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Prime accused in Morikolung dacoity case injured in road accident

Three police personnel also hurt in collision on Borghat bypass

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 16: The prime accused in the sensational Morikolung dacoity case was seriously injured in a road accident during a police operation on Friday night.

The accused, Rajibur Rahman, sustained grievous injuries while accompanying Nagaon Police during a raid conducted to recover gold allegedly looted during the dacoity at the residence of Ranjit Saikia in Seuj Nagar, Morikolung.

According to police sources, the accident occurred on the four-lane Borghat bypass in Nagaon after another vehicle rammed into the police vehicle carrying the accused and police personnel.

Rahman reportedly suffered severe injuries to both legs below the knee.

He was immediately shifted to Nagaon Medical College Hospital, where he is undergoing treatment.

Police officer Biman Gogoi and two other police personnel also sustained injuries in the accident.

Rajibur Rahman, a resident of Nakari in Lakhimpur district, is among the key accused in the April 24 dacoity at Dr Saikia's residence.

Police alleged that he, along with two other dacoits from Lakhimpur and local accomplices from Nagaon, carried out the attack.

During the incident, Dr Saikia and his wife Ruprekha Bhuyan Saikia were grievously injured. While Dr Saikia later recovered, his wife, who had remained in a coma, died on May 10 at a private hospital. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Slice Small Finance Bank launches digital-first branch blending physical and AI-enabled banking services

Himanta inaugurates India's first 'phygital' banking branch

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday inaugurated India's first AI-powered "phygital" banking branch of Slice Small Finance Bank at GS Road in Guwahati.

The new-generation banking branch combines physical banking services with digital and AI-enabled systems, including self-service kiosks, paperless cash deposit and withdrawal facilities, and digital onboarding services aimed at making banking more accessible and convenient.

According to officials, the branch has been designed to provide responsible credit, savings and payment solutions to individuals and small businesses, especially those with limited access to modern banking facilities.



Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said the launch represented a significant step towards building a more inclusive financial ecosystem for both urban and underserved communities.

He stated that the investment re-

flected the kind of technology-driven collaboration Assam seeks to encourage.

Sarma said the inauguration of India's first digital and AI-powered banking branch in Guwahati highlighted Assam's readiness to sup-

port the future of Indian banking.

He added that customers would be able to access credit directly through the UPI interface without requiring separate applications, which would particularly benefit small traders and women entrepreneurs by providing quick access to working capital.

The Chief Minister also reiterated the state government's commitment to positioning Assam as a destination for responsible and technology-driven investments.

He said the government was working to create conditions that support business growth, employment generation and wider access to financial services.

Former minister Ashok Singhal, Rajan Bajaj and Dilip Asbe were among those present at the inaugural programme.

Sikkim Statehood Day celebrated at Assam Lok Bhavan

GUWAHATI, May 16: Sikkim's Statehood Day was celebrated at the Assam Lok Bhavan here on Saturday under the leadership of Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya as part of the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' initiative.

Addressing the event, the governor extended greetings to the people of Sikkim and described the Himalayan state as a symbol of peace, progress, environmental conservation and national pride.

He said Sikkim has emerged as a model for sustainable development by becoming India's first fully organic state, showing how economic growth can coexist with environmental protection.

Acharya also highlighted Sikkim's growing prominence in eco-tourism, organic agriculture and the pharmaceutical sector.

Recalling his tenure as the Sikkim governor, he said the affection, simplicity and deep respect for nature shown by the people of the state. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CBSE makes three-language study compulsory from July 1

NEW DELHI, May 16: The CBSE has made the study of three languages, including at least two native Indian languages, compulsory for Class-9 students beginning July 1, according to a circular issued by the board.

The move is part of the Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) alignment of its Scheme of Studies with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023.

According to the circular issued on May 15, students opting for a foreign language may do so only as the third language after studying two native Indian languages, or as an additional fourth language.

"With effect from July 1, 2026, for Class IX, the study of three languages (R1, R2, R3) shall be compulsory, with at least two languages. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Biology lecturer, part of NTA's paper setting committee for NEET-UG, arrested

NEW DELHI, May 16: The CBI on Saturday arrested a biology lecturer who was part of the National Testing Agency's (NTA) paper-setting committee for NEET-UG held on May 3, officials said.

The arrest was made on the basis of questioning of alleged kingpin P V Kulkarni and other accused in the paper leak case, they said.

The biology lecturer Manisha Mandhare was arrested here after being questioned by the agency at its headquarters, they said.

She was allegedly involved in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate) examination process and was appointed by the NTA as an expert, they said.

Officials said Mandhare had complete access to the Botany and Zoology question papers.

Mandhare is alleged to have mobilised prospective NEET examination candidates in April 2026



through Manisha Waghmare of Pune, who was arrested on May 14, and conducted special coaching classes for these students at her Pune residence.

It is alleged that Mandhare dictated leaked questions and responses to select students and took lakhs of rupees as fee.

Most of these questions tallied with the questions that appeared in the examination on May 3. The NEET exam was cancelled following allegations of a paper leak.

The CBI had arrested Professor

P V Kulkarni, a domain expert in chemistry from Latur on Friday. Kulkarni for years served on panels involved in setting the NEET question paper.

Exploiting his privileged access to confidential material, Kulkarni allegedly hosted special coaching classes at his house in the last week of April and dictated to his students questions, options and answers which appeared in the NEET UG paper on May 3.

"During the last week of April, 2026, he had mobilised students, with the help of another accused namely Manisha Waghmare who was arrested on May 14 by CBI," a spokesperson said in a statement.

Students allegedly paid several lakh rupees to attend the sessions where they wrote the questions down in their notebooks and later "tallied exactly" with the actual NEET-UG. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Suwendu targets Abhishek Banerjee, alleges Diamond Harbour people denied voting rights

KOLKATA, May 16: West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari on Saturday alleged the people of Diamond Harbour have not been able to exercise their voting rights for a decade ever since the local TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee appeared on the state's political scene.

Assuring people that the scenario has now changed, he said the May 21 repolling in the Falta Assembly seat, which falls under the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency, will re-establish voter rights.

Addressing a BJP workers' rally in Falta, Adhikari announced a special development package for the Assembly constituency area, over and above the pre-poll promises made by the BJP in its manifesto.

Canvassing for BJP candidate Debangshu Ponda in his first political meeting since becoming chief

minister, Adhikari said, "The Falta repolls will re-establish voter rights where people have not been able to vote for 10 years in parliamentary, assembly and panchayat elections ever since the nephew (Abhishek Banerjee) arrived on its political scene."

"That scenario has now changed. I urge the voters of Falta to elect the BJP candidate by a margin of over one lakh votes," he said, while urging workers not to take law into their hands and appealing for a violence-free poll.

Adhikari said his party and the local administration will ensure the safe return of those who fled fearing post-poll backlash, but it would be "conditional".

"In the 2021 post-poll violence, 57 BJP workers were killed, and 12,500 FIRs were filed. If any of these absconders feature as accused in those FIRs, we will not

allow them to return home. We will drag them by their hair and throw them in jail," he said.

The chief minister said he has received the files on the properties owned by Leaps and Bounds, a private company linked to Banerjee, and would soon launch a probe into them.

"I had sought the files from Kolkata Municipal Corporation and now have details of the 24 properties, including a palatial office in Amtala in South 24 Parganas district, owned by Leaps and Bounds. I now have a list of the nephew's properties and will soon launch a probe into them," Adhikari declared.

Stating that he has not forgotten the torture which the "TMC unleashed on BJP workers", Adhikari said he has directed police to lodge FIRs for previous political crimes, and. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP asks Rahul Gandhi not to politicise NEET issue, says govt acted swiftly

NEW DELHI, May 16: The BJP on Saturday hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his criticism of the government on the NEET-UG 2026 issue, saying the Modi government acted swiftly against irregularities and stands firmly with students.

The ruling party's response came after Gandhi on Saturday demanded Prime Minister Narendra Modi immediately sack Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan or take personal accountability, and alleged that the "BJP-RSS nexus" has destroyed India's education system.

The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET)-UG test held on May 3 was cancelled following allegations of irregularities in the examination process.

BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari accused the Congress of politicising the issue and said the government had immediately taken corrective and punitive measures after irregularities surfaced in the medical entrance exam.

In a post on X, Bhandari said the government promptly cancelled the exam after reports of irregularities and announced a re-exam on June 21 without placing any additional burden on students.

"Stop politicising Rahul Gandhi. Congress has once again chosen politics over the future of 22 lakh students," he said.

"Before lecturing others, Congress must answer for its own disastrous record on paper leaks and exam scams," Bhandari said, while listing alleged past incidents including AIPMT leaks, SSC scams, CBSE paper leaks and multiple recruitment exam irregularities in Congress-ruled states.

The BJP spokesperson said the Centre handed the case to the CBI soon after the allegations surfaced, and Union Education Minister Pradhan publicly addressed the issue and accepted responsibility.

Bhandari also referred to arrests made in connection with the alleged paper leak racket.

He claimed that operatives linked to Jaipur, Gurugram, Nashik and other locations have also been arrested.

"This is not a cover-up. This is not silence. This is action," Bhandari said.

"The Modi government stands firmly with honest students, not with paper leak mafias and political opportunists," he added.

Earlier, the leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said the hard work of 22 lakh NEET aspirants had gone to waste.

"The whole country knows that two days before NEET, the question paper was being distributed on WhatsApp. Dharmendra Pradhan ji says he has nothing to do with the matter. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bangladesh's ties with India 'will depend on' Ganges water treaty renewal: BNP

DHAKA, May 16: Bangladesh's ruling BNP on Saturday said the country's relations with India "will depend on" a new Ganges Water Sharing Treaty as it sought immediate talks with New Delhi for an agreement in line with Dhaka's "expectations and needs".

The Indo-Bangladesh Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, signed in 1996, is due to expire in December.

"We want to send a clear message to the Indian government that a (new Ganges) treaty must be implemented immediately through discussions according to the expectations and needs of Bangladesh's people," Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said at an event here.

The opportunity to establish good relations with India "will depend on the signing of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty or the Farakka Agreement", said Alam-

gir, who is also the local government, rural development and cooperatives minister.

He alleged that the uncertainty over the renewal of the existing 30-year Ganges water treaty, signed during the tenure of the now-disbanded Awami League government led by deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, is raising concerns over future water-sharing arrangements.

He said the current agreement should remain effective until a new treaty was signed and suggested that future water-sharing agreements between the two neighbours should not be limited to a fixed tenure.

The Ganges, known as the Padma after entering Bangladesh through the northwestern Chapai Nawabganj district, is a major river system in the lower riparian deltaic nation, criss-crossed by hundreds of rivers, including 54 originating

in or flowing through India.

Alamgir said nearly one-third of Bangladesh's 170 million people depended on the river system for livelihoods, biodiversity and water supply to several distributaries.

The BNP leader's remarks came three days after Bangladesh on Wednesday approved a mega project to build a barrage on the Padma river, which it said would help "negate the negative impact" of the Farakka Barrage in upstream India's West Bengal.

The project is expected to be completed by 2033.

Water Resources Minister Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee on Wednesday said the proposed Padma Barrage is "a matter of Bangladesh's own interest and there is no need for any discussion with India on the issue".

"Discussions are necessary regarding the Ganges, and those are ongoing," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

14 prevented from entering India: CM

GUWAHATI, May 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said an infiltration attempt was thwarted, and fourteen people have been prevented from entering India by BSF and state police personnel.

Sarma said that the vigil of forces along the international border is underway, and the fight against infiltration will continue.

"A group of 14 illegals were identified and prevented from entering into India by brave jawans of @assampolice and @BSF_India," the CM posted on X on Friday.

"Our forces are highly alert on the border and thwarting off infiltration attempts," Sarma said.

He, however, did not mention the border district where the infiltration attempt was thwarted.

Sarma had on Thursday said his government would continue to maintain a "zero tolerance" policy towards illegal immigration and forced demographic change. Assam. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Top astronomers converge at IIT-Guwahati for 5-day meeting

GUWAHATI, May 16: The five-day 44th annual meeting of the Astronomical Society of India (ASI) was inaugurated at IIT Guwahati here on Saturday with over 600 astronomers, researchers, students and science communicators from across the world participating in it.

ASI president Devendra Ojha and IIT-G Director Devendra Jalihal were present at the inaugural programme.

In his presidential address, Ojha said the ASI has built a rich legacy since its establishment in 1972 and has evolved into a vibrant scientific community.

"With new facilities such as large telescopes and next-generation observational infrastructure on the horizon, the future of astronomy in India is bright and offers immense opportunities for the as-



ment with science among students and researchers across the region, he added.

Established in 1972, the ASI is the professional association of astronomers in the country.

With more than a thousand members dedicated to advancing astronomy and related sciences in India, this annual meeting serves as the society's flagship platform for scientific exchange, collaboration, and outreach.

The five-day conference will feature more than 140 scientific talks and 355 poster presentations covering a diverse range of themes, including the sun and the solar system, exoplanets and astrophysics, stars and galaxies, cosmology, astrochemistry, astronomy technologies, data science, astronomy education. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

He said such gatherings play an important role in inspiring young minds, especially in the Northeast, to connect with STEM and innovation.

The meet will foster new ideas, collaborations, and greater engage-

Talks focus on tourism, biodiversity conservation, education and sustainable development

Seychelles envoy meets Governor, discusses cooperation and cultural ties



GUWAHATI, May 16: The High Commissioner of Seychelles to India, Harisoa Lalatiana Accouche, called on Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at Lok Bhavan on Saturday and discussed issues of mutual interest between Assam and

Seychelles.

Welcoming the envoy, the Governor said Seychelles is globally known for its natural beauty, ecological richness and biodiversity.

He added that Assam, located in northeastern India, is also recognised for its scenic beauty, cultural

heritage and biodiversity.

Highlighting Assam's attractions, Acharya referred to Kaziranga National Park, famous for the one-horned rhinoceros, along with the state's tea gardens, the Brahmaputra river, muga silk and festivals such as Bihu. He said the state offers immense potential for tourism and cultural engagement.

The Governor expressed hope for cultural exchange programmes between Assam and Seychelles to strengthen people-to-people ties and mutual understanding.

He observed that both regions share common interests in biodiversity conservation, environmental protection and sustainable development.

Acharya also stressed the importance of cooperation in ecological preservation, sustainable tourism, education. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Shivraj Singh Chouhan unveils agricultural roadmap for four Madhya Pradesh districts

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan unveiled a comprehensive agricultural roadmap for four districts of Madhya Pradesh — Sehore, Raisen, Vidisha and Dewas — during the Advanced Agriculture Festival held in Raisen.

During the programme, the Union Minister also inspected an Integrated Farming Model and interacted directly with farmers, scientists and experts on issues related to crop insurance, integrated farming and practical agricultural solutions.

Addressing farmers, Chouhan said agriculture must become more profitable through adoption of modern technology, crop diversification and integrated farming systems.



He encouraged farmers to include activities such as animal husbandry, horticulture, beekeeping and organic farming along with conventional agriculture to increase returns and reduce costs.

He stated that the roadmap pre-

pared for the four districts was aimed at promoting climate-resilient agriculture, efficient water use, sustainable farming practices and market-oriented production systems. Similar district-level agricultural plans would also be devel-

oped for other districts of Madhya Pradesh.

Highlighting the need to move beyond traditional crops such as wheat, paddy and soybean, the Minister stressed the importance of promoting vegetables, fruits and high-value crops including dragon fruit, avocado and pomegranate. He said scientific planning and diversification could significantly enhance farmers' income.

Chouhan also launched a Soil Mobile App aimed at helping farmers adopt scientific farming practices. The application will enable farmers to determine fertiliser and nutrient requirements for crops based on soil conditions in their own fields. He warned against indiscriminate use of fertilisers, stating that it increases costs and damages soil health.

CCPA orders probe into sale of unregistered herbicide on Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho, JioMart

NEW DELHI, May 16: Four major e-commerce platforms, Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho and JioMart, have delisted an allegedly unregistered agro-chemical product following notices issued by the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), which has since ordered a detailed investigation into the matter.

The platforms informed the regulator that listings of "Cyclostinone Herbicide" had been removed with immediate effect and that seller accounts associated with such listings had been placed under scrutiny, the regulator said in a statement on Saturday.

The CCPA, however, said the responses were only a first step and directed that the matter be taken up for comprehensive investigation.

"The CCPA has placed the matter for detailed investigation," the regulator said.

The notices were originally issued following a complaint by the Crop Care Federation of India (CCFI), forwarded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, alleging that the herbicide was being actively sold and promoted online despite not featuring in the Schedule to the Insecticides Act, 1968.

The complaint further flagged that product listings failed to disclose the active ingredient and its precise chemical identity, information considered essential for informed purchasing, particularly by farmers.

On examining the matter, the CCPA found that the listings lacked



disclosure of the product's chemical composition, valid licence numbers and their period of validity, mandatory statutory warnings about the product's hazardous nature, and details of Principal Authorisation Certificates where applicable.

The authority noted that such omissions had the potential to mislead consumers, especially farmers and agricultural users who depend heavily on product disclosures for the safe and effective use of agro-chemicals.

The CCPA also invoked Rule 10(E) of the Insecticides (Second Amendment) Rules, 2022, which specifically governs the online sale of insecticides and requires e-commerce platforms to verify seller licences before permitting such listings.

Failure to do so, the authority said, amounted to violations of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the Consumer Protection (E-

Commerce) Rules, 2020.

As part of its notices, the platforms were directed to furnish details, including the date of initial listing, total number of listings since January 2024, complete particulars of associated sellers, and the due diligence mechanisms in place to ensure regulatory compliance.

"Digital convenience cannot come at the cost of consumer protection, statutory non-compliance, or public safety," the CCPA said, adding that e-commerce platforms bear significant responsibility for ensuring products sold through their marketplaces comply with applicable law.

The authority said it would continue to take stringent measures against misleading advertisements, unfair trade practices, and the online sale of products that may pose risks to consumers, particularly in sectors touching public health, agriculture, and safety. (PTI)

Haier India launches premium Spartan AI Tower AC with AI-Atmox technology

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: Haier India has launched its new premium Spartan AI Tower Air Conditioner powered by AI-Atmox technology, introducing a range of AI-driven features aimed at enhancing cooling performance, energy efficiency and user convenience. The company said the Spartan AI Tower AC has been designed to combine modern aesthetics with intelligent cooling technology for contemporary Indian homes.

According to Haier, the new air conditioner comes equipped with AI Climate Control 2.0, which analyses user habits, room temperature, outdoor weather conditions and comfort preferences to create a personalised cooling profile while reducing unnecessary energy consumption.

The AC also features AI Pre-Cooling technology that uses geofencing to begin cooling automatically when the user enters within 100 metres of the home, ensuring the room is cooled before arrival. Other features include AI Frost Self-Clean for the indoor unit and AI ODU Cyclone Clean for the outdoor unit.

The company stated that these technologies help remove dust and impurities, improve hygiene and maintain cooling efficiency without manual cleaning. Speaking on the launch, NS Satish said the Spartan AI Tower AC was designed to redefine home cooling through intelligent and responsive technology tailored to the needs of Indian consumers.

Caregiving responsibilities prevent 8 in 10 Indian women from applying for jobs: Report



MUMBAI, May 16: Caregiving duties continue to shape women's career decisions, with 83 per cent of respondents saying they had skipped applying for certain roles because they felt balancing work with family responsibilities would be challenging, a report has revealed. Nearly 8 in 10 women in India have chosen not to apply for certain jobs due to caregiving responsibilities, highlighting the continued impact of unpaid care work on women's career choices, according to a report by global job site Indeed.

"While caregiving responsibilities are shared across many households, the report highlights how women in India continue to factor these demands into important career decisions. Women remain ambitious, but many are increasingly selective about roles that

fit the realities of caregiving. Employers that offer genuine flexibility and clearer expectations are better positioned to attract and retain them," Indeed India Managing Director Sashi Kumar said. Indeed's report is based on inputs from 1,141 women - working mothers, women currently on a career break, women who had returned to work after a break - across the country, including major cities such as Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi NCR, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune, and Kolkata. The findings showed that flexibility has become a defining factor in how women evaluate career opportunities as flexible work hours emerged as the top priority for 53 per cent of respondents when choosing a job, followed by hybrid or remote work at 48 per cent.

This shift is also reflected in

compensation choices, with nearly 8 in 10 respondents saying they would either accept lower pay (45 per cent) or consider doing so (34 per cent) in exchange for better flexibility and work-life balance, revealed the report.

For working mothers, it found that hybrid and remote work remained especially important with 37 per cent of respondents identifying hybrid or remote work as the single workplace change that would make the biggest difference for working mothers. Over 59 per cent of respondents believed workplace flexibility has genuinely improved career opportunities for mothers in India, while another 30 per cent said it has helped somewhat.

The report further revealed that as more workplaces return to office-based models, attendance expectations are increasingly shaping job decisions. Over 51 per cent of respondents said they have turned down a job interview or offer because of office attendance requirements.

The report also highlighted the importance of clear and practical job descriptions, with full-time office mandates emerging as the biggest deterrent for women evaluating opportunities, cited by 37 per cent of respondents, followed by lack of flexibility in job roles at 34 per cent. (PTI)

XLRI Jamshedpur announces the Second Batch of Public Policy & Sustainable Leadership (PPSL)

JAMSHEDPUR (JHARKHAND), May 16: Building on the successful launch of its pioneering executive education initiative in public policy and leadership, XLRI - Xavier School of Management has commenced admissions for the second batch of its flagship Public Policy & Sustainable Leadership (PPSL) programme.

Launched in collaboration with the Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT), Government of India, PPSL, the one-year hybrid executive programme, has emerged as a distinctive interdisciplinary platform bringing together policymakers, administrators, academicians, development professionals, sustainability practitioners, and professionals from the private sector under one academic ecosystem. One of the unique elements of the programme is the eclectic class mix comprising both government-sponsored candidates and self-sponsored candidates.

The inaugural cohort includes officers from the Government of India (IAS, IPS, IFS), and State Civil Service officers) and various state governments, senior professionals from UN Women, PSI India, Council on Energy, Environment & Water (CEEW), PCI India, IBM Research Labs, and academicians from public administration institutes.

The 180-hour programme has been carefully designed to accommodate working professionals through a hybrid delivery format combining two short immersive campus residencies with interactive online sessions held on Sundays. It offers a multidisciplinary curriculum covering public policy, public finance, public management, public systems, governance, sustainability, leadership, stakeholder engagement, business strategies & non-market strategies, and emerging developmental challenges.

Speaking about the programme's relevance and impact, Prof. Kalyan Bhaskar, Associate Professor, XLRI and Programme Director of PPSL, stated:

"The PPSL programme reflects XLRI's larger vision of creating responsible leadership at the intersection of public policy, governance, civil society, and public value creation. The diversity of the participants enriches classroom discussions, peer learning, and enables meaningful dialogue between administration, academia, development sector, and industry."

With increasing complexities in public policy, governance, sustainability transitions, and public administration, the programme aims to create a new generation of leaders capable of designing inclusive, ethical, and evidence-driven solutions for society. The second batch is expected to further strengthen the programme's relevance by fostering collaborative learning among officers, practitioners, and professionals working across public systems and developmental institutions.

The last date for application is 18th August 2026. The program commences on 18th September 2026 with the inaugural campus component at XLRI Jamshedpur.

More details about the programme, eligibility, and admissions are available at the XLRI website. (PTI)

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Sikkim Statehood Day

continue to remain among his most cherished memories.

Highlighting the importance of women empowerment in nation-building, the governor said Sikkim has set inspiring examples in promoting women's participation in education, entrepreneurship, self-help groups and public life.

Referring to the spirit of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', Acharya said India's true strength lies in its unity in diversity and stressed the need for the younger generation to understand and appreciate the cultural heritage and traditions of different states of the country.

The governor also lauded the contribution of eminent personalities from Sikkim for bringing pride to the nation through their achievements.

The programme was attended by commissioner and secretary to the governor, SS Meenakshi Sundaram, assistant resident commissioner of Sikkim, Jashoda Chettri, and staff of Lok Bhavan. (PTI)

Prime accused in

in Guwahati. So far, Nagaon Police have arrested eight persons in connection with the case. Investigation is continuing.

CBSE makes three-

being native Indian languages," the circular stated.

The CBSE said to keep the focus on learning and reduce any undue pressure on students, no board examination shall be conducted for R3 at the Class-10 level.

"All assessments for R3 shall be entirely school-based and internal. The performance of students in R3 will be duly reflected in the CBSE certificate. It is clarified that no student will be barred from appearing in the Class X Board Examinations due to R3. Sample question papers, rubrics for internal assessment will be shared by the Board shortly," it added.

The board also asked schools to update their R3 language offerings for Classes 6 to 9 on the OASIS portal by June 30.

Schools facing a shortage of qualified native Indian language teachers may use interim measures, such as inter-school resource sharing, virtual or hybrid teaching support, engagement of retired language teachers and qualified postgraduates, the circular said.

The CBSE further said relaxations would be provided to the Children With Special Needs (CwSN) in accordance with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, while foreign students returning to India may get case-by-case exemptions from the requirement of studying two native Indian languages.

In April, the CBSE had announced a phased implementation of the three-language formula from Class 6 and the introduction of a two-level system for mathematics and science for Class 9 from the 2026-27 academic session. (PTI)

Biology lecturer, part of

paper conducted on May 3, the spokesperson said. The federal agency has registered an FIR and formed teams to probe the alleged paper leak that resulted in the cancellation of the exam held on May 3.

The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) was conducted across 551 Indian cities and at 14 overseas centres.

Nearly 23 lakh candidates had registered for the test, which was administered by the NTA across the country.

According to the NTA, information regarding alleged malpractice was received on the evening of May 7, four days after the exam was held.

The NTA said the inputs were escalated to central agencies the following morning for "independent verification and necessary action." (PTI)

Suwendu targets Abhishek

register complaints for misuse of funds from central schemes.

"I have told the police to register complaints of political crimes, even if they are five years old or more, arrest the criminals and put them behind bars. Not a single goon should be able to stay at home," the CM said.

He added that officials have been asked to identify and jail those who swindled public money allocated by the Centre for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Cyclone Amphan relief, MGNREGA, construction of public toilets, old-age and widow schemes.

Adhikari said that strict police action would be initiated against those accused of torturing women. "People put me on (CM's) chair not for the sake of it. They seek justice, and I am going to give it to them," he said.

He added that police files of cases related to the destruction and defacement of the images of Hindu gods and goddesses will be reopened. "The police officer who placed the idol of Maa Kali inside a prison van has no place in Bengal," the CM said.

He was drawing attention to the October 2025 controversy over a vandalised idol of Goddess Kali in the Kakkwip area of South 24 Parganas district, which the police placed inside a prison van, later clarifying that it was to ensure its safe custody and prevent further damage in the face of stone pelting by a crowd.

Referring to the TMC's Falta candidate Jahangir Khan, the chief minister described him as "a designated most notorious criminal", and said he would personally handle his case. (PTI)

BJP asks Rahul

The (Parliamentary) committee had made recommendations, but he put it in the dustbin on the pretext that opposition people were on the committee and that it was of no use," Gandhi said in a video statement.

"The truth is that you (government) have damaged the core of India. This is a nexus of the RSS, the BJP and their people that have been installed in universities, vice chancellors and professors, to mint money," the former Congress president said.

Pradhan Friday announced that the NEET-UG re-exam would be held on June 21 and the test would be computer-based from next year onwards as part of reforms. (PTI)

Bangladesh's ties with

Anee told reporters after the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council approved the project at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

Leading water expert Ainun Nishat, who played a key role in drafting the Ganges Water Treaty, cautiously welcomed the Padma Barrage project, saying its utility would depend largely on the continuation of the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty.

Several other experts, however, cautioned that the proposed barrage could intensify the adverse effects of the Farakka Barrage by increasing sediment deposits and raising riverbeds in Bangladesh.

The 2,240-metre-long Farakka Barrage was built to divert water into the Hooghly river to flush sediments and maintain navigability at Kolkata port.

The Farakka issue has long remained a sensitive subject in Bangladesh, with successive governments and experts alleging that reduced dry-season water flows downstream caused salinity intrusion, river degradation and adverse effects on agriculture and ecology in the lower riparian country.

India has consistently maintained that the Farakka Barrage was built primarily to preserve the Kolkata port and that water-sharing issues have been addressed through bilateral mechanisms and agreements, including the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty between the two countries. (PTI)

14 prevented from

shares a 263-km-long international border with Bangladesh, stretching across Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Sribhumi and Cachar districts.

Seychelles envoy meets

and skill development. He welcomed the possibility of academic exchanges and opportunities for students from Seychelles to study in educational institutions in Assam.

The Governor further highlighted Assam's ongoing development in sectors such as infrastructure, connectivity, education and economic growth under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

He said improved air, rail, road and inland waterway connectivity had created new opportunities for international partnerships and engagement.

During the meeting, the Seychelles High Commissioner invited the Governor to visit Seychelles.

Both sides expressed optimism for stronger friendship and meaningful cooperation between Assam and Seychelles in the future.

Top astronomers converge

among others. Three workshops on thematic areas—Compact Objects in the AstroSat Era, Radio Astronomy from Space, and Rubin LSST: Exploring the Transient Sky—were also conducted on the opening day of the conference.

The inaugural event also included ASI award presentations, recognising excellence in astronomy and astrophysics. This year, the ASI Zubin Kumbhavi Award was presented to the team behind the GROWTH-India Telescope in Hanle, Ladakh.

Other major honours include the Laxminarayana and Nagalaxmi Modali Award to Girish Kulkarni of TIFR and the Justice Oak Award for Outstanding Thesis in Astronomy to Prateek Mayank.

Alongside the scientific activities being conducted at IIT Guwahati, the Public Outreach and Education Committee (POEC) of ASI is conducting astronomy-themed outreach activities across Guwahati and other parts of the Northeast.

As part of this initiative, astronomers visiting Guwahati will engage with students at nearly 20 schools and colleges.

In addition to this, exhibitions of astrophotography are being showcased at both the Guwahati Planetarium and Guwahati Science City to inspire the researchers of tomorrow.

ASI's annual meeting has returned to the region after 30 years, with the last meet hosted by Gauhati University in 1996. (PTI)

No.DPRD/BTC/6th ASFC/25-26/Baksa-63/2025/29 Dated Kokrajhar the 15th May 2026

63/2025/29

PRESS NOTICE

The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for work "Const. of Barapeta VDC Office Building at Milan Bazar" under Gobardhana Dev. Block of Baksa Dist under the award of Specific Grant-in-Aid of the 6th ASFC for the year 2021-22 (2nd Installment), during 2025-26, for A/A amount of Rs. 40,00,000/- (Rupees forty lakh) only from the registered contractors of Class-II (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads) / (Building), BTC. Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the Office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/- Director,

Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/216

Leaders, MLAs and workers attend grand celebration in Karbi Anglong's Dokmoka

Vijay Utsav celebrated in Howraghat after BJP's electoral success



HT Correspondent
HOWRAGHAT, May 16: A grand 'Vijay Utsav' (Victory Festival) was celebrated on Friday under the initiative of the 109th Howraghat Assembly Con-

stituency, organised by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Karbi Anglong District Committee (East). The mega event took place at Rashingia Aklam in Dokmoka.

The victory festival was organised to mark the party's recent electoral success in the constituency. Hundreds of party leaders, workers and local residents gathered to take part in the celebrations.

The event witnessed the presence of several high-profile leaders and legislators from the region, including Tuliram Ronghang, MLA of Rongkhang Constituency, Nisoo Terangpi, Surya Rongphar, Dr Habbey Teron and Lunsing Teron.

Addressing the gathering, Tuliram Ronghang congratulated party workers for their efforts and dedication. He urged all party members to remain united and work with renewed vigour for the holistic development of the region and the welfare of the public in the days ahead.

NFR records robust freight growth in April 2026

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: The freight business of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) continues to maintain strong momentum, with significant loading achievements across its divisions along with policy initiatives aimed at promoting trade and commodity movement in the region. In a major operational development, Rahamatpur and Pawakhali stations under Katihar Division have been opened for handling both outward and inward goods traffic, including domestic as well as Bangladesh-bound traffic, with effect from 16th April. To encourage bamboo transportation and support allied industries, the exemption of Busy Season Surcharge on all bamboo traffic originating from NFR in covered wagons has also been extended for another year from 1st May, 2026 to 30th April, 2027.

During this period, Alipurduar Division recorded the loading of 09 rakes comprising 378 wagons of potatoes from Dhupguri station to New Tinsukia and Salchakra stations, generating freight revenue of ₹ 1.61 crore. Under Katihar Division, 03 rakes consisting of 126 wagons of maize were loaded from Purnea Junction and Jalargarh stations earning freight revenue of ₹ 0.33 crore.

Lumding Division achieved impressive loading performance across multiple commodity segments. A total of 1,684 wagons of stone chips were booked from Moinarband, Panchgram, Ditokcherra, Bihara, Molvom and Sukhovi to destinations including Jirania, Sabroom, Belonia, Ambassa, Udaipur and Sairang, generating freight revenue of ₹ 7.64 crore. Additionally, 1,986 wagons of cement were booked from Tetelia, Star, Lanka, Salchakra and Kamalajuri to destinations such as Dimapur, Katihar, New Tinsukia, Jorhat Town, New Jalpaiguri, New Bongaigaon, Rangiya, Jirania, Sairang and Falakata, generating freight revenue of ₹ 10.96 crore.

Further, 400 wagons of Petroleum Oil and Lubricants (POL) were booked, generating revenue of ₹ 3.41 crore. In the bamboo sector, 20 wagons of bamboo chips were loaded from Lamsakhang under Lumding Division, earning revenue of ₹ 0.18 crore.

Northeast Frontier Railway continues to focus on strengthening freight infrastructure, improving customer-oriented policies and ensuring efficient transportation services to support economic growth and industrial development across the Northeast and adjoining regions.

Road safety awareness programme held

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 16: The District Road Safety Committee under the District Transport Office (DTO) organised a road safety awareness meeting for auto-rickshaw and e-rickshaw drivers at the Langfer Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) Zone field in Bakalia town on Saturday.

Addressing the gathering, Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Dr Robert Tuolor stressed the importance of following traffic rules and road signs while driving. He said road signs installed along highways and streets must be strictly obeyed by all drivers.

He further said safe driving is not only about the passengers inside a vehicle but also about being aware of other vehicles approaching from behind and in front, as well as pedestrians. "Many people enjoy driving at high speed, but there should always be a limit to avoid accidents," he said.

Dr Tuolor also urged drivers of four-wheelers to wear seat belts and two-wheeler riders to wear helmets to minimise risks during accidents.

District Transport Officer (DTO) Bikram Aditya Gogoi explained traffic safety measures, stating that vehicles entering four-lane national

highways from link roads must give way to vehicles already moving at high speed on the highway before joining.

He also highlighted the importance of following traffic signal lights—red, yellow and green at crossings and junctions for safe movement of vehicles.

During the meeting, it was found that many auto-rickshaw and e-rickshaw drivers were operating vehicles without valid driving licences. The DTO asked them to apply online for licences by May 25.

Gogoi also appealed to drivers to follow traffic rules and road signs to prevent unnecessary road accidents. He urged people to assist accident victims by taking injured persons to the nearest health centre to save lives.

He further instructed auto-rickshaw drivers to ensure that their vehicles are fitted with proper side indicator lights.

Journalists Atul Bora and Lombar Bora, who were present at the programme, alleged that many e-rickshaw drivers in Bakalia town drive recklessly without using indicators or following traffic rules. They appealed to the drivers to be more careful on the roads.

Two killed in wild elephant rampage in Samaguri

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 16: Fear has gripped Samaguri after a wild elephant went on a rampage, killing two people and forcing several schools to close for student safety.

According to reports, the conflict between wild elephants and humans has taken a grave turn in Samaguri under the Udmari Forest Beat, which falls under the Salna Forest Range in Nagaon district. Since Thursday, a solitary elephant has been creating terror across villages in the area. On Thursday night, the elephant destroyed a house in Bajigaon, Samaguri. The situation worsened on Friday morning when two people lost their lives in separate attacks.

Sarifur Islam, a resident of Bajigaon was working in his vegetable field in the morning when the elephant attacked him, killing him on the spot. Shortly afterwards, the elephant attacked Pranab Das, a youth from Samaguri, leaving him critically injured. He was rushed to Nagaon Medical College and Hospital but succumbed to his injuries during treatment. With the help of the Forest Department, Samaguri Police sent both bodies to Nagaon Medical College and Hospital for post-mortem examination.

The Forest Department has been trying to drive the elephant back into the forest but has not succeeded so far. Due to the growing threat, several private schools in Samaguri remained closed to ensure student safety. Locals said the elephant was entering areas where wild elephants had never been seen before. It is now roaming freely in Boubazar, Paghali, Mowamari, Barma, Sonaribali and other localities, spreading panic among residents. The elephant, which strayed from the forest in search of food has also damaged large areas of maize, paddy, jute and vegetable crops.

On Thursday, three people, including a woman were injured by pellets when forest personnel resorted to aerial firing while attempting to drive the elephant away in the Barma area.

Despite announcements by the Forest Department urging people to stay alert, avoid the elephant and not gather in crowds, large numbers of locals assembled at the site. Police had to resort to a mild lath-charge to disperse them. Currently, the wild elephant continues to roam various parts of Samaguri, keeping residents in a state of fear. Locals have urged the Forest Department and district administration to take immediate and effective steps to push the elephant back into the forest.

Police seize opium worth over ₹ 50 lakh in Bokajan

Gujarat-bound SUV intercepted in Karbi Anglong; one person arrested



HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, May 16: In a major breakthrough against interstate drug trafficking, police personnel attached to the Purani Lahorijan Outpost under Dillai Police Station busted a massive contraband smuggling attempt on Friday, seizing nearly 10 kilograms of high-grade opium, locally known as Kani, valued at over ₹ 50 lakh in the international market. One person has been arrested in connection with the seizure.

According to police sources, acting on specific intelligence, a routine check and search operation was launched in the Six Mile area under the jurisdiction of the Purani Lahorijan Outpost. During the operation, security personnel intercepted a Gujarat-bound Tata Harrier bearing registration number GJ 02 DP 7022, which was travelling from Manipur towards Ra-

jasthan.

A thorough search of the intercepted SUV led to the discovery of 10 carefully packed bundles of contraband opium concealed underneath the driver's seat. The recovered consignment weighed 9.803 kilograms.

The driver of the vehicle, identified as Jagdish Ram, son of Mangilal, was immediately taken into custody. The accused is reportedly a resident of the Bobalipul Maya Bazar area in Mehsana district of Gujarat.

Preliminary investigations suggest that the consignment was being smuggled through the interstate highway network for delivery to northern markets. Police have seized the vehicle along with the contraband and launched a detailed investigation to uncover the broader backward and forward linkages of the smuggling network.

Religious organisations condemn Manipur attack

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 16: Various social organisations and religious bodies, including the National Boro Christian Council (NBCC), Inter Church Peace Mission (ICPM) and All Rabha Christian Council (ARCC) have condemned the recent killing of Christian leaders in Manipur.

On Saturday, the organisations issued a joint press statement signed by Enash Kr Basumatary, president and Mridul Baglari, general secretary of NBCC; Enash Kumar Basumatary, secretary of ICPM and Fr. Paul Rabha, president and Rev. Dr Ananta Kr Rabha, chief secretary of ARCC. The statement expressed profound grief and deep sorrow over the tragic and unfortunate incident that took place in Kongpokpi district of

Manipur on May 13, 2026 in which Rev. Dr Vumthang Sithou, Pastor Kaigoulou Lhouvum and Pastor Paogoulou Sithou lost their lives, while five others sustained serious injuries in a violent ambush.

NBCC, ICPM and ARCC strongly condemned the senseless act of violence against innocent citizens and religious leaders.

The statement said the untimely deaths of Rev. Dr Vumthang Sithou and the others were not only a great loss to the Christian community but also to society at large, as they were devoted to peace, service and the welfare of humanity.

At this painful moment, the organisations extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayed that Almighty God would grant them comfort,

strength and peace during this difficult time. They also prayed for the speedy recovery of those who were seriously injured.

The organisations earnestly appealed to all sections of society, civil society organisations, student bodies, religious groups and leaders to maintain peace, communal harmony, mutual respect and restraint. They stated that violence and hatred can never bring lasting solutions and that only dialogue, understanding, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence can restore normalcy and healing in society.

"We further urge the concerned authorities to take immediate and impartial action to ensure justice, strengthen security, and prevent such tragic incidents from recurring in the future," the statement added.

National seminar on Viksit Bharat 2047 held at KC Das Commerce College

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: A national seminar on "Viksit Bharat 2047, Thrives and Contribution Towards Sustainable and Inclusive Development" was held at KC Das Commerce College on May 15 and 16, 2026.

The seminar was organised by the Department of Economics of the college in collaboration with the National Small Industries Corporation with support from North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd and NABARD. It featured five technical sessions covering themes such as environment, agriculture, governance, infrastructure and gender in line with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

A total of 142 participants from 50 educational institutions and government organisations across states including Delhi, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Assam submitted 89 research papers.

At the inaugural session, keynote speaker Prof Ajitaya Raychaudhuri, retired professor of economics at Jadavpur University, emphasised that financial sustainability must complement environmental sustainability for long-term growth. He underlined that sustainable development is multidimensional, involving both green transition and fiscal stability, including management of government debt. He stated that India's debt remains sustainable and that fiscal space allows continued



budget deficits while maintaining manageable debt levels. He also highlighted capital formation as essential for achieving developed nation status, noting that higher public savings could support investment and income growth.

Dr Hrishikesh Baruah, Principal of KC Das Commerce College, said India's ancient heritage should guide the aspiration of Viksit Bharat 2047. Representatives from collaborating institutions, including Loken Das of NABARD and Rajesh Madan of NSIC, also addressed the gathering. MLA Vijay Gupta shared his vision for Viksit Bharat 2047, while Prof Amlan-deep Choudhury extended greetings to participants. Dr Ashok Kumar Laskar also attended the event.

The first day featured technical sessions chaired by experts from Gauhati University, University of Hyderabad, Mahatma Gandhi University, Meghalaya and Assam University, covering environmental sustainability, rural and agricul-

tural development, governance, inclusive growth and gender issues.

The plenary session focused on India's growth trajectory, with panelists including Prof Mrinal K Dutta of IIT Guwahati, Prof Nissar A. Barua of Gauhati University and representatives from NABARD and NSIC. Discussions highlighted India's economic progress, agricultural transformation through the Green Revolution and ongoing developmental challenges.

The valedictory session saw Dr Hrishikesh Baruah express satisfaction over the successful conclusion of the seminar. Dr Sumit Ghosh presented a detailed report, followed by a vote of thanks by Dr Bonoshree Bhuyan. The sessions were coordinated by Dr Upasana Chakravarty.

The seminar concluded with appreciation for participants and reaffirmed the role of academic institutions in advancing the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 through research and policy engagement.

Prime accused in Morikolong dacoity case injured in road accident in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 16: The prime accused in the dacoity at the home of a doctor couple in Morikolong was seriously injured in a road accident on Friday night.

Rajibur Rahman, one of the main accused in the dacoity at Dr Ranjit Saikia's residence at Seouj Nagar, Morikolong in Nagaon town, sustained grievous injuries in a road accident. Nagaon Police had taken Rahman along for a raid last night to trace the gold stolen by the dacoit gang.

During the operation, a vehicle rammed into the police vehicle on the four-lane Borghat bypass in Nagaon, causing the accident. Rahman suffered severe injuries to both legs below the knee. He was immediately admitted to Nagaon Medical College and Hospital and is currently undergoing treatment.

Rajibur Rahman is a resident of Nakari in Lakhimpur. Police officer Biman Gogoi and two other police personnel were also injured in the accident.

It is pertinent to mention that on the early morning of April 24, Rajibur, along with two other dacoits from Lakhimpur and with the help of local Nagaon accomplices, allegedly committed dacoity at Dr Saikia's house. Dr Saikia and his wife Ruprekha Bhuyan Saikia were grievously injured in the attack. While Dr Saikia later recovered, his wife, who had been in a coma, died on May 10 while undergoing treatment at a Guwahati-based private hospital. Nagaon Police have arrested eight persons in connection with the heinous crime and the investigation is ongoing.

Anti-dowry awareness programme held in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 16: An anti-dowry sensitisation and awareness programme was conducted on Friday evening in front of Kokrajhar University to create awareness among students and the public about the harmful social practice of dowry and the need to eradicate it from society.

The event was organised by the National Service Scheme (NSS) unit of Kokrajhar University in collaboration with IQAC, Sankalp: Hub for Women Empowerment, and the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA).

The programme was attended by distinguished guests, including Madhab Prasad Upadhyay and Daiji Basumatary. During the event, the guests highlighted the social, legal and psychological consequences of the dowry system and stressed the importance of collective social responsibility in eliminating the social evil. They also encouraged students and youths to become active agents of social change and spread awareness in society.

A major attraction of the programme was the performance of a powerful Nukkak Natak by NSS volunteers, which effectively portrayed the negative impact of the dowry system on families and women. Through their performance, the volunteers conveyed a strong message against dowry and appealed to society to promote equality, dignity and respect for women.

Obituary

Dilip Parajuli, an Assam Rifles jawan and a resident of Bordekorai, Rangachakuwa in the northern part of Jamugurih who was posted at Dimapur died while performing his duties on Thursday. He was 44. His mortal remains were brought to his Bordekorai residence on Friday by the army and was cremated with full military honour at Nameri Ghat. He was the second son of Indra Parajuli. He leaves behind his wife, father, mother, two minor sons.

Ward 15 Councillor inspects Binapani Samiti Kalimandir construction in Athgaon

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: Ward 15 Councillor Saurav Jhunjhunwala inspected the ongoing construction work of the Binapani Samiti Kalimandir situated on SC Road, Athgaon.

The community hall-cum-temple project has been initiated under the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC), for which an amount of ₹ 25 lakh has been allocated under the initiative and supervision of Councillor Saurav Jhunjhunwala.

During the inspection, Councillor Saurav Jhunjhunwala reviewed the progress of the construction work and instructed the concerned engineers and officials to ensure timely completion of the project by September 2026.

He stated that the project will serve as an important centre for religious, cultural and community activities for the local residents.

NEEA 26th Annual Conference concludes in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: The 26th Annual Conference of the North Eastern Economic Association (NEEA), organised by Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University in collaboration with Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, concluded successfully.

The two-day academic event held on May 15 and 16, 2026, brought together eminent economists, researchers, academicians, policymakers, scholars and students to deliberate on contemporary economic and developmental issues affecting Northeast India and the nation at large.

The conference commenced with an inaugural session held at the Zubeen Garg Auditorium of KKHSOU. The session began with Prof Joydeep Baruah, Director, SKBSS, KKHSOU and Chairperson of the organising committee, welcoming the distinguished guests, delegates and participants.

Dr Parag Dutta, Secretary, NEEA and organising secretary of the conference, presented a brief overview of the associa-



tion and highlighted the objectives of the conference. Delivering the inaugural address, Prof Rajendra Prasad Das, Vice-Chancellor of KKHSOU emphasised the importance of collaborative academic research in addressing regional developmental challenges and promoting inclusive sustainable growth in Northeast India. Prof Saswati Choudhury, Director,

OKDISCD, delivered the introductory remarks and stressed the need for policy-oriented research and interdisciplinary dialogue. The keynote address was delivered by Prof Surajit Mazumdar of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, while Prof Bhagirathi Panda, president of NEEA, delivered the presidential address. A major highlight of the two-day con-

ference was the Gopal Bordoloi Memorial Lecture and Atul Goswami Memorial Lecture, delivered by Prof Basanta Kumar Pradhan, Director of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai and Prof T C A Anant, former Chief Statistician of India and former Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

Panel discussions on the conference themes, broadly "Sustainable Development, Innovation, Institutions & GST in Northeast India" and "Issues of Labour Market in Northeast India," featured eminent economists and experts from leading institutions of the region.

Over the course of the conference, multiple technical sessions were organised covering a wide range of themes including sustainable development, labour markets, climate change, tourism, financial inclusion, agricultural transformation, gender studies, public health, migration, gig economy, digital finance and regional economic development.

Researchers from various universities and institutions of the Northeast presented scholarly papers addressing critical socio-economic concerns of the region and beyond.

The conference concluded with a valedictory session addressed by Subhash Chandra Das, Vice-Chancellor of Assam Skill University and Chairperson of the Governing Body of OKDISCD. He appreciated the quality of academic deliberations and emphasised the importance of continued scholarly engagement for regional development and policy formulation.

The organising committee expressed gratitude to all speakers, delegates, researchers, faculty members, students and volunteers for their active participation, reaffirming the commitment of NEEA, KKHSOU and OKDISCD towards promoting meaningful academic discourse on issues concerning Northeast India and the wider national economy.

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Jolchhobi - Bornom's powerful stage adaptation

The narrative of the play progresses around the life struggle and tragic old age of a woman named Suvarnajyoti. Suvarnajyoti was not an ordinary woman. Though she was highly intelligent in her studies despite being born into a conservative Brahmin family, social customs led to her marriage with tea garden manager Ramesh before she even attained maturity. However, Ramesh was a modern-minded and farsighted husband. Instead of confining his wife to household duties, he encouraged her towards the pursuit of knowledge. An ideal marital relationship gradually developed between them. But in the cruel irony of fate, Ramesh met with a terrible accident. The immense courage and patience displayed by Suvarnajyoti during that period were truly rare. Leaving behind her tender child at home and travelling alone across the Bay of Bengal for her husband's treatment made Suvarnajyoti a rebellious and powerful character for that society and time. The woman who fought countless hardships with a smile in order to restore her husband's health ultimately being defeated by her own mind and memory in the twilight of life deeply shakes the audience.



By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Old age is an inevitable and deeply sensitive phase in the journey of human life. During this period, every individual has to confront not only physical weakness but also a profound mental loneliness. In today's rapidly changing mechanical social system, this loneliness among elderly people has assumed an alarming form. Taking advantage of this isolation, the prevalence of dreadful memory-loss diseases like Alzheimer's has been increasing worryingly among elderly people in recent times. Alzheimer's is not merely a physical disease; it is a cruel process that gradually destroys a person's identity, existence, and the memories accumulated over a lifetime. A person affected by this disease slowly forgets his or her loved ones and becomes detached from the present, getting lost in some dark abyss of the past. In such a condition, the family members often go through even greater mental suffering than the patient. Without immense patience, sincerity, and affection, caring for an Alzheimer's patient becomes impossible. It was around this sensitive and contemporary subject that one of the most renowned writers of Assamese literature and popular novelist Anuradha Sarmah Pujari wrote one of her finest novels, 'Jolchhobi', in 2014. Recently, based on this novel, the theatrical production 'Jolchhobi', staged with two shows every night on 2nd and 3rd May under the initiative of 'Bornom' of Biswanath Chariali, with adaptation by noted playwright Abinash Sarmah and powerful direction by acclaimed theatre director Kushal Deka, succeeded in leaving a deep impression on the hearts of the audience.

Bringing a popular and emotionally heavy novel into the limited space of a stage is always a major challenge for both the director and the playwright. It can be said without hesitation that playwright Abinash Sharma made honest use of the creative freedom granted to him by original author Anuradha Sharma Pujari and provided a meaningful dramatic adaptation while preserving the soul of the novel. Right from the beginning of the play, the audience witnesses a picture of deep loneliness. Inside a room stands an elderly woman alone, gazing outside through the window. The way light and shadow play within the room symbolically represents the battle between memory and forgetfulness unfolding within the woman's mind. This very first scene gives a forewarning of the depth of the play's overall subject matter. At every moment, the acting, direction, lighting control, and background music successfully carry the confusing psychological condition of an Alzheimer's patient into the minds of the audience.

The narrative of the play progresses around the life struggle and tragic old age of a woman named Suvarnajyoti. Suvarnajyoti was not an ordinary woman. Though she was highly intelligent in her studies despite being born into a conservative Brahmin family, social customs led

to her marriage with tea garden manager Ramesh before she even attained maturity. However, Ramesh was a modern-minded and farsighted husband. Instead of confining his wife to household duties, he encouraged her towards the pursuit of knowledge. An ideal marital relationship gradually developed between them. But in the cruel irony of fate, Ramesh met with a terrible accident. The immense courage and patience displayed by Suvarnajyoti during that period were truly rare. Leaving behind her tender child at home and travelling alone across the Bay of Bengal for her husband's treatment made Suvarnajyoti a rebellious and powerful character for that society and time. The woman who fought countless hardships with a smile in order to restore her husband's health ultimately being defeated by her own mind and memory in the twilight of life deeply shakes the audience. Actress Nibedita Bharali brought the character of Suvarnajyoti alive on stage. Her precise portrayal of the psychological reactions of an Alzheimer's patient—the unnecessary anger, suspicion, fear, and memory lapses—was truly commendable. During old age, people generally fear death. Having already lost her husband and son, Suvarnajyoti refuses to accept this ultimate truth of life under any circumstance. She tries to escape whenever death is mentioned. When her daughter and son-in-law leave home due to work, the loneliness of the house makes her restless. She wants the house to always remain full of people and alive with human voices. But reality does not always follow the desires of the mind. Being compelled to spend the day only with the household helper Roma creates an intense inner conflict within her. She often vents her frustration and helplessness upon Roma. The actress portrayed with remarkable finesse Suvarnajyoti's anger, her desperate longing to return to her own home the very next moment, and the childlike joy that appears on her face while recalling old memories.

Another highly important character is Mani, Suvarnajyoti's daughter. Through Mani's character, the play beautifully presents the mental condition of modern working women and the challenges they face while fulfilling responsibilities toward their parents, breathed life into the role of Mani. As a daughter, Mani loves her mother immensely. She is aware of the hardships her mother endured in the past, and therefore re-

mains determined to provide every possible comfort to her mother in her final years. However, her mother's behaviour due to Alzheimer's gradually becomes unbearable for her. When her mother begins looking at her own daughter with suspicion, believes poison has been mixed into her food, hides prescribed medicines, and falsely accuses her daughter of trying to kill her in front of her son-in-law, Mani's heart breaks apart. Returning exhausted from work and facing such abnormal behaviour from her mother sometimes causes Mani to lose her patience. She shouts at her mother and even utters words she should not say in anger. Yet in the very next moment, she is consumed by remorse. She rebukes herself asking, "What is happening to me?" Mani's psychological conflict, her genuine love for her mother, and the instability created under the pressure of reality were all communicated directly into the hearts of the audience through Archana Sharma's performance. The character of Rideep, Mani's husband, maintains a sense of balance within the play. Portrayed by Milan Das, Rideep appears calm, composed, and realistic. He is someone who has learned to accept the truths of life naturally. Amidst his mother-in-law's illness and his wife Mani's emotional instability, Rideep stands like a dependable support system. Preventing situations from escalating, he handles the entire household with affection and tact. He also supports the domestic helper Roma at every step. Hemangi Saikia's portrayal of Roma was equally natural and praiseworthy. The scenes where she silently tolerates all the insults, suspicions, and harsh behaviour of elderly Suvarnajyoti while continuing to perform her duties reveal the real hardships faced by those caring for Alzheimer's patients.

The most powerful and emotional moment of the play emerges towards the very end. Having reached the final stage of Alzheimer's, the mother one day calls her daughter close and places some money in her hand, saying that her daughter and son-in-law have spent a lot on her for so long, and therefore she is giving this money in return. The helplessness and guilt hidden behind this simple statement leave the audience teary-eyed. Soon after, the mother insists on returning to her old home and slips while entering the bathroom for a bath, injuring her head. Seeing her unconscious mother lying on a hospital bed, the daughter can no longer bear the pain.



Witnessing her mother's slow suffering, Mani expresses before her husband a wish for her mother's mercy death. Mani feels that death might perhaps offer her mother true peace rather than such painful survival. Yet the same daughter who wished for her mother's death to relieve her suffering completely breaks down when she finally receives the news of her mother's death from the hospital. Burying her face in her husband's chest, the agonizing cries with which she collapses into grief leave the entire auditorium silent. Director Kushal Deka presented this scene with extraordinary beauty and sensitivity. At the end of the play, two child side characters are introduced. These roles were beautifully performed by Kapil and Aratrika. The lighting design and projection were by Tapan Goswami, stage design by Kushal Deka, stage construction by, and production control by Tapan Goswami.

Ultimately, it can be said that the play 'Jolchhobi' carries a deeply significant message for society. Old age and Alzheimer's are not merely subjects of medical science; they are profound social and familial issues. Just as the body's immunity weakens with age, the strength of the mind too gradually declines. Elderly people begin to feel like burdens upon society and their families. This inferiority complex and fear of death bring extreme despair into their lives. During such times, medicines and hospitals alone cannot heal them. What they truly need is the presence of family members, affectionate words,

and someone patient enough to listen to them. Just as parents sacrifice all their self-interest and raise a child with endless patience, similarly children too must show equal patience and care during their parents' old age. People suffering from Alzheimer's may behave abnormally, may become angry, or may even forget their loved ones, but those are not intentional acts; they are symptoms of the disease itself. Family members must deeply realize this truth.

Just as every phase of life is embraced with warmth, old age too must be accepted with the same sincerity. It is the responsibility of children to make their elderly parents feel that they are not burdens upon the family but rather blessings whose presence enriches the household. Reviving their old memories, spending time with them, and rekindling their attachment toward life should become the foremost duty of every child. Through the creation of Anuradha Sharma Pujari, the dramatic adaptation of Abinash Sharma, and the direction of Kushal Deka, the play 'Jolchhobi' has succeeded in planting all these questions and realizations deep within the minds of the audience. In terms of acting, background score, lighting, and stage design, this play stands as a valuable addition to Assamese theatre. As audience members, getting the opportunity to witness such a thoughtful play is truly a matter of fortune, and undoubtedly it will play a strong role in building a healthy and sensitive outlook toward old age and Alzheimer's disease among people across every level of society.



Seeds of Resilience: Why Assam must strengthen community seed sovereignty

By: Mowsam Hazarika

In the villages of Assam, one often encounters a quiet but powerful tradition — the careful selection and preservation of seeds for the next season. It is not merely a farming practice; it is a philosophy shaped by generations of intimate engagement with land, water, and climate. In an age of rapid agricultural transformation, this tradition holds lessons that are both urgent and globally relevant.

During my years of engagement with agriculture across Assam, I have observed that farmers rarely treat seeds as a simple input. For them, seeds embody memory — of floods survived, droughts endured, pests resisted, and soils nurtured. A farmer in Nalbari or Sontipur does not just sow a crop; he or she sows accumulated wisdom. This understanding forms the foundation of what we now describe as commu-

nity seed systems.

Assam's agro-ecological diversity — from the floodplains of the Brahmaputra valley to the uplands and hill ecosystems — has historically nurtured a rich repository of indigenous crop varieties. Traditional paddy varieties such as those tolerant to submergence or capable of surviving erratic rainfall patterns have long served as natural insurance against climatic uncertainties. Similarly, indigenous pulses, oilseeds, and millets have supported nutritional security while maintaining soil health.

However, this resilient system is increasingly under strain. The gradual shift toward hybrid and commercially controlled seeds has introduced a different agricultural logic — one driven by uniformity, external inputs, and market dependency. While such seeds may promise higher yields in the short term, they often come with hidden

costs: the need for fertilizers, pesticides, and assured irrigation, all of which may not align with Assam's fragile and variable ecological conditions.

More importantly, this transition risks eroding farmers' autonomy. When seeds must be purchased each season and cannot be replanted, the farmer's role shifts from a custodian of knowledge to a consumer within a larger commercial system. In a state like Assam, where the majority of

farmers are smallholders, this dependency can deepen economic vulnerability.

It is here that community seed banks emerge as a critical alternative. These are not merely storage facilities; they are living institutions that conserve biodiversity, knowledge, and local resilience. A well-functioning seed bank in a village acts as a collective memory — preserving diverse varieties, facilitating seed exchange, and ensuring that farmers retain access to



crops suited to their specific micro-environments.

In the context of Assam's recurring floods and changing rainfall patterns, such diversity is not optional; it is essential. A single uniform crop variety cannot withstand the ecological uncertainties that define the region. Diversity in seeds translates directly into resilience in the field.

Furthermore, community seed banks strengthen what may be termed seed sovereignty — the right of farmers to save, use, exchange, and decide the future of their seeds. This autonomy is crucial not only for economic stability but also for fostering innovation at the grassroots level. Farmers who control their seeds are more likely to experiment, adapt, and evolve practices suited to local realities.

There is also a broader ecological dimension. Traditional mixed cropping systems, supported by di-

verse seeds, contribute to soil fertility, reduce pest outbreaks, and sustain biodiversity. In contrast, monoculture systems — often associated with commercial seed regimes — simplify ecosystems and increase vulnerability.

Yet, despite their importance, indigenous seed varieties in Assam are steadily disappearing. This is not because they are inferior, but because they are invisible within market-driven supply chains that favour uniformity and scale. As these varieties vanish, so too does the knowledge embedded within them — knowledge that cannot be recreated in laboratories.

The way forward is not to reject scientific advancement, but to rebalance our approach. Modern agricultural research must work in partnership with traditional knowledge systems rather than replacing them. Institutions, policymakers, and agricultural agencies must

recognise community seed banks as strategic assets and invest in their strengthening.

Assam, with its rich agrarian heritage and ecological sensitivity, is uniquely positioned to lead this paradigm shift. By promoting decentralized seed systems, encouraging farmer-led conservation, and integrating indigenous knowledge into formal frameworks, the state can build a model of agriculture that is both productive and sustainable.

Ultimately, the question is not just about seeds; it is about the future of farming itself. Will it be a system rooted in dependency and uniformity, or one grounded in diversity, resilience, and local wisdom?

The answer may well lie in the hands of those farmers who, season after season, quietly set aside their best seeds — not for immediate gain, but for the continuity of life itself.

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JATI MATI BHETI - A responsible expression of national consciousness

By: Ranjan Bora

For Assam and the Assamese people, the words 'Jati-Mati-Bheti' are not merely a political slogan; they symbolize a historical consciousness, a self-memory, and a deep resolve to protect existence and identity. Embedded within these three words are the spiritual relationship of a people with their land, the pride of a distinct culture, and the responsibility of preserving a secure identity for future generations. The foundation of a nation can never emerge out of emptiness; it requires a strong soil upon which the people can stand and carry forward their language, literature, and philosophy of life. But when, against the backdrop of

this necessity is the book titled 'Jati Mati Bheti'.

This special book clearly reflects the present condition and mentality of the Assamese people. The book does not attempt to take shelter in any form of imagination or aggressive nationalist emotion. Rather, it tries to objectively unveil those harsh realities which we often ignore or hesitate to discuss. The author has brought together sixteen different yet interconnected essays in this volume. The depth of the book can be understood even through the titles of its subjects. Here, topics such as Jati Mati Bheti, Will the Assamese Become Minorities in Assam Itself?, The Decline of National Consciousness, Self-Respecting Assamese Nationality and De-

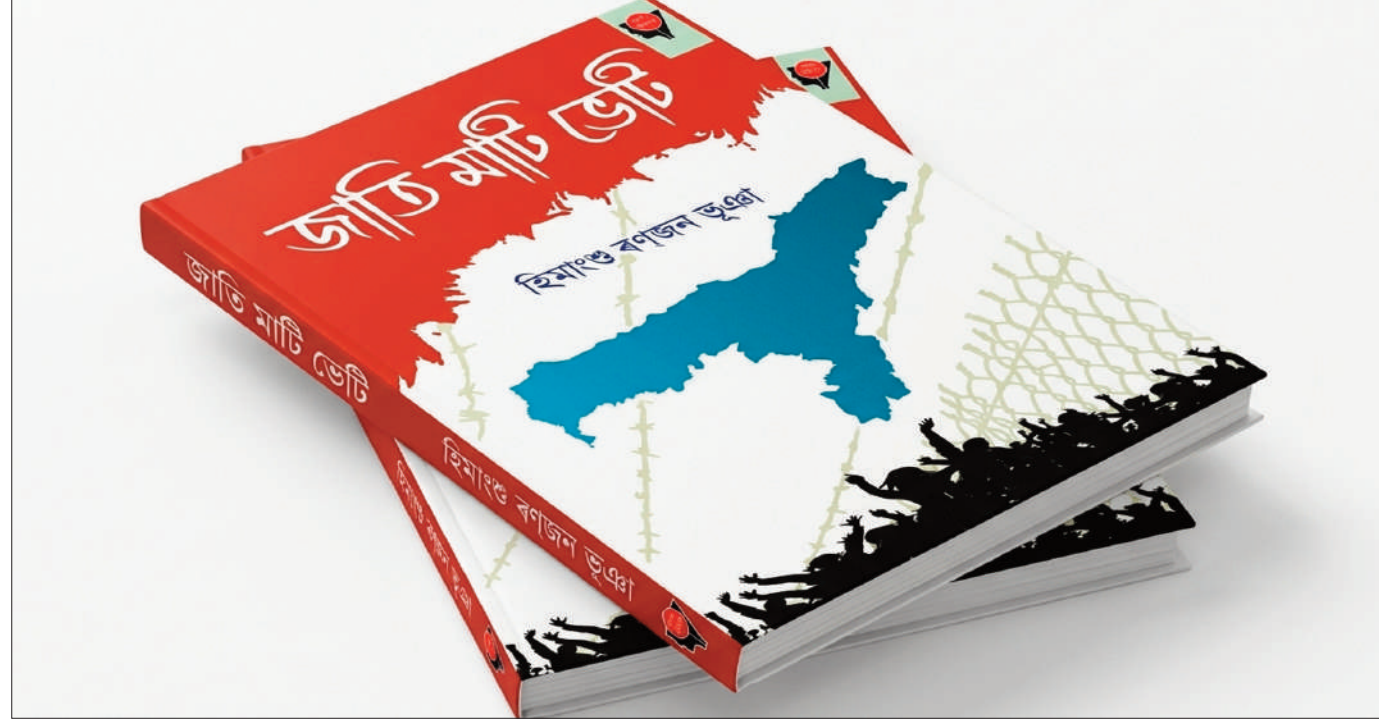
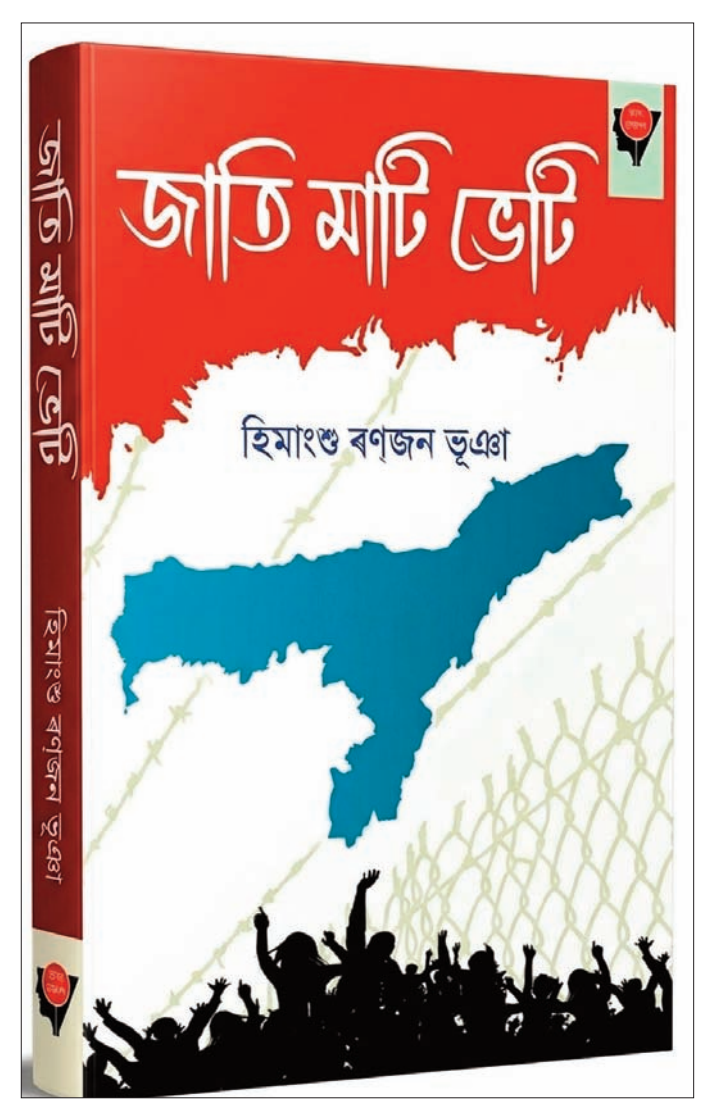
Arena, Festival-loving Assamese Society, and Rootless Generation, all of which encompass every sensitive aspect of Assamese social life. These titles are not merely a collection of words; rather, each essay represents a specific and important chapter in the struggle for the survival of the Assamese nation.

Looking at the analytical aspect of the book, it becomes evident that it strongly criticises the Assamese people's aversion to work, excessive emotionalism, and economic paralysis. The discussions and reactions regarding external aggression in Assam are rooted mainly in our own reluctance towards work culture and our attraction towards an easy lifestyle. Because of a mentality that fails

and resources, its long-term survival becomes endangered in the flow of time. Criticising the irrational emotional outbursts of Assamese society, the book states that the greatest challenge before the Assamese nation today is to maintain a balance between emotion and reason. We often become excessively emotional while searching for solutions to national problems, but in reality, what is needed is a long-term political will and a strong plan for protecting indigenous existence. The author also expresses deep concern regarding the dangerous tendency of losing ownership over land. The mentality of selling ancestral property for temporary comfort or luxury and migrating towards cities is ultimately turning indige-

considerable logical discussion has been presented regarding how much Assamese content exists in the vast world of the internet and how the language can preserve its identity in the digital age. The book also offers an analytical discussion on the contemporary intellectual poverty of society. We are gradually transforming into a festival-loving community where external extravagance has taken precedence over mental and intellectual growth. The book courageously highlights the fear that behind this festival-oriented mentality lies a lack of work culture and creativity that may push us towards a dark future. The most important issue is the rootless new generation, a generation that is drifting away from its language, culture, and the fragrance of its soil while blindly chasing mechanical modernity. How this generation can be brought back to the roots of its national identity is one of the central concerns of the book. A beautiful direction has been provided regarding the practical steps needed to take the philosophy and creations of the great saint Srimanta Sankardev to the global stage. At the same time, the book very smoothly portrays how rapid demographic changes are pushing our future into deep uncertainty and how the lack of political will is shrinking the space of the indigenous people.

Truly speaking, 'Jati Mati Bheti' is not an ordinary book; it is an intellectual effort to sow the seeds of logic in the minds of the Assamese people in place of mere emotion. The author has attempted to trace the roots of social and national problems. Covering every small and large aspect of public life, all the essays included in the book have been prepared from an analytical perspective. Written in a simple, lucid yet powerful and homely Assamese prose style, the book compels readers to continue reading without interruption. The sentence construction and choice of words are so smooth that they directly enter the hearts and minds of readers. Through logic, the author proves that the struggle for survival is not to be fought merely on the streets, but rather in the fields, factories, schools, and business establishments. Filled with impartial analysis and farsighted thinking, this book deserves to be present and read in the home of



present-day society and reality, we cast our eyes around us, we feel a deep stream of uncertainty and anxiety. Amidst rapidly changing demographic patterns, cultural aggression, linguistic contraction, and socio-economic competition, the rights and distinct identity of the Assamese people seem to be gradually fading away. At such a sensitive and alarming time, the need has arisen to analyse society not through emotion, but through logic, responsibility, and a realistic perspective. Giving practical shape to

pendency, Excessive Emotionalism, The Dominance of Non-Assamese on Assamese Soil, Protection of Indigenous Identity and Political Will and several others have been mercilessly analysed. Alongside these are essays on Rapid Demographic Changes and Future Anxiety, The Future of Assamese National Identity, Classical Status of Assamese Language, Linguistic Aggression, Assamese Content on the Internet, The Present Intellectual Poverty of Assamese Society, Srimanta Sankardev in the Global

to understand the dignity of labour and considers physical work inferior, the markets of Assam today have entirely gone into the hands of others. Without accepting this reality, a proper evaluation of the problem is impossible. The book presents a frightening picture of how this economic dependence has paved the way for political and social subjugation. The author very realistically explains that no matter how rich the language and culture of a nation may be, if that nation does not control its own market

nous people into minorities on their own land.

The present condition of Assamese language and culture and the challenges of the future have also been discussed in the book with remarkable subtlety. Although the recognition of Assamese as a classical language is a matter of pride for us, the concerns expressed in the book regarding linguistic aggression and the position of our language in a globalised environment are thought-provoking for every conscious Assamese individual. Con-

every Assamese person in contemporary times so that we may reclaim our fading self-respect and stand before the world as a hardworking nation. It is hoped that this collection will emerge as a guiding force for the younger generation and play an important role in the overall welfare of society.

The creator of such a realistic and thought-provoking book is none other than Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan, a well-known writer, drama critic, and established young litterateur of contemporary Assamese literary and cultural circles. Born in Jamugurihat, a historically rich place in Sonitpur district, this socially conscious writer has been regularly contributing articles to various newspapers and magazines of Assam since his student days, beginning from 2006, and has now successfully built a distinct identity for himself in the fields of journalism, literature, and theatre in Assam. His powerful prose and impartial analysis have always attracted readers. Till now, he has contributed several noteworthy books to Assamese literature, among which 'Chiraj Draupadi' Aru

Anyanya Gadya' (2015), 'Jiyabharali Polash' (2017), the poetry collection 'Mor Preyasir Biya' (2017), 'Sampratik Samay - Prasangik Chinta' (2018), and 'Bishoy - Natak' (2022) are prominent. Not only in prose literature, but also as a dedicated theatre enthusiast, he has regularly published critical writings on dramas staged across Assam in newspapers and magazines. In addition, his research-oriented discussions on many timeless plays, dramatists, and theatrical traditions of Assamese drama literature have become valuable assets for the literary world. In recognition of his remarkable contributions to literature and theatre, he has already received four national-level awards and most recently earned the prestigious 'Yuva Lekhak Samman 2025' from the Government of Assam, proving his merit and talent. His latest book 'Jati Mati Bheti' and the path of self-introspection it has shown to Assamese society are truly commendable, and it can confidently be said that the book will serve as a reliable guide for the younger generation in the days to come.

Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan's *Jati Mati Bheti*: A call for self-analysis

By: Lalit Nath

In the contemporary landscape of Assamese journalism, literature, and theatre, Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan is a well-regarded name. Hailing from Jamugurihat in Sonitpur district, Bhuyan has been a prolific writer since his student days. His insightful essays have appeared regularly in leading Assamese dailies and journals since 2006. With five significant publications to his credit—including the essay collections *Siraj Draupadi* and *Anyanya Gadya* (2015), *Sampratik Samay - Prasangik Chinta* (2018) and *Bishay: Natak* (2022), the non-fiction work *Jiyabharali Polash* (2017), alongside his collection of poems *Mor Preyasir Biya*—he has established the profound depth of his intellectual horizon. His contributions to literary criticism, particularly in the fields of drama and stagecraft, earned him the prestigious 'Yuva Lekhak Samman' from the Government of Assam in 2025. His latest work, *Jati Mati Bheti*, published by the renowned *Bhasha Prakashan*, arrives as a timely and vital addition to the socio-political discourse of Assam.

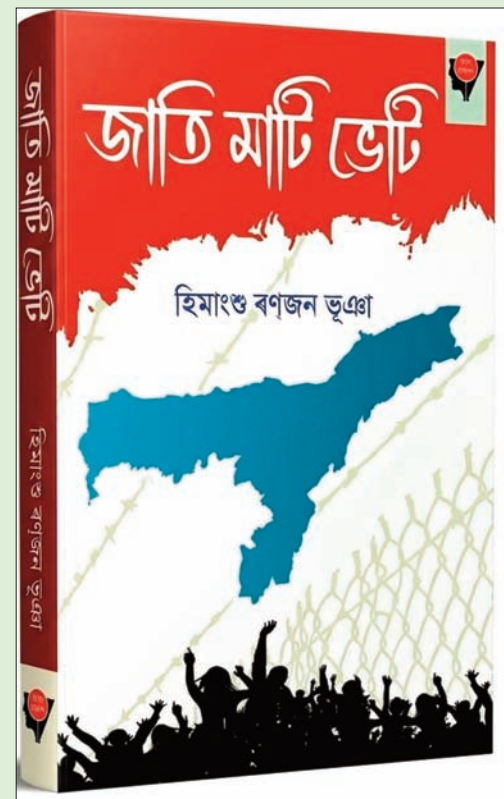
In the preface, Bhuyan addresses a sensitive reality: the phrase 'Jati, Mati, Bheti' has largely been reduced to a mere political slogan or electoral gimmick. However, he argues that these words represent our deep historical consciousness, collective memory and existential resolve for survival. Dedicated to the memory of the legendary artist Zubeen Garg, the book establishes an emotional yet fiercely nationalistic tone from the outset.

Rather than imposing direct conclusions, Bhuyan meticulously dissects the chaotic and directionless state of modern Assamese society, urging readers to engage in critical thinking. The essays—ranging from 'Assamote Bhogoniya Hobo Niki Axomiya' to 'Bhashik Agraxon'—form a cohesive narrative centered on the existential crisis of the Assamese people and the search for pragmatic solutions.

Bhuyan's writing is devoid of artificiality or false consolation. He turns a mirror to society, exposing the deep-seated structural and psychological weaknesses we often attempt to hide. A major theme in the book is the widespread shunning of physical labour and the utter neglect of ancestral land, which has forced the community into a state of economic dependency.

He highlights how a lack of control over the local economy and markets has eroded national pride. Bhuyan argues logically that no race can survive solely on cultural slogans if it is not economically self-reliant. He attributes the current crisis—where indigenous people must struggle for basic rights on their own land—to an overly emotional psyche that routinely ignores harsh material realities.

The author also targets 'intellectual hypocrisy,' questioning whether Assamese society is truly progressing or merely wearing a superficial mask of modernity. He posits that a nation's core strength lies in its work culture and self-respect. By relying on



outsiders for daily necessities, the community is becoming increasingly parasitic—a psychological malady that Bhuyan analyzes with great depth. He calls for an urgent shift in mindset where every form of manual and intellectual labour is accorded equal dignity.

As a playwright, Bhuyan employs a distinctive prose style—sometimes sharp and concise, at other times analytical and expansive. One of the most critical sections of the book deals with linguistic aggression. He warns that a growing indifference toward the mother tongue, especially among the younger generation, is shaking the very foundation of the Assamese identity. While acknowledging the necessity of global knowledge and technology, he reminds readers that an 'uprooted tree cannot survive a storm.' The responsibility for revival, he notes, begins at home, with elders actively fostering a rich linguistic and cultural environment. Though written in lucid, accessible Assamese, the message of *Jati Mati Bheti* is profound. Bhuyan does not stop at identifying structural failures; he offers a pragmatic roadmap for recovery through continuous self-analysis, a renewed work culture, and absolute self-reliance.

At this critical juncture in Assam's history, Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan's book stands out as a courageous and timely intervention. It is not just a book to be read, but a manual for introspection that challenges every conscious citizen to rethink their duty toward their land, language and heritage.

The blind race for marks and the loss of childhood

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

"In this race for marks, childhood became sad. The cloak of hope weighed heavy on the shoulders."

In a developing country like India, education has always been considered a means of respect and progress. Education not only provides knowledge, but also provides understanding of life, social awareness, and direction for a better future. However, over time, the nature of education has changed, and today, the situation has become such that education is simply about scoring high marks and outdoing the competition. Children are evaluated not on their personality, behavior, creativity, or sensitivity, but on their marksheet percentage. As a result, childhood is groaning under the burden of pressure, stress, and expectations.

Today, every parent wants their child to top the class, score the highest marks, and achieve a prestigious position in society. This desire is natural, as every parent wants a bright future for their children. The problem begins when this desire becomes an expectation, and this expectation gradually turns into pressure. Little attention is paid to the child's interests, abilities, and pursuits. The primary concern becomes marks and rank.

The current education system has made children's lives highly competitive. In addition to schoolwork, coaching, tuition, online classes, and assignments have taken up most of their day. Earlier, children played in the fields in the evenings, climbed trees, and laughed and ran with friends, but today their childhood is confined between books and screens. The playground has been reduced to a mobile screen, and worry about results has replaced free-spirited laughter. Every year, after exam results are announced, society's behavior further impacts children's mental health. Children who score high marks are often labeled "brilliant" by society, while those who score relatively low are often seen as inferior. This comparison creates a sense of inferiority in children. Many become overwhelmed with stress, depression, and fear. Sadly, some children even resort to suicide due to exam failure. This situation indicates a failure not only of the education system, but of society as a whole.

Today, the biggest impact on children is "comparison." "Look how much Sharmaji's son studies." "He got 98 percent, why didn't you?"—such statements deeply hurt children's minds. Comparison never inspires; instead, it weakens self-confidence. Every child is unique in their abilities, thinking, and talents. Some may excel in music, some in sports, some in painting, and some in writing. But our education system and social thinking consider success to be limited to becoming a doctor, engineer, or administrative officer.

Another important question is whether sim-

ply scoring high marks guarantees success in life. Both history and the present bear witness to the extraordinary achievements of many great individuals despite mediocre educational attainments. Success comes not from mere bookish knowledge, but from courage, patience, creativity, sensitivity, and hard work. If education fails to transform a person into a good human being, it is incomplete.

Today's children are technologically astute, but they are becoming increasingly isolated emotionally. With both parents working, the breakdown of joint families, and the rise of mobile phone culture, children are receiving less communication and emotional support. They are unable to openly share their problems. Consequently, the pressure of exams and the future breaks them from within. Instead of being a joyful environment, the educational environment is becoming one of fear.

The growing culture of coaching institutes has also exacerbated this problem. Big advertisements showcasing the faces of toppers create the impression in children and parents that success is only achieved through fierce competition and persistent study. Children are being trained like machines. Their creativity and independent thinking are gradually being eroded. Education is no longer a learning process, but rather a marks-making factory.

The most tragic situation is when children feel burdened by their parents' dreams. They fear that if they get low marks, they will disappoint their family. This fear weakens them mentally. Sometimes, parents unwittingly make their children feel that their love depends on their marks. What children need most is unconditional acceptance and emotional security.

We must understand that the true purpose of education is not just to get a job. The goal of education should be to develop humanity, sensitivity, morality, and self-confidence. If a child learns to help others, respect their parents, become responsible towards society, and remain mentally healthy, that is true education.

Children should be allowed to pursue their interests. If a child enjoys music, they should be allowed to pursue it. If someone is interested in sports, acting, writing, art, or any other field, they should be respected. Every talent is important. Society must understand that the world isn't just run by doctors and engineers, but also by artists, teachers, farmers, writers, scientists, musicians, and athletes.

Parents and teachers have a greater responsibility here. Instead of scolding and scaring children, it's essential to understand and motivate them. If a child fails, they should be reassured that failure isn't the end, but an opportunity to learn. Sometimes, life's greatest successes are born from failures. Schools should also move beyond exam-centric education and focus on personality development, creative activities, and moral education. Children should be encouraged to think and understand rather than simply memorize. Education should inspire curiosity and joy, not fear and stress.

The government and society must also be serious about children's mental health. Schools should strengthen counseling systems. Parents also need to be periodically educated about the harmful effects of putting unnecessary pressure on children. Today, we need to redefine education and success. We should see children not just as marks-making machines, but as sensitive and creative human beings. We should make them realize that their value is far greater than their marksheet.

If we truly want to raise the next generation to be happy, healthy, and confident, we must break away from the blind pursuit of grades. Let children play, dream, fail, and then get back up and move on. Because life isn't just about test scores, it's a beautiful amalgamation of experiences, struggles, emotions, and relationships.

Ultimately it would be appropriate to say that "Good marks are not important, the person who becomes great is important." (Dr Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)



India's aspirations 'no longer limited to its borders': Modi 'Amrit Kaal' proving to be 'Mrit Kaal' for students: Cong on NEET row

THE HAGUE, May 16: Describing India as a "land of opportunities", Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that the country is undergoing an "unprecedented transformation" and its aspirations are "no longer limited to its borders".

Addressing the Indian community in The Hague, the Prime Minister also said that India is dreaming big and its youth aspires to reach the sky.

"India of the 21st century is a land of opportunities. India is both technology-driven and humanity-driven. India is becoming as modern as it is ancient. Therefore, this is also the time to connect with your ancestral villages in India, and to participate in the journey of developed India," Modi said in his over 40-minute speech.

He urged all "friends of India" in the Netherlands to increase co-operation with India as much as possible. "This will also increase India's potential, and the return on your investments will also be higher. This is Modi's guarantee," he said, amid applause from the audience. "Today, our India is dreaming big. Today, the country is saying - we don't just want transformation, we want the best. And we don't just want the best, we want the fastest. And that's why when aspirations are unlimited in India, efforts are also becoming limitless," he said.

Modi said the youth of India want to touch the sky now, and cited that as a reason behind India's startup ecosystem getting stronger. "Now we are the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world," he added.

"India's aspirations today are no longer limited to its borders. India



wants to host the Olympics, become a global manufacturing hub, emerge as a leader in green energy and become the growth engine of the world," he said.

Modi said that India is currently experiencing an "unprecedented transformation". He further said: "You must have seen recently that India hosted the world's largest and most successful AI Summit. Before that, India also successfully hosted the G20 Summit. And this was not a one-time event. This has now become the character of today's India." "India reached the moon where no one could reach before", said Modi, referring to India's space mission.

India made history when its Chandrayaan-3 mission successfully executed a soft landing on the lunar far side - often referred to as the 'dark side' - in 2023.

Recalling how India had only four unicorns in 2014, Modi on Saturday said the country now has nearly 125 active unicorns.

"Today, our startups are doing remarkable work in AI, defence, and the space sector. This culture of research and innovation is becoming even more expansive," he

said. The PM said India's aspiration-driven journey is also strengthening its democracy, mentioning the recently held assembly elections in several regions.

"This time, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry witnessed nearly 80-90 per cent voter turnout. Women's participation also increased significantly, and this trend is visible across every state. Today, voters in India are enthusiastic. We feel proud that voting records are being broken every year," he said.

India values the democratic participation of every citizen, the prime minister said. Calling India the "Mother of Democracy", Modi said it is "a matter of great pride for all of us."

Modi also took a jibe at the opposition parties, asking the audience if the popular snack Jhalmuri has reached The Hague as well.

During campaigning ahead of the recently held assembly elections in West Bengal, Modi was seen enjoying Jhalmuri at a local shop. His party later won the elections in the state with a sweeping majority. Modi on Saturday said the Netherlands will become the

"natural gateway" for Indian businesses to enter Europe and added that the Indian diaspora can serve as a trusted bridge in this journey.

Referring to the COVID pandemic, global conflicts, and the energy crisis caused by the ongoing conflict in West Asia, Modi said this decade is becoming a "decade of challenges" for the world.

"If these situations are not changed rapidly, the achievements of the past several decades will be washed away. The vast majority of the world's population will again slip into the quagmire of poverty," he warned. Modi said India and the Netherlands are working together to create a trusted, transparent and future-ready supply chain.

"From energy security to water security, the Netherlands and India are working together. Our cooperation on green hydrogen is very important. And the historic trade agreement between India and the EU will further strengthen the partnership between India and the Netherlands," he added.

Underlining that the Netherlands is known for tulips, Modi said India is known for the lotus. "Both tulips and the lotus teach us that whether the roots are in water or on the earth, if proper nutrition is given, one gains both beauty and strength," he said, adding that this is also the basis of the partnership between India and the Netherlands. Modi also said both countries are doing a lot together in the field of sports. Hailing the Indian community's contribution to Netherlands' cricket, Modi said, "We all feel great when we see Teja Nidamanuru and Vikramjit Singh in the Netherlands jersey, or when young players like Aryan Dutt contribute to the future of Dutch cricket." (PTI)

NEW DELHI, May 16: Amid the NEET cancellation row, the Congress on Saturday alleged that under the Modi government, the 'Amrit Kaal' is proving to be 'Mrit Kaal (era of death)' for students preparing for recruitment examinations and demanded Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation.

The opposition party claimed that Pradhan doesn't appear to be cut out for the task and said that while Prime Minister Narendra Modi gives great publicity to his annual "Pariksha pe Charcha extravaganza", what is needed is "Pariksha ki Samiksha (review of exams)".

Taking a swipe at Modi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said he must hold a "Pariksha leaks pe charcha (discussion on exam leaks)", asserting that mere silence will achieve nothing. "Under the Modi government, the 'Amrit Kaal' is proving to be 'Mrit Kaal' for students preparing for recruitment examinations," Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

"According to reports, several students have committed suicide due to the trauma caused by the NEET paper leak scandal. Ritik Mishra from Lakhimpur Kheri, 20-year-old Anshika Pandey from Delhi, Pradeep Meghwal from Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, and a student from Bengaluru residing in Goa -- all have taken this tragic, suicidal step," Kharge said.

"Some had harboured this dream since childhood; others staked everything on fulfilling their families' expectations, spending years in preparation. Yet, the



Modi government's corrupt and incompetent system has trampled upon their dreams," he said.

Under the Modi regime, more than 90 examination papers have been leaked, he claimed, adding that over 90 million students and their families have been adversely affected.

"The raging fire of unemployment is already destroying the future of the youth. Now, a paper-leak mafia -- operating under the patronage of the BJP -- is tearing to shreds the government's claims of conducting examinations in a fair and transparent manner," the Congress chief said.

"Prime Minister Modi has now even started engaging in 'fact-checking' himself... Yesterday, he tweeted about the 'Ease of Living', yet he maintained a complete silence regarding the NEET paper leak and the ensuing student suicides," Kharge said.

The officials implicated in the 2024 NEET paper leak have not faced any punishment and instead, they have been rewarded with lu-

crative and plum postings, he alleged.

This is precisely why the future of the youth is being "looted" year after year, he claimed.

The situation has become so dire that even the Delhi Medical Association has now written a letter to the Union education minister, Kharge said.

"The water has now risen above our heads; the situation has become completely untenable," he said. "The Union education minister must resign immediately," Kharge said.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh flagged the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education's recommendations on the National Testing Agency (NTA), sharing a media report on it on X.

"The Modi Government's education ecosystem -- populated by third-rate academic mediocrities -- has proven itself to be supremely incompetent, politicised, and corrupt over the last few years," Ramesh alleged. (PTI)

Bengal: TMC's fact-finding teams visit 3 districts

KOLKATA, May 16: The Trinamool Congress on Saturday said its fact-finding teams have visited three districts of West Bengal, where party workers were allegedly attacked by "BJP-backed goons" after the elections.

The party formed three teams to visit South 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur and Hooghly districts to gather reports from party workers and supporters who allegedly faced atrocities after the TMC's electoral setback in the recently concluded assembly elections. Of the 294 assembly seats in the state, the party managed to win only 80.

Speaking to reporters, the TMC's Rajya Sabha MP Dola Sen said one of the teams, comprising herself, was heading to Moyna, Tamluk and Haldia in Purba Medinipur district to meet party workers and their families affected by violence.

"Our workers, common people and supporters are being subjected to atrocities in several places after the poll. Many people have been forced to flee their homes. Houses have been vandalised, and several party offices remain shut," Sen claimed.

She said the fact-finding teams were formed on the instructions of party supremo Mamata Banerjee.

A team led by Sushmita Dev, and also comprising Tanmoy Ghosh, Sajda Ahmed and Prosun Banerjee, visited affected areas in the South 24 Parganas district, while another team was tasked with visiting Hooghly.

"We are trying to reach out to those who have been attacked and displaced so that we can stand by them," Sen said. The Calcutta High Court on Thursday directed the West Bengal government to "strictly maintain law and order at the ground level" in the wake of TMC's allegations of widespread post-poll violence in the state. (PTI)

Karnataka urges Centre to scrap NEET-UG from 2026

BENGALURU, May 16: The Karnataka government on Saturday reiterated its demand before the Centre to scrap the NEET-UG examination from the academic year 2026 onwards and restore the powers of states to conduct their own transparent and merit-based Common Entrance Tests.

Addressing a press conference here, State Medical Education Minister Sharan Prakash Patil called the recent NEET question paper leak a "grave injustice" to the entire student community, and accused the central government of "sabotaging" the futures of thousands of students who dream of becoming doctors.

Karnataka's CET is a far superior model to NEET and should be adopted nationally. The state has urged the Centre on multiple occasions to consider this, but those appeals have gone unheeded, he said.

Alleging that chaos surrounds NEET every single year, Patil demanded the resignation of the Union Minister concerned over this latest debacle and called for an investigation under the direction of a court of law. The minister also expressed his

lack of confidence in the ability of CBI, which is currently probing the scandal, stating that a transparent investigation under its watch is unlikely.

"This scandal appears to have been orchestrated to enable the sale of MBBS seats, and there are strong suspicions that powerful individuals are behind the entire affair," he alleged.

In a statement issued earlier in the day, the Minister emphasised that Karnataka has a long-standing legacy of administering fair, transparent, student-friendly and merit-oriented entrance examinations through the Karnataka Examinations Authority.

He noted that the CET system in Karnataka has for decades enabled lakhs of deserving students, especially from rural, middle-class and economically weaker sections, to secure professional education opportunities based on merit, hard work and academic consistency.

The minister said the Karnataka CET model has been widely appreciated for its transparency, accountability and efficient conduct, helping

meritorious students shape their future with confidence and instilling faith among the younger generation in the integrity of the education system.

He said the NEET experience over the past several years has raised serious concerns across the country.

According to him, repeated allegations and incidents of question paper leaks, impersonation, organised cheating rackets, manipulation, technical irregularities and lack of adequate accountability have severely damaged the credibility of the examination process conducted by the National Testing Agency.

Pointing to recent controversies surrounding NEET examinations, the Minister said these issues have caused stress, uncertainty and mental trauma among students and parents. Repeated reports of malpractice expose the inability of central agencies to ensure a completely fair and foolproof examination system at the national level.

He added that confidence among students in the integrity of the examination process has been deeply shaken. (PTI)

Andhra CM Naidu promises cash incentives for third, fourth child

NARASANNAPETA (Andhra Pradesh), May 16: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday announced incentives of Rs 30,000 for the birth of a third child and Rs 40,000 for a fourth, as part of efforts to reverse the state's declining population trend.

Addressing a public meeting at Narsannapeta in Srikakulam district, Naidu said he had taken the decision and would announce further details within a month.

"I have made a new decision. We will provide Rs 30,000 immediately after the birth of a third child and Rs 40,000 for a fourth child. Isn't this the right decision?" Naidu said on the sidelines of the SwarnaAndhra SwachAndhra cleanliness programme. Although he had once advocated population control measures, the CM said the time had now come for society to work together to increase the birth rate.

Naidu's latest announcement follows an earlier proposal to provide a Rs 25,000 incentive for the birth of a second child.

On March 5, he informed the Assembly that the state government was considering an incentive of Rs 25,000 for couples having a second child.

However, Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav told PTI on Saturday that the government had decided to extend the incentives to families having a third child and beyond.

According to Naidu, rising incomes are leading some couples to opt for a single child, while others are choosing a second child only if their firstborn is a girl. As a result, he warned that the state's population growth rate is declining and stressed the importance of maintaining the replacement-level total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.1.

He noted that a population remains stable only when the fertility rate is 2.1 children per woman. He emphasised that declining populations and ageing societies in several countries have adversely affected their economies.

Rejecting the notion that children are a burden, Naidu argued that they are an asset and vowed to demonstrate it.

Referring to the Taliki Vandanam welfare scheme, which provides Rs 15,000 per school-going child per annum, Naidu said he would increase the amount "if God shows mercy". He said the government is printing tamper-proof pattadar passbooks (land documents) and assured that there would be "no land disputes" by March 2027. (PTI)

Vacancy Announcement

Retusa Women Farmer Producer Company Limited (RWFPCL) is seeking applications for the following positions based out at Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh. RWFPCL is one such Producer Enterprises established in Namsai being promoted by FDRVC which will be dealing mainly Ginger and Orange with other commodities.

FDRVC as Technical Support Agency has been retained to hire following positions for this Producer Enterprise

S/ no	Post	Eligibility	Experience	Other desired skill
1	Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Farmer Producer Company (1 Post)	• Post graduation or Graduation or an equivalent degree in food technology, Agriculture, Horticulture, Agribusiness Management and other related fields	• Minimum 5 years of experience in business operations with topline and bottom line responsibilities out of which 2 year experience in handling paddy, ginger and other commodities • Experience of handling operations for 2/3 years in large size FPO/Dairy processing/Food processing units with annual turnover of more than 5 Cr would be an added advantage	• Candidate having experience of working in AP are encouraged to apply • English/Hindi/Assamese /Local speaking candidate will be given preference
2	IT executive	• Graduate in any subjects, (preferably in agriculture, Agri business and allied subject)	• Must be able to handle data and record • Must have a system (laptop)	• Candidate having experience of working in AP are encouraged to apply • English/Hindi/Assamese /Local speaking candidate will be given preference
3	Warehouse Supervisor	• Graduate in any subjects	• Preference will be given to the candidate with 1-3 years of experience in warehouse management, logistics, transportation, labour handling.	• Candidate having experience of working in AP are encouraged to apply • English/Hindi/Assamese /Local speaking candidate will be given preference
4	Area Procurement officer (4 Posts)	Graduate in any discipline . Preference will be given to agriculture, Agri business and allied subject	• Preference given to the candidate with 1-3 years of experience in processing ginger chilli and other commodities from rural farmers • Candidates from Agri input/output industry, rural marketing or FMCG industry or any other similar industries are encouraged to apply	• Candidate having experience of working in AP are encouraged to apply • English/Hindi/Assamese /Local speaking candidate will be given preference

How to apply: candidates are requested to send their CVs on jobs@fdrvc.in / jobs.retusa@gmail.com mentioning the post you are applying for ("CEO - Retusa or APO - Retusa or IT-Retusa or WS-Retusa") in the subject of mail.
Visit website: www.fdrvc.org ..
Last Date of Application: 27/05/26

Manik Saha highlights progress in healthcare, employment and law and order 'Tripura witnessed massive development in health, education sectors since 2018'

AGARTALA, May 16: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha, who completed four years in office on Saturday, said the northeastern state has witnessed significant development in key sectors such as health, education, law and order and employment generation since 2018.

Saha, who was a Rajya Sabha member, was sworn in as the chief minister on May 15, 2022, replacing Biplab Kumar Deb.

"For the past four years, Tripura has witnessed massive development in fields like health, education, law and order and employment. The number of MBBS seats has increased substantially over the past few years," he told reporters.

The Centre on Friday sanctioned ₹ 273 crore for the expansion of Agartala Government Medical College (AGMC) and approved an increase in MBBS seats from 150 to 250 from the upcoming academic session.

"Two more medical institutions -- ayurvedic and homoeopathic colleges -- will start functioning



from the next academic session. Dental college, nursing and paramedical institutions are also functioning. It means our state has gained a lot in the healthcare sector," he said.

Saha said some private universi-

ties have already established their presence, while many professional colleges, including engineering institutes, have also come up, widening opportunities in the education sector.

The CM also highlighted the

success in addressing the unemployment problem during the past eight years, when the first BJP government came to power in the state.

Highlighting the government's efforts to address unemployment, Saha said around 22,000 people had been appointed to regular government posts, while another 20,000 youths had been engaged in the government sector through outsourcing over the past eight years. "Total transparency has been maintained in the recruitment drive by the government," he said.

On the law and order front, Saha said the situation in the state had remained under control and claimed Tripura ranked third from the bottom in the overall crime graph prepared by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

"In my four years in office as chief minister, I am happy the way development has taken place on all fronts, especially in the health sector, but still there is always room for more development. We are trying to live up to the expectations of people", he said. (PTI)

Manipur: Talks on for release of those still in captivity of armed groups

IMPHAL, May 16: Talks are underway among civil society organisations, representatives of the Manipur government and security forces to ensure the safe release of those who are still being held hostage by armed groups, officials said on Saturday.

Thirty-one of around 38 people belonging to the Kuki and Naga communities, who were held hostage by armed groups in Kangpokpi and Senapati districts, were released on Thursday and Friday.

These people were taken to undisclosed locations after suspected militants shot dead three church leaders and injured four others in Kangpokpi on Wednesday, while a civilian was gunned down and his wife was wounded in Noney district.

All-out efforts are being made to ensure the "safe release of the remaining persons", the police said.

As a result of "concerted efforts" of the administration, security forces, political leaders and civil society organisations, the "majority of the detained civilians, belonging to different communities, have been released safely", the police said in a statement.

"Talks are going on among civil society organisations, representa-



tives of the state government, security forces and Naga and Kuki stakeholders to ensure the safe release of those who are still being held hostage by armed groups," an official said.

Twelve Naga women from Konkhul village, who were held captive by armed militants, were released at Makhon village, another senior official said.

Four men and ten women of the Kuki community, who were also held in captivity in Senapati district, were handed over to security forces late Thursday night, he said. "Two Salesian brothers of Don

Bosco, including one from Nagaland, were also released by armed groups at separate locations," the officer said.

On Thursday evening, three persons, including an 18-year-old woman, belonging to the Kuki community, were handed over to the police teams in the Senapati district, another officer said.

Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam had on Thursday said the government was actively holding discussions with civil society groups and political leaders to secure the release of these people. (PTI)

Arunachal CM, his deputy greet people of Sikkim on Statehood Day

ITANAGAR, May 16: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday extended warm greetings to the people of Sikkim on its Statehood Day, describing the Himalayan state as a symbol of peace, harmony and sustainable development.

"Warm greetings to the people of Sikkim on the joyous occasion of its Statehood Day," Khandu said in a post on X.

The chief minister said Sikkim is known for its breathtaking natural beauty, rich cultural heritage and warm-hearted people and stands as a shining example of peace, harmony, and sustainable progress.

Khandu also lauded Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, saying that under his "dynamic leadership", the state continues to witness "remarkable development while proudly preserving its traditions and identity".

"May Sikkim continue to pros-

per and scale greater heights in the years ahead," the chief minister added.

Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein also conveyed his greetings to the people of Sikkim on the occasion.

"Warm greetings to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of its Statehood Day," Mein said in a social media post.

Highlighting the progress made by the Himalayan state, Mein said that under the leadership of Tamang, Sikkim "continues to make remarkable strides while preserving its unique cultural identity, natural beauty and spirit of harmony".

Sikkim observes its Statehood Day on May 16 to commemorate its merger with the Indian Union in 1975, when the former Himalayan kingdom officially became the 22nd state of India through the 36th Constitutional Amendment. (PTI)

Centre sanctions raising of one more IRBn for Tripura

AGARTALA, May 16: The Centre has sanctioned a proposal to raise one more India Reserve Battalion for Tripura to effectively handle the law and order situation in the northeastern state, an official said on Saturday.

The Union government will reimburse one-time financial assistance of Rs 50 crore for raising one IRBn.

In a letter to Tripura Chief Secretary J K Sinha, an official of the Ministry of Home Affairs said, "I am directed to convey the sanction for raising of one India Reserve Battalion (IRBn) by the Tripura government. The Centre shall reimburse one-time financial assistance of ₹ 50 crore for raising one IRBn".

Currently, the northeastern state has 11 India Reserve Battalions (IRBns).

"The recruitment process shall be completed within two years of the date of sanction," the letter said, adding that a selection board headed by an ADG-rank official will be formed to proceed with the recruitment drive. The force will be deployed for counter-insurgency operations and border guarding, and the state government will be obligated to comply with requests whenever the Centre feels the need to requisition the IRBn, the MHA communication said.

Earlier, the state government announced that it would appoint 916 constables, including women, through a direct recruitment process. A six-member recruitment committee has already been constituted. (PTI)

'EduConnect' to bridge education and career opportunities in Nagaland



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 16: A two-day educational and career-oriented event titled "EduConnect: Connecting Education to Opportunities" commenced in Dimapur on Friday, bringing together educational institutions, industry experts, policymakers, and aspiring students under one platform.

The programme aims to create stronger link-

ages between education, skill development and employment opportunities for the youth of Nagaland.

Addressing the event, chairman of the Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) and adviser to Nagaland CM, Abu Metha described it as a significant initiative aimed at creating meaningful academic and professional opportunities for students.

Additional secretary, finance dept & IDAN, Vineet Kumar said the objective of EduConnect

was to create a "window of opportunities" for students by exposing them to various career paths and educational options available across the country.

He said the programme was designed to be inclusive, with arrangements made for live streaming across all 16 districts of Nagaland through the offices of the DCs, enabling students unable to attend physically to participate remotely.

Founder, Cryptex Solo, Akash Baishya hoped that EduConnect 2026 would be a meaningful experience for every student attending this programme.

A significant highlight of the programme was the exchange of a MoU between Atria Institute of Technology and IDAN, which proposes a framework for collaboration in areas such as academic cooperation, skill development initiatives, student engagement programmes and opportunities aimed at supporting capacity building and educational advancement for students from Nagaland.

Under the MoU, the Atria-IT scholarships will be offered through IDAN under the "Future Achievers Scholarship Programme".

Manipur CM reviews progress of National Sports University project in Imphal West

IMPHAL, May 16: Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khechhand Singh on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream project of establishing the country's only National Sports University in the state was nearing completion.

Singh made the remarks during a visit to the university at Koutruk in Imphal West to assess the status of the ongoing infrastructure development works. The chief minister was accorded a warm reception by NSU vice-chancellor Daljit Singh Chaudhary, former director general of the BSF, and officials of the university. He also held a meeting with the officials to review the progress of the construction work being undertaken on the campus.



Singh was informed that the new campus will house a total of 60 faculty residential units. Addressing grievances raised by university officials, the chief minister said construction of the approach road would commence next week.

He also said around six borewells would be dug as a temporary measure to mitigate water shortage on the campus. Singh further assured that adequate security personnel would be deployed, if necessary, to ensure smooth and uninterrupted execution of the ongoing works.

Later, speaking to reporters, Singh informed that the total intake capacity of the university would be around 1,300 students, and the project is likely to be completed by the end of this year. (PTI)

Kuki women's outfit holds rally to protest killing of 3 church leaders

IMPHAL, May 16: A Kuki women's body held a massive rally in Manipur's Churachandpur district to protest against the recent killing of three church leaders in Kangpokpi.

Attendees of the rally assembled at Koite village ground and marched for nearly 2 km to Tuibong, while raising slogans demanding justice. The rally was organised by the Kuki Women Organisation for Human Rights.

They handed a memorandum to the deputy commissioner of the Churachandpur district, addressing it to the Union home minister.

Their demands included immediate review and strengthening of the security apparatus and deployment of forces in all Kuki-Zo areas to ensure safe and uninterrupted movement of civilians, sources said.

It also called for a high-level investigation into the killings of the church leaders and a swift and "decisive action" against two militant outfits, which are allegedly involved in the violence, they said.

The protesters also called for recognition and legitimisation of village guards formed for self-protection in Kuki-Zo villages under proper legal and administrative mechanisms. (PTI)

Arunachal govt committed to make state an industrial hub: Minister



ITANAGAR, May 16: Arunachal Pradesh Commerce and Industries Minister Nyato Dukam on Saturday said the government is committed to establishing the northeastern state as an industrial hub.

Dukam was speaking at the inauguration of 'Tulang', an edible oil extraction and production unit in Pasighat in East Siang district.

"The state government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Pema Khandu, remains deeply committed to establishing Arunachal Pradesh as an important industrial hub," Dukam said.

Set up as a subsidiary of Elam Industries, 'Tulang' will manufacture and supply pure mustard and sesame oil in the region.

The factory has a production capacity of 200 litres per day.

Pasighat MLA Tapi Darang said the unit would benefit local farmers by creating a market for oilseed produce, while also generating employment opportunities for the youth. (PTI)

Leaders hail Sikkim's progress in sustainable development, tourism and cultural harmony President, PM, CM extend greetings to people of Sikkim on 51st Statehood Day

GANGTOK, May 16: President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday greeted the people of Sikkim on the occasion of the 51st Statehood Day, and said that the contribution of the Himalayan state to India's development is "deeply valued".

In a letter to Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, Modi vowed to extend support and cooperation to Sikkim for its tourism and economic development.

Sikkim became the 22nd state of India in 1975.

President Murmu, in an X post, said, "Warm greetings to the people of Sikkim on the occasion of Statehood Day. With its magnificent natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and strong commitment to environmental conservation, Sikkim stands as a model of sustainable development for the nation. The people of Sikkim are known for their warmth, simplicity, and spirit of harmony. May the state and its people continue to prosper."

Tamang also greeted the people on the occasion of the 51st Statehood Day and said the Himalayan state continues to inspire the country through its commitment to sustainable development and social harmony.

The PM described the occasion as "sacred and joyous", stating that this year carries deeper significance as it marks the culmination of the 50th statehood celebrations of Sikkim.

He said the milestone offers an opportunity to look back with pride on Sikkim's remarkable journey over the past five decades.

"Greetings to my sisters and brothers on their Statehood Day. The contribution of Sikkim to India's development is deeply valued. Wishing the people of the state good health and prosperity," the PM said on X.

Hailing the state's achievements, Modi noted in the letter that Sikkim has carved a unique place in the hearts and minds of people through its steady progress, vibrant cultural spirit, ecological wisdom, and inspiring social harmony.

Recalling his recent visit to the state during the Golden Jubilee celebrations, the prime minister said he was deeply moved by the warmth and affection shown by the people of Sikkim.

He fondly remembered the grand road show in Gangtok and interactions with the women and youth of Sikkim, saying their blessings and energy left a lasting



impression on him.

Modi assured the people of Sikkim that the Centre would continue its efforts to strengthen sporting infrastructure in the state so that young aspirants receive greater support.

The PM praised Sikkim's commitment to biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and organic farming, not-

ing that the state stands as a beacon of sustainability, harmony with nature and cleanliness.

The prime minister highlighted the impact of various central government schemes in Sikkim, including the Jal Jeevan Mission, PM Awas Yojana, healthcare initiatives, and road connectivity. He also reiterated the Centre's commitment

to promoting tourism in the state through schemes such as Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD.

Modi said the coming 25 years would be a defining chapter in Sikkim's journey as the state moves towards celebrating 75 years of statehood alongside 100 years of India's Independence.

He called for a long-term development roadmap rooted in the aspirations of the people and assured the residents of continued support and cooperation from the Centre.

He expressed confidence that Sikkim's finest chapters are still ahead and wished continued prosperity, peace, and progress for the people of the Himalayan state.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, in a social media post, said, "On Sikkim Statehood Day, greetings to the sisters and brothers of the state. From the world's first fully organic state to redefining mountain tourism, its achievements inspire all of India. May Sikkim's glory continue to achieve new peaks."

The chief minister wished that the occasion would strengthen the spirit of unity and progress among the people of the state.

"Blessed with unparalleled natural

beauty, vibrant traditions, and the majestic presence of Mt. Kanchenjunga, Sikkim continues to inspire the nation through its commitment to sustainable development, organic farming, environmental conservation, and social harmony," the CM said in a social media message.

The year-long celebrations, marking 50 years of Sikkim's integration with India, reflected the state's "remarkable journey of peace, democracy, cultural pride, and progressive development," he said.

"On this solemn occasion, let us also reaffirm our collective commitment to the spirit of discipline, unity, and responsibility by supporting the Hon'ble Prime Minister's call for austerity measures in the larger interest of the nation and the state," Tamang added.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, and several Union ministers and chief ministers of various states greeted the people of Sikkim on the occasion.

Vice President C P Radhakrishnan is scheduled to attend the Sikkim Statehood Day function to be held at Manan Kendra here in the afternoon. DoNER Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia will also attend the programme. (PTI)

Afghanistan Series: Focus on Bumrah's workload, Prince could be 'dark horse' for ODIs

NEW DELHI, May 16: Jasprit Bumrah will either play the one-off Test or the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan next month as the national selection committee is keeping an eye on the pace spearhead's workload while naming the squads for the series on May 19.

The one-off Test, which isn't a part of World Test Championship cycle, will be played at New Chandigarh from June 6-10 while the three ODIs will be held on June 14 (Dharamsala), 17 (Lucknow) and 20 (Chennai) respectively.

The bilateral ODIs have gained traction because that is the only format that Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma play internationally.

However, Delhi speedster Prince Yadav's name will certainly be discussed by the selection committee considering his stellar show in the last edition of national one-day championship. Prince took 17 wickets from 8 Vijay Hazare Trophy

games.

Besides that, his effort in the ongoing IPL 2024, 16 wickets from 12 games, including the dismissal of Virat Kohli with a lovely seaming delivery, has underlined the fact that there couldn't be a better series to try out Prince since Harshit Rana is unlikely to get fit anytime soon.

No experiment with Test squad

It can be said with a degree of certainty that the selection committee led by Ajit Agarkar is not going to experiment with the red ball format squad.

The tried and tested faces in the past one year are expected to fill the squad with an eye on the away series against Sri Lanka and New Zealand, where contrasting conditions could be on offer.

While Bumrah has had a hectic IPL, it is unlikely that he will skip the entire two-week series



starting June 6. For someone who takes pride in wearing the India Whites, whether Bumrah will be required for a lone Test against Afghanistan is

the moot point.

As per sources, if he plays the Test match, he wouldn't take part in the three-match ODI series. In case he plays the ODI series, then he would be rested for the Test match.

While there has been a lot of talk about changes in the squad, in all likelihood Devdutt Padikkal, who was also a part of the team that was thrashed by South Africa last year, might replace Sai Sudharsan at No. 3 in the batting lineup. The other options for that slot will be Washington Sundar, who has batted at No. 3 for Tamil Nadu and Dhruv Jurel as a specialist batter.

In case Bumrah doesn't play, the new ball attack is likely to be headlined by Mohammed Siraj and Prasadidh Krishna. With both Akash Deep and Harshit are injured, Jammu and Kashmir seamer Auqib Nabi, who took 60 wickets in the

last Ranji Trophy season, might be the reserve pacer. But his fight is against pace bowling all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy.

If Bumrah plays, then Nabi might have to wait for his turn as not more than three frontline fast bowlers would be picked for a Test match in India where spinners call the shots.

In case of spinners, Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav and Washington are automatic choices. From the squad that was picked against South Africa, Axar Patel's place could be under scanner in the longest format.

While Harsh Dubey has been picked for the Sri Lanka A tri-nation series, he won't be considered but Manav Suthar could give Axar a tough competition although experience could prevail in the end. The two wicketkeepers -- Rishabh Pant and Jurel -- are automatic choices in the Test format. (PTI)

RCB out to seal play-off berth, Punjab Kings to arrest freefall

DHARAMSALA, May 16: Royal Challengers Bengaluru would look to exploit vulnerabilities of a profligate Punjab Kings bowling line up to seal a play-off berth in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

In the only day game scheduled at the scenic Dharamsala stadium, the top draw without an iota doubt is Virat Kohli, fresh off a hundred in the previous game.

A sizeable number of fans have already made their way up to the mountains from Delhi and Punjab to see the larger than life Kohli bat in the breathtaking backdrop of Dhauladhar range. The limited infrastructure in place in the city is pushed to its limits.

Defending champions, the only team which has maintained consistency throughout the tournament, are clear favourites against Punjab Kings, who are in a freefall having lost five games in a row after being the most dominant team in the first half of the tournament.

While RCB are sitting comfortable on the points table, a sixth loss for Punjab Kings would effectively shut the playoff door on the Shreyas Iyer-led side.

In both the games played here, Punjab Kings failed to defend 210 and 200 after failing to control the last five overs. In fact, they have lost the most numbers of games (10) after posting 200 plus total in the format's history.

The team needs to rejig its bowling combination with the likes of Xavier Bartlett and Marco Jansen proving expensive throughout



the tournament. Arshdeep Singh has managed to bring his economy rate under 10 with his frugal returns in the last game while Azmatullah Omarzai made instant impact with bat and ball in his first game of the season.

Vijaykumar Vyshak has been out of the side and perhaps the team goes back to him in search of much needed control in the middle and death overs.

The batting department, which has done well overall, is not firing on all cylinders in the last few games but it is the bowling that

has let the team down repeatedly.

The pitch has offered seam movement thus far and was on the slower side in the MI-PBKs fixture.

RCB, on other hand, are playing like a well oiled machine. Kohli, at 37 years of age, continues to redefine consistency, having smashed a 60-ball 105 against KKR in Raipur.

Their pace department including Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Josh Hazlewood will enjoy bowling on the Dharamsala given the conditions.

"We have played well in the tournament and I think everyone came in the different stage and doing [well] for the team. I think that's a great sign. And being at the top of the table, it's always a good thing. Good for the team. And as I said, we are taking just one game at a time, one step at a time," said captain Rajat Patidar.

With all the pressure on Punjab Kings, expect RCB to produce another clinical performance with majority of the fans cheering every run that Kohli scores in the opposition Squads:

Punjab Kings: Shreyas Iyer (c), Priyansh Arya, Prabhman Singh, Mitchell Owen, Vishnu Vinod, Nehal Wadhwa, Azmatullah Omarzai, Marco Jansen, Musheer Khan, Shashank Singh, Marcus Stoinis, Suryansh Shedge, Arshdeep Singh, Xavier Bartlett, Yuzvendra Chahal, Lockie Ferguson, Harpreet Brar, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Cooper Connolly, Ben Dwarshuis, Pyla Avinash, Yash Thakur, Harnoor Singh, Praveen Dube, Vishal Nishad.

RCB: Rajat Patidar (c), Tim David, Virat Kohli, Devdutt Padikkal, Philip Salt, Jitesh Sharma, Jacob Bethell, Krunal Pandya, Romario Shepherd, Abhinandan Singh, Josh Hazlewood, Rasikh Salam Dar, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Suyash Sharma, Swapnil Singh, Nuwan Thushara, Venkatesh Iyer, Jacob Duffy, Mangesh Yadav, Jordan Cox, Vicky Ostwal, Vihan Malhotra, Kanishk Chouhan, Satvik Deswal.

Match starts 3.30 IST. (PTI)

Sooryavanshi faces Starc test as Delhi Capitals take on Royals in must-win game

NEW DELHI, May 16: Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's audacious stroke-play will come up against seam-and-swing master Mitchell Starc as Rajasthan Royals and Delhi Capitals lock horns in a high-stakes IPL "Sunday Suspense" clash with playoff hopes hanging by a thread.

While DC's qualification chances (10 points from 12 games) are already slim, a defeat would officially knock them out of the playoff race.

For the Royals (12 points from 11 games), the week-long break is expected to have rejuvenated the squad. They would not want DC to play party poopers and allow Punjab Kings (13 points from 12 games) to breathe easy. No teenager since the genius Sachin Tendulkar has captured the public imagination

than 400 Test victims, gets early seam and swing, it will be a test of Sooryavanshi's technique as the teenager's game is more about hand-eye co-ordination than foot-work.

Of late, DC have been playing on tracks which aren't exactly very high scoring but the lack of bite in their international spin attack, comprising skipper Axar Patel (10 wickets from 12 games) and Kuldeep Yadav (7 wickets from 11 games), has been the problem. Neither has the duo been penetrative nor restrictive enough, which has proved to be a bane for Team Delhi.

The pace attack save Lungi Ngidi has looked pedestrian, especially the Indian bowlers like T Natarajan (ER of 11.18) and Mukesh Kumar (ER 10.67), who could once again get thrashed by Sooryavanshi, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Dhruv Jurel.

The only issue that would bother Royals is the form of their skipper Riyan Parag (207 runs from 10 games at a strike rate of 143). Recently named captain of the India A team for



PACE takes out Walkathon



HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 16: The People's Alliance for Change and Empowerment (PACE) took out a Walkathon entitled Mind Over Miles, recently to create awareness on mental health issues.

PACE was supported in this initiative by its youth wing, The Hive Youth Community.

The Walkathon started from PACE's headquarter, Jogen Saikia Bhawan, at Malow Ali here and wended its way to the Jorhat Circuit House via Baruah Chariali. JMCH psychiatrist Dr Dipjyoti Bora, who participated in the Walkathon, addressed the gathering on the importance of understanding mental health issues and creating an awareness among the people.

He planted a sapling of neem at the office premise in a symbolic gesture of well being.

Dr Santana Saikia, Director, PACE and former Principal, Bahona College, Jorhat and DPS Headmistress Angshumita Dutta also participated in the Walkathon. The supervisors included Madhurjya Bora, Prakash Bora, Binita Gogoi, Aditi Baruah, Akash Nath, Nilim Taranga Kalita, Kaustav, Anirban Baruah and Niharika Bora.

MCA to host Uganda for four one-dayers, T20s

MUMBAI, May 16: The Mumbai Cricket Association will host Uganda cricket team for four one-dayers and as many T20s to be played between May 18 and 30 across various venues here.

The MCA informed on Saturday that the four one-dayers will be played against the MCA Colts team, whereas the four T20s will be played against T20 Mumbai League teams.

The fourth edition of the men's T20 Mumbai League will be played here from June 1-13.

The first two one-dayers will be at the Palghar Dahanu Taluka Sports Association ground on May 18 and 20, whereas the third and the fourth matches of this series will be at the Adani Stadium in Palghar on May 22 and 24. (PTI)

Satwik-Chirag enter Thailand Open final after thrilling win over Malaysians

BANGKOK, May 16: A gritty Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty showed nerves of steel as they stormed into the men's doubles final with a riveting three-game win over Malaysia's Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin at the Thailand Open Super 500 badminton tournament here on Saturday.

World No. 4 Satwik and Chirag, who won the title in 2019 and 2024, displayed remarkable composure under pressure to outclass the world No. 9 Malaysian pair 19-21 22-20 21-16 in a gruelling semifinal that lasted 82 minutes.

"It feels good. We didn't start of the year that well, we were also not good mentally because of not a really good start.

"As players we are very very driven and we really wanted some answers and finally the bronze at the Thomas Cup especially boosted our confidence and here we are playing our first final of the year," Chirag said.

"Hopefully We can go and win the title."

It will be their third final appearance at the USD 500,000 tournament and first of the season.

The Indian pair will have to recover from the 82-minute match when they face Indonesia's Leo Rolly Camando and Daniel Marthin in the summit clash.

The Malaysians made a bright start, dominating the front-court battle to lead 3-1, but the Indians quickly caught up with some fine



finishing to make it 5-5.

The match was dominated by lightning-fast rallies, packed with relentless angled attacking returns and immaculate defending.

The Malaysians had their nose ahead for most of the first half of the opening game, going into the break with an 11-8 lead. There were some brutal smashes from Chirag and Izzuddin, while Goh produced a few delightful drop shots.

A few unforced errors from Chirag, who found the net and also went long and wide, only increased the deficit to 9-15.

The Indians tried to narrow the gap to 12-16, but Izzuddin's powerful smashes and quality defending against a barrage of attacks helped the Malaysians open up an 18-12 lead.

Two errors from Goh and a long shot saw the Malaysians' lead reduced to three points at 18-15.

Another net error from the Malaysians made it four straight points for the Indians.

But the Malaysians regained

the serve and when Chirag completely miscued a shot, it handed them three game points. They squandered two before Satwik hit the net to concede the opening game.

After the change of sides, it was once again a tight affair as the two pairs moved from 3-3 to 6-6. Both pairs engaged in short rallies, with Satwik and Chirag varying the pace of their smashes and forcing errors to lead 9-6.

A return of serve into the net from Chirag and a body shot from the Malaysians cut the lead to 9-10 before the Indians took a two-point advantage at the interval.

Goh stepped up at the net to produce a winner as the Malaysians again clawed back to 13-13. A brutal smash from Chirag helped the Indians once again open up a 16-14 advantage.

Another return of serve into the net from Chirag made it 16-16. A successful challenge on a serve error took the Indians to 18-16 and then 19-16. Chirag then pushed one wide, but the Malaysians sprayed one long to hand over two game points to the Indians. Satwik and Chirag squandered both, first when Chirag found the net and then when the Malaysians unleashed a smash.

At 20-20, the Indians came out on top after the highest-intensity rally of the match, which saw both pairs defend relentlessly. This time they converted after Izzuddin sprayed one wide. (PTI)

Aryaveer Dewan to spearhead Asian Junior squash

CHENNAI, May 16: Aryaveer Dewan will spearhead India's challenge at the Asian Junior Individual Squash Championships to be held in Panzhihua, China later this month.

Dewan, who clinched the U-17 boys' title last year, will move up to the U-19 category this time and enter the tournament, scheduled from May 20 to 24, as the third seed.

India will field a 32-member contingent across the U-11 to U-19 categories and will aim to better its seven-medal haul -- comprising two gold, two silver and three bronze medals -- from the previous edition.

Indian contingent:

Boys: U-13: Abhyuday Arora (3/4 seed), Amarya Bajaj (3/4 seed), Dhairya Gogia, Aaron Arambhan; U-15: Dhruv Bopana, Shresth Iyer (2nd seed), Dhruv Johri, Vedant Agrawal; U-17: Lokesh Subramani, Hridhaan Shah, Raghav Vashishtha, Shiven Agarwal; U-19: Gurveer Singh, Aryaveer Dewan (3rd seed), Yusha Nafees, Purav Rambhia.

Girls: U-13: Divyanshi Jain (2nd seed), Shanaya Parasrampuria (3/4 seed), Riya Dalal, Alia Kankaria; U-15: Aadya Budhia (3/4 seed), Goushika M, Vasundhara Nangare, Diva Parasrampuria; U-17: Saanvi Kalanki, Anika Dube (3/4 seed), Diva Shah, Riyansika Verma; U-19: Unnati Tripathi, Eesha Shrivastava, Akanksha Gupta, Vyomika Khandelwal. (PTI)

quite like the schoolboy from Samastipur in Bihar, who already boasts a sizeable fan base.

His 'Capital Debut' at the Ferozeshah Kotla is no less than the cricketing equivalent of a 'Met Gala' with the who's who of NCR clamouring for free passes.

Delhi Capitals' fan base remains something of a paradox in the IPL's 19 years of existence. When Royal Challengers Bengaluru play at the Kotla, the crowd rallies behind Virat Kohli, while the arrival of Chennai Super Kings turns the stands canary yellow, with jerseys bearing the iconic No. 7 of MS Dhoni dominating the scene. Having failed to build an organic fan base, it is hardly surprising that fans queuing up at the Kotla turnstiles would be there to watch their chubby-cheeked hero in the flesh for the first time.

But amid this hype, the sub-plot that will intrigue one and all would be how Starc can stop a marauding Sooryavanshi, who has hit 40 sixes in 11 games while scoring 440 runs at a stunning strike-rate of 236.55.

Over the years, Starc has blown hot and cold during IPL seasons. There have been matches where he has been taken to the cleaners by unheralded Indian batters, and there have been matches like the 2024 IPL final, when he set up KKR's title win with the most memorable opening spell in nearly two decades.

One wouldn't know which Starc would turn up this Sunday but if it is the "Test bowler" Mitchell Starc, then Sooryavanshi will have some really tough problems to solve.

If the Aussie veteran, more

at a List A tri-nation series, the player from Assam has not been able to prove his detractors wrong that his selection has been purely based on merit.

Royals' bowling attack has no such problems, with Jofra Archer possessing the ability to put any batting line-up under pressure.

Save for KL Rahul, who is class apart, the likes of Nitish Rana and Sameer Rizvi are expected to struggle big time against raw pace and bounce with distinct lack of technique and temperament to deal with quality international bowling.

Squads:

Delhi Capitals: Axar Patel (captain), KL Rahul (wk), Pathum Nissanka, David Miller, Tristan Stubbs, Abhishek Porel (wk), Sameer Rizvi, Nitish Rana, Madhav Tiwari, Kuldeep Yadav, Vipraj Nigam, T Natarajan, Mitchell Starc, Lungi Ngidi, Kyle Jamieson, Dushmantha Chameera, Auqib Nabi, Karun Nair, Ashutosh Sharma, Sahil Parakh, Prithvi Shaw, Tripurana Vijay, Rehan Ahmed, Ajay Mandal.

Rajasthan Royals: Riyan Parag (captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Jofra Archer, Nandre Burger, Yashraj Punja, Donovan Ferreira, Shubham Hetmyer, Shubham Dube, Aman Rao, Lluan der Pretorius, Ravi Singh, Ravindra Jadeja, Dasun Shanaka, Brijesh Sharma, Tushar Deshpande, Kwena Maphaka, Ravi Bishnoi, Yuvvir Singh, Sandeep Sharma, Sushant Mishra, Adam Milne, Vignesh Puthur, Adam Milne, Kuldeep Sen.

Match Starts at 7:30 pm. (PTI)

CSK would have learnt a lot from LSG loss, says Ravi Shastri

LUCKNOW, May 16: Cricketer-turned-commentator Ravi Shastri reckons Chennai Super Kings

first, they still made 187. Sanju Samson didn't score runs. Raturaj Gaikwad didn't get many either, so if they find form (in the upcoming matches), that would be key for CSK," said Shastri on JioHotstar.

"Their bowlers will learn what lengths they need to bowl in conditions like these. In Chennai, they know what works and where to bowl, so they will be a much stronger team at home. They will also have their plans ready for that surface. So, I would look at this as an off day, but also as a game that offered plenty of lessons," he added.

With Anshul Kamboj enduring an expensive outing and conceding 63 runs in 2.4 overs, CSK struggled to contain LSG despite conditions offering assistance to the pacers on a surface that was not entirely

batting-friendly.

Shastri said Kamboj should have shown better awareness and targeted yorkers in the blockhole, which might have prevented Mitchell Marsh from smashing him for four sixes.

"After getting hit for four sixes, what should Anshul Kamboj have done? In my opinion, he should have thought more about bowling yorkers, targeting the stumps right in the blockhole.

"When you know Marsh was waiting for anything short of a length, either bowl yorkers at the stumps or, if you're bowling bouncers, bowl them outside the off stump with a deep third man in place.

"Bend your back and bowl them closer to head height, not at chest or waist height, because that is bread and butter for someone, who has grown up playing in Perth. It becomes very easy for him to use the pace," opined Shastri.

The former India skipper said Kamboj would have

learnt some valuable lessons from the punishment he received at the hands of Marsh.

"If he hadn't been hit for four sixes, he wouldn't have learned from it. Everyone makes mistakes, but what you learn from this is the most important thing," said Shastri.

Offering his views on the Kolkata Knight Riders vs Gujarat Titans 'Race to Playoffs' clash, Shastri said the Shubham Gill-led side are good enough to take conditions out of the equation.

"Gujarat Titans are a very strong side. Regardless of the conditions, they have the team combination to excel on any surface. So, their motivation will be to somehow seal a top-two spot.

"If they finish at the top, even better, because they will get two chances to make it to the final, and they know the final is in Ahmedabad. So, GT won't let their guard down and will be keen to pick up those points and almost seal a place in the top two," he said. (PTI)