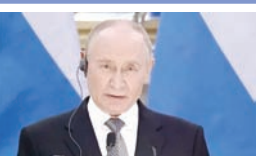


6 WORLD



● Russia presses its barrages of Ukraine as Trump talks of possible peace

● Israeli drone strikes hit highway south of Beirut, killing 8, including 2 children

8 NATION



● TVK govt wins maiden trust vote with ease as AIADMK rebel group cross-votes

● BJP CMs, other leaders follow suit on his appeal for less fuel use

THE HILLS TIMES

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Voice of the hills people

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DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2026

PAGES 12

PRICE ₹ 8



सत्यमेव जयते

Government of Assam

“আজি বন্দো কি ছন্দেৰে সন্মোগত বিৰাট

নৰনাৰায়ণ ৰূপ

নৰনাৰায়ণ ৰূপ”

- অম্বিকাগিৰী বায়চৌধুৰী



Heartfelt Gratitude

to the

People of Assam

for giving

Another Opportunity to Serve

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma

Chief Minister, Assam

DIPR/D/HLT/14/14-May-26



ICICI Prudential Life launches BSE Enhanced Value 30 Index Fund

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 13: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has launched the ICICI Prudential Life BSE Enhanced Value 30 Index Fund for customers investing through Unit Linked Insurance Plans (ULIPs).

The company said the fund is designed to provide long-term exposure to attractively valued companies from the large and mid-cap segment while combining investment opportunities with life insurance protection.

According to the company, the fund follows a passive investment strategy and tracks the ICICI PRU BSE Enhanced Value Index, which comprises 30 companies selected from the BSE Large & Mid-cap universe based on valuation measures such as book value-to-price, earnings-to-price and sales-to-price ratios.

Commenting on the launch, Manish Kumar said the fund offers customers a structured and transparent way to participate in equity markets through value-based stock selection.

Import duty on gold, silver more than doubled to curb imports, support rupee

NEW DELHI, May 13: The government sharply raised import tariffs on gold and silver to 15 per cent from 6 per cent on Wednesday, as it looked to curb non-essential imports and conserve foreign exchange reserves strained by higher oil and fertiliser purchases amid the West Asia conflict.

The hike follows a rare weekend appeal from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to forgo gold purchases alongside unnecessary foreign travel and conserve oil in order to help the domestic currency.

India is the world's second-largest consumer of precious metals, which has seen a rally in prices in recent months because of an unabated rise in demand, including for investment purposes. Gold is India's second-largest commodity import after crude oil, and rising purchases have added to foreign-exchange outflows, pressuring the rupee to record lows.

The higher tariffs are expected to push up domestic prices of gold and silver.

Effective May 13, import duty on gold and silver has been increased to 15 per cent from 6 per cent, and that on platinum has been raised to 15.4 per cent from 6.4 per cent. Consequential changes have also been made to other items such as gold/silver dore, coins, findings, etc.

Gold and silver imports jumped 26.7 per cent year-on-year to USD 102.5 billion in FY2025-26, with their share in total imports rising to 14 per cent from 11.8 per cent in 2024-25.

The duty hike came within days of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's clarion call for curbs on gold purchases, along with other austerity measures to reduce avoidable foreign exchange expenditure.

Gold imports in India, the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China, are driven by the jewellery industry demand. Such imports involve a substantial outflow of foreign exchange.

Meanwhile, the rupee touched its lowest-ever closing level of 95.71

against the US dollar on Wednesday.

The rupee hit a record low of 95.75 against the US dollar on Tuesday, but recovered some lost ground on Wednesday after the gold import duty was announced.

"During periods of external stress, measured moderation of discretionary imports may contribute significantly to overall macro-economic stability and prudent external-sector management," a source said, explaining the rationale behind the duty hike.

Through the duty hikes carried out on Wednesday, basic customs duty on gold has been doubled to 10 per cent, while agriculture infrastructure and development cess (AIDC) has been hiked fivefold from 1 per cent to 5 per cent. This takes the effective import duty on gold and silver to 15 per cent.

Besides, importers have to pay a 3 per cent Integrated GST (IGST), which takes the total duty to 18.45 per cent from 9.18 per cent earlier.

All India Gems and Jewellery Council (GJC) Chairman Rajesh Rokde said the import duty hike will make gold costlier by around ₹ 27,000 per 10 grams.

"What the industry fears is that this will give rise to the grey market... smuggling is likely to grow, setting up a parallel economy in the country," Rokde said.

Jewellery retailer Senco Gold and Diamonds MD and CEO Suvankar Sen said he expects the gold import duty to remain high till the West Asia crisis subsides.

"So maybe for around one year, it shall stay at these levels. The volumes might get impacted by 10-15 per cent, but value-wise, it will remain at a higher level. Consumers will buy lighter-weight jewellery," he added.

Government sources said the import duty increase is a "preventive measure" amid "extraordinary external conditions" and is intended to moderate avoidable import demand and ease pressure on the external account.

The measure is neither pro-

hibitory nor anti-consumer in nature, a source said.

"Rather than resorting to quantitative restrictions or more severe import-management tools, the approach relies on moderate price-based disincentives that preserve market flexibility and consumer choice," another source said.

The increase in customs duty on precious metals is intended to moderate avoidable import demand and ease pressure on the external account, sources said, adding that it is a "calibrated and proportionate intervention" designed to encourage moderation in non-essential imports at a time when external vulnerabilities remain elevated.

Sources said the ongoing war in West Asia is expected to balloon India's import bill, and the government wants to prioritise forex expenditure towards essential imports like crude oil, fertilisers, industrial raw materials and capital goods that directly support economic activity and food security.

The war in West Asia and the effective blockade of the Strait of Hormuz have raised prices of crude oil, food, and fertiliser imports. Brent crude prices have jumped from about USD 73/ barrel level prevailing before the war started on February 28 to around USD 107/barrel. It had touched a 4-year high of USD 126/barrel on April 30.

India imports 87 per cent of its crude requirement, of which 46 per cent transits through or near the Strait of Hormuz, where the seven-day moving average tanker traffic has fallen to five vessels. 60 per cent of India's LPG is imported, over 90 per cent via the Gulf. Besides, 38 per cent of annual remittances originate in Gulf countries.

India's gold imports surged more than 24 per cent to an all-time high of USD 71.98 billion in 2025-26. In volume terms, however, the shipments dipped 4.76 per cent to 721.03 tonnes in 2025-26.

The prices of gold have risen from USD 76,617.48/KG in FY25 to USD 99,825.38/KG in FY26. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Meghalaya govt to beef

discussions on border-related matters. "There is already some deployment there, but more security forces are required. Therefore, we will send additional police personnel to ensure the safety and security of people living along the border," he added.

Assistant Rangbah Shmong of Lapangap village, Samkhoh Situng, said the villagers had sought complete protection for farmers so they could continue cultivation peacefully.

"We face harassment all the time. We cultivate on our own land, but people from the Karbi side come at night and destroy our crops," Situng alleged. He said villagers were "95 per cent satisfied" with the government's assurance and hoped adequate security, including deployment of SF-10 personnel, would be ensured in the area. (PTI)

State Cabinet seals UCC

include downsizing convoys of the governor, CM, ministers and government officials, reduction of government fuel consumption by 20 per cent and a six-month ban on procuring new cars or foreign items by the government.

The other austerity measures include no official or private foreign trips by ministers and officials except in the case of medical emergencies, no physical meetings or seminars for six months.

The government will rent only electric vehicles, if required, and efforts to scrap 15-20-year-old vehicles will be expedited. The Cabinet also adopted the BJP's election manifesto as the guiding principle of governance for the next five years and will form the base of policy formulation in the state, Sarma said.

"The decisive mandate received by the BJP-led NDA in the 2026 assembly elections is a public endorsement of the BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' which is a formal governance agenda committing the government to deliver 31 specific promises over the five-year term," he said.

A Manifesto Implementation Cell (MIC) will be established in the Chief Minister's Office to coordinate, monitor and report on the implementation of the promises made during the election and to address interdepartmental issues as they arise.

The cabinet also approved the constitution of a task force under the chief secretary to decide on how to provide government jobs to two lakh youth in the next five years, and he will submit the report within three months, the CM said.

The chief secretary will discuss the matter with all government departments, corporations, universities, Sixth Schedule Councils so that youth can get jobs, he added.

The cabinet also approved that the closing ceremony of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's year-long centenary celebrations will be held on September 8 at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.

The Cabinet also gave its nod that a Rs 32 crore museum will be set up with memorabilia of the singing maestro at the Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra here. Of the total amount, Rs 13 crore will be provided by the North East Council and the remainder by the state government. The cabinet also approved the appointment of Devajit Saikia as the Advocate General for a second term of five years. (PTI)

CBI arrests 5, conducts multiple

the resignation of Pradhan and a probe by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). Members of ABVP and SFI also staged protests. Rajasthan Police's Special Operation's Group (SOG), which initiated the probe into the leak, found that the origins of a guess paper containing questions similar to those asked in the exam were traced to a student from Sikar district pursuing MBBS in Kerala who went on to share it with his friends and a hostel owner.

The CBI arrested Mangilal Bival, Vikas Bival and Dinesh Bival from Jaipur, Yash Yadav from Gurugram and Shubham Khairam from Nashik with several others suspects being quizzed in various cities and might be arrested later, officials said.

Among the arrested, Khairam (30) is being brought to Delhi for further questioning after a local magistrate court sent him to transit remand of the agency.

The CBI, during the searches, seized a number of digital devices including mobile phones, laptops etc from the suspects which will be sent to for forensic examination to get a trail of messaging applications on which the papers were circulated.

Earlier, the CBI visited the NTA headquarters in Delhi to collect documents related to the NEET UG examination.

SOG IG Ajay Pal Lamba said the Sikar student first received the guess material from a friend and shared it with others in Sikar. It subsequently reached several coaching students and later reached candidates in Jaipur and nearby areas before the exam on May 3.

Another official said the student from Kerala forwarded the guess paper with a hostel owner in Sikar and some of his friends. The hostel owner shared the paper to students living in the hostel, saying it could be helpful.

However, the hostel owner himself later tipped off the local police about the guess paper. He had informed that a question bank had been distributed among a large number of students.

Officials said the material was allegedly routed through a person based in Gurugram before reaching Rajasthan.

Acting on inputs, joint teams of police from Sikar, Jhunjhunu, Alwar, Jaipur City, Jaipur Rural and the SOG questioned more than 150 candidates, along with their friends and parents. It is suspected that the paper leak happened from Nashik, sources said. A CBI team reached late Tuesday evening at the SOG office to take over the investigation.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal addressed a press conference and urged Gen Z to ensure that those behind the alleged NEET paper leak are brought to justice, saying that if the youth in Bangladesh and Nepal could bring political change, Indian students could also force accountability. (PTI)

Himanta completes 25 years as

with the sweat, struggles and triumphs of our people. With their blessings and support, I have tried my best to fulfil their aspirations, realise their dreams, make their lives better," he added. Sarma asserted that it will be his constant endeavour to make the lives of the people better and contribute to the "progress of Maa Bharati, the greatest nation on this Earth".

"This milestone feels even more personal as we begin work on NDA 3.0 today, ready to build an Assam which is stronger and prosperous," he said. Sarma said none of this would have been possible without the unwavering support of the people of Jalukbari and the blessings of the people of Assam.

"On this day, I once again reaffirm my commitment to keep working for Aai Asomi (Mother Assam)," he said.

Sarma made his electoral debut from Jalukbari in 1996, losing to late AGP minister Bhrihu Phukan, but since 2001, he has retained the seat for six consecutive terms. (PTI)

Assam cabinet adopts austerity

of a medical emergency, he said. "We have decided not to purchase any new vehicles for the next six months and will encourage scrapping of vehicles in a big way," Sarma added.

The state government will also reduce fuel expenditure by 20 per cent as compared to the last financial year, he said. Sarma added that seminars and other physical meetings will be discouraged, with greater emphasis on online conferences and virtual meetings. Modi had recently urged austerity and fuel-saving measures, warning that the ongoing military conflict in West Asia could trigger a crisis "bigger than the global COVID pandemic." (PTI)

Himanta welcomes Bengal cabinet's

border of that state, the entire North East will remain insecure.

"This decision of the West Bengal cabinet is very welcoming news for the people of Assam and the North East. I would like to compliment the Bengal cabinet for this historic decision", he added. (PTI)

3 church leaders killed, 4 hurt

Meanwhile, the Naga Legislatures Forum, consisting of nine MLAs from the Naga community in the state, said in a statement, "This act of cold-blooded murder of an unarmed and peace-loving religious leader is unacceptable, and we urge the law enforcement agencies to trace and book the culprits at the earliest."

The leaders also demanded the safe release of all civilians, both Kuki and Nagas, who have been detained.

The appeal came after suspected militants allegedly detained several civilians belonging to the Naga community from the vicinity of Leiton Veiphei in Kangpokpi District. Following the killings, a total shutdown was imposed in Kangpokpi district, with angry locals forcing the closure of markets and movement of vehicles along the NH 2. Meitei organisation Arambai Tenggo denied any role in the ambush. In a statement, it termed the accusations of its involvement as "baseless and politically motivated." Kuki Inpi Manipur, the apex body of the Kuki tribe in the state, also condemned the incident.

"Rev V Sitlhou is a respected Church leader and peacemaker who had only recently led the peace mission alongside the Nagaland Joint Christian Forum (NJCF) in Kohima to foster peace, reconciliation, and mutual understanding between the Kuki-Zo and Tangkhul communities," it said. (PTI)

All 5 Assam ministers crorepatis

The average assets of the five ministers is Rs 10.99 crore. While one minister has declared their educational qualification as class 10, rest four have declared educational qualifications of graduate or above. Neog is the only woman minister in the cabinet. (PTI)

OIL reports 7% rise in

completed 307 workover jobs, both being the highest-ever achievements in its operational history. OIL stated that the aggressive drilling and workover campaign helped it achieve a Reserve Replacement Ratio exceeding 1 during the year.

The company's subsidiary Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) also reported strong growth, with PAT rising by 90 per cent to ₹3,057 crore in FY26 from ₹1,608 crore in FY25.

NRL recorded a Gross Refining Margin (GRM) of USD 13.43 per barrel during the period.

Committed to ensuring Assam's

"The time for speeches is over with the end of the elections. People now expect work from us," he said. Referring to the swearing-in ceremony held on Tuesday, Sarma said the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union ministers, NDA and non-NDA chief ministers, industrialists and spiritual leaders reflected Assam's growing importance on the national stage.

"Assam is emerging as a centre of development and industrialisation. I am deeply grateful to all who attended and became part of the historic occasion," he said, adding that many people who could not attend the ceremony had nevertheless supported the government and watched the event on television. (PTI)

ENGINEERING WORKS AT LUMDING DIVISION

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/28 of 2026. Dated: 07-05-2026. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN. 1. Brief Description of Item:** Repairs to road connecting with Girls wings Loco colony to RBE Relief yard colony including with strengthening of road surface in different colonies under jurisdiction of SSE/W/ South/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹1,62,97,112.84. **Earnest Money:** ₹3,26,000.00. E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 04-06-2026 and opened at 15:00 hrs. on 05-06-2026. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 04-06-2026 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>.

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

NAME CHANGE

I, have changed my name from MOHAMMED ATAUR RAHMAN to ATAUR RAHMAN by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankaradevnagar, Hojai (Assam) ATAUR RAHMAN S/O- Late Abdul Nur Vill-Uttar Dimrupar, PO-Kapashbari, PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

NAME CORRECTION

I, Fikirchan Biswas, DOB 1/1/1997, S/O Ashananda Biswas, Vill- Barunguri, P.O.- Dunganpar P.S.- Bhuragaon, Dist- Morigaon, Assam, PIN 782121, Aadhaar No. 420992454303 have corrected my name from Abhijit Biswas, DOB 01/01/1997 through an Executive Magistrate, Morigaon on 07/05/2026. Fikirchan Biswas, DOB 01/01/1997 and Abhijit Biswas, DOB 01/01/1997 is the same and one person.

DECLARATION FOR CHANGE OF NAME AND GENDER

I, Dipa Das, daughter of Narayan Das and Purmina Das, resident of Rabar Bagan Lane No-6, Kamar Gaon, P.S.- Mahabhairab, P.O.- Tezpur, District- Sonitpur (Assam) do hereby inform the general public that I have renounced my former name "Dipa Das" and female gender, and from today I have adopted the new name "Dip Das" and shall henceforth be known and identified as a male. Henceforth, in all my records, documents, bank accounts, educational certificates, and in all government and non-government matters, I request that my new name "Dip Das" and gender "Male" be recognized and recorded accordingly. Dip Das

NAME CHANGE

I, have changed my name from MOHAMMED KOBIR AHMED TO KOBIR AHMED by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankaradevnagar, Hojai (Assam) KOBIR AHMED S/O- ATAUR RAHMAN Vill-Uttar Dimrupar, PO-Kapashbari, PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

ROAD WIDENING & IMPROVEMENT WORKS

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/30 of 2026. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of Item:** Road widening & improvement of road in Mistry Patty, DTS hill, Lower babu patty, accounts colony, medical colony, circulating area & drain in Lumding under the Sr.DEN/IV/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹1,94,32,052.85/- **Earnest Money:** ₹3,88,700/- **Date & time of closing of tender:** At 15:00 hrs. on 04-06-2026 **opening at 15:00 hrs. on 05-06-2026.** The complete information with tender documents of above e-Tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 04-06-2026 in www.ireps.gov.in

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

CONSTRUCTION OF 2 UNITS OF TYPE V QUARTERS

E-Tender Notice No. TSK/Engg/18 of 2026 Dated: 12-05-2026. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of Item:** At New Tinsukia- Construction of 2 units of Type V quarters at Hijuguri Railway Colony. **Tender Value:** ₹2,06,48,509/- **Earnest Money:** ₹4,13,000/- **Date & time of closing of tender:** At 15:00 hrs. **opening at 16:00 hrs. on 03-06-2026.** The complete information with tender documents of above e-Tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 03-06-2026 in www.ireps.gov.in

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

HDFC BANK

Registered Office: HDFC Bank House, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai - 400 013 and having one of its office as Retail Portfolio Management at HDFC Bank Ltd., 1st Floor, I-Think Techno Campus, Kanjurmarg (East), Mumbai - 400042.

SALE INTIMATION AND NOTICE FOR SALE OF SECURITIES PLEDGED TO HDFC BANK LTD.

The below mentioned Borrowers of HDFC Bank Ltd. (the "Bank") are hereby notified regarding the sale of securities pledged to the Bank, for availing credit facilities in the nature of Loans/Overdraft Against Securities.

Due to persistent default by the Borrowers in making repayment of the outstanding dues as per agreed loans / facilities terms, the below loan / facilities accounts are in delinquent status or classified as NPA (Non-Performing Asset). The Bank has issued multiple notices / loan recall notice to these Borrowers, including the final sale notice on the below-mentioned date whereby, Bank had invoked the pledge and provided 7 days' time to the Borrower to repay the entire outstanding dues in the below accounts, failing which, Bank would be at liberty to sell the pledged securities without issuing further notice in this regard. The Borrowers have neglected and failed to make due repayments, therefore, Bank in exercise of its rights under the loan agreement as a pledgee has decided to sell / dispose off the Securities on or after 20th May 2026 for recovering the dues owed by the Borrowers to the Bank. The Borrowers are hereby notified to treat this as a notice of sale in compliance of section 176 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872. The Borrowers are, also, notified that, if at any time, the value of the pledged securities falls further due to volatility in the stock market to create further deficiency in the margin requirement then Bank shall at its discretion sell the pledged security within one (1) calendar day, without any further notice in this regard. The Borrower(s) shall remain liable to the Bank for repayment of any remaining outstanding amount, post adjustment of the proceeds from sale of pledged securities.

Sr. No.	Loan Account Number	Borrower's Name	Outstanding Amount as on 10 th May 2026	Date of Sale Notice
1	XXXXXXXXXX1146	LOWIS SIANGSHAI	1,54,250.50	11-05-2026
2	XXXXXXXXXX9350	PAUL LYNGDOH	4,69,425.82	11-05-2026

DATE : 14.05.2026 | PLACE : MEGHALAYA
Sd/- HDFC BANK LTD.

Short Notice inviting Quotation

No.NHM/K-Ang/RBSK/MHT/2022-23/ Dated: 08-05-2026: Sealed Quotation affixing court fee of Rs.8.25 (Eight Rupees and Twenty-Five paise Only) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council / Cash receipt of Rs. 10 (Rupees Ten Only) are invited from the Supplier / Farm regarding supply of Vehicle for RBSK (MHT) programme under NHM Karbi Anglong for FY 2026-27.

The invitation of the vehicle will be for Bokajan, Chowkihola, Hawraghat and Manja. The vehicle should be preferable type of Bolero / Scorpio / Innova, / SUV 300 / ECCO Van. The application should be submitted as per the following address: "The Joint Director of Health Services, Diphu Karbi Anglong" and last date of submission is on 18-05-2025 at 4.00 pm at the drop box of the office of DPMU, NHM, Karbi Anglong.

The details of the terms and conditions may be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours on any working day.

Sd/-

Joint Director of Health Services cum
Member Secretary, DHS, Karbi Anglong

27 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM www.thehillstimes.in THE HILLS TIMES Voice of the hills people

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2026

THE HILLS TIMES 3

Meghalaya govt to beef up security in Lapangap

Residents from Lapangap village march to M'laya secretariat in protest

SHILLONG, May 13: Meghalaya Deputy Chief Minister Sniawbhlang Dhar on Wednesday said the state government would send more security personnel to Lapangap village along the interstate border with Assam to ensure uninterrupted farming activities amid tensions and alleged disturbances by Karbi groups.

protect our people and ensure that peace prevails as before," Dhar told reporters after meeting the delegation. The protest was led by the Dorbar Shnong of Lapangap village and supported by several pressure groups. Dhar said the issue discussed during the meeting was related to the livelihood of farmers and not the interstate boundary dispute between Meghalaya and Assam.

"They came seeking intervention because some Karbi groups were troubling them, and we have assured them that additional security forces will be deployed from tomorrow to ensure that cultivation activities continue without any disturbance," Dhar said. On whether the matter had been taken up with Assam, Dhar said discussions had already begun between officials of both states.

Tribal population to be kept out of UCC ambit Bill to be laid in Assembly on May 26 State Cabinet seals UCC implementation

GUWAHATI, May 13: The Assam cabinet on Wednesday approved the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state, but the tribal population will be kept outside its purview, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. The draft of the UCC Bill will be laid before the assembly on May 26, the chief minister said at a press conference here after chairing the first cabinet meeting of his second term as the head of the government.



made during the elections," the CM said. Sarma said Uttarakhand, Goa and Gujarat have already implemented the UCC, but his government has customised it for the requirements of Assam.

of UCC," he said. The UCC will deal with succession, marriage, live-in relationships and compulsory registration of marriage and divorce, he added. It will create a uniform set of laws for all residents -- excluding Scheduled Tribes and Adivasi communities -- and will replace various religion-based personal laws with a common legal framework to ensure equality and transparency, define core legal terms and recognise various customs and modern family structures, Sarma said. The CM also stated that religious practices and rituals related to marriages will not fall within the purview of the UCC.

Himanta completes 25 years as elected representative

GUWAHATI, May 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said he completed 25 years as an elected representative from Jalukbari Assembly constituency, calling it a milestone marked by public support and "Anant Sewa". Sarma said it was on this day in 2001 that he was first elected to the Assam Assembly from Jalukbari, and added that he has since been re-elected from the constituency for six consecutive terms.

NEET paper leak CBI arrests 5, conducts multiple searches; protests intensify



NEW DELHI/JAIPUR, May 13: The CBI arrested five persons and conducted searches at multiple locations across the country in the NEET UG paper leak case as protests over the cancellation of the examination intensified on Wednesday and the chorus for Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation grew louder. During the day, a plea was filed in the Supreme Court by the Federation of All India Medical Association (FAIMA) seeking a

proof of structural flaws and demanded that it be abolished and states permitted to fill seats on their own based on Class 12 marks. He said governments of Tamil Nadu have been consistently and unanimously opposing NEET since its very inception as its introduction has severely disadvantaged the students from rural areas, government schools, Tamil medium backgrounds, and socio-economically disadvantaged families. The NEET (UG) 2026 exam for admissions in undergraduate medical courses held on May 3 was cancelled by the NTA on Tuesday amid allegations of paper leak which is now being probed by the CBI. The cancellation of the exam has left over 22 lakh medical aspirants and their families in a lurch.

Riniki's case: Khera appears before Assam Police

Police to file chargesheet within the stipulated time: Himanta

GUWAHATI, May 13: Congress leader Pawan Khera appeared before the Assam Police Crime Branch on Wednesday for questioning in connection with cases filed by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma. The cases were lodged after Khera alleged that Sharma possessed multiple passports and undisclosed properties abroad. Speaking to reporters before entering the Crime Branch office, Khera said he was cooperating with the investigation. "I have been summoned by the police and have come accordingly. We respect the law and the judiciary, so I am here as per legal procedure," he said.



Station under various provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The charges against the Congress leader include making false statements in connection with an election, cheating, forgery, use of forged documents as genuine, intentional

insult with intent to provoke breach of peace, and defamation. Earlier, Assam Police had visited Khera's residence in Delhi, but he was reportedly not present there. Khera had initially approached the Telangana High Court, which granted him seven-day transit anticipatory bail. However, Assam Police challenged the order in the Supreme Court. The apex court stayed the transit bail order and directed Khera to approach the Gauhati High Court. Subsequently, the Gauhati High Court rejected his anticipatory bail plea, following which Khera moved the Supreme Court again. The Supreme Court later granted him anticipatory bail, observing that the matter appeared to have arisen out of political rivalry. Meanwhile, a local court in Guwahati had earlier rejected Assam Police's plea seeking issuance of a non-bailable warrant against the Congress leader. (PTI)

Assam cabinet adopts austerity measures following PM's call

GUWAHATI, May 13: The Assam cabinet on Wednesday adopted several austerity measures following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for fuel conservation amid the prevailing West Asia crisis, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. The decisions were taken at the first cabinet meeting chaired by Sarma in his second term. "The Assam cabinet went through the appeal made by the PM to save foreign exchange and came out with certain recommendations", the CM told a press conference. As part of the austerity measures, the state government decided to downsize the convoy of the governor, CM, ministers and other officials. It has also been decided that no government official will go abroad for official or private trips for the next six months, except in the case (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta welcomes Bengal cabinet's decision to hand over land to BSF for border fencing

GUWAHATI, May 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday welcomed the West Bengal Cabinet's decision to hand over land to the BSF for fencing the India-Bangladesh border as it was very important for the security of the state and the North East. Strict vigilance and closure of the India-Bangladesh border was very important for the security of Assam and the region, the chief minister said at a press conference here after chairing the first cabinet meeting of his second term in office. "Our fight against infiltration always faced a problem because there was a huge gap in fencing between Bangladesh and West Bengal," he claimed. Sarma said that many organisations in Assam demand that the border must be sealed in the state, but this was meaningless without a similar closure in West Bengal. Five states share the India-Bangladesh border - Mizoram,

3 church leaders killed, 4 hurt in Manipur militant attack

IMPHAL, May 13: Three church leaders were killed and four others injured in an attack by suspected militants in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Wednesday, police said. The incident happened at a place between Kotzim and Kotten villages when members of the Thadou Baptist Association (TBA) were returning from Churachandpur after attending a religious congregation. Chief Minister Y. Khemchand Singh condemned the incident, stating that such "senseless acts of violence" against innocent civilians threaten peace in Manipur which has been rocked by ethnic violence since 2023. Following the killings, a total shutdown was imposed in Kangpokpi district where Kukis are in the majority. A forum of Naga legislators and a Kuki organisation also deplored the killings, while a Meitei group rejected allegations from some quarters that it was behind the

ambush. Police said suspected militants ambushed the two vehicles in which the church leaders were travelling. Among those killed was Reverend V. Sithou, a former general secretary of the Manipur Baptist Convention. The other two deceased were identified as Reverend Kaigoulen and Pastor Paogoulen, they said. The chief minister said three of those injured were admitted to the Shija Hospitals and Research Institute in Imphal. He, along with Deputy Chief Minister Losit Dikho, Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam, visited the injured in the hospital. "The state government will bear all medical expenses for the injured, and I have directed the authorities to ensure they receive the highest standard of care," Singh said in a statement. "This act of violence is deeply troubling and devastating not only

for the families but for the entire state, as it disrupts our path to peace. Our state is gradually moving towards peace; therefore, actions that undermine this collective effort of our people to restore normalcy are unacceptable," he said. Stressing that there is no justification in any society for acts of terrorism, the CM said the people of the entire state stand together against such an act of terror. "Our resolve to fight against terrorism is unshakable," he said and appealed to all sections of society to uphold peace, show restraint and refrain from emotional responses. "Further, I urged people to immediately stop abductions, taking hostages, and intimidation on community lines. This can only aggravate the situation. I assure the people that we will use every resource of the state to bring the perpetrators and their handlers to justice," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

All 5 Assam ministers crorepatis, one has criminal case: ADR report

NEW DELHI, May 13: All the five ministers sworn-in in Assam are crorepatis while one of them has a criminal case, a report by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said on Wednesday. Himanta Biswa Sarma was sworn in as the chief minister for the second consecutive term on Tuesday. Along with him, four MLAs - BJP's Rameswar Teli and Ajanta Neog, AGP's Atul Bora and Charan Boro of BPF -- also took oath as ministers. Bora declared a criminal case against himself in his affidavit, and the charge relates to "criminal breach of trust by public servant, or by banker, merchant or agent (IPC Section-409)", the report said. All the five ministers are crorepatis. Chief Minister Sarma has the highest assets worth over ₹ 35 crore, while he has also declared liabilities of over ₹ 16 crore. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Company records highest-ever drilling and workover operations during financial year OIL reports 7% rise in consolidated PAT in FY26

HT Correspondent DIBRUGARH, May 13: Oil India Limited (OIL) has reported a 7 per cent growth in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) for FY2025-26 while also achieving its highest-ever drilling and workover operations during the year. The financial results were approved during the company's 580th Board meeting held on Wednesday. According to the company, consolidated PAT for the financial year ended March 31, 2026 stood at ₹7,551 crore compared to ₹7,040 crore in FY25. In the fourth quarter of FY26, consolidated PAT rose by 62 per cent to ₹2,424 crore from ₹1,497 crore recorded during the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year. On a standalone



basis, OIL reported a PAT of ₹1,790 crore in Q4 FY26 compared to ₹1,591 crore in Q4 FY25. The company attributed the in-

crease to a 6 per cent rise in crude oil production and a 5 per cent increase in crude oil price realisation from USD 74.46 per barrel in Q4 FY25 to USD 77.89 per barrel in Q4 FY26. The Board of Directors has recommended a final dividend of ₹1 per equity share with a face value of ₹10 each. This is in addition to the first and second interim dividends of ₹3.50 and ₹7 per equity share already paid during the year. The company said it produced 0.891 million metric tonnes of crude oil from its mature oilfields during Q4 FY26, compared to 0.844 MMT during the same period last year. OIL also achieved its highest daily crude oil production of 10,566 metric tonnes during the year, marking the highest daily output in the last decade. During FY26, the company drilled 74 wells and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Committed to ensuring Assam's security, development: Himanta

GUWAHATI, May 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said his government was committed to ensuring the security and development of the state while fulfilling the promises made in the BJP's election manifesto in "letter and spirit". In his first official engagement after being sworn in for a second consecutive term, Sarma, accompanied by four cabinet colleagues, visited the memorial of Assam's first CM, Gopinath Bordoloi, and paid floral tributes. "Our government, before formally beginning work, visited the memorial of Bharat Ratna Gopinath Bordoloi to seek his blessings so that we can continue to work for Assam's security and development," Sarma told reporters. He said Bordoloi had worked tirelessly for the protection of Assam and the Assamese people before and after Independence. "We paid tributes to him with the hope that our dream of taking Assam to greater heights is re-

alised," the chief minister said. Sarma said the new government would formally begin functioning with the first cabinet meeting scheduled in the afternoon. He also said that the first session of the 16th Assam assembly is likely to be held for three days from May 21, during which newly elected MLAs will take the oath. On the expansion of his ministry, Sarma said the exercise would be undertaken after the conclusion of the assembly session. "The government will function with a positive approach, keeping the security and development of Assam, the Assamese people and the nation as its primary goal," he said. "This is not a new government, but a continuation of the earlier one. We will continue to work wholeheartedly," he added. The chief minister asserted that the government's focus would be on delivering the promises made in the BJP's election manifesto. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

'The best way to predict the future is to create it.'
- Abraham Lincoln

Crisis in INDIA bloc

INDIA bloc has suddenly fallen into a deeper crisis, a new phase of disintegration has set in, which cheers the BJP the most. The opposition camp has perhaps forgotten the proverb – united we stand, divided we fall. Just after the Legislative Assembly elections results were out on May 4, 2026 the dark shadow of the crisis started hovering over the INDIA bloc. BJP had swept the polls in West Bengal defeating TMC led by Mamata Banerjee, while TVK of Vijay emerged the largest political party in Tamil Nadu that ultimately ejected M K Stalin and his DMK from power. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi then said that only Congress can defeat the BJP in the country that angered the INDIA bloc allies. The matter did not stop here. Congress deserted INDIA bloc ally DMK in Tamil Nadu after the election results were out and sided with Vijay. This antagonised the DMK leadership, which said that they will not seat with the Congress in the Parliament. The action of the Congress drew sharp criticism by several political leaders. The most significant was the cryptic message of the Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav who took an indirect swipe at Congress by posting in social media.

Since Uttar Pradesh will be going to polls in 2027, this message has acquired special importance. No wonder, if the things are not tackled carefully, Congress and Samajwadi Party may contest separately in the forthcoming election in the state. Congress led United Democratic Front (UDF) has defeated the LDF in Kerala, and that may have emboldened Rahul Gandhi to say that only Congress can defeat BJP at the national level. In Kerala and West Bengal, Congress and the Left are competitors. In West Bengal, TMC, Congress, and Left Front are competitors, and therefore, they could not unite against the BJP. Not only that, reports have come out that the Left front even helped BJP to win by sloganeering at the ground level. TMC had thrown Left Front government in West Bengal in 2011, and hence the Left leadership was unable to reconcile with Mamata.

It is a reality that political parties in the INDIA bloc have their own regional political interests, while the Congress is the only party that has national interests with their larger support base. As the biggest political party in opposition, Congress has therefore greater responsibility to nurture a culture of federalism in the INDIA bloc – that is a union of regional and national political forces. The need of the hour is that the INDIA bloc parties should immediately sit together to sort out differences and reunite, or else be ready to be defeated by the BJP, be ruined as political parties, or become inconsequential.

The Lotus's resilience: Transforming India's political landscape

By: Dipak Kurmi

The lotus occupies a singular position within the Indian civilizational psyche, serving as a profound metaphor for the soul's journey through the material world. It is not merely a decorative motif but a foundational philosophical argument manifest in the iconography of the divine. Lord Vishnu is often depicted seated upon it, Goddess Lakshmi is born from its heart, and both Saraswati and Brahma find their station upon its expansive petals. This consistent imagery suggests a deeper truth about the nature of existence: the lotus draws its primary sustenance from the darkest, most stagnant silt, yet it emerges onto the surface entirely unsoiled. Its petals remain hydrophobic, repelling the very mud that facilitated its growth. In the realm of contemporary Indian politics, this allegory finds its most potent application. The question for a transformative movement is never whether one will encounter the systemic "mud" of corruption, stagnation, or identity-based patronage, but whether the movement possesses the inherent purity and structural integrity to transcend it.

For decades, the political landscape of India's peripheries—specifically West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala—has been characterized by deeply entrenched, often muddy systems. These regions, while distinct in their linguistic and cultural identities, shared a common thread of ideological narrow-mindedness that frequently prioritized the survival of the political class over dynamic, citizen-centric governance. This environment represents the "mud" of the Indian democratic experience: an intrinsic actuality of patronage networks and institutional decay that makes reform appear nearly impossible. However, historical shifts remind us that true political metamorphosis seldom occurs in pristine, sterile conditions. Rather, it happens at the precise moment when the existing systems seem most resistant to change, providing the necessary pressure for a new vision to break through the surface tension of the status quo.

The most dramatic illustration of this phenomenon is visible in West Bengal, a state where the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) represents one of the most significant shifts in modern political history. Bengal has never been a space of political apathy; its citizenry is historically attuned to high-octane ideological discourse and sub-

versive intellectualism. For the BJP, penetrating this terrain was far more than a simple electoral task; it was a grueling, long-term struggle against a deeply embedded cadre-based culture that had effectively blurred the lines between party and state. The incumbent structures were not merely resistant to external ideological currents; they were designed to be impenetrable. Yet, against these formidable odds, the lotus began to bloom. This growth signifies a fundamental change in the political psychology of the Bengali voter, moving beyond the binary of local parties toward a competing vision that juxtaposes regional legacy against a national narrative of developmental aspiration and a rebellion against systemic violence. This success in the East was not a product of coincidence but a result of meticulous organizational depth and the re-calibration of political messaging. The BJP managed to attract constituencies that had long felt neglected or marginalized within the existing power structures of the state. By framing its narrative not as a rejection of Bengali identity, but as an integration of that identity into a wider, more muscular national context, the party navigated the fine line between cultural assertion and national integration. Bengal serves as a crucial milestone because it demonstrates that even the most established political ecosystems are not impenetrable. The lotus, once dismissed as a foreign entity in the political ponds of Bengal, has now established its roots so firmly that it has begun to reform the very topography of the state's political discourse.

In contrast to the ideological breakthrough seen in Bengal, the situation in Assam represents a masterclass in administrative consolidation. In the Northeast, the movement has successfully transitioned from the role of an insurgent challenger to that of a stabilizing institution of governance. Historically, Assam was a state plagued by ethnic anxieties, growth disparities, and extended periods of volatility that hindered long-term planning. Under the current paradigm, stability has become a tangible reality rather than a distant hope. The shift from the politics of agitation to the discipline of administration is what distinguishes a transient wave from a durable political movement. By focusing on the hard metrics of delivery—connectivity, road infrastructure, and the transparent implementation of social schemes—the party has earned a level of credibility that transcends traditional identity

barriers. In Assam, the lotus is not just blooming; it is actively oxygenating the environment, proving that the party can evolve into a reliable vehicle for regional prosperity.

Tamil Nadu, however, presents a distinct set of challenges that require a different temporal perspective. The state's political landscape is defined by decades of Dravidian ideology, which has cultivated a robust identity paradigm and an insular political system. Cracking such a sophisticated and deeply rooted structure cannot be achieved through blunt force or "hacking" into the system; it requires a patient, incremental internalization of ideology. The BJP's strategy here has been one of long-term preparation, prioritizing organizational network-building and a subtle engagement with cultural narratives over immediate, confrontational electoral gains. There is a growing segment of the electorate, particularly among urban youth and those seeking an alternative to the traditional Dravidian binaries, that is beginning to look toward new possibilities. By emphasizing the civilizational roots of Tamil culture and aligning them with a broader national vision, the groundwork is being laid for a future transformation that respects local heritage while ending political isolation.

Kerala remains perhaps the most intriguing and complex battleground within this civilizational project. The state is characterized by a cyclical voting mechanism that has created a stable but potentially inert political equilibrium. While the electorate is highly informed and public discourse is vigorous, the friction between the dominant fronts has often led to a stalemate regarding substantive economic reform and governance innovation. However, the accumulation of "mud" in the form of political fatigue, unmet aspirations among the younger generation, and systemic stagnation is creating a climate ripe for introspection. In Kerala, the hurdle is as much about perception as it is about institutional presence. The challenge lies in establishing the movement as a viable, authentic alternative that can blend governance efficacy with ideological clarity without being viewed through the lens of traditional communal or external stereotypes.

The shifts occurring in Kerala are subtle but unmistakable, resembling the quiet collection of elements beneath a tranquil surface. Political identities that were once considered unshakable are being questioned as voters weigh the merits of performance against the comfort of dogmatism.

The BJP's role in this theater is not to disrupt for the sake of chaos, but to portray a genuine path forward that addresses the economic prospects and governance standards that the current equilibrium has failed to deliver. If the transition in Bengal was an explosion of suppressed aspiration, the transition in Kerala will be a gradual reconfiguration of expectations. The initial signs of this shift indicate that the political environment is no longer as limited as it once was, and the space for a new narrative is expanding as the old systems reach their natural point of exhaustion.

When viewed as a collective trajectory, these four states reveal a sophisticated, adaptive strategy that scales its approach based on local regional factors. In some geographies, the movement acts as an insurgent spirit, breaking through decades of stagnation; in others, it acts as an anchoring force for stability and governance. The central irony, much like the biology of the lotus itself, is that the movement does not reject the mud of the existing political environment. It acknowledges the reality of the silt, uses it as the initial site of engagement, and subsequently grows out of it. This duality—participation in the system without becoming entangled in its worst vices—is what provides the movement with its durability and its claim to purity. The lotus does not emerge clean because it avoided the water, but because its internal nature is designed to rise above it.

The political reclamation of these diverse regions is a testament to disciplined growth and patient rooting. The lotus does not blossom simply because the mud is deep or the environment is challenging; it blossoms because it possesses an unwavering orientation toward the light. In the states of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, the stages of this bloom vary, yet the direction is consistent. Whether through the administrative success in the Brahmaputra valley or the ideological persistence in the Gangetic plains and the southern coasts, the topography of Indian politics is being reshaped. As the sediment of old systems deepens, the room for emergence only grows. The horizon is undergoing a transformation that is at once quiet and monumental, driven by the realization that even in the most resistant soil, the right seed, nurtured by discipline and vision, will eventually find its way to the sun. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)

The Digital Gavel: India's Judicial Revolution

By: Satvabrat Borah

The pursuit of justice in India has long been a marathon through a labyrinth of paper and procedure. For decades, the halls of the judiciary have been defined by the scent of old files and the visual weight of stacked affidavits. Today, that landscape is undergoing a profound transformation as the legal system attempts to reconcile its ancient traditions with the speed of the digital age. Chief Justice of India Surya Kant recently introduced two major technological pillars designed to reshape this experience: a unified data platform known as One Case, One Data and an intelligent assistant named Su-Sahayak. These tools represent a significant leap toward a future where a legal dispute is no longer a fragmented series of disconnected events but a continuous digital narrative. To understand the gravity of this shift, one must look at the historical chaos of judicial record-keeping where a single case could look entirely different as it moved from a small district court to a high court.

The concept of One Case, One Data aims to eliminate this fragmentation by creating a single digital fingerprint for every legal dispute. In the current system, documents are often re-filed, manual verifications are repeated at every level of appeal, and statistics are frequently unreliable because of the sheer variety of software used across thousands of subordinate courts. By standardizing this data, the judiciary hopes to build a system where a judge in a higher court can see the entire history of a case with a single click. This isn't just about convenience; it is about the integrity of information. When records are unified, the risk of losing critical evidence or missing a procedural step decreases significantly. This transparency allows administrators to pinpoint exactly where bottlenecks occur, making it possible to address delays that have historically kept litigants in limbo for generations.

Su-Sahayak acts as the public face of this digital revolution. It is an artificial intelligence chatbot integrated directly into the Supreme Court website, intended to guide users through the complexities of case statuses, judgments, and filing services. For a citizen who has never stepped into a courtroom, the Supreme Court portal can be an intimidating maze of legal jargon and broken links. Su-Sahayak seeks to act as a digital clerk, providing immediate answers to frequently asked questions and helping people find the specific orders they need. This follows in the footsteps of earlier tools like SUVAS,

which focuses on translating judgments into regional languages, and SUPACE, which helps process vast amounts of legal precedents. The goal is clear: to make the highest court in the land feel a little more accessible to the common person.

While these advancements offer a glimmer of efficiency, they also bring into focus the deep-seated inequalities that define the Indian landscape. The digital divide is not a theoretical problem; it is a daily reality for millions of people. When we talk about digitizing the judiciary, we must ask who is being asked to carry the burden of that change. A large corporate law firm in a metropolitan city like Delhi or Mumbai can easily afford the high-speed scanners, cloud storage, and updated software required to maintain a seamless digital trail. These firms have IT departments and the capital to absorb the costs of transition. On the other hand, an independent lawyer practicing in a small taluka court may find these requirements overwhelming. If the system mandates a level of digital proficiency and infrastructure that smaller practitioners cannot provide, we risk creating a multi-tiered justice system where the quality of representation is tied to the quality of one's internet connection.

There is also the very real danger of digital middlemen. In many parts of India, when government services move online, a new industry of unregulated operators often emerges to help those who are not tech-literate. These intermediaries charge fees to navigate portals, upload documents, and check statuses. If the e-filing process becomes too complex, the cost of justice might actually increase for the poor as they pay these unofficial gatekeepers to interact with a system that was supposed to be simpler. Su-Sahayak, for all its intelligence, remains a text-based tool. In a country where oral tradition and voice communication are dominant, a chatbot that requires typing and navigating menus might exclude the very people who need help the most. While other government initiatives have embraced voice-first technology to bridge the literacy gap, the judicial tools currently demand a high level of formal digital literacy.

There are profound ethical questions regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the realm of law. AI models are trained on historical data, and historical data often carries the weight of past prejudices. In India, marginalized communities have been disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system. If an AI tool is used to help process facts or identify precedents, there is a risk

that it might unknowingly replicate the biases present in those older records. The judiciary has wisely kept AI in the role of an assistant rather than a decision-maker, focusing on substantive reasoning remains a strictly human endeavor. This distinction is vital. A machine can summarize a thousand pages of evidence in seconds, but it cannot understand the nuances of human dignity or the social context of a crime. Keeping the human element at the center of the courtroom is essential to prevent the law from becoming a cold, algorithmic calculation.

The security of this data is another pressing concern. A centralized platform containing the life stories and legal battles of millions of citizens is an incredibly sensitive asset. Ensuring the privacy of litigants while maintaining an open and transparent system is a delicate balancing act. Legacy records, often handwritten and decaying, must be digitized with extreme care to ensure their integrity. If a digital fingerprint is corrupted or accessed by unauthorized parties, the consequences for an individual's life could be irreversible. The push for a unified judicial data platform must be accompanied by a robust framework for data protection and a massive effort to train court staff across the country to handle this information responsibly.

The transition to a digital judiciary is a journey that requires more than just code and servers; it requires a deep commitment to empathy. Technology should serve as a bridge, not a barrier. As we move toward a more automated future, the focus must remain on the person standing at the back of the courtroom waiting for news about their case. For that person, the success of One Case, One Data is not measured by the speed of the server but by the fairness of the outcome. The tools introduced by the Chief Justice are a bold step in the right direction, but their true value will be determined by how well they serve the most vulnerable members of society. If we can ensure that a lawyer in a rural district has the same ability to navigate the system as a lawyer in a glass tower, then we will have truly improved access to justice. The path forward is complex, but the goal of a faster, more transparent, and more equitable legal system is worth the effort of navigating these digital growing pains. We are witnessing the beginning of a new chapter in Indian law, one where the pen and paper are slowly making room for the pixel and the algorithm, and the hope is that this change will lead to a more just world for everyone.

Modern lifestyle and mental anxiety

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Every individual in the present-day world has entered into an undeclared and directionless competition. This competition has no definite destination; only a strange and abnormal tendency of running endlessly has spread through every layer of society. While the modern way of life has elevated us to the highest peaks of material comfort and luxury, it has completely snatched away our mental peace. Nowadays, people have started determining their daily activities based more on desires than necessities. The era when people peacefully slept after having two simple meals a day has been replaced by an unending pressure inside the human mind to improve one's social and economic status at every moment. We have fallen prey to a system where taking rest is considered a kind of crime or failure. This mechanical lifestyle has taken individuals so far away from their inner selves that nobody has any leisure left to speak to themselves or understand their own mental condition. From waking up in the morning until collapsing into sleep at night, the human brain is constantly burdened with information, thoughts, and work. As a result, the brain has gradually lost its natural ability to rest, and it is in this state that mental anxiety silently begins to consume a person. Just as physical pain is felt when some part of the body is injured, similarly excessive mental pressure gives rise to anxiety and depression within the mind. This anxiety is not a problem created overnight; it is the accumulated outcome of years of abnormal lifestyle, excessive expectations, and unfulfilled desires. The inability of people to maintain the boundary between their capacity and their needs has transformed this mental disorder into an epidemic. In the name of modernity, we have created an artificial environment that is completely against human nature. Our brains have failed to adapt to these unimaginable changes. Consequently, an uncomfortable atmosphere constantly chases people, which may not be visible externally but gradually weakens individuals from within and transforms the journey called life into a dreadful burden.

The widespread expansion of modern technology and the internet is often said to have transformed the entire world into a small village, but in reality, this very technology has distanced people from one another more than ever before. In the illusory world of social media, there exists an unwritten rule of constantly proving one's superiority. Instead of confronting the joys and sor-

rows of real life, people have started giving more importance to presenting a perfect and artificial version of life on digital screens. By constantly viewing the glamorous, luxurious, and travel-filled lifestyles of others, ordinary individuals develop an unending sense of inferiority and deprivation. This comparative mentality has emerged as one of the biggest causes of anxiety. Instead of being satisfied with what they possess, people spend sleepless nights worrying about why they do not have what others possess. Moreover, the mobile phone in our hands carries every positive and negative event occurring across the globe into our minds every second. The human brain is not capable of processing and analyzing such an enormous volume of information simultaneously.

Particularly, the continuous flow of negative news, wars, violence, and economic crises creates an artificial fear inside the brain, which the mind accepts as a real threat even when it is not directly connected to the individual. As a result, chemical changes occur within the body, hormonal imbalance develops, and people begin to suffer from constant mental instability. Excessive digital connectivity has also shattered real human relationships. Natural human interactions such as looking into each other's eyes while speaking and sharing emotions are gradually disappearing. Even while sitting together in the same room, every individual remains occupied with their own screen. This extreme loneliness slowly pushes people toward depression. People fail to find a genuine listener before whom they can openly express their feelings, and consequently, the emotions suppressed within the mind eventually transform into unbearable mental pressure and anxiety. The more mechanical life becomes, the weaker the emotional foundation of human beings grows, leading society toward a deep psychological crisis.

The present economic system and work culture have started treating human beings like machines where there is no place for human emotions or rest. In earlier times, people worked mainly through physical labour for livelihood, and that labour had a fixed time limit. But in today's corporate world, time has no definite boundary. Even after returning home, office work continues to chase individuals through technology. In the name of productivity and success, people are constantly compelled to exhaust themselves completely. The moment one target is achieved, another bigger target is placed ahead. This endless race leaves no opportunity for ex-

haustion or rest. Simultaneously, the modern consumerist market system continuously stimulates people to purchase new products. Even when unnecessary, individuals do not hesitate to spend beyond their earnings merely to display social status or because they fall into the trap of advertisements. Bank loans, credit card bills, and monthly instalments bind people within chains of economic slavery. This economic pressure destroys mental peace completely. The fear of losing a job, worries about repaying debts, and the constant performance of appearing successful before society collectively create immense psychological pressure. People become so anxious about securing the future that they fail to enjoy the present moment, ultimately transforming their current lives into a kind of hell. Success is now measured solely through wealth and property, due to which essential aspects such as morality, peace, and spending time with family have become neglected. Under such circumstances, when individuals realize that the more they run, the farther the destination moves away, a deep sense of despair begins to grow within them, and this despair ultimately takes the form of severe mental anxiety.

Another major reason behind modern mental instability is humanity's disconnection from nature and confinement within urban environments. The human body and brain evolved over millions of years in harmony with natural surroundings, sunlight, and open air. However, in today's lifestyle, people spend most of their time inside air-conditioned rooms under artificial lighting. This abnormal environment has completely disrupted the biological clock and natural rhythm of the body. The greatest impact of this disruption is visible in human sleep patterns. Staying awake late at night and remaining exposed to artificial screen light while lying in bed interferes with the chemical processes required for deep sleep. Due to the lack of adequate and restful sleep, the brain fails to clear away the fatigue and emotional stress accumulated during the day. Consequently, individuals wake up the next morning with an irritable and unstable state of mind. Alongside this, modern food habits are equally responsible for increasing mental anxiety. Artificially processed foods filled with chemicals and excessive sugar have severely damaged digestive health. Scientific studies have proven that there exists a direct connection between the digestive system and the brain. Unhealthy food destroys beneficial bacteria within the body, indirectly sending negative signals to the brain and

thereby causing depression and anxiety. Lack of physical activity is another significant factor. Physical exercise and labour release chemicals within the body that naturally help maintain a cheerful state of mind. But in today's comfortable lifestyle, physical activity has nearly disappeared, and as a result, the energy accumulated within the body fails to find a natural outlet, gradually transforming into deep mental stress. This disconnection between body and mind has made modern humans increasingly unhealthy and anxious.

Human beings are social creatures by nature, and society itself has always been the strongest foundation of mental stability. In earlier times, people lived collectively within communities where they shared one another's joys and sorrows, and this functioned as a powerful psychological shield. However, modern urbanization and individualistic mentality have completely destroyed this social structure. In today's society, every individual resembles an isolated island. Nobody knows or even cares about what is happening in the neighbouring household. Human relationships are gradually becoming transactional and driven by self-interest. Once necessity ends, relationships also come to an end. Under such circumstances, people struggle desperately to find a trustworthy person before whom they can speak openly about the deepest corners of their hearts. Emotional distance within families has also increased. Due to work pressure on both husband and wife, they fail to give time to one another, while the distance between parents and children continues to widen. This extreme emotional emptiness slowly begins to consume people from within.

Although modern life may appear highly organized and beautiful externally, in reality most individuals are internally engaged in terrifying psychological battles. Anxiety is no longer merely a mental illness; it has become an unavoidable component of modern lifestyle itself. To escape from this situation, humanity must redefine its priorities in life. Instead of allowing technology and the economy to control our lives, we must learn to use them merely as tools. Until people understand the difference between necessity and desire, escaping the vicious cycle of modern life will remain impossible. More than artificial medicines or treatments, the only realistic and permanent solution to mental anxiety lies in reconnecting our lifestyle with nature and human values.

KSA, KAWJF seek women's commission intervention in Deithor minor assault case

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, May 13: The Karbi Students Association (KSA) and the Karbi Anglong Women Justice Forum (KAWJF) jointly submitted a memorandum to the Chairperson of the Assam State Commission for Women on Tuesday, urging immediate intervention in the alleged sexual assault of a minor girl at Deithor.

The memorandum was submitted through a senior officer at the Commission's office in Guwahati. The delegation was led by KSA General Secretary Barnabas Killing along with his team. Representatives from KAWJF, including president Beault Beypri, general secretary Presila Terangpi and other members were also present.



The organisations have demanded that the Commission take immediate cognisance of the serious

allegations against Dr Dipok Bora, Principal of Deithor Government Model College in Karbi Ang-

long. They have called for a fair, impartial and time-bound investigation into the matter, followed by strict legal action against the accused as per the provisions of the law.

The press release regarding the submission was issued by Devinson Kro, Publicity Secretary of KSA-CEC.

This development comes amid growing outrage in Karbi Anglong over the alleged incident with student and women's groups pressing for justice and accountability in cases involving the protection of minors and women's safety.

The Assam State Commission for Women is expected to examine the memorandum and initiate necessary steps in line with its mandate.

Illegal cattle smuggling continues in Chirang

Locals detain six vehicles carrying alleged smuggled cattle



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 13: Illegal cattle smuggling activities continue to thrive in Chirang district, with vehicles allegedly transporting smuggled cattle moving in large numbers.

At Bhirhangaon under Kajal-

gaon Police Station in Chirang district, local residents detained six vehicles allegedly loaded with smuggled cattle.

The registration numbers of the vehicles are as follows:
AS-25-FC-1409
AS-15-AC-6348

AS-26-AC-3033
AS-15-BC-0386
AS-01-NC-5677

A total of 50 allegedly smuggled cattle were found in the six seized vehicles. Although local residents informed the police after detaining the vehicles, the persons allegedly involved in the cattle smuggling fled with the vehicles before police personnel arrived at the spot.

It is noteworthy that every night, an alleged large-scale illegal cattle trade is reportedly carried out from the India-Bhutan border to Nangla, Barpeta and Abhayapuri, while police are accused of turning a blind eye to the activity.

According to one of the vehicle drivers, a youth identified as Saheb Ali alias Ranjit, a resident of Chatipur in Chirang district is allegedly involved in facilitating the daily transportation of these cattle in exchange for money.

Diphu to conduct blackout mock exercise and rescue drill on May 16

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 13: A Blackout Mock Exercise and Rescue Operation is scheduled to be held on May 16, 2026. The drill will be conducted at Don Bosco College during the evening hours from 06:30 pm to 07:30 pm.

The operation is structured to simulate a real-time response to a high-stakes emergency scenario. At 06:00 PM, the Town Civil Defence Control Centre (TCDDC) in Diphu will receive a simulated "Air Raid Red" signal from the Regional Centre in Tezpur.

Residents will hear a siren for two minutes indicating the red signal, followed later by another two-minute "all clear" siren.

The drill will simulate an air strike at the Don Bosco Boys' Hostel. School authorities will report the incident to the Deputy Commissioner's office, which will activate the emergency response chain.

A comprehensive task force will be deployed to the college campus, including Fire and Emergency Services personnel tasked with extinguishing simulated fires and cutting off utility lines to ensure a safe rescue environment. Security and rescue operations will include Police and Civil Defence personnel, who will manage the site and coordinate the extraction of "casualties". A specialised medical team will conduct triage at a field first aid post before transporting participants to Catholic Hospital.

Authorities stated that this is a mock exercise intended to strengthen coordination between various departments. To prevent public alarm, directives in the exercise brief emphasised that media and district social media channels must be informed prior to the event.

Upon completion, a formal evaluation will be submitted to the District Magistrate and the Controller of Civil Defence.

NFR installs Automatic Weather Stations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 13: In a significant step towards strengthening railway safety and disaster preparedness during the rainy season, the Northeast Frontier Railway has initiated the installation of Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) at vulnerable locations across its network. The initiative aims to ensure accurate and real-time weather forecasting, enabling timely preventive measures during floods, landslides and adverse weather conditions.

A total of nine Automatic Weather Stations are being set up at strategically identified vulnerable locations under NFR. These locations include the Lumding-Badarpur section in Assam, the Katakhal-Sairang section connecting Mizoram and the Jiribam-Khongsang section in Manipur. These areas are particularly prone to heavy rainfall, flooding and landslides during the monsoon season, making continuous weather monitoring essential for safe train operations.

So far, three Automatic Weather Stations have already been successfully installed, while the remaining six are currently at various stages of installation and are expected to be completed by the end of May 2026.

The installation of these weather stations is being carried out in close coordination with the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The AWS network will provide precise and location-specific weather data, helping railway authorities take timely and informed decisions during emergencies and adverse weather situations. This initiative is expected to significantly improve preparedness and response mechanisms, particularly in flood-prone and landslide-sensitive sections.

The Automatic Weather Stations are equipped with advanced sensors capable of monitoring multiple weather parameters with high accuracy. The rain gauge sensors can record rainfall intensity up to 900 mm per hour, while temperature sensors can measure temperatures ranging from minus 40 degrees Celsius to plus 75 degrees Celsius. Wind monitoring sensors can record wind speeds up to 80 metres per second. In addition, the stations are equipped with humidity sensors covering a range from 0 to 100% and pressure sensors capable of measuring atmospheric pressure up to 1200 hPa.

The deployment of these advanced weather monitoring systems reflects Northeast Frontier Railway's continued commitment towards enhancing operational safety, adopting modern technology and ensuring uninterrupted rail connectivity in challenging geographical regions during the monsoon season.

Happy Child Higher Secondary School honours Board toppers and teachers

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 13: Happy Child Higher Secondary School, a prestigious educational institution in Guwahati, organised a felicitation ceremony to honour students who achieved outstanding results in the Class 10 and 12 Board examinations for the 2025-26 academic session. Parents of the students were also invited to attend the event.

Continuing its tradition of encouraging students and teachers through recognition and rewards for their hard work, the school management felicitated meritorious students and also paid tribute to teachers for their tireless efforts, service and dedication towards achieving excellent academic results.

During the programme, 24 students who secured 90% or above marks were presented with certificates, trophies and a cheque of ₹ 3,000 each. The school also recognised discipline as a key value and honoured 10 teachers, along with students, for maintaining 100% attendance by presenting them with gifts.

The House Masters, who led various co-curricular activities and cultural programmes throughout the year, were also felicitated with gifts in appreciation of their exemplary contributions.

Expressing her delight on the occasion, School Secretary CA Saloni Binnani released the annual school magazine Agnitio along with other management members. She encouraged the students to further refine the knowledge acquired at the school, strive for holistic development and lead meaningful lives. She also conveyed her gratitude to the dedicated faculty members of the institution.

Commending the school's outstanding examination results, School Chairman CA B K Bansal, along with Management Committee members Sunil Agarwal and Anup Kr Khemani, praised both the students and teachers and extended their best wishes for a bright future.

Livelihood Business Incubation Unit 2 inaugurated at Tocklai Tea Research Institute

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 13: The Livelihood Business Incubation Unit 2 was set up by the Jorhat centre of the Indian Institute of Plantation Management inside the Tocklai Tea Research Institute (TTRI) campus, recently.

The incubation unit is sponsored by the Ministry of MSME, Government of India, under the ASPIRE Scheme.

The newly established Incubation Unit 2 will specifically cater to the needs of spice cultivators and horticulture crops, complementing the earlier Unit 1 that was established for small tea farmers.

The event featured a presidential address by Dr S Senthil Vinayagam, Director of the Indian Institute of Plantation Management, Bengaluru, emphasising the strategic role of the incubation units. Dr Vinayagam also engaged in an interactive session with participants, encouraging dialogue



and exchange of ideas.

The chief guest, Dr Venkatesan Selvaraj, Director of TTRI, officially inaugurated the programme with an address highlighting the importance of fostering entrepreneurship and innovation in the region.

The event commenced with the lighting of lamps by distinguished dignitaries, creating a solemn and auspicious atmosphere.

Dr K Venkateswaran, Associate Professor at the Indian Institute of Plantation Management, Bengaluru, delivered the welcome address, setting the tone for the proceedings. This was followed by addresses from Sumit Gupta, Assistant Director at MSME Guwahati and Mantu Das, DDM at NABARD Jorhat, who highlighted the significance of the initiative.

Hojai District Committee formed to promote historical research and documentation

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 13: A significant meeting under the Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Yojana, New Delhi was held on Wednesday at the Srimanta Sankardeva Campus of Rabindranath Thakur Vishwavidyalaya in Hojai. Organised by the Assam unit of the Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Samiti, the programme focused on the preservation, documentation and reinterpretation of Indian history, culture and civilisation from an indigenous perspective. Scholars, researchers, students, writers and socially conscious citizens from Hojai and different parts of Assam attended the event.

The meeting was addressed by Hemanta Dhing Mazumdar, General Secretary of the Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Yojana, New Delhi. In his speech, he highlighted the importance of studying and documenting Indian history through Indian perspectives rather than colonial interpretations. He stated that many regional histories, folk traditions, local heroes and valuable historical sources had long remained neglected due to colonial historiography.

Mazumdar explained that the Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Yojana has been actively working across the country to collect and preserve local histories, folk culture, manuscripts, monuments and oral traditions. He de-

scribed history as the foundation of national identity, cultural consciousness and civilisational continuity and stressed the need to involve younger generations in historical studies and research. He also called upon society to come forward for the preservation and documentation of the rich historical and cultural heritage of Assam and the North-East.

Speakers at the meeting emphasised the scientific documentation of Assam's history, literature, folk traditions and regional heritage. They also highlighted the importance of organised efforts to popularise the historical and cultural legacy of Hojai district among the younger generation.

During the programme, the Hojai District Committee of the Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Samiti, Assam was formally constituted. Former Principal i/c of Lanka College Dr Guneswar Saikia was elected president, while Gautam Sarmah, Faculty Member of History, Rabindranath Thakur Vishwavidyalaya was elected Secretary.

Dr Achala Bhattacharyya was elected vice-president, Pranjal Kumar Nath Joint Secretary, Narayan Krishna Das Organising Secretary, Dr Dipankar Debnath Joint Organising Secretary, writer Padmakanta Bora Vidwat Pramukh, Professor Nageswar Yadav Lekhak Pramukh and Ranjan Choudhury Prachar Pramukh.

Karbi Anglong ADM issues notice on explosives NOC proposal

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 13: The Office of the Additional District Magistrate (ADM), Karbi Anglong has officially issued an additional public notice concerning a request for a No Objection Certificate (NOC) under the Explosives Rules, 2008.

The application, submitted by M/s A S Enterprise, seeks authorisation for the possession and use of Class 1 to 7 explosives. These materials are intended for critical infrastructure and blasting-related

works, including well sinking, canal construction, quarry mining, pipeline installations, road construction, dam works and other legally approved government projects.

The proposed site for the explosives magazine is located at Patta No 167, Dag No 629, situated in Palam Gaon village, under the jurisdiction of the Dokmoka Police Station and Phuloni Revenue Circle in Karbi Anglong, Assam.

In compliance with Rule 103,

Sub-Rule (3)(a) of the Explosives Rules, 2008, the district administration is inviting public feedback regarding this proposal.

Any person or entity wishing to raise an objection must submit their concerns along with valid reasons within one week from the date of publication of this notice. All correspondence should be addressed to the designated Enquiry Officer, James Daimari, ACS, Executive Magistrate, Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

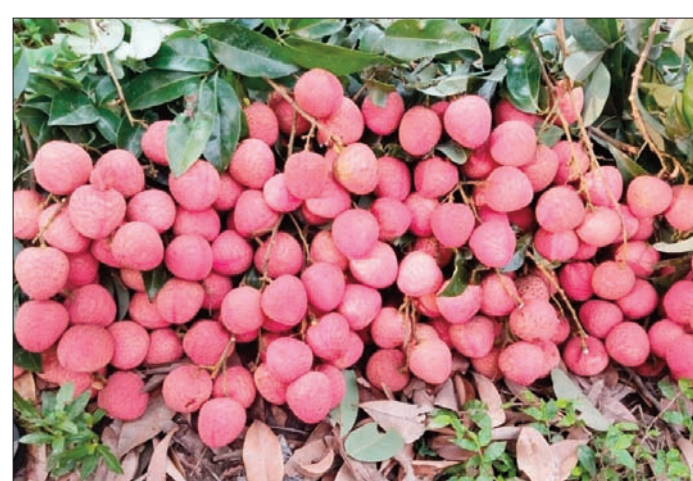
Tezpur Litchi Festival 2026 to showcase GI-Tagged fruit globally

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 13: The Tezpur Litchi Festival 2026 will be held on June 6 and 7 with an elaborate two-day programme aimed at promoting Tezpur's renowned litchi in wider national and international markets and firmly establishing its identity on the global stage.

To discuss the preparations for the Tezpur Litchi Festival 2026, a meeting was held on Monday at Prashanti Lodge of the Tourism Department in Tezpur. In the presence of representatives from various sectors, a strong festival organising committee comprising officials from different departments and local entrepreneurs was constituted.

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Develop-



ment Authority (APEDA) has come forward as one of the principal partners of the festival this year. Representatives of APEDA,

Assam Tourism Development Corporation and NABARD attended the meeting and assured their cooperation for the event.

The organisers have decided to include special programmes for students along with cultural performances by noted artists during the two-day festival. In a bid to create awareness among school students and encourage the development of litchi cultivation as a sustainable industry, one educational institution will also be associated as a special partner of the event.

The committee further resolved to seek all possible cooperation from the Sonitpur district administration for the successful conduct of the festival. Among the major attractions planned are visits to litchi orchards, exhibition and sale of fresh and processed litchi products, outdoor recreational activities and arrangements for visitors to purchase fresh litchis directly from farmers

at the orchards.

The organisers stated that interested participants and visitors may contact 9126665796 for further information regarding the festival.

Notably, Tezpur litchi has already received the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag and has earned praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi on earlier occasions. The meeting also decided to invite Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to formally inaugurate the festival.

The first edition of the Tezpur Litchi Festival was held last year through the initiative of a group of young entrepreneurs and litchi growers with support from the district administration, the Agriculture Department and the Tourism Department.

Wild elephant damages houses in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 13: A wild elephant damaged two houses at Laokriguri village under Gongia VCDC late Tuesday night in Kokrajhar district.

According to local sources, the elephant from Raimona National Park (RNP) strayed into the village from the nearby forest area and damaged the houses while searching for food.

Family members of the affected households managed to escape safely and no casualties were reported in the incident.

The incident once again highlighted the growing human-elephant conflict in areas surrounding the national park.

Local residents informed the forest department after the incident.

"Wild elephants are reportedly moving towards human-inhabited areas in search of food and sometimes damage houses as well as properties," said a resident of the village.



Bishnuram Nunisa receives the 'Adarsha Axomiya Saman - 2026' (Exemplary Assamese Award - 2026) from ANACC.

Sivasagar holds meeting for mock air raid preparedness exercise

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 13: A meeting for preparation of a rehearsal exercise on a possible air strike was held at Sukapha Bhawan in Sivasagar on Tuesday. As per directives of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Assam and the Directorate of Civil Defence, the rehearsal for a possible air strike will be conducted between 6:15 PM and 7:00 PM on May 16. Mock emergency security preparatory exercises will be conducted to create awareness among the public.

The venue for the rehearsal will be the High Street Market Complex and adjacent areas near the Central Market in Sivasagar. The exercise includes moving to safety immediately after hearing a wartime siren, switching off lights in homes and establishments, blocking out the area and cooperating with authorities while emergency service providers or departments attend to victims of air strikes. The drill also includes an emergency response exercise on how to assist those in need.

The meeting sought full cooperation from the public in making the exercise a success and requested residents to ensure blackout of the area within the stipulated time. The lights will be turned off and the area will be darkened as soon as the alarm sounds for two minutes at 6:15 PM and lights will be switched on again at 6:25 PM when the green signal or siren sounds for two consecutive minutes.

Israeli drone strikes hit highway south of Beirut, killing 8, including 2 children



BEIRUT, May 13: Israeli drones struck three vehicles on the main highway south of Beirut Wednesday, killing eight people, including a woman and her two children, the Lebanese Health Ministry said.

The Israeli military said it struck Hezbollah infrastructure in several areas in southern Lebanon, hours after telling residents of six southern villages to evacuate.

Lebanon and Israel are scheduled to hold another round of direct talks in Washington on Thursday as the Trump administration pushes for a breakthrough between the two neighbors that have been at a state of war since Israel was created in 1948.

The Health Ministry confirmed in a statement the three strikes, but didn't detail the number of people in

each vehicle.

Two of Wednesday's drone attacks hit a highway linking Beirut with the southern port city of Sidon, while a third, reported by the state-run National news agency, struck the town of Saadiyat, near the busy freeway. A fourth strike on Sidon's northern entrance happened in the early afternoon, hitting a car, according to state media. An Associated Press photographer saw the bodies of three people killed in two of the strikes near the coastal towns of Barja and Jiyeh.

In southern Lebanon, Israeli airstrikes were reported in different towns and villages while Hezbollah claimed launching more attacks on Israel as both sides keep exchanging fire despite a US-brokered ceasefire that went into effect on April 17. (AP)

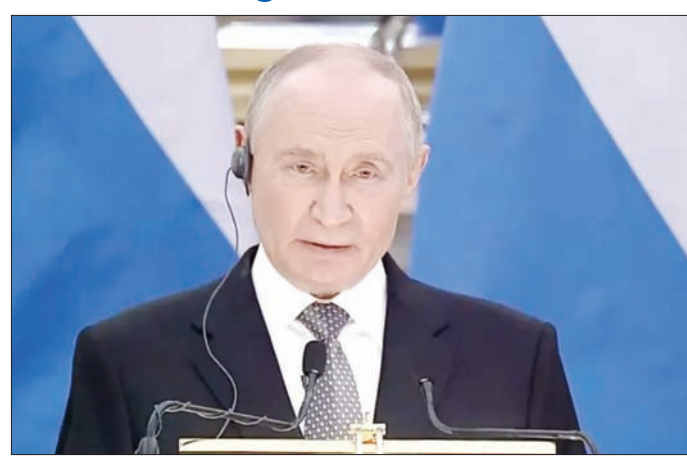
KYIV, May 13: More than 100 Russian drones targeted areas of Ukraine on Wednesday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, hours after another barrage of civilian areas killed at least eight people.

"Russia continues its strikes and is doing so brazenly — deliberately targeting our railway infrastructure and civilian sites in our cities," Zelenskyy said in a post on X.

Moscow's attacks on its neighbour are unrelenting, even as Ukraine is emboldened by its recent military accomplishments and as US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin said — without providing evidence — that the 4-year-old war could be approaching an end.

The overnight strikes targeted Ukraine's residential and railway infrastructure in the central Dnipro and northeastern Kharkiv regions, port infrastructure in the southern Odesa region, and energy facilities in the central Poltava region, according to Zelenskyy. On Tuesday, he said, 14 regions came under attack throughout the day.

"It is important to support Ukraine and not remain silent



about Russia's war. Every time the war disappears from the top of the news, it encourages Russia to become even more savage," Zelenskyy said, in an apparent reference to the world's attention being gripped by the Iran war.

Trump and Putin talk of a possible end to the war

Trump said Tuesday said he believes Moscow and Kyiv will soon reach a deal to end fighting.

"The end of the war in Ukraine I really think is getting very close," Trump told reporters as he departed the White House for a

'KYIV EMBOLDENED'

Russia presses its barrages of Ukraine as Trump talks of possible peace

again. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov indicated Wednesday that Moscow's fundamental terms are unchanged, with Putin insisting that Ukraine pull its troops from the four regions — Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia — that Russia illegally annexed in September 2022 but hasn't fully captured.

"At that point, a ceasefire will be established, and the parties can calmly engage in negotiations, which, incidentally, will inevitably be very complex and involve a lot of important details," Peskov said.

Meanwhile, European governments are assessing the merits of opening talks with Putin. Europe has for years tried to isolate the Russian leader and punished his country with international sanctions.

Fighting appears to shift in Ukraine's favour

The correlation of forces in the war has shifted in recent months. Ukraine has gone from pleading for international help with its defence to offering foreign countries its expertise on how to counter attacks, thanks to its domestically developed drone technology.

Ukraine's long-range drone and missile attacks have disrupted energy facilities and manufacturing deep inside Russia, with three regions reporting strikes Wednesday. The Russian Defence Ministry said that its forces intercepted and destroyed 286 Ukrainian drones over Russian regions, the illegally annexed Crimean Peninsula, the Azov Sea and the Black Sea.

On the 1,250-kilometer (780-mile) front line, the advance of Russia's bigger and better-equipped army has been slowing every month since October, according to the Institute for the Study of War.

Russia's spring offensive has floundered, with Russian forces recording a net loss of territory last month for the first time since 2024, the Washington-based think tank said.

"Not only are Ukrainian defensive lines holding, but Ukrainian forces have managed to contest the tactical initiative in several areas of the front line even as Russia continues to lose disproportionate amounts of manpower to achieve minimal gains," the ISW said Tuesday. (AP)

Pakistan's external debts rise by 3.6 pc: Central bank

KARACHI, May 13: Pakistan's external debts have risen by 3.6 per cent to reach PKR 22,959 billion in FY 2025-26, according to a report by the central bank here.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Wednesday released the latest statistics regarding the country's debt, revealing that Pakistan's total debt has surpassed Pakistani rupees (PKR) 80 trillion rupees.

The federal government's total debt reached PKR 80,524 billion in March, representing a 9.3 per cent increase compared to the same period last year, when the debt stood at PKR 73,688 billion, the central bank said.

The SBP report said that domestic debt had increased by 11.7 per cent reaching PKR 57,566 billion while the external debts stood at PKR 22,959 billion an increase of 3.6 per cent.

On a month-on-month basis, the State Bank noted a slight 1.1 per cent decrease in external debt; however, domestic debt rose by 1.6 per cent, leading to an overall debt increase of 0.8 per cent. The report says that at present the average debt per citizen is around PKR 3,50,000.

In April, Pakistan repaid a PKR 3.45 billion deposit to the United Arab Emirates after the UAE government refused to extend the facility term.

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves had gotten a boost earlier in April when Saudi Arabia deposited USD 3 billion with the SBP after an agreement which also extended a USD 5 billion deposit by Saudi Arabia for a further period of three years. (PTI)

Russia to fulfil all agreements on energy supply to India: FM Lavrov

MOSCOW, May 13: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has pledged that agreements on energy supplies to India will be fulfilled despite unfair external competition, as he underlined that the relations between the two countries are based on friendship and there is no scenario in which their paths would diverge.

In an interview with Russia Today-India ahead of his visit to New Delhi this week, Lavrov also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he is one of the most energetic leaders the world has ever seen.

"I can guarantee that India's interests as they apply to Russian supplies will not suffer. We will do everything to ensure that this unfair and dishonest competition does not damage our agreements," he said.

Lavrov pointed out that Russia has never failed to fulfil its obligations to India or anyone else when it comes to energy supplies.

"The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant is our flagship project. It meets a significant share of India's needs," he said. "Cooperation on the construction of new power units for this nuclear plant is continuing. Even so, India needs more. We continue supplying hydrocarbons such as gas, oil, and coal."

The Kudankulam nuclear power plant is being built in Tamil Nadu with the technical assistance of Russia. The construction began in March 2002. Since February 2016, the first power unit of the Kudankulam NPP has been steadily operating at its design capacity of 1,000 MW.

The plant is expected to start operating at full capacity in 2027, according to Russian state media.

Lavrov said Prime Minister Modi is "one of the most energetic leaders the world has ever known."

"He possesses great energy and channels it towards extremely important goals such as achieving maximum sovereignty across all spheres: the economy, the military, defence, culture, and the preservation of India's civilisational wealth, which is unmatched by any other country."

Lavrov said the relations between India and Russia are based on friendship and there is no scenario in which their paths would diverge.

"There isn't just one word for these relations. Not be-

cause human languages aren't rich enough, but because it is hard to imagine a relationship so full and deep," he said while replying to a question.

"A situation where our paths diverge simply does not exist — it is unthinkable. We began our conversation with the very foundation of Russian-Indian relations: friendship," Lavrov noted.

Stating that "Hindi-Rusi bhai bhai" (Indians and Russians are brothers), Lavrov said that's not just a fun slogan to chant, it has become part of our culture.

"Indian cinema, Raj Kapoor, more recent television series and films — they are immensely popular in Russia, everywhere, in every corner. The economy, joint energy production, military cooperation, nuclear and other forms of energy, cultural and humanitarian ties, and a high-level political dialogue marked by unprecedented trust — all of it is rock solid," he said.

"So anyone worried about the future of Russia-India friendship can rest assured. We must always be aware of the threats that some are posing to our relations, trying to undermine them, creating closed structures, and making attempts to impose their own rules on how to deal with Russia. We see all of that, and so do our Indian friends. That makes it all the more valuable that those attempts keep failing," Lavrov added.

During his visit to India, Lavrov will hold talks with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar and attend the BRICS foreign ministers' meeting. The two ministers will exchange views on current international and regional issues, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

"Special attention is expected to be paid to the situation in the Middle East. The Ministers are also expected to compare notes on cooperation within the UN, BRICS and the G20," it added.

It said that the two ministers will discuss a wide range of priority areas of bilateral cooperation.

"These include expanding trade, intensifying efforts to build sustainable transport, logistics, and financial channels protected from unlawful external pressure, deepening energy cooperation, and increasing collaboration in science and space technology," the ministry said. (PTI)

French hantavirus patient is critically ill, on artificial lung as total cases grow to 11

PARIS, May 13: A French woman infected in the deadly hantavirus outbreak on a cruise ship is critically ill and being treated with an artificial lung, a doctor at the Paris hospital caring for the sickened passenger said Tuesday.

The outbreak has now reached 11 total reported cases, 9 of which have been confirmed.

Three people on the cruise died, including a Dutch couple that health officials believe were the first exposed to the virus while visiting South America. The French passenger hospitalised in Paris has a severe form of the disease that has caused life-threatening lung and heart problems, said Dr. Xavier Lescure, an infectious disease specialist at Bichat Hospital.

He said the woman is on a life-support device that pumps blood through an artificial lung, providing it with oxygen and returning it to the body. The hope is that the device relieves enough pressure on the lungs and heart to give them some time to recover. Lescure called it "the final stage of supportive care." With the evacuation of all passengers and many crew members completed, the MV Hondius is now sailing back to the Netherlands, where it will be cleaned and disinfected.

The director of the World Health Organization said confirmed and suspected cases have only been reported among the cruise ship's passengers or crew.

"At the moment, there is no sign that we are see-

ing the start of a larger outbreak," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director general. He added: "But of course the situation could change, and given the long incubation period of the virus, it's possible we might see more cases in the coming weeks."

The latest person confirmed to be infected is a Spanish passenger who tested positive for hantavirus after being evacuated from the ship, Spain's health ministry said Tuesday. The passenger was in quarantine at a military hospital in Madrid.

Health authorities say it is the first hantavirus outbreak on a cruise ship. While there is no cure or vaccine for hantavirus, the WHO says early detection and treatment improves survival rates. (AP)

Soros' Open Society Foundations commit USD 30M to groups fighting antisemitism, anti-Muslim hate

NEW YORK, May 13: Open Society Foundations, the family philanthropy founded by hedge fund billionaire George Soros, is putting USD 30 million toward groups fighting antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate over the next three years.

The major human rights funder pledged Wednesday to strengthen interfaith partnerships and protect those facing heightened threats in response to the rising levels of hate against both Jewish and Muslim communities, coinciding with the Israel-Hamas war and the current fragile ceasefire.

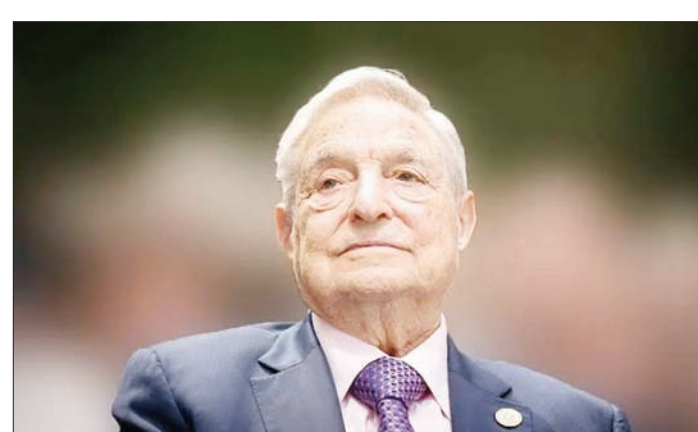
Last year saw the highest level of deadly violence against Jews worldwide in over three decades, according to an annual study released last month by Tel Aviv University, including the December shooting at a Hanukkah celebration in Australia.

Meanwhile, anti-Muslim rhetoric has intensified against the backdrop of the Iran war, with one congressional Republican saying Muslims "don't belong in American society".

"The deep injustices occurring in the Middle East are fuelling indiscriminate prejudice, dehumanisation, and violence directed against both Muslims and Jews," Open Society Foundations President Binaifer Nowrojee said in a statement. "Entire communities cannot be targeted simply because of their religion. Bigotry and intolerance in any form must be called out and confronted."

The announcement marks the foundations' most visible campaign since last fall's reports that the US Department of Justice was considering possible charges against Open Society Foundations. President Donald Trump specifically named Soros as he ordered the FBI to crack down on what he called "left-wing terrorism" — an accusation that OSF has denied in statements emphasizing their mission to strengthen democracy.

Alex Soros, who took over leadership of his father's foundations in late 2022, noted that "discrimination and hate" aren't abstract concepts for him as the son of a Holocaust survivor and husband to



a Muslim American.

The foundation added that George Soros, who holds significant influence as a liberal megadonor with vast financial investments and philanthropic ties, is frequently targeted by conservative conspiracy theories that twist those powerful connections into antisemitic tropes about behind-the-scenes puppet masters.

"At a moment like this we need to stand together and act," Alex

Soros said in a pre-taped video posted on social media. "This investment is about keeping people safe and pushing back against hate."

The commitment is aimed broadly at expanding education on forms of discrimination, supporting cross-community leaders who build trust and safeguarding free speech rights to lawful expression. The foundations have already selected some grantees and are inviting

other nonprofits to apply for funding.

Recipients include the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and the Nexus Project. Shoulder to Shoulder, a multi-faith alliance that prepares religious leaders to address anti-Muslim discrimination, is among those leading the work on Islamophobia.

Amy Spitalnick, the CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, welcomed the strategy to tackle both matters together. The grant will allow JCPA to build upon its solidarity work with Muslim and Arab American communities, Spitalnick said, which have deepened since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

She pointed to a fellowship and a Capitol Hill discussion on Jewish-Muslim solidarity that were both launched with the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

She emphasized that hate is interconnected. The normalisation of Islamophobia, racism and broader anti-democratic extremism creates

the conditions for antisemitism to flourish, she said.

"We need funders and others to recognize that treating any of these issues in silos doesn't get at the root cause, doesn't get at the broader resiliency we need right now," Spitalnick said. "The fact that Jewish safety requires Muslim safety, that Muslim safety requires Jewish safety." The Soros' announcement did not say how the foundations will define antisemitism — a point of contention on college campuses and in state legislatures where debates have raged over whether criticism of Israel amounts to hatred of Jewish people.

The shortlist of Open Society grantees suggests a more nuanced definition than the Anti-Defamation League, which releases an annual audit of antisemitic incidents in the United States. The ADL holds that vilifying Zionism, or the movement to establish and maintain a Jewish state in Israel, is a form of antisemitism.

In contrast, the Nexus Project promotes definitions of anti-

semitism that do not include opposition to the Israeli state's policies. Similarly, as the National Education Association weighed a resolution prohibiting the use of the ADL's educational resources, Spitalnick emphasized that "one does not need to align with the ADL on every issue".

Andrés Spokoyny, the president and CEO of the Jewish Funders Network, estimated that the philanthropic sector has dedicated hundreds of thousands of dollars to countering antisemitism — regardless of its definition.

Other high-profile efforts include the USD 25 million "Stand Up to Jewish Hate" ad campaign launched by New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft in March 2023 through his Foundation to Combat Antisemitism.

But the persistence of antisemitism has left some members of Spokoyny's group questioning their approach.

"There's a lot of perplexity around what actually works," he said. "So many funders are very frustrated." (AP)

Trump arrives in China for talks with Xi



BEIJING, May 13: US President Donald Trump arrived in China on Wednesday for a three-day state visit during which he will discuss a host of global issues, including the Iran war, with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Trump, who is visiting China at the invitation of President Xi, was received by Chinese Vice President Han Zheng at the airport.

The leaders of the world's two largest economies will hold their seventh face-to-face talks. They last met face-to-face in October 2025 in Busan, South Korea.

The US President arrived in China on his second visit in nine years to clinch a trade deal, to end the frictions over tariffs that affected its over USD 525 billion exports to the US.

Trump, who is accompanied by top CEOs, was the last US president to visit China in 2017, during his first term.

President Trump would have a bilateral meeting with Xi on Thursday, US Principal Deputy Press Secretary Anna Kelly said on Sunday.

The two leaders will meet again on Friday for a bilateral tea and working lunch, she said, adding that the US plans to host the Chinese leader for a reciprocal visit later this year.

Ahead of Trump's arrival, Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng and Scott Bessent completed the final round of trade negotiations in South Korea, details of which are not known.

The talks focused on trade and tariffs, Artificial Intelligence and technology, Taiwan and US' arms sales to Taipei, Iran and West Asia security and rare earths and sup-

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi made his first visit to Beijing after the war and held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi.

The US watched his visit closely as China is the largest importer of Iranian oil and shares strategic defence ties with Tehran, and has considerable influence over Iran.

After talks with Araghchi, Wang called on Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz as soon as possible, even as it appreciated Tehran's commitment not to develop nuclear weapons, a prime demand of Trump to end the war.

Commenting on Wang-Araghchi talks, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said, "I hope the Chinese tell him what he needs to be told. And that is what you are doing in the Strait, which is causing you to be globally isolated. You're the bad guy in this."

China's anxieties over the Gulf war increased, especially after Trump imposed a blockade of Iranian ports, restricting Iran's oil exports to China.

Bert Hoffman, former World Bank country director for China, said China wants the Iran war to end because it has many partners in the region, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait. "So they don't like to see wars, they like to have stability," he said.

In its editorial on Trump's visit, state-run Global Times said Xi has held multiple telephone conversations and meetings with him, which have helped correct the course of the bilateral relationship and steer it clear of hidden dangers at critical moments.

For China-US relations to truly stabilise and improve in the future, the most fundamental step is to fully and faithfully implement the important consensus reached by both leaders, it said.

From China's point of view, the Taiwan issue was expected to figure prominently in the talks.

Last week, China's Foreign Minister Wang told US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, during their telephone talks, that the US should make the right choice about the self-ruled Taiwan.

China claims Taiwan as part of its own and has been ramping up military pressure on the island with periodic military drills around the island. (PTI)

Grave assault on the values of harmony, compassion, and coexistence: CM Sangma CMs of Meghalaya, Mizoram deplore killing of 3 church leaders in Manipur ambush

SHILLONG/AIZAWL, May 13: The chief ministers of Meghalaya and Mizoram on Wednesday condemned the killing of Baptist church leaders in Manipur, terming the attack a "senseless act of violence" and calling for immediate action to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Mizoram's main opposition, the Mizo National Front (MNF), also deplored the killing in the neighbouring state's Kangpokpi district and demanded strict punishment for the culprits.

Both Meghalaya and Mizoram are Christian-majority states in the Northeastern region. Three church leaders were shot dead and four others injured in an attack by suspected militants in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Wednesday. The incident happened when members of the Thaduo Baptist Association were returning from Churachandpur after attending a religious congregation.

In a statement, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said, "The victims, who were respected members of the Kuki Baptist community and associated with the Manipur Baptist Convention and the Kuki Church Leaders Forum, devoted their lives to spiritual guidance, peace building, and service to humanity."



Sangma said that the brutal and cowardly killing was deeply disturbing and utterly unacceptable in any civilised society. "Targeting such individuals is not only an attack on innocent lives but also a grave assault on the values of harmony, compassion, and coexistence that bind our society together," the Meghalaya chief minister said.

The NPP chief expressed solidarity with the bereaved families and the Kuki Baptist community and extended condolences to the families of those killed in the incident. Calling for urgent intervention by authorities, Sangma urged both the Centre and the Manipur government to ensure a transparent and time-bound investigation.

He also called for stronger security measures in conflict-affected areas to protect vulnerable communities. "At this critical juncture, the NPP reiterates the importance of dialogue, reconciliation, and collective efforts toward peace. Violence can never be a solution to any grievance, and such acts only deepen divisions and prolong suffering," he added.

Sangma also appealed to civil society organisations, community leaders and citizens to work collectively towards restoring peace and harmony in Manipur and across the Northeast.

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma expressed deep sorrow over the killing of the church leaders.

"Deeply saddened and anguished by the brutal killing of Kuki Church leaders in Manipur. Such heinous violence is utterly condemnable and unacceptable," he said in a post on X.

Lalduhoma also conveyed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and the church community affected by the tragedy.

The MNF issued a statement in the Mizoram capital Aizawl, describing the incident as deeply tragic and expressing solidarity with the bereaved families.

The party said that the incident was especially unfortunate at a time when peace and normalcy were gradually returning to Manipur, which was rocked by ethnic violence since May 2023.

The MNF, which advocates the reunification of all Mizo or Zo tribes, further stated that the assault on religious leaders was difficult to comprehend and highly condemnable. (PTI)

Rio, church bodies condemn killing of church leaders in Manipur

Nagaland CM, NBCC and NJCF express grief and demand



HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 13: Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) and the Nagaland Joint Christian Forum (NJCF) have strongly condemned the brutal killing of three church leaders and injury to five others in an ambush

in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Wednesday morning.

In a statement, Rio said such barbaric and senseless violence against innocent lives is unacceptable and has no place in any civilised society.

Expressing deep sorrow over the incident, he conveyed his heartfelt

condolences to the bereaved families, the church community and the people of Manipur. He also prayed for strength and comfort for all those affected by the tragedy.

The NBCC condemned this act of violence, saying that taking human life is a violation of God's law and an assault on the image of God in which every person is made.

It said this heinous act is an attack on the faith community and a flagrant disregard for the sanctity of human life.

Stating that such violence is a grave transgression that impacts "all of us", the NBCC called upon the relevant authorities to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation to apprehend those responsible and to ensure justice.

Condemning the killing, the NJCF described the incident as "shocking" and "sorrowful". It appealed to all communities to shun violence and work toward peace and reconciliation.

The forum condoned the deaths of the church workers and said they had been faithfully labouring for peace and reconciliation in the conflict-torn land of Manipur.

JICA-funded project reaches 185 villages in Nagaland

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 13: The Nagaland Forest Management Project (NFMP) has reached 185 villages and 440 SHGs across 11 districts in Nagaland so far and channelled more than Rs 2 crore through the revolving fund support, said M Senthil Kumar, additional PCCF and chief project director, NFMP, on Wednesday.

Through this, he said, the SHGs have generated over ₹ 6 crore in earnings and ₹ 2.4 crore in profits. Kumar was speaking on the concluding day of the two-day workshop at the State Environment & Forestry Training Institute (SEFTI) in Dimapur held from May 12.

The workshop was organised to formulate a comprehensive strategic roadmap to transition the project from primary activities to scalable, cluster-based secondary activities of the SHGs. It also aimed to ensure long-term sustainability through institutionalised management frameworks and market linkages.

The NFMP, an autonomous non-profit charitable organisation under the Nagaland forest, environment and climate change department is funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Kumar said the project is nearing its final phase, emphasising the need to focus on scaling up livelihood activities through the formation of clusters and a federation at the state level.

He urged the participants to actively share their insights and collectively formulate a roadmap for the project's remaining two-year implementation period.

During the inaugural session, CCF and project director (Asia Forest Partnership), NFMP, Temjenyabang said the project remains committed to providing all-round support to all components, including the livelihood component, which plays a crucial role in enhancing community-based economic development.

Temjenyabang urged all participants to contribute their rich field experiences to develop a roadmap for transitioning livelihood interventions from primary income-generating activities to secondary activities.

He further stated that besides the main objective of forest conservation, the project also aims to establish an 'NFMP brand'. Altogether 70 participants attended the workshop.

Delhi CM, UP DyCM offer prayer at Maa Tripura Sundari temple

AGARTALA, May 13: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak on Wednesday offered prayers at the Maa Tripura Sundari temple in Tripura's Gomati district.

The temple, located 51 km from the state capital, is one of the 51 holiest Hindu shrines dedicated to the Mother Goddess across the Indian subcontinent.

The Delhi Chief Minister and Uttar Pradesh DyCM, who were in Guwahati to witness the swearing-in ceremony of the BJP led NDA government on Tuesday, landed at MBB Airport on Wednesday. They were welcomed by Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha at the airport.

Later, Gupta and Pathak went to Udaipur and offered prayers at the Maa Tripura Sundari temple.

Speaking to reporters, Gupta said, "Feeling blessed after offering puja to Maa Tripura Sundari, one of the holiest Hindu shrines in India. I pray to Maa for the well-being of the people. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country and states are progressing. I believe we will continue to move forward with the blessing of Maa Tripura Sundari." (PTI)

Disasters affect over 32,000 people in Arunachal from January to May

ITANAGAR, May 13: A series of weather-related disasters, including storms, landslides, floods, forest fires and heavy rainfall incidents have affected more than 32,800 people across Arunachal Pradesh during the period between January and May 13 this year, according to the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC).

An official report issued by the state Disaster Management department stated that at least seven people lost their lives and eight others were injured in various disaster incidents reported from across the state during the period under review.

The fatalities included four deaths caused by landslides, two due to storms and one due to lightning strikes.

The report said 26 districts were affected by natural calamities, with districts such as Anjaw, Upper Subansiri, Namsai, Kra Daadi, East Kameng, Siang and Changlang witnessing significant impact in terms of population affected and disaster occurrences.

According to the report, the state recorded 49 forest fire incidents, 31 storm-related incidents, 24 earthquakes, 24 landslides, nine flood incidents and three heavy rainfall events during the period from January to May 13. (PTI)

Rhino horn worth ₹ 1.2 crore seized in Arunachal Pradesh; four held



ITANAGAR, May 13: Four people have been arrested in Arunachal Pradesh's Papum Pare district with a rhinoceros horn valued at around ₹ 1.2 crore, officials said on Wednesday.

Papum Pare Superintendent of Police (Rural) Taru Gusar said the operation was carried out on May 12 in Hollongi and adjoining areas of Assam following credible inputs about wildlife trafficking.

"One rhinoceros horn was seized during the operation," the SP said, adding that the accused revealed the item was being smuggled for an estimated ₹ 1.2 crore.

A case has been registered at the Balijan Police Station, and an investigation is underway to ascertain possible interstate or international links, Gusar said.

Arunachal Pradesh Home Minister Mama Natung lauded the operation and reiterated the government's commitment

to wildlife protection.

"The successful joint operation carried out by Balijan Police and the forest department against the alleged smuggling of a suspected rhino horn reflects our government's firm commitment towards wildlife protection and organised crime prevention," Natung said in a post on X.

He said wildlife trafficking poses a serious threat to ecological balance and the country's natural heritage, warning that such illegal activities would continue to invite strict legal action.

According to global wildlife conservation organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, habitat loss and poaching remain major threats to rhino populations despite conservation efforts. (PTI)

Khandu greets Rangasamy on taking oath as Puducherry CM

ITANAGAR, May 13: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday congratulated veteran leader N Rangasamy on taking oath as Puducherry CM for a fifth term, expressing confidence that the Union Territory would continue to witness progress under his leadership. In a post on X, Khandu said Rangasamy's continued acceptance among the people was a testament to his dedication towards the growth and well-being of Puducherry.

He said the Union Territory would continue to make strides in infrastructure, tourism, youth empowerment, healthcare and economic development under the veteran leader's stewardship.

"Warmest congratulations to Shri N. Rangasamy Ji on taking oath as the Chief Minister of Puducherry again. My heartfelt best wishes for a successful and impactful tenure ahead in service of the people," Khandu added.

Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein also extended congratulations to Rangasamy, describing his return to office as a reflection of the people's trust and confidence in his leadership. (PTI)

Kohima DC pushes for waste segregation at source

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 13: Kohima DC B Henok Buchem called for segregation of waste at source and proper sanitation practices.

He said a mission-mode drive would be undertaken to address the problem.

Addressing a meeting on sanitation and waste management with officials, community leaders, ward representatives and other stakeholders at the Kohima DC's conference hall, Buchem said segregation of waste at source has become essential and appealed to colony leaders to ensure that households cooperate in segregating waste into different categories.

He also stressed the importance of enhancing awareness activities and dissemination of IEC (information, education and communication) materials at the grassroots level.

The meeting was called to deliberate on measures for effective waste management and sanitation in the district.

Buchem stressed the need for

collective responsibility in maintaining cleanliness and ensuring proper waste management practices. Buchem stated that sanitation and waste management cannot be the responsibility of a single department or agency alone, but requires active participation from every citizen, colony and ward.

He urged all stakeholders to discuss practical and actionable solutions, both short-term and long-term, to address the growing sanitation concerns in Kohima.

Buchem urged the councilors, colony chairmen and sector magistrates to work in coordination and strengthen communication mechanisms for effective implementation of sanitation measures across all 19 wards in Kohima town, many of which have been divided into sectors under designated magistrates.

The DC said meaningful progress can be achieved even by starting with available resources and gradually strengthening the system through collective efforts and community participation.

Arunachal govt launches district review exercise to improve public service delivery system: CM

ITANAGAR, May 13: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday said that his government has launched a comprehensive district-wise review exercise aimed at strengthening governance, addressing manpower shortages and improving the public service delivery mechanism.

Khandu made the statement in a social media post after chairing the first phase of the review exercise, which covered the newly created districts of Kamle, Lower Siang, Pakke Kessang, Lepa Rada, Shi Yomi, Keyi Panyor and Bichom.

He described the exercise as a major step towards building a stronger, more responsive and people-centric administration.

The chief minister said that the district-wise review exercise would continue in multiple phases, covering all districts of the state.

"Phase I of the district-wise review



exercise began with an intensive four-hour meeting convened to comprehensively assess the ground situation and functional status of the newly created districts," Khandu said.

The chief minister said the review focused on manpower gaps, department-wise vacancies, administrative

infrastructure, issues requiring policy intervention at the state level, and overall district preparedness to ensure efficient governance and better public service delivery.

According to him, detailed discussions were held with elected legislators, deputy commissioners and heads

of departments of the respective districts to identify immediate administrative requirements and long-term development priorities.

"This district-wise review exercise will continue up to Phase-IV covering all districts of the state, with the objective of building a stronger, more responsive and people-centric administration," he added.

The review exercise assumes significance as several newly created districts in Arunachal Pradesh are still in the process of strengthening administrative infrastructure and filling vacancies in key government departments.

Officials said the initiative is aimed at ensuring that the benefits of decentralised administration reach people at the grassroots level by improving governance mechanisms, speeding up implementation of welfare schemes and enhancing coordination among departments. (PTI)

No. DPRD/BTC/(6th FC)Koj-155/2025/4 Dated Kokrajhar, the 11th May, 2026

PRESS NOTICE

The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for the work: "Const. of Market Shed of Tanda Bazar under Gardenpur VDC" under Direct Grant of 6th ASFC for the year 2021-22 (1st installment) during 2025-26 for an amounting of Rs. 25,00,000.00 (Rupees twenty-five lakh) only from the registered contractors of Register Firm/ Class-I (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads/Electrical/ Building) BTC.

Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours.

It is to be noted that the only BTC Registered Firms/Suppliers/Contractor can only participate in the e-tendering process.

Sd/- Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/139

No. SEKI/NIT-1/31/2024-25/1324 Date 13/05/2026

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender in prescribed format eventually to be drawn in APWD "F2" Form affixing nonrefundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only are here by invited from the eligible registered contractors of Irrigation Department of Assam for the following works under Udalguri-Mazbat Division (Irrigation), Udalguri, Assam and will be received up to 11.00 A.M on 03/06/2026 in the office of the undersigned which will be opened on the same date and place at 12.00 Noon in presence of the intending tenderers or their authorized agents which may like to be present.

However, in the event of closure of opening / receiving of tender due to some unavoidable reason the next office working day will be considered for the purpose

Name of the works:- Bank Protection at Soraimari FIS under SDMF for the year 2025-26

Approx value:- Rs. 55,08,790.00 (Rupees Fifty Five Lakh Eight Thousand Seven Hundred Ninety) Only in 3 (Three) nos. of Groups.

Time of Completion:- 45 days from the date of issue of work order

Earnest money:- 2% of tendered value (1% in case of ST/SC/OBC/UG)

Detail tender papers with terms and conditions may be obtained in request from the office of the undersigned on payment of Rs.200.00 (Rupees Two hundred) only in the form of IPO/ Demand draft/Cash duly pledge to the Superintending Engineer, Kokrajhar Circle (Irrigation), Kokrajhar from 10-00 am on 14/05/2026

Sd/- Superintending Engineer,
Kokrajhar Circle (Irrigation),
Kokrajhar, BTC

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/121

TVK govt wins maiden trust vote with ease as AIADMK rebel group cross-votes, DMK walks out

CHENNAI, May 13: The four-day old TVK government in Tamil Nadu crossed a major hurdle on Wednesday, comfortably winning the trust vote with the support of 25 rebel AIADMK MLAs amid DMK's walkout and Opposition allegations of horse-trading that were rejected by Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay.

In its confidence-boosting win, TVK romped home by a 144:22 margin, with all the 22 naysayers being the AIADMK MLAs owing allegiance to party chief Edappadi K Palaniswami. The 25 other party MLAs, from the C Ve Shanmugam-SP Velumani camp voted in favour of the government, as announced by them earlier.

Replying to discussions over the resolution moved by him seeking vote of confidence, Vijay said his government will always be secular and would continue to implement the welfare schemes launched by previous regimes. While the main opposition DMK, with 59 MLAs in the 234-member House staged a walkout slamming the government, PMK with 4 MLAs and the lone member of the BJP abstained. The Vijay-led TVK government won the trust vote also due to the support from the Congress, VCK, Left, IUML and MLA S Kamaraj, who was expelled from AMMK for supporting TVK.

In an embarrassment, the split in the AIADMK came into the open during the trust vote proceedings as the faction led by party leaders Velumani-Shanmugam voted in favour of the government.

Though minutes before Velumani announced support Palaniswami had declared in the House that his party MLAs must vote against the government. The Velumani-Shanmugam led group defied the diktat and sided with the TVK regime. Noisy scenes were witnessed as Palaniswami's faction opposed Velumani-Shanmugam group's announcement of support



to the government. In the 234-member House, 118 is the simple majority mark and at the time of voting TVK --which won 108 seats-- had a strength of 105 as one party MLA was barred from voting by court; Vijay resigned from Tiruchi-East and Speaker JCD Prabhakar cannot vote in the absence of a "tie" situation.

Amidst questions of its stability in the wake of a lack of a majority, the win gives the maiden TVK government the much-needed confidence to settle down and get on with delivery of governance, even as the ministers, including CM Vijay, are yet to be allotted portfolios. For the next six months, another floor test may not be held.

As soon as the House convened at 9.30 am, CM Vijay, attired in a black blazer, moved the vote of confidence resolution, and the legislators belonging to all parties spoke on the motion. The "count and assess" method of division-wise voting involving calling out the names of MLAs one by one and ascertaining their stand was taken up. Speaker JCD Prabhakar, after conducting the voting exercise, declared that the resolution moved by the chief minister seeking vote of confidence of the Assembly has won, and as many as 144 MLAs voted with the govern-

ment; 22 MLAs opposed and five took a neutral stand.

Speaking on trust vote, Leader of Opposition Udhayanidhi Stalin said "a majority of people did not vote for TVK." Only 1.72 crore people voted for the Vijay-led party and the remaining 3.21 crore people "voted against your party." Approximately 4.93 crore is the total number of people who voted in the April 23 polls. The DMK leader claimed that about 65 per cent of the people rejected the TVK and the confidence on the government is reducing gradually to also those who had voted for the actor-politician led party. He said the TVK does not have numbers and it has cobbled up support by bringing together parties that fought polls under the DMK-led alliance and opposed the TVK.

Pointing to support from Kamaraj, Udhayanidhi said AMMK leader TTV Dhinakaran had alleged horse-trading earlier. Kamaraj had been part of AMMK which was a constituent of the NDA, the ideological foe of TVK. Another NDA constituent AIADMK has seen an "almost vertical split, and one faction is supporting you." The DMK leader also referred to social media and claimed people were asking, "how to describe ruling party which has joined hands with

corrupt forces; is this clean government?"

Udhayanidhi said people had doubts on the government's longevity as MLAs are borrowed. He accused Vijay of making false promises and diverting attention by levelling allegation of debt burden while borrowing during DMK regime was aimed at growth. "The government does not have majority and even basic political honesty and people have no confidence that the government will give good governance." Both Palaniswami and DMK legislator Premalatha Vijayakanth made references to allegations of horse-trading. Congress, IUML and VCK members were among those who spoke on the resolution supporting the government. Vijay asserted that while the government functioned with "horse-speed", it does not engage in horse-trading.

The CM also alleged that DMK was rejected by the people and hence it may wish to insult TVK. On Udhayanidhi's jibe that a majority of people rejected TVK, Vijay sarcastically asked if DMK won 234 seats and secured 100 per cent votes when it formed the government in 2006. The DMK formed the government at that time with Congress party's support. The DMK is never going to understand the reality, he said and slammed the opposition party again over debt burden.

Meanwhile, Palaniswami claimed that the AIADMK MLAs who had cross-voted in favour of the TVK government in its floor test had fallen to the "lure" of cabinet posts. What they did was "unfair and illegal."

"All the party cadre including at the grassroots level have campaigned to secure the victory for the party to show its identity", he said and alleged that the Velumani faction has "betrayed" the functionaries by supporting TVK in the assembly. (PTI)

PM Modi cuts down convoy size BNP CMs, other leaders follow suit on his appeal for less fuel use

NEW DELHI, May 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has significantly reduced his convoy size, days after he appealed for cutting down fuel consumption and spending more wisely, prompting several BJP chief ministers and other leaders to adopt similar measures.

The prime minister's appeal is not about spending less but spending more wisely by reducing fuel consumption, avoidable dependence on imported goods and foreign-currency-intensive services, official sources said, stressing that the Modi government is not cutting capital expenditure, welfare spending or subsidies.

A downsizing in the prime minister's convoy was implemented in his recent domestic visits. The reduction was done while maintaining essential security components as per the SPG protocol, the sources said. Modi's convoy size was cut in Gujarat and Assam, immediately after his speech in Hyderabad during which he suggested an array of measures for reducing expenditure on imports. The sources said the prime minister also asked for electric vehicles to be included in his convoy, wherever possible, without making new purchases.

They emphasised that Modi's appeal to conserve fuel, adopt work-from-home wherever possible, and reduce avoidable foreign-exchange outflows were "austerity measures", which have a negative economic connotation. "Austerity" usually suggests budget cuts, reduced government spending, lower subsidies, and fiscal tightening, they noted.

But the prime minister's appeal is not about spending less, it is about spending more wisely by reducing fuel consumption, avoidable dependence on imported goods and foreign-currency-intensive services, the sources said.

Taking a cue from the prime minister's appeal, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath



has directed an immediate 50 per cent reduction in the fleet of vehicles accompanying him and ministers. Chairing a meeting of the chief secretary, DGP, additional chief secretaries and principal secretaries of all departments, Adityanath appealed to people to adopt the prime minister's call for spending more wisely in a practical manner across the state.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has announced that he will use a minimum number of vehicles for his convoy and asked his ministerial colleagues to do the same. He also encouraged people to use public transport. "Until the next order, there will be a minimum number of vehicles in my cavalcade from a security perspective, and there will be no vehicle rallies. All ministers will also use a minimum number of vehicles while travelling," Yadav said. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has announced limits on official vehicles used by ministers, MLAs and other public representatives.

She further urged Delhi residents to adopt carpooling and make greater use of buses and metro services instead of private vehicles in view of the prevailing global energy supply uncertainty.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma similarly directed that his convoy use be minimised and unnecessary vehicles should

not be used, especially for security purposes. He also instructed all officials and public representatives, including the chief secretary, to adopt similar practices.

The Maharashtra government has directed all ministers to obtain prior approval from Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis before using aircraft for official travel. Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat announced that he will travel within Gujarat using trains, state transport buses and public transport instead of helicopters and flights, while also reducing the size of official convoys to save fuel. Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghvi also cancelled his planned trip to the United States, after the prime minister's appeal to reduce foreign travel. Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary has announced that he has personally reduced the number of vehicles he uses by half and will undertake official travel only when necessary.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said his government would unveil precautionary measures within two days to mitigate the impact of the West Asia conflict on the state.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said he has reduced the size of his convoy and that there will be special focus on the use of electric vehicles in future. (PTI)

Cabinet clears upgradation of Nagpur International Airport

NEW DELHI, May 13: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the upgradation of the Nagpur International Airport through a public-private partnership.

The Cabinet has cleared the extension of the lease period of the Airports Authority of India's land allotted to MIHAN India Ltd beyond August 6, 2039.

This will enable MIL to license the airport to GMR Nagpur International Airport Ltd (GNIAL), an official release said. Briefing media persons on the Cabinet decisions, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the upgradation and modernisation of the airport has been approved.

With the extension of the lease period for the land beyond August 6, 2039, the civil aviation ministry said it would now become co-terminus with the 30-year concession period of GNIAL.

"This is expected to usher in a new era of growth and infrastructure advancement for Nagpur airport. With private sector efficiency and government oversight, the airport is poised to see significant investment, modernisation, and improved passenger and cargo services," the ministry said in the release.

In 2009, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and Maharashtra Airport Development Company Ltd (MADC) set up the joint venture MIL with an equity structure of 49 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively.

"Though Airport assets of AAI were transferred to MIL in 2009 for airport operation, the lease deed got delayed due to land demarcation issues. Subsequently, AAI land has been leased to MIL up to 06.08.2039," the release said.

Later in 2016, MIL floated a global tender for identifying a partner to operate the airport under the public-private partnership model.

GMR Airports Ltd (GAL) emerged as the highest bidder, with a quoted revenue share of 5.76 per cent. "This was later revised to 14.49 per cent of Gross Revenue. Subsequently, MIL annulled the bidding process in March, 2020. This annulment was successfully challenged by GAL before the Hon'ble Bombay High Court.

"Thereafter, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India also ruled in favour of GAL. Pursuant to the Supreme Court Judgement dated 27th September, 2024, MIL signed a Concession Agreement with 2nd JVC, i.e. GMR Nagpur International Airport Ltd. (GNIAL) on 8th October, 2024," the release said. (PTI)

Proud of our son Suwendu, doesn't need to sign membership to join family: RSS

NEW DELHI, May 13: The RSS is proud of its "son" Suwendu Adhikari and he doesn't need to sign a membership form to be a part of the family, just like a daughter-in-law joining a household -- this is how the Sangh views a spate of leaders joining the BJP from other parties and becoming chief ministers.

"Not necessarily everybody joins RSS only when they are school kids. There are many who join the RSS at a later age," Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale told PTI in an exclusive interview. He was asked about leaders like Adhikari, Samrat Choudhary

and Himanta Biswa Sarma becoming chief ministers despite having come to the BJP from other parties.

Asked whether this trend bothers the RSS or gives it pleasure that more people are coming into its fold, the top Sangh functionary said, "We are happy. The BJP is growing. And that means it is getting accepted." He said the new leaders will also understand the RSS gradually.

Asked whether he would encourage new entrants to the BJP to join RSS also, Hosabale said they are already as good as in RSS because they are in the ideological family of the RSS. "There is no formal member-

ship in RSS. Even I have not taken a formal membership. RSS is a family setup-like thing. So that is why whoever enters the family becomes part of it.

"A daughter-in-law who comes into a family need not fill a form; she naturally becomes one of the family," he said.

Asked whether West Bengal's new Chief Minister Adhikari would be more like a son-in-law, Hosabale said, "We are proud of this son."

Asked about the role the RSS and its swayamsevaks had in the BJP's victory in West Bengal, he said, "As citizens, they (swayamsevaks) did everything." (PTI)

BJP sweeps Haryana municipal corporation polls, tastes victory in Hooda bastion

CHANDIGARH, May 13: The BJP on Wednesday swept the municipal corporation polls, registering emphatic wins in Ambala and Sonapat, and gaining an unassailable lead in Panchkula.

The BJP also swept other civic body polls and clinched the president's post in the municipal committee of Sampla, a stronghold of former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

Notably, the Congress had not fielded its candidate in Sampla for the civic polls.

Meanwhile, celebrations broke out in the BJP camp, with party workers and leaders distributing sweets.

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini

hailed the BJP's stupendous show in the civic polls, which came close on the heels of the party's big wins in West Bengal and Assam.

He said people have once again put their stamp of approval and reposed their trust in the policies and programmes of the Narendra Modi-led government.

Saini hit out at the Congress, saying people have once again rejected them.

"Congress always takes support of lies, people have understood this," he said, adding the grand old party's "real face has been unmasked". On the BJP's win in the Hooda bastion, Sampla, Saini said, "People don't trust Hooda anymore. He speaks lies." (PTI)

SC stays order barring TVK MLA from floor test, terms Madras HC directive 'atrocious'

NEW DELHI, May 13: The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the Madras High Court order that had restrained TVK MLA R Sreenivasu Sethupathi from participating in the floor test in the Tamil Nadu assembly, saying such a directive under writ jurisdiction was "atrocious".

The Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) government in Tamil Nadu crossed the major hurdle on Wednesday, winning a confidence-boosting trust vote by a 144:22 margin amid a walkout by the principal opposition party DMK and a divided AIADMK whose one faction supported the C Joseph Vijay-led government.

"This is atrocious to say the least. The high court says the remedy is election petition but still entertains the Article 226 petition," a bench of justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta and Vijay Bishnoi observed while hearing the plea. Article 226 of the Constitution empowers high courts to issue writs of various nature to do complete justice.

However, any order with regard to cancellation of an elected candidate can only be passed on an election petition filed by defeated candidate or a related party.

While issuing notice on Sethupathi's plea challeng-

ing the high court's May 12 interim order, the apex court also stayed the proceedings pending before the high court in the matter.

"In the meantime, the effect and operation of the impugned order shall remain stayed and further proceedings before the high court in pending writ petition shall also remain stayed," the top court said.

Sethupathi had won the No.185 Tirupattur assembly constituency in Sivagangai district by a margin of a single vote against Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader and former minister K R Periakaruppan. The apex court granted two weeks time to Periakaruppan and other respondents to file their counter affidavits on Sethupathi's plea.

The bench was hearing Sethupathi's plea challenging the high court's interim order which restrained him from voting or otherwise participating in any floor test, confidence motion, no-confidence motion, trust vote or any proceeding where the numerical strength of the House is tested, pending further orders.

During the hearing, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Sethupathi, argued that the high court order was in blatant disregard of the orders passed earlier by the apex court. (PTI)

Andhra CM to announce measures to counter West Asia war impact

NIDAMARRU (Andhra Pradesh), May 13: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday said the state government would unveil measures within two days to mitigate the impact of the West Asia conflict on the state.

Addressing a meeting at Nidamaru village in Guntur district, the Chief Minister said he will make an announcement in the next two days on the steps aimed at safeguarding the state from the effects of the ongoing US - Israel and Iran war.

"Either tomorrow or the day after, we will also make an announcement on what preventive measures we have to take due to the effects of the war on the state," said Naidu, on the sidelines of laying the foundation for a private medical college and skill centre.

Referring to the recent austerity appeal made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Naidu said people of the state must act responsibly and support efforts to strengthen the country's economy.

Naidu also echoed the PM's call, urging people to avoid unnecessary gold purchase and foreign travel, and instead focus on economic self-reliance.

Highlighting Andhra's gold production potential, he said the state plans to inaugurate a gold mine in

Kurnool district in June, where up to "60 per cent of the gold made in India could be produced."

"When you import all the gold, foreign exchange will go out. If we can produce gold domestically, that problem can be reduced," he said, stressing the need for self-reliance and public cooperation.

Urging people to reduce petrol and diesel consumption, which will help save forex, Naidu said the work-from-home (WFH) concept is a reality now.

He said a situation will come "where the whole world will work from home".

Noting that the use of large cavalcades has become a fashion nowadays, he advised public representatives to reduce the number of vehicles in their convoys and their security cover to set an example.

Stressing that we should not depend on foreign countries for fuel, Naidu said an action plan was chalked out to produce green energy domestically.

He suggested installing rooftop solar units on every home and in every field to generate power.

After laying the foundation for the private medical college and skill centre at Nidamaru village, Naidu underscored that a large number of industrialists should come forward in Amaravati. (PTI)

Bihar cabinet approves amendments to EV policy, targets 30 pc electric vehicle sales by 2030

PATNA, May 13: The Bihar government on Wednesday approved amendments to its electric vehicle policy with the aim of ensuring that at least 30 per cent of all new vehicles sold in the state by 2030 are EVs.

The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary.

The move is aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, curbing vehicular pollution and improving air quality across the state, officials said. "The Bihar government aims to ensure that by 2030, at least 30 per cent of all new vehicles sold in the state are electric vehicles," the proposal approved by the cabinet stated.

The policy seeks to increase public acceptance of EVs, improve transportation facilities in rural areas and promote commercial

goods-carrying electric vehicles as well as non-commercial two-wheelers and four-wheelers through incentives under the 'Chief Minister Bihar Environment-Friendly Transport Employment Scheme', officials said.

Under the scheme, incentives through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) will be provided for the purchase and registration of electric commercial goods vehicles, electric two-wheelers for women and other beneficiaries, and non-commercial four-wheelers exclusively for women, they said.

The scheme would help generate employment through commercial electric vehicles while also encouraging women's mobility and empowerment, they added.

Financial assistance will also be provided for setting up EV charging stations under the existing pro-



visions of the policy.

The state government may additionally seek grants from the Ministry of Heavy Industries under the PM E-DRIVE scheme to establish public charging infrastructure, officials said.

A senior transport department officer said the PM E-DRIVE scheme aims to promote electric mobility to reduce environmental impact and improve air quality.

The cabinet also approved an increase in Dearness Allowance

(DA) for state government employees and pensioners.

Employees and pensioners covered under the 6th Central Pay Commission will receive a 5 per cent increase in DA and Dearness Relief, from 257 per cent to 262 per cent, with effect from January 1, 2026.

For employees under the 5th Central Pay Commission, DA has been increased by 9 percentage points, from 474 per cent to 483 per cent, while under the 7th Central Pay Commission, it has been raised from 58 per cent to 60 per cent. The cabinet also approved the establishment of the Bihar Artificial Intelligence Mission.

As part of the initiative, Singapore-based Global Finance and Technology Network (GFTN) has been selected to help develop Bihar's AI ecosystem, skill develop-

ment and innovation initiatives.

With support from GFTN and the National University of Singapore-Asian Institute of Digital Finance (NUS-AIDF), a five-month advanced AI certification programme will be launched to train around 7,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students over the next five years.

The initiative will also include the establishment of an AI and quantum-enabled digital sandbox platform named the Aryabhata Technology Observatory, involving over 100 start-ups.

The government said Bihar would also be showcased before global investors, technology firms and policymakers through international platforms organised by GFTN, including the Singapore FinTech Festival and Point Zero Forum in Zurich. (PTI)

Anti-drug campaign in J-K turning into revolution against narcotics: LG

SRINAGAR, May 13: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Wednesday said the anti-drug campaign in Jammu and Kashmir has dealt a severe blow to the drug-smuggling ecosystem, and that the mass movement is transforming into a revolution against narcotics.

The campaign, titled 'Nasha Mukta Jammu and Kashmir Abhiyaan', reached north Kashmir's Kupwara district on Wednesday, with Sinha leading a padyatra from the Government Boys Higher Secondary School to Main Chowk Kupwara. A large number of people, including students, participated in the foot march.

"Today in Kupwara, I joined the Padyatra under 'Drug-Free Jammu Kashmir Campaign' & addressed a gathering. Over the past 32 days, we have struck a devastating blow to the entire drug smuggling ecosystem, and this people's movement is transforming into a revolution against narcotics," Sinha said in a post on X.

He said consistent action by the administration is crippling narco-terrorist networks.

"Properties worth crores have been seized, as-

sets confiscated, and passports of 15 smugglers recommended for cancellation. Over 730 smugglers and peddlers have been arrested," he said.

The campaign began in Jammu on April 11 with a massive padyatra (foot march) led by the lieutenant governor from the MA Stadium. Sinha also led a similar march in the Lal Chowk area of Srinagar city on May 3, as well as in other districts of the Union Territory.

Addressing a public gathering later, the Lt Governor said that when the campaign was launched in April, many had doubted whether a mass movement against drugs was possible and underestimated the power of awakened citizens backed by determined governance. "With people's participation and massive support across the Union Territory, a truly organic movement has emerged across villages, urban neighbourhoods, schools, colleges, and the streets of Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Sinha said the fight against drugs would be a long and sustained battle.

"For decades, people in Jammu and Kashmir saw drugs and terrorism as separate threats. But



they are two heads of the same snake. One makes money through drugs, while the other uses that money to fuel terrorism. Our terrorist neighbour is financing terror through drug smuggling, turning both drugs and money against innocent Kashmiris," he said.

Sinha said drug smuggling was destroying families and communities while providing terror

groups with their "oxygen". "By dismantling drug smuggling networks, the administration is cutting the lifeline that feeds the fire of terror," he said.

Referring to enforcement action in north Kashmir, Sinha said 28 drug smugglers from Kupwara and Handwara had been jailed.

"I want to urge our police officers, the soldiers guarding Kupwara's borders, and the Anti-Narcotics Task Force warriors that not a single guilty person should escape. As a border district, Kupwara must stay extra vigilant and take the harshest action against drug smugglers," he said.

Sinha also urged citizens of Kupwara to participate in the awareness drive. Stressing the need for rehabilitation, he asked officials and stakeholders to treat drug addicts as victims trapped in the dark web of narcotics. "The drug addicts need our compassion. They are our responsibility. We have to support every young man and woman seeking counselling or treatment. We must ensure they return to society's mainstream."

The Lt Governor directed senior officials to ensure prompt action on complaints and tips received

through the Manas portal and toll-free helpline.

"Every citizen of Kupwara must remember that we will reach every young person extending a hand for help. Together, we will dismantle the drug smuggling networks, free our youth from addiction's clutches, and reconnect them to the path of progress," he said.

Sinha also hit back at critics of the campaign, challenging them to identify even one innocent person who had been unfairly targeted.

"If anyone is trying to protect drug smugglers, we must ask ourselves whether they should face consequences or not," he said.

"The people of Jammu and Kashmir are very clear and firm in demanding stringent action against drug smugglers. When people unite, no force can stop us," he said. Sinha said the crackdown on drug-smuggling networks would become tougher in the coming days.

Recalling his interaction with women from Dardpora village, Sinha said they had spoken about how drug smuggling financed the weapons that devastated their families. (PTI)

Puja, fish meal mark dramatic start to Bengal Assembly's new political chapter

KOLKATA, May 13: The inaugural day of the oath-taking ceremony of the new West Bengal MLAs on Wednesday was marked by a series of unprecedented events, including a puja within the Assembly premises and a state-sponsored fish meal for the legislators.

Together, the symbolic gestures lent the Assembly proceedings a distinctive cultural and ideological character, while also offering a latent statement on the opposition's pre-poll warnings of a crackdown on people's non-vegetarian food habits by the saffron dispensation.

As many as 143 MLAs of the 294-member House, including Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari, were sworn in at the state Assembly on the first of the two-day scheduled ceremony, with pro tem Speaker, Tapas Roy administering the oaths.

The legislators who took their oaths belonged to both the treasury and the opposition benches and included the newly-appointed state ministers of the state's first BJP government - Dilip Ghosh, Agnimitra Paul, Ashok Kirtania, Kshudiram Tudu, and Nisith Pramanik.

Former Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee and Kamarhati MLA Madan Mitra were among those who were sworn in from the opposition Trinamool Congress camp, while BJP's Ratna Debnath, mother of the RG Kar Hospital rape and murder victim, and actor-politician Roopa Ganguly were also among those officially inducted to the House. Adhikari, who set foot inside the Assembly for the first time as chief minister, was accorded a literal red-carpet welcome by means of an official guard of honour.

The chief minister reciprocated the gesture by offering floral tributes at the statue of BR Ambedkar and then, before climbing the staircase at the Assembly portico, which leads to the building's grand hall, by kneeling down and touching his forehead to the ground as a mark of reverence to the haloed edifice.

Adhikari followed up his move by offering a puja at his chamber, an occurrence without precedent in the

state's legislative history. The ceremony was marked by the chief minister himself sounding the ritual hand bell, while sounds from a conch shell shattered the Assembly air.

"The Assembly is the temple of democracy," the CM later said, adding, "Here we will work for the people with transparency. There will be no secrets in this House." "I have been told by many TMC leaders that, at last, they have won their freedom," Adhikari said, without further explanation.

A broad, unmistakably triumphant smile lit up the chief minister's face as the pro tem Speaker rose to announce, at the close of the first half of the day's proceedings, that a special 'Machh-Bhat' (fish curry-rice) luncheon awaited all newly elected legislators.

Far more than a simple meal, the gesture carried layers of political symbolism and cultural messaging, transforming an otherwise routine announcement into a carefully choreographed spectacle of identity, tradition, and power.

The Assembly's charged atmosphere acquired an altogether different flavour when newly formed Aam Janata Unnayan Party chief Humayun Kabir made a dramatic entry carrying boxes of sweets, injecting an unexpected burst of festivity into a day otherwise dominated by political symbolism and power play.

Having fought a bruising and acrimonious electoral battle against both the BJP and the TMC in Murshidabad and emerging victorious from both Naoda and Reginagar, Kabir appeared determined to trade bitterness for bonhomie, at least for the day.

Moving through the Assembly hall ahead of the oath-taking ceremony, Kabir was seen personally distributing local delicacies among legislators across party lines, momentarily dissolving the hard edges of political rivalry in an aroma of sugar and nostalgia.

The sight of rival lawmakers accepting sweets from a leader who had only weeks earlier been locked in fierce electoral combat added a surreal, almost theatrical touch to the day's developments. (PTI)

NEET exam leak: DU VC Yogesh Singh asks protesting students to 'avoid political chaos'

NEW DELHI, May 13: Delhi University (DU) Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh on Wednesday asked various student organisations protesting in the national capital against the alleged paper leak of NEET examination to "avoid unnecessary chaos".

Addressing the ongoing protests, the VC urged associations and political groups to help create a conducive environment for students.

In an interview to PTI, Singh also appealed to students to remain focused on their studies and maintain faith in the system following the cancellation of the medical entrance examination. "If there is unnecessary political chaos and disturbance, the impact will be on our children," Singh said. These are our children and their future is our country's future, he said.

Calling NEET one of the world's largest examinations, Singh said the high stakes associated with such tests were not new and stemmed from the massive competition for limited seats.

"India is a country of 140 crore people. The number of seats is much less compared to the number of students. Around 23 lakh students appeared for a few seats," he said. "When the stakes are high, there are people who think they can make money from the situa-



tion. Just like we hear of liquor mafia or drug mafia, this is also organised crime and it is important to break it," the DU VC added.

He said the examination system was facing new challenges due to rapidly evolving technology and methods used to breach security. "Technology gives us opportunities but it also brings inherent challenges. Hidden cameras and so many other things are being used to breach the system. This fight is here to stay, but eventually there will be improvement," he said.

Speaking amid growing anxiety among students following the cancellation of the NEET-UG examination, the DU vice chancellor termed the development "painful"



and said the situation should have been avoided, but added that the government had taken the "right step at the right time" by cancelling the examination.

"What has happened in the NEET examination is painful. It should have been avoided, but it happened," he said.

Singh urged students not to panic and instead to prepare again for the examination. "My request to students is that they do not waste their time. Study hard again."

"We cannot grieve for a very long period of time. I am confident that the government of India will take all steps and next time this will not happen," the VC said.

Addressing the talk about stu-

dents suffering an emotional toll, Singh said their reactions of disappointment and frustration were "natural".

"Had I been in the place of the students, my reactions would have been the same. They are innocent students. Nobody wanted this to happen," he said.

However, the VC stressed that attention should now shift towards conducting a "better examination" as soon as possible so that deserving students could secure admission based on merit. "Have faith in the government and the system. A lot has gone into building this country. No one conducts exams at this scale as India does," he said.

Encouraging constructive participation, Singh said students and citizens should also contribute ideas to strengthen the examination system.

"This is our country. We need to come up with solutions. No one from outside will come and help us," he said.

The vice chancellor also appealed to student organisations and associations to help maintain a conducive atmosphere.

"This is the time when students need to study. There is no need to divert their attention right now," he said, adding that just protesting at this point would lead to more chaos. (PTI)

NIA arrests wanted narco-terrorist after extradition from Portugal

NEW DELHI, May 13: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday arrested wanted narco-terrorist Iqbal Singh alias Shera after successfully securing his extradition from Portugal. He was taken into custody by an NIA team at the Delhi airport immediately after he arrived from Portugal, to where he had absconded in 2020. His successful extradition and arrest come as a major shot in the arm for the NIA's fight against Pakistan-backed narco and cross-border terrorism, officials said.

During the investigation, the NIA found Shera to be a key conspirator and handler of an India-based narco-terror module engaged in smuggling heroin from Pakistan. A native of Punjab's Amritsar, Shera had allegedly masterminded a conspiracy to smuggle narcotics from Pakistan into the border state, the probe agency said.

According to the NIA, he coordinated and supervised the trafficking and distribution of the smuggled drugs, and channelised the proceeds through

hawala networks to Pakistan- and Kashmir-based operatives of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) terrorist outfit to facilitate terror activities.

The arrested fugitive had a non-bailable warrant of arrest (NBW) against him in the case since October 2020. An Interpol notice had also been in place for his arrest since June 2021.

Later in the day, a Delhi court allowed a two-day transit remand to the NIA to take Shera to Punjab. The NIA produced him before Principal District and Sessions Judge Pitambar Dutt at the Patiala House courts and sought a three-day transit remand to take him to Mohali in Punjab. The court, however, granted a two-day transit remand.

According to the agency, to further the anti-India narco terror conspiracy, Shera had formed a terror gang and operated a Punjab-based network involved in trafficking large quantities of heroin, collecting sale proceeds, and transferring funds to handlers and terror operatives. (PTI)

Flagrant violation of rights of tribals, due processes: Ramesh

NEW DELHI, May 13: Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh wrote to Tribal Affairs Minister Jugal Oram on Wednesday, flagging "flagrant violation" of the rights of tribal communities in the Great Nicobar Island Project and sought remedial action immediately.

In his letter to Oram, the former environment minister termed as "entirely false" the assertion in the government FAQs issued on May 1 that all statutory procedures and policy safeguards for the protection of tribal communities were duly complied with in the project.

"The Great Nicobar Project: FAQs issued by the Union Government on May 1, 2026 stated that 'all statutory procedures and policy safeguards for the protection of tribal communities have been duly complied with in the

Great Nicobar Island Project. Necessary consultations were undertaken with competent authorities and domain experts, including the Anthropological Survey of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and other stakeholders, in line with the Jarawa Policy, 2004, and Shompen Policy, 2015. This is entirely false," Ramesh said.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs as the nodal agency for implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, must take serious note of the "flagrant violation" of the rights of tribal communities and due processes under that historic law in the case of the Great Nicobar Island Project and take credible remedial action immediately, the Congress leader demanded in his letter.

"The Gram Sabha has necessarily to (i) consider any pro-

posal for diversion of forest lands in which tribal communities live; (ii) certify that their claims under the FRA, 2006 have been settled; and only thereafter (iii) consent to the diversion of such forest lands, if indeed that is its decision. The Hon'ble Supreme Court in the Niyamgiri judgment of April 18, 2023, held that such consent is mandatory under the FRA, 2006," he pointed out.

However, for the diversion of more than 13,000 hectares of forest lands for the Great Nicobar project, which includes the traditional, ancestral lands of the Nicobarese and Shompen settlements, the island administration admits to convening gram sabhas of the settler communities in Campbell Bay, Laxmi Nagar and Govind Nagar on August 12, 2022, he said. (PTI)

Prateek Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav's younger son, dies at 38

LUCKNOW, May 13: Prateek Yadav, the younger son of Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, has died at the age of 38 after falling ill with cardiac-lung complications early Wednesday.

Prateek, a fitness enthusiast who chose to stay away from the spotlight notwithstanding the fact that he belonged to a prominent political family, was declared brought dead at the civil hospital here, family and friends said.

Aparna Bisht Yadav, his wife, is a BJP member and vice chairperson of the State Women's Commission. She was out of town and rushed back home Wednesday afternoon.

SP chief and stepbrother Akhilesh Yadav were among those who expressed their shock at the death.

"He was a very good young man who wanted to achieve something through his own hard work. Sadly, he is no longer among us," he said.

Asked about the circumstances surrounding the death, the SP chief said the family would follow all legal procedures.

"Whatever the law says and whatever the family decides, we will abide by that," Akhilesh Yadav said, adding that he had met Prateek about two months ago and had advised him to take care of his health and continue expanding his work.

Prateek died due to "cardiorespiratory collapse caused by massive pulmonary thromboembolism", according to the provisional postmortem report prepared at the King George's Medical University (KGMU) here.

The condition refers to a large blood clot blocking arteries of the lungs, leading to sudden failure of heart and lung functions, sources at KGMU said.

Prateek had been battling deep vein thrombosis (DVT), pulmonary embolism and recent cardiac complications, added a senior doctor who treated him.

"He was my old follow up (patient) for last five-six years for hypertension and DVT. Recently he developed sudden onset of breathlessness and chest discomfort. He was also diagnosed with pulmonary embolism about three weeks back," Ruchita Sharma, associate director, Department of Medicine, Medanta Hospital, told PTI on phone.

Prateek's mother Sadhna Gupta, who died in 2022, was Mulayam Yadav's second wife. He was in his teens when the two got married.

As speculation swirled about the circumstances leading to the sudden death, Civil Hospital Director Dr GC Gupta said, "We ran the necessary SOPs, and after confirmation, we informed senior officials and police."

Asked about reports claiming that Prateek was found unconscious in the kitchen, Gupta said, "Various things are being said, but I can't say anything for sure."

The doctor said a driver from Prateek's residence had come to the hospital around 5.30 am seeking emergency help, following which an Emergency Medical Officer accompanied him back to the residence and took Prateek to hospital. As news of the death came in, the SP and the BJP cancelled their political programmes in Uttar Pradesh.

SP leader and Prateek's uncle Shivpal Singh Yadav described the death as "extremely sad" and prayed for peace to the departed soul.

"The demise of Shri Prateek Yadav Ji is extremely heartbreaking! May God grant peace to the departed soul. Humble tribute!" the SP said in a post on X. The BJP said district-level protests planned by women workers across the state on Wednesday have been postponed following Prateek Yadav's demise.

"The sudden demise of Shri Prateek Yadav Ji, son of former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, 'Padma Vibhushan', the late Mulayam Singh Yadav Ji, and husband of Smt. Aparna Yadav Ji, Vice-Chairperson of the Uttar Pradesh State Women's Commission, is extremely heartbreaking. Humble tribute," Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath posted on X.

State Congress chief Ajay Rai also expressed his grief at the "sudden demise" of the Yadav family member.

"I'm really shocked. He was a young man... I extend my condolences to the bereaved family in this hour of grief and stand by them," said Congress UP in-charge Avinash Pande.

Mourners, including supporters of both the SP and the BJP, started gathering outside the family's Vikramaditya Marg residence soon after news of his death spread. Police tightened security and erected barricades in the area. (PTI)

Pension reforms transformed governance from 'rule book driven' to 'citizen centric': Jitendra Singh

NEW DELHI, May 13: Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said India's pension governance has witnessed a transformational shift during the last decade, evolving from a procedure-bound system into a technology-enabled, citizen-centric mechanism focused on dignity, transparency and ease of living for pensioners.

Addressing the 16th all India pension adalat at Vigyan Bhawan here, he said pensioners must be viewed not merely as beneficiaries of government support but as "valuable contributors to nation building" whose experience, expertise and institutional memory remain a national asset.

Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, said the government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently worked towards ensuring simplified, compassionate and responsive pension administration.

The minister said one of the biggest strengths of the pension adalat mechanism is that all stakeholders sit together on a common platform and resolve issues collectively, often on the spot, instead of limiting interactions to routine file



movement and official correspondence. Such direct engagement, he said, also brings a change in administrative mindset and promotes a more practical and humane approach to governance.

The pension adalat today considered 985 cases pertaining to 37 ministries and departments which had remained pending for more than 45 days as on April 15, 2026.

As on date, 728 cases, accounting for nearly 74 per cent of the total grievances, have already been resolved, a statement issued by the personnel ministry said.

A total of 26 important cases relating to 16 ministries and departments were presented before the

minister during the proceedings. Of these, 12 cases pertained to the Ministry of Defence, eight to the Ministry of Home Affairs and two to the Ministry of Railways, while the remaining cases related to other ministries and departments, it said.

Eight pensioners and family members participated physically in the pension adalat, including beneficiaries travelling from Akola in Maharashtra and Haldwani in Uttarakhand, while 18 others joined through video conferencing from different parts of the country ranging from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh and Bikaner in Rajasthan to Kolkata (West Bengal) and

Erode in Tamil Nadu, reflecting the growing nationwide outreach of the initiative.

In one of the cases resolved through the pension adalat mechanism, pensionary benefits exceeding Rs 74 lakh were released, while in two other cases, benefits of around Rs 46 lakh each were paid to the beneficiaries.

Secretary, Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare, senior officers of the government of India, representatives of ministries and departments, pensioner associations, banks and other stakeholders participated in the proceedings.

Tracing the evolution of pension reforms since 2014, Singh said there was a time when the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare remained largely outside public attention and functioned within a limited administrative framework.

Over the years, however, it has emerged as one of the most responsive departments of the government through continuous reforms, digital interventions and citizen-oriented decision making, the statement said.

Singh referred to the government's decision to simplify life

certificate procedures through biometric authentication and said the Digital Life Certificate campaign has now evolved into a mass participatory initiative and has significantly reduced hardships faced by elderly pensioners.

More than one crore pensioners have already benefited from the system, making pension delivery more accessible, transparent and hassle free, the minister said.

Singh said pension adalats have emerged as an effective institutional mechanism for resolution of complex and long-pending grievances.

Since the launch of the initiative in 2017, fifteen 15 pension adalats have been conducted in which 27,812 cases were taken up. Out of these, 19,948 grievances were resolved during the adalats themselves, reflecting a success rate of more than 71.72 per cent, the statement said.

Remaining cases were subsequently resolved through inter-ministerial coordination and review mechanisms, it added.

The minister also stressed the need for greater outreach and awareness regarding pension-related reforms and grievance redressal platforms. (PTI)

Habitat Film Festival 2026 Returns – 18th Edition



The 18th edition of the Habitat Film Festival (HFF) is set to return with an expansive and compelling showcase of Indian cinema, bringing together 10 days, 20 languages, and the finest films from 2025-2026. Scheduled to be held from May 15 to 24, 2026 at the iconic India Habitat Centre, the festival will continue its legacy as one of the country's most vibrant platforms for cinematic expression.

This year's upcoming edition will present a rich tapestry of sto-

rytelling from painstakingly restored classics by legendary filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak to bold, contemporary voices emerging from across Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Assam, and beyond. The festival will honor the golden era of parallel cinema while embracing a new wave of independent, digital-first storytellers.

Audiences can look forward to a thoughtfully curated selection of feature films, documentaries, and short fiction, reflecting ur-

gent, real-world narratives alongside deeply introspective cinematic journeys. HFF 2026 will go beyond screenings, offering immersive interactions with filmmakers and actors, making it a dynamic space for dialogue and discovery.

Among the festival's most captivating highlights will be a curated showcase of restored, award-winning classics, including Umrao Jaan, a luminous tribute to the timeless voice of Asha Bhosle; the festival will also celebrate the enduring legacy of legends Dharmendra and Asrani with a screening of the beloved classic Chupke Chupke, inviting audiences to relive its charm and brilliance.

A special retrospective pays a resplendent tribute to the enduring legacy of Ritwik Ghatak, bringing together four of his most seminal masterpieces Meghe Dhaka Tara, Komal Gandhar, Subarnarekha, and Jukti Takko Aar Gappo inviting audiences into his deeply poetic, hauntingly evocative world of cinema. The contemporary lineup will also feature notable films such as Moham, Tighee, The Elysian Field, and Vanya, spotlighting fresh narratives and diverse cinematic voices.

Prof KG Suresh, Director, India Habitat Centre states, "As we welcome the 18th edition of the Habitat Film Festival, we celebrate not just cinema, but the many voices, visions, and stories that define India's cultural soul. HFF continues to be a space where timeless classics meet bold new narratives, inspiring dialogue, reflection, and a deeper appreciation of the art of storytelling."

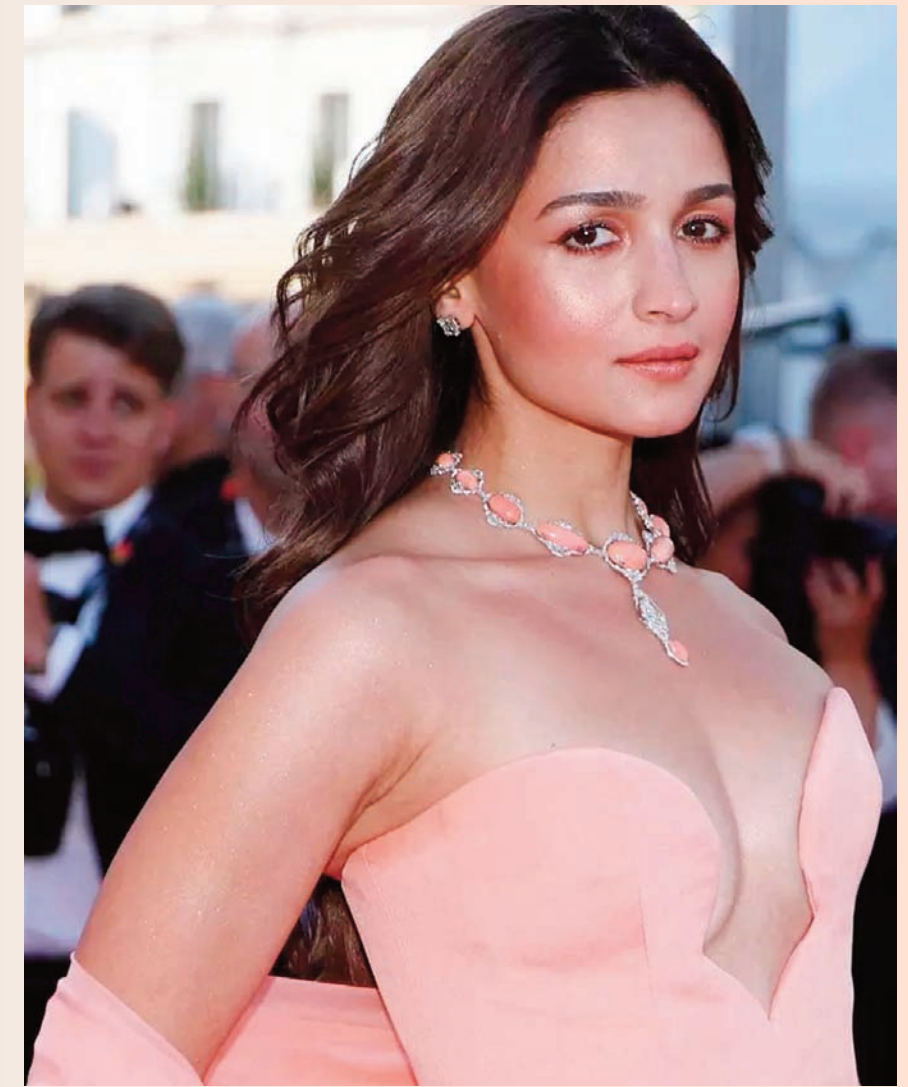
HFF 2026 will also present a specially curated short film package by the Indian Documentary Producers' Association (IDPA), featuring critically acclaimed works nominated by the Film Critics

Guild (FCG). The selection includes Tumhari Baari Jo, Khooh Wala Ghar, and Roses Are, among others, films celebrated for their bold storytelling and recognised at the Critics' Choice Awards 2026. Complementing this showcase is a thoughtfully assembled slate of short documentaries by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT), bringing forth a rich tapestry of intimate, independent voices and deeply personal narratives.

The event will feature a curated showcase of short films and documentaries from Film and Television Institute of India, alongside engaging conversations and masterclasses with distinguished voices from the world of cinema and animation. Two-time National Award-winning filmmaker Kamakhya Narayan Singh will lead a masterclass titled From Research to Reel: Crafting Feature Film Stories. The programme will also feature an insightful conversation between acclaimed animation filmmaker and curator Dhvani Desai and film critic and journalist Murtaza Ali Khan on Animation Storytelling: India vis-à-vis the World. A special exhibition showcases iconic Hindi film posters from the 1950s onwards, along with rare vintage advertising posters and brand endorsements featuring legendary film personalities from different eras.

More than a festival, HFF unfolds as a vibrant cultural movement, an ever-evolving ecosystem where cinema does not merely mirror the present but actively imagines and shapes the future. It stands as an unmissable annual confluence for students, critics, filmmakers, and devoted cinephiles, all drawn together in a shared pursuit of meaningful dialogue with the rich and ever-unfolding tapestry of India's cinematic landscape. (Agencies)

Alia Bhatt stuns in coral silk gown at Cannes Film Festival opening ceremony



Bollywood actor Alia Bhatt made a striking red carpet debut at the 2026 Cannes Film Festival, wearing a custom coral silk couture gown by British designer Tamara Ralph. Bhatt, who is attending the festival as India's global ambassador for L'Oréal Paris, turned heads on Tuesday at the opening ceremony in the bespoke creation.

Ralph shared photos of Bhatt on her official Instagram, describing the outfit as a "bright coral silk crepe marocain corseted column dress, with a structured neckline and graphic plunging cutout detail."

The look was completed with a silk voile chiffon scarf that cascaded dramatically behind her. Bhatt accessorised with jewellery from Chopard, including square-cut diamond earrings and an asscher-cut diamond ring.

In a post on Instagram, celebrity stylist Rhea Kapoor revealed that Bhatt's necklace featured 168.27 carats of rare pink coral and a 5.53-carat Golconda-type 2A diamond at its centre.

On Tuesday, Bhatt was photographed at the Hotel Martinez in a hand-painted gown by Indian designer Yash Patil, which featured a scenic French Riviera landscape rendered in washes of pastel green, blue, lavender and yellow.

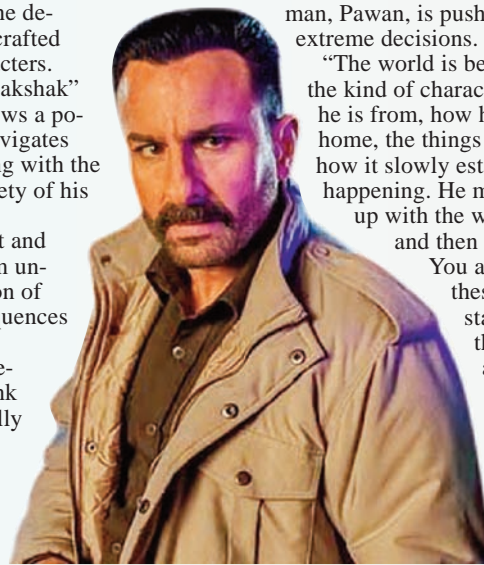
The 2026 Cannes Film Festival concludes on May 23. (PTI)

'Kartavya' is one of the best roles that have come my way: Saif Ali Khan

Actor Saif Ali Khan says he was instinctively drawn to the world of "Kartavya", which he described as a gripping, well-crafted story with compelling characters. Directed by Pulkit of "Bhakhshak" fame, the crime-drama follows a police officer (Khan), as he navigates rising threats while grappling with the weight of his duty and the safety of his family.

As the lines between right and wrong begin to blur, the film unfolds as a layered exploration of power, guilt, and the consequences of silence.

"I dove into 'Kartavya' because I love the script. I think it is a great drama and a really interesting, almost international kind of piecing together of things. I had not read a script like this, and people who read it and discussed it at the time said that this is one of the best roles that have come my way," Khan told PTI in an interview.



The actor said "Kartavya" has an international feel, in which his character of a policeman, Pawan, is pushed to take extreme decisions.

"The world is beautifully crafted, the kind of character he is, where he is from, how he speaks, the home, the things that are at risk, how it slowly establishes what is happening. He might be a bit fed up with the way life is going, and then it slowly builds. You add pressure in these scenes, and he starts reacting," the 55-year-old actor said.

Khan also addressed comparisons between his role in "Kartavya" and his widely acclaimed performance as Langda Tyagi in 2006 movie, "Omkaara". "Omkaara" is Hindi heartland. I think the

voice might sound a little similar; the accent might be similar."

When asked about choosing roles in an industry often dominated by larger-than-life spectacles, Khan said his approach has always been guided by instinct rather than scale.

"I've tried to play whatever is the best of what I'm offered and how I'm feeling. My manager at the time had said, 'We're kind of platform agnostic, we will do anything within reason, if we like it,'" he said.

Having straddled between mainstream cinema and offbeat films like "Agent Vinod", "Race", "Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior", "Devara", "Ek Hasina Thi", "Being Cyrus", "Laal Kaptaan", he said he seamlessly moves between genres.

"I enjoyed playing the villain in 'Tanhaji'. I loved playing 'Sacred Games' as a web show. So, you mix it up as much as you can, and I just get a lot of satisfaction and happiness from doing a good job."

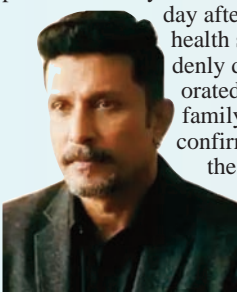
Produced by Gauri Khan under Red Chillies Entertainments, "Kartavya" is set to release on Netflix on May 15. It also stars actors Sanjay Mishra, and Zakir Hussain, among others. (PTI)

Kannada actor-producer Dileep Raj dies at 47

Kannada actor and producer Dileep Raj died on Wednesday (May 13) after reportedly suffering a massive heart attack. He was 47.

Dileep was taken to a hospital in the early hours of the day after his health suddenly deteriorated. His family later confirmed the news of his death to the media.

His death has left the Kannada television and film industry in shock, especially among fans who knew him for his performances in Milana, U-Turn and the television serial Hitler Kalyana. (PTI)



Amitabh Bachchan thanks his fans, calls them 'extended family'

"This is my pride and my honour to have the blessings of the many" said Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan as he extended his gratitude to his fans.

The actor shared a series of pictures of his fans on his blog on Monday. They were taken during his fan meeting session, which he holds every Sunday outside his Mumbai residence, Jalsa. During the meetings, hundreds of fans gather to catch a glimpse of an actor.

"This is my pride and my honour to have the blessings of the many. They make me believe... They make me breathe another day... They provoke me to work and to work harder and to deliver... they are my Ef... my extended family," Bachchan wrote in his post.

The actor also urged his staff to behave with the fans, who wait eagerly for him.

"While explaining to those who work here about how they ought to behave toward his well-wishers, the public understands that the manner in which these staff members conduct themselves is the same way I behave," he said.

"To wait for hours for such a long time and under such scorching sun is no ordinary feat. To subsequently fail to treat them with due courtesy is simply unacceptable. The public, after all, is the embodiment of the Divine. Affection, respect, and goodwill toward them are



all they truly seek. They give us so much; in return, we ought to serve as a mirror reflecting back to them nothing but love, honour, and respect," he added. (PTI)

Akshay Kumar, Vidya Balan reunite for untitled comedy film

Actors Akshay Kumar and Vidya Balan are teaming with filmmaker Aneez Bazmee for an untitled comedy, which will release in theatres on December 4, 2026.

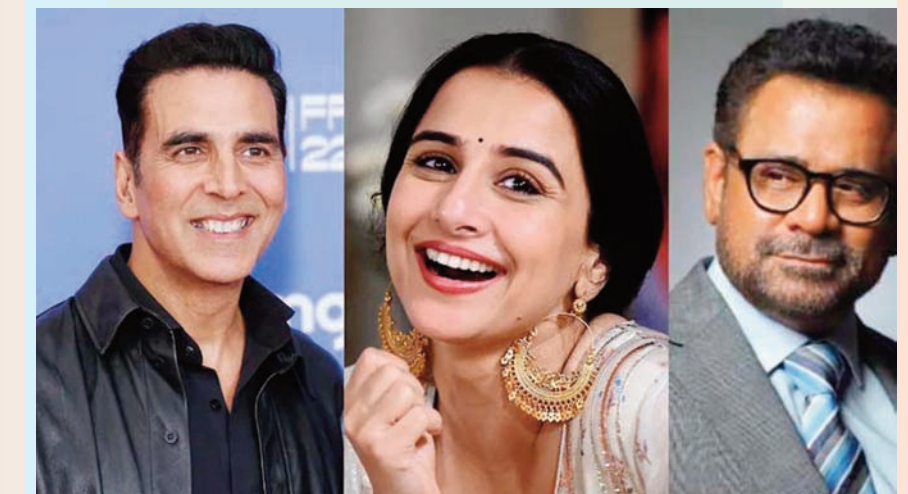
The film is described as a "big-screen family entertainer" and is produced by Shrihar Reddy and Kuldeep Rathore in collaboration with Cape of Good Films and Sri Venkateswara Creations, according to a press release.

It also features Raashii Khanna alongside Vijay Raaz and Sudesh Lehri. The makers have recently wrapped the Kerala schedule of the film.

Akshay Kumar too had taken to social media last week to share a picture with Vidya Balan and Raashii Khanna, updating that the Kerala schedule has been wrapped.

The caption read, "Keralam schedule wrapped! Nothing beats working with good people in a beautiful place."

Big love to our director Aneez Bazmee for the madness behind the camera and to my incredible co-stars Vidya, Raashii, Chota Rajpal and the entire crew! This one's been special."



The film marks a reunion for Kumar and Balan, who have earlier featured in 2007 horror comedy Bhool Bhulaiyaa, Heyy Baby and Mission Mangal.

Kumar's latest work is Bhooh Bangla, which released in April. He will next feature in Haiwaan alongside Saif Ali Khan.

Balan featured in Raja Shivaji. The film released on May 1 and is directed by Riteish Deshmukh. (PTI)

Cristiano Ronaldo enters sixth World Cup looking to show he can still thrive despite Saudi move

MADRID, May 13: Cristiano Ronaldo's sixth and likely final World Cup will be the first for the Portugal great since he left Europe to play in Saudi Arabia.

The surprise move in late 2022 shocked many in the soccer world and prompted widespread doubts about whether his form would be affected by facing lower-level competition.

But Ronaldo, who turned 41 in February, has dismissed any notion of a drop in performance going into next month's showcase event. And, to help make his case, the goals have kept coming, both for Al Nassr and with Portugal.

Portugal coach Roberto Martínez said Ronaldo is as hungry as ever and doesn't see any signs that the star forward has slowed down after moving to Saudi Arabia.

"He keeps performing and he keeps showing his value and he keeps showing that (he) is important for the national team," Martínez said. "To have that hunger when you've won everything in the game is quite remarkable. And that's without getting away from the fact that to be in the national team you need to be somebody that can help the team now and not with what you've done in the past."

Ronaldo and his longtime rival Lionel Messi are set to reach the milestone of playing in six World Cups. Ronaldo is the all-time leader in appearances (226) and goals (143) for a men's national team. He is also the only man to have scored in five World Cups.

"Even though he's the captain, even though probably he's achieved what no other player in world football has achieved, which is the number of games for the national team, over 225 appearances, just with that number is a uniqueness about what he brings, but I think he has the same demands as any other player in the national team," Martínez said.

Ronaldo made the move to Saudi Arabia in the middle of the 2022-23 season after his latest stint with Manchester United, rejecting other offers to take up a reported salary of \$200 million a year and "give a



different vision of this country and football." Ronaldo said at the time his work in Europe was done and he was ready for a "new challenge."

Criticism immediately began to pour in, with many fans and pundits not liking what appeared to be his choice of taking the big Saudi money instead of continuing his career in elite soccer. Some said he was virtually retiring from competitive soccer.

Ronaldo has constantly praised the Saudi league, though, saying it's better than both the French and the Portuguese leagues. He said those who criticize him should go there and try to compete in temperatures of up to 40 degrees Celsius (104 F) and keep performing like he has.

"I don't need to speak because they can say whatever they want, but the numbers don't lie," Ronaldo said in an interview with Piers Morgan last year. "They've never been here, they've never played here ... For me it's (easier) to score in Spain than score in Saudi (league)."

Ronaldo's move away from Europe did not appear to affect his performances on the international stage with Portugal. He has kept playing at a high level since then, scoring 25 goals in his last 30 games with the national team.

Ronaldo went scoreless in five European Championship games in 2024 as Portugal reached the quarterfinals. In 2025, about two and a half years after he started playing

in Saudi Arabia, Ronaldo helped Portugal win the Nations League title, with one of his eight goals in the competition coming in the final against Spain.

Ronaldo has maintained a top-notch physical condition despite just having turned 41. He was hindered by a hamstring injury sustained in late February but recovered quickly. On May 7, he was scoring his 100th Saudi Pro League goal in his 105th league appearances for Al Nassr, which has a chance to win its first league title since 2019.

"All the efforts (Cristiano) makes and what he does on the pitch, which he has experienced more than all of us together, which he puts in every day and every game, is unique," João Félix, Ronaldo's teammate with both Al Nassr and Portugal, told the Saudi Pro League earlier this year. "And that we see him, at 40 years old, doing what he does, only gives us more motivation."

Ronaldo scored 14 goals in 16 matches in his debut season in Saudi Arabia in 2022-23. In his first full season, he netted 35 goals in 31 games, setting a new scoring record in the league. Al Nassr won its first Arab Club Champions Cup in 2023 thanks to a pair of goals by Ronaldo in the final.

In the 2024-25 season, Ronaldo scored 25 goals in 30 matches, and so far this season he has found the net 26 times in 29 appearances. He was the league's top scorer in both of his first two full seasons, and now is five goals shy of Al Ahli's Ivan Toney.

Ronaldo has said this will definitely be his last attempt at winning the World Cup, but it remains unclear for how long he will continue playing.

His coach with Portugal knows better not to make any guesses.

"It's difficult for me to say, because obviously I've learned very quickly not to predict the future with Cristiano, just because he's got this elite brain about being the best that he can be today," Martínez said. "And I'm thinking if you ask him, he'll tell you the same. He doesn't make plans." (AP)

Indian women's hockey team to tour Australia ahead of Nations Cup in NZ



NEW DELHI, May 13: The Indian women's hockey team will tour Australia for a four-match series from May 21 to June 3 as part of its preparations for next month's Nations Cup in New Zealand, which is a pathway to the elite FIH Pro League.

The FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup is scheduled to be held from June 15 to 21 in Auckland. India will play all the four matches against Australia at the Perth Hockey Stadium. India needs to win the tournament to regain entry in the Pro League after being relegated last year.

The first two matches will be played on May 26 and 27, while the remaining two games are scheduled for May 29 and 30.

After the tour of Australia, the team will travel to New Zealand where it will continue its preparations ahead of the Nations Cup.

The Indian women's team heads into the tour after an encouraging outing in Argentina earlier this year, where it showed immense grit to finish a four-match tour with two wins.

Since returning from the tour, the

squad has been training intensively at the national camp in SAI Bengaluru, focusing on improving key areas ahead of a packed international calendar.

With support from Anandana, the Coca-Cola India Foundation, the drag-flickers in the team will also undergo a specialised drag-flick training clinic under Dutch legend Taeke Taekema from May 26 till June 21 in Perth as well as Auckland.

"Very happy that this tour has been made possible by Hockey India because these matches will help us identify our shortcomings and also our improvements after our camps."

"We have seen what the benchmark is when we played Argentina, we can now test how close we are to reach the level of our last two wins and maintain the momentum," Indian women's team chief coach Sjoerd Marjine said.

"Instead of making a long flight we cut the travel in pieces so the acclimatisation will go faster. The weather is colder in New Zealand and Australian (Perth) conditions will be closer to that," he added. (PTI)

Gyaneshwari bags two medals at ASWC



GANDHINAGAR, May 13: India's Gyaneshwari Yadav bagged a double by winning silver and bronze medals in the 53kg category at the 2026 Asian Senior Weightlifting Championships here on Wednesday.

Gyaneshwari won a silver in the snatch section and then an overall bronze medal in the event with a combined lift of 194kg.

The gold medal in the category was claimed by Jinlan Zhao of China with a total lift of 216kg, while the silver went to Vietnam's Hoai Huong Nguyen with a total of 195kg.

Komal Kohar had opened India's medal count, winning a bronze in the women's 48kg on Monday.

The championships, which started on Monday at the Mahatma Mandir & Exhibition Centre here features 178 lifters from 28 Asian nations and two Commonwealth countries and serves as a qualifying event for the 2026 Commonwealth Games. (PTI)

Former Mohun Bagan president Tutu Bose dies at 79

KOLKATA, May 13: Former Mohun Bagan President Swapna Sadhan Bose, fondly known as "Tutu Babu" in Kolkata's Maidan circles, has died after suffering a cardiac arrest. He was 79.

Bose is survived by his sons Srinjay and Soumik. Srinjay is the current Mohun Bagan secretary.

Bose, one of the most influential figures in Indian football administration, had been undergoing treatment at a private hospital here for multiple health complications. He died around 11.45pm on Tuesday, according to family sources.

His mortal remains will be kept at the Mohun Bagan club tent on Wednesday for fans and sports lovers to pay their last respects. The cremation will take place at 4.30pm later in the day.

"It is with deepest sorrow that we announce the passing of Tutu Bose. He was the best father and grandfather one could ever have, a remarkable administrator, and the strongest pillar of support for everyone around him. A true banyan tree in our lives," his grandson Arinjoy Bose posted on Facebook.

Bose played a defining role in shaping Mohun Bagan in the modern era.

He served the club in various capacities for more than three decades, including as secretary and president, and became synonymous with the green-and-maroon club.

Under his leadership, Mohun Bagan overcame several financial and administrative challenges while also embracing transformative decisions, including the induction of foreign players and the club's corporate partnership era.

Signing of Nigerian striker Chima Okorie, who went on to become one of the most iconic foreign footballers to play in India, also took place under his administration. Okorie was poached from East Bengal. This was after Bose changed a 100-year-old club rule of hiring only Indian players.

Bose had risen to control Mohun Bagan after defeating seasoned administrator Dhiren De.

He also played a key role in the merger of Mohun Bagan with ATK (formerly Atlético de Kolkata), ushering in a new chapter in the club's history in 2020. (PTI)



Sreejesh slams HI after removal as India U-21 coach

NEW DELHI, May 13: Former India goalkeeper and junior men's team coach PR Sreejesh on Wednesday publicly expressed his frustration over being removed from his role after just 17 months, questioning Hockey India's preference for foreign coaches despite his successful stint.

In a strongly-worded social media post, Sreejesh said that his tenure was brought to an end despite winning five medals in as many tournaments during his tenure which ended after the junior World Cup in November-December last year.

Hockey India chose to advertise the post instead of extending Sreejesh's contract. He had re-applied for the job after first getting the position in August 2024.

"It seems like my coaching career comes to an end after 1.5 years, during which we played 5 tournaments and secured 5 podium finishes, including a Junior World Cup bronze medal," Sreejesh posted on X.

"I have heard about coaches getting fired after bad performances. But this is the first time I am experiencing being removed to make way for a foreign coach."

The 38-year-old Sreejesh, one of India's greatest goal keepers, questioned Hockey India's apparent preference for overseas



coaches. He had won Olympic bronze medals at the 2020 Tokyo and 2024 Paris Games before retiring from international hockey.

"The Hockey India President stated that the chief coach of the senior men's team (Craig Fulton) prefers a foreign head coach for the junior team, believing it will help develop Indian hockey from the junior level through to the senior level."

"Hence, the continued preference for foreign coaches -- Can't Indian coaches develop Indian hockey?" said Sreejesh.

"On 07-03-2026, during a

meeting with the Hon'ble Sports Minister Shri Mansukh Mandaviya, I was told, 'Sreejesh, we need coaches like you to step up and lead our country as we prepare for 2036.'

"However, Hockey India continues to place its trust in foreign coaches over Indian ones across all four teams."

During his tenure with the under-21 side, India reached the final of the Sultan of Johor Cup, won bronze at the Junior World Cup on home soil and clinched the gold medal at the Men's Junior Asia Cup 2024 in Muscat. (PTI)

Indian origin quartet will hope to spring a surprise at PGA Championship

NEWTOWN SQUARE (US), May 13: For the first time, there will be four players of Indian origin in a Major as Akshay Bhatia, Sahithi Theegala, Aaron Rai and Sudarshan Yellamaraju tee up at the PGA Championship at Aronimink Golf Club here on Thursday.

While the field is very strong and deep, a quartet of rising stars of Indian-origin -- Bhatia, Theegala, Rai and Yellamaraju -- will draw particular attention as players capable of making a serious run at the Wanamaker Trophy.

Americans have won the PGA Championship the last 10 times, the longest such streak of any major, and Scottie Scheffler arrives as the defending champion. But Rory McIlroy, who won the year's first Major, will be a solid contender, despite a niggler. McIlroy can become the fifth player since 1960 and the first since Jordan Spieth in 2015 to win the first two majors of the year.

Bhatia, enters the season's second major with arguably the strongest momentum of the group.

The 24-year-old left-hander has continued his rapid ascent on the PGA Tour in 2026, highlighted by a breakthrough victory at the Arnold Palmer Invitational, where he claimed his third PGA Tour title.

He has also recorded strong finishes at THE PLAYERS Championship, the RBC Heritage and the Genesis Invitational, cementing his place among the Tour's elite young talents. (PTI)

No fear, fast hands makes one hell of a combination: GT pace spearhead Rabada on Sooryavanshi

NEW DELHI, May 13: Kagiso Rabada, a champion fast bowler at the peak of his powers, has been left fascinated by Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's sensational six-hitting skills in the Indian Premier League even though he was at the receiving end briefly.

Rabada, the leader of Gujarat Titans' potent pace attack this season with 21 wickets, was hit for successive sixes by Sooryavanshi in the recent fixture against Rajasthan Royals. In the same fixture, Mohammed Siraj was smashed for a first ball six by the 15-year-old wonderkid who has shown no on field respect also for the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Josh Hazlewood.

Speaking to PTI, Rabada spoke about his mindset while bowling to someone like Sooryavanshi, who has taken world cricket by storm with his IPL exploits over the last two seasons.

"He's a great talent. He's got really fast hands. He's fearless at the moment. There's not an ounce of fear in his body. That's how it normally is when you're young, it's really fascinating. I think it's great to see in the game of cricket, in the IPL. It's great to see the game is well and

truly alive. Who else is going to come in and make headlines of that nature? Let's wait and see," said the 30-year-old South African. Acknowledging his X-factor, Rabada said he doesn't think of the batter's reputation while running in.

"What I'm thinking is just another batter. And try to get the better of him. It's almost like a little bit of flair. He's definitely an X-factor player. Someone that is drawing eyes to the game. Fantastic. Really fast hands. No fear. That's one hell of a combination," said the express fast bowler, who has been clocking 150 kmph consistently this season.

Rabada and Siraj have been the stand-out new ball combination this season with the batters struggling to find answers against them in the powerplay. While Siraj relies both seam and swing, Rabada has been unplayable at times generating extra bounce and seam movement with Test match lengths.

It is the fourth time in his IPL career that he has surpassed the 20-wicket mark. Rabada is someone who doesn't pay lot of attention to the statistics and is happy that he is able to do the job for Gujarat



Titans who are on course to make the play-offs again.

"I just feel like coming into a season, whatever the team that you are playing for,

this time it is Gujarat. I just feel like I am just going to be here to try my best and that is what I am going to leave it at. And whatever the outcome is, it is what the outcome

is going to be," said Rabada.

On his partnership with Siraj, he added: "I guess it is forming a partnership and that is pretty much it. He has got a job to do and I have got a job to do. I guess we have bonded a bit off the field too but it is nothing orchestrated really."

"We found out we are bowling together and we try to fulfil that role to the best of our ability. There is no real magic recipe," he said in a matter of fact way.

Test match lengths in T20s back in vogue? Rabada says they were always effective

While Rabada has excelled for Titans, Bhuvneshwar Kumar has turned back the clock with high quality fast bowling for RCB without relying too much on variations. He has targeted the off-stump channel as if he is bowling in a Test match and got the desired results.

Rabada too has got success with conventional ways that are more seen in red ball cricket. Is he surprised that bowlers are getting success the old fashioned way.

"Not necessarily. There have always been some pacers at the top of the charts when it comes to IPL over the years.

Bhuvneshwar, didn't he get purple cap twice in a row. He is up for it again this year. You can't deny equality. Equality will always show up." If you look at Bhuvneshwar, for example, what has he been doing different? Not much. You can answer that one for yourself," said Rabada.

He also refused to get into the debate relating to batters' inability to handle the moving ball.

"I don't want to get involved in what's happening in other batting line-ups, whether they can cope or whether they can't. If you bowl well, you will get wickets. If you are not really where you would like to be, it's not going to be that way."

"If you can't handle the good balls as much as you would like to as a batter, things are not really going to go your way. That's really the balance of cricket."

"I'm not going to comment on and say that the quality of batting has gone down. Because again, was the quality down when guys were taking wickets before? Or was the quality fluctuating? I don't know," added Rabada, fresh from a match winning performance against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Tuesday night. (PTI)

Plummeting Punjab Kings look to arrest slide against Mumbai Indians

DHARAMSHALA, May 13: Punjab Kings will need to plug gaping holes in the bowling and fielding department as they look to stop their free-fall in the business end of the Indian Premier League against an already eliminated Mumbai Indians here on Thursday.

After bossing the first half of the tournament, Punjab Kings have lost four games in a row and now find themselves in a precarious position in the race for play-offs. They need to win at least two of their remaining games to secure a place in the top four.

It was not so long ago that they were the only unbeaten team in the tournament but such is the nature of the format and the IPL that fortunes can swing either way rather quickly. As captain Shreyas Iyer pointed out after the loss to Delhi Capitals, Punjab Kings only have themselves to blame for being in a difficult spot.

The in-form batting unit masked the frailties in the bowling department in the first half of the tournament but more recently, even posting an above par score, by Iyer's own admission, has not been enough against Delhi Capitals.

Iyer and Co. had the game in the bag on a seaming surface but the pacers could not get their lengths right in the last five overs. The pace attack led by Arshdeep Singh has the worst economy rate among the 10 teams.

Xavier Bartlett and Arshdeep provided a stable new-ball combination in the first half of IPL but now that has been unsettled with the arrival of Lockie Ferguson, who is known



for his skills in the middle and death overs.

They went with three left-arm pacers in the last game by including Ben Dwarshuis who proved rather expensive on the night.

Lead pacer Arshdeep has conceded more than 10 runs per over in the majority of the 11 games he has been a part of.

Spin was not tried for the whole of the game on Monday night and it remains to be seen if Yuzvendra Chahal is used during the second game here.

On the batting front, Prabhsimran Singh needs to get back among the runs to complement Priyansh Arya at the top. A massive improvement in catching and ground fielding is also expected from Iyer and Co.

They face Mumbai Indians, a team that massively under-performed this season but can certainly spoil the opposition's campaign.

It remains to be seen if captain Hardik Pandya, who did not play the last two games due to a niggles, takes the field on Wednesday

night. Suryakumar Yadav, who has struggled for runs both at the international level and franchise cricket over the past 12 months or so, would be looking to make the most of the remaining three outings in the IPL.

Ryan Rickelton and Rohit Sharma too would be expected to provide a flying start in the powerplay. The seasoned pace duo of Trent Boult, who is not a sure starter, and Jasprit Bumrah would be looking to make the ball talk in the seam-friendly conditions.

Teams:

Punjab Kings: Shreyas Iyer (c), Priyansh Arya, Hamoor Singh, Prabhsimran Singh, Mitchell Owen, 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, Yash Thakur, Cooper Connolly, Ben Dwarshuis, Pyla Avinash, Vishnu Vinod, Praveen Dubey, Vishal Nishad.

Mumbai Indians: Naman Dhir, Sherfane Rutherford, Ryan Rickelton, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya (c), Raj Bawa, Will Jacks, Corbin Bosch, Mitchell Santner, Tilak Varma, Trent Boult, Ashwani Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah, Deepak Chahar, Mayank Markande, Shardul Thakur, Quinton de Kock, AM Ghazanif, Mayank Ravat, Anshul Sharma, Mohammed Salahuddin Izzar, Robin Minz.

Match starts 7.30 PM IST. (PTI)

Asia No 1 trap shooter Zoravar Singh not to be part of India shooting squad for Asian Games



NEW DELHI, May 13: Asia No. 1 and world No. 6 trap marksman Zoravar Singh Sandhu has been left out of the proposed Indian shotgun contingent for this year's Asian Games despite the fact that the veteran shooter is one of top shooters in the country and clinched a bronze medal at the prestigious World Championships last year.

Zoravar endured a slump in form during the National Championships and domestic selection trials -- events he was compelled to compete in despite a gruelling international calendar featuring the World Championships and World Cup Finals -- leaving him unable to hit peak form on the domestic circuit.

Those underwhelming scores in the national trials ultimately cost him a place in the Asian Games-bound squad, even though he was ranked world No. 4 barely a month ago.

Zoravar has urged the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) to "review" its decision, pointing out that he has registered the best international scores among Indian trap shooters over the last six months.

The federation, however, has maintained that it will "strictly go by the selection policy put in place a year ago".

The proposed men's trap team -- which NRAI secretary-general Pawankumar Singh said will "99 per cent" remain unchanged -- features Kynan Chenai, Ahvar Rizvi and Shapath Bharadwaj for the continental showpiece to be held in Aichi-Nagoya from September 19 to October 4.

Zoravar, 47, became only the third Indian trap shooter to win a medal at the World Championships when he clinched bronze in Athens in October last year. He also made the medal round at the World Cup Finals before eventually finishing seventh.

More recently, competing as a 'zero' shooter at the World Cup in Almaty this month, Zoravar returned the best score by an Indian in the competition with a tally of 119.

'Zero' shooters are essentially fillers whose scores are recorded for selection purposes, with the NRAI making it mandatory for the country's top-10 athletes to have at least two international scores for national team selection.

However, a 'zero' shooter is not eligible to compete for medals and can participate only for scoring purposes.

Zoravar's international scores stack up strongly against his rivals. He shot 122 at the 2025 World Championships and followed it up with scores of 119 at both the 2025 World Cup Finals and the 2026 World Cup in Almaty. In comparison, Rizvi managed 115 in Almaty in May, while Shapath returned 118 at the same event. Kynan, meanwhile, shot 119 at the Tangier World Cup in March this year.

"The federation should reconsider this (selection policy) but whatever decision they take I have to accept. Being Asia No.1 and currently world No.6, the federation should consider this (achievement)," Zoravar told PTI.

"I shot at the World Cup in Kazakhstan (this month) as a 'zero' shooter and I shot the maximum in the Indian contingent," he added. NRAI secretary-general Pawankumar Singh said: "It's 99 per cent final that this is the final shotgun team that will go to the Asian Games."

Asked whether leaving out the highest-ranked Indian trap shooter and Asia's top marksman compromised the country's medal prospects, he said, "The selection policy was declared more than a year ago and if we start changing names in the squad after seeing the faces of players, then there will be no difference left between shooting and the rest of the sports."

A top shotgun shooter said on condition of anonymity that the sports minister has recently announced that, "only athletes with a real chance of winning medals at the Asian Games will be considered, so why leave Zoravar out of the contingent when he is shooting so well internationally."

But Pawankumar said, "I doubt Zoravar will be included. Even when I say the team is 99 per cent final, this is the squad that is likely to go to the Asian Games."

Proposed shotgun squad for Asian Games:

Men's trap: Kynan Chenai, Ahvar Rizvi, Shapath Bharadwaj. (Women) Neeru, Manisha Keer, Aashima Ahlawat. (Men's skeet) Anantjeet Singh Naruka, Bhavteeg Gill, Mairaj Khan (Women) Parinaaz Dhaliwal, Raiza Dhillion, Maheshwari Chauhan. (Trap mixed team) Kynan Chenai & Neeru. (Skeet mixed team) Anantjeet Naruka & Parinaaz Dhaliwal. (PTI)

Curaçao rehires Dick Advocaat as coach for the World Cup

WILLEMSTAD (CURAÇAO),

May 13: Dutch veteran Dick Advocaat is coming back to take Curaçao to the World Cup and set a record as the oldest-ever coach in the tournament's 96-year history.

The 78-year-old Advocaat's return three months after he resigned citing a family health issue was confirmed Tuesday by the Curaçao soccer federation, one day after Fred Rutten left the job.

"Discussions between (the federation) and Dick Advocaat regarding the further details of this appointment are currently ongoing," it said, with "the aim of ensuring stability, clarity, and continuity around the national team." When Curaçao makes its World Cup debut against Germany on June 14 in Houston, Advocaat will be seven years older than Otto Rehhagel was at 71 coaching Greece at the 2010 World Cup.

It will also be Advocaat's third World Cup with a third different team: His native Netherlands in 1994 and South Korea in 2006.

Curaçao also plays Ecuador in Kansas City and Ivory Coast in Philadelphia at the first 48-team World Cup being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. The expanded format gave three extra guaranteed entries to the CONCACAF region.

Advocaat led the tiny Caribbean island team through qualifying then was replaced in February by his compatriot Rutten.

Rutten oversaw two losses in warmup games in March, against Australia and China, and was reportedly unpopular with players who wanted Advocaat back.

Curaçao is an autonomous territory of about 156,000 people in the Caribbean within the Netherlands kingdom. The team relies almost entirely on players born and raised in the Netherlands. (AP)

Pak preparing to bring Babar Azam back as test captain

KARACHI, May 13: Pakistan is preparing to replace Shan Masood with Babar Azam as Test captain after the Bangladesh series following the team's humiliating 104-run defeat in the opening Test in Dhaka on Tuesday.

There has been a strong backlash in Pakistan over the team's performance and the captaincy of Masood, who also endured a disappointing outing with the bat, failing in both innings.

According to a source close to the team, a campaign has begun to reinstate Babar as Test captain for the remaining matches of the World Test Championship cycle, with Pakistan still scheduled to play seven more Tests this year.

Masood's tenure as Test captain since December 2023 has seen Pakistan lose 11 of their 15



matches, while Babar missed the opening Test against Bangladesh due to a knee injury and is likely to return for the second match from May 18.

"Some influential figures in the

Pakistan Cricket Board also want Babar back as captain and believe this is the right time to give him another run at captaincy," the source said.

He said that even within the team there was support for Babar to be brought back as Test captain.

All three captains of the Pakistan team across formats are currently part of the squad touring Bangladesh, including ODI skipper Shaheen Shah Afridi and T20I captain Salman Ali Agha.

"If Babar plays the second Test and regains his batting form, he is a strong contender to come back as captain. Initial exchanges with some board officials indicate he is also not averse to becoming captain again," the source said.

He said the idea is to bring back Babar as Test captain and then pre-

pare him to take over as ODI captain as well before next year's World Cup.

Babar was captain of all three formats between 2019 and 2023 before he was forced to step down after the 2023 World Cup in India.

He was brought back as T20 captain for the 2024 World Cup but stepped down again after a poor tournament.

The source said Shan Masood was himself deeply disappointed after the first Test defeat and is now seriously considering taking up a permanent role with the Pakistan Cricket Board.

He was offered the post of Director of International Cricket and Player Affairs last year by PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi, but had opted to complete the ongoing World Test Championship cycle. (PTI)

Srikanth, Sindhu, Lakshya advance in Thailand Open

BANGKOK, May 13: Star shuttlers PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and Kidambi Srikanth progressed to the singles second round with straight game wins on a mixed day for India at the USD 500,000 Thailand Open Super 500 tournament here on Wednesday.

Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medalist, saw off Tung Ciou-Tong of Chinese Taipei 21-9 21-12 while seventh seed Lakshya Sen, a two-time All England finalist, prevailed 21-16 21-17 over Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh.

Srikanth stunned eighth seed Loh Kean Yew of Singapore 21-14 21-15 in 30 minutes.

Srikanth, a former world No. 1, will face Chinese Taipei's Su Li Yang, while Sindhu will meet Denmark's Amalie Schulz in the round of 16.

Lakshya, a 2021 world championships bronze medalist, returning back from his injury at the Thomas Cup, will square off against either Chinese Taipei's Wang Po-Wei or China's Zhu Xuan Chen.

Young Devika Sihag, who won the Thailand Masters for her maiden super 300 title early this year, also produced a fine show, outclassing world No. 26

Natsuki Nidaira of Japan, 21-19 13-21 21-15 in an hour and 11 minutes.

In another match, Malvika Bansod beat Wen Yu Zhang of Canada 13-21 26-24 21-13 but Tanvi Sharma suffered a 17-21 8-21 loss to Hina Akechi of Japan.

The 20-year-old Ayush Shetty, a finalist at the Asia Championships, also fought hard before going down 13-21 21-17 4-21 against Japan's sixth seed Kodai Naraoka, while Tharun Manneppalli lost 12-21 16-21 to another Japanese Koki Watanabe.

In women's singles, Unnati Hooda and Anmol Kharb too displayed their fighting spirit before narrowly missed out against Thailand's fourth seed Pornpawee Chochuwong and second seed Chen Yu Fei of China respectively.

While Hooda went down 21-11 17-21 16-21 to Chochuwong, Kharb suffered a 21-19 13-21 18-21 loss to the Tokyo Olympic champion.

Mixed pair of Ashith Surya and Amrutha Pramithesh lost 22-24 11-21 to Tsai Fu Cheng and Sung Yu-Hsuan to bow out. (PTI)

Macneil Noronha replacement for Ramakrishna Ghosh

CHENNAI, May 13: Chennai Super Kings has selected Karnataka all-rounder Macneil Noronha as a replacement for injured all-rounder Ramakrishna Ghosh, an IPL media release stated on Wednesday.

"Chennai Super Kings (CSK) have picked a player replacement for Ramakrishna Ghosh, who injured his right foot during their game against Mumbai Indians on May 3rd. He has been ruled out for the season. Macneil Noronha will join CSK for Rs 30 lakh as a replacement for Ghosh," the release stated.

An all-rounder from Karnataka, Noronha was recently awarded the MA Chidambaram Trophy at the BCCI Naman Awards for being the highest run-getter in the 2024-25 Colonel CK Nayudu Trophy (U-23). (PTI)

England's cricket team announces a new selector and a new-look test squad

LONDON, May 13: England's cricket team has emerged from its post-Ashes self-reflection with a new national selector — a foreigner, for the first time — and a new-look test squad. Marcus North, a former Australia batter, was confirmed in the key position on Wednesday by England, which said he "will contribute to the selection of all England men's squads" from the senior teams through to youth programs.

North has a long history in English domestic cricket, having played for six county teams and, since 2018, been director of cricket at Durham — where he has worked alongside England test captain Ben Stokes.

England selectors have been criticized by some pundits for ignoring county form when picking who plays for the national team, so that might have been a factor behind North's appointment in the wake of the embarrassing 4-1 loss to Australia in the Ashes.

England already has a foreign-born head coach in Brendon McCullum. North replaces Luke Wright after his three years in the role.

Cawley and Pope dropped for NZ series opener Changes were inevitable in England's test team after the McCullum-Stokes era hit a new low in the most recent Ashes.

It means there is a fresh look to the squad ahead of the three-test home series against New Zealand, with opener Zak Crawley and No. 3 Ollie Pope dropped for first test starting June 4 and three uncapped players selected. Two of them are opener Emilio Gay, who has been playing limited-overs internationals for Italy — where his mother was born — over the past two years, and wicketkeeper-batter James Rew.

With Chris Woakes joining James Anderson and Stuart Broad in retiring, Mark Wood and Brydon Carse injured, and Jofra Archer unavailable because of T20 commitments, England's fast-bowling stocks are currently low.

Matthew Fisher, whose sole test appearance came in 2022, was called up along with 23-year-old Sonny Baker, the third uncapped player in the squad. Gus Atkinson, Ollie Robinson and Josh Tongue are the more senior pace options. (AP)

SRH coach Vettori lauds GT's brilliant bowling show

AHMEDABAD, May 13: Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori accepted that a "formidable" Gujarat Titans completely outplayed them with their "brilliant" bowling performance in an IPL match here.

After half-centuries from Sai Sudharsan (61) and Washington Sundar (50) pushed GT to 168 for 5, pace duo of Mohammed Siraj (1/11) and Kagiso Rabada (3/28) wreaked havoc in the powerplay before Jason Holder (3/20) and Prasadidh Krishna (2/23) joined the party to bundle out SRH for 86 on a seaming surface on Tuesday night.

The 82-run loss was SRH's biggest IPL loss in terms of runs.

"Really good performance by GT, they put us under a lot of pressure with the ball and then the opening pair set it up so well. We were satisfied at the halfway mark, we knew we are coming up against their bowling line up. Five seamers plus Rashid (Khan) is always going to be challenging," Vettori said at the post match press conference.

"We didn't get the start we wanted and they were able to capitalise and their bowling was brilliant."

"They (GT) are a formidable team and they definitely have their own style and they can adapt to when they need to. They played the conditions exceptionally well. They are well



suited in these conditions. Mainly for us it was coming against their bowling line-up and they were very impressive tonight," he added.

The former New Zealand left-arm spinner said they didn't get the start they wanted while

chasing the target on seam-friendly conditions.

"169 we thought we had a chance but I don't put any blame on the batting unit, they have been exceptional this year. Every team in the IPL are going to have small blips once in a while and our's was tonight and I don't see any reason why we can't bounce back."

He praised his bowling unit but said GT pacers were completely brilliant.

"We don't expect our bowling unit to be perfect. It is difficult bowling in the IPL in these conditions. To restrict them to 170 was a very good job."

GT left-arm spinner Sai Kishore praised Rabada and Siraj for their lethal display in the powerplay.

"Siraj and Rabada have been hitting their lengths very well and that's the advantage of having proper Test match bowlers in your lineup. We have been able to be helped by Shubman Gill and Ashish Nehra," he said.

He was also effusive in his praise for the batting unit.

"We felt the wicket was little damp, it was seaming a lot, so the talk in the dressing room was that 170 was a par score. It's a very good score if we bowl well in the powerplay. To get to 170 Nishant Sindhu batted with intent in the middle overs, Sai Sudharsan played very well, Washy finished it well." (PTI)

ICC Test Rankings: Bumrah maintains top spot

DUBAI, May 13: India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah maintained his pole position among Test bowlers in the latest ICC rankings published on Wednesday.

Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill were placed 8th and 9th among the batters respectively with former England Test skipper Joe Root leading the charts with 880 points.

Jaiswal has 750 points and Gill, who has climbed a spot, has accumulated 730 points. Harry Brook is second in the list followed by Travis Head and Steve Smith respectively.

It must be noted that India is yet to play any of their WTC matches in 2026 having last played against South Africa at home in the month of November.

In the bowlers' list, Bumrah is still leading the charts with 879 points while the next best Indian is Mohammed Siraj placed 12th. Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep Yadav are currently placed 14th and 15th respectively. Australia's Mitchell Starc and Test captain Pat Cummins have gained to spot to second and fourth place respectively, while New Zealand's Matt Henry also leapfrogged to third spot. (PTI)