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Riniki Bhuyan 3 passports issue SC grants anticipatory bail to Pawan Khera

Matter appears to have stemmed from political rivalry: Top court

NEW DELHI, May 1: The Supreme Court has granted anticipatory bail to Congress leader Pawan Khera in a case related to making allegations against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife, saying the matter appears to have stemmed from political rivalry.

A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar, in its order uploaded on Friday, granted the pre-arrest bail to Khera subject to certain conditions. The court had on Thursday reserved its verdict in the matter.

Khera has alleged that Sarma's wife possessed multiple passports and undisclosed properties abroad.

"The right to personal liberty is a cherished fundamental right, and any deprivation thereof must be justified on a higher threshold, particularly where the surrounding circumstances may indicate the



presence of political overtones," the court said.

The appellant (Khera) is directed to be released on anticipatory bail in the event of his arrest in the crime branch police station and on such reasonable terms and conditions which may be put by the Investigating Officer as deemed fit, it directed.

The top court said it is of the opinion that while adjudicating an application for anticipatory bail, a careful balance must be struck between the State's interest in ensuring a fair investigation and the

individual's fundamental right to personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The bench directed Khera to cooperate in the investigation and to appear before the police station as and when required and intimated and he shall not influence or tamper with any of the evidence during pendency of the investigation or trial in the case.

It directed Khera to not leave India without prior leave of the competent court and said if the trial court deems it fit to impose some other conditions, it has the discretion to do the needful and put those conditions during trial.

"In this context, the criminal process must be applied with objectivity and circumspection so as to ensure that individual liberty is not imperiled by proceedings that may be coloured by political rivalry. We (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Bengal witnesses post-poll violence, probe begins



KOLKATA, May 1: Several incidents of alleged post-poll violence were reported from different districts of West Bengal, even as tension continued in parts of the state following the assembly elections, a senior police officer said on Friday.

Incidents of violence were reported from the districts of South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda and North 24 Parganas, he said.

In South 24 Parganas' Bhangar, tension flared on Thursday night after a TMC worker's shop at Nalmuri was allegedly set on fire.

The shop owner, Mohibur Molla, alleged that ISF supporters were behind the incident.

"I am a TMC worker. They set my shop on fire out of political revenge," he claimed.

ISF leaders denied the allegation, saying their party was not involved.

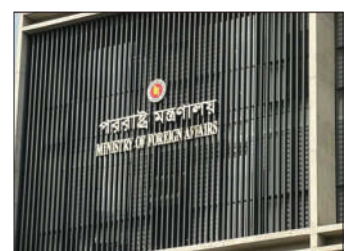
Clashes were also reported between ISF and TMC supporters in Krishnamati area, where locals alleged repeated crude bomb explosions.

"Remnants of explosives were found scattered in the locality, and several motorcycles were allegedly vandalised. Our officers rushed to the spot and deployed additional forces to bring the situation under control. We have detained several persons for questioning. The situation is tense but under control, and monitoring is on to prevent further escalation," the policeman told PTI.

In South 24 Parganas' Falta, BJP supporters staged a blockade on NH-117 on Friday, alleging that their workers were assaulted and prevented from voting during polling.

Residents of Hasimnagar in Bangnagar-II panchayat alleged that a section of voters were stopped from exercising their franchise on April 29 and later attacked. The allegations were denied by the ruling TMC. BJP candidate from Falta, Debanshu Panda,

Bangladesh's foreign ministry summons India's acting envoy



DHAKA, May 1: Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry has summoned India's acting High Commissioner Pawan Badhe and lodged a formal protest over certain comments made by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, according to a media report.

Director General (South Asia) Ishrat Jahan conveyed Bangladesh's position to the Indian diplomat on Thursday, an official was quoted as saying by the UNB news service.

In a social media post, Sarma last week said 20 foreign nationals were apprehended in Assam and pushed back to Bangladesh.

"Rude people don't understand soft language. We continuously remind ourselves of this prophetic line when we expel infiltrators from Assam who don't leave themselves. For instance, these 20 illegal Bangladeshis who were PUSHED BACK last night," Sarma said.

Ishrat told the Indian diplomat that such comments undermine the spirit of friendly relations between the two countries.

The official described the remarks as "disparaging" to Bangladesh-India relations and expressed Dhaka's displeasure.

Ishrat highlighted the importance of exercising restraint when addressing sensitive bilateral issues.

The relations between India and Bangladesh witnessed a major downturn after the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus came to power following the collapse of the Hasina government in 2024. India and Bangladesh (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Three NSCN-K (Nikki Sumi) cadres apprehended in Arunachal's Tirap

Arms, ammunition seized in joint operation by Assam Rifles and police

DIBRUGARH, May 1: Security forces apprehended three cadres of the NSCN-K (Nikki Sumi) in Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap district during a joint operation on Friday, officials said.

The apprehended individuals have been identified as Wingan Agan (33), Jhonny Riba (21) and Rajapeyu Khechan Khetey (30).

Acting on specific intelligence inputs, a joint team of Assam Rifles and Arunachal Pradesh Police launched an operation in the Wancho Colony area of Khonsa, leading to their arrest.

Officials said arms and incriminating materials were recovered from their possession, including two 7.65 mm pistols with magazines, three mobile phones, SIM cards, GPRN-related documents and a small quantity of suspected contraband.

The apprehended cadres, along with the recovered items, have been handed over to Arunachal Pradesh Police at Khonsa for further investigation.

Security agencies stated that the operation reflects sustained efforts to curb insurgent activities in the region.

In recent days, two more individuals linked to NSCN (Khang), including an underground worker, were also apprehended in Changlang district.

The Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts—collectively known as the TLC region—have witnessed insurgent activity for years.

However, officials noted that intensified counter-insurgency operations have led to multiple arrests and a gradual return of some cadres to the (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Mizoram prison spots forgery after 16 inmates escape; police nab 12, form SIT to probe fraud

AIZAWL, May 1: Over the past few months, 16 convicts got released from south Mizoram's Lunglei district jail, and nobody batted an eyelid. It was only last week that it came to light that the inmates were freed based on forged documents.

Spurred into action by the revelation, police apprehended 12 of those released convicts. Officials said an SIT has been formed to probe the lapse.

Jail authorities said the forgery of the documents was detected when officials at the Lunglei district and sessions court could not locate judicial records authorising the release of those inmates.

According to Lunglei Superintendent of Police, J Lalnuankima, 16 convicts serving jail terms of varying durations had walked out of the district jail using forged court orders and fabricated seals.

"Police launched a manhunt immediately after the forgery came to light with the filing of a police



complaint on April 25. Twelve of the 16 released convicts have since been apprehended, while one died while on the run," he told PTI, adding the search for the remaining three was underway.

A four-member Special Investigation Team (SIT), headed by Sub-Divisional Police Officer R Thankima, has been formed to probe into the fraud, the senior police officer said on Friday.

Lalmuankima said that preliminary investigation has identified 22-year-old jail inmate Jeremy Lalhangtura, already facing a litany of charges, including online fraud, as the mastermind behind the forgery. He was remanded to police (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

EC orders repoll in 15 booths of two Assembly constituencies in WB today

KOLKATA, May 1: The Election Commission on Friday ordered repoll in 15 polling stations of two Assembly constituencies in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district, to be held on May 2, following reports of electoral malpractices.

The repolls were ordered in 11 polling stations of Magrahat Paschim Assembly constituency and four in Diamond Harbour.

Voting will be held between 7 am and 6 pm, the EC order said.

Polling in these two Assembly constituencies was held in the second phase of the state election on April 29.

The repoll order was based on reports received from returning officers and observers of the two constituencies and "material circumstances".

The BJP had alleged rampant electoral malpractices in certain polling stations of both the Assembly seats under the Dimanad Harbour (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Domestic ATF steady; commercial LPG, 5-kg cylinders see steepest-ever hike

NEW DELHI, May 1: Aviation fuel prices for domestic airlines were left unchanged on Friday, providing stability for local carriers and sparing flyers any immediate cost increase, while commercial LPG and 5-kg cylinders recorded their steepest-ever rate hike, in line with a surge in international energy costs.

A month after jet fuel prices for them were more than doubled, state-owned oil firms hiked aviation turbine fuel (ATF) rates for international airlines by USD 76.55 per kilolitre, or 5.33 per cent, to USD 1,511.86 per kl.

Alongside, prices of commercial LPG - the one used in hotels and restaurants - were hiked by Rs 993 to a record high of ₹ 3,071.50 per 19-kg cylinder. The rates for 5-kg FTL or market-priced LPG cylinders were hiked from ₹ 549 to ₹ 810.50 per bottle.

The 5-kg FTL cylinder now costs just a shade lower than the ₹ 913 rate for a 14.2-kg cylinder used in household kitchens (called domestic LPG).

Also, prices of bulk diesel, used by industrial users like telecom signal towers, were increased from about ₹ 137 per litre to over ₹ 149 a litre. These rates com-

'Mahendragiri' endowed with potent weapon system delivered to Navy

NEW DELHI, May 1: Indigenous stealth frigate Mahendragiri, endowed with potent weapon system and cutting-edge sensor suite, has been delivered to the Indian Navy, officials said on Friday.

The sixth ship of Nilgiri-class (Project 17A) was delivered on April 30 at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL), Mumbai.

The delivery marks a "significant milestone" in achieving self-reliance in warship design and construction, the officials said.

"Project 17A frigates are versatile multi-mission platforms designed to address current and emerging challenges in the maritime domain. This state-of-the-art frigate reflects a quantum leap in naval design, stealth, firepower, automation, and survivability, and stands as an admirable symbol of Aatmanirbharta in warship building," the defence ministry said in a statement.

Mahendragiri -- Yard 12654 -- is the fourth ship of this class built at MDSL.

Designed by the Warship Design Bureau (WDB) and overseen by the Warship Overseeing Team (Mum-

Above-normal heatwave days likely in parts of India in May: IMD



NEW DELHI, May 1: Above-normal heatwave days are likely in some parts of the foothills of the Himalayas, east coast states, Gujarat and Maharashtra in May, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its monthly forecast on Friday.

The department also highlighted that the rainfall averaged over the country as a whole during May is most likely to be above normal, with the onset of the southwest monsoon over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands expected around May 14-16.

Director General of Meteorology, IMD, Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, said, "During May 2026, minimum temperatures are expected to

be above normal across many parts of the country."

"However, many areas of northwest India, along with some parts of central India and adjoining areas of peninsular India and southern parts of northeast India, are likely to experience normal to below-normal minimum temperatures," he said in a statement.

Rainfall in May is most likely to be above normal over India, barring some parts of east, northeast and east central India, where below-normal rainfall is expected.

On the onset of the southwest monsoon, Mohapatra said, "The monsoon may arrive over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands around May 14-16."

Currently, El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)-neutral conditions over the equatorial Pacific are evolving towards El Niño -- the periodic warming of waters in the central Pacific Ocean -- conditions.

The latest Monsoon Mission Coupled Forecasting System forecast indicates the development of El Niño conditions during the southwest monsoon season, according to the IMD. In April, the (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Calls for inclusive growth, youth empowerment and value-based education Governor inaugurates Sarat Mahanta Memorial Lecture

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 1: Lakshman Prasad Acharya inaugurated the Sarat Mahanta Memorial Lecture organised by the Sarat Mahanta Foundation at Royal Global University on Friday.

Paying tribute to late Prof Sarat Mahanta, the Governor described him as an eminent educationist and social thinker whose contributions continue to inspire generations.

He highlighted Prof Mahanta's academic legacy and his role in advocating for the rights of marginalised communities during his tenure with the Assam Human Rights Commission.

Emphasising the broader role of education, the Governor said it must go beyond knowledge acquisition to building character and responsible citizenship.

He noted that Prof Mahanta's progressive and democratic ideals remain highly relevant in today's context.

Referring to Assam's rich cultural and spiritual heritage, he recalled the teachings of Srimanta Sankardev and Mad-



havdev, stating that their legacy continues to shape the state's intellectual and cultural identity.

Highlighting the theme "India @100", the Governor said it reflects the country's collective aspiration to become a developed nation by 2047.

He stressed the importance of inclusive development, equal opportunities and youth empowerment in achieving

this vision.

He further underscored the significance of initiatives such as Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India in strengthening self-reliance and fostering innovation.

The Governor noted that Assam, with its natural resources and dynamic youth population, has a key role to play in the country's growth trajectory.

Encouraging young people to embrace technology, he said emerging sectors such as startups and artificial intelligence will be critical drivers of future progress.

He also appreciated the growing contribution of women across various fields.

The memorial lecture was delivered by C Raj Kumar on the theme "India@100: Shaping a Future through Education, Justice and Technology".

Michael D Wilson also addressed the gathering.

Among others present were Chief Secretary Ravi Kota, DGP Harmet Singh, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Dairy sector witnesses 70 pc growth in a decade under PM Modi: Shah

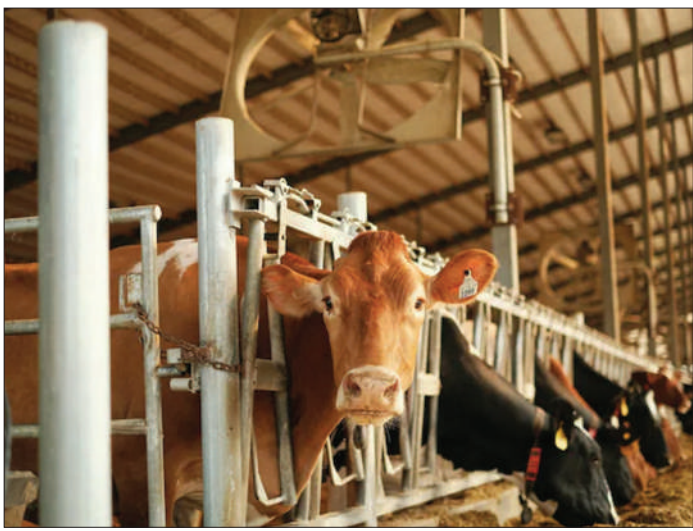
LEH/JAMMU, May 1: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said India's livestock and dairy sector has undergone a major transformation since Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, with milk production rising sharply by 70 per cent in just one decade.

"There has been a major transformation in the livestock and dairy sector across the country after Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014. With the creation of a dedicated Animal Husbandry Department, several revolutionary changes have taken place," he said at an event to launch several projects in the dairy sector.

Shah said the country's milk production has increased from 143 million tonnes in 2014-15 to around 248 million tonnes in 2024-25, marking nearly 70 per cent growth in just ten years.

"Nearly 50 per cent of this growth has come in the last five years," Shah said.

He said per capita milk availability has increased from 307 grams per day in 2014 to around 485 grams at present, describing milk as



an essential component of nutrition, especially for children.

"Pasteurised milk plays an important role in meeting children's nutritional needs," he said.

The home minister expressed hope that Ladakh would also achieve the national average of 485 grams of milk availability per person per day to ensure better nutrition for future generations.

Laying focus on achievements, he said milk powder production has also increased from 15,000 metric tonnes in 2014-15 to around 24,000 metric tonnes.

"Similarly, per capita availability (in another category) has increased from 148 grams to around 214 grams. I believe that the national average of 485 grams per day should also be achieved in Ladakh,

ensuring adequate nutrition for future generations," he added.

Highlighting the expansion of the cooperative network, Shah said India now has over 2.36 lakh dairy cooperative societies with around 20 million milk producers associated with them.

He added that the government has set a target of establishing 75,000 new dairy cooperative societies within five years, of which more than 21,000 have already been formed.

"Simultaneously, efforts are underway to modernise nearly 46,000 existing societies."

The minister urged the Ladakh administration to tap the full potential of villages suitable for livestock rearing, keeping in view local climatic conditions.

He also called for promoting co-operative-based development in allied sectors, such as organic farming and honey production, in the region.

Shah said such initiatives would not only enhance farmers' incomes but also strengthen the rural economy and contribute to sustainable development in Ladakh. (PTI)

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GST collections surge to record high of ₹ 2.43 lakh cr in April

NEW DELHI, May 1: Gross GST collection rose 8.7 per cent in April to a record of about ₹ 2.43 lakh crore in April as growth in import-led revenues outpaced domestic transactions, government data showed on Friday.

The previous all-time high collection from Central GST, State GST and Integrated GST was recorded in April last year at over ₹ 2.23 lakh crore.

Gross revenues from domestic transactions were up 4.3 per cent to over ₹ 1.85 lakh crore, while GST mop-up from imports rose by a massive 25.8 per cent to ₹ 57,580 crore in April 2026.

Total gross GST and SGST collection in April stood at ₹ 52,140 crore and ₹ 61,331 crore, respectively. IGST mop-up during the month stood at over ₹ 1.29 lakh crore.

Refunds were up 19.3 per cent to ₹ 31,793 crore during April.

After adjusting refunds, net Goods and Services Tax (GST) mop-up was up 7.3 per cent to about ₹ 2.11 lakh crore.

Price Waterhouse & Co LLP Partner Pratik Jain said post GST 2.0, a steady 7-8 per cent monthly growth seems to be emerging as the norm, which is broadly in line with budget estimates.

"Notably, growth in import-led revenues continues to outpace domestic transactions, which could indicate some softness in consumption, possibly reflecting a moderation in discretionary spending amid ongoing geopolitical uncertainties," Jain said.

GST collections have continued to increase after the

initial dip post the implementation of GST 2.0 from September 2025, in which tax rates on about 375 items were slashed. Also, four tax slabs of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent were merged into two of 5 and 18 per cent, with the highest 40 per cent slab for a select few ultra-luxury goods and tobacco products.

Deloitte India, Partner & Indirect Tax Leader, Mahesh Jaising said a notable feature of April GST number is the nearly 26 per cent year-on-year growth in import-linked GST, reflecting sustained trade flows even in a volatile external environment.

"Equally important is the steady performance of domestic GST revenues, which suggests that GST-2.0 led rate rationalisation and simplification measures are beginning to support consumption and demand without materially eroding the tax base," Jaising said.

Taken together, the FY26 collections underscore a maturing GST framework -- where policy adjustments, technology-led administration and economic resilience are working in tandem to deliver stable revenue outcomes, he added.

EY India Tax Partner Saurabh Agarwal said while the headline GST collection numbers are encouraging, the divergence between modest domestic GST growth and the significant uptick in import-linked collections warrants a strategic pivot.

"In an increasingly dynamic global landscape, we must critically re-examine our policy frameworks to further incentivize domestic manufacturing and ensure 'Make in India' keeps pace with global supply chain shifts," Agarwal said. (PTI)

Bandhan Innovation Fund completes two years

Fund targets companies driven by R&D, technology cycles and long-term value creation

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 1: Bandhan Innovation Fund has completed two years of operations, focusing on investing in companies where innovation acts as the primary driver of long-term growth and value creation.

Launched with a specialised mandate, the fund targets businesses characterised by strong research and development (R&D) investments, high-skilled workforce intensity, differentiated products and services, and scalable, non-linear business models.

It aims to identify companies whose growth is shaped by innovation cycles rather than traditional economic or commodity trends.

Prateek Poddar, Fund Manager of the Bandhan Innovation Fund, said innovation has increasingly become central to building sustainable com-

petitive advantage. "Businesses that innovate successfully are better positioned to compound independent of short-term economic cycles, improve productivity, expand market share and even create entirely new markets," he said.

He added that many globally successful companies were identified and backed by long-term investors well before they became mainstream. "Our approach is to invest ahead of widespread benchmark inclusion rather than after it," Poddar noted.

The fund's strategy is aligned with India's evolving economic landscape, where emerging enterprises—led by engineers, technologists and entrepreneurs—are developing new products and services that could shape the next generation of market leaders.

According to the fund, this phase

presents an opportunity for investors to participate early in value creation before such companies gain broader recognition. It is positioned as a suitable option for investors with a long-term horizon and higher risk appetite, particularly those seeking to diversify their portfolios and tap into innovation-driven sectors.

Bandhan Innovation Fund also highlighted that combining such thematic investments with more stable large-cap allocations could provide a balance between stability and long-term compounding potential.

As it enters its third year, the fund said it will continue to focus on identifying and investing in businesses that are building enduring value through innovation and are aligned with long-term structural shifts in India's economy.

IDBI Bank reports 27% jump in net profit to ₹9,513 cr in FY26



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: IDBI Bank reported a strong financial performance for FY 2025-26, with its net profit rising by 27 per cent year-on-year to ₹9,513 crore, reflecting improved asset quality and steady business growth.

The bank's total business crossed the ₹6 trillion mark during the financial year, reaching ₹6,00,789 crore, registering a growth of 14 per cent over the previous year.

Total deposits stood at ₹3,47,163 crore, up 12 per cent year-on-year, while net advances grew by 16 per cent to ₹2,53,626 crore.

CASA (Current Account Savings Account) deposits also recorded a 7 per cent growth, indicating stable low-cost deposit mobilisation.

The bank's asset quality showed significant improvement, with gross non-performing assets (GNPA) declining to 2.32 per cent from 2.98 per cent a year earlier.

Net NPA remained low at 0.15 per cent, while the Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR) stood at a robust 99.39 per cent.

On the profitability front, Return on Assets (ROA) improved to 2.27 per cent, while the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) strengthened to 26.65 per cent, reflecting a well-capitalised balance sheet.

The net credit-deposit ratio also improved to 73.06 per cent. For the fourth quarter of FY26, the bank reported a net profit of ₹1,943 crore, with operating profit at ₹3,043 crore.

Net Interest Income (NII) stood at ₹3,851 crore, marking a 17 per cent year-on-year increase, while net interest margin (NIM) improved to 4.15 per cent.

The sustained improvement in profitability, asset quality and capital position underscores IDBI Bank's ongoing turnaround and strengthening financial performance.

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SC grants anticipatory

are further of the opinion that the allegations and counter-allegations, as apparent in the present case, prima facie, appear to be politically motivated and seemingly influenced by such rivalry, rather than disclosing a situation warranting custodial interrogation, and the veracity of the allegations can be tested at trial," it observed.

The bench said it is of the view that in the instant case, the allegations and counter allegations have been made by Khera as well as by the husband of the complainant (Assam Chief Minister). "At this stage, we are cognizant of the fact that personal liberty of an individual enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India cannot be put to jeopardy lightly. But at the same time, we are also of the view that for any offences as alleged in the FIR, the investigation should be completed with integrity and in full swing with co-operation of the appellant," it observed.

While allowing the appeal of Khera against the April 24 order of the Gauhati High Court, the bench said, "In our view, the observations as made by the high court in the order impugned is not based on correct appreciation of all the material which has been placed on record and appears to be erroneous, in particular shifting the burden on the accused."

The top court said the incident as alleged in the FIR occurred on April 6, 2026 which is prior to the conclusion of the election campaign for assembly elections in Assam.

"The appellant being the representative of a national political party organised a press conference making some allegations against the complainant, who is the wife of the chief minister of the State. While doing so, three passports were displayed by the appellant alleging that the complainant is having passports of three countries, out of which, two are of Muslim countries. However, the complainant's husband's politics is based on hatred against the Muslim community in the State," the bench had noted about the incident.

It said the prosecution upon investigation has found that the passports purported to be belonging to the complainant are fake and have been displayed by Khera to defame the wife of the chief minister, intentionally causing harm to their reputation and for this purpose, the press conference was organised.

The bench said it is true that the documents which have been exhibited by Khera are in custody of prosecution and they have made some preliminary investigation thereon.

"However, it primarily appears that merely to gain some political momentum in favour of his party, this statement has been made by the appellant. Albeit, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the chief minister of the state, who is also husband of the complainant, has made certain unparliamentary remarks against the appellant in various press statements which have been filed before this court vide annexure..." it noted.

Following the allegations, the CM's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, filed criminal cases against Khera and others at the Guwahati Crime Branch police station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The Telangana High Court had earlier granted Khera a seven-day transit anticipatory bail, but Assam Police moved the Supreme Court against it. The apex court passed an interim order to stay the grant of anticipatory transit bail and asked Khera to approach the Gauhati High Court. (PTI)

Bengal witnesses post

action against those accused of the attack, alleging involvement of a local panchayat functionary. Police and central forces were deployed, following which officials held talks with protesters and the blockade was lifted. In Murshidabad, a CPI(M) polling agent, identified as Ruhul Amin, was allegedly attacked on Thursday night at Lochanpur within Islampur police station limits. According to party sources, Amin was assaulted at a tea stall by a group of local leaders allegedly led by a TMC regional functionary.

Family members alleged that he had stepped out of his house at night when the incident took place.

The CPI(M) claimed that police did not take action initially, despite lodging a complaint.

The party's candidate from Raninagar Assembly constituency later approached the SP, following which officers visited the spot. Allegations have also surfaced that portions of CCTV footage from the tea stall were deleted, though there was no official confirmation.

In Malda district, a BJP mandal president, Mahananda Mondal, was badly injured after he was allegedly attacked by suspected TMC workers on Thursday afternoon. The incident took place in North Balapur area of Ratua. According to BJP leaders, Mondal was stopped on the road and assaulted with bricks.

He was later admitted to Malda Medical College and Hospital for treatment. Senior BJP leader Khagen Murmu visited him at the hospital. Murmu alleged, "The TMC could not resort to violence during polling due to the presence of central forces. Now they are targeting our party workers. We have informed the police." The TMC has denied the allegations, terming them baseless.

Meanwhile, police said five persons were injured, two of them seriously, in a clash between TMC and BJP workers at Dulduli Kakpara under Hingalganj police station in North 24 Parganas district.

Two persons were arrested in connection with the incident, a police officer said, adding that the clash was triggered by political rivalry.

Both BJP and TMC workers sustained injuries, and one supporter from each party was among those arrested. The two-phase West Bengal assembly polls ended on Wednesday with what the election watchdog said was the state's highest-ever voter turnout of 92.84 per cent, leading to mouth-watering anticipation ahead of the announcement of results on Monday as both contenders sounded sanguine about their victory prospects. (PTI)

EC orders repoll

Lok Sabha constituency, which is represented by TMC National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee. The EC had deputed its special observer, Subrata Gupta, to fact-check the allegations from the ground.

"BJP knows it will be defeated by a big margin in Diamond Harbour and Margahat, and that is why they are demanding a repoll in these places. With the EC's assistance, the BJP is forcing people of these areas to go through the rigours of the voting process yet again. The mandate is against the BJP, and it will remain the same," TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said. On the other hand, senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari said, "There had been malpractices in several booths in these areas to favour the TMC. We are happy with the repoll decision of the EC." (PTI)

Mizoram prison spots

custody on Friday for questioning, the SP said. According to the jail authorities, the fraud began early this year but remained undetected until last week.

The discrepancy surfaced when officials at the Lunglei district and sessions court were unable to locate records authorising the release of specific inmates, they said.

Following this discovery, a formal police complaint was filed. Lunglei district jail deputy superintendent Lalruatsanga said that the counterfeit release orders had fabricated seals and a formatting that closely resembled authentic court directives.

"The documents appeared genuine and had passed initial scrutiny. The inmates were released because there is no scope for delay or questioning court orders by the prison administration," he said. (PTI)

Three NSCN-K

mainstream. Security forces have continued coordinated operations across eastern Arunachal Pradesh to maintain stability and restore peace in the region.

Bangladesh's foreign ministry

are making efforts to rebuild bilateral ties after Tarique Rahman became prime minister following his Bangladesh Nationalist Party's victory in the February parliamentary polls. (PTI)

Domestic ATF steady

per cent to 55-60 per cent, creating completely non-operable conditions for airlines. Prices vary from state to state depending on local taxes like VAT. Announcing the decisions, market leader Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) said the retail prices of petrol, diesel and household domestic LPG (14.2 kg cylinders) have not been changed, fully insulating domestic consumers from the recent increase in international fuel prices. These fuels, along with kerosene, whose rates too have not been changed, make up for over 80 per cent of all fuels consumed in the country. "Price revisions have been limited to select industrial segments, which constitute a relatively small share of overall consumption and are subject to routine monthly adjustments based on prevailing international prices," IOC said in a statement. As part of a consumer-centric approach, "there has been no change in key fuels affecting the general public - retail prices of petrol and diesel remain unchanged for the general public, which constitutes around 90 per cent of the total petrol, diesel consumption in the country. There is no change in the prices of domestic LPG (14.2 kg) for 33 crore domestic LPG consumers.

"There is no change in ATF prices for domestic airlines (scheduled operations) and no change in prices of PDS Kerosene," it said. Overall, about 80 per cent of petroleum products have witnessed no change in prices, ensuring stability for the majority of consumers.

"Prices of bulk and commercial LPG cylinders (less than 1 per cent of total consumption) have been revised," it said. "Prices of bulk diesel and ATF for international airline operations have been adjusted upward."

At the same time, around 4 per cent of petroleum products have seen a downward revision, reflecting the dynamic nature of global price movements. (PTI)

'Mahendragiri' endowed with

shipbuilding, and engineering prowess of the nation, and reflects the Navy's unrelenting focus on Aatmanirbhar in both ship design and shipbuilding, the officials said.

With an indigenous content of 75 per cent, the project has involved over 200 MSMEs at MDSL and has enabled employment generation of approximately 4,000 personnel directly and more than 10,000 personnel indirectly, it said. Indigenous stealth frigate Tarigiri, the fourth ship of Nilgiri-class, endowed with the cutting-edge weapon suite including supersonic missiles, was earlier commissioned into the Indian Navy on April 3.

Dunagiri, the fifth ship of the class, and second of these frigates built at Garden Reach Shipbuilding and Engineers Ltd (GRSE), was delivered to the Navy on March 30 at GRSE, Kolkata, marking a major milestone in achieving self-reliance in warship design and construction. (PTI)

Above-normal heatwave

IMD said, most parts of the country experienced normal to below-normal maximum temperatures, except for southern peninsular India, where temperatures were above normal.

The weather department said the country was impacted by seven western disturbances during April. (PTI)

Governor inaugurates Sarat

Advocate General Debajit Saikia, Vice Chancellor of Royal Global University Dr. A.K. Pansari, Mina Mahanta, and several dignitaries.

FOR CHANGE OF NAME OF DAUGHTER OF SERVING GREF PERS

I KUMARI BINDYA BANIA daughter of GS-175012L MSW-COOK SHIBA BAHADUR BANIA resident of Vill. & PO. - Dhing Hula, Dist: Dibrugarh, Assam- 786101 have change my name from KUMARI BINDYA BANIA to BINDIA BANIA vide affidavit date 30th APR 2026 before 1st Class Magistrate, DIBRUGARH

AFFIDAVIT

I, Nureda Begum, D/O- Nur Jamal aged about 19 years, R/O- Vill- Barujahar, P.O. Bechimari, P.S. Dalgaon, District Darrang, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am citizen of India by birth and a permanent resident of the aforesaid address. That, my actual and correct name is Nureda Begum. That inadvertently in my Aadhaar Card bearing No 6499-4934-1903, my name has been wrongly recorded as Nureda instead of my actual name Nureda Begum. That, Nureda and Nureda Begum refer to the same and one person.

Sd/-
Nureda Begum

Govt to sustain capex push despite fiscal stress due to global uncertainties: FinMin Official



NEW DELHI, May 1: The government will proceed with the planned ₹ 12.22 lakh crore capital expenditure in the current fiscal to maintain the growth momentum despite the fiscal stress arising from the ongoing West Asia conflict, a senior official said on Friday.

Expenditure Secretary V Vialnam said the upcoming few quarters and the coming year would possibly have a "lot of stress points". Tax buoyancy could be impacted by a cut in excise duties on petrol and diesel brought about in late March.

"The fiscal stress is indeed very much a reality, but at the same time... the capex would really be a priority item, which we would like to preserve and ensure that it continues at the budgeted level," Vialnam said at the ICPG Growth Conference organised by the Ashoka University.

He said highways, railways, shipping, ports, and urban development sectors would be the focus areas for FY27 capex. Stating that the current global uncertainties have thrown a "very challenging situation" for India with the country being a net importer of petroleum products, he said the government has been "proactive" in trying to tackle each situation with "agility".

But, India's fiscal prudence has put the country on a very good stead in the current unpredictable times, he added.

"We will, on our part, be committed to see that the required funds are provided in spite of all the stress points that may come up," he said.

The FY27 Budget has pegged the fiscal deficit at 4.3 per cent of GDP, which is now seen at 4.5 per cent of GDP, following a downward revision in India's nominal GDP under the new series.

To contain retail prices of petrol and diesel from rising amid the ongoing West Asia war, the government has cut excise duties, which poses a risk of fiscal slippage. The excise duty cut is estimated to cost ₹ 7,000 crore to the exchequer for a Period of 15 days.

Since the beginning of the war in West Asia on February 28, Crude oil prices have soared to a four-year high of USD 126 per barrel on Thursday from about the USD 73 level before the war.

"The next few months, the next quarter and the coming year are indeed very difficult to envisage, lots of possible stress points," he said.

Tax buoyancy will also have been looked out for amidst these conditions, Vialnam said, which can further squeeze fiscal space.

India imports 60 per cent of its LPG usage, and of that, 90 per cent flows through the now closed Strait of Hormuz, the Secretary said, adding that it would be a "very challenging situation".

The government has also levied an export duty of ₹ 23 per litre on diesel and ₹ 33 per litre on aviation turbine fuel to ensure adequate domestic availability of the fuels. These duty changes are being reviewed by the Centre every fortnight. (PTI)

Workers gather in large numbers, highlight unity and labour rights

Labour Day celebration across state

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, May 1: International Labour Day or May Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm at Pengree Tea Estate in Tinsukia under the aegis of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha, Margherita Branch in collaboration with the Pengree Tea Garden Unit Committee. The event witnessed the active participation of tea garden workers, who turned the playground of Pengree Tea Estate into a bustling hub of energy and solidarity. A large gathering of workers from 38 tea estates under the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha Margherita Branch assembled at the venue, creating a spectacular and inspiring scene.

Assam Government Labour Minister Rupesh Gwala and Digboi Legislative Assembly Constituency MLA Suren Phukan graced the occasion as distinguished guests. Both leaders addressed the enthusiastic crowd, delivering motivational and insightful speeches focused on workers' rights, welfare and the dignity of labour.

The programme was hosted by Harinanda Gorh, Secretary of ACMS Margherita Branch and commenced with the ceremonial hoisting of the flag, followed by Shaheed Tarpan and floral tributes at the portrait of Assam heart-throb Zubeen Garg.

Throughout the day, the atmosphere remained lively with a host of colourful cultural and competitive events. Sports competitions, singing and dance performances involving children, youth and women added joy and vibrancy to the celebrations.

Tea garden workers across the globe observed May 1 as International Labour Day to honour the historic struggles and sacrifices made by labourers in their fight for justice, fair



wages and better working conditions.

The event at Pengree Tea Estate stood as a powerful testament to the unity, resilience and indomitable spirit of the 200-year-old tea industry of Assam.

Our Nagaon Correspondent adds: Nagaon District Commissioner Devashish Sharma marked International May Day with a unique programme on Friday, spending the day with farmers and workers and felicitating them with 'phulam gamosa'.

In the morning, through the Labour Department, the DC invited members of several labour unions to the conference hall of the District Commissioner's office and held discussions with them on the significance of May Day.

Highlighting the indispensable contribution

of workers to the nation's development, Sharma said that everyone must move forward together, hand in hand. To enliven the event, he sang Dr Bhupen Hazarika's iconic song "Manuhe Manuhor Babe" along with those present.

The workers attending the programme were felicitated with 'phulam gamosa' and extended May Day greetings.

Later, the District Commissioner visited the fields of Shyamali Krishi Farm at Senchowah and felicitated several progressive farmers of the area with 'phulam gamosa'. There too, he explained the history and significance of Labour Day and expressed heartfelt appreciation for the role of farmers in the country's progress.

District Agriculture Officer Nikhil Narayan Baruah was also present at the event.

Prohibitory orders imposed in Tamulpur for vote counting

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 1: In order to maintain peace, law and order and security during the counting of votes for the upcoming Assam Legislative Assembly Election, 2026, the Tamulpur district administration has imposed prohibitory measures. District Magistrate Simi Karan issued the order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS).

According to the order, the gathering of people and parking of vehicles within a radius of 100 metres of the counting centre set up at Tamulpur Higher Secondary School have been strictly prohibited. Entry of any person without a valid identity card has also been banned.

Further, the following restrictions have been imposed: setting up of temporary shops or food stalls within 100 metres is prohibited; carrying weapons, sticks or any objects that may be used as weapons, as well as victory processions, are banned; the use of firecrackers, explosives or any sound-emitting devices is prohibited; the use of loudspeakers, whether mounted on vehicles or otherwise, is restricted and carrying mobile phones, cameras and electronic gadgets inside the counting hall is prohibited, except for authorised persons.

The order will not apply to security personnel and government officials engaged in election duty. It will come into force from May 4, 2026 and remain effective until the completion of the counting process.

The administration has warned that any violation of the order will invite action under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The district administration has appealed to all citizens to comply with these regulations and cooperate in ensuring a peaceful electoral process.

Railway Board reviews NFR infrastructure projects



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: Member (Infrastructure), Railway Board, Vivek Kumar Gupta visited Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) and held a comprehensive review meeting at Maligaon to assess the progress of ongoing infrastructure projects and development works across the zone.

The meeting was attended by General Manager of NF Railway, Chetan Kumar Shrivastava and General Manager (Construction), Ashish Bansal, along with other senior officials of NFR. Detailed discussions were held on key infrastructure initiatives, project timelines and strategies for expediting execution to strengthen railway connectivity in the Northeast region.

As part of his visit, Gupta will undertake a comprehensive window trailing inspection on May 2,

from Kamakhya to Dimapur to review track conditions, safety measures and infrastructure status along the route.

After reaching Dimapur, he is scheduled to review the progress of the Dimapur-Kohima new line railway project, along with other ongoing infrastructure works in the state. The visit underscores the continued focus of Indian Railways on enhancing connectivity and accelerating development in the Northeast.

During the meeting, the operational status and progress of several key infrastructure projects in the region were reviewed in detail. Major projects, including the Jiribam-Imphal, Sivok-Rangpo and Murkongselek-Pasighat lines were discussed with a focus on expediting their execution.

In recent years, Northeast Fron-

tier Railway has achieved significant progress in railway infrastructure. A major milestone was achieved by connecting the capital of Mizoram with the rest of the country through the rail network for the first time. The Bairabi-Sairang railway project, which was inaugurated in September last year by the Prime Minister, stands as a key achievement in this progress.

The operationalisation of Molvom and Mendipathar stations for freight services also marks a significant step, enhancing regional logistics, improving connectivity and contributing to economic growth.

Northeast Frontier Railway remains committed to strengthening rail connectivity and infrastructure to drive economic development and improve transportation facilities across the Northeast.

OBITUARY

Kamaleswar Saikia, Sivasagar Sangha Salak of the Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha (RSS), retired employee of Adult Education Department, former president of the SAKP, Sivasagar, former president of Bharat Mata Pujan Samitee, former president of the Sankardev Sishu Vidya Niketan, Melachakar and a noted social worker died on Friday at age of 69 in Sivasagar Civil Hospital following protracted kidney ailments.

His body was taken to Melachakar Namghar, district RSS Karjyalay at Gohachuk before it was taken to Thanapatty crematorium.

Sivasagar RSS sewaks and members, Jila SAKP, Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Samity, Vidya Bharati, BJP Sivasagar district Committee, Brihatar Sivasagar Press Club, Senior Citizens' Forum have mourned the death of Saikia. Saikia leaves behind his wife, a son and his family.

Abandoned newborn rescued at Dhubri Medical College

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, May 1: In an incident that has stirred both heartbreak and hope, a newborn girl is fighting for her life after being found abandoned in the rain-soaked premises of the Dhubri Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) on Thursday.

The tiny infant, wrapped in damp cloth and left shivering in the cold was discovered near the hospital's Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) centre and security staff were alerted. The discovery sparked an immediate, high-stakes rescue mission by hospital staff that has since captured the hearts of the local community.

Nurses rushed to the scene to find the baby wet and struggling for breath, having been exposed to the recent rainfall. Upon receiving the news, Dr Ankumoni Saikia, Principal of DMCH and Dr Abdullah, Additional Superintendent, personally led a team of medical professionals to secure the infant. "The baby was in a very fragile state when she was brought in," Dr Saikia shared. "She was wet from the rain and suffering from severe weakness and respiratory distress. We didn't lose a second; she was immediately placed on a ventilator in the Intensive Care Unit."

Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma's death anniversary observed

Leaders pay tribute, recall his vision for Bodo identity and unity

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 1: The 36th death anniversary of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma was solemnly observed on Friday at his burial site at Thulungapuri, Dotma in Kokrajhar district with befitting programmes.

The programme was jointly organised by the Upendra Nath Brahma Trust (UNBT) and the All Bodo Students' Union, with support from the BTC administration.

The observance began with the ceremonial half-mast hoisting of the ABSU flag by ABSU president Khwrmdao Wary. Leaders and members of various organisations gathered to pay floral tributes to Bodofa, remembering his contributions to the Bodo community and his role in shaping its modern political and social identity.

Among those present were BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary, Deputy Chief Executive Member Rihon Daimary, former CEM of BTR and Rajya Sabha MP Pramod Boro, ABSU president Khwrmdao Wary, General Secretary Khanindra Basumatary, Rajya Sabha MP Rwngrwa Narzary, MLA Lawrence Islary and other dignitaries.

Later, Hagrama Mohilary visited Bodofa's ancestral home at Boragari village and met with his family members.

Speakers at the programme highlighted Bodofa's enduring legacy as a visionary leader who championed the cause of the Bodo people during a period of political uncertainty and social challenges in Assam. They recalled his commitment to building the Bodos



as a distinct and dignified nationality rooted in language, culture and identity.

"Bodofa's leadership is widely associated with the broader movement for political recognition and self-determination, which over the years led to significant milestones such as the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) Accord of 1993, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Accord of 2003 and the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Accord of 2020," said ABSU

Cachar DC steps in as monsoon nears, orders fast-track drainage overhaul

Encroachments flagged, officials told to ensure uninterrupted water flow across key channels

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 1: In a concerted effort to reinforce flood preparedness ahead of the approaching monsoon, Cachar District Commissioner, Aayush Garg, IAS on Thursday undertook an extensive field inspection of key drainage channels and critical flood control infrastructure across the district, focusing on improving water flow and minimising urban flood risks.

He was accompanied by the Additional District Commissioner-Chief Executive Officer of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Devid Kumar Borah, along with the Circle Officer of Silchar Revenue Circle, Executive Engineers from the Water Resources Department and PWD Roads (Silchar-Udharnob Division) and officials from DDMA Cachar, Silchar Municipal Corporation and the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs.

The inspection team, led by the District Commissioner, closely examined three major drainage channels Rangirkhal, Longaikhal and Singirkhal, which play a pivotal role in maintaining the region's drainage system and flood control mechanism. Ongoing desilting and maintenance works were reviewed on-site, with attention given to the removal of accumulated silt, clearing of debris and elimination of obstructions that hinder the natural flow of water.

Extending the inspection to major flood defence structures, the



District Commissioner also visited the dykes and sluice gates of the Barak River at Bhetukandi and other vulnerable locations assessing their operational condition and readiness to handle rising water levels during the monsoon.

Emphasising urgency, the District Commissioner directed that all ongoing works be completed within a stipulated timeframe and called for an accelerated pace of execution. He also stressed the importance of proper disposal of silt and waste materials, cautioning that any lapse could lead to re-entry of debris into the channels, thereby undermining the entire exercise.

With the monsoon drawing closer, the Cachar district administration has placed special focus

on enhancing the water-carrying capacity of the khals.

Meanwhile, the District Commissioner instructed officials to promptly identify and address factors impeding smooth water flow, as part of a broader strategy to reduce the vulnerability of urban areas to flooding.

During the visit, instances of encroachment along the banks of Longaikhal were also observed, posing a threat to the natural drainage system.

Taking serious note, the District Commissioner directed the concerned authorities to initiate swift action for eviction in accordance with existing regulations and affirmed the administration's commitment to preserving vital water channels.

Sonitpur Journalists' Union confers Pranab Sinha Memorial Award to Mahendra Barua



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 1: Sonitpur Journalists' Union remembered noted journalist, social and cultural activist and former president of the Sonitpur Journalists' Union, Pranab Sinha on his 13th death anniversary on Friday. On the occasion, the Pranab Sinha Memorial Award was conferred on noted social worker Mahendra Baruah in recognition of his lifelong contributions to the society.

The event featured a remembrance meeting and tribute ceremony attended by journalists, literary figures and members of various organisations. The programme was presided over by Union president Sanjib Hazarika, while senior journalist Pulak Kumar Deka conducted the proceedings.

Distinguished attendees included noted short story writer Manik Bora, editor of the Tezpur-based weekly Ganakantha Dr Pranjit Hazarika, president of Baan Theatre Bankim Sarma, former president of the Asom Lekhika Samaroh Samiti Dr Charu Saharia Nath, litterateur Sushil Kurmi, Bhuban Chandra Gogoi, former president

of Sonitpur Zila Sahitya Sabha Guna Kanta Barua and executive president of Tezpur Press Club Pankaj Baruah.

The programme began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp before a portrait of the late Pranab Sinha by senior advocate Dulmoni Sinha. Members of the Union, journalists and representatives from various organisations paid floral tributes. Prior to the award presentation, the citation highlighting Mahendra Baruah's contributions was read out by journalist Sangita Devi. Awardee Baruah, an 82-year-old social worker from Bahbari near Tezpur was felicitated with a traditional gamosa, cheleng chadar, memento, jaapi and the citation.

During the meeting Manik Bora reminisced about his early association with Sinha through the newspaper Mahajati, where many of his stories were published. Dr Pranjit Hazarika noted that since Sinha's passing in 2014, the Union has been commemorating his legacy annually by recognising individuals from diverse fields. Dr Hazarika highlighted that Sinha was not merely a journalist but also an ac-

tive cultural figure closely associated with organisations like Sangeet Natakam and played a significant role in shaping the careers of many journalists. His contribution to grassroots reporting and his efforts to bring marginal voices to public attention were particularly emphasised. Sushil Kurmi and Dr Charu Saharia Nath, recalled Sinha's role in encouraging writers and promoting socially relevant literature. Bankim Sarma underlined Sinha's contributions to Tezpur's cultural and sports landscape. Bhuban Chandra Gogoi, Pankaj Barua and Guna Kanta Baruah in their speech recalled Sinha as a committed journalist who combined professional excellence with deep social responsibility and his contributions to different segments of the society of Tezpur.

Noted social worker Mahendra Baruah, receiving the award, said that honour was not only a recognition of his work but also of the greater Bahbari region. He attributed his good health and active life at the age of 82 to his continued engagement with several social, cultural, religious and educational organisations. Notably, Baruah has served for over 35 years as president of the historic Kaliya Gosain Than management committee and has been actively associated with institutions such as Bandamari Hospital, Balishisha Sub-Health Centre, Bahbari Usha Natya Samaj, Bahbari Senior Citizens' Society, Omeo Das Higher Secondary School and several development and religious committees.

Wary said that even after 36 years of his passing, Bodofa continues to live in the emotions and sentiments of the Bodo people as a source of inspiration.

He further stated that while the ultimate goal remains a separate state of Bodoland, significant progress has been made through accords such as the BAC Accord of February 20, 1993, the BTC Accord of February 10, 2003 (under the Sixth Schedule Council for the Bodoland Territorial Areas Districts, BTAD) and the BTR Accord of January 27, 2020, which enhanced boundaries, powers and functions and renamed the region as Bodoland Territorial Region.

He emphasised the need to recognise the present context, noting that the region is halfway towards its aspiration with the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and BKWAC in Assam.

"We hope Bodofa's socialist ideology of self-rule and his desire for respect within the fundamental rights of the Constitution of India will prevail. His vision of equal distribution of resources and opposition to exploitation must be upheld," Wary said.

He added that Bodofa left behind a legacy of "Bodo Political Morality" that calls for fearlessness, uncompromising commitment and visionary leadership for the community.

"This is the time for the present political leadership to maintain faith in self-rule under the Sixth Schedule Council and BKWAC and to continue striving for political self-determination for the Bodos and others seeking equal rights within the framework of the Constitution of India," he said.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Be of love a little more careful than of anything.
-E. E. Cummings

Tough time for migrant workers

The US onslaught on Iran, and the resultant closure of the Strait of Hormuz, are having a massive global impact, and the consequences for Indian migrant workers are just one example. In recent weeks, with prices soaring, businesses closing, and fuel reserves rapidly running out, many migrant workers have been fleeing Indian cities and hurrying home to their villages in a desperate attempt to survive. The current shortage of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders and limited availability of fuel, along with major food price hikes due to the war, has forced many restaurants and other businesses in the big cities like Delhi to close. In fact, many people are increasingly struggling even to cook in their own domiciles due to the lack of cooking fuel, and some are returning home so they can cook on traditional firewood stoves, which is not possible in their cramped city lodgings. Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has claimed that gas cylinders are still easily available, but this is often not the case. In fact, migrant workers in Delhi are unable to access domestic gas consumer cards, which allow people to book gas cylinders online, demonstrating the direct and disproportionate impact of the crisis on migrants.

The scenes of workers travelling long distances in large numbers, while businesses abruptly close, are reminiscent of the first COVID-19 lockdown six years ago. In March 2020, as various lockdown measures were being imposed across the world, the Indian government swiftly opted for an extreme approach: shutting down transport connections nationally. Meanwhile, factories and other workplaces were also abruptly being shut down, leaving India's millions of internal migrant workers no choice but to walk thousands of kilometres back to their home villages. Many tragically died of exhaustion or heatstroke along the way. This experience of migrant workers during the lockdown is captured by Neeraj Ghaywan's 2025 film, *Homebound*. The final section of the film follows the journey of two workers, childhood friends Shoab and Chandan, from a rural North Indian village as they attempt to walk home to their village through the scorching sun.

The focus of the current mass migration is different than that of the 2020 lockdown: this time around, food is at the heart of people's decisions to migrate. There may not be the same kind of public health crisis, but millions are facing just as much of a struggle to meet their basic survival needs. Once again, Indian migrant workers are paying the price of a global economic catastrophe — this time, of course, caused by US imperial violence. While the journey home is the climax of *Homebound*, the circumstances leading up to this point are equally central. Shoab is Muslim and Chandan is Dalit; both of their families are poor, struggling, and reliant on the young men acquiring work.

The Future of Newspapers and Magazines

The rapid transformation of technology in recent times has fundamentally altered our way of life and patterns of thinking, and its profound and direct impact is clearly visible in the world of media, especially on print media such as newspapers and magazines. Once, newspapers were the primary foundation of an Assamese person's morning, the central point of intellectual discourse in society, and the only reliable window to view the world. Today, that same print medium faces an existential crisis and intense challenges. As unprecedented advancements in science and technology have transformed the entire world into a small global village, the revolutionary changes in the exchange of information have gradually weakened the foundation of traditional print media. However, viewing this transformation merely as a crisis of an industry or a matter of financial loss would be a mistake; rather, it is deeply connected with our reading habits, our curiosity for truth, the correctness of language, and the future of a healthy social environment. The mental satisfaction once derived from the smell of freshly printed paper with a cup of morning tea is now gradually being replaced by the mechanical act of scrolling or swiping on a mobile screen. The depth of this psychological and behavioral shift is so significant that it is not confined to the simple decision of whether to buy a newspaper or not, but rather questions the very process of acquiring knowledge and exercising patience.

Before discussing the future of print media, it is essential to deeply analyze the psychological transformation in the way news is consumed, because the mindset of readers determines the survival of any medium. The current internet-based news system has provided humanity with an unimaginable speed that was previously unknown in history. A piece of news from any part of the world reaches us within moments of its occurrence. This speed has created a mindset where people can no longer wait until the next morning for news. Society is now living in an environment addicted to 'instant' or 'break-

ing news'. This psychological change has forced print media into an uneven competition, as newspapers inherently require time for preparation and production, which can never match the immediacy of electronic media. Yet, a more critical issue lies in the depth and reliability of information. The flow of information in electronic media is so rapid and uncontrolled that distinguishing between truth and falsehood often becomes difficult, leading to widespread confusion in society. In contrast, newspapers and magazines undergo multiple layers of editorial scrutiny before publication, where verifying facts and maintaining linguistic accuracy are given utmost importance. This raises a fundamental question: should we prioritize speed or truth? Even in today's fast-paced world, while people casually scroll through mobile screens for quick updates, a majority of conscious and thoughtful readers still rely on print for in-depth knowledge, analysis, and credible information. This reliance proves that despite technological dominance, the relevance of print media has not completely diminished.

The economic dimension is perhaps the most complex and multifaceted aspect in the struggle for survival of print media, as any institution requires a strong financial foundation to sustain itself. Over the past decade, the sharp rise in the cost of raw materials like paper, increased expenses of printing machinery and ink, along with transportation and distribution challenges, have significantly escalated the cost of publishing newspapers and magazines. On the other hand, increasing the selling price proportionately is not viable, as it risks reducing readership. Additionally, the advertising market has undergone a structural transformation. Earlier, newspapers were the primary and most effective medium for advertisers to reach consumers. Today, advertisers prefer digital platforms and social media to target specific

audiences at a lower cost. Large corporations have reduced their spending on print advertisements, causing the primary revenue source of newspapers to shrink. In a smaller market like Assam, where readership is limited and industrial growth is modest, this financial crisis has already pushed many newspapers and magazines toward closure. The situation is even more severe for small and medium publications. Yet, amidst this crisis, one fact stands clear—those institutions that have maintained quality, neutrality, and a distinct identity beyond routine news reporting have managed to retain their readership. This indicates that the future of print media depends more on quality than quantity. When readers find content that offers depth and analysis unavailable on mobile screens, they will not hesitate to pay for it.

Historically, the role of print media in Assam has not been limited to news dissemination; it has also been a powerful instrument in preserving and nurturing language, literature, and culture. Newspapers and especially magazines have served as the primary workshops for maintaining the standard form of language and embracing new vocabulary. At a time when language usage on social media often appears chaotic, with severe lapses in grammar and spelling, print media continues to present language in a refined, grammatically correct, and dignified form. For a language to survive, it must remain visibly present, and printed text provides that permanence. Magazines have also played a historic and undeniable role in nurturing new writers. A glance at Assamese literary history reveals that almost every great writer entered the literary world through newspapers or magazines. Publication in print is regarded as a matter of pride and responsibility for a writer, a sense of seriousness that electronic media often fails to provide. If print magazines gradually disappear, it will not merely

signify the death of an industry but could also dismantle the ecosystem of Assamese literary practice. For the younger generation to learn their language in its pure form, appreciate literature, and connect with their roots, there is no substitute for printed books, magazines, and newspapers. In this context, the struggle to preserve print media is intrinsically linked to the preservation of our linguistic and cultural identity. The shift in reading habits and human psychology is another crucial aspect in understanding the future of print media. Excessive use of modern technology has significantly reduced attention span and patience. Instead of engaging with long-form content, people now prefer headlines, short visuals, and videos. This superficial 'scrolling culture' poses a major threat to print media, which demands time, focus, and concentration from its readers—qualities that are becoming increasingly rare. People now seek information rather than knowledge, and that too effortlessly through mobile devices. However, there exists a positive counter-trend that cannot be ignored. The mental and physical fatigue caused by prolonged screen exposure is gradually leading a section of society back to the calm and soothing experience of reading on paper. The comfort for the eyes and the sense of mental peace offered by print cannot be replicated by electronic devices. Furthermore, for research and deep study, print remains unmatched. Information read on paper tends to stay longer in memory compared to fleeting digital text, enhancing cognitive engagement. Therefore, to ensure the future of print media, it is essential to make the younger generation aware of the joy and benefits of reading in print.

For print media to survive in the future, it must evolve and adapt its traditional format and style of news delivery. Merely reporting "what happened yesterday" can no longer define the role of newspapers, as such information is already available on social media. The future of newspapers lies in opinion, deep analysis, and contextual interpretation. Instead of focusing solely on events, they must explore why

something happened, how it happened, and what its social and political implications are. Investigative journalism, which is often avoided by electronic media due to its time-consuming and costly nature, can become a powerful strength of print media. Additionally, covering local issues, rural life, agriculture, traditional culture, and environmental concerns in a detailed and sustained manner can enhance its relevance. The ability to interpret global issues through a local perspective will be crucial. The same applies to magazines—they must go beyond routine stories and poems and prioritize knowledge-based, scientific, travel, and research-oriented content to satisfy intellectual curiosity. Building a harmonious co-existence between print and digital media, rather than viewing them as competitors, could also prove to be an effective strategy.

Ultimately, it can be asserted with confidence that the future of print media is not entirely bleak, but it is certainly challenging and requires resilience. Change is a natural part of evolution, and while older systems may transform, it does not imply that they lose all value. The historical, social, and intellectual significance of newspapers and magazines cannot be completely erased by technology. The present crisis is, in fact, a period of introspection and renewal for print media. Those publications that understand the demands of time, enhance their standards, uphold neutrality and truthfulness, and respond to readers' concerns will endure. Perhaps in the future, print media may not cater to everyone but will become a specialized choice for serious, knowledge-seeking, and thoughtful readers. Nevertheless, its existence will persist. The human thirst for knowledge, the pursuit of truth, and the love for literature and culture will always keep print media alive. It is our collective responsibility to embrace this medium as a carrier of our civilization, history, and consciousness, and to contribute consciously to its growth. The stream of ideas flowing through printed words will continue to guide society in the right direction and play a vital role in safeguarding democracy.

signify the death of an industry but could also dismantle the ecosystem of Assamese literary practice. For the younger generation to learn their language in its pure form, appreciate literature, and connect with their roots, there is no substitute for printed books, magazines, and newspapers. In this context, the struggle to preserve print media is intrinsically linked to the preservation of our linguistic and cultural identity. The shift in reading habits and human psychology is another crucial aspect in understanding the future of print media. Excessive use of modern technology has significantly reduced attention span and patience. Instead of engaging with long-form content, people now prefer headlines, short visuals, and videos. This superficial 'scrolling culture' poses a major threat to print media, which demands time, focus, and concentration from its readers—qualities that are becoming increasingly rare. People now seek information rather than knowledge, and that too effortlessly through mobile devices. However, there exists a positive counter-trend that cannot be ignored. The mental and physical fatigue caused by prolonged screen exposure is gradually leading a section of society back to the calm and soothing experience of reading on paper. The comfort for the eyes and the sense of mental peace offered by print cannot be replicated by electronic devices. Furthermore, for research and deep study, print remains unmatched. Information read on paper tends to stay longer in memory compared to fleeting digital text, enhancing cognitive engagement. Therefore, to ensure the future of print media, it is essential to make the younger generation aware of the joy and benefits of reading in print.

For print media to survive in the future, it must evolve and adapt its traditional format and style of news delivery. Merely reporting "what happened yesterday" can no longer define the role of newspapers, as such information is already available on social media. The future of newspapers lies in opinion, deep analysis, and contextual interpretation. Instead of focusing solely on events, they must explore why

The Significance of Buddha Purnima

The arrival of the full moon in the month of Vaisakha brings with it a quiet stillness that seems to settle over the earth. This specific lunar phase marks Buddha Purnima, a day that carries a profound weight for millions of people across the globe. It is not merely a religious festival or a date on a calendar; it is a celebration of a life that transformed the way humanity understands suffering, existence, and the possibility of peace. The significance of this day is unique because it honors three pivotal moments in the life of Siddhartha Gautama. It is believed that he was born, attained enlightenment, and finally left his physical form on this very same day of the full moon. This triple coincidence lends the occasion an air of sacred completion and reminds us that the journey of a single soul can illuminate the path for countless others.

To understand why this day resonates so deeply even in our modern, fast-paced world, one must look at the story of the man behind the title of Buddha. Born as a prince in the Shakya clan, Siddhartha had every luxury imaginable within the walls of his palace. His father sought to protect him from the harsh realities of the world, surrounding him with beauty and comfort. This attempt to shield him from pain only made his eventual encounter with the truth more explosive. When he finally stepped outside the palace gates and witnessed the four sights of an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and an ascetic, the illusion of his sheltered life shattered. He realized that no amount of wealth or power could provide a permanent shield against the inevitability of decay and loss. This realization was the catalyst for his great departure, an act of radical renunciation that continues to inspire those seeking truth over comfort.

The journey he embarked upon was not one of easy answers. He spent years as a wandering seeker, pushing his body to the absolute limits of endurance through extreme asceticism. He lived on a single grain of rice a day and practiced intense meditation under the harshest conditions. Eventually, he realized that starving the body only clouded the mind. This led him to the discovery of the Middle Way, a path of moderation that avoids the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. Sitting under the Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya, he made a vow not to rise until he had found the answer to the problem of human suffering. As the morning star rose on the day of the Vaisakha full moon, he achieved a state of total awakening. He became the Buddha, the one who is awake.

This awakening is the heart of Buddha Purnima. It represents the potential within every human being to break free from the cycles of craving and ignorance. The Buddha did not claim to be a god or a prophet; he presented himself as a guide who had found a way out of the labyrinth of the mind. He taught that suffering is not a punishment from an external force but a result of our own attachments and misunderstandings of reality. By sharing the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, he provided a practical roadmap for living a life of integrity,

mindfulness, and compassion. This message is incredibly human because it places the power of transformation directly in our own hands. It suggests that peace is not something to be found in a distant heaven but something to be cultivated right here in the present moment through our thoughts and actions.

On the day of Buddha Purnima, the atmosphere in Buddhist temples and monasteries is one of serene devotion. Devotees gather to offer flowers, light oil lamps, and burn incense. These offerings are deeply symbolic. The flowers, which are beautiful in the morning and wilt by evening, serve as a reminder of the impermanence of all things. The lamps represent the light of wisdom that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

In many traditions, people also engage in the practice of releasing birds or animals from cages as a gesture of compassion and a commitment to the freedom of all living beings. There is a strong emphasis on Dana, or the act of giving. People prepare food for the monks and the poor, reinforcing the idea that our spiritual progress is tied to how we care for the community around us.

The food served on this day is often simple and vegetarian, reflecting the principle of Ahimsa, or non-violence. A special dish called Kheer, a sweet rice porridge, is frequently prepared. This tradition stems from the story of Sujata, a village woman who offered a bowl of milk rice to Siddhartha when he was emaciated from his ascetic practices. That simple act of kindness gave him the strength he needed to reach enlightenment. By eating Kheer on Buddha Purnima, followers honor the role of compassion and nourishment in the spiritual journey. It reminds us that even the most profound realizations are supported by humble acts of care from others.

The significance of this day also touches on the concept of the Sangha, the community of practitioners. While the Buddha and his teachings provide the direction, the community provides the support needed to stay on the path. Buddha Purnima is a time for people to come together and listen to discourses on the Dhamma, the universal law. It is a time for collective meditation, where the shared silence of a group creates a powerful field of tranquility. In a world that is often fragmented and polarized, the sight of people from different walks of life sitting together in quiet reflection is a moving testament to the unifying power of the Buddha's message. He taught that distinctions of caste, race, and status are irrelevant to the quest for inner freedom.

The final aspect of the day is the commemoration of the Buddha's Parinirvana, his passing away at the age of eighty. Even in his final moments, his focus remained on the well-being of his followers. He told them not to grieve but to be lamps unto themselves. He emphasized that his physical presence was temporary, but the truth he had discovered would endure as long as people practiced it. This final lesson on impermanence completes the circle of his life. It teaches us that while death is a certainty, a life lived with purpose and awareness leaves a legacy that time cannot erode. The celebration of his passing is not a funeral but a celebration of a life that reached its ultimate goal.

The relevance of Buddha Purnima today feels more urgent than ever. We live in an era characterized by high levels of anxiety, consumerism, and conflict. The Buddha's diagnosis of the human condition seems remarkably modern. He identified greed, hatred, and delusion as the three poisons that infect the human heart. When we look at the state of our environment, our politics, and our personal lives, we can see the shadows of these poisons everywhere. Buddha Purnima invites us to pause and reflect on how we might apply the antidote of mindfulness and compassion to our daily existence. It asks us to consider if we are living in a state of sleepwalking or if we are making an effort to wake up to the reality of our interconnectedness.

The principle of Karuna, or compassion, is a central theme of the day. The Buddha taught that a heart full of compassion has no room for fear or anger. This is not a passive or weak emotion; it is a courageous commitment to alleviate the suffering of others. When we celebrate Buddha Purnima, we are essentially renewing our vow to be more kind. We are reminded that every person we meet is fighting a battle we know nothing about and that our simple presence and empathy can be a source of healing. This focus on kindness extends to all sentient beings, encouraging a lifestyle that is mindful of its impact on the planet and all its inhabitants.

Mindfulness is another pillar of the Buddha's legacy that takes center stage on this day. In a world of constant distractions and digital noise, the practice of being fully present in the moment is a revolutionary act. The Buddha's teachings on breath and body awareness offer a way to ground ourselves amidst the chaos. By slowing down on Buddha Purnima and engaging in conscious breathing or walking meditation, we reclaim our time and our attention. We begin to see that most of our stress comes from worrying about a future that hasn't happened or regretting a past that cannot be changed. The present moment is the only place where life is actually happening, and the Buddha showed us how to inhabit it fully.

The aesthetic of the celebrations also carries a certain weight. In many Asian countries, the streets are decorated with colorful lanterns and flags. In Sri Lanka, massive structures called Pandals are erected, depicting stories from the previous lives of the Buddha. These visual displays are not just for decoration; they are tools for storytelling and education. They bring the complex philosophy of Buddhism down to a level that can be understood and appreciated by everyone, from young children to the elderly. The beauty of the lights reflecting off the water or the temples creates a sense of wonder that opens the heart to the possibility of something greater than the mundane.

It is also a day for self-correction and forgiveness. Many people use the occasion to reflect on their mistakes over the past year and make a firm resolution to do better. This is not about guilt but about the recognition that we are all works in progress. The Buddha's teachings are fundamentally optimistic. They suggest that no matter how much darkness we have carried, it is always possible to turn toward the light. The story of Angulimala, a murderer who became a saintly monk after meeting the Buddha, serves as a powerful reminder that redemption is always within reach if one is willing to change their path.

In many ways, Buddha Purnima is a

global celebration of peace. The United Nations recognizes this day as the Day of Vesak, acknowledging the contribution that Buddhism has made to human spirituality for over two and a half millennia. It is a day when the message of non-violence is amplified on a global stage. The Buddha's famous saying that hatred never ceases by hatred but by love alone remains one of the most important insights in human history. As we witness cycles of violence in various parts of the world, the quiet, persistent call of the Buddha for dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation feels like a lifeline.

The significance of the full moon itself should not be overlooked. The moon has long been a symbol of the mind in many eastern philosophies. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, a clear and calm mind can reflect the light of truth. On Buddha Purnima, the moon is at its brightest and most complete, symbolizing the fullness of enlightenment. It is a reminder that our own minds, though often clouded by the dust of daily life, have the potential to be just as clear and radiant. The soft, cooling light of the moon is also a metaphor for the Buddha's personality, which was said to be gentle and soothing rather than harsh or demanding.

As the day draws to a close and the moon rises high in the sky, a sense of peace often lingers in the air. People return to their homes carrying the inspiration of the Buddha's life with them. The true test of the day's significance is not found in the rituals performed at the temple but in how people treat each other in the days that follow. If the celebration leads to one less angry word, one more act of generosity, or a few more moments of quiet reflection, then the spirit of Buddha Purnima has been truly honored. It is a yearly reminder that while we are humans bound by the laws of nature, we are also capable of touching the infinite through the power of our own awareness.

The legacy of the Buddha is a gift that keeps on giving. It is a philosophy that does not ask for blind faith but encourages questioning and personal experience. He famously told his followers not to believe something just because he said it, but to test it for themselves as a goldsmith tests gold by burning and cutting it. This spirit of inquiry is what makes his teachings so resilient and adaptable to different cultures and eras. Buddha Purnima is a celebration of this intellectual and spiritual freedom. It is a day to honor the teacher who told us that we are the masters of our own destiny and that the path to peace is paved with the simple bricks of awareness and love.

The quiet power of this day lies in its simplicity. It does not require grand gestures or complex dogmas. It only requires a willing heart and a mind that is ready to be still. Whether it is through a prayer, a meditation, or a simple act of helping a neighbor, the essence of the Buddha's teaching can be practiced by anyone, anywhere. As the moon shines down on a world that is often weary and troubled, Buddha Purnima stands as a beacon of hope. It reminds us that light is always possible, that suffering has an end, and that the journey toward awakening is the most beautiful adventure a human being can undertake. The blue hills of the Nilgiris and the crowded streets of our cities alike are touched by this same moonlight, suggesting that the peace the Buddha found under a tree so long ago is available to all of us, right here and right now.

China launches its biggest outreach to Africa through Zero tariff

By: Satyaki Chakraborty

China has started its biggest outreach to the African nations by implementing from May 1, 2026 by implementing zero tariff treatment to the 53 nations of the continent who have diplomatic relations with China. This poses a major challenge to India as Narendra Modi government is also in the process of taking major initiatives to improve trade relations with the African nations following the recent visit of the Prime Minister to a few African countries.

According to the trade analysts, the latest major policy initiative positions China as the first major economy in the world to grant unilateral and comprehensive zero-tariff treatment to all African countries that have diplomatic relations with China, as well as to all least developed countries that maintain diplomatic relations with China. This "unilateral and full-coverage" arrangement is not just a "subtraction" in tariffs, but also an "addition" for development, a "multiplication" for people's livelihoods, and a "division" of arbitrary tariff impositions.

Already, China with its trade and financial muscle power is dominating the investment and trade in Africa far ahead of the western countries and the USA. India has been in competition in the recent years, but New Delhi has not been able to make significant inroads in the African market compared to China. Now this May 1 initiative is expected to catapult China to a premier position in 2026 when China is involved in a trade war with the USA and President Trump is scheduled to visit Beijing on May 14-15 for the bilateral summit. Global trade experts mention that China has been taking a planned move to woo the African nations for trade and investment for the last two decades. Earlier, at multilateral forums such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China committed to gradually expanding tariff preferences for African countries to help them integrate into the global trading system. Starting in 2005 with zero-tariff treatment for certain products from the least developed countries in Africa, and granting zero-tariff treatment on 100 percent of tariff lines for least developed African countries by the end of 2024, as well as further extending the preference to all African countries with diplomatic relations with China by 2026.

Thus these concessions for the African nations have been a part of a continuous process of integrating African nations into the trade arrangements with Beijing at the most favourable terms. This latest zero tariff implementation from May 1, 2026 has come at the most opportune time as global growth faces mounting pressure due to the rising policy uncertainty over the U.S. stand on unilaterally declaring tariff rates and heightened anxiety over the supply chain security. As against latest Chinese trade outreach in African nations, India-Africa economic relations are rapidly deepening, with bilateral trade surpassing \$100 billion by 2024-25 and cumulative investments reaching roughly \$75 billion. India is now Africa's third-largest trading partner, focusing on long-term partnerships in energy, technology, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing.

On the other hand, China's total trade volume with Africa is estimated at US\$ 348 billion in 2025 which is more than three times of India. China is the largest trading partner with Africa while India is the third largest partner. Key sectors in Africa invested by China include manufacturing, mining and infrastructure. China is making use of its BRI with African countries to raise its trade and investment in the continent.

Key sectors for Indian investment include petrochemicals, fertilizer, digital payments, and mining. Major investors include Bharti Airtel, ONGC Videsh, and various pharmaceutical companies. India provides billions in concessional loans (Lines of Credit) for projects like railways, irrigation, and power, often via the Export-Import Bank of India.

Through the ITEC program and the e-Vidya Bharati & e-Arogya Bharati (e-VBAB) network, India offers education and tele-medicine to African partners. India aims to diversify its energy sources by increasing imports from Nigeria, Angola, and Algeria, while supporting Africa's industrialization. Indian trade experts are emphasizing now the immediate reinventing of Indian trade and investment strategy to meet the big step up in Chinese challenge in Africa. They favour aligning India's trade strategy with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by supporting Regional Value Chains.

Further, India must move beyond its traditional export markets (South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt) and diversify into other regions of Africa with target of doubling bilateral trade to USD 200 billion by 2030. There is a firm view that the India-Africa Forum Summit (IFAS) which has not been held since 2015, needs to be immediately convened. Ideally, such summits should be held once in three years. Right now, there is need for such a summit in 2026/2027 to review the latest status for taking corrective measures. There is another suggestion to meet the financial muscle power of China which is evident in African projects. The idea is that India should leverage partnerships with third countries like and UAE to pool resources for African projects. It is a tough task for India, but this has to be done if New Delhi is serious about expanding its areas of trade and investment cooperation in the African continent. (IPA Service)

Subjects that students from any stream can study after Class XII

By: Dr Buljit Buragohain

After passing Class XII, many students assume that they must continue only within their chosen stream—Science, Arts, or Commerce. However, this perception has changed significantly in recent times. Today, a wide range of subjects and courses are open to students from all streams. With proper guidance and well-structured planning, students can move forward successfully in any field based on their interests and abilities. Below are some of the courses that students from any stream can pursue after completing Class XII.

In the present era, one of the most in-demand fields is Computer and Information Technology. In this digital age, acquiring skills in this sector opens up diverse career opportunities. Some of the popular courses in this field include Bachelor of Computer Applications (BCA), B.Sc. in IT or Computer Science, Diploma in Software Development, Data Science, and Artificial Intelligence. After completing these courses, students can build careers as software developers, web developers, data analysts, cybersecurity experts, and more.

The field of Design and Creativity is an excellent option for students who have a strong interest in creative thinking, imagination, and innovation. With the rapid growth of digital media and the entertainment industry, the importance of this field has increased significantly. Courses such as Bachelor of Design (B.Des), Graphic Design, Anima-

tion and VFX, UI/UX Design, Filmmaking, and Mass Communication are available. After completing these courses, students can work as designers, animators, content creators, video editors, creative directors, and more.

The field of Business and Management is another promising option for students from any stream. It helps in developing leadership skills, organizational abilities, and decision-making capabilities. In today's competitive world, the demand for professionals in this field is growing rapidly. Courses include Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Management Studies (BMS), and Bachelor in Entrepreneurship. After completing these courses, students can pursue careers as managers, entrepreneurs, marketing executives, HR professionals, and more.

Humanities and Social Sciences include many important subjects that help in understanding society, culture, and human behavior. Studying in this field develops critical thinking, analytical ability, and a sense of social responsibility. Major courses include Bachelor of Arts (BA) in subjects like Economics, Political Science, Sociology, Psychology, History, English, Assamese, etc., and Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). After completing these courses, students can build careers in civil services, research, policy analysis, psychology, social work, and more.

Law is a respected and stable career option that plays a vital role in maintaining justice and order in society. Students interested in this field can pur-

sue integrated five-year law programs such as BA LL.B. or BBA LL.B. After completing these courses, students can work as lawyers, legal advisors, judges, corporate legal experts, and more.

The Hospitality and Tourism sector is a rapidly growing industry where personality, communication skills, and a service-oriented mindset are very important. Students who enjoy interacting with people and have an interest in exploring new places, cultures, and experiences will find this field suitable. Courses include Hotel Management and Travel & Tourism Management. After completing these, students can work as hotel managers, event managers, travel consultants, airline staff, and more.

The field of Music and Performing Arts is ideal for students who have a deep passion and talent for music, dance, or drama. Success in this field requires creativity, dedication, and continuous practice. Courses include Bachelor in Music, Performing Arts, and diplomas in music or dance. After completing these, students can pursue careers as performers, music teachers, composers, and artists. Students from any stream can also build a career in Sports if they have strong interest, dedication, and regular practice. Those who want to pursue sports professionally can study Physical Education at diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, and Ph.D. levels. This field provides knowledge about human body science, fitness, sports training, and management. Career options include not only becoming an athlete but also a physical



education teacher, coach, fitness trainer, sports manager, referee, or umpire.

Skill-based courses, though often short-term, are highly beneficial for employment and help in developing practical skills. The demand for such courses has increased significantly as they make students job-ready in a shorter time. These include Digital Marketing, Content Writing, Photography, Foreign Languages, Event Management, and more. After completing these courses, students can work as freelancers, trainers, consultants, or entrepreneurs.

Choosing the right path after Class XII can sometimes feel confusing, but following a thoughtful and systematic approach can make the process easier and more effective. First, it is im-

portant to identify one's interests—understanding which subjects and activities truly excite and motivate the student. Along with this, students should assess their strengths to recognize areas where they are capable and confident. It is also essential to explore different courses and career options in detail to understand the available opportunities. Seeking guidance from teachers, career counsellors, or experienced individuals can provide clarity and direction. Additionally, being adaptable to change and always ready to learn new skills is crucial, as this mindset helps in building a successful and fulfilling career. Students who are interested in learning more about career-related topics may contact on phone (9435188630) every Saturday between 6 PM and 9 PM.

APSC CCE 2026 Notification – Online Apply for 78 Posts

Assam Public Service Commission has released the official notification of Combined Competitive Examination (Preliminary), 2025 or APSC CCE 2025 for the recruitment of 78 vacancy. Candidates may submit their applications from 13th April 2026 to 3rd May 2026 in online mode.

APSC Combined Competitive Examination or APSC CCE is one of the most prestigious examination conducted by APSC. APSC conducts CCE exams for the recruitment of various Group A posts, i.e., Assam Civil Service, Assam Police Service, Superintendent of Taxes, District Transport Officer, etc.

Minimum educational qualification to appear in APSC CCE Exam is graduate in any discipline.

Tentatively, APSC will conduct the Combined Competitive (Preliminary) Examination 2026 on 5th July 2026.

Name of examination: Combined Competitive Examination (Preliminary), 2025

No of posts: 78 posts

Date of preliminary exam: 5th July 2026

Age Limit: The candidate should not be less than 21 years and more than 38 years of age on 01st January 2025.

Educational Qualification:

The candidate must hold a Degree from any of the Universities incorporated by an Act of Central or State Legislature in India or other educational institutions established by an Act of Parliament or declared to be deemed as a University under Section 3 of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956 or possess such qualification as may be declared equivalent by the Government.

Candidates must possess the prescribed qualification on the date of submission of their applications.

Helpline: 0361-2363117 or 1800-572-23-43 | cceapsc@gmail.com

Here is the post-wise scale of pay for various posts under APSC CCE Exam 2025.

Service Pay Scale + Grade Pay

Assam Civil Service (Jr. Grade) PB-4, ₹30,000 – ₹1,10,000 + Grade Pay ₹13,300/-

Assam Police Service (Jr. Grade) PB-4, ₹30,000 – ₹1,10,000 + Grade Pay ₹13,300/-

District Transport Officer PB-4, ₹30,000 – ₹1,10,000 + Grade Pay ₹12,700/-

Superintendent of Excise PB-4, ₹30,000 – ₹1,10,000 + Grade Pay ₹12,700/-

Asst. Registrar of Cooperative Societies PB-4, ₹30,000 – ₹1,10,000 + Grade Pay ₹12,700/-

Assam Urban Administrative Service (EO. Jr. Gr. II) PB-4, ₹30,000 – ₹1,10,000 + Grade Pay ₹12,700/-

Inspector of Labour PB-3, ₹22,000 – ₹97,000 + Grade Pay ₹9,400/-

Inspector of Excise PB-3, ₹22,000 – ₹97,000 + Grade Pay ₹9,400/-

Assistant Employment Officer PB-3, ₹22,000 – ₹97,000 + Grade Pay ₹9,400/-

Sub-Registrar PB-3, ₹22,000 – ₹97,000 + Grade Pay ₹9,400/-

Research Asst. (Border Protection & Dev. Deptt.) PB-3, ₹22,000 – ₹97,000 + Grade Pay ₹9,400/-

Assam Public Service Commission has released the APSC CCE 2025 notification for 78 posts. Category wise vacancy details is as under.

Category	No of vacancy
UR	42
OBC/ MOBC	14
SC	8
STP	7
STH	7
PwBD	3
Ex-Servicemen	-

Service-wise vacancy details for APSC CCE Recruitment 2026 is as mentioned below.

Service/No of posts	Assam Civil Service (Jr. Grade)
Assam Police Service (Jr. Grade)	6
District Transport Officer	3
Superintendent of Excise	1
Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies	2
Assam Urban Administrative Service (EO. Jr. Gr. II)	2
Inspector of Labour	5
Inspector of Excise	1
Assistant Employment Officer	8
Sub-Registrar	4
Research Assistant (Border Protection & Development Deptt.)	1

Nationality: The candidate must be an Indian citizen.

Regional Language Proficiency: The candidate should be able to speak Assamese or other official language or associate official languages of the State or any of the tribal languages of the State.

Residency: A candidate must be an original inhabitant of Assam.

Employment Exchange Registration: A candidate should be registered in a District Employment Office of Assam.

Small Family Norms: Candidates have to submit a declaration regarding "The normal Family Norms" in Form-A at the time of applying for the C.C. (Prelim) Examination.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

SC/ST: 5 years

OBC/ MOBC: 3 years

PwBD: 10 years

Candidates have to pay an application fee as mentioned below:

General	297.20
OBC/ MOBC	197.20
SC/ ST	47.20
BPL	47.20
PwBD	47.20
Women Candidate	47.20

Note: Under the Digital India initiative by Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India, APSC has decided to launch its Online Recruitment portal with the help of CSC-SPV, a MeitY approved organization, which will charge a processing fee of Rs. 40.00/- + 18% tax = Rs.47.20/- from each candidate.

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for APSC CCE Exam by visiting the official portal of Assam Public Service Commission. They may follow below mentioned steps.

- Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
- Click on Online Application Form link .
- A new webpage will be opened.
- Enter all your personal and educational details as required.
- Upload your passport sized photograph and signature and other required documents.

- Pay the examination fee as per your category and at the end click on submit button .
- Don't forget to take a print of submitted application form .

- Applicants must upload the required documents/certificates in PDF format:
- Recent photograph (not older than 3 months) - 50 to 200 KB size only.
- Signature - 50 to 200 KB size only.
- Age proof certificate (Class 10th/12th Pass Certificate/Admit Card/ Marksheet issued by Central /State Board/Council where DOB is clearly mentioned).
- Graduation/Degree pass certificate and all semester/year wise marksheets in a single pdf.
- Caste/Category Certificate as proof of the claimed caste/category. (if applicable)
- PwBD Certificate issued by competent authority clearly indicating the type and percentage of disability. (if applicable)
- BPL Certificate. (if applicable)
- Small Family Norms declaration in the Form A.
- Valid Employment Exchange Registration Card.
- Valid Employment Exchange Registration Card/PRC/Caste Certificate (for proof of original inhabitant of Assam).
- Persons already employed in Govt. Service or Public Enterprises, whether on a permanent, temporary or work-charged basis (excluding casual or daily rated) must submit an Undertaking.
- If a PwBD applicant requires a scribe but does not fall under the PwBD categories of Blindness/locomotor disability (both arms affected-BA), or cerebral palsy, they must submit a certificate in prescribed format. (as Appendix-II)

Note:

a) File size should not exceed 4 MB.

b) The file is to be legible in print.

c) The scanning is to be done at 200 DPI in greyscale.

- Starting date of submission of online application: 13th April 2026
- Last date of submission of online application: 3rd May 2026
- Date of CCE Preliminary 2026 Exam: 5th July 2026

Office of the Director General Assam Rifles, Shillong has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 117 Rifleman/ Riflewomen Posts under Compassionate Ground appointment scheme. Only dependent and eligible family members of Assam Rifles Personnel can apply for these posts.

Interested and eligible candidates may apply here though Offline mode/ Through email.

Name of post: Rifleman/ Riflewomen and Warrant Officer Cipher

No of posts: 117 posts

Post-wise vacancy:

Rifleman/Riflewoman General Duty (GD) (Male & Female): 95

Warrant Officer Cipher (Male only): 06

Havildar Clerk (Male & Female): 03

Rifleman Electrical Fitter Signal (EFS) (Male only): 02

Rifleman Lineman (Lmn) Field (Male only): 01

Rifleman Armourer (Male only): 02

Rifleman Recovery Vehicle Mechanic (Male only): 01

Rifleman Electrician Mechanic Vehicle (EMV) (Male only): 01

Rifleman Metalsmith (Male only): 01

Rifleman Mason (Male only): 02

Rifleman Store Keeper Technical (Electrical Mechanical Engineer) (Male only): 01

Rifleman Vehicle Mechanic (VM) (Male only): 01

Rifleman Engineer Equipment Mechanic (Male only): 01

Name of organisation: Assam Rifles

Pay Scale: Pay scale and other allowance will be as admissible to Assam Rifles Personnel.

Mode of application: Offline/ Through email

Helpline: 0364-2585119 | 0364-2585118 | 8794101693 | rectbrdgar@gmail.com

Age Limit: Age of the candidates should be between 18 to 23 years . More details will be available once detailed official notification releases.

Educational Qualification: Candidates must have passed Matriculation/ 12th (as applicable) . Required knowledge of respective trades (as applicable) from a recognized Board.

Applicability: Only one dependent family member of Assam Rifles personnel is eligible if the personnel was:

- Killed in Action
- Died while in Service
- Discharged on Medical Grounds
- Missing while in Service

The following constitute dependent family members:-

- (a) Spouse, or
- (b) Son (including adopted son), or
- (c) Daughter (including adopted daughter), or
- (d) Brother or sister in the case of unmarried Govt employee who was wholly dependent on him at the time of death in harness or retirement on medical grounds, as the case may be.

Candidates shall submit their offline applications as per format attached along with self attested copies of educational certificate, domicile certificate, caste certificate, diploma/ technical/ ITI certificate (as applicable) of the trade in accordance with Qualitative Requirements, including one Xerox copy of photo ID i.e. AADHAAR, PAN/ Voter ID/ Driving license etc to the address mentioned below:-

Directorate General Assam Rifles (Recruitment Branch)

Laitkor, Shillong, Meghalaya – 793010.

Email: rectbrdgar@gmail.com .

APPLICATION FOR COMPASSIONATE GROUND APPOINTMENT be endorsed on the top of the postal envelope in which the application is being submitted.

Starting date of submission of application: April 2026

Last date of submission of application: 11th May 2026

Recruitment Rally: Tentatively scheduled in Jul/Aug 2026 at Lokhra (Assam).

Dr B Borooh Cancer Institute Recruitment 2026 – 51 Posts, Online Apply

Dr. B. Borooh Cancer Institute, Guwahati has released an advertisement for the recruitment of 51 Assistant, Upper Division Clerk, Lower Division Clerk, Food Supervisor, Kitchen Supervisor, Cook and Driver posts for "Adult and Pediatric Haematology Unit" at Dr. B. Borooh Cancer Institute (BBCI), Guwahati on temporary and purely on contractual basis. Interested and eligible candidates may apply here. Last date of submission of application is 16th May 2026.

1. Assistant

No of posts: 09 posts

Pay: Rs. 42,480/- per month (consolidated).

Educational Qualification: Graduate from a recognized University with 50% marks.

Essential Experience: Minimum 5 year's works experience in Central / State Government / PSU / Autonomous bodies / Private Organization in the field of Administration and relevant field. Candidates having knowledge in Govt. orders, rules-regulations & well versed with govt. procedures along with knowledge of computer applications will be preferred.

Age Limit: 33 years (5 years relaxable for in service candidates of TMC).

2. Upper Division Clerk

No of posts: 14 posts

Pay: Rs. 30,600/- per month (consolidated)

Educational Qualification: Graduate from a recognized University with 50% marks.

Essential Experience: Minimum 2 year's works experience in Central / State Government / PSU / Autonomous bodies / Private Organization in the field of Administration and relevant field. Candidates having knowledge in Govt. orders, rules-regulations & well versed with govt. procedures along with knowledge of computer applications will be preferred.

Age Limit: 27 years (5 years relaxable for in service candidates of TMC).

3. Lower Division Clerk

No of posts: 22 posts

Pay: Rs. 23,880/- per month (consolidated)

Educational Qualification: Graduate from a recognized University with Diploma (1 year or 6 months) in Computer Application.

Essential Experience: Candidates having experience in the field of Administration and relevant field. Candidates having knowledge of computer applications will be preferred.

Age Limit: 25 years (5 years relaxable for in service candidates of TMC).

4. Food Supervisor

No of posts: 01 post

Pay: Rs. 42,480/- per month (consolidated)

Educational Qualification: Graduate in Hotel Management & Catering Technology from a recognized University / Institute with 50% marks.

Essential Experience: Minimum 1 years' experience in a reputed Hospital or Large Institutional Canteen.

Age Limit: 30 years (5 years relaxable for in service candidates of TMC).

5. Kitchen Supervisor

No of posts: 01 post

Pay: Rs. 42,480/- per month (consolidated)

Educational Qualification: Graduate in Hotel Management & Catering Technology from a recognized University / Institute with 50% marks.

Essential Experience: Minimum 1 years' experience in a reputed Hospital or Large Institutional Canteen.

Age Limit: 30 years (5 years relaxable for in service candidates of TMC).

6. Cook 'A'

No of posts: 02 posts

Pay: Rs. 23,880/- per month (consolidated)

Educational Qualification: 10th Standard with compulsory certified craft course in Food Production, Bakery or Cookery.

Essential Experience: Minimum 1 years' experience or post qualification apprenticeship in food production department of 3 or 5 star hotel.

Age Limit: 25 years (5 years relaxable for in service candidates of TMC).

7. Driver

No of posts: 02 posts

Pay: Rs. 23,880/- per month (consolidated)

Educational Qualification:

- For Ex-Servicemen who have rendered minimum 15 years of service:
- SSC or equivalent from a recognised Board or equivalent certificate from Armed Forces.
- LMV / HMV valid Driving licence and Bus Badge.
- Physical fitness as per GOI Norms.

For Civilian:

- SSC or equivalent from a recognised Board.
- LMV / HMV valid Driving licence and Bus Badge.
- Physical fitness as per GOI Norms.

Knowledge of first aid and maintenance / minor repairs of vehicles is desirable.

Essential Experience: 1 years Accident Free driving experience

Age Limit: 28 years (5 years relaxable for in service candidates of TMC).

Place of Posting: Dr. B Borooh Cancer Institute, Guwahati.

Duration: Appointment is for 6 (Six) months, which is extendable solely based on the performance till co-terminus with project. The candidate will have NO right to claim for permanent employment under the mentioned project / BBCI or for continuation of his / her services in any other project.

Age Relaxation: Age relaxation maximum by 5 years for TMC employees and employees working in TMC on temporary basis / under project / on contract basis etc.

Experience Certificates: Current Employment: Appointment letter, Last month's Pay Slip and NOC.

How to Apply for Dr B Borooh Cancer Institute Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy by visiting official Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply online.

- Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
- Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process.
- In the next stage, click on "Online Application Form" Link and Login.
- Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
- At the end, submit the form.
- Don't forget to take a print out of the application form .
- Starting date of submission of online application: 21st April 2026
- Last date of submission of online application: 16th May 2026, 5.30 PM

Resistance weakens in bloody civil war Myanmar army shifts to offense

BANGKOK, May 1: A little more than a year ago, the government's military was on the back foot in Myanmar's bloody civil war, pushed out of great swaths of the country's north by an alliance of seasoned militias, and forced into defensive action around the rest of the country by other established groups and new pro-democracy guerrillas.

Today, the picture has changed. With its ranks swollen by tens of thousands of new conscripts, the military, known as the Tatmadaw, has reversed some of its losses and appears poised to resume the offensive, while some opposition groups have left the fight and infighting and supply issues have weakened others.

"I think we're nearing a crescendo here where the Tatmadaw is going to reassert itself, and the resistance movement is going to peter out," said Morgan Michaels, a Singapore-based analyst with the International Institute of Strategic Studies who runs its Myanmar Conflict Map project.

Still, he said, even if the broader resistance movement that has grown since the military seized power stumbles, the conflict is not close to over.

"Armed resistance will always

continue in Myanmar until there's a comprehensive, negotiated political solution, but the Tatmadaw has retaken the strategic initiative, and everything is in the Tatmadaw's favour."

Weariness after 5 years of civil war

Meanwhile, after five years of fighting that has seen tens of thousands killed, including some 8,000 civilians, and millions displaced from their homes, there is a general weariness, both among the forces fighting the Tatmadaw and the general population, said Aung Thu Nyein, a political analyst from Myanmar who now works in neighbouring Thailand.

"There are many saying that the local population doesn't care much who will win the war, but just want to stop fighting," he said in a text message.

There is also great pressure from China for stability in Myanmar, also known as Burma, which is a critical source for its rare earths elements and other natural resources, to ensure its mines and other operations are secure, he said.

Beijing has invested billions of dollars in Myanmar's mines, oil and gas pipelines and other infrastructure and is a major arms supplier to the Tatmadaw, along with



Russia. It also carries significant influence with the paramilitary groups that operate in border areas with China, many of whose members are ethnically Chinese.

China seeks to protect its investments

China initially supported the Oct. 27, 2023, offensive against the Tatmadaw by the Three Brotherhood Alliance, largely due to Beijing's irritation that the military-run government had allowed organised crime operations to proliferate in border regions. But it has since pulled the plug on arms and ammunition supplies to the militias and

pressured them to stop fighting.

Of the Three Brotherhood Alliance members, both the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army agreed to ceasefires last year after Chinese-mediated talks, leaving the Arakan Army the only member still actively fighting the Tatmadaw, in the western state of Rakhine.

The Brotherhood Alliance members are all long-standing paramilitary groups organised around ethnic minority lines known as Ethnic Armed Organisations, or EAOs. Suu Kyi's ouster has also given rise to pro-democracy militias known as

People's Defence Forces, or PDFs, many of which are affiliated with the shadow National Unity Government, organised by former members of Suu Kyi's party and others.

Resistance fighters push for unity in the face of the military's renewed power

In the face of an anticipated intensification of attacks by the Tatmadaw, there is a need for top-level coordination of resistance operations by established EAOs in concert with the NUG, the Burma Liberation Democratic Front, a pro-democracy group that has been fighting in the Sagaing and Mandalay regions, told The Associated Press.

"Although there is a shared understanding of the need to overthrow the military dictatorship and move toward a future federal union, there are still gaps and differences in overall grand strategy and tactics," the group told the AP in a written response to questions.

"There are still differences in positions, perspectives, and approaches. Many continue to hold onto ethnic, regional, and organisational interests and attachments."

The group, which is part of an alliance of 20 PDFs, added that the Tatmadaw was actively "attempting to divide and weaken the situation

by creating divisions between the public and revolutionary forces, among different ethnic groups, and even among revolutionary groups."

The military officers who ousted the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021 also successfully held elections recently, even though they were criticised by UN experts as neither free nor fair, with opposition stifled. Min Aung Hlaing, who as the military's senior general led the country with an iron fist after ousting Suu Kyi, was sworn in as president earlier this month.

Politically, the elections appeared to be a thinly veiled attempt to add a veneer of legitimacy to his rule to help improve relations with Southeast Asian neighbours and others as Myanmar struggles under international sanctions.

China, which had been pushing for the election, immediately congratulated Min Aung Hlaing and quickly sent its foreign minister to meet with him in person. The TNLA militia group also sent a message of congratulations, pledging to uphold the ceasefire that China helped broker.

The conclusion of the elections also frees up more soldiers who had been used for widespread security at the polls, Michaels said. (AP)

Sri Lanka appoints panel for autopsy of suspended govt official found dead

COLOMBO, May 1: Sri Lanka on Friday appointed a four-member foreign experts panel to conduct an autopsy of a senior government official who was found dead at his residence weeks after he was suspended from his job.

According to the police, the official, Rangana Nishantha Rajapaksa, 48, is suspected to have committed suicide in his house at Kuliyaipitiya in the northwest region.

Rajapaksa's body was found with first aid injuries in the backyard of his house, the police said.

He was posted as an Assistant Director at the External Resources Department of the Ministry of Finance.

He was among six officials suspended in March in connection with the loss of USD 2.5 million allegedly linked to the hacking of the Finance Ministry account -- a case in which an investigation is underway.

Sri Lanka's main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) last week turned the heat on the government over the loss of funds caused by the alleged hacking.

Secretary to the Treasury Harshana Suriyapperuma has confirmed that USD 2.5 million from the Treasury account was hacked in connection with a foreign debt repayment to Australia in January.

This was a part payment of a larger USD 22.9 million debt settlement.

Sri Lanka recovered from an economic crisis around four years ago when the country almost entirely ran out of foreign exchange, leading to external debt default worth billions of dollars. (PTI)

Taiwan expresses concern after China calls island biggest risk in US-China relations

TAIPEI, May 1: Taiwan's government expressed concern on Friday hours after a call between China and the United States' top diplomats in which Beijing stressed that self-ruled Taiwan was the biggest risk in relations. "Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is concerned about the press release issued by China ... which again unilaterally made threatening remarks on the Taiwan issue," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

In a call with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio Thursday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged the United States to "make the right choices" on Taiwan in order to safeguard "stability" between the two nations, according to a statement by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The call came about two weeks ahead of a highly anticipated summit between US President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping, in which Taiwan is expected to be one of the key topics.

China sees self-ruled Taiwan as its own breakthrough province, to be retaken by force if necessary. In recent years China has ramped up military pressure on the island by sending warships and military planes near it almost daily. (AP)

EU-Mercosur trade deal takes provisional effect



SAO PAULO, May 1: The long-awaited trade deal between South American bloc Mercosur and the European Union took effect Friday, at least provisionally. The initiative creates a trans-Atlantic market estimated at USD 22 trillion with 720 million potential consumers, and some nations expect to boost their exports by more than 10 per cent by 2038, once it is fully implemented.

The trade deal was signed January 17 at a meeting of the South American group. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's move to provisionally enact the deal, effectively sidestepping the EU Parliament, is being challenged by EU lawmakers at the bloc's judiciary. The agreement will be halted if the European body rules against it.

"This is good news for EU businesses of all sizes, good news for our consumers and good news for our farmers, who will gain valuable new export opportunities, with full protection for sensitive sectors," she said Thursday.

Von der Leyen is expected to hold a videoconference on Friday with leaders of Mercosur nations Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay to celebrate the agreement.

Earlier this week, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, one of the key supporters of the agreement, signed a decree validating the deal in his country. He said it is a response to unilateral tariffs imposed last year by US President Donald Trump and a reaffirmation of multilateralism.

"Nothing better than believing in the exercise of democracy, in multilateralism, and in cordial relations between nations," Lula said in a ceremony in the capital, Brasilia, to celebrate the milestone after more than 25 years of negotiations.

Last week, Brazil's vice president and one of the negotiators of the deal, Geraldo Alckmin, said in an interview with The Associated Press and other news agencies that not striking the deal with the EU would have meant staying behind

while competitor nations made other agreements.

Brazil is by far Mercosur's largest economy, with a gross domestic product estimated at over USD 2.3 trillion in 2025.

Lia Valls, an associate researcher at the think-tank Fundacao Getulio Vargas based in Rio de Janeiro, agrees that the deal offers better perspectives against unilateralism worldwide.

"The EU and Mercosur are showing that it is possible for big blocs to reach a deal in this world where that multilateral system is being very weakened and where the US clearly operates to do that," Valls told the AP. "It is a very positive sign."

The agreement faced opposition from European farmers and environmental groups and was delayed in December, before being referred to the EU's top court.

South American agribusiness industries, chiefly beef, fruit and minerals, are expecting a boost in exports to Europe. European automakers, pharmaceutical companies and technology firms also look forward to making new inroads in Mercosur markets.

While companies based in Mercosur countries have expressed fear of tough competition from European peers in high-tech industries, European farmers have shown concerns about price pressures and imports that do not follow similar environmental standards.

French President Emmanuel Macron, one of the critics of the deal, has long demanded safeguards to monitor and stop large economic disruption in the EU, increased regulations in the Mercosur nations like pesticide restrictions, and more inspections of imports at EU ports.

The agreement gradually removes trade barriers and tariffs in the two blocs, but it also keeps economic safeguard clauses for European countries to protect some sectors from excessive competition, such as poultry, beef, sugar, and fruit. (AP)

Amid Koh-i-Noor remark, NYC Mayor Mamdani faces criticism over 'rude' welcome to King Charles III

NEW YORK, May 1: New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani is facing criticism for extending a "rude" welcome to King Charles III and for failing to "set aside his obsession with colonialism" when he called for the Koh-i-Noor diamond to be returned.

Just hours before he met King Charles III and Queen Camilla on Wednesday at the 9/11 Memorial in Manhattan, Mamdani had said he would encourage the British monarch to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond.

When asked at a press conference what he would say to the king when he met him at the World Trade Center memorial, Mamdani had said that he would be attending a wreath-laying alongside a number of other elected officials, including New York State Governor Kathy Hochul and New Jersey Governor Mikie Sherrill.

"And the focus of that wreath-laying is to honour the more than 3,000 New Yorkers who were killed in the horrific terror attacks of September 11. And that's what I'm really looking to do at that event."

When pressed further on what he would say to the British monarch, Mamdani had said, "If I was to speak to the king separately from that, I would probably encourage him to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond."

In stinging criticism, The New York Post Editorial Board called out Mamdani's "rude" welcome extended to King Charles.

"Of course Zohran Mamdani couldn't manage a decent welcome for the king of England: That



would've required maturity, grace and humility that our mayor just doesn't have," the editorial said.

It said "Mamdani did the absolute minimum" to welcome King Charles III to New York when the monarchs visited the city Wednesday, adding that the mayor agreed "belatedly" to "just one brief meeting with the monarch, at the 9/11 Memorial — though the royal visited several sites across town."

"Showing respect for the king is showing respect for Britain, yet Mamdani couldn't resist showing disrespect," the editorial said as it cited previous occasions when members of the British Royal Family were warmly welcomed by NYC mayors, including a "ticker-tape parade" organised in honour of Queen Elizabeth's arrival in the city in 1957 by then Mayor Robert Wagner.

"But Mamdani couldn't bother with any such gestures; he couldn't even set aside his obsession with colonialism, telling reporters he hoped to push Charles 'to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond', a 105-carat gem originally from India and now

on display at the Tower of London," the editorial said.

"Mamdani's inexperience is no excuse for letting his personal passions blind him to the duties of his high office," the editorial said, calling out his "addiction to performative displays".

"At best, his youth means there's a chance he'll learn from his graceless mistakes, and do a bit better the next time he's called to represent all the people of New York City," the editorial added.

Another article in the New York Post said that Mamdani had acted "like a petulant teen" in front of the king and queen.

On Mamdani's comment about the Koh-i-Noor diamond, the article said that the king's wish to honour the victims of the 9/11 terror attack "was not an opportunity for a freshman barb on colonialism, and to imply that this crown jewel belongs to India".

"Anyway, what is Mamdani's standing to demand the diamond — has he appointed himself a representative of India's government? It was-

n't just the mayor's rudeness, but his tone and demeanour. Mamdani did his best version of a petulant teen betraying intolerable boredom," the NY Post article added.

King Charles and Queen Camilla visited the 9/11 Memorial in the city and paid their respects to the victims of the terror attack.

They also visited Harlem Grown, a network of urban farms supporting children and families in Upper Manhattan. Mamdani had met King Charles at the 9/11 memorial. A video of their interaction on social media showed the two men greeting each other briefly as King Charles meets other New York officials, including Kochul.

A report in the New York Post had quoted a City Hall spokesperson as saying that Mamdani and Charles "exchanged pleasantries" when they met at the 9/11 memorial. Mamdani had left the event after an hour, the report said.

The 105.6-carat Koh-i-Noor diamond was given to Queen Victoria in 1849 by Maharajah Duleep Singh. It was worn by the Queen Mother on her crown in 1937.

India has indicated previously that it will continue to explore ways to bring back the Koh-i-Noor from the United Kingdom.

The Koh-i-Noor diamond is currently displayed at the Tower of London. The diamond, set within the Crown of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, has "many previous owners, including Mughal Emperors, Shahs of Iran, Emirs of Afghanistan, and Sikh Maharajas", according to the Historic Royal Palaces charity. (PTI)

Israeli authorities taking 2 activists who led Gaza-bound flotilla

BARCELONA, May 1: Israeli authorities have said they are taking two activists who led an aid flotilla bound for Gaza — and were captured by Israel in international waters of the Mediterranean Sea — to Israel for questioning.

The activists, Palestinian-Spanish citizen Saif Abukeshk and Brazilian citizen Thiago Avila, were among dozens of activists intercepted by the Israeli navy off the coast of Crete. They are members of the Global Sumud Flotilla's steering committee, whose mission was to break Israel's naval blockade and bring some humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territory.

In all, some 20 boats and 175 activists were intercepted by the Israeli navy. Activists said Israeli forces stormed their vessels, smashed engines and detained some of those onboard.

The incident occurred hundreds of kilometres from Gaza and Israel overnight from Wednesday to Thursday.

Israeli officials said they needed to take early action against the flotilla before it reached Israeli waters because of the high number of boats involved.

On Friday the Israeli Foreign Ministry said on X that it was taking the two activists to Israel for questioning, and that Abukeshk was "suspected of affiliation with a terrorist organization" and Avila was "suspected of illegal activity," without providing evidence.

The Global Sumud Flotilla appealed for international support.

"We demand that all governments do all they can to pressure the Israeli regime to release all the illegal abductees," the group said Friday.

The rest of the flotilla participants were released in Crete late Thursday. Of the 53 vessels that had been sailing prior to the interception, 31 reached safe waters and would continue their attempts to "break the illegal siege of Gaza," organisers said. (AP)

textbooks highlight the suffering and sacrifices of indentured Indians, as well as their role in the anti-apartheid struggle that led to the election of Nelson Mandela as the country's first democratically-elected president.

Maharaj noted that the struggle was initiated by the Natal Indian Congress, founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1894, nearly two decades before the African National Congress was established.

He also called for recognition of Indian figures such as the Padavatan brothers and Valliamma, as well as philanthropists, including VN Naik, ML Sultan, Narend Pattundeen, AM Moola, RK Khan, and HE Joosab, who helped establish schools and hospitals for the community. (AP)

Hindu body urges inclusion of Indian history in South African textbooks

JOHANNESBURG, May 1: A leading Hindu organisation in South Africa has urged authorities not to "airbrush" the history of Indians in the country, calling for greater representation of the community's contributions in school textbooks currently under revision.

In an open letter, South African Hindu Dharma Sabha (SAHDS) president Ram Maharaj said the history of Indians, despite the community being a minority, must be adequately reflected in curricula.

"As far back as 1981, the SAHDS had adopted a unanimous resolution at its inaugural National Hindu Convention in Durban, calling for substantial inclusion of Indian history in school curricula," he said.

"The history of Indians in South Africa cannot and must not be airbrushed away in history books. We demand that the current content on the history of Indians be at least doubled across all grades, because minorities matter," Maharaj said.

The current level of representation, he alleged, is "an affront" and a "blatant erasure" of the monumental contributions Indians have made to the building of South Africa.

He recalled that Indians, since arriving as indentured labourers in 1860, had contributed across economic, cultural, political and social spheres in South Africa.

"To diminish this legacy in our textbooks is to diminish the truth itself," Maharaj said, adding that enhanced

representation would promote interracial understanding, social cohesion and nation building.

He said greater inclusion of the community's struggles would also counter perceptions that Indians in South Africa had historically enjoyed privilege.

"It must be recorded that our great indentured ancestors toiled tirelessly, and lived in slave-like conditions, incessantly suffering from torture and trauma, deprivation and discrimination.

"However, down through the generations, Indians survived and thrived by prioritising educational advancement with a sense of vision and mission, turning adversity into advantage, and doing more with less," the Hindu leader said. The SAHDS has recommended that

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Sd/
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Administrator

Initiative aimed at ensuring seamless data collection and wider participation across the state

Meghalaya Guv first to enrol as state begins push for digital Census



SHILLONG, May 1: Meghalaya Governor CH Vijayashankar on Friday became the first to enrol as the state began its push towards a fully digital Census and urged citizens to participate in the process, officials said.

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma is set to enrol later in the day, they said.

The Governor completed his enrolment in the presence of senior officials, marking the launch of the digital Census initiative aimed at

ensuring seamless data collection and wider participation across the state.

Urging citizens to take part, Vijayashankar said the transition to a digital platform would make the process more accessible, efficient

and transparent.

"A digital Census is a step forward in making governance more responsive and data-driven. I urge all citizens to actively participate in this initiative for the benefit of the state and the nation," he said.

He added that accurate and comprehensive data is crucial for planning and implementation of welfare schemes and development programmes.

"The success of the Census depends on the cooperation of the people. Wider participation will help in building a reliable database that supports inclusive growth," the Governor said.

Officials said the initiative is part of preparations for Census 2027 and is aimed at simplifying enumeration while improving the accuracy and reliability of data collection.

The digital format is expected to reduce manual errors, ensure real-time data capture and make the process more convenient for citizens, they added. (PTI)

Key bridge in Manipur's Churachandpur collapses



CHURACHANDPUR, May 1: A Bailey bridge over the Tuivai river collapsed in Manipur's Churachandpur district, officials said on Friday.

The bridge, situated between Sinzawl and Khuangwin villages along NH-102B, gave way on Thursday evening while two trucks loaded with cement were crossing it, they said. No casualty was reported in the incident, they added.

The route is a crucial supply line for Churachandpur, facilitating the movement of essential commodities from Silchar in Assam and other areas via Mizoram.

Restoration work is underway on a war footing to resume connectivity, officials said. (PTI)

DIPR Manipur launches fact-check page

Initiative aims to curb misinformation and raise awareness on welfare schemes

IMPHAL, May 1: Amid the increasing challenge of fake news and misinformation in this digital era, the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), Government of Manipur, launched the "DIPR Manipur Fact Check" official Facebook page and organised a one-day awareness programme on its existing welfare schemes at the DIPR Auditorium, Imphal on Thursday.

Secretary, IPR, Hungyo Worshang, formally launched the "DIPR Manipur Fact Check" official Facebook page, which aims at authenticating and verifying various government orders, notices, circulars, etc.

Hungyo highlighted the growing challenge of misinformation in the digital era. He stressed the need to verify sources of news, images and videos and urged media houses to actively support efforts, including this initiative, to curb the spread of false information.

Addressing the media, Director,

IPR, Dr Th Charanjeet Singh, underscored the importance of fact-checking in the age of artificial intelligence, where distinguishing real from fake information has become increasingly difficult. He added that misleading information, rumours and false news incite misunderstanding among people and pose a huge threat to peace and progress.

He further stated that the media awareness programme was organised to create awareness about DIPR schemes and ensure that benefits reach deserving individuals.

Dr Charanjeet informed that nodal officers from various departments will be designated to verify documents related to their respective departments before dissemination to prevent mistrust and possible unrest arising from fake content. Suggestions from stakeholders have also been invited to further strengthen the initiative, he added.

The event featured a media

sensitisation session in the afternoon highlighting the media welfare schemes undertaken by DIPR Manipur. During the programme, officials elaborated on DIPR schemes including the Journalist Pension Scheme, Welfare Scheme, Press Identity Cards and accreditation processes and the Manipur State Journalist Awards Scheme.

Sessions on the "Manipur State Journalist Awards Scheme," "Manipur Working Journalists Welfare Scheme," and "Manipur Working Journalists Pension Scheme" were conducted by T Ramesh Singh, Additional Director (IPR), Km Ph Sheityamala Devi, Deputy Director, DIPR and Ninghoujam Roshan Singh, Assistant Publicity Officer (Press), DIPR, respectively.

The programme concluded with an interactive session between media personnel and DIPR officials, including the Director, Additional Director, Deputy Director and APO (Press). (NNN)

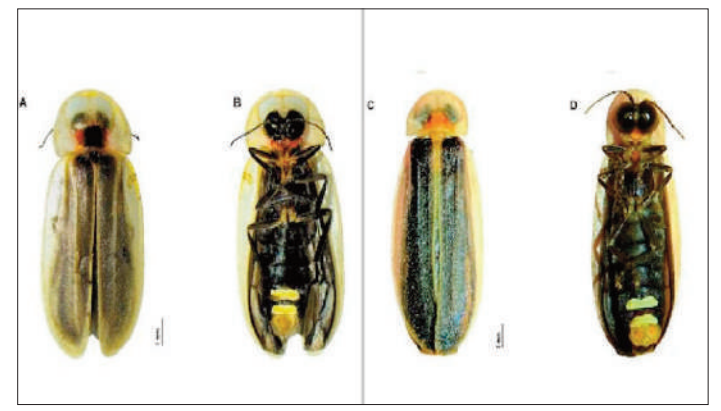
New fireflies species discovered in 'Asia's cleanest village' Mawlynnong

SHILLONG, May 1: Mawlynnong, dubbed as Asia's cleanest village has added another distinction to its name with the discovery of a new species of firefly, as researchers documented Meghalaya's first-ever scientifically recorded luminous insects in the area, officials said on Friday.

The study, led by Emma Magdalene Nonglang of Assam Don Bosco University, identified two previously unknown species, *Diaphanes meghalayanus* and *Diaphanes mawlynnong*, the latter named after the village where it was first recorded, they said.

While *D meghalayanus* was found across multiple habitats in the state, *D mawlynnong* was observed in the dense forested surroundings of Mawlynnong village close to the India-Bangladesh border.

Researchers said the fireflies were located in relatively undisturbed habitats, including semi-evergreen forests and bamboo patches near rocky streams, areas marked by minimal human interference and very low levels of artificial lighting.



Field observations showed that *D meghalayanus* thrives in cool, humid conditions of 18-20 degrees Celsius, with males emitting soft green flashes while flying at heights of 10-15 metres above the ground.

In contrast, *D mawlynnong* is associated with denser forest canopies. While males also fly at higher altitudes, the wingless females were found beneath rocks, producing a slower and longer-lasting glow, the researchers explained.

The finding is significant as there were previously no published records or museum spec-

imens of fireflies from Meghalaya.

Nonglang said firefly populations are highly sensitive to light pollution, noting that the loss of natural darkness often leads to their decline.

Co-researcher Jane Wanry Shangpliang said fireflies act as key indicators of environmental health and ecological balance.

The team believes Meghalaya's varied topography and elevation gradients could harbour a rich but largely undocumented diversity of firefly species, highlighting the need for further scientific surveys. (PTI)

Better connectivity, infra development boosted tourism, agriculture in Arunachal: CM

ITANAGAR, May 1: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Friday described the state as a "powerhouse of India" in hydroelectricity generation and said that improved connectivity and infrastructure development have helped the tourism, agriculture and horticulture sectors grow.

Addressing policymakers and academicians at the ICPP Growth Conference 2026 hosted by the Isaac Centre for Public Policy, Ashoka University in New Delhi, he said hydropower projects with a cumulative capacity of around 19,000 MW are currently under various stages of development in the state.

A long-term target is to achieve 40,000 MW by 2047, contributing significantly to the vision of a developed India, he said.

The CM also spoke about the rapid growth in tourism, agriculture and horticulture sectors, attributing this progress to improved connectivity and infrastructure.

The expansion of road networks, including access to remote and border areas, has opened up new avenues for economic growth and tourism in the state, he said.



Khandu described Arunachal Pradesh as one of the most beautiful and strategically significant states of the country, being the largest in the northeast as well as the easternmost and northernmost state in the region, according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office.

He highlighted the state's rich cultural diversity, with 26 major tribes and over 100 sub-tribes, noting that Hindi serves as a vital language link

that unites the people across different communities.

Khandu emphasised that the northeast, once perceived through the lens of insurgency, underdevelopment and isolation, has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade.

He credited the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for bringing the region to the centre of India's development agenda.

He noted that regular visits by Union ministers and senior officials to the region have played a crucial role in identifying issues on the ground and ensuring timely resolution, thereby accelerating development.

Khandu highlighted key governance reforms undertaken by his government, particularly in ensuring transparency and accountability in recruitment.

The chief minister shared that a comprehensive overhaul of the education system is underway in line with the National Education Policy 2020, with a target for full implementation by 2030.

He noted that difficult but necessary decisions, including the rationalisation of over 600 non-viable schools, were taken to improve educational outcomes.

The chief minister also spoke about Arunachal Pradesh's rich biodiversity and the government's commitment to environmental sustainability. Referring to India's commitments made at COP26, he said the state has adopted a structured approach with defined pillars and strategies to balance economic development with environmental conservation, ensuring community participation in preserving forests and natural resources.

He also spoke about national initiatives like the Vibrant Villages Programme, expansion of highways and hydropower development, which are "contributing to building stronger, more connected communities in the frontier state", the statement said.

"When we invest in people and create opportunities, we move forward together," he added. (PTI)

Two persons dead, four injured in storm-related incidents in Tripura



AGARTALA, May 1: Two persons, including a child, died and four others were injured in storm-related incidents in Tripura over the last 48 hours, an official said on Friday.

The storms also caused extensive damage to standing crops and power transmission lines across the state.

"One five-year-old child died and his brother was injured when their mud-wall house at Radhanagar in Unakoti district collapsed on Thursday. Another man from Longtarai Valley in Dhalai district succumbed to injuries after being struck by lightning on Wednesday," State Project Director (Disaster Management) Sanat Kumar Das said.

He said three more persons were injured in various parts of the state due to storm-related incidents.

"During heavy rainfall coupled with gusty winds, a total of 3,997 dwelling houses were damaged of which 180 huts were destroyed," he said, adding that ₹ 79.59 lakh has been released so far as interim relief.

According to Das, four relief camps were opened to provide temporary shelter to around 243 families, but all inmates have since returned to their homes as the situation improved.

"Apart from extensive damage to transmission lines, as many as 129 electric posts collapsed due to heavy showers and high-velocity winds. Restoration work is going on in some remote areas," he said.

The IMD has predicted that heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely at one or two places in Sepahijala and South Tripura districts on Friday. (PTI)

Mokokchung conducts 'operation night guard' to test air raid preparedness

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 1: In a proactive move to bolster emergency readiness, a mock exercise titled "Operation Night Guard- Civil Defence Air Raid/Blackout Exercise" was conducted across key locations in Mokokchung on Thursday night.

The exercise, which commenced at 6.30 pm, was designed to evaluate the town's emergency alert systems, inter-agency coordination and public response during high-pressure scenarios.

The operation was triggered following a simulated report of an incoming air raid from RCDC Jorhat Air Force 10 Wing and the SEOC Kohima.

Upon receiving the alert, the District Emergency Operations Centre (DEOC) activated sirens through fire & emergency services, while the power department implemented a 15-minute temporary blackout to simulate real-world air raid protocols.

During the blackout, Mokokchung deputy commissioner Ajit Kumar Verma summoned the command staff, including the SP, ADC, SDO (C) Hq, EAC (DDMA Cell), DPRO, OC wireless and DPA, to the DEOC to manage the



simulated crisis.

The exercise concluded with a comprehensive debriefing session.

Sr SP Vesupra Kezo offered observations on

the technical execution, while DC Verma emphasised the importance of such drills in ensuring the safety and resilience of the community during unforeseen emergencies.

Surya Kanth highlights role of digital reforms in overcoming geographical barriers

Tech integration into judicial processes dismantles geographical barriers, helps litigants: CJI

GANGTOK, May 1: Chief Justice of India Surya Kanth on Friday said integrating technology into judicial processes dismantles geographical barriers to help litigants overcome problems of terrain, finance and distance.

Addressing the inaugural session of the two-day National Conclave on Technology and Judicial Education here, the CJI also said the Indian legal landscape has moved away from the era of the paper trail, where vital records languished in physical storage, to a vibrant digital ecosystem.

"When we speak of integrating technology into judicial processes across the country, we are, in effect, addressing the dismantling of geographical constraints, whether they arise from difficult terrain, financial barriers, or sheer distance," he said.

The journey to a courtroom was often measured as a test of endurance, the Chief Justice of India said.

"The mighty Himalayas, magnificent as they are, make movement slow and uncertain. If we look at the scenario just a decade or so ago, for a Sikkimese litigant seeking justice, distance was not measured in kilometres but in days of travel across narrow paths and unpredictable weather," he said.

The CJI said digital reform is not a matter of theory, but a practical necessity for sustaining the rule of law.

"We have moved away from the era of the paper

trail, where vital records languished in physical storage, to a vibrant digital ecosystem. The e-Courts project has rewritten the relationship between the litigant and the law," he said.

What once required physical presence and toilsome inquiry is now available through a simple digital interface, CJI Kanth said, adding that in consonance with this advancement, the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) stands as the "beating heart" of this endeavour, offering a window into the pulse of our judicial performance.

"Beyond basic data collection, we have witnessed the advent of intelligent assistance within our chambers," he said, mentioning translation tool SUVAS and SUPACE, an AI-driven tool designed to assist judges.

"These innovations act as force multipliers, aiding in the swift translation of judgments and providing rapid, comprehensive research to the bench. They relieve the judge of the mechanical burden of routine inquiry, allowing for a deeper immersion in the complexities of the law," the CJI said.

He also discussed another aspect of technological advancements.

"When a litigant in the most distant corner of the country can track the progress of a case or view an order without intermediaries; if he can engage counsel from across the country and view proceedings in real time through video confer-



ing and live proceedings, the power dynamics of the courtroom undergo a healthy calibration," he said.

Yet, it would be premature to assume that the task is complete, said the Chief Justice of India.

He suggested that the large-scale digitisation achieved in trial courts through the National Core Case Information Systems (NC CIS) must now find a clear and consistent reflection in the higher judiciary through stronger standardisation.

"It enables High Courts to align with a common national standard while still accommodating state-specific requirements, whether in terms of nomenclature, local language needs, or procedural workflows," he said.

The CJI said this standardisation exercise must also be accompanied by an expansion of e-Seva Kendras, one-stop digital service centres established in high courts and district courts to help litigants and lawyers access electronic court services such as assistance with case status, e-filing, obtaining certified copies, e-payments, and video conference hearings.

"These centres must grow beyond being simple access points and develop into effective hubs of digital support. In a country marked by varying levels of literacy, they serve as the crucial link between the complexity of the law and the immediacy of a citizen's need," he said.

Noting that currently, there are 48 functioning e-Seva Kendras in high courts and 2,283 operational units across district courts, he said that strengthening their technical capacity is essential to ensure that the digital divide does not become a new line of exclusion.

CJI Kanth also said there is a clear scope for the careful infusion and granular application of Artificial Intelligence at the trial court level.

In the context of recovery suits, for instance, predictive and analytical tools can be deployed at

the very threshold of litigation, he said.

"Instead of allowing valuable judicial time to be spent at the execution stage, on tasks such as verification of assets or tracing encumbrances, these systems can undertake such foundational checks with a degree of speed and accuracy that manual processes often cannot match," he said.

Similarly, Artificial Intelligence systems can be deployed to identify patterns in sentencing and bail practices, to promote greater consistency and predictability, the CJI said.

"This Conclave recognises that the adoption of technology is not only about implementation, but also about a necessary shift in legal education. It is no longer sufficient to be well versed in the statutes of the past. The modern judge must also engage with the logic that underpins emerging technologies," the CJI said.

Judicial academies also must move beyond basic digital literacy, encouraging a deeper understanding of how algorithmic systems operate, and how they intersect with longstanding principles such as natural justice, he said.

"Only then can technology be integrated in a manner that strengthens, rather than unsettles, the core values of the legal system," CJI Kanth said.

The programme was attended by Chief Justice of Seychelles Supreme Court Rony James Govinden, Sri Lankan Supreme Court judge Mohammad Dhillip Nawaz and others. (PTI)

Ladakh a living land of dharma for centuries: Amit Shah

LEH/JAMMU, May 1: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday described the return of sacred relics of Lord Buddha to Ladakh after 75 years as a "historic reunion" and said that the Union Territory has remained a "living land of dharma" that preserved and nurtured Buddhist knowledge for centuries.

Stressing the relevance of Buddha's teachings in modern times, Shah said the message of peace, compassion and the middle path was even more important today than it was 2,500 years ago.

Speaking after inaugurating the exposition of sacred holy relics of Tathagata Buddha and the 2569th Buddha Purnima celebrations at Jivetsal in Leh, Shah said, "Ladakh has been a living land of dharma for centuries. When the Dalai Lama comes here, he says this land is not merely a geographical land but a living laboratory of Buddhist culture and compassion."

Calling Ladakh a land of compassion, he said this land has preserved and nurtured knowledge. "Whenever Buddhism faced crises, this land worked to protect the teachings of Buddha. And when peace returned, it helped to expand and carry forward that preserved wisdom," he added.

Shah said that unless one internalises knowledge and makes it a part of oneself, liberation is not possible.

"Knowledge is incomplete without spiritual practice, while spiritual practice without knowledge is blind. Therefore, the union of spiritual practice and knowl-



edge is the right path. Even with these, if there is no moral discipline, one cannot lead a truly wise life. The basis of a life of wisdom is moral discipline," he said.

Shah said it was through Ladakh and adjoining routes that the teachings of Tathagata Buddha, which originated in India, spread to China and several other countries.

"The message that emerged from the land of Ladakh has become a guiding force that helps many people around take their lives forward. The presence of these sacred relics in Ladakh reminds us that India's civilisation has, for thousands of years, given the message of peace and coexistence," he said. He said in a diverse region like Ladakh, this message becomes even more relevant.

"This heritage still tells us that amidst conflict and unrest, only the path of peace and compassion can provide solutions."

He said the return of the relics

for trade but also for ideas, monks, manuscripts and artistic traditions.

Later, Tibetan influence between the seventh and tenth centuries further enriched Ladakh through Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, Shah added.

Stressing the relevance of Buddha's teachings in modern times, Shah said the message of peace, compassion and the middle path was even more important today than it was 2,500 years ago.

"Amid conflict and unrest, only the path of peace and compassion can provide solutions," he said.

Shah also appealed to the Ladakh administration to ensure smooth arrangements so that followers of all faiths, especially Buddhists, could visit and pay obeisance to the relics.

Later, addressing another gathering in Leh after launching several dairy projects, the home minister praised the people of Ladakh and Kargil for their patriotism and sacrifices in safeguarding the country's borders. Whenever danger came from across the border, he said, the people of Ladakh stood in defence of the nation before the Army reached.

"The Army reached later. First, the people of Ladakh took bullets on their chests to protect the nation," Shah said, adding that the whole country -- from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Dwarka to Kamakhya -- knows and appreciates this history. The home minister, who is on a two-day visit to Ladakh, said he has visited the Union Territory after seven years and was glad to be there on Buddha Purnima. (PTI)

has boosted the significance of Buddha Purnima for the people of Ladakh. "These sacred relics have come to Ladakh after 75 years. It is as if Buddha himself is present here today," Shah said, adding that followers of Buddhism and other religions in Ladakh and Kargil would draw spiritual energy from the relics alike.

Highlighting Ladakh's role in the spread of Buddhism, Shah said Kashmir was once an ancient centre of Buddhist studies, Mahayana philosophy and Buddhist art, from where Ladakh first came into close contact with Buddhism. Emperor Ashoka's envoys laid the foundation of Buddhist influence in Ladakh through Kashmir and Gandhara, while Mahayana Buddhism expanded in the region during the Kushan period between the first and third centuries CE.

The Silk Route linking Kashmir, Leh, Yarkand, Khotan and Tibet became a channel not only

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The Silk Route linking Kashmir, Leh, Yarkand, Khotan and Tibet became a channel not only

'Missing Link' project on Mumbai-Pune Expressway opens: CM



MUMBAI, May 1: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday inaugurated the much-awaited 13.3-km-long "Missing Link" project on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway aimed at bypassing the steep mountain pass section in order to improve road safety and reduce travel time between the two key cities.

Calling it an "engineering marvel", the CM said this "iconic project", built at a cost of ₹ 7,000 crore, will act as an "economic multiplier" and help create a ₹ 70,000 crore economy by boosting investments, connectivity and industrial growth along the corridor.

Coinciding with this inauguration event held on the Maharashtra Foundation Day, a massive traffic jam was witnessed in the Khandala or Bhore 'ghat' (mountain pass) section of the expressway with commuters questioning the government over the timing of the function considering the school holidays and a long weekend. Many of them were stuck in the traffic since early morning.

During his speech later, Fadnavis apologised to people for the inconvenience.

The CM inaugurated the Missing Link at the Khalapur (Raigad district) end of the expressway around 1 pm and then drove a car on the Lonavala-bound carriage-way of the project. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde was spotted sitting next to him in the vehicle. The Missing Link project connects Khopoli (in Raigad) on the Mumbai side to Kusaon near Lonavala in Pune district and is expected to make the expressway fully access-controlled, easing congestion in the ghat section.

Developed by the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC), the project includes two tunnels, two viaducts

and a cable-stayed bridge over Tiger Valley. It bypasses the steep and accident-prone ghat section that witnesses frequent traffic congestion, especially during weekends and on public holidays.

Fadnavis said the completion of the project, which was executed in difficult terrain, was a "dream come true". "This should not be called a Missing Link but a Connecting Link. Nothing is missing. Everything is in place," he said. The project would support the development of a Mumbai-Pune knowledge corridor and emerge as a catalyst for economic activity, he said.

"It cost us ₹ 7,000 crore to create this engineering marvel, but the project has generated such a strong economic multiplier that the Missing Link or connecting link is expected to create an economy worth ₹ 70,000 crore," the CM added.

The project features the widest road tunnel in the world and the tallest cable-stayed bridge in the country, making it an iconic infrastructure asset for Maharashtra, according to him.

Fadnavis said the project was conceptualised in 2010, but got stalled due to multiple objections, including concerns over a lake above the alignment.

"In 2015, our government overruled the earlier decision and decided to execute the project," he said. Stating that the tunnel of the Missing Link is the widest in the world and has been included in the Guinness Book of World Records, Fadnavis said it took nearly three years to design the cable-stayed bridge section due to its technical complexity.

The project was executed with technological and engineering support involving seven countries, according to him.

He also warned motorists to maintain lane discipline on the ex-

pressway, saying strict enforcement would be carried out.

"If lane discipline is not followed, a big challan will be issued," he said.

Ahead of the inauguration event, movement of vehicles was affected in the hilly stretch of the expressway due to a sudden surge in the traffic as a result of school holidays and a long weekend. Heavy traffic towards Pune and popular tourist destinations resulted in long queues of vehicles, particularly at bottleneck points around steep inclines. CM Fadnavis apologised to people who were stuck in the traffic jam. Referring to a social media post by NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule, who was also stuck in the traffic, he said that she will not have to face a similar situation on the route again as the Missing Link project, which was stalled by the previous government, is now ready.

Deputy CM Eknath Shinde said the link will significantly reduce travel time between Mumbai and Pune, and will save fuel, bring down pollution levels as well as accident risks.

Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar also spoke on the occasion.

The Missing Link project forms part of a modern 19.16-km corridor that also includes widening of a 5.86-km six-lane section between Khalapur and Khopoli interchange to eight lanes, the MSRDC said in a release. Officials said the Missing Link will reduce the Mumbai-Pune travel distance by about 6 km and cut the journey time by 20 to 30 minutes.

Initially, only light motor vehicles and buses will be allowed on the new stretch, while heavy goods vehicles will continue to use the existing ghat route due to safety considerations.

Authorities clarified that no toll hike has been proposed in connection with the project, including at the Khalapur toll plaza in Raigad district.

The tunnels were constructed using the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM) and involved extensive geological studies across varying rock formations in the Sahayadri ranges, the MSRDC said.

The 650-metre viaduct features, what officials described as India's tallest road cable-stayed bridge, with pylons rising 182 metres and supported by 240 stay cables. The bridge underwent international testing, including wind tunnel, fatigue and tensile tests. (PTI)

No date fixed yet for leadership change in K'taka: Cong chief

BENGALURU/KALABURAGI (Karnataka), May 1: Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday said that no date has been fixed yet to discuss possible leadership change in Karnataka.

His statement came amid intensifying speculation over a power tussle between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy D K Shivakumar.

Addressing a press conference in his home town Kalaburagi, Kharge maintained that any decision regarding leadership would be taken collectively by the party's high command after due consultation. He also cautioned against misinterpretation of his remarks.

"See, we will take a decision together, the three of us: I as the AICC president, Sonia Gandhi as the Congress Parliamentary Party president, and Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. That is why we always act together," he explained.

Kharge further said, "When the three of us fix a date together, we will take a decision. Since no date has been fixed yet, how can I say whether a change is happening or not?"

He asserted that the Congress leadership follows a consultative process before arriving at any conclusion.

"In the high command, we have extensive discussions among ourselves and also consult other senior leaders. We consider what the outcome would be and then take steps accordingly," the Congress chief said.

Stressing that no timeline had been finalised, he said, "When it happens, I will definitely inform you. Please do not misinterpret this."

He noted that he often avoids commenting publicly to prevent misrepresentation.

Emphasising party discipline, Kharge said any eventual decision would be binding on all.

"Whatever decision is taken, it will be in the interest of the state, and everyone will have to support whatever decision the high command takes," he said.

On Thursday, Kharge said there was no change of CM in Karnataka "for now" and that the leadership issue in the state would be resolved soon.

Reacting to Kharge's statement, Shivakumar told reporters in Bengaluru that he will follow the party high command's direction.

"Whatever Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, or Sonia Gandhi say, we accept it as a blessing," he said.

Karnataka Minister M B Patil also said there is no leadership change on the cards in the state.

"Rahul Gandhi and Kharge are our supreme high command. What the high command said is true. As of today, no such decision exists. Going forward, Rahul Gandhi and all of us will have to sit and discuss if there is any such matter," Patil told reporters. (PTI)

Lt Gen Balbir Singh assumes charge as Chinar Corps GoC

SRINAGAR, May 1: Lieutenant General Balbir Singh on Friday assumed the command of the Army's Srinagar-based strategic XV Corps from Lt Gen Prashant Srivastava, who has been appointed as Quarter Master General at the Army headquarters.

Lt Gen Singh had earlier commanded the Victor Force, which looks after counter-insurgency operations in south and central Kashmir. His tenure saw the killing of Col Manpreet Singh, Major Ashish Dhochack and Deputy Superintendent of Jammu and Kashmir

Huayun Bhat by terrorists in the higher reaches of Kokernag on September 13, 2023.

A statement from the XV Corps, often referred to as Chinar Corps, said Lt Gen Singh is a highly decorated and battle-hardened officer with over 34 years of service.

After assuming charge of the new role, the General Officer Commanding (GoC) paid respects at the Chinar War Memorial, honouring the supreme sacrifice of the nation's bravehearts.

In his inaugural address, Lt Gen Singh reaffirmed his resolve to work in close synergy with the civil administration and the people of Kashmir to further strengthen the foundation of peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

He exhorted all sections of society to join hands with the security forces in overcoming the persistent challenges, the statement said.

Lt Gen Srivastava relinquished the command and handed over the reins of the Chinar Corps after 19 months. (PTI)

AAP govt's Confidence Motion passes in Punjab Assembly

CHANDIGARH, May 1: The Confidence Motion moved by the Bhagwant Mann government was unanimously passed in the Punjab Assembly on Friday, and AAP MLAs reaffirmed that they stand like loyal soldiers of the party. This comes days after seven Rajya Sabha MPs of the Arvind Kejriwal-led party defected to the BJP.

During the special session of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha here, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann moved the Confidence Motion. There are rumours that AAP will be finished and its MLAs would switch sides, and such rumours create an illusion in people's minds, CM Mann said in the House while moving the motion.

With the opposition MLAs not present in the House when the motion was taken up, it was unanimously passed in their absence.

Taking on those allegedly spreading rumours, CM Mann asserted that the party is strong and is expanding. "The party is strong. From Jammu and Kashmir to Goa, the party has a presence. In J&K's Doda, we have an MLA. Our government in Punjab is running successfully. In Delhi, we are in the opposition. We have five MLAs in Gujarat, two in Goa. Besides, AAP has its mayors, councillors, sarpanches at various places, the party has a national presence," Mann said.

"We built the party with hard work and we stand by Kejriwal like a

rock," the Punjab CM further said. The ruling party had earlier issued a whip to all legislators to attend the one-day session.

In the 117-member Punjab Assembly, AAP enjoys an overwhelming majority with 94 MLAs, while 16 belong to the Congress, one BSP, three SAD, two BJP and one Independent.

When Mann moved the Confidence Motion, no one from the opposition camp was present in the House, barring lone Independent MLA Rana Inderpratap Singh, with the Congress having staged a walk-out and the BJP boycotting the session. SAD MLAs and the lone BSP legislator were also not present.

Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, who seconded the motion, slammed the BJP-led Centre over the issue of defection of AAP's seven Rajya Sabha MPs.

Cheema also accused the BJP government of "misusing" central agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate and the CBI, against political rivals. The BJP government is indulging in "gundagardi" (hooliganism), Cheema said.

Kharar MLA Anmol Gagan Maan said, "We will remain loyal soldiers of AAP till our last breath. We have been given a chance by AAP and it is our party which has brought us to this level."

MLA Manjit Singh Bilaspur said they will continue to stand by the

party like a rock. "We are with the party and we will continue to remain in the party," said Bilaspur, MLA from the Nihal Singh Wala seat.

Minister Sanjeev Arora said the AAP government carried out the kind of work for people's welfare in the past four years which had not been done in the past 70 years by the previous governments. He also spoke about free electricity for the domestic sector. In 2025-26, Punjab attracted investments of ₹ 60,256 crore, which is the highest in the state's history, said Arora, who holds the portfolios of power and industries and commerce.

On April 24, AAP suffered a jolt when seven of its 10 Rajya Sabha MPs -- Raghav Chadha, Ashok Mittal, Sandeep Pathak, Harbhajan Singh, Rajendra Gupta, Vikramjit Sahney and Swati Malhiwal -- quit and merged with the BJP, alleging that the party had strayed from its principles, values and core morals. Six of the seven MPs who quit AAP were from Punjab. Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan on Monday officially accepted the merger of the MPs with the BJP, reducing the strength of Kejriwal's party in the Upper House to three.

Earlier this week, the state Cabinet had summoned a special one-day session of the Punjab Assembly on the occasion of Labour Day on May 1. (PTI)

Cancer care bolstered with diverse clinical experiences, personalised approach: Experts

NEW DELHI, May 1: Experts on Friday stressed the need for stronger international collaboration, innovation and personalised treatment approaches to improve cancer care outcomes, ahead of a global cancer summit in the national capital.

The remarks came at a press conference organised a day before the Fortis Cancer Summit 2026 -- being held on May 2 and 3 here. The event has been organised by Fortis Healthcare Limited, which aims to bring together oncologists and researchers from India and over 25 countries, according to a statement. Speaking at the press conference, Iliya Kamiliyus Salu, chief medical director, Trust Char-

itos Hospital, Abuja, Nigeria, said, "Cancer care today demands stronger global collaboration than ever before, as the challenges we face are increasingly complex and universal."

Speakers at the event said that the platforms like the Fortis Cancer Summit are critical in bringing together diverse clinical experiences, research advancements and technological innovations from across geographies. The summit's theme "Beyond Evidence-Based Oncology" is particularly relevant, as the future of cancer care lies not only in evidence, but in translating that evidence into personalised, multi-disciplinary and patient-centric treatment approaches, they said.

Dr Nitesh Rohatgi, principal director, Medical Oncology, Fortis Memorial Research Institute, Gurugram, said, "The future of cancer care lies in collaboration, innovation, and the ability to adapt evidence into personalised patient care pathways. This summit is about building a globally aligned oncology community committed to transforming patient outcomes."

Dr Ankur Bahl, principal director, Medical Oncology, Fortis Memorial Research Institute, Gurugram, said oncology is evolving rapidly with new technologies and precision medicine improving outcomes, and there is a need to better connect research with real-world clinical practice.

Experts also said that improving access to care, early detection and wider use of advanced diagnostics remain key to better outcomes, according to the statement.

Speakers also highlighted that head and neck cancers are among the most common in India, especially in North India, largely due to tobacco use.

The summit will see participation from experts across fields such as medical, surgical and radiation oncology, haematology, paediatric oncology and genomics, along with international experts from the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Oman, Nigeria and Uzbekistan, according to the statement. (PTI)



Kharge, CM Siddaramaiah flay Centre for hiking commercial LPG cylinder refill prices

BENGALURU/KALABURAGI, May 1: Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday flayed the Centre for steep hike in commercial LPG cylinder refill prices and termed it a failure of the union government's assurances on inflation and price stability.

The price of commercial LPG was hiked by the steepest ever ₹ 993 per 19-kg cylinder on Friday, marking the third straight monthly increase due to rising global energy prices linked to the West Asia conflict.

Kharge said Prime Minister Narendra Modi used to say that prices would not be increased and spoke about controlling inflation. "Today, I am seeing the reality. It seems he is unable to do what he said," he told reporters in Kalaburagi. He also slammed people for still backing Modi.

"I do not understand public opinion. Why do people still justify such policies or ideology that have brought the country into such a difficult situation? That is very surprising to me," Kharge said.

Congress leaders in Karnataka said that the commercial LPG hike would severely impact hotel owners, small vendors and daily wage earners.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah came down heavily on the Centre.

In a post on 'X', he said as the Congress warned all along, the



moment Assembly elections got over, the Narendra Modi government has hiked prices again.

The price of commercial LPG cylinders has been increased by ₹ 993 on May 1, taking the cost to ₹ 3,071.50 per cylinder - after deliberately holding back such increases during the election period, he said.

The chief minister claimed that in just four months, the Modi government has increased commercial LPG cylinder prices six times, pushing the total burden up by ₹ 1,518. "This is not governance - this is organised looting," Siddaramaiah alleged.

He accused the Centre that every time global conditions change, instead of protecting Indian citizens, Modi simply passes the burden on

to them. "His (Modi's) much-publicised but hollow foreign policy has failed to shield our economy, and now ordinary Indians are paying the price for it. This hike will not just affect businesses - it will hit every household," Siddaramaiah said.

According to him, hotels, restaurants, small eateries, and catering services will be forced to increase prices, making everyday food more expensive. The urban working class, daily wage earners, and small business owners will suffer the most. From a cup of tea to a simple meal, everything will become costlier, he opined.

"And what a cruel irony - on Labour Day, this is Modi's 'gift' to the working class: higher costs,

shrinking incomes, and more hardship. While workers ask for dignity and relief, this government gives them inflation and excuses," he alleged.

Siddaramaiah said this was only the beginning while more such increases will follow, and the burden will keep shifting to citizens.

"This is the Modi model - mislead people during elections, and burden them after," the CM said.

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar accused the BJP-led Centre of "burdening" the poor.

"The BJP government is betraying poor people of this country. They were waiting for the elections to get over, and immediately after voting, they had increased price hikes across the board. Today, a situation is being created where hotels may have to shut down," he told reporters in Bengaluru.

"They (BJP leaders) have brought the situation leading to the 'firewood Bhagya' scheme, but the Forest Department does not allow people to bring firewood home," he alleged.

Shivakumar said the Centre promoted schemes like Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) and took photos claiming credit. "Now, if prices are increased by about ₹ 1,000, how are people supposed to live," he asked. PMUY was launched in May

2016, to provide free LPG connection to adult women from poor households across the country.

The Deputy CM said the state government's welfare guarantees were aimed at cushioning such impacts.

Keeping this in mind, the Congress government in Karnataka gave five guarantees. Today, the state government is extending various forms of assistance to around 1.5 crore families, he added.

Shivakumar, who is also the Congress Karnataka unit president, said the hike is unacceptable and his party will protest.

Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said the LPG hike has disrupted livelihoods across sectors. "Immediately after the elections, you can see that gas cylinder prices, which had not increased earlier, are now being raised. Because of this, many hotels are shutting down. Lakhs of auto drivers who run gas-powered autos are losing their daily income," he claimed.

Even small vendors, those running tiny idli stalls, who depend on their daily income to survive, are also being affected, he told reporters here.

According to hoteliers, the price of commercial LPG cylinders in Bengaluru has risen from ₹ 2,031 to ₹ 3,153 following the latest hike. (PTI)

'Election Bill': Rahul slams govt on commercial LPG price hike



NEW DELHI, May 1: The Congress on Friday attacked the Modi government over the hike in price of commercial LPG cylinder, with Rahul Gandhi saying this is an "election bill" and the next "strike" will be on petrol and diesel.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said he had warned that the heat of inflation would strike after the elections.

"Today, commercial gas cylinders have become ₹ 993 more expensive. This marks the single largest hike in a single day. This is an election bill," Gandhi said in his post in Hindi on X.

"Since February: A hike of ₹ 1,380, an 81% increase in just three months. Tea stalls, 'dhabas', hotels, bakeries, sweet shops - the burden on every kitchen has increased. And this will inevitably impact your plate as well," Gandhi said.

The first strike was on gas; the next will be on petrol and diesel, he added.

The Congress also said the ruling party's regard for the common Indians' suffering is limited to election gimmicks, after which they are left to their own devices.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary K C Venugopal said, "Just as the election cycle concluded, the Modi government wasted no time to increase prices of LPG cylinders."

"A whopping increase of nearly ₹ 1000 on commercial cylinders will affect crores of Indians who rely on food from small eateries for sustenance. Similarly, crores of small food businesses will have to bear the burden of this hike," he said.

The BJP's regard for the common Indians' suffering is limited to election gimmicks, after which they are left to their own devices, Venugopal said.

"In the three months since the Iran war began, the government should have prepared a solid plan to shield ordinary Indians from the price shocks, instead of passing on

the financial burden," he said.

Gandhi on Tuesday had warned that the prices of petrol and diesel will be increased after the assembly elections conclude on April 29.

He had also attacked the government for allegedly profiteering from low global crude oil prices and said it will now put burden on the public as the prices are rising.

"Election relief over, inflation's heat is on its way! After April 29th, watch out - petrol, diesel, everything will get expensive."

"When (crude) oil was cheap, the Modi government pocketed the profits. Now that it's expensive, it'll dump the burden on you," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X. "A government that loots when it's cheap - leaving the public to bear the brunt of inflation," he had alleged.

The price of commercial LPG was hiked by the steepest ever ₹ 993 per 19-kg cylinder on Friday, marking the third straight monthly increase due to rising global energy prices linked to the West Asia conflict.

A 19-kg commercial LPG - used by establishments such as hotels and restaurants - now costs a record ₹ 3,071.5 in Delhi as against ₹ 2,078.50 previously.

Rates were last increased by 195.50 per cylinder on April 1. Prior to that, prices had gone up by ₹ 114.5 per 19-kg cylinder on March 1.

Prices of domestic cooking gas LPG - the one used in household kitchens - remained unchanged. Domestic LPG rates were last hiked by ₹ 60 per 14.2-kg cylinder on March 7. It costs ₹ 913 per 14.2-kg cylinder in Delhi.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum, and Hindustan Petroleum revise ATF and LPG prices on the first day of every month based on international benchmarks and the exchange rate.

Global oil prices have shot up almost 50 per cent after the war in West Asia disrupted energy supply chains. (PTI)

Bank, realty, corporate scams have declined in India: ED director

NEW DELHI, May 1: ED Director Rahul Navin on Friday asserted that financial crimes like bank frauds, corporate scams and cheating in the real estate sector have seen a "visible decline" due to "sustained" action by investigative agencies and some "landmark" government initiatives.

Delivering his address during the 70th 'ED Day' event here, the agency chief said the current criminal landscape was "defined" by cryptocurrency fraud, cyber-enabled financial crimes, terror financing, anti-national activities and narcotics trafficking. These are the agency's "priority" areas of investigation, he added.

Navin said the ED filed an enhanced number of charge sheets during the last financial year 2025-26 and was undertaking enhanced investigation into "complex" money laundering cases as a result of "deliberate, sustained, and intelligence-driven effort". "A few years ago, our enforcement work was centred predominantly on bank frauds, large corporate scams, and real estate frauds.

"Sustained action by investigative agencies, complemented by landmark government initiatives such as the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and the Real Estate Regulation and Development Act, has brought about a visible decline in such offences." "Today, the criminal landscape is defined by cryptocurrency fraud, cyber-enabled financial crimes, terror financing, anti-national activities, and narcotics trafficking," he said.

Calling money laundering investigations amongst the "most complex", Navin said these probes frequently span multiple jurisdictions, involve intricate cross-border transactions and layered financial structures, and demand engagement with rapidly evolving technologies.

The ED chief added that the agency has accorded "high priority" to narcotics-related investigations. He said the ED's prompt and

focused response in the Red Fort blast case (of November 2025) was a "testament" to its "sharpened vigilance on money laundering dimensions of terrorism and espionage".

The ED arrested Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui, chairman of Faridabad-based Al Falah University, last year as part of this investigation and filed a chargesheet against him and some others. This PMLA case is based on two Delhi Police FIRs alleging that the varsity cheated students using false accreditation.

Navin said the ED filed 812 charge sheets (called prosecution complaints) including 155 supplementary charge sheets before the courts under the anti-money laundering law during the last fiscal which was "nearly twice" the numbers filed during the previous comparative fiscal. He said that out of all the charge sheets ever filed by the agency (PMLA was implemented from 2005), over 41 per cent were filed in just the last two years. The director also said that the current conviction rate of the ED was 94 per cent and the agency was confident that out of more than 2,400 cases pending before trial courts currently, most will result in the conviction of the accused and confiscation of the proceeds of crime.

"Of course, there are legal challenges before the courts. The most important is whether the trial in money laundering cases should pause until the trial in the predicate offence gets concluded or continue on a standalone basis, in consonance with international standards and FATF guidelines," he said, adding the matter was under consideration by the Supreme Court.

The director added that the agency has taken "several" measures to enhance transparency and accountability in its functioning and the investigative framework has been "further strengthened" through a "complete" revamp which includes the institutionalisation of Risk Assessment Management Committee (RAMC) mechanisms. (PTI)

Hate speech: No cognisable offence made out against Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma, says SC

NEW DELHI, May 1: The Supreme Court has said that no cognisable offence was made out against BJP leaders Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Verma for their alleged hate speeches over the anti-CAA protest in Delhi in 2020.

While BJP MP Thakur is a former union minister, Verma is a minister in the Delhi government.

In its April 29 verdict on a batch of pleas concerning hate speeches, a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta also dealt with the petition filed by CPI(M) leaders Brinda Karat and K M Tiwari who had challenged a June 2022 verdict of the Delhi High Court. The high court had dismissed a petition by Karat and Tiwari challenging the trial court's refusal to direct registration of an FIR against Thakur and Verma for their alleged hate speeches over the anti-CAA protest at Delhi's Shaheen Bagh.

In its judgement, the apex court noted that the high court had, on an independent assessment, held that the speeches do not disclose commission of any cognisable offence, and also observed that the statements were not directed against any specific community nor did they incite violence or public disorder.

"Upon a careful consideration of the material placed on record, including the alleged speeches, the status report dated February 26, 2020 submitted before the

trial court, and the reasons recorded by the courts below, we are in agreement with the conclusion that no cognisable offence is made out," the top court said.

The CPI(M) leaders had claimed that on January 27, 2020, Thakur allegedly made a hate speech at a rally in Rithala. They had further claimed that on January 28, 2020, Verma allegedly made inflammatory hate speeches.

A trial court on August 26, 2020, dismissed the petitioners' complaint on the ground that it was not sustainable as the requisite sanction from the competent authority was not obtained.

In its verdict, the apex court observed the high court had declined to direct registration of an FIR on the grounds that prior sanction under Sections 196 and 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) had not been obtained. The bench said the scheme of erstwhile CrPC does not contemplate any embargo on the direction for registration of an FIR or the conduct of investigation at the pre-cognisance stage.

"To hold otherwise would amount to introducing a restriction not envisaged by the legislature," the top court said, adding, "The requirement of sanction is, therefore, a condition precedent only for taking cognisance and not for the registration of an FIR or for the conduct of investigation". (PTI)

Farooq Abdullah claims lack of support within INDIA bloc on restoration of J-K statehood

SRINAGAR, May 1: National Conference president Farooq Abdullah has expressed deep disappointment over the INDIA bloc, especially the Congress, "not supporting" the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood with the "expected vigour".

In a candid assessment of the opposition bloc, Abdullah said that while his party remains a committed member of the alliance, it has fallen short of its potential. He also flagged the lack of a robust, unified approach to Jammu and Kashmir's issues as a primary point of contention within the bloc.

"You see, that has been our biggest objection to this national alliance...we have the hope that they would, with far more vigour, fight for our cause. That has not happened. Really very sad that the major party Indian National Congress has not really played the role that we expect from it," Abdullah told PTI in an interview. He further urged the alliance to move beyond being a mere electoral pact, calling for more frequent meetings to address the "ignored" future of the na-

tion. "...it is very clear that we are not part of the BJP and we will never be part of it. We are part of the INDIA bloc. I hope that the alliance post-election will get together again and take up not only the national issue but the issue of Jammu and Kashmir statehood in a much stronger way," he said. Abdullah, a three-time Jammu and Kashmir chief minister, said it was "very important" to have frequent meetings of the INDIA bloc. "This alliance is not only for elections. It is for the future of this nation which at times is being ignored. I am very sad to say this."

In reply to a question on the current state of democratic condition and political environment for emerging youth leaders, he regretted that the opposition has not been able to project a leader "who could meet the challenges" posed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He advised opposition leaders to have a far more robust approach to the general public, "leave air-conditioned offices" and face the "heat and dust" as a common man. "Today's politics is very different to what it was 50 years ago," he said, adding that today "we don't

have Gandhi, Nehru or Indira".

Abdullah expressed hope that the Centre will take a decision on the restoration of statehood to J&K after the process of assembly elections in various states is over. He said Prime Minister Modi and the government are committed, both in the Parliament as well as in the Supreme Court, to restoring statehood to J&K.

"Now, how long will they take this? One cannot say. And their assurances to the Chief Minister (Omar Abdullah) have been there. Assurances to our members of Parliament, who went and met the Home Minister (Amit Shah). He also assured them. We are hopeful that after these state elections are over, they will take up this issue of statehood," he said.

Asked whether his party will approach the Supreme Court to seek a clarification surrounding the timeline for restoring statehood, Abdullah acknowledged that while the prime minister and the home minister have given repeated assurances, a specific date remains elusive but indicated if things did not materialise, the party may approach the top court. (PTI)

Shah announces plans for dairy sector expansion in Ladakh

LEH/JAMMU, May 1: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday announced plans for a major expansion of the dairy sector in Ladakh and Kargil, including the setting up of a 50,000 litre-per-day milk processing plant in Leh.

The government is committed to strengthening dairy infrastructure in Ladakh and Kargil to ensure sustainable livelihood and enhance the income of dairy farmers, Shah said.

Extending Buddha Purnima greetings to the locals, the minister said that the teachings of Lord Buddha, especially the message 'Appo Deepo Bhava' (be your own light), continue to inspire people towards self-reliance and higher purpose.

"We are also working to further strengthen infrastructure in Ladakh as well as in Kargil. In the coming days, a new dairy plant with a processing capacity of around 50,000 litres per day will be set up in Leh at an estimated cost of ₹ 70 crore," he said.

Shah, who laid the foundation of some projects and inaugurated others in the dairy sector in Ladakh, said that cattle breeding centres will also be established in Leh and Kargil at a cost of around ₹ 4 crore each to provide high-yielding breeds suited to local climatic conditions. (PTI)

25 lakh properties in Bengaluru brought under e-Khata system, says Shivakumar

BENGALURU, May 1: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Friday said that the state government has brought over 25 lakh properties under the e-Khata system in Bengaluru. e-Khata is an electronic property certificate that maintains ownership information in an online database. The e-Khata initiative aimed to ensure accuracy, transparency and universal coverage for property owners, he said.

Addressing a press conference here, Shivakumar, who is also the Bengaluru in-charge Minister, said over 25 lakh properties are being brought under the e-Khata system. Of them more than 7,000 applications have been processed, and additional outreach measures being planned for those yet to obtain their e-Khata. "Twenty five lakh e-Khatas is a great number which has created history," he said.

The Deputy CM said the government is ensuring that every e-Khata will have its GPS, the shape of the property, and the measurement with every photo and document. He explained that the government is integrating Aadhaar details, digital documentation, GPS mapping and property sketches to create a robust database.

"We want to see that every record is filled right. They (officials) are asking for documentation, stamp, digital documents. We wanted to connect every Aadhaar card and have it online," Shivakumar said. To fa-

ilitate access, the Deputy CM announced the opening of more than 50 centres across Bengaluru, many of them in government schools, where citizens can apply for or rectify their e-Khata records.

"All of them will be working this Saturday. This 'Khata Mela' will be done. It is 'Nanna Khata, Nanna Swathu'," he said. Applicants whose documents require verification will be given an acknowledgment and asked to return after 15 days, during which officials will conduct site inspections, he said.

Shivakumar said the government has also taken steps to identify and reclaim properties recorded as roads in revenue documents, asserting that such lands belong to the government. "We have decided through the law that all the roads in the revenue records have been taken out. Those properties belong to the government itself," he said. He noted that the initiative has received recognition from the Union government. "The Government of India has awarded us. It said that it is the model for the entire country," he said, while thanking officials involved in the project.

The Deputy CM said the government expects around 10 lakh additional households to benefit from the drive and assured that even those who have not downloaded their documents will receive printed copies free of cost at their residences. (PTI)

Govt plans to make India a global hub for live events by 2030

NEW DELHI, May 1: The government plans to position the concert economy, under which live events like music shows, concerts are hosted, as one of the key drivers of national growth and make India a global hub for such events by 2030.

The issue was discussed at the 4th meeting of the Live Events Development Cell (LEDC), under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, held on Thursday, an official release said. The meeting was chaired by Chanchal Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB).

It was attended by representatives from nine central ministries, six states, and 12 industry members. The LEDC aims to position the concert economy as one of the key drivers of national growth and make India a global hub for live



events by 2030 and generate 15-20 additional million jobs in this sector, the official release said. India's organised live events sector has emerged as the highest growth segment in the media and entertainment sector.

During the meeting, the secretary of the ministry of information and broadcasting highlighted the role of LEDC in creating a coordinated roadmap for the growth of

India's live events industry.

He noted that the live events sector is one of the fastest-growing segments of the media and entertainment industry, contributing significantly to employment generation, tourism promotion and economic multiplier across allied sectors, the release said.

The progress of various initiatives taken by LEDC was presented by Prithul Kumar, Joint

Secretary (Broadcasting), MIB. It was informed that a single-window clearance system for live event permissions has been developed on the India Cine Hub (ICH) portal.

The adoption of the ICH portal by states will help y the live event permissions process, and ensure timely, transparent, and efficient approvals.

Further, the need for adoption of the "Model Executive Order for Streamlining Licensing and Permissions for Live Events in India, 2026" was emphasised with a target timeline of May 31, 2026, which was shared with states and Union Territories on March 13, 2026.

This framework aims to establish a simplified and standardised regulatory system for the live events industry in India, the release said. (PTI)

I MISS HIM A LOT: HEMA MALINI REMEMBERS DHARMENDRA



Actor-politician Hema Malini on Thursday said she is still trying to cope with the death of her husband, superstar Dharmendra.

Malini graced the inauguration of 'Lens and Legacy: Bollywood in Focus', an expansive and evocative exhibition celebrating the enduring visual culture of Indian cinema, presented by the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Mumbai, in association with

the Union Ministry of Culture. A special section of the exhibition features two tribute walls dedicated to Dharmendra and Asha Bhosle.

"I was really blessed to be with him. I miss him a lot. Now he's not there. So I don't know how I'm going to cope with it my whole life," Malini told the audience.

The actor turned emotional as she paid a heartfelt tribute to Dharmendra, remembering not just his towering contribution to Indian cinema but also the man he was beyond the screen.

"It is very meaningful for me to be part of this exhibition. This tribute is not just a recognition of his contribution to the film industry. It is about his journey, passion, dedication and immense love for the audience. He always used to say, 'Film is my way to connect with the heart'. He was very passionate about working in films and being in front of the camera," she said.

Dharmendra, fondly known as Bollywood's "He-Man", built a legacy that spanned decades, winning millions of hearts with his performances and humility. From powerful action roles to light-hearted come-

dies and emotional dramas, he was one of the most admired actors of his generation.

The legendary actor passed away on November 24, 2025, days short of his 90th birthday on December 8.

As his life partner, Malini shared a more intimate glimpse into his personality.

"As his life partner, I could see how passionate he was. He touched the hearts of millions of people with his wonderful performance and behaviour. He inspired so many people, including the younger generation. As an actor, a friend and a father – he was a great man," she said.

The film industry also lost legendary singer Asha Bhosle (92) on April 12 this year.

Reflecting on her personal connection with the singers, 77-year-old Malini highlighted how both Asha Bhosle and Lata Mangeshkar significantly shaped her on-screen presence through their timeless songs. "We have lost a beautiful, great singer with a golden voice. She sang for me as many songs as Lata Ji did for me," she said.

The exhibition features works by some of India's most respected photojournalists – Pradeep Chandra, Shantanu Das, Sudharak Olwe and Bhandeep Singh – alongside a rare archival showcase curated by noted archivist, author and film historian, S M M Ausaja, and Neha Kamat of Kamat Foto Flash, the grand-

daughter of Damodar Kamat.

The exhibition also draws from NGMA's own collection, including works by Balkrishna, whose portraits of icons such as Madhubala, Waheeda Rehman, Vyjayanthimala and Nargis reflect the timeless allure of Bollywood's golden era.

Malini called the exhibition a rare treat and something that took her down memory lane.

"This is such a big contribution by such great people. This exhibition is a visual treat of the journey of the vast industry. Each frame carries profound memories and immortalises the character, the subject, the artist, the visualiser, and all who helped create that frame. Each poster takes us down memory lane," she said.

She also credited those working behind the scenes, from make-up artists, hairdressers and costume designers to cinematographers and photographers, for enhancing her beauty on screen.

"I'm really fortunate to be representing this beautiful industry and that too in its golden era. I'm really blessed that I was in that era when all those beautiful films were made," she said.

Veteran actor Ranjeet, Poonam Sinha, Madhoo, celebrity photographer Avinash Gowariker, Kiran Shantaram and others graced the occasion. (PTI)

TWO PEOPLE ARE ENOUGH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE: PULKIT ON DIRECTORS WHO LOOKED BEYOND HIS ROMANTIC IMAGE



It is easy for actors to get boxed in unless they have the hunger to break out, says actor Pulkit Samrat calling himself lucky for the support he received from directors like Bejoy Nambiar and Karan Anshuman who offered him roles against his romantic hero image.

Pulkit has reteamed with Anshuman of "Mirzapur" and "Inside Edge" fame for Netflix's upcoming boxing thriller "Glory", a role that required him to go through intense physical training. He earlier worked with the director for "Bangistan" in 2015.

"Actors get boxed into a zone, genre and particular performance. To get out of that, you need to have the hunger to do something different and the support of people like Karan Anshuman and Bejoy Nambiar who managed to look at me and say that he is not just a romantic hero or a chocolate boy but he can also be an angry young man and for Karan to feel that he can be a boxer and have the emotional depth," the actor told PTI in an interview here.

"You take that as a challenge and prove to people that you can do it but that needs support from the fraternity. You may not get support from ten people, but two people are enough to change your life."

Pulkit starred in a string of romantic and comedy films such as "Sanam Re", "Fukrey" franchise, "Dolly Ki Doli" and "Junooniyat" early in his career.

He shifted gears with "Taish" (2020), an action-thriller directed by Nambiar, in which he played a volatile man driven to extremes to correct a wrong, only to spiral into deeper chaos.

Though he featured in two episodes of popular show "Made In Heaven", "Glory" marks his full-fledged series debut.

The show, set against the gritty, high-stakes world of boxing, dives into the brutal ecosystem and the politics of the place through the story of a medal obsessed boxing coach and his fractured relationship with his two sons -- Ravi and Dev -- who return home when their father's student, an Olympics hopeful, is found dead.

What attracted Pulkit to the story was its different narrative structure, which steered clear of the typical arc of training montages.

"Ravi is not just a boxer in the ring but also a player who is very disciplined in handling life... He has a system in reacting to things, not very impulsive. He is a sportsman, he sleeps like a sportsman, he wakes up like a sportsman, he thinks like a sportsman."

"Learning about the sport took me inside the mindset of a boxer and my failures and baggages from life helped me flesh out the complexities. I felt like whatever I had done before was empty compared to what I have done in this show," the actor said.

The 42-year-old actor said the writing by Anshuman and his team served like a Google map for him to navigate the way around in the story.

"The entire arc was beautiful and I had a lot of fun playing with it."

Created by Anshuman and Karmanya Ahuja, and produced by Mohit Shah and Anshuman under the Atomic Films banner, "Glory" is written by Anshuman, Ahuja, and Vaibhav Vishal, and directed by Anshuman and Kanishk Varma.

The show, which will premiere on Netflix on Friday, also features Dviyenndu, Suvinder Pal Vicky, Jannat Zubair, Ashutosh Rana, Sikandar Kher, Kunal Thakur, Sayani Gupta, Yashpal Sharma and Kashmiria Pardeshi in pivotal roles. (PTI)

FILMMAKER ASHUTOSH GOWARIKER APPOINTED FESTIVAL DIRECTOR FOR 57TH IFFI



Filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker, known for films such as "Lagaan", "Swades" and "Jodhaa Akbar", has been appointed festival director for the 57th edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI).

Gowariker succeeds filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, who headed the 55th and 56th editions festival, held annually in Goa.

In a statement, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry said Gowariker is an acclaimed filmmaker with a distinguished contribution to Indian cinema.

"His association with IFFI spans several decades, reflecting his deep engagement with the evolution of cinematic arts and international film culture," the ministry said.

Gowariker said the appointment gave him immense pride and joy.

"I feel privileged to have witnessed the evolution of this festival. From attending it in 1984 to continuing my association over the years, right up to 2024, when I served as the Jury President for International Cinema," he said.

The 62-year-old director said carrying forward the festival's legacy was both an honour and a responsibility.

"To carry forward the legacy that has been created, nurtured, and expanded over the decades since 1952 by innumerable festival teams, is a great honour, accompanied by a renewed sense of responsibility. I look forward to working closely with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the government of Goa," he added.

The International Film Festival of India, established in 1952, is one of Asia's premier film festivals and serves as a significant platform for showcasing excellence in global cinema and promoting cultural exchange. (PTI)

Shoojit Sircar says alternate romantic ending for 'Piku' was shot on Irrfan's insistence

Filmmaker Shoojit Sircar says the 'romantic' sensibilities of Irrfan Khan, his late friend and the lead actor of "Piku", almost altered the final scene of the 2015 film.

At a special screening of "A Story That Refused to Die", the documentary on Irrfan's film "Paan Singh Tomar", the director fondly recalled the romantic side of the late actor.

The comedy-drama narrated a heartwarming story about a father and daughter, played by Amitabh Bachchan and Deepika Padukone. In the movie, played Irrfan played the role of Rana Chaudhary, a witty and charming taxi business owner, who drives Piku (Padukone) and her father to Kolkata.

"Not many people know that Irrfan was a romantic person. While we were shooting the last sequence of 'Piku' where they (Deepika and Irrfan) are playing badminton and then it was cut.

"Irrfan came to me and said, 'Should I not go inside (the house)?' I was like, 'Why do you want to go inside?'. He was like, 'I should rather go inside (the house), since it's a romantic film, and the house help comes, I'll go.' I was like, 'We can shoot it as an option' and he insisted that I keep this in the final edit. We shot that but I didn't keep it during the final edit," Shoojit said.

Irrfan, the versatile star of films such as "Paan Singh Tomar", "The Lunchbox", "Hindi Medium", and "Maqbool", died at the age of 54 in April 2020 after a battle with cancer.

The director, known for movies "Vicky Donor", "Madras Cafe", "Sardar Uddham" and "I Want To Talk", said that Irrfan remains a constant presence in his creative process.

"Whenever I write something, I think of Irrfan. He would bring soul and heart to a film without doing much, but just being there. When I would write something, I would be rest assured that Irrfan is there in the film and he will add something and it will make sense."

The documentary was screened on the sixth death anniversary of Irrfan on April 29 at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre.



Shoojit said he was captivated watching the documentary, which he felt, mirrored Irrfan's fascination about the magic of cinema.

"We know how difficult it is to shoot behind-the-scenes of a film. But the magic of cinema is such that I was enjoying watching it, I was glued into this documentary. Irrfan also would often talk about the magic of cinema," he added. (PTI)

WASIFUDDIN DAGAR, SHUJAAT KHAN AMONG ARTISTES TO PERFORM AT 'MALHAR AND THE SEA' MUSIC FESTIVAL



The third edition of the Malhar & The Sea music festival will bring together a diverse lineup of Indian classical artistes across disciplines, featuring dhrupad by Ustad Wasifuddin Dagar, khayal and thumri by Ronkini

Gupta, and sitar by Shujaat Khan.

The luxury residential music and arts festival, organised by Showhouse, will be held from July 24-26 at Taj Exotica Resort and Spa at Benaulim here, the organisers said.

Designed as a curated getaway where music, art, and hospitality come together, the festival aims to blend "a premium vacation experience with intimate performances" by leading multi-genre artists.

"This time its scale and span will be larger and more diverse than ever before. We have worked very hard to curate varied vocal traditions and artforms like 'Dhrupad', 'Khayal', 'Ghazal', 'Sufi', 'Bhajan', 'Musical Theatre' as well as a tribute to The Beatles in line with the festival theme: 'One India, Many Voices'." Omer Haidar, chairman and managing director of Showhouse, said in a statement.

The three-day festival will open with a line-up of performances, including dhrupad by Ustad Wasifuddin Dagar, carnatic vocals and abhang by the Raga Sisters - Ranjani and Gayatri - followed by a musical theatre performance by

Danish Husain, titled "Main Pal Do Pal Ka Shayar Hoon", in a tribute to Sahir Ludhianvi.

The opening night will also feature Sufi music by the Tasawwur Ensemble, led by Shivam Bhardwaj.

"For me, this is a beautiful opportunity to shed light on the extraordinary life and poetic brilliance of Sahir Ludhianvi. In fact, over 18 Sahir classics will be sung on stage live to celebrate his vast body of work. To bring this rich musical treat in an unhurried way before a discerning audience is going to be very fulfilling," Husain said.

Day two will witness a bhajan recital by Anup Jalota, followed by a khayal and thumri performance by Ronkini Gupta. The evening highlights include 'Gaayeki Ang Sitar' by Ustad Shujaat Khan, ghazal and geet by Priyanka Barve, and Wanted Yesterday's evocative tribute to The Beatles.

"Late maestro Ustad Vilayat Khan Saheb's pioneering 'Gayaki Ang', where he ingeniously made the sitar emulate the human voice, can now be seen in the masterful technique of Ustad Shujaat Khan who is set to stir the listeners with his evocative recital. We will not only be celebrating music and arts across genres but will also offer a refreshing new take on luxurious leisure," Haidar added.

The festival will come to a close on July 26 with 'Fado Unplugged' session by Nadia Rebelo. (PTI)

Wood's penalty gives Nottingham Forest a 1-0 win over Aston Villa



NOTTINGHAM, May 1: Chris Wood scored from the penalty spot to give Nottingham Forest a 1-0 victory over Aston Villa in the first leg of their all-English Europa League semifinal.

In a matchup of two teams hoping to revive former European glory, the win at the City Ground puts Forest a step closer to what would be its first continental competition final in 46 years.

Wood fired his 71st-minute penalty high into the net, giving goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez no chance to save after defender Lucas Digne was whistled for handball.

"It's nice to have the advantage but going to Villa Park will be a tough game," the New Zealand striker told the TNT Sports. "But we've done the job here at home and

now hopefully we'll build into next week."

Vitor Pereira's team stretched its unbeaten run to nine games in all competitions. Forest visits Chelsea in the Premier League on Monday before the semifinal second leg in Birmingham next Thursday.

Forest is in a relegation fight — currently five points above the Premier League drop zone. The winner of the Europa League title earns a spot in next season's Champions League. That could create a scenario in which Forest gets relegated to England's second division but also plays in Europe's top club competition.

Forest has returned to Europe after 30 years to reach its fourth semifinal, but first since the 1984 UEFA Cup. That was after Forest dominated the European Cup — the predecessor of the Champions League —

and won the trophy in 1979 and 1980. Villa became the European champion two years later.

Villa sits fifth in the Premier League and stands a good chance of qualifying for the Champions League domestically.

Villa coach Unai Emery has won the Europa League title four times — three with Sevilla and one with Villarreal.

Braga beats Freiburg
In the other semifinal, Braga beat Freiburg 2-1 after substitute Mario Dorgeles netted the winner in second-half stoppage time in Portugal.

At 1-1, Freiburg goalkeeper Noah Atubolu denied Braga a golden opportunity to restore a lead by diving to his right to save a spot kick by Rodrigo Zalazar.

The Portuguese side hopes to advance to

the final again after it lost to domestic rival Porto 1-0 in the 2011 title match.

The second legs are next Thursday and the final is in Istanbul on May 20.

Sarr scores early for Crystal Palace
In the third-tier Conference League, Ismaïla Sarr scored in the opening minute as Crystal Palace beat Shakhtar Donetsk 3-1 in the opening leg of their semifinal.

Daichi Kamada and Jorgen Strand Larsen also scored for Palace after Olech Ocheretko had equalized for Shakhtar.

The game was played in Krakow, Poland, because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The second leg is next Thursday in London.

Rayo Vallecano beat Strasbourg 1-0 in the Thursday's other semifinal.

The final is on May 27 in Leipzig, Germany. (AP)

Theegala off to a solid start, lies in Top-10 at Doral; Bhatia is Tied-15th

DORAL (US), May 1: Indian-American golfer Sahith Theegala got off to a blistering start, firing three birdies in his first five holes, but then cooled off to end round one with a card of 3-under 69 at the 2026 Cadillac Championship at Trump National Doral.

Theegala, who has had four Top-10s this season, is tied ninth, four strokes behind leader Cameron Young (64) at the USD20 million Signature Event.

Among the other Indian origin players, Akshay Bhatia shot 2-under 70 and was Tied-15 while Indo-Canadian Sudarshan Yellamaraju (74) was T-52.

Bhatia was 3-under and would have been in Top-10 but for his closing bogey on the 18th. He hit his tee shot into the water and took a penalty and ended with a bogey.

Theegala showed consistent form and recorded birdies on key holes such as the par-4 2nd and the par-5 10th, continuing his high-level play this season.

Theegala's strong performance puts him in a good position to contend for his first win of the 2026 season on the demanding "Blue Monster" course.



Theegala's round featured an aggressive start, punctuated by an

early birdie on the par-4 2nd hole with a 19-foot putt and followed

that up with a second birdie on the Par-3 third from 15 feet. A third birdie came on the par-4 fifth, when he hit his second shot to six feet and holed it. Four pars followed and then came a good birdie on the 10th, where he hit his third shot from the rough to under four feet for a birdie. He dropped shots on the 11th and the 13th, when he missed putts from 13 and 14 feet. A final birdie on Par-3 15th saw him finish at 69.

Young led the field after a blistering bogey-free 8-under 64, followed closely by Jordan Spieth and Alex Smalley at 7-under.

Spieth chipped in for an eagle on the par-5 eighth hole and survived a pair of bogeys on the back nine.

World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler made three birdies in the first five holes, then did not get another the rest of the day. Back-to-back bogeys on Nos. 10 and 11 dropped him to 1-under, and that's where he stayed.

Nick Taylor, with a 66, was in fourth, two shots off of Young's lead, while Nico Echavarria was three shots back after an opening-round 67. (PTI)

NJ Academy stuns Rhinoland CA by 3 wickets

Monjit Mahanta's all-round performance seals victory in low-scoring clash



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 1: NJ Cricket Academy, Itanagar, registered a thrilling three-wicket win over Rhinoland Cricket Academy, Guwahati, in the 11th Sitararam Chahachharia Memorial Under-19 Cricket Tournament being played under the aegis of Bud Cricket Club.

The match, held at the NFRSA Stadium in Maligaon on Friday, saw NJ Academy opt to field first after winning the toss in the 50-over contest.

Their bowlers delivered a disciplined performance, restricting Rhinoland CA to a modest total of 88 runs in 38.3 overs.

For Rhinoland, Rajveer Mishra and Samudra were the only notable contributors, scoring 21 runs each, but lacked support from the rest of the batting lineup.

NJ Academy's bowling attack was led by Monjit Mahanta, who picked up three wickets for 22 runs in 7.3 overs.

Loli Yangfo was equally impressive, claiming two wickets while conceding just 11 runs in his 10 overs, including four maidens.

Najrul Ali also chipped in with two wickets for 24 runs.

Chasing a target of 89, NJ Academy faced early setbacks as Rhinoland bowlers fought back strongly, reducing them to 35 for 5.

However, a composed unbeaten partnership steadied the innings.

Monjit Mahanta remained not out on 21, while Tana James played a quick cameo of 20 runs off 12 balls, including two fours and a six, to guide the team home in 24 overs despite losing seven wickets.

For Rhinoland CA, Achyut Das delivered a remarkable spell, claiming five wickets for just 12 runs in nine overs, including four maidens, but his effort went in vain.

NJ Academy thus secured their first win of the tournament by three wickets.

Monjit Mahanta was adjudged Player of the Match for his all-round performance.

In the next match, NJ Academy, Itanagar, will take on NFRSA Cricket Academy.

India beat Macau 8-1 in U-18 Ice Hockey Asia Cup



NEW DELHI, May 1: India beat Macau 8-1 in the U-18 Ice Hockey Asia Cup, with captain Gurtej Singh Bhatti leading the charge while scoring four goals in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

India opened strongly and built an early lead, while staying in control through all three periods.

Ajay Dangi of Rajasthan opened the scoring for India, and with Bhatti scoring four goals, the team hit their stride as Ifiqar Hussain, Tanzin Tashi and Devansh Sharma added one goal each.

"We started with clear intent and maintained our pace through all three periods. The team created good opportunities and capitalised well. A quick self-assessment and response to the situation helped us come even stronger in the third period. It's a strong result, but the focus is on staying consistent in the games ahead," Bhatti said. Harjinder Singh, General Secretary of the Ice Hockey Association of India, appreciated the performance and the team's progress at the international level.

"The victory against Macau is a bold statement of intent from this young Indian side. The team showed excellent composure and adaptability, maintaining strong control across all three periods. This win reflects not just skill, but also growing maturity and belief," he said.

The tournament features ice hockey teams from Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Macau (China), and India. (PTI)

Cricket match between GST customs officers and actors

MUMBAI, May 1: Mumbai is set to witness a celebration of fitness and sportsmanship as the regional unit of Sports Authority of India (SAI) organises a friendly cricket match between GST, Customs officers and actors on Sunday, officials said.

The match will feature public servants taking on the Mumbai Heroes team, comprising actors such as Suniel Shetty, Sohail Khan, and Sharad Kelkar, among others, SAI said in a statement.

Several actors, singers, and fitness influencers are also expected to attend the event to promote awareness on physical and mental health, it said.

The match between the GST & Customs Amateur Team and Mumbai Heroes will be held at Air India Ground, Vakola, from 6 pm onwards on May 3.

The event will be graced by Prachi Saroop, Principal Chief Commissioner (CGST), Mumbai, as the chief guest and B B Gupta, Chief Commissioner of Customs Mumbai Zone-III, as the guest of honour, the statement said. (PTI)

Skipping Fed Cup without valid reason after making entry could lead to bar from later events: AFI

NEW DELHI, May 1: The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has announced that any athlete who does not turn up without valid reason after making entry at the National Senior Athletics Federation Cup to be held in Ranchi from May 22-25 could be barred from taking part in the subsequent event.

Over the years, the AFI has been facing the problem of athletes entering their names for their events but not turning up during competitions apparently due to fear that they may be dope-tested by the National Anti-Doping Agency or due to other reasons, leading to very few competing in a particular event.

"If any athlete fails to participate after sending the entry without any valid reason, he/she may not be allowed to take part in any subsequent event. The Federation has the right to reject any entry without assigning any reason," the AFI said in a recent circular regarding the Federation Cup.

Moreover, only those athletes who have taken part in at least two competitions organised directly by the AFI during the year will be allowed to participate in the Federation Cup.

Meanwhile, the AFI also said that athletes who have completed serving their suspension periods can submit

proof of performances (for entry standard requirement) achieved during the period of one year preceding the date on which such ineligibility was imposed if they want to compete in National Championships.

"... regarding performance requirements for participation in National Championships, it is hereby clarified that athletes who were subjected to sanctions imposed by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) and/or Anti-Doping Agencies, and who have since completed their period of ineligibility and are now eligible to participate, may upload and submit proof of performances achieved during the period of one (1) year preceding the date on which such ineligibility was imposed," the AFI said.

"This provision is intended to ensure that bona fide performances recorded prior to the commencement of the ineligibility period are duly considered, subject to verification.

"It is further clarified that once an athlete resumes participation in competitions after the expiry of the ineligibility period, only performances achieved thereafter shall be taken into account for eligibility and participation in subsequent competitions." (PTI)

FIFA leader Infantino starts race for re-election in 2027 vote hosted by African ally Morocco

VANCOUVER, May 1: The FIFA presidential vote in 2027 that is set to give Gianni Infantino a final four-year term in office will be hosted by Morocco — the soccer body's second straight election meeting in Africa where he has built strong political ties.

Infantino on Thursday announced the 2030 World Cup co-host will stage a March 18 election meeting of FIFA's 211 member federations who currently figure to re-elect him unopposed for a third time since his first win in a five-candidate contest in 2016.

"I am honored and humbled at the same time," Infantino told global soccer leaders before confirming his inevitable candidacy for the election.

FIFA's financial security, with multi-billion dollar reserves boosted by a high-revenue 2026 World Cup in North America, allows paying at least \$8 million during this presidential term to each voting member federation.

Infantino was paid more than \$6 million by FIFA last year in a job

that has given him a global profile as a regular visitor with U.S. President Donald Trump and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, which will host the 2034 World Cup.

The 2027 FIFA Congress had seemed likely to be Europe or Oceania's turn to host after a run of annual meetings in Canada, Paraguay, Thailand, Rwanda and Qatar.

FIFA chose Rwandan capital Kigali for its 2023 election won by acclamation by Infantino, who has allied himself to the Confederation of African Football under the leadership of South African mining billionaire Patrice Motsepe since 2021. That CAF election also was in Morocco which is now Africa's main soccer power.

African voters — now 54 among the 211 members — have for decades been seen as decisive in FIFA presidential elections.

CAF and Motsepe already pledged support to Infantino in Vancouver this week, even before the election period was formally



opened Thursday at the FIFA Congress.

Morocco's rise
Morocco has been a big winner during Infantino's presidency and will host the 2027 FIFA Congress in Rabat, where the soccer body opened its African regional office last year.

The north African nation will co-host the 2030 World Cup with Spain and Portugal and hopes to stage the final at a 115,000-capacity stadium being built in

Casablanca. Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium also is a contender.

Hosting a FIFA gathering of officials, business partners and media next year shapes as a showcase for Moroccan soccer and its influential leader Fouzi Lekjaa, who also is a government budget minister appointed by King Mohammed VI.

Lekjaa is Motsepe's most senior vice president at CAF and sits on the Infantino-chaired, 37-member FIFA Council that approves strat-

egy for the soccer body.

During Lekjaa's 12-year presidency of the Moroccan soccer federation, the men's team made World Cup history in 2022 by becoming the first African team to reach the semifinals.

That fueled Morocco's campaign to join the Spain-Portugal project for hosting the World Cup that was long expected to go to Europe. Morocco had lost several hosting contests since the 1990s including for the 2026 edition as the only rival to the winning bid from the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Morocco also has a five-year deal with FIFA to host the annual Under-17 Women's World Cup.

Morocco hosted the men's African Cup of Nations this year that ended in a chaotic and controversial final. Senegal won the title on the field, Morocco was awarded it by a CAF appeal panel and the result will be settled by Senegal's appeal pending at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland. (AP)

Questions over LIV players coming back to the PGA Tour



DORAL (US), May 1: Jordan Spieth is like everyone else in golf right now. When trying to figure out if LIV golfers who left the PGA Tour will try to return, he doesn't mind saying he has no idea.

Nobody does.
"I think there's just too many unknowns for me to have a good gauge on what would happen," Spieth said Thursday.

The announcement that Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund will stop funding LIV Golf after this year means some of the biggest names in the sport — Jon Rahm, Bryson DeChambeau and Cameron Smith among them — may aim to return to the PGA Tour at some point, much in the same way that Brooks Koepka has and Patrick Reed likely will.

It was, as would be expected, a major talking point at the Cadillac Championship on Thursday.

"If there's a system for Brooks and a system for Patrick Reed, does that stay the same for guys in the same category as those two coming back or does it change now? Does it change for guys who sued and dropped their membership?" Spieth asked.

DeChambeau, for example, was among players who filed an antitrust lawsuit against the PGA Tour in August 2022. That lawsuit, along with a counter-suit by the PGA Tour, was dismissed a year later.

"There's just a lot of different things that happened over the last four years for that," Spieth said. "I'm kind of glad I'm not in that room, and I trust the guys that are in that room to make the

right decision."

One of the guys who will be in the room — but isn't yet — is newly elected Player Advisory Council chairman Lucas Glover, who begins his four-year term on the board in January. It's possible that by then, whatever needs to be decided will be an afterthought.
"I will never begrudge anybody for making a decision for the betterment of their career, their life, whatever that may be," Glover said. "But do I think they should abide by the pathways back and pay the same penalties that the previous people have paid, absolutely?"

Koepka's return, for example, came with stipulations including a \$5 million donation to various charities that he and the tour selected, no access to PGA Tour equity shares for five years and no FedEx Cup bonus money he might earn this year.

"There's always been pathways back with penalty, so yeah, sure, it can be done, as we have seen," Glover said. "It's already happened a couple times. I'm sure the tour is working diligently to figure all that out. I'm not privy to those phone calls."

Brian Harman said he's still operating under the belief that golf fans want to see the best players competing in one place.

"Time heals all wounds," Harman said. "There's still some sentiment out there, especially with all the lawsuit stuff, that stuff's going to be tough to get past. We play with all those guys in the majors, so I think there should be a path back." (AP)

Inconsistent CSK, struggling MI face off in battle for survival

CHENNAI, May 1: Their IPL 2026 campaigns hanging by a thread, Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians face a must-win showdown here on Saturday, with both sides desperate to reverse their inconsistent form and stay afloat in the playoff race.

The two most successful franchises in IPL history have endured a forgettable campaign so far, with neither side able to build sustained momentum.

While CSK have found conditions at the MA Chidambaram Stadium more familiar, their performances have lacked the clinical edge that has defined them over the years.

Their batting has been inconsistent, particularly in the middle overs, while the bowling unit, traditionally their strength at home, has struggled to close out games under pressure.

Mumbai Indians, too, have blown hot and cold this season. Despite flashes of brilliance from their top order, the five-time champions have been let down by a fragile middle order and an underwhelming bowling attack that has failed to defend totals or contain opposition batters at crucial junctures.

With the league entering a decisive phase, this contest assumes added significance as both teams look to turn their fortunes.

CSK will hope their spinners can exploit the slow Chepaak surface, while MI will bank on their power hitters to counter the spin threat.

Given their current form, neither side starts as a clear favourite, making this clash



a battle of survival rather than dominance in what has traditionally been the IPL's marquee rivalry.

Placed sixth in the points table with three wins from eight matches, the Rituraj Gaikwad-led CSK are facing playoff uncertainty due to inconsistency, a negative net run rate, and the prolonged absence of MS Dhoni.

Dhoni has been sidelined with a calf strain injury sustained during pre-season training, and despite initial hopes of a faster return, he has missed the first half of the tourna-

ment.

New recruit Sanju Samson has been CSK's standout batter, scoring over 300 runs in eight innings including two swashbuckling hundreds, and he will once again shoulder the responsibility in batting.

With the ball, Jamie Overton and Anshul Kamboj have been impressive for CSK, with the former recording the best bowling figures of the season, taking 4/18 against Delhi Capitals.

MI's campaign turned from bad to worse

when they failed to defend 243 against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Wednesday at their own den, exposing their inconsistency and inadequacy in bowling.

CSK are placed slightly better than MI's ninth in the pecking order, and the latter must win all six of their remaining matches to reach 16 points and take a shot at qualification for playoff.

Even one more loss will leave MI heavily dependent on net run rates and other results going their way.

Teams:

Chennai Super Kings: Rituraj Gaikwad (c), MS Dhoni (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Kartik Sharma (wk), Dewald Brevis, Sarfaraz Khan, Urvil Patel (wk), Aman Khan, Shivam Dube, Zak Foulkes, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Anshul Kamboj, Jamie Overton, Matthew Short, Prashant Veer, Rahul Chahar, Shreyas Gopal, Gurjapneet Singh, Matt Henry, Akeal Hoseini, Spencer Johnson, Mukesh Choudhary, Noor Ahmad.

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

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

England widen lead over India in women's ODI rankings



NEW DELHI, May 1: England have widened their lead over reigning world champions India in the latest women's ODI rankings, sitting on a clear four-point lead at No. 2, while Harmanpreet Kaur's team are third in the list.

Australia remain on top of the table with 163 ranking points.

India, who clinched their maiden ODI World Cup title with a win over South Africa last year, have since played three ODIs, suffering a 0-3 series sweep against Australia.

"England have increased their lead over India from one to four points and are on 128, India (124), South Africa (100), New Zealand (93) and Sri Lanka (89) are the other teams to retain their positions," said ICC in a release.

In the previous rankings, India had 125 points, just one behind England's 126.

Meanwhile, Australia continue to top the rankings; despite a four-point drop, Sri Lanka have gained six points after the update, reducing the gap with New Zealand from 13 to four while Bangladesh have overtaken Pakistan to reach seventh position. (PTI)

Santner sidelined for at least a month due to shoulder injury



AUCKLAND, May 1: New Zealand white ball skipper Mitchell Santner will be out of action for at least a month due to a grade three ACL shoulder injury he sustained during the Indian Premier League.

The 34-year-old injured his left shoulder while fielding during Mumbai Indians' match against the Chennai Super Kings on April 23. "Santner returned home to New Zealand this morning who confirmed a rest and rehabilitation period of at least one month," New Zealand Cricket said on Friday.

The spin-bowling all-rounder, who took a fine diving catch to dismiss CSK's Kartik Sharma off Jasprit Bumrah but hit his shoulder and head on the ground, will thus be unavailable for the one-off Test against Ireland and the first Test against England. (PTI)

The milestone I would love to match with MS Dhoni is his five IPL trophies: KL Rahul

NEW DELHI, May 1: Delhi Capitals opener KL Rahul has made it clear that personal milestones count for little without titles, saying his biggest ambition remains matching MS Dhoni's haul of five IPL trophies even as he continues to scale the run charts in the league.

Rahul, who recently went past Dhoni on the league's all-time run-scorers list, downplayed the achievement and reiterated his team-first approach.

"I didn't even realise I had gone past Mahi bhai. Personal milestones are good. They reassure me that I am on the right track. But what would truly make me happy is winning as many trophies as MS Dhoni," Rahul said on JioStar. "Cricket is a team sport. You want to win trophies. You want to be part of successful sides. That has always been my goal."

The stylish right-hander also opened up about his remarkable record at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, attributing it to an emotional connect with his home ground.

"I've thought about whether there's a switch I use against RCB, but I haven't found an answer. Chinnaswamy is very special to me. I grew up there, and something just clicks when I play at that venue," he said. "So, a psychological switch happens when I go there. It's not just against RCB. I've done well in international games there too. Some stadiums just give you a good vibe and make you feel you'll do well."

Rahul also hailed the fearless approach of India's new-generation batters, pointing out how youngsters are redefining T20 batting with



their aggressive mindset.

"They don't fear reputations — whether it's someone like Jasprit Bumrah or Pat Cummins. They just see the ball and want to hit it out of the park. That's the mindset modern T20 cricket demands," he noted.

"It's phenomenal what the new-age cricketers are doing. Vaibhav Suryavanshi has taken world cricket by storm. Two centuries at the age of 15 is something I never even dreamt of doing."

"Ayush Mhatre has also done well, helping CSK score quick runs. The amount of talent coming up in India is scary, especially in T20

cricket. These fearless prodigies are changing the way T20s are played," he added.

Reflecting on his own role, Rahul said opening the batting continues to give him clarity and stability, even as moving across positions has helped him evolve.

"Being an opener makes my life easier. It's a role I've always done, and it gives me a clear game plan. But batting in different positions has helped me grow and understand my game better," he added.

With Delhi Capitals firmly in the playoff race, Rahul's form at the top remains key to their prospects. (PTI)

Not a positive reflection on the team: Sangakkara

JAIPUR, May 1: Rajasthan Royals head coach Kumar Sangakkara said the fines his team members, including skipper Riyan Parag, have copped for two off-field incidents do not reflect well on the team.

On Thursday, Parag was fined 25 per cent of his match fee for vaping inside the dressing room during the game against Punjab Kings. He was found guilty of bringing the game into disrepute. This was after team manager Romi Bhinder was fined Rs one lakh for a PMOA protocol breach related to the use of his phone in the dugout earlier in the season.

"I think it is, of course, a reflection that is not positive on the team, a controversy of any kind,"

Sangakkara said ahead of the game against Delhi Capitals.

"All I can say is that both those (incidents) have been addressed by the BCCI and the franchise. And then in terms of the culture, we always try to have a very positive healthy culture. We have our own values we adhere to. And the constant reminder to the players is to make sure they're responsible to the franchise and to our culture and our values."

In a statement on Thursday, the BCCI said it is exploring stringent action also against Rajasthan Royals' captain this season, has not had the best of times as a batter but Sangakkara came to his defence.

"I think he's done really well as a captain. And also in the last game, his little innings is what really shifted the momentum our way. He was fearless, he went out there in tough conditions and really brought the (required) rate and momentum back in our favour.

"Those are the impactful innings that I want to see from Riyan. His skill with the bat is not questionable at all. And sometimes it takes a while as a batter to get in.

"So all I want to do is enjoy his batting and you can't bat like a captain. You have to bat like Riyan Parag, the batter, and you're only captaining when you're fielding," he said. (PTI)

Cricket Canada appoints Monty Desai as head coach

TORONTO, May 1: Cricket Canada has appointed Monty Desai, well-known for his work with associate nations and franchise leagues, as head coach of its men's national team, as the organisation looks to press the reset button after being dogged by allegations of corruption and mismanagement. Following Canada's participation in the T20 World Cup 2026 and ahead of key upcoming ICC pathway competitions, this appointment is a "strategic step toward building momentum" and achieving greater international consistency.

"Our foremost priority is to restore Cricket Canada's prominence through performance, professionalism, and a renewed and vitalized sense of purpose," said Arvinder Khosa, President of Cricket Canada.

"Appointing Monty Desai reflects this vision. His experience with Associate nations, most notably Nepal and Afghanistan, demonstrates his ability to transform teams through effective leadership, discipline, and a clear long term plan. "As we build on our recent ICC

Men's T20 World Cup appearance, this year marks a pivotal moment, and we are confident that under his leadership, the team will make significant progress."

Desai, who has in the past worked with IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals, brings over 20 years of international coaching experience, including leading Nepal to regain ODI status and qualify for multiple ICC global events.

He is widely respected for instilling belief, structure, and competitive discipline in emerging cricket nations.

"I am honoured to take on this responsibility and thank Cricket Canada for their trust," said Desai.

"My previous experience in Canada has given me a clear understanding of the system's potential and the passion that exists for the game. Associate cricket is an important driver in the global growth of cricket today, and teams like Nepal and Afghanistan have demonstrated what belief, discipline, and fearlessness can unlock. (PTI)

Lakshya stuns Chou, Satwik-Chirag win as India lead Taipei 2-0 in Thomas Cup quarters



HORSENS (DENMARK), May 1: Lakshya Sen saved two match points to beat world No. 6 Chou Tien Chen, while Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty added a gritty doubles win as India took a 2-0 lead over Chinese Taipei in the quarterfinals of the Thomas Cup Finals here on Friday.

Lakshya, who trailed for large parts of the contest, showed remarkable resilience to script an 18-21, 22-20, 21-17 victory in a marathon clash lasting one hour and 28 minutes.

World No. 4 Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, the Asian Games champions, then defeated Chiu Hsiang Chieh and Wang Chi-Lin 23-21 19-21 21-12 in an hour and 15 minutes to put India in a commanding position.

India will look to seal the contest when Ayush Shetty, the Asian Championships finalist, takes on world No. 8 and reigning All England champion Lin Chun-Yi in the second singles.

In the remaining matches, the duo of Hariharan Amsakarunan and M.R. Arjun will meet Liu Kuang Heng and Yang Po-Hsuan, while Kidambi Srikanth will face world No. 21 Chi Yu Jen.

Lakshya vs Chou

With the head-to-head locked at 4-4 prior to this contest, the two engaged in another absorbing duel marked by long rallies, precise stroke-play and intense momentum swings.

Chou displayed his experience in the opening game, recovering from 10-15 down and overturning a late deficit to take the lead.

Lakshya, however, responded under pressure in the second game. Trailing 13-17, the Indian reeled off four straight points to draw level. Chou earned two match points, but Lakshya held his nerve, saving both before closing out the game to force a decider.

The 36-year-old Chou appeared to fade physically in the third game as Lakshya seized control with an 11-7 lead at the interval and maintained his composure to seal the contest.

Satwik-Chirag vs Liu-Wang

Satwik and Chirag struggled early, with multiple service fault calls disrupting their rhythm as they trailed 8-13 after being level at 5-5.

The Taiwanese kept their lifts flat and fast, forcing Chirag to vary angles and take pace off the rallies, but Chiu and Wang maintained control at 18-15.

Satwik and Chirag, however, refused to concede. They clawed back to 18-19 before a sharp body smash handed the Taiwanese two game points.

The Indians saved both under pressure and earned a game point of their own, eventually converting it after drawing an error to snatch the opening game.

The second game remained tight, with both pairs locked at 8-8 in the early exchanges. Service issues continued to haunt the Indians, including another height fault and a long flick serve, but they still managed to carry a slender one-point lead into the interval.

From 14-11 up, Satwik and Chirag looked set to consolidate, but the Taiwanese fought back to level terms. A flurry of attacking exchanges followed, with momentum swinging both ways before Chiu and Wang edged ahead late to force a decider.

The third game saw a complete shift in control. The Indians came out aggressive and precise, racing to a 9-3 lead and extending it to a six-point cushion at the break amid a charged atmosphere with drums, horns and relentless crowd support.

With Satwik dominating at the net and from the backcourt, the Indian pair stretched the lead to 13-6 and then 15-7. Satwik and Chirag soon earned a cluster of match points and sealed the contest comfortably, putting India firmly in control of the tie. (PTI)

I'm more focussed on team goals than individual milestones, says Purple cap holder Bhuvneshwar

AHMEDABAD, May 1: Seasoned Royal Challengers Bengaluru pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar said he has reached a stage in his career where team success takes precedence over individual milestones.

The 36-year-old, who is currently the leading wicket-taker in the tournament, returned figures of 3 for 28, his fifth three-wicket haul of the season, in RCB's four-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans, taking him to the top of the bowling chart.

While the performance earned him the Purple Cap, Bhuvneshwar downplayed its significance, emphasising a shift in priorities that comes with experience.

"It's good that I got the Purple Cap. But I think I have come out of that time where I want to achieve something individually," Bhuvneshwar said at the post-match press conference.

"Of course, I want to achieve something, but now it's more of a team. I'm not young anymore. Of course, when



you're young, you want to win those awards, and it comes when you do well. "But when you want to work towards the team's goal, and you get an individual award or reward, you feel good. But honestly, I'm just trying my best. Getting confidence from the management. That's

all I can say," he added.

Put in to bat, RCB endured a rare batting collapse and were bowled out for 155, a total that proved insufficient in a tournament dominated by high-scoring chases.

Bhuvneshwar acknowledged that chasing has become easier this season across venues.

"If you look at this IPL, chasing is a bit easier in any ground because the way wicket behaves and dew comes. So, yes, it could be different.

"But yeah, we didn't win the toss. We were asked to bat first. We tried our best in bowling. So now the result is that we lost. That's all."

Defending a modest total, Bhuvneshwar said RCB's strategy was to attack and take wickets rather than contain runs.

"If you look at the scenario, there was some help for seamers, and we had Romario (Shepherd), third seamer. So, we wanted to take a chance.

"And Suyash (Sharma) is someone who is not easy to pick. So, we wanted to get wickets as quick as possible. So, that's the reason he didn't bowl.

"We couldn't have won the match by defending runs. We could have won by taking wickets, and the bowlers who bowled were the best bowlers to get those wickets," he added.

He also admitted that the batting unit, featuring the likes of Virat Kohli, Devdutt Padikkal, Tim David and skipper Rajat Patidar, had an off day.

"Look it's a long tournament 14 matches. You cannot be perfect in each and every match in any department the way we have batted in the whole tournament it's been good we have scored 200 we have scored more than 200.

"I think it's about complementing each other yes we were not up to the mark with the bat it happens. I mean sometimes we give 200 runs but batsmen never complain they go and chase it out so it was

our duty to try our best and then we did what we could."

For Gujarat Titans, West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder returned with figures of 2/29 while also take three catches. He also scored 12 runs with the bat to be adjudged the player of the match.

"When we were pursuing Jason at the auction, it was with the mind to him being able to fulfil both roles -- the bat and the ball. So he does offer us exactly that," GT Director of Cricket Vikram Solanki.

"His numbers, if you take a look over the last sort of calendar year and perhaps a little bit longer than that, his numbers at five and six have been quite outstanding.

"And that has come about because he, of course, has all of the ability that you need. Physically, a strong guy, has great reach, leverage as far as the bat is concerned, so all the technicalities are covered off," he added. (PTI)