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## BJP to get 68 to 72 seats; Cong 22 to 26: Peoples Pulse Research Organisation Exit poll gives clear edge to NDA in Assam

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 29: An exit poll conducted by the Peoples Pulse Research Organization has projected a decisive mandate in favour of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led North East Democratic Alliance in the Assam Assembly elections 2026, suggesting a strong preference for continuity among voters.

According to the survey, the BJP is likely to secure between 68 and 72 seats in the 126-member Assembly, comfortably crossing the majority mark on its own and indicating the possibility of forming the government independently for a third consecutive term.

The opposition Indian National Congress is estimated to win between 22 and 26 seats, reflecting a limited electoral presence and falling short of mounting a strong challenge.

Among alliance partners, the



Asom Gana Parishad is projected to secure 7-10 seats, while the Bodoland People's Front may win 8-9 seats, taking the NDA tally close to 90 seats and reinforcing the prospect of a stable government.

Other parties, including All India United Democratic Front,

Rajiv Dal and smaller groups, are expected to have limited influence on the final outcome.

The exit poll was conducted across all 126 Assembly constituencies spanning 35 districts, with around 5,000 respondents interviewed through face-to-face interactions to ensure a

representative sample.

The findings were compiled under the supervision of political analyst Rajan Pandey.

Vote share projections suggest a relatively close contest on the surface, with the BJP estimated to secure 38.6 per cent of the vote and the Congress at 36.5 per cent.

However, the survey highlights that the BJP's strength lies in efficient vote distribution, strong regional consolidation and better conversion of votes into seats, giving it a decisive electoral edge.

Leadership preference continues to play a crucial role in shaping voter behaviour.

The poll indicates that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma enjoys a clear advantage, with 45 per cent of respondents backing his leadership, compared to 35 per cent support for Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi. The survey also points to (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Goel assures smooth, transparent counting

Nearly 8,500 people to be engaged for counting on May 4



GUWAHATI, April 29: Around 8,500 officials will be engaged for counting of votes on May 4 for 126 Assam assembly constituencies that went to polls on April 9, the state's Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel said on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference here, he said the Election Commission is fully geared up to conduct the counting process smoothly and in a transparent manner.

"We will have 40 counting cen-

tres spread across the 35 districts of Assam. Most of the districts have a single centre comprising all the constituencies in their jurisdictions," Goel said.

Kokrajhar, Tinsukia and Jorhat will be having two counting centres each, while Nagaon will have three such facilities, he said.

"The EC has deployed 126 counting observers, who are senior IAS officers and will come from outside the state to maintain the neutrality of the process. We will also have 2,348 micro-observers, who are central government employees," Goel said.

For the main counting work, a total of 5,981 people, mostly from the state government, will be engaged as counting officials, he said. A record 85.96 per cent of Assam's 2.51 crore electorate exercised (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Chhattisgarh Police team detained in Guwahati



GUWAHATI, April 29: A team of four Chhattisgarh Police personnel, including an inspector, was detained by Guwahati Police for allegedly demanding and accepting bribes from three cybercrime accused arrested from Assam, officials said on Wednesday.

A case was registered against the four personnel of Raipur Police at Dispur police station, and they were picked up for questioning on Tuesday night, a senior official told PTI. "The Raipur Police team reached Guwahati on Sunday in connection with a cybercrime in Chhattisgarh. They arrested one accused from Bihar and nabbed three others, who also hail from Bihar, from Guwahati on Monday," he added.

The Chhattisgarh team, compris-

ing an inspector, a head constable and two constables, allegedly released two of the accused after accepting bribes and kept the third in custody pending payment of the demanded money, the official said.

"We received a complaint from the two released accused regarding the matter. Accordingly, we took action and carried out an operation. The entire team was picked up and brought to Dispur police station last night," he said.

Police said an FIR was registered under bailable sections, after which the team was allowed to leave the police station on notice following preliminary interrogation.

"We have served a notice on them and asked them to appear before us today again for further actions," the senior official said. He also said the lone accused in the cybercrime case of Chhattisgarh has been released under a 'PR bond'.

According to sources, the team has already reached Dispur police station, and questioning is underway. (PTI)

## Short range naval anti-ship missile clears critical salvo trial

NEW DELHI, April 29: In a boost to India's maritime strike capabilities, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Navy on Wednesday successfully conducted the maiden salvo launch of the short-range naval anti-ship missile system.

The salvo launch was carried out from the Navy's helicopter platform off the coast of the Bay of Bengal in Odisha.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh complimented the DRDO, the Navy, the Indian Air Force and industry partners involved in the project for the successful trial of the Naval Anti-ship Missile-Short Range (NASM-SR).

"During the trial, two missiles were (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Honeymoon murder: Indore victim's kin shocked as Sonam gets bail, seek CBI probe

INDORE, April 29: The family of slain Indore resident Raja Raghuvanshi has sought to know how a court in Meghalaya granted bail to his wife Sonam despite her being the alleged "mastermind" of his murder, and demanded a CBI probe into the case.

Seeking justice, Raghuvanshi's family members on Tuesday said they will move the Meghalaya High Court against the lower court's decision to grant bail to Sonam.

Transport businessman Raja Raghuvanshi went missing on May 23 last year during the couple's honeymoon, and his mutilated body was found on June 2 from a deep gorge near a waterfall in the Sohra area of East Khasi Hills district in Meghalaya. Sonam and several others, including her alleged boyfriend,

were arrested in the case.

A court in Meghalaya granted bail to Sonam on Tuesday.

Later, talking to reporters, Raja's mother, Uma, choked with emotion, said she couldn't understand how Sonam was granted bail despite being the "mastermind" of her son's murder.

"The Meghalaya Police thoroughly investigated the case over the past nine months, but it was beyond our understanding how the game suddenly changed in a month or two," she said.

"We only demand one thing from the government - justice for my innocent son, who was murdered. I want a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into this case," she added.

Raja's elder brother, Vipin

Raghuvanshi, said his family will challenge the lower court's decision to grant bail to Sonam in the Meghalaya HC.

"While arguing for Sonam's bail application in the court, her lawyer primarily emphasised that the Meghalaya Police did not properly inform her of the specific reason for her arrest, violating legal provisions," he said.

Vipin suspected "manipulation" in the investigation, saying the prosecution has not yet provided him with a copy of the chargesheet, nor has he had a chance to review it properly.

Sonam was arrested on June 9, 2025, in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh, for her alleged involvement in the conspiracy to murder her husband, and was in (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 2026 WB poll battle

### 'Highest-ever' voter turnout of over 92% amidst SIR shadow caps fierce BJP-TMC faceoff

KOLKATA, April 29: West Bengal's high-stakes assembly elections ended on Wednesday with a massive voter turnout of 91.66 per cent in the second and final phase, capping one of the most intense electoral contests in the recent years and setting the stage for a far-reaching verdict on whether chief minister Mamata Banerjee will continue her dominance or the BJP will break the TMC's hold in the state.

With 91.66 per cent at the closing of the voting, and reportedly lakhs of voters still waiting in queues to cast their ballots, the second phase of polls across 142 constituencies in South Bengal looked poised to match the first phase's record voter participation of 93.19 per cent.

The metropolis of Kolkata recorded a turnout of around 87 per cent at that time, with Purba Bardhaman district topping the chart at 92.46 per cent.

A communication from the Election Commission said 91.66 per

cent turnout was recorded in the second phase of polls till 7.45 pm, putting the combined poll percentage over the two-phases at 92.47 per cent. The first phase of polling was held on April 23 and the counting will be on May 4.

"This is the highest-ever recorded poll-participation since Independence in West Bengal," it said.

The sheer scale of participation gave the election an immediate political message — voters were not indifferent. They had turned out in numbers large enough to make every narrative contested and every claim of momentum politically loaded.

If the first phase tested whether the BJP could retain its north Bengal citadel, the second and final round was always the real battle for the saffron party on whether it could breach the ruling TMC's southern fortress of Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly, Nadia, North and South 24 Parganas and Purba Bardhaman.

At the centre of the larger political fight stood Bhabanipur, no longer merely a south Kolkata constituency but Banerjee's political refuge, her emotional home turf and the BJP's chosen psychological battlefield.

Banerjee, 71, seeking a fourth consecutive term after 15 years in power, faced Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari in a prestige battle widely seen as a symbolic rematch of Nandigram, where Adhikari had defeated her in 2021 after crossing over from the TMC to the BJP.

Five years later, the duel shifted to Banerjee's own bastion. For the TMC, retaining Bhabanipur is about protecting the chief minister's authority in her own backyard. For the BJP, breaching it would puncture the aura of invincibility around Bengal's most powerful political figure.

The constituency witnessed nearly 87 per cent polling, sharply up from (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Woman accused in matricide case dies in custody in Karbi Anglong

Magisterial inquiry likely as accused's health deteriorates in jail

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, April 29: A woman accused in the sensational beheading of her mother in West Karbi Anglong has died in judicial custody, officials said on Wednesday.

The accused, Pooja Malang, who was lodged at Hamren District Jail, died after her health condition deteriorated late Monday night.

The incident traces back to April 22 at Lalung village in Deramukh, where Pooja allegedly attacked her mother, Anumai Malang, with a machete while she was asleep, resulting in her death.

She had also reportedly assaulted her father, Premendra Malang, and her sister, leaving both injured.

Following the incident, she was arrested and remanded to judicial custody.

Jail authorities said her health worsened rapidly over the past 24

hours.

She was initially taken to Hamren Civil Hospital after falling ill inside the jail premises.

As her condition became critical, doctors advised immediate referral to Nagaon Medical College and Hospital for advanced treatment.

However, she died either during transit or shortly after reaching the hospital, officials said.

Her family members have since reached Nagaon after being informed of her death.

Sources within the jail administration stated that the accused had been in an unstable physical and mental condition following the incident and was provided medical attention as per protocol.

As per procedure in custodial deaths, a magisterial inquiry is expected to be initiated to ascertain the circumstances leading to her death. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Pleas against hate speeches: No legislative vacuum exists warranting intervention, says SC

NEW DELHI, April 29: The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the existing framework of criminal law adequately addresses the issue of hate speeches and no "legislative vacuum" exists warranting intervention.

"The contention that the field of hate speech remains legislatively unoccupied, is misconceived," a bench of justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta said.

The top court delivered its verdict on a batch of petitions seeking action against those involved in hate speeches and also for mechanism to deal with such instances.

The bench said it would be open to the Centre and the competent legislative authorities to consider in their wisdom whether any further legislative or policy measures were warranted in light of the evolving societal challenges or to bring about suitable amendments as suggested by the Law Commission's 267th report of March 2017.

"While we decline to issue directions of the nature sought, we deem it appropriate to observe that the is-

ssues relating to hate speeches and rumour-mongering bear directly upon the preservation of fraternity, dignity and Constitutional order," Justice Nath said while pronouncing the verdict.

The apex court said creation of criminal offences and the prescription of punishments lies squarely within the legislative domain.

It said the constitutional scheme founded upon the doctrine of separation of powers does not permit the judiciary to create new offences or expand the contours of criminal liability through judicial directions.

"The precedents of this court consistently affirm that while Constitutional courts may interpret the law and issue directions to secure the enforcement of fundamental rights, they cannot legislate or compel legislation," the bench said.

It said the existing framework of substantive criminal law, including the provisions of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code, and allied legislations adequately addresses acts that promote enmity, outrage religious sentiments, or disturb public tranquillity. "The field is, therefore, not unoccupied," the (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## NASA's Artemis II moonship returns home to its launch site after historic voyage



CAPE CANAVERAL, April 29: The spacecraft that flew four astronauts around the moon is back where its record-breaking journey began.

NASA's Artemis II capsule returned to Florida's Kennedy Space Center on Tuesday, almost a month after blasting off on humanity's first lunar trip in more than a half-century.

Following its splashdown in the Pacific on April 10, the Orion capsule was trucked from San Diego to Cape Canaveral. Engineers will examine the capsule's heat shield in more detail along with everything else in preparation for next year's Artemis III docking demo in orbit around Earth. The capsule's electronic boxes will be removed and recycled, along with re-

search equipment.

The capsule, dubbed Integrity by its US-Canadian crew, carried astronauts deeper into space than humans have ever travelled before. Aside from a finicky toilet, the capsule appeared to perform well during the nearly 10-day voyage, according to NASA.

Commander Reid Wiseman, pilot Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Canada's Jeremy Hansen are finally getting a break after medical exams and other tests that followed their mission.

"Been waiting for this moment," Wiseman said via X late last week, posting a video of himself relaxing on the beach. "There is a lot in my head that I must process and very little has to do with leaving the planet. Today is my first step. I have never in my life felt peace like this."

Until Artemis II, astronauts had not flown to the moon since Apollo 17 in 1972.

Artemis III will feature a fresh capsule and crew. They will remain in orbit around Earth for docking exercises with lunar landers still in development by SpaceX and Blue Origin. That will set the stage for a moon landing by two new astronauts as early as 2028. (AP)

## SCAN, UPLOAD, PRESERVE

### Mobile app to decentralise digitisation of Assamese language books

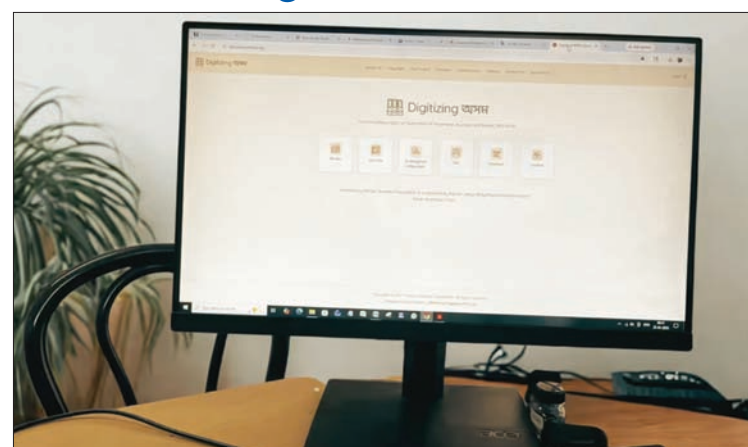
GUWAHATI, April 29: A special mobile application will soon enable the digitisation of manuscripts or books in Assamese language by their owners and link them to one of the largest digital repositories of publications in the language under an ongoing community-driven project.

The mobile app is aimed at decentralising the digitisation initiative led by the Nanda Talukdar Foundation (NTF) and supported by the Assam Jatiya Bidyalyal Educational and Socio-Economic Trust.

Under the 'Digitising Assam' project, 2.76 million Assamese archival documents, including books, journals, manuscripts and rare historical records, have already been digitally preserved and are available at assamarchive.org.

In the next phase, NTF is preparing to launch a mobile app that will transform ordinary smartphones into scanning devices, foundation secretary Mrinal Talukdar told PTI.

"The goal of this innovation is to de-



centralise digitisation and give it the form of a mass movement across Assam, where people can scan books, journals and manuscripts from their own homes and contribute to this knowledge repository," he said.

The yet-to-be-named application, which is set for a June launch, will be

available for Android users only and the documents scanned and uploaded on it will undergo a process of vetting and approval before it enters the assamarchive.org repository.

"There will be no geographical boundaries and anyone from any corner of the earth can be linked with this proj-

ect through the mobile application, be it as uploaders or in the approval process," Talukdar stressed.

He said there are also plans to link this work with student internships within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP), so that academic participation and cultural preservation become bound together in a single thread.

Along with the application, the NTF will also launch its 'Digitizing Assam 2.0', which will make the 2.76 million archived documents fully keyword-searchable, the secretary said.

"This is not merely a technological achievement, it is a historic moment in which the doors of the Assamese world of knowledge are being thrown open to everyone," Talukdar said.

He said a dedicated technological collaboration with Borno Labs (led by Kabyanil and Indranil Talukdar) and Bohman Systems (led by Abhijit Bhuyan) has made it possible to make the entire (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## India's Q1 gold demand rises 10 pc to 151 tons, investment demand tops jewellery consumption: WGC

**MUMBAI, April 29:** India's gold demand witnessed a 10 per cent on-year rise to 151 tonnes during the January-March quarter of this year, driven by a sharp surge in investment demand amid a significant jump in prices of the yellow metal, the World Gold Council said in a report on Wednesday.

According to the World Gold Council (WGC) report, there has been a more pronounced structural shift in the country's gold demand, with investment-led buying gaining momentum, which rose by 54 per cent across bars and coins and ETFs to 82 tonnes, offsetting weakness in jewellery demand.

Jewellery demand faced notable headwinds during the quarter, declining 19 per cent year-on-year to 66 tonnes, as elevated prices and affordability constraints continued to weigh on consumption, particularly in price-sensitive segments.

For the full year, demand for gold could stand between 650-750 tonnes, compared to 712 tonnes last year, as rising gold prices in recent months have outstripped consumer budgets. The country's total gold demand during the first quarter of 2025 stood at 137 tonnes, according to the WGC's Q1 2026 Gold Demand Trends report.

In value terms, demand nearly doubled, surging 99 per cent year-on-year in the March quarter of 2026 to a record ₹ 2,27,500 crore (USD 25 billion), the report added.

"India's gold market in Q1 2026 reflects a continued divergence between volume trends and value



growth, shaped by record-high prices and evolving consumer preferences.

"Total gold demand for the quarter stood at 151 tonnes, marking a 10 per cent increase compared to Q1 2025. In value terms, demand nearly doubled to ₹ 99,900 crores, up 99 per cent year-on-year, underscoring the impact of the sharp rise in gold prices," WGC Regional CEO, India, Sachin Jain told PTI.

Domestic gold price (MCX spot gold price) rose 81 per cent year-over-year during the first quarter of 2026, reaching a record quarterly average of ₹ 1,51,108 per 10 grams compared to ₹ 83,375 during the same period last year.

Bar and coin demand rose sharply, increasing 34 per cent year-on-year to 62 tonnes -- the highest first-quarter level since 2013. Value demand surged 142 per cent to ₹

94,100 crore, a departure from a market where jewellery has traditionally dominated.

"Looking ahead, while elevated prices may act as a near-term headwind for jewellery demand, the summer wedding season and regional festivals are expected to provide support, building on the momentum seen during Akshaya Tritiya. "At the same time, investment demand is likely to remain resilient, with gold continuing to be viewed as a safe-haven asset and an important portfolio diversifier amid ongoing global uncertainties. We estimate full-year demand to be in the range of 650-750 tonnes," he added.

This saw the share of bars and coins to rise to 41 per cent of total domestic gold demand, the highest level in data going back to 2000 and a significant increase from a year

ago (34 per cent). Moreover, India accounted for 13 per cent of global bar and coin demand, with y-o-y growth outpacing most major markets, barring China, the report added.

The first quarter of 2026 was a record quarter for Indian gold ETFs, with net demand of 20 tonnes, driven by strong investor participation amid elevated gold prices and subdued domestic financial markets.

Total Jewellery demand during the quarter decreased by 19 per cent to 66 tonnes as compared to 82 tonnes in the same quarter of 2025, while in value it increased by 47 per cent to ₹ 99,900 crore from ₹ 68,100 crore recorded last year.

"... The value of jewellery demand remained resilient at ₹ 99,900 crores, reflecting the strong price environment and a gradual shift towards lighter and more value-conscious purchases," Jain stated.

The WGC data further revealed that total gold recycled in India was 31.2 tonnes, up by 20 per cent compared to 26.0 tonnes in the same quarter of 2025. While the total gold imports in India during the quarter stood at 186 tonnes, up by 39 per cent compared to 141.2 tonnes in the same period of 2025.

On the supply side, he said recycling activity also saw an uptick, rising 20 per cent to 31.2 tonnes, as higher prices encouraged partial profit-taking, although overall sentiment continues to favour holding gold as a long-term store of value. (PTI)

### Vijay Anandh to take over as MD of CUB

**CHENNAI, April 29:** CUB on Wednesday announced that Vijay Anandh is set to take charge as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Kumbakonam-headquartered bank from May 1.

Anandh, who brings 28 years of banking experience, joined CUB in 2023 as Executive President and was elevated as Executive Director the next year. Prior to CUB, he served as Business & Collections Head for Retail Assets at RBL Bank.

"We are not looking to bring in any drastic changes to a system that has seen robust growth over the last 15 years. There are exciting times ahead for the industry, and we do not want to disrupt the status quo."

"Trust, ease of banking, and customer service will remain the bank's core priorities as it continues to strengthen its position in MSME and secured lending segments," Anandh said in the release.

Following the Board's decision, Dr Kamakodi will take over as Chairman of the CUB Foundation, the bank's philanthropic arm focused on water conservation, cultural preservation, and other social initiatives. (PTI)

## Royal Enfield launches 'Heritage Collection' apparel line

### New range blends 125-year legacy with modern urban design and craftsmanship



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 29:** Royal Enfield has unveiled its 'Heritage Collection', a premium lifestyle apparel range that draws inspiration from the brand's 125-year motorcycling legacy while adapting it for contemporary urban wear.

The newly launched collection integrates archival elements with modern design sensibilities, combining historical references, durable fabrics and versatile silhouettes.

Designed for both riders and everyday users, the range reflects Royal Enfield's longstanding philosophy of craftsmanship, utility and timeless aesthetics.

The collection features garments made from cotton twills, canvas blends and stretch-enabled materials, ensuring durability, comfort and flexibility suited to city

life. The silhouettes range from relaxed fits to more structured forms, offering a balance between mobility and refined styling.

A key highlight of the collection is the incorporation of iconic brand insignia, including the 1910 Cannon logo, the 1893 "Made Like a Gun" slogan and the 1969 Series II Interceptor badge.

These elements are subtly integrated through earthy-toned palettes using woven, embossed and printed techniques, creating a connection between Royal Enfield's mechanical heritage and modern fashion.

Yadvinder Singh Gulera, Chief Commercial Officer at Royal Enfield, said the collection is a tribute to the brand's legacy.

"Every element—from fabric selection and silhouette to the integration of archival logos—draws inspiration directly from the brand's design language. These garments are not merely echoes of the past but contemporary interpretations that allow people to engage with Royal Enfield's legacy in a meaningful way," he said.

He added that the collection is designed to appeal to both motorcycling enthusiasts and style-conscious consumers, combining functional design with a strong sense of identity rooted in history.

The 'Heritage Collection' is now available across Royal Enfield dealerships in India, as well as on the company's official website and select e-commerce platforms.

### Bandhan Life urges mid-career individuals to upgrade insurance cover

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 29:** Bandhan Life Insurance has advised individuals in their late 30s and 40s to reassess and strengthen their life insurance coverage, highlighting the impact of inflation on long-term financial security.

The company noted that people in this age group are typically in their peak earning years while simultaneously managing major financial responsibilities such as children's education, home loans and other long-term commitments.

As these obligations grow over time, static insurance cover may become insufficient. Satishwar B., Managing Director and CEO of Bandhan Life, said that enhancing life insurance at this stage is crucial to safeguarding a family's future.

"A term plan with the option to increase the sum assured can help build a stronger financial safety net in a cost-effective manner, while a high sum assured ULIP can add a valuable dimension of long-term wealth creation," he said.

According to the company, term plans with an increasing sum assured are particularly suited for individuals in this life stage, as they allow the coverage amount to grow over the policy tenure.

This feature helps offset inflation and ensures that the insurance protection remains aligned with rising expenses and evolving financial needs, without requiring frequent purchase of new policies.

Bandhan Life further stated that an individual's total life insurance cover should ideally be 10 to 15 times their annual income. This calculation should factor in existing liabilities, future household expenses, children's education and long-term financial goals, along with the impact of inflation over time.

## West Asia conflict raises inflation risks; India's domestic strength offers cushion: Finmin report

**NEW DELHI, April 29:** The ongoing conflict in West Asia poses a significant supply-side shock with rising risks to inflation, trade and financial flows, though India's strong domestic demand, policy buffers, resilient financial system and continued public investment are expected to provide a measure of insulation to the economy, the finance ministry said in a report said.

Prolonged uncertainty, particularly around energy and fertiliser supplies, could test the resilience of India's macroeconomic stability, the Monthly Economic Review for April released by the finance ministry said on Wednesday.

On top of this, the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is expected to keep India's Southwest monsoon below normal, it said, adding that most rainfall districts are expected to receive below-normal rainfall this season.

Therefore, it said, risks are tilted to the upside for inflation, fiscal and external deficits and to the downside for economic growth.

However, it said, while striving to sustain economic growth, policy is expected to safeguard medium-term fiscal and external stability.

Observing that India enters FY2026-27 at the intersection of domestic resilience and external turbulence, the report said, encouraging a 7-7.4 per cent forecast for the upcoming financial year, only to be clouded by an altered macro-outlook in the wake of the war in West Asia.

The Indian economy is estimated to grow at 7.6 per cent, the strongest in recent years.

Noting that a 'supply shock' is apparent in the economy, it said that an accompanying demand compression is a serious concern, given high prices, rising inflation, and a reduced pace of economic activity.

Inflation may become cost-push as businesses/producers pass on their increased input costs to protect their profit margins, it said.

A wide spectrum of downstream industries relies directly on the petroleum sector, and it is likely that input cost pressures will be felt widely across the economy, it said.

To temper cost pressures in critical sectors like agriculture, it said, the government has taken various measures such as increased allocation of natural gas to the fertiliser production, waiver of customs duty and around 12 per cent increase in nutrient-based subsidy for the upcoming kharif season.

Beyond the production structures, it said, the conflict has seriously dented investors' confidence, disproportionately affecting Emerging Markets and Developing

Economies (EMDEs), including India.

The consequent weakening of the rupee is another pressure point for domestic inflation, as that could raise import prices, it said.

The report said that repairing the damage to the oil and gas production/supply infrastructure in the Gulf region may take several months.

If such a gradual recovery is not supported by a good kharif output (a weather shock/below normal monsoon as predicted by the IMD - possible El Niño conditions), it is likely that the price shock felt at the headline inflation might spill over to the core measure through the cost-push channel, it said.

Yet it remains to be seen whether the spill-over effect will be strong/widespread or weak/limited, as it depends on a range of factors such as the size of the shock, variability in the pass-through duration across different markets/commodities, price flexibility/rigidity in sectoral markets, energy intensity of different sectors, etc, it said.

The crisis in West Asia is not expected to adversely affect financial stability, as key indicators for capital adequacy, liquidity, and asset quality in both SCBs and NBFCs remain strong, it said.

Further, it said, the RBI will continue its proactive approach to ensure adequate liquidity to meet the economy's productive needs.

To sustain momentum in the country's trade performance, the report said, the government has introduced targeted measures complementing its diversified trade strategy.

These include the RELIEF scheme; efforts to improve turnaround times and easier switching of fuels; and reforms under the Advance Authorisation Scheme to enable faster approvals and enhance transparency and predictability, alongside the approval for the establishment of the Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool, it said.

Additional interventions, it said, such as strengthened port coordination, advisories to improve transparency in shipping line pricing, monitoring of insurance risks, and relaxations to facilitate the movement of stranded cargo, further support trade flows.

Looking ahead, it said, the conclusion of recent free trade agreements is expected to reinforce trade performance by expanding market access and deepening integration with global value chains.

"For most economies, the current global drift is a source of vulnerability. However, for India, with its strong domestic fundamentals and tradition of strategic autonomy, it can be an opportunity," it said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Exit poll gives

strong backing for the ruling alliance among women voters and tribal communities, indicating a broad-based support base.

Region-wise analysis shows that the ruling alliance maintains a stronghold in Upper Assam, while Middle Assam presents a more competitive picture with closely fought contests in districts such as Nagaon, Hojai and Karbi Anglong.

In Lower Assam, the presence of multiple parties adds complexity, with AIUDF expected to perform well in select constituencies like Gauripur and Srijangram.

In the Barak Valley region, comprising Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj districts, the BJP is projected to retain an advantage across most seats, although the Congress may make limited gains in constituencies such as Sonai and Barkhola.

The survey further highlights broader electoral trends, including fragmentation of opposition votes, limited recovery of smaller parties and the impact of alliances, all of which appear to have indirectly strengthened the ruling alliance's position.

Overall, the exit poll points to a clear electoral advantage for the BJP-led NEDA, signaling a likely continuation of the current political leadership in Assam.

## Goel assures smooth,

their franchise across 126 seats on April 9. This marked the highest voter turnout in the state's history, surpassing the previous high of 84.67 per cent recorded in 2016.

Regarding the security arrangements, Goel said 25 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) have been deployed across the state in the innermost cordon to guard the strong rooms, and they will also be stationed in the counting centres.

"In addition, we have 13 companies of state armed police stationed outside the strong rooms as the second cordon. We can say it with full confidence that the strong rooms have not been compromised," he said, refuting allegations of security lapses in the EVM storage facilities by some opposition leaders.

On the counting day, 800 more unarmed police personnel will be available for the movement of EVMs from strong room locations to the counting centres.

"We will be having two additional companies of CAPF on static duty, while 93 companies of state armed police have already been deployed in the districts. We will also have the support of 85 Assault Groups (AGs) on the day of counting to deal with any untoward incident," Goel said.

He also said that different agencies have seized various items, including liquor and cash, worth Rs 114.43 crore across the state from March 15 to April 27.

Voting for the Assam Legislative Assembly took place in a single phase on April 9 across 31,490 polling stations.

There are a total of 722 candidates, including 59 women, in the fray. (PTI)

## Woman accused in

Authorities are also awaiting the post-mortem report, which will determine the exact cause. The motive behind the April 22 killing remains under investigation.

## 'Highest-ever' voter

around 61 per cent in the 2021 assembly polls and 57 per cent in the bypoll that brought Banerjee back to the House. Banerjee - who usually votes later in the day and prefers staying indoors on the day of polls - broke convention and hit the ground before 8 am, moving through Chetla, Padmapukur and Chakrabaria areas following complaints of alleged intimidation of local TMC leaders.

As she sat outside a booth amid heavy deployment of central forces, Adhikari arrived there and declared, "I will not allow any hooliganism." He opposed Banerjee moving around with "50-60 people" with her.

Banerjee accused the BJP of trying to "rig" the election by using central forces, election observers and officials. "The BJP wants to rig this election. Polls in Bengal are usually peaceful. Is there a goonda raj here?" she said, alleging intimidation of TMC polling agents and late-night visits by CRPF personnel to party workers' homes.

"The atrocities by the central forces are unprecedented. What is happening is not at all free and fair polls. But despite all this, we have full faith that we will win," she said after casting her vote.

Adhikari dismissed the charges as "frustration", claiming Banerjee had realised that "not a single vote was coming her way".

Tension flared again in Kalighat when Adhikari visited another booth, and TMC workers raised slogans against him. Police resorted to a lathi-charge to disperse the crowd as BJP supporters answered with counter-slogans.

Reports of sporadic tension were also received from some other areas amid sights of long queues at polling stations, booth-level flare-ups, and political bickering.

In Kolkata's Entally, BJP candidate Priyanka Tibrewal alleged that the TMC's polling agents tried to assault her after she objected to overcrowding inside a booth and a lack of voter privacy.

In Panihati, BJP candidate and the R G Kar victim's mother, Ratna Debnath, faced protests, while her party colleague in Basanti, Bikash Sardar, alleged that "200 to 250 TMC goons" attacked his vehicle and assaulted his driver.

The TMC, meanwhile, accused the central forces of exercising brute force on the general voters at Falta's Belsingha village, especially women, who were beaten up during a move to disperse a crowd from near a polling station. The party also alleged CAPF high-handedness on women and a four-year-old child at Sathachhia in Howrah and on villagers at Ausgram in Purba Bardhaman district.

"In the name of ensuring security, central force jawans are not sparing even women who were brutally lathi-charged. TMC protests this highhandedness of the male jawans who exercised brute force on unarmed villagers. We draw the EC's attention to such illegal actions of the CAPF and ask the poll body to issue cease-and-desist orders against such use of force. We believe, people of Bengal will respond to this on EVMs," Anirban Banerjee, party spokesperson, said.

The BJP also alleged that in several polling stations in Falta, the option to vote for the party was blocked using a tape over EVM poll buttons, and demanded repolls in the affected booths.

Sate's Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal said repolling is likely to be announced in booths where EVMs were found tampered with. However, the order will only be issued after authorities receive reports from the district election officer or election observers regarding allegations of EVM tampering, such as using tapes or a blot of ink, he said.

Amid Bengal's charged political landscape, the balance of forces between anti-incumbency and the recalibration of electoral rolls is likely to determine the delicate arithmetic of power at Nabanna, the state's administrative nerve centre. Of the 142 seats that voted on Wednesday, the TMC had won 123 in 2021, leaving just 18 for the BJP and one for the ISF. Together, North and South 24 Parganas, Kolkata and Howrah account for 91 of Bengal's 294 assembly seats, nearly one-third of the House. Without cracking this southern belt, there is no realistic road to Nabanna for the saffron party. (PTI)

## Short range naval

launched in quick succession from the same helicopter, making it the first salvo launch of an advanced air-launched anti-ship missile system," the defence ministry said.

It said all test objectives were fully met as per the data captured using various range tracking instruments like radar, electro-optical system and telemetry deployed by the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur.

"Along with proving the salvo launch capability, the missiles demonstrated the waterline hit capability. The test launches were witnessed by senior scientists from DRDO, users' representatives from the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force and Development-cum-Production Partners (DePP)," the ministry said.

The NASM-SR missile uses a solid propulsion booster and long-burn sustainer. The ministry said all critical subsystems like the seeker, integrated avionics module, advanced navigation and guidance using fibre-optic gyroscope-based inertial navigation system and guidance algorithm were developed indigenously by different laboratories of DRDO and Indian industries.

The missile system has been developed by Hyderabad-based Research Center Imarat in collaboration with several other DRDO laboratories. (PTI)

## Honeymoon murder: Indore

judicial custody in Shillong District Jail for more than 10 months. In September last year, the Meghalaya Police submitted a 790-page chargesheet, naming eight persons, including Sonam and her alleged boyfriend Raj Kushwah, as the accused. (PTI)

## Pleas against hate

bench said. It said the statutory framework under the erstwhile Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), now the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, provides a comprehensive and layered mechanism to set the criminal law in motion.

The bench said the duty of police to register an FIR upon disclosure of a cognisable offence is mandatory and in cases of non-registration of FIR, the CrPC or the BNSS provides efficacious remedy.

The apex court dismissed several pleas and also closed the separate contempt petitions filed against the authorities of some states for their alleged failure in complying with the court's directions of taking action against those involved in hate speeches. The detailed judgement is awaited.

The top court had reserved its verdict on the pleas on January 20, and observed that it would close most of the petitions related to hate speeches pending since 2021, and in which the court had asked the police to suo motu register FIRs. On April 28, 2023, the apex court had extended the scope of its 2022 order beyond three states and directed all states and Union Territories to register cases against individuals guilty of making hate speeches, regardless of whether a formal complaint was lodged.

It had termed hate speeches a "serious offence capable of affecting the secular fabric of the country".

The top court had noted that its October 21, 2022, order shall be made applicable irrespective of religion, warning that any delay in registering cases will be treated as contempt of the court.

Emphasising that the Constitution envisages a secular nation, the apex court had in 2022 directed Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Delhi to promptly register criminal cases against the offenders without waiting for a complaint to be filed. The apex court had warned that any delay from the administration in taking action on this "very serious issue" would invite contempt action.

The top court's order came on one of the pleas, which had initially sought direction to the governments of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand to register cases against those delivering hate speeches.

Later, an application was filed in the court seeking implementation of the October 2022 order across states and Union territories. (PTI)

## Mobile app to

repository keyword-searchable. "These two teams have used advanced artificial intelligence to decode, index and organise this vast repository of Assamese text and data. In terms of language processing, this is among the most complex and computationally challenging work undertaken in India," he said.

A mostly community-driven project, the Oil India Limited has also extended financial patronage to it, Talukdar added. (PTI)

Chief Election Officer reviewed security arrangements for the vote counting

## CEO Anurag Goel visits Sivasagar strong room



**HT Correspondent**  
**SIVASAGAR, April 29:** Chief Election Officer of Assam Anurag Goel visited Sivasagar district on Monday and took stock of the overall preparatory arrangements for the counting of votes to be held on May 4.

During his visit, the Chief Election Officer inspected the strong room set up at Sivasagar Government Higher Secondary Multipurpose School. He was accompanied by District Commissioner and District Election Officer Mridul Yadav and Senior Superintendent of Police Papi Chetia. He also took stock of the

security arrangements of the strong rooms and the management of the counting rooms and discussed various related issues.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Zila Parishad and Returning Officer of 95-Dimow Assembly Constituency Satish Chandra Thakuria, District Development Commissioner and Returning Officer of 97-Nazira Assembly Constituency Pabitra Kumar Das, the constituency Returning Officer Meenakshi Perme, Additional District Commissioner Lukumani Bora and Election Officer Aditi Neog were present during the CEO's visit.

## Advisory issued against eating wild mushrooms during monsoon

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, April 29:** In view of past incidents of poisoning caused by the consumption of wild mushrooms found in forests and open areas during the monsoon season, the District Health Department of Dibrugarh has issued a public advisory urging people to refrain from eating such mushrooms.

According to the department, wild mushrooms that grow along roadsides, in forests and in bushy areas during the rainy season may contain harmful toxic substances. Consumption of these mushrooms can lead to severe health complications and in some cases, may even result in death.

Health officials have warned that symptoms of mushroom poisoning include abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, headache and fever. The department has strongly advised that if any individual or family suspects the consumption of poisonous mushrooms, they should not wait for symptoms to appear and must immediately seek medical attention at the nearest healthcare facility.

The department has also cautioned the public against several common misconceptions regarding wild mushrooms. These include the belief that all poisonous mushrooms are brightly colored or shiny, that mushrooms can be made safe by refrigeration, drying in the sun, or cooking after freezing and that poisonous mushrooms always have a strong odor or taste. Officials emphasised that such assumptions are misleading and can be dangerous.

Notably, the Dibrugarh District Health Department has undertaken various measures to raise awareness about the dangers of consuming wild mushrooms. Health workers are actively conducting awareness meetings to educate the public about the risks. Special announcements are being made through loudspeakers, particularly in tea garden areas, to alert residents.

In addition, awareness messages are being widely disseminated through social media platforms to ensure that people remain informed and avoid consuming wild mushrooms during the monsoon season. The department has once again appealed to the public to exercise caution and prioritise safety by avoiding the consumption of unidentified mushrooms.

## NEET to be held on May 3 at three centres in Sivasagar

**HT Correspondent**  
**SIVASAGAR, April 29:** The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) will be held on May 3 at three centres in Sivasagar district: Sivasagar Kendriya Vidyalaya, Sivasagar Commerce College and Nazira Kendriya Vidyalaya.

To take stock of the preparatory measures for the examinations, the District Commissioner Mridul Yadav on Wednesday, visited all the three centres and held discussions with the city coordinators and the school authorities.

The District Commissioner was accompanied by Nazira Co-District Commissioner Pratibha Meshram, Additional District Commissioner Meenakshi Perme and Assistant Commissioner Ganesh Chandra Boro. The measure of the central NEET authority is appreciated by the people of the district as it would help the students and guardians in large measures financially as well as in saving precious time on the examination day.

## Lumding division achieves 'Eat Right Station' milestone

Ten stations and DRM canteen certified for food safety standards

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, April 29:** In a major step towards ensuring safe and hygienic food for passengers, 10 railway stations, along with the Divisional Railway Manager's office canteen at Lumding under the Lumding Division of Northeast Frontier Railway have been awarded the prestigious "Eat Right Station" certification by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The certification is valid for the period from March 30, 2026, to March 29, 2028, in accordance with FSSAI guidelines.

The stations that have received this certification include Silchar (Cachar district), Karimganj (Sribhumi district), New Hailong (Dima Hasao district), Diphu (Karbi Anglong district), Lumding and Lanka (Hojai district), Jagarmukh (Nagaon district), Jagiraoth (Morigaon district) and Sarupathar (Golaghat district), along with the Divisional Railway Manager's office canteen at Lumding.

This recognition follows a comprehensive audit of food stalls, catering units and food handlers at



these locations, ensuring strict compliance with food safety standards, hygienic preparation practices, safe storage, effective waste management and the availability of nutritious food options for passengers.

This achievement reflects the dedicated efforts and close coordination among railway officials, health inspectors, catering units, authorised vendors and station management teams in maintaining

high standards of cleanliness and food safety.

The "Eat Right Station" certification is part of FSSAI's flagship "Eat Right India" initiative, aimed at promoting safe, healthy and sustainable food practices across the country. Northeast Frontier Railway remains committed to enhancing passenger amenities and ensuring the availability of quality, safe and hygienic food across its network.

## Two separate killings in Sootea spark panic among residents

**HT Correspondent**  
**BISWANATH CHARIALLI, April 29:** Two separate killings in the northern part of Sootea on Monday and Tuesday have created panic among residents of the area. According to information, one Mahabir Ghatowar, a resident of No 2 Diphlonga village, allegedly killed his younger brother Sanjay Ghatowar on Monday night by hitting him with a stick. Further information stated that the two brothers were involved in a land-related quarrel at midnight on Monday, which later turned into a violent clash. Mahabir, the elder brother, reportedly struck Sanjay with a stick, resulting in his instant death. A team of Sootea Police reached the spot, apprehended the accused and sent the body for autopsy.

On the other hand, one Shankar Munda (37) was killed by his younger brother Mangal Munda on Wednesday. According to reports, the two brothers from No 4 ward of Gutbari in the northern part of Sootea were involved in a family quarrel. In a fit of rage, Mangal Munda hit his elder brother Shankar Munda with a stick, who later succumbed to his injuries. A team from Sootea Police Station reached the site, apprehended Mangal Munda and sent the body for autopsy.

Notably, the two killings in the northern part of Sootea have created tension among residents of the area. Concerned citizens have urged the respective Thana Level Nagarik Committees (TLNC), other local NGOs and the civil and police administration to organise awareness programmes among tea tribe communities and address issues such as violent conflicts in order to eradicate such incidents at the earliest.

## Tezpur Cancer Centre marks 4<sup>th</sup> Foundation Day

ACCF facility reports rising patient load, launches awareness initiatives

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, April 29:** Tezpur Cancer Centre, a unit of the Assam Cancer Care Foundation (ACCF), celebrated its 4th Foundation Day on Tuesday, marking four years of transformative work in cancer care delivery across Assam and the Northeast. The foundation was established on 28 April 2022 with the inauguration of its first set of seven cancer hospitals by the Prime Minister of India and Ratan Tata. Over the last four years, ACCF has expanded access to affordable and quality cancer treatment.

Speaking on the occasion, Medical Superintendent of Tezpur Cancer Centre Dr (Major) DJ Borah reiterated the foundation's commitment to ensuring that no patient in Assam has to travel far for quality cancer treatment. He highlighted that as of date, 4,123 new cancer patients have been registered, with an OPD footfall of 33,137 patients. A total of 1,139 cancer patients have undergone radiotherapy treatment and 12,939 chemotherapy sessions have been completed. Dr



Sanjeev Kr Gupta, Senior Radiation Oncologist and Head of the Radiation Department at Tezpur Cancer Centre, shared a presentation on cervical cancer prevention, treatment and the importance of HPV vaccination.

As part of the event, ACCF released its official awareness campaign song composed and sung by Rupam Bhuyan, with music by Priyanka Bordoloi and lyrics by Sasanka Samir, aimed at resonating with communities across Assam and inspiring collective action against cancer. The second volume of 'Pratyusha', ACCF's multilingual magazine was also unveiled by dignitaries during the programme. The publication documents ACCF's ongoing initiatives, features patient

stories of courage and recovery and highlights the collaborative efforts of doctors, caregivers, government and civil society in transforming cancer care delivery.

The dignitaries present at the event included Prof (Dr) Rupam Borgohain, Medical Superintendent of Tezpur Medical College and Hospital, Dr Shafiqul Islam, Deputy Medical Superintendent of Tezpur Medical College and Hospital, Dr Dwipen Mahanta, IMA president, Tezpur branch, Dr Amar Jyoti Hazarika, Director of Narayana Super Speciality Hospital and heads of various departments of TMCH. The event concluded with a pledge to build on the progress of the last four years and work towards a cancer-free future.

## Dredging drive launched near Bogibeel to check erosion

Initiative aims to restore Brahmaputra's flow and protect vulnerable riverbanks



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, April 29:** In a decisive move to address the escalating threat of riverbank erosion, Dibrugarh MLA Prasanta Phukan on Wednesday initiated dredging operations in the Brahmaputra River near the Bogibeel Bridge.

The initiative comes in response to severe erosion reported in Majan and several adjoining areas,

largely attributed to heavy silt deposition in the river.

The accumulation has disrupted the natural course of the Brahmaputra, increasing pressure on vulnerable embankments and resulting in significant land loss across multiple localities.

To mitigate the situation, the MLA engaged in discussions with officials from the Inland Water-

ways Authority of India (IWAI), following which a phased dredging plan was formulated and set into motion.

The primary objective of the operation is to remove excess silt from the riverbed, restore its natural flow and reduce the intensity of erosion along the banks. Phukan personally visited the site near Bogibeel Bridge to review the progress of the ongoing work.

During the inspection, he directed officials to ensure the timely and efficient execution of the project, underlining the urgency of safeguarding lives, property and vital infrastructure in erosion-prone regions.

Residents of the affected areas have welcomed the initiative, expressing optimism that the dredging efforts will provide much-needed relief and help avert further damage, particularly with the monsoon season approaching. Authorities have stated that the dredging work will be carried out in phases, with continuous monitoring to evaluate its effectiveness in controlling erosion across Dibrugarh district.

## Training begins in Kokrajhar for vote counting

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, April 29:** In preparation for the counting of votes for the Assam Legislative Assembly Election, 2026, training sessions for Counting Supervisors, Counting Assistants and Micro Observers commenced in Kokrajhar district on Wednesday to ensure a smooth, accurate and transparent counting process. The training programme has been conducted at Kokrajhar University, where participants were comprehensively briefed on their roles and responsibilities, covering all critical aspects of the counting process. Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers attended the sessions and provided necessary guidance to the participants. A subsequent round of training is scheduled to be held on May 2, 2026, from 10:00 AM onwards at the same venue.

Earlier on Tuesday, District Commissioner and District Election Officer, Kokrajhar, Dr P Uday Praveen, chaired a review meeting to assess preparedness for the counting process, with a focus on the training schedule of counting personnel. The meeting was attended by Additional District Commissioners, the Election Officer, Assistant Commissioners and the Circle Officer, Kokrajhar.

It may be noted that the General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, 2026, was conducted across the state in a single phase on April 9 and the counting of votes will be held on May 4, 2026.

In Kokrajhar district, the election was held for five constituencies, namely Parbatjhora LAC, Gossaigaon, Dotma, Baukhungri and Kokrajhar LAC. Voter participation in the elections was higher than previous election records. The elections passed off smoothly and peacefully across the five constituencies.

## International Dance Day celebrated at Deomornai Degree College

**HT Correspondent**  
**MANGALDAI, April 29:** Deomornai Degree College celebrated International Dance Day with a day-long programme on Wednesday at the college auditorium. The event was jointly organised by the Cultural Department of the Students' Union and the Cultural Cell of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC).

The programme was inaugurated by Dr Gitali Kalita, Principal of the college. She highlighted the importance of dance as a powerful medium to express emotions and creativity and its role in connecting different cultures across the world. Assistant Professor Brindaban Sarma, Coordinator of IQAC, also spoke on the occasion.

Competitions in modern and folk dance were also held among the students on this occasion. In the modern dance competition, Mousumi Das won the first prize. Himamoni Deka secured second place, while Himraj Hazarika and Nizan Sarma jointly secured the third prize. In the folk dance competition, Susmita Devi won the first prize, while the second and third prizes were won by Pushpanjali Saharia and Himamoni Deka respectively. The programme was anchored by Intajul Haque, a fourth-semester student. Bijoy Kumar Boruah, Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics and In-charge of the Cultural Department, offered the vote of thanks.

## OBITUARY

**N**areswari Kalita, a retired headmistress, award-winning teacher and noted social worker of Ketekibari in Tezpur, passed away at her residence at 7 AM on Wednesday due to age-related ailments. She was 93.

Nareswari Kalita, wife of late Bhola Kalita, a distinguished actor, former president of Baan Theatre and recipient of the Natasurjya Phani Sarma Award had been undergoing treatment for age-related illness at a private hospital here for some days and breathed her last at home. Following the news of her demise, several prominent citizens and organisations paid their last respects at her residence.

## DNA sequencer installed at Bodoland University TIC

Facility expected to boost advanced research and regional scientific capacity



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, April 29:** The application training of the Genetic Analyser (Sanger DNA Sequencer) at the Technology Incubation Centre, Bodoland University, was successfully completed on Wednesday in the presence of the Dean, Faculty of Sciences and Technology (BU), Head, Department of Biotechnology (BU), faculty members, research scholars and students of Bodoland University, Kokrajhar University, Science College and Kokrajhar Medical College, among others, under the Bongaigaon Refinery

(IOCL)-sponsored project "Green energy powered analytical equipment for Quality Assurance and Marketing of diverse Mushroom and value-added Mushroom Products at Bodoland University, Kokrajhar."

A DNA sequencer is a very important instrument in modern life sciences, with wide-ranging applications across research, healthcare, agriculture and biotechnology. Its importance lies in its ability to accurately determine nucleotide sequences, enabling precise genetic analysis. Its applications include

molecular diagnostics and clinical applications, mutation detection and genetic variation studies, bioinformatics and genomic research, forensic science and DNA fingerprinting, agricultural biotechnology and plant genetics, microbial identification and metagenomics, drug development and pharmacogenomics, biotechnology and industrial applications, evolutionary biology and phylogenetics, as well as academic training and capacity building.

The acquisition of a DNA sequencer at Bodoland University significantly strengthens high-end research capabilities not only within the university and its affiliated colleges but also across the entire region of Western Assam and the Bodoland Territorial Region. This advanced facility is expected to act as a catalyst for fostering a robust research ecosystem by enabling cutting-edge studies in molecular biology, biotechnology and allied disciplines. It will facilitate collaborative research, skill development and innovation, thereby contributing to regional scientific advancement and capacity building.

The Principal Investigator and other Co-PIs of the project are thankful to the Bodoland University authority for administrative support and also to the Bongaigaon Refinery-BGR (IOCL) authority for financial support towards the installation of the equipment.

In Loving Memory of



**SUBHASH CHANDRA DAS**

30 March, 1937 - 30 April, 2020

Remembering a kind and noble soul whose love and selflessness continue to inspire us. Though no longer with us, his values live on in our hearts

Missed by

Hiranmoyee Kakoti Das and Family

Pranjal, Manasjyoti and Neel Navyan

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

The head never rules the heart, but just becomes its partner in crime. -Mignon McLaughlin

## Change in security landscape

The old framework of rigid alliances in West Asia is giving way to overlapping security partnerships, strategic hedging, internal military modernization, and new calculations shaped as much by technology and economics as by traditional geopolitics. West Asia's defence and security architecture is undergoing one of its most profound transformations in decades. What was once defined by fixed rivalries — Arab versus Persian, state versus non-state actors, US security guarantees versus Iranian deterrence — is now evolving into a far more fluid and contested order. At the centre of this transformation lies a hard lesson reinforced by the recent Iran-US-Israel confrontation: security in West Asia can no longer be outsourced. That realisation is driving almost every major regional power, from Saudi Arabia to Qatar, from the UAE to Jordan, to rethink deterrence, military preparedness and diplomatic balancing. Saudi Arabia has emerged as a pivotal actor in this changing landscape. Riyadh's defence strategy is increasingly defined by dual-track thinking — strengthening military capabilities while pursuing selective de-escalation. On one hand, the kingdom continues to invest heavily in missile defence, indigenous defence production and strategic partnerships beyond its traditional US dependence. On the other, it has shown a pragmatic willingness to engage rivals, including cautious diplomatic channels with Iran. This reflects a shift from confrontation toward managed competition.

The UAE, meanwhile, has moved even further toward a model of strategic autonomy. Abu Dhabi is no longer content to be viewed simply as part of a Gulf collective security system. It is building itself as an independent defence power, combining advanced military procurement, cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence integration and diversified strategic partnerships. Its security calculations are increasingly global, extending from the Red Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean and into the Indo-Pacific. Yet, its exposure during recent regional escalation has also underscored the vulnerability even sophisticated states face in an era where energy infrastructure, ports and digital systems have become legitimate targets. Qatar's position reflects another emerging trend — small-state resilience through strategic relevance.

Oman remains unique. Long known as a mediator, Muscat's value in the evolving security order lies precisely in its neutrality. In an increasingly polarised region, neutral diplomatic actors have become strategic assets. Oman's role in mediation, maritime stability and quiet diplomacy gives it disproportionate importance relative to its size. The emerging security order in West Asia is being built around resilience rather than certainty, flexibility rather than fixed alliances, and layered deterrence rather than singular guarantees. It is a landscape shaped not by the end of conflict, but by a recognition that conflict itself has changed.

## Parents must wake up before too late

Recent incidents unfolding in Guwahati have stirred not just concern but a deep, unsettling introspection among those who still hold faith in the moral fabric of society. A tragic road accident in the early hours of 26th April at Mathgharia, where three young women lost their lives, followed by the shocking revelation of the circumstances surrounding it, has forced many to confront an uncomfortable truth about the state of today's youth. Coupled with earlier incidents like the mysterious and painful death of a young woman such as Namrata Bora, these are no longer isolated tragedies that can be dismissed as unfortunate coincidences. Instead, they collectively signal a disturbing pattern that reflects the vulnerabilities, confusion, and moral disorientation gripping a section of the younger generation. For parents who send their children to Guwahati with dreams of education, independence, and a better future, these events should serve as a piercing wake-up call. The question is no longer whether the city offers opportunities—it undoubtedly does—but at what cost, and under what supervision. A growing number of young people appear to be drifting away from foundational values, drawn instead toward a culture that prioritizes instant gratification over long-term purpose. This drift is not accidental; it is shaped by a complex interplay of social pressures, exposure to unchecked freedom, and the absence of constant parental engagement. The erosion of discipline, respect, and ethical boundaries is becoming visible in everyday incidents, and unless addressed with urgency, it risks becoming normalized. What makes this situation even more alarming is the gap between perception and reality, where parents often remain unaware of the lifestyles their children adopt in distant urban spaces. This gap, if left unbridged, can transform hope into irreversible loss. The transition from rural or semi-urban environments to a bustling city like Guwahati represents not just a geographical shift but a profound cultural and psychological transformation. Young individuals arriving in the city often carry with them aspirations shaped by simplicity, discipline, and familial values, but these are quickly tested against the allure

of a fast-paced, consumption-driven lifestyle. The city, with its promise of modern education, career prospects, and social mobility, simultaneously presents an undercurrent of temptations that can be overwhelming for those unprepared to navigate them. Away from the watchful eyes of family, many young people begin to equate independence with unchecked freedom, gradually loosening their grip on the very values that once anchored them. This newfound autonomy, when not guided by maturity and responsibility, becomes fertile ground for experimentation that often veers into harmful territories. Substance abuse, reckless driving, and indulgence in nightlife culture are no longer rare occurrences but increasingly visible patterns. What begins as curiosity or a desire to fit in can quickly escalate into habits that disrupt academic focus, damage health, and strain social relationships. Compounding this issue is the intense competition that defines urban academic and professional spaces. The pressure to perform, succeed, and maintain a certain social image can take a significant toll on mental health, pushing some individuals toward unhealthy coping mechanisms. In such a scenario, the absence of a strong support system becomes glaringly evident. Parents, despite being physically distant, must recognize that their role does not diminish with distance; rather, it becomes more critical. Regular communication, emotional availability, and a willingness to engage in honest conversations about challenges can act as stabilizing forces in an otherwise chaotic environment. Without these, the city's promise of growth can easily transform into a landscape of confusion and risk. Another dimension that demands urgent attention is the evolving nature of social interactions and relationships among urban youth. In a setting where anonymity and diversity coexist, young individuals often find themselves navigating complex social networks without adequate guidance or experience. The desire to belong, to be accepted, and

to emulate what is perceived as "modern" behavior can lead to associations that are not always beneficial. Relationships formed in such environments, while sometimes genuine, can also be transient and driven by superficial factors such as status, appearance, or access to resources.

This becomes particularly concerning when these dynamics intersect with the lure of easy money and luxury. There is a growing trend where a section of youth, especially young women newly exposed to urban life, become vulnerable to exploitation under the guise of opportunity or companionship. The promise of financial comfort, expensive gifts, and a seemingly glamorous lifestyle can obscure the underlying risks, leading to decisions that compromise personal dignity and long-term well-being. These are not abstract concerns but realities reflected in numerous incidents that surface from time to time, each carrying a story of misplaced trust and irreversible consequences. For parents in distant towns and villages, these developments often remain hidden, creating a dangerous disconnect between assumption and actuality. It is imperative that this disconnect be addressed through proactive engagement. Understanding a child's social circle, encouraging discernment in choosing friends, and fostering an environment where concerns can be shared without fear of judgment are essential steps. The challenge lies not in restricting freedom but in equipping young individuals with the clarity and confidence to make informed choices. When such guidance is absent, the line between exploration and self-destruction becomes dangerously thin. The influence of wealth and the culture it cultivates in urban settings further complicates this landscape. Guwahati, like many growing cities, has witnessed the rise of a class for whom material success is both a symbol and a pursuit, often overshadowing considerations of ethics and responsibility. This has given rise to a social environment where luxury is not just admired but aggressively showcased, creating aspirational pressures among those who



may not have the means to access it legitimately. Nightlife scenes characterized by extravagant parties, expensive alcohol, and conspicuous consumption become stages where a certain image of success is performed and reinforced. For impressionable youth, particularly those from modest backgrounds, this can create a distorted perception of achievement, where the end justifies the means. The normalization of such lifestyles, coupled with the visibility they receive on social media platforms, amplifies their appeal while masking their consequences. It is within these spaces that many young individuals find themselves entangled in networks that prioritize pleasure over prudence, often at the expense of their safety and future. The role of social media in this context cannot be understated. It acts as both a mirror and a magnifier, reflecting curated versions of reality that are designed to attract and influence. The constant exposure to images of affluence and enjoyment can create a sense of inadequacy, driving individuals to emulate behaviors that are neither sustainable nor safe. Parents must therefore extend their awareness to the digital lives of their children, recognizing that online interactions and influences are as significant as physical ones. Open discussions about the difference between perception and reality, about the value of integrity over image, can help counterbalance the pressures exerted by these virtual narratives. Ignoring this dimension would mean overlooking a powerful force that shapes attitudes and decisions in profound ways. Ultimately, the responsibility of addressing these challenges does not rest solely on individual families but extends to society at

large. However, the role of parents remains foundational, as they are the first and most enduring influence in a child's life. Awareness must translate into action, and concern must evolve into consistent involvement. This does not imply surveillance driven by suspicion but engagement rooted in care and accountability. Parents must make conscious efforts to stay informed about their children's academic progress, social interactions, financial habits, and emotional well-being, even when separated by distance. Technology, which often contributes to the problem, can also be part of the solution when used to maintain regular and meaningful communication. Beyond the family, educational institutions and community networks must also play a proactive role in fostering environments that emphasize values alongside achievement. Discussions around ethics, mental health, and responsible behavior should not be peripheral but integral to the educational experience. At the same time, there is a pressing need for stricter enforcement of laws that address issues such as substance abuse, reckless driving, and exploitation, particularly where power and wealth are used to evade accountability. The recent incidents in Guwahati are not just stories of individual misfortune; they are indicators of systemic gaps that require collective attention. If these warnings are ignored, the consequences will extend beyond isolated tragedies to a broader erosion of trust and stability within society. The moment demands clarity, courage, and commitment from all stakeholders, especially parents, who must recognize that sending a child to the city is not the end of responsibility but the beginning of a more complex and demanding phase of it.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT  
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

## When Distant Wars come home: The Iran conflict and its emerging impact on Assam's economy

At first glance, a geopolitical conflict in West Asia may seem far removed from the everyday realities of Assam. The ongoing tensions involving Iran are unfolding thousands of kilometres away, in a region many here engage with only through news headlines. Yet, in today's deeply interconnected global economy, distance offers little protection. The ripples of conflict travel swiftly—through oil markets, trade routes, currency fluctuations, and supply chains—eventually reaching even the most remote corners of India. Assam is no exception.

What we are witnessing now are the early signs of this transmission. These are not dramatic shocks, but subtle, creeping pressures—rising costs, tightening supplies, and growing uncertainties. If the situation persists or escalates, these pressures could evolve into a more serious economic strain for the state. One of the most immediate and visible impacts has been on air travel. Airfares on several domestic routes, particularly those connecting the Northeast to major cities, have begun to rise. Aviation turbine fuel (ATF), derived from crude oil, is highly sensitive to global price movements. As tensions around Iran push crude prices upward, airlines pass on the increased costs to passengers. For a region like Assam, where air connectivity is often a necessity rather than a luxury due to geographical constraints, rising fares are more than an inconvenience—they affect mobility, tourism, business travel, and even emergency access.

Equally concerning is the uncertainty looming over Assam's iconic tea industry. Iran has traditionally been an important market for Indian tea, including Assam varieties. Payment mechanisms and trade routes involving Iran are often complex, shaped by sanctions and geopolitical considerations. Any escalation in conflict can further disrupt these fragile arrangements. Exporters may face delays, higher transaction costs, or even temporary market closures. For an industry already grappling with climate variability, labour challenges, and fluctuating global demand, this adds yet another layer of vulnerability.

Perhaps the most significant channel of impact lies in the energy sector. Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL), a key pillar of Assam's economy, depends on crude oil imports influenced by global prices. A sustained rise in crude costs increases the refinery's operational expenses, which in turn affects the pricing of petroleum products—petrol, diesel, and LPG. While retail prices may not rise immediately due to political and regulatory considerations, they cannot remain insulated indefinitely. The current pause in price revisions may only be temporary; the pressure is building, and an eventual hike appears likely.

The consequences of rising fuel costs are far-reaching. Transportation becomes more expensive, pushing up the cost of goods and services across the board. Agricultural operations, which rely heavily on diesel for irrigation and machinery, face higher input costs. Public transport operators struggle to maintain fare levels, often resulting in reduced services or financial stress. In a state where a large segment of the population depends on agriculture and informal sectors, such cost escalations can quickly erode incomes.

The plastic industry in Assam is already beginning to feel the strain. Many of the raw materials used in plastic manufacturing are derived from petrochemicals, whose prices are closely tied to crude oil. Reports of shortages and rising input costs are emerging. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of this sector, are particularly vulnerable. Unlike large corporations, they have limited capacity to absorb shocks or pass on increased costs. Production cuts, layoffs, or even closures could follow if the situation persists.

Infrastructure development, another key driver of

Assam's growth, is also at risk. Bitumen, an essential material for road construction, is petroleum-based. As its prices rise, ongoing and planned projects may face cost overruns. Contractors may slow work, seek revised budgets, or in some cases abandon projects altogether. This not only affects connectivity and development but also has cascading effects on employment and local economies. The agricultural sector, already under pressure from erratic weather patterns and rising input costs, faces another challenge: increasing fertilizer prices. Many fertilizers are either imported or produced using natural gas, whose prices are linked to global energy markets. Higher fertilizer costs can reduce usage, affecting crop yields and productivity. For a predominantly agrarian state like Assam, this is a deeply concerning trend with implications for food security and rural livelihoods.

What ties all these strands together is the gradual but persistent rise in the cost of living. When fuel, transportation, raw materials, and agricultural inputs become more expensive, the effects permeate every layer of the economy. Prices of essential goods begin to rise. Household budgets come under strain. Consumption slows, leading to reduced demand for goods and services. Businesses, facing both higher costs and weaker demand, may cut back on investment and hiring. The economy begins to stagnate—not through sudden collapse, but through a slow, tightening squeeze.

There is also a fiscal dimension to this unfolding scenario. State governments, including Assam, operate within a delicate balance of revenues and expenditures. Rising costs and slowing economic activity can strain this balance. If revenues fall short while expenditure pressures rise—particularly on subsidies, welfare schemes, and salaries—the government may face difficult choices. Comparisons with fiscally constrained states serve as a cautionary note. While Assam is not in such a position at present, the risk cannot be dismissed if external shocks persist.

Another important aspect is the psychological impact on markets and consumers. Uncertainty breeds caution. Businesses may delay expansion plans, while consumers may postpone major purchases. This sentiment-driven slowdown can reinforce the economic effects of rising costs, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. It is important to emphasize that these developments are neither inevitable nor irreversible. Much will depend on how the geopolitical situation evolves and how policymakers respond. The government can consider targeted interventions—such as temporary tax adjustments on fuel, support for vulnerable industries, and measures to ensure the availability of critical inputs like fertilizers and raw materials. Strengthening local supply chains and promoting alternatives could also help reduce dependence on volatile global markets.

At the same time, greater public awareness is essential. The connection between global events and local economic conditions is often not immediately apparent. Understanding this linkage can foster more informed public discourse and realistic expectations.

The unfolding situation is a reminder of a fundamental reality of our times: no region, however geographically distant, is economically isolated. The Iran conflict is no longer just a distant headline; it is a developing story that is beginning to shape Assam's economic narrative. The signs are already visible—in rising airfares, uncertain exports, increasing input costs, and mounting fiscal pressures.

If these trends continue, Assam could be heading towards a period of economic strain marked by rising prices and slowing growth. The challenge lies in recognising the warning signs early and responding with foresight and resilience. When distant wars begin to shape local realities, preparedness is no longer optional—it becomes essential.

## The Golden Wilt: Resurrecting India's Tea industry

The verdant tapestry of the Brahmaputra Valley and the mist-laden slopes of West Bengal have long been the cradles of a global obsession, yet beneath this emerald facade, the tea industry is currently ensnared in a systemic malaise that threatens to dissolve its very foundation. For centuries, the rhythmic plucking of two leaves and a bud has dictated the pulse of regional economies, but today, that pulse is faltering under the weight of archaic regulatory frameworks and an unforgiving climate. The industry stands at a precipice where tradition meets the cold, hard reality of modern market dynamics, requiring not just a superficial bandage but a profound architectural overhaul. Leading producers' associations have raised a clarion call, demanding that the Union Government re-examine the mandate that forces the liquidation of at least 50 percent of their annual harvest through public auctions. This administrative tether, intended to ensure transparency, has instead become a millstone, dragging producers into a vortex of inefficiency that contradicts the very essence of the contemporary ethos surrounding the ease of doing business.

At the heart of this industrial grievance lies a fundamental clash between centralized control and the fluid necessity of private enterprise. The producers' logic is as transparent as a well-brewed Pekoe; they seek the inherent right to navigate market dynamics with the same agility afforded to other sectors of trade and commerce. By mandating that half of the total production pass through public auctions, the government has inadvertently saddled estates with exorbitant transaction costs and agonizingly protracted selling cycles. When compared to the streamlined efficiency of ex-factory sales—where tea moves directly from the drying floor to the buyer's warehouse—the auction system appears as a relic of a bygone era, a vestige of colonial-style oversight that ignores the urgency of liquid capital. To persist with these outdated curbs is to invite a slow exsanguination of the industry's financial health, especially when the global market demands rapid response times and minimized overheads to remain competitive against rising tea-producing giants in East Africa and Southeast Asia.

The irony of the current situation is sharpened by a paradoxical economic trend that has left even the most seasoned economists in a state of bewildered contemplation. Recent data indicates a robust increase in raw production, yet this agricultural success has failed to translate into remunerative benefits for the producers. We are witnessing a surreal landscape where prominent tea houses, some with histories spanning over a century, are divesting from their ancestral gardens due to mounting, insurmountable losses. Yet, in a twist that defies traditional fiscal logic, there remains a queue of willing takers for these loss-making estates. This phenomenon suggests a speculative undercurrent or perhaps a desperate hope for a future turnaround, but it

does little to alleviate the immediate suffering of the workers and managers who see the ground shifting beneath their feet. The industry is beset by a steep escalation in production costs—driven by rising wages, fertilizer prices, and energy expenses—while the market price for the final product remains stubbornly stagnant, creating a pincer movement that crushes profit margins into

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This administrative tether, intended to ensure transparency, has instead become a millstone, dragging producers into a vortex of inefficiency that contradicts the very essence of the contemporary ethos surrounding the ease of doing business.

non-existence. Furthermore, the small tea grower sector, which emerged two decades ago as a beacon of grassroots economic empowerment and a thriving sphere of rural entrepreneurship, has seen its brilliance dim significantly. Once the vanguard of a new era in tea cultivation, these smallholders are now beset by a plethora of ills, ranging from lack of technical expertise to the absence of direct market access. They remain perpetually in the red, struggling to reconcile the high cost of quality maintenance with the low prices offered by bought-leaf factories. The struggle of the small grower is a microcosm of the industry's broader failure to innovate; without a dramatic shift toward resilience and technological integration, this vital segment of the rural economy could face a long-term setback from which there is no return. The stagnation of this sector is not merely a financial failure but a social one, as it supports hundreds of thousands of livelihoods across the tea-growing belts of the Northeast and North Bengal.

Adding a layer of existential dread to these economic woes is the specter of a changing climate, which has begun to manifest in increasingly erratic and violent weather extremes. The predictable monsoon patterns that once nurtured the *Camellia sinensis* plant have been replaced by a chaotic cycle of excessive, soil-eroding rainfall and grueling, prolonged droughts. These environmental stressors do more than just lower the yield; they alter the chemical composition of the leaf, affecting the flavor profiles that define premium Assam and Darjeeling teas. As the heat index rises and water tables fluctuate, the cost of irrigation and crop protection skyrocket, further bloating the already heavy cost of production. The industry must now grapple with the reality that the very land it depends upon is becoming a volatile partner, requiring a move toward sustainable, climate-smart agriculture that can withstand the atmospheric turbulence of the twenty-first century.

In this climate of uncertainty, the most critical imperative for survival is the aggressive

pursuit of brand building and the broadening of the consumer base. For too long, Indian tea has been treated as a bulk commodity, sold in anonymous lots rather than as a premium, storied experience. To reinvent itself, the industry must adopt a pragmatic strategy that focuses on the emotional and health-conscious narrative of tea, reaching out to a younger, more discerning global demographic. This involves moving beyond the traditional cup of chai to explore the nuances of specialty teas, organic blends, and artisanal processing methods that command higher price points. By creating a distinct brand identity that emphasizes the heritage and unique terroir of the region, producers can bypass the race-to-the-bottom pricing of the commodity market and establish a direct, value-driven relationship with consumers who are willing to pay for quality and ethical transparency.

A potent, yet underutilized, weapon in this battle for revitalization is the burgeoning sector of tea tourism. The rolling hills and colonial-era bungalows of the estates offer an immense potential for a high-end, immersive travel experience that could serve as a dual engine for revenue and brand recognition. By opening these gardens to the world, the industry can create a visceral connection between the consumer and the origin of their drink. Tea tourism not only provides an alternative stream of income that is decoupled from the fluctuations of the tea market, but it also serves as a living advertisement for the region's culture and craftsmanship. When a traveler walks through the misty rows of a garden and participates in a professional tasting session, they cease to be a mere customer and become an ambassador for the brand. This aggressive pursuit of tourism can transform the image of the tea estate from a site of industrial labor into a sanctuary of heritage and luxury, significantly boosting the sector's overall prestige.

Finally, the industry must look inward at the vast, untapped potential of the domestic market. It is a startling reality that in a nation of over a billion people, where tea is the social lubricant of daily life, the per capita consumption remains surprisingly low compared to other tea-drinking nations. There is ample scope for boosting domestic demand through sustained marketing efforts that position tea as a modern, versatile beverage suitable for more than just the morning ritual. By innovating with ready-to-drink formats, tea-based infusions, and promoting the diverse health benefits of the brew, the industry can capture the imagination of the burgeoning middle class. Enhancing domestic consumption provides a vital safety net against the volatility of international trade and export hurdles. If the industry can successfully pivot from being a mere supplier to a sophisticated marketer of its own produce, the current crisis may well be remembered as the catalyst that forced a necessary and brilliant transformation. The path forward requires a symphony of innovation, resilience, and government cooperation to ensure that the golden liquor of India continues to pour with strength and vitality for generations to come. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

# Ancient Indian wisdom is Environmental humanities of 21<sup>st</sup> century

By: Dr Mukul Chandra Bora

The sloka "Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah..." offers a profound ethical and ecological vision that aligns very closely with the core concerns of environmental humanities. The mantra "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" originates from ancient Vedic tradition, with most of the sources pointing to the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.4.14) as its textual home, though its exact appearance varies and it's a widely adopted Shanti Mantra (peace chant) for universal well-being, expressing a profound wish for all beings to be happy, healthy, see goodness, and be free from suffering.

"Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" as the Philosophy of Environmental Humanities:

The Upanishadic prayer "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah", meaning "May all be happy," represents an ancient philosophical foundation of what is now called Environmental Humanities. Rooted deeply in Indian culture, this mantra articulated a holistic vision of life long before environmental studies became an academic discipline. It emphasizes universal well-being, ethical responsibility, and harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, where peace arises from living in one's natural state. Central to the mantra is the word "Sarve" all signifying inclusivity that extends beyond humans to all forms of life. Rejecting anthropocentrism, it recognizes that human happiness is inseparable from the health of the entire ecosystem.

Environmental Humanities emerged in response to the realization that environmental crises which cannot be solved by science and technology alone as the climate change, biodiversity loss and ecological degradation are deeply rooted in cultural values, ethical frameworks, and historical narratives. Similarly, Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah addresses not material prosperity but ethical consciousness and the prayer "MākaścidDuhkhābhāghavet" "Let none suffer" articulates an early form of environmental ethics, where harm to any part of the ecological web is morally unacceptable.

Indian philosophical traditions reinforce this idea through concepts such as *rta* (cosmic order), *dharma* (moral duty), and *ahimsa* (non-violence) and the Earth is described as a mother (*MātāBhūmih*), and humans as her children, establishing a moral relationship of care rather than domination. Similarly, Environmental Humanities critiques modernity's extractive attitude toward nature and calls for ethical frameworks rooted in care, responsibility, and sustainability and hence this mantra provides the spiritual and moral foundation of contemporary environmental thought which seeks to reconstruct it through theory and critique.

Moreover, modern Environmental Humanities

advocates for multispecies justice, the idea that ethical consideration must extend beyond humans to all living beings. This principle is already embedded in Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, which envisions a world where the happiness and health of every being matter equally. The mantra thus anticipates contemporary debates on climate justice, ecological equity, and sustainability.

In conclusion, Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah is not merely a spiritual invocation but a comprehensive ecological philosophy. It represents an original ethical framework that views life as interdependent and happiness as collective. Modern Environmental Humanities, with its interdisciplinary and critical approach, can be seen as a contemporary articulation of this ancient wisdom. By revisiting this mantra, we rediscover that the path to environmental sustainability lies not only in innovation, but in a moral vision that seeks the well-being of all.

The connection between "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" and Modern Environmental Humanities lies in their shared vision of universal well-being, relational existence and responsibility beyond the human. The meaning of the Mantra is as stated below:

Meaning of Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah: The Upanishadic prayer: "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" — May all be happy uses the word "Sarve" (all), which is deliberately inclusive and does not limit happiness to humans alone, but extends it to animals, plants, ecosystems and the Earth itself which reflects a non-anthropocentric worldview, where human welfare is inseparable from the welfare of the natural world.

Environmental Humanities: Although the modern Environmental Humanities is an interdisciplinary field comprised of philosophy, ethics, history, literature and cultural studies as it examines how human values, narratives, belief systems, and power structures shape environmental degradation or sustainability and key shift in this field is from human-centered ethics to more-than-human perspectives. Ethically and philosophically, both are having the same meaning and the convergence of both as tabulated below:

Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah	Environmental Humanities
Universal happiness	Universal ecological well-being
Compassion (Karunā)	Ethics of care
Interdependence of life	Ecological interconnectedness
Non-violence (Ahimsa)	Environmental justice
Harmony with nature	Sustainability and coexistence

## Soil Carbon Sequestration and Carbon Trading: Opportunities for Sustainable Agriculture

By: Dr Manjurma Gogoi, Dr Neethi Baruah

Climate change has become one of the greatest global challenges, largely driven by increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere. Agriculture plays a dual role in this process: it contributes to greenhouse gas emissions but also offers significant opportunities for mitigation. One of the most promising strategies is soil carbon sequestration, which involves capturing atmospheric carbon dioxide and storing it in the soil as organic carbon. In recent years, carbon trading mechanisms have emerged as economic tools that incentivize farmers and land managers to adopt practices that enhance carbon storage in soils.

Soil carbon sequestration refers to the process of transferring atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> into soil organic matter through plant residues, root biomass, and microbial processes. Plants absorb CO<sub>2</sub> during photosynthesis and convert it into organic compounds. When plant residues and roots decompose, part of the carbon becomes stabilized in the soil as soil organic carbon (SOC). Healthy soils can store large amounts of carbon for long periods, making them an important carbon sink. Increasing soil carbon not only helps reduce atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> but also improves soil fertility and productivity.

Carbon is stored in soils through several processes:

1. Photosynthetic fixation – Plants capture atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and convert it into biomass.
2. Residue incorporation – Crop residues, roots, and organic amendments add carbon to the soil.
3. Microbial transformation – Soil microorganisms decompose organic matter and convert it into stable humus.
4. Soil aggregation and stabilization – Carbon becomes physically protected within soil aggregates and mineral complexes.

These processes gradually increase the soil organic carbon pool when sustainable management practices are adopted. Farmers can increase soil carbon by adopting simple and sustainable farming practices such as:

- Adding farmyard manure, compost, or organic matter to the soil
- Leaving crop residues in the field after harvest
- Practicing minimum or zero tillage to reduce soil disturbance
- Growing cover crops or green manure crops
- Planting trees along with crops (agroforestry)
- Following crop rotation and intercropping

These practices not only store carbon in soil but also improve soil fertility and crop yield. For regions like Assam, integrating legumes and organic inputs can significantly enhance soil organic carbon in hill and upland agricultural systems.

Increasing soil organic carbon provides multiple environmental and agronomic benefits:

- Mitigation of climate change through reduction of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>
- Improved soil fertility and nutrient availability
- Better soil structure and water holding capacity
- Enhanced microbial activity and biodiversity
- Increased crop productivity and resilience to drought

Thus, soil carbon sequestration simultaneously supports climate mitigation and sustainable agriculture.

Carbon trading is a system that encourages people and companies to reduce pollution. In this system, carbon emissions are measured and converted into carbon credits. One carbon credit

represents the reduction or removal of one ton of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Companies that produce more carbon emissions than allowed can buy carbon credits from those who reduce or store carbon. This creates a market where environmental protection becomes financially rewarding.

Farmers who adopt practices that increase soil carbon can generate carbon credits. These credits can be sold to companies that need to offset their greenhouse gas emissions. In this way, farmers may earn extra income while protecting the environment.

For example, planting trees, improving soil management, and using organic inputs can increase carbon storage and create opportunities for carbon credits.

Carbon trading operates mainly under two systems:

1. **Compliance markets** – Regulated markets created by international or national climate policies.
2. **Voluntary carbon markets** – Organizations voluntarily purchase carbon credits to offset their emissions.

Farmers can participate in carbon markets through projects that measure and verify increases in soil carbon. The process generally includes:

**1. Registration of a Carbon Project**

The first step is to register a carbon sequestration project. Farmers, farmer groups, cooperatives, NGOs, or organizations can start a project aimed at increasing soil carbon through improved agricultural practices.

The project area, type of crops, soil condition, and farming practices must be clearly described. Usually, projects are registered under recognized carbon standards or programs.

**2. Baseline Assessment**

Before the project starts, experts measure the existing level of soil organic carbon in the field. This is called the baseline measurement.

Soil samples are collected from different parts of the field and analyzed in a laboratory to determine the current carbon level. This baseline is important because it helps measure how much additional carbon is stored later.

**3. Adoption of Improved Farming Practices**

Farmers then adopt climate-friendly agricultural practices that increase soil carbon. Some examples include:

- Conservation or minimum tillage
- Addition of compost, manure, or organic residues
- Growing cover crops or green manure crops
- Crop rotation with legumes
- Agroforestry or tree planting
- Residue retention

These practices help increase organic matter in the soil and store more carbon.

**4. Monitoring and Data Collection**

During the project period, which may last 5–10 years or more, regular monitoring is done. Farmers or project managers record:

- Cropping patterns
- Fertilizer and manure use
- Tillage practices
- Crop residue management
- Tree planting or agroforestry activities

Periodic soil testing may also be conducted to track changes in soil carbon.

**5. Verification by Independent Agency**

An independent third-party organization verifies the project results. They check whether the improved practices were actually implemented and whether the soil carbon increased compared to the baseline.

This verification ensures transparency and accuracy in the carbon credit calculation.

**6. Calculation of Carbon Credits**



Shift from Spiritual Cosmology to Critical Theory: The mantra emerges from Indian cosmological thinking, where humans are part of *rta* (cosmic order). Environmental Humanities critiques modernity's extractive, utilitarian view of nature and both challenge the Enlightenment idea of human dominance over nature. Thus, Environmental Humanities can be seen to be more universal and a critical re-articulation of the spiritual insight embedded in Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah.

Multispecies Justice and "Sarve": A central concern of Environmental Humanities is multispecies justice—the idea that ethical consideration must extend to non-human life.

The mantra's prayer: "MākaścidDuhkhābhāghavet" (Let none suffer) directly resonates with modern debates on animal ethics, extinction and climate refugees (human and non-human).

Contemporary Environmental Relevance: In the Anthropocene era climate change shows that human happiness cannot be isolated and ecological suffering ultimately returns as social suffering. Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah anticipates this reality by grounding happiness in collective ecological balance, a core concern of Environmental Humanities.

Modern Environmental Humanities provides the academic language; Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah provides the ethical soul and both affirm that human flourishing is impossible without the flourishing of the mother Earth and all its life

forms. The Śloka Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah; May all beings be happy, Sarve Santu Nirāmayaḥ | May all beings be free from illness, Sarve Bhadrāṇi Paśyantu; May all behold what is auspicious, MākaścidDuhkhā-Bhāghavet | May none suffer from sorrow.

Environmental Humanities Perspective: Environmental humanities examine how ideas of well-being, ethics, culture, and nature are interconnected. This sloka encapsulates a worldview in which human flourishing is inseparable from ecological harmony.

"Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" – Universal Well-being and Ecological Interdependence The word "Sarve" (all) is crucial. It does not limit happiness to humans alone. In classical Indian philosophy, *sarva* includes all beings—humans, animals, plants, rivers, forests, and even elemental forces.

From an environmental humanities standpoint, this expresses it is a Biocentric ethics, where all life forms possess intrinsic value and recognition that human happiness depends on the well-being of ecosystems is an early articulation of ecological interdependence.

"Sarve Santu Nirāmayaḥ" – Health, Ecology, and Environmental Justice Nirāmayaḥ means "free from disease." In an-

## Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: India's civilisational path to global peace and harmony

By: Kunwar Pushpendra Pratap Singh

In an era marked by persistent conflicts, geopolitical rivalries, climate crises, economic inequalities, and cultural tensions, the quest for global peace and harmony has become more urgent than ever before. The modern world, despite its technological advancements and interconnectedness, continues to struggle with divisions and distrust among nations and communities. In such a scenario, India's ancient philosophical principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — meaning "the world is one family" — emerges as a powerful and timeless framework for fostering global unity, peace, and cooperation.

The concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam originates from the Maha Upanishad, an ancient Indian text that emphasises the universality of human existence. It states that narrow-minded individuals discriminate between "mine" and "others", while those with a noble outlook consider the entire world as one family. This profound idea reflects the inclusive and holistic worldview of Indian civilisation, which transcends boundaries of nation, religion, language, and culture. It promotes a sense of shared responsibility and mutual respect among all human beings.

Unlike many modern political ideologies that prioritise national interest above all else, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam advocates for a balance between self-interest and collective welfare. It calls for empathy, compassion, and cooperation as guiding principles of human interaction. In doing so, it provides a moral and ethical foundation for addressing global challenges that cannot be solved by any single nation alone.

Historically, India has embodied this principle through its commitment to peace and non-violence. The teachings of Lord Buddha and Mahavira emphasised compassion and non-harm towards all living beings. In the modern era, Mahatma Gandhi brought global attention to the power of non-violence (Ahimsa) as a tool for political and social transformation. His philosophy not only played a crucial role in India's freedom struggle but also inspired civil rights movements across the world. Gandhi's vision was rooted in the belief that humanity is interconnected, and that true peace can

only be achieved through understanding and non-violent coexistence.

In contemporary times, the relevance of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam has only grown stronger. The challenges facing the world today—such as climate change, pandemics, terrorism, and economic instability—are inherently global in nature. They demand collective action, shared responsibility, and a spirit of cooperation among nations. India has consistently advocated this approach on international platforms by promoting the idea of "One Earth, One Family, One Future", which reflects the essence of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in a modern context.

India's actions on the global stage further reinforce its commitment to this principle. During the



COVID-19 pandemic, India launched the "Vaccine Maitri" initiative, supplying vaccines to numerous countries, especially developing nations that lacked access to medical resources. This humanitarian effort demonstrated that India prioritises global well-being over narrow national interests. Similarly, India has actively participated in United Nations peacekeeping missions and has provided aid to countries affected by natural disasters, reflecting its role as a responsible and compassionate global actor.

Furthermore, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is not limited to diplomacy or political spheres; it also has profound implications for social and cultural interactions. In a world increasingly divided by identity politics, religious extremism, and cultural misunderstandings, this principle encourages dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect. It reminds us that diversity is not a source of conflict, but a strength that enriches human civilisation.

Education plays a crucial role in promoting the values of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. By instilling a sense of global citizenship and ethical responsibility in younger generations, societies can cultivate individuals who are more empathetic, inclusive, and cooperative. Cultural exchange programmes, international collaborations, and

ancient Indian thought, health was never purely individual or biological; it was environmental and social. In terms of environmental humanities, the interpretation of this line as the recognition that clean air, pure water, fertile soil, and biodiversity are prerequisites for health together with awareness of what we now call environmental determinants of health. Furthermore, a proto concept of environmental justice, where ecological harm creates suffering and illness. The modern parallels include air pollution, water contamination, and climate-related diseases. This line implies that protecting nature is a moral obligation for public health.

"Sarve Bhadrāṇi Paśyantu" – Auspicious Vision and Ecological Consciousness

Bhadrāṇi means "that which is auspicious, harmonious, and life-affirming." Paśyantu (may they see) is significant—it emphasizes perception and awareness.

In environmental humanities terms, this suggests that cultivation of ecological consciousness, seeing nature not as a commodity but as a sacred, meaningful presence, ethical perception, how we see nature determines how we treat it.

"MākaścidDuhkhā-Bhāghavet" – Prevention of Suffering and Ecological Ethics

This line expresses a negative ethical principle: let no one partake in suffering. In ecological terms, suffering often arises from environmental destruction, loss of livelihoods due to ecological collapse and climate disasters affecting the most vulnerable.

Environmental humanities stress that ecological crises are also moral and social crises. This line reflects an ethic of care, responsibility, and precaution, similar to modern sustainability principles and the precautionary approach.

The sloka reflects a moral ecology where human ethics, environmental health, and cosmic order (*rta* and *dharma*) are inseparable. It indicates that well-being is collective, not individualistic and harm to nature is harm to society. The sloka anticipates many modern environmental ideas of Sustainability, One Health – linking human, animal, and environmental health, Deep ecology – intrinsic value of all life and Climate ethics – preventing suffering across generations. Unlike modern frameworks grounded in policy or science alone, this sloka embeds environmental ethics in spiritual aspiration and cultural practice, making care for nature a lived moral value. From the perspective of environmental humanities, "Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" is not merely a prayer—it is a civilizational ecological ethic. It envisions a world where happiness, health, perception, and freedom from suffering arise from harmonious coexistence with the natural world.

people-to-people connections can further strengthen this sense of global unity.

India's soft power also contributes significantly to spreading this philosophy worldwide. Practices such as yoga, Ayurveda, meditation, and Indian classical arts have gained global recognition and acceptance. The celebration of International Yoga Day across countries is a testament to how India's cultural heritage can unite people beyond geographical and ideological boundaries. These traditions not only promote physical and mental well-being but also foster a sense of inner peace and harmony, which are essential for building a peaceful world.

However, the path of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is not without challenges. The current global order is heavily influenced by power politics, economic competition, and strategic interests. Many nations prioritise short-term gains over long-term collective benefits, leading to conflicts and mistrust. Bridging these differences requires strong leadership, moral courage, and a willingness to embrace a broader vision of humanity.

Despite these challenges, the principle remains a viable and necessary path forward. It does not demand the erasure of national identities or interests, but rather encourages their alignment with global welfare. It calls for a shift in perspective—from competition to cooperation, from division to unity, and from self-centredness to shared responsibility.

In conclusion, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is not merely an ancient Indian ideal; it is a universal philosophy with profound relevance in today's world. It offers a roadmap for building a more peaceful, just, and harmonious global society. By embracing this principle, nations can move beyond conflict and rivalry towards collaboration and mutual growth. As the world stands at a crossroads, grappling with complex challenges, India's civilizational wisdom provides a beacon of hope—reminding us that we are all part of one global family, and that our collective future depends on our ability to live together in peace and harmony.

The writer is a Post-Doctoral Fellow (ICSSR, Ministry of Education), Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi; Views presented are personal. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

## PM Modi inaugurates 594-km Ganga Expressway in UP

High-speed corridor expected to significantly boost connectivity across Uttar Pradesh

**HARDOI/LUCKNOW, April 29:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated the 594-km-long Ganga Expressway, a mega infrastructure project connecting Meerut to Prayagraj.

The PM reached Hardoi district around noon and inaugurated the expressway with the touch of a button in presence of Governor Anandiben Patel, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, among others.

The high-speed corridor is expected to significantly boost connectivity across Uttar Pradesh, while giving impetus to industrial investment, logistics, agricultural marketing and regional balance.

Adityanath, in a post on X, said the state's development journey would gain new momentum with the inauguration of the expressway from Hardoi.

He described the six-lane (expandable to eight) expressway as a "lifeline" connecting villages, farmers, entrepreneurs and youth, and said, "it would play a key role in accelerating development and bridg-



ing distances".

Union Minister and BJP's Uttar Pradesh president Pankaj Chaudhary said it is of the longest expressways in the country and a gift of modern infrastructure to the state.

The expressway connects 12 key districts of Meerut, Hapur, Bulandshahr, Amroha, Sambhal, Badaun, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Unnao, Rae Bareilly, Pratapgarh and Prayagraj

and is expected to significantly reduce travel time while ensuring faster, safer and more convenient movement, it stated.

Developed under a public-private partnership model, the project has been constructed as a six-lane expressway with provision for expansion to eight lanes, with a design speed of 120 kmph, it added.

One of its key features is a 3.2-km-long airstrip near Shahjahanpur

for emergency landing of Air Force aircraft. The expressway is also equipped with an Intelligent Traffic Management System (ITMS), CCTV surveillance, emergency call boxes, ambulances and patrolling units to ensure safety, according to the statement.

It stated that integrated manufacturing and logistics clusters (IMLCs) are being developed along the corridor, with facilities such as warehouses, cold storage units and food processing hubs aimed at attracting investment and generating employment.

The expressway will also be connected to other major corridors, including the Purvanchal, Agra-Lucknow, Bundelkhand and Gorakhpur Link expressways, creating a vast interconnected network, the statement said.

Authorities said the project is expected to generate large-scale employment opportunities and play a crucial role in advancing Uttar Pradesh's goal of becoming a trillion-dollar economy, it added. (PTI)

## BJP slams Congress over 'assault' on Jharkhand journalist, seeks action against minister

**NEW DELHI, April 29:** A political row erupted on Wednesday over the assault on a journalist by supporters of Jharkhand minister Irfan Ansari, with the BJP attacking the Congress and seeking action against him.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla asked whether Congress leader Rahul Gandhi or Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren would take action against Ansari, whom he termed a "serial offender".

Ansari is a senior Congress leader and minister in the Jharkhand government who represents the Jamtara assembly constituency. According to some media reports, a journalist was allegedly assaulted by Ansari's supporters for asking "pointed questions" during an interaction in Hazaribagh on Tuesday, prompting opposition leaders to demand action from the Soren-led state government.

Poonawalla alleged that the incident reflects the Congress party's "dictatorial, Emergency mindset" and accused it of having a history of curbing free speech.

"This is not the first time the Congress has done this to journalists. We have seen what it has done -- whether during the Emergency, imposing censorship and putting journalists in prison; curbing the right to free speech through the first amendment; or through anti-media laws during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, including Section 66A and the use of sedition cases against journalists," he said in a video post on X. He alleged that in states where Congress is in power, the governments target journalists through legal and other means.

"False cases are being filed against journalists in Telangana and Karnataka. They are being hounded for asking questions, even as we speak. This is the true face of the Congress party," Poonawalla claimed.

Stepping up his attack, Poonawalla accused the Congress of possessing an "Emergency mindset of Indira Gandhi" while talking about democracy and freedom of speech. (PTI)

## Everyone will welcome if Kharge becomes K'taka CM, says Parameshwara

**BENGALURU, April 29:** Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said everyone in the ruling Congress party will welcome if AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge, a senior politician with a lot of experience, becomes the chief minister of the state.

He also asserted that fulfilling the promise of "good governance" made to the people of the state was important, amid the ongoing internal politics and confusion within the party regarding the chief minister change issue.

The statements have come amid speculation within the party and political circles about a possible decision on leadership change and cabinet reshuffle after May 4, once the results for Assembly elections in four states and one union territory, along with bypolls to two Assembly segments in Karnataka, are announced.

"If he (Kharge) becomes (the CM) we will be very happy, because he is a senior politician with a lot of experience. If he becomes CM, we will all welcome it," Parameshwara told reporters in response to a question whether Kharge himself has a desire to become the CM.

When asked why Kharge, who is from Karnataka, has not been decisive in resolving the state's leadership issue and whether he was postponing the



issue because he wants a Dalit to become the CM, the home minister said, "We don't have much information on the CM change matter appearing in the media, at least I'm not aware of it. So it is not right to speak on it."

The Congress high command will decide whatever they have to, as they are aware of everything in the state. "We are fortunate to have Kharge, who is from the state, as the AICC president," he said.

Kharge is highly experienced and he is aware of everything about the state's politics as he has personally experienced it. "He knows everything and there is no need for us to tell him. I will not say much," he added.

## RG Kar rape-murder victim's mother faces TMC protests for 'influencing voters' in booth

**KOLKATA, April 29:** BJP's Panhati candidate Ratna Debnath, also the mother of RG Kar rape-murder victim, faced protests by TMC workers when she visited a booth in the assembly constituency in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district where polling was underway on Wednesday.

She also accused the ruling party activists of preventing her from leaving the booth premises, following an altercation with them over an allegation of influencing voters.

"When I was coming out of the booth, I noticed an elderly woman who looked infirm and had difficulty walking. I requested those

present there to help the person cast her vote. But as I stepped out, TMC activists accused me of influencing the voter and prevented me from leaving the spot," she told reporters.

Central security force jawans helped her leave the place. She urged the central forces to take action against those who are creating trouble and intimidating voters.

An EC official said the poll panel has sought a report into the alleged incident.

A TMC leader accused Debnath of trying to influence voters and disrupt the election process.

"No one threatened her. She was staging a drama," he said.

Earlier in the day, Debnath cast her vote in Sodepur and said women's safety would be her top priority.

She exuded confidence that people would vote for a regime change and free West Bengal from "the misuse of TMC".

"The TMC failed to address the worsening law and order situation in the state. Only one arrest has been made in the RG Kar case. How did the accused get access to a secure place supposedly guarded by hospital security?" she told reporters.

Twenty months after the rape and murder of the young doctor inside Kolkata's state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital triggered nationwide outrage, the politics of that crime has caught up with Bengal's election battlefield.

"Apart from my daughter, hundreds of women have also been facing atrocities in West Bengal under the TMC rule. My priority is women's safety," the BJP nominee alleged.

Debnath expressed confidence in winning the seat and said, "We have to ensure that not a single vote is lost".

The BJP candidate alleged that

## Mamata accuses BJP of trying to 'rig' Bengal polls, alleges central forces acting at its behest

**KOLKATA, April 29:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday accused the BJP of trying to "rig" the West Bengal assembly elections, alleging that central forces and election observers were acting at the behest of the saffron party.

The BJP, however, dismissed her allegations, accusing her of "trying to create confusion sening public anger against the TMC".

Visiting several polling booths in her Bhabanipur assembly constituency where voting is underway, Banerjee alleged that democratic norms have been severely compromised by the authorities this assembly election.

The Bhabanipur assembly segment is Banerjee's political bastion, where she is locked in a prestige battle against Leader of the Opposition, Suwendu Adhikari, in what is being seen as a symbolic rematch of Nandigram, where he had defeated her in the 2021 assembly polls. "BJP wants to rig this election," she told reporters.

Stating that elections are held in West Bengal in a peaceful manner, Banerjee asked, "Is there goonda raj here?"

West Bengal has had a tradition of poll-related violence with the Calcutta High Court having ordered CBI investigations into post-poll violence after the 2021 assembly elections.

Alleging that TMC workers and leaders were facing atrocities at the hands of police and CAPF personnel, Banerjee said her party cadres "were ready to die".

The TMC supremo, who usually steps out of her Kalighat residence in the afternoon on polling day to cast her vote at Mitra Institution School, went out before 8 am and visited several polling stations in the constituency, including those in the Chetla area of south Kolkata.

She later sat outside a polling station at Chakraberia in Bhabanipur and spoke to reporters, alleging irregularities and accusing the BJP of trying to influence the polling process through central forces and observers. "Several observers have come



from outside and are acting as per the BJP's directions. People are supposed to cast their votes -- can voting take place like this?" Banerjee said.

She also alleged that all TMC party flags had been removed beforehand and claimed that outsiders were interfering with the polling process.

"They are not allowing the councillor of ward number 70 to step out. They are picking up all our boys. Abhishek and I stayed awake the entire night," she said.

Banerjee further claimed that some people from outside the state were trying to create disturbances in the constituency and sought immediate intervention from the Election Commission.

The BJP, however, dismissed her allegations, claiming that the ruling party was trying to create confusion after sensing public anger against it.

Adhikari said the CM will lose the election.

The LoP offered prayers at two temples in the constituency's Khidirpur area.

Adhikari said people are coming out in large numbers to vote, with the Election Commission making proper arrangements for ensuring free and fair election.

"Does not matter, she will lose," Adhikari told reporters about the TMC chief venturing out on polling day early in the morning in a depar-

## Post second blast, Railways to start drone surveillance along freight corridor in Punjab: Bittu

**CHANDIGARH, April 29:** With two blasts in the last three months targeting the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor in Punjab, Union Minister of State for Railways Ravneet Singh Bittu on Wednesday said that Railways will intensify 24-hour patrolling and significantly expand surveillance coverage along the tracks.

Bittu, who visited the blast site between Shambhu and Rajpura and reviewed the situation, expressed concern over repeated incidents targeting railway infrastructure in the state, and assured that strict and immediate measures would be taken to strengthen safety and monitoring.

A pro-Khalistan terror module backed by Pakistan's ISI carried out a blast on the freight corridor near Shambhu in Patiala late on Monday night.

One suspect died while he was trying to detonate the explosives, while four members of the group were arrested, Punjab Police said on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters, the Railways MoS detailed measures being taken to ensure safety along the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC).

He said the Railways will intensify 24-hour patrolling along the corridor and significantly expand surveillance coverage. At present, there are 173 CCTV cameras installed in the Punjab region of the Ambala Division, and further installations are underway.

Railways will give special attention to secluded and vulnerable stretches of the corridor, where advanced monitoring methods, including drone surveillance, will be

deployed.

In addition, key railway personnel will conduct continuous ground patrols to ensure track safety.

"We will deploy drones because CCTV cameras alone won't be sufficient to keep an eye on long stretches. We are also installing solar cameras," Bittu said.

Special Director General of Police (Railway) Shashi Prabha Dwivedi, who visited the explosion site on Tuesday, had also emphasised the need to install CCTVs along the freight corridor.

Talking to reporters, Bittu pointed out that this is the second blast within a span of three months and within a distance of approximately 35 kilometres along the freight corridor.

He said more than 200 groups are currently active in trying to disturb peace and harmony in Punjab.

On January 23, another blast took place at Sirhind in Fatehgarh Sahib district, damaging the engine of a train and leaving a railway official injured.

While the first explosion occurred around 800 metres from NH-44, the latest blast site is located about 300 metres from the same highway, prompting the authorities to believe that miscreants may be exploiting easy access routes from the highway to target railway tracks.

Bittu said there were indications of external involvement, with hostile elements attempting to destabilise the region by targeting critical infrastructure such as railways.

These acts, he noted, are not only security threats but also direct attempts to disrupt economic activity in the state. (PTI)

## NSO survey highlights significant increase in healthcare access across country

**NEW DELHI, April 29:** The findings from the National Statistical Office (NSO) 80th Round Household Consumption: Health survey highlighted a significant increase in healthcare access across the country, supported by targeted government interventions, expansion of public health services, and increased insurance coverage.

Covering both rural and urban areas across the country, the survey canvassed 1,39,732 households, including 76,296 in rural areas and 63,436 in urban areas, thereby offering robust and ground-level insights into healthcare access, affordability, and utilisation patterns.

The findings of the NSO 80th round are underpinned by the government's sustained increase in public investment in the health sector over the years, the health ministry said in a statement.

Enhanced budgetary allocations have enabled significant expansion of healthcare infrastructure across

primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, strengthened human resources, and supported the scaling up of key initiatives focused on preventive, promotive, and curative care, the statement said.

The median out-of-pocket medical expenditure (OOPE) per hospitalisation case in 2025 was ₹ 11,285, indicating that over half of the country's hospitalisations involve relatively low expenditure. The report stated that only a small number of high-cost cases push up the average (mean value).

This shows that high expenditure is not widespread but limited to specific cases requiring specialised treatment. Moreover, the OOPE in more than half of the entire hospitalisation cases in public health facilities incur only ₹ 1,100, the report said.

Importantly, for non-hospitalisation (outpatient) care, the median OOPE in public health facilities is zero, reflecting that a large propor-

tion of citizens can access essential healthcare services entirely free of cost, it stated.

The Government's Free Drugs Service Initiative (FDSI) and Free Diagnostics Initiative (FDI) launched in 2015 has ensured the availability of free medicines and diagnostic services to people even in the remotest areas of the country.

This paradigm shift in primary and essential healthcare accessibility is also aided by over 1.84 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs) situated across the country, which significantly expands the scope of comprehensive primary healthcare, the statement said.

These centres are also leveraging digital health innovations to improve access. Strengthening diagnostics through the in-house hub-and-spoke model with sample transportation has improved the accessibility and availability of diagnostic services across different healthcare tiers.

Further, the Affordable Medicines



and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT) initiative, which has over 220 pharmacies across 29 states and Union Territories, provides more than 6,500 drugs at discounts of up to 50 per cent on market rates, significantly improving treatment affordability, the statement said.

These gains have been further reinforced by Ayushman Bharat Prad-

han Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) and other targeted government interventions, which have enhanced access, reduced financial barriers, and strengthened trust in public healthcare systems, it said.

Encouragingly, this enhanced affordability has coincided with a substantial increase in healthcare demand.

The Proportion of Population Reporting Ailments (PPRA) has nearly doubled between the 75th and 80th rounds from 6.8 per cent to 12.2 per cent in rural areas and from 9.1 per cent to 14.9 per cent in urban areas, signalling improved awareness and a decisive shift towards proactive health-seeking behaviour, the survey report said.

The survey also captured an important epidemiological transition, with a decline in infectious diseases and a rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions.

This reflects the impact of sustained Information, Education and Communication (IEC) efforts, intersectoral convergence through community-based platforms such as Village, Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs), and large-scale screening initiatives at the primary care and community levels.

In response to rising demand, util-

isation of public healthcare facilities has strengthened, particularly for outpatient care in rural areas, where utilisation has increased from 33 to 35 per cent. This improvement is attributable to the expansion of comprehensive primary healthcare services, with an emphasis on preventive, promotive, and early diagnostic care, supported by the availability of free drugs and diagnostics.

Financial risk protection has expanded significantly with the rapid scaling up of government-financed health insurance coverage, including under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) and various state schemes.

The percentage of the population covered under these government health financing/insurance schemes in the country has increased from 12.9 per cent to 45.5 per cent in rural areas and from 8.9 per cent to 31.8 per cent in urban areas, representing more than a threefold expansion. (PTI)

# Rallies in Kuki-majority districts demand justice and judicial probe Protest rallies against gunfight in Manipur's Kuki villages, 'ex-CM's audio tape'

**CHURACHANDPUR, April 29:** Thousands of people on Wednesday took out multiple rallies in Kuki-majority areas of Manipur's four districts to protest the recent gunfight at a village in Ukhrul district that left two people dead on April 24.

The rallies were also held demanding swift judicial action to find out the truth behind the audio tape linked to former chief minister N Biren Singh, which surfaced during the height of ethnic violence in 2024.

The protests were organised by Kuki Women Organisation for Human Rights (KWOHR) and the Kuki Women Union (KWU) in Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Chandul and Tengnoupal districts.



sons were killed in a gunfight with suspected militants.

They also claimed that no concrete action has been taken so far regarding "Biren Singh's" alleged audio tape on the conflict in the state.

The leaders demanded "swift judicial action" in the matter, which is pending in the Supreme Court.

The KWOHR had submitted transcripts of the tapes to the Supreme Court-appointed investigating officer and the National Human Rights Commission, urging an investigation into the tape in which one person, whose voice resembles that of Singh, talks about the ethnic violence.

Protesters commenced a rally from Koite ground and proceeded towards the Wall of Remembrance, raising slogans against Singh and demanding his arrest.

They later submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi through the Churachandpur deputy commissioner, demanding urgent judicial intervention into the audio tape case and immediate action against the gun attack on Mulam and Songphel villages.

At least 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless since May 2023 due to ethnic violence in Manipur between the valley-based Meiteis and the Kukis who live in the hill districts.

Following continued ethnic clashes and the resignation of chief minister N Biren Singh, the state was placed under President's Rule on February 13, 2025. It was lifted nearly a year later on February 4. (PTI)

# Working to restore peace in Manipur since assuming office: CM Khemchand

### Says dialogue and development key to restoring stability

**IMPHAL, April 29:** Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Wednesday said that since assuming office in February, he has been engaging with MLAs, officials and members of different communities to work collectively for the restoration of peace in the state.

Speaking at the inauguration of five infrastructure projects in Langthabal constituency of Imphal West district, Singh said peace remains the foremost prerequisite for development, urging people to remain united in achieving lasting harmony.

"Over the last two months and twenty days, I have held extensive interactions with legislators, government officials and community representatives to foster reconciliation and stability. I have visited both hill and valley regions, including Jiribam, Senapati, Kangpokpi and Ukhrul districts, to hear public grievances and assess local issues," he said.

Calling the recent incidents of violence unfortunate, Singh said those responsible would be identified soon.

He appealed to the people to maintain communal harmony and remain vigilant against forces trying to create division.



The chief minister also said development work would continue across all regions, despite existing challenges, and called for cooperation between the people and the government to build a peaceful and progressive Manipur.

During the programme, Singh inaugurated three water supply projects and two community halls in the Langthabal constituency.

Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho praised the CM's outreach efforts, including visits to remote areas such as Jiribam, Senapati and Ukhrul.

He said Singh has adopted a unique approach by personally meeting people from different communities and listening to their concerns. (PTI)

## Mizoram class 12 results out, pass percentage at 87.67

**AIZAWL, April 29:** Mizoram recorded a pass percentage of 87.67 in the class 12 board examinations on Wednesday, with boys scoring marginally higher than girls.

Across the Arts, Science and Commerce streams, boys secured an 87.7 per cent success rate, while girls followed closely at 87.66 per cent, according to the results published by the Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE).

Of the 12,243 students who sat for the examinations held between February and March, 10,734 passed, 1,394 could not and 115 qualified for compartmental examinations.

Academic performance was strongest in the Commerce stream, which saw a 90.51 per cent success rate among 759 candidates.

The Science stream followed with 89.24 per cent pass rate out of 2,770 students who appeared for the exam, while the Arts stream, with 87, 14 students, recorded a pass percentage of 86.93. (PTI)

## Nagaland holds disaster preparedness exercise

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, April 29:** A table top exercise, as part of the Nagaland Emergency Preparedness Exercise (NEPEX) 2026, was held across the state on Wednesday.

The Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority conducted the table top exercise at the State Emergency Operation Centre of Capital Convention Centre in Kohima.

Chief secretary Sentiyanger Imchen stated that the core objectives of the 8th edition NEPEX is to assess the preparedness of stakeholders and to test and validate standard operating procedures.

It also seeks to strengthen inter agency coordination across various departments to ensure a more effective and unified response during disasters, he added.

Imchen further said the exercise was to evaluate the functioning of critical systems, identify existing gaps and challenges and enhance community preparedness and awareness for better disaster response and resilience.



On the upcoming field exercise, he said a major earthquake scenario of magnitude 7.7 on the Richter scale will be simulated, which is expected to cause extensive damage to infrastructure, disrupt communication networks and overwhelm healthcare systems, while also triggering secondary incidents such as landslides and fires.

He emphasised that the exercise will involve coordinated participation from multiple agencies, including district administrations, security forces, paramilitary units, healthcare providers, urban local

bodies, village councils, NGOs and church organisations.

In Dimapur, the exercise was conducted by the District Disaster Management Authority at the DC's conference hall at Purana Bazar.

Officials designated as observers, site-in-charges and volunteers attended the programme, which focused on response strategies, inter-agency coordination, communication systems and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders during emergency situations.

The exercise was also conducted in other districts of the state.

## Security forces destroy 12 illegal bunkers in Manipur's Kangpokpi, Ukhrul

**IMPHAL, April 29:** Security forces have destroyed 12 illegal bunkers erected by armed groups in different parts of Manipur's Kangpokpi and Ukhrul districts, a police statement said on Wednesday.

Three illegal bunkers were destroyed at Lungter hill and one each at Tingpibung and Leplen villages in Saikul police station area in Kangpokpi district on Tuesday.

Seven illegal bunkers were also destroyed the same day at various locations in Litan police station area in Ukhrul district, it said.

Illegal bunkers have been set up by armed groups of warring Kuki and Tangkhul Naga tribes since violence broke out between the two communities in February this year.

At least seven persons have been shot dead by armed groups and more than 30 houses burnt in Ukhrul, neighbouring Kamjong district and Kangpokpi following the outbreak of violence between the two major tribes.

Meanwhile, in an unrelated operation, security forces seized an AK-47 rifle, three single-barrel guns, a pistol, two grenades and an 81mm mortar from Maovom village and its adjoining areas in Churachandpur police station area in Churachandpur district on Tuesday. (PTI)



## 43 cadres of last active Hmar insurgent group to surrender in Mizoram today

**AIZAWL, April 29:** A total of 43 members of the Lalthingthanga Sanate-led faction of the HPC(D) will lay down arms in Mizoram on Thursday, officials said.

Chief Minister Laldhuma and Home Minister K Sapdanga will attend the event at the Police Central Training Institute in Sesawng, around 40 km from Aizawl, they said on Wednesday.

The 'homecoming ceremony' follows the peace accord signed between the Mizoram government and the Hmar People's Convention (Democratic) on April 14, effectively marking the end of insurgency in the state.

Though largely dormant in recent years, the Sanate-led HPC(D) faction was considered the last surviving ethnic insurgent outfit in Mizoram and was allegedly involved in sporadic criminal activities, including extortion in Hmar-dominated villages.

of the Sikipui Ruoi festival and Hmar Martyrs' Day on May 16 as holidays in the SHC jurisdiction, which covers 31 villages in northern and northeastern Mizoram, bordering Assam and Manipur.

Other demands included construction of internal roads, an Eklavya Model Residential School, and a Netaji Subash Chandra Bose Awasiya Vidyalaya hostel.

"The government of Mizoram shall make utmost efforts to honour and implement the charter of demands submitted by the HPC(D)," the agreement stated.

The Sanate faction was the last of three Hmar insurgent groups in Mizoram since 1986, initially demanding an Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule.

The first group, HPC led by Hmingchungnunga, signed a peace accord with the then Congress government in 1994, leading to the creation of the Sinlung Hills Development Council (SHDC).

The second faction, HPC(D) led by late H Zosangbera, signed a separate accord in 2018 after talks began in 2016. The pact created the Sinlung Hills Council (SHC) with enhanced autonomy, replacing the SHDC.

The 14-member SHC, headed by a Chief Executive Member, held its first election in November 2019, in which the Mizo National Front (MNF)-HPC alliance won 10 seats. Sanate had formed his faction after expressing dissatisfaction with the 1994 accord.

Originally from Khawlian village in present-day Saitual district, Sanate backed with a small group of cadres from bases in Assam's Cachar district.

A leader of the group said the present Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government, led by Laldhuma, had succeeded in bringing the outfit back to mainstream society after a series of backchannel talks. (PTI)

## Schools shut in 5 Mizoram districts as heavy rain, winds lash state

**AIZAWL, April 29:** All schools in Mizoram's Aizawl, Serchhip and Lunglei districts remained closed for a second day on Wednesday as heavy rain and gusty winds continued to batter the state.

Schools in the southern districts of Hnahthial and Lawngtlai, which had remained open on Tuesday, also ordered closure on Wednesday, school education director Angela Zothanpuui said.

Administrations in all five districts took the decision as a precautionary safety measure, she said.

The Aizawl district administration said persistent downpours have significantly increased the risk of landslides, mudflows, rockfalls and flash floods.

Mizoram has been experiencing torrential rainfall accompanied by gusty winds since Monday, leaving a trail of destruction.

The State Disaster Management and Rehabilitation department reported significant infrastructure damage, noting that over 70 houses, a few church halls, schools and government buildings were damaged by storms between Monday and Tuesday.

However, no casualty has been reported to date, it said.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) data said Aizawl recorded the highest rainfall at 57.8 mm over the last 24 hours. Other significantly affected areas included Mamit (47.5 mm), Khawzawl (35.5 mm), Serchhip (34.5 mm) and Siaba (34 mm).

The weather office has forecast continued heavy to very heavy rain, accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning, till Friday for Aizawl, Kolasib, Mamit, Champhai and Serchhip.

Additionally, winds reaching speeds of 50 to 60 kmph are expected in Kolasib on Wednesday and Aizawl on Thursday, it said. (PTI)

## Nagaland chief secy calls for realistic assessment, stronger coordination in disaster response

**KOHIMA, April 29:** Nagaland Chief Secretary Sentiyanger Imchen on Wednesday stressed the need for realistic evaluation and stronger inter-agency coordination in disaster response mechanisms.

Addressing a meeting at the State Emergency Operation Centre, Imchen said the core objective of the eighth edition of the Nagaland Emergency Preparedness Exercise (NEPEX) 2026 was not to showcase performance but to identify gaps and challenges in the system.

The chief secretary, who is also Chairman of the State Executive Committee of Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority, said disaster preparedness is a continuous and evolving process and such exercises should be used as platforms to strengthen emergency response systems.

He said NEPEX 2026, scheduled to be conducted across the state on Thursday, aims to assess the preparedness of stakeholders, test and



validate standard operating procedures (SOPs) and improve coordination among departments for a unified response during disasters.

"The exercise will also evaluate critical systems, identify weaknesses, and enhance community awareness and resilience," he said.

Imchen said a simulated 7.7-magnitude earthquake scenario would be enacted, leading to widespread infrastructure damage, communication breakdowns, and pressure on healthcare services, along with secondary hazards such



as landslides and fires. He said multiple agencies, including district administrations, security forces, paramilitary units, healthcare services, urban local bodies, village councils, NGOs and church organisations, would participate in a coordinated manner.

Urging all departments and districts to be candid in their assessments, Imchen said the focus should remain on identifying shortcomings so that systems can be improved. (PTI)

## Initiative aims to support students from school to higher education Nagaland school edu dept signs MoU on scholarship initiative

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, April 29:** Nagaland school education department signed an MoU with Sarojini Damodaran Foundation for the implementation of a scholarship initiative under the Vidyadhan Scholarship programme at the Nagaland civil secretariat conference hall in Kohima.

Speaking at the programme, Nagaland adviser to school education department Kekhrielhoulie Yhome said the scholarship programme will primarily benefit students from government schools who have recently passed the HSLC examination, adding that the timing of the initiative is opportune following the declaration of results.

Yhome noted that the programme is unique in its approach as it supports students not only at the school level but also through higher education, including professional courses.



He stated that for a state like Nagaland, where many communities

are in rural and economically constrained settings, such initiatives

will play a crucial role in expanding opportunities and aspirations

among students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds.

Yhome further stated that education remains a key priority for the people of Nagaland and expressed confidence that the collaboration would have a positive and lasting impact on the lives of students in the state.

Principal consultant, Sarojini Damodaran Foundation, Pankaj Tripathi said it was an honour for the foundation to implement the programme in Nagaland.

Providing an overview of the programme, Tripathi said the Vidyadhan Scholarship Programme was initiated in 1999 in Kerala and is currently operational in 22 states and Union Territories.

He added that the programme extends beyond financial assistance and includes mentoring, career counselling, soft skills development and internship opportunities.

# It's a reality check but no doom and gloom after first defeat: PBKS fast bowling coach Hopes



**MULLANPUR, April 29:** Punjab Kings fast bowling coach James Hopes said his side's first defeat of the season is a timely "reality check", but insisted there is no sense of panic within the camp.

Table-toppers Punjab Kings, the only unbeaten side heading into the clash, suffered a six-wicket loss to Rajasthan Royals on Tuesday night.

"It's a reality check. Yeah, we're flying. We've been winning games, and it's great, and everyone's happy, and it's still a great environment," Hopes said at the post-match press conference.

"It's game eight, and we've just lost our first game of the IPL, so I'm not going to sit here and say it's doom and gloom in the change room," he added.

The Kings have enough time to regroup as they next fly to Ahmedabad to take on Gujarat Titans on Sunday. Hopes said the focus would be on addressing minor shortcomings.

"One loss, you're not going to go through the IPL and not lose a game. Now it's about we have a few days to regroup before we play GT."

"It's about just getting back to work in a couple of days at training and trying to iron out some kinks, trying to work through the best combination for the conditions we're going to get and the opposition we're going to get in the next couple of games."

Despite the loss the Australian drew positives which included the performance of left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar, who returned with economical figures of 0/25 in game that saw over 400 runs being score.

"Tonight we saw Brar play his first game, as I said, which is good. We needed to get a second spinner into the rotation. He's come in. He's done a beautiful

job tonight.

"It was really good to see Lockie Ferguson get into the tournament. It may not have been his night, but he was going to get in the tournament at some point, so he pulled the trigger on and did it."

He also reserved special praise for Marcus Stoinis, whose explosive unbeaten 62 off 22 balls powered Punjab to a 222/4.

Rajasthan Royals head coach Kumar Sangakkara was delighted with the win against the table toppers, saying it has given his side breathing space.

The Royals currently occupy the third spot with 12 points the same as Royal Challengers Bengaluru, who lead on the basis of a superior net run rate. While Punjab Kings are a point ahead.

"It's tough coming here and playing against the table-toppers, but it's a good win. It's always good to win and get some breathing room," Sangakkara said.

He lauded the collective batting effort, singling out impact substitute Shubham Dubey for his 31 off 12 balls.

"I thought Dubey today, coming in as an impact sub, it's one of the hardest things to do because you don't know if you're playing, you don't know."

"So mentally, he is exceptionally skillful to be able to keep that focus and go and bring the game to us. He went in at a tough position."

Donovan Ferreira then sealed the chase with a blistering 52 off 26 balls, forging an unbeaten 77-run stand with Dubey to guide the Royals home.

"Don today was outstanding. I thought Riyan's small innings was exactly what we needed to bring the momentum back our way. So it was a collective effort," he added. (PTI)

# GT face rampant RCB at home

**AHMEDABAD, April 29:** Searching for some much needed consistency, Gujarat Titans face a stern test against a red-hot Royal Challengers Bengaluru in their Indian Premier League match here on Thursday.

At the halfway stage of the tournament, Gujarat Titans find themselves stuck in mid-table with four wins and as many losses from eight games.

In contrast, defending champions RCB have been in imperious form, registering six victories in eight matches.

RCB's new ball duo of Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Josh Hazlewood has wreaked havoc in tandem. While Bhuvneshwar has turned back the clock with his swing masterclass, Hazlewood has troubled the batters with Test match lengths targeting the outside edge.

Add to that, the challenge of facing Krundal Pandya and his barrage of variations in the middle overs.

GT have been labelled as top heavy with Sai Sudharsan, captain Shubman Gill and Jos Buttler again scoring the bulk of the runs. Washington Sundar has proved himself in the middle order while finishers like Shahrulk Khan and



Rahul Tewatia have not set the stage on fire yet.

Jason Holder has been accommodated in the middle-order to lend more potency.

Both sides met only a week ago at the Chinnaswamy with RCB comfortably chasing down 206 with seven balls to spare. GT have also not been able to dominate at home, having lost two of their three games at Motera.

RCB are favourites to win the game but there is always room for improvement. Jacob Bethell, who played the last two games due to injury to fellow Englishman Phil

Salt, was not able to make an impact.

The highly rated star would be itching to make a statement on Thursday night while batting alongside Virat Kohli.

Bethell displayed his special talent during the preceding T20 World Cup and it is only a matter of time before he unleashes his wide range of strokes on the opposition.

RCB totally annihilated Delhi Capitals in their previous game and that will only add to their confidence.

"It's very important to follow your routines because you know

## Indian lifters grab 3 medals



**NEW DELHI, April 29:** Indian lifter continued their impressive run at the Commonwealth Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships and Universal Cup, fetching a gold and three silver medals on the third day of the competition in Apia, Samoa on Wednesday.

Bellana Harika fetched the lone gold of the day in the 69kg weight class at the Commonwealth Youth and Junior Championships with a total effort of 197kg (86kg+111kg).

Karangi Tharangini 179kg (79kg+100kg) and Bhumika Mohite 195kg (109kg+86kg) won the silver medals in the 63kg events.

In the Universal Cup, Abhishek Nipane clinched the 88kg silver with a total effort of 324kg (140kg+184kg).

Indian lifter had grabbed four golds on the second day of competitions. (PTI)

# Trust, communication with players is key for success as coach: Sarfaraz

**KARACHI, April 29:** Mutual trust and clear communication with players is key for becoming a successful coach, Pakistan's new Test format head coach Sarfaraz Ahmed said on Wednesday.

The first assignment for the 2017 Champions Trophy winning captain will be a two-Test series in Bangladesh from May 8 which will be Pakistan's second outing in the ongoing ICC World Test Championship cycle.

"The technical aspects come later. What is important is a coach has such a relationship with his players that they understand what he wants and at the same time they are comfortable and trust him enough to sit down with him and discuss anything," Sarfaraz said while responding to a question about his limited experience as coach.

Majority of the players named in the Test squad for Bangladesh are busy playing in the Pakistan Super League final stages and the wicketkeeper-batter admitted it would be a challenge for even senior players to adapt to red-ball cricket after playing T20 cricket for over a month now.

Sarfaraz also felt that having played with some of the players in the Test squad and having captained them it would be a plus point to settle into his new job.

The former captain was last year named mentor and manager of the Pakistan under-19 and Shaheens (Pakistan A) squad.

He accompanied them for the Asia Cup and World Youth Cup but on returning home he was appointed a member of the national selection committee and later the red ball head coach.

"I had a very good cricket career and I want to repeat the success as a coach. I have gained some experience in coaching at the domestic level and at the



cricket academy but obviously Test cricket is very different and I am confident with time the exposure will help me a lot," he added.

He said premier batsman Babar Azam's return to form in the PSL was a good sign for the coming tour despite the different formats.

"The main thing is he is back to playing technically good cricket."

Sarfaraz said Bangladesh would offer strong competition to Pakistan in their own backyard and his team will go there prepared for spin or pace oriented pitches. (PTI)

# Veteran Indian golfer Vijay Kumar dies



**NEW DELHI, April 29:** Veteran Indian golfer Vijay Kumar has died in his home town Lucknow due to a heart attack. He was 57.

The winner of the 2002 Indian Open and a four-time Order of Merit champion, Vijay was among the most accomplished and respected names in Indian professional golf. Vijay turned professional in 1988. He dominated Indian domestic golf from the mid-1990s to the early part of the next decade with an illustrious career marked by numerous titles.

Vijay's iconic triumph at the 2002 Indian Open remains a landmark moment in Indian golf. He is one of only nine Indian golfers to have won the Indian Open. Vijay also represented India at the Alfred Dunhill Cup 1999 played at St. Andrews in Scotland.

Widely admired for his skill, consistency, competitive spirit and exemplary conduct, Vijay inspired generations of golfers and contributed significantly to the growth of the sport in the country.

Kapil Dev, President, DP World Professional Golf Tour of India, said, "Vijay Kumar ji was one of the true stalwarts of Indian golf. His achievements, humility and commitment to the sport made him a role model for generations of golfers."

"His passing is a great loss to Indian golf, and we extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones." (PTI)

## Sri Lanka government to take over SIC administration

**COLOMBO, April 29:** Sri Lanka government on Wednesday decided to take over the administration of the country's cricket board after the resignation of its president Shammie Silva and the executive committee.

Sri Lanka Cricket chief Silva and other office bearers stepped down on Tuesday after Lankan president Anura Kumara Disanayake negotiated a peaceful exit for them after mounting allegations of financial irregularities.

"...Accordingly under the powers vested in him by sections 31 and 34 of the sports law no 25 of 1973, all administrative functions of Sri Lanka Cricket will be temporarily brought under the ministry of youth affairs and sports," stated a release from Sports Minister Sunil Kumara Gamage.

Gamage said the resignations of the existing set of office-bearers have been accepted.

The release said an interim committee will be appointed shortly to find solutions to the current issues in Lankan cricket and to implement structural reforms.

Silva decided to quit after nearly three hours of deliberations by the extraordinary executive committee on Tuesday.

However, no reasons for resignations were disclosed.

Since early March, the government has been contemplating the move to sack Silva on complaints received from players and over the Sri Lanka national team's poor performances in the international arena. Silva chaired SLC for seven years having first won its presidency in 2019 by majority votes of member clubs. He was re-elected uncontested in 2021, 2023 and 2025.

Silva also served as the President of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), succeeding Jay Shah in 2025. (PTI)

# Lakshya loses three-game thriller as India trail China 0-1 in Thomas Cup Finals

**HORSENS (DENMARK), April 29:** Lakshya Sen fought hard but went down in three games to world No. 7 Li Shi Feng, leaving India trailing 0-1 against China in their final Group A tie of the Thomas Cup Finals here on Wednesday.

Lakshya, who had beaten Li en route to a runner-up finish at the All England Championships last month, could not replicate that form in the decider, going down 19-21 21-8 12-21.

India will now look to level the tie through the world No. 4 pair of Satwik-sairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, who face world No. 5 duo Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang. In the remaining matches, Ayush Shetty will take on Weng Hong Yang, while the doubles pair of Hariharan Amsakarunan and MR Arjun will meet He Ji Ting and Ren Xiang Yu.

**Lakshya vs Li**  
Lagging behind 3-6, Lakshya mixed his attack with a cross-court slice and a sharp

smash before clawing back as Li went wide. The two traded steep smashes before Li capitalised on a series of weak lifts to move ahead 10-8 and carry a slender advantage into the break.

Lakshya erased the deficit after the interval and edged ahead 14-13, but the contest turned into a tight slugfest with both players locked at 19-19 before Li produced two decisive points to take the opening game. The second game was one-way traffic as Lakshya raced to 5-0 and then 11-2, aided by a string of unforced errors from Li. The Indian maintained relentless pressure to force a decider.

In the third game, Lakshya trailed 1-4 but recovered to 7-7. However, Li opened up a cushion at the interval after forcing errors from the Indian.

Lakshya briefly threatened at 10-12 after winning a long rally with a precise cross-court return, but repeated errors on his smashes allowed Li to regain control.

The Chinese shuttler stretched the lead to 17-12 and soon earned eight match points, converting the opportunity with a clinical cross-court smash.

**Satwik-Chirag vs Liang-Wang**  
The Indian pair was level at 8-8 in the opening game before the Chinese surged ahead to 15-10 with aggressive play and superior service control. They earned eight game points and converted after a service error from Satwik. After the change of sides, Satwik and Chirag flipped the script, racing to 13-6 by targeting awkward placements and forcing errors, especially at the net. They closed out the game comfortably to force a decider.

The third game turned into a roller-coaster, with neither pair giving an inch as they moved neck and neck from 7-7 to 10-10. The Indians edged ahead to 16-12, but Wang's brilliance and a few errors from Chirag helped China claw back to level terms. (PTI)

# FIFA enacts new World Cup rule on yellow cards to help avoid player bans in knockout rounds

**WASHINGTON, April 29:** FIFA has tweaked World Cup rules on yellow cards to ensure fewer players are suspended for key elimination games. An extra amnesty for yellow cards — wiping player disciplinary records twice during the expanded tournament in North America — was proposed to a meeting Tuesday of FIFA's ruling council. Later FIFA issued a statement confirming the change.

"Reflective of the expanded format with an extra knockout round, the FIFA Council confirmed an amendment to the regulations for the FIFA World Cup 2026 whereby single yellow cards in the final competition will be canceled after the group stage and then again after the quarterfinals," it said.

At the World Cup, players must serve a one-game ban if they are shown a yellow card in two different games but single yellow cards were canceled at previous tourna-

ments after the quarterfinals stage. That ensured no player would miss the final through suspension just because of getting a yellow card in the semifinal. The expanded 48-team World Cup format, with an extra round-of-32 knockout stage, led to a FIFA review aimed at helping keep players on the field.

FIFA cleared the disciplinary records of players who have one yellow card after the three-game group stage so they start the knockout phase afresh. A second amnesty after the quarterfinals will apply for players who got one yellow during the three previous knockout rounds and whose teams advanced to the semifinals.

FIFA also announced Tuesday an increase in financial resources to be distributed to all 48 World Cup participating teams by a further 15%, totaling \$871 million, or just over \$18 million per team. (AP)

# How 'scalpel' changes to F1 will change the racing at the Miami Grand Prix

**MIAMI, April 29:** Formula 1 is back, and the show has changed.

This week's Miami Grand Prix is the first test of a package of changes that curb the influence of the electrical battery power which has redefined how F1 drivers go racing in 2026.

Drawn up during the enforced month-long break when races in the Middle East were called off, the changes follow a backlash from many drivers aggrieved at the regular need to go slow to charge the all-important battery. Max Verstappen is publicly considering whether to leave F1 entirely.

The electrical power has produced some thrilling on-track action with plenty of overtaking, but fans and drivers are split over how much driver skill matters when many moves are hard to defend against. Champion Lando Norris has even reported making overtakes by mistake when the power kicked in unexpectedly.

Many senior F1 figures are playing down the changes or deny there was a problem in the first place. Toto Wolff, whose Mercedes team dominated the



first three changes, wanted changes made with a scalpel, not a baseball bat. The rule makers seems to have listened.

Nikolas Tombazis, the top F1 regulations official at the FIA, the sport's governing body, sees his role as a doctor prescribing diet, exercise or vitamins. "It was quite clear we need to take

certain steps. I think it was quite clear that people also need to come out of their comfort zone for some of these discussions," he said Monday.

Avoiding another huge crash Drivers had been warning for months about big differences in speed, and the big crashes that could result.

It finally happened at the Japanese Grand Prix in March as Oliver Bearman hurtled toward a barrier at 190 mph (306 kph) while trying to avoid Franco Colapinto. Bearman was left limping but it could have been worse at a street circuit with barriers closer to the track.

There's now a cap on the extra power from the overtake "boost" mode, and other limits to electrical power in certain areas.

Other safety-focused changes will speed up slow-moving cars at a race start or aim to make cars more controllable in wet weather — conditions the 2026 cars have yet to face.

Qualifying becomes a different challenge. Qualifying will feel faster but actually be slower now that drivers aren't lifting off the gas as often to recharge batteries.

That's because the batteries won't recharge quite as much, and they'll charge more quickly at high speed, too. That means the drivers will be "flat out" more often, even if less electrical power means the cars will be slower overall, Tombazis has said.

"We felt drivers had to do some slightly counterintuitive or unnatural things in order to extract the best performance out of qualifying," he said.

That largely matches recommendations by Mercedes' George Russell, who's started 2026 as a title contender and is influential in the paddock as a drivers' association director.

What hasn't changed The changes don't give drivers much more control over how and when most of the electrical power is deployed.

Except for the optional boost button for overtaking, most of the time, complex algorithms release the power or cut it back in a way that isn't directly related to the driver's use of the gas pedal. That could mean drivers still get unexpected power spikes which can waste power or make the car tricky to control.

Some of the changes mean more automatic control of the power, lowering the limit in certain parts of the circuit for safety reasons.

Tombazis confirmed there was no measure specifically to stop unintentional overtaking, often caused by getting more power than expected at an unfavorable point on the track, but argued other safety-focused changes "go to some extent towards addressing this issue."

What's next Tombazis said the FIA will keep reviewing how the regulations work at upcoming races and could make further changes. There isn't an obvious time to do so until the summer break in August, with eight races before then.

Teams will be hunting for any loopholes in the meantime. Tombazis says he has a regulations staff of around 15 at the FIA, compared to 3,000 engineers across the 11 teams.

"The fact we had a break meant that we could concentrate on these discussions while we didn't have to go racing every other weekend. It doesn't mean that these discussions cannot continue," he said Monday.

There's also the looming question of what comes next for F1 when these regulations run their course, by 2030 at the latest. (AP)