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- Middle East crises divide Europe with rising fuel costs and tensions over Israel policy
- China denies links to Iranian cargo ship seized by US in Gulf

8 NATION

- BJP to resolve decades-old Gorkha issue within 6 months of forming govt in Bengal: Shah
- Adityanath's 'padyatra' practice to sit in Opposition: Akhilesh

Vehicles torched; house of accused vandalised ● 'Justice not assurances', demand protestors

Rongali Bihu hit and run case turns violent



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, April 21: A brutal killing during Rongali Bihu cel-

ebrations at Powai Centre has triggered widespread unrest in Upper Assam, with arson, mob violence and a prolonged highway blockade paralysing normal life.

allegedly run over multiple times by a truck late Monday night following a minor dispute.

Police said the prime accused, Akash Singh, reportedly returned with the vehicle after an earlier altercation and deliberately rammed into him.

Officials said the act appeared intentional and "extremely brutal," with the vehicle allegedly used as a weapon. The victim died on the spot. The accused later surrendered at Margherita Police Station and was taken into custody by Digboi Police as tensions escalated.

The incident sparked massive public outrage on Tuesday, with thousands of residents taking to the streets.

Protesters torched vehicles, including an autorickshaw and a car, and vandalised a house linked to the accused.

In a dramatic escalation, demonstrators placed the victim's body on

National Highway 315, enforcing a blockade that brought traffic to a standstill for hours.

Protesters demanded immediate arrest of all alleged accomplices, capital punishment for the accused through a fast-track court, and compensation for the victim's family.

"We want justice, not assurances," a protester said. Police, fire service personnel and senior officials rushed to the spot to contain the situation.

Authorities said patrolling has been intensified and efforts are underway to defuse tensions through negotiations.

"The situation remains tense but under control," an official said.

The twin developments—an alleged premeditated killing followed by violent public backlash—have cast a shadow over Rongali Bihu celebrations and raised serious concerns over law and order and crisis response in the region.

HC reserves order on Pawan Khera's bail plea in passport row case

Pawan Khera not flight risk, counsel tells Gauhati HC hearing Cong leader's anticipatory bail plea



GUWAHATI, April 21: Pawan Khera is not a flight risk and there is no need for his arrest, his counsel argued in the Gauhati High Court, which on Tuesday heard the Congress leader's anticipatory bail plea over an FIR lodged by the Assam CM's wife for alleging she held multiple passports.

A single bench of Justice Parthiv Jyoti Saikia reserved the final order after hearing both sides for over three hours.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, who appeared for Khera via video conferencing, argued that the remarks made by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in response to the Congress leader's allegations point to political vendetta, especially in the context of the assembly elections in the state.

Saikia pointed out that the dominant offences are cheating and forgery. He argued that Khera is not entitled to interim protection as he is a "flight risk".

The AG submitted that the petitioner had submitted fake and manufactured documents, seals and stamps to gain political mileage and defame the chief minister and his entrepreneur wife.

The Congress spokesperson had moved the Gauhati High Court on Monday seeking anticipatory bail in connection with the case registered against him by the CM's wife Riniki Bhuyan Sharma for alleging that she possessed multiple passports and undisclosed properties abroad.

Khera, in his petition, submitted that anticipatory bail should be granted to him as the accusations appear to be "motivated, and appear to have been made to serve

rest was "under a cloud of suspicion" and pointed to serious procedural lapses in the investigation. "The prosecution failed to establish the case through circumstantial evidence. Lapses in investigation weakened the foundation of the case," the court observed.

Reacting to the verdict, Bimal Bora and his family expressed shock and disappointment. "Due to serious lapses in the investigation, the real culprits have escaped," he alleged, adding that the family is still waiting for justice.

The verdict has sparked widespread concern, with many in Assam expressing dismay that a case which once drew statewide outrage has ended without convictions for the crime.

Senior Counsel KN Choudhary, and convicted by a fast-track court, which awarded death penalty to Haque and life imprisonment to Salimuddin.

However, in January 2023, the Gauhati High Court cited lack of conclusive evidence and reduced the sentences.

Haque's death penalty was commuted to three years under Section 201 (destruction of evidence), while Salimuddin's life term was reduced to five years.

With his sentence already served, Haque was released. The Assam government later approached the Supreme Court, but on April 16, the apex court upheld the High Court's findings and acquitted Haque entirely, observing that there was no reliable evidence linking him to the crime.

The court also noted that his arrest was "under a cloud of suspicion" and pointed to serious procedural lapses in the investigation.

"The prosecution failed to establish the case through circumstantial evidence. Lapses in investigation weakened the foundation of the case," the court observed.

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Interstate border talks will resume after Assam gets new govt: M'laya DyCM



SHILLONG, April 21: Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Sniabhalang Dhar on Tuesday said talks with Assam on the border dispute will resume after a new government is formed in the neighbouring state.

Speaking to reporters, Dhar said the next round of talks would depend on Assam constituting its regional committees. "Dialogue with the counterpart is a continuous process. Let us wait till the new government is formed

in Assam, and we will continue the discussion. That is very clear," he said.

"As of now, we don't know who will be the chairman from their side as the new government is yet to be formed," he added.

Assam voted for its 126-member assembly on April 9, with counting of votes scheduled to be held on May 4.

On whether the issue could be resolved before the Meghalaya assembly (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

One more killed as storm lashes Assam; toll rises to 3

AASU stages protest; admin reviews situation

GUWAHATI, April 21: One person was killed in Assam's Kamrup district as a massive storm lashed parts of the state, officials said on Tuesday.

A report from Chaygaon in Kamrup district, about 50 km from Guwahati, said a local youth was killed during a storm on Monday night.

The youth was taking shelter under a tree along with others when the rains created havoc at an ongoing Bihu cultural function.

A branch snapped and fell on the victim, leading to his death, eyewitnesses said.

A massive storm, combined with heavy showers and winds, lashed several parts of the state, including Goalpara and Bongaigaon, causing extensive damage to property and crops.

Several parts of Guwahati remained inundated since Sunday evening, when torrential rains had hit the city with some respite in the downpour in the last 24 hours.

In Guwahati, a body was recovered floating in the Basistha river in Saukuchi area on Tuesday morning.

It is believed to be that of one Akhtar Ali, a youth of neighbouring Hatigaon area, who was reported missing since Sunday evening.

The family members claimed the body to be his based on the clothes, though the formal identification process is yet to be completed, police said.

A woman, identified as Payal Nath, had died after falling into a drain in Maligaon area on Sunday, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) had said.

A magisterial enquiry has been ordered by the Kamrup (Metropolitan) district commissioner into the incident to fix responsibility.

Several parts of Guwahati, including worst-hit Rukminigaon, Anil Nagar and Nabin Nagar, continued to remain under water for the third day.

In places where the water had receded, people had a harrowing time cleaning their houses and premises. The Guwahati chapter of All Assam Students Union (AASU) staged a protest in the city against the artificial flooding and demanded concrete measures to address it.

The AASU questioned how crores of rupees in the name of Guwahati development have been spent over the years and maintained that the government should accept responsibility.

Guwahati had witnessed heavy rainfall through Sunday night and early Monday, leading to knee-deep water on most roads, with water levels reaching chest height in some areas.

Chief Secretary Ravi Kota, reviewing the situation, had asked the Guwahati Municipal Corporation, Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority, and the Water Resources Department to maintain 24x7 operational readiness to address waterlogging in the vulnerable areas.

The administration has alerted the residents in landslide-prone hilly areas to remain vigilant and take necessary precautions to avoid loss of life and property, given the likelihood of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

KA's Rozlin Brahma shines on national stage

HT Correspondent
HOWRAGHAT, April 21: In a proud moment for Assam, Rozlin Brahma from Langhin Ganesh Pathar in Karbi Anglong has emerged as a symbol of versatility, excelling across sports, academics and beauty pageants.

Daughter of Michael Nolen Brahma and Chapala Narzary, Rozlin is currently serving as a Yoga Instructor at Mahi International School in Agra, where she has been contributing to both academic and co-curricular excellence.

Her academic journey reflects a strong blend of wellness and development studies.

She holds postgraduate degrees in Yoga and Science of Living from Jain Vishva Bharati Institute, Rajasthan, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Assam govt assures Gauhati HC to file reply to PILs against CM's 'hate speech' by next hearing

HC fixes May 28 hearing

GUWAHATI, April 21: The Assam government on Tuesday assured the Gauhati High Court of filing its response by the next date of hearing in connection with a bunch of PILs that accused Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma of giving "hate speech".

The division bench of Chief Justice Ashutosh Kumar and Justice Arun Dev Choudhury listed the matter for hearing on May 28.

"It has been submitted on behalf of the state that the response affidavit shall positively be filed by the next date, with a copy served in advance to the counsel for the petitioners in the respective writ petitions. List all these matters on 28.05.2026," the court said.

The three separate PILs that accused the CM of giving "hate speech" were taken up by the division bench on February 26, and observing that there was a "fissiparous tendency", issued notice to Sarma, the Centre, the state government and the Director General of Police in the matter.

The hearing was conducted before the announcement of the Assembly election schedule for the state, with the polling since held on April 9 and counting of votes to be done on May 4.

One petition was filed by Sahitya Akademi awardee litterateur Hiren Gohain, former DGP Harekrishna Deka and senior journalist Paresh Malakar on February 24. The CPI and CPI(M) had also filed separate petitions on February 21 over the

matter. The CPI(M) had made the BJP also a respondent in its petition, but the High Court had declined to issue notice to the party at the current stage.

The Supreme Court had on February 16 refused to entertain petitions seeking action against the CM over a now-deleted controversial video on X, purportedly showing him taking aim and firing with a rifle at members of a particular community.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi asked the petitioners to approach the Gauhati High Court with their grievances. It also asked the HC chief justice to expedite (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

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ARNAMAI BORA CASE Husband flags probe lapses after SC upholds acquittal

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 21: Bimal Bora, husband of slain teacher Arnamai Bora, has alleged "serious lapses" in the investigation into her rape and murder, saying the real culprits have escaped punishment.

His remarks came after a Supreme Court bench of Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta dismissed the Assam government's appeal and upheld the Gauhati High Court verdict in the case.

Arnamai Bora, headmistress of a primary school in Jamunamukh, was raped and murdered on May 31, 2017, with her body later recovered from the Kapili river.

The incident had triggered widespread outrage across Assam. Two accused—Moinul Haque and Salimuddin—were arrested

and convicted by a fast-track court, which awarded death penalty to Haque and life imprisonment to Salimuddin.

However, in January 2023, the Gauhati High Court cited lack of conclusive evidence and reduced the sentences.

Haque's death penalty was commuted to three years under Section 201 (destruction of evidence), while Salimuddin's life term was reduced to five years.

With his sentence already served, Haque was released. The Assam government later approached the Supreme Court, but on April 16, the apex court upheld the High Court's findings and acquitted Haque entirely, observing that there was no reliable evidence linking him to the crime.

The court also noted that his

SC agrees to hear plea challenging validity of National Investigation Agency Act, 2008



NEW DELHI, April 21: The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought responses from the Centre and others on a plea challenging the validity of the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta issued notice to the Centre, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and others seeking their responses on the plea.

"Issue notice," the bench said, noting that the questions raised before it were of vital importance.

The plea has sought the setting aside of the 2008 Act, claiming it was "violative" of Article 14 (equality before law) of the Constitution and beyond the legislative competence of the Centre.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) was set

up under the Act as a central counter-terrorism law enforcement agency in the wake of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

The court directed that a counter affidavit be filed by the respondents within four weeks and the petitioner would thereafter have two weeks to file the rejoinder affidavit.

Senior advocate Siddharth Dave, appearing for the petitioner, said "police" falls under the State List. He referred to various provisions of the 2008 Act, including Section 3 which deals with the constitution of the NIA.

"Without being a police station, can the NIA register an FIR?" the bench asked Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, who was appearing in the matter. Dave also referred to Section 6 (5) of the Act, which deals with the investigation of scheduled offences and says: if the Centre is of the opinion that a scheduled offence has been committed which is required to be investigated under this Act, it may suo motu direct the agency to probe it.

"You will have to assist us on the suo motu registration of FIR also," the bench told the lawyer. The top court, which said the questions raised before it were of vital importance, posted the matter for hearing on July 14. (PTI)

UNITED NATIONS, April 21: India has underscored the need for greater representation in the permanent membership of the UN Security Council, particularly of countries from the Global South, and called for a fair and inclusive global financial system.

Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs Sibi George delivered India's statements at key meetings here.

At the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) meeting on UN Security Council reforms, he highlighted the "need for greater representation of the Global South, particularly in the permanent category," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a post on X.

George also underlined the "similarities between India's approach to UN Security Council reforms and the African model."

He also delivered India's national



statement at the General Debate of the 2026 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up at UN Headquarters.

He "underscored the need for a fair, inclusive & development-ori-

ented global financial system" to bridge the USD 4 trillion Sustainable Development Goals financing gap.

He also highlighted that reforming international financial institutions, enhancing the voice of the

Global South, and deploying digital public infrastructure are key to delivering on the Sevilla Commitment, a 2025 global agreement to scale up developing financing.

George commenced his official visit to the UN on Monday by paying floral tributes at the bust of Mahatma Gandhi in the UN Headquarters.

During the day, he had a series of engagements and interactions, including with the Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, Khaled Khari.

Both had a productive discussion on various topics, with particular focus on UN Peacekeeping, the Permanent Mission of India to the UN said in a post on X.

George also had a wide-ranging discussion (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Atomgrid opens Bengaluru R&D centre

NEW DELHI, April 21: Atomgrid, a full-stack speciality chemicals platform, on Tuesday inaugurated a research and development centre in Bengaluru, betting on growing global demand for supply chain alternatives to China.

The facility currently houses 15 scientists and researchers, with plans to expand to 25 over the next 12 months. Its capabilities span route scouting, process development and technology transfer for commercial-scale manufacturing.

"India is at an inflection point in speciality chemicals. Global customers are actively looking for alternatives to China — but they're looking for solution providers who combine innovation with execution. This R&D centre is our commitment to being that," Siddharth Gupta, co-founder of Atomgrid, said in a statement. (PTI)

Stock markets climb nearly 1 pc amid hopes for progress on Iran-US peace talks

MUMBAI, April 21: Stock markets advanced for the third consecutive day on Tuesday, with Sensex jumping by 753 points and broader Nifty closing above 24,550 following a drop in crude oil prices and hopes for progress on peace talks between Iran and the US.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 753.03 points or 0.96 per cent to settle at 79,273.33. During the day, it surged 846.78 points or 1.07 per cent to 79,367.08. The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 211.75 points or 0.87 per cent to end at 24,576.60.

Among the 30-Sensex firms, Trent rose the most by 3.55 per cent. Hindustan Unilever, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank were the major winners.

Bharat Electronics, Titan, Reliance Industries and NTPC were among the laggards.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 0.75 per cent lower at USD 94.76 per barrel.

"Indian equity markets traded on a positive note, as investors positioned for a potential near-term deceleration in the Middle East. Energy markets remained in a consolidation phase, as traders balanced hopes of a near-term resolution and a potential reopening of the Strait of Hormuz against ongoing uncertainty around ceasefire negotiations," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Broader markets also advanced with the BSE Mid-Cap Select index jumping 0.73 per cent and Small-Cap Select index by 0.29 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, FMCG rallied the most by 2.23 per cent, followed by Realty (2.17 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (1.71 per cent), Private Banks index (1.67 per cent), Top 10 Banks (1.66 per cent) and Bankex (1.46 per cent). Capital Goods emerged as the only laggard.

"With the ceasefire deadline arriving tomorrow, all eyes turn to the second round of US-Iran talks — while markets remain hopeful of progress, elevated tensions and uncertain participation make any negative surprise a key downside risk," Siddhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. A total



of 2,531 stocks advanced, while 1,760 declined and 162 remained unchanged on the BSE.

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

Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. US markets ended marginally lower on Monday.

"The bullish momentum was largely driven by a combination of macro and market-specific triggers. Easing geopolitical concerns, particularly around the US-Iran situation, played a central role in improving risk appetite.

"This was further supported by a cooling in crude oil prices, which helped ease inflation concerns for an oil-import-dependent economy like India and improved margin visibility across sectors," Hariprasad K, Research Analyst and Founder, Livelong Wealth, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,059.93 crore on Monday, according to BSE data.

"Amid hopes for progress in Iran-US peace talks and supportive global cues, India's equity markets rebounded strongly," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

On Monday, the Sensex closed marginally up 26.76 points or 0.03 per cent at 78,520.30. The Nifty edged up 11.30 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 24,364.85. (PTI)

South Korean steel major Posco set to return to Odisha after 2 decades: Govt

BHUBANESWAR, April 21: Over two decades after leaving a mega project in Odisha following large-scale unrest by local people, South Korean steel major Posco is all set to return to the state and set up a green-field plant in collaboration with JSW Group.

This was announced by Additional Chief Secretary, Industries, Hemant Sharma, here.

"We are very happy to announce that Posco is returning to Odisha. An agreement in this regard was signed on Monday during the South Korean President's visit to India," Sharma told reporters here.

Posco, which had planned to set up a mega steel mill of 12mtpa at an investment of ₹ 51,000 near Paradip in Jagatsinghpur district in early 2000, had to abandon it in the face of stiff

opposition by local people during the land acquisition process.

Apart from this, the company also failed to get a raw material linkage following a change of mineral policy in the country.

Sharma said they have shown interest in setting up two major Green-field projects in Odisha, one a 6 mtpa plant in Keonjhar district and another a 5 mtpa capacity steel mill in Dhenkanal district.

"Though the state government has 1,000 acres of land for the purpose, it may arrange more if required. The state will provide all logistics to Posco to set up its proposed plants in Odisha," Sharma said.

In a major boost to Odisha's industrial landscape, JSW Group has announced a significant investment in the state in partnership with the South

Korean steel giant.

The two companies have signed a joint venture agreement to establish a mega steel plant in Dhenkanal district.

Sources said the agreement in this regard was signed at the India-Korea Business Summit held in New Delhi on Monday, in the presence of Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, JSW Group Chairman Sajjan Jindal, and Posco Chairman Chang In-hwa.

In the proposed project in Dhenkanal, both JSW and Posco will hold equal stakes of 50 per cent each and the total investment is estimated at around ₹ 35,000 crore.

The project is expected to generate significant employment opportunities, both directly and indirectly, and contribute to the economic growth of the region. (PTI)

Tighter norms: MeitY proposes continuous label visibility on full duration of AI-generated content

NEW DELHI, April 21: The IT Ministry on Tuesday mooted tighter disclosure norms for AI-generated content, proposing a mandatory, continuous, and clearly visible label for such synthetically generated information throughout the duration of the visual content.

This replaces the earlier requirement of ensuring "prominent visibility" under the IT Rules.

Adding this to the draft IT rules amendment that, among other changes, proposes to bring independent news creators on the Centre's radar and mandate compliance with advisories, MeitY has also extended the deadline for stakeholder feedback/comments to May 7 as against April 29, 2026. "In the said rules, in rule 3, in sub-rule (3), in clause (a), in sub-clause (ii), for the words, 'that ensures prominent visibility in the visual display', the words and punct-

uation 'that ensures continuous and clearly visible display of such label throughout the duration of the content, in a visual display' shall be substituted," the IT Ministry said circulating the draft changes for feedback.

The Ministry said it is placing the additional amendments in the public domain for consultation "in order to provide stakeholders an opportunity to examine and submit feedback on the additional changes along with the earlier draft amendments".

"In addition to the draft amendments already placed in the public domain, further changes have been proposed in Rule 3(3)(a)(ii), which requires continuous and clearly visible display of label for synthetically generated information throughout the duration of the content in visual display," the IT Ministry said in another notice. (PTI)

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HC reserves order

ulterior motive/political vendetta". He claimed that there was no ground for arresting him and the respondent is acting in haste, while the "arbitrary and coercive conduct" of the police authorities violates his Fundamental Rights.

Khera also pointed out that the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Kamrup (M) has also opined that no grounds for issuance of Non-Bailable Warrants of Arrest were made out from the records, and that the grounds for issuance of NBWs were based on conjectures and speculations.

Khera, the chairman of AICC's Media and Publicity, had alleged in two press conferences held in New Delhi and Guwahati on April 5 that the chief minister's wife possesses three passports of UAE, Egypt and Antigua and Barbuda—two properties in Dubai and assets in shell companies.

Subsequently, she filed criminal cases against Khera and others at the Guwahati Crime Branch police station under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including 175 (false statement in connection with an election), 35, 36, 318 (cheating), 338, (forgery of valuable will, security etc.), 337 (forgery of record of court or of public register, etc.), 340 (forged document or electronic record and using it as genuine), 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), and 356 (defamation).

Assam Police had subsequently visited Khera's residence in Delhi on April 7, but he was not present there, and he later filed for transit anticipatory bail at the Telangana High Court, which was granted to him for a week.

The Assam Police then moved the Supreme Court against the Telangana High Court's order, and on April 15, the highest Court in an interim order stayed the grant of anticipatory transit bail.

Khera again appealed in the Supreme Court to vacate the stay it imposed on the transit anticipatory bail granted to him by the Telangana High Court, but it was turned down on Friday, and he was instead asked to approach the Gauhati High Court.

Meanwhile, a local court in Guwahati rejected the Assam Police's plea for issuance of non-bailable warrant (NBW) of arrest against the Congress leader. (PTI)

One more killed

continued heavy rainfall, an official release had said on Monday.

"As per the forecast by the India Meteorological Department, occasional rain and thunderstorms are likely over the coming days. All agencies have been directed to remain on high alert," it added. (PTI)

Interstate border talks

polls in 2028, Dhar said there is no fixed timeline.

"We are always trying to resolve the issue. Because it involves both states, we are trying to resolve the issue at the earliest, but it is not so easy," he said.

"I cannot say whether we can solve it in two years or in two months, but we will always try our best to resolve it at the earliest," he said.

The two Northeastern states had, in 2022, signed MoUs for six of the 12 areas of differences along the border, ending decades of claims and counterclaims.

On the Shillong airport expansion project, Dhar said the tender has already been allotted, and work is expected to begin shortly.

He said that the project is likely to be completed within 18 months.

"Let us see. It seems the time of completion for the contractor is 18 months," Dhar said, adding that details regarding the contractor and the construction plan are being sought by the state government from the Centre.

"I have asked the Commissioner of Transport to communicate with them, as we would like to know who the contractor is and what type of construction will take place. Maybe next month we will know who the contractor is, what rate they put, and what the time of completion is," he said. (PTI)

KA's Rozlin Brahma

and in Rural Development from Rani Durgavati University, Madhya Pradesh.

She also pursued professional studies at Lakshmbai National Institute of Physical Education (LNPIE), Guwahati, and Barkatullah University, Bhopal.

Her contribution to education was recently recognised when her school earned top rankings by Education World India—securing the first position in Agra, eighth in Uttar Pradesh and 59th nationally in the co-ed day-cum-boarding category.

Beyond academics, Rozlin has represented her state and institutions in National Yoga Competitions and National Softball Championships, along with participation in inter-university tournaments.

She has also served as a national referee in yoga, earning praise for her precision and fairness.

Expanding her horizons further, she has made her mark in the world of pageantry, winning the City Winner title as Miss Petite and participating in the Empress Universe International beauty pageant.

Known for her commitment to promoting physical and mental well-being, Rozlin continues to uphold the core philosophy of yoga while inspiring young talents from smaller towns to pursue excellence on a larger stage.

HC fixes May

the hearing in the matter. The petitioners alleged that remarks made by Sarma could divide society.

"The Respondent No 3 (Sarma), while addressing reporters openly admitted to having directed members of his political party to deliberately file complaints against Bengali-origin Muslims, referred to by him pejoratively as 'Miyas', with the express object of causing them harassment and hardship," alleged the petition filed by the three prominent citizens.

"...the Chief Minister of the State of Assam is sullaying his high constitutional office and violating his constitutional oath of office by indulging in blatant 'hate speech' against a minority community in Assam," it alleged.

The PIL also alleged that Sarma is making speeches and releasing videos that are overtly inciting violence against the minority community by instigating civilians to take law and order into their own hands.

It alleged that CM has indulged in "blatant hate speech" against the minority community by calling for their social and economic boycott and using derogatory words to describe them, and propagating harmful stereotypes about them.

It also alleged that the CM has been "instigating violence and hatred with references to the community's dress and language, instigating communal disharmony, and directing his officials to use their public office in a mala fide manner to harass the minority community".

The PIL also demanded an enquiry by a Special Investigation Team (SIT), chaired by a retired high court judge, against the CM and appropriate action.

"In the present case, despite widely disseminated and publicly recorded speeches that prima facie disclose incitement to discrimination, social and economic boycott of a minority community, no suo motu FIR has been registered by the state authorities," it claimed. (PTI)

India bats for

with Under-Secretary-General for the UN Department of Operational Support Atul Khare, reaffirming India's "steadfast commitment to multilateralism and its remarkable contributions to UN peacekeeping." (PTI)

SOFTEL revives traditional grinding with modern 'ghar ghanti' for home kitchens



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: SOFTEL has introduced a compact home grinding solution aimed at bringing back the traditional practice of fresh atta and spice grinding into modern kitchens.

With over 35 years of manufacturing experience, the company has launched its "ghar ghanti" range designed to combine traditional stone-grinding methods with contemporary convenience.

The appliance is compact enough for kitchen platforms while being capable of grinding grains, millets and spices efficiently.

At the core of the product is a stone grinding mechanism that helps retain natural taste, texture and nutritional value.

The unit offers a grinding capacity of 7.5 to 10 kg per hour with low

energy consumption of about one unit per hour, making it suitable for daily household use.

The company is offering the product in three variants—fully automatic, semi-automatic and manual—catering to different user preferences in terms of control and ease of operation.

Managing Director Anil Kumar Jain said the idea is to restore freshness and trust in everyday food.

"Fresh food is not a luxury, it is the foundation of good health. Grinding fresh is the simplest way to bring purity, nutrition and quality back to our meals," he said.

With this launch, SOFTEL aims to tap into a growing consumer shift towards healthier, less processed food habits while blending traditional practices with modern design.

Flipkart-Uber tie-up lets users earn SuperCoins on rides

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: Flipkart has partnered with Uber to allow users to earn SuperCoins on everyday rides, expanding its loyalty programme into daily mobility use.

Under the collaboration, users who link their Flipkart and Uber accounts can earn 4 per cent of their ride fare as SuperCoins, capped at 150 coins per trip, with no limit on total accumulation.

The rewards will be credited directly to users' Flipkart accounts and can be redeemed across its ecosystem, including Flipkart Minutes and Cleartrip.

The partnership also introduces limited-period incentives. New Uber users—or those inactive for 84 days—can earn 150 bonus SuperCoins by completing their first ride within 28 days of linking accounts.

Additionally, users linking accounts between April 15 and April 30, 2026, will receive an extra 50 bonus coins on their first ride within the same period.

Gaurav Arora, Vice President (Payments and SuperCoins) at Flipkart, said the move marks a step towards making SuperCoins a broader lifestyle rewards programme.

"Mobility is a natural extension, and this partnership allows us to integrate more seamlessly into everyday transactions," he said.

Milk supply uninterrupted, prices of milk and dairy items stable amid West Asia conflict: Govt



NEW DELHI, April 21: The government on Tuesday said that prices of milk and dairy products have remained stable across the country with no interruption in supply despite the West Asia conflict.

There are "no issues" related to the supply of fuel, gas and plastic packaging material to the dairy sector, said Puja Rustagi, the director in the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, at an inter-ministerial briefing on recent developments in West Asia.

She said the dairy industry has been advised to shift to piped natural gas from LPG wherever feasible.

"Milk procurement, processing and supply across the country have remained uninterrupted amid the ongoing West Asia crisis. Prices of milk and milk products are stable. No supply disruption has occurred in the market, and payments to dairy farmers have continued throughout the crisis period," Rustagi told reporters here.

India is the world's largest milk producer. The country's total milk production stood at 247.87 million tonnes during 2024-25.

The director informed that on Monday a meeting with state Milk Federation and milk unions across the India was held to review the milk situation and monitor the impact of West Asia crisis on the dairy sector.

"...There are no issues related to the supply of fuel, gas and plastic packaging material to the dairy sector," Rustagi said.

The director informed that the Department of An-

SUPPLY OF WELDING PORTION AT RANGIYA DIV.

E-Tender Notice No.: 01-Engg/RNY-2026-27. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:- Tender No. 1. Brief Description of Item: Supply of welding portion against the sanctioned work:(i) Rangiya Jn.-Murkongselek (SL)-TBR-21.507km (ii) Provision of Track Machine siding 11(eleven) nos under DEN-III/Rangiya Division. (iii) Rangiya Division -Renewal of Conventional SEJ-100 Nos. (iv) Rangiya Jn.-Majbat (SL)-TSR(P)-36.00 Km. Tender Value: ₹84,04,107.48/- Earnest Money: ₹1,68,100/- Date & time of closing of tender: At 15.00 hrs. & opening at 15.30 hrs. on 08-05-2026 at DRM (W), Rangiya office. The complete information with tender documents of above e-Tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in

Note: For any last minute changes of tender please check on net/ newspaper/corrigendum at the respective offices mentioned in the original tender notice before dropping.

DRM (W), Rangiya
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

IMPROVEMENT OF CESS

E-Tender Notice No. SCL/Engg/25 of 2026; dtd. 16.04.2026. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: SN. 1. Brief Description of Item: Improvement of cess in between Baraigram Jn.-Dullabcherra under ADEN/Karimganj Jn. Tender Value: ₹1,27,97,969.20/- Earnest Money: ₹2,56,000.00/- E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 11-05-2026 and opened at 15:00 hrs. on 12-05-2026. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 11-05-2026 in website http://www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (Works), Lumding at Silchar
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

ENGINEERING WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/24 of 2026; Dated: 16-04-2026 (Two packet system); E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: SN.1. Brief Description of Item : At Senchoa-Depot supplying of 50 mm size hard durable stone machine crushed track ballast as per RDSO new specification with upto date correction slip from private quarry, stacking properly on level surface within the depot including Loading into hopper/wagon/truck for the work "Through Sleeper Renewal (TSR) at km 20/9-22/1 (1.2km) DN, 26/3-28/0 (1.7km) DN, 31/5-36/3 (4.8km) DN, 37/8-50/2 (12.4km), 50/9-55/3 (4.4km) DN, 55/4-56/7 (1.3km) DN, 56/7-59/8 (3.1km) DN, 62/6-66/6(4km) DN, 78/4-83/1 (4.7km) DN, 86/9-93/1 (6.2km) DN, 94/5-100/3 (5.8km), 22/0-23/2 (1.2km) UP, 28/1-28/9 (0.8km) UP, 30/6-31/4 (0.8km) UP (Total=52.4km) with wider PSC sleepers in Guwahati-Chaparmukh section and Through Sleeper Renewal (TSR) at km 102/0-102/7(0.7km) DN, 103/0-109/9 (6.9km) DN, 110/6-126/6 (18km) DN, 131/0-136/7 (5.7km), 140/6-145/2 (4.6km) DN, 147/1-152/5 (5.4km) DN, 154/2-159/8 (5.6km) DN, 62/6-66/6 (4km) DN, 161/6-165/3 (3.7km) DN, 167/0-170 (3km) DN, 171/0-173/6 (2.6km) DN, 184/8-185/8 (1.2km) DN, 137/4-138/7 (1.3km) UP (Total=58.7km) with wider PSC sleepers in Chaparmukh-Lumding section under the jurisdiction of Sr.DEN/II/Lumding. Tender Value: ₹36,94,15,200/- Earnest Money: ₹73,88,300/- Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 18-05-2026 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 19-05-2026. Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 18-05-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM(W)/Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from MOHAMMED IMDADUR RAHMAN TO IMDADUR RAHMAN by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam) IMDADUR RAHMAN S/O- NURUL ISLAM Vill-BURUNGATOLI PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

Sujit Das' manuscript painting earns place at Lalit Kala Akademi showcase Assam's Sanchipat art debuts at national exhibition

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 21: In a historic achievement, Assam's indigenous Sanchipat manuscript painting has been selected for the 65th National Art Exhibition organised by the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. This marks the first time in the exhibition's 65-year legacy that Sanchipat Puthi Chitra from Assam will be exhibited at the national level.

Artist Sujit Das from Nagaon has created this artwork using traditional Sanchipat and natural pigments, representing the rich and ancient manuscript painting tradition of Assam. His work reflects the intricate detailing, spiritual depth, and aesthetic beauty inherent in Assamese Puthi Chitra.

Over the past six decades, the



National Exhibition has showcased diverse forms of modern and traditional art from across India. However, the inclusion of

Assam's indigenous Sanchipat manuscript painting for the first time marks a significant cultural milestone and a moment of pride for the people of Assam.

Expressing his gratitude, Sujit Das thanked the Lalit Kala Akademi for providing a prestigious national platform and for recognising traditional art forms. He noted that this recognition will open new avenues for the preservation and promotion of Assam's artistic heritage.

Sujit Das is a dedicated manuscript painting artist specialising in traditional Sanchipat and Assamese Puthi Chitra. Through the use of natural pigments and classical techniques, he has been actively working to preserve and promote this indigenous art form on a wider platform.

Birangana Sati Sadhoni Divas celebrated at Bishmak Nagar

CYSA marks 502nd birth anniversary with tributes and resolutions



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, April 21: The 502nd birth anniversary celebration of Birangana Sati Sadhoni, the legendary queen of the Chutia Empire was held on Tuesday with grandeur, drawing around 120 participants from various parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh at the historic Bishmak Nagar in Lower Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh.

Organised by Chutia Yuba Sanmilan Assam (CYSA), the event was led by General Secretary Palash Hazarika, Finance Secretary Mukut Shaiki and Education Secretary Victor Khanikor. Participants at

the ancient site paid homage through traditional spiritual rituals and entered the palace premises amid chants and reverence.

As a mark of poignant tribute, they lit earthen lamps before the image of Queen Sadhoni and offered Eri, Muga, silk and cotton clothes to honour her legacy. Leaders and guests from Arunachal Pradesh gathered near the Chandangiri Hills on the bank of the Diffu River and engaged in key discussions during the programme.

The gathering passed a resolution urging the governments of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, along with the Archaeological Department to protect and preserve the invaluable heritage sites of the Chutia Empire in Arunachal Pradesh.

In a parallel observance at Tinsukia, the Tinsukia District Committee, under Acting President Shashanka Shaikia and Secretary Tikendrajit Shaikia, lit 502 lanterns at the historic Padum Pukhuri in memory of Sati Sadhoni. In Pratima Nagar in Sadiya, the occasion was also observed, symbolising the enduring spirit of Sadhoni's valour.

The celebrations highlighted the Chutia community's commitment to safeguarding their rich cultural and historical roots, as stated by Victor Khanikor.

Two students felicitated for CBSE Class X success in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, April 21: In the recently declared CBSE High School Examination results, two meritorious students from Phulamapur village, a remote rural area of Dibrugarh district—Riyen Gogoi and Lucent Gogoi have passed with distinction from Dibrugarh Sampurna Academy, bringing pride to their region. Riyen Gogoi, son of young entrepreneur Debeshwar Gogoi and Swarnali Gogoi, secured 97.8%, while Lucent Gogoi, son of noted teacher Ajay Gogoi and Julie Gogoi, passed with 83.6%.

It has been reported that the people of the area are delighted with their achievement. Following the announcement of the results, leaders of various organisations visited the homes of the two students to congratulate them.

On behalf of the Young Journalists' Association, Assam, executive president Kanchan Jyoti Gohain also extended heartfelt congratulations to both meritorious students.

Assam Rifles marks one year of Operation Sindoor

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 21: Lokra Battalion of Assam Rifles conducted an insightful and motivational lecture commemorating one year of Operation Sindoor for the students of PM Shri Kendriya Vidyalaya Lokra and Assam Rifles High School, Lokra on Monday. The event was organised at Lokra with the aim of educating and inspiring young minds about the valour and achievements of the Indian Armed Forces.

The lecture primarily highlighted the story of gallantry, courage and unwavering dedication displayed by the Indian Armed Forces during Operation Sindoor. It showcased the success and operational supremacy achieved through meticulous planning, teamwork and the indomitable spirit of the troops.

The session included impactful videos and real-time footage depicting the brave actions and heroic efforts of Indian forces, providing students with a vivid understanding of military operations and the sacrifices made in the line of duty.

The lecture proved to be highly insightful and engaging for the students, instilling a sense of pride, belongingness and deep respect for the Armed Forces. It also motivated many students to aspire towards a career in the Armed Forces and contribute to the nation.

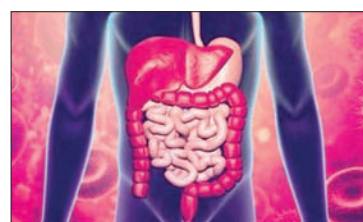
Gastroenteritis outbreak contained in Salganga

Swift health and PHE action halts spread; no new cases detected

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: A timely and coordinated response by the Health Department and Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department has brought the acute gastroenteritis (AGE) situation in Salganga and its surrounding areas under control, with officials confirming that no new cases have been detected in the latest rounds of surveillance.

Notably, between April 15 and April 18, a total of 105 patients with mild AGE symptoms were reported at MG Model Hospital, Tikal. Acting swiftly, health teams launched active surveillance on April 18 across several affected localities, including Salganga Grant, Salganga Par, Tikalpar Grant, Nayagram, Digarkashpur, Kashpur Tea Estate and Bagerkona. During the field visit, 31 patients were identified, all of whom had already been treated at MG Model Hospital and had recovered. Significantly, no fresh cases were found during this exercise.

Meanwhile, the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) team in Cachar has remained engaged in the field since April 15, identifying a few mild diarrhoea cases, all of which were treated promptly and have since recovered. Follow-up house-to-house surveillance carried out on April 19 and April 20 further reinforced the improving situation, with no new cases detected on either day.



Health officials also undertook systematic water quality monitoring. On April 20, samples were collected from five locations—Thaligram, Pathemara Tea Estate, Salganga Grant, Tikalpar near the GP Office and Champatilla and sent to the District Public Health Laboratory at Silchar Medical College and Hospital for testing. Authorities confirmed that all patients are currently stable, with no admissions required at MG Model Hospital or referrals to higher health facilities.

As part of the surveillance expansion, nearby tea garden areas such as Tikal Tea Estate and Pathemara Tea Estate were also covered, where no cases were detected.

It is important to note that the PHE Department received information on the outbreak on the afternoon of April 18 and responded by issuing alert messages to all water supply schemes in Salganga, Tikal Tea Estate and adjoining areas. Water samples collected on April 19 from end-point Functional Household Tap Connections of the distribution network were

tested at the Pailapool Sub-Division Laboratory. Reports received on April 20 confirmed that the water is safe across all parameters, with residual chlorine levels within permissible limits.

Officials also added that additional samples have been sent to the Hailakandi laboratory for advanced bacteriological testing and the report is awaited. Apart from this, multiple field tests were conducted using portable kits that have consistently shown water quality to be safe.

As a precautionary step, water-purifying chemical packets have been distributed among residents of Tikal Tea Estate and nearby areas, particularly those relying on alternative sources such as ring wells. Authorities stated that all necessary precautionary measures have been in place since April 18.

Alongside containment efforts, both departments have carried out awareness activities in the affected areas, sensitising residents on hygiene practices and safe drinking water. Joint field visits by the district administration, PHE officials and health teams have been conducted regularly to assess the ground situation, with officials noting visible improvement in overall conditions.

The administration continues close monitoring to ensure the situation remains under control and public health is safeguarded.

NFR boosts cargo operations and customer services

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) undertook a series of proactive initiatives aimed at enhancing customer satisfaction and increasing freight revenue during the month of March 2026. These measures focus on strengthening logistics efficiency, ensuring smooth cargo movement and supporting the growth of regional agricultural and industrial supply chains.

As part of these initiatives, the Gati Shakti Multi-modal Cargo Terminal of M/s Dalmia Cement (North East) Ltd. at Habapur station under Lumding Division has been operationalised for handling inward traffic with effect from 27th March 2026. Additionally, as per the revised Freight Rates Circular, Baihata GCT under Rangiya Division has been permitted to handle outward traffic for a period of 90 days from 9th March 2026. These strategic measures are set to significantly strengthen logistics capability and efficiently meet the growing freight demands of the region.

Under its Business Development Unit initiative, NFR has recorded commendable freight loading across its divisions. A total of 4.5 rakes (189 wagons) of potatoes were

successfully loaded from Dhupguri Railway Station under Alipurduar Division to multiple destinations, generating freight revenue of ₹ 0.76 crore. Furthermore, 6 rakes (252 wagons) of maize were loaded from Purnea, Jalalgarh and Katihar Junction under Katihar Division to Bangladesh, earning revenue of ₹ 0.55 crore.

Substantial freight movement has also been achieved under Lumding Division. A total of 2,741 wagons of stone chips were transported from various originating points to multiple destinations. In addition, 2,867 wagons of cement were handled, contributing freight revenue of ₹ 11.52 crore. Movement of 441 wagons of POL generated revenue of ₹ 3.88 crore, while 107 wagons of bamboo/chip traffic were also handled, further strengthening overall freight performance.

Northeast Frontier Railway continues to focus on improving its freight services and customer interface while contributing significantly to the logistics and supply chain ecosystem of the region. Through sustained initiatives and technology-driven solutions, NFR aims to ensure faster, safer and more efficient transportation for its customers.

Sankaradeva varsity names two Professors of Practice

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, April 21: Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradev University, one of Nagaon's premier higher education institutions has appointed eminent litterateur Anuradha Sarma Pujari and distinguished sculptor and artist Nuruddin Ahmed as Professors of Practice. Anuradha Sarma Pujari, a Sahitya Akademi awardee, will teach students subjects including humanities, social sciences and media studies, drawing from her extensive experience.

Padma Shri and Sangeet Natak Akademi award-winning sculptor Nuruddin Ahmed, a noted art expert, will impart education in art, fine arts and performing arts to the university's students.

Both distinguished personalities will hold the positions at the university for the next three years. University Registrar Dr Sarat Hazarika recently sent appointment letters for the honorary professor positions to both and they have accepted the roles.

PW celebrates JEE Main 2026 toppers

Nationwide events mark strong performances by students across centres



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, April 21: Tuesday saw festivities at PhysicsWallah Vidyaapeeth centres nationwide to celebrate the success of its topper students, who performed remarkably well in the recently announced JEE Main 2026 Session 2 exam.

Among the top scorers was Sahil Pradhan, a student from Bhayander in Mumbai, whose All India Rank (AIR) is 94. Besides Pradhan, the company celebrated the performance of students such as Gurashish Singh Chadha (AIR 112 - State Topper Uttarakhand) and Naman Verma from Haryana, the son of a farmer who started preparing for JEE just a few months ago through the online Dropper batch and went on to achieve AIR 243.

Additionally, several students topped their respective states, such as Hemakshi Kumar (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), Vishnu Bharadwaj Upadhyay (Meghalaya) and Rohit Sharma (Himachal Pradesh).

Gopesh Gardodia (99.94 - 951) and Dhruv Agarwal (99.82 - 2938) were among the top students of PW Vidyaapeeth in Guwahati.

Alakh Pandey, Teacher, Founder & CEO, PhysicsWallah (PW), said, "We are proud of all our students who appeared for the JEE Main 2026 and would especially like to congratulate those who have secured high scores. Your dedication and hard work are commendable. For students who expected better results, this is only the beginning of your journey. Review your mistakes, strengthen your preparation and keep working towards your goal. We will continue to offer our support and guidance to you."

These students were part of various PW learning programmes, including offline centres like Vidyaapeeth, hybrid centres such as Pathshala and online batches, each choosing the format suited to their needs. This reflects PhysicsWallah's attempt at an integrated approach to education by combining digital and physical platforms to offer an effective learning experience.

JEE Main 2026 Session 2 was held at approximately 566 centres located in 304 cities across India and 14 cities abroad with around 11.23 lakh candidates appearing.

Lawyer's body rescued in four wheeler car

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, April 21: Sensation prevailed after the body of a lawyer was recovered from inside a four-wheeler in Morigaon on Monday evening.

The deceased was identified as Dip Kumar Saikia, a senior advocate and member of the Morigaon Bar Association, a resident of Sankardev Nagar in the town. The vehicle bearing registration number AS 21 H 3671 was found parked for a long time with the lawyer seated in the driver's seat.

It is reported that the lawyer did not respond to phone calls from his wife after leaving the Morigaon court. Meanwhile, pedestrians passing by noticed that he was slumped over the steering wheel and immediately informed the police.

Police rushed to the spot and sent him to Morigaon Civil Hospital, where doctors declared him dead due to cardiac arrest.

The deceased lawyer is survived by his wife, a young daughter and a host of relatives. He was 55.

His untimely death has cast a pall of gloom over the entire town. Members of the Morigaon Bar Association expressed deep condolences over his sudden demise.

Kokrajhar school celebrates 100% pass result with grand programme

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, April 21: The Brahma Baba Techno School, a leading privately managed English-medium school in Kokrajhar town has come out with flying colours, achieving 100 per cent academic excellence in the recently declared CBSE Class X final examination 2026.

The school has received huge applause from citizens following the demonstrated academic excellence by securing an impressive performance in the Class 10 final examination for the academic year 2025-2026.

According to official reports, a total of 28 students from the school appeared in the examination and all of them successfully passed, achieving a remarkable 100 per cent result. Out of the total candidates, 24 students secured first division, three students obtained second division and one student passed in third division. The outstanding performance has brought pride and recognition not only to the school but also to parents, guardians and the teaching fraternity.

To celebrate this achievement, the school authorities organized a grand felicitation programme at the school auditorium on Tuesday. The event witnessed a gathering of students, parents, teachers and well-wishers, creating an atmosphere of joy and pride.

E-AUCTION PROGRAMME FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL/2026 OF TINSUKIA DIVISION		
The e-auction programme for sale of Railway Scrap materials under the jurisdiction of Tinsukia Division for the month of April/2026 is hereby fixed as under:-		
SN	MONTH	Additional Date Fixed
1	APRIL/2026	29-04-2026 For Tinsukia Division & 28-04-2026 For GSD Dibrugarh
Interested bidders are advised to bid through IREPS website (www.ireps.gov.in) for registration, training, participation in e-auction.		
Dy. Chief Materials Manager/Depot, Dibrugarh		
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY		
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E-AUCTION FOR MULTIPURPOSE STALLS ASSETS OVER LUMDING DIVISION		
E-Auction for 18 nos. Multipurpose Stalls (MPS) Assets over Lumding Division for a period of 05 years. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Trips/Days. 1826.		
Auction Catalogue No. MPS-LMG-03-26		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-113-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. NHLGMP5-6 at PF-2 of New Halfong Railway station ('D' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for OBC-women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/2	MPS-LMG-DPU-MPS-133-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. DPUMPS-1 at Platform 1 of Diphu Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/3	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-112-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. NHLGMP5-5 at PF-2 of New Halfong Railway station ('D' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for ST category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/4	MPS-LMG-HBN-MPS-120-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. HBNMPS-1 at PF-1 of Haibargaon Railway station ('B' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/5	MPS-LMG-MBG-MPS-35-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (MBGMP5-1) at PF-1 of MAIBANG Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/6	MPS-LMG-BXJ-MPS-127-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. BXJMPS-1 at Platform 1 of Bokajan Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for Women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/7	MPS-LMG-SZR-MPS-131-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. SZRMPS-1 at Platform 1 of Sarupathar Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/8	MPS-LMG-SZR-MPS-132-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. SZRMPS-3 at Platform 2 of Sarupathar Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for OBC Women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/9	MPS-LMG-DPU-MPS-134-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. DPUMPS-3 at Platform 1 of Diphu Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for Women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/10	MPS-LMG-SANG-MPS-104-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (SANGMP5-1) at platform-1 of Sairang Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only(Unreserved category). Sketch plan uploaded.
AA/11	MPS-LMG-GHY-MPS-124-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. GHYMPS-14 outside the parking lot near SSE/PGHY office of Guwahati Railway station ('A1' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/12	MPS-LMG-SANG-MPS-105-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (SANGMP5-2) at platform -1 of Sairang Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only(Reserved for women). Sketch plan uploaded.
AA/13	MPS-LMG-BXJ-MPS-128-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. BXJMPS-3 at Platform 2 of Bokajan Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for OBC category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/14	MPS-LMG-DPU-MPS-135-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. DPUMPS-4 at Platform 2 of Diphu Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/15	MPS-LMG-BHRB-MPS-107-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (BHRMPS-1) at platform -1 of Bhairabi Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only (Unreserved category). Sketch plan uploaded.
AA/16	MPS-LMG-SANG-MPS-106-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (SANGMP5-3) at platform -2 of Sairang Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only(Reserved for ST category). Sketch plan uploaded.
AA/17	MPS-LMG-HBN-MPS-121-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. HBNMPS-2 at PF-1 of Haibargaon Railway station ('B' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/18	MPS-LMG-KTX-MPS-102-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (KTXMPS-2) at Katakhal Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only. Sketch plan uploaded.
Auction Start Date & Time: 10.00 hrs. and closing at 13:20 hrs. of 04-05-2026. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Lot wise closing time can be viewed in e-Auction module of IREPS.		
Note: Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in for more details.		
Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Lumding		
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QUOTE OF THE DAY

Love is when you meet someone who tells you something new about yourself. - Andre Breton

World Economic Forum report

As the growth strategies that powered the global economy over the past three decades lose relevance, a new World Economic Forum report released on April 15 calls for a renewed blueprint to navigate a rapidly evolving landscape shaped by AI, geostrategic competition, rising debt and inequality, and mounting environmental and demographic pressures. The report draws on two years of dialogue with nearly 200 global business leaders, policy-makers and experts, and a survey of more than 11,000 executives worldwide. Across four major areas of economic policy, Growth in the New Economy: Towards a Blueprint identifies key "no-regret" strategies and open dilemmas for governments and businesses that will define economic policy in the coming decade: Technology, productivity and human capital; Sustained growth in the new economy will depend on strengthening productivity and human capital as technology and knowledge become central to value creation. Govts and businesses must navigate between different approaches to translating innovation into new sources of growth and ensuring its benefits are widely shared, pursuing coordinated or competition-led approaches to harness technology and prioritize redistribution or mobility-based strategies for economic inclusion.

Global cooperation and domestic capacity: Leveraging comparative advantage and diversification remain "no-regret" strategies that may enable expansion of economic opportunity and resilience. Yet, governments and businesses will need to balance global engagement with stronger domestic capacity, navigating between self-reliance and global integration strategies. Business environment and the role of government: In the new economy, reinforcing the fundamentals of economic policy – including credible institutions, high-quality infrastructure and macroeconomic stability – and strengthening multi-stakeholder alignment continue to be winning strategies. The role of government in economic transformation can range from minimal to more expansive, while policy-makers face hard choices to manage debt levels, shifting between greater fiscal prudence and forms of financial repression. Information technology services, advanced manufacturing, health and healthcare, and accommodation and leisure sectors are expected to drive growth over the next five years, with Asia, Europe and North America as key hotspots. Latin America and the Caribbean will see opportunities in the agriculture, mining and metals sectors.

Sustainability and economic policy: Focusing on the economic and societal benefits of green transition strategies is essential to unlocking long-term prosperity and resilience. Critical dilemmas around how to manage the costs and trade-offs of greener growth persist, with decision-makers navigating a range of investment-led and cost-led strategies. Demographic shifts and socioeconomic fragmentation are expected to create divergent growth trajectories, with ageing populations slowing growth in Eastern Asia and Europe, and younger populations supporting growth in the Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

A Pollution-free earth and our responsibility

The alarming situation that the entire world is facing today due to the loss of nature's balance is no longer just a concern for environmentalists or scientists; it has become a grave crisis for the very existence of humankind. The quality of air, water, and soil is deteriorating at an unprecedented rate, and its direct impact is being felt on our daily lives, health, and the overall global economy. The need to build a pollution-free world is no longer merely a moral responsibility or an ideal confined to the pages of books; it has now become the only means of survival. The comforts and modern technologies that we are excessively using today are exacting a definite and severe price in the form of environmental destruction. Rapid industrialization, uncontrolled use of vehicles, continuous production of non-biodegradable materials like plastic, and ruthless deforestation have drastically altered the natural state of the Earth. As a result of these irreversible changes, global warming, abnormal climate change, and pollution-related premature deaths have increased at an alarming rate. Merely becoming emotional about nature or posting a few lines on social media will not solve this deep-rooted problem; rather, it is essential to analyze it rationally, scientifically, and from a practical perspective to find a lasting solution. This environmental degradation did not occur overnight; it is the result of long-term human negligence, selfishness, and profit-driven activities. Therefore, to truly realize the concept of a pollution-free Earth, there must be a fundamental and strict transformation not only in our daily lifestyles but also in national, governmental, and global policies. Environmental accountability must be ensured behind every industrial and technological decision, and every individual in society must clearly define their stance. Ignoring the problem or blaming the government or others will never secure our future or that of the next generation, because pollution does not discriminate based on geographical boundaries, religion, or economic status. Accepting this harsh reality with humility and taking immediate, effective, and strict action has become the most urgent necessity of our time.

Recent research, credible reports, and scientific data have painted a frightening and disheartening picture of global pollution, clearly demonstrating how severe and uncontrolled the situation has become. For instance, according to the latest 2025–2026 data from IQAir, a Swiss air quality technology company, and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, air pollution has emerged as one of the biggest health threats not only in India but across the world. These reports indicate that India is among the most polluted countries globally, and nearly 100 percent of its population is forced to breathe air that exceeds the safe limits prescribed by the World Health Organization (i.e., more than 5 micrograms per cubic meter). Particularly in Delhi and the National Capital Region, the situation has become so severe that not a single day of completely healthy air quality was recorded last year. In regions such as Loni, Ghaziabad, and Begusarai, the abnormal



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

rise in PM2.5 levels has made daily life extremely difficult for residents. This increase in air pollution has reduced the average life expectancy of an Indian citizen by several years, surpassing the damage caused by malnutrition or contaminated water. Not only air pollution, but the condition of oceans and rivers is equally distressing and critical. Industrial waste, plastics, and chemical sub-

stances used in agriculture are continuously being discharged into water bodies, turning most rivers and marine ecosystems into vast drains. This pollution has caused severe damage to marine life, fish populations, and coral reefs, thereby weakening the Earth's overall climate regulation system. These statistics are not just numbers written on paper; they are living evidence of our collective failure and a stark warning for the future of humanity. If we continue to ignore these scientific facts and remain indifferent, the human race will soon have to pay an unavoidable and severe price, where survival itself may become a struggle.

According to the recently published Global Carbon Budget 2025 report, global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels have increased by 1.1 percent compared to previous levels, reaching a record of approximately 38.1 billion tons. When emissions from land-use changes and deforestation are included, the total rises to around 42.2 billion tons. This excessive and uncontrolled carbon emission has significantly increased the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, leading to an uncontrollable rise in global temperatures. The atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has now reached approximately 425.7 ppm, which is more than 52 percent higher than pre-industrial levels. These figures clearly indicate that the carbon budget required to limit global warming within 1.5 degrees Celsius is nearly exhausted. Major economic powers such as China, the United States, and India are key contributors to global emissions. The excessive and unplanned use of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas has raised the Earth's temperature to such a dangerous level that polar ice caps are melting rapidly, causing abnormal sea-level rise. Consequently, coastal regions and island nations face a serious risk of submergence in the near future. These scientific findings clearly establish that strict, scientific, and effective measures must be implemented immediately to reduce carbon emissions alongside economic development; otherwise, the Earth's climate system and ecosystem will collapse entirely. Any development that ignores environmental protection is essentially a form of long-term self-destruction.

The impact of pollution is not confined to external environmental changes; it has deeply affected the internal functioning of the human body, immunity, and even genetic structure. Medical research has repeatedly shown that



fine particulate matter like PM2.5 can penetrate the lungs and directly enter the bloodstream, damaging vital organs. This has led to a sharp increase in heart failure, strokes, respiratory diseases such as asthma, and various types of cancer. In pregnant women, exposure to polluted air and water has been found to hinder the physical and mental development of the fetus, resulting in weaker future generations. Water pollution is equally dangerous, as daily consumption of water contaminated with industrial waste and heavy metals like arsenic, mercury, and lead has led to a rise in severe kidney and liver diseases. Similarly, excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture has destroyed soil fertility and made our daily food toxic. The consumption of such contaminated food has gradually weakened human immunity and given rise to new diseases. This growing health crisis not only claims lives but also places immense pressure on the healthcare system and the national economy. Funds that should have been allocated for infrastructure development, poverty eradication, or education are now being spent on treating pollution-related illnesses. Therefore, the dream of economic progress driven solely by industrial growth is nothing more than an illusion. True and sustainable development is only possible when a nation's citizens are healthy and productive. Recognizing this reality, it is imperative to adopt a sustainable and health-oriented development model without delay.

In controlling pollution and protecting the environment, the role of governments, policy-makers, and large industries is of utmost importance, as no large-scale change is possible without strict laws and effective policies. Although initiatives like India's National Clean Air Programme have been introduced, actual data suggests that their full and effective implementation is still far from reality. Policies must not remain confined to paper; their strict and unbiased execution along with continuous monitoring must be ensured. International climate commitments should not be treated as diplomatic formalities but must be implemented with genuine intent. Governments must invest heavily in renewable energy infrastructure such as solar and wind power while gradually reducing dependence on fossil fuels. Industries must be subjected to strict emission limits, and violations should be met with strict

penalties without political compromise. In agriculture, excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides must be controlled, and organic farming practices should be promoted. Urban planning must prioritize green spaces and scientific waste management systems instead of unchecked construction. Environmental awareness must be deeply integrated into the education system from primary to university levels as a practical and essential subject. A nation that fails to protect its forests, rivers, and atmosphere cannot sustain its economic progress in the long run. Therefore, environmental protection must be treated as an integral part of nation-building, backed by strong political will, and strict action must be taken against environmental offenders.

The responsibility of protecting the environment cannot be shifted entirely to governments or international organizations; every individual must act as a responsible citizen. As consumers, our daily choices directly or indirectly impact the environment. Avoiding plastic, promoting reusable materials, and reducing energy wastage must become our basic duties. The less waste we generate, the lower the level of pollution in society. Using public transportation instead of private vehicles, adopting cycling, or switching to electric vehicles are effective ways to reduce carbon emissions. Conserving electricity at home and planting trees in our surroundings are essential responsibilities. Although these actions may seem simple, their collective impact can bring significant positive change when practiced by millions. It must be clearly understood that the fight against pollution is not limited to any country or community; it is a collective struggle for survival. The environment we live in today is a precious legacy left by our ancestors, and preserving it for future generations is our moral obligation. Development that destroys nature or reduces human life expectancy is not desirable. What we need is a system where humans and nature coexist in a balanced and sustainable manner. This issue must be addressed not with emotional sentiment but with a scientific, rational, and practical approach. Time is extremely limited; to match the rapid pace of climate change, we must act decisively and swiftly. If we fail to correct our mistakes in time and move towards building a greener and safer Earth, nature will not forgive us in the future.

The Guardrail of consensus: Why the 131st amendment fell short

The crushing defeat of the Constitution 131st Amendment Bill in 2026 marks a rare moment where the heavy machinery of a dominant central government hit a wall of its own making. For months, the air had been thick with the scent of an impending political earthquake, one that threatened to redraw the very lines of Indian democracy. But when the dust settled on the floor of the Lok Sabha, the numbers told a story that no amount of verbal maneuvering could mask. The government found itself short of the mandatory two-thirds majority, falling sixty votes shy of the threshold needed to fundamentally alter the representative landscape of the nation. It is a moment of profound significance because it serves as a reminder that our constitutional safeguards are not just ink on old parchment; they are active barriers against the whims of any single political entity that tries to move too fast without taking the whole country along for the ride.

The failure of this Bill was essentially a foregone conclusion for anyone who actually read the fine print instead of just listening to the speeches. The math was simple but the implications were heavy. Out of five hundred and twenty-eight members present and voting, two hundred and ninety-eight supported the move while two hundred and thirty stood firmly against it. To cross the finish line, the government needed three hundred and fifty-two votes. This gap represents more than just a legislative loss; it represents a fundamental lack of trust in the government's approach to the sensitive issue of delimitation. When the Bill collapsed, it took the companion Delimitation Bill and the Union Territories Laws Amendment Bill down with it. The government was forced to shelve the entire package, admitting that these pieces of legislation could not exist in isolation. This admission itself reveals the intertwined nature of the trap the government had tried to set.

At the heart of the storm was the controversial plan to expand the Lok Sabha to eight hundred and sixteen members. On the surface, an increase in seats sounds like a logical response to a growing population. But the devil stayed hidden in the details of how those seats would be distributed. The Home Minister attempted to soothe frayed nerves with a verbal guarantee, suggesting that southern states would see their presence increase in the same proportion as their current share. He even went so far as to offer a one-hour adjournment to redraft the Bill with a uniform fifty percent increase for every state as an official amendment. But the opposition was right to ask why this supposedly fair intent was missing from the actual text of the Bill in the first place.

The language presented to the House clearly mandated that delimitation proceed on the basis of the latest Census, which currently means the 2011 data. This path would have inevitably punished states in the south, east, and northeast for their success in population control, shifting the

balance of power even more heavily toward the Hindi heartland.

One of the most baffling aspects of this entire episode was the timing. The 2026-27 Census is already under way. Why was there such a frantic rush to push through a massive constitutional change based on old data when new, accurate figures are just around the corner? This haste gave the impression of a government trying to lock in a political advantage before the full reality of modern Indian demographics could be officially recorded.

Adding to the confusion was the decision to link the widely supported issue of women's reservation to this messy delimitation process. There is a broad, all-party consensus on giving women their due share in legislative bodies. By tying it to a controversial seat-redrawing exercise, the government used a popular cause as a shield for a much more divisive agenda. This smoke-and-mirrors tactic was a transparent attempt to divide the opposition, making a mockery of the parliamentary process and treating a serious constitutional change like a game of tactical chess.

The unity shown by the INDIA bloc during this vote was a significant turning point. Parties that often find themselves at odds on regional issues, such as the Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the Trinamool Congress, the Left, and the DMK, managed to find common ground. They saw through the promises and focused on the text of the law. Their floor coordination was a masterclass in how a focused opposition can act as a check on executive overreach. On the other side of the aisle, the behavior of the Telugu Desam Party and the AIADMK was strikingly naive. Both parties spoke in favor of the Bill, seemingly swayed by verbal assurances while ignoring the fact that their own states stood to lose significant influence. Under the Bill's own terms, Andhra Pradesh would have lost five seats and Tamil Nadu would have lost eleven. To trust a spoken promise over a written legislative mandate is a dangerous way to conduct politics, especially when the future of a region's representation is on the line.

This defeat provides a much-needed moment of reflection for the ruling establishment. The strategy of ramming through structural changes without building a genuine consensus has reached its limit. The path forward is now dictated by the very constitutional rules the government tried to bypass. It must now wait for the 2026-27 Census to reach its conclusion.

Once the data is in, the proper route involves referring the questions of delimitation and Lok Sabha expansion to a parliamentary committee. This is how democracy is supposed to function through deliberation, debate, and the seeking of a broad agreement that spans across geographic and political divides. The two-thirds threshold for constitutional amendments is a deliberate hurdle designed to ensure that no single party can rewrite the rules of the game to suit its own interests. Today, that hurdle did exactly what the

founders of the Republic intended it to do.

The narrative of a "ramrod approach" failing is a lesson in the limits of political will. While the government may have the numbers for ordinary legislation, the Constitution demands a higher level of cooperation for things that touch the soul of the federal structure. By trying to rush the process, the government actually delayed the progress of women's reservation, a goal that everyone claims to want. The lesson here is that transparency is not an optional extra in a democracy; it is the foundation of trust. If the government truly intended for a proportional increase in seats that protected the interests of all states, that should have been the first sentence of the Bill, not a desperate offer made during a floor debate to save a sinking ship.

The focus must return to a fair and data-driven process. The demographic shifts in India are real and they present a complex challenge for representation. Southern states have invested decades in education, healthcare, and family planning, contributing significantly to the nation's economic progress. To diminish their political voice as a reward for their success would be a historic injustice. Any expansion of the Parliament must balance the need for population-based representation with the need to maintain the federal equilibrium. This balance cannot be achieved through clever wording or verbal guarantees in a heated house. It requires a slow, methodical, and inclusive dialogue that respects the diversity of the Indian union.

The collapse of the 131st Amendment Bill is a victory for the spirit of federalism. It shows that the states are not merely administrative units to be moved around on a map but are the constituent pillars of the nation. The government's attempt to use "smoke and mirrors" failed because the reality of the numbers was too stark to ignore. Moving forward, the only viable way to implement such far-reaching changes is to abandon the politics of confusion and embrace the politics of consensus. The Constitution is a living document, but it is also a protective one. It protects the minority from the majority and the periphery from the center. Today, those protections stood firm, ensuring that the future of Indian representation will be decided by the people's actual numbers and their collective will, rather than by a hurried legislative maneuver.

The journey toward a larger Parliament and a more inclusive one that features women in their rightful place continues, but it must now take the long and honest road. The shortcut was blocked, and for the health of Indian democracy, that is exactly what needed to happen. The government should take this chastening experience as an opportunity to reset its relationship with the opposition and the states. By doing so, it can turn a legislative defeat into a democratic victory, building a future where every part of India feels seen, heard, and fairly represented in the halls of power. The era of the ramrod approach has met its end at the gates of the Constitution, and the country is better for it.

Student suicides: Burden of dreams or failure of the education system?

The recent incidents at the National Institute of Technology, Kurukshetra—where four students died by suicide within just two months—are not merely a tragedy of a single institution. They represent a profound indictment of Indian society as a whole, of our education system, and of our collective insensitivity. These events compel us to ask: what circumstances push some of the nation's brightest young minds to give up on life? No student who has endured intense competition to reach such prestigious institutions chooses death lightly. Such a decision emerges only when darkness seems to surround them from every direction. This darkness is not merely personal—it is the cumulative outcome of social, familial, and institutional failures. The pressing question remains: are these suicides the result of the unbearable burden of dreams, or the failure of the system?

Today's youth, often described as the future of India, are under unprecedented psychological pressure—crushed beneath competition and expectations. In education hubs like Kota, dozens of students die by suicide every year. These tragedies are often reduced to statistics, yet behind every number lies a living dream, a struggling family, and shattered hopes. Rising cases in cities such as Kota, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Chennai clearly signal deep-rooted flaws within our education system. This is not merely academic pressure—it is a crisis of mindset, where success is equated with life itself, and failure with its end. According to data presented by the Ministry of Education in Parliament, 98 students died by suicide in higher educational institutions between 2018 and 2023. The highest number of cases occurred in premier institutions such as the IITs, followed by NITs and central universities. These figures challenge the myth that only academically weak students suffer from mental stress. In reality, it is often the most talented and sensitive students who experience the greatest pressure—driven by high self-expectations and an inability to accept failure.

The problem is not limited to institutions alone. It also lies in a social mindset that defines success in narrow terms. From an early age,

children are conditioned to believe that life's sole purpose is to succeed in competitive examinations. Parents invest beyond their means—sending children to coaching centers, taking loans, and projecting their unfulfilled aspirations onto them. Under this immense burden, children begin to see themselves not as individuals, but as "projects." When that project fails, they feel their very existence has lost meaning. The structure of our education system also contributes significantly to this crisis. It imparts knowledge, but fails to teach the art of living. Students are taught how to solve mathematical equations, but not how to cope with life's challenges. They memorize laws of physics, but are not guided on maintaining emotional balance. Consequently, when confronted with real-life difficulties, they often break down.

Equally concerning is the changing nature of the teacher-student relationship. Earlier, teachers were not just educators but mentors and guardians. Today, this relationship has become largely formal. Many educators confine their role to completing the syllabus, rarely engaging with students' emotional struggles or mental health concerns. This growing distance deepens students' sense of isolation. It is paradoxical that a country known globally for its philosophy of balanced living and non-violence is witnessing a rise in such self-destructive tendencies within its educational institutions. These disturbing incidents have raised serious concerns among policymakers and society alike. While there is growing awareness, the question remains: will there be meaningful action?

There is an urgent need for structural reforms in higher educational institutions to reduce student stress. Institutions must establish systems that actively engage with distressed students—offering continuous support, fostering hope, and promoting positivity. Permanent counseling frameworks, involving trained psychologists and mental health experts, should be an integral part of campus life. The demand by Raja Sabha MP John Brittas for government intervention is a welcome step. However, forming committees alone cannot resolve the crisis. Committees may submit reports, but they cannot

bring back lost lives. What is required is a deeper engagement with the root causes and the implementation of long-term, sustainable solutions.

It would also be inadequate to view rising student suicides solely as a mental health issue. This is a broader societal crisis involving education systems, family structures, social expectations, and individual psychology. We must acknowledge that we live in a society where the blind race for success has overshadowed human sensitivity. Everyone aspires to move ahead, but few pause to consider those left behind. The solution cannot be limited to policy changes; it requires a social movement. First and foremost, we must redefine the purpose of education. It should not merely aim at employment, but at building balanced and resilient individuals. Mental health education must become an essential part of academic curricula. Students must be taught that failure is not the end of life, but the beginning of a new journey.

Secondly, parents must transform their approach. They must realize that their children are more important than their achievements. Instead of burdening them with expectations, they should encourage them to discover and pursue their own aspirations.

Thirdly, educational institutions must take greater responsibility. They should focus not only on academic excellence but also on students' emotional and psychological well-being. Every institution must have a robust counseling system where students can freely share their concerns. Teachers, too, should be trained to identify behavioral changes and intervene at the right time. Finally, society as a whole must rediscover its sensitivity. We must understand that every life is invaluable—far more precious than any measure of success. We need to create an environment where young people can pursue their dreams without fear, and where even failure is met with dignity.

If we fail to act decisively, this crisis will only deepen. Every suicide is not just the loss of an individual, but a reflection of societal failure. The time has come to acknowledge this failure and work collectively to address it. Only then can we steer our youth away from this tragic path and guide them toward a brighter, more hopeful future.

AUTHOR

By: Lalit Garg

The gender quota and the federal balance

By: Satyabrata Borah

The intersection of gender justice and federal representation in India has rarely been as fraught with tension as it is in the current legislative moment. With the convening of a special Parliament sitting to discuss the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill of 2026 alongside a new Delimitation Bill, the Union government is presenting a vision for the future that is as much about the mechanics of power as it is about the empowerment of women. On the surface, the move seeks to finally operationalize the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, the landmark 106th Amendment of 2023 that promised a one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. While that promise was met with broad public approval, the fine print contained a significant caveat: the reservation would only take effect after a fresh Census was conducted and a subsequent delimitation exercise was completed. This coupling of women's rights with the redrawing of electoral boundaries has created a political landscape where the aspirations of half the population are being used as a vehicle for a radical transformation of India's parliamentary map.

The timing of these developments is not accidental. For years, the decennial Census, a cornerstone of Indian administration since the late nineteenth century, remained in a state of unprecedented limbo. Originally scheduled for 2021, the exercise was pushed back repeatedly. While the initial delays were attributed to the global health crisis of COVID-19, the reasons for the continued postponement through 2022, 2023, and 2024 remained notably vague. The government eventually signaled that the Census would finally commence in 2026. This specific date is the key that unlocks the broader strategy at play. According to the existing constitutional framework, the freeze on the number of seats allocated to each State in the Lok Sabha was tied to the 1971 Census figures. That freeze was intended to last until the first Census conducted after the year 2026. If the Census had been held on its regular schedule in 2021, the subsequent delimitation would have had to wait for the 2031 data. By shifting the Census to 2026, the government has effectively bypassed a decade of waiting, bringing the prospect of a massive seat reallocation into the immediate future.

This legislative bundling suggests that the noble cause of women's reservation is acting as a palatable front for a much more controversial process. Delimitation is not merely a technical adjustment of boundaries to account for population growth. In the Indian context, it is a high stakes rebalancing of federal power. Since the 1970s, different regions of India have followed vastly different demographic trajectories. The southern and some western States have been remarkably successful in im-

plementing family planning and population control measures, often in line with Union government directives. These States have also seen significant gains in education, healthcare, and economic productivity. Conversely, many States in the northern heartland have seen their populations continue to grow at a much higher rate. If the Lok Sabha seats are redistributed strictly according to current population figures, the northern States stand to gain a massive number of representatives, while the southern States will see their relative influence in the national Parliament diminish significantly.

The political implications of this shift are profound. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) finds its primary strength and electoral dominance in the northern and central belts of the country.

By accelerating the delimitation timeline, the government is moving toward a parliamentary structure that inherently favors its own geographical strongholds. The southern States, where the BJP has historically struggled to find a foothold, view this development with deep apprehension. They see a future where their success in social development is penalized by a loss of political voice. The concern is that a Union government with an overwhelming majority derived from a specific geographic region might become less sensitive to the unique cultural, linguistic, and economic needs of the rest of the country. This creates a friction point where the principle of "one person, one vote" comes into direct conflict with the principle of "federal equilibrium."

Using women's reservation as the catalyst for this change adds a layer of moral complexity to the debate. No political party wants to be seen as opposing the empowerment of women. By tying the 33 percent quota to the delimitation process, the government has made it nearly impossible for the opposition to contest the latter without appearing to obstruct the former. It is a strategic masterstroke that places the burden of delay on those who seek to protect the federal status quo. If the opposition asks for the decoupling of the two issues, they are told that reservation cannot be implemented fairly without updated population data. If they ask for the reservation to be implemented immediately based on current seat counts, they are met with technical and constitutional hurdles. The result is a legislative package that moves forward as a single, indivisible unit, carrying with it the potential to reshape the Indian Republic for generations.

The human element of this transition is often lost in the talk of seat counts and constitutional amendments. Representation is about more than just numbers; it is about the feeling of belonging to a national project. For a voter in Tamil Nadu or Kerala, the prospect of their State losing relative power in the Lok Sabha feels like a breach of the social contract. They have

contributed disproportionately to the national exchequer and followed national policies on population, only to find that their reward is a smaller seat at the table. On the other hand, a voter in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar might argue that their sheer numbers entitle them to a greater say in how the country is run, and that denying them that representation is a violation of democratic norms. These are not just legal arguments; they are emotional and cultural ones that touch on the very identity of the Indian citizen.

The 131st Amendment Bill of 2026 represents a pivotal moment where these competing visions of India collide. The government argues that it is simply fulfilling a long-standing promise to the women of India and that the 2026 Census is a logical administrative necessity. They frame the move as an act of decolonizing the administrative calendar and bringing representation in line with modern realities. The critics see a "reservation ruse," a clever way to bypass the protections that have kept the Indian union stable for fifty years. They point out that the 106th Amendment could have been implemented using the existing 543 seats, with the quota applied to the current distribution. The insistence on waiting for a new Census and a new delimitation is, in their eyes, proof that the empowerment of women is being held hostage to a broader partisan agenda.

The role of the Census in this drama cannot be overstated. A Census is meant to be a neutral, scientific gathering of data that informs policy and resource allocation. When its timing becomes a matter of political convenience, the integrity of the data itself can come under scrutiny. The delay since 2021 has already left a gap in our understanding of the country's changing needs. From food security to urban planning, every aspect of governance relies on accurate population figures. By making the 2026 Census the trigger for a controversial seat reallocation, the government has turned a statistical exercise into a political lightning rod. The quality of the data gathered during the 2026-27 period will be essential, but the shadow of its political utility will loom large over the entire process.

As the debate unfolds in Parliament, the focus will likely remain on the rhetoric of Nari Shakti, or woman power. The images of women leaders celebrating the quota will be a powerful tool for the government's communication strategy. It is a compelling narrative that resonates with the aspirations of millions of young Indian women who want to see themselves reflected in the halls of power. This narrative serves to soften the blow of the more technical and potentially divisive aspects of the Delimitation Bill. It creates a sense of historical inevitability, making any criticism of the larger package seem like an attempt to turn back the clock on

gender progress.



The federal challenge remains the most significant hurdle. India is a union of States, and the stability of that union depends on a sense of fairness between the various regions. If the northern States gain an overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha, the incentive for the Union government to build consensus across the country might diminish. We could see a shift toward a more centralized and majoritarian form of governance that prioritizes the interests of the heartland over the periphery. This would have implications for everything from GST revenue sharing to the promotion of languages and the management of natural resources. The delicate balance that has allowed India to remain a diverse and functional democracy is being tested by this new legislative push.

The 131st Amendment Bill also raises questions about the internal dynamics of political parties. Implementing a 33 percent quota for women will require a massive shift in how candidates are selected and how political careers are built. If this shift happens at the same time that hundreds of new seats are being added to the Lok Sabha in specific regions, the party hierarchies will undergo a period of intense volatility. The government may see this as an opportunity to refresh the political class and bring in a new generation of leaders who are more aligned with its vision. For the established political families and regional power brokers, it is a moment of existential threat.

The 2026-27 Census will be the largest administrative undertaking in the history of the world. Its success or failure will define the next decade of Indian governance. If the process is seen as transparent and fair, it could provide the foundation for a more representative and equitable India. If it is perceived as a partisan tool, it could deepen the fault lines that already exist within the country. The bundling of the Census, delimitation, and women's reservation has ensured that the stakes could not be higher. Every citizen has a vested interest in the outcome, as it will determine not just who represents them, but how much their vote is worth in the grand scheme of national power.

Looking at the broader trajectory of Indian politics, this move fits into a pattern of bold, transformative actions that seek to break with the past. The government frames its policies as a departure

from the "slow and indecisive" governance of previous eras. By moving forward with delimitation now, they are setting a course for the next fifty years. They are betting that the promise of women's empowerment will be strong enough to carry the weight of the federal restructuring. It is a gamble that relies on the belief that a more populous north should naturally hold the reins of the country, and that the south will eventually find a way to adapt to its diminished legislative role.

The conversation around the 131st Amendment Bill needs to move beyond the simple binary of for or against. It is possible to be a fervent supporter of women's reservation while also being deeply concerned about the timing and method of delimitation. It is possible to acknowledge the need for an updated Census while questioning why it was delayed until it could serve a specific political purpose. These are the nuances that a healthy democracy must navigate.

The rush to pass the bills as a single package avoids this nuanced discussion and forces a choice that many find uncomfortable. The impact on the southern States is perhaps the most critical long term concern. These States have been the engines of India's economic growth and social progress. If they feel marginalized by the new parliamentary arithmetic, it could lead to a sense of alienation that is difficult to heal. The federal compact is not just a legal document; it is a promise of mutual respect and shared prosperity. If that promise is seen to be broken, the consequences could manifest in ways that are hard to predict today. From demands for greater financial autonomy to more intense regionalism, the ripples of this seat reallocation will be felt far beyond the halls of Parliament.

The women of India deserve a seat at the table. Their entry into the Lok Sabha and Assemblies in greater numbers will undoubtedly bring new perspectives and priorities to the national discourse. Issues like childcare, maternal health, workplace safety, and gender-based violence might finally receive the attention they deserve. This is a goal that is worth pursuing with vigor. The tragedy of the current situation is that this goal has been entangled with a process that risks dividing the country along regional lines. Instead of being a moment of national unity

and celebration, the implementation of women's reservation has become a source of suspicion and debate. As the 2026 Parliament sitting progresses, the nation will be watching to see how these tensions are managed. Will there be room for compromise? Could the women's reservation be unlinked from the delimitation process to allow for immediate implementation? Or will the government use its majority to push through the entire package, setting the stage for a new era of northern dominance? These are the questions that will define the political atmosphere for the next several years. The 131st Amendment Bill is more than just a change to the Constitution; it is a blueprint for a different kind of India.

The humanized reality of this policy is that millions of women are waiting for a chance to lead, while millions of citizens in the south are worried about their future voice. These two realities are being forced together in a way that makes it difficult to address one without affecting the other. The "reservation ruse" mentioned by critics captures this sense of a double-edged sword. The light of progress in gender representation is being cast in a way that creates a shadow over federal representation. Navigating this path requires a level of statesmanship that prioritizes national cohesion over short term electoral gain.

The story of the 131st Amendment Bill and the companion Delimitation Bill is a story about the soul of Indian democracy. It is about how a country of over a billion people decides to divide power and responsibility. It is about whether we can honor the achievements of the states that have progressed while also respecting the numbers of the states that are still growing. And it is about whether the empowerment of women can be a standalone victory or if it must always be part of a larger, more complicated political bargain. As the 2026 Census approaches and the new legislative framework takes shape, the answers to these questions will become clear. The path we choose today will echo through the decades, shaping the life of every Indian.

The government's decision to move the Census to 2026-27 is a masterclass in administrative timing. It effectively resets the clock, making the 2031 Census irrelevant for the current round of delimitation. This move allows the BJP to leverage its current strength to lock in a favorable parliamentary structure before any potential shifts in the political winds. For the ruling party, it is a logical and strategic move to ensure their vision for the country remains dominant. For the opposition and the southern States, it is a move that feels like a breach of faith. The lack of a clear explanation for the five year delay in the Census only adds to the sense that the schedule was manipulated for political ends.

The success of the Nari Shakti

Vandan Adhiniyam will be judged not just by the number of women who enter Parliament, but by the health of the democracy they enter. If they enter a Parliament that is deeply divided along regional lines and where the federal balance has been tilted, their ability to effect change may be hampered by broader political instability. A truly empowered woman in leadership needs a stable and fair system to work within. By tying reservation to a contentious delimitation, the government may be handing women a seat at a table that is already starting to crack under the pressure of regional resentment.

The journey toward 2026 and beyond will be one of the most significant periods in India's post-independence history. The combination of a new Census, a major seat reallocation, and the introduction of a gender quota represents a complete overhaul of the electoral system. It is a moment of great risk and great potential. The challenge for the people of India is to ensure that the quest for a more representative Parliament does not come at the cost of national unity. We must find a way to empower women and respect the demographic realities of the north without silencing the successful and vibrant voices of the south. This is the task that lies before us, and the 131st Amendment Bill is just the beginning of that long and difficult conversation.

The focus on the year 2026 as the threshold for change has created a sense of urgency. The government is moving with a speed that suggests they want to finalize these changes before the next general election. This haste can be seen as a sign of confidence, but it can also be interpreted as a desire to bypass the deep and sustained public debate that such a fundamental change deserves. A transformation of this magnitude should ideally be the result of a national consensus, not just a legislative maneuver. The human impact of these changes will be felt in every village and every city, and the people deserve to be part of the conversation in a way that goes beyond just watching the proceedings in Delhi.

The 131st Amendment Bill and its companion Delimitation Bill are not just pieces of paper. They are the instruments through which the future of India is being written. Whether that future is one of greater equality and harmony, or one of deepened divisions and regional grievances, remains to be seen. The coming months will be a test of India's democratic institutions and its ability to balance the competing needs of its diverse population. As the debate rages on, the hope remains that the spirit of the Constitution, which seeks to secure justice, liberty, and equality for all its citizens, will be the guiding light. The empowerment of women is a noble goal, and it deserves to be achieved in a way that strengthens, rather than weakens, the federal fabric of the nation.

Keep hydrated this summer

By: Shahnaz Husain

Does your skin feel tight, dull, or rough with the arrival of summer? That's often a sign your skin is losing moisture faster than it can retain it.

Heat, sun exposure, and long hours in air-conditioned spaces can quietly dehydrate the skin, affecting its texture and natural glow.

Dehydration leads to flakiness, wrinkles, itching, and skin infections. The tricky part is that your skin can look oily even when it's dehydrated underneath. Dehydration can affect many bodily processes, including digestion, immune system support, and temperature regulation.

Dehydration isn't just about feeling thirsty – it can affect your mood, focus, skin, and vital organ functions. The key to avoiding it lies in knowing how to hydrate your body consistently, especially when the temperature soars. Thirst is often a late indicator of dehydration.

Listen to your body - if you're feeling thirsty or sluggish, you might already be running low on hydration. Mild fluid loss can mess with how you feel. There's no magic number when it comes to how much water you need daily - it all depends on your activity level, health conditions, height, weight, gender, and other factors. Experts recommend drinking 8-10 glasses of water daily for healthy adults.

Pregnant women should drink 10 glasses of water daily, and breastfeeding women should drink 12 glasses. Kids and teens should drink 6 to 8 cups of water a day.

Drink a glass of water every 2 hours to maintain hydration.

Most people should drink water, not sports drinks, during their workouts. Sports drinks may be useful for people doing intense exercise for a long time, especially if they're sweating a lot. But for non-athletes, sports drinks are simply another sugary beverage.

Water doesn't have any added sugars or calories in it, which makes it a great beverage to have throughout the day.

Adding lime, cucumber, or mint makes it easier to keep sipping throughout the day as the flavour encourages increased fluid intake compared to plain water.

Infusing water with lemon, lime, cucumber, and mint is an easy way to add nutrients and a burst of natural flavour. It's also a tasty way to stay hydrated, support digestion, and promote alkalinity while adding vitamins, antioxidants, and a natural cooling effect. It's an extra refreshing way to stay hydrated and a cooling alternative when it's too hot to sip on herbal tea.

The hydrating effects of cucumber mint water contribute to glowing, healthy skin. Cucumbers are composed of approximately 95-96% water, making them one of nature's most hydrating foods.

Cucumbers contain vitamins C and K, which help reduce skin inflammation and promote collagen production. Keep water within reach. Carry a reusable water bottle everywhere and use it - refill it often so hydration stays on your radar.

Water-rich fruits are rich in natural sugars, fibre, and antioxidants. They are not only an excellent source of hydration but also protect the body against damage caused by heat and sun exposure. Many fruits naturally contain high amounts of water along with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Including hydrating summer fruits such as watermelon (92%), strawberries (91%), cantaloupe (90%), and peaches (89%) not only provides essential nutrients like vitamin C, vitamin A, potassium, and antioxidants, helping with hydration, immunity, and overall energy.

Adding a variety of colourful water-rich fruits ensures that you get different nutrients to stay healthy all season long. Incorporating hydrating fruits into daily meals just requires

minor dietary changes to add these fruits to your routine. You may prepare fresh fruit salads for breakfast or snacks, add fruits to smoothies or yogurt bowls, and consume chilled fruit slices during mid-day breaks. Key strategies include adding berries or bananas to morning oatmeal/yoghurt, swapping processed snacks for apples or citrus, and adding sliced fruit to salads. Eat whole fruits. However, if you drink fruit juice, keep your serving to 1/2 cup, and be sure it's labeled 100%. Skip fruit drinks, punches or fruit cocktails. They are often loaded with excess sodium and/or added sugar. Be sure to take a wide variety of water-rich fruits with different types and colours since they offer different nutrients. Always keep a good stock of fresh fruit in your refrigerator so that you are always prepared to eat healthily. Develop a habit of eating two servings of water-rich fruit daily.

Choose Coconut Water or Natural Electrolyte Drinks for hydration during this summer season.

Electrolytes are minerals that conduct an electrical charge when mixed with water. They help regulate a variety of your body's most essential functions, including nerve signalling, pH balance, muscle contraction, and hydration. Coconut water replenishes lost electrolytes and is a natural alternative to energy drinks, making it one of the top hydration tips for tropical climates.

Coconut water is best for fluid replenishment after light activity. It offers a hydration boost that performs somewhere between water and traditional sports drinks or electrolyte solutions.

Unsweetened coconut water also contains naturally occurring sugars—about 7 to 10 grams per cup.

Coconut water, milk, fruit juices, and smoothies are high in electrolytes. Drinks with electrolytes may help you rehydrate after intense exercise, vomiting, or diarrhoea. You can also make your own drink at home.

Women's reservation in parliament: Constitutional need or political strategy?

By: Dr. Priyanka Saurabh

The question of women's reservation in Parliament is deeply intertwined with the development and inclusive nature of Indian democracy. Since independence, it has been expected that all sections of society should receive equal and equitable representation in democratic institutions, but the reality is that women's participation has remained limited for a long time. Against this backdrop, the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, passed in 2023, known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Act, emerged as a historic initiative. This Act provides for the reservation of one-third of the total seats in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Delhi Legislative Assembly for women, including proportionate sub-reservations for women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This provision was made by adding new Articles 330A, 332A, and 334A to the Indian Constitution, which not only define the scope of reservation but also determine its duration and implementation process.

However, the most significant and controversial feature of this Act is that its implementation is linked to the next census and the subsequent delimitation process. This provision has given rise to a significant debate as to whether linking women's reservations to delimitation is a true constitutional requirement or a deliberate political strategy. The answer to this question is not simple, as it involves a combination of constitutional interpretation, political interests, and administrative feasibility.

From a constitutional perspective, Parliament has the power to make special provisions for women under Article 15(3). Furthermore, Articles 82 and 170 provide for delimitation of seats in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies, based on the census. Article 334A, added to the Nari Shakti Vandan Act, specifies that seats reserved for women will be rotated after each delimitation. This arrangement appears logical at first glance, as it ensures that the benefits of reservation reach different regions equally and are not limited to a single region.

Yet, the question remains whether it was necessary to necessarily link this entire

process to delimitation. If we look at the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, implemented at the local body level, reservation for women was implemented immediately, even though the delimitation process occurred later. This suggests that delimitation is not a mandatory condition for implementing women's reservation, but rather was added for administrative convenience. Furthermore, several women's reservation bills introduced between 1996 and 2010 did not contain such a condition, indicating that this provision was added later in a specific political context.

Analyzing this provision from a political perspective, it becomes clear that linking women's reservation with delimitation provides a strategic advantage to ruling parties. Women's representation in the current Lok Sabha is around 15 percent, while in state assemblies it is even lower. If 33 percent reservation were implemented immediately, a large number of seats held by current male MPs would be affected, which would naturally lead to political discontent and protests. This problem can be mitigated by increasing the number of seats through delimitation, as new seats can be reserved for women without directly displacing existing MPs.

Furthermore, the delimitation process itself is a politically sensitive issue, as it impacts the balance of representation between different states. Several states in South India have expressed concern that, despite their success in population control, their number of seats may be relatively reduced after delimitation, while northern states may gain more. In this context, linking women's reservations to delimitation appears to be part of a broader political equation, attempting to balance the interests of different regions and classes.

Another important issue is that the Act does not provide a separate sub-reservation for women from the Other Backward Classes. This is considered a significant shortcoming from a social justice perspective, as it may limit the benefits of reservation primarily to women from relatively privileged classes. Furthermore, this provision does not apply to the Rajya Sabha and Legislative Councils, limiting the opportunity to increase women's representation in the upper houses.

Another practical aspect of this entire system is that the actual benefits of women's reservation are being delayed due to delays in the census and delimitation process. Under current circumstances, it is expected that this reservation will only become effective after the 2029 general elections or later. This means that the women for whom this Act became a source of hope will still have to wait for their rights. This situation makes the question even more relevant whether such a delay is truly necessary or could have been avoided.

Nevertheless, the positive aspects of this Act cannot be ignored. This is the first time that such a large number of reservations have been made for women at the level of Parliament and Legislative Assemblies. This will not only increase women's political participation but will also ensure that their perspectives and experiences are considered in the policy-making process. The positive results of women's reservations have already been seen at the Panchayat level, where women have not only demonstrated administrative capabilities but have also made significant contributions in the areas of education, health, and social welfare.

Ultimately, it can be said that linking women's reservations to delimitation is a complex decision, combining constitutional provisions, administrative requirements, and political strategies. It would be inappropriate to call it a purely constitutional obligation, as alternative solutions were possible. However, calling it solely a political strategy would be a one-sided approach, as it also has some practical and logical basis. The reality is that this decision is a combined result of both elements.

It is essential for Indian democracy to embrace the values of equality and justice not only in theory but also in practice. Women's reservation is an important step in this direction, but its effectiveness will depend on how promptly and fairly it is implemented. If it is unnecessarily delayed, it could deviate from its original purpose. Therefore, it is timely to develop a clear and time-bound roadmap for the implementation of this Act, so that women can enjoy their rights without delay and Indian democracy can become truly inclusive and representative.

Middle East crises divide Europe with rising fuel costs and tensions over Israel policy

LUXEMBOURG, April 21: Buoyed by the election of a new leader in Hungary, Europe's top diplomats are meeting in Luxembourg to forge plans of action on multiple crises from the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian hybrid attacks, and economic instability as the war in Iran drives up energy prices worldwide.

But it is the European Union's policy toward Israel — and how to pressure Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as security deteriorates in the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the occupied West Bank, as well as in Lebanon — that is dividing the 27-nation bloc.

The EU has an Association Agreement, signed in 2000, that regulates trade and cooperation with Israel. Spain, Slovenia and Ireland have proposed suspending it in total, a move which likely does not have the unanimous support among EU nations required.

However, a partial suspension targeting just the trade aspects could have enough political support, said Spanish Foreign Minister José Al-Bares.

"The European Union has to say today very clearly to Israel that a change is needed," he said.

The EU has found indications Israel had violated that agreement in its military campaign in Gaza.



Irish Foreign Minister Helen McEntee said the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Israel's recent adoption of the death penalty for some Palestinians, and ongoing fighting in Lebanon should push EU nations to ramp up pressure on Israel.

"We need to act. We need to make sure that our fundamental values are protected. And we need to make sure that any agreement that we have with any other country that country is fulfilling and upholding their obligations," McEntee said.

Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard said that France and Sweden have brought forward

a plan to curtail trade with Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Lebanon's Prime Minister Nawaf Salam spoke at the meeting in Luxembourg about the fragile ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel, disarming the Hezbollah militant group, and the need for EU assistance for the war-torn nation.

"Lebanon today needs its European partners more than ever," Salam posted on X on Tuesday.

While now mainly headquartered in Brussels, EU institutions are also spread out in northern Europe like the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany and

the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. Lawmakers, diplomats and officials regularly move between the cities for meetings.

The Luxembourg meeting comes a day after 60 nations sent representatives to a Palestinian peace conference in Brussels with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohamed Mustafa and Bulgarian diplomat Nikolay Mladenov, who heads the Board of Peace set up by US President Donald Trump.

Meanwhile, one of the loudest dissenting voices within the EU is shortly leaving office.

Hungary's outgoing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán routinely obstructed EU action on issues ranging from support for Ukraine in its war against Russia's invasion to sanctions on Israelis accused of violent extremism.

The EU's foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said that Orbán's defeat by pro-European opposition leader Péter Magyar in Hungary's recent election could accelerate action.

"A lot of issues ... have been blocked" by Hungary, she said. "We are reopening the discussions and hope that we get a positive result."

On Iran, EU diplomats called for diplomacy as a ceasefire struck between Tehran and Washington was set to expire Tuesday.

Kallas called on the ceasefire to be extended "until there is a diplomatic solution."

"The ceasefire is very fragile, but diplomacy should have a chance," she said.

Germany's foreign minister called on Iran to send negotiators to Islamabad to meet with US Vice President JD Vance.

"Iran should now take this outstretched hand in the interest of its own people," Johann Wadepuhl said.

The war in Iran has throttled global oil and gas markets and rattled the EU as a major importer of energy.

While foreign ministers meet in Luxembourg, EU transportation ministers discussed on video conference how to protect consumers at home and at the pump after the head of the International Energy Agency warned that Europe has "maybe six weeks" supply left of jet fuel.

Since the war between Israel, the US and Iran started, fighting has killed at least 3,375 people in Iran and more than 2,290 in Lebanon. Additionally, 23 people have died in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states. Fifteen Israeli soldiers in Lebanon and 13 US service members throughout the region have been killed. (AP)

China denies links to Iranian cargo ship seized by US in Gulf

BEIJING, April 21: China on Tuesday denied any links to the Iranian cargo ship seized by the US in the Gulf allegedly containing chemical materials to manufacture missiles.

"To my knowledge, this is a foreign-flagged container ship. China opposes any malicious linking and hype," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a press briefing here reacting to allegations by former US envoy to the UN Nikki Haley.

In a post on X, Haley claimed that the ship seized by the US was headed from China to Iran and is linked to chemical shipments for missiles. "It refused repeated orders to stop. Another reminder that China is helping prop up Iran's regime - a reality that can't be ignored," Haley said.

A US naval ship enforcing the blockade of ships going to Iranian ports fired at the cargo ship when it reportedly failed to heed calls to stop. The US Marines later boarded the ship and seized it.

The Iranian military warned that it would respond to the US' action against the container ship.

"The 'aggressor United States,' by violating the ceasefire and engaging in maritime highway robbery, attacked an Iranian commercial vessel in the waters of the Sea of Oman," CNN quoted Iran's military as saying.

The Iranian military said that the US had destroyed the ship's navigational equipment and deployed troops on the deck, "effectively carrying out an act of aggression against it."

Following the incident, Iran also declined to confirm its participation in the second round of peace talks with the US in Pakistan this week. Last week, China denied aiding Iran's military with defence and satellite support.

US President Donald Trump also threatened to impose heavy tariffs against China if it supplied weapons to Iran.

Responding to allegations, Guo last week said that China always acts prudently and responsibly on the export of military products, and exercises strict control in accordance with China's laws and regulations on export control and due international obligations.

On the tariff threat, he said, "If the US goes ahead with the tariff hikes on China on the basis of these accusations, China will respond with countermeasures."

China, a major importer of Iranian oil, shares strategic and defence ties with Iran. Also, a CNN report earlier this month said US intelligence indicates that China is preparing to deliver new air defence systems to Iran, including shoulder-fired anti-air missile systems known as MANPADs. (PTI)

Pak further extends airspace ban on Indian airlines till May 24

ISLAMABAD, April 21: Pakistan on Tuesday further extended the ban on Indian aircraft from using its airspace for another month.

Pakistan has kept its airspace shut to Indian flights since April 24, 2025, a move that reportedly caused a loss of billions of rupees to the Indian airlines.

The Pakistan Airports Authority said in the Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) that "all Indian-registered, leased, commercial and military aircraft will remain barred from Pakistani airspace until 5 am on May 24, 2026".

The notice was issued days before the previous one was set to expire on April 24.

Pakistan closed its airspace for Indian airlines following tension in the wake of the Pahalgalam terror attack, for which New Delhi blamed Islamabad.

Pakistan, however, rejected the allegations and also called for a transparent inquiry.

India, in response, also closed its airspace to Pakistani airlines. Pakistan has imposed such restrictions on India for the first time.

The ban has hit commercial Indian airlines badly as they used Pakistani airspace to operate most of their flights to and from different Indian cities to Gulf countries in particular.

Airspace closures were previously enacted during the 1999 Kargil conflict and the 2019 Pulwama crisis. (PTI)

Pak successfully test-fires locally developed anti-ship weapon system

ISLAMABAD, April 21: The Pakistan Navy successfully test-fired an indigenously developed anti-ship weapon system, which can neutralise sea-based threats at an extended range, the military said on Tuesday.

The Taimoor air-launched cruise missile is an example of "powerful demonstration of precision strike capability and operational readiness," the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the military, said in a statement. "The Air-Launched Cruise Missile executed its mission with exceptional precision, validating Pakistan Navy's combat capability to detect, target and decisively neutralise enemy sea-based threats at extended ranges," it said.

It said that the demonstration marks a pivotal elevation of national defence capability, further strengthening Pakistan Armed Forces' multi-dimensional coordinated strike posture and capabilities in the conventional domain.

"Pakistan Navy stands resolute in its commitment to safeguard the nation's maritime interests and sovereign waters," the statement read. (PTI)

China says three of its ships crossed Strait of Hormuz; thanks 'relevant parties'

BEIJING, March 31: China on Tuesday said three of its ships carrying oil supplies have passed through the Strait of Hormuz and thanked relevant parties for facilitation and coordination. After coordination with relevant parties, three Chinese ships recently transited the Strait of Hormuz. We express appreciation for the assistance of relevant parties, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here without naming Iran, which is currently controlling the movement of oil shipments from the Gulf crossing the Strait.

Iran is demanding international recognition of its sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Hormuz and waters nearby are an important route for international goods and energy trade. China calls for an immediate end to hostilities to restore peace and stability in the Gulf, Mao said.

This is the first time China, a large importer of Iranian oil for years despite US sanctions, spoke of its ships crossing the Strait of Hormuz amid reports that Iran is permitting the Chinese ships to cross the Strait in view of the close strategic ties.

In related development, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with visiting Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and For-

eign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar on the Iran situation in Beijing on Tuesday.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, is scheduled to exchange views with Dar on other international and regional issues of common concern, the Chinese state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Earlier, Mao had said the Middle East war would figure in the Dar and Wang.

Dar is expected to brief Wang on the discussions held with the Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to promote talks between the US and Iran to end the ongoing conflict.

On Dar's visit, Mao said China and Pakistan are all-weather strategic cooperative partners of mutual trust and mutual support.

The two countries share similar positions and maintain close communication on major international and regional issues, she said.

It's believed that the two foreign ministers will step up strategic communication and coordination on the situation in Iran and other international and regional issues of mutual interest, jointly call for peace and a just position, and make new efforts to help end the conflict and bring about peace and stability in the region, she said. (PTI)

Macron to press Lebanon ceasefire, sovereignty in Paris talks

PARIS, April 21: French President Emmanuel Macron is to reaffirm France's full commitment to the ceasefire in Lebanon and support for the country's territorial integrity at a meeting Tuesday in Paris with Lebanon's Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, Macron's office said.

Pakistan is preparing for a new round of talks between the US and Iran as the ceasefire is set to expire on Wednesday, while Lebanon and Israel are set to hold a new meeting in Washington later this week.

Macron and Salam "will also address humanitarian support for displaced populations and the continuation of the economic and financial reforms essential to strengthening Lebanon's sovereignty, its reconstruction and the restoration of its prosperity," Macron's office said.

The meeting at the Elysee presidential palace comes after the UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, came under attack from small arms fire Saturday, leaving one French peacekeeper dead and three others wounded, two of them seriously.

Both Macron and the UNIFIL force blamed Hezbollah, but the Lebanese militant group denied involvement.

Macron has called on Lebanese authorities to "shed full light on the incident" and to "identify and prosecute those responsible without delay." UNIFIL soldiers "must under no circumstances be targeted," Macron's office said.

Earlier Tuesday, Salam made a stop in Luxembourg

for a meeting of EU foreign ministers that was to address the situation in the Middle East.

On March 2, two days after the US and Israel launched their war on Iran, Hezbollah entered the fray by firing missiles across the border. Israel responded with an intense bombing campaign and ground invasion.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun offered direct negotiations with Israel — the first in decades — in exchange for a cessation of hostilities, an offer that was initially rebuffed.

That changed after the announcement of a truce between Iran and the United States and talks between the two brokered by Pakistan.

Lebanon and Israel held their first direct diplomatic talks in decades last week in Washington following more than a month of war between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group. Meanwhile, Iran continued to insist that its own ceasefire agreement must extend to Lebanon and said it would not reopen the Strait of Hormuz otherwise.

A ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon was announced by the US on Thursday. The US portrayed the deal as the result of the Israel-Lebanon talks. Hezbollah, which was opposed to Lebanon holding direct talks with Israel and was not part of those negotiations, insisted that the ceasefire was a result of Iranian pressure and not of the Israel-Lebanon meeting. (AP)

New Zealand Prime Minister Luxon survives party leadership vote months before election

WELLINGTON, April 21: New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said Tuesday that he had survived a vote on his leadership among his own party's lawmakers, after recent slumps in the polls prompted speculation he might be ousted.

The vote was held behind closed doors during a routine meeting of Luxon's centre-right National Party lawmakers and was sought by the Prime Minister himself. Luxon emerged afterwards to read a brief statement announcing the vote and departed without taking questions from reporters.

"Last week, there has been intense media speculation about my leadership," Luxon said, adding that he had called for a confidence vote "to put that media speculation to rest." His party caucus had "answered clearly and decisively," the Prime Minister said. "It has backed my leadership."

He did not say that the vote had been unanimous. Nicola Willis, the party's deputy leader, said later Tuesday that the vote had been a secret ballot with only scrutineers knowing the final tally, but that Luxon must have received a majority.

The confidence vote happened months ahead of New Zealand's next national election, scheduled for Nov. 7. Recent drops in the polls for National had prompted

speculation from analysts that he would face a leadership challenge.

That was seen by party lawmakers as an unwelcome distraction in an election year for National, which has governed New Zealand in a right-wing coalition government since the 2023 vote. Luxon, a former airline executive who entered Parliament in 2000, has led the party since 2021.

While two recent New Zealand prime ministers — National's John Key and Labour's Jacinda Ardern — have voluntarily quit the post, it would have been extremely unusual for lawmakers to oust a sitting prime minister. Luxon blamed reports of unrest within his party's ranks on news outlets, but one political poll released days ago appeared to have made a discussion of leadership unavoidable. The INews-Verian poll suggested slumping support for Luxon and for National in a hypothetical election.

The levels of support in the most recent poll implied the right-wing bloc led by his party could come in behind the left-wing bloc led by Labour if an election were held immediately, though the vote won't occur for more than another six months. "If the media want to keep focusing on speculation and rumour, I am not going to engage," Luxon said Tuesday. (AP)

Hong Kong government seeks to seize millions from jailed activist Jimmy Lai

HONG KONG, April 21: The Hong Kong government is seeking to confiscate millions of dollars in funds and corporate shares it says are linked to crimes committed by jailed former media tycoon Jimmy Lai, according to a court document seen by The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The filing does not explain how the property, which it estimates to be worth over 127 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 16 million), is linked to Lai's crimes. The government previously announced that it was seeking asset forfeitures in the case but did not disclose the amount.

Lai, an outspoken critic of China's ruling Communist Party who founded the now-defunct newspaper Apple Daily, was convicted in December of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and conspiring with others to publish seditious articles.

He was sentenced to 20 years in prison in February, the toughest sentence given so far under a Beijing-imposed national security law.

Critics say his conviction reflected the decline of press and other freedoms in the city, a former British colony that returned to Chinese rule in 1997. The government insists the case has nothing to do with a free press, saying the defendants used news reporting as a pretext for years to commit acts that harmed China and Hong Kong.

According to a document sent to the city's court system earlier this month, the Department of Justice is seeking an order for Lai to forfeit to the government money held in 15 bank accounts under his name, money held in bank accounts under various companies, as well as shares in various companies held by him or others.

The money the government is seeking to seize also includes bail money deposited in the court system and a fine of 2 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 255,440) imposed on Lai for fraud convictions in 2022, which could be refunded to him after the convictions were quashed in February.

The government said it had applied to seize the properties linked to Lai's crimes on April 2 in a statement. At that time, the government cited the security law, saying that the funds and tools used or intended to be used in committing an offense shall be confiscated, as well as proceeds obtained in the commission of an offense.

The government said an order made for the purpose of safeguarding national security can prevent convicts, their accomplices or agents from continuing to use their offense-related properties to engage in acts and activities endangering security.

A hearing on the case is scheduled for July. (AP)

Defence Chief General Anil Chauhan holds high-level talks on evolving nature of conflict in UK

LONDON, April 21: The Chief of Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, has held a wide range of high-level discussions with military counterparts and ministers on the evolving nature of conflict and countering emerging challenges in the Indo-Pacific in London this week.

General Chauhan called on Luke Pollard, UK Minister of State (MoS) for Defence Readiness & Industry, and Seema Malhotra, MoS for Indo-Pacific, as part of what has been described as a "landmark" visit.

The Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) said the meetings were aimed at taking forward the India-UK partnership, with a focus on the bilateral Defence Industrial Roadmap and technology and security initiatives.

"Discussions centred on evolving nature of conflict and deepening military-to-military cooperation," the HQ IDS stated. "Both sides emphasised enhanc-

ing cooperation in Cyber, Intelligence and Space domains, including information resilience and specialised exchanges. The exchange reaffirmed a shared commitment to resilient, future-ready forces and a strengthened India-UK strategic partnership," it said.

General Chauhan was accorded a Ceremonial Step Line when he was received by Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton in London on Monday.

Their discussions revolved around an expanding cooperation in cyber, intelligence, industrial collaboration and joint exercises to reinforce global security, stability and resilience.

"Great to discuss UK-India defence and security cooperation with India's Chief of Defence Staff General Chauhan today. The UK and India are working together to promote peace, security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, as set out by Prime Ministers Keir Starmer and Narendra Modi last year," Sir Richard

said in a social media statement.

During a packed schedule, the Defence Chief also engaged with sector experts, officials and academics on a roundtable entitled 'Indian military transformation challenges and opportunity' at King's College London, focused on the evolving strategic landscape and imperatives of modern military transformation.

"Discussions underscored the centrality of advanced technologies in defence, enhancement of operational capabilities and closer synergy across industrial, intelligence and cyber domains, alongside strategic communication and joint engagements to further strengthen a robust, future-oriented India-UK defence partnership," the Defence HQ noted.

The High Commission of India in London added that the Defence Chief's talks ranged from defence transformation, emerging tech, and multi-domain integration to strengthen the bilateral defence cooperation. (PTI)

India, Singapore charting out roadmap for digital corridor, green shipping: Official

SINGAPORE, April 21: India and Singapore are working on a roadmap to set up infrastructure for digital corridor collaboration and green shipping, a senior official said on Tuesday.

The roadmap is part of a larger collaboration between the two countries in line with global decarbonisation initiatives as the world's maritime industries seek to become environment friendly, said Vijay Kumar, Secretary of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.

"A roadmap for a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is being worked out with infrastructure details," Kumar told PTI at the Singapore Maritime Week being held from April 20-24.

The MoU follows up on upgrading work based on a Letter of Intent signed on maritime digitalisation (digital corridor collaboration) and decarbonisation (green shipping) at the same show last year by Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal.

Kumar said details such as invest-



ment, storage tank capacity, pipelines, bunkering facilities and future demand for green fuel are being worked on. He said both nations complement each other — India for its cheaper green energy and resources, among others, and Singapore for being a global shipping and maritime hub.

"As such, we are working together on developing all opportunities," said Kumar, who also represented India in

a 12-country closed-door marine industry development programme attended by top stakeholders and ministers.

The Indian delegation at the maritime week includes senior decision-makers from the Directorate General of Shipping, Shipping Corporation of India, VOC Port Authority, Deendayal Port Authority, major Indian Shipyards, and the Indian Ports Asso-

ciation.

Several bilateral engagements are also planned for the delegation. Singapore's Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Transport, Murali Pillai, inaugurated the 160-square-metre Indian Pavilion at the maritime week on Tuesday.

At the pavilion, scale models of ships and a simulator are being showcased, in addition to displays by exhibitors.

Of particular prominence is a depiction of INSV Kaundinya, the traditionally built, hand-stitched wooden ship commissioned by the Indian Navy to revive ancient maritime techniques.

Inspired by 5th-century Ajanta cave paintings, it uses no metal, relying on cor iron rope to join planks.

It completed a maiden voyage to Oman in January 2026, demonstrating historical sailing capabilities.

More than 20,000 participants from nearly 80 countries and regions, including ministers and stakeholders, are expected to attend the 20th edition of the event, held annually. (PTI)

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Protests over recent killings bring transport, markets and schools to a halt

Nagaland Congress alleges BJP using women's reservation for delimitation agenda

KOHIMA, April 21: Nagaland Lok Sabha MP and state Congress president S Supongmeren Jamir on Tuesday alleged that the BJP-led central government was using the women's reservation issue to advance a "hidden delimitation agenda" aimed at the 2029 parliamentary elections.

Addressing a press conference at Congress Bhavan here, Jamir said the opposition INDIA bloc opposed the move in Parliament as the government had linked women's reservation with delimitation despite constitutional and procedural constraints tied to census and constituency readjustment.

Referring to the 106th Constitutional Amendment enacted in 2023, Jamir said provisions under Articles 239AA, 330A and 332A already lay down the framework for women's reservation, but the Modi government was attempting to use the issue to push delimitation, which he alleged was aimed at increasing Lok Sabha seats from 816 to 850 in a manner favourable to the BJP.

He said the amendment itself clearly linked implementation to the first census after 2026 and subsequent publication of relevant fig-



ures, making immediate delimitation impractical.

He alleged the government knowingly brought the matter despite lacking the two-thirds support required for constitutional changes and claimed the move was intended to trap the opposition politically.

Jamir said the INDIA bloc had made it clear in Parliament that if the government was serious, it should bring a bill to ensure implementation of women's reservation by the 2029 Lok Sabha elections. He said the opposition would continue to press the Modi government to bring such a measure

during the monsoon session.

Countering Monday's allegations by Nagaland BJP leaders that Congress opposed women's reservation, Jamir said it was the BJP, not the opposition, that was delaying implementation while using the issue for political mileage, particularly with elections in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and other states.

He also questioned the BJP's commitment to women's empowerment, asking whether the party was willing to support women for top constitutional positions, including Prime Minister and Speaker.

On Nagaland, Jamir said delimitation and women's reservation raised specific concerns for smaller states, including how 33 per cent reservation would be accommodated without adversely affecting political representation or creating fresh divisions.

He said Nagaland and other northeastern states, including Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Assam, also have to consider the implications in view of negotiated political settlements and seat arrangements.

He said while women's reservation is already being implemented in urban local bodies, the state must ensure Nagaland women also receive fair representation in higher legislative institutions, including the Lok Sabha.

He appealed to all political parties, including the BJP, not to politicise the issue but to work collectively in the state's interest.

NPC leaders maintained that women's reservation should not be tied to political strategy or delimitation calculations and reiterated their demand that the Centre take immediate steps to ensure implementation of the 33 per cent reservation by the 2029 parliamentary elections. (PTI)

Attempts being made to divide people on religious, linguistic lines: Bhagwat

RSS chief stresses unity in diversity, urges people to resist divisive forces

AGARTALA, April 21: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Tuesday alleged that attempts were being made to create divisions among people on religious and linguistic lines, asserting that India's strength lay in its unity amid diversity.

Addressing a gathering after the consecration ceremony of Maa Chinmayi Soundarya Temple at Fakrimura, around 23 km from Agartala, Bhagwat said certain "evil forces" were worried that their "shops" would shut down if India progressed by drawing on its centuries-old civilisational strength.

"They are trying to engineer a quarrel among people along the lines of religions and languages. I don't need to give examples," he said.

Tripura Governor Indrasena Reddy, Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Varma and Chief Minister Manik Saha were among those present at the event.

Emphasising that diversity has long been India's defining feature, Bhagwat said the country had advanced through centuries despite having multiple languages, faiths, traditions and cultures.

"Nations that do not have a history of more than 4,000 or 5,000 years can have one religion and one language, but India is completely different, possessing a long history, tradition and culture," he said.

He urged people to remain united and defeat attempts to sow discord.

"There should be no reason for fear, whatever situation may arise," he said.



The RSS chief also said that in the present world order, power often overshadows what is right.

"If you have power, your might will be proven and no one will pay heed if you are on the right path. Therefore, acquire knowledge and power," he said.

Bhagwat said temples were not merely places of worship but had historically served as centres of social life and enlightenment. (PTI)

5.2-magnitude quake jolts Manipur

IMPHAL/SHILLONG, April 21: Manipur was struck by an earthquake of 5.2 magnitude on Tuesday morning, officials said.

The quake occurred at 5.59 AM with its epicentre located in Kamjong district, they added.

Tremors were felt in neighbouring Ukhrul district and state capital Imphal and even Meghalaya but no casualty or damage has been reported so far. (PTI)

Manipur: Two tribal communities clash over shutdown call

IMPHAL, April 21: Protesters from two tribal communities clashed on the borders of Senapati and its adjacent Kangpokpi districts of Manipur on Tuesday over a shutdown called by a civil society organisation, leading to tension in the area, officials said.

Local police attempting to clear a roadblock set up by Naga volunteers to enforce a three-day shutdown by the United Naga Council to protest the April 18 killing of two persons in Ukhrul district sparked the clash, they said.

An official said the situation turned tense after Changoung Kuki villagers became involved, leading to stone pelting between the two sides.

"A few rounds were fired during the commotion. However, it is not clear who did it," the official said.

The three-day shutdown called by UNC paralysed normal life in all Naga-inhabited areas of the state, including Ukhrul, Kamjong, Senapati, Noney and Tamenglong. The shutdown began at midnight on April 20. (PTI)

MBSE to declare class 10 examination results tomorrow

AIZAWL, April 21: The Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE) is scheduled to declare the results for the class 10 examination on April 23, an official said on Tuesday. He said that students and parents can access the scores of the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) examination through multiple official channels to ensure a smooth dissemination process.

Results will be hosted on the official board websites at www.mbse.edu.in and www.mbseonline.com, and the results sheets will also be displayed at the MBSE office in Aizawl's Chaltlang and the board's regional office in south Mizoram's Lunglei town, he said.

The official also said that candidates and guardians seeking specific information or assistance can contact the MBSE help desk via the designated office numbers during working hours.

Earlier, School Education Minister Vanlalhlana had announced that the MBSE will cease to follow the traditional way of declaring class-10 and 12 results, indicating merit list (Top-10) or rank, distinction and division in the result books from the current year. The move was to prevent high-stakes competition among students through rote memorisation and to ensure quality and competency-based education, he had said. Last year, the pass percentage in the class 10 board examination was 76.68 per cent. (PTI)

Nagaland has adequate fuel, LPG stocks: OMCs



KOHIMA, April 21: Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) on Tuesday said that supply of LPG and petroleum products in Nagaland remains fully normal and under control, with adequate stocks available across the state, while urging citizens not to resort to panic buying or pay heed to rumours.

Addressing a press briefing, IOCL state coordinator Himakshi Saikia said uninterrupted supply of petrol, diesel and domestic LPG is being ensured through robust infrastructure, continuous monitoring and close coordination with the state government.

She said that Nagaland currently has 250 retail outlets, including 238 operated by OMCs and 12 private outlets, along with two supply depots in operation.

On average, 280 kilolitres of petrol and 640 kilolitres of diesel are being supplied daily, she said, adding that the state presently has stocks equivalent to six days of petrol and 16 days of diesel, while

all retail outlets are functioning normally with no restrictions on sales.

Nozzle sales, she said, remain in line with normal consumption trends recorded between January and March 2026, indicating stable demand and no disruption in supply.

On LPG, Saikia said around 4.2 lakh consumers are being served through 84 distributors and one bottling plant, with no dry-outs reported. An average of 6,258 refills are delivered daily, while a backlog of about 3.08 days is being cleared as per scheduled bookings, she said.

Saikia highlighted progress in digitalisation of LPG services, with 80.6 per cent of bookings now made digitally, up from 61.8 per cent two months ago, while Delivery Authentication Code (DAC) compliance has improved to 78.4 per cent from 52 per cent.

The IOCL state coordinator urged consumers to use digital booking methods and share the

DAC at the time of delivery to ensure safe and transparent distribution.

In accordance with Government of India guidelines, commercial LPG allocation is currently maintained at 70 per cent, with priority being given to hospitals, educational institutions, defence, railways, government establishments, hotels, industrial canteens and food processing units. Daily monitoring is being undertaken to ensure smooth distribution.

She said daily coordination meetings are being held between the state government, Civil Supplies Department and OMCs, while district-level monitoring committees remain active and submit stock reports to the state control room every day by 10 AM.

To curb hoarding and illegal diversion, OMC officials in association with state government authorities have conducted 79 inspections since last month and show cause notices have been served to seven LPG distributors for not adhering to standard operating procedures, she said.

Reiterating that adequate stock of petrol, diesel and LPG is available and the supply chain is functioning normally, OMCs and the state government appealed to the public not to believe or spread misleading information and to avoid unnecessary panic purchases.

They maintained that the supply situation in Nagaland remains fully stable and under control, with uninterrupted supply being ensured to the public. (PTI)

Protesters clash with police during torch rally in Manipur

IMPHAL, April 21: People protesting the death of two children in a recent bomb blast in Manipur clashed with security forces during a torch rally in the state capital Imphal, police said. Two children died in a bomb blast at Trongaobi in Bishnupur on April 7. The Imphal Valley districts have been witnessing daily protests over the incident.

A seven-km-long torch rally was brought out from Mayai Lambi to Keishamthong in Imphal West district on Monday night, but the participants turned violent and clashed with the security forces, a police officer said. Security forces fired several rounds of tear gas shells in Keishamthong area after hundreds of protesters defying curfew demanded they be allowed to proceed for another 200 metres towards Keisampat area, which is close to the Lok Bhavan and the BJP state office, he said.

Orders prohibiting the movement of any individuals outside their respective homes are in force in all the five valley districts

from 5 PM to 5 AM.

"Protesters pelted the security forces with stones and iron pellets from catapults, endangering the lives of the heavily outnumbered security forces," the officer said.

Manipur Police have, meanwhile, arrested 19 people for violating curfew and committing offences, including blocking roads and damaging public property in the Greater Imphal area. They were nabbed from different parts of Imphal West district on Sunday, a police statement said.

In the Ukhrul district headquarters, a candlelight vigil was held on Monday night to honour the two Tangkhul Naga civilians who were killed in an ambush in TM Kasom area in the district on April 18. Various civil society organisations from both the valley and hill areas strongly condemned the brutal killings, alleging that the victims were shot by Kuki militants using sniper rifles. (PTI)

Meghalaya launches cash aid for UPSC aspirants

₹ 50,000 for prelims qualifiers, ₹ 1 lakh for mains under CM-INSPIRE scheme

SHILLONG, April 21: The Meghalaya government on Tuesday launched a scheme under which candidates who clear the UPSC Civil Services Preliminary Examination will receive assistance of ₹ 50,000, while those who clear the mains exam will get ₹ 1 lakh.

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said the 'CM-INSPIRE' scheme aims to address the declining presence of the state's youth in the civil services and provide them with the necessary support to succeed.

"My dear young aspirants of Meghalaya, today marks an important step in supporting the dreams of our youth. For many years, our representation in the



civil services has declined. Today, we take a decisive step to change that with the launch of CM-INSPIRE," he said.

Sangma said this initiative is designed to reduce the financial burden faced by aspirants and ensure that economic constraints do not hold back deserving candidates.

"The government stands firmly with you on this journey. Believe in yourselves and stay committed to your goals," he said.

Eligible candidates will be able to apply for the assistance through the Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute (MATI) portal, officials said. (PTI)

Drugs worth ₹ 465 cr destroyed in Mizoram's Champhai



AIZAWL, April 21: Drugs worth ₹ 465 crore were destroyed in Mizoram's Champhai district on Tuesday, officials said.

The drugs had been seized by the police from various locations across the district bordering Myanmar between March and October 2025 and were cleared for destruction by the district court, they said.

The destroyed contraband included 35.85 kg of heroin valued at ₹ 71.70 crore, 490.89 kg of methamphetamine worth ₹ 392.71 crore and 4.74 kg of alprazolam valued at ₹ 94.8 lakh, taking the total estimated value to ₹ 465.36 crore, they added.

Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Aaquib said drugs worth ₹ 117 crore were destroyed in the district last year and described this year's operation as a major achievement reflecting intensified enforcement efforts by the police. He stressed the need to continue efforts to curb drug abuse and called for stronger awareness campaigns to keep youth away from narcotics.

He also appealed for public cooperation in identifying and apprehending those involved in the illicit trade.

"As Champhai grows in popularity as a tourist destination, it is essential to maintain a clean and safe environment so that visitors see the beauty of the district rather than the shadow of the drug trade," he said.

Officials said Champhai police registered 147 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act in 2025, leading to the arrest of 260 persons, including 58 Myanmar nationals.

Seizures last year included 38.47 kg of heroin, 622.4 kg of methamphetamine, 5.16 kg of crystal methamphetamine, 3,000 kg of caffeine, 4.47 kg of alprazolam and small quantities of cough syrup, they said. Between January 1 and April 20 this year, police registered 47 NDPS cases and arrested 76 persons, including 22 Myanmar nationals, they added.

During the same period, police seized 8.266 kg of heroin, 76.245 kg of methamphetamine and 10.259 kg of crystal methamphetamine, officials said. (PTI)

1 injured in firing by security forces near Manipur CM's event in Thoubal

IMPHAL, April 21: One person sustained bullet wounds after security forces allegedly opened fire when a mob advanced towards the venue of Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh's programme in Thoubal district on Tuesday, police said.

The incident took place during the CM's visit to Wangjing Tentha for the inauguration of a newly-constructed Block Development Office (BDO), they said.

A large group of people armed with stones and catapults was heading towards the function with the "apparent intention of vandalising the building", police said in a statement.

"Despite repeated warnings and appeals by police personnel to disperse, the crowd continued to move aggressively, posing a serious threat to public property, dignitaries present and overall law and order," the statement said.

Police said minimum necessary force was initially used and when the situation escalated, controlled firing was carried out as a last resort in accordance with established protocols.

During the action, Elangbam Nandbir Singh (40), a resident of Heirok Part II Elangbam Leirak and presently serving as a Village Defence Force personnel, sustained injuries, police said.

"The situation was subsequently brought under control, preventing further damage and ensuring the safety of all concerned," the statement said.

Officials said the chief minister later travelled to a nearby central force camp and returned to Imphal by helicopter. (PTI)

GOVERNMENT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH ARUNACHAL PRADESH ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

No. APEDA/NMS/NIT-01/RE/2025-26 Dated Namsai, the 21st April 2026

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Project Officer, Arunachal Pradesh Energy Development Agency (APEDA), Namsai invites sealed tenders in two parts, Part-I (Technical Bid) and Part-II (Price Bid) from the reputed manufacturers of SPV Cells/Modules/Lithium Ferro Phosphate Battery / Solar Inverters/ Luminary and reputed SPV system Integrators for turn-key execution of the work "Design, Manufacturing, Supply, Installation and Commissioning of 670 Nos. of LED based Solar Street Lighting System and 40 Nos. Solar High Mast System with CCTV Camera at different locations of Chongkham Block, Namsai District (Phase-II).

The detailed tender documents can be obtained from the office of the Project Officer, APEDA, Namsai Division, by submitting an application in its letterhead with credentials along with a Demand Draft/Cash of Rs. 15,000/- (Rupees Fifteen Thousand) only (non-refundable) in favour of the Project Officer, APEDA, Namsai payable at SBI Namsai on any working day from 1000hrs of 23/04/2025 to 1500 hours of 30/04/2025.

The submission cum closing time is 1300hrs of 4th May 2026. The date of opening of tender is 1400 hrs of 5th May 2026. The Tender documents will not be issued to a party without credentials for which the bid is sought.

The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the offers without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/
Project Officer APEDA, Namsai
APEDA, Namsai

Memo No. APEDA/NMS/NIT-01/2025-26/872

Dated Namsai the 21st April 2026

BJP to resolve decades-old Gorkha issue within 6 months of forming govt in Bengal: Shah

KURSEONG (WB), April 21: Seeking to strike an emotional chord with the politically crucial hill electorate, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday promised that the BJP would resolve the decades-old Gorkha issue within six months if the BJP comes to power in West Bengal.

He said no party other than the BJP could find a solution acceptable to the Gorkhas. Addressing a rally at Kurseong in Darjeeling district, Shah said the BJP understands the concerns and aspirations of the Gorkhas and would work towards a settlement on their terms.

"Within six months of the BJP forming the government in West Bengal, every Gorkha will have a smile on his face. We will find such a solution to the Gorkha issue that Gorkhas can live in peace," he said. The Gorkha issue refers to the century-old demand for a separate state in the Gorkha-majority hill districts of north Bengal, although Shah did not utter the words 'Gorkhaland' or 'statehood' in his speech. Instead, echoing the BJP's long-standing promise of a "permanent political solution" to the hill question, Shah said the issue would be resolved in accordance with the aspirations of the Gorkhas.

"I am leaving today after promising you that as soon as the BJP government is formed, the decades-old Gorkha issue will be resolved according to the Gorkhas' terms," he said. The BJP, which has won the Darjeeling Lok Sabha seat in every election since 2009, has consistently promised a permanent political solution to the hill issue without committing itself to a separate state.



The home minister accused the Mamata Banerjee government of refusing to engage with efforts to resolve the issue and said that after becoming home minister, he had convened three meetings on the matter. "After becoming home minister, I convened three major meetings to resolve the Gorkha issue, but not even once did a representative from Mamata's side attend," Shah said. "Mamata Didi, we are not dependent on you for a solution to the Gorkha issue. We have appointed an interlocutor who is preparing a report by engaging

with Gorkha organisations here and officials of the West Bengal government," he added. Claiming that the BJP alone understands the concerns of the hill residents, Shah said, "We understand you and your problems. No one except the BJP can resolve the Gorkha issue."

The home minister alleged that the Congress and the TMC had betrayed the people of the hills for decades. "The Congress and the TMC have done injustice not only to Darjeeling but also to our patriotic Gorkha brothers," he said.

Seeking to broaden the BJP's pitch beyond the Gorkha issue, Shah sought to portray the election as a battle to free north Bengal and the hills from what he called years of neglect and injustice under the TMC rule. "This election is to free the entire West Bengal from TMC's

crimes. In a way, it is an election to gain freedom from the injustice happening for decades in north Bengal and Darjeeling," he said.

Referring to the Sandeshkhali controversy, Shah said, "The whole of West Bengal has decided that it is time for Didi to step down. This election is about protecting our sisters across the state. The Sandeshkhali incident has brought shame to the state."

The BJP leader told the gathering that while Darjeeling had repeatedly backed the BJP, the party needed support from the rest of West Bengal this time.

"For three elections, Darjeeling has been voting for the BJP anyway, but the rest of West Bengal did not provide as much support. But this time, the whole of West Bengal has made up its mind that it's time to oust Didi," he said.

Shah also raised the issue of Gorkhas' names being allegedly deleted from the electoral rolls during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise. "The names of some Gorkhas were deleted during SIR. Once the BJP government is formed in West Bengal, all such names will be included in the electoral rolls again," he said. He further alleged that hundreds of false cases had been slapped on Gorkha activists and promised that these would be withdrawn if the BJP formed the government.

"They have filed hundreds of

false cases against our Gorkha brothers and sisters. The results will come out on May 4, and a BJP government will be formed on May 5. Before July 31, the BJP government in West Bengal will withdraw all cases against Gorkha brothers and sisters," Shah said.

The home minister also attacked the Mamata Banerjee government over budgetary allocations for the tribals. "For tribal development, for Adivasis, for the hills, and for north Bengal, the Mamata government's total budget is ₹ 2,000 crore. But for Muslims and madrasas, the Mamata government's budget is ₹ 5,800 crore. This injustice will not last much longer," he said. The demand for Gorkhaland and greater political autonomy for the Darjeeling hills has remained one of the most enduring and emotive political issues in north Bengal, often shaping electoral outcomes in the region.

Successive agitations -- from the Subhash Ghising-led GNLFF movement in the 1980s to the later stir spearheaded by Bimal Gurung and the GJM, have repeatedly convulsed the hills. Yet, despite the BJP's rise in Darjeeling and its continued dominance in the Lok Sabha seat since 2009, the party has so far stopped short of endorsing a separate state as it would have an adverse impact on south Bengal, preferring instead to speak of a "permanent political solution". (PTI)

Adityanath's 'padyatra' practice to sit in Opposition: Akhilesh



LUCKNOW, April 21: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday said Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's 'padyatra' against the defeat of a constitution amendment bill for the implementation of women's reservation in legislatures is "practice" for the BJP to sit in the Opposition.

Addressing a press conference here, Yadav said, "This 'padyatra' was practice. It shows that they will have to agitate like this when they sit in the Opposition. This is the first government which, while being in power, is practising how to function as the Opposition."

The 'Jan Aakrosh Mahila Padyatra' earlier in the day began from Adityanath's official residence here on Kalidas Marg and culminated at the UP Assembly.

He took a swipe at the BJP, saying never before had a ruling dispensation struggled so much for a law it had itself enacted. "Perhaps in history no government has fought so much for its own law as this one is doing. This is unprecedented," he said.

Projecting his party's political plank, the SP chief invoked the "PDA" (Pichhda, Dalit, Alp-sankhyak) grouping, asserting that it would decisively challenge the BJP in the upcoming elections.

"For the first time in history, one social bloc is going to defeat them (BJP)... This bloc is PDA - the PDA family. People united by shared pain and issues will come together as one and defeat the BJP," he said. Yadav said the alliance of backward classes, Dalits and minorities would work towards establishing a government based on social justice.

"In the coming time, we are moving towards forming a PDA government to establish a state based on social justice," he added.

Referring to the defeat of the government's Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to implement women's quota and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816, Yadav described it as a "historic

democratic victory" and thanked voters and leaders of the opposition alliance. "We express gratitude to the people and all leaders of the INDIA alliance who supported this effort. This is not just a democratic victory but also a defeat of the BJP," he said.

Reiterating his party's stand on women's reservation, Yadav said, "Samajwadis have always supported reservation for women, both inside and outside the House. If anyone is trying to stall reservation, it is the BJP. We will not allow their intentions to succeed."

He also accused the ruling party of avoiding a caste census, alleging it feared demands for rights and reservations that could follow.

"Those who do not want counting know that once a census happens, people will demand caste enumeration. And when the caste census is done, people will ask for their rights and reservations," he said. He further alleged that those who swore to uphold the Constitution were taking to the streets with "ulterior motives".

"People who have taken an oath of the Constitution are roaming on the streets. The public has seen through their conspiracy and it has been exposed," he said.

Drawing a comparison with Hitler's propaganda machinery, Yadav alleged that the BJP was attempting to "mislead" people. "Historians say that during Hitler's time there was a minister for propaganda. But here, not just the government, many people in constitutional positions are involved. However, the people have understood the truth," he said.

Asserting confidence in the Opposition's prospects, he said, "In the coming time, we will not only remove the BJP but ensure it is removed for good." He also accused the state government of "failing" to ensure women's safety.

"If we look at the data, daughters are most unsafe in Uttar Pradesh, and incidents continue to occur while the government tries to conceal them." (PTI)

Cong abusing PM Modi because he wants women's quota: BJP

NEW DELHI, April 21: The BJP on Tuesday condemned Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a "terrorist", saying this reflects the mindset of the main opposition party and people will give them a befitting reply.

The ruling party claimed that Kharge has made such disparaging remarks against Modi at the behest of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi because the prime minister wanted to provide 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

The BJP's reaction came after Kharge accused Prime Minister Modi of terrorising political parties and people by misusing government machinery and central agencies to stifle the opposition.

Addressing a press conference in Chennai alongside AICC general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal, Kharge initially referred to the prime minister as a "terrorist" while criticising the AIADMK's alliance with the BJP.

However, when pressed by reporters to clarify the context of the remark, the Congress chief said he meant the prime minister was "terrorising" the democratic fabric of the country.

"He is terrorising people and political parties. I never said he is a terrorist (in the literal sense). Terrorising this... he is misusing his power and government machinery and abusing opposition parties," the Congress president said.

Reacting sharply to Kharge's remarks, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra said, "The kind of words Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has chosen for Prime Minister Narendra Modi today is not only condemnable but reflects the mindset of the Congress party. Kharge called him a terrorist."

Patra rejected Kharge's clarification and alleged that the Congress president deliberately called the prime minister a terrorist at the behest of Rahul Gandhi.

"This is not a slip of tongue. It's deliberate. Even though they are giving any clarification, it is a deliberate conspiracy of the Congress," the BJP MP said in a video message. "You must be observing that for the last few days how Rahul Gandhi and other Congress leaders are making indecent remarks against the prime minister. Every day Rahul Gandhi in his speech refers to the prime minister in a disrespectful manner," the BJP leader said.

Patra also alleged that the Congress leaders keep abusing the prime minister because his government is implementing various other welfare schemes like Mudra Yojna, the BJP leader said.

He said that the Congress president has now called the prime minister a "terrorist" just because he wanted 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. (PTI)

Venugopal gives privilege notice against PM to LS Speaker over Saturday address to nation

NEW DELHI, April 21: Congress leader K C Venugopal has submitted a privilege notice against Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Lok Sabha Speaker, accusing him of casting aspersions on opposition MPs during his address to the nation after the rejection of the bills by the House on implementing women's reservation in 2029.

"Imputing motives" to members for their voting behaviour is a deliberate breach of privilege and contempt of the House, he alleged and urged Speaker Om Birla to refer the matter to the Committee on Privileges of the Lok Sabha for a detailed inquiry. In his notice submitted under Rule 222 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, he claimed that on April 18, 2026, the Prime Minister addressed the nation on national television, following the defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 in the Lok Sabha on April 17, 2026. The bill had failed to secure the required two-thirds majority as required under the provisions of Article 368 of the Constitution.

The Congress general secretary and MP from Alappuzha Lok Sabha constituency in Kerala



said that in the 29-minute speech termed as 'address to the nation', the Prime Minister criticised opposition parties for blocking the bill and made direct reflections on the voting pattern of members of the opposition and attributed motives to them. Venugopal said it is well established that casting reflections, aspersions and imputing motives to members of Parliament in regard to speeches made by them in Parliament tantamount to "gross breach of privilege and contempt of the House".

"I therefore submit this notice of breach of privilege to your good office, Hon'ble Speaker,

to take cognisance of this grave incident as a clear and deliberate breach of privilege and contempt of the House, and to refer the matter to the Committee on Privileges of the Lok Sabha for a detailed inquiry so that privilege proceedings can be initiated against the Prime Minister," Venugopal said in his notice.

The Congress leader said this matter deserves to be treated with the utmost seriousness, as questioning an elected representative performing his duty "is not merely a personal assault but a direct affront to the authority of Parliament and to the democratic rights of the people of India".

"I urge you, the Hon'ble Speaker, to take immediate and decisive steps to uphold the sanctity of Parliament and the constitutional protections afforded to its Members, so that such violations are neither ignored nor repeated," the notice said. Venugopal said that the PM addressing the nation, after the government is not able to muster the requisite majority in Parliament, for criticising the opposition parties is "unprecedented, unethical and blatant abuse of power". (PTI)

Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha prorogued; draws curtains on Budget session of Parliament

NEW DELHI, April 20: The Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha were on Monday prorogued by President Droupadi Murmu, two days after the House was adjourned sine die.

"The Lok Sabha, which commenced its seventh session on January 28, has been prorogued by the Honourable President on April 20," a press release issued by the Lok Sabha secretariat said.

A similar notification was issued by the Rajya Sabha secretariat.

"The Rajya Sabha which adjourned sine die on the 18th April, 2026 has been prorogued by the President on the 20th April, 2026," the notification said.

The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were adjourned sine die on Saturday.

The Lok Sabha saw the defeat of a crucial bill to implement 33 per cent quota for women in leg-

islatures by increasing the strength of the Lower House to 816 through a delimitation exercise.

The session, which began on January 28, saw the passage of the Union Budget and Demands for Grants.

In his concluding remarks, Speaker Om Birla said 31 sittings were held during the session that lasted around 151 hours and 42 minutes.

The productivity of the House during the session was 93 per cent. The second half of the Budget session, which began on March 9, saw the passage of some key legislation despite opposition uproar.

The second part of the session saw the passage of the Finance Bill 2026-27 and the Demands for Grants for various ministries, apart from the Appropriation Bill, thus completing the budgetary exercise in Parliament. (PTI)

Modi buying 'jhalhuri' to have impact in Bengal polls: BJP's Anurag Thakur

KOLKATA, April 21: BJP MP Anurag Thakur on Tuesday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi buying 'jhalhuri' in Jhargram would have an impact in the West Bengal Assembly polls and asked if Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee attempted any such outreach to small traders in 15 years.

Addressing a press conference here, the senior BJP leader said that Narendra Modi was "not just a name but a brand who lives in the hearts of people".

The prime minister on Sunday posted a video on his official X account in which he was seen buying 'jhalhuri', a popular Bengali street food made of puffed rice, green chillies, and spices, from a nondescript shop in Jhargram.

The PM, who was accompanied by his security personnel, paid the shopkeeper for the snack. When the man denied taking the money, the prime minister insisted that he accept it. Referring to the incident, Thakur said, "In the past 15 years, did the chief minister ever visit a small shop and buy something to eat? The prime minister did so.

"Even a small vendor selling goods worth Rs 10 feels encouraged that the prime minister can eat at his shop. This is not a small incident. Its impact will be seen in the elections," he said. He also accused the Trinamool Congress government of blocking the implementation of several Central welfare schemes in the state and accused it of indulging in corruption. About the BJP-led Union government's failed bid to pass bills for the implementation of women's quota in legislatures from 2029, Thakur said, "Reservation for women is not a favour, it is their right. The BJP has ensured the passage of the law, but parties like the Congress and TMC delayed it for years."

Another BJP leader, Harsh Vardhan Shringla, claimed the TMC government has failed to ensure the safety of women in the state. Once the BJP wins the West Bengal Assembly polls, it would ensure "zero tolerance" towards crimes against women and provide reservation and financial support to them as outlined in its poll manifesto, he said. (PTI)

V-P hails rise of women power in civil services; hopes for similar shift in Parliament, legislatures

NEW DELHI, April 21: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan on Tuesday appreciated the growing participation of women in the civil services and hoped that similar progress would soon be witnessed in Parliament and state assemblies.

Addressing a gathering of bureaucrats during the Civil Services Day celebrations here, the vice president highlighted that the participation of women in the civil services has risen from around 21 per cent in 2016 to almost 31 per cent in 2025.

"Civil services toppers are increasingly women. We have indeed come a long way. Even during my visit to various districts, I am pleased to see women officers serving as the police commissioners, collectors and SPs (superintendents of police). This progress stands as a powerful testament to 'narishakti' where talent rises above stereotypes and determination wins over every obstacle," he said. Radhakrishnan said that this rise is not merely numerical progress but represents a fundamental shift in the mindset.

"That is the most welcoming trend. It reminds us that when women are given equal opportunities, they do not just succeed, they redefine the meaning of success itself. I am hopeful that we will see similar transformation in the composition of the Parliament and the state legislatures too in the future," he said. His comments came following the recent defeat of The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 -- intended to implement a 33 per cent quota for women in legislatures after carrying out a delimitation exercise and increasing the number of Lok Sabha seats -- in the Lower House.

In his address to the civil servants, the vice president said that a few decades ago, very few women were appointed as district magistrates or police commissioners.

"Even when they were there, their presence was limited to just a handful. But today, the reality has changed significantly," he said.

Radhakrishnan said that the past decade has seen a remarkable shift as the share of women in civil services has risen from around 21 per cent in 2016 to nearly 31 per cent in 2025, and termed it "an en-



couraging and meaningful transformation".

"I really appreciate the interest of the women and they are going to contribute equally with the men, maybe more," he asserted.

The vice president said that the poorest among the poor and their needs have to be taken care of.

Referring to "freebies", Radhakrishnan said, "We have to grow, we have to create wealth and we have to serve the people who are in need. (But) We should not include everybody, if you include everybody, then

everybody will become a beneficiary. Then the money will go out just like that. The real needy people should be helped..."

The vice president said that by focusing on last-mile delivery and staying responsive to ground realities, the civil servants "make governance more inclusive, more effective and more impactful".

Radhakrishnan said that planning an initiative or welfare programme can be done in Delhi, but its results can only be seen in a remote village when it is implemented in the real sense.

The country has achieved several milestones in the last decade and Bharat now occupies a place of pride at the global level, he said.

"From nowhere, we became the fifth largest economy, and from the fifth, we have moved towards the fourth largest economy and I'm sure soon we are going to be the third largest economy of the world," the V-P added. On recent technological changes, he said that they are game changers and they will serve as a useful tool for all of us in our own line of work.

Radhakrishnan remembered going to a typewriting institute one hour a day in his younger days to learn typewriting, but over time, "we shifted to computers and tablets reflecting the steady march of technology".

"Now, we have entered the age of artificial intelligence (AI) and other new emerging technologies. Today, as the chairman of the Rajya Sabha, I am leveraging digital platforms to conduct the house proceedings more effectively. We cannot keep away from modern technological changes," he said. The vice president asked the civil ser-

vants to embrace newer technologies such as AI, machine learning and blockchain, among others, as they offer opportunities for improving efficiency, transparency and citizen service delivery.

He also urged states to adopt forward-looking recruitment policies to strengthen governance. The vice president said that some states have not changed their recruitment systems, as any degree holder is allowed to apply for the post of a technician. "Any degree is good for the colonial mindset because they want only clerks," Radhakrishnan said, and mentioned that selection of technocrats and those with medical degrees are joining civil services.

Character and integrity are the very foundations of public service, the V-P said, adding that those who are straightforward will always be under pressure.

"Obeying the boss is different. Obeying to the pressure is different. I am not against obeying the boss. But I am always against obeying to the pressure. Pressure is always for doing something we should not." (PTI)

No one wants BJP to form govt, TMC will return to power again: Mamata

HALDIA (WB), April 21: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday asserted that the TMC will return to power in the state for the fourth consecutive term, claiming that "no one wants the BJP to form government".

Addressing a poll rally at Haldia in Purba Medinipur district, Banerjee also urged opposition parties to come together to oust the BJP-led NDA government from the Centre.

"The BJP will not win the elections in West Bengal this time. The Trinamool Congress will again form the government. We will also throw out the BJP from Delhi in 2026 itself," Banerjee

asserted. The TMC chief said she has been extensively touring West Bengal for the last one month, and during this period, "I have understood what people want; it is clear that no one wants the BJP."

Slamming the BJP for its 'chargesheet' against the TMC dispensation over alleged financial irregularities and other issues, the CM said she was also issuing a chargesheet against the saffron party for "taking cut-money (commission)" in the Haldia dock complex and adjoining industrial area.

"You gave a chargesheet against the TMC; I am also issuing one against the BJP," Banerjee said. Union Home Minister Amit Shah had on March

28 unveiled a chargesheet against the TMC dispensation, accusing it of corruption, deterioration in law and order and facilitation of infiltration.

The chief minister, without naming anyone, said, "There is one traitor who takes cut money (commission) from truck drivers, workers' wages and companies in the Haldia port and industrial area." She claimed that the "traitor" takes 50 per cent of the money and sends the rest "to one of his leaders". Banerjee also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for stating in a recent rally that he was the BJP candidate in all 294 seats going to polls in West Bengal. "You have to quit the post of the

prime minister first for that to happen," she said.

The assembly elections will be held in two phases - on April 23 and April 29. Votes will be counted on May 4.

Alleging malpractice during vote counting in the 2021 election in Nandigram, where BJP's Suvendu Adhikari defeated her, Banerjee asked TMC workers to come up with the name and address of anyone who may indulge in irregularities.

"We will have to send them sweets after the counting of votes, wherever in the country they are," she said. Banerjee said several industries are coming up in the state and healthcare facilities are

being upgraded.

Addressing another rally at Jagaddal in North 24 Parganas district, the CM asserted that she would go wherever any wrongdoing takes place during the elections. "If I am stopped, I will hold a 'satyagraha' sitting in my house," she said.

Banerjee also said that she has never seen an election for which so many central forces, observers and other officers have been deployed.

A record 2,450 companies of central paramilitary forces that comprise nearly 2.5 lakh personnel have been deployed by the Election Commission for the West Bengal assembly polls. (PTI)

Adityanath leads march against defeat of women quota bill

LUCKNOW, April 21: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday claimed that by opposing the Constitution amendment bill to implement women's quota, the Congress and the SP "misused" the option given to them by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to shed their "anti-women image".

He made the remarks after participating in the 'Jan Aakrosh Mahila Padyatra' here to protest against the Opposition's obstruction of the bill. Thousands of women marched from the chief minister's 5 Kalidas Marg residence to the Vidhan Bhavan via Civil Hospital.

Adityanath led the march along with Union minister and Uttar Pradesh BJP chief Pankaj Chaudhary, deputy chief ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, leaders of allied parties, members of the cabinet and office bearers of various BJP units.

"In protest against this injustice, women across the country have taken to the streets in a democratic manner to express their anger. Despite the intense heat in Lucknow, the participation of thousands of women reflected widespread public support and blessings for the policies of the prime minister," the chief minister said.



The government's Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to implement women's quota and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 was defeated in the Lower House last Friday.

Addressing party workers outside the Uttar Pradesh legislative building, Adityanath said, "Be it the Congress or the Samajwadi Party, their face is undemocratic, their deeds are anti-women. They tried to misuse the option given to them by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to shed their anti-women image." "Hence, the 'aadhee abadee' (women) is staging protests on the streets across the country against the Congress and

its allies," he added.

Adityanath also said the march symbolises the resentment among women against the "anti-women" attitude of the Congress, Samajwadi Party, TMC and the DMK.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said there are only four castes in the country. The first caste is women, the second is poor, the third is youth, the fourth is farmers. By centering all policies around these four groups, he has successfully steered the nation to a new pinnacle of economic progress," he noted.

"Whether it is the work of ushering in a new era of infrastructure, preserving India's rich heritage in alignment with the vision of a 'new

India,' or implementing schemes aimed at the uplift of various sections of society, the focal point of all these schemes is 'Nari Shakti' (women power). Numerous programmes have been launched specifically to ensure their dignity, security, and self-reliance," he said. Citing various schemes for women, Adityanath said they serve as the foundation of their self-reliance.

"Prime Minister Modi has formulated all these schemes by placing the 'aadhee abadee' (women) as well as the poor, the youth, and the 'annadata' (farmers) at the centre," he said. The chief minister referred to the Swachh Bharat Mission, Ujjwala Scheme, and Ayushman Bharat scheme as foundations of women's self-reliance. At the rally, Education Minister Gulab Devi likened the SP and the Congress to frogs, whose fate is to end up in the gutter. "The mindset of the SP and Congress is similar to that of a frog. If they jump, they will only fall into a drain. The women must recognise the mentality of the opposition," she said.

Women Welfare Minister Bani Rani Maurya said Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi and SP MP Dimple Yadav thumped desks when the bill was defeated in Parliament and called upon women to avenge this "insult". (PTI)

North Bengal's 54 seats emerge as key battleground

BJP seeks to retain edge, TMC eyes gains

KOLKATA, April 21: North Bengal, with its 54 assembly seats, has once again emerged as one of the principal theatres of the West Bengal assembly polls, with the BJP striving to retain the region that powered its rise in the state, and the TMC seeking to reclaim lost ground amid shifting political equations.

Voting in all 54 seats will be held in the first phase on April 23. For the BJP, north Bengal remains the most viable route to offset the TMC's dominance in south Bengal. For the ruling party, a recovery here is essential if it is to blunt the saffron surge, and deny the opposition the momentum it needs.

The region presents a complex electoral mosaic where old loyalties are under strain and new fault lines are emerging.

The BJP, which turned north Bengal into its strongest bastion after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and consolidated that rise in the 2021 assembly election, is now battling anti-incumbency, local dissidence and unpopularity over candidate selection. The TMC, on the other hand, believes it has repaired its organisation, rebuilt bridges with social groups and regained some of the ground it had ceded.



That shifting contest plays out differently across the region's eight districts: Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda. From the hills and tea gardens to the Rajbanshi belt and the minority-dominated plains, each district is shaped by its own mix of identity, welfare, local grievances and political memory.

"North Bengal is no longer a one-wave region. The BJP still has a structural advantage, but the contest is much closer than it was in 2021," political analyst Subhomoj Maitra said.

The BJP had swept north Bengal in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, win-

ning seven of the eight parliamentary seats, and consolidated that rise in 2021 by bagging 30 of the 54 assembly seats against the TMC's 24.

The saffron camp retained an edge in 2024, though it slipped from its 2019 peak, winning six of the eight Lok Sabha seats and leading in 31 assembly segments.

That electoral memory has made the region the focal point of an intense contest. The BJP has set itself a target of winning 48 of the 54 seats, banking on its hold over the Rajbanshi belt in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri, the tea gardens of the Doars and Terai, and the hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. (PTI)

Sharad Pawar to skip voting in Baramati bypoll due to ill health

MUMBAI, April 21: NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar on Tuesday said he will not be able to cast his vote in the April 23 Baramati assembly bypoll due to ill health, and appealed to voters to support Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar, who is in the fray from the ruling Mahayuti.

In a statement, Pawar said it was with a "heavy heart" that he had to take a decision of staying away from voting in Baramati this time as doctors have advised him against travelling outside Mumbai due to "sudden deterioration" in his health.

Pawar, 85, was admitted to Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai two days ago for a health check-up, sources said on Tuesday.

The bypoll, necessitated due to the demise of Maharashtra deputy chief minister and NCP president Ajit Pawar in a plane crash on January 28, will be held on April 23, and the results will be declared on May 4.

There is no candidate in the fray from opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) against Sunetra Pawar, who heads the ruling NCP.

The rival NCP (SP) had announced that it will not field a candidate against Sunetra Pawar. While ally Congress gave candidature to Akash More, the party later decided to withdraw his name. There are a total of 23 candidates, including Sunetra Pawar, in the fray.

Sharad Pawar said he had planned to travel to Baramati to cast his vote as per his long-standing practice, but had to be admitted to a hospital in Mumbai after his health deteriorated. Doctors have advised him against travelling out of the city, he added.

"I have exercised my right to vote in the Baramati constituency continuously since 1967. This time, too, I had decided to come to Baramati and vote as per tradition. However, due to a sudden deterioration in my health, I had to be admitted to a hospital in Mumbai. Doctors have strictly advised me not to travel outside the city," he said.

"Due to this unavoidable situation, I will not be able to cast my vote. I wish to express this with a deeply saddened and heavy heart," he added. Pawar said his party has extended support to Sunetra Pawar in the bypoll.

"This is, in a way, a tribute from our party to the late Ajit Pawar. I appeal to all voters in Baramati to vote for Sunetra Ajit Pawar and pay tribute to him," the former Union minister said.

Pawar also said he had explored alternative options with election authorities to cast his vote, but was informed that no such provisions were available. (PTI)

Families battle loss year after Pahalgam attack, Army's stern warning to perpetrators of terrorism

NEW DELHI, April 21: The Indian Army on Tuesday issued a stern warning to the perpetrators of terrorism on the eve of the first anniversary of the Pahalgam attack, asserting the response is decisive when "boundaries of humanity are crossed" as families of the victims said they are still coming to grips with the loss.

As a tribute to those who lost their lives in the attack that took place in the meadows of Baisaran valley, a memorial has been erected in the hill resort of Pahalgam. Built of black marble, it bears the names of the 26 victims - 25 tourists and local ponywallah Adil Shah - and has been constructed along the banks of the Lidder river.

For the family of N Ramachandran, one of the tourists killed, nothing has changed and the family is yet to recover from his untimely death.

Ramachandran, 65, on holiday in Kashmir with his wife, daughter, and grandchildren, was gunned down by terrorists in the attack on April 22 that sent shockwaves across the country, prompting India to launch Operation Sindoor, a military response targeting terror launchpads in Pakistan.

Arathi R Menon, before whose eyes her father was killed, said there was nothing more for her to say about the tragedy. "What more to say. I don't want to say anything more. A year has gone by, everything is the same. So, I don't want to comment anything about it. Right now I am not in a state to comment anything. I am so sorry," she told PTI in Kochi.

She also said she was in Kochi on-and-off

for the past one year and will now return to Dubai permanently. Ahead of the anniversary of the dastardly act, the Army in a post on X, said, "When boundaries of humanity are crossed, the response is decisive. Justice is Served. India Stands United. #SindoorAnniversary #JusticeEndures #NationFirst."

The post, heavily symbolic, also carried a digital poster bearing a silhouetted image of the map of India with the caption "SOME BOUNDARIES SHOULD NEVER BE CROSSED."

The 'O' in the word 'CROSSED' was depicted by a bowl carrying a dash of 'sindoor' (vermillion), and a tagline at the bottom printed in crimson hue, read, "INDIA DOES NOT FORGET" with a red line drawn at the bottom.

After launching the decisive military operation, the Indian Army in a post on X on May 7 last year had said, "#PahalgamTerrorAttack Justice is Served. Jai Hind!" along with a digital poster that carried the name "OPERATION SINDOOR". One of the Os in "SINDOOR" was portrayed as a bowl carrying a dash of 'sindoor'.

For the family of Lt Vinay Narwal, the Indian Navy officer who was among those killed, too, life hasn't been the same.

Lt Vinay, 26, and his wife Himanshi were on a honeymoon in Pahalgam when terrorists shot him at point-blank range.

Speaking to reporters at his Karnal residence, Rajesh Narwal, a government employee, said for the past one year, the family has been grappling with the loss.

He said that his son's death was not only

painful for the family, but also a major loss for the nation.

The family of Manjunath Rao, a realtor from Shivamogga in Karnataka, says the trauma remains etched in their minds even as they try to move on with life.

"They cannot forget anything. It remains in their minds. But life has to go on... They have no choice but to cope. His wife is not willing to speak about it... What is there to say? Life has to go on," his cousin Ravi Kiran told PTI.

Rao (47) was shot dead in front of his wife Pallavi and their son.

Forty-one-year-old IT professional Bharath Bushan from Bengaluru also fell victim to bullets while his wife and their then three-year-old son survived the attack.

Bushan's father V Chennaveerappa was unwilling to speak about the incident, only saying, "We are in a lot of pain. I don't wish to speak about it. My wife is also unwell. We are in deep distress."

Pragati Jagdale, who lost her husband Santosh Jagdale and his best friend Kaushtubh Ganbote, said, "We were all happy, taking pictures at Baisaran Valley when suddenly gunshots were heard. Within moments, terrorists targeted my husband, his friend Kaushtubh Ganbote, and other unarmed Hindu tourists on the basis of religion and killed them."

She said she saw her husband and his friend being killed in front of her eyes.

"The incident has deeply scarred my psyche and it is not possible to forget that trauma," she said. (PTI)

Govt strengthening infrastructure, prioritising early diagnosis of non-communicable diseases: Nadda

NEW DELHI, April 21: Since 60 per cent of deaths in the country take place due to non-communicable diseases, the area is being prioritised with focus on strengthening infrastructure, and early diagnosis and detection, Union Health Minister J P Nadda said on Tuesday.

Nadda chaired a session titled "Addressing Non-Communicable Diseases in India: From Preventive to Care" here on the occasion of Civil Services Day.

Addressing the gathering, Nadda highlighted the transition in India's healthcare approach from preventive to curative care. He said, "In 2017, we came out with a holistic and inclusive health policy, where we focused on preventive, promotive, curative, geriatric, rehabilitative and palliative care."

Nadda emphasised that while the country has performed very well on the communicable diseases front, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) need more focus as observing their outcomes require more time, and a knowledge gap exists in this field which needs to

be addressed. Acknowledging this, Nadda said, "Since 60 per cent of total deaths in the country take place due to NCDs, the area is being prioritised."

He further said under the National Program for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, focus has been on strengthening infrastructure, early diagnosis and detection, timely referral, health awareness and management of NCDs.

"Health promotion is certainly one of the major areas, and management of these diseases and timely referral are also very important. These are the key issues we are trying to address as far as non-communicable diseases are concerned," he said.

Underlining the government's efforts, Nadda said in the past six years, the Centre has set up more than 1.85 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs -- the first contact point between 1.45 billion people and health institutions. Each of these Ayushman centres has one ASHA worker, and wherever possible,



other frontline health staff.

He further said the government has also strengthened mechanisms related to screening of NCDs.

Nadda highlighted the positive outcomes of these efforts, saying "We have developed around 107 non-communicable disease clinics at district-level points and 233 cardiac care units." "In this budget itself, it has been announced that every district will have a day-care cancer centre," he added.

The Union minister underscored the large-scale screening efforts to

address NCDs across the country.

He emphasised that since 2017, 41.5 crore people have been screened for hypertension, out of which 7.1 crore have been diagnosed, and 5.7 crore notified.

"We have tried to ensure early detection to help make India healthy. For example, 41.3 crore people have been screened for diabetes, out of which 4.7 crore people have been found diabetic, and 3.4 crore people are being treated. For oral cancer, 35.3 crore people have been screened so far and 2.3

8 killed, several injured in fireworks factory blast in Kerala

THRISSUR (KERALA), April 21: At least eight people were killed and several others injured in a blast at a fireworks manufacturing unit at Mundathicore in central Thrissur district on Tuesday, officials said.

Around 40 people were suspected to have been present in the shed at the time of the explosion, and many of them sustained burn injuries, with several reported to be in critical condition.

The mishap occurred in a shed where crackers were being prepared on behalf of a temple devaswom ahead of the upcoming Thrissur Pooram, which falls on April 26. The injured were rushed to nearby hospitals.

According to the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA), eight people were confirmed dead. Five bodies were recovered, while the body parts of three others were found at the site. Television visuals showed residents assisting in rescue efforts, shifting the injured and recovering remains from the blast site.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan directed that all necessary medical assistance be provided to the injured and instructed officials to ensure coordinated rescue and relief operations.

He spoke to the chief secretary and directed that, if required, the services of expert doctors from outside the state be utilised for treating those with severe burn injuries, according to a Chief Minister's Office (CMO) statement.

All departments, including police,

fire and rescue services, health, revenue, and disaster management, have been coordinated for rescue efforts, and a special mechanism has been set up to monitor the situation, it said.

The CM also expressed condolences over the loss of lives.

State Health Minister Veena George directed officials to ensure specialised treatment for the injured and to make necessary arrangements at Government Medical College, Thrissur, and Thrissur General Hospital. Nearby hospitals have also been placed on alert.

She also called for the deployment of additional ambulances, including those under the Kaniv 108 service, for emergency response and patient transport.

According to residents, the explosion occurred at around 3.30 pm, and intermittent blasts continued in the area, hampering rescue operations.

Firecrackers were being manufactured in multiple temporary sheds located in an isolated area amid paddy fields. A government official who reached the spot said food had reportedly been arranged for around 40 workers, indicating that at least that many people may have been present when the accident occurred.

Some workers are believed to have escaped with minor injuries, he added.

Fire and rescue personnel, along with police, are leading the operations, though continuing explosions are posing serious challenges to rescue efforts. (PTI)

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Emraan Hashmi-Disha Patani starrer 'Awarapan 2' to re-release on August 14



Production banner Vishesh Films on Tuesday announced that the sequel to the 2007 cult romantic thriller "Awarapan" will arrive in cinemas about August 14. Described as an action drama about "one man's fight for love, death and redemption," "Awarapan 2" brings back Emraan Hashmi as Shivam, the brooding protagonist of the

original, alongside Disha Patani, who joins the franchise for the first time.

The film is directed by Nitin Kakkar, known for "Filmistan," and written by Bilal Siddiqui of "Ba****ds of Bollywood" fame. It is produced by Vishesh Bhatt and is currently in its final leg of production in Mumbai.

Producer Vishesh Bhatt said the project

was rooted in the emotional legacy of the original.

"Awarapan" is an emotion so large that it's meant for the big screen. It also presents exotic settings and large-scale sequences but fundamentally it's built on our core principles of layered storytelling with powerful characters and rich music," he said.

Bhatt added that Hashmi connected deeply with the material.

"Emraan felt the angst of Shivam so deeply that he stepped into character in a heartbeat. And with Disha Patani joining us, the world of the film opened up to new possibilities," he said.

The sequel had earlier been announced for an April 3 release before being pushed to the Independence Day window.

The film is being developed as a musical, intense love story, with two recreated songs from the original album said to be among its major highlights.

The original "Awarapan," directed by Mohit Suri, had gained cult status over the years, particularly for its soundtrack, which featured tracks such as "Toh Phir Aao" and "Tera Mera Rishta". (PTI)

AYUSHMANN KHURRANA, SHARVARI'S 'YEH PREM MOL LIYA' TO HIT THEATRES ON NOVEMBER 27



Filmmaker Sooraj Barjatya's next feature "Yeh Prem Mol Liya", starring Ayushmann Khurrana and Sharvari, will be released in theatres on November 27, the makers announced on Tuesday.

Sooraj's banner Rajshri Productions shared the news in a statement posted on Instagram. "We Have An Announcement!! This November, Rajshri Productions (P) Ltd. in association with Mahaveer Jain Films, brings to the BIG screen a family entertainer directed by Sooraj R. Barjatya titled - 'Yeh Prem Mol Liya' starring Ayushmann Khurrana and Sharvari a Himesh Reshammiya musical. In theatres 27th November 2026 - Save the date," read the statement.

The film marks Sooraj's comeback to movies after a gap of four years. The filmmaker, known for making family dramas like "Hum Aapke Hain Koun..", "Hum Saath Saath Hai" and "Vivaah", last directed "Uunchai" (2022), featuring Amitabh Bachchan, Boman Irani and Anupam Kher.

Sooraj, who won the National Award for Best Director for "Uunchai", reunites with composer Himesh Reshammiya on the project. The two last collaborated on Prem Ratan Dhan Payo in 2014.

The film is being positioned as a wholesome family entertainer at a time when mainstream Hindi theatrical cinema has been largely driven by action, horror and historical epics.

"Yeh Prem Mol Liya" brings Sharvari and Ayushmann together on screen for the first time. Ayushmann has a packed slate ahead of "Yeh Prem Mol Liya". His next release is the family comedy "Pati Patni Aur Woh Do", directed by Mudassar Aziz. The film is slated to hit cinemas on May 15.

Sharvari, meanwhile, is equally busy with multiple projects. She stars in Imtiaz Ali's "Main Vaapas Aaunga" alongside Diljit Dosanjh and Vedang Raina. It is set to release in theatres on May 12.

She will also feature in "Alpha", the first female-led film in the YRF Spy Universe, co-starring Alia Bhatt and directed by Shiv Rawail. The movie is set for a theatrical release on July 10. (PTI)



Jr NTR's movie with 'KGF' director Prashant Neel to come out in June 2027

Telugu superstar Jr NTR's upcoming pan-India movie with filmmaker Prashant Neel will be released in theatres on June 11, 2027.

The first glimpse of the movie will be unveiled on May 20, coinciding with Jr NTR's 43rd birthday.

"When the storm finds its purpose," wrote producer Mythri Movie Makers on X while sharing the announcement. The banner also shared a poster featuring a striking avatar of Jr NTR.

The project, which has been postponed multiple times since it went on floors in April 2025, was earlier scheduled to release in June 2026.

Directed by Neel, who also penned the script, the film is reportedly titled "Dragon". It is jointly produced by Mythri Movie Makers, NTR Arts and T-Series.

Neel is best known for the blockbuster "KGF" franchise and "Salaar Part 1: Ceasefire", the latter releasing in December 2023.

Jr NTR was last seen in "Devara: Part 1", directed by Koratala Siva, which released in September 2024 alongside Janhvi Kapoor and Saif Ali Khan. (PTI)

Scorpions' 'Coming Home' India tour cancelled due to medical concerns, tickets to be refunded



German hard rock band Scorpions, known for hit tracks such as "Wind of Change" and "Blackout", has cancelled its shows in India due to "unforeseen medical circumstances affecting the band members".

The band, which was founded in Hanover in 1965 by guitarist Rudolf Schenker, was set to perform in Shillong on April 21 at JN Stadium, followed by stops at Delhi-NCR on April 24 at HUDA Grounds, Bengaluru on April 26 at NICE Grounds and Mumbai on April 30 at Jio Gardens, BKC.

The "Coming Home" India Tour was produced and promoted by BookMyShow Live.

The organisers shared an Instagram post announcing the cancellation of the shows on Saturday.

"We regret to inform you that the Scorpions 'Coming Home' India Tour scheduled in Shillong on April 21st, Delhi-NCR on April 24th, Bengaluru on April 26th and Mumbai on April 30th, stands cancelled due to unforeseen medical circumstances affecting the band members," read the note in the post.

"We apologise for the inconvenience and disappointment caused to fans. The band are very keen to perform in

India when possible and within their schedule. All the tickets purchased on bookmyshow will be automatically refunded within 7-10 working days," it added.

Besides Schenker, the members of the band include guitarist Matthias Jabs, vocalist Klaus Meine, bassist Pawel Maciwoda and drummer Mikkey Dee.

Scorpions last performed in India during the 2000s, touring the country as part of their "Acoustica Live Tour" in August 2001 with a concert in Bengaluru, and later during the "Humanity World Tour" in December 2007, when they played shows in Shillong, Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Ahead of their "Coming Home" tour, the band had shared their excitement about returning to India and reminisced about their previous visits.

"We have great memories from playing in India almost 20 years ago. We played in Shillong, Mumbai... and we're going to play again in those cities this time around. The audience is fantastic, it's a rock audience and we have best memories. And now, since it's such a long time ago, we expect to play to a new generation also because it's almost 20 years ago and it's time for us to come back now," Jabs told PTI. (PTI)

Adivi Sesh's 'Dacoit: Ek Prem Katha' crosses Rs 50 crore gross worldwide

Action drama "Dacoit: Ek Prem Katha", starring Adivi Sesh and Mrunal Thakur, has crossed ₹ 50 crore gross at the worldwide box office, the makers said on Saturday.

The film, which opened to ₹ 15 crore on its first day last Friday, has seen significant growth over the weekend.

"Adivi Sesh's Dacoit: Ek Prem Katha continues its impressive run, winning hearts, thrilling audiences, and holding a rock-solid grip at the box office. Riding high on an exceptional wave of appreciation, the film witnessed massive growth over the weekend and has now amassed an impressive total of over ₹ 50 crores gross worldwide," the makers said in a press note.

Directed by debutant Shaneli Deo, who co-wrote the screenplay with Sesh, "Dacoit" is a bilingual release in Telugu and Hindi.

The movie, about an angry convict seeking vengeance on his girlfriend who betrayed him, is produced by Supriya Yarlagadda, co-presented by Suniel Narang, and presented by Annapurna Studios. The film also stars Prakash Raj, Atul Kulkarni and Zayn Marie Khan in pivotal roles. (PTI)

'SEPTEMBER 21', HINDI-KANNADA FILM ON ALZHEIMER'S, TO PREMIERE AT CANNES MARKET

"September 21", the debut feature from 22-year-old writer-director Karen Kshiti Suvama, will have its world premiere at the Marché du Film at the Festival de Cannes on May 16.

The film, shot in Hindi and Kannada, centres on an Alzheimer's patient who believes his wife is quarantined next door due to COVID-19, while his estranged son returns home torn between personal ambition and duty.

Suvama, who describes silence and restraint as the film's primary language, said the project is as much about those who care for dementia patients as about the patients themselves.

"The struggles faced by caregivers are much greater than the struggles faced by Alzheimer's patients," the director said in a statement.

In the movie, Pravin Singh



Sisodia plays the father living with dementia.

Goa. (PTI)

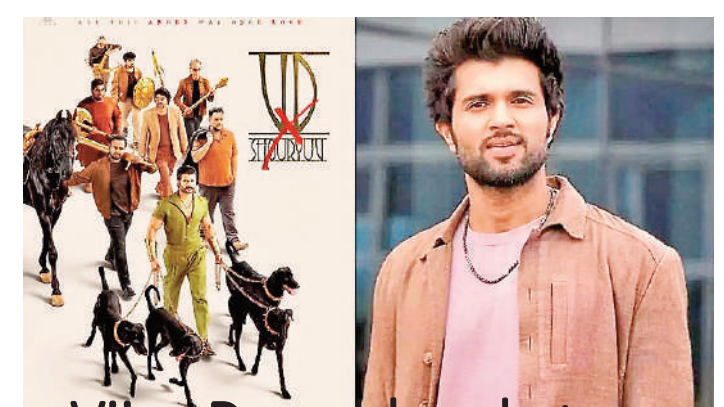
The cast also includes Priyanka Upendra, Zarina Wahab, Ajith Shidhaye and Amit Behl.

The film is written by Rajshekhar, with music by Vinayy Chandraa.

Produced by Visica Films, FMD Productions and HumaraMovie with Filmsmax, the project has been endorsed by the Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India (ARDSI).

HumaraMovie is partnered by Preety Ali, wife of filmmaker Imtiaz Ali, and has previously backed festival titles "Follower" and "Tortoise Under the Earth".

The film was earlier showcased in the Work-in-Progress section at the 56th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in



Vijay Deverakonda teams up with 'Hi Nanna' director Shouryuv for next film

Telugu star Vijay Deverakonda has joined hands with filmmaker Shouryuv for his next feature film, the actor announced on Saturday. The 36-year-old actor shared the first look poster from the project on Instagram and it featured him dressed in an army green jumpsuit with gold gauntlets, walking three black dogs on gold chains.

"My next is #VDxShouryuv. Introducing the team taking on the scary task of making this intimidating film. So happy to have this fire-cracker global team working on this one with Shouryuv on his wild imagination and intense heart.

"ROAR my friends. I will give you my all. Peak excitement and lots of love," he wrote in the caption. Shouryuv made an impressive debut with "Hi Nanna", starring Nani and Mrunal Thakur in the lead.

The 2024 film was a commercial blockbuster and earned critical acclaim for its heartfelt storytelling, the lead performances, and its music composed by Hesham Abdul Wahab. The compose will also provide music for the new project, which is bankrolled by production banner Vyra Entertainment. (PTI)

Real Madrid claims European championship again



LAUSANNE, April 21: Real Madrid has at least earned one trophy this season and become a European champion again on Monday.

Madrid won the UEFA Youth League final — effectively the Champions League for under-19

teams — by beating Club Brugge in a penalty shootout after a 1-1 draw on a sun-splashed evening in Switzerland.

Madrid goalkeeper Javier Navarro was key to a 4-2 shootout win, saving from Brugge's Naim Amengai and Tian Koren.

The Spanish power's second title in the 12-year history of the UEFA youth competition came five days after elimination in the Champions League quarterfinals, where Madrid fielded no home-grown academy players in the starting lineup against Bayern

Munich.

Club president Florentino Perez was present on Monday at the stadium of Swiss club Lausanne-Sport alongside UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin. Two months ago, Madrid and UEFA settled a years-long dispute over the failed breakaway Super League project driven by Perez.

Ceferin presented the players' medals and put his right arm around the shoulders of his fellow Slovenian Koren to console the tearful 16-year-old.

Madrid defender Diego Aguado scored the decisive spot kick beyond the dive of Brugge goalkeeper Argus Vanden Driessche. The teams went directly to a shootout without playing extra time.

It was the second shootout win for Madrid in three days, after Navarro's saves helped the team beat Paris Saint-Germain on Friday in the semifinals, which also finished 1-1 on Lausanne's arti-

ficial turf.

On Monday, Madrid dominated the early play and influential winger Daniel Yáñez came close to scoring three times.

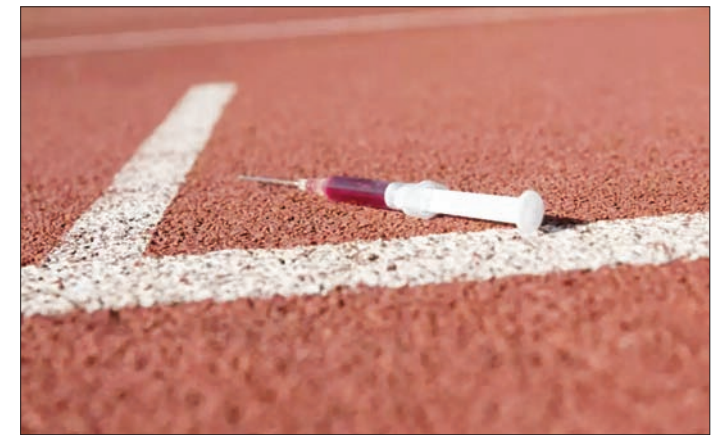
The lead came in the 23rd minute when center forward Jacobo Ortega scored from a deft flick with his right heel in the goalmouth. The Brugge defense was in nervous turmoil and Madrid twice had chances in the next 90 seconds to double the lead.

Brugge leveled in the 64th when Tian Koren's surging run and low cross across the goal was met by Tobias Lund Jensen.

Madrid joined Chelsea with two UEFA Youth League titles. Barcelona has three, including last year.

Barcelona has a clear lead over Madrid in Spain's La Liga, and Real Sociedad won the Copa del Rey on Saturday, leaving Madrid's star-studded first team trophyless for a second straight season. (AP)

Red-faced AFI vows to come out of highest-risk of doping category soon



NEW DELHI, April 21: Left red-faced after the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) designated India as a country with an "extremely high" risk of doping, the national federation on Tuesday said it will work with the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) and the Sports Ministry to quickly come out of the category of worst doping offenders.

India was on Monday placed in the highest-risk category for doping by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU), an independent watchdog set up by World Athletics (WA), after recording the highest number of positive cases over the past two years.

In a decision taken recently by the AIU Board, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has been re-categorised from Category B to Category A under Rule 15 of the World Athletics' Anti-Doping Rules.

The development will put the Indian athletes under more stringent anti-doping stipulations.

The AFI acknowledged the AIU's decision and said it will work towards moving out of Category A.

"With continued collaboration with the AIU, NADA and the ministry of youth affairs and sports, AFI is confident that India will overcome the challenge and soon be removed from Category A," said AFI.

Under the World Athletics Anti-Doping Rules, the AIU Board categorises all Member Federations according to their doping risk to the sport. Category 'A' Member Federations, representing the highest risk, are subject to more stringent requirements, including minimum testing of their national team athletes.

Category 'B' Member Federations represent a medium doping risk while Category 'C' Member Federations represent a low doping risk.

India has ranked in the top two for the most Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs) in athletics between 2022 and 2025.

According to the AIU, India recorded 48 ADRVs (ranked 2nd) in 2022, 63 (ranked 2nd) in 2023, 71 (ranked 1st) in 2024 and 30 ADRVs (ranked 1st) in 2025 (data received so far).

Recently, India has surpassed Kenya to top the Athletics Integrity Unit's (AIU) list of ineligible persons due to doping violations with 148 suspended athletes.

Under Rule 15.3.3 of the World Athletics Anti-Doping Rules in force since January 2026, every three years the AIU Board shall determine in its absolute discretion the category of each Member Federation by taking into account factors such as doping history of athletes, athlete support personnel etc, confidential intelligence or other information, the extent of success, or the potential for success, of the Member Federation in international events, the effectiveness of the national anti-doping programme in the country to detect and pursue doping at all levels.

Cricket is expected to be a major attraction for Indian audiences, with both men's and women's teams in contention for top honours. (PTI)

The AIU, however, may change a Member Federation's assigned category at any time within the three years.

The AFI said it has consistently maintained that doping undermines the growth of athletics in India.

"The federation has actively collaborated with anti-doping bodies, both domestic and international, to strengthen education, enhance testing and support intelligence-led investigation," the AFI said.

"AFI has also strongly advocated for the criminalisation of those responsible for doping — particularly at the grassroots — to deter coaches and parents from exploiting young athletes."

It said the AIU has also recognised AFI's push for meaningful anti-doping reforms in India and said it remains committed to working closely with the AIU and NADA to combat doping at every level.

While upgrading India in Category A from Category B, AIU Chair David Howman has said that the doping situation in India "has been high-risk for a long time" and, unfortunately, the "quality of the domestic anti-doping programme is simply not proportionate to the doping risk."

"While the AFI has advocated for anti-doping reforms within India, not enough has changed. The AIU will now work with the AFI to achieve reforms to safeguard the integrity of the sport of athletics, as we have done with other 'Category A' Member Federations," he had said.

Obligations Under Rule 15

A Category 'A' Member Federation shall ensure that there is an effective, intelligent and proportionate annual testing programme maintained and implemented within their jurisdiction that complies with the International Standard for Testing and Investigations.

The Testing Programme must ensure that athletes of the national team in any World Athletics Series Event, Olympic Games or World Athletics Ultimate Championship, and who are not already on the International Registered Testing Pool, have been adequately tested.

The Testing Programme must include in-competition testing, no notice out-of-competition testing and pre-competition blood testing for screening purposes (Athlete Biological Passport) and analyses as prescribed by WADA.

If athletes do not reside or train from time to time in the country, it remains the responsibility of Category 'A' Member Federation to ensure that the athletes are subject to testing abroad.

A Category 'A' Member Federation shall monitor the performance of elite athletes under its jurisdiction and keeps the pool updated throughout the duration of the Testing Programme.

No athlete may participate in the World Championships or Olympic Games unless, in the 10 months prior to the deadline set by the Integrity Unit for the relevant Event, they have undergone at least three no notice Out-of-Competition tests. (PTI)

Soccer player Dos Santos signs first pro deal after surviving fatal bar fire in Switzerland

METZ (FRANCE), April 21: After surviving a fatal bar fire in Switzerland on New Year's Day, French soccer player Tahiry Dos Santos has signed his first professional contract with Metz.

The Ligue 1 club announced the one-year contract signing late Monday, nine days after the 19-year-old defender returned to play for its reserves team.

Dos Santos was severely burned in the fire at a bar in ski resort Crans-Montana in the early hours of Jan. 1 that killed 41 people and injured more than 100.

"This moment has an even more special meaning after the difficult months I went through in the hospital," Dos Santos said in a club statement. "This test made me stronger and taught me to never give up."

The French teenager, who has family ties to Cape Verde, joined his local club Metz at age eight. His return to action on April 11 was in the French fifth-tier division.

Metz is last in Ligue 1 and will be relegated to play in the second tier next season.

A product of Metz' youth academy, Dos Santos is described by the club as "a tireless worker and exemplary both on and off the field." After being named captain of the reserve team at the start of the season, he began training with the first team and earned his first call-up at the end of December for a French Cup match.

"I am very happy and proud to sign my first professional contract with my training club. It's the culmination of many years of work, sacrifice, and determination to achieve my childhood dream," he said.

That dream could have come to an abrupt end in Crans-Montana. But Dos Santos man-



aged to survive the inferno.

While he could have escaped before the fire spread, he turned back to rescue his girlfriend Coline from the restroom.

"We had been in the bar for thirty or forty minutes, the atmosphere was good," he told L'Equipe newspaper earlier this year. "Coline wanted to go to the restroom, so I went with her. I came out before she did and headed toward the exit. That's when I saw the flames. I immediately understood we were in danger. I didn't think — I turned back to get her. I shouted her name, and she immediately saw in

my eyes that something was wrong. She followed me right away."

Dos Santos recalled that he was separated from his girlfriend after they both slipped in a staircase as panic spread. L'Equipe reported that Dos Santos suffered burns to his back, face, hands and arms, and underwent a skin graft. Coline was evacuated to a hospital in Belgium and spent three weeks in a coma, undergoing surgery three times.

"I want to send all my support to everyone who is still fighting, never lose hope," Dos Santos said. (AP)

Al-Ahli rally into the AFC Champions League Elite final



JEDDAH (SAUDI ARABIA),

April 21: Defending champion Al-Ahli reached the final of the AFC Champions League Elite after Ivan Toney's second-half goal beat Vissel Kobe of Japan 2-1 on Monday.

In Saturday's final in Jeddah, Al-Ahli will face Shabab Al-Ahli of the United Arab Emirates or Machida Zelvia of Japan, who meet on Tuesday.

Al-Ahli came from behind after Vissel Kobe took the lead in the 32nd minute. Yuya Osako headed a free kick into the path

of Yushinori Muto, who finished from close range.

Al-Ahli came close to equalizing just before halftime when Rayad Hamad hit the post with a header, and England striker Toney backheeled narrowly wide moments later.

Toney had the ball in the net five minutes after the restart, running clear to fire low from just inside the area, but the effort was ruled out for offside.

Kobe nearly doubled its lead soon after, only for Daiju Sasaki's shot to rebound off the

crossbar.

Al-Ahli equalized in the 62nd when Brazilian winger Galeno curled a shot into the top corner from 25 meters.

The Saudi side went ahead eight minutes later when the Kobe goalkeeper's parry fell to Toney, whose first-time shot went in through a crowded six-yard box.

Riyad Mahrez thought he had added a third with 15 minutes remaining but the effort from the former Manchester City star was disallowed for offside. (AP)

Sony bags Asian Games broadcast rights

NEW DELHI, April 21: Sony Pictures Networks India has secured the exclusive broadcast rights for the 20th Asian Games Aichi-Nagoya 2026, scheduled to be held in Japan from September 19-October 4.

As per the deal, the continental showpiece will be telecast on Sony Sports Network channels and streamed on Sony LIV across India and the subcontinent.

India will head into the Games on the back of a historic campaign in the previous edition, where it secured a record 107 medals.

"We are proud to bring this continental multi-sport event back to Sony Pictures Networks for the third time," Rajesh Kaul, Chief Revenue Officer and Business Head — Sports and International, SPNI said in a release.

The Asian Games, one of the biggest multi-sport events globally, will feature 41 disciplines, including 32 Olympic sports, with new additions such as mixed martial arts and surfing.

Traditional events like cricket, tennis, esports, kabaddi, sepak takraw and kurash will also be part of the programme.

Cricket is expected to be a major attraction for Indian audiences, with both men's and women's teams in contention for top honours. (PTI)

Bhagwant Mann meets hockey legend Bovelander, invites him to engage with Punjab athletes

CHANDIGARH, April 21: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday reached out to celebrated Dutch hockey legend Floris Jan Bovelander, offering to tap into his expertise to further strengthen hockey in the state, especially in the lead-up to the prestigious Asian Champions Trophy.

During a detailed meeting, Mann, who is currently on a visit to the Netherlands, discussed the broader ecosystem of hockey and sports in Punjab, emphasising the government's commitment to restoring the pristine glory of the national game.

He lauded 60-year-old Bovelander's exceptional skills and immense contribution to hockey, noting that his remarkable journey continues to inspire young players across the globe.

Last month, Mann had said that the upcoming Asian Champions Trophy will be hosted by Punjab in October this year.

The ACT will also be the first international hockey tournament to be held in Punjab under the aegis of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) and the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF).

Mann invited the legendary Dutch drag-flicker Bovelander to Punjab, saying the state is keen to facilitate his engagement with athletes to sharpen their skills and exposure.

Mann said Bovelander has graciously accepted the invitation and added that he will be engaging with Punjab athletes and motivating them ahead of the upcoming ACT.

Mann on Saturday embarked on a visit to the Netherlands to strengthen bilateral part-



nerships and attract investments across key sectors including food processing, logistics, alloys and steels, pharmaceuticals and information technology, officials had said.

"Punjab is committed to nurturing sporting talent and taking hockey to new

heights. It is a matter of immense pride that, for the first time in its history, Punjab will host the Hockey Asian Champions Trophy, which is a major milestone for the state's sporting ecosystem," Mann said, according to an official statement on Tuesday after the CM met Bovelander.

Highlighting the significance of upcoming international events, Mann said the Asian Games will conclude in early October, after which the top six teams will compete in the Champions Trophy.

He added that the approval of a four-nation invitational tournament will further strengthen Punjab's position as a global hockey hub.

"Despite a strong Punjabi presence in Indian hockey over decades, Punjab had

never hosted a major international hockey tournament until now. This marks a historic shift," he noted.

Reiterating the deep-rooted connection between Punjab and hockey, Mann said the two are inseparable.

"It is impossible to imagine Indian hockey without Punjabi players. More than 50 players from Punjab have won Olympic medals, and 10 Punjabi players have captained India in Olympic hockey," he stated.

Emphasising Punjab's rich legacy, Mann pointed out that villages such as Sansarpur, Khusrupur and Mithapur have collectively produced over 20 Olympians.

He further highlighted recent achievements, stating that India's bronze medal at

the Tokyo 2020 Olympics came after a gap of 41 years, with nine Punjab players in the squad led by Manpreet Singh.

"In the 2024 Paris Olympics as well, India secured another bronze medal, with 10 Punjabi players in the team, where Harmanpreet Singh led the side and emerged as top scorer," he added.

Sharing a few snippets from the meeting, Mann wrote on X: "Delighted to meet Olympian Floris Jan Bovelander in Netherlands, who is a celebrated Dutch hockey legend known for his exceptional skills and contributions to the sports industry. His remarkable journey and experience will greatly inspire our young players. Invited him to Punjab, and he has graciously accepted. (PTI)"

Parag's poor form, middle-order woes worry RR as they aim to halt slide vs struggling LSG

LUCKNOW, April 21: The form of the middle order, particularly that of skipper Riyan Parag, will be a key concern as Rajasthan Royals look to arrest a slide after back-to-back defeats when they take on a struggling Lucknow Super Giants in an IPL match, here on Wednesday.

Placed third in the points table, the inaugural edition champions began their campaign with four successive wins but have since faltered in their last two outings.

They suffered a 57-run defeat to Sunrisers Hyderabad after collapsing dramatically, losing five wickets for nine runs against pace.

In their previous match against Kolkata Knight Riders, RR let a strong position slip as Rinku Singh engineered a stunning turnaround to hand KKR their first win in seven matches this season.

As for Parag, a surprise choice as their skipper after Sanju Samson's exit, has endured a pathetic run with the bat, registering three single-digit scores in six innings with a high of just 20 so far.

The top-three, in Yashasvi Jaiswal, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Dhruv Jurel, has been RR's main force with the bat this season, but the side has often struggled when they fail.

While Parag is woefully out of touch, veteran Ravindra Jadeja has looked a shadow of his past self, while Guyanese big-hitter Shimron Hetmyer (39 runs from four innings) is yet to fire.

However, batting coach Vikram Rathour has backed his skipper to come good.

"As far as I am concerned, it is just a matter of time. Not everyone makes runs every time," Rathour had said of Parag's poor run, after their defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens.



"Teams run in such a way that some stay in form, some stay out of form. There is no doubt that he will come back and win us a few games on his own as a batter."

Fielding has also been a concern for RR. Nandre Burger dropped Rinku on 8, a lapse that proved costly as he, along with Anukul Roy, turned the game in the death overs.

However, despite the setbacks, RR appear a stronger unit than LSG, who are languishing in ninth place after three consecutive losses.

RR boast one of the most effective opening pairs this season, with Sooryavanshi in fine

form and Jaiswal providing consistent starts. LSG bowlers will need early breakthroughs to stay competitive.

However, that may not be easy as LSG's bowling attack is reeling after being taken apart by Punjab Kings.

Priyansh Arya and Cooper Connolly powered PBKS to 254/7 -- the highest total of the season -- en route to a 54-run win.

Arya and Connolly shared a 182-run stand for the second wicket in just 13.2 overs, putting the LSG attack under severe pressure.

Prince Yadav has been a rare bright spot with figures of 2/25, while pacers Avesh

Khan and Mohammed Shami have struggled for control. Manimaran Siddharth has also been expensive.

LSG will hope to target RR's fragile middle order.

The Lucknow batting unit, too, looks unsettled and they are still trying to figure out their best XI.

The decision to promote Ayush Badoni to open alongside Mitchell Marsh did not yield results.

Marsh though scored back-to-back 40s but has failed to convert starts, while captain Rishabh Pant has also not delivered consistently.

Nicholas Pooran's poor form has further compounded their problems.

For LSG to turn things around, their batting and bowling have to fire collectively.

Teams:

LSG: Rishabh Pant (c), Aiden Markram, Himmat Singh, Matthew Breetzke, Mukul Choudhary, Akshat Raghuvanshi, Josh Inglis, Mitchell Marsh, Abdul Samad, Shahbaz Ahmed, Arshin Kulkarni, Wanindu Hasaranga, Ayush Badoni, Mohammed Shami, Avesh Khan, M Siddharth, Digvesh Rathi, Akash Singh, Prince Yadav, Arjun Tendulkar, Anrich Nortje, Naman Tiwari, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan.

Rajasthan Royals: Riyan Parag (c), Dhruv Jurel, Donovan Ferreira, Lhuan-Dre Pretorius, Ravi Singh, Aman Perala, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ravindra Jadeja, Sam Curran, Adam Milne, Brijesh Sharma, Jofra Archer, Kuldeep Sen, Kwen Maphaka, Nandre Burger, Ravi Bishnoi, Sandeep Sharma.

Match starts: 7.30 pm. (PTI)

'A 99-run loss is unacceptable'

Hayden blames batting horror

AHMEDABAD, April 21: Gujarat Titans' batting coach Matthew Hayden was scathing about their 99-run defeat to Mumbai Indians, blaming a "horror" batting display and poor death bowling for the heavy loss in the IPL.

From being 44/3 in 5.5 overs, MI hammered 73 runs in the last four overs to post a challenging



199/5 here on Monday. In reply, GT were bundled out for 100.

"I expect our margins to be a lot smaller than 100 (99). That is an unacceptable scorecard for our batting unit," the legendary Australian opener told media in the pre-match interaction.

"It was just a horrible day for us today. Truth be told, there was nothing good about this day, really, apart from Rabada's performance with the ball. So we've got some work to do, definitely."

GT boast a strong batting line-up in Sai Sudharsan (759 runs), Shubman Gill (717), and Jos Buttler (538). They have also added New Zealand's explosive Glenn Phillips in the middle order alongside Shikhar Dhawan and Rahul Tewatia.

"When you look down at our batting line-up, we've got wonderful players that have to be in a better mindset and better position to take their opportunities. That is our expectations and has been since the conception of this Gujarat Titans franchise..."

"So you can't be sitting here and being happy about, a 100-run (99) margin game in a 20-over game. I mean, back in my day, 100 runs was almost a winning total in 50-over cricket!"

The 54-year-old said GT lost the game in the powerplay.

"Well, middle order was undoubtedly exposed today. When they're coming in with six overs, you know that you're in deep trouble. The thing about the power plays is that you can't win it from there, especially in a run chase, but you can definitely lose it, and we lost it in the power play," he said.

Shikhar (35 off 25 balls) and Tewatia (49 off 42) have not fared well this season and Hayden feels the duo along with Phillips (67 off 54 balls) have been struggling because the top order has been below its best.

"The relevance behind balls faced when you look at, for example, someone like Glenn Phillips -- his record in T20 cricket is an impressive strike rate and you'll take that all day long in the majority of games," Hay-

den said. "However, you need an upfront batting effort where you consistently taking the lion's share of the batting. We shouldn't be allowing, Tiwu (Tewatia) or Shikhar or these guys lots of balls. That's not their role. That's not what they train for."

Hayden said GT has an aggressive and adaptable unit but their execution fell apart on the day.

"We are a very good thinking batting unit. We're not a conservative batting unit. You don't go out and get 200s as often as we do being conservative. But they're an adaptive batting unit. ...they've got their roles and they play them and today they simply didn't."

"So the worry isn't just today about the middle order. It'd be unfair to say that, they were going to go on and score 13 runs an over because by that stage, I felt like as a batting coach, I was on the mast and the boat was sinking."

It was poorly executed bowling effort

Hayden also pointed to poor execution in the death overs.

"I feel like one-dimensional is very unfair on a world-class bowling attack, but I will take on board it was a poorly executed bowling effort this evening."

"When you look back at those last four overs, that was just a 'horror story' -- 73 off the last four is unacceptable as world-class players. That bowling line-up has to reflect on that performance... It was purely an executional thing."

He added that GT were below par with the ball on a surface that didn't fully justify the high total.

"We're very average with the ball, firstly, on a wicket that I really felt was probably a 175-type wicket."

"When you look historically at this black soil pitch on No. 5, it's a 200-wicket for the loss of five wickets. That's been its winning first-inning score, and today it wasn't that wicket (199/5)... It was visible that it had cracks in it. It was visible that it was up and down."

"So credit also has to go to Tilak Varma, who put in a wonderful performance. It wasn't a cookie-cutter type performance. It was a dominant performance down the ground. He read the play nicely. He was able to pick up and play with power and precision."

Hayden said the chase was still within reach but poor shot selection proved costly.

"And when you reflect on our own batting, we had one side of the ground that was a little more inaccessible than the other, and we lost, what, three wickets into the bigger side of that boundary."

"And it wasn't an impossible total. 200 still is a total that I would back our three world-class players at the top of the order to fetch into that a bit more and then allow our more sort of game players. An opportunity to set out their stalls and bat deep into the innings." (PTI)

I was working on my yorker, swing: Ashwani

AHMEDABAD, April 21: Young Mumbai Indians pacer Ashwani Kumar said he worked diligently on his yorkers and swing while waiting patiently for an opportunity, making the most of it with a four-wicket haul against Gujarat Titans.

After Tilak Varma's 101 off 45 balls powered Mumbai Indians to 199 for 5, Ashwani, playing his first game of the season, returned figures of four for 24 as the visitors bowled out Gujarat Titans for 100 in 15.5 overs.

"I was working on my yorker, on my swing. I was just waiting. Whenever I got a chance, I would do well. Otherwise, I was going to the temple. That's all I was doing," the 24-year-old said during the post-match press conference.

"I had seen the batsmen before, how they play, but when I went in and saw them, I did what the wicket demanded. We discussed it with the captain and tried to execute accordingly."

"It's a black-soil pitch, so we knew the ball would keep a bit low. In the first innings, the ball was moving a bit here and there. So our plan was to hit the right lengths and bowl according to what the surface demanded."

With the 99-run victory, Mumbai Indians snapped a four-match losing streak to climb to seventh place in the standings.

"We were looking at the mistakes we had made and followed what the coaches were telling us," Ashwani said. (PTI)

Holder calls selection chatter 'unnecessary energy', focuses on staying ready

KOLKATA, April 21: Fretting about selection "consumes a lot of unnecessary energy" for West Indies' seasoned pace-bowling all-rounder Jason Holder, who insists he has moved on from expecting things to "fall into my lap" as he waits for his opportunity with Gujarat Titans.

The 34-year-old, returning to the IPL after two seasons following a Rs 7-crore deal, has so far been overlooked with the franchise persisting with an overseas combination of Jos Buttler, Rashid Khan, Glenn Phillips and Kagiso Rabada.

But following GT's 99-run shellacking by Mumbai Indians at their home in Ahmedabad on Monday could prompt a rethink with Holder providing option of bowling both inside the power play and at the death, and also donning a finisher's hat with the bat.

In an exclusive interaction with PTI, the tall Bajan spoke about remaining focused on staying ready for a call-up rather than get distracted by the outside noise pertaining to selection.

"For us, getting consumed with when to play, or who's to play, or if not to play, or if this person should be playing or not... to me, it just consumes a lot of unnecessary energy," Holder said.

"Your job as an individual player is to be ready -- just come in and do a job for the team when called upon. The rest of it is in our hands."

"So I wouldn't even get sucked into who should play, or where we should be working, or who should bat or bowl. It's just more or less about what is required for us as a team to win."

Asked about his ideal batting position, he said: "Look, whatever position I'm needed in is ideal for me."

"Gone are the days when I would think that things will fall into my lap the way I want them



to be... So for me, it's more or less about adjusting to what the team needs and getting the job done. Me, personally, I came here to play.

"And yeah, whenever I do get an opportunity, I really want to grab it with both hands and enjoy it -- enjoy the experience -- and help this team to win."

On his readiness with bowl, he said: "I've been bowling four overs my whole career, so I don't see it being anything different. But again, whatever the team needs, I'm just ready to bowl, come in and do a good job for them."

"Your job as an individual player is to be ready... Just come in and do a job for the team when called upon. The rest of it is in our hands."

"So I wouldn't even get sucked into who should play, or where we should be working, or who should bat or bowl. It's just more or less about what is required for us as a team to win."

Chasing 200 against MI, GT suffered a batting meltdown to be bundled out for 100 as their batters came in for a lot of flak.

The Shubman Gill-led side has now slipped outside the top five, with their net run rate (-0.821) the second worst in the table -- only

ahead of bottom-placed Kolkata Knight Riders (-0.879) -- ahead of their away match against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Friday.

"It's hard losing any cricket game. Obviously, we had a tough loss last night... a pretty big defeat. But the only direction that we can go from here is up."

"We've had some really good discussions in the dressing room around how we can get better and the things that we need to do to improve."

Watch out for young pace gun Sharma
Bowling 150kph thunderbolts, 23-year-old rookie Rajasthan pacer Ashok Sharma has been a revelation this season.

Holder said he is one to watch out for in the long term.

"To see a young bowler come in and bowl at 145 kmph consistently... Ashok has been one of those guys who has really impressed me on that front."

"He's got pace, and beyond his pace is his skill... You see his slower balls, you see he's able to nail the yorkers, and over a period of time, he'll gain experience, he'll gain knowledge and understand when to bowl his deliveries at the best time."

"I'm really excited to see his progress. I think he's one to watch out for. If he remains fit and remains hungry, I think he can definitely go places."

"You can't train pace. You either have pace or you don't have pace and to sustain it without being injured for a very long time is difficult."

"So he's got a natural gift for being quick, but he's added some skills as well. So, I guess with more experience and more knowledge about the game, I expect pretty good things from him." (PTI)

We can be unstoppable: Tilak on Mumbai Indians' performance

NEW DELHI, April 21: Tilak Varma credited his match-winning century to "adapting to conditions" and expressed confidence that Mumbai Indians can be "unstoppable" from now on if they execute well, given the number of World Cup winners in their squad. Tilak's explosive 101 not out powered MI to a commanding 99-run win over Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad, ending their four-match losing streak in IPL 2026.

"It was very important for the team and for me," Tilak, who has been struggling for form in this season, told JioHotstar.

"Over the last four or five games, the one thing constantly running through my head was that I hadn't spent much time in the middle and hadn't faced many balls, so my aim was to spend some time at the wicket and then adapt according to the team's situation."

Speaking about his approach, Tilak said he assessed the pitch early and focused on straight hitting.

"Whenever MI comes to Ahmedabad, they usually give us a black-soil wicket, which is a bit slow in nature. It's not that our batters cannot adapt, but we know what we can do if there is more bounce," he said.

"Since it was slow and low, we had to adjust and try to hit straight. There wasn't much bounce, so playing across the line to deliveries in line with the stumps was risky."

"I decided to hit straighter, and I



read the conditions well; thankfully, I was able to score some runs."

On his preferred batting position, Tilak said he enjoys batting at No. 3 but remains flexible.

"Personally, I like batting at number three a lot. However, I am happy to bat wherever the team needs me, because since childhood, I have practised in a way that allows me to play confidently in any position."

"But if someone asks me, I would always say number three."

With the win lifting Mumbai Indians to seventh in the table, Tilak remains optimistic about a turnaround.

"I am grateful that it worked out that way. However, we shouldn't look too far ahead and should take one match at a time. Every game is almost like a knockout for us."

"We know what we are capable of, having several World Cup winners in the side, experienced players, and the skills we possess."

"If we execute well, we can be unstoppable. So, it is important to keep our heads down and continue working hard."

He also shared a light moment about his interaction with captain Hardik Pandya during a timeout.

"As everyone knows, Hardik bhai is very energetic. He was charged up and kept saying, 'As everyone knows, Hardik bhai is very energetic. He was charged up and kept saying, 'You can do it, you will do it,' to boost me."

"I just asked him to calm down because I needed to stay focused, and I assured him that I would take care of the rest." (PTI)

Shafali climbs two spots to sixth in ICC rankings for batters, Mandhana slips

NEW DELHI, April 21: India opener Shafali Verma climbed two places to sixth in the ICC Women's T20I Batting Rankings after her half-century against South Africa in the ongoing five-match T20I series.

Shafali struck a 57 off 38 balls in the second T20I in Durban last Sunday, but India lost to the hosts by eight wickets, slipping to 0-2 in the series.

India had also been defeated in the opening T20I at the same venue by six wickets, with Shafali contributing 34 runs.

India vice-captain and Shafali's opening partner, Smriti Mandhana, has slipped one spot to fourth after an underwhelming showing in the two matches so far, scoring 13 and 12. She has been overtaken at No. 3 by West Indies' Hayley Matthews.

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur has climbed two places and is now on the brink of the top 10, currently ranked 11th. She scored an unbeaten 47 in the first T20I.

Women's World Cup hero Jemimah Rodrigues has suffered a notable drop of four places and is now ranked 14th among batters following a subdued run of form.

The series serves as crucial preparation for both teams ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup, scheduled to begin in June in England and Wales.

South Africa captain Laura Wolvaardt has

retained her fifth position among T20I batters, sitting behind Australia's Georgia Voll, following a fine half-century in the second match against India.

Her teammates Annerie Dercksen, who has jumped 18 places to 33rd, and Sunee



Luus, up eight spots to 35th, have also made significant gains in the rankings after strong performances in the Durban match.

Meanwhile, India's bowling stalwarts Deepti Sharma, Renuka Singh Thakur, and Arundhati Reddy have all slipped in the bowlers' rankings. Deepti has dropped two places to fifth, while Renuka has fallen four spots to ninth.

Arundhati, meanwhile, has moved out of the top 10 after slipping three places to 12th. (PTI)

CSK's Ayush Mhatre ruled out of remainder of IPL 2026 due to hamstring injury

NEW DELHI, April 21: Chennai Super Kings batter Ayush Mhatre has been ruled out of the remainder of the ongoing IPL season due to a hamstring injury, dealing a major blow to the five-time champions.

The franchise said Mhatre, who sustained the injury during CSK's previous game against Sunrisers Hyderabad on April 18, will require a rehabilitation period of six to 12 weeks.

"Ayush Mhatre has been ruled out of the remainder of IPL 2026 due to a left hamstring injury sustained while batting during the match against Sunrisers Hyderabad on April 18."

"Ayush's injury will require a rehabilitation period of 6-12 weeks," CSK announced on its social media on Tuesday.

The 18-year-old, who came in as an impact substitute, was seen in visible discomfort and clutched his hamstring while attempting a run during CSK's 10-run loss to SRH in Hyderabad.

He required on-field treatment and, although he continued briefly, was dismissed soon after.

"It looks pretty bad, unfortunately. And he's going to be a big, big loss because he's been in really nice touch for us," CSK's batting coach Mike Hussey had said at the post-match press conference.

Mhatre has been CSK's standout batter this season. He has collected 201 runs from six matches at a strike-rate of 177.87.

Chennai Super Kings have endured a poor start to the 2026 season, losing four of their six matches to languish in eighth place. (PTI)