

6 NATION
 ● 4 linked to pro-Khalistan terror module held
 ● 'Atrocities against Dalits, backward classes increased manifold in BJP-ruled states'

7 NORTHEAST
 ● PM Modi stresses 'Act East, Act Fast' for Northeast
 ● Union minister B L Verma reviews welfare schemes in Arunachal district

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3 held in Morikolong dacoity case, two still absconding

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 28: Police have arrested three of the five accused involved in the dacoity at a doctor's residence in Morikolong area of Nagaon town earlier this week, with two of them remanded to judicial custody and one currently under interrogation.

According to police, the gang had targeted the house of Ranjit Saikia in the early hours of April 24, triggering panic in the locality.

Acting on CCTV footage and technical surveillance inputs, Nagaon Police first apprehended two alleged dacoits, Omar Ali and Mintu Hussain, on April 26.

Both were taken into police custody for questioning before being produced in court and sent to jail.

In a subsequent operation, police arrested another accused, Nazirul Islam, from a char area in Moirabari under Morigaon district.

He is currently in police custody, where sustained interrogation is underway to gather further leads.

Officials said efforts are ongoing to trace the remaining two accused, who are still at large. Despite continuous search operations, no concrete leads have emerged so far regarding their whereabouts.

Police added that the investigation is progressing, with teams working to establish the full sequence of events and recover any stolen property linked to the case.

ASSEB HS results 2026 declared: Science leads across streams

Strong overall performance as over 2.63 lakh students clear examination across streams



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 28: The Assam State School Education Board on Tuesday declared the results of the Higher Secondary (HS) Examination 2026, with the Science stream once again emerging as the top-performing stream in terms of pass percentage, while Arts recorded the highest number of successful candidates.

In the Arts stream, which continues to have the largest number of

examinees, a total of 2,41,124 students appeared for the examination.

Out of them, 1,91,798 candidates successfully cleared the exam, registering a pass percentage of 79.54 per cent.

Among the successful candidates, 54,755 secured first division, reflecting a significant number of high scorers in the stream.

The Commerce stream recorded a total of 19,469 candidates ap-

Mathgharia road mishap: 3 women along with driver found visiting pub

Driver of ill-fated car Shamim arrested



GUWAHATI, April 28: The driver of a car that met with an accident here two days ago, in which three women died, has been arrested from Dibrugarh, with police

claiming that he was acquainted with the victims.

Three women were killed when their car hit a stationary truck, rebounded off a road divider and flipped two to three times in the Mathgharia area here early on Sunday morning.

Addressing a press conference here, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Jayanta Sarathi Borah said, "Shamim Ahmed, who was driving the car, was arrested from Dibrugarh on Monday. He had initially fled to Shillong and was planning to escape to Arunachal Pradesh."

"He had shaved his beard and cut his hair to hide his identity. He was trying to apply for anticipatory bail," the officer added.

The man has been brought to the Noonmati police station here.

Police said that Ahmed was driving the car and was an acquaintance of the deceased. He went missing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Eviction drive likely in Sikhna Jwhwlo National Park

Forest Department awaits orders amid rising concerns over encroachment

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, April 28: The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Forest Department is likely to launch a large-scale eviction drive against illegal encroachers in Sikhna Jwhwlo National Park, a biodiversity-rich reserve located along the India-Bhutan border.

The development comes after organisations including the Bodoland Janajati Suraksha Manch, the All Assam Tribal Students' Union and the BTC Gaonbura Association submitted a memorandum to forest authorities, urging immediate action against alleged deforestation and encroachment inside the park.

Senior forest official S Mahapatra indicated that preparations are underway and the department is ready to carry out eviction once government approval is received.

He stressed that cooperation from police, civil administration and the public would be essential for a smooth operation, and appealed for collective support.

Working president of the Bodoland Janajati Suraksha Manch, Daorao Dekhreb Narzary, called for urgent eviction of encroachers while cautioning against politicising the issue or giving it a communal angle.

He emphasised that long-standing harmony among communities must be preserved and that forest protection is a shared responsibility.

He also demanded a proper probe into the recent attack on the forest office in Runikhata and strict action against those responsible.

Former BTC deputy chief Kampa Borgoyari expressed concern (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

WKA outshines KA in HS results

HT Bureau
DIPHU, April 28: The Assam State School Education Board declared the Higher Secondary final examination results on Tuesday, with West Karbi Anglong emerging ahead of Karbi Anglong in pass percentages across all three streams—Arts, Science and Commerce.

In the Arts stream, Karbi Anglong recorded 7,036 candidates, with 4,943 passing, resulting in a pass percentage of 70.25%.

In comparison, West Karbi Anglong registered a significantly higher pass rate of 83.17%, with 2,615 successful candidates out of 3,144 examinees.

In Commerce, Karbi Anglong achieved a pass percentage of 82.39% with 613 successful candidates out of 744.

West Karbi Anglong, though with a smaller pool of 69 candidates, recorded an impressive 95.65% pass rate, with 66 students clearing the examination. The trend (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam records over 1,000 road deaths in 3 months

Ravi Kota calls for urgent district-level action, stronger enforcement

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 28: With over 1,000 fatalities recorded in just three months, Assam continues to witness high road crash severity despite marginal improvement, prompting Chief Secretary Ravi Kota to call for urgent, time-bound interventions across districts.

At a state-level road safety review meeting, it was revealed that the state recorded 4,219 accidents and 1,008 deaths between January and

March 2026, compared to 1,035 fatalities during the same period last year.

While accident numbers remained nearly unchanged, fatalities declined only slightly, indicating persistent risks on roads.

The chief secretary noted that around 11 people continue to die daily in road accidents, stressing that crash severity remains a major concern.

Although Assam's severity index is lower

than the national average, it still lags behind safer states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Nine districts—including Guwahati City, Kamrup, Nagaon and Sonitpur—accounted for nearly half of all fatalities, even as some districts showed improvement due to focused enforcement and local interventions.

Directing stricter accountability, the Chief Secretary instructed District Commissioners and Superintendents of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sonam Raghuvanshi, accused of killing husband during honeymoon in Meghalaya, granted bail



SHILLONG, April 28: A court in Meghalaya on Tuesday granted bail to Indore resident Sonam Raghuvanshi, who allegedly got her husband killed during their honeymoon in the northeastern state in 2025.

and several others, including her alleged boyfriend, were arrested in the case.

"The accused has been granted bail by the court. However, necessary legal procedures are being followed and the police will continue to pursue the matter as per law," SP Vivek Syiem told PTI. According to police, Indore-based transport businessman Raja Raghuvanshi married Sonam on May 11, 2025, in Indore, and the couple left for their honeymoon in Meghalaya on May 20.

The autopsy report of Raja Raghuvanshi indicated that he was hit twice with a sharp object on his head.

Sonam surrendered on June 8 before the police in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur district.

In September last year, the Meghalaya Police submitted a 790-page charge sheet, naming eight people, including his wife Sonam and her alleged boyfriend, as the accused. (PTI)

Four wild buffaloes successfully relocated to Kanha from Kaziranga

TEZPUR, April 28: Four wild buffaloes have been relocated from Assam's Kaziranga National Park to Kanha Tiger Reserve to revive the presence of the species more than a century after it went extinct from the Madhya Pradesh forest, an official said.

Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve Field Director Sonali Ghosh described the operation as one of the most extensive ground translocations ever attempted in the country.

"Upon arrival, the animals were placed in specially prepared enclosures to help them gradually adapt to their new environment before being released into the wild," she added.

The ambitious exercise connected Kaziranga with Kanha, where the species had vanished more than a century ago, Ghosh said.

"The first group -- comprising one male and three females -- completed a journey of over 2,000 kilometres, reaching their new home after three days on the road, she added. The current programme (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

No plan to raise petrol, diesel prices after assembly elections: Govt Official

NEW DELHI, April 28: The government has no plans to raise petrol and diesel prices, a senior official said on Tuesday, dismissing speculation of a hike after polling in West Bengal ends on April 29.

Retail petrol and diesel prices have remained unchanged for a record fourth year, even as conflict in West Asia has pushed crude oil costs up more than 50 per cent over the past two months.

The widening gap between input costs and pump prices has left state-run fuel retailers incurring heavy losses - with some estimates pegging daily loss at about ₹ 2,400 crore - fuelling speculation of an imminent price hike after politically charged assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry conclude on Wednesday.

"There is no proposal to increase petrol and diesel prices," Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Pabitra Margherita highlights deeper cooperation, upcoming summit in Delhi

India-Africa ties enter 'new and decisive phase': MoS

NEW DELHI, April 28: The relationship between India and Africa is entering a "new and decisive phase", and both sides are preparing to take the ties to a much higher and more meaningful level, Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita said on Tuesday.

In his address at an event held at the Bharat Mandapam here, he also asserted that India and Africa are millennia-old and vibrant civilisations, and bound by centuries of trade, commerce and cultural exchanges.

Several diplomats of various African countries posted in India, representatives of many organisations working to promote India-Africa ties, among others, attended the 'Yuva Bharat Global Forum' held at the Summit Room.

The India-Africa relationship is deeply rooted in civilisational link-



ages, nurtured by centuries of trade, cultural exchanges and people-to-people ties, Margherita said.


He added that the ties between the two sides were further strengthened as a result of the struggle against

colonialism.

The MoS also recalled the recent unveiling of the logo, theme and website of the upcoming India-Africa Forum Summit IV in Delhi in the presence of External Affairs

OM SHANTI

Born on 10th February, 1991 (Diphu)



Died on 29th April, 2014 (New Delhi)

Bhaswati (Lovely) Nunisa

It's been twelve years since you left us. Everyday sweet memories of yours comes our way. Since you will never be forgotten, we pledge to you today. The hollowed space within our hearts is the place where you will always stay. We still love you and deeply miss you though you are gone.

Today the 29th April, 2026, on the day of your 11th Death Anniversary, we all pray for eternal peace of your soul.

Bereaved family members

Dr. Motilal Nunisa (father), Mainodi (Babli) Nunisa (elder sister) Ponaxi (Lolo) Nunisa (younger sister),
Uncles, Aunts.

All the Cousins: Thairingdao, (Smti.) Jaymala, Ms. Tanushree (Nathum), Ms. Donlikdi (Piky), Ms. Ronlikdi (Pinky), Ms. Priyashree (Zimzu), Bangham (Mao), Dr. (Ms) Rinklikdi (Nicky), Chiranjeev (Bonny), Ms. Ringsmaidi, Shivraj (Vir), Repshodao (Tintin), Ringdao, Jushring.

Stock markets decline amid surging oil prices, foreign fund outflows

MUMBAI, April 28: Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure on Tuesday as a sharp rally in oil prices and foreign fund outflows amid persistent geopolitical uncertainties dented investors' sentiment.

Deep losses in banking, financial and auto stocks also dragged the equity benchmarks lower, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 416.72 points, or 0.54 per cent, to settle at 76,886.91. During the day, it lost 562.57 points, or 0.72 per cent, to 76,741.06.

A total of 2,257 stocks declined, while 1,998 advanced and 172 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share gauge NSE Nifty dropped 97 points, or 0.40 per cent, to end at 23,995.70.

"The session was largely influenced by persistent geopolitical uncertainty, particularly around US-Iran negotiations, which kept crude oil prices elevated and weighed on sentiment.

"Additionally, pressure in banking stocks following regulatory developments related to provisioning norms further capped the upside. Despite these headwinds, buying in select index heavyweights and commodity-linked stocks, along with stock-specific earnings triggers, helped cushion the downside."

Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Axis



Bank, HCL Tech, InterGlobe Aviation, Maruti, State Bank of India and ICICI Bank were among the biggest laggards.

In contrast, Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra and Sun Pharma were among the gainers.

The BSE SmallCap Select index climbed 0.42 per cent, while the BSE MidCap Select index dipped 0.27 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, PSU bank dropped (2.20 per cent), bankex declined 1.61 per cent, top 10 banks (1.44 per cent), private banks (1.23 per cent), auto (0.98 per cent) and hospitals (0.95 per cent).

"The Reserve Bank of India has finalised the implementation of the

Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework from April 2027, replacing the incurred loss model with a forward-looking system that enables earlier recognition of credit risks and continuous monitoring.

"In the near term, this transition is likely to increase provisioning requirements and weigh on margins, particularly for PSU banks and lenders with higher exposure to unsecured and MSME segments," Siddhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

However, energy, commodities, industrials, telecommunication, utilities, metal and oil & gas were the gainers.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 2.97 per cent to USD 111.4 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,151.48 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

"Indian equity markets traded under pressure, ending in the red as unresolved tensions in the Middle East and persistent disruptions to energy supply, particularly the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz, weighed on investor sentiment," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The sharp rise in crude oil prices above USD 110, continued disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, rupee depreciation beyond 94.5 and sustained FII outflows underscore mounting macroeconomic pressures on Indian markets, he added.

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

Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory.

US markets ended flat on Monday.

On Monday, the Sensex jumped 639.42 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 77,303.63. The Nifty climbed 194.75 points or 0.81 per cent to close at 24,092.70. (PTI)

Google AI Hub groundbreaking signals India's tech push

Vittal says Vizag will emerge on global AI map



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: "With Visakhapatnam emerging as a new hub on the world's AI map, we will ensure that India sets the pace for innovation and sustainable growth," said Gopal Vittal as Google broke ground on its ambitious AI hub project in Andhra Pradesh, marking a major milestone in India's digital infrastructure expansion.

The project, being developed in partnership with AdaniConneX and Nxta by Airtel, is part of Google's \$15 billion investment plan for India over the next five years and will establish the country's first gigawatt-

scale AI ecosystem.

The groundbreaking ceremony at Visakhapatnam was attended by Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Andhra Pradesh chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who described the initiative as a critical step towards positioning India as a global technology leader.

The AI hub will comprise three large data centre campuses supported by advanced fibre connectivity and clean energy infrastructure, enabling high-performance computing and scalable AI-driven services across sectors.

Officials said the project will also contribute to India's broader economic and environmental goals, including expansion of digital networks and progress towards non-fossil fuel energy targets.

Beyond infrastructure, the initiative includes community-focused programmes such as skill development, digital literacy, women entrepreneurship support and local employment generation, aimed at ensuring long-term regional impact.

With the launch of the AI hub and the accompanying Bharat AI Shakti Conclave, the project is expected to catalyse a wider industrial ecosystem, linking global technology investment with local economic growth.

Bandhan Bank Q4 PAT jumps 68pc YoY to ₹534 crore

KOLKATA, April 28: Bandhan Bank on Tuesday reported a 68 per cent year-on-year jump in net profit for the quarter ended March to ₹ 534 crore, driven largely by strong performance in its retail banking and treasury segments, along with improved asset quality.

Retail banking registered a profit of around ₹ 434 crore in the quarter, a sharp turnaround from losses in the preceding quarters and the year-ago period.

Treasury operations also remained strong, contributing around ₹ 206 crore to profits, the lender informed the bourses.

These gains helped offset continued losses in the wholesale banking segment, which reported a loss of about Rs 80 crore in the quarter to March.

The improvement in retail profitability reflects stabilisation in the microfinance-led portfolio, better collection efficiency and a shift towards secured and granular lending, it said. (PTI)

LOST

I lost my HSLC original marksheet bearing Roll B24-0459 No.0323 of 2024 on April 24, 2026 somewhere around Diphu market. If anyone finding the same may kindly reach to the address mentioned below. Name: Charmi Ch Sangma D/O Beauty Sangma Address: Dharampathar, P.O. Dalali & P.S., Diphu, District, Karbi Anglong, Assam. Mobile No.95550-55321

Rupee falls 41 paise to close at 94.56 against USD

MUMBAI, April 28: The rupee depreciated 41 paise to close at 94.56 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as elevated crude oil prices and unabated foreign capital outflows amid rising geopolitical uncertainties dented investor sentiments. Forex traders said the rupee has already weakened quite sharply, factoring in the likely widening of the Current Account Deficit (CAD) and volatile capital flows.

Moreover, persistent foreign fund outflows weighed on the rupee, as so far this year, FIIs have pulled out over USD 19 billion from Indian equities. (PTI)

Flipkart, Axis Bank, PayU roll out biometric card payments



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: Flipkart has partnered with Axis Bank and PayU to introduce biometric authentication for card payments, allowing users to approve transactions using fingerprint or Face ID instead of one-time passwords (OTPs).

The feature, currently available for Axis Bank cardholders, enables issuer-level biometric verification on supported Android and iOS devices.

With this rollout, Flipkart becomes one of the first major Indian e-commerce platforms to adopt biometric authentication for card transactions.

Officials said the system enhances security through device-based authentication and advanced verification checks, significantly reducing risks associated with SIM-swap fraud and OTP interception.

It also addresses a key friction point in digital payments

by enabling faster, seamless transactions.

Under the collaboration, PayU manages merchant-side infrastructure and authentication flows, while Axis Bank leverages its Wibmo platform for biometric verification at the issuer level.

The move aligns with the Reserve Bank of India's push for stronger and more secure authentication mechanisms. According to RBI-linked data, digital payment fraud in India has risen sharply, crossing ₹1,400 crore in FY 2024, prompting regulatory encouragement for biometric and risk-based authentication systems.

Gaurav Arora, Vice President (Payments and SuperCoins) at Flipkart, said the initiative reflects a focus on consumer trust and security.

"By leveraging secure biometric credentials, we are delivering a payment experience that is intuitive and seamless, while meeting the highest standards of consumer protection," he said.

Amika Dixit, President and Head of Cards, Payments and Wealth Management at Axis Bank, noted that biometric authentication offers a secure, one-touch approval experience that aligns with evolving customer expectations. Hemang Dattani, Chief Business Officer at PayU Payments, said the collaboration marks a step towards eliminating friction in digital payments while maintaining strong security standards.

Industry observers see the rollout as a significant step in India's gradual transition away from OTP-based systems, paving the way for faster, safer and more reliable digital transactions.

FTA to help India's engineering exports

KOLKATA, April 28: India's engineering exports to New Zealand are poised to double over the next five years from USD 140.5 million to USD 280-300 million, following the signing of a free trade agreement (FTA) that grants zero-duty market access to all Indian goods, officials said.

Industry body EEPIC India's Chairman Pankaj Chadha said the pact would provide a strong tailwind to the sector, particularly MSMEs, by lowering trade barriers and ensuring stable market access in a relatively small but high-potential destination.

Engineering shipments to New Zealand

have already shown steady traction, rising around 8 per cent to USD 140.5 million in 2025-26 from USD 129.8 million in the previous fiscal.

Growth has been led by automobiles, dairy sector machinery and medical and scientific instruments, while metal-based products such as iron and steel, aluminium and zinc have also contributed meaningfully.

"With zero-duty access and predictable trade rules, there is a clear opportunity to scale up engineering exports to around USD 280-300 million over the next five years," Chadha said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

ASSEB HS results

percentage while Arts contributes the largest share of successful candidates. The data also indicates a healthy number of first division holders across all streams, suggesting improved academic outcomes and competitive performance among students.

The board stated that details regarding the distribution of hard copies of certificate-cum-marksheets will be announced in due course.

While hard copies will be issued to successful candidates, those who have not passed or have not improved their results may obtain their marksheets by applying separately at the Board office.

Candidates seeking re-checking of their answer scripts or scanned copies will be able to apply through the designated online portal, which will be activated shortly after the declaration of results. Applications must be submitted within a stipulated period along with the prescribed fee.

The board has clarified that answer scripts are treated as confidential documents and will not fall under the purview of the RTI Act until the re-checking process is completed.

The results of re-checking are expected to be declared within 30 days from the last date of application, and scanned copies of answer scripts will be shared with applicants via email, with all identifying details of examiners masked. The board has also made it clear that the revised marks, if any, will be final and binding, and the scanned copies cannot be used for commercial purposes or challenged in any court of law.

The Higher Secondary examinations this year were conducted from February 11 to March 6, 2026, with students being given an additional 15 minutes at the beginning of each paper to read the question paper.

Students who are dissatisfied with their performance will have the option to apply for re-checking or appear in improvement examinations. Those who have failed in up to three subjects will be eligible to appear in compartment examinations, which will be conducted by the board at a later date.

Driver of ill-fated

after taking the victims to a nearby hospital, they said. Borah said the car's route was tracked through the GPS attached to the vehicle, and Bhargab Deka had access to it. The car was registered in the name of Pankaj Kumar Dutta of Dhemaji, who had given it on rent to an agency run by Deka in Guwahati.

"Ahmed had taken the car through Deka on April 25. We located the car at the parking lot of a mall in the Bhangagarh area of the city from 11 pm on Saturday to 3 am on Sunday.

"The three women and Ahmed had spent the time at a pub in the mall, and we have its CCTV camera. There is also a record of them paying a bill of Rs 19,000 at the pub," the DCP said.

After leaving the mall, the car moved through the city at around 130-135 kmph speed, and was travelling at 96 kmph when it hit the truck at 4 am, Borah said.

The DCP termed Ahmed's escape unscathed a "miracle", and said, "Maybe he was wearing a seat belt, which saved him." Asked how Ahmed could flee after being initially helping in the rescue, the officer said that since the focus was on providing medical aid to the victims and police were not aware of his identity, he could have taken the chance to escape. On a police vehicle reaching the accident site within seconds, he said it was an emergency car from Noonmati police station, which was out on patrol. (PTI)

Eviction drive likely

over increasing encroachment, noting that forest areas once constituted a significant portion of BTC land. He warned that destruction of forests would pose serious risks to human survival and economic sustainability, urging all sections of society to take responsibility in safeguarding the park.

Officials reiterated that clearing encroachments is crucial not only for conservation but also for maintaining ecological balance and long-term livelihood security in the region.

West Karbi Anglong

continued in the Science stream, where Karbi Anglong posted a strong 94.10% pass percentage with 1,004 students passing out of 1,067.

However, West Karbi Anglong surpassed it with an outstanding 98.36% pass rate, as 60 out of 61 candidates cleared the examination.

Overall, West Karbi Anglong's performance marks a notable improvement, positioning it among the top-performing districts in the state this year.

Reacting to the results, Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, congratulated the students and highlighted the achievement.

"It is a proud moment for our hills—West Karbi Anglong has secured one of the highest pass percentages in Assam, while Karbi Anglong has also performed excellently," he said.

Executive Member (Education) Richard Tokbi also lauded the performance, crediting students, teachers, parents and institutional efforts for the strong results across streams.

Congratulating the students via his facebook account wrote "My heartfelt congratulations to all the successful candidates of HS Final Year examination 2026. It's a proud moment that Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong has performed exceptionally brilliant with 94.10 & 98.36 percentage in Science streams which has outshines many districts with historic best as West Karbi Anglong secured 2nd position among the best performing district in Science stream."

Officials said the outcome reflects sustained academic progress in the hill districts, with improved performance indicators pointing to strengthened educational support systems.

Assam records over

Police to personally review each fatal accident and ensure corrective measures such as fixing black spots, improving signage and strengthening enforcement. He also flagged pedestrian safety as a major concern, noting that one in five deaths involves pedestrians, and called for urgent policy measures to protect vulnerable road users. Authorities have been asked to enhance road engineering, enforce helmet use and drunk-driving checks, and adopt innovative district-level solutions, including relocation of roadside markets from highways.

Special emphasis was placed on the PM RAHAT scheme, which provides cashless treatment up to ₹1.5 lakh for accident victims, and on strengthening trauma care systems to maximise the critical "golden hour" for saving lives. Reiterating that road safety is a shared responsibility, the chief secretary urged all departments and agencies to work in coordination to reduce fatalities and build safer roads across the state.

No plan to raise

Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said at a news briefing on the fallout of developments in West Asia. She was responding to a question on whether retail fuel prices would be raised after polling in West Bengal concludes on Wednesday. She dismissed speculation of an imminent price rise that had triggered panic buying in parts of states such as Andhra Pradesh. "We have seen panic buying in some places. We are in continuous contact with state governments in all these places. All retail outlets are being monitored and supplies are being prioritised (at petrol pumps witnessing increased buying) so that stock availability is ensured and there are no dry-outs," she said. In Andhra Pradesh, rumours of imminent price rise led to panic buying in several towns, leading to shortage and more than 400 petrol pumps running dry on Sunday, according to reports.

According to the Petroleum Ministry, some outlets saw demand rise by as much as 30-33 per cent.

She added that the country has adequate inventories of all fuels - from petrol and diesel to cooking gas LPG and aviation turbine fuel - to meet demand. "We have enough supplies of LPG, petrol and diesel. Prices are stable and there has been no increase in rates," she said. "I want to urge everyone to please don't believe in rumours. Avoid panic buying and rely on official sources for information."

The clarification comes despite mounting financial pressure on state-run fuel retailers, which officials say are selling petrol and diesel below market rates and incurring significant losses.

Analysts had earlier flagged the possibility of price increases of ₹ 25-28 per litre after elections due to rising global crude oil costs and widening gaps between international and domestic fuel prices.

International oil prices spiked after the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, and Tehran's sweeping retaliation that effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz -- one of the world's most critical energy arteries, linking the Persian Gulf to global markets and handling roughly a fifth of global oil trade along with significant volumes of liquefied natural gas. Last week, Sharma had stated that state-owned fuel retailers were incurring losses of about Rs 20 per litre on petrol and roughly ₹ 100 per litre on diesel as pump prices remained frozen for nearly four years despite a surge in global oil prices. Yet there is no plan to increase prices, she had said.

Crude, which was USD 70 per barrel last year, averaged over USD 114 this month.

Retail petrol and diesel prices have remained frozen since early April 2022 -- a period during which oil prices rose in some months and fell in other times. When prices fell, state-owned oil firms made handsome profits, which they used to set off losses when rates rose.

Petrol is currently priced at ₹ 94.77 a litre in Delhi and diesel comes for ₹ 87.67. (PTI)

Four wild buffaloes

envisions relocating around 50 buffaloes over time to build a stable breeding population in Kanha. Officials indicated that additional batches are expected to follow soon, as the programme moves forward.

The groundwork for the project involved detailed ecological assessments by the Wildlife Institute of India, along with the creation of secure capture and holding facilities.

"Trained teams initiated capture operations in March using veterinary-guided tranquilisation methods, ensuring minimal stress to the animals. Throughout the journey, the convoy was closely monitored by wildlife experts, with continuous veterinary care, food and hydration provided to safeguard the animals' health," another official said. Experts believe that the initiative could play a transformative role in restoring grassland ecosystems in central India. The species, known scientifically as Bubalus arnee, is critical for maintaining ecological balance, particularly through grazing patterns that support habitat diversity.

In a parallel gesture of cooperation, Madhya Pradesh has also proposed support for Assam's conservation initiatives by offering gharials for potential reintroduction efforts, he added.

"The relocation marks not just the movement of a species, but the beginning of a long-term effort to rebuild ecological connections lost over generations," the official said. (PTI)

India-Africa ties

shows that India and Africa are "preparing to take the partnership to a much higher and a more meaningful level". "Africa occupies a pivotal place in India's foreign policy," Margherita asserted.

Defence, security and maritime cooperation "play an important role in our engagement", driven by the vision of MAHASAGAR, and India is working with many African countries to ensure security and stability of the Indian Ocean Region, the MoS said.

He also underlined that India has expanded its diplomatic footprint in Africa in the recent years by opening 17 new missions across the continent, taking the number of Indian missions in Africa to 46.

Diplomats from Kenya, Ethiopia, among other countries, also shared their thoughts during the opening session of the event. (PTI)

E-AUCTION FOR PAY & USE TOILET CONTRACT

E-auction for Pay & Use Toilet Contract over Tinsukia Division. Details are as under, Auction Catalogue No.: Pnu-TSK-Tol-03, Auction Start Date & Time (All Lots) : 11:00 hrs. on 11-05-2026, Auction Close Date & Time : 11:30 hrs. on 11-05-2026, Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee; Trips/Days: 1096.

Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	Pnu-TSK-FKG-Tol-1-26-1 (Pay and Use - Toilets)	Pay and use Toilet Contract at Furkating Junction Railway Station for a period of 3 (Three) Years.

The e-auction catalogue has already been uploaded on 24-04-2026 through IREPS website.

Divisional Commercial Manager (IC), Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

Initiative aimed at boosting green cover and environmental conservation

BoNSU launches massive plantation drive to plant 9 Lakh saplings across BTC

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 28: A commendable and ambitious initiative has been launched by the Bodo National Students Union (BoNSU) to make the entire BTC region greener, especially at a time when illegal encroachers are cutting down valuable trees and clearing forests to establish settlements in the Sikhna Jwhlao National Forest area of Kokrajhar district.

The Bodo National Students Union (BoNSU) has set a target of planting 9 lakh saplings across the BTC region within the coming year.

Accordingly, on Tuesday, under the initiative of BoNSU and with the support of the BTC Forest Department, the plantation programme of 9 lakh saplings was



formally inaugurated.

With the aim of securing the future—"Plant a sapling, one student, one tree, one future"—the programme was launched at the

Dighli forest area under the Hattugao Forest Division, within the Sikhna Jwhlao National Park in Kokrajhar district.

Various species of saplings such

as Lali, Neem, Arjun and Mahogany were planted.

Around 300 participants, including members of BoNSU, the NGO Sikrajhar Multipurpose Society and officials from the Forest Department, took part in the plantation drive.

The student organisation has set a goal to plant a total of 9 lakh saplings across the five districts of BTC within one year, aiming to bring about a green revolution and protect nature.

It is worth mentioning that during the inauguration of the plantation programme on Tuesday, key figures present included BoNSU Chief Advisor Monanjay Daimary, president Briten Islary, General Secretary Sanuma Basumatary, along with officials from the Forest Department.

CEO Anurag Goel reviews counting preparedness in Morigaon

District gears up for May 4 with training and security arrangements underway



HT Correspondent

MORIGAO, April 28: The Chief Electoral Officer, Anurag Goel, visited Morigaon district on Tuesday to assess preparedness for the upcoming counting exercise. He inspected the counting centre set up at Morigaon College and reviewed the overall arrangements in place.

During the visit, Goel examined the strong room and counting halls, taking stock of the security measures and infrastructure. He directed officials to ensure that all arrangements are completed in strict adherence to the guidelines of the Election Commission. Emphasising vigilance, he urged officials to maintain full compliance with all prescribed protocols during the

counting process. The Chief Electoral Officer was accompanied by District Commissioner and District Election Officer Anamika Tewari, Senior Superintendent of Police Prakash Sonowal, District Development Commissioner, Additional District Commissioner (Election), Returning Officers and other election officials.

Meanwhile, the district administration has intensified preparations to ensure the smooth conduct of counting on May 4. Training of personnel engaged in counting duties commenced on Tuesday at the Pibitora Hut Auditorium in Morigaon town. In the first phase, 60 Counting Supervisors, 60 Counting Assistants, 60 MTS and Grade IV staff, 80 personnel for postal ballot counting and 60 Micro Observers were trained. Officials informed that training for Compilation Officers, Compilation Assistants, Transit and Sealing teams will be held on Wednesday, while the second phase of training for counting personnel is scheduled for April 30.

Counting of votes will begin at 8 AM on May 4 at the counting centre at Morigaon College. Three counting halls have been arranged for 52-Jagiroad (SC), 53-Laharighat and 54-Morigaon constituencies, each with 14 tables. The district recorded a voter turnout of 89.58 per cent in the polling held on April 9.

NFR strengthens monsoon preparedness for safe train operations



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has implemented a series of strategic preparedness measures to ensure safe and uninterrupted train operations during the monsoon season. Given the region's susceptibility to heavy rainfall, landslides and flooding, stationary watchmen have been strategically deployed at vulnerable locations to continuously monitor track conditions and raise immediate alerts if any danger is detected. Washout-prone and flood-sensitive areas have been reinforced through embankment strengthening, improved drainage systems and clearing of natural water flow channels. In addition, water level measuring gauges have been installed at critical points, particularly in hill sections, to monitor rising water levels in real time.

To enable swift response during emergencies, NFR has stationed relief materials such as boulders, sandbags and wire mesh at key locations. 'Emergency on Wheels' trains are fully equipped and kept ready with technical staff and essential tools to respond promptly to any situation. Rapid Response Teams have also been constituted across all divisions to address inci-

dents such as landslides, track washouts and water-logging with minimal delay. These teams are trained to restore normal operations quickly, minimising disruption to passenger and freight services.

As part of monsoon preparedness for 2026, substantial quantities of materials have been strategically stocked across all divisions. Luming Division has about 10,000-12,000 cum of boulders and 2,000-3,000 cum of sand/quarry dust, along with over 40,000 cement bags, while Tinsukia Division has around 400-600 cum of boulders, 100-150 cum of sand/quarry dust and over 7,000 cement bags. Rangiya Division has stocked approximately 6,000-8,000 cum of boulders and over 1,000 cum of sand/quarry dust, with more than 5,000 cement bags. Alipurduar Division has over 20,000 cum of boulders along with significant quantities of other materials and Katihar Division has around 3,000-5,000 cum of boulders, 800-1,200 cum of sand/quarry dust and over 20,000 cement bags. Overall, adequate stock is available across all divisions, with minor deficiencies being re-couped to ensure full preparedness for the monsoon season. In addition, various capacities of winch crabs, jacks, tirdors and tripods are available across all divisions, ensuring readiness for rescue or recovery operations.

Furthermore, NFR is working closely with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) to receive real-time weather alerts and forecasts. This coordination helps railway control rooms, which are operational 24x7, to make proactive decisions regarding train movements and field deployment. Passengers are advised to stay updated through official communication channels and cooperate with railway authorities. With these comprehensive measures in place, NFR remains fully committed to ensuring safety, operational efficiency and passenger convenience throughout the monsoon season.

Axom Senior Secondary School maintains 100% HS results streak

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, April 28: Axom Senior Secondary School, located at Agbandha under Margherita Co-District and established in 2010, has successfully maintained its unbroken streak of excellent results over the past several years.

For the 14th year, Axom Senior Secondary School has once again achieved a remarkable feat by securing a 100% pass rate in both the Arts and Commerce streams in the Higher Secondary Final Examination, the results of which were declared on April 28, Tuesday.

In the Arts stream, out of a total of 65 students who appeared, 47 secured first division while 18 ob-

tained second division marks. Among them, 8 students secured distinction and 17 students achieved star marks.

In the Commerce stream, all the students who appeared passed, with 8 securing first division. Among them, 2 students achieved distinction and 6 secured star marks.

Following the declaration of the results, a festive atmosphere prevailed in the school, which has once again achieved a 100% pass percentage in both Arts and Commerce streams for the 14th consecutive year. The school premises lit up with an atmosphere resembling a grand Diwali celebration.

Pinku Kalita, Principal of Axom

Senior Secondary School, Agbandha, Margherita, said that it is a moment of immense pride and joy for all, as they celebrate a remarkable achievement of 100% success in both Arts and Commerce streams over the last 14 years.

He added that this success is not just a number but a reflection of dedication, discipline and determination. All the students have shown that with focus and hard work, excellence is always within reach. In the Arts stream, Anushka Bailung achieved 90.6% marks, while in the Commerce stream, Nayanjyoti Deori secured 86%. Along with numerous distinctions, star and letter marks, the achievement is truly commendable, he said

Nagaon records strong HS results, celebrations muted without ranks

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 28: The Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB) declared the Higher Secondary Final Examination 2026 results for all three streams at 10:30 AM on Tuesday. However, unlike previous years, Nagaon did not witness the usual festive atmosphere as the results were announced without merit positions.

In line with the National Education Policy and modeled on the CBSE pattern, ASSEB declared the results without ranks this year. This marked a stark contrast to earlier years when several educational institutions in Nagaon consistently secured top ten positions, including first rank, creating records. In the past, campuses would be filled with jubilant students, the sound of firecrackers and crowds of parents, well-wishers and journalists. But this time, a subdued and unusually quiet environment prevailed across institutions.

KKHSOU marks 220th birth anniversary of Maniram Dewan

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 28: Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University observed the 220th birth anniversary of Maniram Dewan with an insightful academic talk on "Emerging Entrepreneurial Landscape Opportunities of Sustainable Enterprises" on Monday. The event was organised by the Maniram Dewan School of Management at the University's City Office in Guwahati. The session began with a welcome address by Professor N N Sarma, Director of the Maniram Dewan School of Management, who highlighted the dynamic personality and historical contributions of Maniram Dewan, particularly his association with the tea industry of Assam during the British period.

The keynote speaker, Dr Sriparna B Baruah, delivered a comprehensive lecture focusing on the evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem in India. She contextualised the growth of entrepreneurship in the post-1991 economic reforms era, noting its role in job creation, wealth generation and economic development. She emphasised that entrepreneurship offers not only financial independence but also a

sense of fulfilment through innovation and asset creation.

Dr Baruah underscored the importance of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), start-ups and social entrepreneurship as key drivers transforming the business landscape. She highlighted that innovation is deeply embedded in India's socio-economic fabric and called for the development of sustainable enterprises rooted in ethics, social equity and community welfare.

The speaker identified several critical areas for sustainable entrepreneurship, including green energy, waste management, sustainable agriculture, water conservation, eco-friendly products and social enterprises. She also emphasised the pivotal role of technology in scaling sustainable ventures.

According to the declared results for 2026, Nagaon district recorded pass percentages of 86.49% in Arts, 94.18% in Science, 84.72% in Commerce and 88.16% in Vocational.

In the Arts stream, a total of 13,231 candidates appeared from the district, of whom 11,444 passed and 1,887 failed, with 3,751 students in first division, 4,881 in second division and 2,812 in third division.

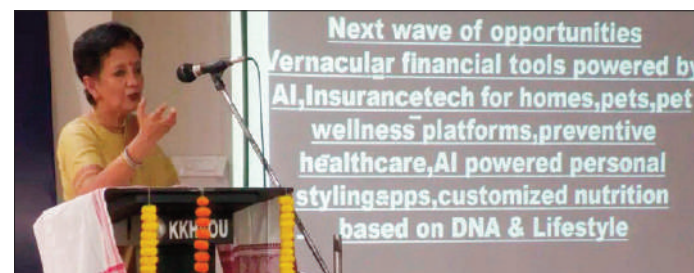
Similarly, in the Science stream, out of a total of 3,573 students, 3,365 passed and 208 failed, with 2,387 students in first division, 860 in second division, and 118 in third division.

In the Commerce stream, a total of 988 students appeared from various institutions in the district, of whom 837 passed and 151 failed, with 495 students in first division, 284 in second division and 58 in third division. Besides, in the Vocational stream, a total of 79 students appeared in the HS Final Examination 2026, of whom 70 passed and

9 failed. Among the successful candidates, 7 secured first division, 58 passed in second division and 5 in third division.

Many students in the district expressed satisfaction with their results; however, some voiced disappointment. Several meritorious students expressed surprise at their marks, noting that while they scored 100 or 99 in some subjects, they received marks in the 70s in others.

It is pertinent to mention that the absence of a rank list has notably dampened the celebratory mood that traditionally accompanies HS results in Nagaon, where academic excellence had become a matter of local pride in recent years. As in previous years, leading educational institutions such as Ramanujan Senior Secondary School, Gurukul Global Academy, Renaissance Senior Secondary School and Concept Senior Secondary School managed to maintain a record of 100% pass results this year as well.



Special attention was given to the North-Eastern region, where Dr Baruah outlined emerging opportunities in sectors such as organic agriculture, bamboo and cane industries, renewable energy, handloom and sustainable fashion, vernacular financial tools, wellness platforms and preventive healthcare.

The session concluded with a strong message that the future of entrepreneurship lies in sustainability, urging aspiring entrepreneurs to integrate responsible practices into their core strategies for long-term impact.

The programme was moderated by Dr Chayanika Senapati. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Smritishikha Choudhury, who expressed gratitude to the speaker and participants for their active engagement.

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Two armed miscreants arrested in Gossaigaon

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 28: Police apprehended two armed miscreants from the Saljhuri area under Gossaigaon police station in Kokrajhar district. Acting on information regarding the movement of armed individuals with alleged intent to carry out subversive activities, a police team led by the Additional Superintendent of Police (HQ) conducted an operation on the intervening night of April 26 and 27 under Gossaigaon Police Station.

During the operation, two individuals were apprehended from the Saljhuri area. The arrested persons have been identified as Jiten Hasda, a resident of No 1 Saljhuri and Martin Hembrom of Laoria-para village. Police recovered one factory-made pistol with a magazine, three rounds of 7.65 mm live ammunition, two mobile handsets and one Hero Super Splendor motorcycle from their possession.

A case has been registered and further investigation is underway.

Mother killed her daughter

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, April 28: Sensation prevails in Kharahat Banglaguri Line near Demow on Monday, where a mother killed her daughter. According to information received, the woman, Kalpana Kalandi, attacked her 4-year-old daughter with a sharp weapon in the neck on Monday, due to which the girl died. Sources said that the incident took place when Kalpana Kalandi's husband was not present at the residence. When Rontu Kalandi, husband of Kalpana Kalandi, knew about the incident, he immediately reached his residence and tried to admit her daughter to the hospital and then his wife came to attack him also, but he ran from there and entered his neighbour's house to escape and then Kalpana Kalandi herself cut her neck. Regarding the incident immediately the Demow Police was informed. The Demow Revenue Circle Officer and Demow Police immediately reached the incident area and started investigation. The girl and the seriously injured woman were taken to the Demow Model Hospital. The doctor declared the girl as dead. After providing primary treatment in Demow Model Hospital the seriously injured woman was referred to Dibrugarh for better treatment. It is not yet known why the woman killed her daughter.

Kokrajhar Cancer Centre marks 4th Foundation Day

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 28: The Kokrajhar Cancer Centre commemorated its 4th Foundation Day on Tuesday, celebrating four years of dedicated service in strengthening cancer care delivery and awareness across the region.

The event witnessed the presence of several eminent dignitaries and stakeholders from the health, academic and community sectors. Among them, Dr Nilu Brahma, Director of Health Services, BTC, emphasised the need to enhance cancer-related training for frontline health workers to improve early detection and outcomes.

The Joint Director of Health Services, Chirang, highlighted the importance of increased community participation in cancer prevention and screening initiatives. Dr Atul Ch Boro, Principal of Kokrajhar Medical College and Hospital (KMCH), stressed the need to intensify awareness efforts, particularly at the grassroots level, to ensure timely diagnosis and treatment.

German Embassy, NABARD, GIZ review JIVA farming project in Nagaon

Delegation assesses sustainable natural farming initiatives in Borbeel clusters

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 28: As part of its vision to promote sustainable natural farming in rural areas, NABARD is implementing its JIVA Natural Farming Project by involving tribal farmers of Jiyana, Gaspura and Bipulu clusters of the Borbeel area in Nagaon district. At the field level, this programme is being implemented by its PIA, Kalong-Kapili, with technical support from SuATI GIZ-India, WASSAN, RySS, among others. Under this project, the identified farmers were provided training on soil health management, pre-monsoon dry sowing (PMDS), intercropping models such as SRI paddy with border crops, bio-input preparation, livestock integration and aquaculture practices.

The trained farmers under the project have adopted innovative intercropping models like ATM (Any Time Money) and A3 (Aharam, Arogyam, Adayam), along with the Surya Mandal nutrition garden model. These models have encouraged farmers to grow short-duration and long-duration crops together on the same plot, resulting in crop diversification, soil health improvement and climate-resilient production systems. In addition, two eco-integrated farm ponds



have been developed to retain soil moisture and store rainwater. Further, customised bamboo-based backyard poultry sheds have also been introduced to boost farmers' income and support the rural circular economy. To reduce dependency on chemical fertilizers and to create a natural, low-cost farming system, manure from livestock is being used in the preparation of bio-inputs

like Jeevamrit, Ghana Jeevamrit, Neemastra and Brahmastra, which are then applied back to crops and ponds.

Through hands-on training and field demonstrations, farmers are adopting diversified cropping systems on their plots. These practices are helping them move away from single-crop dependency, increase productivity, improve soil micro-bial activity and

against erratic rainfall. Crop diversification has emerged as a key step toward sustainable and profitable natural farming under this JIVA Project.

To acquire firsthand insights into the ongoing grassroots initiatives and community-led development efforts under the project, a delegation comprising the Second Secretary of the German Embassy in India, Johannes Schneider, General Man-

ager of NABARD Head Office, Mumbai, Dr Jay Nigam, Director of NRM Ae GIZ-India, Meekha Paul, representatives of GIZ-India including Dr Deepak Chamola, Nameta Sarma, Manoshi Chakravorty, NABARD Assam Regional Office representative Bhama Deuri, DDM NABARD Rajendar Perna and PFA Kalong-Kapili representatives Jyotish Talukdar and Binay Kr Das, among others, visited the project area and interacted with the beneficiary farmers.

During the visit, the team explored several interventions such as ATM, A3 and Surya Mandal nutrition gardens, customised bamboo-based poultry sheds for flood-prone locations, fishery-cum-duckery integrated models, bio-input resource units and the conversion of unutilised or fallow common land into banana plantation areas with suitable intercropping of turmeric, vegetables and napier fodder cultivation.

After planting various saplings, the visiting delegation also shared valuable suggestions and inputs with the farming community to ensure the sustainability of livelihood models, climate-resilient practices and grassroots adaptations in action.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

We hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office -Aesop

Crucial 2nd phase of Bengal polls

West Bengal is set for the second and final phase of polling on April 29 in 142 seats out of the total of 294 in the state assembly. After the holding of the first phase of polls on April 23 in 152 seats, PM Narendra Modi, who was campaigning in another part of the state on the same day, declared that the BJP had swept the first phase getting more than 100 seats in the first phase. Home Minister Amit Shah, who was also on campaign trail, made it more categorical by saying that he had made all the calculations and he found that the BJP would be getting 110 seats in the first phase. Both declared that BJP would be forming the state government ousting the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee next month after the results were known on May 4. There is nothing wrong for a senior party leader in declaring that their party will be winning the elections and forming the new government. In Bengal, Trinamool Congress led by the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is in power since 2011, the year the Left Front government was ousted by her. After that, Mamata has enjoyed three terms. Now she is in the election battle for the fourth term. There is certainly anti-incumbency. This is the most opportune time for the BJP to oust the TMC from power through mobilisation of all its resources, political, financial as also central agencies.

The Bengal election in 2026 is witnessing unprecedented developments which so far have not taken place in any electoral battle in any state. In the present cycle of elections held also in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam and Puducherry, it was only in Bengal that the Home Minister Amit Shah continuously stayed for fifteen days giving directions from his hotel to the BJP leaders. This had immediate impact on the law-and-order administration, especially the IPS officers who are mostly nominated as police observers with complete control on law and order in election time. Already, through the SIR, large-scale deletions have taken place in select constituencies with concentration of minority population. This SIR was the brain-child of Shah and he wanted its implementation in Bengal as an experiment for future state assembly elections, as also Lok Sabha elections.

In 2021 elections, TMC got 215 seats and the BJP 77, though BJP's actual strength in the assembly has come down to 65 due to defections. In the last five years since 2021, TMC won all by polls by increasing margins. This trend can only be totally reversed if there is a massive wave against Mamata and her government. TMC as a party has been the focus of attacks on the issue of corruption, but that is still not impacting Mamata's personal brand and her immense rapport with the people, especially the rural women.

West Bengal is tense before second phase of election

By: Dr Gyan Pathak

On the eve of the second phase of West Bengal Legislative Assembly Election to be held on April 29 the situation, has become very tense, after ECI deployed an "encounter specialist", as described by BJP as poll observer who threatened family members of a TMC candidate Jahangir Khan contesting from Falta in South 24 Parganas.

There is heavy deployment of central forces in the state, that Election Commission of India has deployed for "free and fair" election. PM Narendra Modi and Union Minister of Home Amit Shah have already threatened stern action against "TMC goons" after May 4 counting of votes, and it is the end of the Mamata's rule in the state for the last one and half decades. Mamata has all along been objecting that they can't refer TMC's rank and file as "goons". It has already created considerable level of tension in the state, especially after voting for the first phase of election held on April 23.

The news tension has been created after the so called "encounter specialist" IPS officer Ajay Pal Sharma, who threatened the Jahangir Khan's family members. "Make sure he understands. If there are complaints of people being threatened, we will deal with it properly. If anyone indulges in wrongdoing or tries to harass voters, we will take strict action," he said, adding "Tell Jahangir that repeated complaints are coming that his people are threatening others. If that continues, we will take it up seriously. There should be no complaints later." BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya backed Sharma's actions saying "He wasted no time in setting the tone, firmly reading the riot act to the family members of Abhishek Banerjee's close aide, Jahangir Khan". Not only that Malviya said in his post on X, "Ajay Pal Sharma, the encounter specialist and "Singham" of UP Police, has been deployed as Police Observer in South 24 Parganas." Malviya also said, "The message is loud and clear: the era of intimidation and impunity is over. Law and order will prevail, and those attempting to influence the electoral process will be held accountable."

TMC has objected to the deployment of the "encounter specialist" as poll observer in the state by ECI. The party wrote on X, "Yogi Adityanath's encounter specialist Ajay Pal Sharma has just been parachuted in by the Election Commission as police observer for South 24 Parganas. This is the same man whose badge of honour is a body count from "encounters" and whose real speciality is turning the police uniform into a personal ATM and a tool for personal vendettas." TMC has also pointed out that he has been booked for criminal breach of trust, criminal conspiracy, and tampering with crucial evidence. Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav has also objected to deployment of the "encounter specialist" as poll observer. He said, "BJP has sent their agent who was tested in Rampur and Sambhal to West Bengal in the guise of observer. ...At the right time, there will be a thorough probe into the criminal activities of these 'agents' who are out to implement the BJP's agenda, and strict punitive action will be taken." He also highlighted the IPS officer's "dark record" and "thok-do (encounter) attitude".

These tensions are seen on the surface, but within these are the real political tensions regarding political outcome in the state, in the second phase of polls. Though PM Modi has said that first phase of election has shattered the arrogance and Ego of TMC, the second phase will ensure BJP's win. However, it is not so on the ground. BJP has performed better in the first phase, though far behind TMC. In the second phase BJP's performance is likely to be worse.

For the first phase, BJP had claimed to win 110 seats out of 152, and TMC had claimed to win around 132-134 seats or at least 125. Both the claims were exaggerated. Out of the 152 seats BJP had won 59 seats in the 2021 election, and there were 50 seats where BJP had never won. Though BJP had some edge in several constituencies, it is still not certain that they will actually considerably increase their tally. BJP's position in the second phase is much worse compared to the first phase. Out of 142 seats going to poll on April 19, BJP had won only 18 seats in 2021, while TMC had won 123 seats. This way, the electoral battle in the West Bengal will be fought now on the TMC's favourable turf. There are 102 seats in the second phase where BJP had never won. This makes BJP most worried at this time, and the TMC, though has an edge, facing disruption by the administration led by BJP's agents, as has been alleged. This is the real reason for tension.

Deletion of voters in large number of voters under SIR has also created tensions in both the BJP and the TMC. People are against

The Middle East War and the Current Global Economy

The most sensitive and complex issue in contemporary global politics and economics is the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and its adverse impact on the global economy. Recently, the intensifying military confrontation among the United States, Israel, and Iran has altered the economic landscape of the entire world. This conflict is not confined to a specific geographical boundary; rather, it has deeply affected international trade, energy supply, and the daily lives of ordinary people. In the context of the war, the obstruction of crucial maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz has nearly paralyzed global supply chains. The International Monetary Fund has already reduced the global economic growth forecast for the current year from 3.3 percent to 3.1 percent, and if the war prolongs, there is a clear apprehension that this rate may decline to 2.5 percent. These figures demonstrate how severely the current conflict has damaged the global macroeconomic structure. In this situation, developing and low-income countries, whose economies largely depend on imports, have been the worst affected. The uncertainty created by the war has generated intense anxiety among global investors, resulting in disrupted capital flows and forcing the suspension of new industrial projects. The present economic condition has become entirely dependent on the trajectory of the war, and the possibility of further deterioration cannot be ruled out at any moment. The global market system is now facing an unprecedented challenge where maintaining economic stability has become nearly impossible. This situation has compelled leading economists around the world to rethink their approaches, as traditional economic frameworks have failed to provide adequate solutions to this abnormal complexity. In the era of globalization, the current situation in the Middle East stands as a stark and brutal example of how a military conflict in one region can instantly destabilize the global economy.

The most severe and immediate impact of the Middle East conflict has been on the global energy sector. The International Energy Agency has described this situation as the largest supply disruption in the history of the global energy market. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has halted nearly twenty percent of the world's crude oil supply and a significant volume of liquefied natural gas. As an immediate consequence, the price of Brent crude oil in the international market has surged abnormally, reaching as high as 120 dollars per barrel. This increase in energy prices has created a major crisis in the global industrial sector. Particularly in Asia and Europe, countries that are heavily dependent on the Middle East for energy have been forced to reduce industrial production due to rising costs. Not only crude oil, but the disruption in natural gas supply has also compelled major gas-exporting countries to restrict their exports, leading to an increase of more than one hundred and forty percent in liquefied natural gas prices in Asian markets. This energy shortage has not only affected transportation systems but has also caused severe disruptions in electricity generation, plastics, and chemical industries. In Europe, the rise in energy prices has led to a form of economic stagnation, where both inflation and unemployment are increasing simultaneously. Due to energy shortages, many industrial establishments are on the verge of closure, significantly reducing global production capacity. There is no immediate solution to this energy crisis, as maritime routes are unlikely to become safe until the military conflict ends. Therefore, the global economy must prepare itself for a prolonged and painful energy crisis, which is expected to hinder economic progress for several financial years ahead.

The adverse effects of the war on global supply chains and transportation systems have pushed international trade into a deep crisis. Due to the lack of safety in maritime trade routes, commercial ships are being forced to use longer and more expensive alternative routes. As a result, maritime insurance costs have increased abnormally, directly raising the cost of imports and exports manifold. With the rise in transportation costs, the prices of all goods available across the world have increased significantly. This disruption in supply chains is not limited to the energy sector; it has



DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

also severely affected the supply of electronic goods, machinery, medical equipment, and other essential commodities. Goods are piling up at ports, yet they cannot be transported to their destinations. Attempts have been made to use air transport as an alternative, but the doubling of aviation fuel costs due to rising crude oil prices has made this option economically unviable. The once smooth functioning global trade system is now completely disrupted. Countries dependent on exports are facing huge financial losses as they are unable to deliver their products to markets, while importing countries are struggling with shortages of essential goods. This situation has also strained trade relations among nations and is likely to push countries to reduce dependence on global supply chains and focus more on local production in the future. The current scenario has demonstrated how fragile modern transportation systems are and how a conflict in a single region can bring the entire global logistics network to a standstill. Transportation systems are the nervous system of the global economy, and with this system under attack, the entire economic structure is moving toward paralysis.

The impact of the Middle East war on food security and the agricultural sector has been extremely severe and far-reaching. The deep connection between energy crises and food crises has once again been exposed by this conflict. Around twenty to thirty percent of the world's fertilizer exports, especially urea, pass through the Strait of Hormuz. With the disruption in natural gas supply, both the production and transportation of these fertilizers have been severely affected. The resulting rise in fertilizer prices and shortages

have had a direct impact on agriculture, raising serious concerns about a decline in global crop production. The combined pressure of rising production costs and transportation expenses has led the world toward a dual food inflation crisis. Countries under the Gulf Cooperation Council, which import nearly eighty percent of their food requirements, are currently facing a severe food crisis. The necessity of transporting essential food items by air has caused food prices in these countries to rise by forty to one hundred twenty

percent. Since energy is required at every stage from agricultural production to market distribution, the rise in oil prices has made food inflation inevitable. For the poor populations of developing countries, this food inflation has become a devastating blow, as a major portion of their income is now being spent solely on food. If fertilizer supply does not return to normal soon, agricultural production will decline further in the coming seasons, potentially leading to famine-like conditions at the global level. This complex relationship between food and energy has trapped the global economy in a vicious cycle from which escape is extremely difficult. The collapse of the agricultural economy has not only affected financial statistics but has also rapidly lowered the standard of living of people across the world.

Economic policymaking and the functioning of central banks have now reached an extremely critical stage. Controlling the supply-driven inflation caused by the war has become nearly impossible for central banks. Typically, central banks raise interest rates to control inflation when demand increases, but the current inflation is not demand-driven; it is caused by supply disruptions. As a result, institutions such as the European Central Bank have been forced to abandon their plans to cut interest rates and have revised their economic growth forecasts downward. The rise in long-term government bond yields signals the severity of future inflation. Higher interest rates have increased the cost of capital for industries, halting new employment and expansion. At the same time, the fear of stagflation caused by

reduced production and rising prices has alarmed leading economists worldwide. Central banks in developed countries now face a difficult choice: if they lower interest rates to boost economic growth, inflation may spiral out of control, and if they maintain high rates to control inflation, the economy may slip into a deep recession. This uncertainty has also caused significant volatility in stock markets. Investors are shifting their capital toward safer assets, leading to a potential outflow of foreign capital from developing countries. The limitations of monetary policy in this context highlight how ineffective traditional financial tools can become in the face of geopolitical conflicts in a globalized world.

While inflation and supply chain disruptions have severely affected production sectors and consumers, certain specific sectors have gained unprecedented profits from this situation. Particularly, defence manufacturing companies, certain large financial institutions, and markets built on geopolitical speculation have benefited significantly. However, the gains of these limited sectors cannot compensate for the overall damage to the global economy. The conflict has economically divided nations; countries like the United States have been partially shielded due to their domestic energy production, while European and third-world countries are deeply affected. The path to economic recovery in the coming period is expected to be extremely difficult and prolonged. Until military and political stability returns to the Middle East and maritime trade routes become completely secure, there is no realistic possibility of restoring stability in the global economy. The present situation has sent a clear message to world leaders that political conflict and economic security are not separate issues in the modern world. The network of global trade and energy dependence that has been built is extremely sensitive, and without its security, no nation can safeguard its economic future. The current global economy now stands at a highly uncertain and perilous crossroads, from which recovery will require not just economic reforms, but also a strong and long-term geopolitical resolution.

The Quiet Crisis: Unpacking the Culture of violence in US politics

The air in Washington DC usually carries a certain performative tension during the annual White House Correspondents' Association dinner. It is a night designed for the intersection of power and the press, a rare moment where the friction of the briefing room is supposed to give way to self-deprecating jokes and a shared, if fragile, respect for the First Amendment. But on a recent Saturday evening, that fragile peace was shattered by the sharp, unmistakable cracks of gunfire. The gala, attended by President Donald Trump and his senior administration officials, became the latest backdrop for a terrifying display of political violence that has increasingly come to define the American experience.

A gunman managed to breach security protocols, firing shots that sent the nation's most powerful figures and members of the global press diving for cover under linen-clothed tables. While the President and his staff escaped physically unharmed, the psychological toll of the event rippled instantly across the country. The suspected shooter was quickly apprehended and identified as Cole Tomas Allen, a thirty-one-year-old man from Torrance, California. Initial investigations suggest a premeditated strike driven by deep-seated political animosity. White House officials noted that Allen clearly stated his intention to target members of the administration. A chilling note recovered by law enforcement revealed a man who felt pushed to the brink, claiming he could no longer allow a person he viewed as a traitor to coat his hands with crimes.

This was not an isolated flash of anger but rather the third major incident apparently targeting Mr. Trump. It follows a harrowing campaign rally where an assassin's bullet grazed the President's ear and another tense encounter where a gunman was intercepted near a golf course he frequently visits. Each of these events serves as a grim milestone in a timeline of escalating hostility that shows no signs of slowing. The shooting at the Hilton ballroom is a symptom of a much larger, more systemic rot in the way Americans engage with one another when their visions for the country diverge.

When we look back at the last couple of years, the landscape of American politics is littered with the casualties of this culture of violence. In September 2025, the country was rocked by the killing of conservative activist Charlie Kirk in Utah, an event that sent shockwaves through the Republican base. Only a few months before that, Minnesota felt the sting of tragedy when Democratic State Representative Melissa Hortman and her husband were murdered.

These acts of violence are not confined to one side of the aisle; they represent a total breakdown of the democratic compact. We also cannot forget the 2022 attack on Paul Pelosi, which demonstrated that even the families of political leaders are now considered fair game in this scorched-earth environment.

The current atmosphere is thick with a level of polarization that feels almost impossible to navigate. Mr. Trump is now more than a year into his second term, and the policy battles over immigration, trade, and social issues have reached a fever pitch. Combined with the lingering controversies surrounding his past associations, including his ties to the late Jeffrey Epstein, the national mood has curdled into something dangerously volatile. There is a sense that the common ground has not just shrunk but has been completely excavated.

While bitter partisanship is a historical staple of the American story, the specific danger of the modern era is found in the sheer number of guns available to those who feel they have no other way to be heard. The proliferation of firearms has given a deadly edge to what should be verbal or electoral disagreements. There is a tragic irony in the fact that the current administration has been one of the most vocal defenders of the Second Amendment. By aligning so closely with the National Rifle Association and working to roll back even modest restrictions on ownership, the administration has championed a philosophy that views the widespread presence of guns as a fundamental necessity of liberty.

Mr. Trump's own journey on this issue reflects the shifting tides of the political landscape. Back in 2000, he expressed support for a ban on assault weapons, a position that seems almost unrecognizable compared to his current stance. By the time he entered the 2016 race, his views had shifted to match the priorities of the millions of dollars in NRA support that flowed into his campaign. This policy shift has occurred even as the United States is periodically wracked by the trauma of mass shootings. With three such incidents already recorded this year and hundreds over the last several decades, the frequency of these tragedies has created a sense of national numbness.

The lobbying power of the NRA and the deep pockets of gun rights groups on



AUTHOR
By: Satyabrata Borah

Capitol Hill often make the prospect of reform feel like a distant dream. There is a cycle that occurs after every high-profile shooting: a brief period of national mourning, a heated debate over gun control, and then a return to a status quo that ensures the next incident is only a matter of time. It is a cycle that requires a fundamental re-assessment of what we value as a society. It behoves the nation to take a step back from this unrelenting epidemic and consider the human cost of current policies.

Common-sense reforms, such as more rigorous background checks and limitations on high-capacity magazines, are often framed as radical attacks on freedom. In reality, they are attempts to restore a level of safety to the public square. Until Congress can find the political will to enact such measures into law, the threat remains constant. The incident in Washington is a reminder that no one is truly safe in a society where the first instinct in a disagreement is to reach for a weapon. The cultural shift required to change this trajectory is immense. We are living in a time where moderate voices are often drowned out by those who believe that the only way to save the country is to destroy their opponents. This belief system, when paired with easy access to lethal force, creates a powder keg that can be ignited by a single social media post or a piece of breaking news. The suspect in the Washington shooting, with his talk of traitors and crimes, appears to have been a person who convinced himself that violence was a moral necessity.

The impact of these events goes far beyond the immediate targets. Every time a gun is fired in a political context, it chips away at the foundation of the democratic process. It sends a message that power is not something to be debated or won at the ballot box, but something to be seized or silenced through fear. This climate of intimidation makes it harder for good people to enter public service and makes it nearly impossible for citizens to engage in the kind of honest, difficult conversations that are required for a healthy society.

The events at the press dinner should be a wake-up call, but history suggests it might just be another data point in a long and bloody trend. We have seen time and again that the shock of a single event is rarely enough to overcome the entrenched interests that benefit from the current sys-

tem. The rhetoric from both sides of the political spectrum often serves to fan the flames rather than douse them, creating an environment where the next Cole Tomas Allen is already being radicalized in some corner of the internet.

Addressing the culture of violence requires more than just new laws, though those are essential. It requires a collective decision to reject the idea that our neighbors are our enemies. It requires a media environment that prioritizes facts over outrage and a political leadership that values the stability of the republic over the temporary gains of a news cycle. Without these changes, the proliferation of guns will continue to provide a shortcut to tragedy for anyone with a grievance and a trigger finger.

The events of 2025 and early 2026 have shown us what the alternative looks like. It is a world where activists are picked off at university events, where local representatives are hunted in their own homes, and where a night intended for humor and celebration turns into a scene of chaotic survival. This is not the vision of a functional democracy; it is the portrait of a society in the midst of a slow-motion collapse.

It is reasonable to believe that until there is a move toward a more moderate position on gun laws and a genuine effort to lower the temperature of our national discourse, the violence will continue unabated. The shooting in Washington was a close call that could have altered the course of history in a single second. We may not be so lucky next time. The urgency of this moment cannot be overstated, yet the path to a solution remains blocked by the same partisanship that fueled the fire in the first place.

The story of Cole Tomas Allen is a story about the failure of our social and political systems to provide a constructive outlet for anger and a safe environment for everyone. It is a story about how easily the language of war can be adopted by those who feel forgotten or betrayed. Most of all, it is a story about the cost of inaction. Every day that passes without meaningful change is a day that we accept the current culture of violence as the new normal.

We must look at the names of those lost like Charlie Kirk, Melissa Hortman and the countless anonymous victims of gun violence and ask if this is truly the best we can do. The edge of our disagreements has become too sharp, and the tools we use to settle them have become too lethal. The time for common-sense reform was years ago, but the second-best time is right now. If we continue to wait, we are simply waiting for the next tragedy to arrive.

The life of Puja: How a young woman from rural Bengal became an internet star

By: Nolina Mini

For much of her college life in West Bengal's Midnapore city, Pujarini Pradhan felt invisible. "If you ask people in my college, they probably won't remember me," she said.

Unlike the girls from "big families" of the city, Pradhan was from a village in East Midnapore. "I used to go wearing a salwar suit, and one look at me they knew that I came from a village," she said.

But Pradhan was fascinated by the world that her co-ed college opened up. She was "fascinated" by the girls she saw there. "They wore jeans and tops, their hair was so silky, their manner of talking was so confident," she told Scroll.

She made no friends, barring two other students from nearby villages. "Nobody knew us," said Pradhan, who studied English literature from 2019 to 2021. "We just came, attended college, studied and left." Her classmates even forgot to inform them about their farewell party.

But college was not only about being ignored by those who seemed, at the time, better than her. It introduced Pradhan – now a 26-year-old influencer who goes by the name of @lifeofpuja on Instagram – to the internet.

"I've been on social media since I was 18 years old," she said. "I wouldn't know the world outside if it were not for the internet. But people won't necessarily teach it to you. You find out by going online," she said.

In less than a year, Pradhan's Instagram account, where she posts in English about her life as a woman in an East Midnapore village, has gathered 7.5 lakh followers, brand deals from Netflix and Audible – and a not-inconsiderable fandom.

She speaks to her followers about the books she reads and the films she watches – Rosarita by Anita Desai and The Raven by Edgar Allan Poe, the films of Japanese actor and director Takeshi Kitano – and shares her feminist reflections on womanhood and motherhood. As a woman in a rural setting who knows her mind and speaks in English, she challenges stereotypes about who is considered intellectual and influential.

Prerana Subramaniam, a cultural studies scholar and content creator herself, says that Pradhan "quietly unsettles a hierarchy through her content".

"What makes Pujarini Pradhan stand out is not only that she speaks about books, films, and ordinary life in English, but the setting and the composure from which she does it," Subramaniam said. "She speaks from a domestic, small-town world that Indian audiences still do not automatically associate with intellectual authority, aesthetic confidence, or interpretive ease. That is why her presence feels larger than 'content'."

Last month, Pradhan found herself at the centre of a social media storm as content creators Niharika Jain and Aishwarya Subramanyam questioned if she was "completely authentic" or if she was "performing a carefully curated persona" – and even if she might be an "industry plant".

They wondered how she was making such reels when she herself spoke about not having enough "social and cultural capital" or leisure and insinuated that she had hired agencies to do a lot of her work.

Pradhan's response, when it came, was characteristically spunky.

First, she pointed out that it only took her 15 to 20 minutes to shoot and edit her response video and that this was "not something magical" but

something that "anyone can do".

Then she noted how creators like Jain and Subramanyam wanted to typecast her into the mould of a suffering village woman. "They want to see me suffering in every video, they want me to complain about my life, they want me to seem sad," she said. "But the moment I started earning money from my videos and the moment I started giving liberal opinions on feminism or anything they felt like I am a danger."

In an interview with Scroll, Pradhan looked back at her journey to becoming a content creator. She recalled how she taught herself and learned from others how to access films, books and other information. People like her, said Pradhan, "have made our pathway on our own".

A digital native Pradhan is the eldest daughter among three siblings from a rural family in East Midnapore. She declined to reveal the name of her village.

She is also the first in the family to finish a bachelor's degree. Her father is a shopkeeper and her mother a homemaker.

Pradhan considers herself privileged for having completed her graduation in English honours. "If I hadn't gone far to attend college then I might not have attained the kind of exposure I did," she said.

After her graduation, she wanted to study for a Master's degree and find a job.

But the Covid-19 lockdown resulted in her spending one and a half years at home, during which she faced intense pressure from her mother to get married.

As she had said in her posts, Pradhan did not want to marry early in life. "Whenever I used to say no to marriage, she would accuse me of having a romantic relationship with someone else," she told Scroll. "She couldn't understand that people could have desires in life other than getting married."

But her mother also insisted that Pradhan should be able to continue her education after marriage, when her husband's family approached them for her hand.

"I thought it was a great opportunity too," Pradhan said. "I would finish my education and I would get to escape my mother too," she said.

So, at the age of 21, she was married to a man from a neighbouring village.

In 2022, soon after her wedding, Pradhan enrolled in a Master's course. Since the college was three hours from her home, she planned to stay at a hostel near her college on weekdays and travel back home on weekends.

For three months, Pradhan did her best but the constant travel and other difficulties made her fall sick and she eventually dropped out of the course.

Her husband encouraged her to get a B.Ed degree from a college closer home. But Pradhan could not enroll for the course as the college asked for a "migration certificate" from her earlier college, which she did not have. He then bought her books to study for the West Bengal Public Service Commission exams. Pradhan prepared for the exams until she got pregnant.

After her son was born in 2023, Pradhan said she fell into "something like post-partum depression". "I felt I had not been able to accomplish anything and was sitting at home without a purpose," she said.

She tried taking up some freelance work in marketing or translation, but there was nobody to guide her.

About eight months ago, Pradhan began playing



around with making video stories and posting on Instagram. As a digital native, she had experimented with social media a lot and even ran a meme account earlier, but she was hesitant to focus on herself. "Whenever I used to see a new app, I would end up opening an account," she said.

Her first forays on Instagram were tentative. "I was initially very insecure on Instagram, I used to think I didn't look good," she said. "I made multiple accounts and deleted them."

One day in September, while she was cooking, Pradhan kept her phone on top of a box and spoke into the camera in English about how she was often mocked for making reels.

When she checked her account an hour later, she was stunned to see that it had received 50,000 views. Her first fear, however, was that she would be judged for her English. "I don't speak English in my daily life," she said. "And for four-five years, I had not even practised speaking it."

She made another video, explaining that she was posting in English so that people in her village would not follow what she said, and would not mock her. "That is the reel which went the most viral. I got one lakh followers because of that reel."

Soon, Pradhan realised that people were interested in her and her thoughts, so she began telling them more. She made reels on a range of themes that she thought her audience would connect with – curly hair, body hair, patriarchal rituals in weddings.

"One time, a man commented online that anything is better than girls dancing on Instagram," she recalled. "So I made a reel about that too, saying that if I knew how to dance I would have been very happy because I never got a chance to learn singing, dancing or drawing."

A day in the life

As her followers have grown, Pradhan has become consistent with her posts.

Her day starts around 7.30 in the morning. Both

her mother-in-law and her husband share household chores and make adjustments for Pradhan to be able to make content.

"My mother-in-law knows that I do this work so she doesn't wake me up," she said. In the mornings, if she is not cooking lunch, she helps out in the kitchen and then escapes to the terrace for a bit to work.

As a young mother with a two-year-old son, her day revolves around taking care of him. In the afternoons, when her son takes a long nap, Pradhan watches films, shoots or edits her videos. In the evenings, she sits next to her son and reads.

It is her husband who cooks in the evenings. At night, when her family has fallen asleep, Pradhan gets time to read, edit and prepare for her videos, at times staying up as late as 1 in the morning.

By now, Pradhan's entire extended family has learnt about her social media success and are supportive of her. However, most people in her village are yet to learn about her fame, except for a young neighbour who helps her out with her work.

"A filmmaker's eye" Lately, Pradhan has also begun sharing extended videos, set to music and shot like films that capture the beauty of the mundane in her daily life. They have received a lot of praise, with some fans observing that Pradhan has "a filmmaker's eye".

Pradhan said she had been making videos for a while, but she was not sure if they were worth showing to others.

Her love for movies goes back to a time between 2018 and 2023, when she devoured a lot of films on her phone. "I watched more films than the number of books I read, because books are expensive," she said. "One book costs Rs 500-Rs 600 and I didn't like to trouble my husband since that is a lot of money. But I could watch a lot of films, maybe one or even two films a day."

The internet was her portal to cinema. "I wouldn't have access to these films if not for the internet," Pradhan said. "I would have to travel

two-three hours to find a theatre and even then I wouldn't find these films. Yes, piracy is illegal. But should we sit and wait for a cinema hall to be built close by?"

She added: "We have made our pathway on our own, by figuring out what we need to do to access things."

When I asked Pradhan what her favourite films were, she shot off a long list of international and Bengali films – Ritwick Ghatak's Titas Ekti Nadir Naam and Satyajit Ray's Mahanagar, Perfect Days by Wim Wenders and Little Forest by Yim Soon-rye.

"Little Forest is a Korean film about a young woman who leaves her job in the city and goes to live in a village," Pradhan said. "She grows vegetables, and revives friendships with her childhood friends, wanders about in her cycle, cooks things the way her mother did. She lives her life in her own way. Watching that film was a very peaceful experience."

Pradhan said she hopes to make an actual film someday when her son gets older. "I usually shoot what I find at home and my surrounding areas, but if I start going outside then I can record a lot more, observe more and capture it," she said. "Whenever I go somewhere, even if for a little while, I start thinking about how this would make a nice frame."

"I am not poor" Pradhan had not heard about the controversy questioning her authenticity until she was told about it by a manager from her talent management agency to which she had signed up in January.

"What these two influencers did was not necessary at all," she said. "If they had some evidence [against me] then it would be worth sharing, but there was no logic to their points. They just felt that I didn't have the brains for such content and so surely someone must be helping me."

Pradhan said she had earlier worked with an agency, which was helping her with brand collaborations, but she left them after she realised they were underpaying her. In January, she said, she joined another agency which also only supports her with talking to companies and brands.

The misconception, she said, is that intelligent content about books and films can come from a specific class and are also meant "just for a specific class."

People also make the mistake of assuming that Pradhan is poor. "They say: How can someone from a rural area make such videos?" she said. "But I've never claimed in my videos that I'm poor. I think our income is adequate and keeps me economically stable. Every villager is not poor, there are different classes in villages. We might not be rich but we have never struggled for food. We are comparatively privileged. I am privileged because my mother sent me to college."

As the controversy grew, Pradhan said she started to feel afraid for the creators who had questioned her. Later, she said, she even put up a story requesting her followers to let them be – and not leave hateful comments.

It's an unsavoury side of the internet that she is now more aware of. "The internet can be a very good thing and a very bad thing," she said, matter-of-factly.

But the controversy has left her a "little scared" about how her opinions will be received. "I might speak from one angle but people might misunderstand me. As my followers grow, I feel more afraid." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Rape, Beatings, Addiction: The incalculable burdens borne by Delhi's homeless Girls

By: Harsh Mander

A sullied hand tugs insistently at your clothes. You turn to see a little arm outstretched – peremptory and tentative at the same time – a small head of tousled, matted hair, patchy and pallid skin coated with many days of unwashed dirt, bare sprightly feet, and a loose faded frock almost slipping off the little girl's slender shoulders. On those shoulders rests the burden of the survival of a large destitute family. And yet, almost miraculously, what shines through the grime is the most beautiful pair of sparkling black eyes.

Delhi has far fewer street girls than boys, but those girls who are forced to work on its mean streets negotiate daily the metropolises at its most predatory. Shahida is barely ten years old. Part of a family of migrants from a village near Kolkata, she is delicate and fragile behind her grubby exterior. Neither she nor her younger sister can hear or speak. Their father is addicted to smack and lolls about all day in a small rented hut in

Shastri Nagar. His two daughters beg with wordless insistence at Hanuman Mandir near Yamuna Pushta.

To throngs of waiting beggars, some temple devotees give bananas and other fruits, others bring cooked kulchas and kachoris with halwa; many give away sweetmeats as prasad. On festival days or in memory of loved ones, some even distribute clothes. But the day's work for the sisters is not complete without collections of alms of cash, coins wheedled out of those who line up for worship at the shrine. Their mother sits on a side lane, and the deaf-mute girls leave with her their collections, and run back for more.

A group of volunteers are sitting outside the temple gates, talking with a group of girls who live by begging. Suddenly Shahida tenses, visibly wilts and tries to hide behind one of the young women volunteers. An older street girl, Shabana, fiercely runs and grabs the shirt of a disabled old man who is walking past. He too cannot speak, but he angrily gesticulates and threatens the girls. Shabana protectively embraces the younger Shahida. Her unspeakably gloomy and sordid tale then unfolds.

Shahida's mother has sold her daughter to this aged man, a veteran of the temple premises. He rapes her regularly and in return, he gives money to the family to enable it to survive from day to day. We find her mother and urge her to let us take the girl under our care. She declines sadly. "I love my daughter. But if I let her go, how will we live?" While we plan to requisition the police to rescue the girl, I struggle to not judge the utterly defeated older woman. But I find this very hard.

Shabana's family migrated years ago from Bihar. They had built a tiny shanty in a slum near the iron bridge across the Yamuna River, not far from the cremation grounds, and lived there for 18 years. But more than three years ago, these were razed by government dozers and they were forcibly shifted to a resettlement site in distant Bawana. The house sites there required a down payment of Rs

7,000, which they could not afford to pay. So they now live under a blue plastic sheet on a pavement.

Each day, the family of six takes a two-hour crowded bus ride each way, costing Rs 10 each, to reach the Yamuna Pushta area. Their father used to ply a rickshaw in Chandni Chowk, but these were recently banned by the traffic police, so he mopes unemployed. His four children have been set to work. For the younger two, work is begging at the temple, and for the older ones, earnings are more through ragpicking.

Many street boys courageously negotiate lives alone on the streets, rebelling against abuse and neglect in their homes by severing links with their families. By contrast, most street girls we encounter in Delhi continue to live on pavements or in slums with families, which send them out to earn to support their siblings and parents. This they do stoically and bravely, but with much less of the reckless joyfulness that street boys craft out of their hard-won freedom.

In their early years, street girls mostly beg. As they grow older, the majority ragpick at waste dumps and markets, earning more than Rs 100 daily. Bullied and molested, they learn to shout swear words, and grapple with their fists. Many chew tobacco or sniff adhesive solution bought from cycle shops for a high. And either through their parents or on their own, many learn early ways to furtively earn larger sums from older men who seek street-sex with children.

Sita is 14, and is often detained by the local police. They call her an incorrigible thief. For years, her family has sent her out to earn, beating her if she returns with less than Rs 150 each evening. Usually this is not difficult, as she is an expert rag-picker. But she is not just her family's principal bread earner; she is also a child. And there are days when she and her street friends lose track of time in their games in the public park. She realises it is evening, and she will be thrashed if she returns home empty-handed. So she



breaks into homes and steals what she can clutch and sell in the black market. Other days, she finds a man who wants sex: they are easy to spot. She takes money in advance, and they quickly conclude their liaison in a dark corner of a park. Sometimes she is able to nimbly run away with the man's money before he is able to grab her, but mostly she is not so lucky.

Many street girls have single mothers. Zahida's husband left her ten years ago, and her sons grew into drunken vagabonds. It is her two daughters who help her light the kitchen fires through rag-picking. Asha's father also left home, leaving behind three brothers and three sisters. Her mother started living with an

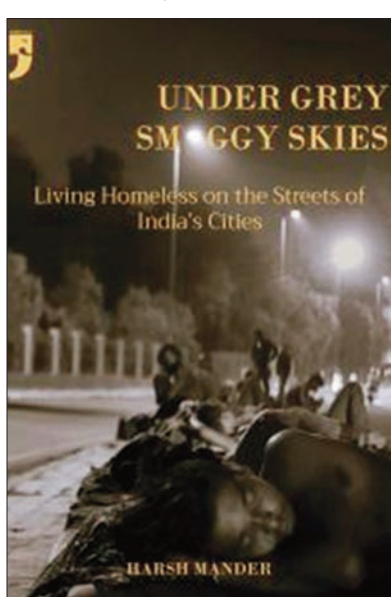
other man, who drinks away the money that the children bring home from rag-picking. For Zahida, the story was the same but it ended in gruesome tragedy five months earlier, when the man she lived with killed her son in rage when she refused to part with her life's savings of Rs 4,000. He is now in jail, and Zahida is surviving on the pavements of Bawana.

Chandni's blind mother has begged all her life but heroically taken her five daughters through elementary school. Proud that she has studied up to class VII, Chandni insists on speaking in broken English. But most street girls are not so fortunate. Every single girl we have met on the streets longs to study, but this is possible only if the government opens

hundreds of residential schools for them.

The Delhi government has at last agreed to help us open three such residential schools for street children. And many more mothers have agreed that the schools have space for, to sacrifice the earnings of their girls so that they live safe and happy childhoods illuminated by learning.

One girl tells us wistfully, "Even if my father does not let me go, I want to wear a school uniform even for one day. Can I at least do that? Just for one day?" Excerpted from Under Grey Smoggy Skies: Living Homeless on the Streets of India's Cities (Yoda Press, February 2026). Harsh Mander is a social worker and writer. (Courtesy:Wire)



Blast at Patiala freight corridor rail track

4 linked to pro-Khalistan terror module held

CHANDIGARH, April 28: A pro-Khalistan terror module carried out a late-night blast at a freight corridor railway track near the Shambhu area in Patiala, in which one of its members was killed while attempting to detonate the explosives, police said on Tuesday, adding that four members of the module have been arrested.

The explosion, which occurred on Monday night on the Shambhu-Ambala rail track, was initially described as a low-intensity blast. However, an investigation later determined it was an attempt to blow up the track, police stated.

The explosion occurred near Bothonia village on the rail track dedicated to freight trains, causing damage and leaving a small crater beneath the railway line, police said.

Noting that the incident marks the second blast at a freight corridor in the past three months, a senior police officer indicated that a National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe into the matter is likely.

Police found an unidentified body, which had been blown into pieces, at the scene. Parts of the body were scattered along the railway track.

The person who was trying to carry out the detonation died in the attempt, Patiala SSP Varun Sharma said.

Police identified the deceased suspect as Jagrup Singh, a resident



of Panjwar village in Tarn Taran district.

CCTV footage captured Jagrup parking his motorcycle in Amritsar, according to Special Director General of Police (Railway) Shashi Prabha Dwivedi, who visited the explosion site.

Deputy Inspector General of Police Kuldeep Chahal stated that the four arrested individuals are Pardeep Singh Khalsa, a resident of Mansa; Kulwinder Singh, also from Mansa; and Satnam Singh and Gurpreet Singh, both residents of Tarn Taran.

Pardeep Khalsa was identified as the main kingpin of the module due to his close ties with Malaysia-based pro-Khalistan handlers. He sent radicalised youth to Malaysia for terror training and assigned them tasks for carrying out terror activities, the DIG said, adding that Pardeep was also running a radical organisation named 'Chalda Vaheer Chakarwanti, At-

tariye.'

Police recovered a hand grenade, two pistols, ammunition, other sophisticated communication devices intended for future detonations, and laptops from their possession, he added.

Interacting with reporters at the incident site, Dwivedi said that as a goods train was passing at the time of the blast, the locomotive pilot sensed something unusual and raised an alarm, alerting authorities.

Referring to some "anti-social elements who are against the progress of the country", the officer said this was the second such attempt at a freight corridor.

In response to questions about the NIA's involvement, Dwivedi confirmed that due to the recurrence of such incidents, the NIA will most likely conduct an investigation.

She also noted the absence of CCTV coverage in the area and

emphasised the need to install cameras at regular intervals along the corridor.

Meanwhile, SSP Varun Sharma said, "Late at night, we had received information about a low-intensity explosion at a railway track near the Shambhu-Haryana border. Immediately, I, along with the deputy inspector general of police and other senior officials, rushed to the spot to take stock of the situation. We found that it was not a low-intensity explosion but an attempted detonation."

Police also said they have recovered a SIM card from the spot.

"After getting scientific evidence, including a SIM card from the spot, police have launched a technical investigation," Sharma said, adding that he expects the entire controversy to be unravelled soon.

He further said the Government Railway Police, the Railway Protection Force and other agencies are involved in the investigation.

Following the blast, a forensic team, along with a bomb disposal squad and other officers, arrived at the location.

A government railway police official confirmed that repair work on the railway track has been completed and rail traffic has been restored.

Earlier in January, a blast on a dedicated freight corridor railway track in Fatehgarh Sahib's Sirhind area damaged a train's engine and injured a locomotive pilot. (PTI)

Atrocities against Dalits, backward classes increased manifold in BJP-ruled states: Cong on Ghazipur case



NEW DELHI, April 28: The Congress on Tuesday hit out at the BJP after its delegation was stopped in Varanasi while it was heading to meet the family of the girl who was allegedly murdered in Ghazipur and demanded that cases should be registered against UP officials for "violating" their fundamental rights.

The body of the 17-year-old girl, who belongs to the OBC community, was found in the Ganga in Karanda area of Ghazipur district on April 15, with her family alleging sexual assault and murder. Citing law and order concerns, the district administration on Sunday imposed prohibitory orders, banning all demonstrations and barring anyone from visiting the victim's village.

The Congress' SC Department head, Rajendra Pal Gautam, said their delegation was stopped at Varanasi on Monday with the district magistrate citing Section 163 of BNS (power to issue order in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger).

He alleged that incidents of atrocities against Dalits and backward classes have increased manifold in BJP-ruled states.

"The situation has become such that if a leader or delegation of any political party goes to meet the victim's family, they are stopped. Even if the delegation manages to reach, the dominant caste people pelt stones at them. "The most serious thing in such cases is that instead

of taking action against the dominant caste people, the police takes action against the people going in the delegation," Gautam, flanked by party leaders Ajay Lallu and Ravi Verma, said at a press conference here.

Gautam claimed that the police were keeping an eye on the Congress delegation as soon as it arrived at Delhi Airport. "Then, as soon as we reached Varanasi, the police there stopped us. I want to ask -- the Congress party delegation was going to meet the victim's family, so why did the government deploy such heavy force? Are we criminals? Why did the UP police stop us from going to Ghazipur?" Gautam said.

"We weren't even allowed to go to the Congress office in Varanasi; why? Why did the police officers take us to the station in a prisoners' van and detain us the entire day?" he said.

Elaborating on the Congress' demands, Gautam said cases should be registered against those police officers and the DM who "violated our fundamental rights, stopped all of us from going to the Congress office, arrested us and took us to the police station in a prisoners' van". Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had on Saturday demanded a high-level investigation into the alleged rape and murder of the girl and sought immediate justice.

Gandhi had also sought immediate action against guilty police officers and said the family of the deceased must get protection.

Police have said a murder case has been registered, though the post-mortem report of the girl suggested drowning, and initial investigation has indicated a possible suicide angle, citing a prior relationship between the deceased and the main accused who has also been arrested.

The Samajwadi Party announced on Friday that a delegation led by party president Akhilesh Yadav will visit the village and meet the girl's family on April 29. An SP delegation on April 22 came under stone-pelting when it came to the village to meet the victim's family, with party chief Akhilesh Yadav alleging that the BJP was behind it. (PTI)

After Kejriwal, Sisodia refuses to pursue excise case before HC judge Swarana Kanta Sharma



NEW DELHI, April 28: AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Tuesday made it clear that he will not appear in further proceedings before Delhi High Court Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma in the excise policy case.

This comes a day after party chief Arvind Kejriwal similarly decided to neither appear in person nor appoint any lawyer for his case in Justice Sharma's court.

In a letter to Justice Sharma, Sisodia said, "No lawyer will appear on my behalf either. Your children's future is in the hands of Tushar Mehta".

"I do not expect justice, there is no path left except Satyagraha," he added.

Referring to the letter written by Kejriwal raising the same concern, Sisodia said "troubling concerns" have been raised.

"I find myself in respectful agreement with the stand taken by him, which is based on Mahatma Gandhi's teachings on Satyagraha," Sisodia said.

On Monday, Kejriwal wrote a letter to the high

court judge after his plea seeking the recusal of Justice Sharma was rejected on April 20.

The former Delhi deputy chief minister said while he does not propose to repeat each and every aspect of what has already been stated in detail by Kejriwal, he wants to record that the "troubling concerns" flagged there are concerns that weigh upon his mind as well.

"The first is the issue arising from your Ladyship's repeated public attendance of the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad, a lawyers' organisation publicly understood to belong to the RSS," the letter said.

Sisodia further said, "The second is the issue arising from the professional engagement of your Ladyship's children on multiple union government panels and the resulting appearance of closeness to the very law officers who now appear against me on the other side."

"In the context of this case, such instances lead to a more troubling question: what were the minimum duties of candour and self-regulation that arose in the present case? Was there not, at the very least, a duty on the part of the parent-judge to disclose these circumstances to the parties at the very threshold?"

"That is the difficulty I face today. My concern too, much like Kejriwal's, is not born out of hostility to the Court. It is born of a deep unease that, if I continue to participate despite these circumstances, I would be acting against my own conscience too while pretending before my fellow countrymen that all doubts stand resolved.

"The question before me is therefore a simple one - can I, with honesty, continue to take part in these proceedings while carrying a serious apprehension about the appearance of impartial justice? After much reflection, my answer is similar to Kejriwal's. I cannot," Sisodia further said.

keeping in the mind these reasons, Sisodia said he too will not appear before the judge whether personally or through his counsel. (PTI)

Puducherry records highest turnout among 3rd gender electors at 91.81 per cent: EC

NEW DELHI, April 28: Puducherry recorded the highest voter turnout among third gender electors at 91.81 per cent during the recent assembly polls.

According to the data shared by the Election Commission between April 9 and April 23, Puducherry had 139 third gender electors, of whom 91.81 per cent exercised their franchise.

Tamil Nadu has 7,728 third gender electors out of which 60.49 per cent voted during the April 23 polls. West Bengal (phase 1) had 465 electors with a turnout of 56.79 per cent.

Among other states, Assam has 343 third gender electors with a turnout of 36.84 per cent, and Kerala has 277 electors with a turnout of 57.04 per cent.

The first phase of polling in West Bengal was held on April 23, while the second and final phase will be held on April 29. Tamil Nadu also went to polls on April 23. While elections in Kerala, Assam and Puducherry were conducted on April 9. The results for all the elections will be declared on May 4.

Former chief election commissioner (CEC) Navin Chawla pushed for allowing third gender persons to register themselves as voters in 'Others' or 'O' category, which is now the norm as EC identifies voters as 'Male', 'Female' and 'Others' or third gender. (PTI)

Bengal polls: Movement via Petrapole land port, other Bangladesh border routes restricted



KOLKATA, April 28: The movement of people and vehicles on the Bangladesh border routes in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district has been restricted ahead of the second and final phase of the assembly elections in the state on Wednesday, officials said.

The curb, which has been imposed on April 26 and will continue till the completion of the polling process, is applicable to the Petrapole land port, the largest such facility in South Asia, they said.

"...this order restraining the movement of both people and vehicles for exit to Bangladesh and entry to Indian territory from Bangladesh in any constituency under the North 24 Parganas district with effect from 6 pm on April 26 till completion of the polling process," the district magistrate said.

The order, however, allowed exemptions in case of medical emergencies, voters returning to exercise their franchise, and transport of perishable goods.

Thirty-three assembly constituencies in the district will go to the polls on April 29.

The curb is aimed at preventing any cross-border movement that could influence the electoral process, particularly in border dis-

Plea filed in HC claiming EC violation of court order on action against 'troublemakers'



KOLKATA, April 28: A petition was filed in the Calcutta High Court on Tuesday, claiming that its earlier order on action against "troublemakers" in view of the West Bengal assembly polls was not being adhered to by the Election Commission.

The high court had on April 22 stayed an order of the commission's police observer, who termed certain citizens as "troublemakers" and directed the authorities concerned to take action against them.

In a plea before a division bench presided by Chief Justice Sujoy Paul, TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee claimed that the commission prepared a fresh list of around 350 people for action against them.

Banerjee, also a senior lawyer, alleged that despite a stay order of the high court till June 30, the poll panel was not adhering to it.

The division bench, also comprising Justice Partha Sarathi Sen, granted permission to Banerjee's client to file a contempt petition on a verbal prayer by him.

Acting on a PIL claiming that people's fundamental right to liberty would be affected by the EC order, the division bench had held that the police observer "erred in issuing a blanket direction by treating certain citizens as troublemakers".

The court had, however, made it clear that the order would not come in the way of the civil/police authorities to proceed against any person, who commits an offence under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Representation of People's Act, 1951 or any other penal law. (PTI)

'Each religious institution needs to have norms, there can't be anarchy'

NEW DELHI, April 28: Observing that there cannot be anarchy, the Supreme Court on Tuesday said the right to manage a religious institution cannot mean absence of structure and there has to be a modality and norms devised for its functioning. The observation by a nine-judge Constitution bench came while hearing petitions related to discrimination against women at religious places, including the Sabarimala Temple in Kerala, and on the ambit and scope of religious freedom practised by multiple faiths.

The bench comprised Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices B V Nagarathna, M M Sundresh, Ah-sanuddin Amanullah, Aravind Kumar, Augustine George Masih, Prasanna B Varale, R Mahadevan, and Joyimalya Bagchi.

Advocate Nizam Pasha, appearing for P eerzada Syed Altamash Nizam, direct ancestral descendant in Chisti Nizam lineage associated with dargah of Hazrat Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya, submitted that a dargah is a place where a saint is buried.

"Within Islam, there are differing views regarding the status of saints after death, but in the Sufi

system of belief, there is deep reverence attached to the place where a saint is interred.

"The Sufi system of belief in India consists of several major orders, including the Chishtiya, Qadriya, Naqshbandiya and Suhrawardiya. The present case concerns the Chishtiya order. This system, I submit, clearly constitutes a religious denomination. If one looks at the teachings attributed to Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, there is emphasis on adherence to Islamic practices such as roza, namaz, hajj, zakat, and above all, faith," Pasha said. (PTI)

'Will continue to fight for people': J&K AAP MLA detained under PSA released after 8 months

JAMMU, April 28: After spending eight months in prison, AAP MLA Mehraj Malik was released from Kathua jail on Tuesday following the quashing of his detention under the Public Safety Act (PSA) by the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court.

Malik arrived at his residence in Jammu to a rousing reception with a floral welcome and beats of dhols and bursting of crackers. Scores of party workers distributed sweets amid slogganning in favour of Malik, as he vowed to continue to fight for the people.

Setting aside the detention order issued by the Doda district magistrate, Justice Mohd Yousuf Wani on Monday directed authorities to release Malik and held that the order was legally unsustainable and based on "non-application of mind."

Malik was detained last September under the PSA for allegedly disturbing public order and was subsequently lodged in Kathua jail.

On September 24, 2025, he filed a habeas corpus petition in the high court, challenging his detention

and seeking ₹ 5 crore as compensation.

On February 23, the high court had reserved its order in the case, and then on Monday, it quashed the detention issued under the PSA.

"Malik was released by jail authorities this morning after completion of all formalities," his lawyer and AAP spokesperson Appu Singh Slathia told reporters here.

As the gates of Kathua jail opened this morning to release the AAP leader, numerous people gathered him with flowers and rallied behind him.

"Our struggle will continue. It will not change. It is not a struggle based on politics but on the thoughts and drive of people's welfare. I urge youth to join politics," Malik told reporters in Kathua.

When Mehraj arrived at his residence in Jammu to a rousing reception, he was received by his mother and father, who hugged him amid a tearful welcome.

"It is the victory of people," Malik, who is the AAP's Jammu and Kashmir unit president, told party workers at his residence.

"When I came out of jail, people understood who was right and who was wrong. Framing anyone won't help," he said in his address.

"It is not that they had jailed me, they had jailed the voice of the people, their aspirations and their strength," Malik said with tearful eyes, calling his release a victory of truth over falsehood.

Malik said that India is the best country in the world and urged people to stay away from divisive politics, saying the Constitution and democratic values are the nation's greatest strengths.

"I truly say this from the core of my heart. You cannot find such a country anywhere else. You are fortunate to live here," he said while drawing comparisons with neighbouring countries.

Urging everyone to uphold the Constitution, he warned that forgetting constitutional rights and values could push society backwards. "India is the largest democracy in the world, and I am proud of it. If such toxic tendencies exist within the country, we must make efforts to stop them," Malik added. (PTI)

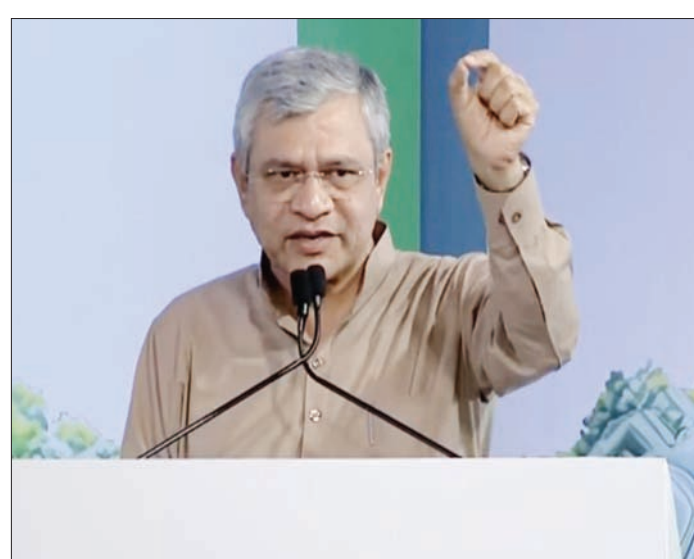
South Coastal Railway Zone to become operational from June 1: Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI, April 28: Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Tuesday announced that the new South Coastal Railway Zone will come into existence and start functioning from June 1, 2026.

Addressing a gathering after the Ground Breaking Ceremony of Google Cloud India AI Hub at Visakhapatnam, Vaishnaw said, "Gazette Notification for the creation of South Coastal Railway Zone will be issued, with June 1, 2026 being notified as the effective date."

He added that this development marks a significant step toward strengthening Railway Administration in Andhra Pradesh.

"The minister further explained that Andhra Pradesh has received a record railway budget allocation of ₹ 10,134 crore, a substantial increase compared to the ₹ 886 crore allocated in earlier years for the combined states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana," a press note from the Railway Ministry said.



Vaishnaw noted that railway projects worth approximately ₹ 1,06,000 crore are currently underway in Andhra Pradesh, aimed at enhancing connectivity across the state, including links to ports, tourism destinations, and major cities, it said.

Narendra Modi virtually laid the foundation stone of this new zone announcement for which was made in February 2019.

According to the Railway Ministry, the purpose of creating SCoR is to improve operational efficiency and provide focused service to the growing passenger and freight demands in the region.

The minister announced that Andhra Pradesh has achieved 100 per cent electrification of its railway network, positioning it among the leading regions in Railway Modernization.

On passenger services, he mentioned that 16 Vande Bharat trains and 22 Amrit Bharat train services currently serve the state, improving travel efficiency and comfort.

Additionally, he stated that the entire East Coast Railway Corridor is being upgraded to a four-line network, which is expected to double capacity and enable the operation of up to 500 new trains. (PTI)

Calls region 'Ashtalakshmi', highlights Sikkim's growth and tourism potential PM Modi stresses 'Act East, Act Fast' for Northeast

GANGTOK, April 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his government was not only committed to its 'Act East' policy but was resolved to 'Act Fast' for the eight northeastern states, which he described as India's 'Ashtalakshmi' -- representing the multifaceted nature of prosperity, wealth and auspiciousness.

Asserting that tourism was the mainstay of Sikkim's economy, Modi said his government's focus is on boosting the state's connectivity, which would increase tourist inflow.

"The government is committed to augmenting Sikkim's infrastructure, including building an expressway from West Bengal's Bagdogra, and a ring road in Gangtok to increase tourist inflow," Modi said during his 35-minute speech at a grand function at Paljor Stadium here to mark the conclusion of the year-long celebrations of 50 years of Sikkim's statehood.

He also said that ropeway and skyways projects are on the anvil for the state, while an expressway would be built in Nathula to ensure more tourist inflow.

"The northeast, including Sikkim, is India's 'Ashtalakshmi'. The government is resolved to 'Act East, Act Fast'," Modi said.

Reflecting on the state's biodiversity, he said, "Nature and culture become alive in Sikkim. The cleanliness of the state's roads and its air purity shows that people here are true brand-ambassadors for the conservation of nature."

Modi asserted that the northeast, including



Sikkim, is set to become the hub of futuristic growth and sustainable development through initiatives such as organic agriculture.

He heaped praise on Sikkim for being an abode of peace, spiritualism and wellness, and urged tourists to visit the Himalayan state in large numbers.

"Sikkim has immense scope in eco-wellness tourism, which the government is promoting. As many as 1,000 homestays are being built, and adventure tourism is getting an infrastructure boost," the PM said.

He said that the Himalayan state "reflects 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' at a time when efforts are made to divide the nation based on "faith and political affiliation".

Describing Sikkim as the heaven of the East, the Prime Minister also appealed to tourists to visit the state for its natural beauty, especially its diverse orchids.

The PM, who played football with budding talents in the morning, said, "The government is making all efforts to augment sports infrastructure in Sikkim and hone talents, especially in football and archery."

He availed the opportunity to take potshots at successive Congress governments, accusing them of keeping Sikkim's development projects on the back burner.

"I will do whatever is possible for the development of Sikkim and other northeastern states, which the Congress had ignored. The Congress neglected health services in Sikkim," the PM alleged.

The current government is committed to augmenting health infrastructure and providing quality and affordable service to people, he claimed.

Modi cited the example of an excruciating delay in the construction of the Sevoke-Rangpo rail project connecting Sikkim with the rest of the country.

The Sevoke-Rangpo rail project was approved by the UPA government in 2008-09, but the construction could not begin due to the "lackadaisical approach" of the then government, which could not acquire land for the project, the PM said.

Modi said that the rail project was fast-tracked only after the NDA came to power, and the work is "progressing at a rapid speed".

The PM was also impressed by the cultural richness of Sikkim and said the artists, who performed with aplomb at the function, showcased the diversity of the country.

The 15-minute cultural show will stay in his mind for a long time, Modi said.

The Prime Minister also recalled a grand welcome extended to him by the people during a roadshow after he reached the state on Monday. (PTI)

Union minister B L Verma reviews welfare schemes in Arunachal district



ITANAGAR, April 28: Union minister B L Verma on Tuesday said welfare initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and the National Food Security Act are making tangible improvements in the lives of people in Arunachal Pradesh.

Describing the northeastern state as "jannat" (heaven), Verma said targeted funding under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE) is aimed at balancing infrastructure growth with preservation of the region's natural and cultural heritage, an official release said.

"Schemes such as PM-DevINE are designed to ensure that development in the northeast is both sustainable and sensitive to local ecosystems," the minister said.

During his visit to Ziro Valley in Lower Subansiri district, the Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, undertook an on-ground assessment of various central government schemes, the release said.

At Pai Gate, he inspected houses constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), reviewed the progress of the 'Housing for All' mission and interacted with residents. He later visited a fair price shop at Hong village, where he examined the functioning of the public distribution system and evaluated the delivery of subsidised food grains to eligible households, the release said. (PTI)

Manuscript survey launched in Nagaland for documentation

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 28: Nagaland's art & culture department has initiated a state-wide manuscript survey under the Gyan Bharatam Mission, a national initiative of the Union ministry of culture.

The Gyan Bharatam Mission aims to identify, document and create a comprehensive national database of manuscripts and historically significant records across the country with a view to preserving India's documentary heritage and traditional knowledge systems for future generations.

The mission recognises that many valuable manuscripts and records are currently scattered across institutions, religious centres, community repositories and private collections. A large number of these is undocumented.

In Nagaland, the nature of documentary heritage is distinct, as much of the state's historical knowledge has traditionally been preserved outside formal archival institutions.

Such materials are commonly found in church archives, missionary records, village institutions, early translations, customary records and private family collections.

The ongoing survey seeks to systematically identify such materials and document their details through a national digital platform.

The department has appealed to all institutions, organisations and individuals to extend their cooperation by sharing information regarding any manuscripts or old records in their possession.

It also stated that the survey is limited to documentation and recording of information only and does not involve removal or transfer of materials from their custodians.

The department said public participation is vital to the successful implementation of the mission and to ensuring that Nagaland's valuable documentary heritage is properly identified, documented and preserved.

Census 2027 to commence in Tripura from July 17

AGARTALA, April 28: The first phase of Census 2027 is set to formally commence in Tripura from July 17 and will continue till August 31, an official said on Tuesday.

There will be two stages in the first phase of enumeration process across the state. During the first stage, citizens can go for self enumeration from July 17 to 31, said Director, Census Operation, Ratan Biswas.

He said another round (stage) will be held from August 1 to 31 during which the enumerators will visit households to collect data on house census.

According to him, during the 45-day (15+30) process, the enumerators are scheduled to complete the first phase of the Census, and around 11,000 enumerators and supervisors will be engaged in the process.

He said to make the process smooth, a state level conference on Census-2027 was held at Pragya Bhavan here on Monday where senior officials including district



magistrates of all eight districts were present.

"While the DMs will perform Census related duties as Principal Census Officers of their respective districts, the Additional District Magistrate and Sub-Divisional Magistrates are also scheduled to join the process actively," he said.

Biswas said the Census 2027 will be completely carried out digitally with no provision for signatures or paperwork.

"The enumerators will conduct house-to-house visits, collect data and upload on mobile phones. The data will automatically go to the main server," he added. (PTI)

PM plays football with boys, girls in Sikkim



GANGTOK, April 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is on a two-day tour of Sikkim, played football with some boys and girls here on Tuesday morning and described the soccer session as "energising".

Modi shared on social media a few photographs in which he is seen playing soccer with youngsters.

"Nothing like playing some football with my young friends in Sikkim on a lovely Gangtok morning! Clearly, an energising football session with these youngsters!" the PM said on X.

Modi also took a photograph with the players, with the Lok Bhawan building seen in the background.

During the day, the PM will attend the closing ceremony of 50 years of Sikkim's statehood and launch projects worth ₹ 4,000 crore. (PTI)

AGARTALA, April 28: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday issued a red alert of thunderstorm, lightning and gusty wind for West Tripura and Khowai districts and an orange alert for the six other districts of the state for the next 24 hours.

The alert came after a nor'wester created havoc across the state this morning, leaving hundreds of dwelling houses collapsed and disrupting road connectivity. It also caused extensive damage to transmission lines in different locations of the northeastern state.

"Thunderstorm coupled with lightning and gusty wind speed reaching 68-80 kmph is very likely to occur at one or two places over Khowai and the West districts of Tripura in the next 24 hours. In view of the situation, we have issued a red alert for two districts," the head of IMD, Agartala Centre, Dr Partha Roy told PTI.

Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday assured the storm-affected people that the state government will extend all possible help during the difficult situation caused by the nor'wester.

"Due to the severe storms,



dwelling houses and electric posts were damaged in different places in the state. The district administrations have taken all possible steps to reach out to the people. The government is working relentlessly to handle the situation and is also committed to extending all possible help to the affected people," the CM wrote on Facebook.

"The nor'wester has caused extensive damage to almost all districts in the last 24 hours. We are still receiving reports on damage caused by the storm. The district administrations are working to render all possible help to the affected

people," said a senior official of the Revenue department.

The IMD said heavy to very heavy rainfall is very likely to occur at one or two places over Khowai and West districts of Tripura for the next 72 hours.

Roy said an orange alert has been sounded for the six districts - Sepahijala, Gomati, South, Dhalai, North and Unakoti for the next 24 hours, keeping in mind the weather forecast.

Roy stated an orange alert has been imposed for all eight districts of the state for the next 72 hours due to constant nor'wester activity. (PTI)

Schools in Mizoram's nine districts closed due to rain



AIZAWL, April 28: All schools in nine districts of Mizoram remained closed on Tuesday due to heavy rain that has been lashing the northeastern state since the day before,

an official said.

School Education Director Angela Zothanpuui said administrations of nine districts, including Aizawl, Kolasib, Lunglei and

Mamit, announced school closure on Tuesday as a precautionary measure for students' safety.

However, schools in the southern districts of Hnahthial and Lawngtlai remained open following a slight improvement in weather conditions there, she said.

According to the India Meteorological Department, Serchhip recorded the highest rainfall at 70.5 mm in a 24-hour period, followed by Hnahthial 55 mm, Siahia 37.5 mm, and Aizawl 36 mm.

Khawzawl district reported 30 mm of rainfall, Mamit 25.9 mm, Kolasib 25 mm, Lawngtlai 17.5 mm and Lunglei 2.2 mm during the same period, it said. The weather department has forecast light to moderate rainfall with thunderstorm and lightning in Mizoram on Tuesday. (PTI)

Justice Surana highlights mission of legal services

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 28: Gauhati High Court Judge and executive chairman of Nagaland State Legal Services Authority (NSLSA) Justice Kalyan Rai Surana on Tuesday said as long as there are individuals in need of legal assistance and others striving to exercise their rights, the work of legal services is far from complete, underscoring that the mission of legal services remains ongoing.

Justice Surana said this at a ceremony after flagging off multi-utility vehicles for the NSLSA and various district legal services authorities at the Kohima bench of Gauhati High Court.

He emphasised that the vehicles must be used strictly for their intended purpose and urged the legal services authorities to ensure their proper and responsible utilisation.

"This is not intended to be a personal vehicle for anyone. So, if you are going out on an outreach programme, you are definitely there to use it. But the end event must be that it should be used only for the purpose it is assigned," he said.

Highlighting the broader role of legal services beyond the courtroom, Justice Surana reminded officers and lawyers that their responsibilities extend far beyond the judicial and legal profession.

He noted that through various outreach initiatives, legal services authorities play a crucial role in reaching marginalised and underserved communities, particularly those who lack access to legal aid.

Justice Surana also stressed the importance of spreading awareness about the schemes and services available to help such individuals exercise their rights. He said it is a significant responsibility that you shoulder when you visit jails to assess the condition of undertrial prisoners and others who are incarcerated.

Tamang hails initiatives as boost to infrastructure, healthcare and growth Sikkim CM thanks PM Modi for launching projects worth over ₹ 4,000 crore

GANGTOK, April 28: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Tuesday expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for attending the concluding ceremony of celebrations to mark the golden jubilee of the state's statehood and launching projects worth over Rs 4,000 crore.

The projects encompass a wide range of sectors such as infrastructure, connectivity, healthcare, education, power, urban development, environment, tourism and agriculture.

In a post on social media, the chief minister said, "It was a singular honour and a moment of immense pride to join Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Governor Om Prakash Mathur, MPs D T Lepcha and Indra Hang Subba at the grand closing ceremony commemorating 50 glorious years of Sikkim's statehood."



"On the occasion, the prime minister inaugurated a series of transformative projects, including the Helen Lepcha Medical College, the mini secretariat, the eco-tourism pilgrimage complex at Dodak, and the Administrative Block of the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Centre of Excellence."

He also lauded the foundation stones for several key initiatives, such as a 100-bed Ayurveda Hospital, the eco-pilgrimage complex at Silnon, a public utility centre, and the comprehensive rehabilitation of the sewage system, among others, Tamang said.

"These landmark initiatives

mark a significant stride in strengthening Sikkim's infrastructure, healthcare ecosystem, and sustainability efforts, laying a strong foundation for a brighter, more resilient, and prosperous future for our people," he added.

The chief minister also expressed his sincere appreciation for the prime minister's address and his gracious words for the state and its people.

"His admiration for the vibrant cultural programme, along with his heartfelt recognition of the cleanliness and breathtaking scenic beauty of Sikkim, deeply resonates with us all."

"His appreciation of our government's initiative has further inspired us to deepen our commitment to environmental stewardship and the overall well-being of our citizens," he said. (PTI)

1 found hanging from tree in Kohima

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, April 28: An unidentified person was found hanging from a tree at Khuochiezhui, below Forest Colony in Kohima on Tuesday morning.

Kohima police PRO, in a release, said a call was received at around 10.38 AM about a body seen hanging from a tree. On getting the information, a team from South police station, led by its officer-in-charge, rushed to the spot.

Upon arrival, an unidentified male (non-Naga) was found hanging from a tree branch about 15 feet above the ground. The deceased is aged around 35-40 years, fair-complexioned and 5.7 feet in height. He was wearing a red jacket, a black T-shirt and black shorts, the release said. On completion of all legal formalities, the body is being kept at South police station morgue for further identification.

The PRO asked claimants, relatives and friends of the deceased to contact the officer-in-charge of South police station at 6009308089. Police also sought assistance of the public to identify the deceased.

Mumbai Indians desperate for revival against in-form Sunrisers Hyderabad

MUMBAI, Apr 28: Mumbai Indians will hope for a massive turnaround in fortunes against an in-form Sunrisers Hyderabad, with the five-time champion's campaign at stake in a crucial Indian Premier League clash here on Wednesday.

With five defeats in the first seven matches, and their most recent being their heaviest in history by margin of runs (103 vs Chennai Super Kings), Mumbai Indians (rank 9th, 4 points, NRR -0.736) have their backs firmly pressed against the wall in a season marred by no-shows from their top guns.

Comprising as many as four players from India's T20 World Cup-winning squad, MI's woes have been compounded by ordinary returns from skipper Hardik Pandya (3 wickets and 97 runs) and Suryakumar Yadav (157).

Tilak Varma's maiden IPL hundred against Gujarat Titans did help MI snap a four-match losing streak, but their massive loss to CSK once again threw their faltering campaign in a tailspin.

MI also have had Jasprit Bumrah (2 wickets) languishing far behind. Usually preserved for breakthroughs in middle-overs and stifling oppositions at the death, Bumrah has uncharacteristically opened the attack for MI in the last two games since the other new-ball bowlers have failed to



deliver. Neither Trent Boult (1) nor Deepak Chahar (1) have been penetrative, and overall, MI have more often than not allowed oppositions to seize control in the powerplays with a lack of wickets and ordinary bowling.

Meanwhile, Rohit Sharma's absence created a void which Danish Malewar (2, 0) hasn't been able to fill in the last two games, and it remains to be seen if the former skipper has regained fitness after a hamstring injury.

With an injured Mitchell Santner being replaced by Keshav Maharaaj, it also remains to be seen if Will Jacks finds a place in the playing XI. He had thrived in similar conditions in the T20 World Cup.

SRH, meanwhile, will feel they

are primed to end a three-match losing streak against MI when they take the field in batting-friendly conditions of the Wankhede Stadium here.

Unfazed by an onslaught from the 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, SRH came out all guns blazing to record a second victory of the season over Rajasthan Royals.

Abhishek Sharma will be keen to make the most of his form after a quiet T20 World Cup. With 380 runs at a strike rate of 212.29, averaging 54.28 with one century and three fifties, the India T20I opener is back to his best.

Ishan Kishan (312) and Heinrich Klaasen (349) have again fired with the bat providing further strength to the 2016 winners, but more will be expected from

Travis Head (186) who has had a quiet IPL so far.

The return of Pat Cummins with a measly spell in a high-scoring game would have pleased the SRH side, which sits comfortably at the third spot, priming themselves up for another appearance in the IPL playoffs.

Teams :

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Quinton de Kock (wk), Ryan Rickelton (wk), Robin Minz (wk), Danish Malewar, Sherfane Rutherford, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, Raj Bawa, Corbin Bosch, Will Jacks, Mayank Rawat, Naman Dhir, Shardul Thakur, Ashwani Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah, Trent Boult, Deepak Chahar, Krishn Maharaaj, AM Ghazanfar, Keshav Maharaaj, Mayank Markande, Mohd Izhar, Raghu Sharma.

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Salil Arora (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Travis Head, Ravichandran Ashwin, Aniket Verma, Abhishek Sharma, Harsh Dube, Krains Fuletra, Liam Livingstone, Kamindu Mendis, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Harshal Patel, Shivam Mavi, Shivang Kumar, Amit Kumar, Gerald Coetzee, Praful Hinge, Sakib Hussain, Dilshan Madushanka, Eshan Malinga, Onkar Tarnale, Jaydev Unadkat, Zeeshan Ansari.

Match starts at 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

England name squad for Women's T20 World Cup

Same team to face India in preceding series



LONDON, April 28: All-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunt will lead the 15-member England squad in the upcoming 2026 ICC Women's T20 World Cup, the ECB announced on Tuesday.

The same England squad led by Sciver-Brunt will also feature in the preceding series against India and New Zealand in May-June. This will be Sciver-Brunt's seventh appearance at the global T20 event.

The India women's team is touring England for three T20Is and a one-off Test at Lord's. The T20Is are scheduled for late May/early June, while the Test match runs from July 10-13, marking 50 years since the first England women's match at the hallowed venue.

The new name in the England squad was uncapped 18-year-old Surrey spinner Tilly Corteen-Coleman, Warwickshire's Issy Wong and Durham's Lauren Filer who have all received maiden T20 World Cup call-ups.

Surrey's Danni Wyatt-Hodge will play in her eighth T20 World Cup edition.

Somerset's Charlie Dean is the vice-captain and joins a list of impressive all-round cricketers in the squad, with Hampshire fast bowler Lauren Bell set to lead the attack.

Head coach Charlotte Edwards, who captained the side in their victorious 2009 T20 World Cup campaign - also in England - will have more than 960 caps worth of T20 international experience to pick

from during the tournament that begins on June 12 at Edgbaston.

And as women's cricket seeks to use the platform of a home World Cup to break into mainstream conversation, stars from across the sporting and entertainment landscape have played their part in revealing the 15 names with a unique announcement film.

Edwards said: "The waiting and wondering is over, we have named our ICC Women's T20 World Cup squad and there is no doubt that it has been incredibly tough to get to these 15 names.

"This is the hardest set of selection meetings I have been a part of because the pool of players to choose from is so strong and so many talented players have put their hand up to be a part of the squad, which is exactly what we want.

"That is the nature of world-class sport, and it is a privilege we don't take lightly to be able to make these difficult decisions.

"An ICC Women's T20 World Cup on home soil is a special mo-

ment for the game in this country, and we are all really motivated by what could be ahead for this group of players and what they can achieve this summer."

Captain Sciver-Brunt added: "We have all been looking forward to this summer and this tournament for some time now and the naming of the squad means it is almost here and we can't wait to get out onto the field and give it everything to win this World Cup again.

"I know how much winning in 2009 meant to the players and to Charlotte Edwards as captain, and being in the team under Heather Knight's leadership for the 2017 ODI World Cup win was incredibly special.

"Now the aim is to do something similar with this fantastic group of players who I know are putting their heart and soul into achieving our goal, and that hard work will continue right throughout the summer as we start with games against New Zealand and India before that tournament begins." (PTI)

India lose 0-5 to China to end campaign in Uber Cup Finals

HORSENS (DENMARK), April 28: Two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu squandered a strong position as India failed to capitalise on chances, going down 0-5 to China to end their campaign at the Uber Cup Finals here.

The Indian women's team had opened with a 2-3 loss to hosts Denmark before bouncing back with a 4-1 win over Ukraine.

China, the most successful team in Uber Cup history with 16 titles, was always going to be a formidable opponent, with India having lost to them three times in their last three major ties.

While Sindhu remained the leader of the group, Isharani Baruah and Devika Sihag were drafted in place of Unnati Hooda and Tanvi Sharma for the other two singles.

Sindhu raised hopes as she looked set for a statement win before letting slip an 18-12 lead in the decider to go down 16-21, 21-19, 19-21 to world No. 2 Wang Zhiyi in the opening singles, handing China a 1-0 lead in the must-win Group A tie on Monday.

It would have taken a miracle to upset the defending champions thereafter and, though the young Indian shuttlers showed fight, they lacked the finishing touch and faltered at crucial moments.

Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra were no match for world No. 1 pair Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning, losing 11-21, 8-21 in the first doubles.

Tasked with keeping the tie alive, Isharani Baruah produced a fast-paced display to trouble Tokyo Olympic champion Chen Yufei but left too many

shuttles and committed errors at the net. The world No. 38 Indian missed a sitter at 20-19 in the opening game as the world No. 4 Chinese eventually sealed a 22-20, 21-13 win in 44 minutes to give China an unassailable 3-0 lead.

The pair of Treasa Jolly and Kavipriya Selvam also had their moments before going down 10-21, 21-12, 19-21 in a 59-minute clash against Luo Xu Min and Zhang Shu Xian.

World No. 43 Devika Sihag, who had won her maiden Super 300 title in Thailand this year, too made a strong start but failed to sustain the momentum, losing 21-19, 17-21, 10-21 to world No. 97 Xu Wen Jing in the third singles.

Sindhu vs Wang
Sindhu recovered from an early 4-7 deficit in the first game, drawing level at 9-9 before reeling off five straight points to take an 11-9 lead at the interval. She maintained control with sharp net play and attacking smashes to move to 14-10, but Wang raised her intensity late, using deception and precise placement to claw back.

From 16-16, the Chinese edged ahead and closed out the game with a series of winners.

The Indian responded aggressively in the second game, opening up a 9-4 lead with a barrage of smashes. Wang fought back with her trademark angles and deception to level at 10-10, but Sindhu held her nerve in the closing stages.

Leading 18-16, she earned two game points and converted on the second

with a powerful smash to force a decider.

Sindhu carried the momentum into the third game, racing to a 9-3 lead and extending it to 11-6 at the break. She continued to dictate play, stretching the advantage to 18-12 with relentless attacking strokes.

However, the momentum swung dramatically thereafter. Wang mounted a remarkable comeback, stringing together six consecutive points to level at 18-18. The Chinese then edged ahead 19-18 before Sindhu drew level once again.

Wang earned match point with a steep smash and sealed the contest when Sindhu found the net, completing a stunning turnaround.

"It was a good match. It would have been really good if I would have converted it into a win. I had chances but it wasn't like there were some easy points, every point was hard fought. Every point we were fighting literally very hard," said Sindhu.

All eyes will be on the men's team to avenge the loss when it takes on China on Wednesday in Thomas Cup.

India, the 2022 champions, sealed a place in the Thomas Cup Finals quarter-finals with a commanding 5-0 victory over Australia in a Group A tie on Monday.

India and China now occupy the top spots in the group. The 2022 champions had opened with a 4-1 win over Canada, while China blanked Australia 5-0 and beat Canada 4-1 earlier in the day.

The two sides will clash in their final group tie on Wednesday to decide the group topper. (PTI)

Marathon record-breaker says he underwent strict testing regime

LONDON, April 28: Sebastian Sawe hopes the stringent testing regime he underwent before becoming the first person to break the fabled 2-hour barrier in marathon running will prove to the world he is competing clean.

The 29-year-old Kenyan pulled off the feat that was long considered unthinkable when winning the London Marathon on Sunday in a time of 1 hour, 59 minutes and 30 seconds.

There have been a slew of high-profile doping cases involving Kenyan runners in recent years, notably women's marathon world record-holder Ruth Chepngetich getting a three-year ban in October.

So, in agreement with his coaches and management team, Sawe said he volunteered to undergo "multiple" doping tests to dispel any suspicion around his own performances, including victories at last year's marathons in Berlin and London.

"Doping has become a cancer in my country," Sawe told reporters on Monday.

Sawe said he and his team decided to implement the stringent testing regime because the possibility of people looking at his results "with a lot of doubts was not good," and he wanted to "show the world that we can run clean and also run fast."

The BBC, which holds the broadcast rights for the London Marathon, reported that Adidas provided \$50,000 to the Athletics Integrity Unit, track and field's anti-doping body, to frequently test Sawe over a 12-month period, including 25 out-of-competition tests leading up to the Berlin Marathon in September and a similar number ahead of the London race.

The Athletics Integrity Unit didn't immediately respond to a request from The Associated Press for comment on Sawe's testing regime.

Sawe is urging other runners to volunteer for more doping tests.

"Everyone will feel comfortable running with



his fellow athlete because there will be no doubt thinking (that) someone is using what he's using," he said. "And so, it's important to run clean and to show the world (that) talent, with hard work, discipline and patience," can lead to big achievements.

Sawe also credited his footwear for helping him break the marathon record by an astonishing 65 seconds in Sunday's race.

He wore an Adidas shoe that weighed less than half the weight of an average running shoe. After the race, he held up the shoe, which had his winning time written next to it.

"The shoe is very nice, very light, comfortable and so supportive," he said, "and is pushing (me) forward."

Sawe was already a superstar in marathon running but has suddenly become a global sensation, something the softly spoken Kenyan is going to have to get used to.

"Being in the history books is not something easy," he said. "So it means a lot to me in my life and I'm so happy."

Sawe said he kept things simple after his world-record run.

"I just celebrated in style — I just relaxed and slept well and woke up," he said. (AP)

Indian lifters bag four gold

NEW DELHI, April 28: Indian lifters impressed at the ongoing Commonwealth Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships and the corresponding Universal Cup (Senior) in Apia, Samoa, securing four gold medals on the second day of competition.

Sunil Singh lifted a total of 271kg (126kg in snatch and 145kg in clean and jerk) to clinch the gold in the 65kg men's category, while Aisangfa Gogoi won the top prize in women 58kg and Abhinob Gogoi bagged the yellow metal in men's 71kg division.

Aisangfa lifted a total of 185kg (79kg in snatch and 106kg in clean and jerk) to bag gold in the 58kg women's category, while Abhinob totalled 284kg (129kg in snatch and 155kg in clean and jerk) to secure top finish in the 71kg men's division.

In the Universal Cup, Arunachal Pradesh's Charu Pesi bagged the gold medal in the men's 65kg category with a total lift of 289kg (127kg in snatch and 162kg in clean and jerk). Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF) president Sahdev Yadav congratulated the athletes, coaches and support staff for their performances in the tournament.

"These achievements reflect the hard work and commitment of our athletes and support team. India continues to rise as a strong contender on the global weightlifting stage," Yadav said in his congratulatory message. (PTI)

KAMSFC climbs to fourth with crucial away win

Blue Giants defeat Sporting Club Bengaluru in I-League 2

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 28: Karbi Anglong Morning Star Football Club boosted their campaign in the I-League 2 with a vital away victory over Sporting Club Bengaluru, climbing to fourth place in the standings with eight points.

The "Blue Giants" have now completed six matches in the competition organised by the All India Football Federation, registering two wins, two draws and two losses in what has been a mixed but encouraging run so far.

KAMSFC began their campaign with a goalless draw against Sudeva Delhi FC at home on March 27, followed by a narrow 1-2 defeat to Delhi FC on April 2.

They then drew 1-1 with Sporting Clube de Goa before producing a dominant 4-0 victory over GMSC on April 15.

However, their momentum was briefly halted with a 0-1 home loss to FC Bengaluru United on April 21.

Determined to bounce back, the side delivered a strong performance in Bengaluru, where a decisive goal from Kevisanyu Peseyie secured all three points against Sporting Club Bengaluru.

Team manager Waisong Bey praised the squad's response after the setback.

"We were disappointed with our last home result, but the team stayed confident and came back stronger. This was a crucial win, and we're focused on finishing the campaign on a high," he said.

He also acknowledged the support of club president Sengkan Ronghang.

With two away fixtures remaining, KAMSFC will next face United Sports Club on May 2 and NEROCA FC on May 8.

The team will look to build on the momentum as they aim for a strong finish in the tournament.

Bad luck, hesitation behind collapse: Axar Patel

NEW DELHI, April 28: Skipper Axar Patel attributed Delhi Capitals' dramatic batting collapse against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League to a mix of "hesitation" stemming from their previous outing and plain "bad luck".

After being blown away in a span of a few frenetic overs, Axar pointed out that the rapid loss of wickets left no batter with the time to settle, turning the contest decisively in RCB's favour.

"I think because of what happened in the last game... there was some hesitation. Other than that, I think it was bad luck. No batter could really settle... we lost wickets in one or two balls," Axar said, underlining how the collapse was more circumstantial than structural.

DC had posted a commanding 264 against Punjab Kings but could not defend the total in their previous outing.

After DC were left to reel at an unthinkable six for eight, the match against RCB on Monday night was as good as over.

The left-arm all-rounder suggested that the psychological residue of failing to defend in the previous match may have subconsciously impacted the batting approach.

Axar also highlighted how the nature of the pitch evolved quickly, catching the batters off guard.

While there was appreciable movement early on, the conditions eased out once the new ball lost its sting.

"In the first over there was swing, later, once the ball got hit for a boundary, the swing reduced. But when you score 60-70,



bowlers come in with that in the back of their mind," he said, admitting that the low total inevitably affected the bowlers' mindset despite their efforts.

He refused to fault the bowling unit, instead placing the onus squarely on the batting unit's failure to adapt.

"The way we batted today, I would call it

bad luck."

Despite the heavy defeat, Axar maintained that pressure is an inherent part of the tournament's business end and not something the team can shy away from.

Starc has checked in

The captain also confirmed that Australian pacer Mitchell Starc has joined the squad

and will be available for selection after May 1, subject to workload management.

On the decision to hand a debut to youngster Sahil Parakh, Axar said it was driven by the need for a left-right opening combination and the player's impressive performances in training.

Parakh's middle stump was uprooted by Bhuvneshwar with an in-dipping yorker in the second ball of the DC innings.

"It was his first match. I cannot judge him on that. The way he has been batting, we believe he has potential," he said.

Axar also conceded that the batters may have misread conditions, carrying forward expectations from a previous game played on a similar-looking surface.

"Two days ago the wicket looked similar... but today, with the wind and day-night conditions, there was more swing. Early wickets put pressure. As professionals, we should be ready for that," he admitted.

Looking ahead, the DC skipper ruled out wholesale changes, insisting that a solitary poor performance should not trigger a knee-jerk reaction.

"This might be the first time in several matches that we have played bad cricket. Changing the team will not guarantee results. It is more about mindset, staying mentally strong and sticking together," he said.

Signing off with a message to supporters, Axar urged fans to stand by the team during a difficult phase.

"It should not be that you support only when we win... whether we win or lose, support should remain the same." (PTI)