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- SIR not reform but imposed oppression: Cong
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- Nocte tribe appeals to defer bandh for Chalo Loku festival
- Mizoram areca nut farmers get remunerative prices

EC cracks down after 'cat-dog voter' claims ● Assam BLOs told to hunt out bogus images in rolls

BLOs to check for 'non-human', 'no image' entries

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: Amid claims that the voters' list in Bihar carried photographs of cats and dogs, the Election Commission has directed its field staff in Assam to check for 'non-human' and 'no image' entries in electoral rolls and replace them with proper photographs of registered voters.

In its instructions issued to the chief electoral officer of Assam, the poll authority said that "software-based" reports should be generated for 'black and white images', 'not to specification images', 'non-human images' and 'no image' entries.

"For replacement of such images, booth-level officer (BLO) field verification should be done and necessary applications - Form-8 along with photograph as per specification - should invariably be collected from the electors and a



proper track record of such replacement should be kept," the EC order read.

Additionally, an EC official said that BLOs are also authorised to take pictures of electors as one option.

Regarding the removal of discrepancies and potential duplicate or multiple entries from the electoral roll, the commission specified that before the draft publication, all logical errors must be removed, addresses standardised, and the quality of photographs checked.

Concerning the use of notional

house numbers, the Election Commission clarified that it will not affect the legal status of the properties involved.

"The purpose of allotting a notional house number is just to keep electors of one household in one polling station during the rationalisation of polling stations. In addition to allotment of notional house number, BLO should also mention the nearby landmark so that the house can be distinctly identified upon inquiry," the commission said.

Social media was abuzz with claims that during the Bihar special intensive revision of the voters' list, some managed to get pictures of dogs and cats into the electoral rolls to prove the flaws in the system. On November 17, the Election Commission had ordered the 'Special (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Anti-polygamy bill does not 'target' Miyas: Himanta

TEZPUR, Nov 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said the state government's proposed bill to ban polygamy is not aimed at targeting 'Miyas', adding that the practice exists among people of other religions as well.

He maintained that the practice of marrying multiple women is more prevalent among Miyas.

"In checking polygamy, we are not targeting Miyas. People of other religions also do it," Sarma told reporters on sidelines of a programme at Rangapara in Sonitpur district.

"Miyas" is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam and the non-Bengali speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants.

Sarma maintained that though polygamy is more prevalent among Miyas, "it cannot be said that it does not happen among Hindus". The state Cabinet on November 9 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ULFA-I top leader Arunoday Dohotia and his PSO surrender

There is no plan for a Delhi visit, says CM Sarma

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Nov 23: In a major breakthrough for security forces, ULFA (I) self-styled Major General Arunoday Dohotia and his PSO Franchis Axom surrendered early this morning at Pangsau Pass along the Indo-Myanmar border.

The high-ranked rebel commander's surrender marks a significant setback for the outfit and a crucial development in ongoing peace and counter-insurgency efforts in the region.

Dohotia is a close aide of ULFA-I chief Paresh Baruah and a member of the outfit's military leadership.

He has been instrumental in sending the faction's communications, including e-mails and video clips of Paresh Baruah to media houses.

He has been involved in significant militant activities.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has identified him as a key conspirator behind a series of grenade attacks on Army camps in eastern Assam's Tinsukia and Jorhat districts in 2023 and 2024.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday reiterated that peace negotiations with the proscribed ULFA(I) will progress only when its chief Paresh Barua personally joins the dialogue process.

His remarks came just hours after the surrender of ULFA(I)'s self-styled Major General Arunoday Dohotia—considered a key military aide of Barua—along with his personal security officer Francis Axom.

The duo reportedly laid down arms early Saturday at Pangsau Pass along the Indo-Myanmar border. Speaking to reporters at an event in Rangapara, Sonitpur, Sarma (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Government to launch a scheme for male students from January next year: CM



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday announced that the State government will launch a new scheme exclusively for male students from January next year.

The announcement marks a significant expansion of the government's welfare initiatives, which so far have largely focused on women and girl students.

The chief minister made the announcement while attending a programme at Rangapara, where he distributed ₹ 10,000 seed capital each to 24,827 women beneficiaries under the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA).

With Sunday's distribution, more than nine lakh women across 41 constituencies have benefited from the scheme.

Sarma said that MMUA has played a major role in bolstering women's economic empowerment, particularly in rural areas.

He stated that women, who once confined themselves mostly to household duties, are now actively participating in income-generating activities with the help of self-help groups.

About forty lakh women across the state are now engaged in productive work, supported by

Tiger bones recovered, 5 detained

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Five people were detained after bones of a Royal Bengal tiger were recovered from their possession in Assam's Biswanath district, a forest official said on Sunday.

The seizure was made on Friday during a joint operation conducted by forest and police personnel in Simaluguri Baligaon village in Gohpur within the Biswanath Wildlife Division under the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Justice Surya Kant to take oath today as next CJI

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: Justice Surya Kant, who has been part of several landmark verdicts and orders on abrogation of Article 370 removing Jammu and Kashmir's special status, Bihar electoral rolls revision and Pegasus spyware case, will on Monday take oath as the 53rd Chief Justice of India.

He will succeed Justice B R Gavai, who demits office this evening.

Justice Kant was appointed as the next CJI on October 30 and will remain in the post for nearly 15 months. He will demit office on February 9, 2027 on attaining the age of 65 years.

Born on February 10, 1962 in Hisar district of Haryana to a middle-class family, Justice Kant went from being a small-town lawyer to the country's highest judicial office, where he has been part of several verdicts and orders of national importance and constitutional matters. He also has the distinction of standing 'first class first' in his

Peddler held with Yaba tablets in Assam

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: A suspected drug peddler has been arrested in Assam with Yaba tablets worth over ₹ 50 lakh, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The operation was carried out in South Salmara district, he said.

"Acting on intel, @SSalmaraPolice raided a hideout, seizing 10,200 Yaba tablets worth ₹ 51L," Sarma said in a post on X on Saturday evening.

"In Assam, @assampolice moves faster than Flash — criminals only move to custody!" the CM asserted. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam tea entrepreneur to launch 'Anti Black Friday Sale'

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: As global retailers slash prices for the annual 'Black Friday' sale, a tea entrepreneur in Assam's Sivasagar district has decided to go against the tide, and launch a campaign to challenge what he calls the growing culture of impulse buying and "normalisation of waste".

This year, 'Woolah Tea' is launching the 'Anti Black Friday Sale - For the Planet', where instead of offering discounts, it will increase prices, a deliberate stance against the culture of impulsive shopping, said founder Upamanyu Borkakoty.

He said 'Woolah Tea', known for its patented bagless tea technology, is firm in its resolve to advocate the significance of sustainability through the brand.

"Black Friday" has become one of the world's most aggressive symbols of consumption. Each year, prices fall, urgency rises and millions buy things they don't need, simply because they are cheaper for a moment," Borkakoty told PTI.

"What remains afterward is waste - unused products, discarded packaging and an economy built on disposability. 'Woolah Tea', a sustainability-led brand, is choosing a different path," he said.

'Woolah Tea', owned by Sivasagar-based TLT India Private Ltd, is "focused on creating authentic and pure tea, collaborating with a community of organic farmers, enterprising rural women and planet-positive practices", he asserted.

If the question every 'Black Friday' sale asks is "How cheap can something be?", 'Woolah Tea' proposes a different one: "What is the real cost of cheap?" said Vishal Bijlani, the head of marketing.

"Through the 'Anti Black Friday Sale' campaign, Woolah rejects a system that rewards excessive purchasing and disposability. The message is simple - If you need something, buy thoughtfully. If you don't, don't buy at all," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'I always believe in balancing things'

Need support from govt and exhibitors for indie cinema: Rima Das

PANAJI, Nov 23: Filmmaker Rima Das expressed displeasure over the diminishing opportunities available for indie cinema in India and said there's a dire need for support and intervention from the government and exhibition sector.

The filmmaker explained that independent filmmakers have less space to exhibit their art compared to big-budget films.

"For independent filmmakers, we have very less space for us. It shouldn't be like that we become invisible; I'm hopeful that it should not happen. I feel there should be a system, we together need to figure out what is happening and how we can balance that," Das, known for "Village Rockstars", told PTI.

Das underscored that big-budget films always get more



attention and visibility, whereas the aim should be to have some sort of balance.

"I always believe in balancing things... But they're already having commercial big cinemas, they have that kind of budget, and they're already getting that visibility mostly everywhere... Government re-

ally needs to (support) this kind of initiative, they should support, even NFDC and state level (people) should support," she said.

Recently, director Kanu Behl took to social media to express angst and disappointment for his film, "Agra", not getting screens in multiplexes. Following this incident, more than 40 filmmakers including Nandita Das, Payal Kapadia, Vasana Bala, Chaitanya Tamhane, Alankrita Shrivastava, Varun Grover, Raam Reddy, Honey Trehan and Ruchi Narain came together to issue a joint statement about the declining space for the exhibition of independent films in the country.

She lauded filmmaker Kiran Rao for supporting Aranya Sahay's independent film, "Humans in the Loop".

"It is important (referring to support)," Das said.

The Assam-born director said she feels fortunate that her films, like "Village Rockstars", managed to create enough buzz, but also highlighted the need for dedicated theatres for screening independent films in every (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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New US sanctions threaten to disrupt India's Russian oil lifeline

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: India's imports of Russian crude oil - the feedstock for fuels like petrol and diesel - are expected to drop sharply in the near term but not halt entirely as new US sanctions on Moscow's top oil exporters take full effect, analysts said.

US sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil, and their majority-owned subsidiaries, took effect on November 21, effectively turning crude linked to these firms into a "sanctioned molecule".

India's crude oil imports from Russia, averaging 1.7 million barrels per day (bpd) this year, remained firm ahead of the cutoff, with November arrivals projected at 1.8-1.9 million bpd, as refiners maximise discounted purchases. But flows are expected to drop noticeably in December and January, with analysts estimating near-term declines to around 4,00,000 bpd.

Traditionally, reliant on Middle Eastern oil, India significantly increased its imports from Russia following the February 2022 Ukraine invasion.

Western sanctions and reduced European demand made Russian oil available at steep discounts. As a result, India's Russian crude imports surged from under 1 per cent to nearly 40 per cent of its total crude oil imports in a short span. In November, Russia continued to be India's top supplier, making up for about a third of all crude oil imported by the country.

"We expect a noticeable drop in Russian crude flows to India in the near term, particularly through December and January. Loadings have already slowed since October 21, though it is still early for definitive conclusions, given Russia's agility in deploying intermediaries, shadow fleets, and workarounds financing," said Sumit Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst, Refining & Modeling, Kpler.

The sanctions have resulted in companies like Reliance Industries, HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd halting imports for now. The only exception is Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy, which is majorly dependent on Russian crude after



supplies from the rest of the world were effectively cut off, following European Union sanctions on it.

"Based on the current understanding, no Indian refiner, other than Nayara's already-sanctioned Vadinar facility, is likely to take the risk of dealing with OFAC-designated entities, and buyers will need time to reconfigure contracts, routing, ownership structures, and payment channels," Ritolia said.

Sanctions announced by the US target specific companies, not all Russian oil or all Russian producers. This means that crude supplied by non-designated Russian entities, for example, Surgutneftegaz, Gazprom Neft, or independent traders using non-sanctioned intermediaries, can still be legally purchased by Indian refiners, as long as no sanctioned entity, vessel, bank, or service provider is involved.

"Russian oil itself is not sanctioned; the suppliers are. That is why non-designated producers can legally step in to fill part of the gap created by the restrictions on Rosneft and Lukoil," he said.

The discounted Russian crude helped Indian refiners - from public sector Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) to private sector Reliance Industries Ltd - post bumper profits in the last two years. It also helped keep retail petrol and diesel prices stable despite volatility in the international

sanctions.

"In the longer term, the trajectory will depend on how strictly Western nations enforce secondary sanctions and whether further measures - such as sanctioning all Russian barrels or penalising refineries that process any Russian crude - are introduced," Ritolia said.

Tighter enforcement would suppress volumes further, while lighter-touch implementation could allow some recovery through intermediaries.

"Overall, Russian crude flows are entering a phase of heightened uncertainty and volatility as the supply chain adapts. New trading intermediaries, alternative shipowners, evolving payment mechanisms, ship-to-ship transfers, and a shift toward 'clean' (non-designated) sellers will all shape post-November trade," he noted.

Until refiners gain clarity on compliant pathways - including secure non-sanctioned counterparties, shipping and insurance availability, and workable banking solutions - India's imports from Russia will remain in choppy waters, marked by short-term disruptions (lower arrivals) and frequent shifts in sourcing patterns, he said.

India's highly complex refineries can replace Russian barrels technically, though margins may tighten. To offset reduced direct Russian liftings, refiners are expected to increase procurement from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE and Kuwait), Latin America (Brazil, Guyana, Colombia and Argentina), West Africa and North America (the US and Canada), Ritolia said.

"Despite near-term declines, a complete halt to Russian imports is unlikely. Discounted Russian barrels remain attractive for margins, and India's energy policy continues to prioritise affordability and security over geopolitical pressure. Unless secondary sanctions directly target Indian buyers or New Delhi imposes formal restrictions - both low-probability scenarios - Russian crude will keep flowing to India, though via increasingly diversified and less transparent channels," he added. (PTI)

From December 1, all product exports from the Jamnagar SEZ unit will be derived exclusively from non-Russian crude. Reliance will, however, honour pre-committed Russian cargoes placed before the October 22 sanctions announcement, routing any post-deadline arrivals to its separate 6,60,000 bpd domestic-market refinery.

The company declined to clarify whether it would continue buying non-sanctioned Russian crude for the domestic facility, reiterating only that it would comply with all

market, on which India is 88 per cent dependent to meet its oil needs.

India's crude oil import landscape is entering a period of sharp uncertainty as new US sanctions on top Russian exporters took full effect, forcing refiners to reassess Russian supply channels that have dominated their purchases for over three years.

While Russian barrels will not disappear from India's slate, flows are expected to decline sharply in the near term and grow more opaque as Moscow and Indian buyers adjust to tightening restrictions, analysts said.

Reliance Industries - the world's biggest buyer of seaborne Russian crude - confirmed it stopped importing Russian oil into its 7,04,000 bpd export-oriented SEZ refinery on November 20 to ensure compliance with upcoming EU rules banning fuels derived from Russian crude.

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G20 underlines need to enhance developing nations' representation in decision making of MDBs

JOHANNESBURG, Nov 23: G20 nations have underscored the need for enhancing the representation and voice of developing countries in decision making in Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) like the World Bank and IMF and other international economic and financial institutions. "In that context, we welcome the creation of a 25th chair at the IMF Executive Board to enhance the voice and representation of Sub-Saharan Africa," as per the leaders' declaration during the G20 South Africa Summit held in Johannesburg. G20 leaders reaffirm the critical role of MDBs in driving poverty reduction, economic growth, and development across client countries. "We welcome the inaugural Progress Implementation Report on the G20 MDB Roadmap by the Heads of MDBs Group. We further acknowledge the Capital Adequacy Framework's (CAF) potential to help MDBs more efficiently utilise existing

resources, share more risk with the private sector and utilise new instruments to increase lending capacity over the next decade and recognise the need for continued work by the MDBs to implement the G20 Roadmap and CAF reforms," it said. G20 reaffirmed its commitment to a strong, quota-based, and adequately resourced International Monetary Fund at the centre of the Global Financial Safety Net.

"We support continued IMF collaboration with Regional Financing Arrangements (RFA). We have advanced the domestic approvals for our consent to the quota increase under the 16th General Review of Quotas, and we look forward to finalising this process with no further delay. We acknowledge the importance of realignment in quota shares to better reflect members' relative positions in the world economy while protecting the quota shares of the poorest members," it said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

BLOs to check

Revision of electoral rolls in Assam. According to the schedule, the final voter list will be published on February 10, 2026. According to instructions issued by the poll panel for the state chief electoral officer, January 1, 2026, will be the qualifying date for the state to carry out the special revision.

According to officials, the special revision stands somewhere between the annual special summary revision and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

"It is, in a way, an upgrade of the special summary revision...instead of enumeration forms, booth-level officers will verify electors on a pre-filled register," a senior functionary explained.

"There are special provisions for citizenship in Assam. The verification of citizenship is already being done under the supervision of the Supreme Court and is in its final stages. Therefore, the special revision (SR) is being ordered in place of special intensive revision (SIR)," the official pointed out. (PTI)

Anti-polygamy bill

approved a bill to ban polygamy, barring some exceptions, which will award seven years of rigorous imprisonment to an accused of the crime.

The chief minister asserted that he will continue "disturbing doubtful Miyas" till he is in power. Sarma also took a swipe at the Congress, stating that "Miyas are oxygen" for the opposition party.

"Congress has no standing in Assam. It will fight in 22 seats. The party will take large sums from candidates, with hints already given to aspiring candidates to pay Rs 1 crore in advance and Rs 3 crore later," he said, alleging the party had collected money from candidates earlier as well.

He hinted that the seats where Congress will contest will be minority-dominated ones.

Election for the 126-member Assam Assembly is scheduled next year.

The chief minister maintained that his government has undertaken welfare steps for Miyas also, pointing that they are benefiting from all schemes such as Orunodoi, entrepreneurship development scheme for women, etc. He added that there is no problem in bringing them under welfare schemes, but they should refrain from activities such as encroachment of any open land. (PTI)

ULFA-I top leader

clarified that the latest surrender would not alter the broader parameters for talks.

"Discussions will only be meaningful if they happen with Paresh Barua and not with anyone else from ULFA(I)," he said. "Unless he shows willingness, there can be no real forward movement," he said.

Sarma also dismissed speculation that the surrendered leaders may be flown to New Delhi for any political engagements. "There is no plan for a Delhi visit. They may remain in Tinsukia or come to Guwahati to meet the DGP, but nothing beyond that," he added.

Despite the state government's repeated call for peace, Barua has so far refused to join any dialogue, insisting on core demands that remain at odds with the Indian government.

The surrender of Dohotia—long seen as a member of ULFA(I)'s top command—marks a notable setback for the armed outfit, even as security agencies hope it could serve as a step toward further dissociation within the ranks.

Peddler held with

Justice Surya Kant

Yaba tablets are illegal in India as it contains methamphetamine, a powerful and addictive stimulant. (PTI)

reference on the powers of the Governor and President in dealing with bills passed by a state assembly. The verdict is keenly awaited with potential ramifications across states.

He was part of the bench that kept the colonial-era seditious law in abeyance, directing that no new FIRs be registered under it until a government review.

Justice Kant also nudged the Election Commission to disclose the details of 65 lakh voters excluded from the draft electoral rolls in Bihar while hearing a batch of petitions challenging the poll panel's decision to undertake Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the voters list in the poll-bound state.

In an order that emphasised grassroots democracy and gender justice, he led a bench that reinstated a woman sarpanch unlawfully removed from office and called out the gender bias in the matter.

He is also credited with directing that one-third of seats in bar associations, including the Supreme Court Bar Association, be reserved for women.

Justice Kant was part of the bench that appointed a five-member committee headed by former top court judge Justice Indu Malhotra to probe the security breach during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Punjab in 2022, saying such matters required "a judicially trained mind".

He also upheld the One Rank-One Pension scheme for defence forces, calling it constitutionally valid, and continues to hear petitions of women officers in the armed forces seeking parity in permanent commission.

Justice Kant was on the seven-judge bench that overruled the 1967 Aligarh Muslim University judgment, opening the way for reconsideration of the institution's minority status.

He was also part of the bench which heard the Pegasus spyware case and which appointed a panel of cyber experts to probe allegations of unlawful surveillance, famously stating that the state cannot get a "free pass under the guise of national security". (PTI)

Tiger bones recovered,

(KNPTR), he said. The detainees have been identified as Eilaram Doley, Ripun Pegu, Kerani Kaman, Pulish Kutum and Depen Pegu, the official said.

It was suspected that the tiger was poached in the Kaziranga National Park, he said.

The detainees were trying to "sell the wild animal trophy and were in contact with past offenders of the Rhino poaching", he said, adding that an investigation is underway. (PTI)

Government to launch a

distribution, he said. The chief minister further said that major development projects are underway in the constituency. Under Asom Mala 2.0, the road from Ghoirali Tea Estate to Borjuli Tini Ali is 90 per cent complete, and about ₹ 154 crore has been sanctioned for road works.

He also mentioned the construction of anganwadi centres, model schools in eight tea estates, roads in garden lines, flyovers, and introduction of a science stream in the local college.

The programme was attended by MP Ranjit Dutta, MLAs Padma Hazarika, Krishna Kamal Tati, Ganesh Limbu, and Prithviraj Rabha; ASRLM Mission Director Kuntal Moni Sarma Bordoloi; Rangapara Municipal Board Chairman Harishdhan Das; and other dignitaries.

Earlier in the day, the chief minister visited the Gupteshwar Temple at Shingri in Sonitpur district, offered prayers, and inaugurated the Atiruda Mahayajna for the welfare of humanity.

Assam tea entrepreneur

Alongside the campaign, 'Woolah Tea' is opening a public sign-up pledge for individuals, who want to stand against overconsumption and take part in a movement rooted in responsibility rather than the excess, said Amrita Acharjya, brand and communications manager. "The pledge is not about buying. It is about shifting perspective, from extraction to stewardship. The 'Anti Black Friday Sale' is a refusal to normalise a culture that treats the planet as an endless resource. In essence, this 'Black Friday', we aren't lowering prices, we are raising accountability," Borkakoty said.

As part of the campaign, it is also launching a '10,000 Trees Project', an ecological effort to grow 10,000 native saplings, in collaboration with Jadav Payeng, known as the 'Forest Man of India'.

"Payeng's work stands as living proof that restoration doesn't need noise, it needs commitment. Over decades, he has grown an entire forest, tree by tree. His philosophy aligns deeply with the spirit of this campaign and Woolah's core belief - regeneration is slow by design," Borkakoty added.

For Chandrawali, a college teacher who shops online for most of her needs, such a campaign can help generate awareness on "mindful spending" among younger consumers.

"On many occasions, I have ended up buying stuff I could have done without. In such a scenario, a campaign to urge consumers to go for mindful spending is more than welcome," Chandrawali added. (PTI)

Need support from govt

city. We couldn't create visibility, later people were asking, 'We wanted to watch it'. So, if we can have theaters in every city and some places, then it will (of great help). We need more (theatres)... and you will see more and more audiences," Das said. She further said that "constant efforts" are needed to resolve the issue of lack of space for independent films in theatres.

"It's not a big thing, but it is just, that something is missing, that efforts (are missing), like we should come together, and keep consistently doing it. We should have a five year plan," Das added.

Das is currently at IFFI where her film, "My Melbourne", an anthology, was screened.

"IFFI is one of our best festivals and we had a morning show of 'My Melbourne', and it was houseful. There's a lot of warmth, love. When we're talking about 'My Melbourne', the next season is also happening. This should keep happening more and more because this is a building cultural exchange," she said. (PTI)

India, Israel may implement proposed FTA in two phases

JERUSALEM, Nov 23: India and Israel are considering implementing their proposed free trade agreement (FTA) in two phases to ensure early benefits for the trade community of both countries. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday.

India and Israel on Thursday inked terms of reference (ToR) to formally launch negotiations for the agreement.

The ToR include market access for goods by eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers, investment facilitation, simplification of customs procedures, increasing cooperation for innovation and technology transfer, and easing norms to promote trade in services. "We are considering doing this in two tranches. A decision will be taken when the talks begin. Both ministers are keen to finalise the first phase early so that the trade community benefits sooner," Goyal said here.

The minister is in Israel to meet leaders and businesses to discuss ways to boost bilateral trade and investments. He is leading a 60-member business delegation.

Goyal said that he and Israeli Economy and Industry Minister Nir Barkat have agreed that they will first focus on low-hanging fruit in the FTA. They have also decided not to touch the sensitive issues on both sides.

The two countries, he said, may look at "how innovative and R&D can drive greater investments in each other's countries, work on joint projects where we can leverage on their

skill sets and they can leverage on the economies of scale in a large market like India".

"It is quite possible that we may come out with the first phase on an FTA, so that we can kickstart the benefits faster," Goyal said. On a big metro project in Israel, the minister said Israel has just come out with pre-qualification documents for a USD 50 billion metro project in Tel Aviv. It involves 300 km of underground tunnelling and is one of the largest projects, and they are keen that Indian companies should also bid for it, he said. "We have several players, both in the public and private sectors, who have done massive works. We have 23 cities which are setting up metros in India," Goyal said, adding that Israel would "very seriously" like India to be a part of that project and "I hope Indian companies take interest and join the bidding process".

During 2024-25, India's exports to Israel dipped 52 per cent to USD 2.14 billion from USD 4.52 billion in 2023-24. Imports, too, fell 26.2 per cent to USD 1.48 billion last fiscal year. The bilateral trade stood at USD 3.62 billion.

India is Israel's second-largest trading partner in Asia.

Though bilateral merchandise trade is dominated mainly by diamonds, petroleum products, and chemicals, recent years have witnessed an increase in trade in areas such as electronic machinery and high-tech products, communications systems, and medical equipment. (PTI)

Garden Cafe plans probiotic snack plant in Bulgaria to power exports

KOLKATA, Nov 23: Garden Cafe, among India's earliest homegrown restaurant chains to adopt the franchise model, is gearing up for expansion with plans to set up a snack manufacturing facility in Bulgaria, a company official said on Sunday.

The proposed expansion for a probiotic potato chips and makhana unit in a European country comes with the brand reflecting on its 56-year legacy.

Garden Cafe Founder Sandip Nowlakha said the proposed Bulgaria unit will anchor the company's export strategy across Europe.

The products will be marketed under the Jiggies brand, which is also available in India through premium retail channels and clubs, he said.

Nowlakha, who already exports probiotic potato chips from its boutique Jiggies label to the Balkan nation of Bulgaria, said the move is driven by the need to reduce shipping delays that eat into the product's shelf life and affect the position of Jiggies as an international premium brand.

"Probiotic chips have a six-month shelf life, but almost three months are lost in shipping and distribution. No one wants to buy a product close to expiry. Producing in Europe is the only viable solution," he told PTI.

The proposed plant will exclusively handle probiotic products and roasted makhana, both positioned as niche, high-value snacks, he said.

"This will never be a mass-market potato chip. Jiggies is a boutique brand, and Europe has international visibility," said Nowlakha.

The company is currently conduct-



ing test-marketing for makhana in Bulgaria with small consignments shipped as the product remains unfamiliar to European consumers, he said.

Probiotic chips, however, already have a steady demand among premium restaurants there. "Without testing and understanding the market, you can't set up a factory. Sampling is crucial," he said.

Nowlakha estimates that setting up a food-grade plant in Bulgaria would "cost about three times as much as a similar unit in India, but the economics remain favourable".

"Food production costs and selling prices in Europe are roughly three times higher, so margins stay the same at about 25 per cent," he added.

Garden Cafe - founded in 1968 and credited with introducing a franchise model in 1992 - has since built multiple F&B and snack brands.

G20 leaders commit to engage on global minimum tax

JOHANNESBURG, Nov 23: G20 leaders have committed to engaging constructively to address concerns regarding global minimum tax and tax challenges arising from digitalisation of the economy, while preserving the tax sovereignty of all countries.

In a declaration issued after the G20 Summit in South Africa, leaders of 20 developing and developed nations also called for a new OECD framework that will enable interested jurisdictions to strengthen international tax transparency on immovable property on a voluntary basis.

"We will continue engaging constructively to address concerns regarding Pillar Two global minimum taxes, with the shared goal of finding a balanced and practical solution that is acceptable for all as soon as possible," said the G20 Summit declaration.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s pillar 2 initiative sets a minimum tax rate of 15 per cent for every country that is signatory to it. There are concerns that the US domestic tax rules might conflict with this new global minimum tax.

US President Donald Trump on January 20 in a Presidential memorandum had said that the "Global Tax Deal has no force or effect within the United States". This has led to countries evaluating the benefit of joining the tax deal with the US not being a part of it. (PTI)

NAME CORRECTION

I, Phatik Tamuly, s/o-Late Sumeshwar Tamuly, resident of Rajagaon, ward No. 1, P.O.-Morigaon, P.S.-Morigaon, Dist.-Morigaon, Assam, have corrected my name from Phatik Chandra Tamuly to Phatik Tamuly through an Executive Magistrate, Morigaon on 21st November, 2025. In my pension Payment Order bearing P.P.O. No. ADP/PPO/GPO/2017/038261 wherein my name has been recorded as Phatik Chandra Tamuly instead of Phatik Tamuly. Phatik Tamuly and Phatik Chandra Tamuly is the same and one person.

LOST

I Polita Beypi have lost my B.A. Consolidated Marksheet and Provisional Certificate bearing Enrollment No. 16018875. Anyone find please return to my following address or call my cellophone - POLITA BEYPIAddress - Rongnighang, Ward no. 3, Diphu, Near Joysing Doloi P.O./P.S.-Diphu. Pin -782460/Phone-6002114514

Party focuses on grassroots mobilisation, development pitch and record win across all 10 Assembly seats BJP leaders visit to Dima Hasao ahead of 2026 Assam polls

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: In a major political move ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly Elections, senior leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party began a two-day strategic visit to Dima Hasao, concluding on Sunday. The delegation included Assam State BJP president Dilip Saikia, State BJP president Ravindra Raju, organising secretary and MP Amarsing Tisso.

The leaders held an introductory meeting with district-level functionaries, kicking off an intensive schedule aimed at energising the party's grassroots network.

Throughout the visit, CEM Debolal Gorkhala and district BJP leaders held organisational discussions focusing on strengthening booth-level outreach, mobilising supporters and consolidating support across Dima Hasao. These meetings form part of the party's strategy to secure the highest victory margins in all ten Assembly constituencies.

Speaking to reporters, State BJP president Dilip Saikia highlighted rapid development in Dima Hasao under what he described as the "triple-engine government" of the Centre, State and the Autonomous Council. He noted improvements in infrastructure, irrigation, agriculture and

tourism, alongside better connectivity and access to health services in remote areas such as Maibang, Mahur and Harangajao.

Saikia also pointed to key welfare and education initiatives, including Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, Arunodoi and various flagship schemes benefiting diverse communities. He reiterated the party's vision of "Raijor Sarkar, Raijor Podulit," emphasising direct connection with citizens.

Targeting the opposition, Saikia said the Congress under Gaurav Gogoi had lost ground, crediting the BJP's recent electoral gains. He criticised the Congress for "failing the people" and urged it to release a white paper on its development record.

Saikia stated that the BJP in Dima Hasao is aligning its structure from booth committees to MAC members, MLAs and grassroots workers to maximise vote share and secure a sweeping victory in 2026.

The high-level visit signals the BJP's focus on deepening grassroots mobilisation, strengthening organisational unity and foregrounding development as its key campaign message. With the elections approaching, Dima Hasao has emerged as an important district in the party's roadmap to a decisive mandate next year.



RPF of NFR apprehends six for theft, recovers valuables worth ₹ 1.65 lakh Joint checks at Guwahati and Katihar stations lead to multiple arrests and recovery of stolen items



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway apprehended six persons involved in theft of passengers' be-

longings during joint checks conducted between 19 and 20 November. Valuables worth about ₹ 1.65 lakh were recovered from trains and railway stations at Guwahati and Katihar. All ac-

cused were handed over to the Government Railway Police (GRP) for further legal action.

On 20 November, the RPF and CPDS team at Katihar intercepted two individuals carrying two stolen mobile phones valued at around ₹ 40,000. The same day, a joint RPF-CPDS operation at Guwahati railway station led to the arrest of one person and recovery of two gold rings worth approximately ₹ 80,000.

A day earlier, on 19 November, the RPF (East), CPDS and GRP teams at Katihar apprehended one person and recovered a stolen mobile phone valued at about ₹ 20,000.

In October 2025, the NFR RPF had arrested 19 persons for similar offences and recovered 20 mobile phones and other items worth roughly ₹ 2.73 lakh. The RPF urged passengers to report any issues during travel by dialing the toll-free helpline 139.

NCC cadets held 60 km cycle rally to honour Bir Lachit Barphukan

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Nov 23: A cycle rally from the historic Rang Ghar in Sivasagar to the Lachit Barphukan Maidam on Jorhat's eastern outskirts was organised on Sunday to commemorate the 403rd birth anniversary of the revered Ahom general Bir Lachit Barphukan. The event paid tribute to his courage, leadership and patriotism that led the Ahom forces to victory against the Mughals in the Battle of Saraighat.

The rally was jointly organised by the 9, 11 and 12 Assam Battalions of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) under the aegis of Group Headquarters Jorhat and NCC Directorate North Eastern Region. According to a statement from Group Headquarters, 40 Senior Division NCC girl and boy cadets participated in the event, covering nearly 60 kilometres.

Brigadier Karnail Singh, Group Commander, Group HQ Jorhat NCC, flagged off the rally. Addressing the cadets, he urged them to draw inspiration from Bir Lachit Barphukan's steadfast dedication to the motherland and highlighted the event's focus on promoting discipline, unity and respect for the region's cultural heritage.

Before the rally began, participants offered prayers at the revered Shiv Doul temple in Sivasagar. The flowers used in the ritual were carried along the entire route and later laid at the Lachit Maidam as a mark of homage. Throughout the journey, the cadets spread messages of patriotism, bravery and unity, reflecting the ideals upheld by Bir Lachit Barphukan.

November 24 is observed as Lachit Divas across Assam to honour the birth anniversary of the legendary general.

Two-day Jolly Phonics training for PPRT teachers held



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Delhi Public School, Nagaon organised a two-day professional development programme for its PPRT teachers on November 21 and 22, focusing on Jolly Phonics—a globally recognised and effective approach to early literacy. The sessions were conducted by Neeti S Nagarkar from Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Jolly Phonics is a systematic, child-friendly methodology that strengthens English reading, writing and speaking skills in young learners. Widely adopted across private and government schools in India, it is praised for its engaging techniques and strong foundation-building for early literacy. Neeti S Nagarkar (M.Sc., ECCE) an internationally certified early childhood educator and Professional Jolly Phonics Trainer (UK), brings extensive global expertise in literacy practices. She also serves as a consultant for Handwriting without Tears (USA) and leads Kids World Education Consultants, supporting schools through impactful training programmes.

During the sessions, Nagarkar provided hands-on guidance, offering teachers valuable insights into phonics-based strategies for classroom implementation. The programme concluded with expressions of gratitude from Principal Ritu Rajnish, Headmaster Dhruvajyoti Das and Administrator Anwar Parvez, who thanked Nagarkar for her efforts in empowering PPRT teachers and enhancing early literacy instruction at DPS Nagaon.

NTPC signs MoA with Manipur to provide nutritional support to 1,800 TB patients

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Nov 23: NTPC Limited, acting as a Nikshay Mitra under the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyan (PMTBMA), has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the State Health Agency, Department of Health, Government of Manipur, to provide nutritional support to 1,800 tuberculosis (TB) patients and their families across 16 districts.

The partnership aims to enhance the nutritional wellbeing and recovery outcomes of TB-affected individuals, aligning with the national mission to eliminate the disease. As a Nikshay Mitra, NTPC will extend comprehensive nutritional kits and maintain regular engagement with beneficiaries throughout the intervention period.

The initiative is part of NTPC's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments under Schedule VII (i) of the Companies Act, 2013, which emphasises healthcare and preventive health. It also complements the Government of India's vision of ensuring equitable healthcare access, particularly in the North Eastern Region. NTPC Bongaigaon will spearhead the project's execution, including monitoring, kit distribution and sustained communication with patients. The MoA was signed by Kengoo Zuringla, CEO of the State Health Agency, Manipur in the presence of Dr Hemlata Thokchom, State TB Officer and Sidhanta Salam, State Programme Coordinator, NTEP Manipur.

Representing NTPC were Arnab Maitra Head of Project NTPC Bongaigaon, V Jayanarayanan Chief General Manager (HR, CSR, R&R & LA), P K Sahu, AGM (CSR) and Amit Kumar Asthana Head of HR, NTPC Bongaigaon along with other officials.

Youth lead digital and on-ground campaign for children's rights World Children's Day 2025 sees adolescents driving awareness on child marriage, education and safe communities

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Children and adolescents across Assam and the Northeast transformed World Children's Day into a movement for their rights, combining digital advocacy with on-ground action to end child marriage, support girls' education and create safer communities. Anchored by UNICEF's mandate to ensure that every child survives, learns and is protected and participates, the campaign placed young people at the forefront as creators, decision-makers and partners with government and civil society.

The 2025 observance was led by the youth-driven digital storytelling series "My Day, My Rights, My Game", featuring adolescents from the Brahmaputra Volleyball League (BVL). Using mobile phones, the participants documented their daily lives through video diaries and photo essays, highlighting challenges around education, protection and play. The stories revealed persistent barriers, particularly for girls at risk of early marriage and reached over one million people via social media, amplified by influencers and UNICEF campaigns.

Dr Madhulika Jonathan, UNICEF Chief for Assam and the Northeast, said, "When children tell their own stories, they shift social norms. Young people from Assam and



the Northeast are powerful partners in realising every child's right to learn, be safe and play."

Senior leaders across the region reinforced their commitment to children's rights. Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma reiterated the state's focus on girls' education and ending child marriage, while Arunachal



Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu highlighted collective responsibility for safe and inclusive environments for children. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal emphasised the role of youth in shaping policy, calling for investment in every child's future.

Olympic medalist Mirabai Chanu, musician Alobo Naga and actress Kripalaxmi Gu-

nes of unity, discipline and national commitment.

Katigarah Circle Officer Dr Robert Tulo (ACS) also spoke at the event, reflecting on Patel's leadership legacy. Earlier, MY Bharat Deputy Director Mehbub Alam Laskar delivered the welcome address, commending the enthusiastic participation of citizens—especially the youth and emphasising the growing strength of community-driven initiatives in Cachar.

The programme concluded with a vibrant cultural showcase featuring folk dance, Manipuri and Khasia performances and Bengali Dhamail, symbolising the rich cultural harmony of the district. A vote of thanks was delivered by Prosenjit Bhattacharjee, acknowledging the efforts of all departments, youth groups and the District Administration in making the event a success.

BJP Assam forms Manifesto Drafting Committee

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Nov 23: The BJP, Assam Pradesh is gearing up for the upcoming assembly elections, expected to be held in March-April 2026, by constituting a Manifesto Drafting Committee.

The committee is tasked with preparing the party's election manifesto and is chaired by Minister Dr Ranaj Pegu. Union Minister of State Pabitra Margherita has been appointed as the Member Secretary.

The committee comprises 17 other members, including Assam ministers, MPs, MLAs and senior party workers. Key members include Minister Ranjeet Kumar Das, Minister Ajanta Neog, Minister Bimal Borah, MLA Dipu Ranjan Sarma, MPs Rameshwar Teli and Amar Sing Tisso, former MPs Mission Ranjan Das and Dwijen Sarma and party leaders Dhruva Prasad Baishya, Dr Pradip Thakuria, Dr Devojit Mahanta, Uday Sankar Goswami, Mihneswar Basumatary, Mita Nath Bora, Kangana Goswami, Swamwar Brahma and Barkar Papukan Gogoi.

The committee will finalise policy priorities and key initiatives that the party intends to implement if re-elected, marking the beginning of BJP's strategic preparations for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections.

Teenager found unconscious in Jagiroad paddy field

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Nov 23: A teenage girl was found unconscious in a paddy field near Dungabori under Jagiroad Police Station on Sunday morning. Local women spotted the victim lying injured and informed the village head, following which she was rescued and taken for medical treatment.

According to allegations received by police, the girl's mother, who is reportedly mentally unwell had been approached by a youth who allegedly lured the teenager to Jhargaoon at night. The accused is alleged to have attempted to assault her inside a moving vehicle. When she resisted, the youth reportedly attacked her, after which the teenager jumped out of the vehicle in an attempt to escape.

Two senior journalists pass away in separate incidents

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT/KHERONI, Nov 23: Two respected journalists from Karbi Anglong passed away in separate incidents, leaving the region's media fraternity and cultural communities in deep grief.

Mohan Ingti, 50, a senior journalist from Prilo village in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, died this morning due to cardiac arrest while undergoing treatment at HAM Hospital, Hojai. Ingti, who had long been diabetic and suffering from other ailments, had been admitted a few days earlier. He is survived by his wife and young daughter. Ingti also served as vice-president of the Kheroni Press Club.

In another incident, prominent journalist and cultural organiser Dipu Charan Dutta, 66, passed away at a private hospital in Guwahati on the morning of Saturday. Dutta, who had been battling a serious illness, was a former secretary of the Karbi Anglong District Sahitya Sabha and the Diphu correspondent of Ajir Assam newspaper.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Excess of sorrow laughs. Excess of joy weeps.
— William Blake

Pak's military supremacy

Pakistan's ruling dispensation is dropping even the pretence of a civilian democracy. The country's 27th constitutional amendment rushed through Parliament and signed by its President, Asif Ali Zardari is a clear pointer to it. The amendment fires a broadside at Pakistan judiciary. It creates a new Federal Constitutional Court and gives the executive effective control at the selection of its judges. This about to be set up court appears to have been designed to reduce the influence of the Supreme Court. The powers that be in Pakistan seems to have cast a long look back before they decided to move this amendment. After all, the Supreme Court in any democracy is the last fora of appeal against any transgression of the Legislature and Executive. The Supreme Court of Pakistan is no exception. Time and again it has stood up to the country's military Establishment and political leadership. On face of it, the Supreme Court remains the apex court of Pakistan. But separately the Amendment changes Article 243 of the Constitution. It governs the relation between the army and civilian leadership. This amendment grants lifelong immunity from criminal prosecution to five-star ranked military officers. This is absurd. It challenges the very foundation of natural justice. It operates on the long laid down principle that everyone is equal before the law.

One cannot resist the temptation to ask what necessitates this legal safeguard. Are not the men in uniform law abiding citizens of Pakistan as men in mufti? Field Marshal, Asim Munir, the current army chief, is the only one five-star general in Pakistan now. He is the second in the country's history after Ayub Khan, the late military dictator and the only gainer from this amendment. Removing a five-star military officer will need a two-third majority in the Parliament. But a elected government can be ousted if it loses simple majority. The amendment places Field Marshal Munir and the officers to be elevated to five-star rank on a higher pedestal than the civilian leadership. It may be pointed out that it is to this civilian authority the men in uniform are ostensibly supposed to report to. The amendment creates a new position, the Chief of Defence Forces. It makes it clear that the army chief will concurrently hold this office. This formalises control of the army chief over Pakistan's navy and air force. It transgresses against the democratic norm of decentralising power and authority.

The military has been the most powerful institution of Pakistan since it came into being. But in the not too distant past, political parties including Pakistan People's Party (PPP) have resisted further consolidation of the military's power. Times have changed. This time, the PPP, a partner of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has gone along with the amendment. There was not even a smallest sign of protest though both PPP and PML-N leadership had got the rap of the military.

The Immortal Legacy of Lachit Borphukan

Every year on the twenty fourth of November, the state of Assam in northeast India pauses to observe Lachit Divas, a day dedicated to the memory of Lachit Borphukan, the legendary Ahom general who, in 1671, halted the advance of the mighty Mughal army at the Battle of Saraighat and preserved the sovereignty of the Brahmaputra valley. The day is not merely a regional commemoration; it carries within it layers of historical, cultural, and political meaning that continue to resonate in contemporary India. Lachit Divas stands as a powerful assertion of indigenous resistance, a reminder of a time when a relatively small kingdom successfully defied one of the most formidable empires of the early modern world, and an affirmation of the distinct identity of the people of Assam.

The Ahom kingdom, established in 1228 by Sukaphaa, a Shan prince from present day Myanmar, had by the seventeenth century developed into a sophisticated polity with a remarkable military tradition. For over six centuries the Ahoms ruled the Brahmaputra valley, absorbing local tribes, adopting wet rice cultivation, and perfecting a system of governance that blended Tai Ahom institutions with indigenous Assamese elements. Their pakt ghat system of compulsory public service, their mastery of riverine warfare, and their ability to mobilize entire villages for defense gave them an edge that larger continental empires often failed to comprehend. By the time Aurangzeb ascended the Mughal throne in 1658, the Ahoms had already repelled more than a dozen Mughal invasions. Yet none of those earlier campaigns matched the scale and determination of the expedition launched in 1669 under the command of Raja Ram Singh of Amber, son of the famous Raja Jai Singh. The Mughals arrived with an army that contemporary chronicles describe as numbering over thirty thousand cavalry, forty thousand infantry, and a large riverine fleet. They brought with them the confidence of having recently subdued Cooch Behar and Kamrup and the expectation that the conquest of Assam would be the final act in the consolidation of Mughal authority in eastern India. The Ahom kingdom, by contrast, was reeling from internal strife. King Chakradhwaj Singha had died in 1670, and his successor Udayaditya Singha was young and inexperienced. Famine and disease had weakened the population, and many among the nobility favored negotiation rather than war. It was in this moment of crisis that Lachit Borphukan emerged as the central figure of Assamese history.

Born in 1622 into a distinguished Ahom family, Lachit had risen through the ranks under the patronage of Prime Minister Atan Buragohain. He held several high offices, including superintendent of the royal stables and commander of the royal bodyguard, before being appointed supreme commander of the Ahom forces in 1667. When the Mughals renewed their offensive in 1669, Lachit was entrusted with the defense of Guwahati. For over two years he conducted a brilliant campaign of attrition, using guerrilla tactics, night raids, and scorched earth policies to wear down the invaders. By 1671 the Mughals had captured Guwahati, but their supply lines were stretched thin, their troops were suffering from malaria and dysentery, and morale was crumbling.

The decisive confrontation came in March 1671 at Saraighat, a narrow stretch of the Brahmaputra near present day Guwahati where the river is hemmed in by hills and sandbanks. Lachit, gravely ill with fever, was carried on a litter to the battlefield. The Mughals, led by Ram Singh,

launched a massive assault with their war boats and cannons. For a time the Ahom forces wavered. Some commanders began to retreat, and panic threatened to spread. According to Ahom chronicles, Lachit rose from his sickbed, drew his sword, and uttered the famous words, "If you want to flee, flee. The king has placed me here to defend our country. My father did not desert the country in times of danger. Shall I do so now?" He then ordered the pursuit of the retreating soldiers and personally led a counterattack. Inspired by his example, the Ahom navy regrouped and launched a ferocious assault. Using their smaller, more maneuverable boats, they rammed the heavier Mughal vessels, boarded them, and engaged in hand to hand combat. By nightfall the Mughal fleet was shattered, Ram Singh was forced to retreat, and Assam remained unconquered.

The victory at Saraighat was not merely a military triumph; it was a testament to strategic brilliance, personal courage, and the resilience of a people determined to preserve their way of life. The Mughals never again attempted a large-scale invasion of Assam. The Ahom kingdom endured for another century and a half, finally succumbing not to Mughal arms but to internal decay and Burmese invasions in the early nineteenth century. Lachit Borphukan died a year after Saraighat, in 1672, at the age of fifty. His mausoleum at Holongapar remains a place of quiet reverence.

For nearly two centuries after his death, Lachit's memory lived on in oral tradition, folk songs, and the annual Bihu performances where bards recounted the exploits of the great barphukan. Yet under British colonial rule, the story of Saraighat was deliberately marginalized. The colonial historiography of the northeast emphasized the inevitability of British conquest and portrayed the Ahoms as a semi barbarous tribe that had been rescued from Burmese tyranny by the East India Company. Lachit's name rarely appeared in official gazetteers or school textbooks. It was only in the early twentieth century, with the rise of Assamese nationalism and the growing demand for recognition of regional histories, that scholars and writers began to rediscover and rehabilitate his legacy. The first major step came in 1904 when the Assamese writer Padmanath Gohain Baruah published Lachit Borphukan, a historical novel that dramatized the events of 1671 and presented Lachit as a national hero. The book became immensely popular and helped crystallize a sense of pride in Assam's pre colonial past. During the freedom struggle, leaders of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee invoked Lachit's example to inspire resistance against British rule. After independence, successive state governments sought to institutionalize his memory. In 1999 the Assam government declared November 24, the date of Lachit's birth anniversary according to some traditional calendars, as Lachit Divas, a state holiday. Since then the day has grown in stature, marked by official functions, cultural programs, and the awarding of the Lachit Borphukan Gold Medal to the best cadet at the National Defence Academy.

The significance of Lachit Divas, however, extends far beyond ceremonial remembrance. At its core, the day is an act of historical reclamation. In a country where the dominant narrative of medieval India has long revolved around the Delhi centric Mughal empire, the celebration of Lachit challenges the notion that the Mughals were invincible. It reminds Indians that the subcontinent was never a monolithic entity waiting to be unified by a single imperial power. Instead, it was a mosaic of kingdoms and cultures, many of

which successfully asserted their autonomy. The Ahoms, like the Marathas in the west and the Sikhs in the northwest, demonstrated that local military traditions, when combined with leadership and determination, could hold their own against much larger adversaries.

Lachit Divas also serves as a powerful symbol of indigenous identity in a region that has often felt marginalized within the Indian nation state. The northeast, connected to the rest of India by the narrow Siliguri corridor, has historically been treated as peripheral. Development indicators lag behind the national average, and cultural stereotypes persist. By honoring Lachit, Assam asserts that its history is not a footnote but an integral chapter in the larger story of India's resistance to foreign domination. The day resonates particularly strongly among the younger generation, who see in Lachit a figure untainted by the compromises of later politics, a warrior who placed country above personal comfort and lived up to the highest ideals of duty.

Recently the central government has taken steps to elevate Lachit's stature beyond the borders of Assam. In 2022 Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a year-long celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of Lachit Borphukan, describing him as a symbol of India's unity in diversity. The Indian Navy commissioned INS Lachit, a destroyer named in his honor, and the National Defence Academy instituted an annual award in his name. These gestures reflect a broader effort to weave regional heroes into a pan Indian narrative of valor and sacrifice. They also underscore the political importance of acknowledging the northeast at a time when the region remains strategically vital and culturally distinct. Yet the celebration of Lachit Divas is not without its complexities. Some critics argue that the day has occasionally been appropriated for narrow political ends, used to stoke regional chauvinism or to draw simplistic parallels between seventeenth century Mughal invaders and contemporary minority communities. Such interpretations distort the historical record. Lachit fought to defend the Ahom kingdom, not to persecute any particular faith. The Ahom army itself was multi ethnic, drawing soldiers from the hills and the plains, and the kingdom practiced a policy of religious tolerance that allowed Hindu, Muslim, and animist traditions to coexist. The true lesson of Saraighat lies in unity born of shared purpose, not in division. As Assam stands on the threshold of the twenty-first century, grappling with challenges of development, environmental degradation, and demographic change, Lachit Divas offers more than nostalgia. It is a call to emulate the qualities that made victory possible: discipline, sacrifice, strategic foresight, and unwavering commitment to the land and its people. Every schoolchild in Assam learns the story of the ailing general who rose from his sickbed to turn the tide of battle. Every year on November twenty fourth, when the tricolor is hoisted and wreaths are laid at his mausoleum, the people of Assam renew their pledge to safeguard the legacy of freedom he helped secure.

Lachit Borphukan belongs not only to Assam but to the collective memory of a nation that has always found ways to resist subjugation. In an era when history is often contested and identities fiercely asserted, Lachit Divas stands as an annual reaffirmation of pride in a past that refused to surrender. It is a day when the Brahmaputra seems to flow a little prouder, carrying within its currents the echo of war drums and the memory of a leader who taught his people that even the mightiest empire can be turned back when a nation stands united in defense of its home.

Lachit Borphukan's contribution to the preservation of Assam's existence

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The history of Assam is a glorious document of pride, the right to self-determination, and the protection of national identity. On the fertile soil along both banks of the Brahmaputra, a great civilisation took shape that, since ancient times, has attracted the covetous gaze of various external powers. Especially in the medieval political context of India, when the aggressive imperialism of the Mughal empire seated in Delhi was poised to swallow the entire subcontinent, bringing this independent and freedom-loving land in the east under its control became a matter of prestige for the Mughal emperors and an unfulfilled dream of imperial expansion. In that critical juncture of the seventeenth century, when storm clouds of calamity had gathered over the sky of Assam's sovereignty and the sun of the nation's existence was about to set, it was at that very moment that a great soul named Lachit Borphukan emerged from the womb of Mother Assam. To confine Lachit Borphukan merely to the role of a general, a warrior, or a royal officer would be a grave injustice to his immense personality. He was the backbone of Assamese national identity; upon his courage, wisdom, and patriotism the entire nation was able to regain new life. The unprecedented unity, sacrifice, and valour displayed by the Assamese people under his leadership not only adorns the pages of Assam's history but remains forever a golden chapter in the military annals of the world.

To properly evaluate Lachit Borphukan's role in preserving Assam's existence, a deep understanding of the political, social, and psychological environment of that period is essential. During the reign of Ahom Swargadeo Jayadhwaj Singha, the devastating invasion of the Mughal general Mir Jumla and the humiliating treaty signed at Ghlidharaghat created a festering wound in Assam's heart. The terms of that treaty posed an extreme threat to Assam's sovereignty. Vast territories on the western frontier of the Ahom kingdom were transferred to Mughal hands, an enormous amount of wealth and resources from the royal treasury had to be sent to Delhi as compensation, and most painfully, a royal princess like Ramani Gabharu had to be sent to the Mughal harem. This defeat did not merely shrink geographical boundaries; it shattered the morale of the Assamese people. Despair and gloom prevailed throughout the kingdom. In such a terrifying situation, for the newly enthroned Swargadeo Chakradhwaj Singha, carrying the burden of this humiliation was unbearable. The fire of revenge burned in his blood, and he vowed that at any cost he would wash away this stain. Yet, to stand against a vast and well-organised military power

like the Mughals, the king's desire alone was not enough; it required long preparation and an extraordinarily gifted commander. It was to fulfill this historic necessity that the appointment of Lachit Borphukan became an epoch-making decision of the Ahom monarchy. His selection was not based merely on lineage or aristocratic identity. He was the son of the illustrious officer Momai Tamuli Borborua, who had been familiar with state administration and military policy from childhood. But Swargadeo Chakradhwaj Singha tested Lachit's strength of character, self-control, and deep reverence for the motherland before entrusting him with this great responsibility. The day Lachit accepted the duty of commander with the golden sword in hand, he did not merely accept a title; he took upon his shoulders the responsibility of changing the destiny of a nation.

Immediately upon assuming command, the first and most complex challenge before Lachit Borphukan was to revive a shattered, disorganised, and demoralised army. Prolonged wars, the terror of Mir Jumla's invasion, and economic crisis had bred reluctance and fear among the people and soldiers. Lachit understood that before fighting the enemy with weapons on the battlefield, he had to fight the fear within people's minds. He knew that against the Mughals' vast cavalry, superior artillery, and countless soldiers, victory through numbers or weapons alone was impossible. For that, indomitable mental strength and strategic skill were required. Lachit first concentrated on reorganising the army. He sent men to every village to explain to the people that this war was not merely to protect the king's power; it was a war for every Assamese to defend their land, their roots, their families, and their faith. This call created an unprecedented response among the masses. The army formed under his leadership included not only Ahoms but also Koch, Kachari, Chutia, Kaivarta, Garo, Naga, and Muslim inhabitants of Assam. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Lachit brought these diverse ethnic groups under one banner and laid the foundation of a modern national identity. For him, a soldier's identity was neither caste nor religion; it was patriotism and competence. This social cohesion and unity was Lachit's first and most important victory, which later made triumphs such as Saraighat possible.

Parallel to military preparation, Lachit Borphukan adopted a strict policy of discipline and law and order. He knew that lax discipline could not defeat a powerful enemy like the Mughals. Behind Lachit Borphukan's severity lay profound patriotism and a sense of duty that never hesitated to sacrifice personal emotions for the nation's interest. In matters of strategy, his wisdom and foresight were compa-

ble to the world's greatest military leaders. He well understood that on flat terrain, the Ahom infantry could hardly survive against Mughal cavalry and massive cannons. Therefore, instead of conventional frontal warfare, he adopted a different approach. He decided to use Assam's geography—its rivers, hills, jungles, and rains—as weapons against the enemy. Centring on Guwahati, he constructed impregnable forts and ramparts on the hills and narrow paths along both banks of the Brahmaputra. His main objective was to drag the Mughals away from open fields into treacherous riverine and hilly areas where their horses and heavy cannons would become useless. Lachit employed "daga judhda" or guerrilla tactics. At night, Ahom soldiers launched surprise attacks on Mughal camps, destroying their food and supplies, then melted away into the jungle by day. This game of hide-and-seek became psychological torture for the Mughals. Unaccustomed to Assam's climate, mosquitoes, and floods, Mughal soldiers' morale gradually crumbled. The Mughal commander Ram Singh, himself the king of Amber and one of the empire's finest generals, repeatedly found himself helpless before Lachit's strategies. Lachit's defensive yet aggressive tactics succeeded in stalling Mughal advance for a long time.

Lachit Borphukan was not only a warrior and strategist; he was also an astute diplomat. To manage complex war situations, he used intelligence alongside military might. Whenever he felt the Ahom forces needed more time to prepare or required information about Mughal plans, he kept the enemy occupied by proposing peace talks. He sent various gifts and letters to Ram Singh, creating a false hope that the Ahoms might submit. This delaying tactic was an integral part of his strategy. He even tried to sow discord within the Mughal camp. Since Ram Singh was a Rajput fighting reluctantly under Aurangzeb's orders, Lachit attempted to exploit that weakness, sending messages that a great warrior like Ram Singh should not demean himself by fighting a small kingdom like Assam. Such psychological warfare struck at the enemy's mental stability. Lachit's intelligence network was extremely active and efficient. He received advance information about every minor movement of the enemy and planned his next steps accordingly. This information-driven warfare always kept him one step ahead.

Of course, victory did not come at every turn during this long campaign. The Battle of Alaboi remains one of the most tragic chapters in Lachit's military career and Ahom history. Provoked repeatedly by the Mughals and under somewhat impatient orders from King Chakradhwaj Singha, Lachit was forced against his will into open-field combat. In that battle, nearly ten thou-

sand brave Ahom soldiers laid down their lives. The plain of Alaboi was stained red with Assamese blood. This massive defeat wounded Lachit deeply. He lamented before the king, "In a single day ten thousand men have died, from where shall I bring them back?" Yet this grief did not weaken him; it only strengthened his resolve. Alaboi taught him that fighting on the enemy's chosen ground was suicidal. He realised that only intellect and strategy, not emotion, could defeat this mighty foe. Learning from this disaster, he reorganised his army and prepared for the decisive battle at Saraighat. The mark of a great commander is to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of defeat, and Lachit did exactly that.

The Battle of Saraighat, fought in March 1671 on the bosom of the Brahmaputra, was a historic moment that decided Assam's fate. Justastone before the battle, Lachit Borphukan fell seriously ill. High fever and physical agony confined him to bed. Yet the fire of patriotism in his heart burned brighter than the fever in his body. At a critical moment when the massive Mughal naval fleet was advancing swiftly, splitting the river, and panic had spread among Ahom troops, some boatmen began to retreat. Hearing this, a demonic energy seemed to surge through the deathly ill Lachit. Ignoring his physicians, he ordered his attendants to carry him to a boat. With his sick body, he reached the battlefield and thundered, "The enemy is near; if you wish to abandon me and flee, go! I shall fight alone and die here, but I will not let the enemy pass." This thunderous voice and scene of sacrifice awakened the conscience of the fleeing soldiers. Fear vanished from their minds in an instant, replaced by near-mad courage. The entire Ahom force attacked the Mughals with double zeal.

That naval battle amid the turbulent waves of the Brahmaputra was a marvellous display of strategy and technology. The small but extremely swift Ahom "bachari" boats danced with the current, while the large, heavy Mughal ships lost control in the river's whirlpools and strong flow. According to Lachit's plan, a triangular attack was launched: continuous cannon and arrow fire from Itakhuli river, fierce assaults by boatmen in the river, and a protective encirclement by infantry on the banks trapped the Mughals from all sides. The Mughal commander Munawar Khan was killed in this battle, leaving the Mughal force leaderless and confused. Ram Singh watched in stunned disbelief as his vast army crumbled before his eyes. He was forced to admit that Lachit Borphukan and the Ahom soldiers' valour had no equal. Finally, the Mughal army was completely defeated and compelled to flee Assam. The victory at Saraighat shattered forever the Mughal dream of conquering eastern India. This

was not merely the victory of one battle; it was the triumph of the indomitable will and freedom-loving spirit of the Assamese nation.

Lachit Borphukan's victory changed the course of Assam's history. Its far-reaching effects were not confined to the political sphere alone; it deeply influenced Assam's culture, language, and religious identity. Had the Mughals won at Saraighat that day, Assam's cultural map today would have been entirely different. The namghars, satras, Sankari art and culture, and indigenous traditions might have been lost or distorted under Mughal aggression. Lachit Borphukan saved Assam from becoming part of the defeated history of mainland India. He ensured that Assam would forever shine with its distinct and unique characteristics. Because of him, Northeast India could maintain its cultural links with Southeast Asia. The secure and stable environment necessary for the later flowering of literature, art, and architecture during the Ahom period was created by Lachit's victory. He gave the Assamese nation such self-confidence that even with lesser resources and numbers, they could challenge any powerful force in the world.

Another great aspect of Lachit Borphukan's character was his extreme selflessness and unwavering devotion to king and country. Despite being the hero of such a historic victory, he never coveted power or sought special privileges for himself. For him, the king was the symbol of the state, and obeying the king's command was his sacred duty. Yet his loyalty was not blind; it was guided by conscience and patriotism. He understood that a commander's true success lay not merely in winning battles or destroying enemies, but in sacrificing everything for the nation's welfare. The way ordinary people dug earth to build ramparts under his leadership, the way Assamese women wove cloth overnight to prepare armour—that was an early and excellent example of a "people's war." Lachit convinced the common people that in times of national crisis, every citizen—be they farmer or artisan—was a soldier. Awakening this collective sense of responsibility was his greatest

achievement as a leader.

In today's society, when self-centred thinking, corruption, and divisive forces are raising their heads, Lachit's selfless patriotism and dedication to duty stand before us as a pillar of light. The ideal of unity and harmony he showed is the most essential lesson for us today. It is improper to confine Lachit Borphukan within the boundaries of any particular caste or religion; he is the symbol of valour for all inhabitants of Assam, the entire Northeast, and the greater Indian civilisation. The way Hindus, Muslims, and various tribal communities fought shoulder to shoulder in his army remains an eternal lesson in secularism and brotherhood. Today's youth should learn from Lachit's life how to maintain mental stability in times of crisis, how to achieve great goals with limited resources, and how to place national interest above personal interest. Lachit is not merely a name; he is an idea, a pulse that still flows in the blood of every Assamese.

In conclusion, Lachit Borphukan was a titan created by time and circumstance who, with his courage, strength, and mental power, altered the course of history. It is difficult to describe in words his contribution to preserving Assam's existence. He did not merely defeat the Mughals; he crushed their myth of invincibility. The taste of victory that Assam savoured under his leadership provided fuel for the nation to survive through centuries. Because of him, we can today declare with pride that we are Assamese. As long as the waters of the Luit flow and the sun rises over this land, the name of Lachit Borphukan will resound in Assam's sky and air. He is the glory of our past, the inspiration of our present, and the guide of our future. His sacrifice reminds us that the price of freedom and existence is very high, and when necessary, we must always be ready to offer everything for it. The torch of patriotism he lit on the battlefield of Saraighat will continue to show the Assamese nation the path from darkness to light in the days to come. Lachit Borphukan—the name itself is strength, courage, and the eternal identity of the Assamese.



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Dentistry in India: Oversupply and Gender bias shaping oral health workforce

By: Damini Bisen

India's dental sector has seen outstanding growth over the past eight decades. In 1947, when India achieved independence, there were only three dental colleges. India currently has 329 Dental Colleges with 27,926 Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) seats available annually. Currently, 82 percent of BDS seats are in private institutions. The National Dental Commission Act, 2023, is a comprehensive legislation enacted to regulate the profession of dentistry across India, modernise dental education, and ensure high standards of oral healthcare services. Its jurisdiction extends to all individuals and entities associated with dentistry: dentists, dental auxiliaries, institutions, colleges, and the general public as indirect beneficiaries. This Act aims to replace the Dental Council of India (DCI), originally set up under the Dentists Act, 1948, with the recently established National Dental Commission (NDC).

India now has one dentist for every 3,846 people, which is almost double the WHO's recommended ratio of 1:7,500. It indicates that the country has more dentists than it actually needs.

However, the inability to constitute the commission is placing the existing Dental Council of India (DCI) in an increasingly unstable position. Despite legislative backing and notified rules, the National Dental Commission has yet to be constituted, raising serious concerns over dental education and regulations. Currently, India has 376,721 registered dentists under the Dental Council of India (DCI). India's 2025 population is estimated at 1,463,865,525 people at mid-year, which makes the current dentist-to-population ratio in India approximately 1:3846.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a dentist-to-population ratio of 1:7500 for developing countries. India now has one dentist for every 3,846 people, which is almost double the WHO's recommended ratio of 1:7,500. It indicates that the country has more dentists than it actually needs. Yet beneath these gains lies an alarming reality characterised by market saturation of dentists, uneven distribution, employment bottlenecks, and complex gender inequalities that continue to pervade the profession.

On one hand, urban areas witness severe competition among dentists who own private

clinics, and on the other hand, rural areas remain critically underserved and deprived of oral healthcare. Simultaneously, the feminisation of the profession, where women now represent 75 percent of dental students in many states has exposed structural barriers in practice, specialisation, research, and leadership. This article aims to analyse how saturation and gender bias interact in India's dental profession, necessitating better policy pathways for equitable workforce planning.

The Problem of Saturation

Over the next decade, there will be a massive oversupply of dentists in the country with a surplus of over 100,000 dentists. The rate of increase in the number of dentists in India is more than three times that of the population growth. The oversupply of dentists in India will continue to affect recent dental graduates the most and is causing high unemployment. The supply and demand imbalance, alongside the overpopulation of dental clinics, has made private practice financially risky for new graduates. To open and run a dental clinic, a huge financial investment is needed, and prospects for establishing a financially sustainable practice in urban areas are already saturated in India.

The rate of increase in the number of dentists in India is more than three times that of the population growth.

The aftermath of oversupply of dentists in India is a reduction in the quality of care given to patients, and it is also causing major compromise to the ethics of dental professionals, such as using low-quality dental materials to make the dental practice profitable. It might also cause other healthcare hazards, such as overtreating patients, i.e. recommending an unnecessary procedure to patients for their dental health, or overpromising, i.e. not telling the complete truth to the patient regarding the outcome of the procedure. All these things have also led to an increase in distrust among patients towards dentists in India.

Dissatisfaction among Dental Academicians

Even with the job stability and financial security offered by academic institutions, the past five years have witnessed a notable decline in the quality of dental education, accompanied by increasing levels of burnout among dental academicians due to occupational stress. Dental faculty members in India have reported high

levels of dissatisfaction with their careers in full-time teaching positions. A 2021 National-level study indicates that a greater willingness to resign is positively correlated with feelings of hopelessness, showing the significant stress experienced by faculty within institutional settings. Married academicians, assistant professors, and those earning below INR 50,000/month reported significantly higher levels of hopelessness compared to other groups ($P < 0.05$). Job satisfaction among academicians plays a critical role in shaping students' learning experiences; thus, continuous dissatisfaction among faculty members may have profound effects on the overall quality of dental education and the competence of future graduates in India.

Dental faculty members in India have reported high levels of dissatisfaction with their careers in full-time teaching positions.

Gender Bias in Dentistry in India

Despite their high number, female dentists are less likely than men to own a clinic or secure postgraduate qualifications. Moreover, the average annual income of full-time, self-employed women in dentistry was 37 percent lower than that of full-time, self-employed men, which clearly demonstrates the persistence of the gender gap.

The current statistics of men and women registered as dentists or students are not available on the DCI website. However, according to a 2019 global study, it was found that more than 70 percent of the registered dentists in India are women. The authors of a 2019 study reported that they made multiple attempts to gather data on gender distribution, but leaders in dental education in India did not respond. This is the case in India, which has the most dental schools and a central registry for dentists. They hypothesised that the male-dominated leadership in some developing nations, like India, may not be eager to share information that recognises inequality in their nations, and that there is little to no diversity at the top levels of dental education and research.

The ratio of male and female dental faculty in Figure 1 very well demonstrates how the ratio is reversed from dental students to academicians.

A 2020 study conducted in Vadodra, India, to assess the disparities at the workplace experienced by female dentists was able to identify reasons behind the disparities. The findings of



the study in Vadodra revealed that male dentists often displayed hostility toward the idea of women in positions of authority, reflecting a deep-rooted bias against the 'woman in power' concept. Additionally, male dentists were generally perceived as being more proficient in technical skills, which further reinforces gender hierarchies within the profession. Many female dentists also faced challenges in balancing their professional responsibilities with family obligations, making it harder for them to progress in their careers. Moreover, workplace discipline and decision-making were often influenced by male authority figures, creating an environment where women remained dependent on male counterparts for professional validation and support.

The findings of the study in Vadodra revealed that male dentists often displayed hostility toward the idea of women in positions of authority, reflecting a deep-rooted bias against the 'woman in power' concept.

Conclusion

Until the National Dental Commission be-

comes fully operational, the country's dental sector remains in a state of uncertainty; its directions are influenced more by bureaucratic delays than by the forward-looking intent behind the Act's enactment. The utilisation of oral healthcare services is limited in rural areas in India. Improving service utilisation requires planned investment in human resources and the enhancement of demand through education and outreach in the rural population.

Lessons can be drawn from countries such as Finland, where, by studying the career choices, appropriate policy measures are taken. Furthermore, a small percentage of leadership positions should be reserved for female dentists in India so that their perspective can also be taken into consideration. There is an urgent need to build a more inclusive environment, one that supports rural practice through incentives and awareness, promotes gender equity at every level, and ensures more transparent pathways for leadership and career growth for a better delivery of oral health services in India. (Courtesy: ORF)

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Our latest poll reveals young India's silent superbug problem

By: Sarah Hyder Iqbal

You wake up with a sore throat before a presentation or an exam. You head to the nearest pharmacy, tell the pharmacist you need something strong, and walk out with antibiotics without even realising. No prescription. No questions. Just a quick fix.

For a lot of young Indians, this is normal. Almost routine. But these habits we think of as harmless shortcuts are quietly feeding a much bigger problem. The problem of Antimicrobial Resistance or AMR, a public health crisis that already causes more than 1.25 million deaths each year worldwide and nearly 300,000 in India.

You might be thinking, great, one more health problem to worry about. Isn't life complicated enough already? But AMR isn't some new scary disease waiting to jump out at us. It didn't start because one person took the wrong medicine last week. It actually begins as a natural process. For millions of years, bacteria have been adapting and evolving. That's how they survive. That's how most living organisms survive. When something threatens them, they learn how to resist it and evolve into more resilient versions (nature's way of saying "new update available").

But here's where things speed up and get worrying. Our everyday habits give bacteria and other disease-causing germs more chances to practise and adapt. Taking antibiotics without need, stopping a course halfway, using leftover medicines, or getting antibiotics from a pharmacy without a prescription all push this natural process into fast-forward. The same thing happens when antibiotics are overused in farming and livestock. All of this creates an environment where bacteria learn faster than we can keep up, and the medicines meant to treat the infections caused by them slowly lose their power.

And this raises a simple but important question. If AMR is growing partly because of everyday choices, how are young Indians actually making those choices? After all, AMR doesn't just shape their present – it defines the future they're stepping into.

To understand how young Indians think about sickness, antibiotics, and infection prevention, Youth Ki Awaaz ran a WhatsApp-based public poll in collaboration with Superheroes Against Superbugs. And the responses show a mix of good instincts, familiar shortcuts, and some worrying gaps in understanding of antibiotics and infections.

Who took the poll

A total of 717 people from across 35 Indian states and UTs responded to the poll and answered the question about how they treat colds and sore throats, and 638 responded to the question about how they prevent infections.

Around 41% of the respondents were between 18 and 23, and another 21% were in their early career years (27-35). About 56% identified as male, 40% as female, and 1% as non-binary.

Understanding our respondents matters because the results reflect not just general habits but the realities of young adults navigating classes, jobs, hostel life, long com-

muters, and limited access to reliable healthcare.

How young people handle colds and sore throats

The poll's first question focused on something simple. What do you do when you get a cold or a sore throat? They were given the following options: A. Wait it out with rest and fluids; B. Ask a doctor for antibiotics; C. Take leftover medicines at home or D. Google symptoms and decide myself.

Nearly half of the respondents, about 47%, said they wait it out with rest and fluids which is a healthy instinct. Most colds and sore throats are viral and clear up on their own with rest, which is why antibiotics don't make a difference in these cases.

About 26% said their go-to response is asking a doctor for antibiotics. For young people who can't afford to miss college or work, antibiotics feel like the fastest way out. It turns into a pattern where people expect antibiotics for anything that feels uncomfortable, and doctors often prescribe them to avoid pushback.

Then there's the worrying group of self-medicators. Around 21% said they take leftover medicines lying around at home. Among the youngest respondents, those between 18 and 20, this number jumps to 25%. As people grow older, this drops to 15% among those above 40.

Younger respondents are the most likely to experiment on their own, often because it's convenient. It's likely that hostel rooms, PG accommodations, and shared flats are full of half-finished strips of tablets passed around like general-use supplies; given how easy it is to buy antibiotics in India.

Some respondents also turn to the internet before they turn to a doctor. While only 9% of the total respondents do this, young men rely on online searches far more than women. It might seem harmless to look things up, but it becomes risky when people mix online advice with leftover antibiotics.

What young people believe actually prevents infections

The second question explored prevention. What do people think keeps infections away? They had the following options to choose from: A. Washing hands regularly; B. Taking antibiotics early; C. Eating healthy; D. Wearing masks in public.

Only 32% picked handwashing, even though it's one of the simplest and most proven ways to avoid falling sick. Eating healthy and wearing masks got attention too, but the most worrying belief came from the 13% who think taking antibiotics early helps prevent infections.

This isn't just a random misunderstanding but reflects how antibiotics have been presented in many Indian households. For years, people stored them like safety nets in their medicine boxes, given for any cold or cough as soon as it would start. The poll shows that this belief is especially strong among older respondents, but younger people are not entirely free from it either.

Looking closer at age and gender patterns Since the goal of the poll was to understand young people better, the age breakdown is revealing. The youngest group, 18 to 20, are the most likely to self-medicate.

It's likely a mix of accessibility and habit. They often feel they don't have the time or money for a doctor's visit, so they rely on what's already around. In India, most pharmacies also sell antibiotics without a doctor's prescription, so that makes this all the easier.

At the same time, older adults in the poll were the most likely to demand antibiotics from doctors and the most likely to believe antibiotics prevent infections. That's a fundamental misunderstanding as antibiotics treat bacterial infections only after they happen. Taking them as a precautionary measure can actually backfire and disturb the healthy bacteria in your gut, making you more vulnerable instead of protected.

Gender adds its own layer. Women are more likely to wait out their symptoms, with about 52% preferring to rest and take fluids, while only 43% of men do the same. But women in our poll showed a higher likelihood of taking leftover medicines. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to seek antibiotics from doctors or rely on internet searches.

Different pressures, different instincts, but both feed into the same cycle of antibiotic misuse and AMR.

Why this matters for young Indians now Young people today are the most connected generation India has ever seen, but they also live in a time where health information is chaotic and often unreliable. Pharmacies hand out antibiotics easily (and illegally). Doctors are overloaded. Family medicine boxes contain random leftover strips. And online advice, now with an added layer of Generative AI, often mixes facts with confident but incorrect opinions.

AMR becomes dangerous because it grows quietly in the background. It doesn't cause obvious public panic like COVID did; it doesn't show up as a sudden outbreak. But it slowly erodes our ability to treat infections that were once routine. If things continue the way they are, simple illnesses will take longer to recover from. Hospital procedures will become riskier and life-threatening. Stronger medicines with harsher side effects will become the new normal.

And young people will face the consequences longest because they're at the start of their adult lives.

What needs to change

While slowing down AMR requires the right actions on many levels, by many people, but it all starts with everyday decisions. It is clear from this dipstick poll data that young people need clearer information about when antibiotics actually help and when they don't and better support at home, colleges and workplaces, to be able to take better care of their health.

The WhatsApp poll also shows something important. Young Indians are curious, engaged and willing to reflect on their own health choices. They already have part of the picture; they just need the dots connected in a way that fits the realities of their lives.

Antibiotics can remain powerful, life-saving tools. But only if this generation understands how to protect them. And that starts with small decisions made every day in pharmacies, clinics, hostels and homes. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Garlic can benefit heart and immune system, suggests research



By: Dipa Kamdar

Whether it is sizzling in a curry, garlic has long been a hero in the kitchen. But beyond its strong flavour, garlic has earned a reputation as a natural remedy with a surprising range of potential health benefits. From heart health to immune support, science increasingly supports what tradition has claimed for centuries: garlic is good for you.

The secret lies in its chemistry. Garlic (allium sativum) contains sulphur compounds, including diallyl disulfide and S-allyl cysteine, that are responsible for both its distinctive smell and its medicinal effects.

The most studied of these is allicin, which forms when garlic is chopped, crushed or chewed. Allicin is unstable and quickly breaks down into other sulphur-containing compounds that are linked to several health effects. Here are some of the best supported benefits.

1. Heart health

Garlic is widely studied for its potential to support the heart and blood vessels. Garlic supplements can help reduce high blood pressure, with some studies finding effects similar to certain prescribed medications. A 2019 analysis found that garlic supplements significantly lowered blood pressure in people with hypertension. This reduction was linked to a 16%-40% lower risk of cardiovascular events, such as heart attacks and strokes.

Research suggests this may be because garlic extract improves arterial elasticity so that arteries become more flexible, helping them expand and contract more easily as blood flows through. Stiff arteries make the heart work harder and are a risk factor for heart disease.

Garlic compounds also appear to help relax blood vessels by increasing levels of hydrogen sulphide and nitric oxide. These are gases naturally produced in the body that help blood vessels widen so blood can flow more easily. Allicin may also help reduce blood pressure by blocking angiotensin II, a hormone that causes blood vessels to tighten.

Research suggests garlic may also lower total cholesterol – the overall amount of cholesterol in the blood – and LDL cholesterol, often called bad cholesterol because high levels can clog arteries. Some studies show that taking garlic for longer than two months can reduce LDL cholesterol by up to 10% in people with mildly raised levels.

Lab studies show that garlic compounds can block liver enzymes that produce fats and cholesterol. They may also prevent plaque building up in the arteries by reducing LDL and making it more resistant to oxidation, a process that contributes to heart disease.

2. Immune support

The antibacterial effects of allicin are well recognised. Garlic extract has also been shown to have antimicrobial activity against bacteria, viruses and fungi.

One study found that people who took aged garlic extract had milder cold and flu symptoms, recovered more quickly and missed fewer days of work or school.

More recent research suggests garlic may support the immune system by activating certain types of white blood cells. These include macrophages, which are immune cells that engulf and destroy bacteria and viruses; lymphocytes, which include T cells and B cells that recognise infections and produce antibodies; and natural killer cells, which target and destroy infected or abnormal cells such as virus infected or cancerous cells.

Garlic may also help regulate inflammation, which is a key part of the immune response.

3. Cancer prevention

Early research suggests garlic may help reduce the risk of certain cancers, particularly those affecting the digestive system, colon, lungs and urinary tract.

A study found that garlic can affect key processes involved in cancer development. It may stop cancer cells from dividing, prevent the formation of new blood vessels that feed tumours and encourage cancer cells to die naturally. These effects appear to be linked to garlic's influence on cell signalling

pathways which control how cells grow and behave. Garlic's antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties may also contribute.

However, most of this evidence comes from laboratory and animal studies which do not always apply to humans. More robust clinical studies on people are needed.

Garlic has also been linked to other possible health benefits although research is still ongoing. Its antioxidant effects may help lower the risk of Alzheimer's disease, and its anti-inflammatory properties may be useful in conditions such as osteoarthritis.

How much garlic is enough

There is no official recommended daily amount for garlic. Many studies use the equivalent of one to two cloves per day. Supplements are also widely available. Eating garlic as part of food provides fibre, vitamins and other plant compounds that supplements do not contain so food sources may offer extra benefits beyond supplements alone.

Garlic is generally safe but it can cause bloating, gas and heartburn especially when eaten raw or in large amounts. People with irritable bowel syndrome, acid reflux or those who are pregnant may be more sensitive.

Garlic is also known for causing bad breath and body odour. As allicin breaks down, it releases sulphur containing gases. Most are processed by the body but one called allyl methyl sulphide remains unmetabolised and leaves the body through breath and sweat.

Garlic can interact with certain medications if taken in large amounts. It may increase the effects of aspirin or blood-thinning medicines such as warfarin which can increase the risk of bleeding. Garlic may also lower blood pressure which could be a problem for people already taking medication for high or low blood pressure. Those who are pregnant or breastfeeding should be cautious because high-dose garlic supplements have not been well studied, so the effects on the developing baby or infant are not fully known.

Garlic is more than a flavour booster. It is a functional food with a growing body of scientific evidence behind it. While it is not a replacement for medical treatment, including garlic in your diet may offer real benefits for your heart and immune system.

Whether you roast it, crush it or take it as a supplement, garlic deserves a place in your health routine. If you take medication or have existing health conditions speak to a doctor or pharmacist before using garlic in large amounts. As with any natural remedy, moderation is important. (Courtesy: scroll.in)

Borrowed lives on fake IDs

SIR sparks reverse migration of 'illegal Bangladeshis' at Hakimpur border

HAKIMPUR, Nov 23: Beside a pitch road that opens into a narrow, dusty mud bylane at the Hakimpur BSF border outpost in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas, a stretch has become an informal departure corridor for "illegal Bangladeshis", who lived in the state for years.

Under a sprawling banyan tree, families with small cloth bags, children clutching plastic bottles, and men waiting on their haunches formed a silent queue on Saturday, repeating a single plea before BSF personnel: "Let us go home."

Across the South Bengal border belt, security personnel and local residents say the number of undocumented Bangladeshi nationals attempting to return to their country has risen sharply since early November.

The movement has taken the shape of an unusual reverse migration, which officials and they themselves link directly to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls underway in West Bengal.

Shahin Bibi, identifying herself as a resident of Khulna district who worked as a domestic help in New Town near Kolkata, waited with her toddler by the roadside.

"I came because we were poor. I have no proper documents. Now, I want to return to Khulna. That is why I am here," she said.

She earned around ₹ 20,000 a month, lived in a shared room with two women, and sent money home regularly.

Many in the queue admit they procured Aadhaar cards, ration cards or voter IDs through touts and middlemen during their stay in West Bengal.

With SIR demanding verification of older documents, several said they preferred leaving rather than risking questioning and possible detention.

"No more staying here," said a young waiter, who lived in Kolkata for eight years. "If they check old papers, we cannot show anything. Better to leave before they ask questions."

The concern is echoed across the queue of men, women and families who arrived from areas such as New Town, Birati, Dhulagori, Bamangachi, Ghosuri and parts of Howrah's industrial belt.

A few had been in the state for over a decade; others arrived only a few years ago.

Border officials confirm the surge. They say 150-200 people a day are being detained and pushed back after verification. The queues began swelling from November 4, the day the SIR exercise began.

"We cannot assume everyone here is simply returning home," a BSF officer said. "Verification is mandatory. Biometric details are sent to district authorities and the state police. That takes time."



Because of the volume, delays of two to three days are common. People wait outside the outpost gate on plastic sheets, newspapers or under halted trucks.

BSF personnel provide meals to those inside the camp, but people waiting outside depend on roadside stalls or occasional food distribution by local youth and shopkeepers. A plate of rice with egg costs ₹ 40; rice with fish ₹ 60.

A group of men from Satkhira said they paid between ₹ 5,000 and ₹ 7,000 to enter West Bengal earlier. Others spent significantly more.

"I paid nearly ₹ 20,000 to get documents," said 29-year-old Manirul Sheikh, who worked in garment units in Dhulagori and collected scrap iron. "Everyone knew which middleman to ap-

proach. But, SIR changed everything. Now, people want to leave before the checking catches up."

Another man, Imran Gazi, said softly: "I voted in 2016, 2019, 2021 and 2024. But, I have no papers from 2002. Hence, I am leaving."

The surge has also strained local policing. "We had 95 detainees in two days. No station has the space or facilities to hold so many. We stopped taking custody after that," an officer said.

On Saturday afternoon, a six-year-old girl tugged at her mother's scarf and whispered, "I will miss my friends in New Town." Her mother, carrying a newborn, said they paid 25,000 Bangladeshi taka last year to cross into West Bengal. Her husband, a rickshaw puller, added, "We came because we were poor. Now, we have to go because we are afraid."

Local shopkeepers and traders say they want the situation to stabilise soon. "Let Delhi, Dhaka and Kolkata fight their political battles. These people should not be suffering on the road," said a member of the Hakimpur Traders' Association, who supervised volunteers distributing khichri.

The SIR exercise has also sharpened political confrontation in the state ahead of the 2026 assembly elections.

The BJP alleges the ruling TMC allowed "large-scale infiltration for electoral gains", while the

state government accuses the Centre of "weaponising" the process to target vulnerable communities and create panic.

At Hakimpur, this debate seems distant. A semi-blind man who came 18 years ago for medical treatment and later earned his living singing in local trains, sat quietly near the fence.

"I want to go back and sing again in Bangladesh," he said. "But, I do not know if they will accept us after so long."

Officials said around 1,200 people have returned to Bangladesh after undergoing official procedures in the past six days. Nearly 60 people were still waiting on Saturday.

As the sun dipped behind the barbed fence, a BSF jawan watched the line snake down the mud road.

"They came in the dark," he said, referring to years of night crossings. "Now they leave in daylight, through the proper channel. That is the difference."

For the families waiting under a banyan tree, clutching small bags, wrapping children against the cold, and waiting for their turn, SIR is no longer an administrative exercise.

It has become the push toward an uncertain return after years spent on borrowed names, documents and soil. (PTI)

Jamiat chief Madani's Al Falah remarks trigger row, BJP says 'save terrorist jamaat' active

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind chief Maulana Arshad Madani's remarks alleging discrimination against Muslims while citing the example of the Al Falah University, which is under scanner in the Delhi blast probe, triggered a row with the BJP on Sunday, saying the "aatanki bachao (save terrorist) jamaat" has become active.

Madani claimed that while Zohran Mamdani had been elected the mayor of New York and a Khan could become the mayor of London, Muslims in India cannot even become vice chancellors in universities.

"The world thinks that Muslims have been crippled and finished. I don't believe so. Today, a Muslim, Mamdani, can become the mayor of New York, a Khan can become mayor of London; whereas in India, no one can even become a university vice-chancellor," he said at a session at the Jamiat headquarters here on Saturday.

"And even if someone does, they will be sent to jail, like Azam Khan. Look at what is happening today with Al Falah. He (the founder) is in jail, and no one knows how many years he will be in jail," Madani said.

The government is working relentlessly to ensure that Muslims never raise their heads, the chief of one of the two factions of Jamiat alleged.



BJP leaders slammed Madani for the remarks and accused him of giving a communal colour to the Delhi blast probe.

The ruling party's spokesperson, Shehzad Poonawalla, said, "In the name of vote bank, the 'bhajjann of appeasement' and the 'aatanki bachao jamaat (save terrorists group)' has become active."

"Arshad Madani ji, leave aside this talk of mayor; this country has seen Muslims becoming President, vice president, chief justice, home minister. The biggest artists and businessmen have also come from the Muslim community."

"When a terror act takes place, those people who say terrorism has no religion, start advocating on behalf of terrorists on the basis of religion," he told PTI Videos.

Poonawalla also said, "Therefore, I say that behind the doctor of terrorism, there are spin doctors of terrorism. And these spin doctors are not just Arshad Madani but others like P Chidambaram ji, who said it is the circumstances that make a terrorist."

"Hussain Dalwai says they were the sufferers of injustice. Imran

Masood calls them youth gone astray... Mehbooba Mufti and her daughter also play the Islamophobia card," he said. "Whenever a terrorist is caught, they keep 'vote bank neeti' over 'rashtriya neeti' and come to the defence of terrorism," Poonawalla alleged.

Reacting to Madani's remarks, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis said, "In India, APJ Abdul Kalam, who became the President, is the icon of Muslims. He always kept his head high. Why make others an icon?"

BJP leader Shah Nawaz Hussain slammed Arshad Madani's statement as "very irresponsible".

"He is an elder and should remember that Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind contributed to the freedom movement. He is defaming Hindustan by saying these things," Hussain said. Al Falah University has become the focus of multiple security agencies following the November 10 blast near the Red Fort, as "suicide bomber" Dr Umar Un Nabi was a professor of medicine there. Additionally, Dr Mujamill Shakeel, from whose rented accommodations in Faridabad over 2,900 kg of explosives were recovered, worked at the university.

Last Monday, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) carried out searches at 25 locations across Delhi and Faridabad in a money laundering probe tied to the ongoing blast investigation. (PTI)

SIR not reform but imposed oppression: Cong

'The objective is clear: To tire out genuine voters and allow voter fraud to continue unabated'

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: The Congress on Sunday targeted the BJP over the death of some booth-level officers engaged in the special intensive revision of electoral rolls in various states, terming the exercise an "imposed oppression" and a "deliberate ploy under which citizens are being harassed".

The deaths of booth-level officers (BLOs) due to unnecessary pressure are being ignored as "collateral damage", the opposition party alleged.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleged that chaos has been "created" across the country in the name of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

"The result? Sixteen BLOs have lost their lives in three weeks. Heart attacks, stress, suicide – SIR is not a reform, it is an imposed oppression," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha further said the Election Commission of India has created a system where citizens have to sift through thousands of scanned pages of 22-year-old voter lists to find their names.

"The objective is clear: to tire out genuine voters and allow voter fraud to continue unabated," he alleged.

India develops cutting-edge software for the world, but the Election Commission of India is still adamant on creating a jungle of pa-



perwork, Gandhi said.

"If the intentions were clear, the list would be digital, searchable, and machine-readable, and the ECI would have taken its time to focus on transparency and accountability instead of rushing through the work in a 30-day hurry," the former Congress chief claimed.

"SIR is a deliberate ploy under which citizens are being harassed and deaths of BLOs due to unnecessary pressure are being ignored as 'collateral damage'," Gandhi said, adding, "This is not a failure, it is a conspiracy; democracy is being sacrificed to protect power."

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also slammed the BJP over the issue and claimed the "hasty" implementation of the SIR exercise is reminiscent of demonetisation and the COVID-19 lockdown.

He said the BJP's "vote chori" has now taken a deadly turn.

On X, Kharge shared a media report which claimed that in 19 days, there have been deaths of 16 BLOs during the SIR of the electoral rolls. The workload is forcing BLOs and polling officers to commit suicide, the Congress chief claimed.

"My deepest condolences to every family who has lost a loved one. Based on ground reality, this number is far higher than reported, which is extremely worrying. Who will provide justice to these families?" Kharge posed in his X post in Hindi.

"The BJP is busy enjoying the fruits of stolen power, while the Election Commission is watching as a mute spectator. The hasty, unplanned, forced implementation of

SIR is reminiscent of demonetisation and the COVID-19 lockdown," he charged.

The BJP's hunger for power is driving institutions to force suicides, shredding the Constitution, and weakening democracy through misuse of power, he alleged.

"Enough is enough! If we still don't wake up, no one can save the last pillars of democracy from collapsing. Those who remain silent on SIR and vote theft are responsible for the deaths of these innocent BLOs. Raise your voice, save democracy!" Kharge said.

A woman working as a Booth Level Officer (BLO) in West Bengal's Nadia district was found hanging at her residence on Saturday, with her family members claiming that she was under considerable SIR work-related stress and died by suicide, police said.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed shock over the BLO's death and said this has become "truly alarming now".

In a "suicide note" shared by the chief minister on social media, the woman held the ECI responsible.

Senior BJP leader Rahul Sinha, however, claimed that the suicide note was "fake".

Also, two teachers who worked as BLOs for the SIR exercise died of "illness" in Raisen and Damoh districts of Madhya Pradesh on Friday. (PTI)

Gita offers answers for a world in confusion: Bhagwat

LUCKNOW, Nov 23: The Bhagavad Gita provides timeless guidance for a world struggling with moral confusion, conflict and the lack of peace, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said on Sunday.

Addressing the Gita Prerna Mahotsav here, Bhagwat said the purpose of the event was not merely ceremonial, but to inspire people to live the Gita. "We are here because the Gita has to be lived, not just recited. Its 700 slokas must be read, contemplated and applied in our daily lives," he said.

Drawing parallels between Arjuna's dilemma on the battlefield of Kurukshetra and the present global situation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief said the world today is "lost, exhausted and directionless", despite material progress. "There is wealth and comfort, but no peace, no contentment, no moral clarity," he said.

Bhagwat said India's ancient wisdom once guided the world for thousands of years and the Gita is the distilled essence of that knowledge.

"Just as Krishna removed Arjuna's confusion, the Gita can help humanity confront its challenges today," he said.

Bhagwat said the Gita inspires one to be courageous while facing problems, rather than running away from those. (PTI)

White-collar terror probe: Doctors' radicalisation began on social media in 2019

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: The radicalisation of the doctors involved in the recent 'white-collar' terror module that came to light with the November 10 Red Fort area bombing began as early as 2019 on social media platforms, officials said on Sunday.

The investigation so far indicated a concerning shift in cross-border terror strategy, where highly educated professionals were groomed entirely through digital means by handlers operating from Pakistan and other parts of the world, the officials familiar with the probe said. The members of the terror cell, which included Dr Muzammil Ganaie, Dr Adeel Rather, Dr Muzaffar Rather and Dr Umar-un-Nabi, who drove the explosive-laden car on November 10, were initially spotted by handlers across the border while active on social media platforms like Facebook and discussion spaces on X (formerly known as Twitter).

They were immediately shifted to private groups on

'Telegram', they said, adding that actual brainwashing started from here. While Ganai and Adeel are now in the custody of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), probing the Red Fort blast, Muzaffar escaped to Afghanistan in August this year, and the process to seek his deportation has already been initiated by the Jammu and Kashmir Police, which unravelled the entire terror module. They also used YouTube extensively to learn how to create Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) for carrying out terror attacks. Digital footprints analysed during the interrogation identified the primary handlers as 'Ukasa', 'Faizan' and 'Hashmi'.

All three have been operating from outside India and their names often crop up in inputs related to the Jaish-e-Mohammed terror network, the officials said.

They said that the recruited doctors had initially expressed intent to join terror groups in conflict zones like Syria or Afghanistan. (PTI)

Andaman and Nicobar govt to study ecological impact as tourist inflow rises, plan new islands

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: The Andaman and Nicobar government is analysing the impact of opening new islands and the rising influx of tourists in the archipelago to ensure the preservation of the ecosystem while ensuring more islands are opened in a graded manner, officials said.

The island Union Territory known for its pristine beaches and mangrove kayaking tours, has witnessed a significant jump in domestic tourism since pre-COVID years.

"We had a very successful tourist season last year. We were able to overcome the effects of COVID-19, and last year, on an island with a population of 4 lakh, we welcomed 7.2 lakh visitors. This year, we are experiencing substantial growth as well. We have already recorded 6 lakh visitors by September, and our peak season is during October and November," Jyoti Kumari, Tourism Secretary of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, told PTI.

When asked about the ecologi-



cal concerns associated with the rising number of tourists, she said, "As an island, we have a carrying capacity. Our advantage is that access is limited to flights, which naturally restricts the number of visitors. That said, the impact on frequently visited islands is minimal. We are opening new islands and exploring different niche segments."

The tourism secretary explained

that the government recently opened North Sink Island and will continue to open more islands in a graded manner.

"We are proceeding carefully to gauge the response and see how visitors are adapting. We are also opening more areas; the forest department has opened Jolly Buoy and Red Skin Islands, which have a carrying capacity of 200 people. We are ensuring that this limit is

maintained."

"This is how we are preserving and promoting the ecosystem. Recently, 21 islands have been opened, and we continue to monitor the impact. Once these islands are fully utilised, we will consider further openings," she added.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands provide an idyllic blend of palm-fringed beaches, white sand stretches extending for miles, unperturbed serenity and crystal-clear turquoise waters that epitomise a tropical paradise.

Discussing plans to diversify the tourism experience in the Andamans, Kumari highlighted a focus on birdwatching and astrotourism.

"We have a huge number of people coming for bird watching because the Andaman features 32 varieties of endemic birds. So, a lot of bird watchers come to increase their count in a single day. We are also looking at astrotourism because Andaman has one of the best night skies. Visitors can see both northern and southern constella-

tions. "There are vantage points that provide 360-degree views of the sky, allowing observation in all directions. The area has zero industrial pollution, which enhances our efforts in promoting astrotourism. Fishing is also a popular activity among both domestic and international tourists, and we are working to promote that, along with our renowned water sports," she explained.

The Union Territory recently launched an astro-tourism policy. "Under this policy, we are registering and training guides besides implementing open sky certification for them. Additionally, we are training local youth and manpower for this initiative. We are designating locations that can be protected from light pollution as potential astro-tourism spots," Kumari said.

"Tourists can also register with us, although this is optional. Once they register on our portal, they will receive extensive information about upcoming astronomical events, allowing them to plan their visits accordingly," she added. (PTI)

CM change in Karnataka Congress high command will decide whatever it is: Kharge

BENGALURU, Nov 23: As speculation around chief minister change in Karnataka refuses to die down, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday said that the party high command will decide whatever it is, and he has nothing to say now. The AICC chief stated this, a day after his more than an hour long meeting with chief minister Siddaramaiah here.

"I have nothing to say about the developments that have happened. So you (media) standing here is a waste of your time and I too feel bad. Whatever it is, the high command will do it. There is no need for you to worry more about it," Kharge told reporters outside his residence here.

The power tussle within the ruling party has intensified, amid speculations about chief minister change in the state, after the Congress government reached the halfway mark of its five-year term on November 20.

Speaking to reporters last night, after meeting Kharge, second such meeting between the two in less than a week, Siddaramaiah, while responding to a question regarding clarity about his tenure as the CM had said, he will abide by whatever the high command decides, and everyone also should.

He however had termed the buzz around leadership change as speculation and media creation.

The CM's meeting with the AICC chief had come after some MLAs supporting Shivakumar travelled to Delhi and met Kharge, as the Congress government completed 2.5 years in office.

Shivakumar however had said he was not aware of legislators travelling to Delhi to meet Kharge. On Sunday, Ministers H C Mahadevappa and K Venkatesh -- considered close to CM Siddaramaiah -- met Kharge at his residence. Speaking to reporters after meeting Kharge, Mahadevappa

said, there is no situation for CM change now, and in case such a situation arises, the Congress high command will decide.

Stating that it was a courtesy call with Kharge, he said, during the meeting, organising the party and preparing it for the upcoming local body polls were discussed.

Asked about discussion on leadership change, Dalit CM and cabinet reshuffle with Kharge, the minister said, "None of them were discussed...there is no race for CM post."

Asserting that there is no question of leadership change before the party, as Siddaramaiah, who is holding the CM position is working effectively, he said, "If such a situation arises, the high command will take a decision, but such a situation is not there right now."

Mahadevappa also ruled out on any signature campaign in the party to gather opinion on CM change. "No one has called or contacted us so far."

"Congress will complete its full term and will come back to power in 2028. The CM will be there till 2028 and complete the term," he added. While Siddaramaiah is pushing for a reshuffle of his Cabinet, Shivakumar wants the party to first decide on leadership change, party sources said.

According to several party insiders, if the Congress high command approves the cabinet reshuffle, it would signal that the incumbent chief minister Siddaramaiah will complete the full five years term, which will scuttle the chances of Shivakumar from occupying the coveted post.

There was stiff competition between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar for the chief minister's post after the declaration of Assembly election results in May 2023, and the Congress had managed to convince the latter and made him the Deputy CM. (PTI)

Mizoram areca nut farmers get remunerative prices

Decline in Myanmar smuggling boosts areca nut prices, benefiting farmers

AIZWAL, Nov 23: Areca nut farmers in Mizoram's Mamit district got remunerative prices for their produce this year as the smuggling of the commodity from Myanmar decreased substantially, an official said on Sunday.

Victor MS Dawngliana, the general secretary of Hachhek Bial Kuhva Chingtu Pawl (HBKCP), an association representing areca nut growers in Hachhek area, said local farmers have "reaped areca nuts worth about Rs 50 crore this year as the prices are high as compared to previous years".

About 30 of around 32 villages in Hachhek area grow areca nuts, and the present harvest season will continue till April next year.

"Farmers were able to sell locally produced areca nuts at reasonable prices due to a drop in smuggling from Myanmar. Areca nuts are now sold at Rs 2,500-3,000 per bag against Rs 1,200-1,500 when areca nut smuggling was rampant," he said.

Dawngliana said areca nuts were purchased by traders mainly from neighbouring Assam, while some also came from Tripura to buy the product.

According to Dawngliana, the



HBKCP will organise an areca nut festival on December 8 to celebrate the harvest.

The programme will be held at Rengdil village, during which various sporting events will be held, he said.

Rengdil village, where the proposed festival will be held, alone has sold areca nuts worth about Rs 10 crore this year, the association said.

About 380 families grow areca nuts in the village.

Areca nuts are grown in different parts of Mizoram, particularly in Mamit district bordering Tripura and Bangladesh, and Kolsib,

which shares a boundary with Assam.

The areca nut plantation began in the Hachhek area in 1950.

Two processing units are being set up in Mamit and Kolasib districts by the state government, according to officials.

Earlier, home department officials said that drug and areca nut smuggling from Myanmar has significantly dropped due to enhanced security measures along the India-Myanmar border.

Mizoram shares a 510-km-long border with Myanmar, and the Assam Rifles are guarding the international border. (PTI)

Harvest festival on Nov 25 promotes communal harmony, peace and cultural unity

Nocte tribe appeals to defer bandh for Chalo Loku festival

ITANAGAR, Nov 23: The Nocte community of Arunachal Pradesh has appealed to defer the bandh call scheduled on November 25 in view of the annual Chalo Loku festival, one of the state's most colorful and significant harvest celebrations.

Addressing the media at the Arunachal Press Club (APC) on Sunday, Chalo Loku Festival Celebration Committee Capital Complex Advisor Wangton Lowang emphasised the festival's cultural importance. "Chalo Loku is celebrated right after the harvest and before the start of new Jhum cultivation. Its name is derived from three words: 'Cha' meaning paddy, 'Lo' meaning season and 'Loku' meaning festival. The three-day festival begins with Phamlamja, followed by Chamkatja on the second day and concludes with Thanlangja on the third day," he explained.

Celebrated annually since 1989 in the Itanagar Capital Complex, the festival brings together people from various tribes, clans and communities, fostering communal harmony, brotherhood and the promotion of tradition and culture. The festival is also a major celebration in Tirap district.



Lowang highlighted that a bandh called by some organisations on the same day could create inconvenience for the Nocte community and disrupt festival activities. "Chalo Loku is a sacred and unifying celebration, bringing together elders, youth and families. A bandh during this period may disrupt programs, cause hardship to participants traveling from distant places, and undermine the

spirit of unity that the festival embodies," he said.

The organising committee of Chalo Loku festival Itanagar has formally appealed to Arunachal Pradesh Indigenous Youth Organisation (APIYO), Indigenous Youth Force of Arunachal Pradesh (IYFA) and All Naharlagun Youth Organisation (ANYO) to defer the bandh. Lowang emphasised that the appeal respects the concerns

behind the bandh but seeks to balance cultural dignity, public peace and community participation.

"We urge all stakeholders to join hands in dialogue so that both cultural traditions and social concerns are upheld with dignity," he added. The state government has fixed November 25 as a local holiday for Chalo Loku in the Capital Complex, further highlighting its significance.

Tension erupts at Torbung-Kangvai buffer zone as Meitei IDPs protest

IMPHAL, Nov 23: Fresh tension erupted on Sunday at the Torbung-Kangvai "buffer zone" along the Bishnupur-Churachandpur border in Manipur when Meitei internally displaced persons (IDPs) attempted to march towards Churachandpur district. Security forces intercepted the protesters along National Highway-2 (Tiddim Road), preventing further escalation.

The IDPs, sheltered at the Kwakta relief camp, staged the demonstration demanding immediate resettlement in their original homes. They criticised the government's decision to resume the Sangai Festival, Manipur's premier tourism event, while thousands continue to live in relief camps. "If the Sangai Festival means peace is restored, why can't we go home?"

asked protester Koijam Sarat, voicing frustration over prolonged displacement.

The Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) condemned the march, accusing the protesters of attempting to breach the buffer line and provoke the Kuki-Zo community. "The coordinated movement despite restrictions forced central forces to use teargas and smoke shells," said Ginza Vualzong, KZC secretary (information and publicity). He added that peace cannot prevail "when one community continues to break the peace while the other remains in constant vigilance."

Reiterating its demand, the KZC asserted that "a Union Territory with constitutional safeguards" is the only viable solution to ensure lasting stability and security for the Kuki-Zo people. (NNN)

Arunachal seeks GI tag for 10 agro products

ITANAGAR, Nov 23: The Arunachal Pradesh government has sought Geographical Indication (GI) registration for 10 agricultural products such as Bagra pineapple, Pasighat jaggery and Baali (rice), an official said on Sunday.

Idu Yamba (finger millet), Angpu (pumpkin), Mipun rice, Libi Balangbu (white rajma), Bebo (large cardamom), cinnamon and Andoye (kidney bean) are also among the agro-products for which GI registration has been filed.

State Horticulture Research and Development Institute (SHRDI) Director Egam Basar said this is the "first time such a high number of products have been filed for GI in one go".

The GI registration process is being facilitated by Human Welfare Association general secretary and GI expert Padma Shri Dr Rajnikant, he said. Basar said another 10 products are in the pipeline for GI registration and will be filed within a week.

"We are hopeful of getting all 20 products GI registered in the near future. The state government is serious about matters of GI registration to protect our heritage products," he said.

The state government declared during the GI Mahotsav 2025 that Arunachal should have at least 50 GI registrations by 2029.

"With 20 already registered, 34 products already filed and 10 more in the pipeline, we are hopeful of going beyond the target," Basar said.

The state's GI-registered agri-horticulture products include Wakro Orange, Adi Kekir (ginger), Khaw Tai (Khamti Rice), Yak Churpi, Singpho Phalap (Singpho Tea) and Angnyat Millet.

It also has GI-registered textiles and handicrafts items, beverages and others.

"Our farmers and people, who are the custodians of our traditional heritage, be it crops, textiles, handicrafts and cuisines will benefit from this initiative of the state government," he added. (PTI)

ACF former president Toko Teki joins NEICC 80th foundation

ITANAGAR, Nov 23: Arunachal Christian Forum (ACF) former president Toko Teki participated in the 80th foundation day celebration of the North East India Christian Council (NEICC) at Aizawl Presbyterian Church in Mizoram on November 21. He also addressed the general public during the two-day seminar organised as part of the celebration.

In his statement, Teki expressed gratitude to Christians from Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and other regions who organised protest rallies in their towns during the 1970s in support of Arunachal Pradesh Christians.

Teki highlighted the enduring legacy of American missionaries who introduced the gospel to the region in the 1960s, noting that their moral support continues to inspire communities today. "We are dedicated to solidifying our soli-



arity as Christians in the future," he said.

He further emphasised the need for renewed unity across the Northeast and the country to promote communal harmony, brotherhood, peace and overall progress for the states, the region, and India as a whole.

ALF 2025 concludes with powerful celebration of stories and identity

ITANAGAR, Nov 23: The Arunachal Literary Festival (ALF) 2025 concluded its three-day celebration of literature, culture and technology with resounding success, drawing diverse voices and large audiences across multiple venues.

The final day opened at Namdapha Hall with a thought-provoking session on "Gastronomy: Books and Bites." Author Sona Bahadur, speaking on her book 'Invitation to Feast', underscored the urgent need to document India's culinary traditions, warning that Northeast Indian cuisine continues to face cultural marginalisation. The panel highlighted how kitchens, viewed through literature, preserve memory, identity and resilience.

The Children's Corner, widely hailed as the festival's "Most Happening Section," remained a major draw. Artist and performer Deepa Kiran captivated young audiences with a musical storytelling session, while writer Pankaj Saikia led a workshop on crafting wordless stories, encouraging children to explore narrative through visuals.

At Pakke Hall, the festival's intellectual pulse was felt through sessions such as "Narrating the Native," moderated by Bompi Riba. Speakers including Miranda



Pertin called for urgent documentation of shifting Indigenous identities, while picture-book creator Ogin Nayam emphasised the importance of visual storytelling for young readers. A special poetry segment brought together 14 poets, led by eminent Urdu poet and Padma Shri awardee Sheen Kaaf Nizam.

The final discussion at Pakke Hall, "What Makes World Literature?" moderated by Tashi Chophel, explored personal literary journeys and reaffirmed the enduring relevance of reading. Reflections ranged from trauma narratives such as Aanchal Malhotra's work on Partition to the timeless charm of bookshops. A preceding debate on "Literature in the Age of AI" concluded that

while technology presents challenges, it cannot replicate the emotional depth central to great writing.

International education also found space at the festival, with Maria Gill Burman of the Institute of Cervantes presenting opportunities for learning Spanish language and Hispanic culture.

The festival closed on a powerful note with an intimate conversation featuring Aanchal Malhotra. The oral historian explored themes of memory, material culture and lived history, offering a fitting end to an event committed to meaningful dialogue and diverse perspectives. ALF 2025 wrapped up as a vibrant affirmation that literature remains a vital space for identity, connection and shared human stories.

BJP MLA angry as her photograph missing in football tournament's flex banner

AGARTALA, Nov 23: Tripura BJP MLA Antara Deb Sarkar on Sunday got angry as her photograph was missing from the flex banner of a football tournament organised in her constituency Kamalasaagar in Sepahijala district.

During the inaugural function of the football tournament, the MLA asked the organisers why her photograph was not on the flex banner.

The flex had the photographs of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, PM Narendra Modi, BJP president J P Nadda, CM Manik Saha and Tripura Industrial De-

velopment Corporation (TIDC) chairman Nabadal Banik.

A video of the MLA saying, "Why is my photograph not there (in the flex)? The local MLA has died or what!" was posted by CPI(M) Tripura unit on its Facebook page.

However, PTI could not independently verify the authenticity of the video.

Contacted by PTI, the MLA (Antara Deb Sarkar) chose to downplay the issue, saying, "What has happened has happened". (PTI)

Four militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Nov 23: Security forces in Manipur have arrested four militants belonging to various proscribed outfits, police said on Sunday.

An active cadre of the banned People's Liberation Army was apprehended from a check point in Kachching district on Saturday, while another member of the outfit was nabbed from Moirang Konjengbam in Bishnupur district on the same day, they said.

The security forces also arrested an active cadre of the proscribed PREPAK (PRO) from Moreh Gate in Tenuouppal district on Friday. Another member of KCP (PWG) was apprehended from his residence at Yumnam Hydrom in Imphal West district, a police officer said.

Arms and ammunition, including rifles and pistols, were recovered from their possession, he said.

The arrests were made as part of "intelligence-based combing, cordon and search operations being carried out extensively to nab those involved in extortion and criminal activities in the state," the officer said. (PTI)

APPSU golden jubilee literary events begin in Balijan

Senior journalist Bengia Ajum urges students to lead society with discipline and purpose

BALIJAN, Nov 23: The All Papum Poma Students' Union (APPSU) Golden Jubilee Celebration began its literary activities on Saturday afternoon at the Balijan Higher Secondary School campus, marking another key milestone in the ongoing 50-year celebration.

The Golden Jubilee, commemorating APPSU's establishment in 1976, was formally launched on October 4, 2025, coinciding with APPSU Foundation Day. Senior journalist Bengia Ajum and APPSU Women Wing president Ponung Darang attended the event as special guest and special invitee.

Since its inauguration, the month-long celebration has featured a series of sports events, cultural programmes and youth-oriented activities aimed at promoting unity and nurturing talent across the region. The literary competitions have now commenced with strong participation from students, while the cultural competitions are slated for November 27 to 30. The celebration will conclude with a grand closing ceremony on November 30.



Organising Chairman Pada Teli Camdir, APPSU IPR secretary Nabam Rade, APPSU president Teli Sera, and general secretary

Tarh Bhai were among those present. Addressing the gathering, special guest Bengia Ajum expressed pride in APPSU's

50-year journey. He urged students to pursue life with ambition and discipline, while upholding respect for elders, teachers and parents. Warning against drug abuse, he advised students to stay away from harmful influences and remain focused on hard work, dedication and service to society. He also congratulated APPSU leaders and founders for their "marvellous 50 years of journey."

AAPSU Women Wing president Ponung Darang, in her address, emphasised that education remains the strongest pathway to success. She encouraged students to excel in any field they choose—be it sports, arts, politics, social service or professional careers—while remaining grounded as good human beings. She also spoke on issues of ragging, molestation and bullying, urging students to understand concepts of good and bad touch and to report any such incidents to teachers or parents, assuring full support from the students' union.

The APPSU Golden Jubilee Celebration continues with enthusiasm as it approaches its finale later this month.

Lakshya Sen ends title drought, emerges Australian Open champion

SYDNEY, Nov 23: A fluent Lakshya Sen ended a difficult stretch on the international circuit by clinching his first title of the 2025 season, defeating Japan's Yushi Tanaka in the Australian Open men's singles final, here Sunday.

The 24-year-old from Almora, enduring a tough phase after finishing fourth at the Paris Olympics, capped a resurgent week with a commanding 21-15 21-11 win over 26-year-old Tanaka. Emerging champion after a 38-minute final of the USD 475,000 Super 500 event, the Indian celebrated the moment by putting his fingers in his ears.

"I have seen a lot of ups and downs this season, with a few injuries at the start of the season. But I kept my hard work going throughout the season and I am very happy to end the season on a good note," said Lakshya. "I'm very excited, looking forward to the next season now and I am really happy with the way I played today and this week."

Lakshya, a 2021 World Championships bronze-medallist, had last won a Super 300 title at the Syed Modi International in Lucknow in 2024.

However, a top-tier crown had eluded him since his triumph at the Canada Open the same year, though he came close at the Hong Kong Super 500 in September when he finished runner-up.

Facing world No. 26 Tanaka, winner of two Super 300 titles this year at the Orleans Masters and the US Open, Lakshya displayed control, sharp placement and clean execution, wrapping up the contest without dropping a game.

With this victory, the reigning Commonwealth Games champion became only the second Indian to win a BWF World Tour title this season, following Ayush Shetty's maiden Super 300 triumph at the US Open.



Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty had reached the finals at the Hong Kong and China Masters, while Kidambi Srikanth also logged a runner-up finish at the Malaysia Masters earlier in the year.

Lakshya made a confident start, opening up a 6-3 lead as Tanaka committed a flurry of errors -- hitting into the net, going wide and overcooking his lifts.

A 35-shot rally ended with the Japanese shuttler again finding the net, before a lucky net cord finally broke Lakshya's run of points.

Two crisp cross-court smashes on either flank had Lakshya on the floor as Tanaka closed the gap to 7-9, but the Indian carried a three-point cushion into the mid-game interval after the Japanese sprayed another shot to the net.

Chants of 'Lakshya! Lakshya!' rang around the arena during the mid-game intervals, with a sizable Indian crowd turning up to support him.

The Indian tightened his grip thereafter, dominating the net exchanges and keeping the shuttle flat and deep, denying Tanaka the length he needed to unleash his whipping smashes as he moved ahead 8-4.

Tanaka responded with a powerful smash, followed by a long error from Lakshya and a sharp net shot to make it 12-13. But Lakshya again pulled away, opening up a four-point lead at 17-13 with a backhand smash and another fierce cross-court winner.

Tanaka tried to stay in the hunt but two long errors handed Lakshya five game points. The Indian converted immediately as Tanaka

drove another shuttle to the net.

Lakshya said making a good beginning to match was important.

"It was important to have a good start, and keep the momentum in the last set because it was quite even in the first one.

"I got a good lead and I could finish it off. The second set started on a good note and then I just kept the lead to finish the match," the Indian noted.

The second game turned into a one-sided affair as Lakshya kept up the intensity, continuing to play fast, flat returns even as Tanaka tried stretching him with his trademark whipping smashes but those were far too few to pose any challenge.

The Japanese overdid his attack and his inconsistency overshadowed his good moments as Lakshya moved ahead 8-4.

A flat cross-court drive pushed Lakshya to 10-5, and he secured a six-point lead at the interval with another thunderous smash.

Lakshya showed excellent backline judgement as Tanaka repeatedly floated the shuttle long. After winning a tight net duel, the Indian extended the lead to 13-6. Tanaka struggled to withstand Lakshya's power, continuing to hit wide and into the net as the lead swelled to 17-8.

Lakshya then hammered a barrage of smashes to move to 19-8 and soon earned 10 match points with another fine shot near the net. He squandered one with a net error but sealed the title with a sharp cross-court return.

The Indian said his focus was on winning each point, rather than getting carried away.

"On the moment he knew he could win: In the second set I was quite far off in the lead, but I didn't want to get too inside my head so I wouldn't relax too much. In the back of my mind it was there but I was just trying to focus on playing one point at a time," he said. (PTI)

Flop show by Indian spinners as Muthusamy, Jansen seize control for SA



GUWAHATI, Nov 23: Sunaran Muthusamy and Marco Jansen made Indian finger spinners' look ordinary in good batting conditions with invaluable lower-order contributions as South Africa seized control of the second Test by posting a massive 489 in their first innings here on Sunday.

Trailing 0-1 in the two-match series, India were nine for no loss in 6.1 overs when stumps were drawn in fading light.

Muthusamy, who had scored a match-winning 89 not out against Pakistan in Rawalpindi a month ago, hit his maiden Test hundred, a gutsy 109 off 206 balls while Jansen sent the spinners on a proverbial leather hunt with smashing 91-ball-93.

The last four Proteas batters from Nos 7 to 11 added a whopping 243 runs. Muthusamy and Verreynne adding 88 for the seventh wicket while the centurion added another 97 runs with number nine Jansen.

During his belligerent effort, Jansen smashed seven sixes, the highest by an overseas batter on Indian soil, surpassing Viv Richards and Matthew Hayden, both of whom had hit half a dozen maximums.

The South African innings lasted for 151.1 overs and the plight of the Indian bowlers could be gauged by the fact that this was also the first time that all five specialist bowlers had to bowl 25 or more overs in a single innings.

Rishabh Pant's captaincy didn't have a plan B and it also didn't help matters that the track at the Barsapara Stadium didn't show any signs of wear and tear.

While Kuldeep Yadav (4/115 in 29.1 overs) increased the pace from the opening day and bowled a lot faster, credit should be given to Muthusamy, Kyle Verreynne (45 off 122 balls) and Jansen for reading him well from the hand.

Since Kuldeep increased the speed of his deliveries it also curtailed the chances of getting drift which had yielded results on the opening day.

Fingers pointed at finger-spinners

However what hurt India the most was the bowling of the two finger spinners, Ravindra Jadeja (2/94 in 28 overs) and Washington Sundar (0/58 in 26 overs), whose figures wouldn't exactly narrate the whole story.

Time and again questions have been raised about Jadeja and even

Washington's ability to be penetrative on tracks that don't turn diabolical from day one.

The second day was best for batting and neither the off-spinner nor the left-arm orthodox got balls to either turn or bounce. They were trying to rush the batters but negligible zip from the pitch ensured they had no difficulty in defending.

The only bowler, who looked a bit penetrative was Jasprit Bumrah (2/75 in 32 overs), who manfully led the attack and also briefly got the ball to reverse in second session. But no pressure applied by Jadeja and Sundar meant that after a certain point even his shoulder drooped.

The performance of the two finger spinners is a pointer towards the tendency of Indian team management -- from the time of MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli to Rohit Sharma -- to demand rank turners.

Both Jadeja and Washington play a lot of white ball cricket which has actually diminished their ability to bowl slightly slower through the air that allows the ball to deviate in the air and also grip after pitching.

Too much of T20 style bowling brings in a certain kind of speed where the bowler is only looking to restrict the batter.

In white ball games, this style of bowling can either get the spinner a wicket as the batter would tend to attack but in Tests one can wait till the bowler changes his line and length.

Once Muthusamy and Verreynne saw off the first session, the second became a cakewalk as Jansen would plunk his front-foot and smash Jadeja and Kuldeep over long-on repeatedly to completely destroy the confidence of the Indian unit.

The Indian team would hope that its batters also reap fruits of good batting conditions and try to make a match of it. Last time an opposition team scored 450 plus in this country and India still won happened in Chennai in 2016. It was the match where Karun Nair got a triple ton after England had scored 477 in first innings. But Jadeja had run through the England side with a seven wicket haul in the second innings.

The red soil tracks have a tradition of staying compact for first two days and in the last two days, it can crumble at a breakneck speed and one hopes Jadeja can relive that magic in favourable conditions. (PTI)

ASEB FC lifts the 77th ID Cup Football Trophy at Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Nov 23: Assam State Electricity Board (ASEB) Football Club has emerged as the champion of the 77th All India Invitation Prize Money Independence Day Cup Football Tournament organised by Nagaon Sports Association.

In the thrilling final match held at Nurul Amin Stadium late evening on Saturday last, ASEB FC defeated Sadar Hills Football Club of Manipur 15-14 in the sudden death shootout after the match ended 2-2 in regular time and 4-4 in the tiebreaker.

The Electricity Board team won the title for the fifth time, having played in the finals eight times.

The match was attended by thousands of spectators and was inaugurated by Pijush Hazarika, Minister of Water Resources, Information and Public Relations, Assam.

The chief guest praised the organizers and the audience for their support. The Best Player award was given to Papu Deuri of ASEB FC, and the Highest Goal Scorer award was given to Lungmingrene of Sadar Hills FC. The winning team received a trophy and a cash prize of ₹ 2 lakh, while the runner-up team received ₹ 1 lakh.

Head's hundred, Cummins' possible return could shake up Australia's lineup for the 2nd Ashes test

PERTH, Nov 23: Changing a winning combination in the second Ashes cricket test could be on the cards for Australia after Travis Head's astonishing audition as an opener and the possible return of regular skipper Pat Cummins.

Changing the England approach after succumbing to an eight-wicket loss inside two days -- a speed unseen in a century -- is unlikely according to head coach Brendon McCullum. He is steadfastly sticking with his "blueprint" despite mounting criticism of the attack-at-all costs Bazball method from critics including former test skippers. Wrapping up the first test in Perth so quickly gave the players from both teams an extra three days to recover and prepare for the day-night test at the Gabba starting Dec. 4.

Head volunteered to move up the batting order from No. 5 to open when Usman Khawaja was injured ahead of Australia's second innings, when the first test was delicately poised after a clattering of 30 wickets in five sessions. Far from being over-awed, he clubbed a century off 69 deliveries -- the third-fastest ever by an Australian in test cricket -- and ended up with 123, more than double the next-highest individual score in Perth.

How the 38-year-old Khawaja recovers from a back problem will determine the Australian top order in Brisbane, his home ground, as much as his batting form and age. The bowling attack may also be overhauled with Cummins saying he's "half a chance" to be fit in time after missing the Perth test. Cummins hasn't played a test since Australia's 3-0



sweep over West Indies in the Caribbean in July because of a lower back issue. "It's feeling good," Cummins said during a brief commentary stint during the first test. "It's on track and pulling up pretty well. I'm pretty hopeful and it's probably better than it was a few weeks ago." Cummins said he was disappointed to miss the opening match but that was better than potentially missing the entire series. "There were probably times where I thought I wasn't going to play a game," Cummins said. "It's been tough. The whole cricketing world is watching, and you just wish you were out there."

Cummins and Josh Hazlewood both missed the Perth test, leaving Mitchell Starc as the only member of the regular pace triumvirate. In a player-of-the-match performance, shading even Head's incredible hundred, Starc took a career-best 7-58 in the first innings and finished with a 10-wicket haul for the match and a stunning catch. Brendan Doggett took five wickets on debut and

likely would be the bowler to make way if needed. England took five seamers into the Perth test, relying on express pace to rattle the Australians. It worked in the first innings, but backfired in the second when Head took on the short-pitch bowling and won. With the Gabba also a venue that offers extra pace and bounce, and it being a day-night format, the English may again go for a similar attack but aim to bowl at a different length.

The batting was problematic for the English, with five-wicket collapses in each innings costing them precious momentum. England was bowled out for 172 and 164 despite being in commanding positions at times and set Australia a target of 205 for victory. The Australians reached that quickly.

"To be honest I thought 200 was a good score, I thought it was a very defendable score," McCullum told the BBC. "We've got some work to do, no doubt. But one thing we won't be changing is our blueprint, we'll stay true to that."

Skipper Ben Stokes said his team need to move past the crushing defeat quickly as the second test has become a must-win for the tourists.

"I'm still very confident of our abilities and achieving the goal," Stokes said. "(It's going) to be so crucial about not taking any baggage from this result into Brisbane, because we need to win that one." England will get a chance to make some adjustments in a tour match against the Australian Prime Minister's XI in Canberra before traveling to Brisbane, where Stokes will be desperate to end the team's run of 16 winless tests Down Under. (AP)

HI gives coach clean chit after inquiry

NEW DELHI, Nov 23: Hockey India on Sunday said its internal inquiry into allegations of sexual misconduct against a coach of the junior women's team found no evidence and they have cleared him to travel with the squad for the World Cup in Santiago, Chile. In an exclusive statement to PTI, Hockey India (HI) said it had conducted an inquiry after certain media reports flagged the alleged misconduct. However, the federation said neither HI nor Sports Authority of India (SAI) had received any formal complaint. "Some media reports have suggested sexual misconduct within the Indian junior women's team. However, no official complaint or incriminating information has been received by Hockey India," the HI statement said. "Despite this, the Internal Complaints Committee under the POSH Act, 2013, conducted an enquiry on Friday based on these media reports."

HI said the committee spoke individually to all members of the team travelling to Chile, where the tournament will begin on December 1, and found no evidence of wrongdoing. "The athletes reposed full faith in the accompanying coaches and support staff. Hockey India has zero tolerance towards sexual harassment or sexual misconduct and maintains high standards to ensure athlete safety, particularly of women and minors," the statement added.

The federation said it had also ensured deployment of female support staff with the contingent, as mandated under its Standard Operating Procedures (SoP). A senior HI official reiterated that no athlete had lodged any complaint and said the coach in question would travel with the team.

"We have received no formal complaint. Neither the sports ministry nor SAI has received anything. Still, we conducted a thorough internal inquiry and spoke to all players, but nothing came out of it," the official told PTI. "We are also in constant touch with the ministry, which has confirmed that it has received no written or formal complaint. SAI never asked us to stop the coach from travelling on the basis of frivolous allegations." The sports ministry also denied receiving any complaint. "We at SAI and TOPS have not received any written or formal complaint. Our officials have personally spoken to the players and nothing came out of it," a ministry source said. (PTI)

Max Verstappen wins Las Vegas Grand Prix, narrows F1 points gap

LAS VEGAS (USA), Nov 23: For a driver who hated the Las Vegas Grand Prix before he'd ever turned a lap, Max Verstappen sure has turned the event into his own personal jackpot.

Verstappen won for the second time in four races and the four-time reigning Formula 1 champion continued to claw his way back into title picture with a Saturday night victory on the streets of Las Vegas.

It is the second time in three years the Dutchman has won on the course that utilizes a part of the famed Strip. He won the inaugural race in 2023 and clinched his fourth consecutive title here last year.

Now he has another win at an event he despised ahead of its debut because of the bright spotlight promoters placed on celebrities and parties instead of the actual competition. But when it comes time to get in the car, no matter how Verstappen feels about the event, he seems to excel.

"Simply lovely," Verstappen said on his Red Bull team radio.

He then rushed into the arms of his waiting Red Bull crew as the skyline was illuminated by a spectacular New Year's Eve-style fireworks display.

Verstappen took a victory lap in a pink Cadillac made of Legos driven by actor Terry Crews, who is an ambassador for the Cadillac F1 team that will debut next year.

It was the 69th victory of Verstappen's career.

"I have to stay at 69 or go to 169 because it is actually quite a cool number," he said on one of the two victory podiums -- this one located outside the foundations of the Bellagio casino.

It was Verstappen's eighth consecutive podium, F1-record eighth win in the United States, and he beat points leader



Lando Norris by more than 20 seconds.

Verstappen started second but took control of the race in the very first turn when Norris made an aggressive move to cut in front of him at the start but wound up sliding wide of the turn in his McLaren.

"I let Max have a win," Norris lamented. "Let him go. Let him have a nice race. I just braked too late. It was my (mess) up."

Verstappen moved to the lead and George Russell darted past Norris into second.

"I made the mistake in Turn 1, that cost me," Norris said. "Sometimes a good result is second and scoring some points. I've had a good run and I think the pace was still good. Max just drove a good race and they were quick. I made the mistake in Turn 1, you know, you've got to be punchy into Turn 1."

"I was just a bit too punchy, you know, and that cost me." It was the 150th career start for Norris,

said. "The upcoming weekends, well, again, try to win the race. And at the end of (the season finale at) Abu Dhabi, we'll see where we end up. But I'm very proud of everyone."

Kimi Antonelli of Mercedes crossed the finish line in fourth but a penalty dropped him a spot to fifth, which moved Piastri to fourth.

Piastri has not won since the final day of August at the Dutch Grand Prix and has just one podium finish in the seven races since. He seemed to accept that his title chances are slipping away.

"I don't really know what to think, to be honest. The first lap was eventful, to say the least," Piastri said. "It is what it is. I think I'm going to try my best, obviously, for the next two races and try to put myself in the best position possible. There's still a lot of laps left to go, a lot can still happen, but I need to make sure that I'm in the best position to capitalize if that happens."

"That's all I can do now, so I'll set my sights on that and see how we go."

The biggest mover of the race was seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, who qualified 20th in Ferrari's first last-place qualifying result since 2009. He actually started 19th and immediately gained six spots. Hamilton steadily picked his way through the field and finished 10th.

Charles Leclerc finished sixth for Ferrari as he and Hamilton both finished in the points one race after both failed to finish in Brazil, which drew criticism from Ferrari executive chairman John Elkann.

Carlos Sainz Jr. started third but finished seventh for Williams, while Isack Hadjar of Racing Bull was eighth. Nico Hulkenberg of Sauber and Hamilton rounded out the top 10. (AP)

Top shuttlers set for Syed Modi India International Super 300 meet in Lucknow

LUCKNOW, Nov 23: Former champion Kidambi Srikanth, Olympians Nozomi Okuhara and HS Prannoy along with a strong international field will headline the Syed Modi India International HSBC World Tour Super 300 Badminton Championship beginning here on Tuesday.

Defending women's doubles champions Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand will also return to this meet. The field also includes emerging talents like Priyanshu Rajawat, Tanvi Sharma, Anmol Kharb and Unnati Hooda with India fielding the largest contingent of 152 players.

The Uttar Pradesh Badminton Association president Dr Navneet Sehgal on Sunday announced that a total prize purse of USD 240,000 will be on offer. Qualifiers and select main-draw matches will be played on Tuesday, while the finals are scheduled for November 30.

Each of the five events -- men's and women's singles, men's and women's doubles and mixed doubles -- will feature a 32-player (or pair) draw, with 28 direct entries and four qualifiers. Uttar Pradesh's Shruti Mishra will compete in both women's doubles and mixed doubles.

In the women's doubles main draw, Shruti Mishra, Samridhi Singh, Sonali Singh and Tanisha Singh will be from the hosts association, while Ayush Agarwal and Shruti Mishra will lead the state's challenge in mixed doubles.

Spectator entry will be free, while the semifinals and finals will be broadcast live on DD Sports and the WAVE OTT platform. (PTI)