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- Tejashwi named as INDIA bloc's CM candidate for Bihar polls

IED blast on rly track near Kokrajhar; train services remain disrupted for hours

One suspect identified, says Himanta

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Oct 23: Sensation prevailed in Kokrajhar — often called the “city of peace” — after an improvised explosive device (IED) blast occurred on the railway track between Kokrajhar and Salakati railway stations in the early hours of Thursday.

The explosion, reported around 12.10 am, ripped apart nearly three feet of the track near Singimari railway gate, disrupting train services across Lower Assam and parts of north Bengal.

According to official sources, the IED was planted by unidentified miscreants on the middle portion of the track, about five kilometres from Kokrajhar railway station.

The blast, which occurred just minutes after a goods train passed through, caused heavy damage but fortunately resulted in no casualties or derailments.

Senior police and railway officials rushed to the site immediately after the explosion.

Repair work began shortly after the incident, and the damaged portion of the track was restored by 5.25 am, allowing normal train movement to resume by morning.

Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) Chief Public Relations Officer Kapinjal Kishore Sharma said around eight trains were detained



due to the incident.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said police have identified one suspect for his alleged involvement.

On the sidelines of an official function in Bongaigaon, CM Sarma said the state escaped a dangerous situation due to the active response of a loco pilot.

“When a train was passing, the loco pilot noticed it and immediately informed the railway police. If the loco pilot had not noticed and alerted us, we would have received very bad news today morning,” he said.

Kokrajhar Senior Superintendent of Police Pushpraj Singh confirmed that the police had launched

a detailed investigation and collected forensic samples from the site.

Assam DGP Harmeet Singh visited the blast site later in the day, accompanied by senior police officials. He said that some preliminary clues had been found but declined to share details pending further investigation.

Security has since been intensified along the railway route, with joint teams from the State Police, Railway Protection Force (RPF), and intelligence agencies monitoring the area.

The incident marks the first such blast in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) since the signing of the BTR Peace Accord on January

27, 2020, and comes just days after the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) assumed power in the BTC following the October 5 council formation.

The blast has drawn widespread condemnation from political and social organisations. UPPL president and former BTR Chief Executive Member Pramod Boro condemned the incident and urged the government to ensure a strict and transparent investigation.

UPPL general secretary Raju Kumar Narzary described the attack as “frightening” and called on all stakeholders — government, civil society, law enforcement agencies, and citizens — to work collectively to preserve peace.

“Peace is not just a slogan; it is a shared responsibility. We hope this is an isolated incident and not a return to darker times,” Narzary said.

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) also issued a strong statement condemning the “cowardly and inhuman act,” terming it a direct assault on the peace and progress achieved in the region.

“Violence in any form goes against the spirit of democracy and humanity,” the ABSU stated, appealing to people to remain calm and not be swayed by rumours.

“The culprits must be brought to justice,” (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gaganyaan mission: 90 pc development work completed, says ISRO chief

BENGALURU, Oct 23: The Gaganyaan mission is progressing steadily with nearly 90 per cent of the development work being completed, ISRO Chairman V Narayanan said on Thursday.

The Gaganyaan mission is India's first human spaceflight mission under development.

“The Gaganyaan mission is going very well. In fact, when you talk about the Gaganyaan mission, a lot of technology development has to take place, you are aware — the rocket has to be human-rated, the orbital module has to be developed, and the environmental control safety system has to be developed. Then coming to the crew escape system, parachute system and then, of course, human-centric products,” Narayanan said while responding to a question about the progress of the mission.

He was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the promotional activities for the upcoming Emerging Science, Technology, and Innovation Conclave (ESTIC-2025), scheduled to be held from November 3 to 5 in New Delhi.

He said that approximately 90 per cent of the development work has been completed.

“Now three uncrewed missions have to be accomplished before going for the crewed mission and we are working towards it. In the first uncrewed mission, Vyommitra is going to fly and we are working towards that to accomplish the crewed mission by the beginning of 2027,” he added.

On August 24, 2025, ISRO accomplished (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

EC top brass interacts with chief poll officers of 5 states

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: Election Commission top brass on Thursday held one-on-one interaction with chief poll officers of five states where assembly polls are due next year to assess their problems and understand their requirements.

Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry -- where polls are due next year --

are also among the states where the first phase of all-India Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter list will take place in the coming days.

In a statement, the poll authority said it interacted one-to-one with the chief electoral officers (CEOs) of poll-bound States/UT of Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala and West Ben-

gal. The chief electoral officers of the five states were in the national capital along with CEOs of other states for a two-day meet on review of SIR preparedness.

The Commission also directed the CEOs to finalise their preparations for the SIR in their respective states and Union territories.

After the presentations by senior officers (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Body blow to Reliance as US sanctions force cut in Russian oil imports

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd, India's biggest buyer of discounted Russian oil, plans to scale back imports of Russian crude oil following fresh US sanctions on Moscow-linked firms, sources said.

State-run refiners, however, may continue purchases through intermediary traders for now, industry officials said.

Reliance, which operates the world's largest single-site oil refining complex at Jamnagar in Gujarat, purchased about half of the 1.7-1.8 million barrels per day of discounted Russian crude shipped to India.

The company refines the crude into petrol, diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF), a large share of which is exported to markets such as Europe and the United States at market prices, generating strong margins.

All this may change after US President Donald Trump imposed sanctions on Open Joint Stock Company Rosneft Oil Company (Rosneft) and Lukoil

OA0 (Lukoil) -- Russia's two largest oil companies that he accuses of helping fund the Kremlin's “war machine” in Ukraine.

This means that no entity, American or foreign, can have any commercial dealings with the sanctioned Russian companies. Violators face civil or criminal penalties.

Reliance, which has signed a 25-year deal to buy up to 500,000 barrels of crude oil per day (25 million tonnes in a year) with Rosneft, will now reduce and potentially halt all purchases from Russia, three sources with knowledge of the matter said.

The company has huge business interest in the US and cannot risk attracting scrutiny, they said.

Reliance, which bought an estimated USD 35 billion worth of Russian oil since the start of the Ukraine war in February 2022, started “recalibration” of its imports soon after the recent European Union adopted its 18th package of sanctions against Moscow in late July this year.

Recalibration is nothing but moving the import requirement to a different region. And this may get expedited now, sources said.

Transactions involving the two sanctioned Russian firms need to be wound down by November 21.

Reliance did not respond to emails seeking comments.

The other company to be hit hard by the US sanctions is Nayara Energy. The firm, in which Rosneft holds a 49.13 per cent stake, has been entirely reliant on Russian crude supplies since the EU imposed sanctions against it in July.

Nayara did not respond to an email sent for comments.

State-owned oil refiners, however, are not in such dire straits as they do not have any direct contract with Rosneft or Lukoil and had been buying Russian oil through intermediary traders, mostly European (who are out of the sanctions net), sources said. That purchase can continue for now. The public-sector (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM Modi to attend India-ASEAN summit virtually

EAM Jaishankar to travel to Malaysia for East Asia summit

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not travel to Kuala Lumpur for annual ASEAN meetings due to scheduling issues and he will join India's annual summit with the 10-nation grouping virtually.

Following a phone conversation with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Modi said he was looking forward to joining the ASEAN-India summit virtually, and to further deepening comprehensive strategic partnership between the two sides.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent PM Modi at the 20th East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur on October 27, according to an official statement.

The Association of Southeast

Asian Nations (ASEAN) is considered one of the most influential groupings in the region and India and several other countries including the US, China, Japan and Australia are its dialogue partners.

Apart from the ASEAN member states, East Asia Summit includes India, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the US and Russia.

In a social media post, the Malaysian prime minister said he had spoken to PM Modi last night and discussed efforts to strengthen the bilateral relationship to a more strategic and comprehensive level.

The ASEAN summit and related meetings will be held in Kuala Lumpur from October 26 to 28. PM Modi has led the Indian dele-

gations at the ASEAN-India summit and the East Asia Summit in the last few years.

“Had a warm conversation with my dear friend, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia. Congratulated him on Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship and conveyed best wishes for the success of upcoming Summits,” Modi said on ‘X’.

“Look forward to joining the ASEAN-India Summit virtually, and to further deepening of the ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership,” he said.

People familiar with the matter said PM Modi is not travelling to Kuala Lumpur due to scheduling issues. Malaysian PM Ibrahim said Modi told (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tiwari panel report on Nellie massacre of 1983 to be tabled in Assembly

Regularisation of SSA teachers now after 3 years of service

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma chaired a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Lok Sewa Bhawan on Thursday, where the Cabinet took several important decisions aimed at boosting industrial development, strengthening education, and promoting social welfare across the State.

The Cabinet approved an increase in project cost for Assam Petrochemicals Limited's 500 TPD Methanol Plant and 200 TPD Formalin Plant, raising it from ₹1,709.18 crore to ₹2,267.22 crore.

The decision also includes additional equity contribution to be made by the State Government to support the project's completion and operational efficiency.

In the education sector, the Cabinet reduced the minimum service period required for regularisation of teachers working under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Assam, through the special recruitment drive, from five years to three years. This move is expected to benefit around 3,000 teachers currently serving under the Mission.

Additionally, the Cabinet decided to reduce the mandatory service period for transfer of male teachers at a station from 10 years to seven years, facilitating better mobility and career progression.

On social welfare, the Cabinet decided to exempt members of the Tea Tribe, Moran, Motok, and Scheduled Tribe communities from the provision of restricting the number of children to two under the State Population Policy, ensuring greater flexibility and social equity.

The Cabinet also held detailed discussions on a proposal to grant land pattas to tea garden workers residing in labour lines, giving in-principle approval to the initiative.

This step is expected to secure land rights and improve the living conditions of tea garden communities. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Man sentenced to death by Assam court for killing wife, daughter with axe



BARPETA, Oct 23: A court in Assam's Barpeta district gave the death penalty to a man for killing his wife and daughter.

Sessions Judge Deepak Thakuriya convicted Rishav Das for killing his wife, Binita, and daughter, Hiya, with an axe, and pronounced the sentence on Wednesday.

In October 2023, Das, who ran a shop in the Gandhinagar area of Barpeta town, had attacked his wife and daughter.

Eyewitnesses claimed that there was an altercation among them over a dispute.

In a fit of rage, the person had attacked his wife and daughter with an axe, and they both had died on the spot. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Defence ministry approves procurement proposals worth ₹ 79,000 crore

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: The defence ministry on Thursday cleared proposals to procure weapons and military hardware worth ₹ 79,000 crore, including Nag missiles, amphibious warfare ships and electronic intelligence and surveillance systems, to boost the combat capabilities of the three services.

The procurement proposals were cleared at a meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

It is the second major decision on procurement following Operation Sindoor.

Procurement projects worth ₹ 67,000 crore were approved on August 5.

The DAC approved various proposals amounting to a total cost of about ₹ 79,000 crore, the defence ministry said.

For the Indian Navy, approval was granted for the procurement of Landing Platform Docks (LPDs), 30-mm Naval Surface Guns (NSGs), Advanced Light Weight Torpedoes (ALWTs), the Electro Optical Infra-Red Search and Track System and Smart Ammunition for the 76-mm Super Rapid Gun Mount.

The procurement of LPDs will help the Navy undertake amphibious operations along with the Army and the Air Force, the ministry said.

LPDs are amphibious warfare ships that are generally capable of carrying helicopters, ground mobility vehicles, tanks and land troops.

The Indian Navy was looking at procuring at least four LPDs.

The ministry said the integrated sea capability provided by LPDs will also help the

Navy undertake peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief measures.

“The induction of ALWT, which is indigenously developed by Naval Science and Technological Laboratory, DRDO is capable of targeting conventional, nuclear and midget submarines,” the ministry said in a statement.

The procurement of 30-mm NSGs will enhance the capability of the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard to conduct low-intensity maritime operations and initiate anti-piracy measures. For the Indian Army, approval was accorded for the procurement of the Nag missile system (Tracked) Mk-II (NAMIS), the ground-based mobile ELINT (electronic intelligence system) and high-mobility vehicles (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IIT Madras expands collaboration with Applied Materials India Private Limited, a subsidiary of Applied Materials, Inc, to advance cutting-edge semiconductor research and workforce development, officials said on Thursday.

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras has expanded its strategic collaboration with Applied Materials India Private Limited, a subsidiary of Applied Materials, Inc, to advance cutting-edge semiconductor research and workforce development, officials said on Thursday.

As part of their collaboration, IIT Madras will deploy the foundational software framework of Applied Materials' AppliedTwin platform -- a sophisticated digital twin solution designed to model and optimise semiconductor manufacturing equipment and processes.

The development comes at a pivotal time as IIT Madras along with Government of Tamil Nadu is establishing its own semiconductor fabrication (FAB) facility with in-



tegrated reliability and packaging capabilities.

“The deployment of the foundational software of Applied Materials' Applied Twin framework will empower our faculty and students

to accelerate concept creation, prototyping, testing, and process exploration virtually, thereby reducing R&D cost and time significantly,” said IIT Madras Director V Kamakoti.

“This initiative is a transformative step toward preparing an industry-ready workforce and aligns strongly with India's semiconductor mission. By integrating advanced digital twin technologies into our curriculum and research, we aim to contribute significantly to the country's goal of becoming a global hub for semiconductor design and manufacturing,” he added.

Applied Materials' AppliedTwin framework is a comprehensive digital twin solution aimed at transforming semiconductor manufacturing.

The foundational software powering AppliedTwin is designed to foster collaboration and build an innovation network across suppliers, government, customers, and Research and Development institutions -- (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India and Bhutan review bilateral security cooperation, border management

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: India and Bhutan reviewed bilateral security cooperation, border management and issues like mobile signal spill over, future roadmap for integrated check posts, among others, at a high-level meeting held in Thimphu.

The fourteenth India-Bhutan meeting on border management and security, held in Thimphu between October 16-17, also discussed issues related to capacity building for Bhutan's Police.

Both sides reviewed bilateral security cooperation, border management, issues related to mobile signal spill over, future roadmap for integrated check posts, maintenance of boundary pillars and cross-border movement, according to an official statement.

Both delegations expressed satisfaction regarding the cordial and constructive discussions and reiterated their resolve to work together towards ensuring a safe, secure and prosperous border region, it said.

The Indian delegation was led by Rajendra Kumar, Secretary, Department of Border Management, Ministry of Home Affairs, while the Bhutanese side was headed by Sonam Wangyel, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs.

The Indian delegation included officials from the Sashtra Seema Bal, Land Ports Authority of India,



Department of Telecommunications, Narcotics Control Bureau, Survey of India, Customs and representatives from Assam, West Bengal, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh governments.

Reaffirming their strong friendship, India and Bhutan committed to deepening cooperation across traditional and emerging areas.

Their enduring partnership, rooted in shared geography, culture, and people-to-people ties, continues to serve as a model for regional cooperation, the release said.

The last such meeting was held in 2019. (PTI)

Sensex, Nifty climb for 6th day; eke out gains after hitting 52-week high levels

MUMBAI, Oct 23: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally higher on Thursday, helped by robust buying in IT and tech stocks amid growing optimism on the US-India trade deal front.

After hitting a 52-week high, indices reversed most of their intraday gains on lag-end profit-taking after sentiment turned cautious amid concerns over US sanctions against Russia's two largest oil companies.

Besides, an over one per cent decline in heavyweight Reliance Industries also pulled the markets lower.

Rising for the sixth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 130.06 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 84,556.40. During the day, it jumped 863.72 points or 1.02 per cent to 85,290.06.

The 50-share NSE Nifty ended 22.80 points or 0.09 per cent higher at 25,891.40.

"Domestic equities started on a positive note; however, they pared early gains as investors booked profits following sanctions on Russian oil and the possible postponement of India-US trade negotiations.

"Meanwhile, IT stocks advanced as sentiment improved after Trump's softer tone on H1B visas...As the undercurrent vibes of the domestic market have improved due to a possible India-US deal and a rise in consumer demand, the broad market is expected to do much better henceforth," Vinod Nair, Head of



Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

FIIIs are gradually returning to Indian markets, encouraged by expectations of earnings rebound in H2 FY26 supported by festive demand, tax benefits and GST reductions, he added.

From the Sensex firms, Infosys climbed 3.86 per cent. HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Axis Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Titan and Tech Mahindra were also among the gainers.

However, Eternal, UltraTech Cement, Bharti Airtel and Adani Ports were among the laggards.

"Markets traded volatile on the weekly expiry day and ended nearly unchanged. The session began on a positive note, followed by range-bound movement in the first half; however, profit-taking in heavyweight stocks across sectors

erased all the early gains. Sector-wise, technology stocks led the advance, with Infosys, HCL Tech, and TCS among the top gainers," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.42 per cent, and the mid-cap index dipped 0.15 per cent.

BSE Focused IT jumped 2.36 per cent, IT (2.26 per cent), teck (1.17 per cent), bankex (0.36 per cent), metal (0.16 per cent) and FMCG (0.14 per cent).

In contrast, services dropped 1.19 per cent, telecommunication (0.72 per cent), energy (0.54 per cent), oil & gas (0.48 per cent), commodities (0.41 per cent) and capital goods (0.28 per cent).

"The Indian equity market ended the session on a flat note, trimming early gains as investors resorted to selective profit booking

amid cautious global sentiment. Uncertainty around global trade developments and the absence of fresh domestic triggers led to a profit booking," Bajaj Broking Research said in a note.

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

Markets in Europe were trading on a mixed note in mid-session deals.

US markets ended in negative territory on Wednesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 96.72 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has imposed further sanctions on Open Joint Stock Company Rosneft Oil Company (Rosneft) and Lukoil OAO (Lukoil) - Russia's two largest oil companies that the Trump administration accuses of helping fund the Kremlin's "war machine" in Ukraine. Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 5.43 per cent to USD 65.99 a barrel.

Equity markets were closed on Wednesday on account of Diwali Balipratipada.

In a special one-hour Muhurat trading session on Tuesday, the Sensex rose by 62.97 points or 0.07 per cent to settle at 84,426.34.

The Nifty went up by 25.45 points or 0.10 per cent to settle at 25,868.60. (PTI)

Tata Trusts moves to reappoint Mehli Mistry as lifetime trustee

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: Tata Trusts has circulated a proposal to reappoint Mehli Mistry as a trustee for three of its key philanthropic bodies, a move that would make him a lifetime trustee, according to people familiar with the development.

The circular, issued by the CEO of Tata Trusts to other trustees on Thursday, seeks Mistry's reappointment to the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and Bai Hiralal Jamsheji Tata Navsari Charitable Institution. The development comes at a time with opinions are divided on whether Mistry's continuation is automatic or requires unanimous approval from the trustees for a lifetime tenure.

Reportedly, there is a vertical split within Tata Trusts - with one faction said to align with Noel Tata, who took over as chairman following Ratan Tata's death, and the other comprising those seen as loyalists of the former doyen.

The matter had reached the government with the top brass of the Tata group, including Tata Trusts Chairman Noel Tata and Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran, meeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman earlier this month. (PTI)

trustees -- Pramit Jhaveri, Jehangir HC Jehangir and Darius Khambata -- while approving Srinivasan's reappointment as trustee and Vice-Chairman of Tata Trusts, had put a condition that all renewals of trustees in future be approved unanimously, failing which their approvals would be withdrawn.

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Initiative launched to curb pollution through Paddy waste conversion

CHANDIGARH, Oct 23: As north India grapples with deteriorating air quality post-harvest season, a large-scale initiative to curb stubble burning is underway by converting agricultural waste into clean energy, a renewable company said on Thursday.

Targeting regions like Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan, where stubble burning contributes significantly to seasonal smog, this drive aims to reduce pollution at the source while supporting rural livelihoods, it added.

SAEL Industries Ltd (SAEL), an integrated renewable energy company, announced that it is expecting to procure 20 lakh tonnes of paddy waste with the onset of the harvesting season this year and convert it into clean electricity through its fuel aggregator.

This scale of paddy-waste procurement drive addresses the pressing concern of stubble burning and agri waste management, the company said. SAEL has a portfolio of 11 WTE plants across Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan, totalling

165 MW (including one Under Construction project in Rajasthan).

As per the Indian Journal of Agronomy, India produces about 500 million tonnes of crop residue annually, out of which 140 million tonnes remain unutilised, and 92 million tonnes are burnt in open air, causing serious air pollution and health issues to the people in the Northern states of India, the company said. A sustainable way to convert agricultural residue into electricity is one of the preferred ways of managing this problem. (PTI)

Premier Energies forays into transformer manufacturing

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: Premier Energies on Thursday announced its foray into transformer manufacturing by acquiring a majority 51 per cent stake in Transcon Industries for a total consideration of ₹ 500.3 crore.

The acquisition is a key milestone in its strategy to become a fully-integrated clean energy solutions provider, Premier Energies said in a statement.

The renewable energy player said it has entered into definitive agreements to acquire a 51 per cent ownership interest in Transcon Industries for a total consideration of ₹ 500.3 crore.

"This investment marks our foray into the fast-growing transformer business on the back of surging renewable power capacity addition and growing electrification of the economy," Premier Energies MD & CEO Chiranjeev Saluja said.

The acquisition of Transcon, which manufactures a wider range of transformers, including solar and distribution, will help Premier Energies move further downstream, offering integrated and bundled solutions to power producers, DISCOMs, and industrial customers, while shifting focus toward the higher-value medium voltage, high voltage, and extra high voltage segments over time. (PTI)

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One suspect identified

and unity and harmony must be upheld," the ABSU added, reaffirming its commitment to the path of peace, dialogue, and development.

Local MLA Lawrence Islary and several other leaders visited the site on Thursday morning to take stock of the situation.

The police have appealed to the public to share any information that might assist in the investigation.

Train services have since returned to normal, though heightened security measures remain in place across the Kokrajhar-Salakat stretch. (With inputs from PTI)

PM Modi to attend

him that he would attend the India-ASEAN summit online since the "Deepavali festival was still being celebrated". "India remains an important partner for Malaysia in the fields of trade and investment, in addition to close cooperation in the sectors of technology, education, and regional security," he said.

"We also touched on the organization of the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur at the end of this month." Ibrahim said PM Modi "informed him that he will attend virtually due to the ongoing Deepavali celebrations in India at that time". "I respect his decision and extended my greetings for a happy Deepavali to him and the entire people of India," he said.

Malaysia will remain committed to strengthening relations with India and further enhancing ASEAN-India cooperation towards a more peaceful and prosperous region, he added.

The Ministry of External Affairs said PM Modi will virtually attend the 22nd ASEAN-India summit on October 26. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ASEAN leaders will jointly review the progress in ASEAN-India relations and discuss initiatives for strengthening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," it said.

The MEA said strengthening the relationship with ASEAN is a key pillar of India's Act East Policy and its Indo-Pacific vision.

It said External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 20th East Asia Summit on October 27.

"The East Asia Summit will provide an opportunity to deliberate on the challenges to peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and also exchange views on regional and international developments," the MEA said. The ASEAN-India dialogue relations started with the establishment of a sectoral partnership in 1992. This graduated to full dialogue partnership in December 1995 and summit level partnership in 2002.

The ties were elevated to a strategic partnership in 2012. The 10 member countries of ASEAN are Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

The two-way relations between India and ASEAN have been on a significant upswing in the last few years with focus being on boosting cooperation in the areas of trade and investment as well as security and defence. (PTI)

Regularisation of SSA

Finally, the Cabinet approved the tabling of the Tiwari Commission Report, which investigated the 1983 Nellie massacre, in the upcoming November session of the Assam Legislative Assembly, underlining the State Government's commitment to transparency and historical accountability.

These decisions collectively reflect the State Government's focus on industrial growth, educational reforms, social justice, and inclusive development for the people of Assam.

Man sentenced to death

Eight years ago, Das had attacked his sister and cut her fingers. (PTI)

EC top brass interacts

of the EC on the SIR process, queries raised by the CEOs were also clarified, the poll body said. (PTI)

Gaganyaan mission: 90 pc

the first integrated air drop test for the Gaganyaan programme at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. According to ISRO, this test successfully demonstrated the objective of end-to-end performance validation of the critical parachute-based deceleration system of the crew module for the Gaganyaan mission in one of the typical mission scenarios.

"For the Gaganyaan programme, the integrated air drop test -- because when the entire module returns in the final phase almost nine parachutes have to work in a synchronised way for the proper splashdown -- so we lifted off a simulated module using a helicopter to a height of around three kilometres above the Earth. Using nine parachutes, it was successfully splashed down," the ISRO Chairman said. (PTI)

Body blow to Reliance

units are assessing compliance risks, checking every contract to look for Rosneft footprint. Reliance had in December 2024 signed a term deal with Russia's Rosneft -- now sanctioned -- to import as much as 500,000 barrels per day of Russian oil for 25 years. It also buys oil from intermediaries.

Reliance bought about USD 35 billion in oil from Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, accounting for roughly 8 per cent of Moscow's crude sales over that period.

In 2021, before the Ukraine war, Reliance bought just USD 85 million worth of Russian oil. The Indian government has maintained that the country's purchases are not illegal as no sanctions have yet been imposed on Russian crude buyers. It has pointed to US officials previously encouraging it to buy Russian crude to stabilise global energy prices.

It has called as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable" Trump's decision to double tariffs on Indian goods coming to the US to 50 per cent because of Russian oil purchases. The country's purchases of Russian oil were "based on market factors," it has maintained.

The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed further sanctions on Open Joint Stock Company Rosneft Oil Company (Rosneft) and Lukoil OAO (Lukoil) -- Russia's two largest oil companies that the Trump administration accuses of helping fund the Kremlin's "war machine" in Ukraine. The two companies together export 3.1 million barrels of oil per day. Rosneft alone is responsible for 6 per cent of global and nearly half of all Russian oil production.

India became the largest purchaser of Russian crude since Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, capitalising on steep discounts that followed western buyers' withdrawal.

Russian oil is bought both by private sector firms -- Reliance Industries Ltd and Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy -- and state-owned refiners Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd, and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd (HMEPL).

State-owned refiners do not have any term or fixed quantity deal with either Rosneft or Lukoil and typically buy Russian oil through tenders. In these tenders, oil traders, mostly European or ones based in Dubai and Singapore, who had purchased oil from Russian entities, participated.

These traders have not been sanctioned by the US, sources said, adding that European Union sanctions, too, had not targeted these traders.

And even if some traders shy away from picking Russian volumes, Moscow is capable of overnight resurrounding new ones with Dubai registration, sources said, adding that these traders can buy oil from Russian firms and sell to refiners such as those in India and China.

"The measures by the Trump administration are 'half-hearted'," a source involved in the business said. "For months, US President Donald Trump has resisted pressure from US lawmakers to impose energy sanctions and even now the ones who do bulk of the trade are out of its net."

Another source said the markets are somehow not buying into Trump's latest sanctions.

"If sanctions were so impregnable, international oil prices would have jumped at least USD 5-10 per barrel on news of such large volumes going out of the market. Instead what we saw was just a USD 2 per barrel increase, implying the market believes not all of the oil that is exported from Russia is going anywhere."

Nayara Energy, in which Rosneft holds a 49.13 per cent stake, is the other big private sector buyer of Russian oil. The company, which operates a 20 million tonnes a year oil refinery at Vadinar in Gujarat, has already been sanctioned by the European Union and it may have to recalibrate its purchases, sources said.

Kesani Enterprises Company Ltd -- a consortium led by Maretera and Russian investment group United Capital Partners (UCP) -- holds another 49.13 per cent stake in Nayara.

Sources said so far the Indian government has not given any instruction to refiners on stopping or reducing Russian oil imports. They said Trump's recent comments on India agreeing to stop all purchases of Russian oil (with no such commitment being made by New Delhi) may have got to do with the European Union (EU) sanctions on import of fuel made from Russian oil.

The EU has banned import of fuels refined from Russian crude with effect from January 21 next year. Reliance, whose one of the two refineries is only-for-export, refines Russian crude into fuels like petrol and diesel, some of which is exported to the EU. MRPL also exports to the EU.

From January, such exports will have to stop and in a way Reliance and MRPL will have to cut Russian oil purchases if they have to continue exporting to the EU, they said, adding that Nayara has already stopped fuel exports to the EU after being sanctioned.

With three big buyers of Russian oil recalibrating their purchases, Russian flows will reduce by January and this is something that Trump may be using as a bargaining chip to beat around his point, they added. (PTI)

Defence ministry approves

(HMs). The procurement of the NAMIS will enhance the Army's capability of neutralising the enemy's combat vehicles, bunkers and other field fortifications, whereas the GBMES will provide round-the-clock electronic intelligence of enemy activities, the ministry said.

The induction of HMs will significantly improve logistics support to the forces in diverse geographical terrains, it added. The DAC approved the procurement of Collaborative Long Range Target Saturation/Deconstruction System (CLRTS/DS) for the Indian Air Force (IAF). It also cleared some other procurement proposals of the IAF.

The CLRTS/DS has the capability of autonomous take-off, landing, navigating, detecting and delivering payloads in the mission area. (PTI)

IIT Madras expands

supporting the development of India's semiconductor ecosystem. "By deploying the foundational AppliedTwin framework, we are equipping future engineers and researchers with the tools to engage deeply with advanced semiconductor technologies. This initiative not only strengthens workforce development but also catalyses innovation through academia-industry collaborations that are essential for India's semiconductor journey," said Avi Avula, Country President, Applied Materials India. (PTI)

HUL's Q2 profit up 3.8 pc to ₹ 2,694 cr; sales see flat volume growth

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: FMCG major Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) on Thursday reported a 3.8 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at ₹ 2,694 crore and sales was up 2.1 per cent in the September quarter of FY'26 with a "flat underlying volume growth" due to the transitory impact of GST changes and prolonged monsoon in parts of the country.

HUL, which owns popular brands such as Rin, Surf Excel, Lux, Horlicks etc had logged a net profit of ₹ 2,595 crore in the July-September quarter a year ago.

The company's revenue stood at ₹ 16,034 crore in the July-September quarter of this financial year, up from ₹ 15,703 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, the company said in a regulatory filing.

It had a "consolidated Underlying Sales Growth (USG) of 2 per cent and a flat Underlying Volume Growth (UVG) in the September Quarter of 2025. Performance for the quarter reflected a transitory impact of GST changes and prolonged monsoon conditions in parts of the country," as per the HUL earnings statement.

During the quarter, the EBITDA margin stood at 23.2 per cent, which was lower by 90 bps year-on-year amidst higher investments in the business, said HUL, part of British multinational consumer goods company Unilever Plc.

HUL's profit before exceptional items and tax was down 4.8 per cent to ₹ 3,386 crore in the second quarter of FY'26, as against ₹ 3,558 crore of the corresponding quarter a year ago.

However, Profit After Tax grew by 4 per cent, primarily driven by one-off positive impact (Rs 184 crore) pursuant to resolution of prior years' tax matters between UK and Indian tax authorities," it said.

HUL's total expenses in the September quarter were at ₹ 12,999 crore, up 3.32 per cent.

Its total income, which includes other revenue,



was up 1.5 per cent to ₹ 16,388 crore.

"We delivered a competitive performance with an Underlying Sales Growth (USG) of 2 per cent and an EBITDA margin of 23.2 per cent in the quarter," HUL CEO and Managing Director Priya Nair said.

The latest GST reforms are a positive step by the government to drive consumption, expected to increase disposable income and improve consumer sentiment. However, the quarter saw a transitory impact as the market adjusted to these changes.

"We anticipate normal trading conditions starting early November, once prices stabilise, paving the way for a gradual and sustained market recovery," she said.

While sharing the segment revenue, the FMCG major said that in the September quarter, the revenue of Home Care, which is the leading division of HUL was down 1.16 per cent to ₹ 5,664 crore.

However, HUL's Beauty & Wellbeing segment, with brands such as Lakme, Dove, Lux, and OZiva, reported a 9 per cent revenue growth to ₹ 3,732 crore. The Skin Care and Health & Wellbeing delivered 5 per cent growth in revenue.

"However, turnover declined year-on-year due to the transitory impact of GST rate rationalisation.

Skin Care, including Colour Cosmetics, grew by high single digits, driven by continued momentum in the Future Core and Market Makers portfolio, and a well-executed winter loading ahead of the season," it said.

HUL's revenue from Personal Care was flat at ₹ 2,425 crore in the September quarter. It was at ₹ 2,411 crore in the corresponding quarter.

According to HUL, the segment was "impacted by GST rate transition in the quarter".

HUL's revenue from food was up 1.73 per cent in the September quarter to ₹ 3,869 crore. This was at ₹ 3,803 crore in the corresponding July-September quarter a year ago.

The segment has a double-digit growth in beverages supported by overall performance amid softness in the Ice Cream and Lifestyle Nutrition segment, it said.

"Beverages (Tea and Coffee) grew in double-digits. Tea saw high single-digit growth driven by a healthy mix of price and volume. Coffee sustained its strong double-digit growth momentum," it said.

While ice cream turnover declined year-on-year due to prolonged monsoons in parts of the country, and the GST transition.

HUL's revenue from others, which includes exports, was down 1.6 per cent to ₹ 551 crore in the September quarter of FY'26.

Looking ahead, Nair said that with a portfolio transformation and a supportive macroeconomic environment, she expects to accelerate volume-led growth in the mid-to-long term.

Meanwhile, in a separate filing, HUL said its board in a meeting held on Thursday, has declared an interim dividend of ₹ 19 per equity share of face value of ₹ 1 each for FY'26.

Shares of HUL on Thursday were trading at ₹ 2,617 apiece on BSE, up 0.95 per cent in the afternoon trade. (PTI)

Over 20,000 women beneficiaries to receive support for self-employment CM launches cheque distribution under MMUA for Bongaigaon LAC

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 23: Continuing the state's mission of empowering women, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday launched the distribution of cheques to women beneficiaries of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under the Mukhyamantrir Mahila Udyomita Abhiyan (MMUA) for the Bongaigaon Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC). A total of 20,308 beneficiaries — including 16,741 from rural areas and 3,567 from urban areas are covered under the scheme.

Addressing the gathering at Bongaigaon Mini Stadium, CM Sarma said the MMUA aims to make women financially self-reliant. Citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, he noted that around 3 crore women across India are being transformed into "Lakshpati Didis." In Assam, many women who started as SHG members have now become "Lakshpati" and even "Mahalakshpati Baideus," earning up to ₹ 10 lakh annually.

Highlighting success stories, the



Chief Minister mentioned Himani Barman of Hanuman SHG in Chirang district and Kavita Daimari of Parbati SHG from Bongaigaon, who have achieved financial independence through SHG activities. He said women across Assam are now a vibrant force, contributing to their families and communities through productive work.

CM Sarma informed that of the

40 lakh SHG-linked women in Assam, 32 lakh have applied for assistance under the MMUA, with an estimated budget requirement of ₹ 3,200 crore. He urged beneficiaries to utilise the first installment of ₹ 10,000 wisely, suggesting investments in small-scale ventures like goat or poultry farming. Beneficiaries who use the funds productively will receive ₹

25,000 in the second phase and ₹ 50,000 in the third.

He also highlighted various state initiatives for women's welfare, including the Orunodoi Scheme, which now provides ₹ 1,250 per month along with a ₹ 250 LPG subsidy from January next year. From November 7, families with ration cards will receive pulses, salt and sugar at subsidised rates and from February, Orunodoi beneficiaries will also get edible oil as part of the scheme.

The Chief Minister further stated that strong government measures have led to a decline in crimes against women and child marriage cases. He announced that a new law to prohibit polygamy and another to curb child marriage would soon be introduced in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

MP Phanibhushan Choudhury, MLA Diptimoyee Choudhury, ASRLM Mission Director Kuntamani Sharma Bordoloi, District Commissioner Nabadeep Pathak and several other dignitaries attended the event.

Gauhati University joins British Council, TERI, HSBC to empower youth

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 23: In the wake of escalating climate challenges and the growing need for sustainable development, it has become imperative to nurture an aware and skilled youth community capable of driving sustainable practices and leading community-based climate action. With this vision, Gauhati University on Thursday hosted the inaugural session of the Regional Climate Skills Workshop for Youth, organised by the Centre for Himalayan Studies in collaboration with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), the British Council, HSBC and Vishva Yuva Kendra.

The two-day programme marks the fifth and final regional workshop under the Climate Skills: Seeds for Transition India initiative. It aims to equip young people with knowledge, practical skills and leadership tools to tackle climate change through sustainable and inclusive approaches.

Delivering the opening address, Dr Debanjan Chakrabarti, Direc-

tor, East and Northeast India, British Council, said, "If you run, you reach somewhere quicker, but if you walk with your friends, you reach much farther." His remarks underscored the importance of collaboration and collective responsibility in building climate resilience.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Nani Gopal Mahanta, in his address, emphasised the importance of integrating climate education into higher learning. "Universities must serve as catalysts for change by nurturing informed, responsible and action-oriented youth who can lead the transition towards a more sustainable future, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions like the Northeast," he said.

The inaugural session also featured insights from Dr Dipankar Saharia, Senior Director, Social Transformation and Strategic Alliance Programme, TERI and Dr Livleen K Kahlon, Director, Environment Education and Awareness Division, TERI, who highlighted the crucial role of education and

partnerships in shaping climate-ready societies.

More than 130 research scholars and students from Assam, Odisha, and other Indian states, along with participants from countries such as South Africa and Thailand, are attending the workshop. Over two days, participants will undergo interactive training on climate change mitigation, adaptation strategies, sustainable community practices and project-based learning.

The workshop will conclude with participants presenting their project ideas, from which ten students will be shortlisted for the National Climate Skills Workshop based on innovation, feasibility and potential impact.

Funded by the British Council and jointly implemented by TERI and the Centre for Himalayan Studies, the initiative represents a concerted effort to build a generation of climate leaders who can combine science, policy and community engagement to drive transformative change.

Trust announces Zubeen Garg Memorial Excellence Award

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Oct 23: The Lanka-based Omprakash Pramilla Devi Memorial Charitable Trust has announced the establishment of the "Zubeen Garg Memorial Excellence Award" in loving memory of the legendary Assamese artist, cultural icon and voice of generations, Zubeen Garg.

Rohit Agarwalla, trustee and director of the trust, said the award is a humble tribute to Zubeen Garg's extraordinary legacy by recognising artists who embody his passion, creativity and dedication to cultural expression. "From music and performance to visual and creative arts, this is a celebration of those who dare to dream and create a new," he said. Agarwalla added that Zubeen Da's untimely demise has left a deep void, but his legacy continues to inspire millions. "Through this award, we strive to honour his spirit by uplifting the next generation of artists who carry forward his dreams and creative fire," he stated.

He further mentioned that the trust remains committed to inspiring positive change in young lives through social action. The award will include a cash prize, a memento, motivational books and other gifts to encourage budding artists. This year's award ceremony will be held on November 2 in Lanka, where several social personalities will also be felicitated for their exemplary contributions to society.

NFR accelerates railway development in Assam's BTAD region

Initiatives are expected to boost regional development, create employment opportunities

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 23: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is spearheading a series of major railway development projects aimed at enhancing connectivity, infrastructure and economic growth in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) of Assam. These initiatives are expected to boost regional development, create employment opportunities and integrate the BTAD region more closely with India's national rail network under the vision of a Viksit Bharat.

A key project underway is the proposed Wagon Periodic Overhauling (POH) Workshop at Basbari in Kokrajhar district. Recently, Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager of NFR, conducted an inspection of the site along with senior officials and representatives from the Bodoland Territorial Council. The modern facility, to be built over approximately 2,500 bighas at an estimated cost of ₹ 256.35 crore (Phase I), will initially service 75 wagons per month, with capacity increasing to 250 wagons monthly in later phases. Strategically located near Basbari station and Rupsi Airport,



the workshop will serve as a major logistics hub, providing large-scale employment and skill development opportunities for local youth, while strengthening NFR's wagon maintenance capabilities.

In addition, NFR is advancing the Kokrajhar-Gelephu New Railway Line Project, a 69 km cross-border rail link connecting Kokrajhar in Assam to Gelephu in Bhutan. Declared a Special Rail-

way Project by the Government of India and estimated to cost ₹ 4,033 crore, this line is set to open new avenues for trade, tourism and regional cooperation under India's Neighbourhood First and Act East policies. The project will position Kokrajhar as a key gateway for India-Bhutan rail and logistics operations, benefiting the BTAD region significantly.

Under the Amrit Bharat Station

State BJP slams Congress: Left for brazenly misusing Zubeen Garg's name in power-hungry politics

Party accuses Opposition of spreading false narratives, vows to seek justice through legal process



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 23: The Bharatiya Janata Party, representing its 65 lakh dedicated karyakartas along with countless admirers of the legendary artist Zubeen Garg across Assam, has collectively initiated a Nyay Yatra from Nalbari district on Wednesday, seeking justice through the court of law over the untimely and unexpected demise of the illustrious Sun of Assam, Zubeen Garg.

Addressing the media at the party headquarters, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, State BJP spokesperson Suranjan Dutta stated that the prime objective of this Nyay Yatra is to ensure justice through judicial proceedings regarding the unfortunate passing of Zubeen Garg. The party and the government, with the heartfelt cooperation of the people of Assam, are determined to immortalise his artistic legacy, creations and ideals so that Zubeen Garg's contribution continues to shine like the eternal radiance of the sun.

The BJP spokesperson further alleged that Lurinjyoti Gogoi, Akhil Gogoi, and Gaurav Gogoi are attempting to derail the entire investigative process through false and misleading propaganda. Their supporters have been spreading fabricated reports about Zubeen Garg's post-mortem findings on social media, falsely claiming that the accused are being kept in air-conditioned facilities and treated as VIPs in an insidious attempt to divert the course of justice.

"Moreover, during the one-month memorial of Zubeen Garg, leaders from Congress and the Opposition alliance held a discussion under the banner Kanchanjanga, where they irresponsibly claimed that the cause of Zubeen Garg's death was scuba diving. If so, how can Gaurav Gogoi, Lurinjyoti Gogoi, Akhil

Gogoi and Ajit Bhuyan now seek justice for his death? This contradiction is both shocking and hypocritical" - spokesperson Suranjan Dutta

Dutta further clarified that the Nyay Yatra initiated by the BJP should not be misunderstood as a question raised against the government but rather as an act of solidarity and cooperation. He appealed to all opposition parties to set aside their politics of confrontation and extend their support in the pursuit of justice for Zubeen Garg, who resides in the hearts of all Assamese people.

Recalling the grim days of Congress rule in Assam, Dutta highlighted that under their regime, Assam witnessed atrocities and injustices of the worst kind: During the protest for tribal recognition at Beltola, Lakshmi Orang, a leader of the Tea Tribe community, was brutally stripped by miscreants.

Pranab Boro, a leader from the Bodo community, immolated himself on the streets of Guwahati in protest over land rights.

On 15 August 2004, a bomb blast at the Independence Day function in Dhemajy claimed the lives of 13 innocent school children.

The serial bomb blasts across Assam on 30 October 2008 killed 81 people and left 447 permanently disabled.

The ethnic clashes in the BTAD region in 2008 and 2012 claimed numerous lives and rendered thousands homeless overnight.

During the Congress era, government jobs were openly sold for money, depriving countless youths of their rightful opportunities.

Congress's politics of minority appeasement and vote-bank indulgence destroyed vast forest lands, encroached upon Satra lands and endangered Assam's cultural identity.

Even the strongholds of Kaziranga National Park were not spared from encroachment and neglect under their rule.

Hence, the BJP questions how many instances of injustice the Congress ever corrected and how many victims truly received justice under its governance.

It is deeply condemnable that the Congress and Left bloc are now politicising the judicial process in the name of Zubeen Garg. At a time when the Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and the people of the state are sincerely striving to ensure justice for the departed artist, the Congress and Left forces are shamelessly engaging in this vile act of political opportunism merely to regain power.

The Assam Pradesh BJP strongly denounces this unfortunate and disgraceful act of turning the people's beloved artist, Zubeen Garg, into a political pawn for electoral gains.

Golaghat Book Fair and Literary Festival -2025 begins

HT Correspondent

GOLAGHAT Oct 23: Amidst a huge multitude representing students and people of Golaghat, while performing the inaugural song of Axom xahitya xabha -- "Siro senehi mur bhasha janani" and the undying song of Zubeen Garg -- "Mayabini Ratir bukt", Dr Basanta Kr Goswami, president of Axom xahitya xabha, started off the Golaghat Book Fair and Literary Festival 2025 at Samannay Khetra on Thursday. Paschim Golaghat Shakra xahitya xabha, Numaligarh Refinery Ltd, various organisations and the people of Golaghat organised this book fair and literary festival where distinguished writer Dr Ajit Baruah, Filmmaker and educationist Dinesh Gogoi, District Commissioner Pulak Mahanta, SSP Rajen Singh, chief Manager, NRL, Dr kajal Saikia, chairman, GMB, Dulumon Borbora will officiate the festival as special guests.

This book fair and literary festival will be continued till 29 October, 2025. "Granthakanan" the souvenir will be inaugurated by Bhaskarjyoti Phukan, Managing Director, NRL. Moreover, 150 distinguished guests will be honoured, different competition and seminars will also be held during these days, as mentioned by Dr Putul ch Saikia, president and Swagata Borah, secretary of Paschim Golaghat shakra xahitya xabha. Minister Ajanta Neog and Atul Bora were also present in the inaugural function.

Drunken youths attack two reporters

HT Correspondent

MORIGAOON, Oct 23: Morigaon police have arrested three youths — Manab Halder (19) and Rajdeep Bardoloi (19), both from Na-Bheti, Morigaon town, and Krishna Bora (18) of Bakorigaon, Morigaon town, for allegedly attacking two journalists. The accused were booked under Sections PS C/N-262/25, 126(2), 117(2)/109/303(2)/324(4)/3(5) of the BNS at Morigaon Sadar Police Station and have been sent to judicial custody. The victims, Manabendra Deb Nath of Pratidin Times and Abuddin Rahman, a camera person with DY 365, were assaulted by a group of drunken youths at Lathabori around 9 PM on October 21 while returning home. Both sustained serious injuries and are undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Guwahati.

According to reports, the incident occurred after the journalists protested against the youths consuming alcohol in public. The attackers not only beat them brutally but also snatched and destroyed their mobile phones before fleeing the scene.

In a separate incident, Himangsu Tamuly of Prag Channel was injured in the abdomen during an attack on Nabami night in Morigaon town. The repeated assaults on journalists have raised serious concerns about press safety in the district.

Fake recruitment ad for Tata Semiconductor Project

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Oct 23: A fake recruitment advertisement for the Tata Semiconductor Project under construction in Jagiroad created a stir across the town and the state after it went viral on social media on Thursday. The project authorities confirmed that the advertisement was fake and lodged a complaint at Jagiroad Police Station. It is suspected that a fraudulent agency is behind the circulation of the fake notice. A few months ago, Jagiroad police had arrested members of a similar fake recruitment agency.

Residents of Jagiroad have urged the police to take prompt action and arrest those involved. The concerned authorities have also appealed to the youth not to fall victim to such fraudulent schemes.

Suspect identified in Kokrajhar railway track blast

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 23: Authorities have identified a suspect in connection with the suspected IED blast near Kokrajhar Railway Station, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday.

Speaking at the Mahila Udyomita Scheme distribution programme in Bongaigaon, Sarma confirmed that the individual has multiple complaints registered in Assam and Jharkhand.

On whether the suspect had links to any organisation, Sarma stated that such information would be revealed only after the investigation is complete. "We will determine if the person is supported by any group after a proper investigation," he added. Investigators are currently examining the suspect's background and connections while assessing any wider security implications in the region.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Quality is everyone's responsibility.
-W. Edwards Deming

Tejas Mk1A fighter roars

On October 17, something special happened at HAL's facility in Nashik. The Tejas Mk1A fighter jet took to the skies for the first time, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh was there to witness this proud moment for India's aviation industry. It wasn't just about one aircraft flying—it was about India proving that it can build world-class fighter jets on its own soil. On the same day, the Defence Minister also opened HAL's third production line dedicated to building more of these indigenous fighter jets, marking a new chapter in India's journey towards self-reliance in defence manufacturing. This development comes at a crucial time for the Indian Air Force. Just last month, the IAF said goodbye to its old MiG-21 fighters, the legendary jets that served the nation for decades but had become outdated and difficult to maintain. The Tejas Mk1A is stepping in to fill those shoes, and according to reports, the IAF is likely to receive its first Tejas Mk1A by the end of October. This is not just a replacement—it's an upgrade that brings modern technology and Indian engineering together. The numbers tell an important story about why the Tejas programme matters so much. The Indian Air Force should ideally have 42 squadrons to protect our vast borders and airspace. But right now, it has only 29 squadrons. When you consider that each squadron has 18 aircraft, you realize there's a serious shortage.

The state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, commonly known as HAL, has set up this third production line at Nashik with the capacity to build up to eight fighter jets every year. This might not sound like a huge number, but when you add it to the two existing production lines in Bengaluru that together make 16 jets annually, HAL can now produce 24 Tejas fighter jets every year. This increased production rate is exactly what the Air Force has been waiting for, as delays in the past have caused considerable frustration. The Indian Air Force already operates two squadrons of the first-generation Tejas LCA Mk1, based at Sullur in Tamil Nadu and Naliya in Gujarat. These are primarily used for training pilots, helping them learn how to fly and fight in modern combat aircraft. The Air Force is still waiting for the delivery of two Tejas Mk1 jets from the original 2010 order of 40 aircraft—these will be the two-seat trainer versions that can carry both an instructor and a student pilot.

So, what makes the Tejas Mk1A different from the older Tejas Mk1? From the outside, both versions look almost identical. But inside, the Mk1A is like comparing a smartphone to an old button phone. The new version comes packed with modern electronics, faster computers, and better screens that give pilots much clearer information during flight.

NORTH-EAST INDIA: TURNING INVESTMENT POTENTIAL INTO TANGIBLE DEVELOPMENT

The North-East of India, long regarded as a region of strategic significance and untapped potential, is once again in the spotlight with the upcoming Vibrant North East 2025 summit, scheduled to be held in Guwahati under the aegis of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). The initiative aims to showcase the region's investment potential across multiple sectors, highlighting its natural resources, cultural heritage, and strategic location as a gateway between South and Southeast Asia. Such summits play a critical role in projecting the North-East as an emerging hub for trade, commerce, and tourism, sending strong signals to both public and private investors.

The Rising North East-Invaders Summit 2025, held earlier in May in New Delhi, saw proposals worth Rs. 4.48 lakh crore from industrial conglomerates, public sector undertakings, and private investors, illustrating the growing visibility and allure of the region in national and global investment circles. Yet, this surge of interest starkly contrasts with the persistent under-utilisation of central funds earmarked for infrastructure and development in the North-East. Recent reports reveal that eight states in the region have yet to spend Rs. 9,384 crores allocated under various central sector schemes administered by the DoNER Ministry. These schemes, fully funded by the central government, are intended to catalyse rapid development across sectors including roads, health, education, tourism, sports, handlooms, and handicrafts. States are primarily tasked with submitting detailed

project reports, ensuring timely execution, and furnishing utilisation certificates to facilitate disbursement. The gap between allocation and utilisation reflects institutional bottlenecks, limited interdepartmental coordination, and a lack of adequate administrative capacity rather than a shortage of funds. Over the past few years, tangible progress has been achieved in the region. Expansion of highways, new railway lines, electrification projects, establishment of hospitals, educational institutions, and stadiums indicate a clear intent to improve the region's infrastructure. Schemes such as the North-East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS), with its dual components for roads and other infrastructure, along with the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for the North-East Region (PMDevINE) and various special packages, have been designed to accelerate socio-economic development. The commitment of 54 central ministries to earmark 10% of their annual budgets for the North-East, with DoNER as the nodal ministry, reflects a deliberate attempt to correct historical neglect and prioritise the region's strategic importance.

However, the effectiveness of these schemes is contingent upon the ownership and active engagement of the states themselves. Too often, implementing departments in North-East states approach centrally funded projects as passive beneficiaries, focusing on procedural compliance rather than proactive execution. This approach hampers timely completion, delays investor engagement, and diminishes the region's credibility as an investment destination. To sustain

the momentum generated by investment summits, states must recalibrate their roles as co-creators of national assets, adopting a hands-on approach to project implementation, monitoring, and timely problem-solving.

Real-time monitoring and accountability are essential for meaningful reform. Traditional review mechanisms, which often rely on paperwork, reminders, and retrospective assessments, fail to address practical obstacles such as outdated technology, insufficient technical expertise, and institutional inertia. The adoption of comprehensive, real-time monitoring systems can bridge this gap, ensuring that allocated funds translate into measurable outcomes. Such systems would allow for the tracking of progress, identification of bottlenecks, and rapid intervention, creating a culture of accountability and efficiency within state departments.

The North-East's development narrative also carries broader geopolitical and economic implications. The region's connectivity to neighboring countries positions it as a strategic corridor for cross-border trade, commerce, and tourism. Delays in project execution threaten to undermine this potential, discouraging investors who require reliable infrastructure and logistical support. Rapid utilisation of allocated funds is therefore not only an administrative necessity but also a strategic imperative. Investment inflows, whether from domestic conglomerates or foreign partners, depend heavily on the region's ability to provide the physical and institutional infrastructure that sup-

ports business operations, market access, and supply chain efficiency.

Beyond infrastructure, the central sector schemes are vital instruments for inclusive socio-economic development. They encompass projects in agriculture and allied sectors, health-care, education, sports, and cultural promotion, reflecting a holistic approach to regional development. Proper utilisation of funds can generate employment, enhance human capital, and strengthen institutional capacities, thereby addressing long-standing development deficits. Moreover, these schemes represent a tangible signal of the central government's commitment to the North-East, reinforcing its integration into the national development agenda.

The persistent underutilisation of funds also highlights the need for states to invest in institutional capacity-building. Training professionals, adopting modern project tools, and fostering interdepartmental collaboration are essential for expediting project execution. States must also cultivate a mindset that views central projects not merely as externally funded programs but as opportunities to generate local growth, build regional assets, and attract further investment. This shift from procedural compliance to active ownership is crucial for transforming developmental potential into tangible outcomes.

The paradox of the North-East's development lies in the contrast between its immense potential and the inertia of its administrative ma-

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Dipak Kurmi

Political leadership and credibility

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Political leadership serves as the backbone of a society. A leader's role extends beyond formulating policies or governing; it involves fostering trust and confidence among the people through their actions, guiding society toward a path of progress, stability, and harmony. Building this credibility is not easy and hinges on the leader's integrity, accountability, transparency, and dedication to the public. The connection between a leader's responsibilities and their credibility is profound.

A political leader's primary duty is serving the public with unwavering commitment. Their core task is to improve the lives of the people by ensuring basic needs like education, healthcare, security, and economic stability. While fulfilling these duties, a leader must prioritize public welfare over personal interests. However, we often see leaders, driven by power or personal gain, neglect their responsibilities, focusing instead on amassing wealth or influence. Such behavior breeds distrust among the people. A leader's duty goes beyond policymaking or law enactment; their actions must inspire confidence that they are working for the public's good. This trust is rooted in integrity and transparency. When a leader maintains transparency, openly shares decisions, and honors promises, trust naturally grows, fostering a strong bond with the people that paves the way for societal progress. To build this bond, a leader must align their words with their actions, ensuring decisions positively impact the public. Transparent and people-centric decisions earn a leader credibility, forming a solid foundation for societal stability. A leader must remain vigilant about their responsibilities, with every action proving their dedication. When the public finds a leader who prioritizes their needs and improves their lives, trust emerges, strengthening the leader's credibility and influence in society. This credibility enables a leader to inspire positive change, paving the way for societal advancement.

Credibility depends not only on a leader's words but also on their actions. To earn trust, a leader must be honest in keeping promises. Often, leaders make grand but unrealistic promises to gain support, only to forget them once in power. This creates frustration and feelings of betrayal among the people, raising questions about the leader's credibility. A successful leader maintains consistency between words and actions, demonstrating through deeds what they promise. Their decisions must serve the public's interests, fostering respect and strengthening credibility. Integrity and transparency in actions are vital for building trust, requiring continuous effort. When the public sees a leader working honestly to address their issues, respect deepens, reinforcing credibility.

A leader must maintain constant, two-way communication with the people to understand their problems, needs, and aspirations. They should listen, value opinions, and accept constructive criticism. Yet, many leaders distance themselves, ignoring public concerns and opinions, which breeds dissatisfaction and distrust. A leader who engages actively with the people and works to solve their problems earns credibility. This communication proves their accountability, conveying that they care about the public's welfare. Such engagement fosters trust, strengthening the leader's credibility and influence.

In a diverse society with varied castes, religions, languages, and cultures, fostering unity is a key leadership responsibility. Some leaders, however, create divisions for



personal gain, sowing discord based on caste, religion, or region. This disrupts peace and stability, fostering distrust and damaging credibility. A successful leader maintains impartiality, acting as a leader for all, not just specific groups. Decisions should reflect the interests of all societal sections, earning respect and strengthening credibility. Unity fosters societal progress, making it stronger and more stable, and reinforces a leader's accountability to all.

Another critical aspect of leadership is foresight in policymaking. Leaders must address current issues while planning for future challenges like environmental protection, economic stability, education, and healthcare. This requires expert advice and public input. However, some leaders prioritize short-term gains, neglecting long-term planning, which hinders progress and fosters distrust. A visionary leader makes decisions with the future in mind, earning trust and credibility. Transparent and accountable policymaking makes decisions acceptable, positively impacting lives and paving the way for progress.

A leader's personal character significantly impacts credibility. People prefer leaders whose personal lives reflect integrity and morality. Allegations of corruption or unethical behavior severely damage trust. A leader must uphold in their personal life the principles they advocate politically. Consistency fosters trust, while discrepancies lead to accusations of hypocrisy. A leader's transparent and honest personal life creates a positive perception, reinforcing credibility.

During crises, people expect leaders to act with courage and competence. Effective decision-making and accountability during such times enhance credibility, while abandoning the public or prioritizing personal interests breeds distrust. A successful leader stands by the people, addressing their problems and earning trust through consistent effort.

A leader must educate the public, especially the youth, about their rights and responsibilities. Promoting education empowers people to contribute to societal progress, earning trust and credibility. Neglecting education fosters distrust. Similarly, leaders have a special responsibility toward marginalized groups like the poor and uneducated. Policies to uplift these communities earn respect and strengthen credibility, conveying equal accountability to all.

Leaders must respect and reflect society's moral values in their actions. Disregard for these values fosters distrust, while adherence earns respect and strengthens credibility. In conclusion, a political leader who fulfills their responsibilities effectively builds credibility, fostering a strong bond with the people and ensuring societal stability and progress. Neglecting duties or breaking trust creates instability and distrust. Leaders must remain vigilant, continuously striving to earn credibility. This paves the way for their success and societal advancement, uniting all sections to build a progressive society. Every action must prove their dedication, strengthening credibility and enabling positive change.

Unanswered deaths in India's scientific realm

By: Satvabrat Borah

The mysterious deaths of Indian scientists have cast a long, unsettling shadow over the nation's scientific community, raising questions that remain unanswered and fueling speculation about conspiracies, systemic failures, and hidden threats. The recent death of Akashdeep Gupta, a 30-year-old systems engineer working on the BrahMos missile project at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in Lucknow, has reignited these concerns. Found dead in his residence in October 2025, reportedly due to a sudden heart attack, Gupta's passing adds to a disturbing pattern of unexplained deaths among India's scientific elite. With no known health issues and a recent marriage just six months prior, his death has sparked suspicion, especially given the sensitive nature of his work. The police await a postmortem report, but the incident echoes a history of similar tragedies involving scientists from DRDO, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC). This article explores the historical context, statistical anomalies, possible causes, and broader implications of these mysterious deaths, delving into a complex web of intrigue that demands urgent attention.

The history of India's nuclear and space programs is marred by incidents that suggest a targeted threat to its scientific community. In 1966, Homi J. Bhabha, the father of India's nuclear program, perished in a plane crash near Mont Blanc. The lack of a conclusive investigation led to widespread speculation of foreign involvement, particularly from the United States and Pakistan, who were wary of India's growing nuclear capabilities. Experts believe that had Bhabha lived, India's nuclear program might have advanced far beyond its current state. Similarly, in 1971, Vikram Sarabhai, the architect of ISRO, died suddenly in a hotel room under unclear circumstances. No definitive evidence of health issues was ever confirmed, leaving his death shrouded in mystery. These early incidents set a troubling precedent, raising questions about the safety of scientists working on projects critical to national security.

In more recent decades, the frequency of such incidents has only increased, painting a grim picture. Between 1995 and 2010, ISRO and its affiliated units reported 684 employee deaths, many of which were labeled mysterious. Data obtained through the Right to Information (RTI) Act reveals that a significant number of these were scientists, with many cases officially classified as suicides. However, the suicide rate among these scientists far exceeds the national average of 3 percent, prompting skepticism. At BARC, from 1995 to 2014, 3,887 employees died due to health-related issues, with 70 percent attributed to cancer. This unusually high cancer rate has led to speculation about the



long-term effects of radiation exposure in nuclear facilities. Additionally, 255 BARC employees reportedly took their own lives, citing chronic illnesses and family issues. DRDO has not been spared either, with cases like the 2014 murder of Uma Rao, initially dismissed as a personal dispute, adding to the tally of suspicious deaths.

The period between 2009 and 2013 is particularly alarming, with BARC reporting 11 mysterious deaths of scientists, seven of which were classified as suicides. Families and colleagues have consistently questioned these verdicts, pointing to inconsistencies. For instance, in 2009, two young researchers, Umang Singh and Partha Pratim Beg, died in a fire at BARC's radiation and photochemistry lab. The absence of flammable materials in the lab raised doubts about the official narrative, yet no clear answers emerged. In 2010, Mahadevan Padmanabhan Iyer, a mechanical engineer, was found dead in his home with a noose around his neck. Initially ruled a suicide, the case was later reclassified as murder, but the perpetrator was never identified. That same year, two C-grade scientists were found hanged in their residences, both labeled as suicides. In 2011, Uma Narayana Rao, a retired scientist, was found dead in his home, with police claiming suicide despite objections from his family. In 2013, a scientist at the Kalpakkam nuclear facility drowned in the sea, officially deemed a suicide, though investigations remain inconclusive. Of these 11 deaths, eight involved scientists working in BARC's laboratories, with causes ranging from explosions to hangings to drownings. Three scientists from the Nuclear Power Corporation also met similar fates, with two labeled suicides and one attributed to a road accident.

The explanations for these deaths often fall into two categories: workplace stress and health risks. Scientists in these high-stakes institutions face immense pressure. Long working hours, the burden of maintaining secrecy, and the expectation of delivering breakthroughs take a toll on mental health. Some scientists have left notes citing harassment by superiors as a reason for their actions, pointing to a toxic work environment. Health risks, particularly in

nuclear facilities, are another factor. Prolonged exposure to radiation is linked to higher cancer rates, with BARC reporting 2,600 cancer-related deaths among its employees. Chemical exposure in labs may also contribute to other chronic illnesses. These explanations, while plausible, do not fully account for the sheer number of deaths or their suspicious circumstances.

Beyond these surface-level reasons lies a darker possibility: conspiracy. India's nuclear and missile programs pose a threat to global powers, making its scientists potential targets. Speculation has long pointed to foreign intelligence agencies like Pakistan's ISI, China's secret services, or even the CIA. The assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist offers a parallel, suggesting that targeted killings are not unheard of in the geopolitical arena. In India, investigations into these deaths are often incomplete, with missing fingerprints or insufficient evidence leading to cases being closed as "unexplained." DRDO has also faced security breaches, such as the 2018 arrest of a BrahMos engineer for allegedly leaking sensitive information to Pakistan through a honeytrap. Such incidents fuel fears that scientists are being targeted to sabotage India's strategic advancements. The lack of transparency in these investigations only deepens public distrust, as critical details are withheld under the guise of national security.

The implications of these deaths extend beyond individual tragedies. Each loss represents a setback for India's scientific progress and national security. Scientists like those at DRDO, ISRO, and BARC are not just employees; they are custodians of knowledge that drives India's global standing. Losing them to unexplained circumstances risks derailing critical projects, from missile development to space exploration. Moreover, the fear of being targeted can deter young talent from pursuing careers in these fields, creating a chilling effect on innovation. The psychological toll on surviving scientists is also significant, as they work under the shadow of potential threats, whether from internal pressures or external enemies.

Addressing this crisis requires immediate action. First, the government must establish an independent

investigation. Investment summits, MoUs, and proposals for multi-lakh-crore projects demonstrate the attractiveness of the region, yet without timely execution and fund utilisation, these promises risk remaining symbolic. To truly unlock the region's potential, the North-East states must act decisively, translating allocations into infrastructure, social development, and institutional readiness that can sustain investor confidence and drive economic growth.

The Vibrant North East 2025 summit and previous investment initiatives represent critical milestones in promoting the region's potential to investors and policymakers. Yet, the North-East's developmental journey is at a crossroads. The effectiveness of central sector schemes, coupled with the active engagement and ownership by the states, will determine whether the region can convert opportunity into progress. Accelerating fund utilisation, strengthening institutional capacity, embracing modern project management practices, and ensuring comprehensive real-time monitoring are indispensable steps. The North-East stands poised to become a strategic hub of growth, trade, and cultural influence in South and Southeast Asia, but only if administrative efficiency and active state ownership match the vision laid out in investment summits and central initiatives.

The time has come for the North-East states to move beyond procedural compliance and embrace the role of proactive co-creators in building a prosperous, connected, and strategically vital region. (The writer can be reached at dipakurmi@gmail.com)

The paradox of the North-East's development lies in the contrast between its immense potential and the inertia of its administrative ma-

The period between 2009 and 2013 is particularly alarming, with BARC reporting 11 mysterious deaths of scientists, seven of which were classified as suicides. Families and colleagues have consistently questioned these verdicts, pointing to inconsistencies. For instance, in 2009, two young researchers, Umang Singh and Partha Pratim Beg, died in a fire at BARC's radiation and photochemistry lab

task force to reinvestigate these deaths, ensuring transparency and accountability. A dedicated inquiry into the patterns and inconsistencies could uncover systemic issues or external interference. Second, the safety of scientists must be prioritized. This includes providing personal security for those working on sensitive projects, regular health screenings to mitigate occupational risks, and mental health support to address workplace stress. Counseling services and stress management programs could help alleviate the pressures that may push some toward extreme measures. Third, investigations must be made more transparent, with findings shared publicly to the extent possible without compromising national security. The current practice of closing cases as unexplained or hastily labeling them as suicides erodes trust and leaves room for speculation. As ISRO scientist Tapan Mishra revealed in a post, he survived two poisoning attempts, a claim that underscores the need for vigilance and openness.

The mysterious deaths of Indian scientists are a stain on the nation's scientific legacy. They are not merely personal losses but attacks on India's aspirations to be a global leader in science and technology. The government, scientific institutions, and civil society must work together to lift this shadow. Protecting the lives and well-being of scientists is not just a matter of justice but a necessity for safeguarding the nation's future. Without decisive action, the fear of losing more brilliant minds to this enigma will persist, undermining India's scientific ambitions and leaving its brightest talents vulnerable to an unseen enemy. The time to act is now, to ensure that those who dedicate their lives to advancing the nation can do so without fear, and that their contributions endure for generations to come.

TOMAHAWK GAMBIT: Trump's unreliable military support for Ukraine

By: TN Ashok

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy departed his Friday White House meeting with President Donald Trump without the commitment he desperately sought—American Tomahawk cruise missiles capable of striking deep into Russian territory. Yet he maintains cautious optimism, telling NBC News that while Trump “didn’t say yes,” crucially, he also “didn’t say no.”

This diplomatic limbo encapsulates the broader uncertainty surrounding U.S. military support for Ukraine, in its 44 months of war with Russia. The question of Tomahawk missiles has become the latest flashpoint in Trump’s erratic approach to the conflict—one moment threatening to flood Ukraine with advanced weaponry, the next hedging about depleting American stockpiles.

The Tomahawk cruise missile represents a quantum leap in Ukraine’s strike capabilities. With ranges between 1,000 and 1,550 miles, these precision-guided weapons could reach Moscow itself from Ukrainian territory—a capability that has sent shivers through the Kremlin and sparked dire warnings from Russian officials about “qualitatively new escalation.”

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev warned that Tomahawk supply could “end badly for everyone,” noting the impossibility of distinguishing between nuclear-armed and conventional Tomahawks after launch—a thinly veiled nuclear threat. Russian President Vladimir Putin has called potential Tomahawk transfers “a completely new stage of escalation.”

The missiles’ tactical value is undeniable. According to NATO ally Estonia’s foreign minister, supplying Tomahawks to Ukraine would help “push Russia back”, while the Institute for the Study of War notes they would enable Ukraine to inflict “substantial damage on key Russian military assets located deep within Russian territory,” including the Shahed drone factory in Tatarstan and the Engels-2 Air Base from which Russia launches strategic bomber strikes.

Ukrainian officials view Tomahawks not merely as offensive weapons but as strategic deterrents. Serhiy Leshchenko, an adviser in Zelenskyy’s office, called them “extremely important as a deterrent weapon,” while Ukrainian security official Andriy Kovalenko described Tomahawks as “not tactical deterrence, but a strategic turning point.”

Trump’s stance on military aid to Ukraine has followed a familiar pattern throughout his second term: dramatic pronouncements followed



by tactical retreat, promises of support undermined by concern for American stockpiles, and strategic leverage treated as reality television drama.

In early October, Trump said he had “sort of made a decision” on supplying Tomahawks to Ukraine, telling reporters he wanted to know Ukrainian plans for the missiles and adding, “I am not looking to see an escalation”. Days later, he suggested using Tomahawk threats as negotiating leverage, telling reporters aboard Air Force One, “I might say, ‘Look, if this war is not gonna get settled I may send them Tomahawks.’ Russia doesn’t need that. I think it is appropriate to bring that up”.

But following his Thursday phone call with Putin—during which Trump told reporters, “I did actually say, ‘Would you mind if I gave a couple thousand Tomahawks to your opposition?’ I did say that to him. I said it just that way. He didn’t like the idea”—the president appeared to backpedal. When asked about Ukraine’s request, Trump said: “We need Tomahawks for the United States, too. We can’t deplete for our country”.

This vacillation reflects the broader inconsis-

teny in U.S. support for Ukraine under Trump. His administration has approved some weapons systems—recently green-lighting the Extended Range Attack Munition with a 280-mile range—while denying others and imposing restrictions that limit battlefield effectiveness.

Trump announced following his Thursday call with Putin that the two leaders would meet in Budapest, Hungary, within two weeks for their second face-to-face summit since Trump’s return to office. The meeting will be preceded by talks between Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

The choice of Budapest carries uncomfortable historical resonance. The Hungarian capital was where Russia signed the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, pledging to respect Ukraine’s territorial integrity in exchange for Kyiv surrendering its nuclear weapons—a promise Putin violated with the 2014 Crimea annexation and again with the 2022 full-scale invasion.

The venue selection reflects Trump’s warm relationship with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, widely considered Putin’s closest partner in the European Union. Orbán cele-

brated Budapest as “the only place in Europe” where such a meeting could be held, given Putin’s International Criminal Court arrest warrant for war crimes.

Yet expectations for breakthrough remain minimal. Trump and Putin’s August summit in Alaska—where Trump gave Putin a red-carpet welcome, jet flyover, and ride in the presidential limousine—produced no tangible progress toward peace. Trump has proven unable to pressure Putin into accepting a ceasefire or direct negotiations with Zelenskyy, whom the Russian president refuses to meet.

Hungarian-Italian historian Stefano Bottoni expressed skepticism about Budapest, noting the Alaska summit “did not yield results” and “there is no evidence of serious, expert-level preparations for the Budapest meeting”. He added that both Trump and Putin have made clear their personal commitment to Russia’s electoral success in Hungary’s April 2026 elections, suggesting “American-transatlantic-EU interests are not at stake here”.

Even if Trump commits to Tomahawk supply, formidable practical barriers remain. The rate of Tomahawk production has ranged from just 55 to 90 missiles annually in recent years, with the Pentagon planning to purchase only 57 missiles in 2026. Ukraine launches dozens of long-range drones nightly, while Russia fires between 100 and 200 missiles of all types monthly—dwarfing available Tomahawk production.

More critically, Ukraine lacks ships capable of launching Tomahawks, and the U.S. ground-based Typhon launch system is not yet operational even for American forces. Only small numbers of the ground-based Typhon launchers exist in U.S. inventory, making battlefield deployment unlikely in the near term.

Security concerns compound these limitations. American officials worry about sensitive Tomahawk technical data falling into Russian hands if missiles are captured, while U.S. control over target selection may further limit their effectiveness.

Despite leaving Washington empty-handed, Zelenskyy’s optimism derives from Trump’s refusal to completely close the door. Sources familiar with the Trump-Putin conversation told CNN that Trump “did not take the possibility of the US sending long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles to Ukraine off the table during his call with Russian President Vladimir Putin”.

More significantly, Zelenskyy believes the very threat of Tomahawks provides leverage. Writing on X after the Budapest summit was announced, Zelenskyy noted, “We can already see that Moscow is rushing to resume dialogue as

soon as it hears about Tomahawks”. The Ukrainian president interprets Putin’s alarm as confirmation that Tomahawk pressure could prove effective in forcing genuine negotiations.

Trump’s recent Gaza ceasefire success has also emboldened hopes. The president’s administration has drawn up plans to provide Tomahawks to Ukraine, with officials stressing Trump “can do at any time if he feels it is right”. One Trump administration official told CNN, “Why would he give up that leverage? He won’t remove the threat until it’s no longer necessary”, suggesting Tomahawk supply remains a genuine possibility depending on diplomatic developments.

Trump’s proposal for three-way talks with Putin and Zelenskyy has already failed to materialize, and Budapest may prove the breaking point. If Putin remains intransigent and Russian attacks intensify, Trump could approve Tomahawk sales—not from strategic calculation, but wounded ego at diplomatic failure. This would represent the most dangerous outcome, potentially triggering the Russian escalation Moscow has threatened.

The fundamental problem remains unchanged: Trump treats Ukraine policy as transactional reality television rather than strategic necessity. He has shown “little willingness to push for US-led measures that would punish the Kremlin,” even suggesting that bipartisan Senate sanctions legislation represents “may not be perfect timing” given his pursuit of diplomacy.

Russia continues hammering Ukraine’s energy infrastructure with drones and missiles, leading to blackouts across the country. Winter approaches, and with it renewed Russian offensives targeting civilian infrastructure—the very terror Tomahawks are meant to deter.

Zelenskyy’s hope, though understandable, rests on the shifting sands of Trump’s attention span and ego. The president who promised to end the war “within 24 hours” has watched months drag on without progress. Budapest represents another roll of the dice in a high-stakes game where Ukraine’s survival hangs on American whims, Russian calculations, and Hungarian hospitality for a war criminal wanted by international courts.

Whether Tomahawks ultimately reach Ukrainian launchers depends less on military necessity or strategic logic than on Trump’s mercurial temperament and Putin’s willingness to flatter, threaten, or simply wait out an American president whose commitment to Ukraine remains as inconsistent as his policy pronouncements. For now, Zelenskyy clings to ambiguity—not quite a “yes,” mercifully not yet a

Trump’s hostage deal: A step toward peace? Indian marvel Brahmos among world’s fastest supersonic wonders

By: Satyabrata Borah

The release of Israeli hostages by Hamas has sparked a flicker of hope across West Asia, a region long scarred by conflict and mistrust. Former President Donald Trump whose diplomatic efforts have been credited with brokering this moment is being hailed by some as a peacemaker. Yet the euphoria surrounding this achievement must be tempered with caution. The return of hostages while a significant humanitarian breakthrough does not automatically pave the way for lasting peace. The road to stability in West Asia remains fraught with challenges rooted in deep seated grievances competing national aspirations and the ever present specter of violence. For peace to take hold both Palestinians and Israelis must confront difficult truths about their respective roles in perpetuating the conflict and commit to transformative steps that go beyond symbolic gestures.

The hostage release is undeniably a triumph of negotiation, one that underscores the power of diplomacy when wielded with determination. Trump’s unconventional approach often criticized for its bluntness and disregard for diplomatic norms appears to have yielded results where others have faltered. His administration’s focus on leveraging economic incentives and regional alliances particularly through the Abraham Accords reshaped the geopolitical landscape of West Asia. By normalizing relations between Israel and several Arab states Trump’s team created a framework that sidelined traditional sticking points like the Israeli Palestinian conflict in favor of broader regional cooperation. This strategy while controversial provided the leverage needed to pressure Hamas into releasing the hostages. The deal reportedly facilitated by Gulf states and Egypt demonstrates that pragmatic diplomacy can achieve tangible outcomes even in the most intractable conflicts.

However the release of hostages is not a panacea. It is a single step in a much longer journey one that requires both sides to address the underlying causes of the conflict. For Palestinians the path forward hinges on their ability to demonstrate a genuine commitment to demilitarizing Hamas. The militant group which has controlled Gaza since 2007 has long been a lightning rod for Israeli security concerns. Its rocket attacks, cross border incursions and explicit rejection of Israel’s right to exist have fueled a cycle of violence that has left thousands dead and entire communities

traumatized. While Hamas’s decision to release hostages may signal a willingness to engage in diplomacy it does not erase the group’s history of militancy. The Palestinian leadership whether through the Palestinian Authority or other factions must prove that this moment is not a tactical maneuver but a genuine pivot toward peace. This means dismantling Hamas’s military infrastructure disavowing terrorism and fostering a political culture that prioritizes coexistence over confrontation.

The challenge for Palestinians is immense. Hamas’s grip on Gaza is not merely a matter of military control but a reflection of deeper social and economic realities. Years of blockade, economic stagnation and political disenfranchisement have created fertile ground for militancy. For many Palestinians Hamas represents resistance against Israeli occupation, a symbol of defiance in the face of overwhelming odds. Convincing ordinary Palestinians to abandon this narrative in favor of demilitarization will require more than rhetorical appeals. It demands concrete improvements in living conditions, economic opportunities and a political process that gives Palestinians a stake in their future. International donors particularly the Gulf states must step up with investments in infrastructure education and job creation to show that peace delivers tangible benefits. Without such efforts the allure of militancy will persist and the hostage release will remain a fleeting moment rather than a turning point. On the Israeli side the path to peace requires a fundamental shift in attitude toward Palestinian statehood. For too long Israeli governments have oscillated between ambivalence and outright hostility to the idea of a Palestinian state. While security concerns are real the blanket rejection of Palestinian aspirations has only deepened the conflict. The hostage release offers Israel an opportunity to reassess its approach to engage with Palestinian moderates and to signal that it is open to a future where two states can coexist. This does not mean ignoring the very real threats posed by groups like Hamas but it does mean recognizing that the military might alone cannot secure Israel’s future. A Palestinian state provided it is demilitarized and committed to peace could serve as a buffer against extremism rather than a threat to Israel’s existence.

Yet the obstacles within Israel are formidable. Domestic politics driven by nationalist factions and settler movements have increasingly

shaped the country’s approach to the conflict. These groups view any concession to Palestinians as a betrayal of Israel’s historical and religious claims to the land. The expansion of settlements in the West Bank now home to over 700,000 Israelis has further complicated the prospects of a two state solution. Each new settlement entrenches a reality that makes territorial compromise harder to achieve. For Israel to move forward its leaders must confront these internal divisions and make the case to their public that peace with the Palestinians is not only possible but necessary for long term security. This will require political courage, a commodity often in short supply in a nation perpetually on edge.

The international community too has a critical role to play. The United States under Trump’s leadership has shown that it can wield significant influence in West Asia but it must do more than broker one off deals. Sustained engagement including support for Palestinian institution building and pressure on Israel to halt settlement expansion is essential. Other global powers particularly the European Union and the United Nations must move beyond moral posturing and contribute to a coordinated strategy that incentivizes both sides to make concessions. The Arab states emboldened by their new ties with Israel can act as mediators ensuring that neither side feels isolated or abandoned in the peace process. Their economic clout and regional influence could tip the balance toward a sustainable resolution. The end of a war or in this case a significant step like the hostage release often brings a surge of optimism. People celebrate the return of loved ones and the promise of a quieter future. Yet history teaches us that such moments are fragile. The Israeli Palestinian conflict with its decades of bloodshed and mistrust is not a puzzle that can be solved with a single diplomatic coup. The selective amnesia that accompanies ceasefire celebrations must not obscure the hard work ahead. Both Palestinians and Israelis have agency in shaping what comes next. For Palestinians this means proving that they can move beyond the politics of resistance and embrace governance that prioritizes peace. For Israelis it means acknowledging that Palestinian statehood is not a threat but a prerequisite for their own security. The world watches not with bated breath but with cautious hope knowing that peace in West Asia is a prize worth pursuing but one that demands sacrifice, compromise and an unwavering commitment to a shared future.

By: Girish Linganna

When Defence Minister Rajnath Singh called Operation Sindoor a “trailer” and declared that every part of Pakistan now lies within India’s striking range, he was not merely issuing a warning. He was announcing the coming of age of India’s most formidable conventional weapon, one that has fundamentally altered the strategic balance in South Asia. Standing beside Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on October 18, as the first batch of BrahMos missiles rolled out from the new Lucknow facility, Singh’s message was unmistakable: India’s military capabilities have entered a new era, and the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile is at its heart.

The journey of this remarkable weapon system began not in the glare of geopolitical tensions, but in the quiet corridors of scientific collaboration. In 1993, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, then DRDO Secretary, travelled to Russia on what would become a historic visit. There, he discovered a half-finished supersonic engine project gathering dust, abandoned after the Soviet Union’s collapse left Russia struggling with funds. What others saw as a failed venture, Kalam saw as opportunity. Five years of negotiations later, on February 12, 1998, he and Russia’s Deputy Defence Minister NV Mikhailov signed the agreement that created BrahMos Aerospace, a joint venture with India holding 50.5% and Russia 49.5%. The name itself, combining the Brahmaputra and Moskva rivers, symbolized this east-meets-west partnership.

The financial commitment was substantial but balanced. Russia invested \$123.75 million (₹10,766 crores at present conversion rates) while India put in \$126.25 million (₹10,984 crores), and work began immediately in the specialized laboratories of both DRDO and NPOM. The first successful test launch on June 12, 2001, from Chandipur in Odisha, marked the arrival of the world’s only operational supersonic cruise missile. Flying at Mach 2.8 (3,430 km/h), the BrahMos was faster than anything else in its class. More importantly, it combined this blistering speed with precision and a “fire and forget” capability, meaning once launched, it required no further guidance to find its target.

But speed and autonomy were only part of the story. The BrahMos operates on a two-stage propulsion system that gives it remarkable versatility. A solid-fuel booster provides the initial thrust for take-off, detaching after launch. Then a ramjet engine kicks in, using specialized fuel to sustain Mach 3 speeds (3,675 km/h) while allowing the missile to fly anywhere from 15 km high to a mere 10 metres above ground. This ability to hug terrain makes it extraordinarily difficult to detect on radar, and nearly impossible to intercept.

Combined with its massive kinetic energy at impact, the BrahMos became a weapon that could overwhelm any defence system.

The most challenging adaptation came when India decided to make the missile air-launchable. Former DRDO Director General S.K. Mishra recalls that fitting the BrahMos onto a Sukhoi-30 MKI fighter jet was considered nearly impossible. The Russian company Sukhoi quoted ₹1,300 crore for the redesign work. Instead, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd took up the challenge and completed it for just ₹88 crore, a stunning example of Indian engineering prowess and cost efficiency. This air-launched version, reportedly used during Operation Sindoor in May to strike deep inside Pakistan, has proven to be a game-changer, giving the Indian Air Force the ability to launch devastating attacks from standoff distances.

The missile’s range has grown steadily as India’s strategic environment evolved. Initially capped at 290 km due to Missile Technology Control Regime restrictions, the range jumped to 450 km after India joined the MTCR in June 2016. Now, an 800-km variant is in advanced testing, with upgrades to the ramjet engine and navigation systems. What makes this particularly significant is that existing 450-km versions can be upgraded to the longer range through software modifications alone, changes to the fire-control systems and related interfaces, without major hardware overhauls. This means the Indian Navy’s 20 warships already equipped with BrahMos can gain extended reach relatively quickly and inexpensively. The international validation of the BrahMos came in 2022 when the Philippines signed a \$375 million deal (₹32,625 crores at present conversion rates) for the missile system, marking India’s first export of such advanced military hardware. The second batch was delivered in April 2025, and countries like Argentina have expressed interest. As Mishra noted, while other nations shopped around comparing different systems, the Philippines chose BrahMos as superior to all alternatives. For a country that has traditionally been an arms importer, becoming an exporter of cutting-edge weapons technology represents a fundamental shift in global perception.

The numbers tell the story of India’s commitment to this platform. In March last year, the Defence Ministry signed its largest-ever deal worth ₹19,519 crore for over 220 BrahMos missiles for the Navy. After Operation Sindoor demonstrated the weapon’s battlefield effectiveness, the Defence Acquisitions Council gave initial approval in August for the Air Force to acquire 110 more air-launched variants worth about ₹10,800 crore. The new Lucknow facility, which Singh inaugurated, will produce about 100 missiles annually, generating ₹3,000 crore in turnover and ₹500 crore in GST revenue.

But beyond the impressive specifications and production numbers lies a deeper strategic reality. The BrahMos represents India’s move toward genuine self-reliance in critical defence technology, even while maintaining valuable partnerships. The Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme started in 1983 laid the groundwork, and the BrahMos partnership with Russia showed that collaboration need not mean dependence. The involvement of private sector companies like PTC Industries in creating the Strategic Material Technology Complex in Lucknow demonstrates that India is building an entire ecosystem, from raw materials to finished components, within its borders.

The BrahMos has changed the calculus of conflict in South Asia. A missile that flies too fast to intercept, too low to detect easily, and strikes with devastating precision creates a conventional deterrent that was previously impossible. Pakistan can no longer rely on geographic depth or hardened installations for protection. Every military installation, every command center, every strategic asset is now vulnerable to strikes that can come from land, sea, or air with less than a few minutes of warning.

The development of the 800-km variant, expected by late 2027, will extend this reach even further, making it impossible for adversaries to position critical assets beyond India’s conventional strike capability. This is deterrence without nuclear weapons, a way to project power and defend interests while staying below the nuclear threshold. In a subcontinent where nuclear weapons make total war unthinkable, having overwhelming conventional superiority in key systems like cruise missiles provides India with options and flexibility that pure nuclear deterrence cannot offer.

The BrahMos story is ultimately about transformation, about a nation that once imported all its advanced weapons becoming a developer and exporter of systems that lead the world. It is about scientific vision, exemplified by Kalam’s ability to see potential in an abandoned Soviet project, and engineering excellence, shown by HAL’s cost-effective integration work. It is about strategic partnerships that leverage foreign expertise while building domestic capability. And it is about a missile that has become more than a weapon, it is a symbol of India’s technological rise and a concrete reminder to those who might threaten Indian interests that the costs of such actions have grown exponentially. When Singh said Pakistan should remember that India knows what to do when the time comes, the BrahMos gives weight to words that might otherwise seem like empty rhetoric. The trailer, as he said, has been shown. The question now is whether anyone wants to see the full feature. (IPA Service)

'Republicans are united, and I expect the president to say, Stand strong' SENATE REPUBLICANS HEAD TO THE WH IN A SHOW OF UNITY AS THE SHUTDOWN

WASHINGTON, Oct 23: As the government shutdown enters its fourth week, Senate Republicans are headed to the White House on Tuesday — not for urgent talks on how to end it but for a display of unity with President Donald Trump as they refuse to negotiate on any Democratic demands.

Senate Democrats, too, are confident in their strategy to keep voting against a House-passed bill that would reopen the government until Republicans, including Trump, engage them on extending health care subsidies that expire at the end of the year.

With both sides showing no signs of movement, it's unclear how long the stalemate will last — even as hundreds of thousands of federal workers will miss another paycheck in the coming days and states are sounding warnings that key federal programs will soon lapse completely. And the lunch

meeting in the White House Rose Garden appears unlikely, for now, to lead to a bipartisan resolution as Senate Republicans are dug in and Trump has followed their lead.

Asked about the message at lunch, Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, second in Senate GOP leadership, told Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends" on Tuesday that it will be, "Republicans are united, and I expect the president to say, Stand strong."

Senate Republican leader John Thune, of South Dakota said on Monday that he thinks Trump is ready to "get involved on having the discussion" about extending the subsidies. "But I don't think they are prepared to do that until (Democrats) open up the government," he said.

Missed paychecks and programs running out of money

While Capitol Hill remains at a standstill, the effects of the shut-



down are worsening.

Federal workers are set to miss additional paychecks amid total uncertainty about when they might eventually get paid. Government services like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, known as WIC, and Head Start

preschool programs that serve needy families are facing potential cutoffs in funding. On Monday, Energy Secretary Chris Wright said the National Nuclear Security Administration is furloughing 1,400 federal workers. The Federal Aviation Administration has reported air controller shortages and

flight delays in cities across the United States.

And as the shutdown keeps future health costs in limbo for millions of Americans, most U.S. adults are worried about health care becoming more expensive, according to a new Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll, as they make decisions about next year's health coverage. Still, there has been little urgency in Washington as each side believes the other will eventually cave.

"Our position remains the same: We want to end the shutdown as soon as we can and fix the ACA premium crisis that looms over 20 million hardworking Americans," said Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., on Monday, referring to the expanded Affordable Care Act subsidies that expire in December. Schumer called the White House

meeting a "pep rally" and said it was "shameful" that House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has kept the House out of town during the shutdown.

November deadlines Members of both parties acknowledge that as the shutdown drags on, it is becoming less likely every day that Congress will be able to either extend the subsidies or fund the government through the regular appropriations process. The House GOP bill that Senate Democrats have now rejected 11 times would only keep the government open through Nov. 21.

Thune on Monday hinted that Republicans may propose a longer extension of current funding instead of passing individual spending bills if the shutdown doesn't end soon. Congress would need to pass an extension beyond Nov. 21, he said, "if not something on a much longer-term basis." (AP)

Pak resumes Afghan transit trade after 10-day suspension



ISLAMABAD, Oct 23: Pakistan has resumed Afghan transit trade in a phased manner following a ceasefire agreement with the Afghan Taliban government, according to a media report on Thursday.

The trade activity was suspended on October 13 due to clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan forces, and it remained suspended for ten days, leaving scores of vehicles stranded.

Around 300 vehicles stranded at various locations are now being cleared, beginning with operations via the southwestern Chaman border crossing in the Balochistan province.

Quoting the Directorate of Transit Trade (Customs), The Express Tribune newspaper reported that the cargo operations will be completed in three stages, adding that all regular transit trade activities will resume on a "first in, first out" basis once the existing backlog is cleared.

In the first phase, nine vehicles that were turned back when the Friendship Gate was closed will be reweighed and rescanned. Any discrepancies will lead to a full inspection. The Friendship Gate connects Balochistan province to Afghanistan's Kandahar.

The second phase will cover 74 vehicles that were returned from the NLC Border Terminal Yard. These will also undergo reweighing and scanning, with complete checks if inconsistencies are found. The third phase involves clearing 217 vehicles currently parked in the halting yard, which will then be allowed to cross the border into Afghanistan.

The directive added that photographs of all returning or halted vehicles will be taken and archived at the Friendship Gate to ensure transparency and proper documentation. Officials said the resumption of transit trade is expected to provide relief to traders, transporters and cargo operators who suffered heavy losses during the border closure.

They added that security checks and inspection procedures have been further tightened to prevent smuggling and illegal trade.

The Chaman border remains Pakistan's most significant land trade route with Afghanistan, handling dozens of trucks and consignments daily. Authorities hope that the phased reopening will restore smooth cross-border trade and strengthen economic ties between the two countries, according to the newspaper.

Pakistan had closed crossings along the 2,600-km border with Afghanistan, including the two main border crossings at Torkham and Chaman, and at least three minor crossings, at Kharlachi, Angoor Adda and Ghulam Khan.

On October 19, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to an immediate ceasefire during talks in Qatar. The two sides agreed to meet on October 25 in Istanbul to discuss "detailed matters."

The restoration of transit trade is expected to revive cross-border commercial activity and improve bilateral trade relations, according to the newspaper. (PTI)

Trump claims India to 'almost stop' buying Russian oil by year-end

WASHINGTON, Oct 23: US President Donald Trump has reiterated his claim that India has agreed to "stop" buying oil from Russia and would bring them down to "almost nothing" by the end of the year.

However, he said, it is a process and will take some time. Trump also said that he would try to persuade China to do the same. China and India are the two biggest buyers of Russian crude oil.

"India, as you know, has told me they are going to stop (buying Russian oil)... It's a process. You can't just stop... By the end of the year, they'll be down to almost nothing, almost 40 per cent of the oil. India, they've been great. Spoke to Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi yesterday. They've been absolutely great," the president told reporters at White House on Wednesday.

Trump has been claiming for the past few days that India has assured him that it will significantly reduce its oil imports from Russia.

According to the US, India is helping Putin to finance the war through its purchase of Russian crude oil. The relations between New Delhi and Washington have been reeling under severe stress after Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent, including a 25 per cent additional duty for India's purchase of Russian crude oil. India described the US action as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable". Trump said during his upcoming meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, he would discuss with him ways to end the Russia-Ukraine war.

"What I'll really be talking to him about is how do we end the war with Russia and Ukraine, whether it's through oil or energy or anything else. I think he's going to be very receptive," he said.

The president said that the relationship between China and Russia "is a little bit different".

Though Beijing's relationship with Moscow "was never good", it had changed due to the policies of the previous US administrations.

"China is a little bit different.

They have a little bit different relationship with Russia. It was never good, but because of Biden and Obama, they got forced together. They should never have been forced together... by nature, they (China-Russia) can't be friendly... I hope they are friendly, but they can't be... Biden and Obama forced them together because of energy and oil. They are closer than they would normally be," he said. Trump is set to meet Xi on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in South Korea later this month. Defending his trade policy, Trump credited tariffs for strengthening the US economy. "We are doing so well as a country right now because of tariffs. Tariffs have been used against us for decades... and that was slowly hurting our country. That's why we owe USD 37 trillion. Because of tariffs, we're now a rich country. We're taking in money like we've never done before," he said.

Asserting that tariffs were vital for America's prosperity, Trump said, "Without tariffs, the US would become a third-world country. I cannot let that happen. With tariffs, we are a rich, secure country; without them, we would be a laughing stock." Trump claimed tariffs have also helped prevent conflicts. "I solved eight wars. Of the eight, five or six were because of tariffs," he said. Repeating his claim that he helped stop the recent military conflict between India and Pakistan, Trump said he told the two countries, "If you want to fight, that's okay. But you're going to pay tariffs. Two days later, they called up and said they're not going to fight anymore. They have peace."

Trump has been repeating his claim dozens of times that he "helped settle" the recent military conflict between India and Pakistan. India has consistently maintained that the understanding on cessation of hostilities with Pakistan in May was reached following direct talks between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of the two militaries. (PTI)

Rubio will travel to Israel after Vance's visit to ensure fragile Gaza ceasefire holds

JERUSALEM, Oct 23: As US Vice President JD Vance's visit to Israel comes to a close, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he would be travelling to the country to keep the momentum on the US-brokered ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas.

Earlier this week, Vance announced the opening of a civilian military coordination centre in southern Israel where some 200 US troops are working alongside the Israeli military and delegations from other countries planning the stabilisation and reconstruction of Gaza.

Rubio told journalists at Joint Base Andrews late Wednesday that he plans to visit the centre and appoint a Foreign Service official to work alongside the top US military commander in the Middle East, Vice Adm Brad Cooper.

The US is seeking support from other allies, especially Gulf nations, to create an international stabilisation force to be deployed to Gaza and train a Palestinian force.



"We'd like to see Palestinian police forces in Gaza that are not Hamas and that are going to do a good job, but those still have to be trained and equipped," he said.

Rubio also criticised efforts by far-right politicians in the Israeli parliament who on Wednesday took the symbolic step of giving preliminary approval to a bill that would give Israel authority to annex the occupied West Bank — a move he

Meanwhile, Vance visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the sprawling 12th century basilica where Christians believe Jesus was crucified, died and rose again, in Jerusalem's Old City.

He is then expected to meet Israel's Defense Minister, Israeli military leaders and other officials at the army's headquarters in Tel Aviv.

On Wednesday, Vance sought to ease concerns that the Trump administration was dictating terms to its closest ally in the Middle East.

"We don't want in Israel a vassal state, and that's not what Israel is. We want a partnership, we want an ally," Vance said beside Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in response to a reporter's question about whether Israel was becoming a "protectorate" of the US.

Netanyahu, who will meet with Rubio on Friday, expressed similar sentiments while acknowledging differences of opinion as they push forward the US-proposed ceasefire agreement. (AP)

Vance visits Holy Sepulcher

China's ruling party's key meet consolidates Xi's 'core' leadership

BEIJING, Oct 23: A key body of the ruling Chinese Communist Party reaffirmed the "core" leadership of President Xi Jinping as the head of the party and the powerful military, as it ended its four-day meeting on Thursday.

The meeting also backed a major purge of top military officials while endorsing a new 5-year plan to build a more resilient domestic market and achieve greater self-reliance to ward off the impact of US President Donald Trump's tariff war and resultant global trade tensions.

The 370-member strong body called the plenum, which met from Monday to Thursday, called on the party and country to unite behind Xi. The 72-year-old leader is in his unprecedented third term in power, becoming the only Chinese leader after party founder Mao Zedong to do so.

"At the session, a call was issued to the whole Party, the entire military, and Chinese people of all ethnic groups to rally more closely around the Party Central Committee with Xi at its core," an official communique issued at the end of the meeting said.

"All of us in the Party must acquire a deep understanding of the decisive significance of

establishing Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the Party Central Committee and in the Party as a whole and of establishing the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," it said. The plenum also approved the sacking of number two general of the Chinese military, He Weidong, along with eight other top officials who were expelled from the military and party for corruption, violation of discipline and work-related crimes in the latest crackdown, an official statement said.

The plenary meeting appointed Zhang Shengmin, the military's anti-graft chief, as Gen He's replacement. Zhang was promoted to the rank of Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the communique said. Xi chairs the CMC, and Gen Zhang Youxia is serving as another vice-chairman of the body, it said. Gen He, along with CMC member Miao Hua, were expelled from the CPC and military service.

Ahead of the plenary meeting, a spokesperson of the Chinese Defence Ministry, Col. Zhang Xiaogang, said besides the two top Generals, seven former senior military officials have also been expelled from the CPC and military. (PTI)

EU leaders seek role in Gaza at summit focused on Ukraine and Russia

BRUSSELS, Oct 23: European Union leaders are seeking a more active role in Gaza and the occupied West Bank after being sidelined from the US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. At a summit Thursday in Brussels largely focused on Ukraine and Russia, EU heads of state are also expected to discuss the shaky ceasefire in Gaza and potential EU support for stability in the war-torn coastal enclave. The EU has been the biggest provider of aid to the Palestinians and is Israel's top trading partner.

"It is important that Europe not only watches but plays an active role," said Luc Frieden, the prime minister of Luxembourg, as he headed into the meeting. "Gaza is not over; peace is not yet permanent," he said. Outrage over the war in Gaza has riven the 27-nation bloc and pushed relations between Israel and the EU to a historic low.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced in September plans to seek sanctions and a partial trade suspension against Israel, aimed to pressure it to reach a peace deal in Gaza.

Momentum driving the measures seemed to falter with the ceasefire deal mediated by US President Donald Trump, but European supporters say they should still be on the table as violence continues to flare up in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. (AP)

Health care compromise appears far off as govt shutdown stalemate persists

WASHINGTON, Oct 23: The government shutdown has reopened debate on what has been a central issue for both major political parties in the last 15 years: the future of health coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Tax credits for people who get health insurance through the marketplaces created by the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, expire at the end of the year. Democrats say they won't vote to reopen the government until Republicans negotiate an extension of the expanded subsidies. Republicans say they won't negotiate until Democrats vote to reopen the government. Lawmakers in both parties have been working on potential solutions behind the scenes, hoping that leaders will eventually start to talk, but it's unclear if the two sides could find a compromise.

As Congress circles the issue, a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about 6 in 10 Americans are "extremely" or "very" concerned about their health costs going up in the next

year. Those worries extend across age groups and include people with and without health insurance, the poll found.

A look at the subsidies that are expiring, the politics of the ACA and what Congress might do:

Enhanced premium help during the pandemic

Passed in 2010, the ACA was meant to decrease the number of uninsured people in the country and make coverage more affordable for those who don't have private insurance. The law created state-by-state exchanges, some of which are run by the individual states, to try to increase the pool of insured and bring down rates.

In 2021, when Democrats controlled Congress and the White House during the COVID-19 pandemic, they expanded premium help that was already in the law. The changes included eliminating premiums for some lower-income enrollees, ensuring that higher earners paid no more than 8.5% of their income and expanding eligibility for middle-class earners.

The expanded subsidies pushed enrollment to new levels and



drove the rate of uninsured people to a historic low. This year, a record 24 million people have signed up for insurance coverage through the ACA, in large part because billions of dollars in subsidies have made the plans more affordable for many people.

If the tax credits expire, annual out-of-pocket premiums are estimated to increase by 114% — an average of \$1,016 — next year, according to an analysis from KFF.

Democrats push to extend subsidies

Democrats extended those tax credits in 2022 for another three years but were not able to make them permanent. The credits are set to expire Jan. 1, with Republicans now in full control.

Lacking in power and sensing a political opportunity, Democrats used some of their only leverage and forced a government shutdown over the issue when federal

funding ran out on Oct. 1. They say they won't vote for a House-passed bill to reopen the government until Republicans give them some certainty that the subsidies will be extended.

Democrats introduced legislation in September to permanently extend the premium tax credits, but they have suggested that they are open to a shorter period. "We need a serious negotiation," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer has repeatedly said.

Republicans try to scale the ACA back, again

The Democratic demands on health care have reignited longstanding Republican complaints about the ACA, which they have campaigned against for years and tried and failed to repeal in 2017. Many in the party say that if Congress is going to act, they want to scrap the expanded subsidies and overhaul the entire law.

The problem is not the expiring subsidies but "the cost of health care," Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida said Tuesday.

In a virtual briefing on Tuesday, the libertarian Cato Institute and

the conservative Paragon Health Institute branded the subsidies as President Joe Biden's "COVID credits" and claimed they've enabled fraudsters to sign people up for fully subsidised plans without their knowledge.

Others have pitched more modest proposals that could potentially win over some Democrats. Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-SD, has said he is open to extending the subsidies with changes, including lower income limits and a stop to auto-enrollment that may sign up people who don't need the coverage.

The ACA is "in desperate need of reform," Thune has said.

House Republicans are considering their own ideas for reforming the ACA, including proposals for phasing out the subsidies for new enrollees. And they have begun to discuss whether to combine health care reforms with a new government funding bill and send it to the Senate for consideration once they return to Washington.

"We will probably negotiate some off-ramp" to ease the transition back to pre-COVID-19 lev-

els, said Maryland Rep. Andy Harris, the head of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, during a virtual town hall on Tuesday.

Is compromise possible?

A number of Republicans want to extend the subsidies. Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said most people who are using the exchanges created by the ACA "don't really have another option, and it's already really, really expensive. So I think there are things we can do to reform the program."

Hawley said he had been having conversations with other senators about what those changes could be, including proposals for income limits, which he said he sees as "very reasonable." Bipartisan groups of lawmakers have been discussing the income limits and other ideas, including making the lowest-income people pay very low premiums instead of nothing. Some Republicans have advocated for that change to ensure that all enrollees are aware they have coverage and need it. Other proposals would extend the subsidies for a year or two or slowly phase them out. (AP)

Calls for establishment of 'Siang Hydro Power Development Corporation' to ensure local participation and transparency

PPA president Nabam Vivek urges state government to create separate entity for SUMP issues

HT Correspondent

DOIMUMKH, Oct 23: People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) State President and MLA Nabam Vivek has urged the Arunachal Pradesh Government to create a separate state-level entity to address issues related to the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) instead of allowing Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs) such as NHPC to handle the project.

Speaking to the media, Nabam Vivek said that the proposed hydropower project has stirred widespread debate and dissatisfaction among the local populace.

"I have been closely following the developments in the media and social platforms. On one side, there is discontent and concern among the local people; on the other, security forces are being deployed and public meetings are being held in support of the PFR (Pre-Feasibility Report) inspection," he stated.

The PPA leader informed that he had personally visited the project-affected areas on September 24 and 25, interacting with villagers to understand the ground realities of the SUMP.

"I visited both the left and right banks of the Siang River, including villages such as Paron, Geku, Yingkiang, Jengging, and Boleng. During my visit, I realised that the concerns of the people are genuine and deeply rooted," he said.

According to Vivek, most of the agricultural and Wet Rice Cultivation (WRC) lands are situated on both banks of the river, and villagers have no alternative livelihood sources.

"The people are emotionally connected to their land. They fear losing not just their property but their identity, culture, and demographic balance. They believe that the project could lead



to irreversible losses to their agricultural and horticultural fields," he explained.

While acknowledging that hydropower development is a major source of potential revenue for a resource-rich state like Arunachal Pradesh, Vivek emphasised the need for an approach that ensures transparency, accountability, and fairness.

He proposed the creation of a state-owned corporation, to be named the Siang Hydro Power Development Corporation (SHPDC), to oversee all matters related to the project.

He suggested that the office of this corporation should be based within the state and not under any external agency.

"All discussions, decisions, and resolutions concerning the SUMP should be made locally in Arunachal Pradesh. This will ensure quicker redressal of grievances, better coordination, and greater public confidence," he said.

Vivek also proposed a dedicated compensation and revenue-sharing mechanism to maintain trust between the government and affected communities.

He suggested that compensation and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) benefits should be directly transferred to the bank accounts of land-affected families through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode, either monthly or annually. He added that the share of project revenue for local development should be increased even after commissioning, ensuring sustained regional progress.

"The voices, emotions, and rights of the land-affected people must be given due respect. The sentiments of the local population cannot be overlooked in the name of development. The government must take proactive measures to safeguard the interests, environment, and rights of the affected communities," Vivek said, urging the government to build mutual trust between the state authorities and the people.

The PPA President further proposed the constitution of a special committee to examine the SUMP in detail. The committee, he suggested, should include non-political representatives to ensure an unbiased assessment of public concerns and project feasibility.

"Such a committee can help frame a balanced proposal that upholds both developmental goals and the welfare of the people," Vivek added.

Concluding his statement, the regional party chief reiterated that development must not come at the cost of local identity and livelihood, and that the people of the Siang region deserve to be genuine stakeholders in decisions that affect their future.

Governor urges SEWA to continue its journey with humility, courage, and compassion



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Oct 23: The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnaik, (Retd), attended the silver jubilee celebration of the Socio Educational Welfare Association (SEWA) at Dibrugarh, Assam, on Wednesday.

Established in 2000, SEWA has completed 25 years of dedicated service in uplifting the underprivileged through education, skill development, empowerment, and compassion across Assam and the North Eastern region.

The Governor lauded SEWA for its multi-dimensional initiatives in promoting gender equality, sustainable livelihoods, mental well-being, and disaster resilience, along with its pioneering work in organic tea cultivation, clean cookstove adoption, and elderly care programmes.

He praised SEWA's Family

Counselling Centre for supporting over 2,300 families and its WASH initiatives for transforming sanitation and hygiene standards in tea garden communities.

Encouraging SEWA to look ahead with renewed purpose, Governor Parnaik urged the organisation to strengthen its efforts in climate action, sustainable agriculture, and mental health awareness.

He stressed on engaging youth and volunteers, fostering leadership, and building institutional sustainability to ensure long-term impact.

"As SEWA steps into the future, it must continue to walk with the same humility, courage, and compassion that defined its past," the Governor said. "The challenges may change, but the mission remains to empower the voiceless, uplift the marginalised, and build a society rooted in equality, dignity,

and hope."

The Governor paid homage to Late Shanti Gogoi, the founder of SEWA, for her vision, compassion, and lifelong dedication to social reform and women's empowerment.

He also commended Smti Nandita Hazarika, President of SEWA, for her dynamic leadership, and Air Marshal Anjan Kumar Gogoi (Retd) for his continued guidance in strengthening SEWA's credibility and outreach.

On the occasion, the Governor conferred the Best Community Action Awards to Anastacia Toppo and Hemma Reddy of Kellyden Tea Estate, Nepolian Meli of Majuli, Paulus Basumatary of Udalguri, and Anita Kumari of Margherita Tea Estate.

Governor Parnaik also launched the "SeshYatra" Van and Service and released SEWA's silver jubilee souvenir. The event concluded with a colourful cultural presentation, including a traditional Jhumur dance, performed to mark the milestone celebration.

The event was attended by Air Marshal Anjan Kumar Gogoi, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd.); Nandita Hazarika, President, SEWA; Arfan Hussain, Vice President, SEWA; Prof Alak Kumar Buragohain, former Vice Chancellor, Dibrugarh University; Kaushik Deka, Managing Editor, India Today; Bikram Kari, Deputy Commissioner, Dibrugarh; and Anastacia Toppo, Community Health Volunteer, Kellyden Tea Estate, among others.

Four-day eco-adventure to promote conservation and sustainable tourism

HT Correspondent

KOMSING, Oct 23: The Donyi Sango Culture Preservation Society (DSCPS), in collaboration with the village committees of Komsing, successfully organised the Namkam Hornbill Trek Expedition 2025 from October 20 to 23, with the aim of promoting eco-tourism and cultural awareness in the pristine Namkam Hills under Komsing village in Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The expedition sought to highlight the region's breathtaking landscapes, traditional trails, rich biodiversity, and vibrant cultural heritage.

Participants explored the untouched natural beauty of Namkam — home to the majestic Hornbill and the rare white-spotted squirrel — while interacting with the local community to better understand its traditions and ecological wisdom.

Led by Tapun Taki, managing director of Namkam Hornbill Trek, the four-day adventure drew participation from local youths, nature enthusiasts, and trekkers from across the region. Taki was joined by his dedicated team comprising Nektu Taloh, Tayam Tamuk, Nalo Taki, Tanyo Taki, Tajok Taki, Kalen Taki, and Kamin Gao, a reporter from Arunachal Express.

The route of the expedition covered several stunning natural and cultural landmarks, including Lingang Tuksing (White Spotted Stone), Esar Arung (Wind Hole), Raklong View Point, Namkam Hilltop, Ene Hieng (Natural Lake), Yumhing Yorbe (Hornbill Nest), Yumging Yorbe, Yumbung Hoyit (Animal Water Drinking Point), Lebung Stream, Hebung Lokne (Biggest Hollock Tree), Pangi Village, Dr. Gregorson Murder Spot (Historic Site), Yembung-Siang Confluence, and the War Memorial at Kekar Moniyang.

DCM Mein attends 2nd wakro butterfly meet

Emphasizes Eco-Tourism, conservation, and sustainable development

HT Correspondent

WAKRO, Oct 23: Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein attended the 2nd Wakro Butterfly Meet on Thursday, organised as part of the 8th Northeast Butterfly Meet at Kamlang Tiger Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary, in Wakro, Lohit district.

The event celebrated Arunachal Pradesh's extraordinary butterfly diversity and served as a platform to promote eco-tourism, biodiversity conservation, and environmental awareness.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Chief Minister lauded the efforts of the Kamlang Valley Nature Club, the Butterflies of North Eastern India Group, and the Kamlang Tiger Reserve & Wildlife Sanctuary authorities, along with researchers, experts, and volunteers for their commitment to preserving the State's ecological richness.

Mein said that the event reflects the growing environmental consciousness among the youth, who are emerging as the "true custodians of biodiversity."

"Butterflies are integral to our ecological balance. Events such as the Namdapha Butterfly Meet and Ziro Butterfly Meet have inspired awareness and conservation efforts across the Northeast. It is heartening to witness the same enthusiasm here at Wakro, especially among the youth," Mein remarked.

Highlighting the State Government's emphasis on sustainable and community-based tourism, the Deputy Chief Minister announced plans to develop a Nature Trail and an Angling Spot in the Kamlang area to promote responsible tourism and generate livelihood opportunities for local communities.

He said such initiatives would help strike a meaningful balance



between progress and preservation.

Mein also shared his long-term vision of establishing a Butterfly Park in a suitable and ecologically sensitive region of Arunachal Pradesh — a dedicated space for research, conservation, and ecotourism that would serve as both an educational and scientific centre for biodiversity enthusiasts.

The Deputy Chief Minister noted that 582 butterfly species have been recorded in Arunachal Pradesh so far, with new species still being discovered regularly — reaffirming the State's position as one of the richest biodiversity hotspots in the country.

Stressing the interlink between conservation and holistic development, Mein said that promoting eco-tourism must go hand in hand with preserving natural resources.

"Arunachal's development must always remain aligned with nature. We must progress, and at the same time, we must conserve and protect

our environment too," he said.

He further spoke about the government's efforts to integrate heritage, culture, and conservation in tourism promotion.

Referring to events such as the Sunrise Festival in Anjaw, Walong Day commemorating the 1962 War, and the Namsai to Namti Cycle Expedition, Mein said these initiatives reflect the State's community spirit and shared legacy.

He also mentioned that with the Frontier Highway progressing up to Vijaynagar, new avenues are emerging for eco-tourism and connectivity-driven sustainable development, opening doors for livelihood generation and regional growth.

The event concluded with a renewed commitment from all stakeholders to preserve Arunachal Pradesh's natural treasures and promote a model of development that harmoniously integrates culture, community, and conservation.

Training on natural farming conducted at Nahmed Village

HT Correspondent

TAWANG, Oct 23: An Awareness-cum-Orientation Training Programme on Natural Farming was conducted on Thursday at Nahmed Village under Kydphel Circle, organised by the Department of Agriculture, Tawang, as part of the National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF).

The programme aimed to promote sustainable agricultural practices and reduce farmers' dependence on chemical-based inputs.

The training saw active participation from PRI members, Gaon Burhas, Self-Help Group (SHG) members, Community Resource Persons, and over 60 farmers from the region.

District Agriculture Officer Pema Dechhen highlighted the growing significance of natural farming in ensuring long-term soil health, environmental conservation, and enhanced farm profitability.

She encouraged farmers to gradually transition to natural methods to make agriculture more resilient and sustainable.

As a resource person, K B Kayastha, Entomologist, Tawang, elaborated on natural cultivation practices that minimise external input costs by utilizing locally available resources.

He underscored how adopting bio-inputs and traditional pest management techniques can ensure eco-friendly and cost-effective farming.

Lakshmi Priya Borah, Subject Matter Specialist (Plant Protection) from KVK Tawang, conducted a practical demonstration on seed treatment techniques vital for safeguarding seeds and seedlings from pests and diseases.

TCL People's Forum holds general conference at Khonsa, elects new executive members

HT Correspondent

KHONSA, Oct 23: The General Conference-cum-Selection of New Executive Members of the Tirap, Changlang, Longding People's Forum (TCLPF) was held with much enthusiasm and participation at the Community Hall, Circuit House, Khonsa, on Thursday.

The day-long programme, chaired by N Changmi, witnessed deliberations on unity, regional development, and employment generation in the TCL region of Arunachal Pradesh.

The conference began with a welcome address by Hangliam Sumnyan, General Secretary of TCLPF, who briefed the gathering about the Forum's objectives, achievements, and long-term vision.

He emphasised the importance of unity and cooperation among the people of the three districts — Tirap, Changlang, and Longding — rather than allowing divisions to weaken their collective voice.

Delivering the keynote address, N Changmi, President of TCLPF, elaborated on the Forum's journey since its inception.

He spoke about the challenges it had faced in pursuing the collective aspirations of the people and highlighted several milestones achieved over the years.

Veteran leader and former minister T L Rajkumar, who attended the conference as a special guest, underscored the urgent need for an Autonomous Council for the TCL region.

He asserted that "integrity, unity, and a sense of belonging" were far more crucial than mere numerical strength when it comes to regional empowerment.

A host of other dignitaries also addressed the gathering, including Wanglong Rajkumar, advisor, TCLPF; Sontung Lowang Bangsia, president, Women Wing of TCLPF; Wangphoon Lowang, ZPM, Deomali; Tediap Hallang, ZPM, Bari-Basip; Jentoi Minyank, President, All Olo Welfare Association; Jiten Wangchha, vice president, BJP Tirap Unit; Ngampay Lamaty, Senior Public Leader; Nokche Boham, public leader; and Thangkai Khusumchai, president, TCLPF Longdong Unit.

All speakers echoed a common concern — the need to strengthen people's understanding of the Forum's objectives and activities.

They also discussed ways to ensure that the benefits of the Forum's initiatives reach the grassroots.

Advocate Somnai Wangpan, president of the Wancho Council, proposed the formation of district-level sub-committees to enhance coordination and strengthen the Forum's operations at the local level.

The house further discussed the idea of forming a separate Demand Committee under the TCLPF to articulate the region's socio-political and developmental aspirations more effectively.

Addressing the issue of limited financial resources, several speakers urged elected representatives from the region to voluntarily contribute funds to support the Forum during its formative phase.

Motorcycle Rally from Tawang to Bumla pays glorious tribute to 1962 war martyrs

HT Correspondent

TAWANG, Oct 23: A motorcycle rally from the historic Tawang War Memorial to Bumla Pass was organised on Wednesday as a stirring tribute to the martyrs of the 1962 Indo-Sino War.

The event, held on the occasion of Shaheed Diwas of Param Vir Chakra awardee Subedar Joginder Singh, marked the first-ever such homage dedicated to his memory.

The initiative was spearheaded by MLA Tawang Namegy Tsering on behalf of the people of Tawang, in collaboration with the District Administration, Tawang, and the Tawang Brigade of the Indian Army.

The rally was jointly flagged off by Deputy Commissioner Nangyal Angmo, IAS, and the Deputy Commander, Tawang Brigade, from the Tawang War Memorial. MLA Namegy Tsering himself led the group of riders on motorcycles, traversing the treacherous route from Tawang to Bumla Pass — situated at an altitude of 15,200 feet — and back.

Before the rally commenced, MLA Namegy Tsering laid a wreath at the Tawang War Memorial and offered floral tributes at

the memorial dedicated to Subedar Joginder Singh, PVC.

On their way to Bumla, the participants halted at Tongpen La, where a solemn homage was paid to the martyrs of the 1962 Indo-Sino War.

The ceremony featured a Guard of Honour by the Bumla Battalion of the Indian Army.

Addressing the gathering of participants, tourists, and Army personnel at Tongpen La, the MLA said, "On behalf of the people of Tawang, I pay my deepest tribute to Subedar Joginder Singh and all the brave soldiers who laid down their lives defending Tawang in 1962. It is unimaginable to think of their courage — fighting in snow-covered mountains against a far larger and better-equipped enemy, yet standing firm in their duty to protect our motherland."

He further expressed his heartfelt appreciation to the personnel of the Tawang Brigade, paramilitary forces, and district security agencies for their unwavering commitment to safeguarding Tawang.

The MLA also called upon the youth to remember the supreme sacrifices of the nation's heroes and to draw inspiration from their courage and devotion to duty.

CM Khandu holds series of meetings in Tokyo to boost India-Japan cooperation

ITANAGAR, Oct 23: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu, who is currently on an official visit to Japan, held a series of high-level meetings in Tokyo on Thursday aimed at expanding cultural and economic cooperation between India and Japan.

In a significant engagement, Khandu met Yasutoshi Nishimura, member of the House of Representatives Japan and chairman of the Japan-India Parliamentary Friendship League.

The two leaders discussed ways to take forward the India-Japan partnership and deepen cultural exchanges.

"We discussed taking forward the India-Japan partnership to further strengthen our cultural ties and explore avenues of development cooperation," Khandu said in a post on X, after the meeting.

The chief minister also held an interaction with Toshiaki Nishikawa, chairman and CEO of ASEAN Group Co Ltd and associated companies.

During the discussion, Nishikawa expressed his commitment to enhancing the presence of the Indian workforce in Japan and highlighted ongoing collaborations with several Indian states to promote Japanese



language learning and skill development.

"Encouraging to see such initiatives strengthening the India-Japan partnership," Khandu noted, acknowledging Japan's proactive role in supporting India's skilled workforce development.

Khandu attended a luncheon meeting with

senior Japanese leaders, Itsunori Onodera, Chair of the Policy Research Council and the Tax System Research Council; Yoshiaki Wada, former Member of the House of Representatives; and Rui Matsukawa, Member of the House of Councillors.

The meeting centered on deepening bilat-

eral ties and advancing cooperation in alignment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for stronger India-Japan relations.

"Grateful for their warm hospitality and insightful discussions aimed at further deepening India-Japan relations in line with Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji's vision during his recent visit to Japan," Khandu said in another post.

In another engagement, the chief minister interacted with Sankyo Frontier Co Ltd, a Japanese firm specialising in modular and factory-built construction solutions.

Khandu appreciated their innovative technology that enables rapid, all-weather construction in remote and high-altitude terrains, a model he believes could revolutionise infrastructure development in Arunachal Pradesh and across the Himalayan region.

"Innovative ideas like these can truly transform the way we build in the Himalayas," he said.

Khandu's ongoing visit reflects a concerted effort to promote collaboration in technology, infrastructure, and human resource development while reinforcing cultural and strategic ties between Arunachal Pradesh and Japan, officials said. (PTI)

Criticising the RJD's poll promise of providing a government job to every family in Bihar

Bihar polls fight between 'Vikaas' and 'Vinaash': Nadda

AURANGABAD/HAJIPUR (BIHAR), Oct 23: BJP chief J P Nadda on Thursday said that the assembly election in Bihar is a fight between 'Vikaas' (development) of the NDA and 'Vinaash' (destruction) of the INDIA bloc.

Addressing a rally in Aurangabad district, Nadda lashed out at the Congress, accusing it of being a "parasitic party that finishes off its junior alliance partners".

The senior BJP leader attacked the RJD, saying the Lalu Prasad-led party stands for 'Rangdari' (extortion), 'Jungle raj' (anarchy) and 'Dadagiri' (intimidation).

Making light of RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav's promise to provide employment to youngsters and check out-migration, he said such promises of the RJD reminded him of the party's alleged involvement in the land-for-jobs scam.

Criticising the RJD's poll promise of providing a government job to every family in Bihar, Nadda sought to know from where would funds be generated to pay the salaries.

He also lambasted the RJD for giving a ticket to gangster-turned-politician, the late Md Shahabuddin's son Osama Shahab in the upcoming polls, stating it showed how concerned the party is for Bihar.



"The RJD has fielded Shahabuddin's son... how can it ensure the security of the people of Bihar if it fields such candidates? Lalu's RJD stands for Rangdari, Jungleraj and Dadagiri," he said.

The RJD has fielded Shahab in the Raghunathpur assembly constituency in Siwan district.

Nadda claimed that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar made Bihar free from 'jungleraj' in the last 20 years.

"In this election, the fight is between 'Vikaas' and 'Vinaash'," he said.

"People of Bihar can never for-

get jungle raj. During Lalu Prasad's tenure, people from Bihar were forced to migrate to other states. Today, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, people of Bihar are witnessing growth. The state is continuously moving towards development," he said.

"The NDA government in Bihar has done a lot for the state in recent years. The rail budget for Bihar has been increased by almost 10 times by the Centre. Besides, out of the total 44 Vande Bharat trains introduced by the Centre recently, 26

are for Bihar only," he said.

Besides, the Railways Ministry has also increased the number of special trains to 12,000 this time to meet the passenger rush during Chhath festival, he added.

Later addressing a rally at Patepur assembly constituency in Vaishali district, Nadda said the NDA government is working for overall development of Bihar.

"Ten airports are being constructed in Bihar, which will increase exports from the state... also the Makhana Board established by the Centre will increase farmers' income. And the Youth Commission set up by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar will change the lives of the youngsters," he added.

Sharpening his attack on the RJD, he alleged that abduction had become an industry during 'jungle raj' of the RJD and ransom amount used to be finalised at the then CM's residence.

"How can people forget the days of jungle raj during the RJD rule... Abduction had become an industry in the state," he alleged.

Without taking the name of RJD supremo Lalu Prasad, a former chief minister of the state, Nadda alleged, "People are well aware of the fact that ransom amount in cases of abduction was finalised at the official residence of the then CM." (PTI)

Tejashwi named as INDIA bloc's CM candidate for Bihar polls

PATNA, Oct 23: The opposition INDIA bloc on Thursday declared RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav its chief ministerial candidate for Bihar assembly polls, in what is being seen as a last-ditch effort to put an end to squabbles and project unity ahead of the elections.

Senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot, who has been camping in Patna since Wednesday to iron out differences with the RJD, said the decision had the approval of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi.

Addressing a crowded press conference here, Gehlot also said Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP) chief Mukesh Sahni and leaders from other sections of society will be deputy CMs if the INDIA bloc comes to power in the state, "keeping in mind the complex social structure of Bihar".

"We have decided, after consultations with our national president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, besides all coalition partners who are here, to name Tejashwi Yadav ji as our chief ministerial candidate", Gehlot said.

Incidentally, demands have been made by a section of Congress leaders in Bihar that it would like one of its leaders, preferably a Muslim or a Dalit, as a deputy CM if the multi-party coalition came to power.

Speaking at the same press con-



ference, Yadav, who had led the Mahagathbandhan in the last assembly polls, thanked his allies for reposing his trust in him again and said, "It was not a big issue for us, but since there was so much media speculation, we decided to make it clear."

The 35-year-old leader, often dubbed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the "crown prince of jungle raj", addressed the criticism head-on.

"I would like to tell the people of Bihar that Tejashwi will never compromise on corruption and will spare nobody accused of a crime, be it his own shadow or anyone with influence," said Yadav, who has enjoyed two short tenures as deputy CM.

The RJD leader also alleged that the bogey of jungle raj was a "propaganda" by the BJP, which shares power in Bihar, where "not a day

passes that murders and rapes do not take place. Victims of sexual assault die for want of timely medical help".

Later, Congress media and publicity department head Pawan Khara, who was present at the press conference, told reporters, "We have taken the lead by announcing our face. Now it is for the NDA to stop equivocating on the issue and declaring whom it proposes to make the CM if it forms the government".

Notably, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the second most powerful leader in the NDA after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, recently said that the coalition would contest the assembly polls "under the leadership" of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who heads the JD(U), but "the legislators would decide" who will occupy the top post after the elections. (PTI)

Indian Railways deploys 12,011 special trains to manage festive rush

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 23: In a major step to handle the surge in passenger demand during the ongoing festive season, Indian Railways (IR) has announced the operation of 12,011 special trains across the country. This marks a substantial increase from 7,724 special trains operated during the same period last year, reflecting IR's efforts to ensure safe and comfortable travel during Puja, Diwali, and Chhath. Within the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) zone, 48 special festival trains are being operated, making a total of 620 trips between September and December 2025.

The move aims to accommodate the growing number of passengers and reduce congestion on key routes connecting the northeastern states with major cities and religious destinations. To ensure a smooth travel experience, Indian Railways has made extensive arrangements at major stations such as Katihar, New Jalpaiguri, Guwahati, Jorh, and Kishanganj.

Facilities like improved holding areas, upgraded passenger announcement systems, additional ticket counters, fans, and automatic ticket vending machines have been put in place. Round-the-clock war rooms have been set up, and additional staff, including Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel, have been deployed for crowd management and passenger assistance.

Special trains are operating to major destinations including Katihar, Kishanganj, New Jalpaiguri, Sonpur, Dauram Madhepura, Agartala, New Tinsukia, SMVT Bengaluru, Amritsar, Patna, Dibrugarh, Gorakhpur, Silchar, Naharlagun, Kolkata, Guwahati, Ranchi, Charalpalali, Mumbai Central, Agra Cantt, Jorh, Lumding, Howrah, Gomti Nagar, Anand Vihar, Kamakhya, and several others. On October 24, 2025 (Friday), sev-

eral important special trains are scheduled to operate. Train No. 07541 Katihar-Dauram Madhepura (Daily Special) will depart from Katihar at 19:00 hours and reach Dauram Madhepura at 22:00 hours, while Train No. 07542 Dauram Madhepura-Katihar (Daily Special) will leave Dauram Madhepura at 22:45 hours and arrive at Katihar at 2:30 hours. Train No. 07540 Katihar-Manihari (Daily Special) will depart from Katihar at 20:30 hours and reach Manihari at 21:30 hours, and the return service, Train No. 07539 Manihari-Katihar (Daily Special), will leave Manihari at 5:00 hours and reach Katihar at 6:00 hours. Train No. 07551 Manihari-Katihar (Daily Special) will leave Manihari at 00:15 hours and arrive at Katihar at 1:30 hours, while Train No. 07552 Katihar-Manihari (Daily Special) will leave Katihar at 2:00 hours and arrive at Manihari at 3:15 hours.

Similarly, Train No. 07555 Katihar-Jogbani (Daily Special) will depart from Katihar at 21:30 hours and arrive at Jogbani at 1:15 hours, while Train No. 07554 Jogbani-Katihar (Daily Special) will leave Jogbani at 2:00 hours and reach Katihar at 5:45 hours. Train No. 07535 Amritsar-Katihar (Weekly Special) will depart from Amritsar at 13:25 hours and arrive at Katihar Junction at 23:45 hours. Train No. 05640 Kolkata-Silchar (Weekly Special) will leave Kolkata at 13:15 hours and reach Silchar at 23:50 hours, and Train No. 05634 Gorakhpur-Narangi (Weekly Special) will leave Gorakhpur at 16:55 hours and arrive at Narangi at 21:40 hours. Train No. 05625 Kamakhya-Rohtak (Weekly Special) will leave Kamakhya at 22:00 hours and reach Rohtak at 14:45 hours, while Train No. 04195 Agra Cantt-Jogbani (Weekly Special) will leave Agra Cantt at 5:00 hours and reach Jogbani at 18:45 hours.

BJP leader suspended after video shows him humiliating trader in UP's Meerut

MEERUT (UP), Oct 23: The BJP has removed its Kisan Morcha district vice-president, Vikul Chaprana, from all posts and suspended his primary party membership after a video purportedly showing him publicly humiliating a cloth trader circulated online, officials said on Thursday.

The action follows the video in which Chaprana was seen allegedly forcing the cloth trader to rub his nose on the road.

The order of his suspension was issued by BJP Kisan Morcha regional president Teja Gurjar on Wednesday, who said the conduct was "against party discipline" and reflective of a "criminal mindset".

The incident, which took place at Meerut's Tejarahi crossing on October 19, involved trader Satyam Rastogi, who had parked his vehicle outside a restaurant. A dispute over parking allegedly led Chaprana to force the trader to rub his nose on the road and apologise, officials said.

The episode was captured on video and quickly went viral on social media, triggering outrage.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Vipin Tada said the investigation has been handed over to the Superintendent of Police (City).

INDIA bloc not one-man show but people's alliance: Cong

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: With RJD's Tejashwi Yadav declared Mahagathbandhan chief ministerial face ahead of the Bihar Assembly polls, the Congress on Thursday asserted that the INDIA bloc is "not a one-man show" but a people's alliance built on mutual respect, inclusive representation, and the principle of shared power. At a joint press conference in Patna, the Mahagathbandhan on Thursday declared Yadav its chief ministerial candidate for the elections.

Senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot, who has been camping in Patna since Wednesday to iron out differences with the RJD, said the decision had the approval of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi.

Addressing the press conference, Gehlot also said Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP) chief Mukesh Sahni and leaders from other sections of society will be deputy CMs if the INDIA bloc comes to power in the state, "keeping in mind the complex social structure of Bihar". (PTI)

Chaprana, who was arrested earlier, has been granted bail by a court. Police have also arrested three of his associates -- Happy Bhadana, Ayush Sharma, and Subodh Yadav -- while efforts are on to nab the others involved. Additional charges related to obstruction of road and vehicle vandalism have been added to the FIR, police said.

The incident sparked widespread condemnation from opposition parties and business organisations.

The Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress have demanded the resignation of Minister of State for Energy, Somendra Tomar, whom Chaprana mentioned in the viral video. SP leaders Vipin Chaudhary and Mukhia Gurjar staged protests, demanding the invocation of the Gangsters Act and the National Security Act (NSA) against the accused.

The Meerut Vyapar Mandal, led by district president Jeetu Singh Nagpal, also held a demonstration, demanding strict legal action to ensure traders' safety and end the "atmosphere of fear".

Rastogi later told police that he was satisfied with the action taken and had no personal dispute with anyone. However, the viral video continued to fuel political tension and public outrage across the state. (PTI)

Tejashwi Yadav's poll promises impractical: BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad

PATNA, Oct 23: BJP Lok Sabha MP Ravi Shankar Prasad on Thursday dismissed RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav's poll promises as "impractical" and accused him and his family of corruption.

The former Union minister alleged that the RJD was planning "to take away people's land under the garb of providing government jobs," in an apparent reference to the alleged 'land-for-job' scam during the party's previous tenure.

"Yadav has promised to provide a government job to at least one person in 2.6 crore households, which will require an estimated expenditure of ₹ 12 lakh crore. Bihar's total budget is around ₹ 3 lakh crore. From where will he provide these jobs?" Prasad asked while talking to reporters here.

Reacting to Yadav's promise to regularise contractual workers, including community mobilisers such as Jeevika Didis, Prasad said, "The Jeevika Didi scheme is a brainchild of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Around 1.21 crore women have benefited from the scheme. Now Yadav is trying to take credit for it."

He accused the RJD of making "false promises to mislead voters" and claimed that the people of Bihar would not trust a party "whose track record is tainted by corruption and misgovernance".

Responding to Yadav's charge that the NDA lacked vision, Prasad said, "The development works done by the NDA are visible to everyone. Our organisation is strong and rooted. Nitish Kumar is capa-

ble of good governance. People trust the double-engine government led by Narendra Modi and Nitish Kumar."

The BJP leader alleged that the RJD rule was marked by "fear, loot and corruption", which earned it the tag of 'jungle raj'.

"Yadav claims he did a lot of work when he was in government. He should answer who was the chief minister when he served as deputy CM. He only makes hollow announcements, while the NDA is an alliance of action," Prasad remarked.

Attacking the Yadav family, the BJP leader said, "You (Tejashwi) talk about corruption, which story do you believe in? The story of your father, your mother, or yours?" (PTI)

'BJP's vote chori' direct attack on democracy

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: The Congress on Thursday said "vote theft" was a direct attack on democracy and the rights of the poor, and the people will teach the BJP a stern lesson as they have understood its intentions.

The party made the fresh attack in the light of the latest revelation by a Karnataka SIT zeroing in on at least six suspects allegedly involved in vote theft in the state's Aland Assembly segment.

In a post on X, the Congress claimed that with the Special Investigation Team (SIT) finding "evidence" of ₹ 80 being paid to delete each voter from the Aland seat, a major scam had come to light.

"The Karnataka SIT investigation revealed that in this 'vote theft' scam, fake applications were filed to delete the names of 6,018 voters, for which a total payment of 4.8 lakh rupees was made. These fake applications for voter deletion were being sent from a data operating centre in Kalaburagi," the party alleged.

An SIT was formed to look into the matter after Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, in a press conference, claimed that votes had been stolen in Aland. (PTI)

President unveils bust of former President K R Narayanan at Kerala Raj Bhavan

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Oct 23: President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday unveiled the bust of former President, the late K R Narayanan, on the premises of Kerala Raj Bhavan here.

The bust, erected to honour the first Indian President from the Dalit community, was unveiled in the presence of former President Ram Nath Kovind, Bihar Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, and Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, an official release said.

Earlier, a PIB release had stated that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan also attended the event. However, the release was later corrected.

In a brief speech following the ceremony, the President said that Narayanan's life is a story of courage, perseverance, and self-belief.

"Through immense dedication and the power of education, he went on to occupy the highest constitutional office of our nation. His academic excellence was a symbol of what determination and opportunity can accomplish when



guided by purpose," Murmu said. She said that before entering politics, Narayanan built a distinguished career in the Indian Foreign Service.

He upheld India's values of peace, justice, and cooperation with utmost sincerity.

She added that Narayanan was always steadfast to the principles of fairness and inclusion.

"Narayanan was also the Vice-President of India. His journey reached its peak when he became the President of India. He carried into the Rashtrapati Bhavan not

only his experience as a statesman but also wisdom and humility of his personality," Murmu said.

The President underlined that Narayanan was deeply rooted in his connection to Kerala, his home state.

"He drew inspiration from its social progress and emphasis on education and inclusivity. Even after reaching the highest office, he remained connected to his roots," Murmu said.

She stated that throughout his life, Narayanan emphasised the role of education in human and na-

tional development.

"For him, education was not a privilege for the few, but a right for all. Narayanan believed that human values are essential for the growth of a civilisation and are fundamental to the development of a society," the President said.

She said that Narayanan has left behind a rich legacy of morality, integrity, compassion, and democratic spirit.

"As we remember him today, we should draw inspiration from his life, which was dedicated to nation-building, to create a more inclusive, just, and compassionate India."

The President expressed confidence that his memory will inspire people to uphold the values of equality, integrity and public service that he stood for.

"I would like to thank Ram Nath Kovind ji, Former President of India, under whose guidance this initiative has been taken," she said.

Narayanan served as the 10th President of India from 1997 to 2002. He passed away on November 9, 2005 at the age of 85. (PTI)

Fadnavis' 'CM till 2029' assertion an indirect message to Shinde: Sachin Sawant

MUMBAI, Oct 23: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has sent out an indirect message to his deputy Eknath Shinde by asserting that he would occupy the top post till 2029, claimed state Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant on Thursday.

Responding to a question about his role in national politics, Fadnavis had told reporters on Wednesday that "Delhi is still far away" and that he would continue as Maharashtra CM till 2029.

"It is an indirect message to those eyeing the CM's post. He cannot directly speak to Shinde Saheb, so he is attempting to communicate indirectly, also signalling to those in his party who closely watch developments," Sawant told PTI Videos.

The ruling Mahayuti alliance in the state has the BJP, Shinde's Shiv Sena and NCP led by Deputy CM Ajit Pawar as partners. After breaking away from the undivided Sena in 2022, Shinde had become the CM until last year's assembly polls, with Fadnavis as his deputy.

Fadnavis on Wednesday had made it clear that there will be no change in the present ruling dispensation. "There will be no new partners or swapping of partners," he had added. His assertion is also a message to the BJP central leadership that he does not want to leave his post over the "apprehension that, as seen in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttarakhanda, someone else could replace him", said the Congress leader.

Sawant claimed that efforts are being made to dislodge Fadnavis from the CM's post. "They are frequently visiting Delhi and being entertained there. This adds to the fear. So, Fadnavis is trying to assert that he won't step down," said the Congress leader. Asked about Samajwadi Party leader Abu Azmi's announcement that they would go solo in the upcoming elections to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) in Mumbai, Sawant said all election-related decisions in the Congress will be taken by the party high command in consultation with local leaders. The Congress aims to secure the mayor's post in Mumbai, he said.

The Congress is a part of the Opposition bloc Maha Vikas Aghadi, which also comprises the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP). (PTI)

'Supporters block roads at 36 locations in the state' Bandh called by NGO seeking detection of illegal immigrants evokes mixed response in Tripura

AGARTALA, Oct 23: A 24-hour bandh called by a newly formed non-governmental organisation, the Tripura Civil Society, demanding implementation of the Tiprasa Accord and detection of illegal immigrants and setting up of detention camps in each district, evoked a mixed response in the northeastern state on Thursday, officials said. While the bandh, which started at 6 am, evoked a massive response in the hilly areas falling under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACD) - where Tipra Motha Party holds sway -- with shops remaining closed and vehicles off the roads, the impact was relatively less in the plains, where normal life was not much affected. "The bandh remained peaceful and no untoward incident has been reported till 10 am. The bandh supporters have blocked roads at 36 locations in the state, which has impacted vehicular movement. Train services have been affected



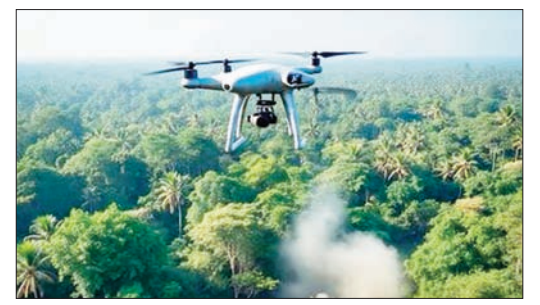
from Agartala to Dharmanagar as picketers blocked the tracks but services remained normal from Agartala to Sabroom," state police's PRO Rajdeep Deb said. He said adequate security personnel have been mobilised in the sensitive areas and riot control arrangements made in some areas to thwart any untoward incident.

The NGO called the bandh on its eight-point charter of demands, which includes the implementation of Tiprasa Accord, identification of the illegal foreign immigrants in compliance with the directives of the Ministry of Home Affairs and setting up of a detention camp in each district. While opposing the bandh,

Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday said that development can't be stalled by observing strike in the state. Without naming anyone, he said, "Although an NGO has called the bandh, people know who is behind it. Many NGOs have also opposed the strike." "The bandh call is aimed at grabbing media attention to send a message across the country that something is happening in Tripura but development can't be stalled this way," he told reporters at Takarjala in Sepahijala. CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Chaudhury on Wednesday opposed the bandh call, saying the demands on which the strike was called were not related to the people. The Tiprasa Accord refers to the tripartite agreement signed between the Tipra Motha Party, the Centre and the Tripura government in March last year for socio-economic development of the tribals in the northeastern state. (PTI)

NSF condemns drone assault on Mon village, seeks UNHRC probe

DIMAPUR, Oct 23: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Thursday denounced the targeted drone assault in Khammoi village under Mon district on October 20, reportedly by Indian armed forces, resulting in the death of two civilians and destruction of private properties. The NSF called upon the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to launch an independent, international fact-finding mission and the office of the high commissioner for human rights to issue a situational report on violations occurring under the AFSPA. According to the federation, such actions reflect a disturbing pattern of militarised suppression, weaponised fear and systemic impunity under the cover of domestic legislation such as AFSPA. In a release, the NSF said the victims included a promising young student leader Khampei Wangsa, joint secretary, Khammoi Students' Union, and an eight-year-old child, Phiphot Wangsu, a Grade-1 student of Khammoi Mission School. It said their lives were abruptly extinguished in an act that defies every standard of humanity. "The use of combat drones and explosive payloads in civilian-populated areas amounts to a direct violation of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Geneva Conventions' Prohibition against targeting civilians and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), among other international laws," the NSF stated.



Saying that the AFSPA continues to provide legal immunity to excesses of force, creating an ecosystem where accountability becomes optional, the NSF reiterated its demand for immediate and unconditional repeal of the Act from the Naga homeland. Additionally, in its continued protest against militarisation and "state-sponsored violence", the NSF reaffirmed non-cooperation with armed forces across all its federating units and subordinate bodies until the AFSPA is repealed. The federation extended condolences to the grieving families, saying their loss is a collective wound upon the conscience of humanity. It also urged all democratic nations, humanitarian organisations and conscience-driven citizens to condemn this atrocity and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable within the frameworks of international criminal law.

24 people held for blocking Mizoram highway protesting its dilapidated condition

AIZAWL, Oct 23: Twenty-four people were held on Thursday for allegedly blocking a vital highway in Mizoram, protesting its dilapidated condition, officials said. The Mizoram Tipper Association (MTA)'s Kolasib unit and Joint Action Committee of drivers and owners of commercial vehicles announced a four-day strike on NH-306/06, the state's lifeline, to protest its dilapidated condition and the sluggish pace of repairs. Kolasib's SP David H Lalthangliana told PTI that the strike did not affect vehicle movement as sufficient police personnel were deployed at various sites. He said 24 people, including leaders of MTA and JAC, were detained for violating prohibitory orders. There was no serious law and order issue during the strike, which began around 7 am, he said. Home Minister K Sapdana had earlier warned truckers and commercial vehicle operators of legal action if they went ahead with the blockade. He said the government was strongly against the agitation as the Public Works Department (PWD) and the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) were carrying out repair work on the highway. He had said that blocking a national highway violates several laws, including the National Highway Act and Sections 126 and 285 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The MTA and JAC had planned to block the Sairang-Vairengte and Kolasib-Bairabi stretches of NH-306/06 and a diversion road between Aizawl and Kawnpui/Kolasib via Durtlang till Sunday. PWD Minister Vanlalhlana said the repair works are expected to be completed in November. The NH-306, certain stretches of which are designated NH-06, was repaired in July and August. The highway's condition deteriorated again recently. (PTI)

Wokha dist inks MoU with 3 national institutes to empower farmers

DIMAPUR, Oct 23: The Wokha district administration signed an MoU with ICAR-National Research Centre for Banana, Tamil Nadu, Institute of Bioresource and Sustainable Development, Imphal and CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology, Jorhat, for long-term partnerships, focusing on technological integration, scientific farming, production enhancement, circular economy promotion, joint research, cultivation of medicinal and aromatic crops, farmer training, sustainable practices, and improved market linkages. The MoU was inked on the first day of the first edition of the Banana Festival 2025 at Wokha public ground on Wednesday. Held under the theme "Banana for Food, Fibre and Future," the three-day event is aimed at promoting agricultural innovation, empowering farmers, and strengthening market linkages across Nagaland. The inaugural ceremony was graced by Nagaland deputy chief minister TR Zeliang as the special guest. In his address, Zeliang emphasised that the festival would serve as a platform to connect producers with consumers, boost the local and rural economy, generate employment for youth, and promote entrepreneurship. He asked the government departments to play a key

role in advancing such initiatives, not only for Wokha district but across Nagaland. Zeliang highlighted the importance of sustainable approaches and praised the collaboration between state, district, and national institutions, noting that such integration would penetrate grassroots levels and improve the overall economic structure. He also urged the scientists from participating institutions to offer their best guidance and research support for the district's development. Deputy chief minister Y Patton, the host of the festival, reiterated Wokha's identity as the "land of plenty" and emphasised the festival's potential to improve the rural economy. He noted that the event brought together all stakeholders to collaborate in boosting the economic sphere. Wokha DC Vineet Kumar outlined the festival's inception, concept, and alignment with the 'one district one product initiative'. He highlighted the availability, cultivation, and quality of bananas produced in Wokha, emphasising the district's potential for agricultural growth. The festival features over 100 exhibition stalls, representing various villages, blocks, and departments. Exhibits include diverse banana species, banana by-products, and local innovations.

Civil Society holds Tripura bandh demanding ILP, deportation of illegal Bangladeshi migrants

AGARTALA, Oct 23: The Tripura Civil Society on Thursday launched a 24-hour statewide bandh to press for an eight-point charter of demands, including the introduction of the Inner Line Permit (ILP), speedy implementation of the Tiprasa Accord, and the identification and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi migrants. Protesters staged road blockades across Agartala and in more than 45 locations throughout the state, shouting slogans such as "Illegal Bangladeshi go back." The agitation brought several areas to a standstill as picketing continued through the day. Tipra Motha Party MLA Ranjit Debbarma, who is leading the protest, accused the state government of inaction on the issue of illegal immigration. "Our demand is clear - the Centre had directed all states to identify and deport illegal Bangladeshi migrants, but the Tripura Government has done nothing. Assam, Haryana, and Delhi have taken action, but Tripura has not followed suit," Debbarma said. He also expressed frustration over the delay in implementing the Tiprasa Accord, signed over 18 months ago between the Centre, the Tripura Government, and tribal representatives. "There has been no progress on the promises made for the welfare of indigenous people," he added. Debbarma further reiterated the long-standing demand for the Roman script for the Kokborok language, saying that despite raising the issue in the state assembly, there has been no response from the government.

Autumn Festival, a prelude to Nagaland's Hornbill Festival, to begin in Delhi today

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: The fourth edition of the Autumn Festival 2025, a prelude to Nagaland's iconic Hornbill Festival, will commence here on Friday, showcasing the Northeastern state's rich tribal culture, traditional music, and cuisine, among others. The two-day event, to be held at the Nagaland House here, will offer visitors a glimpse of the state's vibrant culture through dance performances and handicrafts, an official statement said. Nagaland's Minister for Tourism and Higher Education, Temjen Imna Along, said the festival celebrates the Naga tribes - each with its own history, culture and unique traditions. "Through this event, we aim to bring the beauty and essence of Nagaland's heritage to the people of Delhi. On behalf of the chief minister of Nagaland, I warmly invite everyone to experience this festival and join us in celebrating unity in diversity," he said. The event will be graced by Delhi Tourism Minister Kapil Mishra, along with ambassadors and representatives from various countries, including Ireland and Thailand. Along said the world-renowned Hornbill Festival - known as the 'Festival of Festivals' - will be held at Kisama heritage village in Nagaland from December 1 to 10, featuring participation from all 17 major tribes of the state, partner countries and partner states. "Nagaland's tourism policy is being made more visitor-friendly. We welcome all those who wish to experience the natural beauty, culture, and warmth of our people. The participation of international delegates and ambassadors this year adds a special dimension to our celebration," he said. To make travel easier for visitors, the Inner Line Permit (ILP) process is being simplified, and a dedicated helpline will be launched at Nagaland House in New Delhi, Kolkata and Guwahati to assist travellers, the statement said. (PTI)

Strike called by civil society disrupts rail services; 7 trains cancelled

AGARTALA, Oct 23: Train services across Tripura were thrown out of gear on Thursday as a state-wide bandh, called by the Tripura Civil Society, brought rail operations to a halt. The organization has been demanding the detection and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, the introduction of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system, and the implementation of the Tiprasa Accord, among other issues. The bandh began early in the morning, with protesters blocking railway tracks at several locations along the Dharmanagar-Agartala section from around 7:25 a.m. As a result, multiple trains were either cancelled, short-terminated, or controlled en route. According to the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), a total of seven trains were cancelled, while several others were curtailed due to the ongoing blockade. Among the affected services Train No. 55676 (Dharmanagar-Agartala Passenger) was short-terminated at Ambassa and cancelled between Ambassa and Agartala, Train No. 15664 (Silchar-Agartala Express) was short-terminated at Karimganj, while its counterpart, Train No. 15663 (Agartala-Silchar Express), was short-originated from Karimganj, remaining cancelled between Agartala and Karimganj. Local DMU services - Train Nos. 75684, 75683, 75679, and 75680 - operating between Agartala, Sabroom, and Karimganj were also cancelled for the day. Long-distance trains were not spared either. Train No. 07030 (Charlapalli-Agartala Special), which began its journey on October 20, is being controlled at Dharmanagar. Meanwhile, Train No. 13174 (Sabroom-Sealdah Kanchanjunga Express) and Train No. 12520 (Agartala-Lokmanya Tilak Terminus SF Express), both scheduled to depart on October 23, have been held at Agartala and Jirania respectively. Chief Public Relations Officer Kapinjal Kishore Sharma confirmed the widespread disruptions and urged passengers to stay updated through official railway channels before planning their journeys. Railway authorities said that operations will resume once the tracks are cleared and normalcy is restored, adding that the situation continues to be closely monitored.

CM Rio stresses on renewed humanitarian commitment

KOHIMA, Oct 23: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Thursday called for a renewed commitment to humanitarian service and voluntary action. Addressing the 38th Annual General Meeting of the Indian Red Cross Society's Nagaland branch, he said humanity remains society's greatest strength amid global challenges, such as disasters, conflicts, and pandemics. Encouraging greater youth involvement, Rio urged members to "strengthen branches, broaden humanitarian outreach, and engage young people as the torchbearers of empathy". He commended the society for its role as a "beacon of hope, compassion, and voluntary service". He lauded the contributions of the managing committee, staff, and volunteers in reaching vulnerable communities, promoting health and hygiene, conducting blood donation drives, enhancing disaster preparedness, and providing relief to the needy. (PTI)

UP-GRADATION, OPERATION & MAINTENANCE OF RETIRING ROOM & DORMITORIES
E-Auction for Up-gradation, operation and maintenance of Retiring Room and Dormitories at Jigirood Station on 'Upgrade, Operate and Transfer' basis has been invited by the Lumping division. Auction Catalogue No.: RR-JID-01-2025; Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Days: 1826; Auction Start Date & Time : At 11:00 hrs. on 03-11-2025.
Sr. DCM, Lumping
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Nagaland University opens cancer research lab Nagaland ranks first in nasopharyngeal cancer and second in oral cancer in India

DIMAPUR, Oct 23: Nagaland University on Thursday opened a cancer research laboratory at the department of zoology at its Lumami campus, marking a significant milestone in the university's scientific advancement and commitment to addressing the growing burden of cancer in the region. Prof Jagadish Kumar Patnaik, VC of the varsity, inaugurated the laboratory in the presence of faculty members and students. In his address, Patnaik shared his personal experiences on how cancer had profoundly affected his own family, having lost close relatives to the disease. He reaffirmed his dedication to advancing scientific research and innovation at Nagaland University, urging faculty and students to pursue excellence through research and publication. He further urged scholars to document and explore traditional healing practices by engaging with kobiraz (local healers) to identify potential natural remedies,



suggesting the possibility of recognising and patenting such indigenous knowledge. Patnaik also expressed his enduring emotional connection with Nagaland, assuring continued support for the university's scientific initiatives. Delivering the welcome address, Prof Bendang Ao emphasised the urgent need to focus on cancer research due to the alarming increase in cancer cases in Nagaland, particularly gastrointestinal cancers.

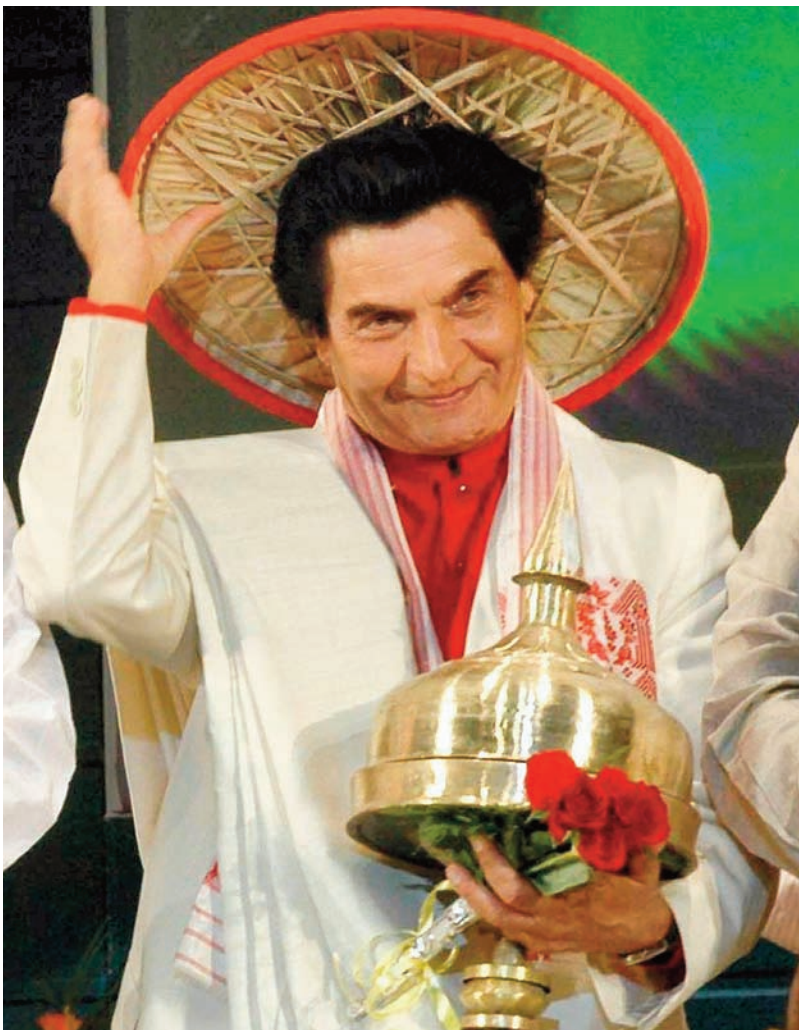
He lauded the efforts of Prof. Ranjit Kumar for conceptualizing the idea of the cancer research lab and expressed gratitude to the university administration and the engineering team for their unwavering support. He expressed hope that Nagaland University would soon emerge as a centre of excellence in cancer research. Prof Ranjit Kumar highlighted the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) data, showing Nagaland ranking first in nasopharyngeal cancer and second in oral cancer in India, with notable incidences of oesophageal and colon cancers. He pointed out that the actual burden may be even higher, as many cases go unreported. In his address the guest of honour Dr Abemo, registrar of the university, commended the VC's vision for fostering scientific innovation within the university. He added that Nagaland University holds immense potential in contributing to cancer prevention and cure.

Govt of Assam
Office of the District Adult Education Officer
Karbi Anglong, Diphu.
No. DAE/KA/Material Supply/01/2025-26/204 Dated: 23-10-2025
NOTICE FOR QUOTATIONS
In pursuance of the Administrative Approval from the KAAC, Diphu vide letter No. KAAC/Adult Edu/AA&F/Non-Exempted/2025-26/05 Pt.11/04 Dated 27-05-2025, quotation is hereby invited from Govt. registered/reputed firms/supplier for material and supply for the financial year 2025-26 from Establishment Expenditure fund. The quotations will be received on or before 30-10-2025 upto 3.00 P.M and will be opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the quotationers/supplier or their authorized agent, if any.
If the day of the opening of quotation happens to be any holiday/non-working day, the quotation will be opened in the next day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject without any reason thereof and will not be bound to accept the lowest tender quoted.

Sl. No.	Materials	Place of delivery	Amount
1	Supply of furniture etc.	Skill Development Training Centre at Bahini Adarsha, Bakalia, Karbi Anglong.	Rs. 3,45,000/-

The rate quoted must be inclusive of all taxes.
Details tender documents may be obtained from the office of the Dist. Adult Edn. Officer, Karbi Anglong, Diphu during working hours.
Sd/-
I/C., District Adult Education Officer,
Karbi Anglong, Diphu.
Memo No. DAE/KA/Material Supply/01/2025-26/204-A Dated: 23-10-2025

ASRANI WAS BORN TO PLAY JAILOR IN 'SHOLAY', THE ROLE WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN: SIPPY



MUMBAI, Oct 23: Veteran actor Asrani will always be remembered for portraying the dictatorial jailor in "Sholay" as it was a role he was born to play, says director Ramesh Sippy.

Condoling the death of the actor on Monday at the age of 84, the "Sholay" director said Asrani seemed "absolutely fine" when they recently met.

"It (demise) feels sudden... He did a lot of work but this (his role in 'Sholay'), stands out. I will long long remember him. It's a role he was born to play. But saying all this on a day like this doesn't feel good. It feels maybe that's the best way to remember him," Sippy told PTI in an interview.

Asrani's character in the movie, which turned 50 this August, was modelled after Charlie Chaplin in "The Great Dictator", which in itself was a spoof on Hitler. "Sholay" was penned by writer duo Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar.

Sippy said he first worked with Asrani in "Seeta Aur Geeta" and he was impressed with the way the actor performed his scenes.

"Then 'Sholay' came up and this part was written by Salim-Javed and they discussed it with me. We all thought Asrani would be the right person. We called him, discussed it with him. He was very happy to come and do this role. He was part of the creation of that character," Sippy recalled.

The filmmaker praised Asrani for playing the character of the jailor in the most "natural" way.

"He played it naturally; it was like he was born to play the role. Hitler is the most popular person about whom books are written, stories have been told, the whole world's attention was on him because of the way he conducted himself, the killings that took place.

"But a comic look at it (Hitler) was (a great idea)... He worked so well that people till today remember it. This character will never be forgotten," the 78-year-old director said.

Sippy said the part was beautifully written by Salim-Javed and he and Asrani managed to strike the perfect note during the shoot.

"Salim-Javed had a way with words and this became a catch line, and it got caught on very well because of the caricature that he was. Hitler is a German character but instead of 'Angrezo ke', you can't say 'German'. We didn't know how many people will understand it. It was improvised and the shape in which it came out seemed to be the right form," he said.

"The way the four of us managed to bring out the character, then actors like Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra ji in it, all together, it made the whole sequence unforgettable. The character is loud because the comedy is loud," he added. (PTI)

CHARLIE XCX, JESSICA ALBA TO STAR IN DAKOTA JOHNSON'S DIRECTORIAL DEBUT

LOS ANGELES, Oct 23: Hollywood star Dakota Johnson is all set to debut as a feature director with 'A Tree is Blue', written by and starring Vanessa Burghardt. The British singer Charlie XCX and Jessica Alba are also in talks to star in the movie, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

While the plot details have not been disclosed, the movie is scheduled to begin production next month in Los Angeles.

In an earlier interview, Dakota shared her plans to direct her first feature film, based on a script written by Burghardt.

"I think I will direct a feature, a very small one,

hopefully soon. And it's really close to my heart and very close to TeaTime. We're making it with Vanessa Burghardt, who played my daughter in Cha Cha Real Smooth. She's an incredible autistic actress," she said in an interview.

The 'Fifty Shades of Grey' star also said that she always felt that she was not ready to direct a feature. "I don't have the confidence. But with her, I

feel very protective, and I know her very well, and I just won't let anybody else do it," she told The Hollywood Reporter.

Dakota Johnson previously directed the short film "Loser Baby", which premiered at last year's Toronto International Film Festival.

She most recently played the lead in Celine Song's 2025 film "Materialists", alongside Chris Evans and Pedro Pascal.

She will also appear in the upcoming adaptation of Colleen Hoover's "Verity" alongside Anne Hathaway.

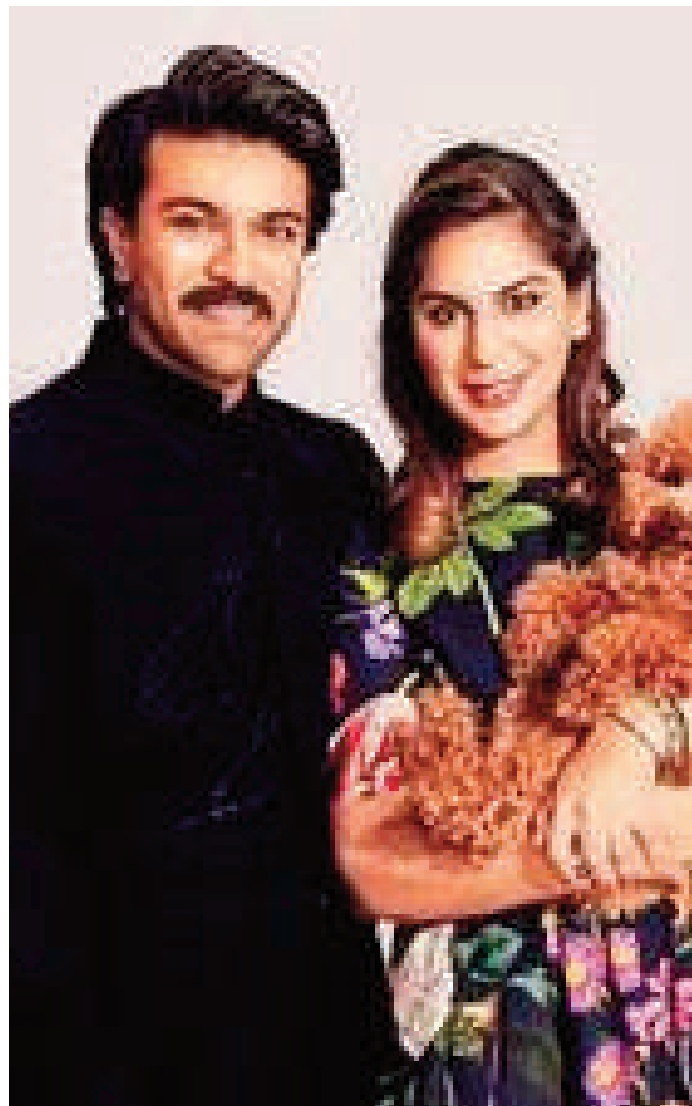
Jessica Alba recently produced and starred in Netflix's "Trigger

Warning" and will next feature in the biographical sports film "Maserati: The Brothers" alongside Anthony Hopkins, Andy Garcia and Al Pacino.

Grammy-winning musician Charlie XCX will be producing and starring in the A24 movie "The Moment" and has also worked on the music for the upcoming Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi-starring adaptation "Wuthering Heights". (PTI)



Ram Charan and Upasana Konidela announce second pregnancy



NEW DELHI, Oct 23: Telugu actor Ram Charan and wife Upasana Konidela on Thursday announced that they are expecting their second child.

The couple posted a video from Upasana's baby shower ceremony on Instagram with Chiranjeevi and wife Surekha. The ceremony coincided with Diwali celebrations.

Upasana wore a traditional blue kurta while the guests showered her with gifts and blessings. Charan also wore a baby blue kurta while hugging guests which included celebrities like Venkatesh, Prithviraj Sukumaran, Nagarjuna and Varun Tej among others.

Tej, the nephew of Chiranjeevi, also welcomed a son with wife Lavanya Tripathi on September 10.

Charan was last seen in a double role in the 2025 political action film "Game Changer". He will next feature in "Peddi" alongside Shiva Rajkumar, Janhvi Kapoor, Divyendu Sharma and Jagapathi Babu. (PTI)

JAI SHRI KRISHNA TULSI JI: BILL GATES IN 'KSBKBT' PROMO

NEW DELHI, Oct 23: Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates finally made his much-publicised debut on Indian television through a cameo in "Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi 2" promo where he is seen greeting Smriti Irani's Tulsi Virani with "Jai Shri Krishna".

The newly-released promo of the Star Plus serial shows Irani's Tulsi Virani talking to Gates on video call. She greets him with the trademark "Jai Shri Krishna, Tulsi Ji". "It feels really nice that you are connecting with my family directly from America. We are waiting for you eagerly," Tulsi says to which Gates replies, "Thank you, Tulsi Ji". The promo clip shared by Star Plus on its social media, features Tulsi on a video call with Gates, who greets her with a warm "Namaste Tulsi ji, Jai Shri Krishna." Tulsi reciprocates with her signature greeting, "Jai Shri Krishna," leading to an exchange that has captivated audiences. The caption of the promo read, "Iss baar

#KyunkiSaasBhiKabhiBahuThi ki kahaani ke beech, ek naya rishta jud raha hai — sehat ka, samvedna ka, aur badlaav ka. Aur iss kahani mein jude hain duniya ke sabse bade changemaker — Bill Gates, ek soch ke saath: har maa aur har bachcha rahe surakshit aur swasth. Do alag duniyaan, ek hi maqsad ke saath — maa aur bachche ki sehat, har ghar tak pahunchani hai. Mr Bill Gates aur humari Tulsi ke iss vishay par vichaar jaanne ke liye dekhiye (This time, amidst the story of #KyunkiSaasBhiKabhiBahuThi, a new relationship is forming — one of health, compassion, and change. And joining this story is one of the world's biggest changemakers — Bill Gates, with a vision: that every mother and child stays safe and healthy. Two different worlds, united by one goal — to bring health for mothers and children to every home. Watch to hear Mr. Bill Gates and our Tulsi share their thoughts on this important issue.) (PTI)



It's such a sparkling script, was blown away: Konkona Sensharma on 'Luck By Chance'

MUMBAI, Oct 23: Konkona Sensharma says she was completely blown away when she first read the script of Zoya Akhtar's 2009 movie "Luck By Chance", an unusual story that spoke about the inner workings of the film industry through the eyes of two strugglers.

The popularity of Aryan Khan's series "Ba**ds of Bollywood" has brought the focus back on "Luck By Chance" and Farah Khan's 2007 hit "Om Shanti Om" as they all are set in the big bad world of Hindi cinema. Fans are sharing reels, scenes and memes from these movies on social media.

Konkona, who currently headlines JioHotstar's popular series, "Search: The Naina Murder Case", is happy that "Luck By Chance" is back in the lime-light.

"I had heard about this script, I'd heard it's great, not very conventional. It was perhaps not getting the kind of green light or the actors that it had wanted to originally," she told PTI in an interview.

"Then I read it and felt, 'It's one of the best scripts I've ever read.' It is such a sparkling, fantastic script that I

was just blown away. I was bowled over. I was just like, 'Oh my God, can we start shooting tomorrow, please?'"

The actor said it was fun to play Sona Mishra, a small town woman trying her luck in the film industry.

"What an interesting and unusual character with a great and unusual resolution. It has a nice little traditional romance, male hero... I was really privileged to have worked on that film," she said.

Known for her roles in films such as "Mr. and Mrs. Iyer", "Omkara", "Life in a...Metro", "Wake Up Sid", "Talvar", and "Lipstick Under My

Burkha", Konkona has also directed two critically-acclaimed projects her feature debut "A Death in the Gunj" and "The Mirror" segment in anthology movie "Lust Stories 2".

For "Search: The Naina Murder Case", the actor reunited with Rohan Sippy, who produced "The President is Coming" and directed web series "Side Hero".

Konkona said Rohan and the writers had already covered most of the ground in the series, which is based on the popular Danish series "Forbrydelsen".

"The original is a great show and was beautifully adapted to an Indian context, and Rohan was directing it," she said.

The actor, mostly known for her intense portrayals, explored her comedic chops in "Killer Soup", where she played a woman, who is terrible at cooking, but dreams of opening her own restaurant. When her dreams are thwarted, she turns to killing those who block her way to realising her dream.

Konkona said she rarely gets to do comedy, though she loves the genre. "I'm, very often, a very earnest and good kind of, above any moral reproach, woman of substance and all of that."

Is she bored of it?

"A little bit," she said. In "Search: The Naina Murder Case", she is playing ACP Sanyukta Das, who is forced to team up with Surya's ACP Jai Kanwal, her eccentric replacement, to investigate the murder of a teenager.

Konkona said it would be great fun to watch a woman play a "stylized over the top cop" and she is up for a role like that in future.

"But we rarely see women behaving

badly on screen anyway, regardless of their profession. We rarely see women behaving irresponsibly, especially if they're a mom. We rarely allow for that in real life or even in other roles," she said. According to the actor, most women cops are portrayed a certain way because that's what the majority of the audience likes.

"I am always so wary of majoritarianism because unless a few people take chances, we're never pushing the envelope actually," she said, adding that she liked "The Wire".

"But I was just thinking 'Kill Bill', where we actually see a woman, very stylized and fighting, and it's so much fun." The actor is returning to the direction soon with a comedy series that she is co-writing and co-directing with Jaydeep Sarkar of docuseries "Rainbow Rishta" fame. "I'm co-writing, co-directing, and it's quite a challenge. That's still coming up, and it's still a while away." She said she will not act in it. The actor, who is the daughter of Bengali filmmaker Aparna Sen and writer-journalist Mukul Sharma, has often chosen content over popularity. That, she said, is a deliberate choice. (PTI)

India look to continue dominance in South Asian Senior Athletics Championships

RANCHI, Oct 23: A second string Indian team, made up of several junior players, will look to continue the country's dominance in the South Asian Senior Athletics Championships which will make a return after 15 years here on Friday.

The fourth edition of the championships to be held at the Birsa Munda Stadium under the aegis of South Asian Athletics Federation (SAAF) will mark the revival of the regional event after Kochi in Kerala hosted the last one in 2008.

In fact, the championships is being held in India for the third time, with the country having hosted the inaugural edition in 1997. Sri Lanka hosted the second edition in 1998.

This time, 206 athletes from six South Asian nations -- India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives -- will compete across 37 medal events over three days.

Pakistan is not taking part in the championships despite invitation from the organisers.

"We sent invitations to all the member countries of the South Asian Athletics Federation. Pakistan is a member country, but they have not given any response to our invite," an official in the organising committee told PTI.

In fact, the fourth edition has been postponed twice. It was to be held in 2024 but got postponed to May 2025 and then to October 24-26. For India, the three-day event, being held when most of the top athletes have wound up their season, is an opportunity for giving exposure to junior and upcoming athletes. The 73-strong Indian team has no big name with the exception of M R Poovamma who has been named in the women's 4x400m relay team.

Other Indian medal contenders include Seema, Pranav Gaurav and Samardeep Gill.

The Indians will face tough competition from Sri Lanka in some events, including the men's javelin throw. The island nation has sent 63 athletes led by their top



men's javelin thrower Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage, who is the favourite to win gold in the event.

Pathirage holds the Sri Lankan national record of 86.50m, which he had produced while winning gold in the World Athletics Continental Tour bronze level meet in Bhubaneswar in August. He had

also finished seventh in the World Championships in Tokyo earlier this year.

India has fielded National Open Championships gold and silver winners Rishab Nehra and Uttam Patil against Pathirage. Nehra recently joined the country's growing 80m club with 80.12m effort at

the National Open Championships here in September.

The Sri Lankans will also offer strong competition to the Indians in men's sprint races.

Bangladesh is being represented by 20 athletes while Nepal has sent 27. Maldives has sent 15 athletes while eight will represent Bhutan.

For India, several junior athletes have been rewarded for their good performance in the season by picking them in the team.

In the last edition in 2008, India had won 57 medals -- 24 gold, 19 silver, 14 bronze, while Sri Lanka had accumulated 7 gold, 9 silver, 15 bronze.

The quality and level of competition is unlikely to rise to any great heights. But the local organisers and the Jharkhand government, which is funding the event, are looking at the championships as a stepping stone to bigger competitions in future.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren is expected to inaugurate the championships. (PTI)

Babar, Naseem recalled in Pakistan's T20 squad for home series against SA



LAHORE, Oct 23: Former captain Babar Azam and pacer Naseem Shah have been recalled to Pakistan's T20 squad for the upcoming home assignment against South Africa and a tri-Series involving Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe next month.

Babar, after being sidelined from the T20 format since December last year, is back with young hard-hitter Abdul Samad and Naseem. The T20 series between Pakistan and South Africa will be played in Rawalpindi and Lahore from October 28 to November 1.

The tri-series, also will be staged at the same venues from November 17 to 29.

Pakistan and South Africa, who are currently playing the second Test at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, will also feature in a three-match ODI series to be held at the Iqbal Stadium in Faisalabad from November 4 to 8.

It will be followed by another three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium from November 11 to 15.

Naseem and Babar also feature in the Pakistan's ODI squad.

It is being said that Babar's return to the shortest format is a result of the national selectors' decision to rejig the side which lost thrice to arch-rivals India in the recent Asia Cup including in the final.

It is also being put down to Pak-

istan's batting woes in the shortest format and his recent good form in the ongoing Test series against South Africa.

The selectors have ignored seasoned opener Fakhar Zaman and wrist spinner Sufyan Mueqem.

Another notable selection is that of wicketkeeper-batsman Usman Khan even though Muhammad Harris has lost his place in the T20 squad.

Mystery spinner Usman Tariq is the only uncapped player in the T20 squad.

In the ODI squad, Faisal Akram, Harris Rauf and Haseebullah have returned to the fold.

T20I squad: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Hasan Nawaz, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Usman Khan (wicket-keeper), Usman Tariq.

Reserves: Fakhar Zaman, Harris Rauf, Sufyan Moqim

ODI squad: Shaheen Shah Afridi (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Faisal Akram, Fakhar Zaman, Harris Rauf, Haseebullah, Hasan Nawaz, Hussain Talat, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan (wicket-keeper), Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Salman Ali Agha. (PTI)

Mixed start for India as Rakshit, Anshul lie 20th at Asia-Pacific Golf

DUBAI, Oct 23: Rakshit Dahiya raised hopes of a fine first day for India at the 16th Asia-Pacific Amateur Golf Championship before ending at even par 72 for a tied 20th place here on Thursday.

Dahiya, the only one of the five Indians to have played the AAC previously, hauled himself up into the Top-10 with three birdies between his second and fifth and another one on 10th. At that stage he was 3-under through 10 holes as he went past the turn.

Then came a run of four bogeys in five holes on the back nine, which pulled him back and was over par, before closing the day with a birdie on the 18th.

Dahiya at 72 was tied 20th, and so was reigning All India Amateur champion Anshul Mishra, who went out in 2-over and then rallied with two birdies on the back nine to finish with a creditable even par round. Raghav Gulati, who plays most of his golf in Dubai, carded 1-over 73 which included one birdie against two bogeys. He was tied 31st.

Ranveer Mitroo (74) at T43rd and Harman Sachdeva (77) at T84th were further down the leaderboard. Thailand's Fifi Laopakdee, Australia's Billy Dowling and Vietnam's Khanh Hung Le carded matching six-under 66s to share the early lead.

There were 19 rounds under par during the first round at the renowned Majlis Course, the first grass course that opened in the Middle East and home to champions such as Ernie Els, Rory McIlroy and Tiger Woods at the Dubai Desert Classic.

Laopakdee, a junior at Arizona State University, is making his fourth appearance at the Asia-Pacific Amateur with a high finish of T-5 in his home country in 2022.

After entering the championship as the highest-ranked player in the field in the World Amateur Golf Ranking, the 20-year-old birdied six of his first nine holes beginning on the par-4 10th. (PTI)

Lionel Messi and Inter Miami complete new contract

FORT LAUDERDALE (USA) Oct 23: Lionel Messi has finally agreed to a new contract with Inter Miami, a deal that required several months to complete and ensures that the sport's biggest icon will be with the Major League Soccer club for its planned move into a new stadium next year.

The deal was announced Thursday, one day before Inter Miami's playoff opener against Nashville. Messi's team — the No. 3 seed in the Eastern Conference — will play host to Game 1 of that best-of-three series on Friday night.

The team announced the move in a social media post, one showing Messi signing the contract inside the new stadium that remains under construction. "HE'S HOME," the team said in the post. Inter Miami said it was a three-year deal through 2028. The notion of Messi playing two or three more seasons certainly would serve as a boost to ticket sales at the stadium the team has been building near Miami International Airport. The team has been selling ticket packages and taking deposits on seats in the new park for more than a year, all with the assumption that Messi would remain part of the franchise.

Messi's decision to stay in Miami is big for both the club and for MLS. He was the league's MVP last season and is the overwhelming choice to win the award again this year, which would make him only the second two-time winner in league history and the first to win it in back-to-back years. Preki won the MVP award in 1997 and 2003. "To enjoy him, watching him enjoy doing the things he is doing, he's very, very competitive and he tries to translate that to the team," Inter Miami coach Javier Mascher-



ano said Thursday. "The best way to help him is trying to do the right things ... he has to be comfortable on the pitch. He's comfortable when things are working in the right way."

"With him, when we do things the right way, we'll have many chances to help success."

Messi won MLS' Golden Boot this season after scoring 29 goals, five more than LAFC's Denis Bouanga and Nashville's Sam Surrridge. He also had 19 assists, and his 48 total goal contributions was one shy of matching the MLS record of 49 set by Carlos Vela in 2019.

This season, Messi had multiple goals in five consecutive games — making him the first MLS player to achieve such a feat — and had 10 multigoal games, another league record. The previous mark was eight such games.

Messi is 38, which makes this contract likely his last as a professional player. He has spent well over half his life playing at the pro level, making his debut with Barcelona as a 17-year-old in 2004. It is not clear how long Messi, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner and generally

considered the sport's biggest star, plans to keep playing. He led Argentina to the World Cup title in 2022; his country will aim to defend that trophy when the tournament is played next June and July in the U.S., Mexico and Canada.

His Inter Miami team will look different in 2026, for certain. Messi agreed to join the club in July 2023 on what was a 2 1/2-year contract, and it wound up becoming a reunion of long-time Barcelona teammates when he was eventually joined by Jordi Alba, Sergio Busquets and Luis Suarez. Busquets and Alba are both retiring after this season; Alba made the decision to step away just months after agreeing to a three-year contract. Suarez's future is unclear, and it's believed retirement could be an option for him as well.

But Messi will play on, into 2026 anyway. He and the team were closing in toward the finish of this drawn-out contract negotiation last month, and it wasn't clear why it took several more weeks to get Messi to finally sign the deal.

His first contract with Inter Miami was worth an estimated \$150 million at the time. It immediately began paying off, with Inter Miami winning its first trophy — the 2023 Leagues Cup — shortly after he arrived.

Last season, when he won the MLS MVP award for the first time, he did so while missing 15 of Inter Miami's 34 regular-season matches because of injuries or commitments to Argentina's national team. Even with those absences, Inter Miami won its first Supporters' Shield by having MLS' best regular-season record — then got upset in the first round of the playoffs. (AP)

Mandhana, Rawal, Rodrigues fire India to 340/3 against New Zealand

NAVI MUMBAI, Oct 23: Imperious hundreds by Smriti Mandhana (105) and Pratika Rawal (122) along with Jemimah Rodrigues' rapid unbeaten 76 fired India to a daunting 340 for three against New Zealand in their rain-affected Women's World Cup match, here on Thursday.

India's progression was affected by a rain break which caused a 90 minutes delay, and the contest was truncated to 49 overs per side later.

With qualification for semifinals at stake and coming off a three-match losing streak, India cashed in on a benign track to register the highest score of the tournament led by Mandhana. Rawal made it count with her first World Cup hundred, which was made in a conventional manner, while forging two big partnerships -- a record 212 runs with Mandhana for the first wicket and 76 runs with Rodrigues for the second.

Rodrigues, who was dropped from the last match as India favoured a sixth bowler, unleashed a flurry of fours to make the fastest fifty of this World Cup from

39 balls, eventually finishing with a 55-ball 76 with 11 fours. Mandhana (109 off 95 balls, 10x4s, 4x6s) looked to be peaking at the right time with her third World Cup ton, first of this edition, with a spectacular six over cover off spinner Eden Carson, giving early indications of her prime form.

In hot and humid conditions, Mandhana and Rawal did not take too long to make New Zealand realise that perhaps it wasn't the right call to ask India bat first.

While New Zealand began well with tidy spells, it all unravelled soon for the White Ferns who were sent on a leather hunt.

Mandhana was the aggressor among the two as her rich array of strokes — from delicate late-cuts to powerful strokes on the on-side — proved why she has been in a different league among Indian batters.

Mandhana's 14th ODI ton was also her fifth in this calendar year as she also moved closer to breaking Australian great Meg Lanning's record for most ODI centuries for any player (15). (PTI)

Antonio Conte vows to 'bring the whip' as Napoli faces Inter Milan after 6-2 defeat



MILAN, Oct 23: Antonio Conte is looking to whip his players into shape like a "tiger tamer" for Napoli's Serie A match against his former team Inter Milan on Saturday.

Napoli is facing Inter at the worst possible moment for the defending champion, which is reeling from Tuesday's 6-2 defeat at PSV Eindhoven in the Champions League — the first time one of coach Conte's teams has conceded six goals in a single match.

Conte appeared unusually calm on the sidelines during the game and was not his usual vociferous, strident self.

"I always try to help my players," Conte said. "Certainly it was my fault that I was less aggressive on the bench and we lost 6-2. Next time I'll bring the whip and a stool like a tiger tamer."

It was Napoli's second successive defeat — after last weekend's loss at Torino in Serie A — as it struggles to cope with an injury crisis and incorporating new faces.

"We added nine players in the summer, that has cost us in terms of chemistry," Conte said. "The old guys, including me, need to rediscover their spirit, the new guys need to learn to fit in and be humble and silent."

Napoli welcomed back Scott McTominay against PSV while Rasmus Hojlund could make his return from injury against Inter.

But Romelu Lukaku, Stanislav Lobotka and Amir Rrahmani are still sidelined.

Napoli, Inter and Roma are level on 15 points, one behind league leader AC Milan.

The Rossoneri could be four clear before the match kicks off in Naples as they host promoted Pisa on Friday. Roma visits Sassuolo on Sunday.

Key matchups Inter and Napoli have shared the title over the past three years — with Inter in 2024 splitting Napoli's two wins. Conte also led Inter to the crown in 2021.

Inter is on a run of seven straight wins in all competitions. It beat another title rival in Roma last weekend and routed Union Saint-Gilloise 4-0 on Tuesday.

Under-pressure Juventus coach Igor Tudor returns to his former club when the Bianconeri visit Lazio. He resigned as Lazio coach in 2024 after three months in charge.

Juventus is four points behind Milan but hasn't won since Sept. 13. Milan is heavily favored to beat bottom club Pisa but its one defeat this season came on the opening day against another promoted club, Cremonese.

Atalanta is the only undefeated team in Serie A. It is only eighth, however, having drawn five of its seven matches — the most in the division. It travels to Cremonese, which has played out four stale-

mates. Bologna winger Riccardo Orsolini leads the Serie A scoring charts with five goals. The 28-year-old has netted in each of his past four league matches and is looking to continue that streak at struggling Fiorentina.

Inter goalkeeper Yann Sommer is proving almost unbeatable this season. The 36-year-old pulled off a number of fine saves against Roma to help his team to a 1-0 win and Inter has conceded just one goal in its past five matches in all competitions.

Bologna coach Vincenzo Italiano is almost certain to miss the trip to his former club Fiorentina because he is in hospital with pneumonia.

Milan has an injury list as bad as Napoli's. As well as Christian Pulisic, the Rossoneri will also be without Adrien Rabiot, Ardon Jashari and Pervis Estupinan, while Christopher Nkunku and Ruben Loftus-Cheek are also not fully recovered.

Como forward Jesus Rodriguez and Parma defender Abdoulaye Niakhathe Ndiaye are the only two players serving suspensions this weekend. Parma hosts Como on Saturday.

With the Spanish league having called off a game in Miami, pressure is mounting for Serie A to cancel plans for AC Milan to play Como in Australia in February.

"Serie A must do the right thing in the face of growing isolation and withdraw its proposal," a statement from fan group Football Supporters Europe said on Wednesday. "If not, we urge the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), which still needs to decide on this proposal, to respect the voice of fans."

Pisa and Hellas Verona fans have been banned from away matches for three months following clashes last weekend. The suspension starts with Pisa's match at Milan on Friday.

Construction is underway for a new stadium on the outskirts of Venice, where Serie B club Venezia hopes to play from 2027-28. (AP)

Golden era of Ro-Ko will remain engraved in hearts of fans, not just record books: Chappell

ADELAIDE, Oct 23: Virat Kohli's passion and detachment from personal glory coupled with Rohit Sharma's humility and elegance will not just be etched in record books but will be engraved forever in the hearts of fans, feels former India head coach Greg Chappell.

On their last tour of Australia, Rohit and Kohli are closer to the end than beginning and Chappell feels that the legacy created by the duo goes well beyond numbers.

"Now, as the cricketing world moves forward, new names will rise. New captains will lead. But this golden chapter - the Kohli-Rohit era - will remain engraved not just in record books but in the hearts of every fan who understood what they stood for," Chappell wrote in his column for the ESPN Cricinfo.

The former Aussie legend feels that merely bracketing Kohli in the pantheon of batting greats will be a disservice to him.

"Kohli was never just a batter, he was a movement. He brought what few dared to - a warrior's mindset. He turned India's ODI



side into a sharp, focused and supremely fit unit that played to win, home or away." He then dissected their games and personas and what the duo stood for.

"Kohli's passion, his refusal to settle, his belief in legacy over statistics. Rohit's elegance, his humility, and his redemption arc, which reminded us all that timing is everything - in cricket, and in life."

Chappell didn't forget to mention that unlike some of Kohli's predecessors, he wasn't obsessed with stat-padding.

"But what truly set him (Kohli)

apart, even from the legends who came before him, was his detachment from personal statistics. While the world raved about centuries and aggregates, Kohli cared only about the outcome.

"He once said that he played for India, not for records - a statement that defined his leadership. Individual feats were often the focal point of India's cricketing narrative; Kohli sought something larger. His currency was legacy, not numbers," Chappell wrote.

In case of Rohit, it was opening the innings that turned him into a

red ball colossus who could disintegrate opposition with meticulous precision.

"Where Kohli's rise was meteoric and defined by intensity, Rohit's journey was more about a slow-burn path to greatness. For years he dazzled in limited-overs cricket; his timing, poise and flair made him a household name," Chappell wrote. "But it didn't come easy; though he made his debut in 2007, inconsistency and middle-order struggles kept him from cementing a place, especially in big tournaments."

"Then came 2013. Promoted to open during a home series against England, he seized the opportunity with quiet confidence. There was a double-century against Australia. Elegant hundreds, of which the first came also against Australia that year," Chappell recollected.

"Sudden comfort against the swinging ball. Something had changed - not just in technique but in belief. What followed was one of the most remarkable second winds in Indian cricket. Rohit didn't just adapt to ODI cricket, he conquered it," he further wrote. (PTI)

Australia seal ODI series vs tactically errant India despite Rohit's 73

ADELAIDE, Oct 23: Rohit Sharma's defiant 73 went in vain as India surrendered the three-match ODI series against Australia after losing the second game by two wickets here on Thursday, a setback that will reignite the debate on proven match-winner Kuldeep Yadav's omission from the playing XI.

Under pressure, Rohit mixed grit with grace in a 97-ball knock on a spicy track that formed the cornerstone of India's total of 264 for 9 which was at least 25 short of what should have been a par-score. In reply, Australia struggled against Indian spinners but with Nitish Reddy being shoe-horned as a multi-skilled player instead of a genuine match-winner in Kuldeep, the visitors paid the price in a close situation.

Cooper Connolly (61 not out off 53 balls) and Mitchell Owen (36 off 23 balls), two cricketers, who are also appearing for IPL auditions, flayed the pacers and spinners alike as Australia survived a late collapse to canter home in 46.2 overs to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three match series.

The duo added 59 in just 6.3 overs to end Australia's three-series losing streak in the format. The ongoing rubber will end in Sydney with the inconsequential third ODI on October 25.

Connolly, who was recently in Kanpur for an 'A' series, brought back memories of a certain Michael Bevan to finish the match by finding the gaps with ease in a pressure-cooker scenario.

"...the future is bright for Australian cricket," declared Australia's stand-in



skipper Mitchell Marsh.

In the process he also exposed how difficult it could get for India in the 2027 World Cup if the obsession with all-rounders is not reconsidered.

Reddy, coming in at No. 8, scored 8 off 10 balls and gave 24 in three overs although in his defence, Axar Patel dropped a sitter offered by Matthew Short (74), who laid the foundation for Australia's victory.

"Never easy to defend those total when you drop a couple of catches," said India skipper Shubman Gill.

However, the absence of Kuldeep was felt more than ever when the Australian batters struggled against the two finger spinners.

Axar Patel (1/52 in 10 overs) just

slowed the pace and shortened the length as Matt Renshaw (30) gave the charge to be bowled. At the other end, Washington Sundar (2/37) had an impatient Alex Carey (9) trying to sweep and getting bowled in the process.

However, once the burly Mitchell Owen came into the scene, he smashed the daylights out of Harshit Rana (2/59 in 8 overs) to tilt the game decisively in favour of Australia. Earlier, the Indian innings was about Rohit's determination and he had to survive a lot of anxious moments in the Powerplay when Josh Hazlewood (0/29 in 10 overs, including two maidens) made the ball talk.

There was a point when Rohit had played 17 consecutive dot balls off Hazlewood and both him and Iyer looked

overtly cautious due to the underlying moisture and lateral movement.

While Rohit fought, Virat Kohli was dismissed without scoring for a second consecutive game.

He was shaping for an outswinger but Xavier Bartlett got one to move in sharply after pitching and the maestro was caught plumb in front.

While leaving the ground, he acknowledged the fans at Adelaide, a venue where he has scored multiple Test hundreds and a World Cup century against Pakistan.

For Rohit, the first 50-odd balls were about consolidation and keeping the bat close to his body, trying to leave the deliveries on the length and taking a few on the body. The only positive shot in that phase was a flicked boundary over square leg off Mitchell Starc. The first time one got a glimpse of vintage Rohit was when he played back-to-back customary pick-up pulls off Mitchell Owen's friendly medium pacers.

India got 17 from that over and with Iyer also rotating the strike with an upright stance, the scoreboard suddenly saw movement and momentum.

The innings was, however, far from silky smooth.

It was about a veteran, who wanted to make his naysayers eat humble pie. He was ready to grind it out and look ugly initially before eventually opening up.

The 2027 World Cup is still far but what Rohit intended to prove was that there is still some fuel left in the tank. (PTI)

South Africa thrash Pakistan by 8 wickets to level the two-test series

RAWALPINDI, Oct 23: South Africa thrashed Pakistan by eight wickets Thursday to level the two-test cricket series, with off-spinner Simon Harmer playing a crucial role with a six-wicket haul.

Pakistan opened the series with a 93-run victory inside four days at Lahore last week,



but Harmer flipped the script on another spinning wicket at Rawalpindi. He snared 6-50 to dismiss Pakistan for 138 on Day 4.

That set South Africa a victory target of 68 runs, and the World Test Championship winners eased to 73-2 in 12.3 overs.

Harmer and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj, who missed the first test due to injury, scripted South Africa's victory with 17 wickets between them in the second test.

South Africa skipper Aiden Markram made a brisk 42 off 45 balls with eight fours to power the chase before he was trapped lbw by Noman Ali when his team needed only four runs for victory.

Tristan Stubbs, one of the four half-century makers in South Africa's first innings of 404, was out for a duck when he edged Noman to slip, before Ryan Rickelton (25 not out) smashed Sajid Khan for six to secure the win just before the scheduled lunch interval.

Harmer became only the third South African bowler to reach the 1,000-wicket milestone in first-class cricket when he had Noman caught behind, and Pakistan's second innings collapsed in just over an hour.

The home team's hopes hinged on overnight batters Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan to lift them from 94-4, but both fell to Harmer inside off-spinner's first three overs of the morning.

Babar, 49 overnight, completed his first half-century of the series with a single and it was loudly applauded by his fans at the Pindi Cricket Stadium. However, Harmer pinned Pakistan's premier batter lbw with a delivery that spun back and hit Babar low on the

pads. Babar, who hasn't scored a test century since December 2022, went for a review but the television replays indicated the ball didn't make any contact with the bat before hitting the pads flush in front of the wickets.

Harmer then got an inside edge off Rizwan's bat and the ball popped to Tony de Zorzi close to the wicket as Pakistan lost two key wickets inside the first 20 minutes and led by just 34 runs.

Salman Ali Agha made rearguard 28 off 42 balls but chopped Maharaj back onto his stumps before the left-armed had Khan stumped to finish off Pakistan's resistance. (AP)

Govt sets Nov 14 deadline for public feedback on draft rules for sports governance act



NEW DELHI, Oct 23: The

Sports Ministry has set November 14 as the deadline for general public to submit feedback on the draft rules of the National Sports Governance Act, which seeks to re-vamp the country's sports administration and dispute resolution set-up among other aspects.

The ministry has posted the draft rules for the National Sports Board (NSB), the National Sports Tribunal (NST) and the National Sports Election Panel (NSEP) on its website and sought public feedback.

"These Rules have been formulated to facilitate the implementation of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025," the ministry stated.

"The Act seeks to ensure ethical practices, fair play across all levels of sport, safeguard the interests of sportspeople as the primary stakeholders, and create a robust ecosystem for sports in the country," it added.

The feedback can be submitted to the Ministry either by post or by email at rulesnsga2025@sports.gov.in.

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya is keen to implement the act in the first half of 2026 by finalising the NSB at the end of this year.

"Last date for submission of comments/feedback is 14 Novem-

ber 2025," the ministry said.

The NSB will have the power to not just grant affiliation to the National Sports Federations (NSFs) but also monitor their financial operations and penalise them for any wrongdoing. It would be mandatory for NSFs to take NSB affiliation to be eligible for government funding.

The Board will comprise of a Chairperson and two other members with experience in the field of public administration, sports governance, and sports law.

The appointments will be done by a search-cum-selection committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, and comprising the Sports Secretary and "one person possessing experience in sports administration, and two persons who are recipients of national sports awards, to be nominated by the Central Government".

The Board will hold office for a three-year or till the members attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier. All members will be eligible for re-appointment for one more term subject to the age limit.

The members of the National Sports Tribunal will hold office for four years with an age cap of 67 years as per the ministry draft.

In addition, the tribunal's office-bearers will not be allowed to prac-

tice before it after retirement. They will also not be permitted to undertake any arbitration assignment while functioning in their respective capacities in the Tribunal.

Besides, for a period of two years from the date on which they cease to hold office, they will have to avoid "accepting any employment in, or connected with the management or administration of, any person who has been a party to a proceeding before the Tribunal".

The tribunal primarily aims to ensure that sporting matters do not end up in courts, where over 300 cases related to sports are currently pending.

The rules lay down a tiered criteria for athletes, who are being encouraged to take up administration. As per the provisions of the act, it is mandatory for every federation's general body to have four or higher number of 'Sportspersons of Merit', elected or nominated.

The interested athletes should be retired from their sport at least one year before applying for the position in administration and only those who have won an Olympic medal or participated in at least one Olympics are eligible for inclusion in National Olympic Committee.

The criteria has been relaxed for inclusion in the federations with a National Sports Award or medals in the World Championship of the concerned discipline being enough for entry.

The tier one athletes will be the ones who have won at least a medal in the Olympics or Winter Olympics, while tier two would comprise applicants who have participated in two or more editions of the Olympics or Winter Olympic Games.

There are 10 tiers in descending order of achievements in different sporting events.

The National Sports Election Panel, which will take over the responsibility of facilitating elections in national sports bodies, will be required to have at least 20 members on its roster at all times. (PTI)

Punjab Kings appoint veteran cricketer Bahutule as new spin bowling coach

CHANDIGARH, Oct 23: Indian Premier League side Punjab Kings (PBKS) has roped in former India cricketer Sairaj Bahutule as its new spin bowling coach ahead of the league's next season.

The 52-year-old Bahutule, who played two Tests and eight ODIs in his brief international career, has replaced Sunil Joshi, who was serving in the role since 2023.

Bahutule is a veteran of first-class cricket and a highly-regarded cricket coach. He has previously held coaching roles with domestic teams like Kerala, Gujarat, Vidharbha and Bengal, and IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals, focusing on developing young talent.

Satish Menon, CEO of Punjab Kings, welcomed Bahutule and said, "We extend our sincere thanks to Sunil Joshi for his dedicated service and contribution to the Punjab Kings over the years. As we look forward, we are thrilled to welcome Sairaj Bahutule to our coaching staff."

"Sairaj's deep understanding of the game, particularly his extensive experience in grooming domestic bowlers and managing strategy, will be invaluable to our side. His expertise aligns perfectly with our vision of building a strong and cohesive bowling unit for the season ahead."

Bahutule also shared his excitement about joining the franchise.

"I'm really excited to join Punjab Kings as a spin



bowling coach for the upcoming IPL season. This is a team that plays a different brand of cricket, and I can see the potential is massive.

"They have a bunch of talented players, and I'm looking forward to working with them to refine their skills and help them reach new heights."

PBKS had finished runners-up in the season gone by after a stellar run in the league stage. (PTI)

Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports invites applications for National Sports Awards 2025

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Oct 23: The Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India, has invited online applications for the prestigious National Sports Awards 2025, which include the Arjun Award, Dronacharya Award, Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award, and the Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar.

Eligible sportspersons, coaches, and sports institutions are requested to submit their applications online through the dedicated portal www.dbyas-sports.gov.in. The last date for submission of online applications is October 28.

Nishu, Pulkit and Srishti reach U23 World Championship semifinals

NOVI SAD (SERBIA), Oct 23: Putting up a strong show at the U23 World Championships, three Indian women wrestlers -- Nishu, Pulkit and Srishti -- reached the semifinals in their respective categories, here Thursday.

Nishu (55kg) began in an impressive fashion by beating Japan's Moe Kiyooka, whom she pinned while leading 6-2.

Up against Kira Solobchuk, she won 10-1 and marched into the semifinals. Pulkit (65kg) was as cool as ice in her two technical superiority wins. Hardly showing emotions, Srishti beat Canada's Maria Sawiak (10-0) and Turkey's Beyza Akkus (18-8).

In the 68kg category, Srishti easily tackled Canadian wrestler Angelina Ellis Toddington for a technical superiority win (12-2) and followed that up with a controlled 6-3 win over Ukraine's Manola Skobelska in the quarterfinals.

Meanwhile, Neha Sharma, competing in the 57kg weight category, lost at the quarterfinals stage. She lost by technical superiority to Japan's Akari Fujinaga after beating Romania's Georgiana Lirca (6-0) and Kazakhstan's Nilufar Raimova (5-0).

Hanny Kumari (50kg), Diksha Malik (72kg) have exited the competition while Priya will fight for bronze in the 76kg weight class. (PTI)



Sri Lanka eye big win over Pakistan to stay alive in Women's ODI WC



COLOMBO, Oct 23: Mathematically still in contention, Sri Lanka would look for a comprehensive win over already-eliminated Pakistan and favourable results from other remaining league matches to stay alive in the semifinal race in the Women's ODI World Cup, here Friday.

Sri Lanka currently are placed at number six on the points table with four points and a net run rate of negative 1.035.

To stay alive in the tournament, the Chamari Athapaththu-led side must beat Pakistan by a big margin and hope for a string of favourable results, including India's defeat in both their remaining matches against New Zealand and Bangladesh. Besides, Sri Lanka would also need England to beat fifth-placed New Zealand (also 4 points) on Sunday.

Sri Lanka have had a mixed tournament, registering one win, three losses, and two no-results because of washed out matches here. And come Friday, the island nation would hope for weather Gods to bless them to stay in the mix

with a win.

Sri Lanka's only win came against Bangladesh in their last match by seven runs.

For Sri Lanka, Hasini Perera, who has featured in five games so far, has been the team's best batter. With 182 runs under her belt, Perera has been the fulcrum of Sri Lanka's batting unit. In the last game against Bangladesh, the 30-year-old smashed a sublime fifty to take her team over the line. And Sri Lanka would be hoping for her to continue her batting form in the next game as well to keep them afloat. While she hasn't been at her best with the bat, skipper Chamari produced a dream final over, scalping three wickets to help Sri Lanka pip Bangladesh in their last game in a low-scoring thriller.

But the main concern for Sri Lanka going into Friday's match would be weather as incessant rains here have wreaked havoc on the schedule. Pakistan, on the other hand, have pride to play for as they are already out of the tournament, languishing at the bottom of the

eight-team competition with just two points, which came from two washed out matches.

Pakistan's campaign has been disappointing as they are winless after six matches, with four defeats and two no-results, and a poor net run rate of negative 2.651. But come Friday, the Fatima Sana-led side would be eager to draw curtains on their campaign with a win and spoil Sri Lanka's chances.

Teams : Sri Lanka: Chamari Athapaththu (c), Anushka Sanjeevani (vc&wk), Imesha Dulani, Vishmi Gunaratne, Hasini Perera, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Nilakshika Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Piumi Wathsala, Dewmi Vihanga, Achini Kulasuriya, Sugandika Kumari, Malki Madara, Udeshika Prabodhani, Inoka Ranaweera.

Pakistan: Fatima Sana (c), Aliya Riaz, Diana Baig, Eymaan Fatima, Muneeba Ali, Nashra Sandhu, Natalia Pervaiz, Omaima Sohail, Rameen Shamim, Sadaf Shamas, Sadia Iqbal, Shawaal Zulfiqar, Sidra Amin, Sidra Nawaz, Syeda Aroob Shah. (PTI)