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● 16th Kerala Assembly swearing-in witnesses oaths in different languages

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Several MLAs take oath in languages not in Eighth Schedule of Constitution

## Himanta, new MLAs take oath for 16th Assembly

**GUWAHATI, May 21:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday took oath as an MLA on the first day of the new assembly. Pro-tem Speaker Chandra Mohan Patowary administered the oath to Sarma for the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly.

Sarma took his oath in the Assamese language. Patowary said, "All the members can take an oath in any recognised language they wish to. They can submit their oath copies to the assembly office."

After the CM, the other MLAs have started taking oath in different languages such as Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and Sanskrit.

The NDA, comprising the BJP, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF), secured a sweeping mandate in the assembly polls, winning a record 102 seats in the 126-member House.

The BJP alone bagged 82, while the AGP and BPF won 10 seats each.

The Congress and Rajgor Dal, who were part of a six-party opposition alliance, won 19 and two seats respectively.



The AIUDF and Trinamool Congress fought as single entities and have two and one MLA, respectively.

Meanwhile, in a departure from norms, several newly elected members of the Assam Legislative Assembly on Thursday took oath in languages such as Karbi, Rabha and Rajbongshi, which are not in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

Pro-tem Speaker Chandra Mohan Patowary allowed the

bjongshi communities took the oath in their native languages.

The MLAs also took the oath in other recognised languages such as Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Sanskrit, Hindi and English.

Explaining the Pro-tem Speaker's decision, the Chief Minister said, "A member can take oath only in Eighth Schedule languages. But our MLA Tankeswar Rabha asked me if he could take oath in the Rabha language. As it is not part of the Eighth Schedule, there was no provision for it."

However, he, along with AGP president Atul Bora, discussed the matter with Patowary in the morning, and the Pro-tem Speaker decided to allow the members to take the oath in their respective mother tongues, the CM added.

"So, our members took the oath in Rabha, Karbi and Rajbongshi languages as well. It is a historic milestone in the Assam Assembly," Sarma said.

Thanking Patowary for allowing this deviation, he said it has represented a diverse multi-cultural Assamese society in the Assembly. When (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ranjeet Dass begins 2nd innings as Speaker

**GUWAHATI, May 21:** Four-time BJP MLA Ranjeet Kumar Dass was on Thursday unanimously elected as the Speaker of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly, becoming the only legislator in the state to assume the chair for the second time.

Pro tem Speaker Chandra Mohan Patowary announced that there were three nominations in favour of Dass, and no one contested him.

"As there is no other nomination, I declare Ranjeet Kumar Dass as the Speaker of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly," he added.

This is the second term for Dass as the Speaker of the Assembly. He was in the chair in 2016 when the BJP formed its first government in the northeastern state.

Dass, the MLA from Bhowanipur-Sorbhog seat, was a cabinet



minister during Himanta Biswa Sarma's first term as CM from 2021 to 2026.

He also served the party as its Assam unit chief.

Dass has been elected to the Assam Assembly for four consecutive terms since 2011.

After his election, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma congratulated Dass.

"Today, you have made history. You are the only person who is assuming (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## High turnout marks peaceful Falta repoll; BJP eyes virtual walkover after Jahangir exit



**KOLKATA, May 21:** Electors of West Bengal's Falta voted peacefully on Thursday with over 86.11 per cent polling till 5 pm in a re-election held under the shadow of TMC candidate Jahangir Khan's dramatic withdrawal from the contest two days earlier, a move widely seen as handing over the ruling BJP a virtual walkover in the politically sensitive constituency.

With central forces heavily deployed and long queues visible outside booths through the day, the repoll passed off without major incident, though the political shadow over the constituency came less from the voting itself and more from the abrupt exit

of Khan.

The repoll stemmed from controversy surrounding the April 29 election, when complaints surfaced from several booths, alleging perfume-like substances and adhesive tapes had been applied to EVMs.

The Election Commission subsequently ordered a repoll in Falta even as results for the remaining 293 assembly constituencies had already been declared on May 4, with the BJP scripting a historic victory and coming to power in West Bengal for the first time.

Election officials said 86.11 per cent of the 2.36 lakh electorate had cast their votes till 5 pm, marginally lower than the 86.71 per cent recorded till the same hour in the original polling on April 29.

Reacting to the high turnout, Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari thanked the people of Falta and said visuals from the constituency resembled a festival.

"From the visuals, it appears people are taking part in a festival. Such a turnout in a repoll is really unprecedented," he said.

Khan's exit significantly altered the political arithmetic around Falta.

The BJP, already projecting confidence of an emphatic victory, sees the constituency as a near-certain addition to its assembly (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Courts can hold sedition trials if accused has no objection: SC

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** The Supreme Court on Thursday said that courts can hear trials pertaining to section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, which relates to sedition, if the accused has no objection to it.

The clarification from a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joydip Bagchi and Vipul M Panchoi came while hearing a plea by an accused who has been in jail for 17 years in a case related to sedition.

The appeal filed by the accused is pending before the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

"The petitioner's grievance is that he has no objection if his criminal appeal is heard in entirety, including with respect to the charge under Section 124A. That being so, we clarify... that wherever the accused has no objection against proceeding of the trial, appeal, or any other proceeding where he has been chargesheeted under Section 124A IPC also, there shall be no impediment for the courts to decide such matters on merits and in accordance with law," the bench said.

The top court asked the Madhya Pradesh High Court to hear the petitioner's appeal, and decide the same on merit.

In a landmark order passed on May 11, 2022, the apex court had put the penal provision on sedition on hold till the Centre completed its promised review of the colonial-era relic and also asked the Union and state governments not to register any fresh case invoking the offence. It had also directed that the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Pulwama attack mastermind Burhan Hamza shot dead in PoK

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** Arjmand Gulzar, alias Burhan Hamza, a designated terrorist and the key mastermind behind the 2019 Pulwama terror attack on a CRPF convoy, has been shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), officials said here on Thursday.

Hamza, who was operating under heavy ISI-vetted security, was ambushed in Muzaffarabad.

He was critically injured and airlifted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Rawalpindi, where he succumbed to his injuries, the officials said.

The assailants managed to flee the scene before local security forces could intervene, they added.

Originally from Khar in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district, Hamza was once associated with Al Badr, moved to Al Baraq, and

maintained a close alliance with Pakistan's espionage agency, the ISI, after an acrimonious exit from the outfit.

He was declared a designated terrorist under UAPA for his involvement in orchestrating the February 14, 2019, suicide terror attack conducted by Pakistan-based terrorist organisation Jaish-e-Mohammad, on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India-Africa Forum summit postponed

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** India and the African Union have postponed the India-Africa Forum Summit scheduled for May 28-31 in New Delhi in view of concerns over the spread of Ebola virus.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), without citing reasons for postponement of the mega event, said on Thursday that new dates for the summit will be finalised through consultations with the African nations.

There has been an Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo and it has been declared as a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Over 136 people were reportedly killed in view of the outbreak in the African nation so far.

India had planned to unveil an ambitious roadmap to further solidify its ties with the African continent at the upcoming summit. Top leaders from several African nations had already confirmed their participation at the gathering.

The last India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) was hosted in New

Delhi in October 2015.

India and the African Union exchanged views on the "evolving health situation" in parts of Africa and reaffirmed the importance of continued cooperation in strengthening public health preparedness and response capacities across the continent including through support to Africa CDC and relevant national institutions, the MEA said.

The Africa CDC (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention) is a continental autonomous health agency of the African Union.

The MEA said India reaffirmed its solidarity with the peoples and governments of Africa and expressed its readiness to contribute to Africa CDC-led efforts aimed at addressing the evolving health situation.

"Recognising the importance of ensuring the full participation and engagement of African leaders and stakeholders, and mindful of the emerging public health situation on the continent, consultations were held between the government of India, the Chairperson of the African (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Parliamentary panel members grill top NTA officials over NEET paper 'leak'

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** Several members of Parliament grilled top NTA officials on Thursday, with the agency's director general telling them that the NEET-UG paper was not leaked through their system and the CBI is probing the matter, sources said.

During a meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports, several MPs questioned the National Testing Agency (NTA) officials on the steps taken by them to strengthen the exam system in order to prevent paper leaks in the future.

The panel had summoned top officials of the education ministry, including Education Secretary Vineet Joshi. The NTA officials, including Chairperson Pradeep Kumar Joshi and Director General Abhishek Singh, gave a detailed presentation on the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Report on reforms in the agency.

The sources said on queries from the MPs on how the National

Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (Undergraduate) paper was leaked, Singh said it was not leaked through their system.

At this, several MPs asked him then how did the paper get leaked and what was the need to cancel the exam and hold a retest.

The NTA DG had no answer to this and instead, said the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is looking into the matter.

Some opposition MPs demanded that the probe report be presented before the panel, but some of their counterparts from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) objected to this, saying the CBI is an independent body and it should be allowed to do its work.

The sources said Singh gave a detailed presentation on the implementation of the steps recommended by the Radhakrishnan Report on NTA reforms and informed that around 70 per cent of the short-term measures suggested have already been implemented.

The NTA officials told the mem-

bers of the panel that steps are being taken to evolve a foolproof examination system and a comprehensive review is being conducted. They also said credible people should be involved in the paper setting and distribution system.

The NTA officials said holding the NEET through a computer-based testing (CBT) platform is being considered and future exams could be conducted through this mode.

The MPs are learnt to have raised the issue of a shortage of staff and filling vacancies in the NTA to ensure that the agency functions efficiently and leakages are prevented.

The sources said the NTA informed the members of the committee that there is a staff shortage of around 25 per cent in the agency currently and steps are being taken systematically to fill up all such vacancies to plug any loophole.

After the meeting, the chairperson of the parliamentary panel, Congress (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Mission Kiwi to power Arunachal farmers: DyCM Mein

**ITANAGAR, May 21:** Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Thursday hailed the launch of "Mission Arunachal Kiwi: The USP of Arunachal Pradesh" as a transformative initiative aimed at empowering farmers and building a globally competitive organic kiwi ecosystem in the state.

Mein said the mission would strengthen the entire kiwi value chain, from cultivation and post-harvest management to branding, exports and agri-tourism, while opening up new economic opportunities for farmers of the state.

"The launch of Mission Arunachal Kiwi: The USP of Arunachal Pradesh marks a transformative step towards empowering our farmers and building a globally competitive organic kiwi ecosystem from Arunachal Pradesh," he said in a post on X.

Highlighting the Centre's support for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# PM Modi gifts Muga silk stole for Italy PM

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** A Muga silk stole for Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, a Madhubani painting with fish motif for Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten and a Ladakhi pure wool stole for Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson were some of the gifts presented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his just concluded five-nation tour.

During his trip, Modi also gifted Kesar mangoes and Meghalaya pineapples to UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a replica of the ice axe used by Sherpa Tenzing Norgay to Iceland's Prime Minister Kristinn Frostadóttir and a Bidri silver work vase to Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen among others, officials said.

Modi visited the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy.

The Muga silk stole gifted to Meloni is a rare and prestigious textile from the Brahmaputra Valley. Muga silk is known as the "golden silk" of Assam and is celebrated for its natural golden hue and understated elegance.

Italy's celebrated tradition of luxury textiles and timeless design finds a natural resonance in the elegance of Assam's "golden silk", the officials said.

The prime minister of Italy was also gifted a Shirui Lily silk stole, which draws its inspiration from the misty heights of Shirui Kashong peak in Manipur.

It is inspired by the rare Shirui Lily, a delicate bell-shaped flower with pale pinkish-white petals that blooms nowhere else in the world.

For the Tangkhul Naga community of Manipur, the Shirui Lily symbolises purity, identity and cultural pride. The lily also holds deep cultural resonance in Italy, where it has long symbolised purity, grace and artistic refinement, frequently appearing in Renaissance art.

President of Italy Sergio Mattarella was gifted a marble inlay work box with CDs of legendary Hindustani classical vocalist Pandit Bhimsen Joshi and Carnatic singer M S Subbulakshmi. The box is a refined example of India's handcrafted artistry, closely associated with



the master craftsmen of Agra.

Created using the intricate art of Pachikari, or Pietra Dura, this decorative tradition is believed to have originated in Florence, Italy, before flourishing in India under royal patronage, making it a remarkable artistic bridge between the two nations.

Together, the marble inlay box and the timeless musical works celebrate the shared appreciation of India and Italy for art, heritage and cultural excellence.

King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands was gifted blue pottery from

Jaipur. It is a GI-tagged art form with deep Indian roots, iconic for its vibrant cobalt blue, white, and yellow designs.

It stands as a celebrated symbol of Indian craftsmanship, blending traditional artistry with contemporary design. With the Netherlands' world-famous heritage of producing masterful Delft Blue pottery, these pieces are an ode to a shared commitment to artistic excellence, the officials said.

Queen of the Netherlands Máxima was gifted Meenakari and Kundan earrings. These earrings embody the finest traditions of Indian jewellery craftsmanship, originating from the royal ateliers of Rajasthan.

Prime Minister of the Netherlands Rob Jetten was gifted a Madhubani painting with a fish motif. Madhubani painting is a GI-tagged folk art tradition from the Mithila region known for its intricate geometric patterns and vibrant colours.

Prime Minister of Norway Jonas Gahr Store was gifted a pressed orchid painting and orchid paperweights. These exquisite artworks, composed of real

pressed orchids and ferns from the mist-covered valleys of Sikkim, celebrate the extraordinary biodiversity of the Eastern Himalayas.

King Harald V of Norway was gifted an intricate sailboat model. This exquisite silver sailboat is a masterpiece of Tarakasi, the ancient art of silver filigree from Cuttack, Odisha, the officials said.

Queen Sonja of Norway was gifted a palm leaf Pattachitra, locally known as Tala Pattachitra, one of Odisha's most ancient and intricate art forms.

Apart from the Ladakh pure wool stole, the Swedish PM was also gifted the Loktak tea, an artisanal, small-batch tea from the lush hills surrounding the largest freshwater lake in the northeast, and a handcrafted Santiniketan messenger bag.

Iceland's prime minister was gifted a replica of the ice axe used by Norgay as a tribute to the legendary tool carried by the Sherpa guide of Sir Edmund Hillary on the first ascent of Mount Everest in 1953. The prime minister of Denmark was gifted (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Sensex, Nifty slip in volatile trade on profit-taking in blue-chips

**MUMBAI, May 21:** Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed marginally lower after a volatile session on Thursday, driven by profit-taking in select IT, financial, and oil & gas shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 135.03 points, or 0.18 per cent, to settle at 75,183.36. During the day, it hit a high of 75,945.79 and a low of 74,996.78, gyrating 949.01 points.

The 50-share NSE Nifty skidded 4.30 points, or 0.02 per cent, to end at 23,654.70.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Infosys, Bajaj Finserv and Bharti Airtel were among the major laggards.

InterGlobe Aviation, Trent, Bharat Electronics and Adani Ports were among the winners. "Indian equity markets witnessed another volatile session today, with benchmark indices surrendering their strong opening gains as positive global cues collided with persistent macroeconomic concerns and strong resistance at higher levels," Hariprasad K, Research Analyst and Founder, Livelong Wealth, said.

Broader markets were also rangebound as the BSE SmallCap Select index climbed 0.48 per



cent, while the MidCap Select index ended almost unchanged.

Among sectoral indices, IT declined the most, by 0.53 per cent, followed by Focused IT (0.52 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (0.46 per cent), Utilities (0.42 per cent), FMCG (0.42 per cent), and Bankex (0.24 per cent). However, Services jumped 1.59 per cent, followed by Capital Goods (1.29 per cent), Industrials (1.08 per cent), Commodities (0.91 per cent) and Telecommunication (0.80 per cent).

"Markets remained volatile and ended largely flat for yet another session on Thursday, extending the ongoing consolidation phase

amid mixed global cues. The Nifty opened firm following stability in global markets; however, selling pressure in heavyweight counters across sectors capped the upside and gradually dragged the index lower as the session progressed," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Persistent foreign institutional outflows, elevated global bond yields, and concerns over inflationary pressures arising from high fuel prices continued to keep the undertone cautious, he added.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.71 per cent to USD 104.3 per barrel. "Indian markets opened on a

positive note but failed to hold higher levels as geopolitical tensions, weak global cues and persistent selling pressure dragged indices lower throughout the session," Gaurav Garg, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

The Nifty witnessed strong selling activity from the 23,850 zone, confirming a clear downturn structure in the broader market. Investor sentiment remained cautious amid rising crude oil prices, continued rupee weakness and concerns over foreign fund outflows, Garg said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi and Japan's Nikkei 225 index ended higher. The Kospi surged over 8 per cent. Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower.

Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. US markets ended significantly higher on Wednesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,597.35 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE benchmark climbed 117.54 points, or 0.16 per cent, to settle at 75,318.39. The Nifty edged higher by 41 points, or 0.17 per cent, to end at 23,659. (PTI)

## Dalmia Bharat nears deal for JAL cement assets after Adani insolvency takeover: Sources

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** Dalmia Bharat Ltd will acquire the cement assets of Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) for more than Rs 2,500 crore, sources said, as the Adani Group moves to carve up and integrate key businesses of the infrastructure conglomerate following its acquisition under the insolvency process.

The proposed transaction would give Dalmia Bharat control of JAL's 5.2 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) cement capacity and 3.3 MTPA clinker capacity, the sources said.

Dalmia Bharat did not immediately respond to requests for comments.

Adani Group had acquired JAL under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), marking it one of India's largest multi-asset infrastructure resolutions across power, EPC, logistics-linked land, real estate, hospitality and ancillary businesses. Dalmia had previously entered into an agreement with JAL for the cement assets before the company entered insolvency proceedings, but the transaction had run into legal disputes and shareholder challenges.

Dalmia has now signed an agreement with JAL and the Adani Group to settle all disputes, pending legal proceedings, arbitral awards and prior framework arrangements related to the cement business, the sources said, adding that a formal announcement is expected soon.

Dalmia Bharat's earlier attempt to acquire the cement assets for Rs 5,666 crore had faced legal hurdles linked to a shareholder dispute.

JAL was admitted into the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) by the National Company Law Tribunal's Allahabad bench on June 3, 2024, following a petition by ICICI Bank.

## Spike in freight rates amid global tensions big challenge for steel sector: Tata Steel official

**RANCHI, May 21:** A 28-30 per cent surge in global freight costs amid geopolitical tensions, including the escalating West Asia situation, is emerging as the biggest challenge for India's steel industry, even as domestic operations and raw material supplies remain largely stable, a senior Tata Steel official said.

The sharp rise in shipping rates, triggered by instability in West Asia and the prolonged Russia-Ukraine conflict, is significantly increasing logistics costs for steelmakers dependent on imported coking coal, he said. "For steel, the biggest impact is freight. Freight rates have gone up by almost 28-30 per cent... This is the direct impact. First, the Russia-Ukraine war, and now the West Asia situation... This is definitely having a cascading effect on almost all countries," Tata Steel Vice-President (Corporate Services) D B Sundara Ramam told PTI.

Despite global disruptions, the steel industry has so far managed to maintain production levels, though rising freight and logistics costs are becoming a major concern for the movement of raw materials, he said.

Tata Steel imports around 78 per cent of its coking coal requirement, or nearly 12-13 million tonnes per annum, mainly from Australia, while the remaining 22 per cent comes from domestic mines in West Bokaro and Jharia, Ramam said.

He said coal supplies from Australia and Indonesia remain operationally stable, but higher freight charges are pushing up input costs across the sector.

Ramam, who earlier served as vice-president (raw materials) at Tata Steel, said tensions around the Strait of Hormuz have not materially impacted the company's overall raw material security, as India remains largely self-sufficient in iron

ore and imports only limited quantities.

However, recent disruptions in limestone imports from the Gulf region have prompted the company to pivot to alternate sources to ensure continuity of supplies, he said, adding that the situation underlines the need for greater domestic mineral self-reliance.

"The lesson from these disruptions is how to become more self-reliant in minerals such as limestone. We have resources, but technology improvements are needed to make them suitable for steelmaking," he said.

India's steel industry has remained relatively insulated from global disruptions, due to strong domestic demand and lower dependence on imported finished steel, he said. Ramam said India became a net steel exporter in the 2025-26 fiscal, with exports exceeding imports by around 5-6 million tonnes.

Domestic steel consumption grew by about 8 per cent during the last fiscal, supported by government infrastructure spending, manufacturing expansion and healthy demand from the automobile sector, the senior company official said.

Domestic consumption of finished steel grew by 7-8 per cent to 164 million tonnes in 2025-26 on the back of increased activity in infrastructure, construction, railways, and manufacturing sectors.

The country's crude steel output grew by over 10.7 per cent to around 168.4 million tonnes during the financial year, reflecting sustained industrial momentum, company officials said.

Tata Steel India achieved production of 23.4 million tonnes in 2025-26, while deliveries stood at 22.5 million tonnes, with operations remaining stable despite global volatility, they said. (PTI)

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## Himanta, new MLAs

contacted, a former principal secretary of the Assam Legislative Assembly told PTI that taking the oath in languages other than those mentioned in the Eighth Schedule is not permissible by law.

"The Speaker of the House has some discretionary power and can make decisions independently in matters where the law is silent. However, in this case, it is clearly noted that the oath can be taken only in any of the 22 recognised languages," the retired IAS officer said on condition of anonymity.

The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution consists of Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri. (PTI)

## Ranjeet Dass begins

the Speaker's chair for the second time," Sarma said. Legislators from the ruling coalition and the opposition parties also congratulated Dass and offered their full support for his tenure.

"We expect you to be fully neutral in the House. We, the opposition, have very few seats this time. So, we will be allotted less time. However, we expect you to show some leniency and give more time to present the issues affecting the people," Congress MLA Jakir Hussain Sikdar said.

Dass, while acknowledging the support of the MLAs, said he would be neutral inside the House.

"However, I am a member of a political party following a particular ideology. It is not easy to leave it instantly," he added. Dass also objected to the word 'Speaker', saying it originated from British rule.

"I hope there will be some discussions in this House on the usage of the word - Speaker. Sabhapati or Adhyaksh words sound fine. In future, I will try to work as per Indian culture and tradition. I will not follow the British tradition," he added. The Speaker also appealed to all members to make the Assam Legislative Assembly a model House in the country. (PTI)

## High turnout marks

tally after the TMC nominee stepped out of the contest before repolling. If the BJP wins Falta, its tally for the 2026 Assembly polls would rise to 208, although operationally its Assembly strength would remain 207 following Adhikari's decision to vacate Nandigram after retaining Bhabanipur.

The total electorate in the constituency comprises 1,21,300 men, 1,15,135 women and nine third-gender individuals. Voting began at 7 am and continued till 6 pm.

Around 35 companies of central forces guarded the 285 polling booths, while 30 Quick Response Teams remained on standby after the Election Commission significantly strengthened security arrangements for the repoll.

"Polling has remained peaceful in Falta. We have not received a single report of any problem from anywhere in the constituency," a poll panel official told PTI.

Large numbers of voters queued outside polling stations from early morning in a constituency where the campaign had undergone a dramatic transformation over the last fortnight.

Among those waiting outside polling booths, some said the atmosphere felt markedly different this time.

"For the first time in nearly 15 years, I feel I could vote peacefully. Earlier, many people felt they could not vote freely. This time, the atmosphere is different," a voter said, alleging that Jahangir Khan and his associates had exercised overwhelming influence in the area during previous elections. (PTI)

## Pulwama attack mastermind

which killed 40 personnel. In retaliation, the Indian security forces ran an intelligence-led operation led by IAF jets in the early hours of February 26, 2019, striking the biggest training camp of JeM in Balakot.

Hamza, who also had an alias, Doctor, was currently living in Cheela Bandi, a densely populated neighbourhood on the outskirts of Muzaffarabad, with security details of eight commandos, a bullet-resistant (BR) vehicle, and an escort vehicle, indicating state-level protection and operational importance, sources said.

The security cover was given to him after he allegedly made a fabricated attack on himself somewhere between January and February 2025, they said.

He worked closely with Farooq Qureshi, a former Al Baraq commander whose name has repeatedly surfaced in dossiers linked to narcotics trafficking, counterfeit currency rackets, arms smuggling and cross-border militant operations in the Kashmir Valley. The two operated from an industrial compound locally referred to as the "Machis Factory" in Muzaffarabad, the sources said.

Hamza maintained close ties with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, particularly with an officer identified as Col Rizwan, suggesting deeper intelligence ties and protection, they said.

The terrorist had recently married the daughter of Qadir Lala, a former Hizbul Mujahideen operative from Kupwara, currently employed as a security operator at the terror group's housing project in Chek Shezad, Pakistan. He was also said to have maintained close ties with Murtaza, another former Hizbul Mujahideen operative from Pulwama, now based in Islamabad, making frequent visits to his residence, the sources said. (PTI)

## Courts can hold

ongoing probes, pending trials and all proceedings under the sedition law would be kept in abeyance across the country and those in jail on sedition charges could approach the court for bail.

The offence of sedition, which was included in section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 1890, has been under intense public scrutiny for its use as a tool against expressions of dissent, including on social media. The British government, during its colonial rule, had used the sedition law primarily to suppress dissent and imprison freedom fighters such as Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

The Editors Guild of India, Major General (Retd) S G Vombatker, former Union minister Arun Shourie and the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUC) have filed petitions against the penal provision. (PTI)

## India-Africa Forum

Union, and the African Union Commission regarding the holding of the summit and associated activities," it said. "Following these consultations, the two sides agreed that it would be advisable to convene the Fourth India-Africa Forum Summit at a later date," the MEA said in a statement.

The upcoming summit was aimed at imparting transformational changes in the India-African relations.

India's policy approach for development partnership with the African continent has been guided by African priorities and local ownership. New Delhi has also been focusing on boosting its presence in the African continent. Since 2018, India has expanded its diplomatic footprint in Africa by opening 17 new missions taking the total number to 46. (PTI)

## Parliamentary panel

MP Digvijaya Singh, said, "Whatever discussions happen in the parliamentary committee, we are under oath and we cannot discuss it." He later said, "The meeting went off very well. We got inputs from all the members. The members expressed their concerns over the NEET paper leak."

Earlier, listing out the steps taken by the NTA and the government to prevent breaches and malpractices, the officials of the agency said detailed standard operating procedures (SOPs) and checklists for breach management in both PPT and CBT modes have been sent to stakeholders and the collaboration established with the state or district administrations for conducting high-stake examinations and reporting malpractices are being actively monitored on social-media platforms.

The NTA informed the panel that the NEET (UG) 2026 was conducted by it on May 3 at 5,432 centres in 565 cities (including 14 cities abroad). The examination was conducted in 13 languages and more than 22.7 lakh candidates had registered, with over 22.05 lakh appearing in the examination.

The medical-entrance exam was cancelled recently amid allegations of paper leak. A re-test is scheduled to be held on June 21. (PTI)

## Mission Kiwi to

the initiative, Mein said the mission has been launched under the "visionary leadership" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and with the guidance of Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia.

"With the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji and the guidance of Hon'ble Union Minister Shri Jyotiraditya M Scindia ji, this mission will strengthen the entire kiwi value chain from cultivation and post-harvest management to branding, export and agri-tourism," Mein said.

The deputy chief minister observed that Arunachal Pradesh already contributes more than 50 per cent of India's kiwi production and said the convergence-driven initiative would help farmers gain better infrastructure, improved market access and higher value realisation.

"Through this convergence-driven initiative, our kiwi farmers will now gain better infrastructure, improved market access, enhanced value realisation and new global opportunities," he added.

Mein further expressed confidence that 'Arunachal Organic Kiwi' would soon emerge as an international brand representing quality, sustainability and the strength of the state's farming communities. (PTI)

## PM Modi gifts Muga

a Bidri silver work vase, which reflects the refined artistry of the Deccan, celebrated for its intricate silver inlay, elegant form, and meticulous craftsmanship. Finland's Prime Minister Petteri Orpo was given a Kamal Talai Pichwai painting, which reflects the serene beauty and devotional artistry of the Nathdwara tradition of Rajasthan.

The UAE president was gifted a Rogan painting with the tree of life. The Rogan painting is a rare and exquisite textile art form from the Kutch region of Gujarat.

He was also given Kesar mangoes, a GI-tagged fruit also known as Gujarat's "Queen of Mangoes", and Meghalaya's pineapples, which are celebrated as some of the finest in the world, thriving in the hilly terrain of Meghalaya.

The UAE crown prince was gifted a dagger with Koftgari work. A ceremonial dagger, adorned with intricate Koftgari work, is a rare expression of India's martial and artistic heritage, and Mithila makhana, a premium agricultural product from the Mithila region of Bihar. The UAE Queen Mother was gifted Maheshwari silk fabric, one of India's most elegant handloom traditions, originating in the historic town of Maheshwari on the banks of the Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh, and Chak Hao rice, famously known as Manipur's "black rice", a prized aromatic rice variety from the fertile valleys of the northeast.

Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN, was gifted red rice, an indigenous grain from the black soils of Palakkad, Kerala; Gobindobhog rice, a premium, aromatic short-grain rice from West Bengal; Basmati rice a premium long-grain variety originating from the Indo-Gangetic plains; Joha rice, a premium, indigenous aromatic variety exclusive to the fertile Brahmaputra Valley of Assam; and Kalanamak rice, often called the "Buddha Rice", which originated in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh.

He was also given healthy millet bars. Millets are an integral part of Maharashtra's agricultural heritage, widely cultivated in regions such as Solapur, Ahmednagar, and the Marathwada belt. (PTI)

## IPL Biologicals opens 3rd plant in Vadodra, raises capacity to 7,000 KL/year

**VADODRA, May 21:** IPL Biologicals Ltd on Thursday opened its third biological manufacturing facility in Vadodra, Gujarat, with an investment of ₹ 200 crore, bringing its total production capacity to 7,000 kilolitres per year, the company said.

The plant, built across 12 acres with 2,00,000 square feet of floor space, will produce biofertilisers, biopesticides and crop health products. According to the company, it features automated harvesting and transfer systems.

The facility, with 40,000 kilolitre per day capacity, operates a zero-liquid-discharge system and generates 500 kilowatts of captive solar power. It is certified under ISO 9001:2015 and holds IMO, Indocent and OMR1 organic certifications.

The company's other two plants are located in Haridwar, Uttarakhand.

IPL Biologicals said the expansion was aligned with the government's target to cut chemical fertiliser use by 50 per cent.

Harsh Vardhan Bhagchandka, President, IPL Biologicals, said, "The third plant is part of the phase-1 expansion. We have invested ₹ 200 crore and plan to invest an additional ₹ 210 crore for the next phase."

The company, which achieved a 40 per cent increase in turnover to Rs 290 crore for the 2025-26 fiscal, aims to expand its footprint in India and



biologicals by farmers. The company said domestic biologicals production could reduce India's fertiliser subsidy burden and lower dependence on imported chemical inputs.

IPL Biologicals supplies to more than 45 million farmers across 27 countries through over 8,000 distributors. It holds 19 patents, with 37 more pending.

The company's brand ambassador and cricketer, Yuvraj Singh, said, "In cricket and real life, the real strength comes from a strong foundation. True recovery happens within and that's why I connect with IPL Biologicals for restoring the soil health."

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Pracharak Suresh Soni, environmentalist Gopal Arya, progressive farmers, scientists, policymakers and distributors were also present at the event. (PTI)

**CANCELLATION OF E-TENDER NOTICE NO.: DBWS-NIET-04-2026-27; DATED: 02-05-2026**

Due to Typographical error in tender schedule in E-Tender Notice No.: DBWS-NIET-04-2026-27; Dated: 02-05-2026 for the work "Cleaning of coaches and undergear of both ICF and LHB Coaches at DBWS for a period of 03 (three) years" has been CANCELLED.

Chief Workshop Manager/  
Mechanical Workshop/Dibrugarh  
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY  
Serving Customers with a smile

**AFFIDAVIT**

I, Bipul Upadhyaya, S/o Kapil Upadhyaya, a resident of village 4th Mile Chandra Sing Teron Gaon, P.O. Dillaji, P.S. Diphu, district Karbi Anglong, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare through an affidavit before the Notary, Diphu on this day of 21st May 2026, that my actual name is 'Bipul Upadhyaya' and my father's actual name is 'Kapil Upadhyaya,' whereas my surname, name and my father's surname is wrongly written as 'Upadhyaya' and 'Khatiwada' instead of 'Upadhyaya'. All the above names refer to one and the same persons, namely myself and my father.

**LOST**

I, Ashish Chandra Dey, R/O:- Uttar Bidiya Nagar, Hojai, District:Hojai, Assam have lost my Higher Secondary (H.S.) marksheet and certificate bearing Roll: 0778, No: 20130, Registration No. 175162 of 2012-13 issued by Assam Higher Secondary Education Council.

Awareness campaigns at Diphu Government College focus on youth participation and public safety

## Karbi Anglong administration launches road safety, anti-drug drives

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, May 21:** In a major push towards public safety and youth welfare, the Karbi Anglong District Administration on Wednesday held two back-to-back awareness campaigns at Diphu Government College. Headed by top district officials, the initiatives focused on tackling the rising number of road accidents and launching a decisive community fight against drug abuse.

Both programmes saw large turnouts of students from Diphu Government College and nearby schools, positioning the younger generation at the centre of these critical societal reforms.

During the Road Safety Awareness Meeting, organised under the "Sadak Suraksha Jeevan Raksha" initiative, District Commissioner (DC) Aranyak Saikia called for collective responsibility to prevent further loss of life.

To ensure rapid accountability, DC Saikia issued a strict directive to the Transport, PWD and Police Departments. Officials must jointly visit accident sites within 48 hours of any mishap and submit detailed reports covering the exact causes of the accident along with preventive measures to be implemented



regularly.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Pushpraj Singh echoed the call for action, stressing the need for better driving habits, particularly among the youth. Both the DC and SP have personally been visiting accident-prone locations across the district to identify structural and behavioural fixes.

The District Road Safety Committee (DRSC) reviewed current data and expressed deep concern over the high number of victims in the 18-35 age group. Officials revealed that 43 road accidents have been reported in Karbi Anglong since 2024, resulting in 25 fa-

talities.

District Transport Officer Bikramaditya Gogoi strongly urged young drivers to completely avoid the primary causes behind these tragic statistics: over-speeding, drunken driving, triple riding on motorcycles, using mobile phones while driving and neglecting seat belts and helmets.

Running parallel to the traffic safety campaign, the college hosted an Anti-Drug Awareness Programme organised by the Medical and Health Committee. The core message of the event was clear: "Drugs end all dreams — Say No to Drugs."

DC Saikia emphasised that eradicating substance abuse is impossible without the active participation of the youth, urging students to become "ambassadors of awareness" in their neighbourhoods. SP Pushpraj Singh also appealed to the students to support law enforcement in curbing the drug menace.

Highlighting the scale of the enforcement operations, Additional Superintendent of Police (Crime) Partha Pratim Saikia shared recent success metrics from police actions in the region.

During anti-drug operations conducted in April 2026 across Karbi Anglong, several cases were registered and multiple arrests made. Police seized narcotic substances, including heroin, tablets and capsules, valued at approximately Rs 70 lakh.

Keynote speaker Dr John concluded the segment by emphasising that while enforcement is necessary, community-led initiatives, professional counselling and early education are the most effective long-term tools for prevention.

The dual events concluded with a shared call from administration officials, educators and students to build a safer, healthier and more responsible Karbi Anglong.

## ABSU demands timely textbook supply, proper implementation of education rights



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, May 21:** The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has demanded proper implementation and protection of the fundamental right to education under Article 21A of the Constitution of India, along with timely distribution of textbooks for Bodo medium schools across the state.

The students' organisation on Thursday submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, through the District Commissioner, Kokrajhar, seeking timely provision of textbooks and effective implementation of educational rights among students of Bodo medium schools.

The students' union, in its memorandum, extended best wishes to the Chief Minister for assuming office for a second term. It expressed hope for development and growth under his leadership.

The ABSU stated that Bodo medium schools have been facing recurring shortages of textbooks across various classes despite repeated appeals to the government. It noted that Bodo medium has been studied by a large number of students since its inception in 1963 as a medium of instruction in Assam.

The union said that approximately 15,938 students appeared in the HSLC examination in 2026 under the Bodo medium and similar numbers are enrolled in other classes across the state.

"In today's era of artificial intelligence and machine learning, it is very sad and disappointing that Bodo medium students are deprived of basic foundation due to lack of textbooks. Meanwhile, the NEP 2020 is already being implemented by the Assam government. Any kind of neglect will lead to a feeling of step-motherly treatment towards Bodo medium education in Assam. In case of failure to re-

solve the issue, ABSU is ready to file a writ petition in the High Court for violation of the fundamental right to education under Article 21A of the Constitution of India," the union said.

The students' body urged the Government of Assam and the Education Department to resolve several issues, including the supply of textbooks to Bodo medium schools, irrespective of shortages in different subjects and classes. It said the academic session had already begun one and a half months ago, but students were still without textbooks.

The union also said that the shortage of Bodo medium textbooks is reported in 12 districts of Assam, including Karbi Anglong, Biswanath, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Barpeta, Chirang, Udalguri, Goalpara, Baksa, Kokrajhar, Morigaon and Dhemajai.

It further demanded that the government provide proper traditional attire, including Bodo Dokhona for secondary-level students and cotton uniforms for elementary students. It criticised the previous distribution of polyester uniforms and urged the government to respect traditional attire, including the Bodo Dokhona, which has received GI tagging.

ABSU also demanded timely provision of school stationery, including school bags and raised concerns over repeated delays in textbook printing and distribution. The union said it had already submitted a memorandum to the Managing Director of Assam Textbook Publication and Corporation Ltd on May 11, seeking resolution by May 18, 2026.

The organisation said Bodo medium education has completed 63 years since its introduction in Assam and stressed the need for a systematic and timely distribution mechanism for textbooks and related materials.

## ATTSA stages protest against McLeod Russel over unemployment issue

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, May 21:** Margherita was rocked on Wednesday over allegations that McLeod Russel India Limited is pushing the future of educated youths from tea tribe communities into uncertainty.

At the initiative of the Assam Tea Tribes Student Association (ATTSA) and Assam Tea Tribes Women's Association (ATTWA), a five-hour democratic sit-in strike was organised on Wednesday in front of the advisory office of McLeod Russel India Limited in Margherita.

The protesters alleged that the company is following an "unofficial policy" of retaining employees in service even after retirement, which has blocked employment opportunities for local educated unemployed youth.

## Brahmaputra erosion intensifies at Hatimura dyke Nagaon DC orders urgent action

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, May 21:** Severe erosion by the Brahmaputra river has suddenly intensified at Hatimura under the Kaliabor revenue circle in Nagaon district as monsoon rains have raised water levels.

District Commissioner Devashish Sarma carried out an on-site inspection on Wednesday to assess the emergency situation. Responding to the crisis, the DC issued immediate directives to departmental officials to undertake anti-erosion work on a war-footing and ensure public safety.

Following his orders, the Water Resources Department has already begun temporary protection measures and other urgent works at a rapid pace to check the erosion.

During the inspection, Kaliabor

Co-District Commissioner Raj Baruah, CEO of the District Disaster Management Authority and Additional DC Dipankar Barman, Kaliabor Circle Officer Manish Bhargava and Water Resources Executive Engineer Pinku Majumdar, along with other concerned officials were present.

Meanwhile, on the DC's instructions, a team led by DDMA CEO Dipankar Barman inspected flood-prevention measures in Raha Revenue Circle on Tuesday. The team, comprising the Raha Circle Officer, District Project Officer, officials from Raha PWD (Roads) and Water Resources departments and DDMA field officers, reviewed vulnerable areas and ongoing preparedness.

The team examined SDRF

schemes at Bhatigaon village and assessed pre-monsoon preparations in previously flood-affected areas. A key meeting was also held with village heads of flood-prone areas. Discussions focused on timely dissemination of early warnings, setting up relief camps with proper management, systematic distribution of relief materials and accurate data entry of camp inmates on the DREAMS portal.

The team further inspected sites damaged in the 2022 floods to review repair and restoration progress, including Raha Chowki Railway Point, Raha Chowki Road and embankment, Garmari Tinikhuti Point and Chaparmukh Chokialgaon Road and embankment, an official press note added.

## Mock drill by Army, NDRF, SDRF and district administration Joint flood relief exercise held in Biswanath

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 21:** A joint flood relief response exercise was successfully conducted at Dathkola under Halem revenue circle in Biswanath district on Wednesday by the Indian Army in collaboration with the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Biswanath, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) 12th Battalion and the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF).

The exercise was organised with the objective of strengthening inter-departmental coordination, improving disaster preparedness and validating joint response mechanisms for effective flood disaster management during the ensuing monsoon season.



The mock exercise simulated flood emergency scenarios involving evacuation of affected people, rescue operations, med-

ical assistance, relief distribution and coordination among various responding agencies. Personnel from the Indian Army, NDRF,

SDRF, district administration, health department, police, fire and emergency services and local volunteers actively participated in the operation.

The aim was to enhance operational readiness and ensure timely and coordinated response during actual flood situations. The exercise also helped in identifying gaps in communication and response systems while promoting community awareness regarding disaster preparedness.

Senior officials from the district administration and participating agencies appreciated the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders and reiterated their commitment towards safeguarding lives and property during flood emergencies in the district.

## Two schoolgirls found dead in Kokrajhar pond

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, May 21:** In a shocking incident, the bodies of two schoolgirl students were recovered from a pond in Kokrajhar on Thursday.

The incident took place at Lalkura Tea Estate, Dholmara, under the Salakati police outpost in Kokrajhar district.

The girls were studying in Classes IX and VIII at Dholmara High School.

The deceased have been identified as Anamika Bara (15) and Charita Lakra (14).

The bodies were found in a pond at Lalkura Tea Estate near Dholmara.

According to local residents, the two girls had gone missing at around 10 AM while returning home from school. Later, at around 1.30 PM, their bodies were recovered from a pond inside the tea garden.

Meanwhile, the two girls' bicycles and pairs of sandals were found near the pond.

Local residents expressed anger against the tea garden management and suspected mystery surrounding the entire incident.

The All Assam Adivasi Students' Association (AASAA) and Hindu Jagaran Manch demanded a proper investigation into the incident.

Calling the incident mysterious, they also criticised the alleged negligence of the tea garden management and staff.

Police rushed to the spot, recovered the bodies and sent them to Kokrajhar Medical College for post-mortem examination.

Police have started an investigation into the incident.

The incident has created a sensation in the area and tension prevailed in the locality.

## BJP Karbi Anglong welcomes Karbi language oath in Assam Assembly

Party thanks state leadership, calls move a milestone for tribal linguistic recognition

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, May 21:** The BJP East Karbi Anglong District Committee has thanked everyone for allowing oath-taking in the Karbi language in the Assam Legislative Assembly.

At a press conference held at the BJP office at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, the vice-president of the district BJP, Hundar Sing Kramsa, said, "We thank the Government of Assam for allowing oath-taking to be done in the Karbi language (by Karbi MLAs) for the first time ever. It is a good sign and we thank the leadership of CEM (of KAAC) Tuliram Ronghang and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma."



The BJP Karbi Anglong unit also congratulated veteran BJP leader Ranjeet Kumar Dass on being elected Speaker unopposed.

The press conference was at-

tended by vice-president Robbie Rongpi, vice-president Hundarsing Kramsa, general secretary Sarsing Phangocho, district media convener Bidyasing Rongpi and secretary Dhansing Kramsa.

## Karbi Anglong launches outreach campaign in remote villages

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, May 21:** The district administration of Karbi Anglong has launched an extensive IEC campaign under the theme "Jan Bhagidari - Sabse Door, Sabse Pehle", which officially commenced on May 19 and will continue across various VDCs of the district till May 25, 2026.

The campaign is being organised with the active participation and coordination of all concerned departments to ensure that essential government services and welfare schemes reach the remotest and underserved tribal communities of the district.

As part of the initiative, departmental officials are conducting localised camps directly at the village level, enabling citizens to access government services without the need for long-distance travel. The programme focuses on doorstep delivery of public services, welfare outreach, healthcare access, infrastructure awareness, grievance redressal and community participation.

During the campaign, eligible citizens are being facilitated with on-site documentation and enrolment services, including Aadhaar registration, Ayushman Bharat health cards, bank account assis-

tance and other welfare-related services. Health departments are also conducting free medical screenings, diagnostics and awareness programmes with special emphasis on diseases such as sickle cell anaemia and tuberculosis. Public grievance hearings (Jan Sunwai) are also being organised during the camps, allowing local residents to directly interact with administrative officials and place their concerns for immediate resolution. The campaign additionally aims to strengthen awareness regarding basic amenities such as drinking water, electricity, roads and telecom connectivity.

## Six arrested in cattle smuggling

**HT Correspondent**

**DOKMOKA, May 21:** In a dramatic early-morning pursuit, local residents and an alert youth intercepted a suspected inter-district cattle smuggling operation in Howraghat, Karbi Anglong, leading to the arrest of six persons. The suspects, all hailing from the neighbouring Nagaon district were caught after a high-speed chase that ended with them attempting to flee on foot through open fields.

According to local sources, the group was travelling from the direction of Manja in a black Mahindra Scorpio bearing registration number AS 01GG 7927. The suspicious movement of the SUV caught the attention of an alert youth in Bakaliaghat, who decided to trail the vehicle in his own car. This led to a high-speed chase along the district highway.

The Sivasagar Zila Sahitya Sabha, said that Dr Goswami might have been overwhelmed by the warm reception accorded by the organisers in Barpeta and therefore spoke highly of their achievements without considering the possible backlash in Upper Assam.

Dipali Bhattacharya Baruah, a literary pensioner, said that Dr Goswami could not generalise what he observed from a particular group of people or predict the future of the Assamese language and community. However, she added that the actual speech delivered by Dr Goswami might have been different from what was highlighted on social media.

Santosh Dutta, executive member of the ASS, criticised the president for allegedly undermining students from districts such as Jorhat and Sivasagar while praising the achievements of Miya students.

Meanwhile, Prof Raghunath Kagyung of Sonari College and executive member of the ASS stated that the Misings, contrary to Dr Goswami's remarks, remain one of the main pillars of Assamese society and culture. He said numerous Mising students have scored 100 per cent in As-

samese and have also conducted extensive research on the language.

The Ujoni Asom Muslim Kalyan Parishad (UAMKP), in a statement issued on Wednesday, contested Dr Goswami's claims and stated that only 20 lakh Miya people out of a total population of 70 lakh in Assam had opted for Assamese as their mother tongue in the 2011 Census.

Monirul Islam Bora, president of the UAMKP, claimed that the total Muslim population in Assam is around 1.06 crore, of which 35 lakh belong to indigenous communities such as the Moria, Garia and other local Muslim groups.

Bora also refuted the claim that Assamese students from districts like Sivasagar, Dibrugarh and Jorhat fail in Assamese in HSLC examinations. He asserted that many students from these districts score full marks in the subject.

On behalf of the UAMKP, Bora urged all people living in Assam, irrespective of faith or culture to adopt Assamese as their mother tongue, stating that Assamese is a composite culture that includes migrant Hindi speakers, Tea Tribes and various other communities.

## Litterateurs, UAMKP oppose remarks by ASS president

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, May 21:** Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, president of the Asom Sahitya Sabha (ASS), while addressing a meeting in Barpeta district, allegedly stated that all Muslims are not foreigners and that Miya communities living in chars are far ahead of their counterparts in Upper Assam in studying Assamese as a subject. He also allegedly remarked that tribes such as the Misings and Bodos no longer consider themselves Assamese. The comments triggered strong criticism from various quarters, with many demanding an explanation from Dr Goswami.

Padma Shri awardee Prahlad Chandra Tasa, former vice-president of the ASS and a noted scholar, told The Assam Tribune on Wednesday that it was unfortunate for the Assamese community that the president of the Sabha had become the subject of such harsh criticism. He called upon all concerned to exercise restraint and expressed hope that those holding responsible positions would carefully consider the impact of their speeches on diverse sections of society.

Juga Gogoi, former president of

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*'The secret of getting ahead is getting started.'*  
— Mark Twain

## SC ruling on stray dog menace

The Supreme Court's endorsement of lawful euthanasia for rabid, incurably ill and demonstrably dangerous stray dogs marks a decisive shift in India's long-running debate over public safety, animal welfare and the limits of sentiment in civic governance. The ruling does not license indiscriminate killing, nor does it erase the place of compassion in animal policy. Its larger significance lies in restoring an uncomfortable principle that had been blurred by years of administrative drift and activist pressure: when human life is placed at risk by a preventable public hazard, the state cannot hide behind slogans, procedural inertia or selective interpretations of animal protection. The verdict is a setback not merely for one set of campaigners but for an entire policy culture that treated sterilisation and vaccination as sufficient answers even when evidence on the ground showed a grimmer reality. India's Animal Birth Control programme was conceived as a humane and scientific alternative to mass culling. Properly implemented, it could have reduced street dog populations over time, lowered rabies risk and balanced public health with animal welfare. But the programme's implementation has been patchy, underfunded, poorly monitored and frequently detached from local conditions. Municipal bodies often lacked shelters, trained dog-catching teams, veterinary capacity and reliable data on dog populations. Sterilised dogs were routinely released back into the same crowded areas where children, elderly people, hospital patients and commuters faced the risk of attacks.

That failure created a vacuum. Into it stepped a highly emotional public discourse in which any call for firm action against dangerous dogs was portrayed as cruelty. The result was a policy paralysis that protected neither people nor animals. Rabid dogs continued to spread infection. Aggressive packs grew around garbage points, public institutions and transport hubs. Other dogs suffered bites, disease and starvation. Citizens injured in attacks were left to navigate overburdened hospitals and expensive post-exposure treatment. Municipal officers, fearing litigation or public outrage, often chose inaction over enforcement. The court's intervention therefore has to be understood as a correction to an imbalance. Animal welfare law was never intended to override the constitutional duty to protect life and public health. Rabies is not an abstract threat. Once symptoms appear, it is almost invariably fatal. A dog that is infected, incurably ill or demonstrably dangerous is not simply an object of pity; it is a source of continuing risk. Compassion cannot mean allowing such an animal to remain in a public place until it injures a child, attacks a passer-by or infects other animals.

A credible stray dog policy must recognise that vaccination, sterilisation, sheltering, adoption, waste management and euthanasia in extreme cases are not mutually exclusive. They are parts of the same framework. Rabies control requires sustained vaccination coverage. Population control requires sterilisation at scale.

## POST BAG

## Meme Culture or Movement?

The Cockroach Janta Party is an ingenious biting mirror held up to India's institutional elite. By reclaiming a derogatory courtroom slur Abhijit Dipke has brilliantly weaponized youth disillusionment. However satire alone cannot fix structural rot. To survive beyond the volatile lifespan of internet trends this movement must transition from digital cynicism to actual civic disruption, they must weaponize their million sign-ups into a hyper localized voter awareness brigade. They must actively shame defector politicians draft alternative youth policies and crowd source legal interventions against voter deletion. They must turn their ironic laziness into relentless, organized democratic agitation.

Dr Vijaykumar H K

## War and the future of world economy

The world economy is passing through one of the most fragile and uncertain periods in modern history. Markets still function, stock exchanges still open every morning, ships continue crossing oceans, and currencies rise and fall on digital screens every second, yet beneath this visible movement lies a deep and unsettling instability. The present economic crisis cannot be explained merely through statistics, inflation reports, or declining growth forecasts. Something larger is unfolding across the global system. Political aggression, military confrontations, economic nationalism, and the collapse of international trust have begun reshaping the financial foundations of the modern world. The ongoing tensions in the Middle East, particularly the growing hostility involving Iran, Israel, and the strategic involvement of the United States, have transformed a regional conflict into a global economic emergency. The Gulf region remains the beating heart of the international energy market, and even the slightest disturbance there sends shockwaves across continents. Crude oil prices rise overnight, transportation costs surge without warning, and industries dependent on fuel and raw materials suddenly find themselves trapped under unbearable production expenses. For ordinary people, the consequences appear quietly at first. Electricity bills become heavier. Food prices climb steadily. Medicines, transportation, cooking gas, construction materials—everything grows more expensive. What begins as geopolitical tension soon enters kitchens, factories, offices, and marketplaces. The danger today is not limited to temporary inflation. Economists increasingly fear a prolonged phase where weak growth and rising prices exist together, creating an atmosphere of economic suffocation. Governments are struggling to respond because every decision now carries painful consequences. Raising interest rates may slow inflation, but it also destroys investment and employment. Increasing liquidity may encourage economic activity, but it risks making inflation uncontrollable. This dilemma has exposed the vulnerability of the global economic structure that once appeared powerful and indestructible. The idea that globalization would permanently guarantee stability and prosperity is now being questioned across the world. Countries that once celebrated open markets and unrestricted trade have suddenly become defensive, suspicious, and inward-looking. Supply chains built over decades are beginning to fracture under the pressure of war, sanctions, and strategic rivalries. The psychological impact of this uncertainty is equally severe. Investors hesitate. Businesses delay expansion. Consumers reduce spending. Financial confidence, once damaged, rarely returns quickly. Modern economies depend not only on money and resources but also on trust, predictability, and cooperation. War destroys all three with terrifying speed.

The policies pursued by have further complicated an already volatile global environment. His political style has consistently



## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

carried unpredictability, confrontation, and economic aggression, and these characteristics have deeply influenced international markets. Under his leadership, economic policy increasingly became a weapon of geopolitical pressure rather than a tool for global stability. Sanctions against Iran intensified fears surrounding energy supplies at a time when the world economy was already under severe strain. Simultaneously, his administration's protectionist trade policies weakened the very foundations of international commerce. Tariffs imposed on China and several other economic powers disrupted manufacturing networks that had taken decades to establish. Global corporations, which once relied upon seamless international production systems, suddenly found themselves facing rising costs, uncertain regulations, and unstable diplomatic relationships. The impact extended far beyond the United States and China. Developing nations that depended heavily on exports, foreign investments, and dollar-based financial systems suffered greatly. The strengthening of the US dollar increased debt repayment burdens for poorer countries already struggling with fragile economies. Nations that borrowed heavily in dollars found themselves paying drastically higher costs simply to service old debts. Meanwhile, Trump's repeated criticism of international institutions and multilateral agreements weakened confidence in the global order itself. Markets do not react only to policies; they react to tone, consistency, and expectation. When world leaders deliver contradictory messages, investors retreat into caution. That caution spreads rapidly through industries and financial systems. Major corporations postpone expansion projects, hiring slows, and long-term investments disappear. The atmosphere created by such unpredictability damages economic momentum even before official crises emerge. At the same time, several countries have begun accelerating efforts to reduce their dependence on the American financial system altogether.

Discussions surrounding de-dollarization, regional trade currencies, and alternative banking mechanisms are no longer limited to academic debates. They are becoming active political and economic strategies. China, Russia, and several emerging economies increasingly seek financial arrangements that bypass traditional Western-controlled institutions. This gradual fragmentation of the international financial system could reshape global trade patterns for decades. The danger lies not only in economic separation but also in the possibility of competing financial blocs emerging across geopolitical lines. If that process deepens, the world economy may become less interconnected, less efficient, and far more unstable than before. The age of easy globalization may already be fading, replaced by a harsher era dominated by strategic competition, economic suspicion, and regional alliances built primarily around security concerns rather than economic cooperation.

One of the most immediate consequences of

modern warfare has appeared within global transportation and logistics systems. The disruption of trade routes through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal has revealed how dangerously dependent the world remains on a few critical maritime corridors. Attacks on commercial vessels and rising security risks in the region have forced shipping companies to avoid shorter routes and adopt far longer journeys around Africa. This single alteration has multiplied transportation costs, delayed deliveries, and intensified pressure on already fragile supply chains. Modern economies operate on speed, precision, and timing. Factories often rely on components arriving exactly when needed. Retail industries depend upon uninterrupted movement of goods across borders. When transportation slows, the entire system begins losing efficiency. Delays at ports create shortages in markets thousands of miles away. Small disruptions gradually evolve into large economic disturbances. The aviation sector has suffered similar pressures. Airspaces across conflict zones have become unsafe, forcing airlines to reroute flights over longer distances while consuming additional fuel. Ticket prices rise, cargo transportation becomes more expensive, and international business activity slows. These developments may appear technical, but their effects spread through every level of society. Industrial production faces rising costs not only because of expensive energy but also because critical raw materials become harder to transport. Shortages of helium, industrial metals, and chemical components have already disrupted sectors ranging from semiconductor manufacturing to automobile production.

The technology industry, once celebrated as the engine of modern economic growth, is itself vulnerable to geopolitical instability because advanced manufacturing depends upon highly complex international supply chains. Agriculture faces another dangerous challenge. Fertilizer production and exports have been severely affected by rising energy prices and disrupted industrial operations. For many countries, this threatens future food production itself. Lower agricultural output inevitably pushes food prices higher, and food inflation carries dangerous political consequences. Throughout history, economic hardship linked to food shortages has repeatedly triggered unrest, protests, and social instability. Poorer nations remain especially vulnerable because their populations spend a larger share of income on essential goods. When food and fuel prices rise simultaneously, the pressure on households becomes unbearable. Governments attempt subsidies and emergency relief programs, but many lack the financial strength to sustain such measures for long. Public frustration then transforms into political anger. Economic crises rarely remain confined within markets; eventually they spill into streets, elections, and national stability. The current global environment reflects precisely this danger. What began as regional conflict now threatens to reshape the social and political atmosphere of countries far removed from the battlefield itself.

The future of the world economy will depend heavily upon how nations respond to this prolonged period of instability. Even if current wars eventually subside, the economic struc-

ture that emerges afterward is unlikely to resemble the one that existed before. The old assumptions of globalization have weakened beyond repair. Businesses and governments have realized that excessive dependence on distant supply chains creates enormous strategic risks. Consequently, many countries are shifting toward regional production systems, domestic manufacturing, and strategic self-reliance. This transition may increase resilience, but it will also raise costs permanently. Cheap global production flourished because industries could freely seek the lowest labor costs and most efficient international networks. A more fragmented economic world will inevitably become more expensive. Consumers may face higher prices for years, perhaps decades. Yet governments increasingly appear willing to accept those costs in exchange for greater security and control. Energy policy will also undergo profound transformation. The repeated crises surrounding Middle Eastern oil have convinced many nations that dependence on fossil fuel imports represents a long-term strategic vulnerability. Investments in renewable energy, nuclear power, and alternative technologies are therefore likely to accelerate dramatically. However, this transition will not occur smoothly. Renewable infrastructure requires enormous capital, advanced industrial capacity, and stable access to critical minerals. Competition over these resources may itself become another source of geopolitical tension.

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence, automation, and digital economic systems will continue expanding, reshaping labor markets and industrial productivity. Yet technology alone cannot eliminate the physical realities of resource scarcity, political instability, and military conflict. Financial systems too are entering an uncertain future. The dominance of the US dollar, though still powerful, faces growing challenges from regional currency arrangements and alternative financial partnerships. Central banks across several countries have increased gold reserves, reflecting declining trust in traditional monetary stability. If global financial fragmentation deepens, international trade could become slower, less predictable, and more politically divided. The modern world may gradually separate into competing economic spheres shaped by ideology, security alliances, and resource access. Such fragmentation would mark the end of the post-Cold War economic order that dominated global affairs for decades. Beyond statistics and policy debates, however, lies a more human reality. Every war leaves economic scars that outlive the battlefield itself. Children grow up in weakened economies. Young people enter labor markets with fewer opportunities. Families lose savings accumulated across generations. Entire societies become more fearful, more defensive, and less hopeful about the future. The true cost of war cannot be measured solely through destroyed buildings or military expenditure. Its deepest damage often appears slowly, through broken financial stability, shrinking opportunities, and the gradual erosion of public confidence in tomorrow. The present crisis serves as a harsh reminder that political arrogance and military ambition rarely remain confined to borders. Eventually, they reach every marketplace, every household, and every future generation.

## From Social Media trend to cockroach Janata Party movement

By: Satyabrata Borah

A fascinating shift is taking place across the digital landscape of India, where political conversations are often heavy, polarized, and deeply structured. A new entity has emerged out of nowhere, capturing the collective imagination of millions of young citizens almost overnight. It goes by the unusual and intentionally provocative name of the Cockroach Janta Party. If you spend any time scrolling through social media platforms, you have likely seen its crest, its memes, and its rapidly climbing follower count, which managed to zoom past the official accounts of some of the country's most powerful, established political machines within a matter of days. This sudden explosion of digital popularity raises a highly compelling question for anyone watching the subcontinental political theater. Can a movement that started as a hyper ironic online joke translate into a force capable of causing a monumental shift in Indian politics, or is it destined to remain a fleeting moment of digital defiance.

To understand the potential of this movement, one has to look closely at its origin story, which is deeply rooted in anger, alienation, and a sharp sense of institutional betrayal. The spark that ignited this entire phenomenon was a comment made during a high profile courtroom hearing. When public remarks compared unrepresented, unemployed young people trying to find their footing through digital media, activism, or alternative professions to pests and parasites attacking the system, a nerve was hit. For a generation already dealing with a highly competitive environment and a stark lack of traditional jobs, the analogy felt like a direct insult from the highest corridors of institutional power. Instead of responding with standard political rallies, legal petitions, or solemn press statements, a thirty year old public relations student and former political social media strategist named Abhijeet Dipke decided to fight back using the language of the modern internet. He created a registration link, built a quick website with the help of artificial intelligence, and invited everyone who felt ignored, insulted, or labeled by the system to claim the identity proudly. The Cockroach Janta Party was born, using the very label meant to devalue young citizens as a badge of honor.

The response was immediate, massive, and entirely unprecedented in the history of Indian digital movements. Within hours, thousands of people registered. Within five days, the party's Instagram presence exploded past ten million followers, leaving long established political parties trailing in its digital wake. Prominent national politicians and well known social media influencers began engaging with the platform, requesting membership or boosting its reach. The eligibility criteria

listed for prospective members were intentionally absurd, requiring people to be unemployed, physically lazy, chronically online, and capable of ranting professionally. This self-deprecating, deeply ironic stance resonated instantly with Gen Z and millennial Indians who feel stuck in a loop of endless examinations, paper leaks, rising living costs, and an economy that seems unable to absorb their skills. By wrapping their genuine anxieties in layers of sharp sarcasm, the creators of this movement managed to bypass traditional political exhaustion. They turned a feeling of absolute helplessness into a massive, participatory digital festival.

When evaluating whether this phenomenon can leave a lasting scar on the traditional political landscape, it helps to analyze the specific demands put forward by this group. Their manifesto is a brilliant, tightrope walk between laugh out loud parody and dead serious systemic critique. They demand a complete ban on post retirement Rajya Sabha seats for Chief Justices, a direct swipe at perceived judicial alignment with ruling establishments. They argue for a twenty year election ban on any elected representative who switches political allegiances, addressing the rampant problem of political defection that often makes a mockery of ordinary votes. They call for fifty percent reservation for women in both the parliament and the cabinet without increasing the overall size of the legislature. They even target everyday student grievances, demanding that the Central Board of Secondary Education eliminate high rechecking fees, which they describe as institutional extortion targeting young people for errors made by examiners. They have taken a stand on national examination controversies, directly aligning themselves with the frustrations of millions of students. By mixing grand constitutional reforms with everyday student struggles, they have built a platform that feels incredibly real to the average youth.

The true strength of this movement lies in its mastery of modern communication. Traditional Indian politics relies heavily on massive physical mobilization, expensive billboard campaigns, television news cycles, and complex caste alliances. The Cockroach Janta Party operates on a completely different playing field. Their primary weapon is the mobile phone, which they have jokingly declared as their official election symbol. Their campaign material consists of high quality, AI generated anthems, nostalgic aesthetic templates, and relatable short videos that explain complex institutional failures through humor. They speak the native language of the internet, a space where mainstream political parties often struggle to appear authentic. Traditional parties invest massive amounts of money into IT cells to manufacture trends and push rigid narratives. The Cockroach Janta Party achieved organic, explo-

sive growth simply by reflecting the unvarnished feelings of its audience. This demonstrates that the monopoly over political narrative is shifting away from centralized party offices and into the hands of decentralized digital creators.

There is a massive gulf between collecting millions of digital clicks and building an actual, functioning political organization capable of fighting elections in India. Social media metrics are notoriously deceptive. A double tap on a smartphone screen requires virtually zero effort, zero personal risk, and zero financial investment. Standing in a long line at a polling booth, facing local intimidation, organizing grassroots workers at the booth level, and convincing rural voters who are completely disconnected from Instagram trends are entirely different challenges. India's electoral machinery is vast, brutal, and deeply dependent on money power, physical muscle, and entrenched local networks. A movement that thrives on being chronically online inherently alienates vast sections of the population who do not spend eleven hours a day on the internet. For this party to become a genuine political challenger, it would need to transform its digital followers into foot soldiers willing to do the tedious, unglamorous work of ground level organizing.

We are already seeing early signs that the leaders of this digital rebellion want to test these deeper waters. There are discussions about fielding a candidate in an upcoming assembly by election in Bihar. This move represents a critical turning point. It shows a desire to transition from an online pressure group into a tangible electoral option. If they follow through, it will be a fascinating experiment in political science. It will show whether viral fame can be converted into actual votes when stacked against traditional political giants who possess decades of experience and massive resources. A single candidate in a regional election will not change the balance of power in New Delhi, but it could serve as a proof of concept. If an independent candidate backed entirely by a meme movement manages to secure a respectable number of votes, it will send a shiver down the spines of mainstream politicians who have long assumed that the youth vote can be easily managed through standard rhetorical promises.

The immediate reaction from the establishment has been a mix of confusion and quiet anxiety. The withholding of the party's official account on certain social media platforms within India points to a familiar pattern of institutional nervousness. When a movement cannot be easily categorized into traditional boxes, the default response from those in power is often to restrict its visibility. This heavy handed approach usually backfires in the digital age. Censorship often acts as fuel for alternative movements, giving them an aura of anti-establishment resistance that attracts even more

young people. Every time an account is restricted or a post is deleted, it validates the party's core narrative that the system is terrified of the voice of ordinary, unrepresented citizens. The establishment finds itself in a difficult position because you cannot easily fight an opponent whose primary weapon is self aware ridicule. When you try to penalize a group that openly calls itself lazy and unemployed, traditional methods of political intimidation lose their effectiveness.

It is worth looking at global parallels to see how similar movements have played out in other parts of the world. History shows that satirical political movements are not a new invention. From the Five Star Movement in Italy, which started partly as an anti establishment protest led by a comedian, to various pirate parties across Europe, humor has frequently been used to disrupt rigid political systems. In many cases, these movements successfully channeled widespread public anger to win seats, alter policy discussions, and force traditional parties to change their strategies. They often faced a common dilemma once they entered the formal system. The moment a satirical, anti establishment movement wins power, it becomes part of the very establishment it promised to dismantle. It has to deal with administrative realities, compromise on its ideals, and handle governance challenges that cannot be solved with a clever joke or a viral video. If the Cockroach Janta Party ever finds formal electoral success, it will face this exact crisis of identity.

The ultimate impact of this movement might not be measured in terms of seats won or governments formed. Its true significance lies in its role as a mirror reflecting the deep structural flaws of modern India. The fact that millions of educated young people found solace in a group dedicated to the identity of a cockroach is a severe indictment of the current socio economic reality. It highlights a massive crisis of aspiration. India is home to one of the largest young populations in the world, a demographic dividend that is constantly praised in economic forums. On the ground, graduate unemployment rates are worryingly high, and the competition for a limited pool of stable jobs has created an environment of intense psychological stress. When traditional avenues of protest feel closed, ineffective, or dangerous, satire becomes the ultimate form of democratic expression. The Cockroach Janta Party has successfully created a safe space where young people can express their systemic exhaustion without the fear of being lectured or dismissed.

Even if this movement loses its momentum in the coming months, the underlying causes that allowed it to explode will remain completely undressed. The frustration surrounding examination scandals will persist. The lack of meaningful employment opportunities for university graduates

will continue to be a pressing challenge. The desire for a more transparent, accountable, and empathetic governance system will not disappear. The Cockroach Janta Party has provided a highly visible template for future political mobilization. It has shown that a small group of creative individuals using basic digital tools can challenge the narrative dominance of multi billion dollar political organizations. Future leaders and activists will undoubtedly study this moment to understand how to capture public attention instantly.

The mainstream political entities would be making a grave error if they dismiss this phenomenon as a meaningless digital fad. They need to recognize that the millions of followers shifting toward this satirical platform represent a highly critical voting bloc that feels completely alienated by traditional political rhetoric. Young voters are growing tired of old narratives centered entirely on identity divisions and grand promises that rarely materialize into concrete employment letters. They are looking for a political language that acknowledges their daily struggles, their anxieties, and their desire for genuine systemic fairness. If the established parties fail to adapt and address these core issues, the space for alternative, unconventional movements will continue to expand.

The Cockroach Janta Party stands at a highly critical crossroads. It can choose to remain a brilliant piece of performance art, a digital sanctuary where frustrated citizens gather to laugh at the absurdity of the system while maintaining their distance from the harsh realities of electoral politics. It can attempt the incredibly difficult journey of becoming a structured, ground level political force that challenges the status quo in physical polling booths. Both paths carry significant challenges. Remaining purely online risks turning the movement into a temporary trend that fades away once the next viral sensation captures the internet's attention. Transitioning to the ground risks dilute the unique, chaotic humor that made it popular in the first place.

What this entire episode proves is that Indian politics is entering a highly unpredictable era driven by digital native generations who refuse to follow the old rules of engagement. They have discovered that humor can be a highly potent tool for democratic accountability. By taking an insult and turning it into a national movement, they have forced a conversation about youth unemployment, institutional elitism, and the quality of public discourse. The Cockroach Janta Party has already succeeded in shifting the political conversation and demonstrating the power of decentralized digital expression. Whether they ever win an election is secondary to the fact that they have permanently altered the way young Indians perceive their own power to disrupt the political landscape from the screens of their mobile phones.

# Impact of the Iran War on the Agricultural sector in India

By: Mowsam Hazarika

The ongoing Iran war in 2026 has emerged as one of the most consequential geopolitical crises of recent times, with far-reaching implications for global energy markets, trade routes, and food systems. Although the conflict is geographically distant from India, its ripple effects are being felt acutely across the Indian economy—particularly in the agricultural sector. Agriculture in India, which supports nearly half of the population directly or indirectly, is highly sensitive to fluctuations in input costs, supply chains, and climate-linked vulnerabilities.

The Iran war has intensified pressures through rising oil prices, disruptions in fertiliser supply chains, increased inflation, and heightened uncertainty in global commodity markets. This article examines how these interconnected factors are impacting India's agricultural sector and what it implies for farmers, policymakers, and food security.

• Energy Shock and Rising Cost of Cultivation:

One of the most immediate consequences of the Iran war has been a sharp increase in global crude oil prices. The conflict has disrupted supplies through the Strait of Hormuz—a critical artery for global energy trade—leading to supply shortages and price volatility.

India, which imports nearly 90% of its crude oil requirements, is particularly vulnerable to such disruptions. The surge in oil prices has led to higher diesel and petrol costs domestically, which directly impacts agriculture.

Diesel is a critical input in Indian farming, used for:

- Operating irrigation pumps
- Running tractors and harvesters
- Transporting produce to markets

As fuel prices rise, the cost of cultivation increases significantly. This is especially burdensome for small and marginal farmers, who constitute over 80% of India's farming community. Higher input costs reduce profit margins and, in some cases, discourage cultivation altogether.

Moreover, increased fuel prices also raise the cost of agricultural logistics. Transporting crops from farms to mandis (markets), storage facilities, and processing units becomes more expensive, ultimately leading to higher consumer prices

for food.

• Fertiliser Crisis and Input Supply Constraints:

Perhaps the most serious impact of the Iran war on agriculture is the disruption of fertiliser supply chains. The Middle East plays a critical role in the production and export of key fertiliser components such as urea, ammonia, and natural gas.

The war has severely disrupted these supply chains, particularly due to restrictions in maritime trade through the Strait of Hormuz. As a result, fertiliser prices have surged globally. Reports indicate that fertiliser costs have increased sharply, prompting governments in various regions to consider emergency support measures for farmers.

India, one of the largest consumers of fertilisers, depends heavily on imports to meet its demand. The rising cost of fertilisers has several consequences:

- Increased cost of crop production
- Reduced fertiliser usage by farmers
- Decline in soil nutrient replenishment
- Lower crop yields

Studies warn that sustained high fertiliser prices could lead to reduced application rates, which in turn may yield lower yields of staple crops such as rice, wheat, and maize.

For a country like India, where food security depends on stable production of these staples, this is a serious concern.

• Inflationary Pressures and Food Prices:

The Iran war has triggered inflationary pressures across the global economy, driven largely by rising energy and commodity prices. In India, this has translated into higher input costs for agriculture and increased prices for food items.

Higher fuel and fertiliser costs push up the overall cost of production, which is eventually passed on to consumers. This leads to food inflation, affecting both rural and urban populations.

Additionally, the war has increased India's import bill and weakened the rupee, further exacerbating inflation. A weaker currency makes imports—including fertilisers and agricultural machinery—more expensive, creating a vicious cycle of rising costs.

Food inflation disproportionately affects low-income households, which spend a larger share of their income on food. Thus, the agricultural impact of the Iran war is not limited to farmers alone but extends to broader issues of afford-

ability and nutrition.

• Disruption of Supply Chains and Trade Routes:

The Iran war has disrupted key global trade routes, particularly in the Middle East. The Strait of Hormuz is a vital passage for not only oil but also fertilisers and other agricultural inputs.

Shipping disruptions have led to:

- Increased freight costs
- Delays in delivery of inputs
- Higher insurance premiums for cargo

These factors have strained agricultural supply chains in India. Import-dependent inputs such as fertilisers, agrochemicals, and even certain machinery components are facing delays and cost escalations.

Furthermore, export-oriented agricultural sectors—such as rice, tea, spices, and marine products—may also be affected due to disruptions in global logistics and reduced demand from affected regions.

• Impact on Government Finances and Subsidies:

The Indian government plays a crucial role in supporting agriculture through subsidies, particularly for fertilisers, electricity, and irrigation. However, the Iran war has increased fiscal pressures on the government.

Rising global fertiliser prices mean that the government must either:

- Increase subsidy allocations to maintain affordability for farmers, or
- Allow prices to rise, which would burden farmers

Both options have significant implications. Increased subsidies strain the fiscal deficit, while higher prices could lead to reduced agricultural productivity.

Similarly, rising fuel prices may compel the government to cut taxes or provide relief, further affecting public finances. These fiscal constraints may limit the government's ability to invest in long-term agricultural infrastructure and reforms.

• Impact on Cropping Patterns and Agricultural Decisions:

The uncertainty created by the Iran war is influencing farmers' decisions regarding crop selection and input use. Higher input costs may encourage farmers to:

- Shift from input-intensive crops (like paddy and sugarcane) to less resource-intensive crops
- Reduce the use of fertilisers and pesticides



• Delay or scale down cultivation

While such adjustments may help farmers cope in the short term, they can have long-term consequences for agricultural productivity and food supply.

For example, reduced fertiliser usage can degrade soil health over time, leading to lower yields in subsequent seasons.

• Food Security Concerns

The combined effect of higher input costs, lower fertiliser usage, and disrupted supply chains poses a risk to India's food security.

Global analysts have warned that the Iran war could trigger a food price shock similar to previous crises. Reduced agricultural output, combined with rising demand, could lead to shortages and price spikes.

India has relatively strong buffer stocks of food grains, but prolonged disruptions could strain these reserves. Moreover, regional disparities in production may exacerbate food insecurity in vulnerable areas.

• Impact on Allied Sectors:

The agricultural sector does not operate in isolation; it is closely linked with allied sectors such as dairy, poultry, and fisheries.

Rising feed costs (due to higher input prices) and transportation expenses are affecting these sectors as well. For instance:

- Poultry farmers face higher costs of feed and logistics
- Dairy farmers incur increased expenses for fodder and transport

• Fisheries are impacted by rising fuel costs for boats

These cascading effects highlight the broader (wider) impact of the Iran war on the rural economy.

• Opportunities Amid Crisis:

While the Iran war poses significant challenges, it also presents certain opportunities for India:

1. Promotion of Organic and Bio-fertilisers

The fertiliser crisis may accelerate the adoption of sustainable alternatives such as organic manure and bio-fertilisers.

1. Energy Diversification in Agriculture

Increased fuel costs could encourage the use of solar-powered irrigation pumps and renewable energy solutions.

1. Strengthening Domestic Production

The crisis underscores the need to boost domestic fertiliser production and reduce import dependence.

1. Policy Reforms

It may prompt reforms aimed at improving efficiency, reducing wastage, and enhancing resilience in the agricultural sector.

• Policy Recommendations:

To mitigate the impact of the Iran war on agriculture, the following measures are essential:

- Enhancing fertiliser subsidy efficiency while promoting balanced nutrient use
- Encouraging alternative fertilisers and sustainable farming practices
- Investing in renewable energy for

agriculture

• Strengthening supply chains and logistics infrastructure

• Diversifying import sources for critical inputs

• Providing targeted support to small and marginal farmers

• Conclusion:

The Iran war has exposed the deep interconnections between geopolitics and agriculture. For India, the crisis is a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities arising from dependence on imported energy and fertilisers.

The agricultural sector, already grappling with structural challenges, now faces additional pressures from rising costs, supply disruptions, and inflation. While the immediate impact is visible in higher input costs and food prices, the long-term implications could include reduced productivity and heightened food security risks.

However, the crisis also offers an opportunity to rethink and reform India's agricultural system. By investing in sustainability, reducing import dependence, and strengthening resilience, India can not only mitigate the current challenges but also build a more robust agricultural future.

In a globalised world, distant conflicts can have local consequences. The Iran war is a powerful example of how geopolitical tensions can shape the destiny of farmers thousands of kilometres away—and why building resilience in agriculture is more important than ever.

## Politics should Focus on public issues rather than Anti-Sanatan narratives

By: Lalit Garg

In the contemporary landscape of Indian politics, a discourse has steadily emerged that has shifted political debate away from core public concerns such as development, education, healthcare, employment, and social justice, and instead centered it around religious identity and faith. This discourse revolves around "support for Sanatan versus opposition to Sanatan." On one side are those who regard Sanatan culture as the eternal foundation of Indian civilization and life, while on the other are certain political statements and tendencies that many perceive as being opposed to Sanatan values. The issue is not whether one agrees or disagrees with a particular ideology; rather, the real question is whether religion should become the central axis of politics, or whether politics should remain focused on the actual concerns of people's lives.

India's democracy is founded upon a secular Constitution, where the role of the State is neither to promote nor oppose any religion, but to safeguard the rights of all citizens equally. Political parties, too, bear the responsibility of prioritizing public welfare, development, and national unity. However, in recent years, religious discourse has increasingly occupied the center stage of political debate. Sanatan is not merely a religious term; it represents the cultural consciousness, philosophical outlook, and value system of Indian civilization. Ideals such as "Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara" (Speak the truth, follow righteousness), "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (The world is one family), and "Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah" (May all be happy) are integral expressions of this worldview.

Therefore, when political statements employ derogatory or aggressive language regarding Sanatan, their impact extends beyond religion and touches the cultural and emotional fabric of millions. The controversy surrounding the remarks made by a leader from Tamil Nadu comparing Sanatan Dharma to a disease became widely debated precisely because it was perceived as hurting the sentiments of a large section of society. Several opposition parties attempted to distance themselves from the statement, recognizing that remarks perceived as offensive toward the faith of millions could create political discomfort in a country like India. It is important, however, to understand the historical and social context behind movements such as the Dravidian movement. Their original struggle was against social inequalities and caste-based dominance. Yet, when the discourse of social reform begins to appear as opposition to an entire

faith or culture, it risks losing broader public acceptance. It is equally true that many opposition parties do not describe themselves as anti-Sanatan; rather, they claim to oppose social evils, caste discrimination, and inequality. Their emphasis is on social justice and constitutional values—a viewpoint fully legitimate in a democracy, as every tradition requires introspection and reform.

Indian civilization itself has a long tradition of dialogue, debate, and self-reflection. Great reformers and spiritual leaders such as Gautama Buddha, Mahavira, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Dayananda Saraswati, and Mahatma Gandhi questioned social distortions, but their objective was reform—not division. The problem arises when political language loses balance. When criticism shifts from reform to rejection, it creates social polarization. In a pluralistic nation like India, such tendencies are not conducive to democratic health. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the discourse of cultural nationalism and civilizational identity has gained greater prominence over the past decade. Initiatives such as the construction of the Ram Temple, redevelopment of cultural and spiritual centers, and revival of heritage spaces have strengthened cultural confidence among many sections of society and have also yielded political benefits. At the same time, several opposition parties have at times appeared uncomfortable in adapting to this changing political sentiment. In some cases, they struggled to balance secularism with public faith; in others, statements by individual leaders created political challenges. Electoral trends across states have shown that caste equations and traditional vote banks alone are no longer sufficient. Voters increasingly value cultural identity, development, and national narratives alongside economic concerns. Yet, there is another side to this debate. Should politics be driven primarily by religious identity? Should pressing concerns such as unemployment, education, healthcare, environmental degradation, agrarian distress, economic inequality, and social fragmentation recede into the background? These questions are equally vital.

Over recent years, certain remarks by leaders from parties such as Congress, Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Trinamool Congress, DMK, and others regarding Sanatan and Hindu faith have been interpreted by sections of society as insensitive toward Hindu sentiments, and political consequences have followed. However, this issue cannot simply be reduced to "Hindu opposition versus political opposition." India is a demo-

cratic and pluralistic nation where every political party has the right to oppose governments, policies, or leadership. Yet, when such opposition appears to conflict with the cultural and religious sentiments of the majority, it may carry political costs.

Sanatan in India is not viewed merely as a religious identity; it is widely regarded as a symbol of philosophy, culture, tolerance, tradition, and civilizational continuity. Consequently, insensitive language or negative signaling toward it often evokes strong public reactions. At the same time, democratic maturity requires that political discourse remain centered on governance, policies, and public welfare rather than religious polarization. Political parties must preserve the balance between criticism and respect for the nation's cultural consciousness and religious sensitivities because, ultimately, people support leadership that understands their emotions, traditions, and national ethos.

Indian politics must rise above a "religion versus religion" framework and move toward a discourse centered on "people and their problems." Citizens seek both temples and employment, faith and opportunity, culture and modernity. Religious polarization alone cannot become the foundation of sustainable national progress. Political parties should move beyond accusations of "anti-Sanatan" or "anti-Hindu" politics. If reforms within traditions are needed, they should be pursued through respectful language and constructive engagement. Social justice should not imply cultural rejection, and cultural nationalism should not mean denial of alternative perspectives. The strength of Indian civilization lies in its diversity and tolerance. India embraces Shankaracharya and Buddha, Mahavira and Kabir, the Vedas and the Constitution alike. It has always valued dialogue above conflict. Therefore, politics too must adopt a language that unites society rather than divides it.

At a time when the world is struggling with conflicts, cultural tensions, and identity-based politics, India possesses the message of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"—the world as one family. This, indeed, reflects the true spirit of Sanatan: inclusion, compassion, and coexistence. Political parties must introspect and ask themselves: Do they wish to lead society toward religious confrontation or toward national reconstruction? If politics remains trapped in disputes over faith, the real issues of public life will continue to be neglected. But if it respects culture while prioritizing development, education, healthcare, and social harmony, India can emerge as a stronger and more balanced nation.

## Greening India's highways: A sustainable path forward

By: Dipak Kurmi

India is currently expanding its civil highway infrastructure at an unprecedented pace, establishing a vast web of high-speed corridors designed to catalyze long-term macroeconomic growth and industrial synchronization. Under the ambitious remit of the Bharatmala Pariyojana and the expansive, multi-sectoral blueprint of Vision 2047, thousands of kilometers of newly minted expressways and economic highways are systematically reshaping regional connectivity, drastically reducing logistics costs, and accelerating domestic commercial velocity. However, this monumental civil engineering transformation simultaneously imposes an escalating demand and public-health burden that demands immediate, sophisticated policy intervention. Highway corridors are increasingly transforming into localized zones of intense pollution accumulation, severe landscape fragmentation, and acute agricultural risk. Because significant portions of these high-velocity arterial networks traverse densely populated, highly fertile agricultural heartlands, the negative externalities generated by vehicular emissions and infrastructural runoff extend far beyond the literal edge of the asphalt carriageway, directly jeopardizing rural communities and natural ecosystems.

To reconcile these diverging trajectories of economic mobility and environmental preservation, India requires a fundamental paradigm shift in its overarching infrastructure doctrine. Transport corridors must no longer be viewed strictly through the narrow lens of civil engineering and logistics efficiency, but rather reclassified as complex, integrated socio-economic and ecological landscapes. A highly promising and systemic solution to this compounding crisis lies in the deployment of Highway Farm Forestry (HFF). This market-linked, decentralized agroforestry approach encourages farmers whose lands directly adjoin major national highways to voluntarily cultivate high-value, commercially viable tree crops in lieu of conventional, pollution-sensitive food crops. By deliberately establishing these robust tree crop buffer zones, the state can foster a multi-tiered ecological defense system capable of intercepting atmospheric particulate matter, capturing heavy metal deposits, reducing localized ambient noise, and fundamentally mitigating the hazardous exposure vectors that currently threaten the regional agricultural supply chain. Unlike historical social-forestry programs initiated in the latter half of the twentieth century, which frequently suffered from chronic operational inefficiencies, top-down bureaucratic mandates, and weak institutional market linkages, the contemporary Highway Farm Forestry model is explicitly profitability-driven. Rational rural landowners will only adopt intensive tree cultivation if the projected financial returns demonstrably exceed their existing baseline land-use income from traditional agrarian cultivation. Fortunately, several fast-growing tree species and woody perennials, including hybrid poplar, industrial bamboo, high-grade teak, Malabar neem, and gamhar, already enjoy robust, well-es-

tablished demand within domestic industrial manufacturing sectors. By embedding these species into highly structured agrarian landscapes through assured private-sector buyback arrangements and continuous public extension support, roadside agroforestry can transcend conventional conservation paradigms to become a highly lucrative, self-sustaining rural enterprise. This approach aligns individual financial incentives directly with national ecological priorities, ensuring sustained community participation without relying on perpetual public subsidies.

The economic rationale underpinning this macro-policy shift is remarkably compelling when analyzed against India's broader international trade realities. At present, India imports approximately Rs 70,000 crore worth of timber, wood pulp, and derivative wood products annually, exposing its domestic manufacturing base to volatile global supply chains and putting substantial pressure on its foreign exchange reserves. The widespread domestic scaling of Highway Farm Forestry could systematically reduce this heavy import dependence, while simultaneously generating millions of green jobs across the rural landscape and fortifying primary timber industries in precise alignment with the national Make in India agenda. By creating decentralized hubs of wood production along major transportation arteries, the domestic log supply chain achieves optimal spatial efficiency, dramatically shortening the logistical distance between rural production zones and urban processing centers, thereby enhancing the overall competitiveness of Indian wood manufacturing.

Nevertheless, this comprehensive institutional proposal extends far beyond simple timber production and fiber extraction; it represents a sophisticated effort to integrate advanced ecological planning directly into national infrastructure policy. Conventional roadside green belts, which rely exclusively on public land acquisition within the formal right-of-way, are notoriously difficult to scale across thousands of kilometers of highways due to the exorbitant capital costs and prolonged legal disputes associated with acquiring private land in India. A far more pragmatic and financially viable alternative is the implementation of a differentiated Tiered Zone Framework that optimizes land-use efficiency through voluntary partnerships with local farmers. Under this calibrated spatial model, agrarian lands located nearest to the primary pollution-affected belts, roughly within a one-hundred-meter threshold from the highway edge, are explicitly prioritized for intensive tree-based systems capable of maximum pollution interception. Conversely, agricultural zones extending beyond this immediate hundred-meter boundary can seamlessly transition into mixed agroforestry configurations or sustain conventional food cultivation, depending on localized ecological variables and prevailing rural livelihood conditions.

This highly calibrated, context-specific framework explicitly recognizes that ecological restoration, national food security, and agrarian livelihood resilience must advance in tandem rather than functioning as

mutually exclusive policy mandates. Properly designed and spatially optimized roadside tree systems can serve as invaluable ecological stepping stones across heavily fragmented rural landscapes, effectively reconnecting isolated habitats and providing vital spatial continuity for native pollinators, avian species, and local beneficial insects. Furthermore, the substantial plantation biomass generated by these linear agroforestry networks can dramatically accelerate carbon sequestration rates, offering a scalable mechanism for smallholder farmers to participate directly in emerging domestic and international carbon markets. By converting verified carbon mitigation into a tangible, tradeable commodity, the framework introduces a secondary, non-extractive revenue stream that insulates rural households against the accelerating climatic shocks of the twenty-first century.

At the same time, the institutionalization of robust ecological safeguards is absolutely essential to prevent unintended environmental consequences. The careless propagation of vast monocultural plantations could inadvertently engender novel ecological crises, such as severe biodiversity depletion, heightened vulnerability to catastrophic pest outbreaks, and localized hydrological imbalances. Therefore, species selection protocols within the Highway Farm Forestry paradigm must remain fundamentally science-based, strictly region-specific, and acutely sensitive to local groundwater tables. Ecologically invasive or hyper-water-consumptive exotic species must be explicitly excluded from the approved regulatory registries, while the cultivation of diverse, multi-species systems and native timber varieties must be systematically incentivized. It is vital to emphasize that Highway Farm Forestry is not a convenient substitute for cleaner mobility solutions, rapid vehicle electrification, or the enforcement of rigorous environmental impact assessments in infrastructure planning; rather, it must function as a powerful, complementary strategy within a holistic national decarbonization matrix.

The successful nationwide implementation of this visionary program will ultimately require unprecedented institutional coordination, policy harmonization, and sustained technical support for the farming community. Adjoining landholders must be guaranteed seamless access to certified, high-yielding planting material, advanced silvicultural extension services, highly predictable commodity markets, and significantly simplified harvesting and transit regulations. Encouragingly, the formal introduction of the National Transit Pass System in 2023 has already successfully resolved a historic structural bottleneck by enabling the seamless, digitized interstate movement of timber through a unified One Nation, One Pass regulatory framework. What India urgently requires now is a cohesive national policy vision that officially codifies this synergy, transforming highway corridors from mere linear engines of physical mobility into strategic socio-ecological landscapes that actively cultivate both ecological resilience and enduring economic prosperity for generations to come. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

# 16th Kerala Assembly swearing-in witnesses oaths in different languages

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 21:** The swearing-in of members to the 16th Kerala Legislative Assembly on Thursday became more than a formal constitutional ceremony, as the House witnessed moments reflecting the state's diversity, simplicity and political culture.

While some newly elected MLAs walked to the Assembly or arrived on bicycles, others took oath in different languages and in the name of God or through solemn affirmation, adding a personal touch to the proceedings.

The day also saw political rivals setting aside the sharp exchanges of the election campaign as leaders greeted and smiled at one another after the ceremony, giving the Assembly a rare moment of warmth and camaraderie.

The swearing-in also saw Chief Minister V D Satheesan disregarding the recent criticism he faced on social media and from within the Congress for mentioning his 'caste' while taking oath as CM, and again referring to it while being sworn in as an MLA.

While taking oath as an MLA, the CM said his entire name -- Vadasseri Damodara Menon Satheesan -- as he had done on Monday while being sworn in as the chief minister.

Following the criticism,



Satheesan on Wednesday, at a press conference here after a Cabinet meeting, had defended his use of the caste surname during his swearing-in ceremony, saying he had only mentioned his father's name and saw nothing wrong in doing so on such an occasion.

The swearing-in also saw Protem Speaker G Sudhakaran getting up from his seat and walking a few paces to congratulate Pinarayi Vijayan as he walked up to the dais after taking oath.

The two, who had engaged in a war of words during the poll campaign after Sudhakaran chose not to renew his CPI(M) membership and contested as a UDF-backed independent candidate from Ambal-

apuzha constituency, greeted each other and shook hands as if nothing adverse had ever transpired between them.

Sudhakaran, a day ago, had said that he had no enmity with his erstwhile CPI(M) colleague and former chief minister Vijayan, as there was no place for personal grudges in politics.

He had also said that he sees no difference between Vijayan and any other MLA to whom he would be administering the oath of office.

The disregarding of political and personal differences was also seen when former CPI(M) leaders V Kunhikrishnan and T K Govindan, who left the party recently and successfully contested as a UDF-

backed independent candidates from the Left strongholds of Payyanur and Taliparamba in Kanur district, walked up to Vijayan and greeted him after taking oath as MLAs.

Besides these friendly gestures, the swearing-in also witnessed several MLAs opting for English, Tamil and a mix of Kannada and Malayalam while taking oath.

Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) MLA from Manjeshwar assembly seat, A K M Ashraf, took the oath in a regional language -- a mix of Kannada and Malayalam -- while Congress legislator F Raja from Devikulam constituency took oath in Tamil.

On the other hand, senior Congress leaders Ramesh Chennithala, K Muraliedharan and Sunny Joseph, party leaders Mathew Kuzhalmadan and Sandeep Varier, RSP MLA Shibu Baby John, IUML legislator Fyzal Babu and UDF partner Kerala Democratic Party MLA Mani C Kappen took oath in English. In addition to opting for different languages, legislators also differed in taking oath in the name of God or choosing to solemnly affirm.

Forty-two MLAs chose to solemnly affirm and they included all the CPI(M) and CPI MLAs, Congress legislators V T Balram and Sumesh Achuthan, Revolu-

tionary Socialist Party (RSP) leaders Shibu Baby John and Vishnu Mohan and Revolutionary Marxist Party of India (RMP) MLA K K Rema.

Besides them, Govindan, Kunhikrishnan and Communist Marxist Party Kerala State Committee (CMP KSC) legislator C P John also chose to solemnly affirm.

The rest of the MLAs, including the three from BJP and one from LDF partner Rashtriya Janata Dal, opted to take oath in the name of God.

The BJP MLAs -- Rajeev Chandrasekhar, V Muraliedharan and B B Gopakumar -- highlighted their party's achievement, of marking a space for itself in the state assembly, by walking to the House in the morning after paying floral tributes at the Palayam Martyrs' Memorial here.

On the other hand, Chandy Oommen, the Congress MLA from Puthuppally constituency and son of former Kerala CM Oommen Chandy, arrived at the assembly complex on a bicycle.

He had opted to campaign on a bicycle for the assembly polls, foregoing the traditional methods of putting up posters, banners and wall paintings.

The other MLAs reached the assembly in their respective official or personal vehicles. (PTI)

# TN voters saw Vijay as credible alternative to Dravidian parties: Pradeep Gupta



**NEW DELHI, May 21:** Pollster Pradeep Gupta has said his agency began detecting Vijay's emergence as a serious political force in Tamil Nadu nearly a year before the Assembly election, with support for the actor-politician steadily rising as voters increasingly viewed him as a credible alternative to the state's entrenched Dravidian parties.

In an interview to PTI on Wednesday, Gupta said his agency, Axis My India, tracked Vijay's support climbing from around 25 per cent a year before the Assembly election in the southern state to 35 per cent by the polling day.

"Our groundwork started one year prior to the election. His vote share was around 25 per cent around six months before the polls. It rose to 28 per cent three months ago, then to about 30 per cent about a month ago. And by the polling day, it had risen to 35 per cent. This was the trajectory," Gupta said.

Asked whether he feared that Axis My India might have made a "blunder" in projecting Vijay's TVK in contention for power, with most other agencies predicting the DMK-led alliance's victory, Gupta said there is always an element of uncertainty in election forecasting.

"We gave a range of 98 to 120 seats because there was some doubt over whether the majority mark of 118 would be crossed. Even a 2-per cent variation in the vote share can dramatically alter seat outcomes," he said.

After days of political uncertainty and intense back-and-forth with Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar over proving his majority, Vijay finally took oath as the chief minister of Tamil Nadu on May 10, backed by parties ranging from the Congress and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to the CPI, VCK and IUML, which helped his coalition cross the halfway mark.

Gupta noted that Axis My India had projected a 35-per cent vote share, with a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points, and

the TVK eventually secured exactly 35 per cent.

"The midpoint of our projected range was 109 seats, and it finally won 108. That is how we mitigated the risk in our forecast," he said.

Gupta explained that once alliances were formed and candidates entered the field, voters started identifying Vijay as a frontrunner.

"It was becoming increasingly clear that he was in the forefront. The question was not whether he had emerged, but how many seats he would ultimately win and whether that would be enough to form the government," he said.

Explaining Vijay's rise, Gupta said the actor's decades-long popularity in Tamil cinema had given him unmatched "brand equity". "For 30 years, he has been a known face and for nearly two decades, he has enjoyed major stardom. In Tamil Nadu, cinema following is at the highest level, through the days of M G Ramachandran and even prior to that," he said.

Gupta said Vijay's films over the last 10 years frequently portrayed anti-establishment characters, reinforcing his image as a leader capable of challenging the political status quo.

"People had begun seeing him in a leadership role linked to political issues. Once that trajectory formed, voters started asking, if not the incumbent government, then who is the alternative?" he said. Gupta argued that the weakening of the AIADMK after the death of former chief minister J Jayalalithaa also created political space for Vijay's rise.

"For nearly 50 years, Dravidian politics revolved around either the DMK or the AIADMK. But demographic changes have created a younger Tamil Nadu looking for a credible alternative.... People wanted change and wanted to try something new. They saw Vijay as someone credible enough to trust and capable of making a difference," he said. (PTI)

# Calcutta HC grants TMC's Abhishek protection from coercive action

**KOLKATA, May 21:** The Calcutta High Court on Thursday granted senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee protection from coercive action till July 31 in an FIR over his comments at a public meeting last month, and asked if it was appropriate for a parliamentarian to make unwarranted statements.

Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya directed Banerjee, the TMC's national general secretary, to cooperate with the probe and comply with notices sent to him by the investigating officer.

The court also directed him not to travel abroad without the leave of the court.

The MP from Diamond Harbour moved the high court seeking the quashing of the FIR over his comments against the leaders and workers of a rival party at a public meeting on April 27 in the run-up to the second phase of West Bengal assembly polls.

Asking why "irresponsible statements" were made by Banerjee, Justice Bhattacharyya wondered what would have happened if the



TMC won the election. "This state has a very dark history of post-poll violence," he observed.

The judge further asked whether Banerjee's comments at the public meeting matched the position of an all-India general secretary of the Trinamool Congress.

Granting him protection from coercive action till July 31, the court said it will hear the matter again on July 20.

Appearing for the West Bengal government, Additional Advocate General Rajdeep Majumder opposed Banerjee's plea but submitted that the investigation will follow the due process of the law. (PTI)

# Murder convict jumps parole and acts in Bollywood films; nabbed 12 years later in Gujarat

**AHMEDABAD, May 21:** A murder case convict, who jumped parole in 2014 and started doing supporting roles in Bollywood films, including those made by prominent production houses, after changing his identity, was arrested in Ahmedabad 12 years later, police said on Thursday.

The crime branch arrested the convict, Hemant Modi (53), on Wednesday near a metro rail station in Ahmedabad, they said.

A case of murder and rioting was registered against Modi in Ahmedabad in 2005. In 2014, the Gujarat High Court granted him a 30-day parole. However, after he failed to surrender, the HC declared him a parole jumper in July that year, a release issued by the city crime branch said.

He was serving a sentence of life imprisonment in the Mehnsana District Jail, it said.

After jumping parole, he changed his name and started working as a supporting actor, doing various roles in Hindi and Gujarati films, web series and plays in both the languages, it added.

"During his 10 years on the run, Modi maintained a highly active and visible career in the entertainment industry, appearing in major Bollywood productions such as 'Thugs of Hindostan' alongside Amitabh Bachchan and Aamir Khan, and 'Jayeshbhai Jordaar' with Ranveer Singh", the official release said.

Beyond the screen, he remained active in theatre, performing in plays such as "Yugpurush" and "Gandhi



Viruddh Godse". Despite his public-facing career in films, web series and serials, he successfully evaded authorities until the recent detection by the crime branch, it said.

Hailing from Naroda in Ahmedabad, he was traced to a residence near the Gheekanta Metro Station in Ahmedabad around 1 pm on Wednesday, the police said.

The crime branch will hand him over to Mehnsana District Jail so that he serves the remainder of his sentence.

The 2005 case against Modi was registered under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 302 (murder), 324 (causing hurt with dangerous weapons), 147 and 148 (rioting and rioting with deadly weapons), 149 (unlawful assembly) and 120(B) (criminal conspiracy), along with section 135(1) of the Bombay Police Act related to violation of police prohibitory orders. (PTI)

# Cockroach Janata Party's X handle withheld, founder starts new account

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** The X account of Cockroach Janata Party, the satirical digital outfit that came up last week and took social media by storm, was withheld in India on Thursday. Soon after, came up another handle - 'Cockroach is Back'.

"This was expected since there were attempts to hack the account yesterday. But this is a self-goal by the government," founder Abhijeet Dipke told PTI.

"I have now started a new account named 'Cockroach Is Back' on X," Dipke added. He said the team would pursue the matter legally.

At 3.40 pm, a little over an hour after it started, the 'Cockroach Is Back' X handle had 16,800 followers. Cockroach Janata Party, which according to Dipke had 201,000 followers on X, came following a controversy over Chief Justice of India Surya Kant using "parasites" and "cockroaches" while pulling up a lawyer for his plea seeking senior designation.

The CJ later clarified that he was misquoted and his remarks were directed specifically at individuals entering the legal profession through "fake and bogus degrees".

Cockroach Janata Party came into being a day after the CJ's remarks on May 15. It quickly went viral, attracting support from politicians, activists, artists and a large number of young and not so young social media users.

While the X account became inaccessible in India on Thursday, the platform's Instagram page remains

active with around 14.3 million followers -- and counting. One post on Instagram drew comparisons with the official Bharatiya Janata Party account, which has approximately 8.8 million followers on the Meta-owned platform.

Questioning the action against what he described as a satirical platform, Dipke said the account and the movement had been growing rapidly.

"The X handle and movement has been growing, getting thousands of followers every day... perhaps that is what scared the government," Dipke alleged.

Dipke, who was earlier associated with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), on Thursday posted on X that attempts were also being made to hack the Instagram account.

Several other accounts using the 'cockroach' nomenclature remain active on X. These include 'The Cockroach Youth', 'Cockroach News', 'IAMCockroach', 'Cockroach Party of India' and 'Cockroach Janata Party (Gen Z)'.

What began as an online satire project has soon evolved into a wider conversation about contemporary protest and the role of humour and meme culture in it.

Using memes, the Cockroach Janata Party platform gained traction through sharp political satire and commentary. Much of its content centres on youth concerns such as unemployment, examination paper leaks and education, packaged through graphics, animation, manifestos and charter-style demands. (PTI)

# Twisha Sharma death case: Absconding husband moves MP High Court for pre-arrest bail

**JABALPUR, May 21:** After failing to get any relief from lower court, Samarth Singh, the absconding husband of Twisha Sharma who was allegedly harassed for dowry and died last week, has filed an anticipatory bail application in the Madhya Pradesh High Court claiming that his family was cooperating with the investigation team and that there was no need for custodial interrogation.

In a Miscellaneous Criminal Case (MCC) filed before a single bench by his brother Siddharth Singh, the petitioner claimed that the entire prosecution story had been constructed and built "on imagination and presumptions" and that every substantial material had already been seized.

The applicant, who has been on the run ever since the case was registered by the Madhya Pradesh Police, claimed in his 69-page petition that he and his mother have been cooperating in the investigation till today.

The absconding accused moved the High Court after a magistrate court had earlier rejected his anticipatory bail application while granting it to his mother, Giribala Singh, a retired district sessions

judge. She is also named in the FIR registered in the case.

Twisha Sharma was found hanging at her marital home in Bhopal's Katara Hills area on May 12. The family of the 33-year-old model turned actor accused her in-laws of pushing their daughter to death. The Singhs claim she was addicted to drugs.

Police registered an FIR under Sections 80(2), 85, and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita along with relevant sections of the Dowry Prohibition Act, naming Samarth Singh and Giribala Singh.

Police have announced a cash reward for information leading to Samarth Singh's arrest and also approached the court for the revocation of his passport.

In his application, the absconding accused claimed that the WhatsApp chats presented by the complainant are "edited and incomplete" and also alleged that the same had been tampered with, which cannot be relied upon. Samarth also annexed screenshots of payments sent to Twisha and claimed that charges of dowry harassment from her side are "very disappointing". (PTI)

# Deployment of 500 CAPF companies in Bengal extended till June 20

**KOLKATA, May 21:** The Union Home Ministry has decided to continue deploying 500 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) in West Bengal till June 20 for post-poll law and order management based on a request from the West Bengal government, an official said Thursday. In an official communication, the home ministry said the West Bengal government had sought continuation of the Central forces' deployment till the end of October for post-election duties. "The request of the Government of West Bengal has been considered in this ministry," it said.

The communication addressed to the West Bengal chief secretary, home secretary and director general of police stated that 500 companies of CAPFs, comprising 200 of the CRPF, 150 of the BSF, and 50 each of the CISF, ITBP and SSB, would continue to remain deployed in the state till June 20. A senior state government official said the forces are being retained primarily to assist police in maintaining law and order in sensitive areas following the Assembly election. "The deployment is aimed at ensuring peace and preventing any untoward incidents in vulnerable areas. Coordination between the state police and CAPFs is continuing," the official said.

The Union Home Ministry has also asked the West Bengal government to ensure necessary logistics, accommodation and other operational arrangements for the central forces stationed across the state. On May 16, Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari, during an administrative review meeting held at Diamond Harbour, requested the chief secretary and home secretary to seek an extension of the stay of CAPF personnel beyond the scheduled two-month period.

Incidentally, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, during one of his rallies for the just-concluded assembly polls in Bengal, had said that a total of 500 companies of CAPF would extend their stay in the state for 60 days after the election, primarily to keep a check on the post-poll violence. (PTI)

# SMC guidelines not for private unaided schools: Education Ministry

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** The Education Ministry on Thursday clarified that the School Management Committee (SMC) Guidelines 2026 are not applicable to private unaided schools that do not receive government aid or grants.

The clarification came amid concerns raised by certain sections of society regarding the implementation of the guidelines.

However, the ministry said such schools are still encouraged to constitute School Management Committees to promote greater transparency, accountability and participatory governance.

"With reference to concerns raised by certain sections of society regarding the School Management Committee Guidelines (SMCs) 2026, the Ministry of Education clarifies that the Guidelines are not applicable to private unaided schools covered under Section



2(n)(iv) of the RTE Act, provided such institutions do not receive any aid or grants from the appropriate government or local authority towards meeting their expenses," the ministry said in a post on X.

The ministry also stressed that education is a shared responsibility of the government, schools, parents and the community.

"Strengthening collaboration among parents, schools and other stakeholders is essential to improving the overall functioning of schools and ensuring better learning outcomes for children," it added.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on May 6 launched the guidelines, underscoring the need for stronger commu-

nity participation, improved school infrastructure and updated pedagogy in line with the National Education Policy 2020.

Pradhan had underlined that SMCs are not a new concept but have evolved over time and remain central to improving learning outcomes and governance in schools.

The guidelines introduced several key reforms, including a single SMC for all classes from 'Balvatika' to Class 12, aimed at strengthening school-level governance and continuity in decision-making. The guidelines clearly define the roles and responsibilities of SMCs and member secretaries, with a focus on improved accountability, transparency and financial oversight in school management.

They also emphasise proactive monitoring of student attendance and teacher engagement to enhance learning outcomes. (PTI)

# NFR reviews safety, progress of Balurghat-Hili railway line project

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 21:** Northeast Frontier Railway General Manager (Construction) Ashish Bansal conducted a detailed safety inspection and review of ongoing works under the Balurghat-Hili New Broad Gauge Line Project on May 20.

The inspection covered the Eklakhi-Balurghat and Balurghat-Hili sections, with focus on railway infrastructure, track conditions, station development, bridges, passenger amenities, operational preparedness and overall construction progress.

The Balurghat-Hili New Broad Gauge Line Project, spanning 29.257 kilometres in Dakshin Dinajpur district of West Bengal, is being implemented at an estimated cost of ₹1,181.09 crore.

The project aims to improve rail connectivity and boost socio-economic development in the region.



According to NFR, 100 per cent land acquisition covering 156.38 hectares has already been completed and handed over to the Railways. The project includes construction of 11 major bridges, 43 minor bridges, station buildings, road over bridges (ROBs), road under bridges (RUBs), staff quarters and other railway infrastructure works.

During the inspection, special emphasis was placed on safety standards, quality control, progress of bridge construction, station infrastructure and utility shifting to en-

sure safe and reliable train operations in the future.

The General Manager also reviewed ongoing Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) works in the Balurghat-Kumedpur and Labha-Kumedpur sections.

NFR stated that the target for completion of the project has been fixed for March 2027.

Trolley inspection activities continued on May 21 for further review of safety aspects and developmental progress in the section.

Senior officials from the NFR headquarters and Katihar division accompanied the inspection team.

The railway authorities said the visit reflects NFR's continued focus on strengthening railway infrastructure, improving safety standards and accelerating development works aimed at providing faster, safer and more efficient rail services in the region.

# Meghalaya one of India's fastest-growing states with 4-fold rise in capital investments: CM



**SHILLONG, May 21:** Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Thursday said Meghalaya has emerged as one of the country's fastest-growing states with a 15.3 per cent five-year nominal GDP growth and a fourfold rise in capital investments since 2018.

## Dimapur declared ASF-infected, surveillance zone

**DIMAPUR, May 21:** Dimapur DC Tinojongshi Chang has declared Dimapur an African swine fever (ASF) infected and surveillance zone following the detection and laboratory confirmation of positive cases in pigs at Signal Angami village.

According to a notification dated May 20, a 1 km radius from the infected area at Signal Angami village has been declared the infected zone, while a 10 km radius from the infected area has been declared the surveillance zone.

The movement of pigs and piglets from the infected and surveillance zones to non-infected areas has been completely banned. The order further stated that the movement of pigs, pork, pig feed, carcasses and other pig-related products into and out of the infected and surveillance zones has been strictly prohibited.

Slaughter, sale, transportation and congregation of pigs within the infected area will also remain banned until further orders.

The district administration advised the pig farmers and residents to immediately report any unusual sickness or death of pigs to the nearest veterinary officer or department.

It also directed all pig farm owners to maintain proper bio-security measures, including disinfection and restricted farm access.

The disposal of pig carcasses will be carried out strictly as per the veterinary department protocols and the Government of India guidelines.

The veterinary department, along with law enforcement agencies will conduct surveillance and monitoring in the affected areas.

The DC said any violation of the order would invite necessary legal action under the relevant provisions of law.

## Mandatory training for Census 2027 field trainers of 4 dists begins in Kohima

**DIMAPUR, May 21:** A three-day mandatory training programme for field trainers from Kohima, Tseminyu, Wokha and Zunheboto districts under the Census of India 2027 commenced at the commissioner's circuit house in Kohima on Wednesday.

Addressing the inaugural programme, SDO (Civil) Sadar, Seyiekhrietuo Solo said the census exercise goes beyond mere head counting and has a far-reaching impact on the developmental landscape of the state.

Referring to the 2001 and 2011 censuses, he noted that gaps and discrepancies in data had affected developmental indicators and planning at various levels. He stressed the importance of conducting the upcoming census with accuracy and sincerity to ensure better planning and development for the coming years.

Solo said the role of field trainers was as important as any other in the census process since they would be responsible for training enumerators and field workers.

He urged the participants to make full use of the three-day training by actively engaging with the resource persons, raising queries and participating in interactive sessions.

Stating that the months ahead would be crucial, he urged the trainees to continue exchanging ideas and supporting one another even after the training period.

## Kohima DC reiterates total ban on single-use plastic in villages

**HT Correspondent DIMAPUR, May 21:** Kohima DC B Henok Buchem on Thursday reminded about the total ban on single-use plastic across all villages under the district.

In a notification, issued in pursuance of the home department (GAB-I) notification dated 18th May 2026, the directives of the Supreme Court dated 14th February 2026 and the provisions of the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules 2021, Buchem reiterated earlier notifications on the ban issued by the state urban development department.

Accordingly, all villages under Kohima district have been directed to strictly comply with the ban on various single-use plastic items.

The prohibited items include all plastic carry bags with or without handles, irrespective of thickness and size, plastic cutleries such as plates, cups, forks, spoons and straws, Styrofoam (thermocool) decorative materials, polythene,

nylon, Poly Vinyl Carbohydrates (PVC), polypropylene and polystyrene materials.

The notification also reiterated the ban on the use of flex banners, boards and posters by departments, institutions and government agencies during functions and programmes, as notified by the urban development department in December 2020.

Further, the order highlighted the prohibition of items such as ear buds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, thermocol decoration materials, plastic trays, wrapping or packing films around sweet boxes, invitation cards and cigarette packets, PVC banners less than 100 microns and plastic stirrers.

Additionally, the notification reaffirmed the total ban on packaged drinking water bottles below 20 litres capacity for meetings, seminars, functions and personal consumption.

## In meeting with Arunachal edu min, AAPSU demands teacher recruitment, infra upgrade

**ITANAGAR, May 21:** The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union has submitted a memorandum to Education Minister PD Sona over a host of demands, including teacher recruitment and improvement of infrastructure.

An AAPSU delegation led by president Meje Taku met the minister on Wednesday and submitted the memorandum highlighting issues faced by students across all 26 districts of the state, according to a statement issued on Thursday.

The union said 52 government schools in the state are functioning without regular principals or vice principals.

The absence of full-time heads has adversely affected academic and administrative functioning, the union said, demanding immediate appointments to all vacant posts of principals, vice principals and headmasters.

AAPSU also called for a state-wide recruitment drive to fill vacancies of primary teachers (PRT), trained graduate teachers (TGT) and postgraduate teachers (PGT). (PTI)

## CM Tamang thanks Modi for taking Sikkim's orchid heritage to international stage

*'Biodiversity and traditional craftsmanship gained global recognition during PM's Norway visit'*

**GANGTOK, May 21:** Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Thursday thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for showcasing the Himalayan state's orchid heritage and traditional craftsmanship on the international stage during his recent visit to Norway.

He said Sikkim's natural beauty and rich biodiversity found a "place in global diplomacy" as Modi presented beautifully crafted pressed orchid paintings and orchid paperweights to Prime Minister of Norway, Jonas Gahr Store.

These exquisite artworks, composed of real pressed orchids and ferns from the mist-covered valleys of Sikkim, celebrate the extraordinary biodiversity of the eastern Himalayas. "On behalf of the people of Sikkim, I sincerely thank Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji for bringing Sikkim's orchid heritage and traditional craftsmanship to international attention," Tamang said in a social media post.

The chief minister said the orchids and ferns gifted by the PM symbolised Sikkim's pristine environment and organic way of life.

He also noted that the gesture reflected the recognition of the state's distinct cultural and ecological identity.



Tamang said Sikkim is widely known for its extraordinary floral diversity, especially its rare orchid species, which form an important part of the state's natural heritage.

The international showcase of these hand-crafted artworks has been welcomed as a proud moment for the people of the state, he said.

"It is truly heartening to see Sikkim's floral legacy receiving international recognition, bringing immense pride to every Sikkimese," he added.

Modi on Thursday returned from a five-nation tour during which he signed pacts on energy, defence, and critical minerals.

The Prime Minister embarked on his tour on May 15, visiting the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Italy over the course of several days. (PTI)

# Tripura CM bats for technology-driven policing

*Saha asks police to adopt modern methods for swift crime detection and speedy justice*



**AGARTALA, May 21:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday exhorted the police to focus on technology-driven methods to detect crimes swiftly and ensure speedy justice.

Addressing the passing-out parade of 476 police constables at an academy in west Tripura, he said

the state government has been making efforts to bring in modernisation in the force.

"From maintaining law and order to control crowd to handling cyber crimes and investigation, the police have different roles to play. Therefore, it must focus on technology-driven policing, displaying

the highest degree of professionalism and integrity," Saha said.

The CM said the government has already initiated the process to strengthen the state police by inducting constables and officers of different ranks.

"The Tripura government has begun the process to recruit 218 sub-inspectors and approved a proposal for the appointment of 916 constables," Saha said.

He also asserted that the police have been given a free hand to control law and order across the state.

Saha also highlighted his government's initiative to increase the participation of women in the force.

"It is heartening to know that 318 out of these 476 police constables are females. This shows the government's commitment towards women empowerment," he said. (PTI)

## Man drugged, robbed of ₹ 7 lakh in Gangtok, found in Cuttack Railway Station

**GANGTOK, May 21:** A man from Sikkim's Gyalshing district was allegedly drugged and robbed of ₹ 7 lakh cash he was carrying in a handbag while travelling in a taxi for Tadaong, police said here on Thursday. Soon after boarding the taxi at Gangtok for Tadaong on April 15, the man became unconscious. He regained his consciousness on April 17 at Cuttack

Railway Station in Odisha, where he sought assistance from the Government Railway Police (GRP). He was provided medical treatment at a government hospital in Cuttack, the police said.

The Cuttack GRP registered a zero FIR and transferred the case to the Sadar Police station, Gangtok, on jurisdictional grounds, they said. (PTI)

## NEC allocates ₹ 515 cr for Nagaland during 15th FC period

**HT Correspondent DIMAPUR, May 21:** The North Eastern Council (NEC) allocated Rs 515.04 crore for Nagaland during the 15th Finance Commission (FC) period under Schemes of NEC (SoNEC) and NESIDS-Roads projects.

In its project report on Nagaland, released on Thursday, the NEC said Nagaland recorded one of the most dynamic project portfolios among all northeastern states during the period, with a strong focus on value-chain development and industry-led economic advancement.

Under SoNEC, the state recorded significant developmental progress during the 15th FC cycle, with an expenditure of ₹ 205.84 crore, with major interventions in the development of sports and tourism infrastructure, educational institutions, cultural complexes, skill development centres, community infrastructure and projects for backward and tribal communities.

Special emphasis was also laid on agriculture and allied sectors through promotion of sericulture, beekeeping, horticulture, coffee, rubber, bamboo, handloom and handicrafts, livestock development, fisheries and value-addition initiatives.

The NEC-funded projects also covered preservation and promotion of Naga cultural heritage through museums, heritage complexes, indigenous learning centres, cultural tourism infrastructure and tribal artisan support facilities, while enhancing eco-tourism and adventure tourism opportunities across

the state. In addition, the SoNEC interventions promoted environmental conservation, geospatial planning, mineral resource assessment, afforestation, post-harvest infrastructure and market linkage initiatives, contributing to balanced regional development and improved public service infrastructure.

Under the NESIDS Roads programme during the 15th FC period, nine road projects worth ₹ 309.20 crore have been implemented in Nagaland, out of which five projects valued at ₹ 231.79 crore have already been completed.

Among the recently completed projects is the upgradation of the road from Dikhu bridge to Amguri in Mokochung district, significantly improving connectivity to the cultural heartland of the Ao Naga community and enhancing regional mobility.

In 2025-26, the NEC sanctioned four major projects in Nagaland valued at over ₹ 67.87 crore, aimed at strengthening commercial agriculture, industrial infrastructure and livelihood generation.

Among the flagship initiatives is the Cluster-Based Coffee Value Chain Development project, the single largest state-specific project sanctioned in the Northeast during the year, designed to promote coffee cultivation, processing, branding and marketing by building upon Nagaland's internationally recognised Arabica coffee heritage and creating sustainable livelihoods for farming communities.

## 4 UNLF (P) militants arrested, over 60 weapons seized

**IMPHAL, May 21:** Four members of the proscribed UNLF (Pambei) were arrested and more than 60 weapons, including assault rifles and an RPG launcher, were recovered in Manipur's Imphal West district, police said on Thursday. Addressing a press conference, SP Shivakanta Singh said police had received intelligence inputs on Wednesday that arms looted from security forces were being brought to Lamdeng for sale.

Acting on the tip-off, a special team of Manipur Police launched a cordon-and-search operation at an UNLF(P) camp in Lamdeng and arrested two persons, he said.

"During the operation, 29 firearms, including AK-series rifles, M-series rifles, pistols and ammunition, were recovered," he added.

Singh said associates of the arrested men opened fire on the police team during the operation, triggering a gunfight. Two more cadres were subsequently apprehended.

Following the arrests, joint teams of Manipur Police, Assam Rifles and CRPF carried out extensive searches at the camp and adjoining areas, leading to the recovery of another 38 weapons, he said. The seized cache included 11 AK-series rifles, three M-series rifles, a sniper rifle, a carbine, an RPG launcher, anti-drone jammers and explosives, he said.

UNLF (Pambei) had signed a peace agreement with the Centre in 2023. However, members of the outfit have continued to be arrested in connection with alleged illegal arms trade and other anti-social activities. (PTI)

### MISSING BOY CHILD



Name - OMKER  
Age - 14 Years approx  
Gender - Male  
Address - Currently staying at Nabajiban Children Home, Nagaon, Assam  
Skin Colour - White Charming  
Eye Colour - Light Black

Note: - The said Child was found at Bokajan, Karbi Anglong GDE No. 465 Bokajin P.S Dated-16/01/2021 and produced at Child Welfare Committee, Karbi Anglong on Dated- 28/01/2021 and on the same date i.e on 28/01/2021 placed at HDVC, Diphu Karbi Anglong Since the child is a special child and there is no Children Home for Special Child in Karbi Anglong so CWC Members, Karbi Anglong had decided to transferred the child to CWC Nagaon on Dated-05/02/2021. The current status of the said child is presently staying at Nabajiban Children Home, Nagaon, Assam.

IF ANY INFORMATION OR IDENTITY OF THE CHILD IS FOUND PLEASE CONTACT 00. DISTRICT CHILD PROTECTION UNIT, RONGKHELAN BELTOLA ROAD NEAR KIDZEE SCHOOL DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG.

Contact No-8133912557  
Chairperson  
Child Welfare Committee, Karbi Anglong

Sd/-  
District Child Protection Unit  
Diphu, Karbi Anglong

DIPR /D/HLT/5/22-May-26

No. DPU/KAAC\_(AAP)/02/2025-26/251 Dated 20.05.2026

### CANCELLATION NOTICE

It is for general information to all concerned that the Bids invited vide Tender ID: 2026\_KAAC\_51945\_1 and Tender ID: 2026\_KAAC\_51948\_1 for the works under AAP for the year 2025-26 stand cancelled due to non receipt of any bid. Fresh tender notices for the said works will be floated shortly.

Sd/-  
(D. KAMAN)  
Superintending Engineer, PWD (R&B),  
Diphu Circle-I, Diphu

IPRD/KA/2026-27/13

No. DDB/15<sup>th</sup> FC/2025-26/700

### SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Dated :19/05/2026

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & twenty five) only with a validity period of 180 Days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered Contractors of Class-II and Class-I(A,B, & C) category of Assam PWD(Roads & Building) and BTC, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under 15<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission (Tied Grant) for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26 as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 12.00 Noon on 12/06/2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 3.00 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of works	Tender Amount (Approx)	Cost of Tender Paper	Time of Completion of Work
1.	Construction of Community Toilet at Paschim Ambari village under 15 <sup>th</sup> FC (Tied Grant) for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26.	Rs. 11,00,000.00	Rs.500/-	3(three) Months from the date of issue of F.W.O.
2.	Construction of Community Toilet at No 3 Jopadong village under 15 <sup>th</sup> FC (Tied Grant) for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26.	Rs. 11,00,000.00	Rs.500/-	Do

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 21/05/2026 to 12/06/2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Demand Draft/Banker's Cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC Kokrajhar, payable at Kokrajhar.

Sd/-Block Dev. Officer  
Dhamdhama Dev. Block  
Baganpara.

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/291

## Relegation fight, Salah's last game and Guardiola's likely exit as Premier League reaches finale



**LONDON, May 21:** The Premier League will say goodbye to West Ham or Tottenham on Sunday. Mohamed Salah and Bernardo Silva, too. Likely Pep Guardiola as well.

Emotions are sure to run high in the final round of a season that has already delivered a relatively new champion — Arsenal had won the title since 2004 before clinching it on Tuesday — but still has plenty of stories to tell when all 10 games are played concurrently.

Like which of two recent winners of European competitions — 2023 Conference League champion West Ham or 2025 Europa League champion Tottenham — will be the final team to drop into the Championship, joining Wolverhampton and Burnley in getting relegated.

West Ham has it all to do to maintain its 14-year top-flight status.

The team that plays in the 68,000-capacity Olympic Stadium in east London occupies third-to-last place — the final relegation spot — and is two points behind Tottenham with an inferior goal difference of 12.

West Ham must, therefore, beat Leeds at home and also needs Tottenham to lose at home to Everton in north London.

Everton has collected more points away than at home this season and Spurs have won only once at home in the league since the opening weekend, so all is not lost for West Ham.

Tottenham being relegated would be a huge development for English soccer. Spurs have been an ever-present in the Premier League since the competition was rebranded in 1992 and last played in the second tier in the 1977-78 season.

**Salah's Liverpool exit turned sour**

It's not quite been the farewell that Salah might have hoped for at Liverpool.

The Egyptian winger is leaving after nine years as one of the club's greatest ever players but not on the best terms with his manager, having taken an indirect swing at Arne Slot in a social media post last weekend when he said Liverpool needed to recover its identity and "go back to being the heavy metal attacking team that opponents fear."

This latest public swipe came five months after he spoke of his relationship with Slot breaking down and complaining that "someone wanted me to get all of the blame" for Liverpool's shocking run of results at the time.

How Slot deals with this will be interesting. Salah will want a big send-off in his final game, which is against Brentford at Anfield, but might be seen as a sign of weakness from Slot if he doesn't drop Salah for his latest outburst?

It's still a significant game for fifth-placed Liverpool, which needs a point to guarantee Champions League qualification. Bournemouth, which visits Nottingham Forest, is three points back in sixth place and has an inferior goal difference of six compared to Liverpool.

Salah has netted 257 goals in 441 games for Liverpool and is third in Liverpool's all-time scorers' list.

Guardiola's exit looks certain. Guardiola hasn't officially said he is leaving Manchester City after 10 years, but all the signs are there that his record-breaking, era-defining tenure is coming to a close.

Speaking on Tuesday after City lost the title race, Guardiola didn't dismiss widespread reports that he was stepping down at the end of the season and was going to be replaced by Enzo Maresca. Even his playful conduct in news conferences — and his willingness to speak about wider, deeper, non-soccer issues — hinted at a less burdened, less intense Guardiola, of someone potentially preparing to give up the reins.

Guardiola said he would be talking to City chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak this week before making his decision. An emotional guy, Guardiola is guaranteed to prompt tears at Etihad Stadium if City's home match against Aston Villa is his farewell.

**Silva and Stones also departing**

Also saying goodbye at the Etihad will be Silva and John Stones, two cornerstones and emblems of the trophy-laden Guardiola era who have confirmed their City exits.

These are also the final Premier League games in charge for Andoni Iraola at Bournemouth and Oliver Glasner at Crystal Palace, which hosts newly crowned champion Arsenal. Arsenal's players will be getting their hands on the trophy at Selhurst Park.

**Bournemouth could reach Champions League**

Four years after promotion to the Premier League, Bournemouth — with its tiny 11,300-seat stadium and about-to-depart coach — could seal a fairytale place in the Champions League.

It will need a combination of results to do so, however.

Bournemouth is in sixth place and that finishing position will be enough to get Champions League qualification this season if Aston Villa — the newly crowned Europa League champion — finishes in fifth place.

For Villa to drop from fourth to fifth and Liverpool to climb from fifth to fourth, Villa needs to lose to Man City and Liverpool has to beat Brentford. Bournemouth then needs to get a point at Nottingham Forest to secure sixth place. (AP)

# RCB seek top-place finish as SRH chase Qualifier 1 berth

**HYDERABAD, May 21:** Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Sunrisers Hyderabad will both be eyeing a top-two finish when they square off in their final IPL league match here on Friday.

RCB currently sit atop the points table with 18 points and the best net run rate (NRR) of 1.065 among the 10 teams. A victory on Friday would guarantee them a first-place finish and two opportunities to reach the final.

Sunrisers Hyderabad, meanwhile, are placed third with 16 points from 13 matches, level with Gujarat Titans but behind on NRR. SRH have an NRR of 0.350 compared to GT's 0.400 and their best chance of breaking into the top two would be to beat RCB convincingly and hope Chennai Super Kings defeat GT.

RCB have once again enjoyed an outstanding campaign under skipper Rajat Patidar, blending explosive batting with disciplined bowling to emerge as title contenders for the second successive season.

The talismanic Virat Kohli has continued to redefine consistency at the top of the order, collecting 542 runs from 13 matches, while Devdutt Padikkal has also enjoyed a good season.

The experienced pace duo of Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Josh Hazlewood has also played a pivotal role in RCB's success. Bhuvneshwar has been among the leading wicket-takers this season, making the new ball talk regularly, while Hazlewood has delivered impactful spells at crucial moments.



Krunal Pandya too has impressed with his all-round value, troubling batters with subtle variations. Leg-spinner Suyash Sharma and all-rounder Romario Shepherd have also done their bit.

RCB start as favourites against an inconsistent SRH outfit, which appeared to have rediscovered momentum when they won five matches on the trot before suffering two defeats in their last four outings.

SRH have one of the most destructive

batting line-ups in the competition, with Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Ishan Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen capable of dismantling any bowling attack on their day.

However, inconsistency with the bat has hurt them at critical junctures. Their batting failures were the reason behind their recent defeats and the former champions will hope to iron out those lapses heading into the knock out stage.

On the positive side, SRH have drawn confidence from skipper Pat Cummins' leadership and the emergence of exciting young fast bowlers.

Sri Lankan pacer Eshan Malinga has been one of the revelations of the season, consistently delivering breakthroughs and economical spells under pressure.

Cummins himself has added greater intensity and control to the bowling unit since returning from injury midway through the tournament, providing SRH both tactical clarity and a cutting edge with the ball.

**The Squads:**

**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Pat Cummins (c), Salil Arora, Travis Head, Ishan Kishan (wk), Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Aniket Verma, Abhishek Sharma, RS Anshu, Harsh Dubey, Krains Fuletra, Liam Livingstone, Kamindu Mendis, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Harshal Patel, Shivang Kumar, Amit Kumar, Gerald Coetzee, Praful Hinge, Dilshan Madushanka, Eshan Malinga, Sakib Hussain, Onkar Tarmale, Jaydev Unadkat, Zeeshan Ansari.

**Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** Rajat Patidar (c), Tim David, Virat Kohli, Devdutt Padikkal, Philip Salt, Jitesh Sharma, Jacob Bethell, Krunal Pandya, Romario Shepherd, Abhinandan Singh, Josh Hazlewood, Rasikh Salam Dar, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Suyash Sharma, Swapnil Singh, Nuwan Thushara, Venkatesh Iyer, Jacob Duffy, Mangesh Yadav, Jordan Cox, Vicky Ostwal, Vihan Malhotra, Kanishk Chouhan, Satvik Deswal. Match starts 7.30 IST. (PTI)

## Anukul Roy added to India A squad for Sri Lanka tri-series

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** All-rounder Anukul Roy was on Thursday added to the India A squad for the upcoming tri-series in Sri Lanka, replacing Harsh Dubey who received a maiden call-up to the senior Test and ODI squads.

A left-handed batsman and a left-arm spin bowler, Roy has represented Jharkhand in domestic cricket and plays for Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL.

"The men's selection committee has added Anukul Roy to the India A squad for the upcoming tri-series in Sri Lanka. He replaces Harsh Dubey, who has received his maiden call-up to India's Test and ODI squads for the upcoming IDFC First Bank home series against Afghanistan," the BCCI said in a statement.

Roy first rose to prominence as the joint-highest wicket-taker (14 wickets) during India's victorious 2018 ICC Under-19 World Cup campaign. (PTI)

## I used to stand on road just to watch CSK team bus pass by our school: Sudharsan

**NEW DELHI, May 21:** Young batter Sai Sudharsan grew up idolizing Chennai Super Kings and used to stand on the road just to watch the team bus pass by his school. Interestingly, that emotional connect with the hometown franchise has turned into a special love for scoring runs against it.

A part of Gujarat Titans franchise since its inception in 2022, the 24-year-old left-hander has evolved into one of the most dependable batters in the IPL. He scored 362 runs in just eight games at an average of 51.71 and a strike rate of 141.40 in the 2023 edition.

He smashed a fluent 47-ball 96 in the 2023 final against CSK, an innings that underlined both his temperament and ability to deliver on the big stage. He then scored his maiden IPL century, also against CSK, in 2024 in Ahmedabad.

"It wasn't a conscious decision; I think it was the grace of God, and it came at the right time. But it's always special to spend time in the middle, especially when I play



against CSK because, whatever may be said and done, there's a deep emotional connection with CSK for me," Sudharsan said about the IPL 2024 century.

"I grew up watching CSK play. We used to stand on the road just to watch the team bus pass by our school. Those are fantastic memories. I'm grateful to God that I've been able to deliver some memorable performances against CSK," he said while speaking on 'JioStar'.

He scaled greater heights in IPL 2025, amassing 759 runs at an average of 54.21 and a strike rate of 156.17, clinching the Orange Cap. So far this season, he has scored 554 runs from 13 matches at an av-

erage of 46.17 and strike rate of 157.83 with the help of one century and six half centuries.

"It's actually very interesting. I don't look at the past anymore, to be honest, because it's already gone. What matters is the present... whatever I've done yesterday doesn't serve a purpose for me today. I have to start the grind again from today."

"And when tomorrow comes, I'll start fresh again. So, I don't worry about or dwell on the last season. I try to take the learnings from it and remain as fresh as possible for the coming season or the coming day."

He scored exactly 100 off 58 balls in GT's match against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on April 24 in Bengaluru. He shared 128 runs with captain Shubman Gill for the opening wicket.

On his partnership with Gill, he said, "Shubman is such a mastermind. He understands the game so well and is tactically very strong. It gives you a sense of freedom to do whatever you want because you know Shubman is there." (PTI)

## Nitish Reddy unlocks pace potential: All-rounder bumps up pace to increase cross-format utility

**BENGALURU, May 21:** When England speedster Jofra Archer became the template for refining Nitish Kumar Reddy's bowling action, the results were bound to be exhilarating.

Nitish has shown improved accuracy and a notable spike in his pace during the ongoing edition of IPL — from a trundler bowling at late 120 kmph to someone who can touch late 130 to early 140 clicks, his transformation with the ball has not gone unnoticed. Chief selector Ajit Agarkar recently highlighted the all-rounder's improved bowling while explaining his inclusion in India's squads for the upcoming one-off Test and ODI series against Afghanistan.

"We have seen a lot of progress over the last few months with regards to his bowling. He will be a critical part of our team if he keeps developing, especially leading to 2027 ODI WC." Agarkar had said, indicating that Nitish is not merely a like-for-like backup option for Hardik Pandya.

Nitish's transformation will certainly add a lot more teeth to India's bowling attack and how has

he done it?

"It's the understanding that fast bowling is more about the brain than muscle and the brain can be trained quickly by waking it up. Nitish was a bit asleep in his bowling earlier. All I did was just to wake him up by training methods that he hadn't done before," Steffan Jones, a renowned pace bowling coach from England, told PTI.

So, what were those training methods?

"It was a seven-day session and skill requires frequency of practice. So, we made sure that every ball he bowled was flat out. We minimised the fatigue, because when you're tired, you're not working on speed. But it was multiple exposures of moving quickly, of bowling quickly," said Jones.

"That was the training — lots of bowling with heavy and light balls. I also kept Varun Aaron (SRH bowling coach) in the loop with all of it because I coached Varun as well for three weeks during his playing days."

Jones, who earlier worked with Rajasthan Royals as bowling coach, said some essential

tweaks were to be made in Nitish's action and run-up to gain the optimum results.

"Based on the data I did with him on the Pitch-wolf app, which is called a 1080 sprint, I told him that he needs to run in faster, he needs to run in from further back, because he's a hip-dominant bowler, and relies on linear momentum from his run-up."

"He needed to run in straighter, not on a curve, and then we improved his back foot contact to get him off back foot quickly, which in turn has meant he's now blocking better on his front leg, which doesn't collapse as much," explained the Englishman. Jones said he used Archer's action as a case in point to bring more balance to Nitish's delivery posture.

"The big one was his bowling circle, if you notice how he now brings his arm up high, and I told him he needs to bowl more like Archer. So, he now brings the ball up past his head, which creates a larger bowling circle, and it's called a centripetal acceleration. He now has a bigger lever in his bowling arm." (PTI)

## Ashmita Chaliha moves to quarterfinals of Malaysia Masters



**KUALA LUMPUR, May 21:** Ashmita Chaliha moved to the women's singles quarterfinals, emerging as the country's lone surviving contender after the rest of the Indian challenge came to an end at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 tournament here on Thursday.

Ashmita registered a comfortable 21-13, 21-16 victory over Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei in the pre-quarterfinals, wrapping up the contest in under 30 minutes with a composed all-round display.

She will next face eighth seed Line Højmark Kjærskeld of Denmark in the last-eight stage.

Kjærskeld advanced after defeating India's Malvika Bansod, who squandered a one-game advantage to go down 21-16, 8-21, 15-21 in a 59-minute battle.

In another women's singles clash, reigning Thailand Masters champion Devika Sihag was outclassed by top seed Chen Yufei of China, who sealed a 21-16, 21-13 win in 36 minutes.

India's mixed doubles pair of Sathwik Kanapuram and Radhika Sharma also bowed out after a hard-fought 12-21, 25-27 defeat to the American duo of Presley Smith and Jennie Gai.

In men's doubles, the Indian combination of Hariharan Am-sakaruman and MR Arjun exited following a 14-21, 15-21 loss to China's Hu Ke Yuan and Lin Xiang Yi.

India had endured a disappointing outing on Wednesday as well, with the likes of Lakshya Sen and HS Prannoy crashing out of the tournament. (PTI)

# Varun playing through 'pain' out of 'desperation' to contribute for team: Watson

**KOLKATA, May 21:** Kolkata Knight Riders assistant coach Shane Watson has hailed ace India mystery spinner Varun Chakravarty for continuing to play in the IPL through "pain" after suffering a hairline fracture in his left foot.

Watson said Chakravarty "desperately" wants to contribute in KKR's fight to stay alive in the IPL playoff race.

Chakravarty sustained the injury while fielding during KKR's away match against Delhi Capitals on May 8. He missed their next game against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on May 13, with head coach Abhishek Nayyar later confirming the fracture.

But with KKR needing to win remaining matches after the RCB loss, Chakravarty returned for the successive games against Gujarat Titans and Mumbai Indians despite appearing not fully fit.

"Well, I'm not exactly sure where he is on his rehab journey at the moment. All I do know is he's obviously playing through a bit of pain at the moment, which just shows how brave he is, how much he wants to be here to contribute for KKR, and he's still bowling beautifully," Watson said after KKR's four-wicket win over Mumbai Indians here on Wednesday.

The India T20 spin spearhead had endured a poor run since the T20 World Cup triumph in March. He went wicketless and leaked 105 runs in his first three IPL matches -- a slump that badly hurt KKR's campaign early on.

However, Chakravarty rediscovered his rhythm in the business end of the tournament, taking 10 wickets in four matches to fuel KKR's late resurgence.

"It's been brilliant to see the turnaround from the first few games of the season to the impact he's been able to consistently have every single game," Watson said.

"We are so lucky to have someone with Varun's skill and also his desperation to be here and want to play for KKR."

After enduring a six-match winless streak, KKR have now won six of their last seven matches to keep their slender playoff hopes alive heading into Sunday's last match against Delhi Capitals.

But Chakravarty was visibly struggling in the last two games, hobbling in pain while continuing to bowl against Gujarat Titans on May 16 and again against Mumbai Indians on Wednesday.

He has gone wicketless in the last three matches, conceding 47 runs against GT and 28 against MI.



Watson hailed his commitment, saying Chakravarty could easily have opted out. "Because with the pain that he's managing, he could have easily just said, 'I don't want to be a part of this, I'm just going to go and rest it.'"

"So we're very fortunate that he's all in and he's done a brilliant job again tonight. Obviously an unfortunate collision with Angkrish Raghuvanshi, but he did a brilliant job again tonight. So we're very grateful for everything that he continues to do for KKR."

BCCI has taken note of Chakravarty's injury, and the fact that he has continued to play despite it, but secretary Devajit Saikia has said with IPL going on, they cannot "interfere too much."

"Had it been the Indian team situation, our control would have been more."

India are scheduled to play seven T20Is in Ireland and England during their UK tour beginning on June 26.

**Raghuvanshi suffers injury**  
KKR also suffered another injury scare

during Wednesday's match, again involving Chakravarty.

While attempting a return catch off Tilak Varma in the 11th over, Chakravarty collided with wicket-keeper-batter Angkrish Raghuvanshi, who had sprinted all the way from behind the stumps towards the non-striker's end in an attempt to complete the catch.

Chakravarty initially held on to the ball but spilled it on impact.

Raghuvanshi later walked off the field in the 14th over and did not come out to bat.

"Angkrish, unfortunately... he ran a long way to try and get that catch. Unfortunately, the collision he had with Varun Chakravarty meant he ended up getting some neck pain, a bit of dizziness and a headache within a couple of overs as well," Watson said.

Under sticky conditions at Eden Gardens, batting was difficult for both sides. KKR's modest 148-run chase was far from straightforward as they kept losing wickets regularly.

Veteran Manish Pandey, finally getting his first batting opportunity of the season and promoted to No. 3 in Raghuvanshi's absence, set up the chase with a 33-ball 45, while Rovman Powell chipped in with 40 off 30 balls as KKR won by four

wickets with seven balls to spare.

**Pandey at his best**

Watson was especially impressed with Pandey's batting and said the 36-year-old looked to be in the best touch in many years.

"I've worked with him previously at Delhi Capitals for a couple of seasons, and seeing him throughout the season, this is the best I've seen him bat over the last few years," said Watson.

"The positions that he's getting into, the freedom with how he's playing, the practice matches and centre wickets that he's been batting in as well -- he's been batting beautifully."

Watson also highlighted Pandey's overall value to the squad.

"He's obviously a super experienced guy. He's an amazing fielder. He adds so much energy to our group, whether it's off the field, on the field, around the group. Those types of people, you give anything to have them in your squad."

Praising Pandey's fitness and work ethic, Watson added: "I know when I was at his age, I certainly wasn't moving anything like he's moving in the field."

"He's still one of our fittest and one of our best fielders. We saw the incredible catch he took against RCB." (PTI)