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'They are likely to visit the five-star hotel where Garg had stayed. It will try to examine every angle of the case'

Assam Police team reaches Singapore to probe Zubeen Garg's death

GUWAHATI, Oct 20: Two senior officers of the Assam Police reached Singapore on Monday to investigate the death of singer Zubeen Garg in the island nation last month, officials said.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Assam Police is at present probing Garg's death case after more than 60 FIRs were lodged across the state.

According to a senior official, CID Special DGP Munna Prasad Gupta and Titabor Co-District SP Tarun Goel have reached Singapore in a flight from Guwahati. Gupta is heading the nine-member SIT, while Goel is a member of it.

The two SIT members will visit the "place of occurrence where Garg had breathed his last", another official said.

"Linking the series of events with the place of occurrence is one of the most important aspects of the entire investigation process. Besides, the Assam Police team will sit with their counterparts in Singa-



The Indian government had earlier invoked the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) with Singapore, seeking cooperation in the investigation into the death of the singer. The Singapore Police Force (SPF) is also carrying out an independent investigation into the incident.

In a statement on October 17, the SPF said that the preliminary investigations have not indicated any foul play in Garg's death. It also said that investigations into the death of the popular Indian singer-songwriter-composer may take up to another three months, after which the findings will be submitted to the State Coroner for further proceedings.

The Assam Police has interrogated 10 Assamese expats from Singapore out of 11, against whom summonses were issued, while the remaining one is a citizen of the Southeast Asian nation. A yacht was booked by a few office bearers of the Assam Association Singapore, and these 11 people (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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Guv, CM wish people on Kali Puja, Deepawali

GUWAHATI, Oct 20: Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday extended their wishes to the people on the occasions of Kali Puja and Deepawali, urging all to celebrate the festival with environmental responsibility.

In his message, the governor highlighted the deep spiritual essence of the festival. He noted that Kali Puja (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Exceptional coordination among armed forces brought Pak to its knees: PM Modi

PANAJI, Oct 20: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the exceptional coordination among the three armed forces -? fear instilled by the Navy, extraordinary skills of the Air Force and bravery of the Army -? forced Pakistan to its knees during Operation Sindoor in no time.

Addressing the Navy personnel onboard INS Vikrant off the Goa coast, he said the indigenously built aircraft carrier was a "powerful symbol of Aatmanirbhar Bharat" and its handover to the Navy led to renoucement of a major colonial legacy.

"A few months ago we had seen how INS

Vikrant had given Pakistan some sleepless nights. INS Vikrant, the name itself puts an end to the courage of the enemy," Modi said. Modi spent a night onboard INS Vikrant and witnessed the Navy's air power at the high seas with MiG 27 aircraft demonstrating its skills on the aircraft carrier built at the Cochin Shipyard.

He said that when the enemy is in front and war is imminent, the side that possesses the strength to fight independently always holds the advantage. "The fear instilled by the Indian Navy, the extraordinary skill demonstrated by the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Whereas the Government of Assam vide Its Notification No. ECF-708361/4 dated 03-10-2025 has constituted a One Man Inquiry Commission to be headed by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Soumitra Saikia, Judge, Gauhati High Court under The Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 to inquire into the facts and circumstances leading to the unfortunate death of Late Zubeen Garg in Singapore on the 19th of September, 2025 with the following terms of reference:-

- To inquire into the facts and circumstances leading to the death of Late Zubeen Garg.
- To ascertain the sequence of events in the period preceding and following the incident.
- Examine whether there were any lapses, acts of omission or commission, or negligence on the part of any individual, authority, or institution connected with the incident.
- Ascertain whether any external factors, including the possibility of foul play, conspiracy, or unlawful acts, contributed to or were connected with the incident.

Whereas, in order for the One Man Inquiry Commission to receive the evidence, statements etc. in order to conduct the inquiry, Notice is hereby given to all having knowledge of the facts and circumstances relating to the above incident, as mentioned in the Four (4) Terms of Reference and submit their statements by way of a duly notarised Affidavit on and from the date and at the time and venue mentioned below.

All persons, intending to furnish their statements before the Commission as mentioned above, shall also furnish a list of documents in support of the facts stated in the affidavit by them, on which they propose to rely upon along with the originals or true copies of such documents in their possession or control and shall also state the name(s) and address(es) from whom the remaining documents may be obtained.

Given under my hand and Seal of the Commission on this 17th day of October, 2025
Date : 3rd November, 2025 (Monday) to 21st November, 2025 (Friday) (except Sunday)
Time : 10.30 AM to 4.00 PM

Venue : Office of the One Man Inquiry Commission headed by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Soumitra Saikia located at the premises of Assam Khadi & Village Industries Board, Maniram Dewan Road, Chandmari, Guwahati-781003

By Order & in the name of the Commission
(Sri Aroop Pathak, ACS)
Secretary, One Man Inquiry Commission

VIDE NOTIFICATION NO. ECF-708361/4 DATED 03. 10. 2025

পঞ্জীকৃত নম্বৰ - ৭৬৮ / ৯৭

Registered No.-768/97



THE ASSAM GAZETTE

অসাধাৰণ

EXTRAORDINARY

প্ৰাপ্ত কৰ্তৃদ্বৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰকাশিত

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY

নং 679 দিশপুৰ, মঙ্গলবাৰ, 7 অক্টোবৰ, 2025, 15 অহিন, 1947 (শক)

No. 679 Dispur, Tuesday, 7th October, 2025, 15th Asvina, 1947 (S. E.)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
ORDERS BY THE GOVERNOR
POLITICAL (A) DEPARTMENT

NOTIFICATION

The 3rd October, 2025

No. ECF-708361/4.- In exercise of the powers conferred under the Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952, the Governor of Assam is pleased to constitute a One Man Inquiry Commission headed by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Soumitra Saikia, Judge, Gauhati High Court to inquire into the facts and circumstances leading to the unfortunate death of Late Zubeen Garg in Singapore on the 19th of September, 2025, on the following terms of reference:-

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- Ascertain whether any external factors, including the possibility of foul play, conspiracy, or unlawful acts, contributed to or were connected with the incident.

The Commission of Inquiry will submit its report within 6 (Six) months from the date of issue of this Notification.

Sd/-AJAY TEWARI,

Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam,
Home & Political Department.

Guwahati: Printed and Published by the Director, Directorate of Printing & Stationery, Assam, Guwahati-21. Extraordinary Gazette No. 1357-5010-07-10-2025. (visit at-dpns.assam.gov.in)

DIPR /D/HLT/196/21-Oct-25



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Assam Baibhav Assam Gaurabh Assam Gaurav



Invitation for Nominations for HIGHEST STATE CIVILIAN AWARDS-2025

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- One may self-nominate or nominate other changemakers
- Only nominations received through the portal assamcivilianawards.assam.gov.in shall be considered valid

Last date for submission of nomination

20th November 2025

Published by Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Assam

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DIPR/D/HLT/197/21-Oct-25

Indian economy exhibit resilience driven by strong macroeconomic fundamentals: RBI bulletin

MUMBAI, Oct 20: The Indian economy has so far exhibited resilience, driven by a focus on strong and durable macroeconomic fundamentals amidst broader global uncertainty and weak external demand, a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) bulletin said on Monday.

Global uncertainty has edged up, said an article on 'State of the Economy' published in the RBI's October Bulletin.

In the US, both trade and economic policy uncertainty increased in September. Global growth, however, has broadly held up. Investor sentiments dampened in October, on renewed US-China trade tensions and prolonged US government shutdown, after a phase of buoyancy.

The Indian economy displayed resilience amidst broader global uncertainty and weak external demand. High-frequency indicators point to a revival in urban demand and robust rural demand.

"While the Indian economy is not immune to global headwinds, it has so far exhibited resilience, driven by a focus on strong and durable macroeconomic fundamentals, including low inflation, robust balance sheets of banks and corporates, adequate foreign exchange reserves and a credible monetary and fiscal framework," the article said.

Rupee rises 9 paise to close at 87.93 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Oct 20: The rupee rose 9 paise to close at 87.93 against the US dollar on Monday, supported by foreign fund inflows and lower crude oil prices.

Positive sentiments in the domestic equity markets lent further support to the local unit, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.94 against the US dollar and traded in the range of 87.74-87.94 during the day before settling at 87.93, higher by 9 paise against its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee closed at 88.02 against the US dollar.

"The Reserve Bank of India ensured that the rupee opened below 88... There was no specific development on the India-US trade front, while on the US-China front, the talks by government officials gave hope that US-China trade developments could be solved amicably," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Executive Director, Finrex, said.

Stock exchanges will hold a special Muhurat trading session on Tuesday from 1.45 pm to 2.45 pm for Laxmi Pujan, according to notices by the BSE and the NSE.

The forex markets, however, will be closed on Tuesday and Wednesday.

"After two days' holidays from Tuesday, the rupee is expected to be in the range of 87.70-88.30 on Thursday," Bhansali added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, edged up 0.1 per cent to 98.53. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.36 per cent to USD 61.07 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex soared 411.18 points to settle at 84,363.37, while Nifty climbed 133.30 points to 25,843.15. (PTI)



The RBI said the views expressed in the bulletin article are of the authors and do not represent the views of the Reserve Bank of India.

Headline consumer price index (CPI) inflation moderated sharply in September, marking its lowest reading since June 2017, as per the bulletin.

The article also noted that high-frequency food price data for October so far (up to 17th) point towards a pick-up in cereal prices.

Among pulses, prices moderated for gram dal, tur/arhar dal and moong dal.

Within edible oils, prices firmed

up for mustard oil, sunflower oil and palm oil while groundnut oil prices eased. Key vegetable (tomato, onion, and potato) prices softened, with the decline being most pronounced for tomatoes.

"As noted in the Monetary Policy Committee resolution of October 1, 2025, the growth outlook remains resilient, supported by domestic drivers, despite uncertainties on the external front," it added.

The RBI's article further said domestic structural reforms are helping to somewhat offset the drag on growth from the weakening external demand conditions.

The current macroeconomic

conditions and the outlook, as noted by the MPC, has opened up policy space for further supporting growth.

On the domestic currency, it said the rupee depreciated against the US dollar in September amidst elevated trade tensions, heightened global uncertainties, and persistent foreign portfolio investment outflows.

The depreciation in the real effective exchange rate was mainly driven by the depreciation in the nominal effective exchange rate.

Net foreign portfolio investment flows continued to remain negative for the third consecutive month in September driven by equity outflows amidst weak investor sentiments on concerns over US tariff measures and the steep hike in H-1B visa fees.

It also noted gross inward foreign direct investment (FDI) moderated in August. Singapore, Cayman Islands, the UAE, the Netherlands, and the US accounted for more than three-fourths of total inflows.

Manufacturing, computer services, construction, and financial services were the top recipient sectors.

Net FDI turned negative in August, due to a moderation in gross inflows and an increase in repatriation, it added. (PTI)

Stock markets surge for 4th day; Sensex jumps over 411 points

MUMBAI, Oct 20: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended higher on Monday, taking their winning run to the fourth day in a row, driven by buying in blue-chip Reliance Industries and sustained foreign fund inflows.

A sharp rally in global markets also added to the markets' optimism.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 411.18 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 84,363.37. During the day, it zoomed 704.37 points or 0.83 per cent to 84,656.56.

The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 133.30 points or 0.52 per cent to 25,843.15.

From the Sensex firms, Reliance Industries climbed 3.52 per cent after the firm on Friday reported a 9.6 per cent year-on-year rise in net profit for the September quarter, driven by strong performance in its consumer-facing retail and telecom businesses and a recovery in its core oil-to-chemicals segment.

Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, Tata Consultancy Services, Titan and Bharti Airtel were also among the gainers.

However, ICICI Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Eternal, Adani Ports and Power Grid were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled higher. Markets in Europe were trading in the green.

US markets ended in positive territory on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 308.98 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) also bought stocks worth ₹ 1,526.61 crore on the same day.



"The Indian market extended its upward march on Monday, carrying forward the festive rally ahead of the Diwali Muhurat trading session. The Nifty-50 climbed, driven by strong buying in index heavyweights such as Reliance Industries," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.29 per cent to USD 61.11 a barrel.

"The Indian market extended its positive momentum, driven by better-than-expected Q2 results from major companies and festival optimism," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said. The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.69 per cent and small-cap index went up by 0.59 per cent. Among sectoral indices, energy jumped 1.48 per cent, tech (1.33 per cent), telecommunication (1.22 per cent), oil & gas (1.10 per cent), BSE Focused IT (1.05 per cent) and IT (0.96 per cent).

BSE commodities, FMCG, auto and power were the laggards.

"Markets began the week on an upbeat note and extended their up-

ward momentum, largely supported by favourable domestic cues. The market's strength was underpinned by upbeat quarterly results from heavyweights such as Reliance, HDFC Bank, along with expectations of sustained foreign inflows amid improving global risk sentiment," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

A total of 2,530 stocks advanced while 1,740 declined and 194 remained unchanged on the BSE.

On Friday, the Sensex jumped 484.53 points or 0.58 per cent to settle at 83,952.19. The Nifty climbed 124.55 points or 0.49 per cent to 25,709.85.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,451.37 points or 1.75 per cent, and the Nifty surged 424.5 points or 1.67 per cent.

Stock exchanges BSE and NSE will conduct a special Muhurat trading session on Tuesday.

The symbolic trading session will be held between 1:45 pm and 2:45 pm. The market will remain closed for regular trading on Tuesday, but a special trading window will be open for one hour. (PTI)

China's economy slows to 4.8 per cent annual growth in July-September

HONG KONG, Oct 20: China's economy expanded at the slowest annual pace in a year in July-September, growing 4.8 per cent, weighed down by trade tensions with the United States and slack domestic demand.

The July-September data was the weakest pace of growth since the third quarter of 2024, and compares with a 5.2 per cent pace of growth in the previous quarter, the government said in a report Monday. In January-September, the world's second largest economy grew at a 5.2 per cent annual pace. Despite US President Donald Trump's higher tariffs on imports from China, the country's exports have remained relatively strong as companies shifted their sales to other world markets.

Tensions between Beijing and Washington remain elevated, and it's unclear if Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping will go ahead with a proposed meeting during a

regional summit at the end of this month.

Xi and other ruling Communist Party members are convening one of China's most important political meetings for the year on Monday, where they will map out economic and social policy goals for the country for the next five years.

The economy slowed in the last quarter as the authorities moved to curb fierce price wars in sectors such as the auto industry that resulted from overcapacity.

China is also facing challenges including a prolonged property sector downturn which has been affecting consumption and demand.

Ratings agency S&P estimates nationwide new home sales will fall by 8 per cent in 2025 from the year before and by 6 per cent to 7 per cent in 2026.

The World Bank expects China's economy to grow at a 4.8 per cent annual rate this year. The

government's official growth target is around 5 per cent.

China's stronger economic growth in the first half of this year has given it "some buffer" to achieve the growth target, said Lynn Song, chief economist for Greater China at ING Bank.

However, spending during China's eight-day Golden Week national holiday in October was "mildly disappointing," reflecting sluggish consumer confidence and demand, Morningstar analysts said in a note this month.

There's room for the government to do more, Song said.

"(We) are looking to see if there will be further measures to support consumption and the property market, as the impact from previous policies begins to weaken," Song said. Economists are also expecting a rate cut by China's central bank by the end of the year, which could encourage more spending and investment. (AP)

European Council approves 'New Strategic EU-India Agenda', efforts to conclude FTA

LONDON, Oct 20: The European Council on Monday approved conclusions on a 'New Strategic EU-India Agenda' announced earlier by the European Commission, welcoming the "strong impetus" it provides to relations between the European Union and India.

The Belgium-based council, responsible for the general political direction and priorities of the 27-member economic bloc, highlighted efforts on both sides to conclude an India-EU free trade agreement (FTA) by the end of the year.

Its conclusions this week endorse the Joint Communication on the new agenda and its objective of deepening EU-India ties, including prosperity and sustainability, technology and innovation, security and defence, and connectivity and global issues.

"The council welcomes in particular efforts to conclude a balanced, ambitious, mutually beneficial and economically meaningful free trade agreement, which the European Commission and the Indian government aim to finalise by the end of the year," the council said in a statement.

"Such agreement must include enhanced market ac-

cess, removal of trade barriers, and provisions on sustainable development," it said.

The European Council noted that closer collaboration between the EU and India on security and defence matters based on the principles of mutual trust and respect were of particular importance against the backdrop of an increasingly complex geopolitical outlook.

"The council takes note of the intention to pursue work towards the establishment of a security and defence partnership, which could also facilitate defence industrial cooperation when appropriate," it states.

It said the EU will continue to engage with India on all aspects of "Russia's war of aggression against the Ukraine". It also emphasised the joint capacity and responsibility of the EU and India to safeguard multilateralism and the rules-based international order with the UN Charter at its core, as well as the multilateral trading system, in particular the World Trade Organisation (WTO). "The promotion and protection of democratic values and norms, international law and human rights, including the rights of women and children, is an intrinsic part of the EU-India strategic agenda," it added. (AP)

Contd. from Page 1

Assam Police team reaches

were present when Garg allegedly drowned in the sea.

Earlier, North East India Festival's chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddharth Sharma, and his two band members – Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amrit Prabha Mahanta – were apprehended.

Later, Garg's cousin and Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg was arrested in connection with the singer's death in Singapore last month.

Zubeen Garg's PSOs Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya were also arrested after police found huge financial transactions, worth over Rs 1.1 crore, in their accounts.

All seven arrested people are now in judicial custody. They were booked under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for murder, culpable homicide not amounting to murder, criminal conspiracy and causing death by negligence. (PTI)

Guv, CM wish people

signifies the awakening of inner strength to overcome fear and darkness. Acharya also requested everybody to celebrate the occasion in a spirit of togetherness, compassion and care.

"We celebrate Deepawali to commemorate the triumph of truth, hope and light. This is a festival, which is a reminder of the enduring power of righteousness and the light of wisdom rests in each of us," he added.

The governor also underscored the need for greater environmental awareness during the celebrations. He encouraged people to embrace eco-friendly practices, reduce noise and air pollution, and protect natural resources.

"A truly joyful Diwali is one that brings light not just to our homes, but also to the world around us. Let us celebrate in ways that honour both tradition and our responsibility to future generations," he added.

The chief minister also offered his heartfelt wishes to the people of the state. "On the sacred occasion of #KaliPuja, may Maa Kali's fierce energy destroy all evils and illuminate everyone's path with divine power," he said in a post on X. (PTI)

Exceptional coordination

Indian Air Force, and the bravery of the Indian Army, along with the exceptional coordination among all three services, brought Pakistan on its knees swiftly during Operation Sindoor," the prime minister said, adding that the armed forces deserved a special salute for their actions.

"For the armed forces to be strong, self-reliance is essential," he said, asserting that over the years India's forces have steadily advanced towards self-reliance.

"Missiles such as BrahMos and Akash have proven their capabilities during Operation Sindoor. Several countries around the world are now interested in purchasing these missiles," Modi said.

He said that the armed forces have identified thousands of items that will no longer be imported, resulting in most essential military equipment now being manufactured domestically.

He said that in the last 11 years, India's defence production has more than tripled, crossing Rs 1.5 lakh crore last year.

Since 2014, Indian shipyards have delivered over 40 indigenous warships and submarines to the Navy, Modi said, adding that on an average a submarine or warship produced domestically is being inducted every 40 days.

He said India was building the capacity to export weapons and equipment for all three armed forces.

"India's goal is to be counted among the world's top defence exporters," Modi said, adding that over the past decade, the country's defence exports have increased more than 30-fold.

He credited this success significantly to the contributions of defence start-ups and indigenous defence units.

The prime minister also commended the Indian Coast Guard for their vital role in national defence and noted their continuous coordination with the Navy to secure India's coastline day and night.

He recalled the moment when INS Vikrant was handed over to the nation, and said the warship was grand, immense, panoramic, unique and exceptional.

"Vikrant is not merely a warship; it is a testament to 21st-century India's hard work, talent, impact, and commitment," Modi said.

"On the very day the nation received the indigenously built INS Vikrant, the Indian Navy renounced a major symbol of colonial legacy," he said.

Modi highlighted that inspired by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the Navy adopted a new flag.

INS Vikrant, India's first home-built aircraft carrier, was commissioned in 2022 to strengthen the country's naval presence.

Described as a city on the move, INS Vikrant is the largest warship to be built in India and also India's second operational aircraft carrier after INS Vikramaditya, which was built on a Russian platform.

Modi arrived here on Sunday evening and boarded the home-built aircraft carrier off the coast of Goa.

While onboard INS Vikrant, the prime minister went to the flightdeck, surrounded by MiG 29K fighter aircraft.

He witnessed the takeoff and landing of MiG 29 fighter jets on a short runway of the aircraft carrier, both during the day and in the dark night.

Modi also witnessed a vibrant cultural programme where the officers and sailors of the Indian Navy sang various patriotic songs, including a song specially written by them to commemorate the success of Indian Armed Forces in Operation Sindoor.

Modi had dinner with the extended family of naval personnel during the Bara Khana.

On Monday morning, Modi joined a Yoga Session on the deck of INS Vikrant and also witnessed a spectacular steampast of warships and flypast by aircraft.

The warships which took part in the steampast included INS Vikrant, INS Vikramaditya, INS Surat, INS Mormugao, INS Chennai, INS Imphal, INS Kolkata, INS Tushil, INS Tabar, INS Teg, INS Betwa, INS Deepak and INS Aditya.

The flypast included Chetak, with flag and naval ensign, MH 60 R, Seaking, Kamov 31, Dornier and P8I and MiG 29K.

"Last night spent onboard INS Vikrant is hard to put into words. I saw the immense energy and enthusiasm you all were filled with. When I saw you singing patriotic songs yesterday, and the way you described Operation Sindoor in your songs, no words can ever fully convey the experience that a jawan feels standing on a battlefield," Modi said. "My Diwali has been special as it was spent amongst you," he said. The prime minister has been celebrating Diwali with the armed forces since 2014. (PTI)

Avaada Electro files confidential papers to raise up to ₹10,000 cr via IPO

NEW DELHI, Oct 20: Avaada Electro, the solar manufacturing arm of the Brookfield-backed Avaada Group, has filed preliminary papers with markets regulator Sebi through a confidential route for raising ₹ 9,000-10,000 crore through an Initial Public Offering (IPO), people familiar with the development said.

With this, the company expects its valuation in the range of ₹ 1.10 lakh to ₹ 1.3 lakh crore, they added. The IPO is expected to comprise a mix of fresh issue and offer-for-sale (OFS) components by existing shareholders.

Proceeds are likely to be utilised toward capacity expansion in high-efficiency solar cell and module manufacturing, including the development of a 5.1 GW integrated facility in Uttar Pradesh and capacity scale-up at its Butibori plant in Maharashtra, the people added.

Avaada Electro is part of the Avaada Group, a diversified clean-energy conglomerate spanning solar PV manufacturing, renewable power generation, green hydrogen and derivatives, pumped hydro storage, battery storage, and green data centres.



The group, backed by Brookfield Renewable Partners and Thailand's GPSC (PTT Group), raised over USD 1.3 billion in 2023 to fund expansion across solar, hydrogen, battery-storage, and green-ammonia verticals.

Avaada Electro's Butibori Super Factory near Nagpur has emerged as a key part of the company's expansion strategy.

The facility, which features on the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's (MNRE) Approved

List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM), produces bifacial glass-to-glass TopCon G12 modules of up to 720 Wp and G12R modules of up to 630 Wp--among the more efficient solar modules available in the Indian market.

Currently operating at 7 GW of module capacity, the Nagpur facility is expected to add 6 GW of solar-cell manufacturing capacity by FY26, paving the way for a more integrated domestic production setup.

Across its operations in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, Avaada Electro has a total solar-module capacity of 8.5 GW. The company aims to increase this to 13.6 GW of module capacity and 12 GW of cell capacity over the next two financial years.

The company's operational capacity grew from 1.5 GW in September 2024 to 8.5 GW by September 2025, following the commissioning of the Nagpur plant and the start of commercial production at the Dadri facility.

Avaada Electro is also developing a fully integrated solar manufacturing hub at Nagpur, with plans to achieve 6 GW of TOPCon solar-cell capacity by FY26 and 12 GW by FY27. The company intends to add 3 GW of ingot and wafer capacity by FY27, completing the value chain from raw materials to finished modules.

Meanwhile, industry projections indicate that annual solar PV demand in India could more than double between FY26 and FY30, surpassing 40 GW a year, even as domestic capacity for high-efficiency TOPCon cells remains relatively limited. (PTI)

Bom Singpho Memorial Ladoi Ghat Bridge on the anvil in Margherita

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Oct 20: The long-pending demand to honour freedom fighter Bom Singpho is gaining momentum as the "Bom Singpho Memorial Ladoi Ghat Bridge" at Inthem in Margherita is set to be constructed soon.

The initiative has been formally taken up by Bhogeswar Shyam, retired Secretary of Handloom and Textiles, Government of Assam, who has written to the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) seeking funds for the project.

In his letter, Bhogeswar Shyam highlighted that Bom Singpho, a valiant freedom fighter from the Singpho community, played a significant role in resisting British colonial rule in Assam.

However, despite his contributions, he has not received due recognition from either the state or the Central government, he said.

Shyam noted that while a Bhawan was built in 1995 in memory of Bom Singpho, it now lies in a dilapidated state. "The structure is almost in ruins, and repeated appeals for its renovation have gone unheard," he stated.

According to Bhogeswar Shyam, the proposal for the bridge has reached the NCST through the Tinsukia District Commissioner's office. In response, Dr. P. Kalyan Reddy, Director of the NCST, has sought factual details and a roadmap for the project as the bridge will be constructed over the Buridighing River at Ladoi Ghat in

Inthem which falls under the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency in Tinsukia district.

Recalling his tenure as Extra Assistant Commissioner (EAC) in Tinsukia in 1995, Bhogeswar Shyam said that an amount of ₹2.5 lakh was sanctioned from the MP LAD fund by then Lakhimpur MP Balin Kuli for constructing the Bom Singpho Bhawan at Inthem, located about 17 km from Margherita headquarters. However, he alleged that the funds were misused by vested interests, leading to the construction of a sub-standard structure that has since collapsed.

"Despite several requests, no government authority has taken steps to restore or rebuild the Bhawan," Shyam lamented.

Bom Singpho, who led a rebellion against the British in 1830, was captured and imprisoned in Dhaka Jail. Shyam said Bom Singpho's descendants, who still live in Bisa Gaon Ledo under Khumchai Gaon Panchayat in Margherita have long felt neglected by the government.

He urged both the Assam and Central governments to recognize Bom Singpho's contribution to India's independence and to ensure that his legacy is preserved through proper memorials.

Local residents and community leaders have also welcomed the proposed bridge, expressing hope that it will finally bring long-overdue recognition to the forgotten hero of Assam's freedom struggle.

Bodoland varsity holds international seminar

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Oct 20: A two-day international seminar in hybrid mode on the theme of "Reclaiming IKS: Global South in Focus" concluded on Sunday.

The event was organised by the Department of History and the Department of English, Bodoland University, in collaboration with Birangana Sati Sadhini Rajyik Vishwavidyalaya and Bhattadev University.

The seminar was jointly organized following an MoU among the universities. It drew 150 participants from across India, with speakers addressing thematic issues on different indigenous communities from the Global South.

The occasion was graced by Professor B. L. Ahuja, and Professor G Singaiah, the Vice-Chancellors of Bodoland University and BSSRV respectively, the Academic Registrar of Bhattadev University, the Registrar, the Academic Registrar, Professor P.K. Patra, Dean and HoD of English, and the Deans and faculty members of Bodoland University.

Dr. Manash Pratim Borah and Dr. Debabhusan Bora from BSSRV, along with Dr. Pratisha Bhowmik and Dr. Sudev Basumatary, jointly convened the programme, with an international speaker from Central Connecticut State University joining online.

Invited talks included presentations by Professor Nirmal Silvamany, Dr. John Charles Ryan, Professor Morgan Nkululeko Ndlovu, Professor Om Prakash Dwivedi, Dr. Subhadeep Paul, Dr. Prateek, Dr. Birman Debbarma, and Mr. Gyati Rana. Following the seminar, special issues highlighting the significance of IKS are scheduled to be published in a reputed academic journal, as reported by the conveners.

Karbi Anglong witnesses low-key Diwali

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Oct 20: Diwali is subdued in Karbi Anglong this year. In Diphu market unlike every year there is low selling of firecrackers attributing to people having less purchasing power and the death of the iconic singer Zubeen Garg.

A firecrackers vendor at Rongkhelan market said he has invested more than Rs. 1 lakh, but around Rs. 40,000 of the items could be sold out.

The festival symbolises light over darkness, houses and buildings are decorated with lights dangling from the houses and wear a festive look.

In Diphu market businessmen and shopkeepers decorated their shops with lights and set up plantain (banana) stems fitted with earthen lamps. Diyas (earthen lamps) are placed on bamboo sticks decorated on the plantain stems but the mood of the festive occasion is rather in low spirit.

Asam Sahitya Sabha to confer 'Sadasi Borenya' upon Professor Nagen Saikia in Dibrugarh on November 1

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Oct 20: The Asam Sahitya Sabha will confer its prestigious honour, Sadasi Borenya, on former Sabha president and eminent litterateur Professor Dr. Nagen Saikia.

In a press release issued by Asam Sahitya Sabha's Principal Secretary Debajit Bora, it was stated that the decision to confer the honour was taken during the Sabha's third Karnataka Samiti meeting held on October 4 at the Sabha's central office in Guwahati under the chairmanship of Sabha President Dr. Basanta Kumar Goswami. The decision was later ratified during the third plenary executive session held on October 11 at Bonga Bhawan, Silchar.

The felicitation ceremony to confer the honour will be held on November 1 at Ramesh-

war Lal Saharia Sanghati Bhawan, the Dibrugarh Regional Office of the Sabha, from 10:30 a.m. onwards. Sabha President Dr. Basanta Kumar Goswami personally visited the residence of Professor Saikia on Sunday, offering a traditional tamul-paan and formally inviting him to the event. Professor Saikia has kindly consented to attend the ceremony.

The event on November 1 will be organised jointly by the Dibrugarh Regional Office of the Asam Sahitya Sabha, the Dibrugarh Zila Sahitya Sabha, and the Dibrugarh Sahitya Sabha. The function will be presided over by Dr. Basanta Kumar Goswami.

Several distinguished academicians and personalities, including Dr. Samudragupta Kashyap, Chancellor of Nagaland University; Dr. Pitambar Deva Goswami, Vice-Chancel-

lor of Auniati University; Dr. Jiten Hazarika, Vice-Chancellor of Dibrugarh University; Dr. Ajay Jha, Vice-Chancellor of Arunachal University; Dr. Jyotiprasad Saikia, Vice-Chancellor of Jagannath Barooah University; Dr. Arupjyoti Choudhury, Vice-Chancellor of Srianta Sankardev University; Dr. Mahadev Patgiri, Vice-Chancellor of Sivasagar University; Dr. Ajanta Borgohain Rajkonwar, Vice-Chancellor of Assam Women's University; Dr. G. Singhaiya, Vice-Chancellor of Sati Sadhani University; Dr. Nirod Kumar Baruah, Vice-Chancellor of Majuli Cultural University; and Dr. Hitesh Deka, Vice-Chancellor of Nagaon University, are expected to grace the occasion, along with a large number of literary figures, scholars, and admirers of Assamese literature.

Acharya lauds dedication of armed forces

Assam Governor exchanges Diwali greetings with Armed Forces personnel

GUWAHATI, Oct 20: In a gesture reflecting deep respect and solidarity with the nation's defenders, Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya visited the 51 Sub-Area of Indian army and exchanged greetings with the jawans of the Indian armed forces at Narangi Military Station on the auspicious occasion of Diwali today.

On the occasion, besides exchanging greetings, the Governor Acharya distributed sweets, and interacted with the soldiers, commending their unwavering dedication to the nation.

Expressing his deep appreciation to the armed forces, the Governor said that the commitment and dedication of the armed forces ensures that citizens across the country can safely celebrate festivals with their families.

Fondly recalling his previous position as the Governor of Sikkim, where he would invariably celebrate the Diwali and Holi with the armed forces stationed



at the international borders, Shri Acharya said, "This time being in Guwahati, I

took the privilege of celebrating the festival of lights with our armed forces who are far away from their homes". Referring to the historical roots of Diwali, the Governor said that the festival marks the return of Lord Ram to Ayodhya after vanquishing evil. The moment is celebrated by lighting diyas, symbolizing the "triumph of good over evil". The Governor said, "Every person who walks the path of righteousness and returns after fulfilling a noble duty is celebrated just as we celebrate the achievements of our brave jawans."

The Governor extended his best wishes for a prosperous, safe, and joyous Diwali to all armed forces and their families, reaffirming the state's unshakable support and gratitude to the armed forces.

GOC 51 Sub Area Maj Gen A K Sharma, along with several other senior military officers and their subordinates were present on the occasion.

Asam Sahitya Sabha observes 125th Birth Anniversary of Sanskrit Scholar Baikuntha Nath Chakraborty with releasing commemorative volume 'Gyan Briksha'

Contributions of Pandit BN Chakraborty to Assamese literature recalled

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Oct 20: Asam Sahitya Sabha observes the 125th birth anniversary of eminent Sanskrit scholar and litterateur Pandit Baikuntha Nath Chakraborty on Sunday with motley of events at Sangeetacharya Lakshmiram Baruah Sadan.

The programme began with a floral tribute to both the distinguished scholar and cultural icon Zubeen Garg. Dr. Sanjib Kumar Sharma, Secretary of the Asam Sahitya Sabha Guwahati Office delivered the welcome address in the main session presided over by former vice-president of Asam Sahitya Sabha Kanak handra Sarma.

In his welcome address, Dr. Sarma recalled the outstanding contributions of Pandit Baikuntha Nath Chakraborty to Assamese and Sanskrit literature. Referring to Zubeen Garg's untimely passing, Dr. Sarma also urged for a fair and speedy investigation into the circumstances of the artist's death. Dr. Abani Kumar Bhagawati attending the programme as the chief guest expressed concern that the diminishing interest and opportunities for Sanskrit studies had indirectly affected the prestige of the Assamese language.

Dr. Narendra Lahkar emphasized the importance of preserving ancient manuscripts and urged authorities to

prioritize both archival and digital conservation of such texts.

Novelist Leena Sharma praised the publication of the commemorative volume titled 'Gyan Briksha' as a historical and noble literary endeavour and expressed her gratitude to the editors and organizers.

In his presidential remarks, Kanak Chandra Sharma lauded the illustrious scholar's colourful personality and his tireless dedication. He described Chakraborty as a "creative poet and scholar". Debajit Bora, Principal Secretary of Asam Sahitya Sabha during his address to the gathering announced that the Sabha would soon publish an expanded edition of the Writers' Directory featuring authors of Sanskrit and Assamese literature. The commemorative volume published for the occasion titled "Gyan Briksha edited by writer Jyogendra Nath Sarma was formally released by noted litterateur Kanak Chandra Sharma along with former professor of Gauhati University and writer Dr. Abani Kumar Bhagawati, retired professor Dr. Narendra Lahkar and novelist Leena Sarma.

Notably, Pandit Baikuntha Nath Chakraborty, born in Nalbari spent over forty years teaching at Dhubri Harisabha Sanskrit Pathshala before passing away in 1976. He had

presided over the Poets' Meet of the Dhubri Session of Asam Sahitya Sabha held in 1972. His notable works include Srikrishna Leelamritam, Dewarchana Paddhati, and Brahmaputra Snan Vidhi.

The event began with a soulful rendition of Ganesh Vandana performed by Shreyashi Rao, followed by a Guru Vandana presented by Alokya Sarma, Bhanita Sarma and Abhinav Sarma. Members of the Bhaskar Nagar Unnayan Samiti performed the song Mayabini as a tribute to Zubeen Garg. The distinguished attendees of the event included Aloka Chakraborty (daughter-in-law of Pandit Chakraborty), Jyogendra Nath Sarma (editor of the commemorative volume), Ujjal Jyoti Das (associate editor), Gobinda Kalita (convener of the Sabha's financial committee), Hridayananda Gogoi, Anjana Gogoi, Swargajyoti Chetia, Syed Maruf Husain, Prafulla Sarma (former administrative officer, Govt. of Assam), Asomi Gogoi, Dr. Satyanarayan Sarma (former professor, Assam Agricultural University), Utpal Sarma (Librarian, Guwahati Commerce College), family members of Pandit Chakraborty and several others. The event concluded with a rendition of the Jatya Sangeet of the state "O Mor Aponar Desh."

Subdued Diwali follows low key Durga puja in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Oct 20: After a subdued Durga Puja celebration this year, the Diwali celebrations here on Monday was shorn of its festive fervour in view of the entire State still reeling under the collective grief over the sudden demise of iconic singer, musician and composer Zubeen Garg a month ago under mysterious circumstances.

The Diwali which is known for its attractive display of decorative lights along with bursting of high decibel fire crackers and release of projectiles that illuminates the skyline has been missing as people were yet to come out of from mourning Zubeen's demise.

The use of banana plants as part of the beautification process was rare with people using earthen lamps in plenty. Devotional songs and those of Zubeen were played in the loudspeakers all over the day

continued.

The pandals (marquees) installed at several areas within and outside the town to celebrate Kali Puja, were without portraits of the legendary singer installed with some also putting up his cutouts.

The number of shops and roadside vendors here selling fire crackers for the past few days, too were few in number with the shopkeepers saying the sales was next to nil.

"Till today we have hardly been able sell only a few packets of crackers, mostly of the light variety rather than the sound ones.

Those selling flowers and earthen lamps were in a better position than those selling the crackers. It is to be mentioned here that in the previous years the bursting of fire crackers and illuminating the buildings with fancy lights began from about a week ahead of Diwali celebrations.

Body of 13-year-old girl recovered in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, OCT 20: The body of a 13-year-old girl was recovered from the Bedlangmari area under Kokrajhar Sadar Police Station in Kokrajhar district. According to police sources, the girl had been missing for the past one and a half months. Her body was found today in a forest area about 150 meters from her residence in Bedlangmari. Family members had earlier lodged a missing person complaint at the Kokrajhar Sadar Police Station following her disappearance, officials confirmed.

While the exact cause of death has not yet been determined, Kokrajhar Police have launched a preliminary investigation into the incident.

NFR to install acoustic-based tech across its railway network to protect elephants

GUWAHATI, Oct 20: The Northeast Frontier Railway has decided to roll out a high-end acoustic-based technology in its network by April next year to prevent the death of elephants by speeding trains, a senior official said. NFR Chief Public Relations Officer Kapinjal Kishore Sharma said trial works of the Intrusion Detection System (IDS) has been successfully commissioned in four important sections. The IDS uses advanced optical fibre sensing technology to detect elephant movement near railway tracks, generating real-time alerts for train drivers and control rooms to take timely preventive action. "We have undertaken a major initiative to ensure the safety of elephants and smooth train operations by implementing the IDS across the NFR network," he said in a statement on Sunday night. This innovative system aims to protect wildlife while maintaining operational efficiency, especially in areas where railway lines pass through forested and elephant-inhabited zones, the CPRO said. (PTI)

613 trips of special trains being operated by NFR to accommodate festive rush



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Oct 20: To manage the heavy passenger rush during Diwali and Chhath Puja 2025, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has been operating 48 festive special trains for a total of 613 trips across various routes between September and December 2025. These special trains are connecting important destinations such as Kati-

har, Sonpur, Dauram Madhepura, Agartala, New Tinsukia, SMVT Bengaluru, Amritsar, Patna, Dibrugarh, Gorakhpur, Silchar, Kolkata, Guwahati, Ranchi, Charalapalli, Mumbai Central, Agra Cantt, Jogbani, Shalimar, Kamakhya and several others. The train services are being operated on a daily, weekly, tri-weekly or specific weekday basis, depending on operational feasibility and

passenger demand.

The running of these special trains will help clear the extra rush of passengers travelling to and from various areas, including the Northeast, North Bengal, and Bihar. Passengers are advised to check detailed timings, stoppages, and coach compositions from official railway sources before planning their journey.



People buying diwali items on the eve of Diwali at Fancy Bazar in Guwahati on Saturday. - HT Photos

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Art is the daughter of freedom.
— Friedrich Schiller

Putin visit and Modi's dilemma

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic woes are mounting as Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposed visit to India on December 5 and 6 is approaching. US President Donald Trump is determined to ensure substantial reduction in Indian imports of Russian oil by November and this has been linked with the progress of the next round of India-US trade talks scheduled in Washington next week. Already Trump has caused a deep embarrassment to the Indian PM by claiming that his good friend Modi had assured him that India would not be buying oil from Russia and that there was a little bit of process which would be over soon. This was immediately denied by the external affairs ministry by stating that Modi had no talks with Trump. This was right factually by later the US President himself clarified that this was conveyed to him by the US ambassador designate Sergie Gor while briefing him on his long discussions with the Indian PM in New Delhi last week. This part has not been denied by the external affairs ministry. In fact, the actual reality is that Modi must have given some assurance about reduction of Russian imports of oil but certainly that did not mean total stoppage. Trump, as usual, exaggerated the nature of conversation by stating that Modi had agreed to stop supplies.

The main issue is that the US President, as a part of his deliberate policy is putting high pressure on Modi to take some concrete action on reduction of oil imports from Russia and this Trump has linked with the progress of the India-US trade talks, the conclusion of which is of special interest to the Indian Prime Minister. The timing of all these pressure tactics on the Russian oil imports by India has become disturbing to Modi who is making plans to have the annual bilateral talks with the Russian President in December next. On August 31 during the SCO summit in China, both Putin and Modi had detailed discussions on continuing the oil imports and had even talked of expanding to new areas. Trump's insistence on linking stoppage of oil imports from Russia with the progress of the India-US trade talks, has thus posed a big problem to the Prime Minister at this hour. The task before him now is how to balancing best the Indian interests by keeping both Putin and Trump in good humour.

Presently, India is having 50 per cent tariff hike on its exports to the US market. The original hike is 25 per cent and another 25 per cent was added by Trump in August this year as a penalty for importing oil from Russia which was helping Russia in financing war, according to Trump. If India stops importing oil from Russia, that will automatically lead to the withdrawal of the penalty of 25 per cent. Apart, this decision may help in facilitating the process in India-US trade talks towards a conclusive deal.

Childhood is on sale: Making children beg is a social crime

The exploitation of innocent children has become a serious social problem. Begging is not just a result of poverty, but a systematic business that exploits children's innocence. People give money out of pity, while children suffer mental and physical harm. Society, the government, and citizens must work together to raise awareness, ensure the safety of children through Childline (1098) and NGOs, and prioritize providing them with education and a safe environment. Childhood is a child's right, not anyone's business

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

In our society, children's childhood is their greatest asset. They have the right to play, study, learn, and thrive in a safe environment. However, child exploitation, their use for begging, and the exploitation of their innocence have become a serious social problem.

Begging isn't just an individual problem; it's become a systematic business. It's a common sight in small towns and large cities to see innocent children walking around with a plate, a piece of clothing, or an object in their hands, while people, taken by pity on their innocent faces, pour money into their hands. This not only robs children of their childhood, but also affects them mentally and physically.

Lack of social awareness, public compassion, and the financial constraints of some families contribute to this problem. It's not just a result of poverty, but a violation of children's rights.

Childhood is the most important and vulnerable part of any human life. It is the time when children learn, gain experiences, and form their identities. However, when children are forced into begging or other forms of exploitation, their development is hampered.

Begging may sometimes be the result of financial compulsion, but when it occurs regularly and the child is forced, it becomes exploitation. Taking advantage of children's innocence to make money is a moral crime.

Society's role becomes crucial here. People give money thinking they are helping, but in reality, they are encouraging child exploitation. Parents and families also have a responsibility to protect their children from such activities.

India has several laws to prevent child labor and child begging. The Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act is designed to protect children from forced labor and exploitation. Additionally, services like Childline 1098 are available 24/7 to help children.

NGOs and social organizations are also actively working to protect children from exploitation and provide them with education. However, the real challenge is that children and their parents are often unaware of the legal framework, and exploitation networks are so organized that they are difficult to catch.

The government and society together will have to spread awareness for the safety of children and guide them in the right direction.

Society's compassion and sympathy often lead to child exploitation. If people help children in the right way, instead of giving them alms, they can prevent exploitation from spreading.

Local communities, schools, parents, and neighbors can work together to ensure children's safety. Providing children with a safe environment, education, and playful opportunities are essential for their development.

Society needs to understand that simply giving money isn't enough to help children. Only appropriate action, such as reporting to NGOs, Childline, and social organizations, can protect children from exploitation.

Begging has become a financial business in many places. Some families and networks exploit innocent children to earn thousands of rupees a day. This not only exploits children's innocence, but also impacts them mentally and physically.

Those who donate money think they are being compassionate, but in reality, they are reinforcing this system. This creates a cycle in which child exploitation continues. This is a serious problem for the future of children and for society's moral responsibility.

The solution to this problem lies in the collaboration of society, government, and citizens. It is essential to take steps to protect and educate children.

Help children instead of giving them money. Instead of letting them beg, provide them with education, play, and a safe environment. Contact Childline (1098) and recognized NGOs for their safety. Raise awareness in society about child rights and the problem of child abuse. Schools, parents, and neighbors should work together to ensure a safe environment for children.

Mere acts of kindness or small amounts of money won't help children. Only action, awareness, and legal recourse can save them.

Childhood is a child's right, not anyone's business. The exploitation of innocent children challenges society's moral and social responsibility. We must understand that it is our duty to provide children with a safe, educated, and independent environment.

Only through collective action by society, the government, and citizens can we resolve this problem. Through awareness, education, and support, we can give children back their childhood and lay the foundation for a bright future.

The Festival of Diwali: A Path to Enlightenment

Diwali, often described as the festival of lights, holds a revered place in the cultural and spiritual fabric of India and its diaspora. Celebrated by millions across the globe, it transcends religious boundaries, uniting Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and even some Buddhists in a shared expression of joy, hope, and renewal. The festival, which typically spans five days, is marked by the lighting of oil lamps, the sharing of sweets, and the exchange of gifts. Yet, beyond its vibrant rituals and communal fervor, Diwali embodies a profound philosophical core—a journey toward enlightenment that resonates with universal human aspirations. This editorial explores the multifaceted dimensions of Diwali, delving into its historical roots, spiritual significance, cultural expressions, and contemporary relevance, while reflecting on how it illuminates the path to inner awakening in a world often shrouded in darkness.

The origins of Diwali are steeped in ancient narratives, each carrying layers of meaning that have evolved over centuries. For Hindus, the festival is most commonly associated with the return of Lord Rama, the protagonist of the epic Ramayana, to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile and his victory over the demon king Ravana. This triumph of good over evil is a central theme, symbolizing the power of righteousness to overcome malevolence. In Jainism, Diwali commemorates Lord Mahavira's attainment of nirvana, marking the moment of ultimate liberation from the cycle of birth and death. For Sikhs, the festival coincides with Bandi Chhor Divas, celebrating the release of Guru Hargobind and 52 princes from Mughal imprisonment, signifying freedom and justice. These diverse stories converge on a shared motif: the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and truth over falsehood. This convergence underscores Diwali's universal appeal, inviting reflection on the timeless struggle between virtue and vice within individuals and societies. At its heart, Diwali is a celebration of light, both literal and metaphorical. The lighting of diyas—small clay lamps filled

with oil and a cotton wick—is the festival's most iconic ritual. These lamps, placed in homes, courtyards, and public spaces, create a mesmerizing glow that transforms the night into a canvas of warmth and radiance. The act of lighting a diya is not merely decorative; it carries profound symbolic weight. In Hindu philosophy, light represents knowledge, purity, and divine presence, while darkness signifies ignorance, fear, and chaos. The diya's flame, fragile yet resilient, mirrors the human spirit's capacity to endure and illuminate even in the face of adversity. This symbolism aligns with the Upanishadic concept of "tamaso ma jyotirgamaya"—from darkness, lead me to light—a prayer that encapsulates the quest for enlightenment at the core of Diwali.

The spiritual dimension of Diwali extends beyond the act of lighting lamps to encompass a broader journey of self-discovery and moral awakening. The festival occurs during the Hindu month of Kartik, typically in late October or early November, when the nights are long and the skies are dark. This temporal setting amplifies the significance of light as a metaphor for inner transformation. Diwali encourages introspection, urging individuals to confront their own "inner demons"—whether pride, greed, or anger—and to cultivate virtues such as compassion, humility, and wisdom. The cleaning of homes, a customary practice before Diwali, symbolizes not only physical purification but also the clearing of mental clutter, making space for clarity and positivity. The worship of deities like Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, and Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, further reinforces this inward focus, emphasizing abundance not just in material terms but in spiritual and emotional richness.

Diwali's rituals are deeply rooted in the idea of renewal. The festival marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year in many regions, particularly in Gujarat, where businesses open new account books, signifying fresh beginnings and optimism for the future. This theme of renewal extends to personal relationships,



ships, as families and friends come together to forgive past grievances, mend broken bonds, and strengthen communal ties. The sharing of sweets and gifts—mithai, dried fruits, or intricately wrapped presents—is more than a social custom; it reflects the principle of "vasudhaiva kutumbakam," the world is one family. By exchanging tokens of affection, individuals reaffirm their interconnectedness, fostering a sense of unity that transcends caste, creed, and class. In a world increasingly fragmented by polarization, Diwali's emphasis on harmony offers a powerful reminder of the need for collective goodwill.

The festival's cultural expressions are as diverse as India itself, reflecting the country's pluralistic ethos. In North India, Diwali is synonymous with firecrackers, rangoli designs, and grand feasts, while in South India, the focus may be on early morning oil baths and the preparation of traditional delicacies like adhirasam. In eastern states like West Bengal, Diwali coincides with Kali Puja, where the fierce goddess Kali is worshipped as a symbol of strength and transformation. Across the diaspora, from Fiji to Canada, Diwali adapts to local contexts, blending Indian traditions with global influences. For instance, in the Caribbean, Indo-Trinidadian communities celebrate with tassa drums and chutney music, while in the United Kingdom, public Diwali festivals feature multicultural performances. This adaptability highlights Diwali's ability to remain relevant, bridging cultural divides while pre-

servicing its spiritual essence.

Yet, Diwali's celebration is not without its challenges, particularly in the modern context. The widespread use of firecrackers, while a source of joy for many, has raised environmental concerns due to air and noise pollution. In recent years, cities like Delhi have imposed restrictions on firecrackers to combat smog, prompting debates about balancing tradition with ecological responsibility. This tension reflects a broader question: how can Diwali's message of enlightenment guide us in addressing contemporary issues? The festival's emphasis on light over darkness can inspire sustainable practices—opting for eco-friendly diyas, reducing waste, or embracing community-driven celebrations that prioritize shared experiences over material excess. By aligning Diwali's values with environmental consciousness, we can honor its spirit while safeguarding the planet for future generations.

Diwali also holds a mirror to society's socio-economic disparities. The festival's association with wealth and prosperity, symbolized by Lakshmi worship, can inadvertently highlight inequalities. For many, the pressure to spend lavishly on gifts, clothes, or decorations can strain finances, turning a time of joy into one of stress. Moreover, the labor behind Diwali's festivities—whether the artisans crafting diyas, the vendors selling sweets, or the workers cleaning homes—is often underappreciated. A truly enlightened celebration of Diwali would involve recognizing these contributions, advocating for fair wages, and

ensuring that the festival's abundance is shared equitably. This aligns with the Jain principle of "aparigraha," or non-possessiveness, which encourages detachment from material excess and compassion for all beings.

In a globalized world, Diwali's message of enlightenment resonates far beyond its cultural origins. The festival's universal themes—hope, resilience, and the triumph of good—offer solace in times of uncertainty. In an era marked by political divisiveness, economic instability, and existential threats like climate change, Diwali's call to illuminate the self and the world takes on renewed urgency. The festival reminds us that enlightenment is not a solitary pursuit but a collective endeavor. Just as a single diya can light countless others without diminishing its own flame, acts of kindness, wisdom, and courage can ripple outward, fostering a brighter, more compassionate world.

Diwali's relevance in the 21st century lies in its ability to inspire both personal and societal transformation. On an individual level, it encourages mindfulness, urging us to reflect on our values and actions. Are we living in alignment with the principles of truth and righteousness that Diwali celebrates? Are we nurturing our inner light through knowledge, empathy, and self-awareness? On a societal level, Diwali challenges us to address systemic issues—poverty, injustice, environmental degradation—that perpetuate darkness. By embracing the festival's ethos, we can work toward a world where light, in all its forms, prevails.

As we light diyas this Diwali, let us remember that the festival is not just a celebration but a call to action. It invites us to look within, to confront our shadows, and to emerge with greater clarity and purpose. It asks us to share our light with others, to build communities rooted in mutual respect and understanding. In a world often clouded by division and despair, Diwali offers a timeless path to enlightenment—one that begins with a single flame and grows into a radiant beacon of hope. Let this Diwali be a moment of awakening, not just for ourselves but for the world we share.

Religion vs Spirituality: A Distinct Journey

By: Satyabrata Borah

Religion and spirituality are often used interchangeably in everyday conversations, but they are distinct concepts with unique characteristics, purposes, and impacts on human life. While both offer pathways to meaning, purpose, and connection, their approaches and implications differ significantly. Religion is typically associated with organized systems of beliefs, rituals, and practices, often rooted in specific cultural or societal frameworks. Spirituality, on the other hand, is a more personal, introspective journey that seeks inner peace, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of existence. In this article, we explore the nature of religion and spirituality, their differences, their interplay, and their roles in shaping individual and collective lives, particularly in the context of modern society.

Religion is a structured system that provides a framework for understanding the universe, human existence, and morality. It often includes sacred texts, rituals, institutions, and a set of moral codes that guide adherents. For example, in Christianity, the Bible serves as a foundational text, with practices like attending church, praying, and celebrating festivals such as Christmas forming the core of religious life. Similarly, in Hinduism, texts like the Bhagavad Gita and rituals like puja or festivals like Diwali define the religious experience. Religion is inherently communal, bringing people together under shared beliefs and practices. It fosters a sense of belonging, creates social cohesion, and often serves as a moral compass for communities. Religious institutions, such as temples, mosques, or churches, provide spaces for collective worship and reinforce cultural traditions. Moreover, religion often prescribes specific roles and responsibilities, offering a clear path for individuals to follow in their quest for meaning or salvation.

Spirituality, in contrast, is deeply personal and less bound by external structures. It focuses on an individual's inner journey to find purpose, peace, and connection with something greater than themselves, whether that be the universe, nature, or their own consciousness. Unlike religion, spirituality does not require adherence to specific doctrines or participation in organized rituals. A spiritual person may find fulfillment in meditating under a tree, contemplating the beauty of a sunset, or practicing mindfulness to connect with their inner self. For instance, someone might feel a profound sense of awe while hiking in the mountains, experiencing a connection to the universe without invoking any religious framework. Spirituality is about exploration and self-discovery, often transcending the boundaries of any single belief system. It allows individuals to ask existential questions, such as the purpose of life or the nature of existence, and seek answers in their own way.

One of the most significant differences between religion and spirituality lies in their scope and structure. Religion is often collective, rooted in tradition, and governed by established rules and institutions. It provides a shared identity and a sense of community, but it can also be restrictive, as it may demand conformity to specific practices or beliefs. For example, religious doctrines might dictate how to pray, what to eat, or how to conduct oneself in society. Spirituality, however, is more fluid and individualistic. It does not require allegiance to a particular deity, text, or institution. A spiritual person may draw inspiration from multiple traditions or none at all, focusing instead on personal growth and inner peace. For instance, practices like yoga or mindfulness, which have roots in religious traditions, are often pursued in a spiritual context without requiring adherence to the religious systems from which they originated.

Despite their differences, religion and spirituality are not mutually exclusive and often intersect. For many, religion serves as a gateway to spirituality. Religious practices, such as prayer, meditation, or reading sacred texts, can foster spiritual experiences by encouraging introspection and connection with a higher power. In Hinduism, for example, the practice of yoga is both a religious discipline and a spiritual tool for self-realization. Similarly, in Islam, the act of Salah (prayer) is a structured religious obligation that can also lead to a profound spiritual connection with Allah. However, not all religious practitioners experience spirituality, and not all spiritual individuals follow a religion. Some people may diligently perform religious rituals out of habit or social expectation without delving into the deeper spiritual significance, while others may reject organized religion entirely yet pursue a rich spiritual life.

The relationship between religion and spirituality also highlights their respective strengths and limitations. Religion's strength lies in its ability to create community and provide moral guidance. Festivals like Eid, Christmas, or Durga Puja bring people together, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. Religious teachings often emphasize values like compassion, honesty, and charity, which help maintain social order. However, religion can sometimes become rigid, leading to dogmatism or division. History is replete with examples of conflicts fueled by religious differences, from crusades to modern sectarian tensions. Spirituality, by contrast, is less likely to create such divisions because it is inherently personal and inclusive. It emphasizes universal values like love, empathy, and interconnectedness, which transcend cultural or religious boundaries. However, spirituality's lack of structure can sometimes leave individuals feeling directionless, lacking the clear guidance that religion provides.

In modern society, the distinction be-

tween religion and spirituality has become more pronounced, particularly as people increasingly seek individualized paths to meaning. Many individuals, especially in urban and globalized settings, are moving away from strict religious adherence and embracing spirituality as a way to navigate the complexities of modern life. Practices like meditation, mindfulness, and yoga have gained popularity as tools for stress relief and self-discovery, often divorced from their religious origins. This shift reflects a growing desire for flexibility and personal freedom in the search for meaning. For example, a young professional in a bustling city might practice mindfulness to cope with stress, finding spiritual fulfillment without affiliating with any religious tradition. At the same time, religion continues to play a vital role for many, offering a sense of identity and community in an increasingly fragmented world.

In the context of Assamese society, both religion and spirituality have deep roots and continue to shape cultural and individual lives. The Vaishnavite tradition, propagated by the revered saint Sankaradeva, emphasizes both religious devotion and spiritual introspection. Practices like Naam (devotional singing) in Namghars (community prayer halls) blend religious rituals with spiritual experiences, fostering a sense of unity and inner peace. Festivals like Bihu, while rooted in cultural and religious traditions, also evoke a spiritual connection to nature and community. In contemporary Assam, many young people are exploring spirituality through practices like yoga or environmental activism, reflecting a global trend toward individualized spiritual paths. Yet, religious festivals and institutions remain central to Assamese identity, illustrating the coexistence of both dimensions.

The interplay between religion and spirituality also raises questions about their relevance in addressing modern challenges. Religion, with its emphasis on community and moral frameworks, can provide stabil-

ity in times of crisis, such as during natural disasters or social upheavals. It offers a sense of hope and collective strength. Spirituality, meanwhile, equips individuals with tools to navigate personal struggles, such as anxiety, loss, or existential uncertainty. By fostering self-awareness and resilience, spirituality can complement religion's communal support. For instance, someone attending a religious service might find solace in the community, while also using meditation to process personal grief. Together, these dimensions can create a holistic approach to well-being.

Ultimately, neither religion nor spirituality is inherently superior; they serve different purposes and cater to different needs. Religion provides structure, community, and a shared moral framework, while spirituality offers freedom, introspection, and a personal connection to the universe. The choice between them or the balance one strikes depends on individual temperament, cultural background, and life circumstances. Some may find fulfillment in the rituals and traditions of religion, while others may seek the unbound exploration of spirituality. Many find a middle path, integrating religious practices with spiritual introspection to create a meaningful life.

Religion and spirituality, while distinct, are interconnected pathways to understanding life's deeper questions. Religion offers a structured, communal approach to meaning, rooted in tradition and shared beliefs. Spirituality, by contrast, is a personal journey that prioritizes inner peace and self-discovery. Both have unique strengths and limitations, and their interplay can enrich human experience. In a world that is increasingly complex and diverse, understanding the differences and synergies between religion and spirituality can help individuals and communities navigate their search for purpose, connection, and peace. By embracing the wisdom of both, we can cultivate a more balanced and fulfilling approach to life.



Coming together of NDPP, NPF not for personal gains but for sake of Naga people: Rio

KOHIMA, Oct 20: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Monday said that the scheduled merger of the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) with the Naga People's Front (NPF) is not for personal gains but for the sake of the Naga people.

Addressing the Traditional Central Executive Council (CEC) meeting on the eve of the NPF general convention, Rio called the upcoming merger a "prayer answered by divine intervention", saying it marks a new chapter of unity in the state's political journey.

Rio was unanimously elected as the new leader of NPF legislature party and is also the president-elect of the party.

His election as the leader of both the NPF and its legislature party took place on Saturday following the sixth general convention of NDPP, which passed a resolution to fully accept the September 6 proposal of the NPF for merger with it.

Rio thanked NDPP and NPF leaders for their trust and cooperation throughout the transition.

Tracing his long political career from the United Democratic Front in 1973 to the present times, Rio reflected on decades of challenges, instability, and evolution of regional politics.



He recalled the formation of the Nagaland People's Front in 2002, subsequently changed to Naga People's Front, and its peak strength in 2013, when it secured an absolute majority with 38 MLAs, before internal divisions weakened the party.

"Greed and mistrust divided us in the past, but this reunion must remind us that our strength lies in unity — in thought, purpose and action," Rio said.

He emphasised that regionalism, rooted in Naga identity, must remain the guiding principle of the party.

Rio also underlined the need to "maintain a strategic alliance with

the BJP", noting that partnership with a national party was essential for governance, development, and safeguarding Naga interests within the Indian union.

He reiterated his commitment to the NPF's founding slogan, "Peace for Development and Development for Peace", and called upon members to rise above personal ambitions.

"Let us recommit ourselves to unity, peace, and prosperity. With sincere leadership and a united vision, no goal is beyond our reach," he said.

The chief minister also expressed gratitude to the NDPP and NPF rank and file for their faith in

his leadership and announced that the party would seek endorsement from the NPF general convention before forwarding the merger resolution to the Election Commission for official recognition.

Outgoing leader of the NPF legislature party, Kuzholuzo Nienu, credited Rio, his deputy T R Zeliang, and 32 MLAs for steering the merger of the NDPP with the NPF.

Nienu also extended appreciation to NDPP leaders and workers for their cooperation and goodwill throughout the transition.

He further acknowledged the roles of NPF president Apong Pongener, secretary general Achumbemo Kikon and other senior leaders in facilitating the unification.

Urging all to bury the past difference and come together, Nienu called upon members of both parties to embrace reconciliation and unity.

"Let us be born again and truly try to lift up one another," he added.

The entire process of merger, which commenced with the September 6 proposal of the NPF urging Rio to rejoin the party and take over its leadership, is scheduled to culminate on Tuesday with the party's general convention marking its 63rd Foundation Day. (PTI)

CoRRP withdraws boycott call of govt programmes after Nagaland cabinet accepts key demands

KOHIMA, Oct 20: The Five Tribes Committee on Review of Reservation Policy (CoRRP) on Monday withdrew its call for boycott of all state government functions following the Nagaland cabinet's decision to accept its key demands.

The committee, comprising five major Naga tribes — Ao, Angami, Lotha, Rengma and Sumi — had been demanding the renaming of the Job Reservation Commission to the Commission for Review of Reservation Policy, and an expansion of its terms of reference beyond job-related matters, which was accepted by the government on October 16.

In a press release, CoRRP convenor Tesinlo Semy and member secretary GK Zhimomi said they took the decision to revoke the boycott call after a meeting where representatives of all five tribe bodies and their frontal units participated.

"The decision of the cabinet aligns with the representation it had submitted to the state government on September 24, calling for a broader review mechanism to examine the reservation policy across sectors," they said. The committee thanked the government for honouring its concerns and confirmed that all five apex tribe bodies under it are ready to extend full cooperation to the newly renamed commission "as and when asked for."

"The meeting welcomed and appreciated the decision of the state cabinet. The CoRRP and the five apex tribe bodies are ready to extend full cooperation to the commission," the statement said.

The committee also officially declared that the boycott of all state government functions and activities, which had been in force since August 15, now stands withdrawn.

The push to review Nagaland's more than four decades old reservation policy intensified after the five tribal apex bodies under the banner of the 5-Tribes CoRRP submitted a joint memorandum to the state government.

They argued that the policy, which has been in place since 1977, no longer reflects the current socio-economic and educational realities of the various communities in the state.



Pressing for fulfillment of their demand, the committee conducted at least two phases of agitation — first on May 29 in the form of protest rallies across multiple district headquarters (Dimapur, Kohima, Mokokchung, Wokha, Tseminyu, Zunheboto, Chümoukedima, Nuland).

The second phase was on July 9, thousands of people from the tribes staged a protest outside the Civil Secretariat.

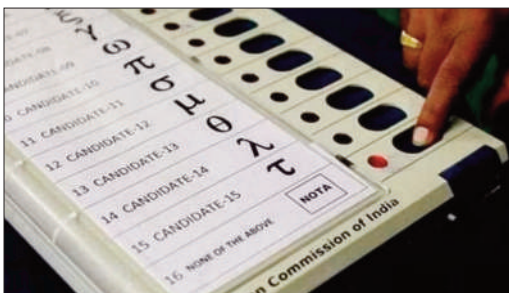
It has also declared non-cooperation with the government and did not participate in Independence Day celebrations.

While the government had accepted CoRRP demand for review of reservation policy and announced formation of a five-member Job Reservation Committee, they asked the nomenclature be changed to Reservation Review Commission saying that their demand is not for job reservation but also other areas of reservation existing in the state.

Initially, 25 per cent reservation was allocated for seven tribes in non-technical and non-gazetted posts for a period of 10 years. These tribes were designated as 'backward' based on educational and economic disadvantages, and limited representation in state services.

Over the years, the reservation has increased to 37 per cent comprising 25 per cent for seven Eastern Nagaland Backward Tribes and 12 per cent for four other backward tribes of the state. (PTI)

Opposition People's Conference to contest Dampa bypoll in Mizoram



AIZAWL, Oct 20: Opposition People's Conference (PC) in Mizoram will contest the November 11 bypoll to Dampa assembly seat in Mamit district, a party leader said on Monday.

The party has named its vice-president K Zahmingthanga as its candidate for the bypoll, PC chief Vanlalratu said.

Zahmingthanga will file his papers on Tuesday, the last date of filing nominations, he said.

Four candidates from major political parties in the state have already filed their papers for the bypoll.

The ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) has fielded Mizo singer and preacher Vanlalsailova, main opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) nominated party senior vice-president and former health minister Dr. R. Lalthangliana and the Congress has fielded party vice-president and former minister John Rotluangliana.

The BJP has nominated Lalhmangaiha, who recently joined the party and earlier contested the seat twice.

Nomination papers will be scrutinised on Wednesday, and the deadline for withdrawal of candidature is Friday (October 24).

The bypoll was necessitated following the death of MNF MLA Lalrintluanga Sailo on July 21.

There are 20,790 voters, including 10,185 females in the assembly segment, according to the final rolls published on September 30.

There are 41 polling stations in the constituency. Silsury-I polling station has the highest number of voters at 1,103, while Zopui polling station has the least at 30. The counting of votes will be held on November 14. (PTI)

Nagaland Governor, CM, DyCM greet people on Diwali

KOHIMA, Oct 20: Nagaland Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and Deputy Chief Minister Y Patton on Monday extended warm greetings to the people on the occasion of Diwali.

In his message, Bhalla conveyed heartfelt wishes for peace, prosperity and happiness to all.

"May this festival of lights bring peace, prosperity and happiness to all. As we celebrate the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil, let us embrace the spirit of harmony, compassion and togetherness," he stated.

The governor further wished that the radiance of diyas illuminate lives with hope and wisdom and inspire renewed unity and strength among the people.

The CM, in his message, extended warm greetings on the joyous occasion of Diwali.

"May the festival of lights bring blessings of hope, harmony, and prosperity to our lives. As we celebrate, let us spread kindness, nurture togetherness, and work towards a brighter tomorrow," he shared on social media while wishing everyone a happy and safe celebration.

Patton also joined in extending Diwali greetings to the people.

"As this festival of lights marks the triumph of good over evil, may it also inspire a renewed commitment to compassion, integrity, and kindness among all," he said.

Patton wished that the festival bring joy to every home and strengthen the bonds of love and friendship, adding, "Wishing everyone happiness, health, and prosperity," he said. (PTI)

Peaceful dialogue only solution to ethnic conflict: Manipur Police chief



IMPHAL, Oct 20: Manipur Police DGP Rajiv Singh said that peaceful dialogue is the only solution to resolve the ethnic conflict in the state.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 134th Raising Day in Imphal on Sunday, the DGP said, "These are very challenging times, but we have been trying to tackle them with the best possible strength, and with the cooperation of everyone."

Singh said there has been a lot of damage to properties and people, and normal life has been disrupted.

"There are problems which we are trying to solve at the earliest because we also want peace and normalcy as quickly as possible... Things have improved in the last one-and-a-half years," Singh said.

Violence, deaths and injuries have come down, he said.

"There are sporadic incidents of arson and firing, but the security

forces are alert and everybody is on the job to see that nothing escalates," the DGP said.

"I request communities on both sides to come forward with suggestions and try to talk it out. The only solution to this problem is peaceful dialogue between both communities (Meitei and Kuki) by taking into account all the stakeholders," the DGP said.

He also said that the Manipur Police is a civilian-friendly force.

There have been instances where the security forces have not pushed themselves because otherwise, it would have resulted in a lot of damage to innocent civilians, the officer said.

Earlier, addressing a gathering at the 1st Manipur Rifles parade ground, Singh said, "As many as 3,014 illegal arms and 30,000 rounds of ammunition have been recovered, while over 1,000 illegally possessed arms along with 15,000 rounds of ammunition have been surrendered before security forces over the past year."

He added that 445 IEDs and 809 hand grenades were recovered over the past year, during which 26

insurgents were detained under the National Security Act.

In view of the ethnic strife, the Centre had imposed the President's rule in Manipur after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned.

The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation.

The Manipur Police celebrated its 134th Raising Day on Sunday with parade shows, a statement said on Monday.

"The Manipur Police on Sunday celebrated its 134th Raising Day with a parade at 1MR (Manipur Rifles) Ground with Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla gracing the function as the chief guest," it said.

Twelve contingents of Manipur Police took part in the parade along with a skill show by sports personnel of Manipur Police, it said.

Additional SP Saikhom Mirabei Chanu, who had won a gold medal at the Commonwealth Weightlifting Championships in Ahmedabad in August 2025 and a silver medal at the World Weightlifting Championships 2025 in Norway's Forde, was also presented with a special award, it said.

"DGP Manipur announced that the Governor-in-Council has recently approved a proposal of the PHQ (police headquarters) regarding the revision of the annual uniform allowance for Manipur Police Service (MPS) officers and Junior Commissioned Officers (Inspectors, Subedars, Sub-Inspectors, and Jemadars) to ₹ 8,000 and ₹ 6,000 respectively," the statement said, adding the present uniform allowance which was implemented in 1989 had remained unchanged for the past 36 years.

It also said Kangpokpi Police Station has been awarded the DGP Manipur Trophy for Best Police Station, 2025. (PTI)

Manipur: 7 employees of state power company 'assaulted' in Churachandpur

IMPHAL, Oct 20: Seven employees of Manipur State Power Company Limited were allegedly assaulted by unidentified miscreants on the premises of a sub-station in Churachandpur district, an official said on Monday.

The company strongly condemned the "brutal assault" of its employees.

"Seven staffers, including the officer in charge of the 33/11 kv sub-station at Tuila, were assaulted by unidentified miscreants on October 18 in the sub-station complex. The reasons behind the attack are not known to us," the official said.

In a statement, the power utility demanded a swift and transparent investigation and arrest of those responsible for the attack.

Notably, more than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. (PTI)

Tripura CM to inaugurate three-day Diwali festival at Maa Tripura Sundari temple



AGARTALA, Oct 20: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha will inaugurate the Diwali festival and mela at Maa Tripura Sundari temple in Gomati district on Monday evening, an official said.

The temple is one of the 51 'shakti pithas', holy shrines for Hindus.

MPs Biplab Kumar Deb, Kriti Devi Debbarna, BJP state president Rajib Bhattacharjee, Agriculture Minister Ratan Lal Nath and Finance Minister Pranajit Singha Roy will be present during the inaugural programme, said MLA Abhishek Debroy, who is also the head of the mela organising committee, on Monday.

Debroy said the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced two special trains - Agartala-Dharmanagar-Agartala and Agartala-Sabroom-Agartala for pilgrims to visit Maa Tripura Sundari temple.

Superintendent of Police (SP), Gomati, Kiran Kumar, said all necessary steps have been taken to maintain law and order during the three-day festivities.

As part of the security measures, 37 CCTV cameras have been installed and 10 watch towers set up around the temple complex for round-the-clock surveillance, he said.

Forces from the district police, CRPF and Tripura State Rifles (TSR) will be deployed to manage the large crowd expected during the three-day event.

The SP said regular vehicle checking and intensified patrolling would also be carried out to prevent any untoward incident. (PTI)

Bridging beliefs: Historic interfaith marriage in Meghalaya draws praise for love and tolerance

SHILLONG, Oct 20: In a remarkable display of interfaith harmony, a wedding in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills district on Monday brought together two families from different religious traditions — the Unitarian and the Niamtre — marking what is believed to be the first such union jointly blessed by leaders of both faiths.

Held under the Khasi matrilineal tradition, the ceremony saw Rev. Derrick P Pariat, Minister of the Unitarian Church, and Pa Daloi Purmon Kynji, a traditional religious leader, jointly officiating the wedding, each offering blessings from their respective faiths in a gesture of mutual respect and understanding.

The event drew attention not only for its historic nature but also for its message of coexistence at a time when interfaith marriages across India often face social and familial opposition.

The groom's father, Rev. HH Mohrmen, a senior Unitarian minister from Jowai, described the wedding as "a historic moment that embodies the true spirit of freedom and coexistence."

Reflecting on the event, he said, "At a time when interfaith marriages elsewhere in the country are often opposed or burdened by conversion pressures, this union reminds us that faith can unite instead of divide."

Unitarianism took root in the Khasi Hills in the late 19th century through Hajom Kissor Singh, who, though born a Christian, broke away from missionary orthodoxy and founded a movement that aligned more



closely with Khasi-Jaintia traditional beliefs, minus the sacrificial practices.

The movement emphasised reason, equality, moral living, and freedom of conscience, blending the principles of Christianity with indigenous Khasi values of simplicity, service, and respect for all faiths.

The bride belongs to the Niamtre faith, one of the

traditional belief systems of the Khasis, rooted in reverence for the Creator, ancestors, and the natural world.

Central to Niamtre is the principle of Tip Briew, Tip Blei (Know Man, Know God), which underscores that moral living and respect for others are inseparable from one's relationship with the divine.

The wedding inspired emotional reactions online. Heirtami Paswet commented, "So heartwarming to see love triumph over trivial religious differences," adding, "My lover recently left because her mother insists she should only be with someone who's Christian."

His words highlighted the challenges faced by many young couples navigating faith and family expectations.

Deiwi Tariang Tongper, an elected member of the Voice of the People's Party in the Jaintia Tribal Council, said, "This is what our society badly needs! I'm so overwhelmed by the union of these two beautiful souls who understand that love is the ultimate solution. God bless them always in their new beginnings."

The event has been widely hailed as a milestone for religious understanding, demonstrating that love, mutual respect, and shared values can bridge communities and traditions even in societies bound by strict faith norms.

Interfaith and intercaste marriages in Meghalaya are relatively uncommon but not unheard of.

According to a 2011 study, inter-caste marriages in Meghalaya stood at 25 per cent, which is higher than the national average of 9.9 per cent.

However, interfaith marriages are less frequent.

The study, using data from the 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey, found that inter-religious marriages in Meghalaya were at 6.7 per cent, compared to the national average of 2.1 per cent. (PTI)

Israel still fires on Lebanon almost year after ceasefire

BEIRUT, Oct 20: As a tenuous ceasefire took hold in Gaza this month, Israel launched more airstrikes on southern Lebanon — 11 months into a ceasefire there.

The bombardment of a construction equipment business killed a Syrian passerby, wounded seven people including two women, and destroyed millions of dollars worth of bulldozers and excavators.

The October 11 strikes would be an anomaly in most countries not at war. But near-daily Israeli attacks have become the new normal in Lebanon, nearly a year after a US-brokered truce halted the latest conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

Some see a likely blueprint for the Gaza ceasefire, with ongoing but lower-intensity conflicts. On Sunday, Israel struck Gaza after it said Hamas fired at its troops, in the first major test of the US-brokered truce.

Mona Yacoubian, director of the Middle East programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies think tank, described the Lebanon scenario as a "lessfire" rather than a ceasefire.

Lebanon "could well serve as the model for Gaza, essentially giving leeway to Israeli forces to strike whenever they deem a threat without a full resumption of conflict," she said.

A ceasefire with no clear enforcement The latest Israel-Hezbollah conflict began the day after the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack on Israel triggered the war in Gaza. The militant group Hezbollah,

largely based in southern Lebanon, began firing rockets into Israel in support of Hamas and the Palestinians.

Israel responded with airstrikes and shelling. The low-level conflict escalated into full-scale war in September 2024.

The ceasefire on November 27, 2024, required Lebanon to stop armed groups from attacking Israel and Israel to halt "offensive" military actions in Lebanon. It said Israel and Lebanon can act in "self-defence," without elaborating.

Both sides can report alleged violations to a monitoring committee of the US, France, Israel, Lebanon and the UN peacekeeping force known as UNIFIL, but the deal is vague on enforcement.

In practice, Israel has largely taken enforcement into its own hands, asserting that its strikes in Lebanon target Hezbollah militants, facilities and weapons.

Israel says it aims to stop the badly weakened group from rebuilding. Lebanese officials say the attacks obstruct its efforts to get Hezbollah to disarm by giving the group a pretext to hold onto its weapons.

Lebanon also says Israel's strikes, including the October 11 one, often harm civilians and destroy infrastructure unrelated to Hezbollah.

Lebanon's health ministry has reported more than 270 people killed and around 850 wounded by Israeli military actions since the ceasefire. As of October 9, the UN human rights office had verified that 107 of those killed were civilians or non-



combatants, said spokesperson Thameen Al-Kheetan.

No Israelis have been killed by fire from Lebanon since the ceasefire.

From November 27, 2024, to mid-October, UNIFIL detected around 950 projectiles fired from Israel into Lebanon and 100 Israeli airstrikes, spokesperson Kandice Ardil said.

During the same period, it reported 21 projectiles fired from Lebanon toward Israel. Hezbollah has claimed one attack since the ceasefire.

Conflicting narratives After the October 11 strikes in Msayleh, Israel's army said it hit "engineering equipment intended for the re-

construction of terrorist infrastructure in southern Lebanon."

Lebanese authorities, Hezbollah and the equipment's owner disputed that.

"Everyone in Lebanon, from all different sects, comes to buy from us," owner Ahmad Tabaja told journalists. "What have we done wrong?"

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun called the strikes "blatant aggression against civilian facilities." Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri accused Israel of seeking to prevent communities' reconstruction. Lebanon complained to the UN Security Council.

A few days later, Israel struck a cement factory and a quarry, claiming Hezbollah

planned to use it to rebuild its infrastructure.

Last month, an Israeli strike hit a motorcycle and a car carrying a family in Bint Jbeil. It killed Shadi Charara, a car salesman, three of his children — including 18-month-old twins — and the motorcycle, and badly wounded Charara's wife and oldest daughter. It was among the highest death tolls since the ceasefire, sparking particular outrage because of the children.

"My brother was a civilian and his children and wife are civilians, and they have nothing to do with politics," said sister Amina Charara.

Israel's military said it was targeting a Hezbollah militant, whom it did not name, but acknowledged that civilians were killed.

Even when the target is a known Hezbollah member, the military necessity can be disputed.

Earlier this month, an Israeli drone strike killed a Hezbollah member who was blinded last year in Israel's exploding pagers attack, along with his wife.

Israel's army said Hassan Atwi was a key official in Hezbollah's Aerial Defence Unit. Hezbollah officials said he had played no military role since losing his eyesight.

The end of 'mutual deterrence' Hezbollah was formed in 1982, with Iranian backing, to fight Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon at the time. Israeli forces withdrew in 2000, and Hezbollah grew into one of the region's

most powerful non-state armed groups.

In 2006, Hezbollah and Israel fought a month-long war that ended in a draw. For the next 17 years, "there was a tense calm ... that was largely due to mutual deterrence," said Nicholas Blanford, a senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Middle East programme.

Strikes in Lebanon were generally understood to be off limits. Both sides wanted to avoid another damaging war. Now that equation has changed.

Though Blanford said Hezbollah could still deliver blows to Israel, the group's "deterrence has been shattered by the recent war," he said.

In an interview with The Associated Press last month, Hezbollah political official Mohammad Fneish said the prospect of coexisting with daily Israeli attacks is "not acceptable."

But the group has largely limited itself to calling on Lebanon's government to pressure Israel with what Fneish called "its political, diplomatic or other capabilities."

He added: "If things develop further, then the resistance leadership is studying matters, and all options are open."

Yacoubian, the analyst, said she didn't see the situation in Lebanon changing any time soon, "barring a breakthrough in behind-the-scenes negotiations brokered by the US."

With the Gaza ceasefire, she said, the difference could be the "significant role" of fellow mediators Qatar, Egypt and Turkey. (AP)

Centrist Rodrigo Paz wins Bolivia's presidential runoff, topping right-wing rival



LA PAZ (BOLIVIA), Oct 20: Rodrigo Paz, a centrist senator who was never a nationally prominent figure until now, won Bolivia's presidential election on Sunday, preliminary results showed, galvanizing voters outraged by the country's economic crisis and frustrated after 20 years of rule by the Movement Toward Socialism party.

"The trend is irreversible," Oscar Hassenteufel, the president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, said of Paz's lead over his rival, former right-wing President Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga.

Paz won 54 per cent of the votes, early results showed, versus Quiroga's 45 per cent.

"Today, Bolivia can be certain that this will be a government that will bring solutions," he told supporters. "Bolivia breathes winds of change and renewal to move forward."

Shortly after the results came in, Quiroga conceded to Paz.

"I've called Rodrigo Paz and wished him congratulations," he said in a somber speech, prompting jeers and cries of fraud from the audience. But Quiroga urged calm, saying that a refusal to recognize the results would "leave the country hanging."

Paz and his popular running mate, ex-police Capt. Edman Lara gained traction among working-class and rural voters disillusioned with the unbridled spending of the long-ruling Movement Toward Socialism, or MAS, party, but wary of Quiroga's radical 180-degree turn

away from its social protections. Paz's victory sets the South American nation of 12 million on a sharply uncertain path as he seeks to enact major change for the first time since the 2005 election of Evo Morales, the founder of MAS and Bolivia's first Indigenous president.

Paz plans to end Bolivia's fixed exchange rate, phase out generous fuel subsidies, and reduce hefty public investment, redrawing much of the MAS economic model that dominated for two decades. But he says he'll maintain MAS-style benefits and take a gradual approach to free-market reforms, in hopes of avoiding a sharp recession or jump in inflation that would enrage the masses — as has happened before in Bolivia.

Paz inherits an economy in shambles

Paz's supporters erupted into raucous cheers and ran into the streets of La Paz, setting off fireworks and honking car horns. Crowds thronged a hotel downtown where Paz spoke, some shouting, "The people, united, will never be defeated!"

"We feel victorious," Roger Carrillo, a volunteer with Paz's party, said by phone from eastern Bolivia, where he was rallying a celebratory caravan. "We know there is work ahead of us, but we just want to enjoy this moment."

Vowing to avoid the IMF, Paz has pledged to scrape together the necessary cash by fighting corruption, reducing wasteful spending, and restoring enough confidence in

the country's currency to lure US dollar savings out from under Bolivians' mattresses and into the banking system.

But Paz's stated reluctance to slam on the fiscal brakes — with promises of cash handouts for the poor to cushion the blow of subsidy cuts — has led to criticism.

"It's just so vague, I feel like he's saying these things to please voters when fiscally it doesn't add up," said 48-year-old Rodrigo Tribeño, who voted for Quiroga on Sunday. "We needed a real change."

An outsider with political experience

Although Paz, the son of former President Jaime Paz Zamora, who was in office from 1989 to 1993, has spent more than two decades in politics as a lawmaker and mayor, he appeared in this race as a political unknown. The senator rose unexpectedly from the bottom of the polls to a first-place finish in the August vote.

Paz's slogan of "capitalism for all" appealed to many merchants and entrepreneurs who flourished in Morales' heyday but later chafed against his high taxes and regulations. "There's an obvious class difference. For Quiroga, you have people who've been in politics and in the economic elite for a long time — businesspeople, agro-industrialists," said Verónica Rocha, a Bolivian political analyst. "With Paz, it's the opposite."

An ex-cop shakes up the race

The race looked to be a staid affair until Paz surprised everyone by picking Lara as his running mate. The charismatic young ex-police officer had zero political experience but gained fame on TikTok after being fired from the police for denouncing corruption in viral videos.

Lara's fiery, populist promises of universal income for women and higher pensions for retirees frequently forced Paz into damage control, causing tension on the campaign trail. But for those who see Lara as divisive and hot-headed, there are plenty of Bolivians who say those traits connote authenticity in comparison to the other scripted, telegenic candidates. (AP)

Body of Nepali student who died in Hamas captivity returns to Nepal

KATHMANDU, Oct 20: The body of a Nepali student who saved several lives during the Hamas attack in Israel two years ago was on Monday brought to Kathmandu from Tel Aviv for his last rites.

Bipin Joshi, a 23-year-old student under Israel's Learn and Earn Programme, was taken into captivity along with several others by Hamas in Kibbutz Alumim on October 7, 2023. The Israeli military assessed that he was murdered in captivity during the first months of the war.

Nepal's Prime Minister Sushila Karki paid tributes to Bipin's mortal remains at the Tribhuvan International Airport here, saying he will "always live in the hearts of every Nepali."

His body was wrapped in Nepal's national flag.

Karki said although Bipin is no longer in physical form, his courage and sacrifice will be remembered by the nation. "He is a brave Nepali youth — a true son of Nepal," she said.

The prime minister said she had hoped Bipin would return alive and be welcomed home but was deeply saddened by the confirmation of his death.

"Although his body has returned lifeless, Bipin has immortalised the name of a brave Nepali," she added. She expressed deep condolences to Bipin's family and acknowledged the tireless efforts of his mother and sister throughout the two-year ordeal.

His body will be later flown to his home district of Kanchanpur in Western Nepal by a Nepali Army helicopter, where his family will perform his final rites as per religious traditions.

Bipin was one of 17 Nepali students studying under the Learn and Earn program in southern Israel when Hamas launched its surprise attack on October 7, 2023. Ten of the students were killed in the assault, while Bipin was taken hostage. Six other Nepalese students escaped safely during the attack launched by Hamas.

After nearly two years, Hamas recently handed over Bipin's body to the Israeli government and subsequently repatriated his remains to Nepal. (PTI)

Iraq keeping small contingent of US military advisers due to IS threat in Syria



BAGHDAD, Oct 20: Iraq's prime minister said Monday that a small contingent of US military advisers will remain in the country for now to coordinate with US forces in Syria combating the Islamic State group.

Washington and Baghdad agreed last year to wind down an American-led coalition fighting IS in Iraq by this September, with US forces departing some bases where they have been stationed.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani told a small group of journalists in Baghdad that US military advisers and support personnel are now stationed at the Ain al-Asad air base in Western Iraq, a base adjacent to the Baghdad airport, and the al-Harir air base in northern Iraq.

Al-Sudani noted that the agreement originally stipulated a full pullout of US forces from Ain al-Asad by September, but that "developments in Syria" since then "required maintaining a small unit" of between 250 and 350 advisers and security personnel at the base.

He said they would work "to support counter-ISIS surveillance and coordination with the al-Tanf base" in Syria.

He added that "other US sites are witnessing gradual reductions in personnel and operations."

After the fall of former Syrian President Bashar Assad in a lightning rebel offensive in December, fears arose in Iraq of an IS resurgence taking advantage of the ensuing security vacuum as well as of weapons abandoned by the former Syrian army.

Al-Sudani maintained that the extremist group, which seized wide swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria a decade ago "no longer

poses a significant threat inside Iraq."

Iraq has sought to balance its relations with the United States and Tehran and to avoid being pulled into regional conflicts, a policy that the prime minister said he will continue.

"We put Iraq first, and we do not wish to act as a proxy for anyone," he said. "Iraq will not be a battlefield for conflicts."

At the same time, al-Sudani urged the US to return to negotiations with Iran, describing the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" approach to curtail Iranian influence as "counterproductive."

"Iran is an important and influential country that must be treated with respect and through direct dialogue," he said.

There have been tensions between Baghdad and Washington over the presence of Iran-backed militias in Iraq. The Popular Mobilization Forces, a coalition of militias that formed to fight IS, was formally placed under the control of the Iraqi military in 2016 but in practice still operates with significant autonomy.

The Iraqi parliament has been considering legislation that would solidify the relationship between the military and the PMF, drawing objections from Washington.

Al-Sudani did not directly address the proposed legislation but said his government's programme "includes disarmament and national dialogue to remove any justification for carrying weapons."

"We encourage all factions to either integrate into state institutions or engage in political life," which could include becoming political parties and running for election, he said. (AP)

US envoys arrive in Israel to shore up Gaza ceasefire after major flareup

TEL AVIV, Oct 20: Special envoy Steve Witkoff and the US president's son-in-law Jared Kushner were in Israel Monday to shore up the tenuous ceasefire that's holding in Gaza, a day after the fragile deal faced its first major flareup with Israel threatening to halt aid transfers after it said Hamas militants had killed two soldiers.

The US Embassy said the two envoys had landed in Tel Aviv. The Israeli military later said it resumed enforcing the ceasefire, and the official confirmed that aid deliveries would resume Monday.

By early afternoon, it was not immediately clear if the flow of aid had restarted.

More than a week has passed since the start of the US-proposed truce aimed at ending two years of war. US President Donald Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday that Hamas has been "quite bumptious" and "they've been doing some shooting."

He also suggested that the violence might be the fault of "rebels" within the organisation rather than its leadership.

Since the ceasefire started, Hamas security forces have returned to the streets in Gaza, clashing with armed groups and killing alleged gangsters in what the militant group says is an attempt to restore law and order in areas where Israeli troops have withdrawn.

On Sunday, Israel's military said militants had fired at troops in areas of Rafah city that are Israeli-controlled according to agreed-upon ceasefire lines.

Hamas, which continued to accuse Israel of multiple ceasefire violations, said communication with its remaining units in Rafah had been cut off for months and "we are not responsible for any incidents occurring in those areas."

The next stages of the ceasefire are expected to focus on disarming Hamas, Israeli withdrawal from additional areas it controls in Gaza, and future governance of the devastated territory. The US plan proposes the establishment of an internationally backed authority. (AP)

UK businesses accelerate India expansion plans post-FTA: Report

LONDON, Oct 20: Several UK businesses see the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India as a "game-changer" as they accelerate expansion plans and a majority of firms without a presence move to enter the market, according to a new report.

According to Grant Thornton's latest 'International Business Report' (IBR) analysis from last week, 72 per cent of UK firms now identify India as a key market for international growth, up from 61 per cent last year, signalling India's "shift to the centre of global strategy conversations".

The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's UK visit in July, is expected to significantly enhance the 44.1-billion-pound bilateral trading partnership once it is ratified by the British Parliament in the coming months.

The IBR report found that while only 28 per cent of businesses surveyed currently operate in India, 73 per cent of those without a current presence plan to enter the market, including 13 per cent within the next 12 months.

"The shift we're seeing is clear: UK mid-market businesses are no longer asking 'why India', they are asking 'how soon'," said Anuj Chande, Partner and Head of South Asia Business Group, Grant Thornton UK.

"With 73 per cent of firms planning to establish operations in India and over half of existing players looking to scale up within a year, this is a pivotal moment. The UK-India FTA is a game-changer, reducing entry barriers and accelerating opportunity," he said.

The analysis finds that India's appeal for UK businesses is driven by a combination of scale, talent, and economic momentum, with 65 per cent of British firms citing India's fast-growing economy and 60 per cent pointing to its vast consumer market as key reasons for the prioritisation. (PTI)

Amazon cloud computing outage disrupts Snapchat, Robinhood and many other online services

SAN FRANCISCO, Oct 20: Amazon said its cloud computing service was recovering from a major outage that disrupted online activity around the world on Monday.

Amazon Web Services provides remote computing services to many governments, universities, and companies, including The Associated Press.

On DownDetector, a website that tracks online outages, users reported issues with Snapchat, Roblox, Fortnite, online broker Robinhood, the McDonald's app, and many other services. Coinbase and Signal both said on X that they were experiencing issues related to the AWS outage.

The first signs of trouble emerged at around 3:11 am Eastern Time, when Amazon Web Services reported on its Health Dashboard that it was "investigating increased error rates and laten-



cies for multiple AWS services in the US-EAST-1 Region."

Later, the company reported that there were "significant error rates" and that engineers were "actively working" on the problem.

Around 6 am Eastern Time, the company said that it was seeing recovery across most of the affected services. "We can confirm global

services and features that rely on US-EAST-1 have also recovered," it said, adding that it is working on a "full resolution."

AWS customers include some of the world's biggest businesses and organizations.

"So much of the world now relies on these three or four big (cloud) compute companies who

provide the underlying infrastructure that when there's an issue like this, it can be really impactful across a broad range, a broad spectrum" of online services, said Patrick Burgess, a cybersecurity expert at UK-based BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT.

"The world now runs on the cloud," and the internet is seen as a utility like water or electricity, as we spend so much of our lives on our smartphones, Burgess said.

And because so much of the online world's plumbing is underpinned by a handful of companies, when something goes wrong, "it's very difficult for users to pinpoint what is happening because we don't see Amazon, we just see Snapchat or Roblox," Burgess said.

Amazon Web Services said at about 6:30 am Eastern time that "most AWS Service operations are succeeding normally now." (AP)

Bihar polls: RJD releases list of 143 candidates

4 of them to fight against INDIA bloc partners

PATNA, Oct 20: The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) on Monday announced its list of 143 candidates for the Bihar assembly polls, at least four of whom would end up contesting against nominees of the other INDIA bloc constituents.

The list was released hours before the filing of nomination papers for the second and final phase was to be over.

It put paid to rumours that the RJD was going to contest the Kutumba seat, currently held by state Congress president Rajesh Kumar Ram, which would have led to a full-blown face-off between the two allies.

Nonetheless, the party would end up contesting against the Congress in Vaishali, Lalganj and Kahalgaon, and against former state minister Mukesh Sahni's Vikasheel Insaan Party in Tarapur. Earlier, the RJD had given the party symbol to Afzal Ali from Gaura Bauram, but the same has been withdrawn by party supremo Lalu Prasad, in favour of Santosh Sahni, the VIP's national president who is the younger brother of its founder.

However, Afzal has filed his nomination papers and did not withdraw the same, prompting Prasad to write to the Chief Electoral Officer that his candidature "not be taken into consideration".

RJD sources said while the cadre was likely to back Sahni in the polls, there would remain plenty of room for confusion as



Afzal could campaign using the party symbol.

Notable among the candidates are Tejashwi Yadav (Raghopur), Alok Mehta (Ujijarpur), Mukesh Raushan (Mahua) and Akhtarul Islam Shahin (Samastipur), all of whom will be defending their sitting seats.

RJD president Lalu Prasad's personal aide Bhola Yadav, who had also won the Bahadurpur seat in 2015, but dropped five years later when the party lost the constitutional to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U), will try to wrest it back from minister Madan Sahni.

Former Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary, who was trounced by a JD(U) greenhorn in the Lok Sabha

polls last year when he contested from Siwan, has been allowed to try and retain his sitting assembly seat of the same name.

Former education minister Chandrashekhar, who has been in the news for his controversial views on Hindu scriptures, has also been fielded from his sitting seat of Madhepura.

The 'MY' (Muslim-Yadav) support base of the party appears to have been kept in mind in the selection of candidates, though other backward castes and upper castes have also been given tickets.

The principal opposition party can also pride itself in having fielded 21 women, far more than its main rivals -- the JD(U) and

the BJP.

The JD(U) and the BJP, the two main constituents of the ruling NDA, are contesting 101 seats each.

Often charged by its detractors with having ushered in 'jungle raj' while in power, the RJD has preferred realpolitik to an image makeover.

A gangster-turned-politician like Bogo Singh (Matihani) is himself in the fray, while Osama Shahab has been given a chance to carry forward his late father Mohd Shahabuddin's legacy by making a debut from Raghunathpur, which falls under Siwan Lok Sabha seat, where Shahabuddin had remained unbeaten until he was disqualified following conviction in criminal cases.

Women are not far behind in carrying forward the legacy of their 'bahubali' (strongman) husbands and fathers either.

Former MP Veena Devi, wife of gangster-turned-politician Suraj Bhan Singh, will challenge her husband's arch-rival Anant Singh in Mokama.

Debutante Shivani Shukla, who has a law degree from London, has entered the fray from Lalganj, which has been won twice by her father Munna Shukla, one of the most feared gang-lords of north Bihar, and once by her mother Annu Shukla.

There is also an instance of more than one member of a family getting the RJD ticket. (PTI)

JK BYPOLLS

NC fields DDC member as Cong leaves Nagrota to realise 'larger goal' of defeating BJP



JAMMU, Oct 20: The National Conference has fielded its District Development Council (DDC) member Shamim Begum from Nagrota constituency, which is going to bypolls next month, after Congress decided not to contest from there to realise their 'larger goal' of defeating BJP despite being offered the seat by the ruling party.

Both coalition partners had fought last year's assembly elections together but the alliance has been going through a rough patch ever since the National Conference (NC) refused a safe seat to the Congress for the Rajya Sabha elections.

Elections to the four Rajya Sabha seats in the Union Territory will be held on October 24.

Bypolls are scheduled for Nagrota and Budgam assembly segments on November 11.

A by-election was necessitated in Nagrota by the demise of BJP legislator Devender Singh Rana on October 31 last year, while the Budgam seat fell vacant after Chief Minister Omar Abdullah retained Ganderbal -- his family's bastion -- after winning the two assembly seats.

"The party leadership has given mandate to DDC member Shamim Begum from Nagrota constituency after Congress decided not to contest from there. She is filing her nomination papers from the seat within the next couple of hours," NC Provincial President Rattan Lal Gupta told PTI.

Begum, who won from Nagrota's Dansal block in December 2020 DDC elections, thanked the party leadership for reposing faith and giving mandate to her to fight the by-election from her home constituency.

"The people know me very well. They have seen my work as a DDC member over the last four years and they will support me whole-heartedly to give me a chance to represent them in the assembly," she told PTI.

Earlier, Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) chief spokesperson Ravinder Sharma said the Indian National Congress has decided to leave the Nagrota assembly seat to its ally National Conference, keeping in view the larger interest and goal of defeating the BJP.

Downplaying rift with the Congress over seat-sharing in Rajya Sabha elections, NC vice-president and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said that "if the Congress has a better candidate for Nagrota, we are ready to compromise (by supporting Congress and not fight the election). We have no objection".

Sharma said the decision follows detailed deliberations over a JKPCC report and also after considering various factors, including that the NC had emerged second in Nagrota in 2024 assembly elections.

"Taking into account the broader parameters and principles of coalition, the INC central leadership has decided to leave the (Nagrota) seat to its ally NC, in furtherance of larger interests and goal of defeating the BJP," Sharma said in a statement. (PTI)

NC will fight assembly bypolls in Nagrota, Budgam on public issues: J-K deputy CM

JAMMU, Oct 20: Jammu and Kashmir Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Choudhary on Monday said the ruling National Conference (NC) will fight the bypolls to Nagrota and Budgam assembly seats on public issues, the biggest being the restoration of statehood to the Union Territory.

He expressed confidence that the voters in both the constituencies will ensure the win of the NC candidates to strengthen the hands of party president Farooq Abdullah and chief minister Omar Abdullah.

NC fielded District Development Council (DDC) member Shamim Begum from Nagrota and former minister Agha Syed Mehmood from Budgam. The two seats are going to the by-elections on November 11.

A by-election was necessitated in Nagrota by the demise of BJP legislator Devender Singh Rana on October 31 last year, while the Budgam seat fell vacant following Chief Minister Omar Abdullah retained Ganderbal -- his family's bastion -- after winning the two assembly seats.

Talking to reporters at NC headquarters here before accompanying Begum to file her nomination from Nagrota, the deputy chief minister said, "We will fight the elections on the issues being faced by the people and restoration of statehood is the biggest issue for us."

"We have restarted the practice of Darbar Move to provide major relief to the business community and others in Jammu. The practice was stopped by the BJP without caring for the business of the people," he said.

The J&K government recently issued orders for the closure of the Darbar Move offices in the summer capital Srinagar, hours after Chief Minister Abdullah announced restoration of the age-old tradition introduced by Dogra rulers in 1872.

According to the order, all offices shall reopen at Jammu, the winter capital, on November 3.

Lt Governor Manoj Sinha-led administration had scrapped the Darbar Move tradition in 2021.

"The restoration of Darbar Move is a very big decision of the NC-led government as it will not only benefit shopkeepers in Raghunath Bazar or Afsara road but will revive the age-old tradition and bring people closer," Choudhary said.

He alleged that the BJP is expected to fight the elections on misleading narratives and dividing people on the basis of their religion, creed and caste.

"The people are expected to vote for the ruling party candidate rather than the opposition for overall development. The 28 BJP legislators could do nothing for the people in their constituencies during the recent floods," the deputy CM said.

"We will win both the seats to end the arrogance of the BJP," he said. Another minister Javed Rana said National Conference is a cadre-based party. "We are sure that the people will stand with Abdullah-led government so that we can bring back the lost glory of the erstwhile state," Rana said.

Later, Begum accompanied by hundreds of supporters including the deputy CM submitted her nomination papers before the returning officer for the Nagrota bypoll. (PTI)

Polls: Liquor worth ₹ 23 cr among combined seizure of ₹ 64 cr in dry Bihar

PATNA, Oct 20: Enforcement agencies have seized liquor, cash, drugs and freebies with a combined value of ₹ 64.13 crore across Bihar since the announcement of the schedule for the assembly elections on October 6, officials said on Monday.

These seizures include liquor worth ₹ 23.41 crore in dry Bihar, they said.

The police and other agencies concerned have also arrested 753 people, since October 6, in the state and executed 13,587 non-bailable warrants during this period, an official said.

According to the latest information provided by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), "the authorities have seized cash, liquor, drugs, and freebies worth around ₹ 64.13 crore across the state" since the announcement of the assembly polls on October 6.

The seizures include liquor worth ₹ 23.41 crore, freebies worth ₹ 14 crore, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances of ₹ 16.88 crore and ₹ 4.19 crore in cash, the official said.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has already directed multiple enforcement agencies to intensify their vigilance to curb the use of money power in the polls.

The instructions have already been issued to the state police, excise and income tax departments, customs, revenue intelligence, and enforcement directorates, another official said.

"Flying squads, surveillance teams, and video surveillance teams are active round-the-clock across the state to monitor any attempt to influence voters through inducements. Instructions have also been given to ensure that enforcement activities must not



inconvenience the public during inspections or checks," he said.

The 243-member Bihar Assembly will go to polls in two phases on November 6 and 11, and the counting of votes is set to be announced on November 14.

"The ECI has already deployed 121 general observers and 18 police observers for phase 1 and 122 general observers along with 20 police observers for phase 2 of the assembly polls," the official said.

The ECI has instructed the observers to closely monitor the entire election process and ensure a transparent, free and fair conduct of elections, he said.

Observers have also been instructed to visit polling stations and ensure the implementation of the recent initiatives taken by the commission for the convenience of the voters, he said.

While the filing of the nomination papers for the first phase of polls has already been closed on October 17, the last date for submitting such documents for the second round of polls will end on Monday. (PTI)

Andhra Pradesh basks in festive spirit as Deepavali shines bright

AMARAVATI, Oct 20: Andhra Pradesh marked Deepavali with vibrant enthusiasm on Monday, as devotees thronged temples, decorated their homes with lamps and flowers, and lit fireworks to celebrate the festival of lights.

Dressed in new festive attires, families exchanged greetings and embraced the spirit of a festival symbolising the victory of light over darkness. People rose early, and ignited firecrackers as part of the traditional observance.

Markets thrived with shoppers, while streets glittered under bright lamps and festive decorations across towns.

Clear skies and bright sunshine in Vijayawada and several other parts of the state, allowed people to enjoy outdoor celebrations.

Families gathered in open spaces to burst firecrackers, while children played and elders performed traditional rituals, celebrating the festival's spirit safely and

joyously across the region.

Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and YSRCP supremo YS Jagan Mohan Reddy extended greetings to the people on Deepavali.

In a message issued by Raj Bhavan, the Governor said, "On the auspicious and joyous occasion of the Deepavali festival, I extend my heartfelt greetings to the people of Andhra Pradesh. Deepavali stands as a symbol of the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance."

He further said the lights of Deepavali eliminate dark thoughts, inspire mutual help, and foster harmony and brotherhood in society.

In his message, Naidu said Deepavali is the festival that dispels darkness and brings forth light, symbolises the triumph of good over evil and reflects India's cultural ethos.

"On the auspicious occasion of

Deepavali the holy day on which the lamp is revered as the Supreme Brahman I convey my greetings to the people of the state. May this festival bring more light into people's lives and may Andhra Pradesh shine with progress, he said in a post on X.

Reddy remarked that Deepavali signifies the victory of knowledge over ignorance and the triumph of righteousness.

Deepavali is the festival of lights that triumphs over darkness. I extend Deepavali greetings to all Telugu people across the world, wishing that this occasion brings more light into everyone's lives, he said in a post on X.

Deepavali is celebrated over five days, starting with Dhanteras for prosperity, followed by Naraka Chaturdashi, the main Diwali day of lights and Lakshmi Puja, then Govardhan Puja, and concluding with Bhai Dooj honoring sibling bonds. (PTI)

Despite rains, TN ushers in Deepavali with usual fervour

CHENNAI, Oct 20: Deepavali was celebrated with usual fervour across Tamil Nadu, despite heavy rainfall, on Monday.

People woke up early, wore new attire and burst crackers to mark the Festival of Lights.

The Tamil Nadu government, citing a Supreme Court judgement of 2018, has said people may burst firecrackers for two hours--between 6 am and 7 am and from 7 pm to 8 pm.

With rains playing spoilsport, people are forced to burst crackers in breaks between spells of rains.

It also said bursting of firecrackers must be avoided in 'silence areas', including those housing hospitals. Also, it should be avoided near huts and other places that may easily

catch fire. Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi and political leaders including Leader of Opposition, Edappadi K Palaniswami, greeted people on the occasion.

"May Maa Lakshmi bless us with happiness, health and prosperity, filling our lives with love and compassion and fostering a harmonious society rooted in peace and oneness. Wishing everyone a joyous, vibrant and safe Deepavali," posted the governor on his X official handle.

Conveying his wishes, Palaniswami, former Chief Minister and AIADMK general secretary, said "On this joyous festival day, may love and peace flourish across the nation; may all sorrows fade away, giving rise



to a bright and radiant future; may divisions disappear and unity prevail; and may prosperity and well-being abound in everyone's life."

At around 10am, actor Rajinikanth met his fans in front of his residence in Poes Gar-

den in Chennai, as is his tradition, and wished them.

Actor-politician Kamal Haasan, founder of Makkal Needhi Maam took to X to convey his Deepavali greetings. "A festival of all efforts to dispel darkness with light; a day of joy united by light; let all good things in life prosper; let Deepavali bring good things to every one," he posted.

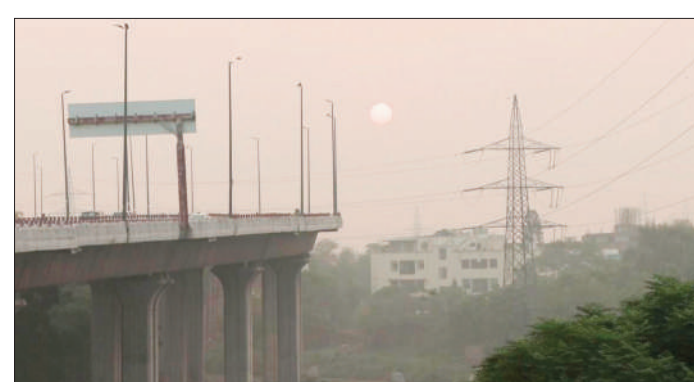
Meanwhile, it has been reported in a section of the media that Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) founder, actor-politician Vijay has advised his party members not to celebrate Deepavali on behalf of TVK this year. Vijay, who took to X to share Deepavali wishes last year, is maintaining radio silence so far this year. (PTI)

The Centre's air quality panel also asked all implementing agencies to keep strict vigil GRAP Stage 2 curbs kick in as Delhi's air turns 'very poor'

NEW DELHI, Oct 20: The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has invoked Stage II of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) across Delhi-NCR as the city's air quality slipped into the "very poor" category, with the AQI crossing 300 mark. The move came after the Sub-Committee on GRAP on Saturday reviewed the worsening pollution levels and forecasts by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), which warned of further deterioration in the coming days.

"The AQI of Delhi has shown an increasing trend since morning and has been recorded as 296 at 4 pm and 302 at 7 pm," the CAQM said, directing authorities to implement all Stage II measures with immediate effect, in addition to Stage I actions already in force since October 14.

The Centre's air quality panel also asked all implementing agencies to keep strict vigil, particularly on dust mitigation and to ensure



compliance with targeted timelines laid down under the comprehensive policy to curb air pollution in NCR.

Under Stage II of GRAP, several curbs and intensified actions include daily mechanical or vacuum sweeping and water sprinkling on identified roads, preferably before peak traffic hours, to control dust.

Construction and demolition sites face intensified inspections to ensure strict enforcement of dust control measures.

To promote cleaner mobility, the

GRAP Stage II mandates augmentation of public transport services through additional CNG and electric buses and increased frequency of metro services, along with differential fare rates to encourage off-peak travel.

Resident welfare associations (RWAs) are required to provide electric heaters to staff such as guards, gardeners and sanitation workers to prevent open burning of biomass and solid waste during winters.

Entry of inter-state buses into

Delhi is restricted to those running on CNG, EVs or BS-VI diesel, excluding tourist buses operating under all-India permits.

GRAP categorises air quality into four stages: Stage I (Poor) with AQI between 201 and 300, Stage II (Very Poor) between 301 and 400, Stage III (Severe) between 401 and 450, and Stage IV (Severe Plus) for AQI above 450.

Unfavourable meteorological conditions, combined with vehicular emissions, paddy-straw burning, firecrackers and other local pollution sources, contribute to hazardous air quality levels in Delhi-NCR during winters.

According to doctors, breathing in the polluted air of Delhi is equivalent to the harmful effects of smoking approximately 10 cigarettes a day.

Prolonged exposure to high levels of pollution can cause or exacerbate respiratory problems such as asthma, bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and dramatically raise the risk of cardiovascular disease. (PTI)

Pakistan grinds to 259-5 against scrappy South Africa in the second test



RAWALPINDI, Oct 20: Captain Shan Masood and Abdullah Shafique survived four dropped catches to hit half centuries as Pakistan grinded to 259 for five against world champion South Africa on the opening day of the second and final test on Monday.

Masood, put down on 71, scored bulk of his runs in singles before falling for 87 off 176 balls in the final session on a dry wicket that is expected to favor the spinners more and more.

Kagiso Rabada should have dismissed Shafique off his fourth ball of the test match, but had to wait for his first wicket until late on the first day when he trapped Mohammad

Rizwan (19) plumb lbw on the backfoot.

Left-hander Saud Shakeel was batting on 42 and Salman Ali Agha was not out on 10 at stumps as South Africa could get just one wicket with the second new ball late on Day 1.

Surprisingly South Africa used its best bowler in the first test – Senuran Muthusamy – for only two brief spells of two overs each. Keshav Maharaj (2-63) and Simon Harmer (2-75) kept the scoring rate under control by sharing 54 overs in between them. Muthusamy had bagged career-best 11-wicket haul at Lahore on a spin wicket.

Shafique's (57) luck finally ran

out after getting dropped on 0, 15 and 41 when he feathered a catch down the legside to wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne, but South Africa had to review the not out on-field decision as ultra edge showed a clear spike when the ball passed Shafique's bat.

South Africa's scrappy fielding allowed Masood and Shafique to add 111 runs for the second wicket stand after spinners created several chances in the first two sessions but got little support from the fielders.

Maharaj, who missed South Africa's 93-run defeat in the first test last week, had to wait until his 20th over for his first wicket when he dismissed Babar Azam for 16 in the

most productive second session for the visitors in which they got two wickets for 82 runs.

Babar, who hasn't scored an international century since his hundred against Nepal in an ODI in August 2023, hit three boundaries against the spinners in his brief 19-minute stay at the wicket before he was caught one-handed by a diving Tony de Zorzi at forward short leg.

Earlier, Shafique had three re-tries after Masood won the all-important toss and Pakistan reached 95-1 at lunch. Shafique was dropped by Tristan Stubbs at third slip off Rabada's fourth ball, before he'd scored. Then Marco Jansen's sharp delivery beat the inside edge of

Shafique's bat, but the bails didn't fall after the ball grazed the off stump.

Maharaj could have made an early impact but failed to grab a return catch to his left in his first over after inducing an outside edge off Shafique's bat. And luck continued to go Shafique's way when he was adjudged leg before wicket against Maharaj but went for a successful television review as replays suggested the ball had hit his bat first.

Amongst all those nervy moments for Shafique, Masood smashed two sixes against Harmer's off-spin and welcomed Muthusamy with another big hit over the long-on boundary before the left-arter was taken out of the attack.

Shafique and Imam-ul-Haq survived Rabada and Jansen's opening spell before South Africa captain Aiden Markram turned to his spinners inside the first hour.

Harmer provided the breakthrough when he bowled Imam for 17 with a ball that spun sharply away from the left-hander and hit the top of off-stump.

"Bit frustrating, but no one means to drop chances," Maharaj said. "It was nice to see the guys bounce back and take the catches that they did. It was an even-stevens day, I felt if we got one more wicket at night we'd probably have had a little bit of an upper hand."

Maharaj was available only for the second test because he was recovering from groin injury. He replaced off-spinner Preenelan Subrayen in one of the two changes the World Test Championship winners made to their XI.

Seaming all-rounder Jansen returned in place of Wiaan Mulder, who bowled only two overs in the first test and struggled against spinners in both innings while batting at No. 3. (AP)

Shorna's three-for helps Bangladesh restrict Sri Lanka to 202

NAVI MUMBAI, Oct 20: An inspiring spell from Shorna Akter (3/27) helped Bangladesh bowl out Sri Lanka for a modest 202 after Hasini Perera struck a career-best 85 in their must-win Women's World Cup match here on Monday.

Perera (85 off 99 balls, 13x4s, 1x6s) was the fulcrum of Sri Lanka's innings with her maiden fifty, forging two vital stands with Chamari Athapaththu (46) and Nilakshika Silva (37) on the way, but Shorna took away the bragging rights with a fine spell of 10-4-27-3.

Perera's 85, now her highest ODI score, also featured two dropped catches when she was put down on 55 and 63.

The Sri Lankan No. 3, Perera had herself to blame for a tired-looking shot late in the innings which not only denied her a deserving century but gave Bangladesh an unexpected opening, which they fully capitalised on.

Sri Lanka appeared to be on course for a daunting first-innings total but a flurry of wickets, which began with Silva being dismissed by Shorna, ending a 74-run fifth wicket stand with Perera which threatened to take the game away for Bangladesh.

Shorna was the architect of Sri Lanka's slide as after getting Silva caught at short third in the 32nd over, she had Anushka Sanjeevani back in shade for an easy return

grab.

And then, in a poor execution of the reverse sweep, the 18-year-old right-arm spinner Shorna's loopy delivery hit Perera on her backfoot in front of the leg stump.

Perera, who displayed a rich array of strokes especially along the ground, paid a hefty price for attempting to reverse sweep from a vertical position and not reaching out to play the ball conventionally, and her challenge against on-field call of out was futile.

From a comfortable 174 for four in the 32nd over and looking set for a big finish, Sri Lanka folded meekly for 202 all-out in 48.4 overs.

Earlier, Athapaththu made a strokeful 46 which included two sixes and six fours and even as she looked primed for a big knock, it wasn't meant to be.

Athapaththu began with a four through covers but a lofed hit for a six over cover off Marufa Akter (1/36) in the fifth over was the highlight of her innings.

The Sri Lankan skipper was more belligerent of the two in her 72-run stand for the second wicket with Perera after her side was rocked by Marufa on the first ball of the match, who pinned Vishmi Gunaratne (0) in front of the wickets.

Athapaththu, meanwhile, created history when she became the first Sri Lankan woman to cross the landmark of 4,000 ODI runs. (PTI)



French Open: Satwik-Chirag eye deep run as Indians face tough openers

PARIS, Oct 20: Fresh from a string of consistent performances in Asia, India's premier men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will look to go the distance at the French Open Super 750 badminton tournament, beginning here on Tuesday.

The world No. 6 duo, who reached the finals at both Hong Kong and China Masters before bowing out in the semifinals of the Denmark Open last week, will start against the Indonesian combination of Muhammad Rian Ardianto and Rahmat Hidayat.

Having rediscovered their rhythm after an injury-plagued mid-season, the Indians will aim to convert their recent form into a title run at one of their favourite venues — the tournament where they had claimed their maiden Super 750 crown in 2022 and also won in 2024.

They also claimed a second bronze at world championships in Paris this year. Among others, Lakshya Sen, who reached the final of Hong Kong Open, will begin his men's singles campaign against Nhat Nguyen of Ireland

once again, while young Ayush Shetty, the US Open champion, faces a tough test against Japan's Koki Watanabe.

Lakshya had defeated the Irish shuttle in three games last week at Denmark. In the women's singles, rising star Anmol Kharb, who made a breakthrough semifinal appearance at the Arctic Open Super 500 earlier this month, has drawn a formidable first-round opponent in top seed An Se-young of Korea.

Anupama Upadhyaya will meet fourth seed Han Yue of China, while Unnati Hooda, fresh from her semifinal finish at the World Junior Championships, takes on Malaysia's Karupathevan Letshanaa. The men's doubles draw also features Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Sai Pratheek K, while the women's doubles will see an all-Indian first-round clash between Kavipriya Selvam and Simran Singh and the Panda sisters, Rutupama and Svetapama.

In the mixed doubles, Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto and the duo of Rohan Kapoor and Rutvika Shivani Gadde will look to make their mark against experienced international pairs. (PTI)

Red-hot Mbappe, Kane and Haaland lead Madrid, Bayern and City as Champions League returns

MADRID, Oct 20: Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and Manchester City return to the Champions League with Kylian Mbappé, Harry Kane and Erling Haaland enjoying red-hot starts to their seasons. They all found the net in their teams' league victories this weekend to extend impressive scoring runs. Each has scored at least once in all but one of the games in which they played for club and country this season.

Haaland arrives for Man City's league-phase match at Villarreal on Tuesday having scored 23 goals in 13 matches, including 10 goals in his last five matches with City and Norway. He scored both goals in City's 2-0 win against Everton in the Premier League on Saturday.

The fastest player to 50 goals in the Champions League, the 25-year-old Haaland also scored twice when City drew 2-2 at Monaco in the Champions League earlier this month. City had opened with a 1-0 win against Napoli.

The 32-year-old Kane has 22 goals in 14 matches, with 15 goals coming in his last eight games with Bayern and England. He scored once in his team's 2-1 win against Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga on Saturday. Bayern, which currently leads the league phase,



hosts Club Brugge on Wednesday.

Mbappé has 18 goals in 14 appearances with Madrid and France. He has scored nine goals in his last six games, including the winner in Madrid's 1-0 win at Getafe in the Spanish league on Saturday.

"We're very pleased with how Kylian is doing," Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said. "He's been decisive with his goals and his involvement."

The 26-year-old Mbappé is set to become the youngest player to make 90 appearances in the Champions League proper. The record is currently held by former Madrid

great Raúl González, who was 27 years old when he reached that mark.

Madrid, which also started the league phase with two victories, hosts Juventus on Wednesday. The Italians are coming off two draws in the Champions League, against Borussia Dortmund and at Villarreal. Juventus lost 2-0 at Como in the Italian league on Sunday.

Six teams have started with victories in the first two rounds, including surprising Qarabag from Azerbaijan, which will go for three in a row when it visits winless Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday.

Qarabag had never won in the competition proper before.

Among the others with two wins is defending champion Paris Saint-Germain, which visits Bayer Leverkusen on Tuesday.

Arsenal will try to extend its perfect start when it hosts Atletico Madrid on Tuesday. The Premier League leader is seeking its 100th Champions League victory.

Inter Milan, runner-up to PSG in last season's final, visits Belgium's Union Saint-Gilloise on Tuesday.

Liverpool, enduring a four-game losing streak that includes a home defeat against Manchester United in the Premier League on Sunday, will try to rebound in the Champions League when it visits Eintracht Frankfurt on Wednesday.

Among Liverpool's recent setbacks was a loss at Galatasaray in its second league-phase match.

Liverpool's Mohamed Salah needs two goals to reach 50 in the Champions League. The Egypt international is trying to become the first African player to reach that mark. Barcelona is another team looking to make up some lost ground in the Champions League after a home defeat against PSG in the previous round. It will host Olympiakos at Montjuic stadium on Tuesday. (AP)

Mbappe gives Madrid 1-0 win after Getafe player is sent off after less than a minute on the field

MADRID, Oct 20: Real Madrid took advantage of a red card for a Getafe player who stayed less than a minute on the field to win 1-0 with an 80th-minute goal by Kylian Mbappé.

The hard-fought victory moved Madrid back on top of the Spanish league, two points ahead of Barcelona, which beat last-placed Girona 2-1 with a stoppage-time goal by Ronald Araújo on Saturday.

Mbappé's league-leading 10th goal of the season came shortly after host Getafe went a man down because of a straight red card shown to Allan Nyom about 40 seconds after he came off the bench on Sunday.

Nyom fouled Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior away from the ball as Madrid started to build a breakthrough in the 77th.

Madrid, which had been struggling to create significant scoring chances, took advantage of the sending off and Mbappé scored with a shot from inside the area after a nice through ball by Arda Güler.

Mbappé has scored in 13 of the 14 games he played this season for club and country. He has scored at least once in 11 straight matches.

"We're very pleased with how Kylian is doing," Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said.

"He's been decisive with his goals and his involvement. Goals give you points, but we need everyone because there's a lot going on in the background."

Getafe went another man down four minutes later when Alex Sancris was shown a second yellow card for another foul on Vinicius.

Despite playing with nine men, Getafe nearly equalized in stoppage time, with Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois charging from the net to make a difficult clearance save to a shot by Abu Kamara inside the area.

"That missed chance by Kamara was a pity," Getafe coach José Bordalás said.

"Nyom's red card made the difference. For me that's not a red card, at most a yellow."

Bordalás criticized Vinicius, claiming the Brazil forward pro-



voled him by saying something to the effect of "good job making the substitution" to include Nyom in the match. Getafe, which had only one attempt on target, stayed in 12th place. It has a five-game winless streak. Madrid has won 10 of its 11 games in all tournaments this season, with its lone setback a

league loss at Atletico Madrid last month. Just like at the other league matches this weekend, players stood still for the first 15 seconds of the game in opposition to La Liga's plan to hold the Barcelona-Villarreal game in the U.S. on Dec. 20.

Jorge de Frutos scored two first-

half goals as Rayo Vallecano won 3-0 at Levante for its third straight win across all competitions.

De Frutos, a former Levante player, scored in the 12th and 25th minutes, and Alvaro Garcia sealed the victory in the 65th.

Rayo was coming off another road win in the league against Real

Sociedad, and it had beaten Shkendija 2-0 at home in the Europa League.

Levante has won only one of its last four league matches.

Real Sociedad needed an 89th-minute goal by Carlos Soler to draw 1-1 at 10-man Celta Vigo, extending both teams' poor start to the season.

Sociedad, sitting in 18th, has only one win in nine league matches, with five losses and three draws. The Basque Country team's only win was against Mallorca.

Celta, which had defender Carl Starfelt sent off with a second yellow card in first-half stoppage time, opened the scoring with Pablo Durán in the 20th.

In 17th place, Celta remains the only team without a league win after nine rounds. It has seven draws and two losses.

Athletic Bilbao needed a solid performance by Spain goalkeeper Unai Simón to salvage a 0-0 draw at promoted Elche.

The result kept seventh-placed Elche tied with eighth-placed Athletic on 14 points. (AP)

F1 leader Piastri in poor form and fighting to hold off Norris and Verstappen in title chase

AUSTIN (TEXAS), Oct 20: Oscar Piastri likely can't leave Texas fast enough.

McLaren's Formula 1 championship leader certainly wasn't very fast Sunday at the Circuit of the Americas as teammate and title rival Lando Norris and Red Bull's Max Verstappen both took big bites out of his points advantage at the United States Grand Prix.

Verstappen won for the third time in four races and Norris finished second. Piastri was a disappointing fifth.

What looked like a cruise control finish to his first career championship over the summer is now shaping up as a potential heart-pounding grind over the final five races of the season starting next weekend in Mexico City.

Piastri still leads Norris by 14 points and Verstappen by 40, but nothing feels comfortable any more.

"I'd still rather be where I am than the other two, but obviously this weekend was not what I wanted or expected," Piastri said.

His misery started Saturday when he crashed into Norris on the first turn of the sprint race and knocked out both cars. Verstappen won the sprint, punctuating the mishap between teammates that came in the first race after first-lap scrap in Singapore had raised internal tension.

Piastri started Sunday sixth but only made up one place. The Verstappen-Norris 1-2 finish made it the fourth consecutive race Piastri has lost points to both drivers.

Verstappen has shaved a 104-point deficit to 40 in just four races. That includes the Azerbaijan Grand Prix when Piastri crashed on the first lap. "Max and Red Bull have found a lot of pace since the summer break. We saw flashes of it at the start of the year, but it's been consistent since then," Piastri said.

Piastri said before the race he did not expect the team to favor either driver for the championship over the final stretch of the season. He was asked again after his poor race on Sunday. "I don't think so. We are so incredibly tight and we both said we want an opportunity to try and fight for the championship because we deserve it," Piastri told Sky Sports.

"I think it is far too close to start picking one or the other."

McLaren team principal Andrea Stella said the team should relish the chance to fight for a drivers championship. "It is a privilege to be there, we have the pace to be there. It is about execution, believing in it and we do believe," Stella said. "We never want to lose the joy of doing that. The tension is part of the game." (AP)