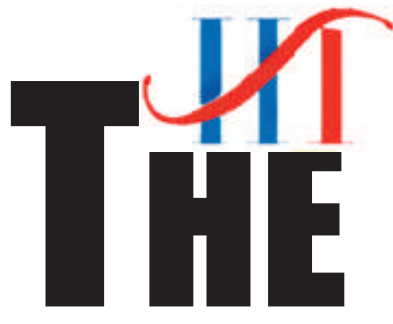




- Shaky ceasefire in Iran war challenged again as Kuwait faces a missile attack
- Israel strikes Beirut southern suburb ahead of crucial Washington talks
- Resolve water disputes through cooperation: PM Modi to states
- Pradhan, Rahul engage in verbal war over CBSE exam row



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Birendra Baishya elected head of joint panel of Parl on salary of MPs

NEW DELHI, May 28: Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Rajya Sabha member Birendra Prasad Baishya has been elected as chairperson of the Joint Committee on Salaries and Allowances of Members of Parliament for 2026-27.

Constituted to frame rules under the Salaries and Allowances of Members of Parliament Act, 1954, the joint committee comprises 10 members from Lok Sabha and five from Rajya Sabha.

"As intimated by the Lok Sabha Secretariat, the Joint Committee on Salaries and Allowances of Members of Parliament (2026-27) unanimously elected Birendra Prasad Baishya, Member, Rajya Sabha as Chairperson of the Joint Committee at their sitting," a Rajya Sabha Secretariat notification said.

The committee is empowered to make, after consultation with the government, rules on matters of salary, allowances and pension of members of Parliament. (PTI)

India, China hold 'constructive' talks on LAC Agreement on border peace key to normalise ties

NEW DELHI, May 28: India and China held "constructive" and "forward-looking" talks on the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, noting that maintaining border peace and tranquillity enabled progress in the normalisation of overall relations.

The two sides discussed various aspects of the border situation during a meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) in Beijing on Wednesday.

"The discussions were constructive and forward looking," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, a day after the talks.

India and China rolled out a series of measures in the last over one year to rebuild their relationship after it came under severe strain following the deadly Galwan Valley clashes in 2020 and the subsequent military face-off that lasted



for over four years.

"The two sides reviewed the situation in the India-China border areas. They expressed satisfaction with the progress made in maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas, which has enabled progress towards gradual normalisation of bilateral relations," the MEA said.

The two sides also agreed to work together to make "substantive preparation" for the next meeting of the Special Representatives (SR) which is to be held in China.

In August last year, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held Special Representatives dialogue in New Delhi that produced

a number of outcomes to maintain peace along the border.

"The two sides discussed issues pertaining to delimitation, border management, mechanism building and cross-border cooperation," the MEA said on the WMCC meeting.

It said the Indian side stressed an early meeting of the next expert-level mechanism on trans-border rivers.

"Both sides agreed to maintain regular exchanges and contacts at the diplomatic and military levels through mechanisms including those that were agreed as part of outcomes of 24th Special Representative talks," the MEA said in a statement.

The Indian delegation was led by Sujit Ghosh, joint secretary (East Asia) in the MEA while the Chinese delegation was led by Hou Yanqi, director general of the Boundary and Oceanic Affairs Department (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Student body holds meet in Karbi Anglong NSF resolves to strengthen Naga unity



HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 28: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) at its 2nd federal assembly held at Jongpha village (Western Rengma) in Karbi Anglong district of Assam on Thursday unanimously resolved to 're-strengthen Naga unity and collective identity'.

The meeting, hosted by the Rengma Students' Union (RSU), called upon all sections of Naga so-

Govt exploring option of using IAF for transportation of NEET retest papers

NEW DELHI, May 28: The government is exploring the possibility of using the Indian Air Force (IAF) for transportation of NEET-UG papers to ensure foolproof conduct of the retest on June 21, official sources said on Thursday.

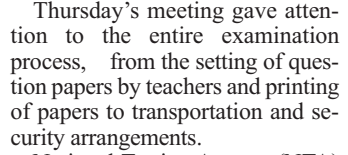
The option was explored at a high-level meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and attended by Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia here.

The ministers and senior officials discussed whether IAF aircraft could be used for transportation of the NEET-UG test papers, the sources said.

However, as of now, no final decision has been taken and the option will be placed before Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a final view, they said.

The prime minister is believed to have been personally monitoring the preparations for the June 21 retest and he is being updated on every details related to the examination process, the sources said.

3 dead in SUV-truck collision in Gauripur



RANGIA, May 28: Three people were killed when their SUV collided head-on with a truck in Kamrup district of Assam on Thursday, police said.

The accident took place in Gauripur near North Guwahati, they said.

"The truck was coming on the wrong side of the road. An SUV coming at a high speed collided head-on with the truck, turning the vehicle into a mangled heap of metal," a police officer said.

All three occupants of the SUV died, he said.

The deceased have been identified as Parth Pratim Burman, Ranjit Dey and Karuna Bezbarua, police said.

The driver of the truck fled from the scene, leaving the vehicle at the spot, they said. (PTI)

EAM Jaishankar meets EU foreign ministers in Cyprus to discuss shared interests

NICOSIA, May 28: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday attended an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Cyprus and discussed "practical collaborations" and "shared interests" in the emerging multipolar order.

Jaishankar arrived in Cyprus on Wednesday to participate in the meeting being held in Limassol amid the West Asia conflict and other geopolitical issues concerning Europe and the wider region.

"Our partnership with the EU and the region continues to deepen across a wide range of domains. Discussed opportunities, practical collaborations and our shared interests in the emerging multipolar order," Jaishankar said in a social media post.

Jaishankar also called on the President of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides and conveyed greetings from President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The recent State Visit saw significant outcomes, taking our partnership to its next phase. Assured the President of strong follow up," Jaishankar posted on X.

India and Cyprus unveiled a five-year roadmap for defence cooperation last week during the visit of President Christodoulides to India.

Jaishankar also discussed the situation in West Asia, as well as India's interests in the Mediterranean, with President Christodoulides.

He also held a meeting with Jose Manuel Albares, who is the foreign minister of the EU and minister of cooperation in the Spanish government, on the sidelines of the Gymnich.

"Discussed further steps for our trade, technology, defence and P2P ties. Appreciate his views on ongoing global and regional developments," he said in a social media post.

The Gymnich meetings are informal gatherings of EU foreign ministers, held periodically to discuss major geo-economic challenges, security and strategic matters.

The minister also held quick meetings with the foreign ministers of the Netherlands, Poland, France, Slovakia and Estonia, and Poland's Deputy Prime Minister Radoslaw Sikorski on the sidelines of the Gymnich.

Earlier on Wednesday, Jaishankar held a meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart Andrii Sybiba and discussed the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, battlefield developments and efforts to achieve a "comprehensive and lasting peace".

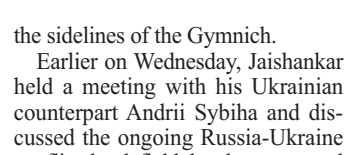
"As Europe steps up its responsibility, we would welcome India's strong voice and input," Sybiba said in a social media post after the meeting.

He also discussed India-EU cooperation with Vice-President of the European Commission Kaja Kallas on Wednesday.

"Pleasure to meet EU HRVP @kajakallas this evening. Our discussions covered India-EU cooperation and the situation in West Asia/Middle East," he posted on X after the meeting.

The engagements came as India and the European Union concluded a landmark Free Trade Agreement (FTA) earlier this year, marking a new chapter in their economic and strategic (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

New species of gecko discovered in Assam



GUWAHATI, May 28: A new species of gecko - *Cyrtodactylus Bapme* - has been discovered in Goalpara district of Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday.

"Nature continues to reveal new wonders from Assam. The first confirmed record of the bent-toed gecko (*Cyrtodactylus bapme*) in Assam from Urapad Beel highlights the extraordinary biodiversity of our ecosystems support," he said in a post on X.

The government's continued conservation efforts are helping preserve these fragile habitats where diverse species continue to thrive, Sarma said. (PTI)

Goa's maritime infrastructure discussed

PANAJI, May 28: Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has met Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal during his visit to New Delhi, and the two leaders reviewed initiatives aimed at strengthening the state's maritime infrastructure.

Sawant met the Union minister in the national capital on Wednesday.

"Reviewed various initiatives to strengthen the beautiful coastal state's maritime infrastructure. Modi government is committed to harnessing the true potential of our coastal regions for national growth," he said in a post on X.

Earlier on Wednesday, Sawant also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah during his Delhi visit. (PTI)

Two Indian peacekeepers to be honoured posthumously on International Peacekeepers Day

UNITED NATIONS, May 28: Two Indian peacekeepers will be honoured posthumously by the United Nations for their ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty on the International Day of UN Peacekeepers.

Lance Havildar Harbhajan Singh, who served with the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and Naib Subedar Sujit Kumar Pradhan, who was deployed with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), will be posthumously honoured by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres with the prestigious Dag Hammarskjold Medal for their sacrifice in the line of duty.

Additionally, Guterres will present the 2025 Military Gender Advo-

cate of the Year award to Major Abhilasha Barak of India, who serves on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), honouring her outreach efforts with women and girls during her deployment in the West Asian nation.

The world commemorates the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers annually on May 29, paying homage to the fallen Blue Helmets who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving in UN peacekeeping missions across the world.

The UN Headquarters in New York will observe the Day on June 5, when the Secretary-General will lay a wreath to honour the men and women who served in UN peacekeeping and lost their lives in the cause of peace, the UN said in a statement.

Guterres will then preside over a solemn ceremony at which the Dag Hammarskjold Medal will be awarded posthumously to 68 military, police and civilian peacekeepers, who paid the ultimate price in the line of duty, including 59 who died last year.

India is the second largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping.

It currently contributes more than 4,200 military and police personnel - including 155 women - to UN peace operations in Abyei, the Central African Republic, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, the Middle East, Somalia, South Sudan and Western Sahara.

Nearly 180 Indian peacekeepers have made the supreme sacrifice in the line of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Two suspected ULFA-I cadres arrested in Unnao

UNNAO (UP), May 28: Police have arrested two men allegedly linked to the banned militant outfit United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent, or ULFA-I, here, with the security agencies launching a probe into their local networks and possible hideouts, officials said on Thursday.

The arrested duo has been identified as Noor Mohammad from Saharanpur and Mohammad Subhan from Kanpur, who were living in a rented accommodation in the Budhwari area of Unnao for nearly six months while allegedly concealing their identities, they said. A team of Assam Police, assisted by the local police and surveillance units, traced and arrested the duo, the officials said.

According to Assam Police, the accused (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

NEC spends ₹ 339 crore on development projects in Mizoram

AIZAWL, May 28: The North Eastern Council (NEC) has invested ₹ 339.06 crore in development projects across Mizoram during the 15th Finance Commission period (2022-26).

According to an official statement issued on Thursday, the expenditure was made under the Schemes of NEC (SoNEC) and the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS-Roads) for development and strengthening of healthcare, education, connectivity, tourism, agriculture, and livelihood sectors.

Under the SoNEC programme alone, the NEC spent ₹ 123.83 crore on a wide range of projects, which covered medical and veterinary facilities, market infrastructure, educational institutions,

cultural centres, sports infrastructure, and community development works, it said.

The Council also prioritised agriculture and allied sectors by supporting wet rice cultivation, potato seed production, fisheries, pigery, poultry, livestock development, areca nut farming, and passion fruit processing.

It further supported preservation and promotion of Mizoram's cultural and natural heritage through the establishment of cultural heritage centres, tourism circuits, ecological parks, and other cultural infrastructure aimed at boosting eco-tourism and cultural tourism in the state.

In the road sector, six projects worth ₹ 277.99 crore were taken up under (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Diphu Muslims refrain from cow sacrifice Community opts for goats and sheep following CM's appeal to maintain communal harmony

HT Bureau
DIPHU, May 28: Muslims in Diphu town joined the global Islamic community in celebrating Eid-ul-Adha with prayers, charity and community gatherings on Thursday, while voluntarily refraining from cow sacrifice this year following an appeal by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Instead of cows, devotees offered goats and sheep during the festival, popularly known as the festival of sacrifice, in consideration of communal harmony and the sentiments of other communities.

Eid-ul-Adha commemorates the devotion of Prophet Ibrahim, who, according to Islamic belief, was willing to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah's command before a ram was provided in his place.

The festival is observed on the 10th day of Dhul Hijjah, the final month of the Islamic calendar.

Special Eid prayers were offered at Diphu Zame Masjid from 8:30 am, where Alhaj Maulana Giasuddin Qasimi led the congregation and prayed for peace and harmony in the

Technology converts methane and carbon dioxide into clean fuel through biological process IIT-G, Hyderabad firm partner for commercial bio-methanol production

GUWAHATI, May 28: Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati on Thursday said it joined hands with Kaashyap Cleantech Innovations for commercial production of bio-methanol.

To advance sustainable energy and greenhouse gas utilisation, the IIT-Guwahati signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Hyderabad-based Kaashyap Cleantech Innovations Pvt Ltd for large-scale commercialisation of bio-methanol production technology based on chemoautotrophic bacteria.

"The technology enables the biological conversion of methane and carbon dioxide, two of the most potent greenhouse gases, into bio-methanol, a versatile, liquid fuel and industrially relevant solvent," IIT-Guwahati said in a statement.

Methane is a greenhouse gas 27-30 times more potent than carbon dioxide in terms of global warming potential.

While converting methane and carbon dioxide into liquid fuels offers a dual benefit of emission reduction and

Technology converts methane and carbon dioxide into clean fuel through biological process IIT-G, Hyderabad firm partner for commercial bio-methanol production

renewable energy generation, existing chemical methods are energy-intensive, expensive, and produce toxic by-products, severely limiting their scalability.

IIT Guwahati researchers have addressed this challenge through a fully biological and catalyst-free process, the statement said.

"The research team, led by Prof Debashish Das and Krishna Kalyani Sahoo (PhD scholar), Department of Bio-sciences and Bioengineering, IIT Guwahati, has developed a two-stage bioprocess based on a chemoautotrophic biocatalyst that operates under mild conditions," it added.



The bio-methanol produced has been tested as a diesel-blended fuel in a four-stroke diesel engine, yielding significant environmental and performance benefits like up to 87 per cent reduction in carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, hydrogen sulphide and smoke emissions compared to pure diesel.

"Diesel-methanol blends outperformed pure diesel in fuel consumption, energy efficiency and engine performance, while maintaining similar mechanical efficiency. Bio-methanol serves as a precursor for producing formaldehyde, acetic acid and other high-value industrial chemicals," IIT-Guwahati said.

Speaking about the technology, IIT Guwahati Director Devendra Jalihal said that the institute is committed towards addressing sustainable development challenges.

"The technology presents an eco-friendly and cost-efficient avenue for clean fuel generation while supporting efforts (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Finance ministry to conduct factory visits for ground-level inputs ahead of Budget planning

NEW DELHI, May 28: In a first, the Union finance ministry has launched a nationwide programme of field visits to manufacturing units and industrial clusters as the government seeks ground-level industry feedback to support economic policymaking and manage challenges arising from the ongoing West Asia crisis.

The initiative, led by the Department of Economic Affairs in the Finance Ministry, will involve senior DEA officials visiting large, medium and small manufacturing units, as well as externally aided projects, to assess operational and policy challenges across sectors.

According to an official communication reviewed by PTI, the visits aim to provide direct insights into infrastructure bottlenecks, regulatory hurdles, supply chain disruptions, access to finance, skill gaps and technology adoption issues affecting businesses.

An email seeking comment from the finance ministry did not receive any immediate response.

Despite strong public capital expenditure and resilience in some sectors, private investment activity in India has remained uneven amid global economic uncertainty and tightening financial conditions.

The ongoing West Asia crisis has added to industry concerns by driving up crude oil prices, weakening the rupee and widening current account deficit, while also disrupting supply chains and increasing freight and input costs for businesses dependent on imports

ICAI to host Mega CA Students Conference 'Metaballo Vista 2026' in Guwahati

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 28: The Board of Studies (Operations) of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) will organise a two-day Mega CA Students Conference titled "Metaballo Vista 2026" on May 30 and 31 at the GMCH Auditorium, Bhangagarh, Guwahati.

The conference is being organised under the leadership of Rajesh Sharma, Gyan Chand Mishra and Ravi Kumar Patwa.

The event is being hosted by the Guwahati Branch of EIRC led by Anjani Kumar Mundhra and Nitika Bagaria.

The conference will feature four knowledge sessions over two days, during which selected CA students will present papers on subjects including accounting and auditing standards, artificial intelligence and technology, taxation and capital markets.

Experts chairing the sessions will also share their professional insights with participants.

The best three paper presenters will be awarded during the conference.

A special interactive session with the Chairman of BOS (Operations) ICAI and the Programme Director has also been scheduled.

In addition, four skill-up sessions will be conducted on themes such as "Articleship Blueprint - From Article to Leader", "Future Ready CA - Innovation, Curiosity and Career Vision", "Roadmap to Public Services through the Journey of CA" and "The CA Journey - Mindset, Grit and Growth".

Swati Tejawat informed that more than 500 students and Chartered Accountants from across Assam are expected to participate in the conference, along with distinguished invitees from different parts of the country.

Piyush Birmiwala stated that the conference would provide aspiring Chartered Accountants with an excellent platform for academic exchange, skill enhancement and networking opportunities.

NAME CHANGE

I Minmoy Sur S/o Tapan Sur residing at Dharammala, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam 782460 shall henceforth be known as Mrinmoy Sur as declared before the Notary Public Diphu Court (Karbi Anglong/Assam) vide affidavit No. IN-As37417199196031Y dated 25 May 2026.

Minmoy Sur and Mrinmoy Sur both are the same and single person.



and global trade flows.

To get a better grip on the extent of the issue, the DEA wants to complement macro-level analysis with granular, ground level insights. And so teams of up to five members, led by either additional secretary, joint secretary or a director in the ministry, will undertake 2-3 days of field visits across different industrial clusters.

Under the programme guidelines, teams will be required to cover manufacturing, infrastructure, employment and research sectors, as well as engage with at least two startups during each visit.

The initiative is designed to strengthen evidence-based policymaking by incorporating real-time field inputs into economic policy decisions and upcoming Union

Budget proposals, the DEA said.

An April 17, 2026 office order issued by the department said the evolving global economic environment required "structured, field-based assessment exercises" to generate first-hand insights for more targeted policy interventions.

Detailed sectoral reports from the visits are to be submitted to the secretary of economic affairs within 10 days of completion to support policy formulation and implementation reviews.

Industry body Confederation of Indian Industry has been asked to facilitate interactions between companies and visiting officials, with businesses encouraged to share policy recommendations and operational concerns with the teams.

The visits are intended to facilitate direct interaction with industry and to better understand operational realities, including infrastructure constraints, regulatory challenges, access to finance, skill requirements and technology adoption.

The initiative aims to strengthen evidence-based policymaking through structured, field-based assessment exercises, according to the DEA order.

It aims to bridge policy gaps and improving design and delivery. It also aims at enhancing policy precision, ensuring all divisions of DEA actively contribute to economic policy formulation, fostering a more integrated and holistic approach.

The move also looks to systematically capture sector-specific operational challenges, including infrastructure bottlenecks, regulatory hurdles, supply chain constraints, access to finance, skill gaps, technology adoption issues which will assess the effectiveness of existing policies and schemes, including their implementation challenges at the ground level.

This initiative, the DEA said, will institutionalise a feedback loop between field realities and policy design, ensuring that policy interventions are both responsive and targeted.

Detailed sectoral report are to be submitted within the stipulated timeline to support policy formulation and the upcoming Union Budget proposals. (PTI)

Asian shares decline, oil prices up more than USD 1 after US strikes on Iran



HONG KONG, May 28: Asian shares mostly declined Thursday following what the US military said were defensive strikes against Iran.

Oil prices gained more than USD 1 a barrel after having dropped sharply a day before US futures inched lower.

US officials said Central Command forces shot down four Iranian one-way attack drones that posed a threat near the Strait of Hormuz. The US military also hit an Iranian ground control station in Bandar Abbas that was about to launch a fifth drone.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump asserted that Iran is "negotiating on fumes" and said November's midterm elections in the United States won't make him rush into a deal to end the nearly three-month-old conflict.

In early Asian trading, Japan's Nikkei 225 edged less than 0.1 per cent higher to 65,039.78, while the Kospi in South Korea lost 1.2 per cent to 8,126.67.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index shed 1.9 per cent to 24,855.86 and the Shanghai Composite index fell 0.3 per cent to 4,080.00.

In Australia, the S and P/ASX 200 declined 0.8 per cent to 8,646.30, while Taiwan's Taiex gained 0.6 per cent.

"Conflicting reports on the contours of a US-Iran deal dampened risks sentiments as markets grow increasingly wary about the possibility of a deal," Tan Boon Heng of Mizuho Bank in Singapore said in a commentary.

"While there is desire to maintain the ceasefire with

Airtel defends 'Priority Postpaid' service amid net neutrality concerns

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 28: Bharti Airtel has defended its newly launched "Priority Postpaid" service before a Department of Telecommunications (DoT) panel, asserting that the 5G network slicing-based offering does not violate net neutrality norms and does not degrade service quality for prepaid users.

According to Airtel's submission before the Committee on Communications and Information Technology, the company stated that restricting the use of mainstream 5G features for innovative services could adversely impact the future potential of 6G technology in the country.

"Priority Postpaid is implemented in a content-neutral manner and is fully consistent with the existing TRAI and DoT framework. There is no blocking, throttling, content-specific prioritisation, zero-rating, or preferential treatment of any application," the company said in its clarification.

Airtel had launched the "Priority Postpaid" plans on

both Iran and (asterisk)the US toning down language on renewed attacks and persisting with indirect channels of communication, it remains remarkably hard to envisage how a compromise can be reached on key issues," he said.

On Wednesday, US stocks inched to more records after oil prices declined more than 4 per cent, easing pressure on consumers and businesses worldwide.

The S and P 500 edged up by less than 0.1 per cent to 7,520.36 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 0.4 per cent, to 50,644.28. The Nasdaq composite gained 0.1 per cent to 26,674.73. All three indexes set all-time highs.

Stocks of companies with big fuel bills helped lead the way on hopes that lower oil prices will remove a big drag on their profits. Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings climbed 6.1 per cent, and United Airlines rallied 6.3 per cent. Delta Air Lines rose 3 per cent and set an all-time high.

The price for a barrel of Brent crude oil fell 4.6 per cent to USD 92.25 after the ceasefire between the United States and Iran appeared to hold despite the US military launching what it called "self-defense" strikes in southern Iran.

However, after further strikes, in early Thursday trading Brent was up USD 1.70 to USD 93.95 a barrel.

A barrel of benchmark US crude gained USD 1.68 to USD 90.36. On Wednesday, it had fallen 5.5 per cent, to settle at USD 88.68, back to where it was in mid-April.

Prices have moderated, after surging well over USD 100 a barrel, on hopes that the United States and Iran can reach an agreement to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and allow oil tankers to exit the Persian Gulf for deliveries again.

Stocks have been able to run to records despite the painful inflation and uncertainty caused by high oil prices largely because companies have reported surprisingly strong profits for the start of 2026, and the forecast is for them to continue.

In other dealings early Thursday, the US dollar rose to 159.57 Japanese yen from 159.51 yen. The euro slipped to USD 1.1611 from USD 1.1626. (AP)

May 19, promising more stable and consistent network speeds for postpaid customers even in congested areas and crowded locations.

The telecom operator further clarified that the new feature would not impact other users on the network.

"Airtel Priority feature does not degrade the quality of service for any customer, whether prepaid or postpaid," the company stated.

According to Airtel, overall 5G capacity utilisation currently stands at around 38 per cent during peak hours.

Of this, postpaid traffic accounts for nearly 4 per cent, which may rise to about 6 per cent after implementation of a dedicated virtual "slice" or tunnel for Priority Postpaid customers.

The company maintained that prepaid and non-priority users would still continue to have substantial unused network capacity available, with nearly 60 per cent headroom remaining, thereby ruling out any possibility of network degradation for regular users.

Lincoln Pharms posts ₹ 11.63 cr profit for Q4

NEW DELHI, May 28: Healthcare company Lincoln Pharmaceuticals on Thursday reported a marginal increase in profit at ₹ 11.63 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2026.

The company had posted a profit of ₹ 11.57 crore in the same period of the previous year, Lincoln Pharmaceuticals said in a statement.

Revenue from operations rose by 13.5 per cent to ₹ 183.08 crore in the quarter under review compared to ₹ 161.30 crore reported in the last quarter of FY25, it added.

For the full 2025-26 fiscal, Lincoln

Pharma reported over 6 per cent growth in consolidated net profit to ₹ 87.89 crore compared to the net profit of ₹ 82.35 crore in FY25.

Revenue from operations for FY26 was reported at ₹ 704.48 crore as compared to revenue of ₹ 645.71 crore reported in FY25, registering a growth of 9.10 per cent Y-o-Y, the statement said.

The company said its board has recommended a dividend of 18 per cent, ₹ 1.80 per share on the face value of ₹ 10 per share for the FY 2025-26. (PTI)

FSSAI issues notice to IRCTC over viral video of utensils washed in train toilet

NEW DELHI, May 28: Food regulator FSSAI on Thursday issued a notice to state-owned IRCTC, taking suo motu cognizance of a video posted on a social media platform that shows utensils being washed inside the toilet area of a train compartment, sources said.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has termed this act, if true, objectionable, as it could lead to food contamination, they added.

A source said the FSSAI has served a notice to Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd (IRCTC) citing this social media video, in which utensils are allegedly being washed inside the train toilet premises. As per the video taken by a passenger, the

train number is 12223 - LTT ERS Durgam. Utensils were being washed by catering staff or contractual persons engaged by IRCTC, as per the video.

FSSAI has sought a reply from the IRCTC on this matter at the earliest. Washing utensils in toilet areas poses serious risks of contamination and is highly objectionable from the food safety perspective, a source said. Under Schedule 4 of the Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, 2011, food business operators have to maintain hygienic processing, handling, washing and cleaning practices so as to prevent contamination of food and food contact surfaces. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

India, China hold

of the Chinese foreign ministry. Ghosh also met Liu Jinsong, director at the Chinese foreign ministry's Department of Asian Affairs. The joint secretary also made a courtesy call on Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Hong Lei. The WMCC meeting took place as India and China sought to reset their strained ties.

Following a series of diplomatic and military talks, the two sides withdrew their troops from several friction points along the LAC in eastern Ladakh.

In October 2024, the two sides signed a disengagement pact for Depsang and Demchok, the last two friction points in eastern Ladakh.

Days after the agreement was finalised, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks in Kazan and took a number of decisions to improve the ties.

In August last year, PM Modi travelled to the Chinese city of Tianjin to attend the annual SCO summit. Modi and Xi held extensive talks on the sidelines of the SCO summit.

In the meeting, Modi said India is committed to taking forward its ties with China based on mutual trust, respect and sensitivity. (PTI)

NSF resolves to

under the enduring spirit of 'One voice, one Naga'.

After thorough deliberations, the assembly unanimously reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to preserving Naga unity and advancing the shared vision and aspirations of the Naga people in one voice and one spirit.

It also resolved to extend its unwavering solidarity to the Naga people affected by the ongoing conflict in 'southern Nagalim'.

Strongly condemning the unwarranted attacks on Naga civilians by Kuki militants and their cohorts, the NSF reiterated its firm position that 'any attack on one Naga is an attack on all Nagas'.

It appealed to all Naga citizens to uphold prayers for the well-being, safety, peace, and unity of the Naga people wherever they are.

Govt exploring option

amid allegations of paper leak. A re-examination has been scheduled for June 21.

The CBI registered a case based on a written complaint by the Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education.

The central probe agency formed special teams to probe the case, conducted searches across the country and made prompt arrests.

So far, 13 accused have been arrested in this case from Delhi, Jaipur, Gurugram, Nasik, Pune, Latur and Ahilyanagar.

The investigation conducted so far has brought out the actual source of the leakage of the question papers, the CBI had said earlier. (PTI)

EAM Jaishankar meets

relations. The relations between India and the EU have been on an upswing in the last few years.

The EU, as a bloc, is India's largest trading partner in goods. For the financial year 2024-25, India's total trade in goods with the EU was worth about USD 136 billion, with exports around USD 76 billion and imports at USD 60 billion. (PTI)

NEC spends ₹ 339

the NESIDS-Roads programme during the 15th Finance Commission period.

Of these, two projects worth Rs 25.19 crore have already been completed, the statement said.

The Council also highlighted the upgradation of the Saiba-Lungbu-Tlangnam-Haka road, which is expected to improve connectivity between Mizoram's southern districts and the Myanmar border, supporting the broader objectives of India's Act East Policy.

The Council also expanded youth engagement and scientific outreach programmes during 2025-26.

Under the Ashtalakshmi Youth Exchange Programme, 581 students from different parts of the country visited premier institutions in the Northeast. Mizoram University hosted 44 students from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep in January this year.

Under the NE-SPARKS (North East Students' Programme for Awareness, Reach and Knowledge on Space) initiative, 99 students from Mizoram were among 786 students from the Northeast region who visited the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to promote scientific awareness and innovation.

The NEC also released funds in April for several ongoing projects in Mizoram, including livestock rearing support in the Sinlung Hills Council (SHC) area, establishment of a State Veterinary Information and Resource Centre, construction of a market building at West Phaileng in Mamit district, and tourism development works at Vangchhia in east Mizoram's Champhai district under the "Our Heritage, Our Treasure" initiative.

Additionally, Rs 20.09 crore was released under the NESIDS-Roads programme during April for ongoing road works, including the construction of the Pukzing-Silsury road and the Tualpui-Champhai road. (PTI)

Two suspected ULFA-I

were involved in raising funds for ULFA-I, and a case had been registered against them in Assam's Tinsukia district under various sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Sadar Kotwali SHO Chandrakant Mishra said the accused were handed over to Assam Police on transit remand after completion of legal formalities on Wednesday.

Two Indian peacekeepers

duty, the highest number by far from any troop-contributing country.

Barak will be the third recipient of the prestigious award from India, after Major Suman Gawani and Major Radhika Sen were honoured for their commendable work while serving in UN Peacekeeping missions.

Barak is serving with the Indian Battalion as the Commander of the Female Engagement Team (FET) in UNIFIL. She is also the first woman combat helicopter pilot of the Indian Army.

Gawani, who had served with the UN Mission in South Sudan, was honoured with the 2019 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award. Sen, who served with MONUSCO, received the 2023 award.

The UN General Assembly had established the International Day of UN Peacekeepers in 2002 and selected May 29 for the annual commemoration since it was the day in 1948 when the Security Council established the first UN peacekeeping operation, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation in the Middle East.

Currently, over 50,000 civilian, military and police peacekeepers serve under the UN flag in peacekeeping missions across some of the world's most complex environments, where "conflicts are increasingly fragmented, protracted, and shaped by emerging threats, including the misuse of digital tools and the spread of harmful information", the UN said.

A total of 118 countries currently contribute uniformed personnel to 11 peacekeeping missions.

In his message for the day, Guterres honoured the peacekeepers past and present and reaffirmed "our shared responsibility to respect and strengthen their work." He paid tribute to the nearly 4,500 peacekeepers who have lost their lives since 1948, including 59 last year.

"No one should die serving the cause of peace. Attacks on peacekeepers are grave violations of international humanitarian law, and Member States must uphold their obligations to ensure the safety and security of UN personnel at all times," Guterres said.

He added that "in an era of rising tensions, peacekeeping is a proven and cost-effective way to restore stability and hope. But it requires steady political backing - and reliable financial support."

"The theme for this year's Day of UN Peacekeepers is 'Invest in Peace'."

"At a time when UN Peacekeeping operations face reduced resources, the theme underscores that peacekeeping remains one of the most effective tools the international community has to respond to conflict - supporting political solutions, preventing escalation, protecting civilians, monitoring ceasefires, enabling humanitarian assistance, clearing landmines, and more," the UN said.

"At a time of rising conflict and shrinking resources, United Nations peacekeepers continue to protect civilians, prevent violence from escalating, and keep hope alive in some of the world's most difficult environments. Investing in peacekeeping means investing in stability, prevention and the possibility of peace itself," Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix said. (PTI)

Diphu Muslims refrain

reiterated that the community had honoured the Chief Minister's appeal by refraining from cow sacrifice and instead choosing goats and sheep for the ritual sacrifice.

IIT-G, Hyderabad firm

toward carbon mitigation," he added. Kaashyap Group Managing Director Kiran KK said that the cutting-edge technology developed by IIT-Guwahati is highly remarkable as it achieves two important sustainability milestones simultaneously.

"It successfully produces a high-quality biofuel, Methanol, providing a viable green alternative to fossil fuels, while actively sequestering carbon dioxide that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere," he added.

This dual-action mechanism makes the entire process remarkably green, positioning it perfectly to qualify for carbon credit schemes and accelerate our transition to a net-zero future, the official said. (PTI)

RENOVATION, OPERATION & MAINTENANCE OF PAY & USE TOILET

E-Auction is invited for the contract of Renovation, Operation and Maintenance of Pay & Use Toilet at PF-4/5 Lumding Railway Station over Lumding Division. Catalogue No.: PNU-LMG-05-26. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Auction Start Date & Time (All Lots) : At 10:00 hrs. on 09-06-2026.

Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Days
AA/1	PNU-LMG-LMG-Toi-73-25-2 (Pay and Use -Toilets)	3653

E-Auction Close Date & Time: At 10:30 hrs. on 09-06-2026. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Successive lots closing interval 10 minutes. Note : Prospective bidders are requested to visit e-Auction leasing module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in for more details.

Sr. DCM, Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Eid-ul-Adha observed with religious fervour in Bokajan



HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, May 28: Along with the rest of the state, the sacred festival of Eid-ul-Adha was observed with immense devotion, peace and religious fervour at the Dudu Colony Jame Masjid Eidgah premises in Lahorijan under Bokajan subdivision on Wednesday.

In the early morning, a large gathering of devotees from the Muslim community was witnessed at the Eidgah. Children, youth and elders, dressed in new attire, converged on the grounds to take part in the special congregational prayers.

The Eid-ul-Adha prayers commenced at around 8 AM, with hundreds of worshippers standing shoulder to shoulder and seeking peace, prosperity, happiness and universal brotherhood from Almighty Allah.

Following the conclusion of the prayers, Imam Maulana Moinuddin Saheb led special prayers (dua). He prayed for the well-being of humanity across the globe, the preservation of peace and harmony in the country, the strengthening of communal bonds and the elimination of hatred and violence from society.

On the occasion, worshippers exchanged festive greetings and embraced one another, presenting a symbol of unity, love and brotherhood.

The management committee of the Dudu Colony Jame Masjid later expressed gratitude to the local public and authorities for helping the Eid prayers conclude peacefully and successfully.

RSS holds memorial meeting for Kamaleswar Saikia

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 28: A memorial meeting of Kamaleswar Saikia, RSS Sangha Salak of Sivasagar was held at Keshavalay, Gohainchuk, here on Wednesday. Saikia passed away recently while undergoing dialysis at Sivasagar Civil Hospital.

Saha Byabashtha Pramukh, Asom Prant, Kanu Deka; Jila Saha Sangha Salak Munindra Konwar; Head Priest of Sivasagar Sivadol, Suresh Borthakur; distinguished guests and RSS workers were present at the meeting. Prasar Sachib Navajyoti Gogoi spoke on the objectives and said that Kamaleswar Saikia's life was entirely devoted to human well-being. All the participants paid floral tributes before a portrait of Kamaleswar Saikia and observed a silent prayer session.

₹ 2 Lakh each provided to the families of the deceased

Rameswar Teli visits Dholmara, meets families of deceased students



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 28: Cabinet Minister Rameswar Teli on Thursday visited Dholmara in Kokrajhar district and met the families of two minor students whose bodies were recovered from a pond under mysterious circumstances on May 21. The minister handed over sanction letters providing financial assistance of ₹ 2 lakh each to the families of the two victims on behalf of the Assam government.

Notably, the bodies of two schoolgirls were recovered from a pond at the Lalkura Tea Estate near Dholmara in Kokrajhar district recently. The girls went missing while returning from Dholmara High School.

Several social organisations and student unions, including AASAA, demanded a proper investigation into the incident.

In this regard, two persons have been apprehended so far.

Memorial book on poet Junmoni Das released

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, May 28: Noted poet Junmoni Das, who died recently at the age of just 41, was remembered by his admirers and fellow poets in Sivasagar through a collection of memorial write-ups titled 'Swarna Surjya', which was released at a commemorative meeting held on the occasion of the poet's Adya Shraddha at Thanamukh on Wednesday.

A host of distinguished poets and writers jointly released the book edited by Prasanta Borghain and Satyajit Nath. Junmoni Das wrote over 15 books and was able to draw the attention of the state's leading intellectuals. Haren Gogoi, former president of Sivasagar Kabi Sanmilan, addressing the gathering, said it would take years to fill the void left by Junmoni's departure.

The meeting was also attended and addressed by the deceased poet's wife Tarali Das, social activist Sarat Hazarika, Ujjal Thakur, writer Samsul Barik, district president of Kabi Sanmilan Hemanta Rajkhowa, poets Mukul Nath, Haren Nath, Pramod Arandhara, Ismail Tamuli, Ranjit Bora, Saurovjyoti Duwora, Brajen Das, Bijju Borthakur, Nabin Buragohain, Pranjal Abir Das, Ashrumoni Dutta Ghosh, artists Mainu Gogoi and Sujit Baruah, journalists Ratu Das, Pradip Gogoi, Munna Agarwala, Parikhit Gogoi and many others.

Upendranath Borkatoky receives Sahitya Sabha special honour

Eminent litterateur honoured at his Nagaon residence for contribution to Assamese literature

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, May 28: Eminent litterateur Upendranath Borkatoky was conferred the Assam Sahitya Sabha President's Special Literary Honour for 2025-26 at his residence in Ratnapur, Nagaon on Wednesday.

The award was presented by Sabha Vice-President Padum Rajkhowa and General Secretary Debajit Bora, as the former professor and writer was unable to attend the central felicitation ceremony held earlier in Guwahati due to health reasons.

Accepting the honour, Borkatoky said receiving recognition from the Assam Sahitya Sabha was a "matter of great fortune" and felt like divine acknowledgement of his lifelong work. "Controversies around the Sabha will always exist. There were even attempts to divide it. Yet the Sabha continues to hold its head high and will do so in future," Borkatoky added.

Vice-President Padum Rajkhowa said honouring person-



alities who have enriched the Assamese language and national life through their work is a social responsibility.

"By conferring this award on distinguished thinker and litterateur Upendranath Borkatoky, the Assam Sahitya Sabha itself feels honoured. We pray for his

well-being," Rajkhowa said.

General Secretary Debajit Bora, who anchored the programme, noted Borkatoky's role in strengthening the Sabha, including his key contribution in keeping the Sabha flag flying in places like Lumding during his days as a journalist.

A Sabha delegation visited Borkatoky's residence for the ceremony. It included Permanent Financial Fund Convener Govinda Kalita, Kunhi Sub-Committee Convener Prashanta Saikia, Kamrup Metro District Sabha president Prafulla Barman, Nagaon Regional Office Secretary Rewat Hazarika, Nagaon District Sabha Secretary Rajib Kumar Hazarika and other office bearers. Sabha president Dr Basanta Goswami joined the event over phone and paid his respects.

The award comprised a gamosa, Karbi traditional cloth, phulam japi, a set of books, a memento, Sabha insignia and a citation.

Earlier, the Sabha had felicitated writer Puspa Gogoi and SP Nomal Mahatta at a ceremony held at Bhagawati Prasad Baruah Bhavan in Guwahati.

Borkatoky's son, Professor Arindam Borkatoky, family members and local journalists were present at the event.

NFR observes World Environment Day with awareness campaigns



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 28: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has been actively observing World Environment Day 2026 through a series of awareness programmes and environmental protection activities across all its divisions and units since May 15.

The observance, which will continue till June 5, is being conducted under the theme "Climate Change", highlighting the importance of environmental conservation, sustainable practices and collective responsibility towards safeguarding the planet for future generations.

As part of the ongoing campaign, programmes including plantation drives, cleanliness campaigns, awareness rallies, seminars and eco-friendly initiatives are being organised throughout the NFR network to promote environmental sustainability and conserva-

tion awareness among railway employees, passengers and the general public.

Special emphasis is being laid on reducing plastic usage, maintaining cleanliness at railway stations and railway colonies, water conservation and the adoption of green practices in railway operations. Railway officials, staff members, students, scouts and guides, along with members of social organisations are actively participating in the awareness drive.

In a significant outreach initiative, Nukkad Natak performances highlighting environmental protection, cleanliness and the harmful effects of plastic pollution were staged by the NFR Scouts and Guides at the NFR Headquarters in Maligaon. The performances attracted the attention of passengers and the public, spreading awareness on the need for collective environmental responsibility.

To encourage eco-friendly practices, jute bags, cloth bags and biodegradable items are being distributed among passengers, railway staff and local residents across different locations under the NFR jurisdiction. These initiatives aim to discourage the use of single-use plastics and promote sustainable alternatives in daily life.

Northeast Frontier Railway has consistently undertaken various eco-friendly measures and remains committed to sustainable and environment-friendly railway operations in the Northeast region.

The observance will culminate on World Environment Day on June 5, 2026, with special programmes, awareness activities and the administration of an environmental pledge across all divisions and units of NFR.

ICAI to host Mega CA Students Conference in Guwahati

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 28: A two-day Mega CA Students Conference, "Metaballo Vista 2026" is being organised by the Board of Studies (Operations), ICAI on May 30 and 31 at the GMCH Auditorium, Bhangagarh, Guwahati.

The conference is being led by Chairman, BOS (Operations), CA Rajesh Sharma; Vice Chairman, BOS (Operations), CA Gyan Chand Mishra; and Programme Director and Central Council Member, ICAI, CA Ravi Kumar Patwa.

The conference is being hosted by the Guwahati Branch led by CA Anjani Kumar Mundhra, Chairman, Guwahati Branch EIRC and CA Nitika Bagaria, Chairperson of EICASA Guwahati Branch.

The conference will feature four knowledge sessions over two days, during which selected CA students will present papers on topics relating to accounting and auditing standards, AI and technology, taxation and capital markets. The sessions will be chaired by experts who will share their insights and knowledge with the students.

The best three paper presenters will be awarded during the conference.

There will also be a special interactive session with the Chairman, Board of Studies (Operations), ICAI and the Programme Director.

The conference will further include four special skill-up sessions on topics such as "Articleship Blueprint - From Article to Leader", "Future Ready CA - Innovation, Curiosity and Career Vision", "Roadmap to Public Services through the Journey of CA", and "The CA Journey - Mindset, Grit and Growth".

CA (Dr) Swati Tejawat, Chairperson, Media and Publicity Committee, informed the press that the mega conference is expected to be attended by over 500 students and chartered accountants from across the state, while renowned invitees from different parts of the country will interact with the participants.

CA Piyush Birmiwal, Secretary of the Guwahati Branch, said the conference would provide an excellent opportunity for academic exchange and networking among aspiring chartered accountants.

Online registration for the conference can be done through ICAI BOS Activities Portal. Interested persons may also call 97070-78491 for registration support.

Gajraj Corps hosts 'Sonitpur SAMVAD' to boost civil-military synergy

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, May 28: The Gajraj Corps successfully hosted a military-civil fusion seminar in Tezpur titled "Sonitpur SAMVAD", an initiative aimed at reinforcing civil-military collaboration under the overarching vision of "Samoohik Prayas Se Rashtrianman" with the guiding principle of "Rashtra Sarvopari".

The acronym SAMVAD embodies the core pillars of the initiative—Samanvay, Aatmanirbharta, Mansik Dridhita, Vishwas aur Vikas—Am-

ritikaal ka Lakshya, Dhyyeya Sarvopari. The seminar witnessed participation from senior representatives of the state administration and key institutions, including the Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University, Inspector General SSB, Inspector General Sonitpur Range, Divisional Forest Officer, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Chairman of the Bar Council and Municipality, members of the medical fraternity of Tezpur, including management representatives from private hospitals, Principal of the Skill Development Centre Mangaldoi, Addi-

tional Deputy Commissioners of Tezpur and Missamari, along with several other stakeholders.

Addressing the gathering, the General Officer Commanding (GOC), Gajraj Corps, highlighted JAI—Jointness, Aatmanirbharta and Innovation—as the guiding framework for building a secure, resilient and future-ready India in line with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. The GOC also emphasised coordinated action, convergence of institutional capabilities and time-bound implementation of achievable

goals to further national development and regional resilience.

In a significant step towards enhancing civil-military cooperation, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Lokopriya Gopinath Bordoloi Regional Institute of Mental Health (LGBRIMH) and Army hospitals under Gajraj Corps. The collaboration aims to strengthen holistic mental healthcare through clinical support, professional training, research initiatives and community outreach programmes.

Rising stroke cases among youth linked to illicit drug abuse: Dr Anil Gulati

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 28: For decades, the public image of a stroke patient has been that of an elderly individual. However, a startling shift is occurring. New evidence suggests that illicit drug use is rapidly lowering the age of stroke victims, creating an urgent health crisis that traditional medicine is struggling to contain. But as the risks escalate, so does innovation, with a new therapy called sovateltide offering a potential breakthrough in how we treat stroke patients.

A major new global analysis published in the International Journal of Stroke has provided compelling evidence that illicit drug use significantly increases the risk of stroke—particularly among younger populations raising urgent concerns for public health systems worldwide.

The study by Megan Ritson, Hugh S Markus and Eric L Harshfield (2026), titled "Does illicit drug use increase stroke risk? A systematic review, meta-analysis and Mendelian randomisation analysis," analysed data from over 100 million individuals across 32 studies. It found that substances such as cannabis, cocaine and amphetamines are strongly associated with an elevated risk of stroke. Cocaine nearly doubled the likelihood of a stroke, while amphetamines were linked to more than a twofold increase. Cannabis, often perceived



as relatively safe was also associated with a meaningful rise in stroke incidence.

The study used advanced genetic methods (Mendelian randomisation) to show that these associations are not merely coincidental but are likely causal in several cases—particularly for cocaine and cannabis. Alarmingly, the impact appears even more pronounced in individuals under 55 years of

age, proving that drug-related strokes are actively driving a shift toward younger stroke populations.

Stroke remains one of the leading causes of death and long-term disability globally. Importantly, much of this burden is driven by modifiable risk factors. These new findings reinforce that substance misuse is not only a social and psychological issue, but also a critical vascular risk factor.

These biological pathways explain why young users, who often lack traditional risk factors like chronic hypertension, still suffer disproportionate cardiovascular harm.

While prevention strategies targeting substance abuse are essential, a major challenge remains: current acute therapies—such as clot-busting drugs (thrombolytics) and mechanical thrombectomy—are highly time-sensitive. They benefit only a small subset of patients who manage to reach medical care within a narrow time window. Many patients either arrive too late or are ineligible for these procedures, leaving a significant unmet need for therapies that can improve recovery outcomes beyond the acute phase.

In this context, sovateltide is emerging as a novel and potentially transformative therapy for stroke patients. This innovative drug targets endothelin-B receptors to trigger neuro protection, stimulate new neuron growth, facilitate new blood vessel forma-

tion, and restore blood flow to the brain. Beyond mere clot clearance, it actively works to rebuild damaged tissue.

Unlike conventional treatments that focus primarily on reopening blocked vessels, sovateltide aims to repair and regenerate brain tissue, offering hope for improved recovery even after the traditional treatment window has closed.

Patients with substance-related strokes often face much steeper recovery challenges. They typically exhibit more severe vascular damage, complicated by overlapping mechanisms like vasospasms, acute hypertension and inflammation, as well as a heightened risk of recurrence. These factors complicate care far beyond standard clot removal, underscoring the need for advanced treatment options.

Sovateltide's unique mechanism of action fits perfectly here by boosting neuronal survival after toxic insults, aiding recovery in damaged brain areas, and enhancing long-term functional outcomes.

Tackling the rising tide of youth strokes requires a two-pronged strategy. First, we must focus heavily on prevention, utilising public health interventions to curb substance misuse before irreversible damage is done. Second, we must embrace medical innovation by investing in next-generation therapies like sovateltide.

KVK Golaghat selected for NAAS-Dhanuka Award 2026

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 28: The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Golaghat, under Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Jorhat has been selected for the prestigious NAAS-Dhanuka Award for Excellence in Agricultural Extension - 2026 under the category of Best Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Zone VI, Guwahati.

An official of AAU said that the award has been instituted by the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS), New Delhi in collaboration with Dhanuka Agritech Limited, to recognise outstanding contributions in agricultural extension and farmer welfare across the country. Vice Chancellor of Assam Agricultural University, Dr Dipjyoti Rajkhowa, congratulated the entire team of KVK for this prestigious award and described it as a proud moment for the whole AAU fraternity. He said the award is a testimony to the commitment and excellence demonstrated by the scientists, staff members and stakeholders associated with KVK Golaghat. Dr Bidyut C Deka, Director of ICAR-ATARI, Zone VI, Guwahati, also congratulated the KVK team and appreciated their sincere dedication, innovative extension approaches and untiring efforts towards the upliftment of the farming community.

The achievement has brought pride to Assam Agricultural University as well as the entire northeastern region. The recognition is expected to further motivate the KVK team to continue their outstanding service for the welfare and empowerment of farmers.

According to an official communication issued by Dr Ashok K Singh, Secretary of NAAS, the award will be conferred during the NAAS Foundation Day celebration scheduled to be held on June 5, 2026 at NASC, New Delhi.

The official added that KVK Golaghat has earned this national recognition for its exceptional contribution towards dissemination of agricultural technologies, promotion of scientific farming, capacity building of farmers and implementation of innovative extension programmes in the district. Through continuous field-level interventions, farmer training programmes, frontline demonstrations and awareness campaigns, the KVK has played a significant role in improving agricultural productivity and livelihood opportunities for farming communities.

The KVK has been actively engaged in promoting climate-resilient agriculture, integrated farming systems, improved crop management practices and entrepreneurship development among rural youth and farm women. Its farmer-centric approach and dedicated extension activities have greatly strengthened the linkage between agricultural research and field application.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

May you live all the days of your life.
- Jonathan Swift

Petro price hike and its impact

Starting from May 15, 2026, India has been increasing prices of petrol and diesel, in quick succession – four times in 11 days on May 15, May 19, May 23, and May 25 – cumulatively between ₹ 7.50 – ₹ 8 per litre by May 25, that is sharper than fuel consumers, especially transport sector, could absorb. The rise is over 7 per cent for both. Consequently, it is being passed to consumers and the economy, and people have just started feeling the impact. It has already been reported that 20 percent of India's trucks are off the roads due to the price hike and shortage of diesel afterwards. There have been long queues on petrol pumps, and shortages of diesel have been reported from various states, though the public sector oil companies have claimed that there is no shortage of diesel at national level but shortages reported are localized. They have also claimed that demand is expected to ease with the fall of the monsoon. Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), which is India's largest state owned refiner and fuel retailer, has reportedly said that petrol sales rose 14 per cent and diesel around 18 per cent during May 1 up to May 22, compared to the corresponding period last year. However, this is not a matter of pride, because the panic buying might have increased the sale, meaning thereby, the crisis has already produced panic among people.

India has about 95 lakh commercial vehicles, and if one fifth of them are off the road, it is a matter of concern. About 19 lakh commercial vehicles going off the road has significantly delayed the goods movements that has put the inflationary pressures on all goods – both food and non-food items, apart from rise in the freight rates causing general price rise for all goods. It has increased even the input costs of all productions, which have caused price hikes of almost all products. There is a tremendous inflationary pressure. The direct impact on small commercial vehicle operators is now clearly seen. They constituted over 70 per cent of the total commercial vehicles in the country. Price rise of diesel has increased their operating costs and reduced their income margin. They are battling to survive. According to the National President of All India Transport Congress until now diesel accounted for 40-45 per cent of the operational costs, which have now increased, sharper for local operators than the operators on the long routes.

As for auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers, the rise in CNG, petrol, and diesel prices, their earnings have considerably reduced. They have reported a loss of about 17 per cent of their daily income, as it has been reported. They are trying to pass the increased costs to the commuters and altercations between them on fairs have become common.

Wealth-hungry and crumbling relationships

By: Dr. Priyanka Saurabh

The land of Haryana has long been known for its familial love, brotherhood, and the culture of joint families. The warmth of relationships was evident in village Chaupals. Family was not merely a blood relationship, but was considered the foundation of life's greatest security and respect. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and brothers and sisters together formed a social structure where individuals were never left alone. Family joys were shared, and sorrows were shared together. From labor in the fields to household decisions, everything was done with a spirit of sharing. At that time, it was difficult to imagine that someone could become an enemy of a family member for property.

But with changing times, the landscape of society has rapidly changed. Economic competition, urbanization, growing material desires, and consumerist thinking have gradually weakened the intimacy of relationships. Now, families that once epitomized love and cooperation are being torn apart by property and financial disputes. A small piece of land, a share of inheritance, or monetary transactions are often fueling conflicts that culminate in violence and murder. Today, not only in Haryana but across the country, news of a brother killing another brother, a son attacking a father, or an uncle-nephew relationship being marred by bloodshed, is constantly emerging. These incidents are not merely crimes but a sign of the growing moral decay within society. This increasing violence within families suggests that wealth and property are now considered more important than relationships. In states like Haryana, land is no longer merely a means of farming. Urbanization and industrial expansion have led to rapid increases in land prices. Farms that were once modest in value have now become assets worth crores of rupees. This economic transformation is causing tension within many families. Brothers are now fighting in the courts over the division of land that was once cultivated jointly by the family. In many cases, these disputes transcend legal boundaries and escalate into violence. The breakdown of joint families has also exacerbated this problem. In the past, elders served as mediators. If there was a dispute, respected family members would sit together and find a solution. Their word was considered final. But now, the trend of nuclear families has increased. Families have become smaller, and communication has decreased. As family members began living separately, the emotional distance between them also increased. This distance often gives rise to distrust and selfishness.

In modern society, a person's success is measured by their financial status. A large house, an expensive car, and abundant wealth have become symbols of social prestige. Social media and market-driven culture have further reinforced this mindset. Everyone seems to

be engaged in the race to earn as much money as possible. In this race, the sensitivity of relationships is being left behind. People are beginning to view their families as partners and competitors rather than collaborators.

From a psychological perspective, property disputes aren't just financial struggles. They also stem from insecurity, ego, comparison, and a sense of entitlement. Often, individuals feel wronged, have received a smaller share, or are neglected within the family. These feelings gradually escalate into anger and violence. Tensions pent up for years within a family can explode over a minor dispute. The patriarchal mindset in Indian society also plays a role in fueling these disputes. Competition among sons over property is increasingly evident. Parents often unwittingly discriminate between their children. Giving more importance to one son or disparity in property distribution lays the foundation for future conflicts. This tension can build up over the years, eventually leading to major disputes. Today, millions of property dispute cases are pending in the courts. Families remain embroiled in legal battles for years. Litigation consumes time, money, and peace of mind. The court cycle can sour relationships to the point where any possibility of reconciliation is virtually eliminated. Sometimes, even subsequent generations carry this animosity as a legacy.

The irony is that the very possessions for which people destroy their relationships ultimately fail to bring them peace of mind. Wealth can provide comfort, but it cannot provide intimacy and trust. Brothers who spent their childhoods playing together become enemies. Parents who have devoted their entire lives to raising their children find themselves feeling insecure among their own children in old age. This situation is not just a family crisis, but a social tragedy.

This problem is further complicated in rural society because land is not only a property but also a symbol of social prestige. Families with more land are considered more influential. This is why people struggle for years even for small parcels of land. Panchayats often fail to resolve these disputes, leading to violence and murder. The situation is different in urban areas. Legal battles between siblings over their parents' property, homes, and businesses have become common in metropolitan areas. Elderly parents often suffer from loneliness and insecurity. In some cases, children pressure their parents to transfer the property to their names. This situation raises serious questions about the values of the Indian family system.

Money and wealth are not inherently bad things. Problems arise when a person places wealth above morality and human sensibilities. Greed gradually erodes a person's sensitivity. They begin to view relationships from a financial perspective, not an emotional one. When human values weaken within a person, the avenues open for violence and crime. Solving the problem isn't

possible through legislation alone. Serious efforts are needed at the social and moral levels. First, we must strengthen the culture of dialogue within families. When family members express themselves openly and understand each other's feelings, disputes will be less likely. Often, small misunderstandings can escalate into major conflicts due to a lack of communication.

The role of elders remains crucial even today. They should not only be guardians of property but also guides of family values. Children must be taught from childhood that relationships are more valuable than any land or wealth. If love and trust prevail within the family, property division will be smoother.

The education system also needs to give greater importance to moral education and family values. Today's education is making people successful, but it's failing to make them sensitive. It's important to teach children that true success in life isn't just about financial achievement, but also about preserving humanity and relationships. Society must also change its mindset. The tendency to honor only financial success is dangerous. When society prioritizes wealth over character, behavior, and sensitivity, the mad pursuit of wealth intensifies. Society needs role models that inspire sacrifice, cooperation, and family unity. The media and entertainment industry also have a major responsibility. If films, serials, and digital platforms consistently portray wealth and prosperity as symbols of success, the new generation will adopt that mindset. Society needs cultural examples that strengthen the dignity of family, sensitivity, and relationships.

The government and administration should also take initiatives in this direction. Family counseling centers, mediation committees, and community resolution mechanisms can be developed at the Panchayat level. If disputes are resolved through dialogue at an early stage, many families can be prevented from breaking up and violence.

The most important thing is to look within oneself. Life is fleeting. Wealth and land remain here, but the memories of relationships endure for generations. No possessions can match the love that comes from family. If a person learns to control their selfishness and ego, many conflicts can be prevented.

Ultimately, we must understand that while wealth may be a necessity, it is not the ultimate truth. The ultimate truth is love, trust, and the sense of belonging that sustains a person in difficult times. If the pursuit of wealth begins to consume relationships, it will be a defeat not just for the family but for society as a whole. Civilization is not defined by large buildings and vast properties; it is the respect people give to their relationships. Therefore, the greatest need of the hour is to learn to value relationships more than wealth, because ultimately, it is not land but our people who provide the support for a person's survival. (Dr. Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

Assam Uniform Civil Code

The Assam Uniform Civil Code, 2026 Bill, recently passed in the Assam Legislative Assembly, has initiated a far-reaching transformation in the legal and social structure of the state. With the passage of this Bill, Assam has become the third state in India after Uttarakhand and Gujarat, and the first state in the North-East, to implement such a strict and unified civil code. As mentioned in Article 44 of the Directive Principles of State Policy under Part IV of the Constitution of India, the State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India. Giving practical shape to this constitutional directive, the state government has brought matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption under one

strictness of the law. Alongside this, marriages between persons within prohibited degrees of blood or family relationship have been declared entirely invalid unless permitted by the long-standing customs of their community. Free and valid consent from both parties is essential for marriage; marriages solemnised through force, fraud, or circumstances involving mental incapacity shall not be legally acceptable. However, this legal strictness does not interfere with the religious and cultural freedom of individuals. The law fully recognises various religious beliefs and social traditions in the solemnisation of marriages. Legal validity has been granted to all forms of customary and religious marriage ceremonies, including the Saptapadi of Hindu society,



AUTHOR

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Nikah under Islam, the holy blessing in Christianity, the traditional Choklong marriage of the Tai-Ahom community, Anand Karaj of Sikhism, as well as Vedic and Brahma marriages. In other words, while the conditions of marriage have been unified officially, complete freedom has been granted to the people regarding the celebration and observance of traditional customs and rituals. This arrangement proves that, in the interest of building a modern and disciplined society, the state has attempted to establish legal equality amidst diversity.

With the enforcement of the law, official registration of every marriage and divorce conducted within the state has been made entirely mandatory, marking a strong step toward making the legal system more transparent and accountable. Within a fixed period after the formation of a family, that is, within sixty days of the solemnisation of marriage or receipt of a divorce decree from the court, registration must compulsorily be completed before the Sub-Registrar. This registration process will bring social relationships within a definite legal framework. Simultaneously, the process of divorce has been established on a common foundation for all religions. Any person may seek divorce on grounds such as adultery, cruelty, desertion by the spouse for more than two years, conversion to another religion, mental illness, and similar causes. Furthermore, after living separately for one year, both husband and wife may jointly seek divorce before the court through mutual consent, where special provisions have been made for speedy settlement under appropriate circumstances. The long-practised instant triple talaq system has been completely prohibited and declared invalid. Giving special importance to the protection of women, the law has determined that if a husband commits rape or unnatural sexual



offences, or if he already had multiple wives before the enforcement of this Act, the woman may seek divorce on additional grounds. In matters of maintenance, a clear policy has been framed whereby both husband and wife may claim financial assistance from each other according to necessity. However, Mehr, dowry, or Stridhan received by the wife shall be regarded entirely as her own property and shall remain completely outside the calculation of maintenance. These provisions have provided women's dignity and economic security with a strong legal foundation throughout life.

The legal intervention introduced by this Bill in relation to live-in relationships, recognised today as a modern and complex social arrangement, is likely to create a deep impact upon society. Men and women living in such relationships shall now be required to jointly submit a declaration before the Sub-Registrar and complete registration within one month. This registration process is not limited only to the commencement of the relationship; even upon termination of the relationship, submission of a notice of closure shall be equally mandatory. If any person refuses to comply with this registration requirement, they may be punished with imprisonment up to three months or a fine up to ten thousand rupees, or both. This arrangement indirectly reminds individuals of the legal responsibilities associated with such relationships. Furthermore, after registration, the Sub-Registrar shall forward every declaration to the local police, and if either partner is below twenty-one years of age, their parents or guardians shall also be informed. The most important aspect is that registration of such relationships shall never be permitted in cases involving close relatives, already married individuals, minors, or circumstances where consent has been obtained through coercion. The law has ensured the right of maintenance for women in such relationships; if a man abandons his partner, the woman may seek financial assistance through the court. Alongside this, children born out of such relationships shall be recognised as biological and fully le-

gitimate children. Such children shall enjoy all legal and property rights equal to those born within a valid marriage. These specific provisions demonstrate that the State has taken personal relationships seriously and has built a protective legal shield to prevent one individual from exploiting another.

In the sphere of inheritance and property rights, this Bill has struck a powerful blow against the patriarchal and gender-discriminatory mindset that prevailed for generations. Under the new law, a balanced and equal rights-based legal structure has been established for determining inheritance of property, granting men and women entirely equal rights. In the earlier social system, daughters often faced deprivation in matters relating to ancestral property, but this code has ended such discrimination by ensuring equal distribution among all children. Not only that, the scope of legal legitimacy has been expanded by granting equal property rights not only to biological children but also to adopted children, children previously regarded as illegitimate, and children born through surrogacy. In cases where a deceased person leaves behind no will, the surviving spouse, children, and parents shall be recognised as first-class heirs, and property shall be distributed among them in a balanced manner. This entire system ensures financial security for every member of the family. A clear and definite legal arrangement has also been introduced for the preparation of wills so that future family disputes over property may not arise. Overall analysis reveals that the Assam Uniform Civil Code is not merely a law; it is a strong document for the creation of a modern, just, and discrimination-free society. The code has maintained a beautiful balance between individual rights and social discipline. Alongside respecting traditional customs and practices, the effort visible in establishing legal equality is undoubtedly commendable. In the coming years, proper and impartial implementation of this law will strengthen the social structure of the state and play an important role in securing the future of every citizen.

Semiconductor: The Global Chip War and India

By: Lalit Nath

The word 'semiconductor' or 'chip' has recently transitioned from technical journals to becoming a core subject of discussion across mainstream and social media platforms. Today, it is no longer viewed merely as an electronic component. Its significance in the modern world has escalated to such an extent that it has sparked a silent economic and geopolitical warfare among global superpowers. Amid this intense international competition, the Government of India has also announced a massive financial blueprint, investing thousands of crores of rupees to foster domestic semiconductor manufacturing.

To understand this phenomenon in simple terms, materials in the physical universe can be broadly categorized into two types based on their electrical properties: 'conductors', which allow electricity to flow seamlessly and 'insulators', which completely resist electrical conductivity. Positioned between these two categories are certain materials that remain non-conductive under normal conditions but exhibit excellent electrical conductivity when exposed to heat or specific chemical processes. These materials with intermediate properties are known as semiconductors and they are primary manufactured using silicon, an element abundantly available in ordinary sand.

In specialized laboratory environments, these semiconductor materials are used to integrate billions of microscopic electrical switches, known as transistors—each multiple times thinner than a human hair—onto a tiny square substrate. This integrated device is what we call a semiconductor chip. Its primary function is to regulate the flow of electricity. Just as a physical valve or tap controls the flow of water, these chips precisely govern the movement of electrical currents within electronic devices.

Consequently, the utility of these chips is vast and absolute, practically every smart or electronic device in contemporary life is non-functional without them. From handheld mobile phones, home computers and smart televisions to washing machines and standard LED bulbs, this technology is embedded everywhere. Furthermore, these chips serve as the technological 'brain' powering modern automobiles, commercial aircraft, critical medical equipment like X-rays and ventilators, orbital satellites and advanced defense systems including missiles and tanks. They also serve as the foundational architecture for Artificial Intelligence (AI), the defining technology of our era. In short, modern civilization would instantly grind to a halt without them, proving that the semiconductor is no longer just a technical component, but the very nervous system of global civilization.

Because the gears of the global economy turn on this microscopic component,

it has become the focal point of a new geopolitical rivalry. The contemporary landscape of international politics and macroeconomics has undergone a radical paradigm shift, the strategic dominance once dictated by crude oil reserves is now gradually being overtaken by the semiconductor chip. The ongoing 'Chip War' involving the United States, China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan is far more than a commercial or technological race. It represents a silent yet fierce struggle for economic security, strategic sovereignty, and ultimate leadership over the future global order. Against this complex international backdrop, the Indian government's 'India Semiconductor Mission' (ISM) emerges not merely as a routine industrial policy, but as a deeply visionary national security strategy. Historically, India's entry into this high-tech domain was highly promising, yet tragically short-lived. In 1989, a mysterious fire at the state-owned Semiconductor Complex Limited (SCL) in Mohali, Punjab, incinerated the nation's nascent dreams of a domestic chip revolution right at its inception.

While global giants like Taiwan's TSMC and South Korea's Samsung were laying the bedrock of the modern global chip manufacturing ecosystem, India lapsed into a prolonged period of policy stagnation and heavy import dependency. Over the subsequent decades, the nation's technological focus remained confined largely to software development, which inadvertently left its hardware foundations fragile.

However, historical stagnation is never permanent. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a global wake-up call, exposing the devastating vulnerabilities of chip supply chain disruptions. As assembly lines stalled worldwide—affecting everything from automotive manufacturing to basic consumer electronics—developed nations realized that relying on a concentrated cluster of geographies for semiconductors was a catastrophic vulnerability. In response, the United States enacted the 'CHIPS Act' to deploy billions of dollars in subsidies, the European Union began constructing its own localized ecosystem and China adopted an aggressive doctrine to establish a fully autonomous chip empire. Had India remained passive in this geopolitical storm, it would have faced a dangerous and compromised technological dependency in the emerging eras of advanced 5G, 6G, and AI.

Recognizing this reality, the Government of India launched the India Semiconductor Mission with a financial stimulus package of approximately ₹76,000 crore. The dividends of this mission are already materializing. The country's first commercial mega-scale chip fabrication plant is currently under construction in Dholera, Gujarat, through a landmark joint venture between the Tata Group and Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC). Crucially, this technological wave has extended into Assam

and the greater Northeast region. The Tata Group's investment of approximately ₹27,000 crore to establish a semiconductor assembly and testing (ATMP) facility in Jagirao, Assam, marks the dawn of a new industrial epoch for the region. This project will not only seed an electronics manufacturing ecosystem in Assam but will also directly integrate a historically isolated region into the global technology supply chain.

Nevertheless, the path ahead remains formidable. The semiconductor industry cannot be built overnight by simply erecting factories. Success requires the flawless orchestration of a complex ecosystem comprising advanced chip design, fabrication, specialized packaging, an uninterrupted supply of rare earth minerals, stable power grids and an abundant supply of ultrapure water. Furthermore, the astronomical capital expenditure required to establish and sustain modern fabrication units is impossible for the private sector to shoulder without sustained state subsidies. Additionally, matching the technological maturity of incumbent giants like Taiwan or South Korea will demand decades of relentless domestic research and development.

Despite these hurdles, India's potential remains immense. The nation is already an established global powerhouse in chip design, with Indian engineering talent contributing pivotally to the world's leading semiconductor firms. The current mandate is to translate this formidable design prowess into tangible manufacturing capacity. The strategic synthesis of 'Design in India' and 'Make in India' is poised to add a transformative dimension to the national economy. In an era increasingly defined by AI and automated workflows, software services alone will not suffice to generate long-term mass employment. Only a robust hardware manufacturing sector can trigger a sustainable industrial revolution capable of employing millions of educated youths. True technological autonomy cannot be achieved without sovereign control over hardware. The nations that command chip manufacturing will inevitably dictate the future of defense technology and the global digital economy. Therefore, the India Semiconductor Mission is far more than a commercial venture, it is the resurrection of national self-reliance.

To bring this collective vision to fruition, state funding must be paired with deep, institutionalized synergy among universities, research laboratories, and corporate industries. Furthermore, the nation requires a bipartisan, stable policy framework protected over the next ten to fifteen years. Nearly four decades after the lost opportunities of 1989, India stands at a critical technological crossroads. In this global chip war, India's era as a mere consumer has drawn to a close, the time has arrived for the nation to firmly establish its sovereignty as a global technological powerhouse. (The author is a retired teacher, poet, and literary critic.)

How the Electric vehicle transition is anchoring India's geopolitical resilience

By: Dipak Kurmi

Energy remains the immutable bedrock of modern economic life, dictating the growth trajectories of nations and shaping the daily realities of their citizens. For a subcontinent like India, which must import nearly nine out of every ten barrels of the crude oil it consumes, the imperative of securing reliable energy lines is far more than an isolated policy dilemma. It has fast converged into the defining strategic question of the twenty-first century, carrying immense fiscal and geopolitical implications. India confronts this reality with greater vulnerability than most peer economies, standing as the world's third-largest crude importer, home to the largest two-wheeler base on the planet, and managing a passenger vehicle market that is still in its early exponential growth stage. Consequently, the mechanisms by which the country chooses to power its domestic mobility will fundamentally alter household budgets, dictate the long-term health of the Indian rupee, and reshape New Delhi's strategic standing on the global stage for generations to come.

Over the past decade, a clear and globally visible structural answer has emerged to address this profound dependency: the gradual, systematic transition of vehicular mobility away from fossil fuels like petrol and diesel toward advanced electric drivetrains. Data from the International Energy Agency reveals that the global electric vehicle stock successfully displaced more than 1.3 million barrels of oil per day in 2024, with that figure projected to aggressively cross the threshold of five million barrels daily by 2030. Recognizing this tectonic shift, India has spent the last ten years under the administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi methodically positioning its industrial apparatus and consumer markets to lead this transition. At the absolute center of this national effort sits the flagship PM E-DRIVE scheme—officially known as the Prime Minister Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement. Launched in October 2024 with a massive fiscal outlay of 10,900 crore rupees and recently extended through March 2028, this overarching policy framework is engineered to support the deployment of 24.79 lakh electric two-wheelers, 3.16 lakh electric three-wheelers, 14,028 electric buses across nine major metropolitan cities, alongside heavy electric trucks and specialized medical ambulances. This extensive vehicular push is anchored by a nationwide charging infrastructure back-

bone worth 2,000 crore rupees, a network that received a further boost at a national conference in Bengaluru where an additional 4,874 electric vehicle chargers were sanctioned across several states.

The early economic and behavioral returns of this concerted state intervention are already highly visible across the domestic landscape. India recorded the sale of over 25.5 lakh electric vehicles in the last financial year alone, representing a staggering 25 percent year-on-year jump and driving the electric segment to a historic 8.64 percent share of all national automobile sales. This transition is particularly acute in the public and commercial transportation domains, where electric penetration within the three-wheeler passenger segment has triumphantly crossed the 33 percent mark. Crucially, the 16.72 lakh vehicles that have already been actively supported by targeted state demand incentives are cumulatively saving the country approximately 0.14 crore rupees worth of foreign exchange fuel expenditures every single day. From a broader strategic perspective, every single electric vehicle deployed onto Indian roads effectively represents a barrel of crude oil that no longer needs to be imported from volatile global energy cartels, reducing the nation's exposure to external macroeconomic shocks.

Yet, the Indian state recognizes that consumer-end subsidies like the PM E-DRIVE scheme cannot deliver a permanent structural transition if they exist in an industrial vacuum. A consumer subsidy is merely the highly visible, retail end of a much longer, capital-intensive global supply chain that encompasses advanced lithium-ion batteries, rare-earth permanent magnets, specialized electronic components, and complete vehicle assemblies. To prevent India from merely swapping its traditional dependence on foreign oil for a new, equally dangerous dependence on foreign components, a carefully connected matrix of manufacturing schemes has been deployed to anchor a domestic ecosystem. The Production-Linked Incentive for Automobiles and Auto Components, backed by an allocation of 25,938 crore rupees, acts as the primary anchor for advanced automotive engineering. Simultaneously, the PLI for Advanced Chemistry Cells, with a budget of 18,100 crore rupees, is successfully scaling domestic battery cell production to a massive gigawatt-hour capacity, targeting what has historically stood as the single largest cost component in an imported electric vehicle.

This industrial defense is further rein-



forced by the Scheme for Rare Earth Magnets, which deploys 7,280 crore rupees to target a hyper-concentrated global supply chain currently held in very few monopolistic hands, an asymmetry that a truly self-reliant or Aatmanirbhar Bharat cannot afford to ignore. Complementing these upstream efforts, the Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India, which was opened to global corporate applicants in June 2025, has successfully incentivized world-leading electric vehicle manufacturers to commit to Indian soil by mandating a minimum investment of 4,150 crore rupees each. Beyond the immediate macroeconomic benefits of import substitution, these high-tech factories serve as critical engines of socioeconomic mobility, generating high-value employment opportunities for thousands of young Indian engineers, advanced technicians, and Industrial Training Institute graduates.

The same rigorous logic of scaling efficiency is being applied to public transport, an essential domain considering that buses account for nearly 60 percent of all passenger kilometers traveled across the country. The state has approached this challenge through a dual-policy mechanism: first, through PM E-DRIVE's dedicated 4,391 crore rupee allocation for

14,028 clean transit buses, and second, via the highly innovative PM e-Bus Sewa Payment Security Mechanism. Backed by an outlay of 3,435.33 crore rupees, this financial mechanism supports over 38,000 additional electric buses by providing a robust sovereign guarantee for operator payments in instances where financially strained State Transport Undertakings face delays. This single financial intervention effectively eliminates a legacy credit risk that no standard capital subsidy could ever resolve, instilling immense confidence in private transport operators. As a direct result, Indian cities are witnessing a rapid transformation of their mass transit fleets, with Bengaluru scheduled to receive 4,500 electric buses, Hyderabad 2,000, Delhi 2,800, Ahmedabad 1,000, and Surat 600 in the current implementation phase.

While none of these long-term structural reforms were originally initiated in response to sudden international crises, the severe geopolitical developments of early 2026 have cast their immediate value into exceptionally sharp relief. Global energy markets have been buffeted by extreme, unpredictable volatility since late February, driven by acute maritime disruptions around the critical Strait of Hormuz chokepoint that have upended

major global shipping routes. The fiscal danger for New Delhi is immense; during the 2025-26 fiscal year, India spent a staggering 174.9 billion dollars—accounting for roughly 22 percent of its total national import bill—solely on crude oil and petroleum products. As a consequence of this latest geopolitical shock, several major European and Asian economies were forced to witness retail pump prices skyrocket by twenty to thirty percent, stoking domestic inflation and political unrest. In stark contrast, retail fuel prices at Indian petrol pumps moved only marginally during this turbulent period, an exceptional economic insulation achieved through a combination of highly diversified crude sourcing, prudent fiscal management by the union government, and the financial resilience of state-backed oil marketing companies.

It is precisely against this turbulent international backdrop that the Prime Minister's recent public appeal—urging citizens to consciously consume less petrol, embrace carpooling, utilize expanding urban metro networks, and prioritize electric vehicles during their next upgrade cycle—has found a population uniquely prepared to respond. The localized carpool concept championed by the political leadership has already material-

ized at an urban scale in the form of the quiet electric buses rolling through the streets of Bengaluru and Hyderabad. The transition to electric mobility has successfully evolved from a niche, idealistic lifestyle choice into a thoroughly practical, economically sound option for the average middle-class citizen, frequently delivering a substantially lower total cost of ownership than legacy internal combustion engines.

This internal domestic consolidation is being matched by an equally aggressive diplomatic campaign on the international front, as demonstrated by the Prime Minister's extensive five-nation tour covering the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Italy. The high-level agreements signed in Abu Dhabi established a critical Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Petroleum Reserves alongside a robust, long-term supply arrangement for Liquefied Petroleum Gas, effectively fortifying India's conventional energy lifelines for the immediate future. Simultaneously, ongoing ministerial dialogues within the Nordic capitals are advancing sophisticated bilateral cooperation in clean technology, advanced battery chemistry, and green industrial manufacturing.

What remains profoundly vital across all of these disparate initiatives is the deliberate, elegant manner in which they structurally interlock into a singular national project. The various Production-Linked Incentive schemes construct the foundational domestic manufacturing base, while the PM E-DRIVE framework ensures that the resulting alternative vehicles are placed within financial reach of ordinary consumers. Concurrently, the Payment Security Mechanism provides the financial architecture necessary to deploy massive clean transit fleets onto city roads, while proactive diplomatic outreach secures the raw material inputs and technological partnerships required to sustain this momentum for decades to come. Energy sovereignty on a continental scale cannot be manifested overnight through executive decree; it is built methodically through the hard, unglamorous accumulation of industrial factories, physical infrastructure, and shifting societal habits. The holistic ecosystem set in motion over the past decade provides India with more strategic options than ever before at a time of severe international energy uncertainty, ensuring that the grand civilizational vision of achieving a fully developed Viksit Bharat by 2047 rests upon a highly resilient, self-sustaining foundation. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Movement of half the population is in trouble

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

The sight of a woman standing at a bus stop in India may seem ordinary, but if we look deeper, she's more than just a passenger. She carries with her many layers of society, struggles, hopes, and questions. She's waiting for a bus, but she's also waiting for her rights, opportunities, and a dignified existence. Ironically, we rarely attempt to understand the social and psychological implications of this scene we witness every day.

In Indian society, there's still a significant gap regarding the public presence of men and women. If a man is seen walking on the street at night, waiting for a bus, or sitting at a tea stall, it's considered normal. But if the same scene occurs with a woman, many questions automatically arise. Where is she going? Why is she alone? Why is she staying out so late? Who might be waiting for her? These questions aren't merely curiosity, but rather a reflection of a social mindset that still hasn't fully embraced women's freedom of movement.

This situation isn't limited to small towns or rural areas. Even in metropolitan areas, women feel more unsafe in public spaces than men. For them, leaving the home isn't just a physical journey, but also a process of overcoming numerous psychological and social barriers. Therefore, the importance of schemes, facilities, and policies related to women's mobility is not only economic but also social and psychological.

When governments implement schemes like free or subsidized bus travel for women, the value goes beyond simply saving on fares. It opens new doors of opportunity for women, for whom even small daily expenses influence decisions. In many families, the cost of women's education, employment, or other activities is still considered an additional burden. In such situations, reduced transportation costs can provide them with greater independence.

It's important to understand that not every woman who leaves home is simply going to work. She may be pursuing an important purpose in her life. One woman may be moving to another neighborhood or city to care for her ailing mother. Another may be gathering the courage to resume her studies, which she left after marriage. Another may be traveling long distances every day in search of better employment. Another may be taking on extra work to ensure a better future for her children. And it's also possible that she's simply leaving home for a few moments of peace of mind, because her unpaid labor within the home never ends.

In Indian society, women's domestic labor remains largely invisible. Cooking, caring for children, caring for the elderly, cleaning the house, and countless other small and large tasks—these are tasks without which family life is impossible, yet their economic value is not measured. Therefore, when a woman leaves the home, she leaves not just as an individual but also with the burden of numerous responsibilities. She has limited time,

limited resources, and high social expectations.

Our social perception of women's presence in public spaces also reveals many contradictions. While we advocate for women's education, employment, and self-reliance, we also maintain a tendency to suspect and control their freedom of movement. Families often want to educate their daughters, but worry about their late evening returns. They want women to progress, yet they also place numerous social limitations in their path.

For women, public transport is not just a means of travel, but also a means of social participation. Accessible, safe, and affordable transportation significantly increases women's education, employment, and social participation. Numerous studies around the world have demonstrated that increased women's mobility also enhances their economic independence and decision-making. Therefore, women's mobility should be viewed not simply as a transportation policy, but as a policy of social de-



velopment. The issue of safety in public spaces is also crucial. A large number of women in India still remain deprived of opportunities due to a lack of safe environments. Many female students refuse to enroll in distant colleges because travel is difficult or unsafe. Many women forgo better job opportunities because returning home late in the evening is considered risky. Thus, unsafe public spaces not only restrict personal freedom but also impact the country's economic and social progress.

However, simply discussing safety isn't enough. Respectful behavior in public spaces is equally important. Women often face stares, unwanted comments, and uncomfortable environments. This experience impacts their self-confidence and often forces them to avoid public life. A civilized society isn't defined solely by its crime rate, but by how respectful people treat each other.

It's also worth noting that the issue of public discipline isn't limited to men. Problems like illegal parking on sidewalks, disregard for traffic rules, littering in public spaces, and misuse of community resources involve diverse segments of society. Therefore, solutions must be collective. Both men and women must fulfill their civic responsibilities equally. Public life can only improve when duties are valued alongside rights.

Women's needs are also not adequately considered in urban design and development plans. Most cities have developed with a male-centric approach. Roads, transportation systems, public toilets, lighting, and security systems are often not designed with women's needs in mind. As a result, women face numerous disadvantages. To truly create inclusive cities, urban planning must center women's experiences and needs.

Women's freedom of movement is not just a woman's issue, but a question of democracy and equality. In a democratic society, every citizen should have the right to use public spaces without fear or discrimination. If half the population has to struggle extra hard to exercise their rights, it is a collective failure of society.

What's needed today is not just policies and plans, but a shift in mindset. We must instill in our daughters the belief that public spaces belong to them as much as anyone else. We must teach our sons that women's freedom is not a privilege but a fundamental right. We must understand that it's not unusual for a woman to travel alone, return home late in the evening, or take time for herself.

The woman standing at the bus stop is a reflection of a changing India. She wants to make her own decisions about her life. She wants equal access to education, employment, and opportunities. She wants to pursue her dreams not within boundaries, but in the open sky. Her struggle is not merely personal, but a struggle for social change.

Only when women in a society can be considered truly progressive can they travel without fear, be viewed without suspicion, and reach their goals without obstacles. Development isn't measured solely by tall buildings, wide roads, and modern technologies. The true measure of progress is the dignity and freedom a society provides to its most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Women standing at bus stops send us a silent message every day. They show us that freedom comes not just from the words of the Constitution, but from the conditions in which individuals can fearlessly exercise their rights. They remind us that equality should not be just a slogan, but a reality felt in everyday life.

The day a woman standing at a bus stop is not worried about what people will think about her, the day there is no question mark on her safety and dignity, the day her journey is considered just that of a normal passenger, only that day we will be able to say that we have taken an important step forward towards social equality.

The women standing at the bus stop aren't just waiting for a bus; they're waiting for a society that accepts them as full citizens, free individuals, and human beings with equal rights. And this wait is as much theirs as it is society's. Because a nation's path to progress is paved only when half its population can move forward without fear, without discrimination, and without obstacles. (Dr. Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

A Green transformation for Guwahati: The Promise and Potential of vertical gardens

By: Mowsam Hazarika

The city of Guwahati, the gateway to Northeast India, is today witnessing rapid urban expansion and infrastructural growth. While this transformation has brought economic opportunities and improved connectivity, it has also introduced a range of environmental challenges, including rising temperatures, declining air quality, and shrinking green spaces. Against this backdrop, the Government of Assam's recent announcement to introduce vertical gardens across 20 major flyovers and urban corridors marks a visionary step toward sustainable urban development.

This ambitious initiative aims to convert nearly 8,000 square metres of concrete surfaces into lush green vertical spaces. Typically, flyovers, bridge pillars, and roadside walls contribute to the stark, heat-retaining character of urban landscapes. By transforming these otherwise unused vertical surfaces into green installations, the project seeks to redefine the visual and ecological identity of the city.

Vertical gardens, also known as living walls, involve the cultivation of plants on upright surfaces using specially designed support systems. This technique has gained global popularity, particularly in densely populated cities where horizontal space for parks and gardens is limited. In cities like Guwahati, where land availability is increasingly constrained due to urban sprawl, vertical gardening offers an innovative and space-efficient solution to enhance greenery.

The project is a key component of the next phase of Guwahati's urban modernisation drive. Increasingly, urban planners around the world are recognising the importance of integrating nature into city infrastructure. Green urbanism is no longer a luxury but a necessity in the face of climate change and environmental degradation. In this context, Guwahati's move aligns with global trends and reflects a growing awareness of sustainable planning practices.

One of the most significant benefits of vertical gardens is their ability to reduce urban heat. Cities dominated by concrete and asphalt often experience the "urban heat island" effect, where temperatures are noticeably higher than in surrounding rural areas. Vertical greenery helps mitigate this by absorbing less heat and providing natural cooling through evapotranspiration. For Guwahati, which experiences warm and humid conditions for much of the year, this could lead to a more comfortable urban climate.

In addition to temperature regulation, vertical gardens can substantially improve air quality. Plants act as natural air filters, absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen while also trapping dust, smoke, and other pollutants. With the steady

increase in vehicular traffic and construction activities in Guwahati, air pollution has become a growing concern. The introduction of large-scale vertical greenery could play a meaningful role in addressing this issue.

Another important dimension of this initiative is the enhancement of urban aesthetics. Green walls can transform dull, grey structures into vibrant, visually appealing spaces. This not only improves the everyday experience of residents but also boosts the city's image as a modern and environmentally conscious urban centre. Combined with Guwahati's natural attractions, such as the mighty Brahmaputra and iconic landmarks, these green corridors could strengthen the city's appeal as a tourist destination.

However, the success of this project will depend largely on effective implementation and sustained maintenance. Vertical gardens require regular watering, pruning, and monitoring to ensure plant health. Without proper upkeep, these installations can quickly deteriorate, defeating their purpose. Therefore, establishing a robust maintenance framework will be crucial.

Cost is another factor that cannot be overlooked. Installing vertical garden systems involves significant initial investment in infrastructure, irrigation, and plant selection. Long-term operational costs must also be considered. To address these challenges, the government may explore collaborative models such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), encouraging private sector participation in funding and maintenance.

Community involvement can further strengthen the initiative. When citizens feel a sense of ownership and pride in such projects, they are more likely to support and sustain them. Awareness campaigns, educational programs, and local participation can help embed environmental consciousness into the urban culture of Guwahati.

Globally, cities such as Singapore, Paris, and London have successfully implemented vertical gardening as part of their urban design strategies. These examples demonstrate that with proper planning, investment, and management, vertical gardens can deliver long-term environmental and social benefits. Guwahati has the opportunity to learn from these models and adapt them to its own unique climatic and cultural context.

In conclusion, the proposed introduction of vertical gardens in Guwahati represents a forward-thinking approach to urban development. It is not merely a beautification project but a comprehensive strategy to address pressing environmental concerns while enhancing the quality of life for residents. If executed effectively, this initiative can set a benchmark for other cities in the Northeast and beyond, positioning Guwahati as a leader in sustainable urban transformation.

Israel strikes Beirut southern suburb ahead of crucial Washington talks



BEIRUT, May 28: Israel's air force carried out an airstrike on a southern suburb of the capital, Beirut, Thursday afternoon, the Israeli military said, further straining a fragile ceasefire a day ahead of crucial negotiations in Washington.

The strike hit an apartment building but it was not immediately clear who might have been targeted. Videos from the suburb of Choueifat, close to Beirut's international airport, showed white smoke billowing from a residential neighbourhood.

Tensions have been escalating in southern Lebanon, where Israeli troops have crossed the Litani River over the past days and issued a warning for residents to leave much of the area.

Israel in recent days has widened its attacks on Lebanon, some of the deadliest days since a Washington-brokered ceasefire agreement went into effect on April 17.

This was the first attack close to the Lebanese capital since May 6, where an Israeli strike killed a military official with Hezbollah's elite Radwan Forces in another southern Beirut suburb.

Overnight, the Israeli military pounded the coastal city of Tyre, Lebanon's fourth-largest city, killing at least 14 people across the south of the country in its ongoing military escalation against the Hezbollah group ahead of the Washington talks.

Among those killed in the flurry of strikes were five women and children and a Lebanese soldier. Dozens of others were wounded, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry and the state-run National News Agency.

An Israeli soldier meanwhile was killed in a Hezbollah drone at-

tack in northern Israel, the Israeli military said.

Attacks increase ahead of Washington talks

The intensification comes after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced an expansion in the Israeli military's attacks in Lebanon, apparently sparked by Hezbollah's use of fiber-optic exploding drones that have struck Israeli troops in Lebanon and reached some of Israel's northern border towns. The Israeli military said it has launched hundreds of attacks targeting what they said were Hezbollah military assets.

Lebanese and Israeli military officials are set to hold their first security talks on Friday in the US capital. The talks have extended a nominal ceasefire that went into effect April 17, although the attacks have since intensified, while largely sparing Beirut.

Hezbollah has dismissed the talks and instead endorsed its key ally Iran, which has made ending the war in Lebanon a condition for its own talks with Washington brokered by Pakistan.

Before the attacks on Thursday, Israeli military Arabic spokesperson Avichay Adrae issued warnings to residents of eight buildings in Tyre, along the Mediterranean, and in surrounding neighborhoods. Many people have fled the area.

Further north in the city of Sidon, an Israeli drone struck an apartment building where some displaced families lived, killing five people and wounding 21 others, among them five children. Among the killed was Hossan Zeidan who once was a correspondent for Iran's Arabic-language al-Aalam television.

Mohammad Al-Gharbi, who

lived across the street from the building in Sidon, woke to the sound of the explosion.

"I was in my room when part of the wall and shattered glass fell on me, and everything was thrown into chaos," he said. "This building that was hit had six apartments occupied by poor families who had fled from the south to escape the attacks there, only to be hit here."

In the nearby coastal town of Adloun, an Israeli drone struck a car with a family that was fleeing, killing six people, of which four were two children and their parents, the Lebanese Health Ministry said. Another drone strike that came without warning killed two people on a motorcycle near Tyre. The target of the attack was not immediately clear, NNA reported.

Elsewhere near the city of Nabatiyeh, the Lebanese military said a soldier was killed in an Israeli drone strike while he was riding his motorcycle.

Hezbollah attacks targets Israeli forces that have crossed the Litani River

The Israeli military said Thursday that a soldier in northern Israel was killed in a Hezbollah drone attack and two reservists were wounded.

Hezbollah has claimed dozens of drone and rocket attacks that it says targeted Israeli troops in southern Lebanon and northern Israel. The group said Thursday it has launched several attacks on Israeli troops and tanks that have crossed the Litani River into the town of Zawtar al-Sharqieh near Nabatiyeh, as close-range fighting continues.

Over 1 million people in Lebanon have been displaced by the war between Israel and Hezbollah, which was sparked when Hezbollah fired rockets into northern Israel on March 2 in solidarity with Iran, two days after the Iran war began.

At least 3,269 people have been killed in Israeli strikes since the start of the war, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry, with over 9,800 wounded.

According to Netanyahu's office, at least 23 Israeli soldiers and a defence contractor have been killed in or near southern Lebanon and two civilians have been killed in northern Israel, the vast majority by drones. (AP)

Shaky ceasefire in Iran war challenged again as Kuwait faces a missile attack

DUBAI, May 28: The US military on Thursday slammed Iran for violating a fragile ceasefire after Kuwait reported coming under attack in the latest flare-up that threatened ongoing negotiations to end the war.

US Central Command said that Kuwait had intercepted missiles launched by Iran late Wednesday night, calling the Iranian attack on one of America's top allies in the Persian Gulf an "egregious ceasefire violation."

Kuwait had earlier announced an attack on its territory, and Iran said had retaliated after strikes earlier in the week by firing on a US base in a Gulf state it did not name.

The US and Iran have traded strikes throughout the week, even as President Donald Trump has said he's confident his administration is making headway in negotiations with Iran to end the war.

On Monday, the US said it conducted what the Pentagon called "defensive" strikes on missile launch sites and minelaying boats



in southern Iran. U.S. officials said late Wednesday in Washington that forces launched more strikes on Iran, shooting down four one-way attack drones that posed a threat around the strait and hitting an Iranian ground control station in Bandar Abbas that was about to launch a fifth drone.

The officials were not authorised to comment publicly and

spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard via the state-run IRNA news agency acknowledged the attack around Bandar Abbas International Airport and said it launched its own retaliatory attack on the air base that launched the assault, without specifying whether the attack referenced had targeted

Kuwait.

Kuwait's military announced its air defense systems intercepted incoming missiles and drones on Thursday, without providing further details on what had been targeted. Home to US Army Central's forward headquarters as well as air bases and a naval base, Kuwait repeatedly came under fire from Iran and Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Iraq before the April ceasefire.

The announcement comes as the Middle East is on the edge and talks to end the war remain in flux.

Trump is looking for an agreement that will reopen the Strait of Hormuz — through which about a fifth of all traded oil and natural gas once passed. He is also seeking to get Iran to give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium while the Islamic Republic wants economic sanctions to be lifted and frozen assets to be released to aid its shattered economy. The war has been unpopular in the US, and Iran's closure of the strait has sent oil prices skyrocketing, driving up fuel prices around the world. (AP)

Fire rips through dormitory at girl's school in Kenya, killing at least 16 students



GILGIL (KENYA), May 28: A fire ripped through a dormitory in a girls' boarding school in central Kenya on Thursday, killing at least 16 students, a government official said, in the latest such incident to afflict the East African nation. Education Minister Julius Ogamba said Thursday that 79 others were injured at the Utumishi Girls School, which has more than 800 students in the Gilgil area of central Kenya.

The cause has not yet been established. Ogamba said authorities would investigate whether the school's fire safety manual had been adhered to. Police said they were leading the rescue and emer-

gency response efforts at the school, which is located about 120 kilometres from the capital, Nairobi.

The government-owned secondary school is managed and sponsored by the Kenya Police Service. Many of the students are daughters of police officers.

The victims have not yet been identified.

One person at the scene, Wambui Nderitu, arrived to check on her cousin, who is a student at the school. She said she heard that the matron opened one of two dormitory doors "without alerting the children to exit."

"The second door remained closed, and even though my cousin escaped with a leg injury, we've been told many children are injured and some died," Nderitu said.

The Kenya Red Cross said several students were evacuated and are receiving treatment in various hospitals. The group said it deployed "tracing and psychosocial support teams to support affected students and families."

Kenya's deadliest school fire in recent history occurred in 2001 when 67 students died in a dormitory fire in Machakos County. In 2024, 21 students burned to death in a school fire in central Kenya. President William Ruto declared three days of mourning.

In 2017, 10 students died in a school fire in Nairobi. A student was charged with murder. (AP)

India to build 14 schools in Nepal's earthquake-hit districts



KATHMANDU, May 28: India has pledged Nepali Rupees 560.2 million for the construction of 14 schools in eight earthquake-affected districts of Nepal, reaffirming its commitment to the Himalayan nation's post-disaster reconstruction and socio-economic development.

The Central Level Project Implementation Unit-Education under Nepal's Ministry of Education and Sports has signed agreements for the construction of 14 schools across eight districts of Nepal under a Government of India grant of Nepali Rupees 560.2 million, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu said in a press statement on Wednesday.

The schools will be built in Gorkha, Nuwakot, Dhading, Dolakha, Kathmandu, Kavrepalanchok, Ramechhap and Sindhupalchok districts - regions which bore the maximum brunt of earthquakes in the country over the last several years.

The country witnessed its worst earthquake in 2015, which killed nearly 9,000 people.

The schools will be constructed as per the Government of Nepal's norms for earthquake-resilient reconstruction. The infrastructure will include academic blocks, classrooms with furniture, and separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls, the statement said.

This is not the first time India has undertaken such an initiative. As many as 70 schools across eight districts and the Tribhuvan University Central Library in Kathmandu were completed and handed over to the Nepal government in January 2024 under India's post-earthquake reconstruction grant.

The Indian government has said it remained committed to continuing its collaboration with Nepal and its agencies for the socio-economic development of the Himalayan nation, including post-earthquake reconstruction projects. (PTI)

Australian PM hails India's economic growth; looks forward to hosting Modi again

CANBERRA, May 28: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Thursday said he looked forward to hosting PM Narendra Modi again soon, while describing India's growing economic importance as an "extraordinary opportunity" for the Indo-Pacific region.

Addressing the parliament in Canberra, Albanese said India, which already has the largest population in the world, was set to become the third-largest economy over this decade.

"That is an extraordinary opportunity for us in our region. We are a Pacific nation, but we are also an Indian Ocean nation as well," he said.

He said the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, which was signed in 2022, had enhanced the trading relationship between the two countries, and that they were further drawn together through culture, education and cricket.

Albanese recalled that he had first visited India as a backpacker in 1991 and had since made two visits as prime minister. He said the best way to understand India was to travel by bus or train.

"It is a wonderful experience to see first-hand the warmth that is there. Now, likewise, I'll have the privilege of hosting Prime Minister Modi here soon, a privilege I look forward to repeating for the second time," said Albanese.

He further said the visit would be "made extraordinary" by the million-strong Indian-Australian community - the largest growing immigrant community in Australia.

Modi last visited Australia in May 2023.

Albanese said the Indian community in Australia has strengthened the country's economy and benefitted countless small businesses.

"We are a better country because of you. My government will always stand up for you and your interests. We will reject any attempt to divide," he added.

The video clip of Albanese speaking at the parliament was shared on social media by Australian High Commissioner to India Philip Green, who said that his prime minister's warm equation with India made his job "infinitely more meaningful".

Earlier this week, Modi met Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and discussed the growing India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Wong was in India to participate in the Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting. During her visit, she also joined External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for the 17th Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue in New Delhi. (PTI)

Air India extends suspension of flights to Israel till July end

JERUSALEM, May 28: Amid continued geopolitical uncertainties in West Asia, Air India on Thursday said it is extending its suspension of operations on the Tel Aviv-Delhi route till July end. Earlier this month, it had announced suspension till June end but with no clarity on the prevailing security situation in the region, the leading Indian carrier has decided to further extend its suspension of operations on the route by another month. A senior executive heading the airlines' Israel operations told PTI that the "schedule amendment (has been) notified yesterday evening."

The flights have been "further suspended till 31 July due to the geopolitical situation," he said. In the wake of the West Asia conflict, which started in late February, airlines have been facing multiple headwinds, including costlier fuel and airspace curbs, which pushed up their operational costs. Earlier in April, the Indian carrier announced to put on hold its operations till the end of May, which now is further extended. Despite the ceasefire between the US and Iran holding on for some time, the uncertainties surrounding the situation in West Asia have pushed the majority of airlines to stop operating on the Tel Aviv route. (AP)

Chinese dissident in South Korean custody after perilous escape by rubber boat

SEOUL, May 28: A Chinese political dissident is in South Korean custody after making a perilous escape from his country in a small rubber boat, officials and his friend said. It was his fourth attempt to escape China, a risk he reportedly took hoping to be reunited with his family.

Dong Guangping, 68, was aboard a 3.3-metre (10.8-foot)-long rubber boat in the waters off a western South Korean island on Monday night when he was detained by South Korea's coast guard for allegedly violating the country's immigration law.

The coast guard sought a warrant to formally arrest him, but a local court on Thursday refused to issue one, saying it's "difficult to recognise sufficient grounds and necessity" for his arrest.

Prospects for Dong's fate are still unclear. Investigative authorities could pursue Dong's arrest again or indict him without his physical detention. If Dong applies for refugee status, South Korea's Justice Ministry said it will review it.

While Dong's submission of evidence of his political oppression in China could increase his chances for getting refugee status, observers still note that South Korea's acceptance rate for refugee status applications has been less than 2 per cent in recent years.

Dong, a former police officer in China, had previously been detained in China several times for his activism. He was imprisoned for three years in 2001 for "inciting subversion of state power" and spent more than eight months behind bars after being arrested in 2014 for participating in a memorial for victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown,

according to past statements from Amnesty International. It is his fourth known attempt to flee China. He reportedly wants to reunite with his family, which resettled in Canada. He previously escaped to Thailand and Vietnam, but authorities there deported him back to China. Dong also unsuccessfully tried to swim to a Taiwanese island.

In a post Wednesday on X, Sheng Xue, a Chinese Canadian activist, praised Dong's bravery. She said Dong had discussed fleeing by boat with her, though she felt it was too dangerous. She said she talked again to Dong through Messenger, after he arrived in South Korea.

"Dong Guangping said that when he reached Korean waters, he was already in a state of unconsciousness. He hadn't slept for over 50 hours and had been blown by sea winds for over 30 hours," she said.

A local coast guard office handling Dong's case said he had no major health issues when he was detained. The office said Dong told investigators that he came from Weihai city in China's eastern Shandong province though he's refused to respond to most other questions.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning, asked about Dong's case at a regular briefing Wednesday, answered that he was "not familiar with that".

South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson Park II told reporters Thursday that Dong's case would likely be handled in line with the local law, though he referred questions to immigration authorities at the Justice Ministry. (AP)

Think it's hot now?

The next five years will smash records: UN

WASHINGTON, May 28: In the next five years, the Earth is overwhelmingly likely to surge again and again past the international climate threshold set as safe and shatter its hottest-year record along the way, according to new United Nations climate projections.

The World Meteorological Organisation also forecasts an overheating Arctic that warms nearly 3 degrees Fahrenheit (1.66 degrees Celsius) between now and 2030 and a dangerous drought with potential wildfires for the Amazon, a crucial part of Earth's natural defences to lessen human-caused climate change. A hotter globe from the burning of coal, oil and gas means more extreme weather including floods, droughts and heat waves, scientists said.

The projections by the UN climate agency and the United Kingdom's Meteorological Office said there's a 75 per cent chance that the average global temperature between 2026 and 2030 will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. That threshold is the agreed-upon limit of warming — averaged over 20 years — set in 2015 by the Paris climate agreement.

A UN likely death, danger and species loss. Even though it's only a few tenths of a degree, some of the planet's ecosystems, such as coral

and glaciers, can't handle the strain.

Passing warming limit has consequences, but no cliff

There's a 91 per cent chance that at least one of the next five years will shoot past the 1.5-degree threshold and an 86 per cent chance that one of those years will smash the record for Earth's hottest year set in 2024, the WMO report said.

The WMO projects each year between now and 2030 to be between 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 degrees Fahrenheit) and 1.9 degrees Celsius (3.4 degrees Fahrenheit) since the late 1800s.

"It's important to note that (1.5) is not kind of a cliff edge that we're going to fall off," said report co-author Melissa Seabrook, a climate scientist at the U.K. Meteorological Office. "Every kind of 0.1 of a degree has more and more severe impact."

She pointed to unprecedented May heat in Europe this week.

An entire year or more above the 1.5 degree mark "means a whole range of extreme weather events, probably many so hot/wet/dry that it exceeds anything we've experienced in the past and thus crucially, anything our city planning, agriculture etc. has anticipated," Imperial College of London climate scientist Friederike Otto, who was n't part of the report, said in an email.



"This will mean many people will lose their lives, we are in for a lot of food price shocks, and more intense wildfires."

Nearly all the shorter-term forecasts call for a strong El Nino — a natural warming of parts of the central Pacific that alters weather worldwide and spikes global temperatures — to form soon. The WMO report said it could stretch all the way to 2028. Because of that, Seabrook said 2027 will likely break the 2024 heat record.

And if the next five years do average more than 1.5 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times, that means Earth will have warmed a quarter of a degree Celsius (0.45 degrees Fahrenheit) in a decade, which is faster than the previous rates of warming. Those were closer to two-tenths

of a degree Celsius per decade.

Climate scientists are debating whether global warming is accelerating, "which obviously is quite scary," and if these projections come true it would give additional evidence to those who see a speeded up rate of change, Seabrook said.

Accelerating warmth forecast in the Arctic

The projections, based on the averaging of about 200 runs of computer simulations using 13 different climate models from various countries, show warming in the Arctic rising 3.5 times faster than the rest of the globe, because there's less ice and snow that had been reflecting solar radiation to space, Seabrook said. It becomes a vicious cycle.

"As the temperature warms, more sea ice melts, the worse this makes it," Seabrook said.

Winters in the Arctic from 2020 to 2025 on average were 2.1 degrees Fahrenheit (1.2 degrees Celsius) warmer than the 1991-2020 average. The WMO projects the next five winters will average 5.1 degrees Fahrenheit (2.8 degrees Celsius) warmer than that recent normal, Seabrook said.

The report also forecasts Arctic sea ice to continue to shrink in the summer.

Amazon may get drier, sparking fire worries

The report calls for even warmer and unusually dry conditions in the Amazon basin, and that could be devastating for both local residents and the planet as a whole, Seabrook said.

People rely on the Amazon for water and the hotter, drier conditions should increase wildfire risk, Seabrook said, threatening to turn the Amazon, which now sucks heat-trapping carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, into a region that worsens the problem.

Africa's Sahel area, which has been extra dry, is likely to get more than normal rain and that could lead to flooding, Seabrook said.

United Nations officials said efforts to curb climate change haven't been enough.

"Despite the progress of recent years, it's clear that global heating is still outpacing global efforts to contain it, and the baking temperatures in Europe, India and elsewhere show yet again the brutal human and economic impacts of humanity still burning colossal amounts of coal, oil and gas," UN climate chief Simon Stiell said about the WMO report.

"Whether it's extreme heat, mega-storms, floods, massive wildfires or droughts hitting food supply and prices," he said, "every nation is already paying a huge price from this global climate crisis." (AP)

Sikkim becomes 15th state in the country to receive the prestigious honour

Prez Murmu confers President's Police Colour upon Sikkim Police

GANGTOK, May 28: President Draupadi Murmu on Thursday conferred the prestigious President's Police Colour on the Sikkim Police at an event at Paljor Stadium.

Sikkim has now become the 15th state of the country and the third in the northeast to receive the award.

The President's Police Colour, also known as 'Nishaan', is the highest ceremonial honour bestowed upon a state or central police force in India in recognition of exceptional service, bravery and professionalism.

The officers of the state police honoured with the President's Police Colour are authorised to wear a special emblem on the uniform.

Speaking on the occasion, Murmu said, "I am delighted to have conferred the 'President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service' upon the Sikkim Police. This honour is a matter of pride for all members of the Sikkim Police."

She praised the Sikkim Police,



founded in 1897, for dedication to maintaining law and order in the strategically important state.

Observing that the police have had a colonial bearing, having been set up to control the people instead of serving them, the President said the mindset must change and police should become citizens' allies and guides.

"By adopting the role of an ally,

trust between the public and the police will increase," she said.

Murmu called upon the police to embrace technology to deal with cybercrimes.

"Now, new challenges like cybercrime, online fraud, hacking, and deepfakes are emerging. To tackle these new challenges, the police must become proficient in the latest technology, cybersecurity and digital

investigation," she added.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang hailed the conferment of the President of India's Police Colour upon the Sikkim Police.

"It is a matter of immense pride and profound honour for Sikkim and its police to receive the prestigious President's Police Colour," he said in a social media post.

Tamang said this distinguished recognition reflects the force's dedication, discipline, professionalism, courage, and selfless service in safeguarding peace, harmony, and security across the state.

"It reflects the force's commitment towards upholding the rule of law and serving the people with integrity, compassion, and honour," he said.

"The conferment of the President's Police Colour further strengthens our resolve to continue working with dedication and unity towards the progress, peace, and prosperity of our beloved state and the nation," the chief minister said. (PTI)

Centre recognises Nagaland's 19 tribal local languages for GDS recruitment

Move hailed as historic step towards inclusivity and protection of indigenous linguistic identity

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 28: The government of India has recognised 19 notified tribal local languages and dialects of Nagaland in the recruitment process of Gramin Dak Sevaks (GDS) in the postal department.

Nagaland's lone Lok Sabha MP S Supongmeren Jamir, who initiated and pursued the recruitment policy reform on recruitment of GDS in Nagaland, called the Centre's decision "historic".

In a statement on Thursday, Jamir said this decision is a significant acknowledgment of the linguistic and cultural identity of the Naga people and will help ensure greater inclusivity, representation and participation of the youth of Nagaland in the GDS recruitment process.

He added that the GDS recruitment was previously open on a broader all-India basis, but this initiative has ensured that the recruitment process in Nagaland will now duly recognise and incorporate the notified tribal languages, thereby safeguarding the interests and opportunities of the indigenous people of the state.

The MP hailed the office memorandum issued by the postal department on May 21, recognising proficiency and knowledge of the notified tribal local languages/dialects for GDS engagement in Nagaland.

Jamir expressed hope that such initiatives would continue to strengthen the protection, preservation and promotion of indigenous tribal languages and cultural heritage across the state.

He expressed his sincere gratitude to the Nagaland



home department, MLA Tseihoutou Rhuso, chief secretary Sentiyanger Imchen and director, Postal Service Kohima, Dr Alice K Vizo for their collective support and efforts in making the policy initiative a success.

Tripura CM congratulates BJP MLA Abhishek Debroy on his appointment as state unit president

AGARTALA, May 28: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday congratulated BJP MLA Abhishek Debroy on being appointed as president of the party's state unit.

Debroy, the MLA of Matabari assembly constituency in Gomati was appointed the party's state unit chief, BJP national president Nitin Nabin announced earlier in the day.

"Heartiest congratulations to Abhishek Debroy ji on being appointed as the president of BJP Tripura Pradesh. Confident that under his dynamic leadership and organisational vision, the party will grow stronger and continue working dedicatedly for the welfare of Tripura's people," the CM said in a social media post.

Saha had earlier met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP chief to discuss organisational matters, party leaders said. (PTI)

Arunachal launches digital teacher transfer system to ensure transparency

ITANAGAR, May 28: The Arunachal Pradesh government has launched a digitised teacher transfer and posting system to ensure transparency in the process, balanced deployment and stricter monitoring of attendance in schools.

Announcing the rollout of the Arunachal Pradesh Teacher Transfer and Posting Policy Act on Wednesday, Education Commissioner Amjad Tak said the reform is being implemented under the government's 'Reach to Teach' initiative to improve staffing in remote and underserved regions.

A key feature of the new system is the Teacher Registry Portal, an online database that will digitally manage transfer applications, service records and posting histories of teachers.

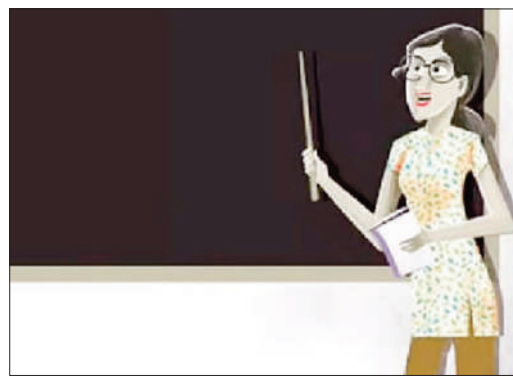
Tak said that 16,068 teachers, accounting for nearly 97.4 per cent of the state's teaching workforce, along with 107 ministerial staffers, have already enrolled on the portal.

He added that the portal would maintain comprehensive records of teachers, including their transfer history, classroom performance, students' academic results and medical details, enabling the department to strengthen accountability and reduce irregularities in the education sector.

"The department now has complete data on teachers," Tak said.

He said the new transfer framework has been designed keeping in view Arunachal Pradesh's challenging topography, while also attempting to reduce inconvenience for teachers during postings.

The department has already issued 2,064 intra-district transfer orders, of which more than 1,000 have been implemented.



The commissioner further said that more than 600 teachers have already applied for self-transfer through the digital platform.

At the same time, the department clarified that teachers unwilling to opt for voluntary transfers could still be shifted manually depending on staffing requirements and vacancies, particularly in schools facing acute shortages.

The government is also working to maintain the prescribed teacher-student ratio of 1:45 in remote institutions.

The commissioner warned that teachers failing to join their new place of posting within 15 days could face action under provisions of the Act.

The Teacher Registry Portal is expected to become fully functional by the first week of July this year, while the transfer system will be implemented in phases before becoming fully operational by May next year. (PTI)

Arunachal governor, CM Khandu greet people on Eid-ul-Adha

ITANAGAR, May 28: Arunachal Pradesh Governor K T Parmaik, Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Thursday extended greetings to the people on Eid-ul-Adha, highlighting the festival's message of sacrifice, compassion and social harmony.

Parmaik said the festival symbolises values such as sacrifice, humility, and selfless service to humanity.

"Beyond celebrations, it also promotes brotherhood, mutual respect, generosity and social harmony, while encouraging people to care for the less fortunate," he added.

Khandu also conveyed his greetings on the occasion and took to X to say, "May this sacred occasion bring peace, compassion, gratitude and togetherness. Wishing everyone happiness, good health and prosperity."

Mein also extended his greetings to the people. "On the joyous occasion of Eid al-Adha, I extend my heartfelt greetings and warm wishes to all. May every home be blessed with peace, happiness and prosperity," he added. (PTI)

Cabinet tightens VIP vehicle norms

'As you recall, we have come out with SOPs where we had mentioned different sirens, lights and other VIP culture issues that we are very concerned about'



HT Correspondent

SHILLONG, May 28: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday said the state government has approved a standardised list and format for the use of name boards on official vehicles as part of its ongoing drive against VIP culture.

Speaking to reporters after chairing a Cabinet meeting, Sangma said it was part of the government's move against VIP culture.

"The second notification was a very simple notification, it was the regulation of the use of names or boards of official vehicles," Sangma said.

"As you recall, we have come out with SOPs where we had mentioned different sirens, lights and other VIP culture issues that we are very concerned about."

He said the Transport Department has now finalised who is eligible to display name boards and how they should appear.

"The Transport Department will define who will be allowed to use the name board and who will not and based on that decision the Transport Department today has given the list of individuals rather than positions who can use the name board and what the format of the name board will be," Sangma said.

"There has to be a standard format as per designation, which now will be used and that list was today approved," he added.

The Chief Minister said the approved list spans several wings of government.

"Basically, it is the list of different officials and positions at the government level and judiciary, mostly in administration and certain statutory positions from a central government perspective," he also said. (NNV)

Mizoram Tourism Director quits amid MZP protest over re-employment of retired official

AIZAWL, May 28: R Lalrodingi, a retired official who was recently re-employed by the Mizoram government as OSD to the chief minister and given additional charge as Director of Tourism, stepped down on Thursday from the tourism post following days of protests by the influential student body, Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP).

Chief Minister Lalduhoma has accepted her resignation, bringing to an end a standoff that had paralysed the functioning of the Tourism Directorate for three consecutive days, officials said.

Lalrodingi submitted her resignation letter, requesting the chief minister to withdraw her appointment as Tourism Director while protecting the status of the post as a departmental officer position.

The controversy began after the state government issued an order on April 24 re-employing Lalrodingi following her retirement as Additional Director in the Commerce and Industries Department on April 30. Her re-engagement came into effect on May 1.

The move triggered sharp criticism from Mizo Zirlai Pawl, which argued that re-employing retired officials blocks promotional opportunities for serving officers and reduces employment prospects for educated youth.

The organisation demanded the immediate withdrawal of Lalrodingi's appointment as Tourism Director.



Tourism with immediate effect.

The decision prompted MZP members to stage a picket outside the Tourism Directorate from May 25 to 27, preventing Lalrodingi and other officials from entering the office.

In her resignation letter, Lalrodingi said the agitation had severely disrupted the functioning of the department.

"Due to the intense opposition from the MZP regarding my appointment as director of tourism, the office has virtually remained unable to function normally for the past three days, thereby affecting the smooth progress of tourism development activities," she wrote.

"I do not believe it is right for me to remain in a position where I disrupt work and make your government appear as though it is showing undue favouritism. Therefore, I request that I be relieved from the post of director of tourism," she added.

Following her resignation, the MZP cancelled its meeting to decide its future course of action over the issue. (PTI)

Combing operations underway to trace those held hostage by armed groups: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, May 28: Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khechhand Singh on Thursday said security forces are carrying out search and combing operations to trace those held hostage by armed groups.

During a visit to Makhana Naga village in Kangpokpi district, he told reporters that four persons, suspected to be involved in the kidnapping of the six Naga people, have been arrested.

The government is taking the issue seriously, and search and combing operations by security forces are underway to trace the

hostages, the chief minister said.

More than 38 people were abducted and held hostage by armed groups in Kangpokpi and Senapati districts on May 13, hours after three church leaders were killed in an ambush in Kangpokpi district.

Of them, 31 people have been released, including 12 Naga women and 16 Kukis. Six Naga men, however, continued to be held hostage, and their whereabouts are not yet known.

Kuki Inpi Manipur, the apex body of the Kuki tribes in the state, claimed that 14 people from the

community continued to be held hostage by Naga groups.

Singh said investigations were underway to nab the culprits and assured people that the hostages would be traced out soon.

The Makhana Naga Village in Kangpokpi district also has a Relief Camp for Internally Displaced Persons. Singh met those taking shelter at the Makhana Baptist Church and distributed relief materials.

The village chief told the chief minister that many Nagas in Kangpokpi district had left their villages out of fear. (PTI)

Traditional ecological knowledge greatest defence against climate change: Arunachal minister

ITANAGAR, May 28: Arunachal Pradesh minister Gabriel D Wangsu on Thursday said traditional ecological knowledge is the state's greatest defence against climate change, an official report said.

Speaking after inaugurating the Arunachal Pradesh Jaiv Vividhata and Mvm Lid Soanam/Beej Utsav 2026, Wangsu described Keyi Panyor district as a pioneering model of "biohappiness-driven" development.

Highlighting changing climatic conditions, the agriculture and horticulture minister said rainfall patterns have become increasingly erratic, winters are shorter and floods more intense.

He cautioned that solutions designed for the plains cannot be simply transplanted to the region's unique terrain and urged protection and promotion of indigenous crop varieties as "living insurance" against climate uncertainty.

The two-day festival and stakeholder consultation, being held at the Government Higher Secondary School in Yazali, has been co-organised by the 16th YAC MLA office, Krishi Vigan Kendra (KVK) Keyi Panyor, the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM) and the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF).



The event aims to position the newly established district as a living template for sustainable development that fuses biodiversity conservation with human well-being. Officials said Keyi Panyor has been recog-

nised as India's first "Bio-Happy District", a distinction based on biological diversity, tribal cultural identity, ecological sustainability and community well-being.

They said the recognition highlights the district's traditional wisdom, resilience and ecological practices among the country's more than 800 districts.

Wangsu lauded local conservation efforts and singled out Hage Nanya from Ziro for seeking intellectual property protection under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act for 12 indigenous paddy varieties from the Lower Subansiri district.

To scale such successes, the minister announced measures to bolster community seed banks, strengthen local seed certification systems, expand storage infrastructure, and mobilise networks of women-led 'Seed Guardians'.

Yachuli MLA Toko Tatung, in his address, celebrated the region's rich agricultural heritage.

MSSRF chairperson Dr Soumya Swaminathan said the biohappiness concept can integrate grassroots conservation with inclusive livelihoods, nutrition security, and social equity. (PTI)

PM Modi to help attract investments in Tripura: CM Manik Saha

AGARTALA, May 28: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured support in attracting investment to the northeastern state to boost industries and allied sectors.

The state government has already decided to organise a business summit in July to attract investments worth around ₹ 30,000 crore.

"I had a detailed discussion with the PM on May 26 on different issues ranging from development to financial matters and deregulation measures for ease of doing business. In the first phase, Tripura stood first in deregulation implementation," Saha told reporters. He said the PM assured support in bringing investment to the border state to strengthen industries and allied sectors.

Saha also met Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Union Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya in New Delhi on Thursday.

Talking to social media, the CM said, "A fruitful discussion was held with Pradhan on various important matters related to the state education department." (PTI)

Resolve water disputes through cooperation: PM Modi to states

Pradhan, Rahul engage in verbal war over CBSE exam row

NEW DELHI, May 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked states to resolve inter-state water disputes through cooperation, timely clearances and technology-based monitoring, and said the Ken-Betwa project should serve as a model.

Chairing the 51st PRAGATI meeting, where seven critical infrastructure projects across railways, power and road sectors covering nine states worth around Rs 30,000 crore were reviewed on Wednesday evening, he underlined that delay in implementation of public projects leads not only to cost escalation but also deprives citizens of timely access to essential facilities. "During yesterday's PRAGATI session, projects worth over Rs 30,000 crore were reviewed. The works covered sectors like railways, power and road connectivity. Aspects relating to ports, Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 and other social sector schemes were also discussed," Modi said in a post on X on Thursday.

While reviewing the Ken-Betwa river inter-linking project, the prime minister said it should serve as a model for other states to resolve inter-state water issues through cooperation, timely clearances, technology-based monitoring and mission-mode execution, an official statement said.

States were encouraged to identify similar opportunities where



river-linking, water conservation, groundwater recharge and efficient irrigation can be taken up in an integrated manner to ensure long-term water security, the statement said. PRAGATI is an ICT-enabled, multi-modal platform aimed at fostering pro-active governance and timely implementation, by seamlessly integrating efforts of the central and state governments.

The seven critical infrastructure projects are pivotal to economic growth and public welfare and these were reviewed with a focus on timelines, inter-agency coordination, and timely issue resolution.

Besides the Ken Betwa river link project, Modi also reviewed the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0. While reviewing power sector projects, he emphasised the need to accelerate rooftop solar adoption across urban areas, with a special

focus on cities, residential clusters and public institutions.

Modi underlined that rooftop solar should be taken up in mission mode to reduce electricity costs, improve energy security and promote clean energy at the household and community level.

The prime minister also emphasised that innovative use of canal networks should be explored, including installation of solar panels along canals and over canals for clean electricity generation.

This would help optimise land use, reduce evaporation losses, generate renewable energy and create additional economic value from water infrastructure.

At the beginning of the meeting, Cabinet Secretary TV Somanathan said that in pursuance of the directions of the prime minister, a system of monthly review of social sector schemes at the state level has also been operationalised. (PTI)

the need for effective implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0, underlining that it should move beyond infrastructure creation and ensure measurable outcomes through regular monitoring, citizen participation and convergence between various stakeholders. He asked the states to expedite the completion of solid waste management-related infrastructure, including waste processing plants and GOBARdhan plants.

Modi observed that every delay has a direct impact on people's lives, regional growth and public resources and stressed that central ministries, departments and states must adopt a more proactive and time-bound approach to resolve pending issues, remove bottlenecks and ensure faster execution.

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Nitin Nabin appoints new chiefs for BJP Delhi, Punjab, two other states

NEW DELHI, May 28: BJP national president Nitin Nabin on Thursday appointed new party chiefs for its four state units, naming Union minister Harsh Malhotra as the Delhi BJP president.

While Archana Gupta was appointed as the BJP Haryana president, Sardar Kewal Singh Dhillon was made the party's Punjab unit chief, according to separate notifications issued by party national general secretary Arun Singh.

Abhishek Debroy, an MLA from Matabari assembly constituency in Tripura, was made president of the BJP state unit. "All these appointments come into force with immediate effect," Singh said.

Harsh Malhotra, 62, is the only Union minister in the Modi Cabinet from Delhi. He replaces Virendra Sachdeva, who completed his three-year term as the Delhi BJP president in March this year.

Malhotra, who served as the general secretary of the Delhi unit of the BJP before becoming a minister at the Centre, is considered an expert on organisational matters as well as the functioning of the civic bodies. In 2015, he was elected as mayor of the erstwhile East Delhi Municipal Corporation.

Archana Gupta, newly appointed Haryana BJP president, is a doctor by profession. She was serving the party as its state general secretary. (PTI)

Regional parties' income falls 52 pc in 2024-25: ADR

NEW DELHI, May 28: The combined income of 36 regional political parties declined by over 51 per cent in 2024-25 compared to the previous financial year, while 21 of them spent more than their declared earnings, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

The report, released on May 27, analysed the audited accounts of 36 out of 67 recognised regional parties whose annual audit reports for the financial year (FY) 2024-25 were available on the Election Commission website.

It noted that the remaining 31 parties had not made their audit reports available even 207 days after the October 31, 2025, deadline.

According to the ADR's analysis, the total income of the 36 regional parties stood at ₹ 1,192.94 crore in the FY 2024-25, down from ₹ 2,463.17 crore in FY 2023-24, a decline of ₹ 1,270.23 crore or 51.57 per cent.

The total expenditure declared by these parties, however, reached ₹ 1,433.07 crore, exceeding their combined income by ₹ 240.12 crore or about 20 per cent.

The report said the top five parties accounted for nearly 69 per cent of the total income and over 77 per cent of total expenditure among the parties analysed.

Among regional parties, the highest income was declared by the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) at ₹ 228.31 crore, constituting 19.14 per cent of the total income, followed closely by the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) at ₹ 219.35 crore and the YSR Congress at ₹ 140.39 crore.

On the expenditure front, YSR Congress spent the most at ₹ 340.20 crore, followed by Biju Janata Dal (BJD) at ₹ 288.44 crore and AITC at ₹ 227.59 crore.

The ADR report highlighted that 21 of the 36 parties spent more than the income they collected during the year.

YSR Congress recorded the highest excess expenditure, spending ₹ 199.82 crore more than its income, amounting to 142.33 per cent above its earnings. Parties such as AITC, BRS, BJD, JD(U) and Samajwadi Party also reported expenditure exceeding their income.

At the same time, 15 parties reported unspent income. The TDP had the largest surplus, retaining ₹ 166.98 crore unspent, followed by Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) with ₹ 36.27 crore and AIADMK with ₹ 35.86 crore.

Voluntary contributions remained the biggest source of funding for regional parties. Donations and contributions accounted for ₹ 702.36 crore or 58.88 per cent of total income. The AITC reported the highest donations at ₹ 184.08 crore, followed by YSR Congress at ₹ 140.05 crore and TDP at ₹ 85.20 crore. Interest income contributed another ₹ 277.21 crore, or 23.24 per cent of the total income.

The report further observed that election expenditure and administrative expenses remained the most common spending heads.

Fifteen regional parties spent more than 55 per cent of their expenditure on elections. (PTI)

Siddaramaiah to resign, Shivakumar will be next CM, says Minister Patil

BENGALURU, May 28: Karnataka Law Minister H K Patil on Thursday said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah informed him and other ministers of his decision to step down and that Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar will be his successor.

After taking part in the breakfast hosted by the chief minister, Patil, who holds the Parliamentary Affairs portfolio, said that Siddaramaiah will visit Lok Bhavan to tender his resignation. The proposed change in the leadership is in compliance with the directions of the Congress high command, he added.

The minister told reporters: "The CM, quoting discussions with the high command, has said that he will resign...there is no point of dissent anywhere. It is unanimous, and everyone agrees to whatever the high command has said."

The party brass has given instructions for elevating Shivakumar as the chief minister, and appropriate procedural steps will be initiated in this regard at the legislature party meeting, he added.

Labour Minister Santosh Lad turned emotional and broke down when the reporters questioned him about the developments in the meeting.

Excise Minister RB Timmapur said a few ministers turned emotional at the meeting when the CM announced his decision to step down.

Minister of Science and Technology N S Boseraju said the discussions also reflected on the government's performance over the last



three years and preparations for the future.

"Everybody joined today. So everybody spoke well. Chief Minister and Deputy CM said how they have managed the government and the finances for the last three years. They urged us to maintain it in the same way for the remaining two years and said that everybody should work hard," he told reporters.

"BJP people are doing a lot of mischief; you have to face all those things, and once again in 2028, you have to win the elections," Boseraju quoted Siddaramaiah as saying. Asked about the political equation within the Congress after Siddaramaiah's resignation, Boseraju said, "As it is, everything is well. Everybody will follow whatever the High Command says."

The Minister also informed that both Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar will address the press. When asked about addressing the Rajya Sabha post or the next KPCC president, he asserted that nothing else was discussed.

Meanwhile, Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy said Siddaramaiah was expected to resign by the afternoon.

"He is going to resign...The governor is not in the station, but he will give his resignation to the secretary," Reddy added. When asked whether Siddaramaiah would travel to Delhi soon, Reddy said he did not know.

Responding to questions on what transpired during the meeting, Reddy said Siddaramaiah thanked ministers for their cooperation during his tenure and informed them about his decision to step down.

Asked when the next chief minister would take over, he said it was "not known". Senior Congress MLA and Chairperson of the Administrative Reforms Commission R V Deshpande, said the transition in leadership would be smooth. "The transition is going to be very smooth," he said.

According to CMO sources, the CM sought an appointment with the governor after the party high command asked him to make way for a leadership change in the state.

However, Lok Bhavan sources said Siddaramaiah has not yet sought time to meet Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, who has left for his native city of Indore in Madhya Pradesh for personal reasons.

Asked if the chief minister can hand over his resignation letter to the Lok Bhavan secretary, an official told PTI that Siddaramaiah may do so if he wishes. (PTI)

Rahul 'frustrated', opposed to India's scientific progress: Pradhan

NEW DELHI, May 28: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his remarks on alleged discrepancies in the CBSE exam system, saying he was "frustrated" and "opposed" to India's technological progress.

The response came after Gandhi on Wednesday said the CBSE examination results have been marred by "massive irregularities" and demanded an independent judicial inquiry and constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to unearth the truth behind the "entire scam". He had also alleged that a firm with a murky past in Telangana was handed the contract by CBSE for digital evaluation of answer books.

"Yesterday, CBSE gave its response regarding this matter. It is in accordance with the procurement policy of the Government of India. I want to assure everyone that if any irregularities are found, no one will be spared," Pradhan said.

Targeting Gandhi, the minister said the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha appeared "frustrated" due to continuous electoral defeats

and accused him of opposing reforms and technological progress.

"But as far as Rahul Gandhi is concerned, he seems to have reached a different state of mind. Due to continuous electoral defeats, he appears frustrated. He opposed SIR, he used to oppose EVMs, and he opposed Digital India. He does not seem to stand with India's scientific progress," he said.

Pradhan also said that issues related to students and examinations should not be politicised. "As far as this issue is concerned, I myself take responsibility on behalf of the government for any inconvenience, and I request everyone that this is not the time for politics. I have said this earlier as well. Politics can be done later," he said.

"The most important thing is that the mental stress of these students and examinees should not increase further. We appeal to everyone that no one's words or behaviour should add to their stress," the minister added.

The Education minister also said that some issues have come to light regarding the evaluation process. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, May 28: Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Rahul Gandhi on Thursday engaged in a fierce public spat over the CBSE exam row, with Pradhan accusing Gandhi of politicising the issue and being frustrated and the Congress leader hitting back, asserting that attacking him would not absolve the union minister of his "crimes".

Pradhan's attack came after Gandhi alleged irregularities in the CBSE exam system and demanded an independent judicial probe and constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to unearth the truth behind the "entire scam". He also alleged that a firm with a murky past in Telangana was handed the contract by CBSE for digital evaluation of answer books.

Targeting Gandhi, Pradhan said the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha appeared "frustrated" due to continuous electoral defeats and accused him of opposing reforms and technological progress and accused him of politicising the issue.

"But as far as Rahul Gandhi is concerned, he seems to have reached a different state of mind. Due to continuous electoral defeats, he appears frustrated. He opposed SIR, he used to oppose EVMs, and he opposed Digital India. He does not seem to stand with India's scientific progress," he said.

The minister emphasised that the CBSE's actions align with the Government of India's procurement policy and assured that if any irregularities are discovered, action will be taken against those responsible.

"As far as this issue is concerned, I take responsibility on behalf of the government for any inconvenience, and I request everyone that this is not the time for politics. I have said this earlier as well. Politics can be done later," he said.

Hitting back, Gandhi said, "Dharmendra Pradhan ji, you can attack me all you want, but it won't absolve you of your crimes. Nor will it stop me from demanding answers for 18.5 lakh children."

Posing a string of questions in a post on X, Gandhi asked why the CBSE OSM contract was handed to COEMPT - "a company already mired in controversy under its old name, Globarena?"

"On whose orders was it done? Why were no background checks done? What is the connection between COEMPT's management and the Modi government?" Gandhi asked. "Either you ran a background check and went ahead anyway - or you didn't run one at all. Either way, you are complicit," his post read.

Gandhi asserted that if the prime minister truly cared about the situation, he should have dismissed Pradhan long ago for jeopardising the futures of countless students.

In a post on X, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said, "Arrogance and political dramabazzi is the best the Mantri Pradhan can come up with, even amidst the chaos he has created for lakhs of India's students and the absolute incompetence he has shown as minister."

He noted that Pradhan was now training his guns on the Leader of Opposition, as he was not content with slandering the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education.

"Even while his own ministry is a den of corruption



and mismanagement. His thick skin and false bravado are a great fit for the Modi-Shah brand of politics: utterly shameless and disinterested in governance."

Ramesh claimed that Prime Minister Modi's "patronage" was responsible for Pradhan's arrogance.

"The responsibility for the NEET-CBSE debacle is equally on the Pradhan Mantri, who has protected the Mantri even after the 2024 NTA debacle," Ramesh alleged.

Earlier, Pradhan asserted that the most important thing is that the mental stress of students and examinees should not increase.

"Certain issues have come to light regarding the CBSE Class 12 examination evaluation process, and a re-evaluation process will now begin," Pradhan said.

The minister said that around 17 lakh students appeared for the exam, and answer sheets of each student have been securely preserved. "In total, there are 98 lakh answer-sheet copies, with each copy consisting of around 40 pages, which means nearly 40 crore scanned pages were evaluated for the first time by CBSE through the OSM process," he said.

Describing OSM as a "progressive and student-centric" system, he said several institutions in India and abroad are adopting such mechanisms for greater transparency in evaluation.

"Through this process, students can transparently access information about their marks, and through scanned copies, they can directly view their answer sheets. It helps address students' doubts and concerns regarding whether they received fewer or more marks, or whether any answer or section was overlooked during evaluation," he said.

Pradhan said this was the first time CBSE had implemented the system on such a large scale and acknowledged that some discrepancies had come to notice. "These issues will be resolved, and appropriate measures will be taken. We are all committed to ensuring that no student's concerns or queries go unanswered," he stated.

The CBSE has also said that its On-Screen Marking (OSM) system is backed by a "secure and robust IT platform". The Board said the platform has been "tested and certified through empanelled security audits" and is supported by a "robust digital infrastructure". (PTI)

Menstrual dignity must be society's shared responsibility: Experts

BHUBANESHWAR, May 28: Menstruation is a natural part of life and society must create an environment where girls and women can speak openly about menstrual health with dignity and confidence, Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights Chairperson Babita Patra said on Thursday.

Addressing the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Conclave 2026 here, Patra stressed that no girl or woman should feel excluded, embarrassed or unsafe because of menstruation and said "a compassionate and informed society is the foundation of menstrual dignity for all".

Marking Menstrual Hygiene Day 2026, the Odisha Menstrual Health and Hygiene Alliance (OMHH Alliance), led by Aaina in collaboration with UNICEF, organised a state-level multi-stakeholder dialogue on the theme "Rising Together: Transforming Menstrual Health as a Fundamental Right."

Speaking at the conclave, Odisha Additional Director Gen-

eral of Police Shyeni S said there are still significant challenges in ensuring girls' and women's access to safe water, clean toilets and sanitary pads across the country -- whether in schools, colleges, workplaces or even during travel on roadsides and public spaces.

"These are not luxuries but basic necessities that must be guaranteed so that every woman and girl can manage her menstrual cycle with safety, comfort and dignity," she said. She also questioned the idea of celebrating the first period, saying that such practices are often accompanied by exclusionary and discriminatory social customs.

Shyeni said celebration without dignity, freedom and respect has little meaning and stressed that women themselves must support one another as they are in a better position to understand these experiences. She also called for involving boys and men in conversations around menstruation, saying empathy and awareness among all genders are essential to dismantle stigma and build a more equal and dignified society.



Prasanta Kumar Dash, Chief Field Officer, UNICEF Odisha, noted that taboos and restrictions surrounding menstruation continue to persist across many parts of the country despite increased access to sanitary products. He said normalising menstruation in society must begin with open conversations at home, in schools, workplaces and communities.

"Odisha's Khushi scheme and similar initiatives are important steps toward improving menstrual hygiene but breaking stigma re-

quires collective social change," Dash said.

Noting that menstrual health is closely linked to healthcare, safety, equality, self-respect and human dignity, Patra also called for collective efforts to break harmful taboos and discriminatory practices that continue in many parts of the country.

"Schools, hostels, anganwadi centres and healthcare institutions must become safe and period-friendly spaces with proper sanitation, healthcare support and access

to menstrual products," Patra said, adding that such efforts are directly connected to the goals of good health, quality education, gender equality, clean sanitation and reduced inequalities.

Professor Shreepad Karmalkar, Director of IIT Bhubaneswar, said transforming menstrual health and hygiene into a fundamental right is a collective call to action rooted in dignity, equality and human well-being. "Health, hygiene, dignity and well-being are rights that belong to every individual," he said, adding that menstrual health is intrinsic to the constitutional rights to life, dignity and privacy under Article 21.

Karmalkar said IIT Bhubaneswar, along with its Research and Entrepreneurship Park, has emerged as a leading centre for menstrual health and hygiene innovation through collaborations with UNICEF, the Odisha Menstrual Health and Hygiene Alliance and other partners.

He said the institute has introduced progressive measures such as allowing female students two

Centre, Delhi govt working on six major road projects to decongest NCR routes: CM Gupta



NEW DELHI, May 28: In a major infrastructure push, the Delhi government and Centre will jointly undertake six major road projects to ease travel between Delhi, Gurugram, Noida and Ghaziabad. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Thursday.

The move comes a week after Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari and the Delhi chief minister held a review in this regard, during which discussions were held on a decongestion plan for major NCR routes.

One of the approved plans include the 'Urban Extension Road-II (UER-II) Delhi-Dehradun Expressway Link Project'.

Under the project, a nearly 17-km-long six-lane corridor will connect the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway with UER-II near Tronica City in Ghaziabad, at an estimated cost of ₹ 3,500 crore.

"The project is expected to reduce traffic pressure on routes such as IGI Airport, Barapullah corridor, Mukarba Chowk, Singhu Border and the Ashram-Badarpur stretch. The project is currently in the alignment finalisation stage, with construction targeted to begin by December 2026," the CMO said in a statement. The chief minister said the Centre and Delhi government will jointly undertake a series of large-

scale road projects, with all of them designed in view of future traffic requirements.

Another proposed project is the 'Delhi-Dehradun Expressway Noida-Faridabad Connectivity Corridor'. Spanning around 65 km and featuring six lanes, its cost is estimated at ₹ 7,500 crore.

"The corridor will connect the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway, Delhi-Meerut Expressway, DND, Faridabad and the Yamuna Expressway," the CMO said.

It is expected to improve connectivity for Loni, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Noida and Faridabad while reducing congestion at Kalindi Kunj, Sarai Kale Khan and the Outer Ring Road. Work is expected to commence by December 2026.

The chief minister also highlighted a project linking the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra corridor with UER-II.

"Under the proposal, traffic from the Delhi-Katra Expressway will gain direct access to Delhi, Gurugram and IGI Airport through UER-II and the Dwarka Expressway. The 17-km, six-lane corridor, estimated to cost ₹ 1,500 crore, is targeted to begin by March 2027," Gupta said. To decongest Kalindi Kunj areas, authorities plan to construct an "interchange" near the Okhla barrage to improve traffic flow on the Delhi-Noida-Faridabad corridor.

"The project, estimated at ₹ 300 crore, includes the construction of a 500-metre-long, six-lane interchange and flyovers. The project aims to decongest Kalindi Kunj and provide signal-free connectivity between Noida, Jasola, Sarita Vihar and Faridabad," the statement added.

The chief minister said the land acquisition process for the project has already begun and construction is expected to start by October 2026.

Another project, the 'AIIMS-Mahipalpur-Gurugram Elevated Corridor' -- a 20-km-long six-lane road -- is estimated at ₹ 5,000 crore, with construction slated to begin by April 2027. (PTI)

No lapses will be tolerated: Pradhan at CBSE review meeting on Class 12 evaluation

NEW DELHI, May 28: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday directed officials to take all necessary measures to ensure that issues faced by students are resolved in a timely, transparent and student-friendly manner.

Chairing a high-level review meeting at the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) headquarters here, Pradhan said any lapses or negligence, whether within or outside the system, will not be tolerated and strict action will be taken in such cases.

The meeting came after the CBSE defended its digital evaluation system, saying the On Screen Marking System (OSM) process was backed by a "secure and robust IT platform". The board said that the platform has been "tested and certified through empanelled security audits" and is supported by a "robust digital infrastructure" with multiple quality checks and safeguards for secure scanning and processing of answer books.

Held at the board's headquarters in Dwarka, the meeting was attended by School Education Secretary Sanjay Kumar, CBSE Chairperson Rahul Singh, directors of IIT Madras and IIT Kanpur, and senior officials from the Ministry of Education, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, public sector banks and CBSE, the ministry said



in a statement.

"During the meeting, the minister directed officials to take all necessary measures to ensure that issues faced by students are resolved in a timely, transparent and student-friendly manner," the statement said. Pradhan reiterated the government's commitment to ensuring transparency, accountability and a student-centric examination system, while assuring students and parents that all genuine concerns would be addressed effectively and expeditiously.

The minister reviewed the progress of post-result services with a focus on strengthening student support systems, improving the evaluation and monitoring framework, enhancing the CBSE digital platform, and making examination-related services more

accessible and efficient for students. He was apprised that nearly 18 lakh students appeared for the Class 12 examinations this year, involving around 98 lakh answer sheets and nearly 40 crore scanned pages. So far, approximately four lakh students have accessed around 11 lakh scanned answer sheets through the portal.

Reiterating that students' interests remain the government's foremost priority, Pradhan assured strict action against any lapses and stated that no negligence, whether within or outside the system, would be tolerated, the statement said.

The minister also took note of reports related to login access issues, heavy server load and payment-related difficulties on the post-examination services portal.

According to the ministry, an

expert technical team comprising professors from IIT Madras and specialists in digital systems has been tasked with reviewing portal stability, server capacity, login management and payment gateway integration to ensure seamless and uninterrupted services for students. "The Ministry of Education is closely monitoring the situation," the statement said.

The review meeting came amid a political row over alleged discrepancies in the CBSE examination system after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday claimed that the Class 12 examination results had been marred by "massive irregularities".

Gandhi demanded an independent judicial inquiry and constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to unearth the truth behind the "entire scam". He also alleged that a firm with a murky past in Telangana was handed the contract by CBSE for digital evaluation of answer books.

Pradhan said this was the first time CBSE had implemented the system on such a large scale and acknowledged that some discrepancies had come to notice. "Certain discrepancies have come to our notice, and I take responsibility for them. These issues will be rectified, and appropriate solutions will be worked out," the minister said. (PTI)

FDA takes action against food violators across Maharashtra

33 arrested, 27 establishments sealed

THANE, May 28: The Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration conducted operations in several areas of the state targeting adulterators, banned gutka sellers and unhygienic food producers, resulting in the arrest of 33 persons and sealing of 27 establishments, an official said on Thursday.

The action was taken on May 25 in FDA's Mumbai, Konkarni, Pune, Nashik, Amravati, Nagpur and Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar divisions under commissioner Tukaram Mundhe, he said.

"During the drive against prohibited items like gutka and pan masala, officials inspected 53 establishments, finding 34 of them in violation. It led to registration of 25 First Information Reports (FIRs), 33 arrests, seizure of five vehicles, and the sealing of 27 establishments. Contraband worth approximately ₹ 20.57 lakh was seized," he said.

Included 19 arrests in Mumbai division, he added.

"A total of 23 other establishments were inspected under Food Safety and Standards Act (FSSAI). Some 60 food items worth ₹ 28.78 lakh were seized, including packaged drinking water, milk, noodles, carbonated water, edible oil, sweets, farsan, ice cream, toddy, and ghee," he said.

In Jalgaon, a person in Dharaona taluka was caught manufacturing artificial milk by blending edible oil into cow's milk, while in Indapur in Pune, officials found mangoes being artificially ripened using ethylene chemicals.

"In Dhule, a flour mill was found producing pea flour under highly unhygienic conditions. In Mumbai, a manufacturing unit in Dharavi was penalised for produc-



ing noodles in gross violation of packaging and labelling rules. In Nashik, multiple establishments were booked for manufacturing food products without valid license," he said.

In Palghar, stock worth several lakh rupees was seized from an ice cream manufacturing unit operating in unhygienic conditions, the official said. Issuing a stern warning, Mundhe said chapter cases would be filed under section 129 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Samhita, requiring violators to sign a good conduct bond, while subsequent violations will attract immediate criminal FIRs.

"No concession will be given to any person or establishment that plays with the health of the public. Action against adulteration, sale of prohibited substances, and unsafe food production will henceforth be stricter and more consistent," Mundhe said. The FDA has appealed to citizens to report food adulteration and quality concerns directly to the administration with specific details, including the complainant's contact details and the exact address of the violating establishment.

To streamline this process, Mundhe announced that the FDA will soon develop a dedicated mobile application, making it easier for the public to log complaints regarding the quality of food and drugs seamlessly. (PTI)

Right to trauma care of citizens integral part of right to life: SC

NEW DELHI, May 28: Observing that right to trauma care of citizens is an integral part of right to life, the Supreme Court has asked all states and Union territories to operationalise within three months one helpline number '112' for emergency responses and establish functional good samaritan grievance redressal system.

A bench of Justices J K Maheshwari and A S Chandurkar also directed the states to furnish periodic compliance reports by organising monthly meetings and uploading the minutes on the concerned portals.

The bench passed the order on Tuesday on a plea filed by Savellie Foundation which raised the need for trauma care to be recognised as a matter of right in the Indian public law system.

The top court said when a person suffers an accident or any such similar incident which requires urgent trauma care, they usually feel shock and disorientation, a

sense of helplessness where they have to hope that those around them would somehow help them get the care that they need.

"In such a situation, every minute spent without medical intervention or urgent care significantly narrows the scope for survival. Swift response, is quite literally, like medicine," it said. Referring to different stages of care after such an incident, the bench said a robust mechanism for trauma care must take a "bottom-up approach" which accounts for various stakeholders. It said usually, no matter how strong the urge to be a good samaritan is, the bystander hesitates, suffers a reactive paralysis, sometimes due to fear of legal proceedings, of getting summoned to police station as a witness and sometimes due to the psychological weight of the situation itself.

"To address these barriers, what is required is a systemic intervention, creation of a uniform framework for trauma care,

building public awareness, standardization of first aid skills and proper good samaritan laws; since right to trauma care of citizens is an integral part of right to life enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India," the bench said.

It permitted the Centre to issue a medical rescue protocol for trauma cases within three months, and directed all the states and UTs to operationalise the same within three months thereof. "All states/UTs shall ensure full automotive industry standard-125 (AIS-125) compliance across all registered ambulances (public and private); mandate Global Positioning System (GPS)/vehicle location tracking device (VLTID) fitment and real-time integration with helpline 112; and conduct periodic structured audits (response times, quality of care, equipment, outcomes) with compliance reporting to a designated union-level authority, within a period of three months," it said. (PTI)

Maharashtra onion growers association seeks transparency in procurement process

MUMBAI, May 28: Onion growers in Maharashtra have sought complete transparency in procurement operations being carried out by government agencies NAFED and NCCF and also demanded immediate relief and compensation for farmers who were forced to sell their produce at extremely low prices over the past several months.

In a statement on Thursday, Maharashtra State Onion Growers Association founder-president Bharat Dighole raised several questions over onion procurement being undertaken through the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED). The organisation asked how much onion had actually been procured by NAFED from various market committees in Nashik district and other major onion-producing regions of Maharashtra.

It also demanded that the agency publicly disclose the names, addresses and quantities of onion purchased from farmers on a daily basis to ensure complete transparency in the procurement process.

The farmers' body further questioned whether procurement operations were genuinely being conducted across all major onion-producing districts or whether the benefits were reaching only a limited section. The statement alleged that onion growers across Maharashtra were forced to sell their produce below production cost for several months, while government agencies remained inactive during the period of crisis. "Farmers who sold onions at throwaway prices earlier this year should be given compensation or subsidy support in proportion to the current procurement rates - Rs 1580 per quintal," it said in the

statement. The organisation also raised concerns over whether the National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF), which was assigned onion procurement targets along with NAFED, had actually started procurement operations on the ground.

The farmers' body demanded that NAFED and NCCF publish daily procurement details online, including market-wise procurement quantity, number of farmers benefited and procurement rates, to remove doubts and ensure accountability.

It further demanded the establishment of a permanent price protection mechanism for onion growers, stating that farmers continue to suffer severe financial losses every year due to sudden policy decisions such as export bans, export duties and market intervention measures. The organisation

also demanded a high-level meeting involving the chief minister, Union agriculture minister and Union commerce minister to address the ongoing crisis faced by onion growers.

Calling for long-term reforms, the organisation reiterated its demand for the establishment of a dedicated Onion Corporation to handle procurement, storage, processing and export of onions in a systematic and farmer-centric manner. "Farmers want transparency, justice and relief. The dignity of farmers is our self-respect. Ensure transparent procurement, provide justice and extend immediate relief to onion growers," the statement said.

The organisation warned that if onion growers continue to be ignored despite suffering massive losses, farmers across Maharashtra would be compelled to intensify their agitation in the coming days. (PTI)

From Incredible India to Inevitable India, Shekhawat says foreign tourists will go up to 100 mn by 2047

NEW DELHI, May 28: Laying out a grand vision for India's tourism, Union minister Gajendra Shekhawat says the sector's contribution to the GDP is set to cross 7 per cent by 2030 and international tourist arrivals will grow from 10 million to 100 million by 2047.

Riding on India's economic growth, improving infrastructure and decentralisation of tourism development, India will go from being an international tourism laggard to a leading light of global tourism, Shekhawat, the minister of tourism and culture, told PTI Videos in an interview on Wednesday.

In 2024, India's foreign exchange earnings from tourism amounted to about USD 35 billion, or about 1 per cent of the country's GDP. Also, in 2023-24, the travel and tourism sector in India generated direct and indirect employment for about 8.4 crore people, according to official data.

Asked if India should be satisfied with these figures or if "tourism can become" one of India's top three generators of jobs and foreign exchange by 2047, the minister replied, "I just wish to take out the 'can' word from your question. It WILL become." Shekhawat pointed out that while foreign earnings contribute 1 per cent to the GDP, tourism



industry as a whole makes up a little less than 6 per cent of the GDP. Still, it is not impressive, considering that the global average contribution of tourism to the global economy is 10 per cent.

"So, our aim and target, which has been given to us by the prime minister, is that by 2047 we have to arrive at a global benchmark (of 10 per cent)," Shekhawat said. "By 2030 at any cost, we have to reach the target of contributing 7 per cent. And the way India's economy is growing, the way the demand for tourism is increasing in India, I am fully confident that by the year

2030, we will cross this 7 per cent mark," he said. "The day we (tourism sector) contribute 10 per cent to the economy, that day we will become the second sector after agriculture in terms of the number of jobs created. And, we will leave behind the MSME (sector)," Shekhawat said. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created a "new narrative of India" globally.

"The way India is being viewed is changing, and the view is changing in front of the whole world, and the image of India is changing. It is once again becoming the centre of attraction of the

world," Shekhawat said.

"We will take it (foreign tourist arrivals) to 100 million by 2047," he asserted. The number of foreign tourists right now is 10 million (1 crore).

The minister acknowledged that India remains a laggard in international tourist arrivals compared to other countries such as Thailand, which gets 35-40 million (3.5 crore to 4 crore) tourists a year. France crosses 100 million (10 crore), and Singapore, a nation of 4 million, gets 16 million (1.6 crore) tourists.

In Shekhawat's view, it is an unfair comparison because it doesn't take into account domestic tourism. Unlike India these countries have very small domestic tourism component. India, on the other hand, recorded nearly 3 billion or 300 crore domestic trips by Indians in 2025. This number includes travel for leisure, medical treatment, wedding or pilgrimages, religious tourism or any other reason. "So, if any person is going to visit Mahakal Temple in Ujjain, then we cannot deny that he is a tourist... if there is a travel economy, we will have to add it... He left home, travelled to another city, stayed there for at least one night, and then returned. If I were to quantify this, the number would come to 294 crore," the minister said.

This number, he added, does not include the 66 crore people who went to Maha Kumbh (in 2025).

Shekhawat acknowledged that India's poor infrastructure, lack of cleanliness, perception of safety and pollution, lack of connectivity, insufficient quality hotels rooms and high cost of hotels have been a hindrance in attracting foreign tourists.

Ironically, growing economic prosperity has meant more Indians are travelling within the country and are taking up all the available hotels rooms, thus raising the room tariff because of high demand. This has hit the middle-class foreign traveller - not the ultra-luxury guest or the backpackers. The mid-rung foreigner then finds it cheaper to go to neighbouring destinations, the minister explained. He said the perception of pollution and safety is false. Pollution persists only for a couple of months, that too in Delhi while the rest of the country remains pristine. While hailing India's diversity of attractions, such as natural beauty, history, culture, spirituality, adventure and cuisine, Shekhawat lamented that Indians still do not treat foreign tourists and historic sites with the respect and care that he sees in other countries such as Switzerland. (PTI)

Noted poet Bashir Badr passes away at 91

BHOPAL, May 28: Bashir Badr, one of most quoted Urdu poets of his generation with famous lines like "Ujale apni yaadon ke hamare saath rehne do", died in Bhopal on Thursday after a prolonged illness. He was 91.

The veteran poet, who was living with dementia for many years, breathed his last at his home in Bhopal, his son Syed Badr told PTI.

"For me, for my mother, and for all his loved ones, it is a very painful day. His poetry is poetry of love and life. 'Ujaale unki yaddon ke'... This couplet is a representation of his life; it is his trademark. I would like all of you to celebrate this," Syed Badr said, adding that his father withdrew from public after his memory started failing him. "He had dementia and had not been part of any mushaira (gathering of poets) for the past 10 years. That was his conscious decision because he was a showman... That is why he retired from mushairas when he realised that his memory was weakening, and he had not been active in writing or public life for quite some time. But the impact of his couplets and verses on the world has its own life," the son added.

During the Shimla Agreement between India and Pakistan in 1972, Badr wrote the famous couplet "Dushmani jam kar karo lekin ye gunjaish rahe, jab kabhi hum dost ho jayein to sharminda na hon". The lines were recited by Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge during a debate in the Lok Sabha in 2018, to which Prime Minister Narendra Modi responded with another couplet from the poet: "Jee bahut chahta hai sach bolein, kya karein haunsa nahi hota".

Badr's couplets are oft quoted by people in their everyday life, whether it is "Kuch to maj-booriyaan rahi hong, yun hi koi bewafa nahi hota" or "Ujale apni yaadon ke hamare saath rehne do, na jaane kis gali me zindagi ki shaam ho jaye", and "Log toot jaate hain ek ghar banane mein, tum taras nahi khatte bastiyain jalane mein".

Noted lyricist Javed Akhtar expressed grief over Badr's demise.

"Today, our language Urdu has become a little poorer. Bashir Badr, an extremely melodious poet, has departed from our gathering forever. This poet and his poetry will live on in our memories forever," Akhtar posted on X.

Badr's ghazals, like those of Meer Taqi Meer, contained highly contemporary Urdu and were easily understood and appreciated by people. Some of his masterpieces served as an expression of anguished love and also spoke about the mysteries of life.

Born in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) on February 15, 1935, Badr was renowned for his mastery of the Urdu language, especially in ghazals, and was also well versed in Persian, Hindi and English.

"Aas", the award-winning collection of 69 ghazals, is considered a jewel in the poetic crown of Badr and earned him the Sahitya Akademi Award in Urdu in 1999.

One of his collections, titled 'Kulliyate Bashir Badr', has been published in Pakistan.

Believed to have started writing poetry at an early age of seven, he was a pioneer in melting the soft tenderness of Urdu communication into the English diction in many of his lyrics, as per a website dedicated to Badr.

Badr wrote the famous couplet "Ujaale apni yaadon ke..." when he was in his teens.

He brought out more than seven collections of poems in Urdu and one in Hindi. He has to his credit several ghazal collections - 'Ikai', 'Image', 'Aamad', 'Aahat', 'Kulliyate Bashir Badr'.

Badr also penned two books of literary criticism - 'Azadi Ke Bad Urdu Ghazals Ka Tanqid Mutala' and 'Biswin Sadi Mein Ghazal'.

He also brought out a collection of Urdu ghazals in the Devnagari script, titled 'Ujjale Apni Yadon ke'. His works have also been published in Gujarati and translated into English and French.

Apart from the Padma Shri, Badr was awarded four times by the UP Urdu Academy and once by the Bihar Urdu Academy. He was bestowed with the Meer Akhtar Award and received several other honours. Badr's life journey was not easy. His house in Meerut was burnt during communal violence in April 1987, destroying most of his unpublished works.

But he started all over afresh and moved to Bhopal. The incident, together with other life challenges, lent a strong pathos to many of his writings, as per the website. (PTI)

FWICE directive can spell trouble for Ranveer Singh's films: Experts

Ranveer Singh is not working on any film at the moment. If he was, he would be in trouble after the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) asked its four lakh plus workers not to work with him, a "non-cooperation directive" that could lead to serious trouble for his films.

Though such an order cannot restrain an individual's freedom to work, it could definitely cause operational issues for his films, said Sonam Chandwani, managing partner, KS Legal and Associates.

"Till the time he doesn't come and attend a meeting with us, none of our members will work with him. He is not shooting for anything at the moment. If he begins, we will ensure none of us work with him," said a resolute B N Tiwari, president of FWICE.

FWICE, formed in 1956, is the primary trade union and umbrella organisation for film and television workers in India. Other than taking care of its members, including spot boys, camerapersons, sound engineers and editors, it also steps in to mediate conflict arising between artists, technicians and production studios.

On Monday, the FWICE said its members would not work with Singh following his last minute exit from Farhan Akhtar's "Don 3".

According to Chandwani, who specialises in contract law, FWICE's directive may carry "persuasive and operational weight" within the film industry but its legal enforceability is not absolute.

"From a strict legal standpoint, a 'non cooperation directive' cannot automatically override contractual rights or restrain an individual's freedom to work.

Under Indian law, any restriction that effectively prevents a professional from carrying out lawful employment or profession can be challenged as arbitrary or contrary to principles flowing from Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution, which protects the right to practice any profession or carry on any occupation, trade, or business," she told PTI.

Courts in India, Chandwani added, have previously taken a cautious view against industry bodies attempting to impose blanket bans or blacklisting measures without due process or contractual backing.

The FWICE's order came after Akhtar and his part-

ner Ritesh Sidhwani filed a complaint against Singh before the Indian Film & Television Directors' Association (IFTDA), which then referred the matter to FWICE for further intervention.

"Don 3", which was to reboot the successful franchise for a third time with a new face, was yet to begin shooting when he quit. The producers claim that more than Rs 45 crore had already been spent in the pre-production phase.

Despite three notices from FWICE, Singh, fresh from his success in the "Dhurandhar" movies, did not respond, said Tiwari.

He only sent a mail once the FWICE press conference was announced on Monday, arguing that the federation had no jurisdiction over the dispute. In a statement after the press conference, the actor stuck to his previous stance of maintaining silence on the issue while wishing success for the franchise.

Chandwani said a key legal issue would be whether Singh was under a "binding contractual obligation while exiting the project and whether his conduct caused demonstrable financial loss or breach".

"If the exit was contractually permitted, mutually negotiated, or based on commercial restructuring, then punitive trade action by workers' body may struggle to sustain legal scrutiny if challenged before a court," she said.

In her view, an organisation like FWICE does possess a certain degree of influence as it represents a large network of technicians, workers, and allied professionals engaged in film production. Its directive could "create operational pressure".

"Such bodies often function through internal industry arrangements, collective bargaining mechanisms, and long standing trade practices... Producers of upcoming projects may become cautious to avoid labour related disruption, delays in shoot permissions, refusal of technical staff participation, or reputational controversies surrounding production.

"In high budget films where daily shooting costs are substantial, even indirect non cooperation from unions can become commercially damaging," she added.

Tiwari was adamant that there would be no backing down.

"We've told the setting department about it... they

can't put a set for a project that Singh will be working on. We are not stopping work but we will not work on the projects that he is part of."

Tiwari referred to a similar order last year against actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh for working with Pakistani actor Hania Aamir in the Punjabi movie "Sardaar Ji 3".

In June, FWICE issued a "non cooperation directive" when the trailer of the movie was released and asked production banner T-Series to drop the actor from the war drama "Border 2".

"... actors like Sunny (Deol) requested us to allow him (Dosanjh) to work on 'Border 2' because the work was underway. It must be noted that we didn't allow the release of Diljit's movie, 'Sardaar Ji 3' in India.

The Federation was upset because Diljit worked with a Pakistani actor and hence we had taken action against his film," Tiwari said.

Asked about why the union didn't intervene in the dispute between Paresh Rawal and the team of "Hera Pheri 3" last year when the senior actor abruptly announced his exit from the film, Tiwari said the matter was not referred to the union.

"In case of Paresh Rawal's exit from 'Hera Pheri 3', we didn't receive any complaint from the producer, so we couldn't do anything," Tiwari said.

At the time, the film's producer Akshay Kumar sued Rawal for Rs 25 crore in damages. However, Rawal later reversed his decision and rejoined the project.

Producer-distributor Girish Johar expressed the hope that the matter is solved amicably.

"It is important to understand the issues or problems of both the parties involved in this matter. It gives certain pause to whatever things Ranveer Singh is planning to do, but I believe he is on a break after 'Dhurandhar'. Technically, immediately there isn't anything that he is working on," Johar, who distributed "Delhi 6" and "Kaminey", said.

At an event on Tuesday, actor Manoj Bajpayee also reacted to the matter, expressing hope that it would be settled soon.

"All the people who are in this industry, they are only reading it on social media and don't have the detailed information about it. But all we can say as colleagues is that we hope that the matter is sorted out soon," Bajpayee said. (PTI)



NOT MANY CHILDREN FILMS MADE IN INDIA, WOULD LOVE TO EXPLORE THIS GENRE MORE: JACKIE SHROFF

in movies otherwise. I do all kinds of films, but this genre is close to my heart because there's a child in all of us," the actor told PTI in an interview.

"The Great Grand Superhero" is directed by Manish Saini, who won the National Film Award for his Gujarati language drama "Dhh". He has also directed "Gandhi & Co", "Shubh Yatra", "Jai Mata Ji - Let's Rock" and award-winning short film "Giddhi".

Shroff, who previously appeared in children's films like "Hari Puttar: A Comedy of Terrors" and "Bhoot Uncle", said he grew up listening to stories like "Cinderella", "Alice in Wonderland" and "Arabian Nights", but believes Indian children should also be more connected to their own cultural roots.

"As a child, instead of learning Atharvaveda, Ayurveda, Rigveda, we were learning 'Jack and Jill went up the hill', 'Ring-a-Ring-a-Roses,' and 'Aladdin.' We are not learning about what is more in-

dian; I thought these were things we missed in childhood. Today, their imagination is shaped by the internet and AI," he said.

Having played a superhero in the 1985 Indian film "Shiva Ka Insaaf", Shroff said he feels "lucky" to get the opportunity to play a superhero yet again, this time, as a grandfather.

"The senior-most person in the family is the grandfather and he has real superpowers. Kids learn so much from grandparents," he said.

The 68-year-old actor also floated the idea of a homegrown superhero universe, imagining a crossover featuring his son Tiger Shroff's film, "A Flying Jatt" alongside Shah Rukh Khan-starrer "Ra.One" and Hrithik Roshan's "Krish", akin to Hollywood's "Avengers" franchise.

"When I did 'Shiva Ka Insaaf', I had to hang on at a certain height, jump, and do everything. Today, technology definitely is a big help now. Those days, it was

tougher; now it's easier. However, I did whatever I could," he said.

"But wearing a superhero costume is still not easy. For seven to eight hours you can't go to the restroom, so these issues exist. So, you've to go through the grind," the actor added.

Shroff said his roles in some of the recent films like "Mast Mein Rehne Ka", "Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri", and "The Great Grand Superhero...", have allowed him to explore ageing and simplicity on screen.

"I'd done a film called 'Mast Mein Rehne Ka'. There I followed the way how a senior person is, how they talk, walk, their strength, etc. I had discovered what an old man is. I got to learn that simplicity and I feel that simplicity is the best form of beauty. The simpler it is, the more beautiful it will be. I had a great role in 'Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri'. So, all those experiences helped me for this movie." (PTI)

Veteran actor Jackie Shroff, who stars in the upcoming children fantasy film "The Great Grand Superhero - Aliens Ka Aagman", said the genre remains close to his heart as it taps into a genre that's missing from mainstream cinema.

In the film, Shroff plays a grandfather who spins a story about being a superhero to his grandson, leading to all kinds of funny situations and an encounter with aliens.

"Children's films are hardly made today and if there are films that are about them, their dreams, innocence then I love to explore that. We don't get to see all of that

In times of strife, important to remind ourselves of the love in our heart: Imtiaz Ali

The world is getting harsher and that is precisely why Imtiaz Ali says he made "Main Vaapas Aaunga", a story about love, healing and the quiet sweetness that people carry in their hearts long after everything around them has been torn apart.

With the film, which reunites Ali with his "Amar Singh Chamkila" star Diljit Dosanjh, the director seeks to explore how love is the very thing that makes survival possible during and even after a crisis.

"I feel that all of us have some sweetness, which we ascribe either to a romantic or to a spiritual thing that we keep close to our hearts that sustains us through harsh realities. Today in the



world, a lot is going wrong, there is a lot of strife, unfortunately. Therefore, there is all the more reason to remind ourselves of the love in our hearts," the director told PTI in an interview.

"The emotion of love, healing, romance,

and beauty is required more in a condition of harshness outside. When there is strife, there is more reason for us to keep closer what is precious to our heart," he added.

Set against the backdrop of the Partition of India, Ali's new film draws not from history books but from the first-hand accounts of survivors he encountered while filming for his 2024 movie "Amar Singh Chamkila" across Punjab.

He met elderly men and women who, decades later, spoke not of the violence they had witnessed but of the beauty they had held onto.

"What surprised me when I met these very old people is that the stories they are talking about now are not stories of tragedy, nor are they stories of hatred. In fact, they are only talking about things that are dear and precious, loving and beautiful," said the filmmaker, known for films like "Rockstar", "Tamasha", "Love Aaj Kal", "Highway" and "Jab We Met".

He added that such recollections highlight an inherent "romanticism in humanity". "Main Vaapas Aaunga" follows a young man (Vedang

Raina) who falls in love with a woman (Sharvari) in the pre-Partition era. The story unfolds across two timelines, with Naseeruddin Shah essaying the older version of the character and Diljit Dosanjh playing his grandson.

The film marks Ali's first collaboration with Shah, though their connection goes back to early 2000s.

They first met at a Mumbai editing studio, when Shah had dropped in to evaluate actor Ayesha Takia from Ali's debut film "Socha Na Tha" (2005) for his own directorial project, "Yun Hota Toh Kya Hota" (2006).

When they finally worked together, Ali found the veteran to be a man without ego.

"You give him something, he reacts directly, he does not set a standard for his directors. I thought that maybe I'll have to say it in a certain way which is more the right way of directing but he was not judging me at all. He was just trying to take what he could from me to have a good performance underway," Ali said.

"I feel there is so much more that this actor has in him to give, he has done so much, he understands so much. But believe me, he does not wear it on his sleeve, he does not throw his experience at you at all. So, people should approach him without any fear. He is just like a kid, all artists, in some way, are like kids."

In the movie, Shah's character battles dementia -- a man held together by emotions he never resolved in his youth -- and the physical demands were relentless: three hours of daily makeup, hours strapped to a cot with ECG leads.

Between takes, rather than breaking the spell, Shah simply remained. "It was very uncomfortable, so troublesome for him to get up and off and come back again to his position that he used to sit over there while the lighting was changing. Sometimes for 45 minutes he would just keep lying on the cot because it was easier to just be in that way."

Didn't know a personal story like 'Shape of Momo' will resonate with people globally: Tribeni Rai

Culture and language are not a limitation for a story to resonate with others, says director Tribeni Rai, whose Nepali-language drama "Shape of Momo" is ready for its theatrical release after fulfilling global festival run.

At the heart of the Sikkim-set story is Vishnu, a young woman who has left her job in Delhi to return home where she hopes to convince her mother and open a homestay. But her independent nature is threatened by rigid cultural and gender constraints of the place.

"It is such a personal story that when I was writing it, I did not know so many other people would resonate with it and are going through the same experience somewhere, and not just in India. Culture and language are not a limitation for that. I am so grateful to be able to take a story in my language, from my region to places and be representing our country and my state," Rai told PTI in an interview.

"We had older ladies, younger women and even men walking up to us and saying, 'I am that protagonist in your film'," she added.

The film has won 15 awards internationally, including trophies at the Busan International Film Festival (South Korea) and San Sebastián International Film Festival (Spain).

Actor-producer Rana Daggubati's Spirit Media, which also backed the theatrical run of Payal Kapadia's Cannes Grand Prix winner "All We Imagine As Light" and Rohan Kanawade's much-lauded "Sabar Bonda", is releasing the film in India on May 29.

"Shape of Momo" has Kapadia as well as filmmakers-producers Reema Kagti and Zoya Akhtar as executive producers. All three came on board after seeing what Rai has managed to achieve in her story, which has been praised for its incisive look at the way women deal with the many unwritten rules of patriarchy.

A graduate from the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Rai said she went back to her village after completing her studies and that's when she realised she wanted to make this film. It is also a way to honour her late father and her mother, who is credited as a producer on the project.

"The start was my own personal experiences and the experiences of other women around me. When I grew up, I started to question why we were not as equal as men living around me. For instance, we are four daughters, and we are a house full of women. My father passed early on, so I live with my mother and I have three other sisters. We constantly grew up with fear, insecurity or the pressure to compensate for not having a son," she said.

But while writing the movie, she realised that she needed an objective eye and that's when filmmaker-writer Kislay came on board.

"It (my story) was filled with angst about how the world is not working for a perfect modern woman like me, and then I think he (Kislay) brought in a lot of objectivity, where we started becoming critical of her (protagonist's) privileges as well... I was a bit scared when I kept saying that it's a personal story. (I thought) people will judge me, but friends who know me, they know that I am one of these characters," she added.

Momo, an important dish in every Sikkimese household and has over the years gained prominence all over the country as a street snack, serves as a metaphor for the inability of Rai's protagonist to conform to the norms as Vishnu is not interested in mastering the dish.

Rai said through her film, she wanted to explore the layers between gender and privilege by introducing migrant labourers to the story.

"Northeast people are constantly being discriminated against in the mainland but if you come to my place, you will find another story where we discriminate against people who come from the mainland. So most of the migrant labourers who come to build roads in Sikkim are either from UP or Bihar, we discriminate against them.

"When I am being critical of the society that is not functioning for me, I also have to be critical about me, like I just can't be saying, 'You discriminate against us in the mainland.' But I also have to put up a mirror and say 'we do the same here'."

"Shape of Momo" comes at a time when stories from women directors from the northeast are being recognised globally. (PTI)



Sports admin is tough, but system must be cleaned up: Purav Raja



NEW DELHI, May 28: Former India doubles player Purav Raja says Indian tennis administration needs a complete clean-up with accountability and transparency "from the bottom", but admits that sports administration is such a tough field that he is unsure whether he himself has the capacity to take it up.

Raja, along with former Davis Cupper Somdev Devvarman, had challenged the 2024 elections of the All India Tennis Association (AITA), leading to the appointment of former Chief Justice Geeta Mittal as administrator to oversee the federation's functioning and align its constitution with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 before conducting fresh elections.

"The system has to be run professionally. I am not sure about my capacity for this. Sports administration is a tough field," Raja told PTI in an interview.

"We didn't file this petition because we wanted to take over (AITA). Whoever is in charge should be elected in a fair and constitutional manner. My con-

tribution is that, for the first time, we got somebody to oversee things and reform the bylaws," he said.

Raja, however, insisted that Indian tennis administration suffers from deep-rooted structural issues beginning at the district level and called for a complete financial clean-up of the system.

"First and foremost, we need to clean up the system. We need to adhere to the administrator and make it very systematic and transparent," he said.

"Let's do financial audits on every state, on DTLA, on AITA Trust and on AITA itself. Let's get a professional firm to do audits in every state. Maybe nothing is fishy and everything is completely clean, but at least we will know where the money is being allocated."

Raja said transparency alone would help remove suspicion and improve governance.

"Nobody is dirty, everybody is clean, I am just asking to show me. If somebody doesn't have money, then show me that you don't have money. And if there is money, are we spending it correctly?," he asked.

"Let's get it professionally done by Deloitte or some reputed body. Then we will know where the money has gone for the last 20 years and that should clean up a lot of issues."

The 39-year-old said the administrative problems begin at the grassroots level itself.

"The clear system starts from the districts. Districts should be elected properly, states should be elected properly and the terms should run properly throughout," he said.

"How can you clean up a system that is dirty from the bottom if it is? The same people who run the states run the centre."

Raja repeatedly questioned how the 2024 elections were conducted despite several office-bearers allegedly being over-age or over-term under the sports code.

"How can you conduct elections with ineligible people? We all know people are over-age and over-term. That's my concern," he said.

"The same people I was talking to 30-40 years ago about tennis are the same people I am talking

to today. So, what are we talking about?"

While maintaining that the petition was never personal against any administrator, Raja said the intervention became necessary because "nothing changed" in Indian tennis despite administrators remaining in power for decades.

"The proof is in the pudding. We don't have a single male or female player in the top-300 today. Parents are still saying they are paying for tournaments themselves. We still have the same mess and infighting going on," he said.

Raja also stressed that player representatives on the AITA Executive Committee should come through an independent players' body rather than being nominated by the federation itself.

"Players have to be selected by the players, not by the association," he said.

"There are four players on the committee now. How are those players picked? They cannot be picked by the association. They have to be elected by the players and report back to the players." (PTI)

Mandaviya to review National Games preparations

NEW DELHI, May 28: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will chair a review meeting for the 39th National Games in Meghalaya and also inaugurate an Integrated Multipurpose Indoor Sports Complex in Shillong during a three-day visit to the North-Eastern state starting Friday.

The Host State Contract for the National Games to be held in March next year will be signed with Meghalaya in the presence of senior dignitaries and representatives of the Indian Olympic Association.

Mandaviya will also participate in a series of programmes related to youth affairs, sports infrastructure development, and review centrally-sponsored schemes in the state.

During the visit, the Minister will attend a Chintan Shivir organised by Department of Youth Affairs, Meghalaya Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Shakliar Warji and other senior officials will also be present.

Mandaviya will inaugurate the Integrated Multipurpose Indoor Sports Complex in Shillong on Saturday along with Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma.

"The Integrated Multipurpose Indoor Sports Complex, being developed at a project cost of Rs 132.9 crore, is designed as a modern multi-functional sports facility capable of hosting disciplines such as basketball, badminton and volleyball, besides other indoor sporting events," the ministry stated.

The complex is also a key venue for the National Games and will include integrated infrastructure such as multipurpose halls, auditorium, banquet facilities, etc.

The review meeting of the Games preparations will include presentations and discussions involving officials from Meghalaya and representatives from other North-Eastern states.

As part of the visit, Mandaviya will inspect the Umsavli Sports Complex in Shillong, including the aquatics and tennis facilities, to review ongoing sports infrastructure development in the state.

Paris Saint-Germain on the brink of greatness in the Champions League

BUDAPEST, May 28: The Champions League, the most important continental trophy in European club soccer, is the prize at stake in the final at Budapest on Saturday. For Paris Saint-Germain and Luis Enrique, it doesn't end there.

On the line against Arsenal for the defending champion and its serial-winning Spanish coach is the chance to stake its claim to be considered the greatest team of this era.

"I arrived at the club thinking, My objective is to make history, and we have indeed made history," Luis Enrique said. "We want to keep writing the story because we believe there's still more there for us to achieve."

PSG is already in the conversation when it comes to judging the finest teams to have won the title in the age of the Champions League. But sometimes cold, hard facts are required to drive the point home.

Back-to-back titles are rare
Victory at the Puskas Arena would see PSG become only the second team to retain the trophy since the old European Cup was re-branded as the Champions League in 1992.

For many years it didn't happen even for teams regarded as generationally great.

Pep Guardiola's Barcelona won two in three years. AC Milan and Juventus each reached three consecutive finals in the 90s but only won one apiece. Ajax and Manchester United took title defenses all the way to the final only to fall at the last hurdle.

Real Madrid — winner of more European titles than any other club — finally bucked that trend, winning three in a row from 2016-18. What seemed unthinkable before and since would suddenly seem a



very real target for PSG if it prevails on Saturday.

Luis Enrique would join Guardiola and Zinedine Zidane as a three-time Champions League winner. Not that his motivation is based on personal accolades.

PSG's ascent
Having won the Champions League with Barcelona, Luis Enrique has produced a PSG team that has set the benchmark in Europe over the past two seasons. It combines attacking flair with an energy and tenacity that appears to be moving the sport in a new direction. A team that plays with a high risk of being exposed defensively for the ultimate reward.

At its best, PSG seems unstoppable, with last year's 5-0 rout of Inter Milan in the final the most dominant in the tournament's history.

And with a squad that has an average age of under 24, the potential is there for it to dominate for years to come.

Desire Doue, the two-goal hero of last year's final, is just 20. Tireless midfielder Joao Neves is 21.

Madrid's premier positionIt is plain to see in PSG's performances — such as the 5-4 win over Bayern Munich in the semifinals — that this is a special team, but titles are needed to confirm its status among the greatest.

To many, Guardiola's Barcelona that won in 2009 and 2011 with Lionel Messi, Xavi and Andres Iniesta is the benchmark for the modern era.

To some, Luis Enrique's title-winning Barcelona team in 2015, spearheaded by Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez, was even better.

Statistically, none can match Zinedine Zidane's Madrid team of Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema, Luka Modric and Toni Kroos that won three consecutive titles. Over a five-year period Madrid was European champion four times.

Overall, PSG has a long way to go to come close to Madrid's 15 titles, having won the Champions League for the first time last year. But it can stake its claim to be considered the best of its era.

End of the Galacticos
While PSG targets history, Arsenal is aiming to pull off an upset and win its first Champions League title.

The Premier League champion advanced to the final after topping the league phase of the European competition with a perfect winning record.

Mikel Arteta's team is in the final after being beaten by PSG in last year's semifinals.

"It's two teams that are exceptional in the way they function, (how) they adapt and the intensity they play with," Arteta said. "We're going to have to be our best version to win it." (AP)

India look to take upperhand over Australia in 3rd match of Down Under tour



PERTH, May 28: An ever-improving Indian women's hockey team will look to consolidate its position in the ongoing four-match series when it takes on Australia in the third encounter here on Friday.

The Indian women started the tour on a positive note with Navneet Kaur handing an early lead to the visitors in the series opener before Abby Wilson's brace ensured a 2-1 win for Australia.

But the Indians bounced back strongly by winning the second match 4-2 in shootout after both the teams were locked 1-1 at the end of regulation time on Wednesday.

The Sjoerd Marijne-coached side showed tremendous fighting spirit with Chanu Pukhrambam equalizing for India after Olivia Downes' 10th minute strike.

The Indians have impressed in most aspects of the game in the tour so far, especially in defence and midfield.

But coach Marijne would be eager to see some field goals from the strikers.

India would look for inspiration from their skipper Salima

Tete, who is a livewire on the turf on her day.

The Indians would also look to better their penalty corner conversion rate going into the match.

It promises to be an exciting series as there is hardly anything to separate the two sides in terms of world rankings. While Australia are currently ranked eighth in the world, India are a rung below.

The tour Down Under serves as an important preparatory matches for India ahead of the FIH Hockey Women's Nations Cup, scheduled to take place in Auckland from June 15 to 21.

The ongoing tour also holds greater significance for India ahead of this FIH World Cup to be jointly hosted by Belgium and The Netherlands from August 15 to 30.

The upcoming Nations Cup will be India's opportunity to earn back promotion to the FIH Pro League for the 2026-27 season, which will also be a hockey qualifier for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

The final match of the tour is scheduled for Saturday. (PTI)

Aguirre's early Mexico camp revives a 1986-style grind for a home World Cup push

MEXICO CITY, May 28: When Javier Aguirre was a player, he believed Mexico's grueling, year-long training camp ahead of the 1986 World Cup was the key to El Tri's run to the quarterfinals — matching its best result. As coach of the national team, he is trying to replicate that vintage formula.

Unlike most competing nations, which must wait for domestic leagues to conclude before gathering their squads, Mexico began assembling its players more than a month before its opening World Cup match on June 11 against South Africa — pulling them away from their teams while the Liga MX was ongoing.

"This is a project, not a whim — it's a project to try and make this a great World Cup," Aguirre says. "We concluded that being at home and having these magnificent facilities we needed to be well prepared in every way. This meant having them ready five weeks before the World Cup."

The 67-year-old manager, steering Mexico into the World Cup for a third time, was an integral part of the 1986 squad that beat Belgium and Bulgaria and lost to eventual finalist West Germany in a penalty shootout in the quarterfinals. The only other time El Tri reached that stage was in 1970, also on home soil.

"Being part of the national team and being able to play in a World Cup at home is priceless," Aguirre says of the 48-team tournament that Mexico is co-hosting with the U.S. and Canada.

A modern dilemmaModern soccer presents challenges that didn't exist in 1986. While that Mexico squad featured only one Europe-based star — Real Madrid icon Hugo Sánchez — the current pool boasts 14 players competing in Europe.

To secure his domestic players early, Aguirre had to convince the owners of the 18 Liga MX first-division teams that an extended camp was the only way to truly stand out at home. His blueprint was approved last December, and the gates to the training ground opened on May 6 with an initial group of 12 domestic players.

Yet, the strategy has drawn criticism from prominent figures within Mexican football, most notably former national team manager Ricardo La Volpe, who led El Tri to the round of 16 at the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

"I'm truly surprised, and I have a lot of respect for Javier Aguirre, but I don't understand him for one simple reason: First, he doesn't have most of the players, making the practices meaningless," La Volpe argued.



"I would say that if you can't work with everyone you should let the players use the domestic playoffs to maintain their match rhythm." Gathering the piecesBecause of the staggered arrivals, Aguirre initially had to bring in youth academy players as sparring partners to fill out his training sessions. Behind the scenes, however, the manager utilized his deep network and public relations savvy to persuade some European clubs to release their Mexican players ahead of schedule.

The politicking paid off. By early last week, Aguirre had 18 of his final 26 players available for a warmup match against Ghana, which Mexico won 2-0.

Mexico's intensive preparation continues with friendlies against Australia on Saturday in Pasadena, California, followed by a final test against Serbia in Toluca on June 4 — just one week before the spotlight turns to the high-stakes World Cup opener against South Africa at Azteca Stadium. Mexico also faces South Korea and the Czech Republic in Group A.

At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Mexico failed to advance from its group.

World-class foundationsTo ensure optimal preparation, the Mexican Football Federation invested 400 million pesos (\$23 million) into a massive renovation of its elite training center, the Centro de Alto Rendimiento on Mexico City's outskirts.

"This investment reflects our responsibility toward the World Cup," federation president Mikel Arriola says. "We have built a facility that will provide the national team with the best possible conditions for preparation, on par with the world's leading football powers. Hosting a World Cup demands that we raise all our standards, both on and off the field." (AP)

Sports Ministry to engage IT Consultants in NSFs

NEW DELHI, May 28: The Sports Ministry on Thursday said it would be deploying IT Consultants in National Sports Federations (NSFs) to strengthen their digital systems for better coordination during the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad.

The plan is part of the broader framework of the National Sports Digital Ecosystem (NSDE). However, the ministry did not specify the timeline, criteria or the number of professionals per federation that it would be looking to hire.

The Sports Ministry currently recognises over 40 national federations.

"The initiative is aimed at streamlining federation-specific digital systems and enabling more effective planning for competitions, national coaching camps, athlete participation, governance processes and real-time coordination as India prepares to build a stronger sporting ecosystem ahead of the 2030 Commonwealth Games and its long-term Olympic ambitions," Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on the first-time endeavour through a press release.

The IT Consultants would be required to assist NSFs in the "smooth onboarding, operationalisation and coordination of digital systems under the NSDE framework."

"The IT professionals have been trained by the Sports Authority of India's IT cell and they are ready for deployment. They are especially useful for smaller federations which do not have the resources to carry out this upgrade



CWG 2030 preparations

on their own," said a ministry official.

The consultants are expected to support federations in areas such as annual calendar and proposal creation, athlete and official nominations on Games Management Systems, annual renewal submissions, and tournament result uploads for DigiLocker among other aspects.

"The initiative is expected to substantially improve efficiency in competition participation planning and national camp management by ensuring that athlete data, schedules, nominations and approvals are processed in a timely and integrated manner," the ministry said.

"It is also expected to reduce operational coordination gaps, strengthen data quality, improve adherence to timelines and enable federations to focus more effectively on athlete development and sporting excellence," it added.

The ministry and the Sport Authority of India (SAI) have al-

NMPA Indian Open of Surfing begins today

MANGALORE, May 28: The seventh edition of the NMPA Indian Open of Surfing will begin here on Friday with over 80 surfers from six states competing in an event that carries added significance ahead of the sport's debut at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games later this year.

With the event expected to serve as the final major domestic evaluation event ahead of the Asian Games, leading Indian surfers including Ramesh Budihal, Shivaraj Babu, Kishore Kumar, Srikanth D, Kamali P, and Sugar Shanti Banarse will headline the competition.

Surfers from Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Goa are expected to compete in the three-day championship across the Men's Open, Women's Open, Under-18 Boys, Under-18 Girls, Under-14 Boys and Under-14 Girls categories at the Tannirbhavi Eco Beach.

Organised by the Mantra Surf Club and Surfing Swami Foundation under the aegis of the Surfing Federation of India, the championships will also serve as the second stop of the National Championship Series following the inaugural Little Andaman Pro held earlier this season.

Among the leading names is Budihal, who recently became the first Indian surfer to reach the Open Men's final at the Asian Surfing Championships in Mahabalipuram before clinching a bronze medal.

Shivaraj, winner of the Men's Open title at the Little Andaman Pro earlier this year, along with Kishore and Srikanth, are expected to be among the key contenders in the men's competition. (PTI)

Onus on Gujarat Titans' bowlers to stop RR wonder kid Sooryavanshi in Qualifier 2

MULLANPUR, May 28: Gujarat Titans' potent pace attack will have to stop the marauding boy wonder Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and their traditional-minded top-order needs to fire against Rajasthan Royals in the Qualifier 2 of the Indian Premier League here on Friday.

In the previous outing between the two teams, Mohammed Siraj did get the better of Sooryavanshi with the short ball after being disdainfully slapped for a six.

Kagiso Rabada too was at the receiving end of Sooryavanshi's sizzling shot-making.

Both Siraj and Rabada have provided the early breakthroughs through this tournament for GT, but the 15-year-old has raised the bar with an awe-inducing 97 off 29 balls in the Eliminator against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

It is expected to be another belter of a surface here and Sooryavanshi would be looking to smash every ball out of the park, caring little for the bowler's stature like he punished Pat Cummins.

The batting sensation has been dismissed off a short ball multiple times and probably that is one area the GT bowlers would like to target judiciously.

Royals, on a roll at the moment, rely heavily on Sooryavanshi and Jofra Archer. Both the X-factor players effectively won them the Eliminator against Sunrisers here.

Yashasvi Jaiswal has been totally overshadowed by Sooryavanshi's sensational ball striking at the top of the order.

Dhruv Jurel has done well at number three but he has been benefited by the head start provided by Sooryavanshi.

By captain Riyan Parag's own admission, Royals should have reached 260 on Wednesday but had an inexplicable collapse in the death overs. They would surely want to improve on their finishing skills.

Titans, on the other hand, get another shot



at reaching the IPL final after getting a passing at the hands of Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Titans bank heavily on their top three — Shubman Gill, Sai Sudharsan and Jos Buttler. If they don't deliver, RR really don't have the batting depth to turn it around.

If they end up conceding a 250-plus total like they did against RCB, it puts additional pressure on Gill and Sudharsan, who are

highly consistent but can't go hammer and tongs from ball one.

The bowling has been their biggest strength but it faltered big time in the death overs in Dharamsala where RCB skipper Rajat Patidar took the game away from Gill and Co.

Titans would also need a big improvement in the fielding department.

The middle-order and lower-order do not

inspire a lot of confidence but runs from Rahul Tewatia in the last game were among the few positives they would carry into Qualifier 2.

If the bowlers can repeat what they have been doing for a majority of this tournament, Titans will be the favourites to reach Sunday's final, underlining their consistency barring a bad day in the office in Qualifier 1.

"Yeah, definitely, you know, this (Qualifier 1) is, like you said, one of those games that we'd like to forget and start over in Mohali," Gill said ahead of the knockout game on home turf.

The city has been enduring extremely hot weather but the prospect of another Sooryavanshi special would draw thousands into the swanky stadium in the city's outskirts.

Teams ::

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), Jos Buttler, Kumar Kushagra, Shahrukh Khan, Glenn Phillips, Rashid Khan, Manav Suthar, Nishant Sindhu, Rahul Tewatia, Washington Sundar, Mohammed Siraj, Prasad Krishna, Kagiso Rabada, Ravir-nivasan Sai Kishore, Ishant Sharma, Jason Holder, Luke Wood, Sai Sudharsan, Connor Esterhuizen, Anuj Rawat, Jayant Yadav, Kulwant Khejroliya, Arshad Khan, Ashok Sharma, Gurnoor Brar.

Rajasthan Royals: Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag (c), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Donovan Ferreira, Ravindra Jadeja, Jofra Archer, Nandre Burger, Kwena Maphaka, Sandeep Sharma, Ravi Bishnoi, Sushant Mishra, Aman Rao Peralta, Adam Milne, Kuldeep Sen, Dasun Shanaka, Shubham Dubey, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Vignesh Puthur, Yash Raj Punja, Emanjot Singh Chahal, Brijesh Sharma, Tushar Deshpande.

Match starts at 7.30 IST. (PTI)

Vinesh Controversy Wrestling Federation moves SC, flags 'judicial overreach' in selection



NEW DELHI, May 28: The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has moved the Supreme Court, challenging the Delhi High Court order that allowed Olympian wrestler Vinesh Phogat to participate in the selection trials for the 2026 Asian Games, scheduled to be held here on Saturday.

In its Special Leave Petition (SLP), the WFI termed the Delhi High Court division bench order dated May 22 as "ex facie illegal" and argued that the federation was not given adequate opportunity to file a detailed reply before directions were issued in favour of Vinesh.

The federation said the High Court had directed inclusion of Vinesh in the trials for the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya despite her allegedly being "ineligible" under the published selection criteria.

The WFI further argued that selection of athletes for international multi-sport events falls exclusively within the domain of the recognised National Sports Federation and warned against "judicial overreach" into sporting selection matters.

Giving background to the dispute, the federation stated that Vinesh had voluntarily retired from wrestling in December 2024 through communications sent to the International Testing Agency (ITA).

According to the plea, under United World Wrestling (UWW) anti-doping rules read with the WADA Code, an athlete returning from retirement must undergo a mandatory six-month whereabouts and dope-testing

period before becoming eligible to compete.

The WFI also referred to a "recorded missed test" allegedly registered against Vinesh on May 4 in connection with an unsuccessful testing attempt on December 18, 2025, following which a show-cause notice was issued to her on May 9.

The federation contended that the disciplinary process against the wrestler was still pending and should be allowed to reach its "logical conclusion".

The plea also said the selection policy, published in February 2026, had no provision for an "iconic player" or maternity-based exemption and maintained that selections had always been merit-and-performance based.

The WFI further submitted that 12 wrestlers in each category had already qualified for the trials on the basis of medals won at the Senior National Championships, Senior Federation Cup and Under-20 National Championships, and claimed those wrestlers were not heard before the High Court passed its order.

The federation additionally argued that the deadline for accreditation for the Asian Games had expired on May 14, prior to the High Court order, making implementation of the directions difficult.

Vinesh had approached the Delhi High Court seeking permission to compete in the trials after she was denied an opportunity to compete in National Open Ranking event which was supposed to be her first even on come back.

WFI had issued a showcause notice for violation of rules.

Vinesh moved court but did not get relief and only after she appealed that verdict, the Delhi High Court asked WFI to allow the celebrated wrestler to compete in trials in Delhi on May 30. (PTI)

Four Indians in ICC's all-female panel of match officials for Women's T20WC

DUBAI, May 28: Four Indian officials, including match referee GS Lakshmi, have been named in the 18-strong all-female list of ICC match officials who will supervise the Women's T20 World Cup beginning June 12 in England and Wales. It will be the third straight edition of the showpiece that will feature an all-woman panel, with Candace La Borde, Gayathri Venugopalán, Kerrin Klaaste and Shathira Jakir Jesy slated to make their tournament debut.

Vrinda Rathi and Janani N are the other two Indians in the umpires' list. "This panel of match officials for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 reflects the ICC's commitment to expanding the scope of representation to all facets of the sport," ICC CEO Sanjoy Gupta said in a press release. "The ICC takes into consideration a comprehensive, holistic, and evidence-based account while assessing its sports officials and their decision-making performance," he added.

There are 14 umpires and four match referees who will be used across the 33 fixtures at the World Cup, with nine members of the match officials' team from the 2024 edition returning for the upcoming event.

Australian official Claire Polosak is the most experienced as she gets ready for her sixth appearance at the tournament having umpired 22 matches previously, while Jacqueline Williams and Kim Cotton, who have overseen 19 matches each on this stage, will reach the milestone of five T20 World Cups in England and Wales. (PTI)

From Armageddon to Total Chess, Norway Chess keeps redefining elite chess

OSLO, May 28: If innovation is the name of the game, then Norway Chess has not resorted to gimmicks or risky detours to carve its niche in an era overflowing with chess tournaments. Instead, it has trusted the simplest instincts -- ideas and experiences that resonate instantly with players, fans and everyone drawn to the game.

Two years after its inaugural edition in Stavanger in 2015, the tournament introduced the now-famous "confession box" -- an innovation spearheaded by the organisers that allows players to briefly step out during games and speak directly into a camera, offering viewers a rare glimpse into their live calculations, frustrations and strategies.

Now in its 14th edition, and staging itself in Oslo for the first time, Norway Chess continues to reinvent the viewing experience with a string of innovations that are reshaping how elite chess is presented to the world. "I'm constantly trying to figure out the best ways to develop chess -- both for viewers and for players -- going forward. It's something I think about all the time," said Kjell Madland, the founder and CEO of Norway Chess.

Often dubbed the 'Wimbledon of Chess' -- a comparison first drawn by legendary Grandmaster Garry Kasparov -- the tournament has

built its reputation not just on elite competition, but on continually reimagining how chess can be experienced by both players and audiences. Realising that hours of intense classical chess often ended anti-climactically in draws, Norway Chess introduced another bold innovation in 2019 -- the Armageddon tie-break. Under the new format, any classical game ending in a draw would immediately be followed by a sudden-death Armageddon playoff, guaranteeing a decisive result and adding fresh drama for both players and spectators.

Madland admitted these innovations are driven by the need to keep the tournament relevant in a competitive landscape, while adapting to evolving business models and shrinking profit margins -- all without losing sight of delivering the best possible experience for players and spectators. Madland said the growing number of drawn games had become a serious concern for elite chess, both from a sporting and commercial perspective.

"By 2018, nearly 85 per cent of games at the highest level were ending in draws, something I felt risked alienating spectators who spent hours following games only to see no decisive outcome. That was the problem. People felt it was boring when games just ended in draws. You could sit for

hours watching a game and then nothing happened in the end."

Concerned that audiences could gradually drift away from the sport, he began searching for ways to make games more decisive and engaging without compromising the integrity of classical chess.

The solution came in the form of the Armageddon tie-break system, coupled with a revised time control that reduced the classical game to two hours with a 10-second increment after move 40 -- a format he believes "encouraged players to push harder for victories instead of settling for safe draws".

Norway Chess also overhauled the traditional scoring format. Instead of the standard one point for a win and half a point for a draw, a classical victory was rewarded with three points, while a drawn classical game earned one point each before players battled for an additional half-point in Armageddon.

Through all its changes and innovations, one thing Norway Chess ensured was that Magnus Carlsen -- one of Norway's greatest sporting icons -- remained at the heart of the tournament. Carlsen is the only player to have featured in every edition of Norway Chess, continuing his association with the event even as he has gradually distanced himself from classical chess in recent years. (PTI)

Sindhu sails into Singapore Open quarters

SINGAPORE, May 28: Twin Olympic medallist PV Sindhu sailed into the women's singles quarterfinals of the USD 1,000,000 Singapore Open Super 750 badminton tournament with a straight-game win here on Thursday.

Sindhu took just 37 minutes to get the better of Riko Gunji of Japan 2-1 in 21-12 in her second round match.

But a stern test awaits Sindhu as she is pitted against top seed An Se Young of Korea in the last-eight round.

The fourth seeded Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, however, had to sweat it out to progress to the quarterfinals, beating Chinese Taipei duo of Lee Hwee-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan 21-15 11-21 21-18 in a contest that lasted exactly an hour. Satwik and Chirag will next face Malaysia's Khai Xing Kang and Aaron Tai.

The Indian mixed doubles pair of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto too progressed to the quarterfinals, beating Japanese combination of Yuta Watanabe and Maya Taguchi 8-21 21-17 21-16.

They will next meet the winner of the match between Korean pair of Kim Jae Hyeon-Jang and Ha Jeong and third seeded Malaysian combination of Chen Tang Jie and Toh Ee Wei. (PTI)

Yogasana coming for an Olympic spot

NEW DELHI, May 28: 'Faster, Higher, Stronger', goes the Olympic motto. But one sport is hoping to add a bit of "stillness, and balance" to the movement.

Yoga, the ancient Indian practice for mental and physical well-being propagated for centuries by spiritual gurus, is hoping to also become an eye-catching global sport -- Yogasana -- in the next one decade.

The audacious plan includes being big enough to be a medal sport in the 2036 Olympics, which India is hoping to host in Ahmedabad.

"But even if the Games were to be held in Timbuktu, we are working to ensure that Yogasana is a medal sport in 2036," World Yogasana vice president Udit Sheth asserted in an interview to PTI, referring in jest to the fifth century city in Mali that is also a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Yogasana's global standing as a sport is gradually rising and it has made it to this year's Asian Games as a demonstration sport. Sheth said the 2032 Olympics would be the next pit stop as a demo sport.

The stake-holders of the sport, which include the government of India, are eyeing an upswing in momentum with the first ever Yogasana World Championship featuring 75 countries from June 4 to 8 in Ahmedabad, the city that has become the national sporting hub thanks to its Olympic ambitions.

It has already bagged the 2030 Commonwealth Games where Yogasana will be one of the two indigenous disciplines



Hold your breath and posture!

that India has proposed.

Sheth is upbeat about the prospects even though World Yogasana, with 40 affiliates, is still some distance from the minimum 50 from at least three continents that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would demand before considering recognition.

The 47-year-old Sheth is the Founder and Managing Director of SE TransStadia, a sports infrastructure company that came into existence in 2009. He is not new to sport and its vagaries, having been the owner of the Mumbai franchise in the now defunct World Series of Boxing (WSB).

In World Yogasana, he is one of the three deputies to the body's head Baba

Ramdev, a renowned yoga guru who has branched into every aspect of India's thriving wellness industry that includes food products, and even medicines.

Ask Sheth about how and why Yogasana caught his fancy, he recalls a phone call from the Ministry of Ayush, which was formed in November 2014 to "revive the profound knowledge of ancient systems of medicine in India".

"In 2019, I got a call from the Ayush Ministry that we need to federate Yoga sport. Then we had a massive discussion with all the gurus. And yoga can't be packaged, you can't measure breathe and the pranayams, the kriyas but the asanas part, we said we will make it into a competitive sport," he said.

Yogasana's scoring and points system is heavily inspired by gymnastics and like the latter, it has artistic and rhythmic categories for groups and pairs besides the traditional yogasana event in the individual category.

The difference, however, is the criteria on which the judges evaluate the competitors.

While gymnastics rewards fluency and flexibility of movement, yogasana adjudicates the individual's ability to hold complex postures and ensure that the face reflects serenity while doing so.

"The competition is inward, it's with yourself," explained Sheth.

"This is one of the toughest sports because it is not only strength and flexibility, it is also balance and stillness. It's harder to be still than to be in motion because inertia carries you when you are in motion but over here stability counts.

"There is a holding time. So we measure all of that, we have nine judges around the FOP (Field of Play). We eliminate the highest and the lowest score and then do an average," he said.

He then goes on to list numbers that convey rapid growth in reach and popularity of yogasana since gaining government recognition as a competitive sport in 2020.

"After the world championships, a league is coming up in September this year. In India, Yoga is now in 700 districts and we have more than three lakh athletes registered with Yogasana Bharat.

"It is a part of the Khelo India Games, the National Games, and now a part of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA). So very

soon this will climb towards the Olympic vision," he said.

The expansion drive has been expectedly spearheaded by India and has found eager takers in West Asia, Europe and Africa with limited success in the Americas too with Canada being one of the WY's affiliates.

"The Islamic countries would not accept yoga due to religious reasons but yogasana as a sport is something that they are keen to explore. India has been at the forefront in sending trainers wherever there is a demand for yoga gurus," Sheth said.

"The idea is that we should be relevant and big enough for the IOC to be interested in yogasana's inclusion instead of us having to pursue them with repeated requests. So we would like to have at least 90 affiliates globally," he added.

Anti-Doping World Yogasana insists that it is following the World Anti-Doping Agency's rules even though the body is not yet an official signatory to the WADA's code.

"We follow all the rules of NADA (National Anti-Doping Code) and WADA. We are doing workshops with athletes. Only thing is that we don't have benchmarks because we are starting the sport from scratch but we tell them what to eat, what to not eat, not to take just any protein powder which is available.

"You have to buy it from the NADA-certified places. Also what happens here is that eating at the right time and right thing becomes most critical because your body can't be flexible if you are full," Sheth said. (PTI)

Not looking to replace anyone: All-rounder Harsh Dubey on maiden India call-up



NAGPUR, May 28: Rookie spin bowling all-rounder Harsh Dubey would like to create his own identity while representing India rather than just being dubbed as a "replacement" for any seasoned senior cricketer. The 23-year-old Vidarbha cricketer, one of the most promising all-rounder from the stable of left-arm orthodox spinners and left-handed batters, has got a maiden call-up for both one-off Test and three-match ODI series against Afghanistan next month. National selection committee chairman Ajit Agarkar hinted that they are looking at Dubey as a future prospect while strictly maintaining that Ravindra Jadeja has been only rested for this Afghanistan Test match.

"This opportunity has helped me grow a lot as a player. I am not looking to replace anyone. I worked hard for this opportunity and my hard work is the reason why I am here today. Instead of thinking too much about the future, my focus is entirely on giving my best on any given day," Dubey told PTI on his arrival after completing his IPL assignment with Sunrisers Hyderabad.

Having already picked up 198 wickets in 95 games across three formats, Dubey doesn't want to put undue pressure on himself in case he makes it to the playing eleven in Mullanpur during the one-off Test starting June 6.

"Right now, I am treating this international match just like any normal game. I don't want to put too much pressure on myself; I just want to back my abilities and keep doing what has always worked for me."

While left-arm spin bowling is his main forte where he has 133 first-class wickets with nine five-fors and two 10-wicket hauls, Dubey is also adept with the willow having scored more than 1000 runs in 27 red ball games so far.

"I really enjoy my batting and want to consistently perform as an all-rounder. I see myself as an all-rounder because I have always played as one," said Dubey, who has nine half-centuries in first-class cricket at an average of shade below 27. (PTI)