.' She was the first person who believed in me," she recalled.

"Everyone dreams of playing for India and in a World Cup. I feel lucky to have this opportunity, and I will try my best to do well for the team and for India."

On her transition from pace to spin, Charani said: "I was a medium-pacer, but I wasn't very effective, batters rarely got out. That's when I decided to become a spinner.

"Once I started bowling spin, I began picking wickets consistently because batters struggled against my deliveries. That's how my journey as a spinner began," she concluded. (PTI)

## ISSF Jr World Cup: Rashmika-Kapil pair wins air pistol mixed team Gold



**NEW DELHI, Sept 27:** Indian shooters dominated the 10m air pistol mixed team event, clinching the top-two podium finishes while skeet exponent Raiza Dhillon pocketed a silver as the hosts continued to shine in the ISSF Junior World Cup at the Dr Karni Singh Ranges, here on Saturday.

India lead the tally with 11 medals, including three gold, five silver and three bronze. Italy are second with two gold and a silver, while Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN) are third with two gold.

The pair of Rashmika Sahgal and Kapil, who recently won the men's and women's gold in 10m air pistol junior event at the Asian Championships in Kazakhstan, joined forces to hog the limelight on day three by taking the top spot in air pistol mixed team event.

The duo defeated the other Indian pair, Vanshika Chaudhary and Antony Jonathan Gavin, 16-10 in the title round.

The Spanish pair of Ines Ortega Castro and Lucas Sanchez defeated Iran's Parimah Amiri and Mohammadreza Ahmadi 16-14 to take the bronze.

It was a start-to-finish domination by Rashmika and Kapil, who topped the qualification round en route to the four-team final with an aggregate of 582. Both shot 291 each as the Vanshika-Gavin pair was second entering the final, aggregating 578 (287+291).

In the air pistol mixed team

event, the top-two finishers in the preliminary round compete for gold, while the next two fight for the bronze.

The final turned out to be a one-sided affair with Rashmika and Kapil taking an early lead.

Gavin, the 16-year-old who stole the limelight on Friday while winning the men's 10m air pistol title with a flawless performance, was erratic with his scores swaying wildly.

A 9.9 was followed by 10.5 and 10.6 before he slumped to three consecutive scores of 9.7, 9.8 and 9.5. Ditto for Vanshika as she had three scores in the mid-8s, something which led the gold slip out of their hands.

The junior women's skeet event saw Olympian Raiza Dhillon take the silver medal behind Italy's Arianna Member in a closely-fought final. Arianna totalled 53 while Raiza, who competed at the Paris Olympics, shot 51.

Mansi Raghuvanshi took the bronze with a score of 41. Italy's traditional dominance in shotgun events continued with the junior men's skeet gold being cornered by Marco Coco (56), while Lassi Matias Kauppinen (Finland, 53) and Andreas Pontikis (Cyprus, 43) took the silver and bronze respectively. India's Harnehar Singh Lally and Atul Singh Rajawat finished fourth and fifth with scores of 35 and 25 respectively in the six-shooter final. (PTI)

## Asia Cup: What will be India's stance if Mohsin Naqvi takes presentation stage as ACC chair?



**DUBAI, Sept 27:** Asian Cricket Council (ACC) chairman Mohsin Naqvi, who is also the Interior Minister of Pakistan, will be in attendance when his country takes on India in the Asia Cup final here on Sunday and it would be interesting to see how the Indian team responds to his presence at the post-match trophy ceremony.

Naqvi is also the head of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

While a Board chief coming to watch a cricket match isn't a big deal but what can snowball into a controversy is the fact that in his capacity as ACC chief, Naqvi is mandated to be present at the post-final presentation ceremony.

As the head of the continental body, he will be well within his rights to present the trophy and also engage in a customary handshake with both squads.

With the Indian team maintaining a 'No Handshake' Policy with Pakistan, it is highly unlikely that BCCI will allow its players to engage with a PCB chief whose public stance has been anti-India.

The Indian board hasn't made its stance on Naqvi pub-

lic yet. Not only that, it was on Naqvi's insistence that the PCB accused match referee Andy Pycroft of prohibiting the exchange of pleasantries after the September 14 game here, something that summarily rejected by the ICC.

Later, it was Naqvi, who wanted India skipper Suryakumar Yadav banned from the final. PCB had Level 4 charges against him for dedicating his team's September 14 victory to his country's Armed Forces and for also showing solidarity with families of the victims of Pahalgam terror attack.

This year has been far from ideal for 30-year-old Sindhu, who has endured multiple first and second round exits, but she showed signs of revival by reaching the quarterfinals of the World Championships last month.

"It's not that you cannot do well after a certain age. (It's) definitely possible, but you will have to look forward to the tournaments (in which) you want to do well," Nehwal told PTI in an exclusive interaction during the launch of CXO Pickleball League organised by Gravate Sports here.

"You cannot target all the tournaments because it is tough. At

**NEW DELHI, Sept 27:** Neeraj Chopra's fame is not limited to India, and Dutch javelin thrower Noelle Roorda, who won gold at the World Para Athletics Championships, said she even bought a ticket during the 2024 Paris Olympics just to watch him compete. Chopra, who created history with a gold at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, followed it up with a silver at the Paris Games.

"Yes, of course. I know him," Roorda told PTI after winning the F46 women's javelin event, a classification for athletes with moderately affected movement in one or both arms or with limb absence.

"I went to Paris to the Olympic Games and bought tickets for the javelin night there. But that was the closest I ever saw him," said the 25-year-old, who throws with her left hand as her right arm extends only up to the elbow.

Roorda, however, admitted she had expected German thrower Johannes Vetter to win the Tokyo

Olympic gold instead of Chopra.

"I thought Vetter would win gold. Then Chopra on the podium definitely but Vetter was like outrageous good and he was throwing like crazy that year. But he was too good too early (peaked early). That's part of the game."

Roorda, who had won a silver in the Tokyo Paralympics and a bronze in the 2024 edition of the World Para Athletics Championships in Japan, sent her spear to a personal best of 43.74m at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here.

Her role model in javelin, though, is another German, Thomas Rohler, who won gold in 2016 Rio Olympics but somehow on the decline in the last few years.

"I think I'm a person who loves like sort of dance around and I'm a technical like easy thrower. Thomas Rohler is the perfect example of power and speed and sort of like he's dancing around. So, I think that that made him like my role model."

She said she took part in a com-

## Bought ticket to see Neeraj in Paris: Dutch para world javelin champion Roorda



petition-cum-training camp organised by Roehler in the German town of Jena in 2021 after the Tokyo Paralympics.

"I joined that training camp and it was very nice and the year after I went there one or twice just to train with him and his group and his coach. Yeah, he's like a big inspiring."

"It was a six-hour drive for me

and I went there two years ago. I try to like pick from different athletes, and mix it all around to create my own sort of style."

She said her goal in future is to win gold in Paralympics.

"I worked so hard this year. The whole season was the best of my life and to winning here is like the cherry on the cake -- 10 out of 10."

"I'm thinking of reaching the

world record (some day). It's 45.73m but I am getting closer every year, and of course, the Paralympics gold."

She got into javelin through talent scouting in the Netherlands.

"I first played tennis with able-bodied athletes and football earlier. There is a sort of Paralympic talent day in the Netherlands and it's every year event and that's the day where you can try all different Paralympic sports. "I was scouted on a talent day for athletics and I first started doing long jump and 100m, but I'm not quite talented with that. And in 2018, we tried the javelin and fell in love within a second and now I'm here." Asked what aspect of javelin she likes the most, she said, "When you throw the javelin away, you can see your own performance. When you do long jump, you're in the air and you can't see yourself."

"In javelin, I can just enjoy the flight (of the spear) and everything, that's the coolest thing about javelin." (PTI)

## Sindhu will have to pick tournaments she wants to go all out in, says Saina

**MUMBAI, Sept 27:** PV Sindhu knows how to win big tournaments, but as she enters her 30s, the two-time Olympic medallist must be selective about which competitions she chooses to go "all out" in, feels London Games bronze winner Saina Nehwal.

This year has been far from ideal for 30-year-old Sindhu, who has endured multiple first and second round exits, but she showed signs of revival by reaching the quarterfinals of the World Championships last month.

"It's not that you cannot do well after a certain age. (It's) definitely possible, but you will have to look forward to the tournaments (in which) you want to do well," Nehwal told PTI in an exclusive interaction during the launch of CXO Pickleball League organised by Gravate Sports here.

"You cannot target all the tournaments because it is tough. At

that age, when you are consistently playing so many tournaments to maintain your ranking, you will have to obviously manage up to a certain round."

"But if you are looking at winning, suppose a World Championship or Asian Championship, you will have to go all out in those tournaments."

Nehwal, who knows the grind better than most, highlighted the reality of aging in elite sport.

"I think (after the age of) 28-29, the body's recovery is slow. You will obviously train very hard but it is not easy to push every day for five days."

Nehwal said the coming tournaments would also give an idea about Sindhu's form.

"I just hope that (in) the next few tournaments which she has left, let us see how the performance happens because she has done well after the World Cham-

ampionships."

"You never know how things will change because she is an experienced player. She knows how to win tournaments."

"It's just that, sometimes, after a certain age it gets difficult with the body but the mind is always ready to win the tournaments. I am sure she can do well," Nehwal said. The 34-year-old also stressed the need for more depth in Indian women's badminton with the World Championships set to return to India next year.

"I can say that in the women's category we need more youngsters to do well. (In) men's we have Lakshya (Sen), Priyanshu (Rajawat), (HS) Prannoy, (and Kidambi) Srikanth who are there. But in the women's category we only have Sindhu at the moment," she said. "The youngsters still are picking up, they are doing well. But I don't see them consistent

enough still."

"The Junior World Championships is happening next month, so let us see what the performances will be from them."

"At the same time, the senior World Championships will be an interesting one because it's happening (in India) after 2009, the last one was in Hyderabad."

"Sindhu will be looking forward to doing well again but I would want to see how many girls get entry because there is an entry limit into that," she added.

Nehwal said the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have the capability to win "every tournament possible." "They are such a strong pair. They can win every tournament possible. If you see the No 1 ranking pair or Satvik-Chirag, the game is almost the same."

"The way I see them, they can win any tournament possible."

"It just depends on that day, luck, everything matters in the sport. That is the difference between Olympic gold and silver. It's just that little bit of here and there," she said.

Nehwal, who has not announced her retirement officially, said she has decided to stop playing the sport due to arthritis in her knee.

"Last two years have been tough and I got arthritis in my right knee so I decided to stop playing. It is very tough to play at the highest level when you need to practice for so many hours and your knee is not ready for that," she said.

"I just felt that it is tough to compete at the highest level, so I decided to stop and now I am happy that I can motivate a lot more youngsters to play many more different sports," Nehwal added. (PTI)

# Only win counts as India eye team game against bitter foes Pakistan

**DUBAI, Sept 27:** Winning isn't everything but for 11 Indian cricketers it would be the only thing on their minds when they take on an unpredictable Pakistan in the Asia Cup final here on Sunday after a high-voltage build-up that has blurred the lines between on-field sport and off-field politics.

In the words of American political activist and author Mike Marqusee, it is "War Minus Shooting".

Over the years, this contest has never lacked in adrenaline, but seldom has it arrived with such a volatile backdrop, where cricket seems inseparably knotted with off-field tension, provocative gestures, and fines slapped on both camps.

Yet, beyond the noise, the cricket itself has been compelling, headlined by Abhishek Sharma's audacious 200-plus strike rate and Kuldeep Yadav's 13 wickets on return. Sadly, even these feats have often been overshadowed by flash-points and feuds.

It began with India's "No Handshake Policy" in the opening clash, with skipper Suryakumar Yadav turning away at the toss and post match.

Pakistan's pacer Haris Rauf responded with taunts, abuses, and even an aircraft-crash gesture, igniting a storm that brought both under ICC scrutiny and 30 per cent fines. The bars have lingered all the way to the final.

To add fuel to the fire, Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, who also happens to be the Pakistan Cricket Board and the Asian Cricket Council chief, has been constantly putting cryptic but provocative posts on his



'X' timeline. On paper though, India are unbeaten juggernauts in the tournament, Sri Lanka alone pushing them to a Super Over in six back-to-back wins overall.

Pakistan, by contrast, stumbled and staggered to the finale. But as their head coach Mike Hesson wryly noted after beating Bangladesh: "The final is the only match that counts."

In this fixture, pedigree counts for little. Even India's own support staff echoed the sentiment. Bowling coach Morne Morkel, dispatched for pre-match duty, admitted that aesthetics don't matter anymore: "Winning it ugly is still winning."

India's unbeaten run has been smooth, but

it hasn't been injury-free.

Hardik Pandya's hamstring scare against Sri Lanka forced him off after a single over, while Abhishek Sharma too cramped up under the punishing Gulf heat.

"Hardik will be assessed tomorrow morning. Both him and Abhishek suffered cramps. But Abhishek is fine," Morkel reassured on Friday night.

That news is a relief as the Punjab left-hander has single-handedly shouldered India's batting load with 309 runs in six games. The gulf is telling -- Tilak Varma's 144 is the next best. Law of averages, however, remains the looming shadow. As Pakistan legend Wasim Akram warned in a snap quote to PTL, "They

need to get him early."

The real question is whether India's others can rally around their new talisman.

Suryakumar himself is due a commanding knock. Shubman Gill has flattered without finishing, and the likes of Sanju Samson and Tilak have only cashed in against Sri Lanka in inconsequential matches.

So far, it has been Abhishek laying down platforms in the Powerplay. What happens if he fails once?

India's batting throughout the tournament in the back-10 hasn't been convincing at all and one doesn't know what is the plan B if there is a top-order collapse.

If India lean too heavily on Abhishek, Pakistan's fragility is starker. Their batting, frankly, has bordered on abysmal.

Except Sahibzada Farhan, who briefly unsettled Jasprit Bumrah, there has been no batter of substance.

Saim Ayub, touted as their equivalent of Abhishek, has endured a nightmarish campaign -- four ducks, almost tallying more wickets lost than runs scored at one stage.

Hussain Talat and Salman Ali Agha have floundered against India's spinners. Sunday could once again be decided by Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarty's guile.

Pakistan's slim hopes rest on their new-ball burst. If Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf can dismantle India's top order early, a low-scoring scrap might unfold. But as with India's over-reliance on Abhishek, Shaheen and Haris need allies, something Pakistan have sorely lacked. (PTI)

## Different as chalk and cheese, Arundhati and Sree Charani find common goal in World Cup



**NEW DELHI, Sept 27:** Pacer Arundhati Reddy drew inspiration from legendary Sachin Tendulkar and MS Dhoni during her formative years, while Sri Charani made the transition from athletics to cricket, but now they want to rise above their diverse background and make an impact for India in the Women's ODI World Cup at home, beginning on Tuesday.

India will face Sri Lanka in Guwahati on September 30 to kick off the Women's ODI World Cup.

For 28-year-old Arundhati, inspiration came from India's T20 World Cup win in the inaugural edition in 2007 and then the ODI World Cup triumph in 2011.

"To be honest, the 2007 T20 World Cup that India won inspired me to start playing cricket, but it was the 2011 World Cup at home, with Sachin sir being part of it and everything that happened that year, that really left a mark on me," Arundhati said on JioHotstar.

"The kid inside me always wanted to play for India and win a World Cup for the country. Now, that I have the chance to play a 50-over World Cup at home, I am truly grateful to God for this opportunity," she said, adding that support in Vizag, where two of India's matches will be held, will be crucial.

Arundhati, who idolised Dhoni, said she initially wanted to be a wicketkeeper.

"I never wanted to be a fast bowler. I always wanted to be a wicketkeeper," she recalled.

"On my first day at coach Ganesh sir's academy, he asked me to bowl, and it all came naturally. A week later, I told my mom I didn't want to keep bowling and wanted to be a wicketkeeper."

"She spoke to him, and he told her that if I stayed there, I would be a medium-pacer. That's how my journey as a fast bowler

began." She progressed through Hyderabad U-19 and senior teams and admitted there were moments of doubt: "There was a time in my career when I felt like I might never wear the India jersey again, but when I made my comeback and wore the jersey, it felt really special."

Twenty-one-year-old N Shree Charani began playing cricket with her uncle Kishore Reddy's casual sessions at the Rayalseema Thermal Power Station quarters in Kadapa district, starting with plastic bats in Class III and competing against older players.

She gradually shifted from athletics, where she excelled in kho-kho, badminton, and running, to cricket under the guidance of coaches and former Indian selector MSK Prasad.

Charani recalled how her family reacted when she chose cricket.

"My mother accepted my decision to become a cricketer immediately, but my father took about a year to come around."

"Once, when we went to a gold shop in Kadapa, the cashier asked about the kit bag I was carrying. My mom replied, 'She plays cricket, and one day she will play for India.' She was the first person who believed in me," she recalled.

"Everyone dreams of playing for India and in a World Cup. I feel lucky to have this opportunity, and I will try my best to do well for the team and for India."

On her transition from pace to spin, Charani said: "I was a medium-pacer, but I wasn't very effective, batters rarely got out. That's when I decided to become a spinner."

"Once I started bowling spin, I began picking wickets consistently because batters struggled against my deliveries. That's how my journey as a spinner began," she concluded. (PTI)

## We have healthy mix of youth and experience in our World Cup squad: Harmanpreet

**DUBAI, Sept 27:** India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur is confident that a mix of youth and experience across the departments will help them in their bid to win their maiden Women's World Cup beginning on Tuesday.

India is hosting the ICC showpiece event for the fourth time with the team having come close to lifting the trophy on two previous occasions, the latest being in 2017 when the team, led by Mithali Raj, lost a thrilling final to England at Lord's.

The Indian has shaped up nicely for the event with maiden T20I and ODI away wins against England and a keenly-contested ODI series against defending champions Australia at home, which they lost 1-2.

"There is a healthy mix of youth and experience in our World Cup squad across all the departments. There is plenty of batting talent around the group with Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues, Harleen Deol, Pratika Rawal, Richa Ghosh and Uma Chetry in the mix," said Harmanpreet in her column for ICC. Mandhana was the standout batter for the hosts against Australia striking back-to-back centuries, while her opening partner Pratika Rawal too shone with bat.

The bowling department, especially spin, too has performed com-

mendably, though, against Australia, it conceded far too many runs in the deciding third ODI in Delhi recently. "The bowling unit is equally impressive, with Renuka Thakur and Arundhati Reddy accompanying the young and promising Kranti Gaud, Sree Charani and Radha Yadav. Add to this, the three all-rounders in the form of Deepti Sharma, Sneha Rana and Amanjot Kaur who can turn the tide of the game in India's favour," said Harmanpreet.

"With a well-balanced squad, a dedicated and focused preparation leading into the tournament and a team which is hungry and determined to succeed, we are entering the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup with positivity and belief," added the captain, who has played a key role in guiding Indian to the final in 2017 following her unbeaten 171 against Australia in the semifinal. Harmanpreet said that though the competition would be tough, especially against seven-time champions Australia, England and New Zealand, the team had a lot of self belief.

"The competition like it always has been, is stiff, but the team has complete belief in its skills, preparations and tenacity to overcome any challenge that comes its way." (PTI)

## International Paralympic Committee lifts the partial suspensions of Russia and Belarus

**SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA), Sept 27:** The International Paralympic Committee has lifted the partial suspensions of Russia and Belarus. The IPC general assembly in Seoul, South Korea on Saturday first voted against a full suspension for Russia by 111 to 55, with 11 abstentions, and then voted against a partial suspension by 91-77 (with eight abstentions).

It also voted against a full suspension for Belarus by 119 to 48, with nine abstentions, and against a partial suspension by 103-63 (10 abstentions). The decisions raise the possibility of a clash with each sport's governing body ahead of the Milan-Cortina Paralympics in Italy from March 6-15 next year.

The IPC said "this decision means NPC Belarus and NPC Russia now regain their full rights and privileges of IPC membership, in accordance with the IPC Constitution. The IPC will work with the two members involved to put practical arrangements in place for this as soon as reasonably possible."

Russia and ally Belarus have been banned from international sporting events after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

In a statement posted on its website, the Russian Paralympic Committee's press service said the organization welcomed what it called the "fair decision" of the



IPC to "fully reinstate" the Russian Paralympic Committee.

"This is an important contribution to the development of the international Paralympic movement and an example that the rights of athletes must be protected without discrimination on the basis of nationality and political affiliation," the statement read.

There was no immediate reaction from the Ukraine Paralympic or Olympic committees but state broadcaster Suspilne said that "In Ukraine, it is legally prohibited to delegate national teams to competitions where aggressor countries are represented without observing the principles of neutrality, under state symbols."

The Russian Olympic Committee has been suspended since 2023 by the International Olympic Committee for breaking the Olympic charter by using an administrative land grab to incorporate regional sports bodies in occupied eastern Ukraine.

Russians will be allowed to compete at next year's Milan-Cortina Winter Games in northern Italy from Feb. 6-22. The IOC last week confirmed that it will follow the system it used at the Paris Games last year, allowing Russians to compete as Individual Neutral Athletes — using the French acronym AIN. (AP)

## Abhishek has licence to play his natural game: Sanath Jayasuriya



**DUBAI, Sept 27:** Sri Lanka head coach Sanath Jayasuriya has lauded India opener Abhishek Sharma's fearless batting, crediting the team management for allowing the youngster to play his natural game, which he felt has translated into his consistent runs in the ongoing Asia Cup.

The 25-year-old Indian opener smashed his third successive half-century as India defeated Sri Lanka in the Super Over here on Friday.

"He (Abhishek) is playing his natural game and they (team management) have encouraged him to play his natural game," said the Sri

Lankan great when asked if he saw shades of a young Jayasuriya in Abhishek during the post-match interaction.

"That's the key because if someone is playing his natural game then we need to encourage him to play his natural game."

After a relatively quiet group stage, Abhishek has struck 74 (vs Pakistan), 75 (vs Bangladesh) and 61 (vs Sri Lanka), playing his brand of belligerent cricket.

"Whenever he wants to slow down a bit, he knows how to slow down also now. So, after six overs (of powerplay) if he wants to bat for a longer period, he is doing that. So, day by day



he is getting (more) runs and he is batting really well."

Jayasuriya added that the Indian coaches backing the youngster completely has helped Abhishek unleash his batting prowess coming at the top. "I think, the good thing is the coaching staff has given him the license to play his natural game. That's the key."

Jayasuriya further asserted that his side doesn't have a "mental block" against India after going down in the Super Over to Suryakumar Yadav and Co in the inconsequential Super 4s match.

Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh produced a brilliant Super Over to win the game for his side after Sri Lanka matched India's 202 runs at the end of 20 overs with opener Pathum Nissanka smashing a belligerent century.

The legendary left-hander said that he was fairly satisfied with his boys, saying this team can go very far despite Sri Lanka losing all three Super 4s games in the tournament.

"I would've preferred to finish games in normal time. No captain or coach wants to go to a Super Over," said Jayasuriya.

"Unfortunately, Dasun (Shanaka) missed completing the third run. But no, there's no mental

block against India. Our batting line-up is strong, and we've given them confidence. Chasing 200 (203) is never easy, but we almost did it, which shows the quality we have," he added.

Sri Lanka had suffered a similar defeat in 2024 during the third T20I in Pallekele when they made a mess of an easy chase to be at the mercy of a Super Over, which India won.

Jayasuriya praised Nissanka (107) and Kusal Perera (58 off 32 balls) whose second-wicket stand yielded 127 runs in just 70 balls.

"When you're chasing 202 (203), you have to keep finding boundaries. Their partnership was the key. The momentum shifted when we started losing wickets. That's natural in a chase because someone has to take risks."

"Sadly, Pathum got out at the wrong time, and later on, the ball began to turn more. Still, it was a very good game of cricket."

"Kusal is one of the best players of spin in our team. He played that role well again, though I'd have liked him to bat longer. Both took calculated risks, and when they wanted boundaries, they executed them. Pathum also had a bit of a hamstring issue recently but still gave 100 per cent for the team, which shows his commitment." The batting great added that one of the reasons for Sri Lanka's defeats was the team's sluggishness in adapting to the wickets.

"In T20 cricket, assessing conditions quickly is everything. In Abu Dhabi, for example, the first-round pitches had pace and bounce, but in the second round, things changed, and we were too slow to adapt. That cost us."

"The disappointment was the Bangladesh match in the Super Fours -- 168 on that pitch was a good score, but we didn't bowl well enough to defend it. Against Pakistan, we didn't assess the conditions (in Abu Dhabi) quickly enough, and we were late to adapt."

"Today (Friday), India played very well to get over 200. Our boys showed they're capable of chasing that, but they just fell short. (PTI)

## Indian swimmers will bag 3-4 medals at Asian Aquatics Championships: Head coach Nihar Ameen



**AHMEDABAD, Sept 27:** Two-time Olympians Sajjan Prakash and Srihari Nataraj will spearhead India's challenge against the continent's creme de la creme at the 11th Asian Aquatics Championships, beginning here on Sunday.

A total of 40 swimmers including 20 men and 20 women will compete at the newly-built state-of-the-art Veer Savarkar Sports Complex in Naranpura here.

The Indian contingent has been based in Naranpura over the past month for the national coaching camp.

Over 1,100 swimmers, coaches and technical officials have arrived from 29 countries for the marquee event in the Asian Aquatics calendar which will serve as a qualifying event for the Asian Games to be held in Nagoya, Japan next year.

Besides Prakash and Nataraj, Dhinidhi Desinghu and Bhavya Sachdeva will be India's top hopes in women's category.

Optimistic about India's chances in the event, which

is historically dominated by the Chinese swimmers, India head coach Nihar Ameen said, "We had very good preparations with the entire contingent training together here at the Veer Savarkar Sports Complex. It is a fantastic facility and it's a very fast pool so I am quite confident our swimmers will do well here."

He further touted Prakash, Nataraj and Rohit B Benedicto to medal in their respective events.

"We should win at least 3-4 medals. If Sajjan swims as fast as he did in 200m butterfly in the Senior Nationals, he is sure to win a medal and same goes with Srihari, who will be swimming 100m and 200m backstroke. Rohit also stands a chance to win a medal in 200m freestyle," Amin said.

"Among the women, Dhinidhi, Bhavya, Nina Venkatesh, Soubrity Mondal are all clocking good times. We will have relay teams as well in the women's categories and we are optimistic of a good show," he added.

A total of 10 water polo teams in the men's category and eight teams in the women's section will be vying to book their berth for the Asian Games next year to be held in Nagoya, Japan.

In diving, 16 countries will participate, while artistic swimming has entries from 10 countries and swimming will have 21 countries participating.

The chief guest for the opening ceremony on Sunday will be Chief Minister of Gujarat Bhupendra Patel Indian Swimming Contingent:

Men: S Dhanush, Shoan Ganguly, Jashua Thomas, Aneesh Gowda, Rohit B Benedicto, Advait Page, Sajjan Prakash, Bikram Changmai, Heer Gitesh Shah, MS Yadesh Babu, Vidith S Shankar, Kushagra Rawat, Jananjay Jyoti Hazarika, Akash Mani, Nithik Nathella, Manikantha L, Vinayak V, Likith SP, Rishabh Anupam Das, Srihari Nataraj.

Women: Thanya S, Shristi Upadhaya, Vihitha Nayana, Nina Venkatesh, Manavi Varma, Vritti Agarwal, Roshini B, Dhinidhi Desinghu, Bhavya Sachdeva, Astha Chodhury, Shreenithi Natesan, Naisha, Aditi Satish Hegde, Saanvi Deshwal, Sanjana Prabhugaonkar, Rujula S, Soubrity Mondal, M Ritivika, Avantika Chavan, Houshri Jayaram. (PTI)