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CM meets Vaishnav, discusses railway link to picturesque Umrangso

CM seeks Centre's nod to boost connectivity with new Umrangso-Lanka rail link, Bhutan line via Kokrajhar

GUWAHATI, Nov 2: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday called on Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav in Delhi and they discussed various issues pertaining to the railway communication in the state, including a new line connecting tourist spot Umrangso. In a post on X, Sarma said they also discussed the proposed international line with Bhutan through Kokrajhar district.

"Had a very productive meeting with Hon'ble Minister Shri @AshwiniVaishnav Ji this morning... We deliberated on key issues to expand railway's footprint in Assam to enhance overall connectivity for our people," he added.

The issues they discussed included a new railway line from the picturesque Umrangso town to



Lanka in Hojai district, expediting work on the new railway line from Kokrajhar to Gelephu in Bhutan, three new Amrit Bharat trains for Assam, and more stoppages in the

state of all major trains passing through it. "Happy to share that the Hon'ble Minister has kindly consented to these action items," he added. (PTI)

16 illegal migrants from Bangladesh deported

GUWAHATI, Nov 2: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has said 16 Bangladeshi nationals were nabbed and deported from Sribhumi district.

"Miyabhai Ki Daring won't work in Assam! 16 illegal migrants from Bangladesh entered Assam with nefarious intentions and faced the consequences," Sarma said in a post on X on Saturday night.

Lauding the efforts of police in Sribhumi district, he said every such illegal immigrant will be caught and deported from Assam.

Assam's Sribhumi, Cachar, Dhubri, and South Salmara-Mankachar districts share 267.5 km of international border with Bangladesh.

There is an Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Sutarkandi in Sribhumi. Northeast has a total of three ICPs along the India-Bangladesh border, and the other two are at Dawki in Meghalaya and Akhaura in



Tripura.

There is another ICP in the region at Darranga in Assam along the India-Bhutan border.

Assam Police had earlier said that the state force and BSF would do everything possible to prevent any attempt by non-Indians to enter the country from Bangladesh, as per the law, after a political turmoil hit the neighbouring nation last year.

However, all Indian passport holders would be allowed to return from trouble-hit Bangladesh through the entry point in the state. (PTI)

India Industrial Fair concludes in Guwahati with focus on MSME growth, innovation

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Nov 2: The 13th edition of the India Industrial Fair (IIF) - Udyog 2025, organised by Laghu Udyog Bharati (LUB) - Purvottar Prant, concluded on Sunday at the Veterinary College Ground, Khanapara, marking a major step in promoting entrepreneurship and industrial collaboration in Assam and the Northeast.

Held under the chief patronage of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the patronage of the minister of industries and commerce, the four-day fair drew enthusiastic participation from entrepreneurs, innovators and industry stakeholders across the region. The event featured over 300 stalls representing sectors such as food processing, renewable energy, electrical and electronics, pharmaceuticals, packaging, rubber, waste management, handloom, handicrafts and Ayurveda, highlighting the industrial diversity and potential of the North-



east. "IIF 2025 has been a major step toward connecting entrepreneurs, innovators and industries under one dynamic platform," said Partha Pratim Pathak, President of LUB - Purvottar Prant.

He added that the fair aimed to empower local MSMEs, build market linkages and inspire youth to pursue entrepreneurship for an Atmanirbhar Assam and Bharat.



A major highlight of the fair was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Directorate of Technical Education (DTE), Government of Assam, and LUB - Purvottar Prant to strengthen industry-academia collaboration.

The MoU will provide engineering and polytechnic students access to internships, industrial

visits and live projects across 850 industries affiliated with LUB in Assam and other Northeastern states. "This MoU will allow our youth to learn from real industrial experiences and develop skills that make them job creators rather than job seekers," said Pramod Kumar Mour, General Secretary of LUB - Purvottar Prant.

Seminars on artificial intelligence, semiconductors, banking, environment and pollution control were also organised, benefiting young entrepreneurs and students with insights into emerging industrial trends.

The participation of youth entrepreneurs and the success of the "Sayamsiddha" initiative for women entrepreneurs added to the fair's inclusive spirit. LUB has announced plans to expand the IIF platform to other Northeastern states to promote regional industrial integration, employment generation and sustainable growth.

Gogoi says he'll raise issues concerning NE varsities in Parliament

GUWAHATI, Nov 2: Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi on Sunday said he would "strongly" raise the issues concerning the universities of the Northeast in Parliament.

Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha, wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month, expressing deep concern over the ongoing administrative and institutional crisis at Tezpur University in Assam.

"Recently, many top universities in the northeast have been in the news for the wrong reasons, such as Tezpur University, NEHU and the Guwahati University. Often it is the action of the Vice Chancellor which has raised concerns," he said in a post on X. Once the centres of academic excellence, both students and teachers of these institutions have expressed displeasure in the functioning of these universities. Gogoi pointed out. "This has affected the performance of the university and the rankings. I have written to the @PMOIndia about Tezpur University, but my concern is for the broader Northeast region. "I will be raising this issue strongly in the Parliament. I hope for a positive response from the Prime Minister's office," he added. (PTI)

Two held with pistol, fake currencies



HAILAKANDI, Nov 2: Two persons were arrested with a pistol and fake currencies from Sribhumi district of Assam, police said on Sunday.

According to a police officer, the operation was carried out at the Ratabari area after getting a tip-off on Saturday night.

"We nabbed two persons from the Jalalabad market. Police seized one pistol, one live round and fake currencies (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

US urges ASEAN to be firm in countering China in South China Sea

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 2: US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has urged Southeast Asian nations to stand firm and strengthen their maritime forces to counter China's increasingly "destabilising" actions in the South China Sea.

Hours later, he struck a notably softer tone online, saying that US-China ties have "never been better" and that both sides agreed to set up direct military communication channels.

Speaking at a Saturday meeting in Malaysia with his counterparts from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Hegseth reiterated US concerns over what he called China's aggression in the disputed waters, citing incidents such as the ramming of vessels and the use of water cannons.

He warned Beijing's provocative behaviour threatened the sovereignty of its neighbours and regional stability.

"China's sweeping territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea fly in the face of their commitments to resolve disputes peacefully," he said. "We seek peace. We do not seek conflict. But we must ensure that China is not seeking to dominate you or anybody else."

The South China Sea remains one of Asia's most volatile flashpoints. Beijing claims almost the entire region, while ASEAN members the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei also claim ownership of coastal areas and features. The Philippines, a key US ally, has had frequent clashes with China's maritime fleet.

Manila has repeatedly urged a stronger regional response, but ASEAN has traditionally sought to balance caution with economic ties to Beijing, the region's largest trading partner.

Hegseth criticised Beijing's recent declaration of the Scarborough Shoal — seized from the Philippines in 2012 — as a "nature reserve." He told the meeting it was "yet another attempt to coerce new and expanded territorial and maritime claims at your expense."

He urged ASEAN to hasten the conclusion of a long-delayed Code of Conduct being negotiated with China to govern behaviour in the sea... He also proposed developing shared maritime surveillance and rapid-response systems to deter provocation. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Scindia marvels at Meghalaya's living root bridges, calls them symbol of nature's harmony

PYNURSLA (MEGHALAYA), Nov 2: Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia expressed awe at Meghalaya's famed living root bridges, describing them as a "vision of the past" and a symbol of the harmony between humans and nature that must be treasured and protected.

Scindia on Saturday visited one of the tallest living root bridges at Rangthylliang village near here in East Khasi Hills district, where he interacted with locals and community elders who have preserved the centuries-old natural marvels.

Scindia and environmentalist Morningstar Khongthaw, along with others, spent some time on these towering living bridges, standing hundreds of feet above the forest floor below.

"When you come here, you are

transported to a vision of the past, the beauty and tranquility of Mother Nature, her creativity as she wraps her arms around the earth and provides a pathway for us mere mortals to meet and connect," Scindia said in a video he posted on Instagram on Sunday.

He described the natural bridges as a reflection of the deep bond between people and their environment, saying, "The natural beauty of Mother Nature, her enveloping warmth, is something we, as humans, as Indians and as the people of Meghalaya must always treasure and worship because she is our protector and provider."

Calling his visit "an enthralling experience", the minister said he was humbled to be "in touch with the soil of Meghalaya and the roots

of natural-born people."

"With profound humility, my head bows in reverence to her (Mother Nature)," he said, urging people to pledge to "spread her wonder far and wide" and to protect and nurture nature as she has done for humankind, "for millions of generations".

Scindia also praised the contributions of the Living Roots Foundation, led by Morningstar Khongthaw, whose work focuses on preserving, protecting, and passing on traditional knowledge of root-bridge making to future generations of tribal communities living along the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills.

Khongthaw, who interacted with Scindia (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

French Ambassador visits Nameri National Park, lauds conservation efforts



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Nov 2: French Ambassador to India Thierry Mathou visited the Nameri National Park and Tiger Reserve on Sunday as part of his official tour to review initiatives under the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC) Phase-II, supported by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD).

Mathou was accompanied by Lise Breuil, Country Director of AFD, New Delhi; Thierry Morel,

Consul General of France in Kolkata; Samuel Bouchard, Chargé de Mission - Influence et Coopération; and Anurag Singh, APCCF and Project Director, APFBC Phase-II.

During the visit, the delegation interacted with Piraisoodan B., Divisional Forest Officer, Western Assam Wildlife Division-cum-Field Director, Nameri Tiger Reserve, and other forest officials.

The Field Director presented an overview (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Spread of infectious diseases rose to 11.5 per cent in second quarter of 2025

1 in 9 persons tested found positive for infectious disease in ICMR study

NEW DELHI, Nov 2: Pathogens were found in 11.1 per cent of the 4.5 lakh patients tested by the network of labs under the Indian Council of Medical Research as part of efforts to identify viral infections of public health significance.

The top five pathogens detected were Influenza A in acute respiratory infection (ARI)/severe acute respiratory infections (SARI cases), dengue virus among acute fever and haemorrhagic fever cases, Hepatitis A in jaundice cases, Norovirus in acute gastroenteritis cases, and Herpes simplex virus (HSV) in Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) cases.

The spread of infectious diseases rose from 10.7 per cent in the first quarter to 11.5 per cent in the second quarter of 2025, according to the report by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

According to the Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories (VRDL) network of



ICMR, between January and March, out of 2,28,856 samples, 24,502 (10.7 per cent) were found to contain pathogens from April to June

2025, 26,055 (11.5 per cent) out of 2,26,095 samples tested positive. Thus, the infection rate rose by 0.8 percentage points over the

previous quarter, signalling the need for stronger monitoring of infection trends.

According to a senior scientist while this increase may not appear large, it should not be underestimated - it could serve as a warning for seasonal diseases and emerging infections.

If we continue tracking quarterly changes in infection rates, future epidemics could be prevented in time. The VRDL network acts as an early warning system for the country.

The ICMR report found that between April and June this year, 191 disease cluster were investigated and infectious diseases such as mumps, measles, rubella, dengue, chikungunya, rotavirus, norovirus, varicella zoster virus, Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) and astrovirus were identified.

Between January and March, 389 disease clusters were investigated and infectious diseases such as mumps, measles, rubella, hepatitis, dengue, chikungunya, rotavirus, influenza, Leptospira, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Akasa Air will consider flights to Kenya, Egypt, other countries; feels 'very good' about Boeing delivery schedule: CEO

NEW DELHI, Nov 2: Akasa Air will consider operating flights to Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt and some other countries, and the three-year-old airline now feels "very good" about the delivery schedule for its Boeing planes, according to its CEO Vinay Dube.

Stressing that Akasa Air's international expansion will continue on the right path, Dube, also the founder, said the airline will shortly announce flights to Sharjah.

The airline has a fleet of 30 Boeing 737 MAX planes and expects to add "more than one aircraft" this year.

"Our aircraft are capable of hitting the shores of East Africa, absolutely it can go to Mauritius and on the southern side, it can go to Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt... We can (also) go into Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan... Boeing 737 MAX is also capable of going deep into South Asia... All will be considered," Dube told PTI in an interview.

Currently, the carrier flies to six international cities -- Doha (Qatar), Jeddah, Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), Abu Dhabi (UAE), Kuwait City (Kuwait) and Phuket (Thailand) -- and 24 domestic destinations.

According to Dube, the airline's Available Seat Kilometres (ASK) is now 20 per cent international and 80 per cent domestic, and the overseas pie is expected to reach around 30 per cent by the end of March 2027.



Generally, ASK is a measure of an airline's passenger carrying capacity.

The airline, which has 750-775 pilots, expects to restart hiring of pilots in 2026, mainly first officers.

"We will have a need for pilots in the second half of next year. So, we will have to restart the (hiring) process well before that... We feel very good about our delivery schedule, we have more predictability," Dube said during the interview in the national capital.

There has been a delay in deliveries of the Boeing 737 MAX planes and earlier this month, the US Federal Aviation Administration allowed the aircraft maker to increase the production of MAX

aircraft to 42 from 38 per month. The airline has a firm order for a total of 226 Boeing 737 MAX planes.

Akasa Air expects to have some codeshare and interline partnerships in the next financial year, with Dube emphasising that the airline needs to be a little bigger to be an attractive partner for a number of codeshare, interline requirements that other airlines have.

Currently, the airline has a codeshare partnership with Ethihad Airways.

Generally, a codeshare partnership allows an airline to book passengers on its partner carrier in a single ticket. Under an interline arrangement, an airline issues and

accepts tickets for flights operated by partner carriers, and the passengers will have a single itinerary but different tickets.

About the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) flagging certain lapses at the airline, Dube said all the observations have been addressed to the satisfaction of the regulator.

"We had observations like every airline had observations as part of routine audits. All of these observations have been addressed to the satisfaction of the regulator and there is no cause for safety concern at all," he said.

On funding, the Akasa Air chief said the airline is well-capitalised and will look at an Initial Public Offering (IPO) in the next two to five years.

In August, the carrier announced it raised funds from various investors, including Premji Invest and Claypond Capital, and that the money would be utilised mainly for expanding operations.

Regarding any plans for having wide-body and regional aircraft as well as changing seat configuration, Dube said it keeps evaluating and emphasised that the airline is driven by economic sense.

"... If we think it is sustainably positive for us, then we will jump into the wide-body mix but so far our analysis is not one where we have concluded for us (that) it is sustainably positive."

The airline offers only economy class in its planes. (PTI)

RSTRC cuts annual losses from ₹1,000 cr to ₹300 cr; to add 800 new buses

JAIPUR, Nov 2: The Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation (RSRTC) has significantly reduced its annual operational losses from about ₹1,000 crore to ₹300 crore under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, officials said on Saturday.

According to an official statement, the improvement comes as a result of better management, strict supervision, and effective use of resources, it said. The state government has implemented transparent policies aimed at making public transport more efficient, safe, and passenger-friendly, the statement said. Sharma has directed the transport department to prioritise providing safe, punctual, and quality travel services to the passengers, it said.

The RSRTC has also strengthened its fleet and route network with the induction of 810 new buses and the addition of 352 contractual buses, while improved monitoring systems and fuel management have helped reduce diesel consumption, leading to substantial savings in operational costs, the statement said.

To further strengthen services, the government plans to induct 800 more buses in the coming months, which is expected to make operations more profitable and eliminate the remaining losses, it said.

"The focus is on continuous financial improvement and expansion of passenger services to ensure safe, efficient, and reliable transportation across the state," the statement said. (PTI)

HCCBL expects growth in FY26 despite disruptions in H1; 4 Jubilant nominees join board

NEW DELHI, Nov 2: Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages, the bottling arm of beverage major Coca-Cola in India, expects a decent growth in FY26 despite facing disruptions in the first half, from adverse weather conditions to external macroeconomic pressures, according to a top company official.

HCCBL hopes for a "promising potential outlook", encouraged by favourable macro conditions, such as rapid urbanisation and rising disposable income, and it would continue to invest in expansion of capacity, portfolio and distribution, among others, said its Chief Financial Officer Harsh Bhutani.

Besides, the board of Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Ltd (HCCBL) has been reconstituted after the parent entity, The Coca-Cola Company, divested a 40 per cent stake to Jubilant Bhartiya Group.

According to an industry insider, four people from the Jubilant Bhartiya Group, engaged in pharmaceuticals, food services, agribusiness, energy, and other services, have joined the board of HCCBL.

When asked about the development, Bhutani told PTI that after the deal, the HCCBL board has been reconstituted.

"After the 40 per cent stake sale to the Jubilant Bhartiya Group, HCCBL is now jointly owned by The Coca-Cola Company and The Jubilant Bhartiya Group. The transaction was concluded in July, post which the board has been reconstituted," he said.

Earlier this month, The Coca-Cola Company Chairman and Chief Executive Officer James Quincey, in the latest earnings calls, said it has sold a 40 per cent ownership stake in company-owned Indian bottler (HCCBL) in July this year to Jubilant Bhartiya Group. This is per its strategy to rebrand company-owned bottlers to fortify the system and unlock further growth, he said. "Together with our new business partners, we are focused on evolving the business and continuing to win in the marketplace," said Bhutani.

HCCBL, like other beverage makers, faced disruptions in the first half of FY26, "driven by adverse weather conditions and external macroeconomic pressures".

However, unfazed by this, Bhutani said: "Despite these challenges, we remain confident in our ability to

recover and continue investing in the market and delivering sustainable growth".

As per RoC filings by HCCBL, in FY25, its revenue from operations slipped 9 per cent to ₹12,751.29 crore, and its net profit fell 73 per cent to ₹756.64 crore. However, this was due to a high base in 2023-24 on account of gains from divesting bottling operations in Rajasthan, Bihar, North-East and parts of West Bengal.

According to Bhutani, on a like-for-like basis, HCCBL revenue was actually up 5.9 per cent in FY25 in comparison to FY24.

"On an adjusted comparable basis in FY25, comparable revenue we delivered grew (+) 5.9 per cent over FY24, with a Profit Before Tax margin of 7.2 per cent. The EBITDA margin stood at 13.2 per cent (grew in line with revenue growth over the same period)," he said.

HCCBL's growth drivers continue to be execution excellence, capacity expansion, and portfolio strength.

"We are investing heavily in distribution expansion - opening new outlets, adding coolers, strengthening our presence on the street and increasing distribution points. These on-ground efforts will remain our primary growth levers for the foreseeable future," said Bhutani. Over the second half (H2), which covers festivals and other occasions for consumption, HCCBL expects to stay on a growth trajectory.

"From H2's perspective, we are well prepared, in terms of capacity, portfolio and execution plans. As the weather normalises, we are well-positioned to take advantage of the next two quarters.

"It's hard to forecast the exact numbers, but we remain focused on driving growth. The India growth story remains robust, and despite the temporary setbacks, we expect to stay on that trajectory," said Bhutani.

HCCBL, to meet the growing demand, has invested ₹6,500 crore in the last two years in India, which is the fifth largest market of Coca-Cola globally.

"Last year, we invested about ₹3,100 crore in capacity expansion, and the year before that about ₹3,400 crore. We continue to invest because of the huge growth potential we see ahead," said Bhutani. (PTI)

Coal India chief calls for biz overhaul to stay relevant amid changing energy landscape

KOLKATA, Nov 2: Newly appointed Coal India Limited (CIL) Chairman Sanoj Kr Jha called for an "overhaul" of the state-run miner's business model and systems.

He also emphasised on emerging production methods, stressing that the organisation must adapt swiftly to stay relevant amid the global shift towards renewable energy.

"The world is not the same as it was 50 years ago, when coal was the primary source of energy. Renewable energy and many other competitors have come up," Jha said while addressing employees and stakeholders during CIL's 50th anniversary celebration in Kolkata on Saturday, marking his first day in the organisation.

Jha, who is also Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Coal, said the sector is at a "turning point" and must evolve beyond traditional methods of operation.

"We have to change our entire system, all of our current business models, and the method of production. The minister constantly reminds us that Coal India and all PSUs must come out of the mindset that they can continue working in the same way," he stated.

The chairman noted that while CIL has already taken steps toward diversification over the last five to



ten years, much more remains to be done.

"The entire team is geared up to execute the vision of the minister and the Prime Minister, and we will meet the expectations regarding the new things happening in the country," he said.

Outlining CIL's transformation roadmap, Jha identified three key strategic pillars — diversification beyond core mining, expansion of underground mining, and modernisation of logistics and technology.

As part of diversification, CIL is focusing on coal gasification projects and renewable energy ventures, particularly solar and wind power. The company also plans to contribute to India's productivity and energy security through participation in the critical minerals sector, both

domestically and abroad.

Highlighting the company's plans to elevate underground mining, Jha said CIL is targeting 100 million tonnes of production from underground operations by 2035 through upgraded technology, new equipment, and enhanced manpower training.

On operational modernisation, the chairman said CIL aims to mechanise almost all transport arrangements within the next four to five years under its First Mile Connectivity initiative. The company is also deploying advanced technologies such as surface miners, continuous miners, and an integrated command and control centre (ICCC) to improve efficiency and real-time monitoring across mines.

Jha also reaffirmed CIL's commitment to sustainability, citing large-scale plantation drives and eco-restoration initiatives. "CIL will continue contributing to the country's growth, not just as a coal producer but as a responsible energy company aligned with the nation's evolving needs," he said.

CIL, which remains India's largest energy supplier, currently meets around 55 per cent of the country's energy demand. The company's production has grown nearly 10-fold since its inception in 1975. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

ISRO scripts history

launch, he described the LVM 3 satellite as 'Bahubali,' in an apparent reference to its heavy-lift capability. He recalled that the rocket's previous launch was the "most prestigious Chandrayaan 3 which brought pride to nation."

It achieved "yet another pride" on Sunday after succeeding with the "heavier satellite."

All the eight LVM 3 launches, including its experimental mission, have been successful, showing a 100 per cent success rate.

The satellite was designed to provide communication services for at least 15 years and is "yet another shining example of Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India)," Narayanan, also Secretary, Department of Space, added. The ISRO scientists had a tough time with the mission since the weather was not cooperative, but they worked hard and ensured success, he said.

Prior to Sunday's launch, the Indian space agency has been utilising the services of Kourou launch base in French Guiana by Ariane rockets offered by France-based Arianespace, for launching heavier satellites.

On December 5, 2018 ISRO had launched its heaviest communication satellite GSAT-11 weighing 5,854 kg, onboard an Ariane-5 VA-246 rocket from French Guiana.

LVM3-M5, a three stage launch vehicle with two solid motor strap-ons (S200), a liquid propellant core stage (L110) and a cryogenic stage (C25) gives ISRO full self-reliance in launching heavier communication satellites that weigh up to 4,000 kg in GTO.

LVM3 is also termed by ISRO scientists as Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) MkIII.

Scientists at ISRO have classified launch vehicles depending upon the mission objectives, targeted orbit, altitude among others.

The launch vehicles or launchers used by ISRO include Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), GSLV and LVM3 (Launch Vehicle Mark-III). The space agency has been providing launch services for customer satellites since 1999 from Sriharikota.

PSLV has been ISRO's trusted workhorse for scientists due to its reliability in achieving mission success. PSLV has been a versatile launch vehicle and can carry payloads of about 1,750 kg.

For satellites weighing up to 500 kg and required to be placed in Low Earth Orbit at an altitude of about 500 km, ISRO banks on its Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).

The GSLV with cryogenic upper stage is used for carrying heavier satellites of about 2,200 kg while the LVM-3 rockets have enhanced the capability by carrying payloads of over 4,000 kg, ISRO said.

As regards Sunday's mission, LVM3 rocket holds significance as it has successfully launched heavier communication satellite from Indian soil. The LVM3-M5 is the fifth operational flight, ISRO said.

The LVM3 vehicle was developed with completely indigenous technology including the C25 cryogenic stage. It has a track record of all successful launches, from the first development flight LVM-3 Crew module Atmospheric Re-entry Experiment (CARE) launched in December 2014, ISRO said.

For the ambitious Gaganyaan Mission, ISRO had planned the Human rated LVM3 rocket as the launch vehicle, which is named as HRLV, ISRO said.

This LVM3 rocket is capable to carry payload to GTO weighing 4,000 kg and for Low Earth Orbit, payloads of 8,000 kg with its powerful cryogenic stage. The two S200 solid rocket boosters located on the sides of the rocket provide the thrust required for lift off. The S200 boosters are developed at Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram.

The third stage is L110 Liquid Stage and is powered by two Vikas engines designed and developed at the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre.

The previous mission of LVM-3 rocket was the successful launch of Chandrayaan-3 mission, wherein, India became the first country to land successfully near the lunar South pole in 2023. The satellite weighed 3841.4 kg. (PTI)

PM Modi, V-P congratulate

CMS-03," Modi said in a post on X. Besides placing the satellite in the desired orbit, ISRO scientists also demonstrated the re-ignition of the thrust chamber of the C-25 cryogenic engine after it placed the satellite in the orbit.

The experiment will help ISRO restart the cryogenic stage and give it the flexibility to place satellites in different orbits.

"Powered by our space scientists, it is commendable how our space sector has become synonymous with excellence and innovation. Their successes have furthered national progress and empowered countless lives," the prime minister said.

Hailing the satellite launch, the vice president said ISRO continues to script remarkable milestones in space exploration.

"Hearty congratulations to ISRO and the Indian Navy! India's mighty LVM3-M5 rocket roared to the skies once again with the successful launch of GSAT-7R (CMS-03) -- the heaviest and most advanced communication satellite for the Indian Navy -- placed into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit," Radhakrishnan said.

"This indigenously developed satellite will strengthen space-based communications, connectivity, and maritime domain awareness across the Indian Ocean Region, marking another proud milestone in Atmanirbhar Bharat," the vice president added.

ISRO Chairman V Narayanan said the space agency plans to carry out seven launch missions in the next five months.

Indian Space Association (ISpA) Director General Lt Gen A K Bhatt (retd) said the CMS-03 satellite will be a game-changer for India's maritime and national security, providing advanced, secure communication channels that are critical in the Indian Ocean Region and the mainland.

"The launch by ISRO not only strengthens our strategic autonomy but also signals a vibrant future for private industry participation in building and supporting our nation's space assets, reinforcing our position as a formidable space power," Bhatt said. (PTI)

Scindia marvels at

during the visit, told PTI, "I am delighted to have got the opportunity to interact closely with the Union Minister for DoNER. I urged the Centre, through the minister, to highlight these living engineering marvels of Meghalaya. We need to preserve the bridges."

The minister was in Meghalaya as part of a two-day visit during which he also laid the foundation for the Rs 233-crore Sohra circuit project under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE) scheme on Saturday.

The project aims to strengthen tourism infrastructure and create sustainable livelihood opportunities in Sohra, formerly known as Cherrapunji.

Earlier this year, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had also visited a living root bridge in Sohra area, praising the indigenous engineering and community-led efforts to conserve Meghalaya's natural heritage. (PTI)

US urges ASEAN

A "shared maritime domain awareness" network, he said, would ensure that any member facing "aggression and provocation is not alone."

He also welcomed plans for an ASEAN-US maritime exercise in December to strengthen regional coordination and uphold freedom of navigation.

Early Sunday, Hegseth posted on X that he had spoken again with China's Defense Minister, Admiral Dong Jun, on Saturday following their bilateral meeting the previous day.

Both sides agreed to establish military-to-military communications channels to discuss any problems that might arise, he said. They also agreed that "peace, stability, and good relations are the best path for our two great and strong countries," he added.

Hegseth said he spoke to President Donald Trump and that they agreed "the relationship between the US and China has never been better." Trump's meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in South Korea earlier this week "set the tone for everlasting peace and success for the US and China," added Hegseth, who was set to leave Malaysia on Sunday for Hanoi.

The contrasting messages — a sharp warning at the ASEAN meeting followed by conciliatory language online — underscored Washington's effort to balance deterrence with diplomacy amid rising tensions with Beijing.

"This is damage control. More importantly, it reflects two different currents in US relations with China — one that sees China as a threat and another a possible partner," said Southeast Asian political analyst Bridget Welsh.

China rejects US criticism of its maritime conduct, accusing Washington of interfering in regional affairs and provoking tensions through its military presence. Chinese officials say their patrols and construction activities are lawful and aimed at maintaining security in what they consider Chinese territory.

Chinese officials Saturday slammed the Philippines for being a "troublemaker" after Manila staged naval and air drills with the US, Australia and New Zealand in the South China Sea. The two-day exercise that ended Friday was the 12th that the Philippines says it has carried out with partner nations since last year to protect its rights in the disputed waters.

Tian Junli, spokesperson of China's People's Liberation Army Southern Theater Command, said the exercise seriously undermined regional peace and stability. "It further proves that the Philippines is the troublemaker in the South China Sea issue and a saboteur of regional stability," he said. (AP)

Two held with

with a face value of ₹48,000 from their possession," he added. The duo had carried the items hiding in the seat of a two-wheeler, the officer said. (PTI)

French Ambassador visits

of key interventions undertaken under the APFBC Phase-II Project, focusing on habitat restoration, wetland rejuvenation, eco-tourism, and the conservation of the White-winged Wood Duck.

The Ambassador also met members of Eco-Development Committees working in the buffer areas of Nameri and appreciated their contribution to community-based conservation and eco-tourism.

Later, Mathou undertook a Gypsy safari inside the Tiger Reserve to experience its diverse ecosystem and wildlife. He expressed appreciation for the ongoing conservation initiatives, particularly efforts to protect the White-winged Wood Duck, Assam's State Bird, and the role of the Nameri Eco-Camp at Hatigate in linking local livelihoods with sustainable tourism.

The visit concluded with an ethnic lunch hosted at the Nameri Eco-Camp by the community-run management team.

1 in 9 persons

Varicella zoster virus and Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) were identified. From 2014-2024, more than 40 lakh samples were tested with pathogen identified in 18.8 per cent.

The VRDLN expanded from 27 laboratories in 2014 to 165 laboratories across 31 states and UTs by 2025. Through this network, 2,534 disease clusters have been identified across the country so far. (PTI)

Tea production falls 5.9 per cent in Sept 2025



KOLKATA, Nov 2: Tea production during September 2025 has declined 5.9 per cent at 159.92 million kilogrammes as against 169.93 million kilogrammes in the similar previous period.

According to Tea Board data, production of the crop in Assam during September 2025 remained almost stagnant at 94.76 million kilogrammes as compared to 94.03 million kilogrammes in the same period of 2024.

Production of the crop in West Bengal declined to 40.03 million kilogrammes in September 2025 from 48.35 million kilogrammes in the same month of 2024.

In north India, comprising the states of Assam and West Bengal, production of the crop fell to 138.65 million kilogrammes in September 2025 from 146.96 million kilogrammes in the same month in 2024.

In South India, production marginally declined to 21.27 million kilogrammes in September 2025, as against 22.97 million kilogrammes in the same month of 2024, according to the data. (PTI)

Minister Bimal Borah stresses cultural unity, honours tea garden performers with cash awards and recognition

331 Barak valley artists felicitated under Jhumoir Binandini scheme

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 2: "Language should never be a barrier to unity, our strength lies in our shared culture," said Bimal Borah, Minister of Industries, Commerce and Cultural Affairs while addressing a felicitation ceremony at Banga Bhawan, Silchar. The event organised by the Cachar District Administration, honoured 331 Jhumoir artists and master trainers from Barak Valley for their contribution to Assam's cultural heritage.

Under the Jhumoir Binandini scheme, each participant received ₹ 25,000 through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), an initiative by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma commemorating 200 years of Assam's tea culture. Minister Borah praised the artists as "the heartbeat of Assam's cultural revival" and highlighted the role of art in uniting communities across linguistic and regional lines. Minister Kaushik Rai also lauded the initiative, noting its significance in celebrating Assam's tea garden communities and citing Prime Minister Modi's praise for the Jhumoir dance. Cachar District Commissioner Mridul Yadav called the occasion a "historic moment



of cultural pride" for Barak Valley, recalling the mega Jhumoir Binandini event at Sarusajai Stadium in Guwahati on February 24, 2025 which drew national and global attention.

The ceremony included certificate distribution and live transfer of cash awards to the artists, highlighting transparency and govern-

ment recognition of grassroots artistry. Distinguished dignitaries, including Nihar Ranjan Das, MLA and Kankan Narayan Sikidar, president of Cachar Zilla Parishad were present. The event concluded with a screening of the iconic Jhumoir Binandini performance that captivated the nation earlier this year.

Powaimukh Buddha Vihar inaugurated

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Nov 2: The newly constructed Powaimukh Buddha Vihar in the historic Tai Khamyang village of Tinsukia district was inaugurated in a resplendent two-day Daanustav celebration on November 1-2, blending ancient Tai Khamyang traditions with Buddhist wisdom.

The festivities began with the hoisting of the World Buddhist Flag by Itika Mahathera Sangha Nayak of the Purbanchal Bhikkhu Sangha and All Assam Buddhist Association, followed by the formal inauguration by Weriya Bhikkhu, president of Purbanchal Bhikkhu Sangha. Sacred rituals, including the Khamchin Thamra, were performed and devotees offered alms to the Bhikkhus, culminating in a communal feast fostering unity and compassion.

The open session, presided over by Gyanopal Mahathera saw speeches by Debananda Machee and other dignitaries highlighting the vihar's role as a beacon for future generations. Community leaders, including Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma and village elders such as Madoi Chausang, Nangok Chowlik and Sashidhar Shyam were honoured for their contributions. Two publications were unveiled: the anthology "Poy Kyang Lu," edited by Sashidhar Shyam and "Buddha Bhagawan and His Dharma" by Chamsang Chowlik Shyam celebrating Buddhist philosophy and Tai Khamyang heritage.

A procession featuring the sacred Kalpataru tree and a Buddha statue, lighting of lamp and release of sky lanterns marked the conclusion of the first day. On November 2, ceremonies including Anikacha Tang, Khamching Thamra and the dedication of the Buddha statue were conducted by monks from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Sashidhar Shyam emphasised the importance of preserving the Tai Khamyang language, noting that only ten individuals worldwide still speak and write it fluently, underscoring the vihar's role in safeguarding the community's unique cultural identity.

TAYPA protests demanding ST status for Ahoms

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Nov 2: The Tai Ahom Yuva Parishad, Asom (TAYPA) organised a massive torchlight procession in Sivasagar on Sunday, reiterating their longstanding demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for the Ahom community in Assam.

Led by Diganta Tamuly and other leaders, the procession began from the historic Rangghar Bakori and moved through the town amid thunderous slogans. The demonstrators set November 25 as the deadline for the BJP-led state government to announce ST status for the Ahoms along with five other ethnic communities — Moran, Motok, Tea Tribes, Koch Rajbongshi and Chutia.

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Four-day electrical workshop at CIT Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Nov 2: A four-day hands-on workshop on "Basics of Electrical Connections" successfully concluded at the Central Institute of Technology, Kokrajhar (CITK). Organised under the Science, Technology and Innovation Hub (STI Hub) CITK project funded by DST, the program aimed to provide practical knowledge and skill-based training to the youth, enhancing self-reliance and employability in the electrical field.

Participants learned fundamentals of electricity, household wiring, circuit design, the use of measuring instruments like voltmeters and basic repair and maintenance techniques. A guided tour of the CITK substation offered real-world exposure to power distribution systems.

The sessions were conducted by experts including Bishnu, Aron and Kwrmdao, whose interactive demonstrations helped participants grasp key concepts effectively.

Dr Pranav Kumar Singh, PI of STI Hub CITK, expressed satisfaction at the workshop's success, thanking the expert team, Co-PI Dr Kaushik and staff members for their support. He highlighted the importance of such initiatives in equipping rural youth with practical skills for local employment opportunities.

The workshop concluded with a feedback session, where participants shared their enthusiasm for applying the knowledge in real-life scenarios. The STI Hub continues to promote innovation, skill development and community engagement through training and outreach programs supporting inclusive growth in the region.

Dr Prayag Saikia's book 'Kalika Loga Kothar Batere' released

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Nov 2: 'Kalika Loga Kothar Batere,' a collection of poems by noted Assamese poet and physician Dr Prayag Saikia, was ceremonially released at Nagaon Art Village on Sunday.

The event began with a traditional Totay performance by child artist Sanav Das, followed by the unveiling of the book by esteemed Assamese poet Jiban Narah. The ceremony was attended by prominent personalities, including art critic Ankur Deka, storyteller Sibananda Kakati, translator Krishna Dula Baruah, organiser Noushad Akhtar Hazarika and educationist Sanandana Payeng.

Jiban Narah praised the book as a significant addition to Dr Saikia's 16 publica-

tions, featuring 56 selected poems curated by literary critic Arindam Borkataky. Dr Saikia expressed gratitude to Prasanta Bora, owner of Buk Nuk Cafe for his support in publishing the book.

The event also included a prize distribution ceremony for students of Jyoti Chitrangan Vidyalaya, showcasing their artistic skills. Art critic Ankur Deka was felicitated with a Nahor sapling and special honours were given to legendary singer Zubeen Garg. The ceremony concluded with participation from folk artist Golap Bora, writers Ashok Ram Bhattacharya, Dula Bora and others. The event was organised by Jyoti Chitrangan Vidyalaya under the guidance of its principal, world-renowned sculptor and artist Sujit Das.

Dr Nagen Saikia honoured with 'Sadasya Varenya'

ASS confers its highest title on the eminent litterateur

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Nov 2: Eminent Assamese litterateur, educationist and former president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, Dr Nagen Saikia, was conferred with the Sabha's highest honour, the "Sadasya Varenya" title, at a grand felicitation ceremony held at the Rameshwar Lal Saharia Sanghati Bhawan in Dibrugarh on Saturday.

The award was presented by Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, in the presence of distinguished litterateurs, scholars and academics from across the state.

Overcome with emotion, Dr Saikia expressed heartfelt gratitude, calling it both a happy and sad day in his life. "Due to my ill health, I am deprived of the full joy of this moment. Yet, I feel deeply blessed to receive such love and affection. The Assam Sahitya Sabha is not just an institution — it is the soul of our national life," he said.

Expressing concern over the socio-political state of Assam, Dr Saikia remarked, "We are living through a time of great crisis. If we fail to stand united, we may never regain the Assam that once was." He also emphasised linguistic unity, stating, "All Indian languages must work together. Assam is my mother and my cradle. Only when we remain united as Assamese can we shine as true citizens."

The "Sadasya Varenya" honour included a phulam gamosa, seleng chadar, phulam japi, memento, citation, angavastra and books.

Among the dignitaries present were Dr Jiten Hazarika Vice-Chancellor of Dibrugarh University, Dr Nirod Kumar Barua Vice-Chancellor of Majuli Cultural University, Dr G Singhaia Vice-Chancellor of Birangana Sati Sadhani University and several other prominent scholars and educationists.

The event began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, General Sec-



retary Devojit Bora and Dr Jiten Hazarika, followed by the planting of a red sandalwood sapling in the Sabha premises.

Over a hundred organisations, including literary, cultural and community bodies from across Assam, extended greetings to Dr Saikia, celebrating him as a towering figure — a banyan tree of Assamese literature — whose works continue to inspire generations.

UPPL launches motorcycle rally to promote unity

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Nov 2: A six-day Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Motorcycle Rally was flagged off from Kazigaon, Parbojhora in Kokrajhar district on Saturday, organised by the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) to promote peace, unity and ethical values ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections.

Led by UPPL general secretary Raju Kumar Narzary and flagged off by UPPL president and former CEM Pramod Boro, the rally involves hundreds of bikers traversing the BTR, concluding on November 6 at Golpur. The route covers key areas including Mornai Tea Estate, Gossaigaon, Dotma, Banargaon and Salakati with nightly halts and community interactions along the way.

During the rally, participants paid floral tributes to Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma at Kazigaon Gurudham, Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma at Dotma Thulungapuri and Swahid Lafikul Islam Ahmed at Salakati. Local communities warmly welcomed and

felicitated the rally team at various stops.

UPPL leaders emphasised the rally's objectives: strengthening the party, promoting BTR development, advocating for full implementation of the BTR Accord, the 125th Constitutional Amendment, increasing BTC constituencies from 40 to 60, justice for late artist Zubeen Garg and fostering unity among the 26 indigenous communities of BTR. Pramod Boro highlighted social concerns such as rising syndicate culture, substance abuse and violence, stressing that the rally aims to raise awareness and engage citizens responsibly. He reiterated UPPL's commitment to contest the 2026 Assembly election as a strong force and criticised BTC CEM Hagrama Mohilary's recent remarks regarding the BTR Accord implementation.

The rally, titled "Well-Organised UPPL for a Prosperous BTR," began with prayers at Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma's birthplace and involves around 100 motorcyclists traversing the region to engage communities and promote unity.

Gaurav Gogoi's two-day tour in West KA



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Nov 2: Deputy Leader of the Indian National Congress in the Lok Sabha and President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), Gaurav Gogoi (MP) received a warm welcome from thousands of party workers at Forest Bazar, the border area between Hojai and West Karbi Anglong districts. The reception marked the beginning of his two-day tour aimed at strengthening grassroots connections and addressing local concerns.

Gogoi's visit under the 111 No Rongkhang Legislative Assembly Constituency began on Sunday with prayers at Shiv Mandir in Kheroni Charali and Dayangmukh Bangali Mandir highlighting his focus on cultural and community ties. He later held interactive sessions in Dayangmukh and street-corner meetings in Kheroni and Donkamokam drawing large crowds eager to discuss development issues and party initiatives.

He also met district leaders and intellectuals from West Karbi Anglong to discuss key challenges and will spend the night at the Donkamokam Inspection Bungalow.

On Monday, Gogoi will visit the 112 No Amri LAC, holding meetings with intellectuals and public interaction sessions. A key highlight will be his visit to Tapat, a sensitive border village along the Assam-Meghalaya frontier affected by recent disturbances. His visit aims to draw attention to local security concerns and extend support to affected families.

Gogoi is accompanied by senior APCC and district-level leaders, including Augustine Enghee, Raton Engti, former KAAC Executive Members Alice Engpti, Bidyasing Rongpi, Ashok Teron, former MLA Dr Mansing Rongpi, Joyram Engng and Jagat Sing Engti. Representatives from various Congress frontal organisations also joined the tour.

The visit underscores the Congress party's renewed outreach in Assam's hill districts, focusing on unity, development and protection of border communities ahead of upcoming elections.

Silchar to echo with 5,000 voices in tribute to Dr Bhupen Hazarika

District administration to host grand musical homage on November 5 at Police Parade Ground

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Nov 2: The Cachar District Administration is all set to pay a stirring tribute to Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika with an extraordinary cultural celebration at the Police Parade Ground on November 5. The event expected to draw thousands, will witness an awe-inspiring chorus of 5,000 voices singing the maestro's timeless song "Manush Manusher Jonno," celebrating his universal message of love, humanity and social harmony.

Preparations for the grand event were finalised at a meeting chaired by District Commissioner Mridul Yadav IAS, at the news conference hall of the DC's office in Silchar on Saturday. Detailed arrangements were discussed to ensure a smooth and dignified observance of the revered artist's death anniversary. The meeting was attended by senior officials from various departments, educational institutions and cultural organisations. Additional District Commissioner (Cultural Affairs) Phyllis Hrangchal ACS, welcomed all members and outlined the objectives of the event, emphasising its importance in preserving and promoting Dr Hazarika's enduring musical and cultural legacy.

According to the plan, the commemoration will begin at 3 PM with a floral tribute to Dr Hazarika by the District Commissioner, invited dignitaries, senior citizens and prominent cultural personalities. The focal point of the programme

will be the mass chorus performance, featuring 5,000 participants rendering "Manush Manusher Jonno" in unison, followed by a 17-minute Grand Chorus Medley — the same musical piece that captivated audiences during the centenary celebrations held in Guwahati.

A parallel programme will also be organised in Lakhipur Co-District, where 500 performers will join in paying homage through the same song. To ensure seamless coordination, a final rehearsal of all participants will be held on November 4 at the Police Parade Ground, Silchar. In a progressive move, the District Administration will issue self-generated participation certificates, digitally signed by the District Commissioner, through an online portal for all students taking part in the event.

Cachar District Commissioner Mridul Yadav IAS, has laid special emphasis on inclusivity and community participation. Social workers, NGOs, local cultural organisations, clubs, tea garden workers, NCC, NSS, ASLRM groups, PSUs and government departments are being encouraged to take part. Representation from all legislative constituencies of Cachar district will make the programme a collective celebration of unity through art and music.

As part of the detailed arrangements, various departments have been assigned specific responsibilities. The Inspector of Schools, Cachar, will coordinate the par-



ticipation of students from schools, ensuring rehearsals are conducted efficiently. All students are to report by 1 PM on the event day, wearing white shirts for boys and traditional attire for girls. Universities and college authorities will also submit their participant lists and oversee preparations.

To maintain law and order, the Police Department will deploy an adequate security and traffic management plan. The Health Department will ensure ambulance and medical support at the venue, while the Information and Public Relations Department, Barak Valley Region will handle media coverage and publicity. The Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs will provide refreshment packets to all participants.

Following the State Government's

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), the District Commissioner will act as the nodal officer for organising the district-level observance. The event's cultural segment will feature local artists and expert committee members performing Dr Hazarika's compositions, culminating in a moving human chain formation during the collective singing of "Manush Manusher Jonno." Male volunteers across departments and organisations have been encouraged to wear white attire, a symbol of peace, purity and the harmony that defined Dr Bhupen Hazarika's art.

Notably, the November 5 event, scheduled to begin at 3 PM, will be graced by Kaushik Rai Minister for Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, Mines and Minerals and Barak Valley

Development Department, along with several dignitaries and distinguished guests.

Meanwhile, District Commissioner Mridul Yadav said the event is a heartfelt effort to unite the people of Cachar through the power of music and the spirit of togetherness that Dr Hazarika embodied. "Dr Bhupen Hazarika's songs transcend boundaries and continue to inspire generations. This programme is not just a tribute but a reaffirmation of the values he stood for — humanity, unity and cultural pride," he added.

The meeting was also attended by Co-District Commissioner, Dholai, Roktim Baruah ACS, Lakhipur Co-District Commissioner, Dhrubajyoti Pathak ACS, Assistant Commissioners Bonnykha Chetia ACS, Deepa Das ACS, Anjali Kumari ACS and other officials.

Our Hojai Correspondent adds: The Hojai District Administration will observe the death anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika on November 5 and organise a Unity March on November 6 in Hojai town to promote the spirit of unity, patriotism and national integration. Addressing a press conference at the DC's Conference Hall in Srimanta Sankardev Nagar on Sunday evening, Kaziranga MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa said, "Just as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel unified a fragmented India, we will carry forward that spirit so the youth can adopt the ideals of 'Ek Bharat' and 'Aatmanir-

har Bharat."

He added that the Unity March will raise awareness about the Iron Man of India and his efforts in uniting the nation. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been tirelessly working toward building a self-reliant and united India. Under his leadership, the North East is witnessing rapid progress and peace. I appeal to everyone in Hojai district to actively participate in the march," Tasa said.

During the press meet, District Commissioner Bidyut Bikash Bhagawati informed that Assam is celebrating the birth centenary of the legendary singer Dr Bhupen Hazarika with year-long programmes. In line with the state's observance, the Hojai District Administration will mark his death anniversary on November 5 at Srimanta Sankardev Nagar with various events.

The programme will include a plantation drive, floral tributes before the portrait of the music maestro, a special 17-minute melody presentation and addresses by distinguished guests. Thousands of people from different walks of life are expected to attend. Several organisations will also participate in the event, which aims to inspire all to follow Dr Hazarika's ideals of humanity and harmony as he proclaimed, "Manuher Manuher Babe."

The press meet was also attended by Ramkrishna Ghosh, MLA of Hojai and Sibum Misra, MLA of Lumding.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The most wasted of all days is one without laughter.
— E. E. Cummings

Trump-Xi meeting

Since the holding of the historic summit between President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping, a large number of commentaries in the American media as also in other western papers have been written. While in US, the assessment of the outcome of talks is on expected lines—New York Times and other anti-Trump media focusing more on the gains of Xi Jinping as against Trump, the pro-Trump media, especially Fox News have gone gaga by saying that Trump is a winner and he is the most capable world statesman as a truce maker. Everyone however agrees that the final trade deal and the future nature of political relations will depend on the coming summit in April next year in Beijing, as announced by Trump. The US press is however missing to some extent a radical change in approach shown by the Chinese President during his talks with Trump on Thursday morning. The focus was solely on economy and Xi's emphasis was more on long term collaboration in harnessing synergies of both economies to get full dividends for both. One message that Xi gave at the Busan meet was China wants US as a trusted ally in its coming journey for building a mega economy by 2049—the centenary year of the Communist Party taking over power in 1949.

Global Times, the official mouthpiece of the Chinese Government in its editorial on October 31 mentioned that during the Busan meeting, President Xi said that "China and US should be partners and friends. This what history has taught us and what reality needs". The discussion provided new guidance and momentum for the stable development of bilateral ties and enhanced the world's common expectations for the further stabilisation of China-US relations. The Chinese official line is that whatever happened earlier leading to decline in China-US relations, was due to the earlier regimes and under Trump, new era is going to open leading to high development of both economies. President Xi emphasized that the two sides should think big and recognize the long-term benefit of cooperation and must not fall into a vicious cycle of mutual retaliation.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that there are no insurmountable hurdles or unmanageable issues between China and the US. Based on the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation, the two countries can certainly build a constructive relationship grounded in a long-term vision.

The importance of Mother Tongue: UNESCO and UNICEF perspectives

Language is the foundation of human communication, shaping thought processes, cultural identity, and social interactions. For children, their mother tongue is the first language they acquire naturally, making it the most effective medium for early education and cognitive development. When education begins in a child's native language, learning becomes more meaningful, comprehension improves, and a strong foundation is laid for academic success. UNESCO and UNICEF, two of the most influential global organizations in education and child welfare, have long advocated for mother tongue-based education as a key strategy for inclusive and equitable learning. They emphasize that children should start their education in a language they understand best, ensuring an easier transition to literacy, better retention of knowledge, and higher academic achievement. However, despite the overwhelming evidence supporting mother tongue instruction, millions of children worldwide continue to be taught in languages they do not speak at home, creating significant barriers to learning.

UNESCO has consistently highlighted the importance of linguistic diversity in education, stressing that language is more than just a tool for communication; it is an integral part of cultural heritage and identity. When children are educated in their mother tongue, they connect more deeply with their surroundings, feel a greater sense of belonging, and develop confidence in their ability to learn. Conversely, when children are forced to study in an unfamiliar language, they often struggle to understand lessons, leading to frustration, disengagement, and, in many cases, school dropout. The loss of mother tongue instruction is not just a linguistic concern but a cultural crisis, as it threatens the transmission of indigenous knowledge and traditions. UNESCO actively promotes policies that encourage mul-

lingual education, recognizing that preserving linguistic diversity strengthens societies, fosters mutual understanding, and contributes to social cohesion.

UNICEF, as the leading global organization advocating for children's rights and education, also recognizes that language plays a crucial role in shaping a child's learning experience. UNICEF's position on mother tongue education is rooted in principles of equity, quality education, and child-centered learning. The organization argues that education in a foreign or dominant language often alienates children, making it difficult for them to express themselves, engage in classroom activities, and grasp new concepts. This challenge is particularly severe for children from marginalized and indigenous communities, who are already at a disadvantage due to economic and social barriers. UNICEF strongly supports mother tongue-based education as a means of improving

an unfamiliar language often resort to rote memorization without fully understanding the material, leading to weak literacy skills and long-term academic struggles.

Beyond literacy, mother tongue education also significantly improves overall academic performance. When students understand the language of instruction, they are more likely to engage in discussions, participate actively in class, and perform well in assessments. Subjects such as mathematics, science, and social studies require critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are best developed in a language that the learner fully comprehends. Studies from various countries have demonstrated that students who receive early education in their mother tongue perform better in standardized tests and are more likely to complete their schooling. This advantage extends beyond primary education, as a strong foundation in the mother tongue enhances the ability to learn additional languages and complex subjects in later years.

A major concern associated with language barriers in education is the high rate of school dropouts among children from non-dominant language backgrounds. When students struggle to understand lessons, they often feel discouraged, leading to disengagement from school and eventual dropout. This is particularly common in rural and economically disadvantaged communities where children do not have access to additional language support outside the classroom. UNESCO and UNICEF have identified linguistic exclusion as one of the leading factors contributing to educational inequality and low school completion rates in many regions. By implementing mother tongue instruction, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that helps students stay engaged, complete their education, and transition suc-

cessfully to higher levels of learning.

Despite the clear benefits of mother tongue-based education, several challenges hinder its widespread implementation. One of the primary obstacles is the lack of educational resources in many indigenous and minority languages. In several countries, local languages do not have standardized scripts, textbooks, or teaching materials, making it difficult to develop curricula and provide quality instruction. Addressing this challenge requires collaboration between governments, linguists, educators, and local communities to document and create learning resources in diverse languages. UNESCO has been actively involved in language preservation initiatives, working to develop multilingual educational materials and policies that support mother tongue instruction.

Another critical factor in the success of mother tongue education is teacher training. In many multilingual societies, teachers themselves may not be fluent in the native languages spoken by their students. This creates a gap in delivering effective instruction and maintaining language continuity in education. To address this issue, UNICEF has supported teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills needed for multilingual teaching. These programs emphasize the importance of teaching methodologies that integrate the mother tongue while gradually introducing second or third languages, ensuring that students do not experience a sudden linguistic transition that disrupts their learning process.

Parental and community involvement is also essential in strengthening mother tongue education. When children receive support for their native language at home, their learning experience is reinforced, making them more confident learners. However, many parents, influenced by the belief that global or national languages offer better career opportunities, discourage the

use of the mother tongue in education. This societal bias contributes to language erosion and weakens the long-term benefits of mother tongue instruction. UNESCO and UNICEF emphasize the need for awareness campaigns to educate parents and communities about the advantages of mother tongue-based education, encouraging them to actively participate in their children's linguistic and academic development.

The global discourse on language policy in education is more than just a technical debate; it has profound implications for the future of learning, cultural preservation, and social development. As nations work toward achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, which focuses on quality education for all, language inclusion must be a top priority. UNESCO and UNICEF continue to advocate for policies that recognize linguistic diversity as a strength rather than a challenge. Governments, education ministries, and policymakers must collaborate to develop education systems that embrace multilingualism, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn in a language they understand best. In conclusion, the importance of mother tongue instruction in education cannot be overstated. It is a fundamental right that guarantees children equal access to quality education, enhances literacy and cognitive development, improves academic performance, and preserves cultural identity. UNESCO and UNICEF have been steadfast in their support for mother tongue-based learning, recognizing its crucial role in building inclusive and equitable education systems. While challenges remain in its implementation, the long-term benefits far outweigh the difficulties. The international community must commit to fostering linguistic diversity in education, ensuring that every child, regardless of their linguistic background, can learn, grow, and thrive in a language that truly belongs to them.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

learning outcomes, reducing dropout rates, and ensuring that all children, regardless of their linguistic background, have an equal opportunity to succeed.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of mother tongue instruction is its impact on literacy development. Research has consistently shown that children who begin learning in their first language develop stronger reading, writing, and comprehension skills compared to those who start with a second or foreign language. Literacy is not merely about recognizing letters and words but about understanding meaning, constructing ideas, and applying knowledge in real-life situations. When children learn in a language they already know, they can relate to the content, grasp concepts more quickly, and retain information more effectively. In contrast, children who are forced to learn in

Welcoming, not opposing, the Meaningful Initiative of SIR

By: Lalit Garg

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar's announcement to launch the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls not only in Bihar but now across 12 states and union territories is indeed a commendable and courageous step toward correcting electoral irregularities and deficiencies. This initiative is not merely a technical or administrative process, but rather a decisive attempt to strengthen the very roots of Indian democracy. The soul of democracy resides in the impartiality and transparency of its electoral system, and the Election Commission's latest move must be seen as a concrete, positive, and essential effort in this direction. Learning from the experiences of Bihar's SIR process, this time the Commission has allowed more time for implementation to avoid the hurry and confusion seen earlier. The Aadhaar card will now be accepted as a supporting document, making the process smoother and more accessible.

Naturally, since this phase covers 12 states, the challenge is also greater. Yet, it is hoped that the difficulties faced in Bihar will serve as valuable lessons, ensuring that similar problems do not arise elsewhere. While announcing the new SIR schedule, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar emphasized that the process will ensure no eligible voter is left out and no ineligible voter remains on the list. The states selected for this phase include Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Goa, Kerala, Puducherry, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Lakshadweep. Of these, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal will face assembly elections next year. Although Assam too will have elections next year, it has been excluded from this phase.

The Commission has clarified that while the Aadhaar card will not be accepted as proof of birth, citizenship, or residence, it can still be used as a supporting document during SIR. This clarity was much needed, as the issue had reached the Supreme Court during the Bihar process. The chosen documents must be those accessible to the largest section of society, and Aadhaar today serves as the simplest form of identity proof. The accuracy, transparency, and fairness of the voter list form the spine of democracy. In a vast and diverse nation like India, ensuring the precision of electoral rolls is a major challenge. Therefore, periodic Special Intensive Revisions are essential. The last such revision took place nearly two decades ago, and such a long gap must never recur. Due to migration for employment, millions of people settle in new places permanently, while in many cases, names of deceased persons remain in the list and new eligible voters are not included. This leads to distortions in voter turnout and raises doubts about the credibility of election outcomes. The purpose of SIR is not to decide citizenship or exclude voters, but to simplify and encourage voter registration, inspiring citizens to participate in the festival of democracy. If implemented honestly at the ground level, this initiative will enhance both the sanctity of the voter list and the dignity of democracy.

For a democracy as vast as India's, the cooperation of political parties is vital. They should view this process positively rather than through the narrow lens of political interest. It is unfortunate that some opposition parties are creating an atmosphere of resistance and suspicion toward this much-needed reform. Frequently, when the Election Commission takes reformative steps, political parties respond according to

their vested interests. Yet, the health of democracy depends on whether all parties can rise above political gain or loss and uphold transparency. The opposition should welcome this initiative, cooperate in its fair implementation, and avoid sowing doubt and distrust. Political parties have a serious responsibility—not merely to criticize, but to participate constructively. Similarly, civil society organizations must also stay vigilant; their involvement can help local election officers (BLOs) make the process more accurate and efficient.

The Election Commission, which dreams of holding simultaneous elections across the nation, must first succeed in executing this primary responsibility effectively. In the digital age, electoral reforms are no longer merely a question of manpower or administrative will but also of technological transparency. Measures like biometric verification, online registration, and data cross-verification have become indispensable. The Special Intensive Revision serves as the foundation for such reforms—cleansing and reorganizing electoral data. India's election process is recognized as the largest democratic exercise in the world, but this glory is meaningful only when there remains no doubt about the purity of the voter list, impartiality of polling, and adherence to the Model Code of Conduct. This initiative by the Election Commission is a significant step in that direction. Democracy is not merely the counting of votes—it is the counting of trust, and that trust rests upon the integrity, transparency, and vigilance of the Election Commission. Under Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the Election Commission holds the constitutional authority to prepare and revise electoral rolls. Ensuring accurate voter lists is not just a right but a constitutional necessity for free and fair elections.

Ironically, some political parties that complain of errors in voter lists are the same ones opposing their correction. Their protests during Bihar's SIR, alleging "vote theft," even reached the Supreme Court, but neither the Court nor the people of Bihar supported their baseless propaganda. Gyanesh Kumar's initiative, therefore, represents more than a technical correction—it is a renewal of democratic culture. Elections are not merely about a change of power but about the test of public trust. If this campaign is carried out with honesty and citizen participation, it will make Indian democracy more mature, credible, and participatory. The responsibility now lies not only with the Election Commission but also with every citizen and political party to support this reformative initiative and help keep the festival of democracy pure and unblemished. Isn't it strange that the same opposition parties that demand cleaner voter lists now oppose the very process that ensures it? Even though their propaganda has been exposed, the Election Commission must remain vigilant, as opposition-ruled states may still resist the process. The Commission must ensure zero error in the revision to prevent any attempt to undermine this constitutional exercise.

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar's SIR initiative is not just a technical reform but a message of democratic renewal. Elections are not merely a contest for power—they are the mirror of public faith. If implemented with sincerity and citizen involvement, this initiative will strengthen the foundations of democracy and preserve the purity of the electoral process. Let us, therefore, welcome rather than oppose this meaningful step toward a more transparent, trustworthy, and mature Indian democracy.

Silicon Rivalry: When state pride met semiconductor politics

By: Dipak Kurmi

A political storm has erupted over semiconductor investments in India, pitting Karnataka's Congress minister Priyank Kharge against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in a bitter war of words that has quickly escalated from policy disagreements to personal attacks. What began as a question about industrial investment patterns has transformed into a full-blown controversy involving allegations of arm-twisting, accusations of insulting regional talent, and counter-claims of corruption and administrative failure. The dispute highlights the intense competition among Indian states for high-value technology investments and the politically charged atmosphere surrounding economic development in the country.

The controversy ignited on October 26, 2025, when Priyank Kharge, who serves as a minister in Karnataka's Congress-led government and is the son of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, spoke to reporters about what he perceived as unfair diversion of industrial investments away from his state. His comments were pointed and provocative, questioning why semiconductor industries were being directed toward Assam and Gujarat when companies apparently wanted to establish operations in Bangalore. Kharge did not mince words when he alleged that investments destined for Congress-ruled Karnataka and DMK-ruled Tamil Nadu were being redirected through central government pressure toward BJP-governed states.

The Karnataka minister's most controversial remarks centered on his questioning of talent availability in the competing states. He asked pointedly what Gujarat and Assam had to offer in terms of skilled workforce, suggesting that these states lacked the talent pool that Karnataka, particularly Bangalore, could provide. His statement raised fundamental questions about the criteria being used to allocate major industrial projects and whether political considerations were trumping economic logic. Kharge specifically mentioned that industrialists were submitting applications expressing their preference for Karnataka or Tamil Nadu, only to see these investments redirected toward Gujarat through what he termed as arm-twisting by the central government.

The immediate trigger for Kharge's comments appears to be the TATA group's decision to establish a semiconductor assembly and testing facility in Jagrood, Assam. This project represents one of the most significant industrial developments in Assam's recent history, with an estimated investment of approximately Rs. 27,000 crore. The facility's first phase is scheduled to become operational by mid-2025 and is projected to generate over 27,000 direct and indirect jobs, making it a cornerstone achievement for Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's administration. For Assam, a state that has historically lagged behind in industrial development, this semiconductor facility represents not just economic opportunity but also a symbolic victory in the national competition for high-technology investments.

Sarma's response to Kharge's comments was swift and aggressive. The Assam Chief Minister did not hold back, calling Priyank Kharge a "first-class idiot" and accusing him of insulting the youth of Assam. Sarma framed Kharge's remarks as an attack on the capabilities and potential of Assamese young people, suggesting that the Karnataka minister had essentially declared that Assam lacked educated and competent youth. The Chief Minister went further,

stating that his government was considering filing a legal case against Kharge for what he characterized as an insult to the entire youth population of Assam. This escalation from policy disagreement to threats of legal action demonstrates the intensity of regional sensitivities and political competition in contemporary India.

What makes this controversy particularly significant is that criticism of Kharge's comments extended beyond the BJP and its allies. The Assam Jaitiya Parishad, a regional political outfit that had actually allied with the Congress during the previous year's Lok Sabha elections, also condemned Kharge's remarks. Leaders Lurinjyoti Gogoi and Jagadish Bhuyan issued a statement defending Assamese talent and innovation, pointing out that many young professionals from Assam are serving in leading roles in the information technology sector in Bangalore itself, making significant contributions to Karnataka's IT growth. They emphasized that Assamese youth are excelling in the technology sector not just within India but across the world, and that undermining Assam's talent pool constituted an insult to the state's hardworking younger generation. This criticism from a Congress-aligned regional party highlighted the political damage caused by Kharge's comments and the sensitivity surrounding questions of regional capability and pride.

Faced with this backlash from multiple quarters, Priyank Kharge attempted to clarify his position, accusing Sarma of deliberately twisting his words for political advantage. Kharge insisted that his statement was clear and specific, focused on how semiconductor companies were being pressured to establish operations in Gujarat and Assam despite having expressed clear interest in Karnataka due to its engineering talent and established technological ecosystem. He shifted the debate toward Assam's broader development record, citing NITI Aayog's latest report to claim that after nearly a decade of BJP rule, Assam ranks among the bottom five states in crucial development indicators including health, education, and economic growth.

Kharge's counterattack became more personal as he questioned what Sarma had actually achieved for Assam's youth and suggested that the only thing the Chief Minister had successfully grown was his own wealth. The Karnataka minister alleged that major scams and corruption cases seemed to trace back to Sarma's doorstep while young people in Assam remained without adequate jobs or opportunities. He accused Sarma of attempting to whitewash his administrative failures by giving political spin to straightforward policy criticisms. Kharge pointedly asked why Assamese youth were leaving their state to find work elsewhere if the BJP government had truly created the opportunities it claimed.

In a particularly sharp rejoinder, Kharge referenced a 2024 social media post by Sarma himself that mentioned 1,500 youth from Assam receiving training at TATA facilities in and around Bangalore to prepare them for work at the semiconductor facility in Assam. Kharge used this information to make a pointed observation about Karnataka's role in building the capacity that would ultimately benefit Assam's semiconductor project. He stated that he was glad Karnataka's ecosystem was able to support the youth of Assam but suggested that a simple thank you would have been more appropriate than what he characterized as rabid political comments from the Chief Minister.

This controversy raises important questions about how India allocates major industrial investments and the role of political considera-

tions in economic decision-making. Karnataka, particularly Bangalore, has indeed built a robust ecosystem for technology industries over several decades, with established infrastructure, educational institutions, and a deep talent pool in engineering and technology sectors. The state's claim that it should be the natural destination for semiconductor manufacturing facilities has some merit based on these existing advantages. However, the central government's semiconductor policy appears to aim for geographic diversification of this critical industry, bringing high-technology manufacturing to regions that have historically been underrepresented in India's industrial development.

The semiconductor industry represents the future of technological manufacturing, and countries worldwide are competing to establish domestic capacity in this strategic sector. For India, building a strong semiconductor industry is not just about economic development but also about technological sovereignty and supply chain security. The location decisions for these facilities will shape regional development patterns for decades to come, determining which states benefit from high-value employment, which regions develop advanced manufacturing ecosystems, and how economic opportunities are distributed across India's diverse geography.

The personal nature of this political dispute, with accusations of idiocy, corruption, and regional incompetence flying between leaders, reflects the high stakes involved. Both Sarma and Kharge represent ambitious political figures with national aspirations beyond their current positions. For Sarma, the semiconductor facility represents a signature achievement that can showcase Assam's potential and his administrative capabilities. For Kharge, protecting Karnataka's interests and questioning the fairness of investment allocation serves both his state's interests and his own political standing within the Congress party.

The dispute also highlights the tensions inherent in India's federal structure when it comes to economic development. State governments compete fiercely for investments, offering incentives and building infrastructure to attract industries. When political party lines divide these competing states, economic competition becomes intertwined with partisan politics, making rational policy discussions difficult. The central government's role in influencing investment locations through various incentives and approvals adds another layer of complexity, particularly when opposition-ruled states perceive bias in favor of BJP-governed regions.

Ultimately, this controversy transcends the specific question of where semiconductor facilities should be located. It reflects deeper questions about regional development, talent distribution, the role of central intervention in state economies, and how political competition shapes economic policy in India. Whether Assam has the talent to support a semiconductor facility or whether Karnataka's claims are justified matters less than ensuring that India successfully builds a competitive semiconductor industry that serves national interests. The challenge for Indian policymakers and political leaders is to channel competitive energies toward building capacity across multiple regions rather than engaging in zero-sum battles that generate more heat than light. As this dispute demonstrates, in the race for economic development, political egos and regional sensitivities can sometimes overshadow the larger goal of national technological advancement. *(the writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

CAN AI BRIDGE INDIA'S HEALTHCARE GAP?

By: Satyabrata Borah

India faces a severe shortage of doctors, with far fewer physicians per person compared to countries like Myanmar, Pakistan, or even Cuba, which has thrived medically despite decades of economic challenges. The situation is especially grim in rural India, where finding a doctor is as difficult as in some of the world's most underserved regions. The question is, how long would it take for India to build a doctor workforce comparable to a country like Brazil, which has a significantly stronger healthcare system? More importantly, with artificial intelligence (AI) rapidly advancing, will India even need that many doctors in the future, or could AI reshape the role of physicians entirely?

To reach a doctor-to-population ratio like Brazil's, India would need a massive increase in its medical workforce. Training doctors is a lengthy process, requiring years of education and practical experience. Even if India significantly boosts its medical school output, producing thousands more doctors each year, it would likely take several decades to close the gap. This timeline assumes steady progress without setbacks like brain drain, where doctors leave for better opportunities abroad, or uneven distribution, where urban areas remain better served than rural ones. The scale of the challenge suggests that simply training more doctors may not be the fastest or most practical solution.

This brings us to the transformative potential of AI in healthcare. Advances in AI are already changing how medicine is practiced, and experts like Robert Wachter, a prominent figure in academic medicine, argue that AI could soon play a central role. In his book *A Giant Leap*, Wachter explores the idea that AI might evolve from a tool assisting doctors to, in some cases, the primary point of care for routine medical needs. This is particularly relevant for India, where the short-

The concept of AI in medicine isn't new. In the 1970s, early attempts to use AI for diagnosis failed because the technology was too limited and the goals too ambitious. Decades later, IBM's Watson supercomputer, which gained fame for outsmarting humans in a trivia game, sparked hope for healthcare applications. Despite significant investment, Watson stumbled, notably when it made a dangerous treatment recommendation for a cancer patient

age of doctors, especially in rural areas, leaves millions without access to basic healthcare.

The concept of AI in medicine isn't new. In the 1970s, early attempts to use AI for diagnosis failed because the technology was too limited and the goals too ambitious. Decades later, IBM's Watson supercomputer, which gained fame for outsmarting humans in a trivia game, sparked hope for healthcare applications. Despite significant investment, Watson stumbled, notably when it made a dangerous treatment recommendation for a cancer patient. These failures underscored the high stakes in medicine, where errors can be life-threatening.

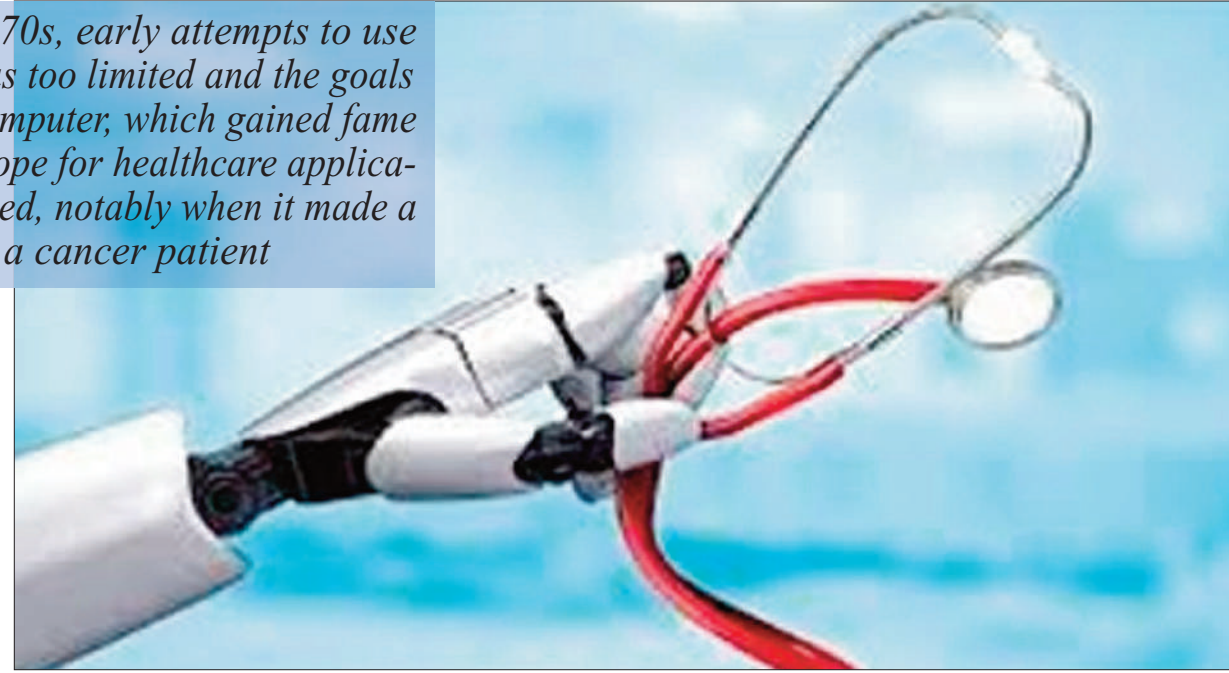
Today, the landscape has shifted. Recent AI advancements have made experts like Wachter more optimistic. AI excels at analyzing vast amounts of data and identifying patterns, a skill well-suited to diagnosing illnesses. By learning from countless patient records, AI can connect symptoms to likely causes with impressive accuracy. Studies show AI performing as well as top medical professionals on challenging diagnostic tests, suggesting it could handle routine consultations, especially in areas with few doctors. This could be a game-changer for rural India, where patients often travel far for care or go without it entirely.

AI is also showing an unexpected ability to mimic human qualities like empathy. Research indicates that AI-generated responses to patient queries can some-

times feel more compassionate than those from human doctors. This stems from AI's ability to craft tailored, thoughtful replies based on learned communication patterns. While AI cannot genuinely feel empathy, its ability to simulate it could make it a viable option for initial patient interactions, particularly in resource-scarce settings.

The potential for AI to address India's doctor shortage is significant. Startups, including those led by innovators of Indian origin, are developing AI systems to handle basic medical tasks, such as diagnosing common ailments or recommending treatments based on established guidelines. These tools could be deployed via mobile apps or community kiosks, bringing healthcare to remote areas. By providing virtual consultations, AI could ease the burden on overworked doctors and improve access to care for millions.

But integrating AI into healthcare comes with challenges. AI systems can inherit biases from their training data, leading to inaccurate results if the data doesn't reflect diverse populations. For instance, an AI trained on urban hospital records might struggle with conditions common in rural areas. Another issue is the risk of AI generating convincing but incorrect information, known as hallucinations. A single misdiagnosis could damage trust in AI and halt progress. These concerns explain why AI hasn't yet revolutionized medicine, despite strong incentives. In countries like the



United States, where healthcare costs consume a significant portion of the economy, and in India, where rising costs and doctor shortages strain the system, the drive to adopt AI is clear. Yet, caution remains paramount, as one high-profile failure could set back adoption.

For now, AI's role in medicine is mostly supportive, tackling time-consuming tasks like summarizing patient records or managing appointments. By automating these, AI frees doctors to focus on patient care, which is critical in India's overburdened public hospitals. The ultimate goal of AI-driven diagnosis is still on the horizon, as companies prioritize safety and accuracy. The stakes are too high for rushed deployment, but progress is steady.

The timeline for AI to transform healthcare depends on overcoming these hurdles. Wachter suggests that roles heavily reliant on pattern recognition,

like radiology or pathology, could see significant automation within a decade. For general physicians, the shift will likely take longer, as their work involves complex decision-making and patient interaction. In India, AI could play a complementary role sooner, especially in underserved regions. By handling routine cases, AI could reduce the need for an unattainable number of new doctors, allowing India to focus on training specialists for complex care.

The implications for India's healthcare strategy are profound. Instead of aiming to match Brazil's doctor numbers, India could invest in a hybrid system, combining a smaller, highly skilled physician workforce with widely accessible AI tools. This would require robust digital infrastructure, including reliable internet in rural areas and secure data platforms. Regulations would also need to ensure AI systems are safe and equitable. Med-

ical education might evolve too, preparing doctors to collaborate with AI, leveraging its analytical strengths while providing the human judgment machines lack.

Wachter's point that today's AI is the least advanced it will ever be highlights the rapid pace of innovation. As AI improves, its role in healthcare will grow, potentially transforming India's ability to address its doctor shortage. While training enough doctors to rival Brazil's system could take decades, AI offers a faster, more scalable solution. By thoughtfully integrating AI, India could not only improve healthcare access but also lead the way in using technology to solve global challenges. The future of medicine likely lies in a partnership where AI and human doctors work together, ensuring better care for more people, especially where doctors are scarce.

Nutrition as Economic Policy: Investing in diets is investing in development

By: Hamza Ahmad

Introduction - The Scale of the Problem

India's growth story has a hidden leak/caveat in its foundations: poor nutrition. Estimates suggest that malnutrition costs India between 0.8 and 4 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annually, contingent on the study and year of measurement. This translates to tens of billions of dollars in lost productivity, healthcare expenditure, and premature mortality every year. To put this in perspective, the estimated US\$10 billion lost annually to malnutrition is equivalent to nearly the annual budget of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Despite a GDP growth of 6.5 percent in 2024-25, India continues to face stubbornly high child malnutrition, highlighting the contradiction between rapid economic expansion and weak nutrition outcomes. This suggests that the fiscal burden of malnutrition remains substantial and requires an updated analysis.

Nutrition and Productivity
Nutrition is often overlooked as a key component of development and economic policy. It is considered a healthcare issue rather than an economic one. However, in reality, it is very much an economic concern. Moreover, it has also been proven that people with nutritional deficiencies are less productive at work.

At the heart of this loss is productivity. Workers suffering from poor nutrition are less productive, more absent from the job, and vulnerable to illness. Research consistently shows that nutrition deficits translate into lower wages and diminished lifetime earnings. This indicates that India's vast demographic dividend is, in practice, a productivity trap. The productivity trap refers to a vicious cycle where malnutrition diminishes learning and work capacity, resulting in reduced productivity and slower economic growth. This, in turn, limits resources for improving nutrition, locking both individuals and the economy into stagnation.

The framing matters. Nutrition should not be viewed only as a welfare cost but also as an economic investment in human capital. Each rupee spent on nutrition translates into a measurable return, much like the investments poured into physical infrastructure. If highways fuel commerce, good nutrition fuels the workforce that drives said commerce.

The relationship between nutrition and economic performance is not theoretical; it operates through and impacts the workforce, classrooms, and hospitals. India's population growth—as indexed to the age group of 15-59—contributed to an increase in the working-age population from 1996 to 2016. However, the upside of this demographic dividend continues to be eroded by poor nutrition.

For instance, a staggering 57 percent of women and 67 percent of children in India are classified as anaemic in the most recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). This is not just a health statistic; it translates to diminished energy for daily work, affects maternal health, and limits the economic aspirations of millions of families. Anaemia also reduces physical work capacity and cognitive performance, reducing productivity not only in the present but also in the future. In India, malnutrition remains the leading risk factor for the disease burden, particularly among children and young women.

Policy Gaps

Despite being the world's largest producer of milk, pulses, and the second-largest producer of rice and wheat, India ranks very poorly on nutrition-related metrics. The gap between agricultural abundance and nutritional well-being indicates structural deficiencies in policy design. Food policy continues to prioritise calorie sufficiency over nutrient density, resulting in diets that are often void of iron, protein, and micronutrients.

Simultaneously, India grapples with the 'double burden' of malnutrition, where this widespread undernutrition coexists with a rising prevalence of obesity and non-communicable diseases, adding complexity to the public health challenge.

The gap between agricultural abundance and nutritional well-being indicates structural deficiencies in policy design. Workforce nutrition is another blind spot. Corporate wellness programmes generally focus on fitness or mental health, and rarely on nutrition. Dietary practices among industrial and gig-economy workers (both of which are fast-growing) are often devoid of organised, nutrition-oriented support, which stunts productivity. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has warned that neglecting workforce nutrition can reduce efficiency and earnings across developing economies.

The Pradhan Mantri (PM) POSHAN (mid-



day-meal) programme serves millions, yet they are seldom structured to optimise for cognitive outcomes or link nutrition to future employability. Similarly, Smart Cities, as an urban planning intervention, rarely consider food security as part of their design, even though the problem of urban malnutrition continues to increase.

These gaps demonstrate how nutrition remains sequestered as welfare and is not considered as an economic infrastructure which crosses sectors.

The Way Forward

Maximising the economic returns from nutrition requires breaking out of policy silos. Outcomes in nutrition are achieved not only in clinics but also on farms, in schools, and in workplaces. A collaborative framework is therefore essential. The agriculture-health-finance triangle is a starting point. Subsidies for crops are currently biased toward calorie-dense staples, but agricultural subsidies can be switched to nutrient-dense crops; the reform is less about farm incentives aligning with public health interests. Lower health insurance premiums could also provide income incentives to reduce food insecurity.

Similarly, the education-nutrition-employment pipeline must be strengthened. School meal programme standards must not only develop calorically-dense children, but also optimise outcomes for cognitive development, while skills development is integrated with food and nutrition education initiatives. Better

nourished students become a better trained, more employed and higher earning workforce, which leads to more prosperous communities and a more flexible economy.

India has proof that nutrition investments can deliver measurable returns. The PM POSHAN (mid-day meal) scheme has a combined central and state investment of INR8.57 billion over five years and is one of the largest school feeding programmes in the world. Studies, including a 2024 World Food Programme (WFP) evaluation of PM POSHAN, highlight that mid-day meals improve attendance, enhance learning outcomes, and increase lifetime earnings potential.

Likewise, the POSHAN Abhiyaan was launched in 2018 and has yielded proof-of-concept on how to enable multi-ministry coordination and leverage technology to accelerate nutrition progress. As supported by the World Bank, the programmed digital platforms, such as the Poshan Tracker, improve monitoring of beneficiaries and more targeted interventions. Evidence from independent evaluations in a NITI Aayog report supports evidence that it has some contribution in reducing stunting, undernutrition, and anaemia. However, these successes must be viewed critically, as the latest NFHS-5 data reveals worrying trends on key indicators, such as anaemia, underscoring the scale of the challenge that remains.

India has experience that nutrition is not charity; nutrition serves as a good investment in growth with a return-on-investment (ROI) and scalable impact.

The economics is simple; programmes that are successful in reducing malnutrition, lower healthcare costs, enhance school performance, and can enhance productivity in the workforce. According to the Global Nutrition Report 2024, every US\$1 invested in nutrition yields US\$23 in economic returns. The World Bank estimates that school meal programmes alone generate US\$4-\$11 in returns for each dollar spent. India has experience that nutrition is not charity; nutrition serves as a good investment in growth with a return-on-investment (ROI) and scalable impact. The lesson from POSHAN Abhiyaan is clear: coordinated, multi-ministry action multiplies economic returns and creates measurable growth dividends.

If India is serious about becoming a developed economy by 2047, nutrition must take centre stage in economic policy strategies starting today. The evidence is compelling: malnutrition quietly undermines productivity, raises healthcare costs, and jeopardises human capital. Three strategic shifts are essential. First, policy integration: nutrition impact assessments should be mandatory for all economic policies, and an inter-ministerial task force linking food, health, and finance must be established. Secondly, scaling investment—nutrition expenditure should increase according to the measured yield. Nonetheless, new financing mechanisms need to be developed, including nutrition bonds and corporate integration with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks. Third, measurement reform—platforms such as Poshan Tracker must evolve to capture not only health but also productivity and income gains.

Nutrition is not charity, but one of India's most cost-effective growth strategies. To unlock the demographic dividend, India must invest in the fuel that powers its workforce. (Courtesy: ORF)

Cyberknife Radiosurgery can treat even hard to access pituitary gland tumors

Hormonal imbalance - indication of Pituitary tumors can be deadly in some cases

By: Dr Aditya Gupta

Shalini Verma, a 45-year-old woman, began experiencing severe headaches, blurred vision, and unexplained weight gain. After several visits to different specialists, an MRI scan revealed a tumor in her pituitary gland. The tumor's location made it challenging to access, and traditional surgery posed significant risks, including damage to nearby structures like the optic nerve.

Mrs Verma was referred to Artemis Hospital, Gurugram. After a thorough evaluation, she was recommended Cyberknife Radiosurgery, a state-of-the-art, non-invasive treatment that could precisely target the tumor without the need for traditional surgery.

Mrs Verma underwent Cyberknife treatment, which involved several sessions over the course of a week. The procedure was painless, and she experienced minimal side effects. A follow-up MRI six months later showed a significant reduction in the tumor size, and her symptoms had almost completely resolved.

The treatment journey of Mrs Verma showcases the effectiveness of Cyberknife Radiosurgery, especially for tumors in complex locations like the pituitary gland, where traditional surgery might be risky or impossible. Our team's expertise in using this advanced technology provided Mrs. Verma with a safe and effective treatment option, allowing her to return to her normal life without the long recovery time associated with conventional surgery.

What is a pituitary gland tumor?

Pituitary gland, which is also known as the master gland has the most important function of producing hormones that regulates the critical organs of the body including thyroid, adrenal glands, ovaries and testes. It is a small pea-size gland located behind the eyes and below the front of the brain. Improper functioning of the gland usually results in excess or under production of hormones that leads to a formation of mass called tumor, which can be benign or malignant. Such tumors in this gland can create numerous serious medical conditions by interfering with the normal functioning of the endocrine system and pituitary gland. Some tumors produce hormones known as functional tumors, and others can cause the glands to secrete too few or too many hormones. Also if the tumor pressed on the nearby structure, for instance the optic nerve, can also limit a person's vision.

Though the occurrence of tumor is more likely after the age of 50 years, it still can impact at an early age. The survival rates of tumor due to its complicated location also depend on other factors like the patient's age, type and size of tumor.

What causes a pituitary gland tumor?

Mostly, pituitary gland tumors are non cancerous but the exact causes are unknown. Some of them are hereditary and some are caused by a rare genetic disorder called as multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1. This disorder can also lead to over-activity or enlargement of 3 different endocrine-related glands, which also includes the pituitary gland. Many researches are still underway to know the exact cause of such uncontrolled growth of certain cells that leads to a pituitary tumor.

What are the symptoms?

Depending upon the hormonal variations in the body, there can be a variety of symptoms. The most common symptoms include Headaches, vision problem, tiredness, mood changes, irritability, changes in menstrual cycle in women, impotence, infertility, Inappropriate breast growth or production of breast milk, Cushing's syndrome which is a combination of weight gain, high blood pressure, diabetes, and easy bruising, the enlargement of the extremities or limbs, thickening of the skull and jaw caused by too much



growth hormone.

Treatment for Pituitary gland tumor

Diagnosis at an early stage can help the treatment procedure to be totally non-invasive with the use of advances technology called as Cyberknife. Cyberknife which is the most advanced radiation therapy is completely non-invasive therapy available for the treatment of benign as well as malignant tumors. Highlights of the therapy being ease of access to any complex location without the need to use the surgical knife, precision of the beam with high dose radiation to the tumor location, and the safety. It is a day care procedure without pain and risk, and the patient can get back to daily chores as soon as the session gets over which depends on the tumor (30 minutes to 1 hour) and hence eliminates the requirement of any hospital stay. Moreover the procedure makes use of the most sophisticated image guidance technique to focus high doses of radiation directly to the tumor spot which eliminates the chances to damage the healthy cells as in any other methods of treatment.

This therapy works the best for tumors that are upto 1-3 cm in size (for pituitary tumors, this figure is even smaller) and is a very powerful and effective technique for treating patients suffering from early stage primary and medically inoperable tumors.

The treatment is safe to administer and also offers a new option in patients with recurrent pituitary tumors, those that cannot be operated, or those involving the cavernous sinus (an area difficult to reach and completely remove tumors from, without side effects).

Phasing of the cyberknife procedure

1. Planning – To have enough time with the surgeon to design and finalize a customized treatment plan, imaging is performed a few days in advance.

2. Treatment - Once the plan is set in place, the patient will return for a non-invasive, pain-free treatment experience. Using advanced tumor-tracking technology, the CyberKnife system is able to deliver either one single high-dose treatment, or smaller doses (upto 5) over the course of two to five days, depending on the plan generated. This approach limits side effects and enables most patients to return to their regular routine the same day.

Each session of treatment usually lasts for about 30 -50 min and is cost effective with a success rate of 98% in such complicated tumors. Patients with pituitary adenomas receive stereotactic radio surgery with CyberKnife and are followed up for more than 12 months. After 6 months of therapy patients are monitored for positive responses and ensure there is no recurrence of any mass.

Typically MRI is doing 6 monthly for the first year, and then yearly for at least 5 years.

Pituitary tumors that are larger, and create pressure on the optic nerves are better dealt by endoscopic removal of the tumor through the nose.

RJD forced Congress to name its leader Bihar CM face by placing 'katta' on head: Modi

ARRAH/ NAWADA, Nov 2: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday claimed that the Congress had been unwilling to accept Tejashwi Yadav as the INDIA bloc's chief ministerial candidate and relented only after the RJD pointed a "katta", an unlicensed country-made gun, at its head.

The PM made the statement on the campaign trail in Bihar, where he addressed back-to-back rallies in Bhojpur and Nawada districts, and highlighted the RJD's reputation for alleged strong-arm tactics and its troubled equations with alliance partners. "The Congress never wanted to announce the chief ministerial candidate in favour of the RJD. The RJD secured it by placing a 'katta' on the head of the Congress. They have learnt their lessons in the school of 'jungle raj'. Such elements can never do good for Bihar," he alleged. Modi said Congress wanted to defeat the RJD in the Bihar polls, and urged people to wait for the second phase of polling to be over on November 11 "to see



them fighting". Without mentioning Congress leader Rahul Gandhi or Yadav by name, the PM said, "The crown prince of 'jungle raj' has been wary that the 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' of the other 'yuvraj'

may be denting his own prospects. Hence, the RJD has put up its candidate against the state president of the Congress. Let the polls be over. The two allies will be breaking each other's heads."

The allusion was to the reserved Kutumba seat, where the RJD had reportedly planned to field a candidate against sitting MLA and state Congress president Rajesh Kumar. Although the RJD decided

against doing so, the two allies have ended up in "friendly fights" at a number of places.

The PM also predicted a "record victory" for the ruling NDA, which would continue providing a government that was "upright" and "foresighted" and build a "developed Bihar" that was necessary for "Viksit Bharat".

"Jungle raj wallahs are set to get the worst drubbing in history. The people of Bihar have not forgotten the 'jungle raj'," he added.

The PM, who was visibly pleased with the huge turnout, said, "Analysts sitting in Delhi, who are racking their brains over poll arithmetic, would do well to come here and experience for themselves which way the wind is blowing". Modi said the manifesto released by the NDA last week was honest and put forth a vision for the future, unlike the charter of promises of the INDIA bloc, which was "a dossier of lies". He also envisaged a future in which people of the state will not migrate under economic com-

pulsions and "the youth of Bihar will work in Bihar and make their motherland proud".

Listing the achievements of the NDA government in the state, he said, "The condition of power connectivity was such that people used to dry clothes on electrical wires, but we changed it."

"Modi also helped open bank accounts for small farmers who have been ignored since Independence," he said.

Noting that Bhojpur and adjoining districts were known for providing a large number of recruits in the armed forces, he said national security and those who ensure it are of paramount importance to his government.

"One rank one pension (OROP) has resulted in the disbursement of Rs 1 lakh crore, which is benefiting families of servicemen," he said. The PM said it was "Modi's guarantee" that Article 370 would be scrapped, and it has been, with the Constitution of India now in force in Jammu and Kashmir. (PTI)

BJP leaders carry out silent protest against Bengaluru tunnel road project

BENGALURU, Nov 2: BJP leaders in Karnataka on Sunday carried out a signature campaign and a silent protest at the Lalbagh botanical garden here, against the state government's proposed tunnel road project in Bengaluru, calling it a "VIP corridor".

The protest led by the Leader of Opposition in Legislative Assembly R Ashoka and Bangalore South MP Tejasvi Surya, under the slogan "Protect Bengaluru - Stop tunnel road", was also participated by several party legislators from the city.

The leaders also interacted with the public, morning walkers at the Lalbagh regarding the proposed project.

BJP leaders and other activists have raised concerns over the possible environmental impact of the project on Lalbagh, and have said it will clearly be a disaster for Bengaluru.

Leaders have alleged that in Lalbagh, 6 acres of land will be acquired for the project. (PTI)

Reacting to BJP's signature campaign, Deputy CM D K Shivakumar, who is also in charge of Bengaluru development said he was ready to constitute a committee on the tunnel road under the leadership of Ashoka, and its members will be selected as per his recommendations, "let them give solutions."

"This (project) is not my property or anyone else's, it is for the public good. I have studied everything, I'm not a fool to destroy Lalbagh. They (BJP) are doing politics, doesn't the metro project have tunnels. They don't want developmentopposition is a different matter, let them give suggestions and solutions, I'm ready to examine," he said.

He said that he too can give a call for a signature campaign using the Congress party organisation, while BJP can't do anything without RSS. "Without RSS they (BJP) is zero."

The proposed 16.75-km tunnel road will connect Silk Board and Hebbal, at an estimated cost of about Rs 17,800 crore.

Earlier in the day, speaking to reporters here, Ashoka said, this is not a twin tunnel road for citizens, it is a "VIP corridor".

"The tunnel road project will not benefit the middle class, lower middle class poor, which constitutes over 90 percent of Bengaluru's population.

Two wheelers are not allowed on the tunnel road, only cars are allowed. 70 per cent of vehicles in the city are two wheelers. It is a VIP project.

Bengaluru corporation will have to take a Rs 8,000 crore loan for this project, a tender has been called for this," he said.

Noting that the project will have negative effect on Bengaluru's economy, the Leader of Opposition said, the project will come 130 ft below the ground, no permission has been taken from the geological survey department for the project which passes through Lalbagh, which is a monument.

Questioning whether the tunnel road will fix Bengaluru's traffic issues, he said, "we are not opposed to development. First fix the potholes on the roads above the ground, which have created a world record of sorts. What happened to the CM's deadline to fix all potholes in the city by October 31? As per officials still 25,000 potholes are to be filled." Ashoka also raised questions on the feasibility of the project, and also termed it as a "costly" project. Advising Shivakumar to go for expanding the Metro network in the city instead of tunnel roads, he said, permissions from 120 departments are required for tunnel roads, but none of them have come. (PTI)

Bihar to see portfolios of murder, kidnapping, extortion if Lalu's son voted to power: Shah



MUZAFFARPUR/VAISHALI, Nov 2: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday vowed to make Bihar free from floods if the NDA retains power and claimed that the INDIA bloc would create "three portfolios of murder, kidnapping and extortion" if the opposition alliance gets a chance to form a government in the state.

Shah also urged people to vote for the NDA to "check the recurrence of 'jungle raj' witnessed during the RJD regime" in the state.

Addressing election rallies in Muzaffarpur and Vaishali, Shah appealed to electors to "cast votes to prevent the return of 'jungle raj' that saw kidnappings, murders, atrocities".

"If voted to power, the NDA will make Bihar flood-free. It is our pledge. We will set up a separate ministry to ensure that Bihar is saved from flood fury," Shah said. He also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "chalked out a scheme to ensure water from Koshi, Ganga, and Gandak rivers reaches farmers' fields for irrigation in Bihar".

In a blistering attack on the family of RJD supremo Lalu Prasad, the former BJP president warned that if Tejashwi Yadav becomes chief minister, Bihar would see the birth of "three new portfolios".

"If Lalu's son (Tejashwi) becomes Bihar chief minister, three more new portfolios will be created to oversee kidnapping, extortion and murder...Your votes for the NDA will save Bihar from

RJD's 'jungle raj'. Efforts are underway to bring back 'jungle raj' with new faces," Shah alleged.

He also claimed that "infighting is underway among 'Mahagathbandhan' constituents in Bihar", but five NDA allies were committed to taking the state to new heights.

Shah termed the NDA allies - the BJP, JD(U), Chirag Paswan's LJP (RV), HAM, Kushwaha's party as the five "Pandava's" and said they will "ensure Bihar's prosperity".

On the other side, he accused Prasad and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi of "trying to make their sons the Bihar chief minister and the prime minister, respectively," and asserted that both posts "are not vacant".

"Lalu & company and Rahul & company indulged in Rs 12 lakh crore scams and corruption," Shah alleged.

He claimed that Bihar CM Nitish Kumar's 20-year rule and PM Modi's 11-year regime at the Centre were fully "transparent with no corruption charges levelled".

He asserted, "Lalu (RJD's regime) gave only Rs 2.80 lakh crore to Bihar in 10 years, whereas Modi allotted Rs 18.15 lakh crore between 2014 to 2025" for the state's development.

"We will set up over 50,000 cottage industries, and will invest Rs one lakh crore in agriculture infrastructure. Can Lalu-Rabri or Sonia do such development works?" he questioned. (PTI)

Modi not only scared of Trump, but also remote-controlled by big business: Rahul

BEGUSARAI/KHAGARIA, Nov 2: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not only "scared" of US President Donald Trump, but was also "remote controlled" by big business.

Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, made the stinging attack in poll-bound Bihar, where he addressed back-to-back rallies in Begusarai and Khagaria districts.

"Having a huge chest does not make you strong. Just look at Mahatma Gandhi, who had a frail build but took on the British, who were the superpowers of the time," he said. "On the other hand, we have Narendra Modi with his boast of a 56-inch chest, who got a panic attack when Trump called him during Operation Sindoor, and the military conflict with Pakistan ended in two days. He is not just scared of Trump, but is also being remote-controlled by Ambani and Adani," he alleged.

The Congress leader said that in 1971, then PM Indira Gandhi was threatened by the US, but she didn't get "scared and did what needed to be done".

"But when Trump told Modi to



stop Operation Sindoor, he halted it," he claimed.

Gandhi claimed that all the major decisions of the Modi government, like GST and demonetisation, were "aimed at destroying small businesses and benefiting the big ones". "Our approach is different. We want to promote small businesses. We want to replace made in China labels on your phones and T-shirts with made in Bihar tags," he said.

Claiming that the PM can do anything for votes, Gandhi said, "Tell him to do yoga, he will do a few asanas." "He will even dance on stage for votes. Whatever you

say until election day, Modi will do that. Because after the elections, he will only work for his favourite corporations," he alleged.

Gandhi said if the INDIA bloc is voted to power in the state, it will form a government for every section, not for any particular caste.

He alleged that the PM was asking youths to watch reels as he wants to divert their attention so that they do not raise questions on real issues, such as unemployment.

"Modi says that the BJP has given you cheap internet so that you can watch reels and make reels. But when you watch reels on Instagram and Facebook, the

money goes to Ambani," he alleged.

He also alleged that the BJP and RSS "completely stole" the elections in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh.

"The Election Commission has removed names of Mahagathbandhan supporters from the voters' list in Bihar. We have provided proof of this before, and we will provide it again," he claimed.

Gandhi was accompanied, at the rallies, by INDIA bloc partner Mukesh Sahni, who has been promised the deputy CM's post though his Vikassheel Insaan Party had no MLA in the outgoing assembly.

Pointing towards Sahni, the Congress leader said, "There is a thought behind intending to make him the deputy CM. We want to form a government that represents all sections of society."

Sahni belongs to the extremely backward Nishad caste, which is traditionally a community of fishermen.

Highlighting his priorities, Gandhi said, "If I am invited to a wedding by a poor farmer, I go there. But I turn down such invitations from people who own big businesses." (PTI)

Dular Chand Yadav death case: Bihar Police arrests ex-MLA Anant Singh, 2 others

PATNA, Nov 2: Former Bihar MLA Anant Singh, the JD(U) candidate from the Mokama seat, was arrested early on Sunday in connection with the murder of Jan Suraj supporter Dular Chand Yadav, police said.

Singh has been under the scanner since the death of Yadav, who recently clashed with his sympathisers, and was picked up from his house in Barh, about 200 km from the state capital, Patna.

Police also arrested two other persons, Manikant Thakur and Ranjeet Ram, in connection with the killing of Yadav. All three will be produced before a court during the day.

Yadav died while he was campaigning for Jan Suraj Party's candidate Piyush Priyadarshi in Patna's Mokama area on Thursday.

The incident had taken place

close to the Bhadaur and Ghoswari police stations in the Mokama area.

Addressing a late-night joint press conference with Patna District Magistrate Thyagarajan S M, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Patna, Kartikeya Sharma, said, "Police have arrested three persons — Anant Singh, Manikant Thakur and Ranjeet Ram — in connection with the murder of Dular Chand Yadav."

According to Yadav's post-mortem report, he died of cardiorespiratory failure due to shock caused by injury to the heart and lungs by a hard and blunt substance, the SSP said. "Therefore, the post-mortem report and preliminary investigation suggest that it's a case of murder," he said. Investigations also revealed that all three were present at the time of the incident, Sharma said.

"They have been arrested as part of a police investigation into the murder of Yadav. A total of four FIRs, one pertaining to the violation of the model code of conduct, have been registered by the police to investigate the incident," the SSP said, adding that Singh was named in one of the FIRs.

Singh, a local strongman, has been named as an accused along with four others in one of the FIRs, filed on the basis of a complaint by the grandson of Yadav, a gangster-turned-politician who was named in a number of criminal cases.

Singh, the multiple-term former MLA, whose wife Neelam Devi currently represents the Mokama seat, has also been booked for model code of conduct violation, as instances of his movement in large cavalcades have come to the fore.

When asked about the killing of

Yadav, Singh had admitted to a clash between his supporters and the deceased, but also sought to put the blame on Suraj Bhan, his old rival in the underworld and local politics, whose wife Veena Devi is contesting the seat on an RJD ticket.

Yadav, a dreaded gangster of the 1990s known to be at odds with Anant Singh, was supporting Priyadarshi Piyush, a political greenhorn fielded by Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj Party.

Reacting to Singh's arrest, RJD leader and INDIA bloc's CM nominee Tejashwi Yadav said, "It should have been done earlier. This is the 'jungle raj' in Bihar, where murders are taking place regularly. Recently, a man and his son were killed in Ara...Today, the prime minister is coming for a poll campaign, but he doesn't see all these." (PTI)

Prez Murmu emphasises women's role in India's development at Patanjali University convocation

HARIDWAR, Nov 2: President Draupadi Murmu on Sunday emphasised the need for collective cooperation of the entire nation, including women, to realise the vision of a developed India by 2047.

Speaking as the chief guest at the second convocation ceremony of Patanjali University, Murmu highlighted the significant role women are playing in the educational landscape.

Murmu expressed her delight at the fact that 62 per cent of the students at Patanjali University and 64 per cent of the graduates at the convocation were girls.

Notably, the number of female students receiving medals was four times greater than that of their male counterparts.

"This is not just a statistic; it symbolises the progress of a de-

veloped India under the leadership of women," the President said, adding that it represents the continuation of India's ancient tradition, where prominent women like Gargi, Maitreyi, Apala, and Lopamudra played vital intellectual and spiritual roles.

The President asserted that women, who make up 50 per cent of India's 1.4 billion population, are integral to the country's growth.

"To develop India by 2047, we need the full participation of both sons and daughters. If only sons strive and daughters lag behind, the dream of a developed India will remain unfulfilled," she said.

Praising Patanjali University's contribution to the promotion of yoga, Ayurveda, and naturopathy, Murmu remarked that the univer-



sity is playing a pivotal role in preserving and advancing India's ancient cultural heritage, especially in the region of the Himalayas, which is known for its

spiritual and intellectual legacy. Addressing the students, the President noted that by choosing to study at a university that blends modern education with Indian

cultural values, they have embraced a rich tradition. She commended both the students and their parents for their commitment to this noble path.

Murmu also underscored the importance of environmental protection and adopting a lifestyle aligned with nature to ensure the future of human society.

"With the education you have received in this picturesque location, I am confident that you will be well-prepared to tackle global challenges, including climate change," she concluded.

The convocation ceremony, which celebrated the academic achievements of the students, highlighted the growing role of women in higher education and the importance of cultural integration with modern learning. (PTI)

Zero tolerance for any kind of violence: CEC Gyanesh Kumar on Bihar polls

KANPUR (UP), Nov 2: Any act of violence will not be tolerated and voters will be able to cast their votes peacefully and freely in Bihar, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar asserted on Sunday, a day after the poll body took action against officials in Patna following violence during campaigning in Mokama.

"The Election Commission has zero tolerance towards any form of violence during polls," the CEC told reporters here.

"Any act of violence will not be tolerated. All voters will be able to cast their votes peacefully, freely and transparently. The Election Commission is fully prepared for this," he said. The Election Commission on Saturday ordered the transfer of Patna Superintendent of Police (Rural) and action against three other officials, taking a stern view of violence in Bihar's Mokama in which gangster-turned-

politician Dular Chand Yadav was killed during poll campaigning.

Former Bihar MLA Anant Singh, the ruling JD(U)'s candidate from the Mokama seat, was arrested early on Sunday in connection with the case. Police also arrested two other persons, Manikant Thakur and Ranjeet Ram. Yadav died while he was campaigning for Jan Suraj Party's candidate Piyush Priyadarshi in Patna's Mokama area on Thursday.

The CEC asserted that everyone is equal before the EC, whether it is the ruling side or the opposition. "For the Election Commission, there is no 'paksh' or 'vipaksh' (ruling side or opposition). Everyone is 'samkash' (equal) before us," Gyanesh Kumar said.

CEC Kumar said all voters in Bihar will get the opportunity to celebrate the festival of democracy and expressed confidence that it will be a model election. (PTI)

'The magnificent building has brought together almost all departments under one roof'

Khandu launches key infra projects in Arunachal's West Kameng district

ITANAGAR, Nov 2: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Sunday inaugurated several key infrastructure projects in West Kameng district, including a sub-divisional secretariat, a major bridge, and upgraded educational facilities.

He also inaugurated the Jambe Tashi Memorial Peace Park at Chug Valley in memory of his late brother and former MLA Jambe Tashi.

In a post on X, Khandu said the peace park stands as a symbol of his brother's legacy of harmony and service.

"May this serene peace park situated at Chug Valley, Dirang, stand as a symbol of harmony, compassion, and selfless service, reflecting the noble path he walked in life," the chief minister said, expressing gratitude to all who joined in prayers on the occasion.

The consecration prayers were led by Padma Shri awardee Guru Tulku Rinpoche.

During his official visit to Dirang in the district, Khandu inaugurated the newly constructed sub-divisional secretariat at Hing Thangkha in the presence of Home



Minister Mama Natung and several MLAs.

"The magnificent building has brought together almost all departments under one roof," he said in another post, adding that it would "greatly enhance administrative efficiency and ensure better delivery of public services to the people".

Connectivity in Dirang received a boost with the inauguration of a 70-metre double-lane steel bridge over the Meyong River at Kharsa,

replacing the old suspension bridge.

Khandu said the infrastructure would significantly ease movement for residents and facilitate the shift of administrative services to Hing Thangkha.

"It is a vital step towards improving road connectivity and easing movement for the people of Dirang sub-division," he added.

In the education sector, the chief minister dedicated the newly built

government higher secondary school at Dirang, which is equipped with smart classrooms, science and geography laboratories, IT rooms, a library and a conference hall.

He said the upgraded infrastructure would "provide a safe, comfortable, and modern learning environment, improving attendance, reducing dropouts, and motivating teachers to deliver their best".

Khandu also opened Changphu Park, a new amusement and recreational facility at Kharkatang spread across four acres along the Meyong River. With a walking track, children's play zone, open gym, and water features, the park aims to boost recreation and tourism.

"This initiative promotes healthy living, outdoor recreation, and boosts local tourism and economy," he said.

He also laid foundation stones for several connectivity projects, including the Chug Bridge in Dirang, multiple strategic roads linking Thembang and nearby villages, and new bridges at Khonpathar and Khasso. (PTI)

India to conduct tri-service exercise in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, Nov 2: A tri-service exercise to integrate warfighting capability, technological adaptation and operational synergy among the three wings of the armed forces will be held in the rugged mountains of Mechuka in Arunachal Pradesh this month, an official statement said.

'Poorvi Prachand Prahar' exercise, conceived as a forward-looking exercise, will validate multi-domain integration across land, air and maritime fronts, reflecting the Indian Armed Forces' evolving readiness for future conflicts, Defence PRO Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said in a statement on Saturday evening.

The exercise aims to refine interoperability, enhance situational

awareness and validate command and control structures for joint mission execution.

The official said the highlight of the exercise will be the coordinated employment of special forces, unmanned platforms, precision systems and networked operations centres operating in unison under realistic high-altitude conditions.

Revised tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) will be tested and validated to reinforce combat agility and adaptability, he said.

Exercise 'Poorvi Prachand Prahar' marks the next milestone in India's tri-service integration effort, following the successful conduct of Exercise 'Bhala Prahar' (2023) and Exercise 'Poorvi Prahar' (2024). (PTI)

ANSAM condemns attack on Monsang Naga student leaders

IMPHAL, Nov 2: The All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM) strongly condemned the attack on Monsang Naga student leaders on the night of October 30 near Kakching Lamkhai and Pallel, describing it as a "barbaric, cowardly and premeditated attempt on life." The victims included Gideon Kiiri, president of STS (Monsang Naga Students' Union), Wanglar Phillip, general secretary and senior leaders Ts Hollyson and Th Moni.

In a statement, ANSAM alleged that the students were brutally assaulted in an act intended to intimidate and destabilise the Naga student community. The association called the attack a direct assault on the unity, honour and peace-loving nature of the Monsang Naga people. (NNN)

Meghalaya pollution board pulls up road project agency for dumping debris into Umngot river

'The filled portion near the bridge appears unstable'

SHILLONG, Nov 2: A firm engaged in constructing a road project funded by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) from Shillong to Dawki near Bangladesh border was found dumping construction and demolition waste into tributaries of Meghalaya's Umngot River, famous for its crystal-clear waters, officials said on Saturday.

Officials of the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) inspected the site after locals, many of whom depend on tourism for their livelihood, shared videos showing the river's once-transparent waters turning murky.

The issue also prompted Shillong MP Ricky Syngkon to take it up with the Union ministers for road transport and environment, officials said.

Dawki, where the Umngot river flows through, was once famed for its pristine waters so clear that the bottom sand could be seen several feet below the surface.

Thousands of tourists visit the spot every year to witness the glass-like river and enjoy boating activities in one of India's cleanest natural waterbodies.

Following the inspection, the MSPCB directed the project management unit - Myllem, which oversees the Shillong-Dawki road project, to immediately remove the dumped debris and ensure strict compliance with environmental safeguards.

In a notice on Friday, MSPCB chairman R. Nana-malai invoked powers under Section 5 of the Environ-

ment (Protection) Act, 1986, ordering the agency to adhere to the standard operating procedure notified on March 17, and prevent further dumping near the river.

The inspection found that large quantities of soil and construction waste from earthwork and excavation had been discarded without containment or stabilisation measures, causing loose material to slide towards the Umngot River.

Officials said filling works by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) near the Pynursla-Dawki Bridge, carried out without retaining structures such as sandbags, have increased the risk of erosion and sedimentation.

"The filled portion near the bridge appears unstable and has the potential to cause additional landslides, especially during rainfall," the MSPCB said in its report.

The board has collected water samples for laboratory analysis and directed contractors to obtain consent to establish and operate within 15 days.

It also reminded project authorities to comply with the Meghalaya Stone Crusher Order of December 23, 2021, particularly regarding the legal sourcing of boulders.

The Project Management Unit-Myllem has been asked to submit an action-taken report at the earliest, officials added. (PTI)

5th IRBn Pasighat observes National Unity Day

PASIGHAT, Nov 2: The 5th India Reserve Battalion (IRBn), Pasighat in collaboration with East Siang District Police observed National Unity Day (Rashtriya Ekta Diwas) 2025 at the Battalion Headquarters to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Iron Man of India.

The event, held under the national theme "Ek Bharat, Aatmanirbhar Bharat," included a "Run for Unity" mini marathon with 5 km, 2.5 km and 1.5 km categories, engaging over 190 participants, including students, women and IRBn personnel. The marathon aimed to promote the spirit of unity in diversity and honour Sardar Patel's role in national integration. A prize distribution ceremony followed, and participants received certificates of participation. Superintendent of Police, East Siang, addressed the gathering, emphasising Patel's contributions and urging citizens to uphold unity, integrity and self-reliance as pillars of a strong and progressive India.

Dimapur police recover 230 grams of heroin

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Nov 2: Dimapur police recovered around 230 grams of heroin from a vehicle involved in a hit-and-run case on October 30, Dimapur DCP (crime) said in a release on Saturday. The contraband was concealed in 18 soap cases in the vehicle. Police said the Wagon-R vehicle (AS-07P-5457) fled towards neighbouring Khatkhathi in Karbi Anglong district of Assam after hitting a Bolero vehicle at Tragopan police point in Dimapur. Immediately after the incident, a search operation was conducted, and the officer-in-charge of Khatkhathi police station was informed to look out for the vehicle in his jurisdiction, the release said.

Tripura Congress alleges BJP attacks on party offices

TPCC president claims such incidents have been recurring since the BJP came to power in 2018

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Nov 2: The Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) has accused the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of attempting to suppress opposition activities in the state, following an alleged attack and arson at its party office in Bishalgarh sub-division, Sepahijala district.

TPCC president Asish Kumar Saha said unidentified miscreants vandalised, looted and set fire to the office on October 28. He claimed such incidents have been recurring since the BJP came to power in 2018.

"Since 2018, after the BJP formed the government, we have faced repeated attacks on our Bishalgarh office, including looting and arson. Despite drawing the administration's attention, no action has been taken," Saha said.

He alleged the attacks were aimed at obstructing opposition activities and criticised authorities for inaction, saying a sense of fear prevails in Bishalgarh and urging immediate intervention to ensure opposition parties can function without intimidation.

NSF condemns attack on Naga student leaders in Manipur

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Nov 2: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Saturday condemned the brutal and unprovoked assault on Monsang Naga student leaders by unidentified miscreants near Bijoypur, between Kakching Lamkhai and Pallel in Manipur, on the night of October 30. Sirti Thimijittam Sourkhe (Monsang Students Union) president Gedion Kiiri and general secretary Wanglar Phillip, besides two other student leaders Ts Hollyson and Th Monihy, were reportedly attacked by more than half a dozen assailants without any provocation, leaving two of them grievously injured, NSF president Mteising and general secretary Kenlo Kent said in a release.

The NSF extended solidarity with the student body and the entire Monsang Naga community during this distressing time. Saying that the Naga student fraternity is deeply shaken by the incident, the federation said such a cowardly act, aimed at silencing young leaders devoted to community service, is utterly unacceptable and deserves the strongest condemnation. It questioned the sinister motive behind this targeted assault, especially at a time when the Naga people are sincerely striving for peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding and goodwill with all neighbouring communities.

"This act of barbarity is not only an attack on individuals but also an assault on the shared spirit of harmony and inter-community respect that the Nagas have long upheld," the NSF stated. It urged law enforcement authorities to leave no stone unturned until all the perpetrators are identified and apprehended, so that justice may be delivered without delay.

The NSF cautioned that failure to act swiftly would only embolden such elements who seek to sow division and insecurity in the region.

Resonance '25 concludes at Saint Claret College

HT Correspondent

ZIRO, Nov 2: The annual art, literature, cultural, sports and games festival, Resonance '25, organised by Saint Claret College (Autonomous), Ziro concluded on Saturday. The week-long event, held from October 27, was jointly hosted by the college's St Claret Art & Literary Endeavour (SCALE) and Sports and Games Association (SAGA), bringing students together in a celebration of creativity and sportsmanship.

Tasso Hinda, Managing Director of M/s PH Construction, attended the closing ceremony as the Chief Guest, alongside Taru Maji, Executive Engineer, PWD Ziro and Tasso Butung, District Agriculture Officer, Ziro as Guests of Honour.

Students participated in four teams: Namdapha, led by Mr Teri Taje and Ms Joram Akania; Dibang, led by Ms Yiyum Boje and Mr Diidong Kendo Yirang; Sessa, led by Ms Laa Puski and Mr Tokrik Panggeng; and Kamlang, led by Ms Higio Meykum and Mr Akor Modi.

After 41 events across arts, literature, culture, sports and indoor-outdoor games, Dibang emerged as the overall champion with 322 points, while Sessa finished as runners-up with 277 points. Judia Hrangkhawl of Dibang was named Individual Champion for his outstanding performance.

For the first time, the Mr & Ms Resonance pageant was held. Yiyum Boje of Dibang was crowned Ms. Resonance 2025 and Miyik Yirang of Dibang received the title of Mr Resonance 2025, impressing with their talent and grace.

The festival aimed to inspire creativity, encourage cultural exchange and provide a platform for students to showcase and nurture their talents.

Legal awareness programme held in Siang

HT Correspondent

SIANG, Nov 2: A one-day Legal Awareness Programme was organised by the Adi Bane Ane Kebang (ABAK) and sponsored by the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW), Itanagar at Riga, Siang District. The event focused on social and legal issues under the theme "POCSO, Foundation and Elementary Education, Safeguard and Uplift of Widowed, Destitute and Abandoned Women and Drug Abuse and Its Impact on Society."

The programme began with an address by Oming Jamoh Pertin, vice president of ABAK, highlighting its aims and objectives. Sessions covered topics such as strengthening elementary education, protection of widowed and destitute women, drug abuse and the role of POCSO in child protection.

Eminent speakers included Taram Mize District Adult Education Officer, Adv Techi Nikhi Yab, Joya Tasung Moyong General Secretary of WASE and Tamuk Talom Public Representative from Riga. Yamek Mize Taggu ABAK president, spoke on the social impact of gambling and emphasised government welfare schemes for women, including Sarkar Aapke Dwar, CM's Health Card Scheme and SHG programmes.

Yalem Taga Burang, Chairperson of APSCW, addressed women's empowerment and legal awareness. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Yadam Komut, secretary of ABAK (Siang District Unit). The event saw active participation from women leaders, teachers, students and the public, promoting social responsibility and legal literacy in the community.

APWWS holds farewell and oath-taking ceremony

HT Correspondent

YINGKIONG, Nov 2: The Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS), Yingkiang Unit organised a Farewell-cum-Oath Taking Ceremony at its newly inaugurated office in Yingkiang.

Deputy Commissioner of Upper Siang, Talu Jerang attended as Chief Guest and lauded the outgoing team for their dedication while urging the newly elected president, Kasimang Jopir Pazing and her team to work with unity and sincerity for women's empowerment in the district.

JMFC cum Civil Judge (Jr Div) Yingkiang, Epi Kapu administered the oath to the new president and executive members, emphasising their responsibility to uplift women and ensure their welfare. She encouraged members to act as a "needle that connects everyone, not like scissors that divide." President Kasimang Jopir Pazing introduced her 30-plus member team, representing various sectors including health, legal, senior advisory and youth and assured dedication to protecting the rights and welfare of women and children in Upper Siang.

Outgoing president Kalpana Perme Sitek shared her tenure's highlights and extended best wishes to the new team, pledging her continued support. The program featured the oath-taking ceremony, felicitations, APWWS theme song and cultural performances. The event was welcomed by general secretary Oseng Taron and the vote of thanks was proposed by vice president Nepang Siboh Lipir.

Manipur to export indigenous white sticky rice to Japan

Following the success of black Chakhao rice, the state signs MoU to introduce 'Chakhao Angouba' to global markets

IMPHAL, Nov 2: Manipur is set to introduce its indigenous white sticky rice, 'Chakhao Angouba', to the international market following the successful export of black sticky rice, 'Chakhao Amuba'. The move marks another step in promoting the state's traditional agricultural products abroad.

The Department of Agriculture, Government of Manipur signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Japan to export 20 metric tonnes of the white sticky rice, valued at around Rs 4 crore. The agreement was signed during the Bharat International Rice Conference (BIRC) 2025, held at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, on October 30 to 31, organised by the Indian Rice Exporters' Federation (IREF) in collaboration with APEDA.

Peter Salam, Director of the Agriculture Department, said Manipur already enjoys a strong mar-



ket for black sticky rice, and efforts are underway to establish the white variety internationally. "Chakhao Angouba will soon find its place abroad due to its unique

farmer-producer organisations from across India, providing a global platform for rice trade and knowledge exchange.

Chakhao is aromatic sticky rice traditionally used in rituals and social ceremonies in Manipur and is rich in antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and fibre. While the black variety has a Geographical Indication (GI) tag and certified organic cultivation, the white Chakhao remains relatively unknown outside the state.

Interest is growing from countries such as Japan, where the rice could be used in dishes like sushi. However, production of the white variety remains limited due to low-yielding strains and lack of farmer incentives. The Agriculture Department is promoting modern farming techniques to boost production and income, though no exact annual production data is currently available. (NNN)

Kuki-Zo community skips Kut festival in Manipur amid ongoing ethnic tensions

CHURACHANDPUR/ IMPHAL, Nov 2: The Kuki-Zo community in Manipur on Saturday refrained from participating in the state-level Kut festival, the annual post-harvest celebration observed on November 1, citing the continuing ethnic conflict in the state.

Kut, also known as the Chavang Kut, is celebrated every year by the Kuki-Zo communities across the state to mark the completion of the harvest season.

The festival has remained suspended since 2023 when ethnic vi-

olence broke out in the state.

Extending greetings on the occasion, Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla described Kut as "a celebration of gratitude, unity and bountiful harvest," and urged for strengthening the "bonds of brotherhood among all communities."

Former chief minister N Biren Singh also extended his greetings and said, "The festival embodies the spirit of unity, peace, and brotherhood among all communities of the state."

In a post on X, he said, "May

this Kut bring happiness, prosperity, and harmony to every home."

Meanwhile, Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) spokesperson Ginza Vualzong said, "The Kut festival has been celebrated for many decades and is also recognised as a state holiday. However, with the outbreak of the ethnic conflict in 2023, the community has decided to skip its largest festival." He said, "Until the community gets some kind of solution from the government, I don't think we will be celebrating the festival." (PTI)

7 arrested so far in connection with Oct 23 Tripura bandh violence: Police

AGARTALA, Nov 2: Five more persons were arrested for their alleged involvement in Santirbazar violence in Tripura's Dhalai district, in which 10 people, including three government officials, were injured, police said on Saturday. Violence had broken out during a statewide bandh on October 23, called by the Tripura Civil Society (TCS) in support of an eight-point charter of demands, including the immediate implementation of the Tiprasa accord.

The Tipra Motha Party (TMP), an ally of the BJP-led coalition government, signed an accord with the Centre and the state government in February last year to address the problems of the indigenous people.

"Five persons were arrested by police for their al-

leged involvement in the Santirbazar incident on Friday. They will be produced before a local court," police spokesperson Joydeep Deb said.

Earlier, two persons had been arrested in connection with the case and are currently in judicial custody, he said. A delegation headed by Animal Resource Development (ARD) Minister Sudhangshu Das visited Santirbazar on Friday to assess the situation following the violence. "We visited Santirbazar to assess the ground situation. Many shops were gutted and miscreants looted goods from the shops. Some people, including the block development officer (BDO) and an engineer of Salema RD Block, were injured in the violence during the bandh", he told the reporters. (PTI)

South Africa claw back after Shafali's blazing 87 in World Cup final



NAVI MUMBAI, Nov 2: India rode on Shafali Verma's blistering 87 and Deepti Sharma's composed half-century to post a challenging 298/6 against South Africa in the Women's World Cup final, here on Sunday.

Put in to bat after a two-hour delayed start due to a wet outfield, India were off to a flying start as Shafali and vice-captain Smriti Mandhana (45) added 104 for the opening wicket at nearly seven runs per over.

Shafali, drafted in for the semi-final against Australia following Pratikha Rawal's injury, continued

her dream run with her first ODI fifty in over three years -- her fifth overall -- before falling for 87 off 78 balls with seven fours and two sixes.

South Africa clawed back through Ayabonga Khaka (3/58 from nine overs) and Nonkululeko Mlaba (1/47), who triggered a middle-overs slide after India's commanding start to deny the hosts a psychological 300-mark.

Khaka's twin strikes removed Shafali and Jemimah Rodrigues (24), while Mlaba dismissed skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (20)

just as a partnership with Deepti Sharma was blooming.

Deepti then anchored the innings with a steady 58 off as many balls, her 18th ODI half-century and third in this tournament, adding vital runs with Richa Ghosh (34 from 24 balls) before the latter was dismissed by Khaka in the penultimate over.

Brief Scores
India 298/7; 50 overs (Shafali Verma 87, Deepti Sharma 58, Smriti Mandhana 45, Richa Ghosh 34; Ayabonga Khaka 3/58) vs South Africa. (PTI)

Sundar stars in India's series levelling win against Australia

HOBART, Nov 2: Washington Sundar enhanced his reputation as a T20 hitter with India batting in top gear through the innings to comfortably chase down a target of 187 for a series levelling five-wicket win over Australia here on Sunday.

This is the first time that Australia have lost a T20 International at the Ninja Oval, earlier known as Bellerive Oval.

Tim David (74 off 38) bludgeoned the Indian bowling attack to take Australia to 186 for six after the visitors opted to bat.

With the firepower India possess, they were expected to overhaul the target but Nathan Ellis (3/36) made their job tougher with his sharp and testing spells. India eventually got home in 18.3 overs.

Abhishek Sharma (25 off 16) once again produced a flurry of boundaries in the powerplay before skipper Suryakumar Yadav (24 off 11), Tilak Varma (29 off 26), Axar Patel (17 off 12) and Sundar (49 not out off 23) did their bit.

Jitesh Sharma (22 not out off 12), playing his first game of the series, got valuable time in the middle and got the job done alongside Sundar.

Washington, who is rather underrated as a power-hitter, showed he can use the long handle effectively with majority of his sixes coming in the cow corner region.

The absence of Josh Hazlewood in the opposition camp -- the pacer's focus now shifts to the Ashes, also made India's task a lot easier.

Barring Ellis, who troubled the Indian batters with short balls at express pace, Australian bowlers were not able to test the Indians enough.

The fourth T20 of the five match series will be played in Gold Coast on November 6.

Opting to bowl in nippy conditions, India started well cour-

tesy Arshdeep Singh who struck twice in a two-over spell on his return to the side. His performance earned him the Player of The Match award.

Playing his first game of the series, India's leading wicket taker in the format removed the dangerous Travis Head and Josh Inglis to leave Australia at 14 for two.

However, India's early advantage was negated by David (74 off 38) who targeted every Indian bowler in an exemplary show of power-hitting. Four of his five sixes came down the ground while one was a slap over cover off Axar Patel.

Following his dismissal, the seasoned Marcus Stoinis (64 off 39) stepped up on the offensive to take Australia to a competitive total.

Whether it was the peerless Jasprit Bumrah or mystery spinner Varun Chakaravathy, David just looked to dominate.

David got a reprieve batting on 20 when Washington Sundar dropped him at point off Bumrah. It was a regulation catch though the ball literally flew towards him.

India missed the services of injured all-rounder Hardik Pandya with Shivam Dube being taken to the cleaners by both David and Stoinis.

The sixth bowling option was Washington but the team opted for left-arm spin of Abhishek Sharma who leaked 13 runs in his only over. It was more to do with no left-handers at the crease during that specific time.

After Arshdeep's twin strike in the powerplay, it was Chakaravathy who put brakes on the scoring rate by dismissing Mitchell Marsh and Mitchell Owen in successive balls. The incoming delivery to Owen, flicked through the fingers, was a peach. Arshdeep and Bumrah closed the innings well for the visitors. (PTI)

Sebastian Coe pushes for a cross-country running race at the 2030 Winter Olympics

NEW YORK, Nov 2: Sebastian Coe would love to see a cross-country running race brought back to the Olympics at the 2030 Winter Games.

The president of World Athletics has long argued for the event's inclusion in the Olympics, but he said the willingness of new IOC president Kirsty Coventry to explore ways of doing things has helped.

"The new president is clear they want to put everything on the table at the moment," Coe told The Associated Press in an interview Saturday. "It's a very different atmosphere. It's very much how can we improve together rather than we'll tell you how to do it. She's blown some oxygen into the organization."

Coe said he's discussed bringing the event in for the 2030 Winter Olympics in the French Alps, or possibly in Salt Lake City four years later.

Cross country was in the Summer Olympics until 1924, when it was removed because of harsh conditions at the Paris Games that caused extreme exhaustion from the heat and the course. Adding it to the Winter Games would alleviate those issues and would also go a long way to including more countries, especially African nations who would potentially excel at the sport.

"Winter Games aren't African. It doesn't scream African," said Coe, who was in the U.S. for Sunday's New York City Marathon. "So I think it was a good opportunity." For cross country to be eventually included again, Coe said there would have to be a simple Olympic charter amendment that says that a sport practiced in the winter would be eligible to be in the program. (AP)

Nazira College Zone B winner of DU Inter College Football Tournament

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Nov 2: Nazira College thrashed Dikhowmukh College 6-0 in the final match of the Dibrugarh University Inter-College Football Tournament (Zone B) held at Nitaipukhuri Higher Secondary School Playground under the patronage of HCDG College Nitaipukhuri, on Sunday. Nazira College is the Zone B winner of the Dibrugarh University Inter-College Football Tournament. The Tournament started on October 29 and a total of six colleges participated in the Tournament.

Ramos scores winner deep into stoppage time for Ligue 1 leader Paris Saint-Germain against Nice

PARIS, Nov 2: Substitute Gonçalo Ramos headed home from a corner in the final seconds of stoppage time as Ligue 1 leader Paris Saint-Germain scraped a 1-0 home win against Nice on Saturday.

With the last action of the match, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia headed on a right-wing corner and Ramos nodded in from close range to spare PSG a fourth draw in five games.

Coach Luis Enrique was missing injured forward Désiré Doué, and started with Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembélé on the bench with a view to the Champions League game against Bayern Munich on Tuesday.

PSG dominated play but struggled to create chances in the first half against a well-organized Nice side. Midfielder Vitinha's powerful shot was well saved by Nice goalkeeper Yéhvann Diouf midway through the second half.

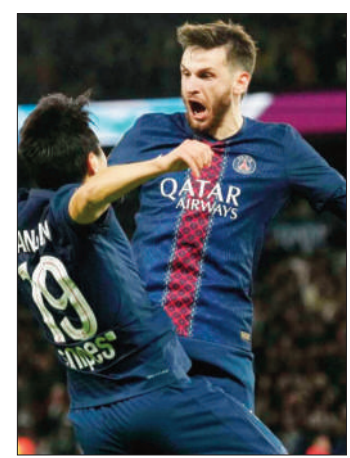
Ramos hit the post in the 80th minute then had a point-blank header tipped over by Diouf in the fourth minute of stoppage time.

But Diouf was let down by his defense on the ensuing corner and Ramos — who is often used as an impact substitute — marked his 100th appearance for PSG with his 38th goal.

"He's a very important player for us because he's ready in every game, whether he starts or not," Luis Enrique said. "Five minutes of Gonçalo on the field is five minutes of quality."

PSG stayed two points ahead of Marseille, which moved above Monaco and into second place thanks to a hard-fought 1-0 win at struggling Auxerre. Monaco slipped four points behind PSG after losing 1-0 at home to Paris FC.

England midfielder Angel Gomes gave Marseille the lead in



the 30th minute with a low shot after goalkeeper Donovan Léon failed to deal properly with a cross.

Marseille was reduced to 10 players midway through the second half when defender Ulisses Garcia was sent off for a high challenge on Josué Casimir.

We handed I-League 'trophy' to Inter Kashi as per CAS and Swiss Federal Tribunal decisions: AIFF

NEW DELHI, Nov 2: The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Sunday defended its handing over of the I-League 'trophy' to Inter Kashi, saying it did so after "due legal consultation" and as per the decisions given by the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and Swiss Federal Tribunal.

The AIFF on Saturday presented a replica of the I-League trophy to Inter Kashi at Bambolim, one of the venues for the ongoing Super Cup in Goa, six months after handing the silverware to Churchill Brothers, following a ruling by the CAS that declared the Varanasi-based debutant side as the rightful champions.

The national federation disputed Churchill Brothers' claim on Saturday that a final order on the I-League champions is yet to be given by the CAS and that the Goan club is waiting for it.

"All India Football Federation wishes to clarify that all decisions taken by the Federation have been in accordance with the operative directions in force and after due legal consultation," the AIFF said in a statement on Sunday.

With regard to the issues raised by Churchill Brothers, the AIFF said, "As per the oper-



ative decision given by the CAS as on June 17 and June 18, 2025, Inter Kashi were adjudged as the winners of I-League 2024-25.

"Furthermore, in the order given by the Swiss Federal Tribunal on July 29, 2025, the tribunal adjudged that the court cannot go beyond its powers and annul the judgment given by CAS. "As of date, the decision by CAS stands, and the Swiss Federal Tribunal has dismissed Churchill Brothers' request for the suspensive effect of CAS' decision."

CAS had in July overturned the AIFF Appeals Committee's

decision to award the title to Churchill Brothers, directing the national federation to "forthwith declare Inter Kashi FC as winner of the I-League 2024-25 season."

Churchill Brothers on Saturday hit out at the AIFF for handing over the I-League trophy to Inter Kashi, calling the move "disrespectful" to the Goan club and its supporters.

"This is an insult to our fans and supporters who have stood by Churchill Brothers through the years," the club said.

Churchill Brothers have refused to return the I-League trophy handed to them in July,

forcing the AIFF to hand over a replica to Inter Kashi.

"CAS has never asked us to return the trophy till date. The final order is yet to be given and we will challenge it in the Swiss Federal Tribunal," Churchill Brothers said in a statement on Saturday.

"We are extremely shocked by the manner in which the AIFF is dealing with the matter."

The Goan club has also filed a petition in the Delhi High Court, seeking Inter Kashi's disqualification for alleged rule violations during the season.

The AIFF made the trophy presentation on Saturday after Inter Kashi's final group league match of the Super Cup against Jamshepur FC at the GMC Athletic Stadium at Bambolim.

The AIFF said the silverware handed to Inter Kashi on Saturday was only a replica, as the original trophy remains with Churchill Brothers, who have refused to return it.

"Despite letters to return the trophy, Churchill Brothers did not do so. We will pursue the matter. But since the whole team was here for the Super Cup, we have presented a replica of the trophy as per the CAS order," a top AIFF official had said on Saturday. (PTI)

ABSU organises Under-13 football tournament in Chirang

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Nov 2: An Under-13 football tournament organised by the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) began on Sunday at the Sidi-Kashikotra Higher Secondary School playground in Kashikotra, Chirang district.

A total of 26 teams, 7 in the girls' category and 19 in the boys' category are participating in the four-day-long tournament.

The event was inaugurated by ABSU president Dipen Boro. In his inaugural address, Boro said that the dream envisioned by Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma was to

bring the Bodo community forward on the world stage by ensuring quality education, good health, and excellence in sports and games at the state, national, and international levels.

He added that, in line with this vision, ABSU has been organizing football tournaments across various districts to promote young talent. Boro also extended his best wishes to all the participants and expressed hope that players from the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) would get opportunities to represent the region at higher levels in the future.

Luciano Spalletti makes a successful debut at Juventus

ROME, Nov 2: It took all of 85 seconds for Juventus to score its first goal under Luciano Spalletti.

Filip Kostic celebrated his 33rd birthday by finishing off a swift team effort that included a backheel pass from Lois Openda in the second minute of a 2-1 win at Cremonese in Serie A on Saturday.

Andrea Cambiaso added another for Juventus midway through the second half before former Leicester striker Jamie Vardy pulled one back for Cremonese.

Spalletti was hired on Thursday to replace Igor Tudor, who was fired three days earlier after an eight-match winless streak.

The victory boosted Juventus up to fifth place and level with the two Milan clubs, which both play on Sunday. Spalletti said during his presentation on Friday that he believes he can turn Juventus into a title contender and the Bianconeri are now just four points behind Italian league leader Napoli.

"I've already got my back up against the wall," Spalletti said with a laugh when reminded of what he said a day earlier. "I'm already a prisoner."

Spalletti, the former Napoli and Italy coach, surprisingly used Teun Koopmeiners as a defender in a 3-5-2 formation. The Netherlands international is usually a midfielder. "It was meant to serve as a message: We're not going out to de-

fend. We want to play," Spalletti said. Cambiaso's goal came when a cross from Francisco Conceicao toward Dusan Vlahovic deflected into his path.

The 38-year-old Vardy then finished off a counterattack by muscling past defender Federico Gatti and beating goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio with an angled shot. It was Vardy's second goal in three matches after also scoring against Atalanta.

Napoli goalkeeper Vanja Milinkovic-Savic saved another penalty but the defending champion was held to a 0-0 draw at home by Como.

Midway through the first half, Milinkovic-Savic took down Alvaro Morata as the Como striker came streaking in on goal.

Then Milinkovic-Savic lunged to his left to stop Morata's spot kick for his sixth save from the last 10 penalties he has faced.

Having lost Kevin De Bruyne to a long-term injury, Napoli had Rasmus Hojlund back after a physical issue but still struggled to create chances.

Napoli moved one point clear of Roma, which visits AC Milan on Sunday. Cesc Fabregas' Como dropped to sixth.

Napoli remained unbeaten at home for nearly a year — since getting beat by Lazio last December. (AP)