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Riniki case: Congress leader assures cooperation with probe

Khera asked to appear on May 25 again

GUWAHATI, May 14: Congress leader Pawan Khera on Thursday said the Assam Police's Crime Branch has summoned him again on May 25 for further questioning in connection with cases filed by Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, the wife of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Khera was questioned for the second consecutive day at the Crime Branch office here in connection with allegations he had made against Sharma regarding possession of multiple passports and undisclosed foreign properties.

"The inquiry is going on. Questions are being asked, and I am answering them as part of the process. I have been asked to come again on May 25, and I will do so," Khera told reporters after coming out of the Crime Branch office in the evening.

He said he was cooperating fully with the investigation, "as every responsible citizen should".

However, the Congress leader declined to disclose details of the questioning, saying he was responding to all queries raised by investigators.

Police had questioned Khera for more than 10 hours on Wednesday before asking him to appear again on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, before entering the Crime Branch office, Khera had reiterated that he would cooperate with the probe.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said the investigation would proceed as per law and claimed that the Centre had informed the state in writing that the documents displayed by Khera were "fake".

He also said the police would be able to file a chargesheet within the stipulated time.

Sharma had lodged criminal complaints against Khera and others at the Guwahati Crime Branch police station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

The charges include making false statements in connection with an election, cheating, forgery, use of forged documents as genuine, intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace, and defamation.

Earlier, Assam Police had visited Khera's residence in Delhi, but he was reportedly not present there.

Khera had initially secured seven-day transit anticipatory bail from the Telangana High Court, which was later challenged by Assam Police in the Supreme Court.

The apex court subsequently stayed the transit bail order and directed Khera to approach the Gauhati High Court. His anticipatory bail plea was later rejected by the Gauhati High Court, following which he again moved the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court then granted him anticipatory bail, observing that the matter appeared to stem from *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

111 killed, 72 injured as storm, rain batter UP; relief work underway

LUCKNOW, May 14: At least 111 people were killed and 72 injured after a strong storm and heavy rain pounded several districts of Uttar Pradesh, uprooting trees and damaging houses, an official statement said on Thursday.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took cognisance of the loss of lives and damage caused by the unseasonal rain, thunderstorms and lightning on Wednesday and directed officials to ensure relief reaches the affected families within 24 hours.

In a statement, the Relief Commissioner's office said, "Due to bad weather on May 13, including storms, rain, hailstorm and lightning, reports of 111 deaths were received from 26 districts. 72 persons were injured, 170 livestock losses and damage to 227 houses have been reported in the state."

It said Adityanath has directed all divisional commissioners and district magistrates to verify the incidents "with full sensitivity" and ensure financial assistance is distributed to affected families within 24 hours while establishing direct communication with them and extending other necessary help.

The commissioner's office said it is continuously monitoring the situation through direct coordination with district officials, and necessary funds are being made available to districts.

According to a list issued by the Prayagraj district administration, till morning, 17 deaths were reported due to the storm and rain. As reports pour in from other areas, the district administration said that a total of 24 deaths have come *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

NEET exam leak

5 accused remanded to CBI custody; 2 more arrested

NEW DELHI, May 14: The CBI on Thursday secured the custody of five persons arrested in the NEET-UG exam leak case and apprehended two more suspects as officials said the agency is also looking into possible role of any insider in the National Testing Agency (NTA) in the irregularities.

The court which granted CBI the custody of the five accused for seven days said the allegations revealed the role of an "organised gang" involved in leaking and circulating confidential examination papers for monetary gain.

In Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri district, a 21-year-old NEET aspirant hanged himself in his house in Gangotrinagar locality over the cancellation of the exam, his father claimed.

This was Mishra's third NEET attempt, and he was highly confident of clearing the exam this time, his father said.

Police said no suicide note was recovered from the room where Ritik's body was found hanging.

During the day, protests continued at several parts of the country demanding immediate scrapping of the NTA and the dismissal of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

In Ahmedabad, Pradhan was greeted with black flags by members of the Congress-affiliated National Students Union of India (NSUI) when he arrived at the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) to chair a coordination forum meeting of IIMs.

The protesters also demanded his resignation over the NEET-UG 2026 examination paper leak case.

The Federation of Resident Doctors' Association (FORDA) wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding strict action against those involved in the paper leak and seeking a shift to a computer-based format for the medical entrance test.

The NEET (UG) 2026 exam for admissions in undergraduate medical courses held on May 3 was cancelled by the NTA on Tuesday amid allegations of paper leak. The cancellation of the exam has left over 22 lakh medical aspirants in uncertainty.

Addressing reporters here, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra said the government has taken up the NEET paper leak case with "great seriousness and sensitivity" and assured students and parents of strict action against all those involved.

"No one will be spared, especially this exam mafia that is attempting to toy with the future of our children. Absolutely no one will be spared," he asserted.

Calling the issue "sensitive and distressing", Patra said it concerns not only 22 lakh students, but also the sentiments of their parents.

The CBI, which is probing the case, has arrested two more persons in connection with the paper leak. Dhananjay Lokhanda was arrested from *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Newly built athletics facility in Assam to host Indian Athletics Series

NEW DELHI, May 14: The newly-built stadium at Sariahtali in Nalbari district of Assam will host the seventh leg of Indian Athletics Series on June 6, providing the athletes of the state and adjoining areas a chance to compete in a national level meet.

The one-day meet will feature 18 events in senior category -- nine each for men and women -- and 10 in junior section (five each in men's and women's U20).

"The meet being an inaugural meet will enable the athletes from the interior areas of Assam State to promote athletics," said the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) in a circular.

The meet will be organised by Assam Athletics Association under the aegis of the AFI.

The venue has a newly-laid 9-lane track, which is a part of the Nalbari District Sports Stadium Complex, inaugurated in February by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. The complex also houses Assam's first Athletics Academy for elite training, besides having a football ground.

Assam has earlier hosted major national athletics events such as National Inter-State Championships in the past at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in Guwahati. (PTI)

4 Assam ministers allocated portfolios

GUWAHATI, May 14: The four Assam ministers who took oath along with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma were allocated their portfolios on Thursday.

The governor approved the list of portfolios of the ministers sent by the chief minister, officials said.

The four ministers in Sarma's cabinet are BJP's Rameshwar Teli and Ajanta Neog, AGP's Atul Bora and BPF's Charan Boro.

Teli, a former Union minister, has been allocated the Labour Welfare, Tea tribes and Adivasi Welfare and Transformation and Development department.

Neog, who was finance minister in Sarma's previous cabinet, has been allocated the portfolios for Women and Child Development and Tourism.

Bora, the Agriculture minister in the last government, has been given charge of Panchayat and Rural Development, Implementation of Assam Accord, Border Protection and Development, and Excise department.

Boro, also a minister in the previous government, retains the Transport and Welfare of Bodoland department.

All other departments will be held by the Chief Minister till the expansion of the ministry.

Sarma had said on Wednesday that the ministry would be expanded after the first assembly session concludes on May 26.

The four ministers represent the tea tribes (Teli), women (Neog), the regional Assamese community (Bora) and the indigenous Bodo tribal *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Xi warns Trump on Taiwan as US, China discuss trade and Iran war

BEIJING, May 14: Chinese President Xi Jinping warned his US counterpart Donald Trump that mishandling the Taiwan issue could trigger "clashes and even conflicts" between the two countries, as the leaders held wide-ranging talks on the Iran war, energy security and trade on Thursday.

After concluding the first round of talks in Beijing, which lasted for around two hours, Trump invited Xi and his wife to the White House on September 24, even as both leaders were in agreement that the Strait of Hormuz needs to be opened to support global energy needs.

China and the US have agreed on a "new vision" for building constructive bilateral ties, Xi said. "I have agreed with President Trump on a new vision of building a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability."

Xi said the "new vision" would provide strategic guidance for bilateral relations over the next three years and beyond and should be welcomed by the people of both countries as well as the international community, official media reported.

He, however, stressed that the Taiwan question remained the most important issue in China-US relations.

If it is handled properly, the bilateral relationship "will enjoy overall stability", Xi said. Otherwise, the two countries could face "clashes and even conflicts", putting bilateral ties in great jeopardy, the leader was quoted saying by state-run Xinhua news agency.

He urged the US to exercise extra caution in handling the Taiwan issue.

China regards self-ruled Taiwan as a renegade province that must eventually be reunified with the mainland, by force if necessary. It opposes formal diplomatic ties between Taipei and countries that recognise Beijing.

Since establishing diplomatic relations with modern China in 1979, the US has maintained unofficial ties with Taiwan and continued supplying arms to the island while formally acknowledging Beijing's position that Taiwan is part of China without explicitly endorsing it.

According to statements released by the White House, the two leaders discussed expanding economic cooperation, keeping the Strait of Hormuz open and preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

The two sides also discussed ways to enhance economic cooperation, including expanding market access for American businesses in China and increasing Chinese investment in US industries, it said.

Leaders from several major American companies joined a portion of the meeting, according to the White House.

The leaders also highlighted the need to build on progress in ending the flow of fentanyl precursors into the US, while increasing Chinese purchases of American agricultural products, *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

'12 infiltrators stopped from entering Assam'

GUWAHATI, May 14: The BSF and Assam Police intercepted 12 alleged infiltrators and prevented them from entering the state, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday.

Sarma said the state government would continue to maintain a policy of "zero tolerance" towards infiltrators.

"At 12:20 AM today, @assampolice along with @BSF India intercepted infiltrator movement and prevented the entry of 12 illegals into Assam", the CM said in a post on 'X'. "We will continue to maintain a ZERO TOLERANCE policy towards illegal immigration and forced demographic change," Sarma added.

He, however, did not mention the border district from where they were intercepted.

Assam shares a 263-km-long international border with Bangladesh, stretching across the districts of Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Sribhumi and Cachar. (PTI)

Two more arrested in Morikolong dacoity case, total arrests reach eight

Police say accused assisted gang involved in attack on doctor's family

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 14: Nagaon police have arrested two more persons in connection with the sensational dacoity case at the residence of Dr Ranjit Saikia in Morikolong, taking the total number of arrests in the case to eight.

The newly arrested accused have been identified as Harish Sarma and Satish Shah. According to police, both allegedly assisted the dacoit gang in executing the crime.

The incident took place in the early hours of April 24 when a gang attacked the residence of Ranjit Saikia in Morikolong.

Dr Saikia and his wife Ruprekha Bhuyan Saikia sustained serious injuries during the assault.

Ruprekha Bhuyan Saikia later succumbed to her injuries on May 10 while undergoing treatment in Guwahati.

Following the incident, Nagaon Sadar Police Station registered a case under FIR No. 292/2026 under Sections 310(2), 311 and 109 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Earlier, police had arrested Omar Ali, Mintu Hussain, Najirul Islam, Rajibur Rahman, Rezak Ali and Nurul Hussain in connection with the crime.

Police had also seized two machetes allegedly used in the dacoity along with a vehicle bearing registration number AR-01-M-4013. Investigation into the case is continuing.

Peace cannot be piecemeal: India flags serious concerns over West Asia crisis, unilateral sanctions

NEW DELHI, May 14: India on Thursday flagged grave concerns over the West Asia crisis and its impact on energy supplies and maritime stability in the Strait of Hormuz and urged BRICS nations to develop "practical ways" to navigate "unprecedented" geopolitical and economic uncertainty as well as "unilateral coercive" sanctions.

In his address at the opening day of a two-day BRICS conclave in New Delhi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserted, without naming specific nations, that respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity must anchor international relations, maintaining that "dialogue and diplomacy" offer the only sustainable path to conflict resolution.

Jaishankar said India stands ready to contribute constructively towards de-escalation efforts and to support initiatives aimed at restoring stability while noting that "peace cannot be piecemeal" and "it is essential to uphold international law, protect civilians, and avoid targeting public infrastructure".

He also underlined the importance of new members "fully" appreciating and subscribing to the BRICS' consensus mechanism on various important issues, remarks that came amid sharp differences between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Iran over the West Asia conflict.

It is learnt that there were heated exchanges between Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Khalifa Shaheen Al Marar *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Assam exports first consignment of agarwood chips to Saudi Arabia, UAE

GUWAHATI, May 14: Assam has exported its first consignment of agarwood chips worth ₹ 2.35 crore to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, officials said.

Agarwood, also known as Oud, is one of the world's most valuable aromatic raw materials, and is widely used in luxury perfumes, incense, cosmetics and traditional products across the Gulf, Europe and Southeast Asia.

The shipment marks a "significant milestone" in the state's agro-forest economy, as it is the "first legally approved export of agarwood chips", according to a release issued by the All Assam Agarwood Planters and Traders Association.

It is expected to open a new chapter for an industry with vast global demand and strong revenue potential, the association said.

The consignment, comprising 100 kg of agarwood chips to Saudi Arabia and 12 kg to the UAE, was dispatched from the cargo terminal of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport on Wednesday.

The agarwood chips were exported after securing all statutory clearances, the release said.

"This achievement is the result of years of research, policy advocacy, farmer engagement, plantation *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

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WPI inflation spikes to 42-month high of 8.3 pc as West Asia crisis raise energy prices

NEW DELHI, May 14: Wholesale price inflation shot up to a 42-month high of 8.3 per cent on the back of a spike in energy prices that followed the disruptions caused by the West Asia conflict.

Wholesale price index (WPI) inflation was 3.88 per cent in March, while it was 0.85 per cent in April last year.

According to global brokerage Barclays, the sequential increase in WPI inflation was the highest on record in the series.

A sharp increase in global oil prices drove the surge in the headline rate. Core WPI inflation rose to 5 per cent year-on-year, led by higher manufactured prices of metals, chemicals and textiles.

WPI inflation in fuel and power jumped to a 42-month high of 24.71 per cent in April, from 1.05 per cent in March. In crude petroleum, inflation was 88.06 per cent in April, the highest since October 2021.

The West Asia war and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted crude petroleum imports into India. Also, the sharp rise in crude prices globally has made fuel imports costlier.

"Positive rate of inflation in April 2026 is primarily due to an increase in prices of mineral oils, crude petroleum & natural gas, basic metals, other manufacturing and non-food articles, etc," the ministry said in a statement.

Inflation in food articles was 1.98 per cent in April, compared to 1.90 per cent

in March. In non-food articles, inflation rose to 12.18 per cent during April, 11.5 per cent in the previous month, data released by the commerce and industry ministry showed.

In manufactured products, inflation was 4.62 per cent in April, as against 3.39 per cent in the previous month.

In the fuel and power basket, inflation in LPG was 10.92 per cent in April, as against (-) 1.54 per cent in March, while in petrol it was 32.40 per cent, as against 2.50 per cent in the previous month. In high-speed diesel, inflation was 25.19 per cent in April as against 3.26 per cent in March. Despite a 50 per cent spike in global crude oil prices, the government has so far held fuel pump and household LPG rates stable to shield households from the impact of the retail price rise of petrol, diesel and LPG.

However, prices of commercial LPG cylinders have been raised.

This was evident from the April retail inflation data, which came in at 3.48 per cent.

India Ratings & Research Director Megha Arora said the headline inflation is likely to further rise to 9 per cent in May 2026, due to transmission of high energy prices and via its users, ie. the manufacturing sector.

"WPI is expected to be higher than the CPI on account of higher weight of fuels in the index, as well as delayed transmission of high crude price to consumers, as the government and the oil marketing companies absorbed most of it until now," Arora said.

The West Asia conflict leading to higher price of crude and its derivatives, as well as the potential El Nino effect continues to pose the upside risk to inflation, Arora added.

Bajaj Broking Fundamental Analyst Shashwat Singh said higher logistics, freight, and commodity prices are now increasingly getting reflected in wholesale inflation, which could eventually pass through to consumer inflation as well.

"The spike also suggests margin pressure for manufacturing and industrial companies if cost increases cannot be fully passed on to consumers," Singh said.

Barclays further said it expects a Rs 5/litre hike for both petrol and diesel is imminent in May, as crude oil prices remain elevated " We expect the MPC to look through the supply-shock-driven increase in inflation and persist with a pause for the remainder of 2026," it added. (PTI)

India bans sugar exports till Sept 30

NEW DELHI, May 14: India has banned the export of sugar till September 30 this year with immediate effect, a move which would help enhance domestic availability and contain prices.

Earlier the exports were under a restricted category, under which a license was required for the outbound shipments.

"The export policy of Sugar (Raw Sugar, White Sugar and Refined Sugar)... is amended from 'Restricted' to 'Prohibited' with immediate effect till September 30, 2026, or until further orders, whichever is earlier," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification dated May 13.

This order, however, does not apply to sugar being exported to the European Union and the US under the CXL and Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) arrangement, respectively. The arrangements allow exporters to ship specified quantities of sugar to these destinations at significantly reduced or zero customs duties.

The DGFT's order is also not applicable to the shipments under the advance authorisation scheme, government-to-government exports and consignments already in the physical export pipeline.

For the 2025-26 sugar marketing year (October to September), the Food Ministry initially allowed 15 lakh tonnes in exports, then opened an additional 5,00,000-tonnes pool, of which only 87,587 tonnes were approved. So, nearly 16 lakh tonnes of sugar export were allowed.

The food ministry and sugar mills were expecting 7.5-8 lakh tonnes of shipments in the entire 2025-26 marketing year.

India's sugar production rose 7.32 per cent to 27.52 million tonnes till April in the 2025-26 marketing season, driven by higher output in Maharashtra and Karnataka, according to industry body ISMA.

ISMA projected total production for the 2025-26 marketing season at 29.3 million tonnes after ethanol diversion, up from 26.12 million tonnes recorded in 2024-25.

Banning exports of a commodity helps in preventing a rise in prices, amid inflation concerns and uncertainty caused by the West Asia conflict.

In October 2022, India imposed export restriction on sugar and then it was extended from time to time.

The world's second-largest sugar producer keeps exports under government control through quotas distributed proportionally among mills. (PTI)

AFFIDAVIT

I, Priyam Chetia, DOB-01-01-2008, S/O Samir Jyoti Bordoloi, R/O Rahdhala, P.O.Gosaibari, P.S. Jajori, district Nagaon (Assam), do hereby solemnly affirm and declare on this 22nd day of April, 2026 at Nagaon Court that my actual and correct name is 'Priyam Chetia' which is recorded in all relevant documents including in my Aadhaar card, vide No-9841-1039-4364, but in my H.S.L.C. Admit Card Roll-B24-0892, No-0062, with Regd. No-19/PR/0006/365423/22, my name has been recorded as 'Priyam Chutiya' instead of 'Priyam Chetia.' Both Priyam Chetia and Priyam Chutiya are the names of one and single person i.e. myself.

TITLE CHANGE

I, Sri Amit Tiwari, S/o Lt. Hari Nandan Tiwari, resident of village Dillaji, Mithiphang, P.O & P.S- Diphu, district Karbi Anglong, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare in an affidavit before the Notary Public, Diphu, on the 8th of April, 2013, that from today henceforth in all records, deeds, documents etc., I shall be known as 'Amit Kemprai' in place of my former name and title 'Amit Tiwari' to 'Kemprai'.

Abbott launches Ensure Strength Pro in India for healthy ageing support

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 14: Abbott has announced the launch of Ensure® Strength Pro in India, a scientifically formulated nutritional supplement aimed at supporting healthy ageing and overall well-being among adults.

According to the company, the product has been designed to nourish seven key areas of health — muscles, bones, heart, blood cells, immune system, metabolism and nervous system — to help ageing adults maintain strength, stamina and independence.

Abbott stated that ageing naturally brings changes in muscle mass, metabolism, bone density and immunity.

The company cited research indicating that adults may experience up to 33 per cent loss of muscle mass between the ages of 40 and 80. It also highlighted nutritional gaps in Indian diets due to lack of dietary diversity.

Speaking on the launch, Anirban Basu said healthy ageing depends on several body systems working together and that Ensure® Strength Pro was developed to address evolving nutritional needs and common nutrient deficiencies among adults.

The product contains 31 nutrients, including 30 grams of protein, along with calcium, vitamin D, vitamin K, phosphorus and zinc to support bone health.

The formulation also includes vitamins and minerals aimed at supporting heart health, metabolism, immunity and nervous system functions.

Priti Thakor said balanced nutrition becomes increasingly important with age and can help support overall strength and resilience beyond muscle health alone.

The launch is part of Abbott's "Power of 7" campaign, which focuses on raising awareness about the importance of comprehensive nutrition for healthy ageing through scientific outreach, expert engagement and consumer education.

No.CSDB-155/BTC/SOPD/Pt-III/2025-2026/416/926 *Date 14/05/2026*

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs.8.25 (Rupees eight & paisa twenty five) only with a validity period of 90 days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 for are invited from the registered contractors of Class-I (ABC) and Class-II category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works SOPD for the year 2026-27 under as stated below. The tender will be received by the undersigned up to 2:00 P.M on 08/06/2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2:30 P.M

Sl. No.	Name of works	Tender Amount in Rs.	Cost of Tender in Rs.	Time of Completion
1	Construction of CC block road from Parman Marak's house to Lutpo! Marak's house at Boroghola village	19,50,000.00 (Nineteen lakh fifty thousand)	19,50,000.00 (Nineteen lakh fifty thousand)	3 months

Details NIT may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors of their authorized representatives from 05/06/2026 and 06/06/2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment cost of tender paper in the form of demand draft /Bankers cheque from any nationalized bank duly pledged in favour of the principal secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar payable at Kokrajhar.

A pre-bid meeting is schedule on 03/06/2026 at 11.00 AM. Address for the meeting is Office of the Block Dev. Officer, Chapar-Salkocha Dev. Block

The TIA reserve the right to accept or reject any bid/tender and to cancel /annul the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award.

Sd/- Block Development Officer,
Chapar-Salkocha Dev. Block

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/150

NO.GDBG-144/AW&DC-17/2024-25/ *Dated Gossaigaon the 14th March/2026*

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed Tender are invited in F-2 Form for the works shown below from the intending Registered Contractor of Class-I and Class-II (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) with affixing Non-refundable court fee of Rs.8.25 (Rupees Eight and paise twenty five) only in a prescribed Form under **(AW&DC)** fund for the year 2025-26. The Tender will be received on **08-06-2026** upto 1:00 PM in the Office of the undersigned and will be opened on same day at 1:30 PM in the Office of the undersigned and C.S. will be submitted to the B.D.O ,Gossaigaon Development Block , Gossaigaon for approval.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Estimated amount	Bid Security	Cost of BID documents (D/D) @ 0.03% (Approx.)	Time of completion
1	Const. of Village road with earth filling and Sand gravelling from Mohan Bihar PWSS to Durga Mandir under VCDC, Babubil	Rs. 10,00,000.00	Rs. 10,000/- @ 1% for ST/SC/OBC & Rs. 20,000/- @ 2% for General	Rs. 300/-	3 (Three) Months from the date of issue of work order.

The Terms and Condition details may be seen at Notice Board in the Office of the Block Development Officer, Gossaigaon Development Block, Gossaigaon from **14-05-2026 to 08-06-2026** up to 1:00 PM.

Sd/-
Block Development Officer,
Gossaigaon Dev. Block, Gossaigaon

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/154

Contd. from Page 1...

Khera asked to

political rivalry. Meanwhile, a local court in Guwahati had earlier rejected the Assam Police's plea, seeking issuance of a non-bailable warrant against the Congress leader. (PTI)

111 killed, 72

to the fore in Wednesday's incidents. In Bhadohi, district administration sources said at least 16 people died in storm-related incidents. Additional District Magistrate Kunwar Virendra Kumar Maurya said trees and electric poles were uprooted in several areas, while many houses were damaged in the storm. Fatehpur Additional District Magistrate Avinash Tripathi said nine people were killed and 16 were injured in storm-related incidents in the district.

"Eight people, including five women, died in Khaga tehsil, while a woman died after a wall of a house collapsed in Sadar tehsil," he said. In Pratapgarh, four people died in separate incidents of wall and cemented shed collapses and lightning strikes amid strong winds and rain, officials said. Superintendent of Police Deepak Bhukar said Bhim Yadav (25) died after he was trapped under the debris of a cemented shed that collapsed in Ojha Ka Purwa village in the Lalganj Kotwali area. He said Bhushan Pandey (56) died after a wall collapsed in Sari Swami village under the Baghrai police station area.

Bhukar said Shanti Devi (46) of Narangpur village and Lal Bahadur (44) of Chhatrapur Shivala Raghna village also died in storm-related incidents. In Kanpur Dehat district, two persons died in rain-related incidents, the officials said.

Police sources said a 19-year-old woman, Ruchi, died after being struck by lightning in Bhauthari village under the Rasulabad area while standing under a neem tree with goats during heavy rain. Several goats also died in the incident.

A 60-year-old man standing nearby was injured, they added. Additional District Magistrate (Finance and Revenue) Dushyant Kumar said reports regarding human and livestock losses have been sought from local officials, and financial assistance will be provided as per government rules. In Deoria, Komal Yadav (62), a resident of Bhimpur Gaura village, died after being struck by lightning, district administration sources said. Two others were injured in the incident.

In another incident, Ramnath Prasad (65), a resident of Neruari village, died in a lightning strike.

In Sonbhadra district, Madhav Singh (38) died after being trapped under a tree uprooted during the rain and the storm.

Adityanath directed the district magistrates and officials of various departments to visit the affected areas and provide all possible assistance to the victims and their families. He also instructed the officials to remain alert and ordered the revenue and agriculture departments, along with insurance companies, to conduct a survey of the damage and submit a report to the government. (PTI)

5 accused remanded

Ahilyanagar and Manisha Waghmare from Pune. The role of several officers of the NTA and other organisations having access to the printing press where NEET UG papers were printed have come under the scanner, officials said. The CBI is focussing on identifying the source of the leak, they said. According to the CBI investigation so far, the involvement of public servants in the leak could not be ruled out.

During the day, Special CBI judge Ajay Gupta sent the five persons arrested earlier to seven days' CBI custody.

Gupta was hearing a CBI plea to interrogate all the five accused for seven more days in the case to unearth the whole conspiracy. The five arrested - Shubham Khairnar from Nashik, Mangilal Biwal, Vikas Biwal and Dinesh Biwal from Jaipur, and Yash Yadav from Gurugram - were taken into custody by the agency after a transit remand was secured from different states.

In a remand plea, the agency alleged that the exam was compromised after questions were circulated in PDF format through WhatsApp and Telegram before the exam. An FIR was registered on May 12 on a complaint by Department of Higher Education (NTA Division) director Varun Bhardwaj. Special Public Prosecutor VK Pathak and Special Public Prosecutor Neetu Singh informed the court that an inquiry by Rajasthan's Special Operations Group (SOG) had reportedly confirmed the authenticity of some leaked questions, following which the government cancelled the exam.

"In April 2026, one Shubham of Nasik informed Yash Yadav that Mangilal had approached him for arranging leaked NEET UG 2026 question papers before the examination for his younger son for 10-12 lakhs," Pathak said.

The agency claimed that on April 29, Yash Yadav shared the leaked Physics, Chemistry and Biology question papers in PDF format through Telegram. According to the CBI, Mangilal allegedly received the leaked papers from Yadav as part of a Rs 10 lakh deal and distributed printed copies to NEET aspirants, including his son Aman Biwal, and his relatives and acquaintances.

The agency also alleged that Vikash Biwal contacted several candidates and shared their details with Yadav through WhatsApp and Instagram for the circulation of leaked papers. "On April 29, 2026, Shubham allegedly informed Yash Yadav that he would provide leaked question papers of Physics, Chemistry and Biology papers, which will have approximately 500-600 questions capable of securing around very good marks, which can ensure admission in reputed medical colleges," it said.

The CBI said incriminating chats, leaked question papers, and other digital evidence were recovered from the mobile phones of the accused, while some deleted data would require forensic examination.

Seeking custodial interrogation, the agency told the court that police custody was necessary to identify other accused, trace the source of the leak, analyse digital and financial trails, recover evidence and probe the possible involvement of NTA officials.

"The purpose of conducting investigation, the arrested accused persons are required to be taken under police custody for custodial interrogation to prevent further commission of similar offences involving leakage of question papers, to identify and apprehend other co-accused persons involved in the offence," the CBI said in a remand copy. (PTI)

4 Assam ministers

community (Boro). The BJP-led NDA government swept to power in the state for the third consecutive term with a record 102 seats. Sarma was sworn in as the chief minister for a second successive term on May 12. (PTI)

Xi warns Trump

it said. "The two sides agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open to support the free flow of energy," the White House said, adding that Xi "made clear China's opposition to the militarisation of the Strait and any effort to charge a toll for its use".

According to the White House statement, Xi also "expressed interest in purchasing more American oil to reduce China's dependence on the Strait in the future". "Both countries agreed that Iran can never have a nuclear weapon," the White House said.

The Strait of Hormuz - which is a major transit route for roughly one-fifth of the world's energy supplies - and Iran's nuclear ambitions remain the two main sticking points in the ongoing peace talks between Iran and the US.

Earlier, Trump had described the meeting as "maybe the biggest summit ever", saying the two countries would have a "fantastic future together". Calling Xi a "great leader", Trump said the talks covered the Iran war, trade tensions, tariffs, technology and Taiwan. Trump, who arrived in Beijing on Wednesday, is accompanied by several top American business leaders, including Nvidia's Jensen Huang, Apple chief Tim Cook, Tesla and SpaceX chief Elon Musk, and BlackRock CEO Larry Fink.

This is the first visit to China by a US president in nine years. Trump himself was the last US president to visit the country in 2017 during his first term. The meeting comes amid growing geopolitical tensions over the Iran conflict, renewed tariff disputes, export controls, rare earth supply chains and US arms sales to Taiwan. (PTI)

Peace cannot be piecemeal

during one of the two sessions at the conclave and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov intervened to cool the tempers.

Iran and the UAE have been sparring in recent weeks over Iran's alleged attacks on energy infrastructure in the UAE that has resulted in BRICS coming out with a consensus statement on the West Asia crisis.

BRICS, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, expanded in 2024 to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE, with Indonesia joining in 2025. "It is essential for the smooth advancement of BRICS that later members fully appreciate and subscribe to the BRICS' consensus on various important issues," Jaishankar said.

In his remarks, he also strongly pitched for ensuring safe and unimpeded maritime flows through the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea, and voiced concerns over the "grave humanitarian implications" of the conflict in Gaza.

The India-hosted meet assumed greater significance as the influential bloc grapples with the economic consequences of the West Asia crisis, particularly the severe energy supply disruptions, and Washington's policy on trade and tariffs.

Besides Araghchi and Lavrov, Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono and South Africa's Minister for International Relations Ronald Lamola were among the senior leaders attending the meeting.

"The conflict in West Asia merits particular attention. Continuing tensions, risks to maritime traffic, and disruptions to energy infrastructure highlight the fragility of the situation," Jaishankar said. He said safe and unimpeded maritime flows through international waterways, including the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea, remain vital for global economic well-being.

"The wider region also gives rise to serious concern. The conflict in Gaza has grave humanitarian implications.

"A sustained ceasefire, humanitarian access, and a credible pathway towards a durable and peaceful resolution remain essential. India supports a two-state solution where the Palestine issue is concerned," he said.

Jaishankar also made a mention of challenges facing Lebanon and Syria as well as prevailing situation in Sudan, Yemen and Libya while calling for sustained international engagement and coordinated diplomatic efforts to address them.

"Taken together, they underline a clear reality: stability cannot be selective, and peace cannot be piecemeal. It is essential to uphold international law, protect civilians, and avoid targeting public infrastructure."

"India stands ready to contribute constructively to de-escalation efforts and to support initiatives aimed at restoring stability," Jaishankar said. Without naming any country, he also underlined the need for addressing what he called "the increasing resort to unilateral coercive measures and sanctions inconsistent with international law and the UN Charter".

"Such measures disproportionately affect developing countries. These unjustifiable measures cannot substitute dialogue, nor can pressure replace diplomacy," he said.

The external affairs minister, referring to "unprecedented geopolitical and economic uncertainty" facing the world said these developments are weakening growth prospects and deepening vulnerabilities.

"Many of these issues have far-reaching consequences beyond their immediate region. Their impact is particularly severe for emerging markets and developing countries, through pressures on energy, food and fertilizer security, supply chain disruptions, inflationary trends and constraints on growth," he said.

In this context, BRICS solidarity assumes particular significance, he said.

Jaishankar also described terrorism as a "continuing threat" and that there can be no justification for terrorism in any form.

"Cross-border terrorism violates the basic principles of international relations. Zero tolerance must remain an uncompromising and universal norm," he said. Jaishankar noted that technological advancements are reshaping the global landscape and there is a need to bridge the digital divide.

"While they offer opportunities, they also raise concerns relating to trust, transparency, and equitable access," he said.

"Climate change continues to be a defining challenge. Climate action must go hand in hand with climate justice, with credible commitments, adequate financing, and accessible support," he said.

Jaishankar also pitched for reform of the UN Security Council.

"Even as challenges mount, the multilateral system unfortunately weakens. The state of the United Nations, which is at its core, is particularly worrisome. With each passing day, the case for reformed multilateralism only gets stronger."

"This includes the reform of the UN Security Council in both the permanent and non-permanent categories. Continued delay comes at a high cost," he said. "The message from our times is clear: cooperation is essential, dialogue is necessary, and reform is overdue. We must work together to shape a more stable, equitable, and inclusive international order," he said.

Jaishankar said India remains committed to engaging constructively with all partners in advancing these objectives.

The BRICS foreign ministers also made a joint call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

India, as the chair of the BRICS, is hosting the conclave of the foreign ministers ahead of the annual summit of the grouping in September. The BRICS has emerged as an influential grouping as it brings together 11 major emerging economies of the world, representing around 49.5 per cent of the global population, around 40 per cent of the global GDP and around 26 per cent of the global trade. (PTI)

Assam exports first

development, processing innovation and international compliance efforts," All Assam Agarwood Planters and Traders Association chairman Jehirul Islam said.

Assam-grown agarwood is highly valued for its superior quality, rich aroma and high oil content, giving the state a strong advantage in international markets, the officials said. (PTI)

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BJP praises Cabinet's first decisions on poll promises

Party says NDA government has begun implementing Sankalp Patra commitments from first Cabinet meeting

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 14: Bharatiya Janata Party Assam Pradesh on Thursday lauded the NDA government in Assam for initiating action on electoral promises during the very first Cabinet meeting of the new government.

Addressing a press conference at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan in Guwahati, BJP spokesperson Suranjan Dutta said the party had presented a 31-point Sankalp Patra during the 2026 Assam Assembly elections focusing on welfare, development and governance.

He said that after Himanta Biswa Sarma took oath as chief minister for a second consecutive term on May 12, the first Cabinet meeting held on May 13 adopted a decision to implement all the commitments mentioned in the BJP's Sankalp Patra over the next five years.

Dutta stated that the Cabinet also took a landmark decision to move towards implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in Assam, re-

calling that the chief minister had earlier announced in the Assembly that the government would pursue the initiative if re-elected to power.

He further said the Cabinet meeting adopted several important decisions relating to governance reforms, infrastructure development, employment generation, transport reforms and administrative restructuring aimed at accelerating Assam's development.

According to Dutta, the Cabinet also resolved to constitute a Special Task Force under the leadership of the chief secretary to expedite the recruitment process for an additional two lakh government jobs in the state.

The BJP Assam Pradesh Committee expressed gratitude to chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for taking steps to fulfil electoral commitments immediately after assuming office for a second term.

Dutta also said the party prayed for strength and guidance for the chief minister in continuing his work for the development of Assam and the welfare of its people.

Assam Higher Education Department orders action against Deithor college principal

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 14: The Higher Education Department of the Assam government has directed the Director of Higher Education to take immediate action regarding allegations against Dipak Bora, Principal of Government Model College Deithor in Karbi Anglong district.

According to official communication issued by the Under Secretary to the Government of Assam, Higher Education Department, the Director of Higher Education has been instructed to examine the allegations raised against the principal in accordance with applicable service rules, departmental procedures and relevant statutory provisions.

The communication further stated that if necessary, appropriate legal and departmental action, including initiation of departmental proceedings, may be taken after examination of the matter.

The department has also sought an action taken report from the Director of Higher Education.

The development follows complaints and representations submitted by several youth, student and social organisations from Karbi Anglong alleging sexual harassment of a female student by the principal.

On May 11, representatives of Karbi Nationalist Youth Council, All India Karbi Students' Union, Karbi Students' and Youth Council and Karbi National Organization had jointly submitted a memorandum through the Principal Secretary of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council to the Higher Education Department seeking immediate dismissal of the principal.

The memorandum was signed by KNYC president Podmo Teron and general secretary Jirsong Bongrung; AIKSU president Easterson Tisso and general secretary Mensing Teron; KSYC vice-president Sarongkim Terang; and KNO president Sarmon Hanse.

Dimasa community mourns demise of scholar and social leader Dr Subal Maibangsa

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 14: A wave of grief has swept across the Dimasa community and Karbi Anglong district following the untimely demise of Subal Maibangsa, president of the Dimasa Sahitya Sabha Karbi Anglong District Committee.

His passing has been described as an irreparable loss not only to his family but also to the Dimasa society, academic fraternity and the people of Karbi Anglong.

A resident of Amolapatty in Diphu, Dr Maibangsa was serving as a professor in the Department of Crop Physiology at Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat.

He was widely respected as an academician, literary figure, social worker and community leader.

Known for his dedication towards the promotion of Dimasa literature, preservation of culture and advancement of education and social welfare, Dr Maibangsa earned admiration and respect from people across communities. His demise has left a deep void in the region, with many remembering his leadership and contributions towards the upliftment of the Dimasa community and society at large.

He is survived by his wife, son and daughter.

On behalf of the Dimasa Sahitya Sabha, vice-president Satya Brat Kemprai expressed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and prayed for strength and courage for them during the difficult time.

Members of the Dimasa community and residents of Karbi Anglong paid tribute to Dr Maibangsa, recalling his lifelong commitment to literature, education and social service.

24 livestock seized from oil tanker in Jagiroad, 3 arrested

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, May 14: Jagiroad police seized 24 livestock being illegally transported in a crude oil tanker during a routine checking drive on NH-27 on Thursday and arrested three persons in connection with the incident.

According to Bhadreshwar Pegu, the livestock were being transported in an oil tanker bearing registration number AS-05-C-1034.

The arrested persons were identified as Shariful Ali and Mohammad Alaluddin, both residents of Kadam village under Baginadi Police Station in Lakhimpur district, and Muzzamil Haque of Rangalu village under Kampur Police Station in Nagaon district.

Police said the accused were allegedly attempting to smuggle the livestock through Jagiroad towards Jorabat in Meghalaya.

Investigators suspect the involvement of a larger illegal livestock smuggling network and stated that further investigation and intensified operations are underway.

Elderly man reported missing from Howraghat

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, May 14: A 71-year-old man identified as Chijtan Harijan has been reported missing for the past two days from Gorokhia Pukhuri Harijan village under the jurisdiction of Howraghat Police Station in Karbi Anglong district.

According to family members, Chijtan Harijan had left home on the morning of May 12 to visit his father-in-law, Gunenswar Harijan, at Loksonjan in Bokalia Ghat (Rajapather).

After staying there overnight, he reportedly started his return journey the next day but did not reach home.

Family members said they searched for him in several places including Kheroni, Lanka, Hojai, Kaki and Beltola, but his whereabouts remain unknown. The family stated that the elderly man is mentally unwell and had gone missing on four or five occasions in the past, although he was always traced and brought back safely.

An appeal has been made to the public for assistance in locating him.

Anyone having information regarding his whereabouts has been requested to contact the family at 9395185909 or inform the nearest police station. The family also sought cooperation from local residents and well-wishers to help bring the elderly man home safely.

Leopard caged at tea estate in Mariani

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 14: A leopard that had allegedly been creating panic among workers of Heeleakah Tea Estate in Mariani, under Jorhat co-district, was captured by forest officials on Thursday.

According to sources, the leopard had been spotted in the area for the past three months and had reportedly killed several cattle in and around the tea estate.

Sources further stated that a woman tea garden worker was recently attacked by the animal but narrowly escaped after a co-worker pulled her away in time.

Following the incident, the management of Heeleakah Tea Estate informed the Forest Department.

Officials from the Mariani Forest Range Office subsequently installed a cage in the tea garden area. The leopard was later trapped in the cage and taken into custody by forest personnel.

DRSC reviews road safety measures in Kokrajhar

Committee stresses infrastructure improvement and accident prevention initiatives

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 14: A meeting of the District Road Safety Committee (DRSC) was held in Kokrajhar on Wednesday under the chairmanship of District Commissioner P. Uday Praveen to review the prevailing road safety situation in the district and discuss measures for strengthening road safety protocols.

The meeting was attended by Akshat Garg, ADC (Magistracy), officials of National Highways Authority of India, the District Transport Office, representatives from PWD, NHIDCL and NH-PWD along with other stakeholders.

Detailed discussions were held on improving road safety infrastructure and reducing road accidents across the district.

The committee emphasised the immediate installation of proper road signages and speed breakers at vulnerable locations to ensure safer movement of commuters.

Special focus was also given to preventive measures at identified accident-prone black spots in the district.

The committee further discussed regulating the movement of e-rickshaws within Kokrajhar town to streamline traffic flow and reduce congestion in urban areas.

The establishment of trauma care centres along national highways was also prioritised to ensure timely emergency medical assistance during road accidents.

The district administration directed all concerned departments and agencies to ensure timely implementation of the proposed measures through coordinated efforts, stressing that road safety is a collective responsibility requiring active cooperation from all stakeholders and citizens.

KA admin issues public notice on explosives storage proposal

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 14: The Office of the Additional District Magistrate of Karbi Anglong has issued an additional public notice regarding an application submitted by A S Enterprise for issuance of a No Objection Certificate (NOC) under the Explosives Rules, 2008. According to the notice, the applicant has sought permission to possess and use explosives of Class 1 to 7 in a magazine for blasting-related activities connected with well sinking, canal works, quarry mining, pipeline projects, road construction, dam works and other legally approved government projects.

The proposed site for the explosives magazine is located at Patta No 167, Dag No 629 at Palam Gaon under Dokmoka Police Station in Phuloni Revenue Circle of Karbi Anglong district. The administration stated that, in accordance with Rule 103, Sub-Rule (3)(a) of the Explosives Rules, 2008, any objections along with valid reasons may be submitted within one week from the date of publication of the notice. Objections are to be submitted before James Daimari, Executive Magistrate, Diphu, who has been designated as the enquiry officer for the matter.

Woman killed in wild elephant attack in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 14: A woman was killed in a wild elephant attack at Kandali under the Kathiatoli forest range in Nagaon district in the early hours of Wednesday amid continuing human-elephant conflict in the region.

The deceased was identified as Rupali Rongpi, a resident of Kuhiartoli near the Firing Field area of Kandali.

According to local residents, a wild elephant entered her house during the night, damaged the structure and dragged her outside before trampling her to death.

Her husband and 10-year-old child reportedly escaped unharmed.

Residents said herds of wild elephants have been creating havoc in several areas including Bharaguri, Samaguri Bou Bazar, Paghali, Baroma, Mowamari, Kandali and Kachua over the past several days.

The animals have allegedly damaged standing Boro paddy crops, causing concern among farmers.

The incident triggered panic and grief in the locality, with villagers alleging that repeated requests to the Forest Department to drive away the elephant herd had not been acted upon.

Forest officials later reached the spot, assessed the situation and sent the body for post-mortem examination. Locals said elephant depredation has remained a recurring problem in the area, with wild elephant herds frequently straying into villages from nearby forest regions.

Three-year-old killed in wild elephant attack in Bokajan

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, May 14: A three-year-old child was killed and two others were injured in a wild elephant attack at Arucha Adivasi village in the Karagaon area under Khatkhati Police Station on Wednesday night. The deceased was identified as Tanbir Alam, son of Jahirul Islam.

According to local residents, a wild elephant strayed into the village from a nearby forest at around 1 am and went on a rampage, damaging several houses in the area.

During the incident, the elephant attacked a house where the child was present, leading to his death.

Two other villagers also sustained injuries in the attack and are currently undergoing medical treatment.

Personnel from the Karagaon Pohora Outpost rushed to the spot after receiving information about the incident and secured the area.

The incident has left residents of Arucha Adivasi village and nearby Bengenabari in shock, with villagers expressing concern over the growing human-elephant conflict in the Karbi Anglong region.

Local residents urged the Forest Department to increase patrolling and strengthen preventive measures to avoid such incidents in future.

"The entire village is in mourning. It happened so fast; we could only watch in horror as the elephant entered the settlement," a resident said.

SHORT e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
Invitation for BIDS (IFB) NIT No.1 of 2026-27

PHE-DIP/R/TB/TND/1(12)/2026-27: On behalf of the Governor of Assam, Bids are invited online through e-Procurement system against (IFB) NIT No.1 of 2026-27 of Diphu Rural W/S Division from the eligible registered contractor (Class-2 and above category) having valid trading license/ NOC from Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council under Public Health Engineering Deptt., Assam, in two Part viz., Part – I : Technical Bid and Part – II : Financial Bid, for the work "Construction of (Two) nos. of reservoir connecting water facilities to Gangjang village from the main source of water at a distance of 09 KM." The detail Bid Document is available in the web portal www.assamtenders.gov.in and can be viewed from 14/05/2026 up to 11.00 hrs. of 04/06/2026. Bid is to be submitted through online and in no case manual bid shall be entertained.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer (PHE)
Diphu Rural W/S Division

E-AUCTION FOR MULTIPURPOSE STALLS ASSETS OVER LUMDING DIVISION

E-Auction for 15 nos. Multipurpose Stalls (MPS) Assets over Lumding Division for a period of 05 years. **Rate Unit:** Annual Licensing Fee. **Trips/Days.** 1826.

Auction Catalogue No. MPS-LMG-04-26

Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-113-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. NHLGMPS-6 at PF-2 of New Halfong Railway station ('D' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for OBC-women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/2	MPS-LMG-HBN-MPS-121-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. HBNMPS-2 at PF-1 of Haibargaon Railway station ('B' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/3	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-112-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. NHLGMPS-5 at PF-2 of New Halfong Railway station ('D' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for ST category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/4	MPS-LMG-HBN-MPS-120-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. HBNMPS-1 at PF-1 of Haibargaon Railway station ('B' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded).
AA/5	MPS-LMG-MBG-MPS-35-23-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (MBGMPS-1) at PF-1 of MAIBANG Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded)
AA/6	MPS-LMG-BXJ-MPS-127-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. BXJMPS-1 at Platform 1 of Bokajan Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for Women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/7	MPS-LMG-SZR-MPS-131-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. SZRMPS-1 at Platform 1 of Sarupathar Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/8	MPS-LMG-SZR-MPS-132-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. SZRMPS-3 at Platform 2 of Sarupathar Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for OBC Women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/9	MPS-LMG-DPU-MPS-134-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. DPUMPS-3 at Platform 1 of Diphu Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for Women category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/10	MPS-LMG-GHY-MPS-124-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. GHYMPS-14 outside the parking lot near SSE/P/GHY office of Guwahati Railway station ('A1' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Unreserved category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/11	MPS-LMG-BXJ-MPS-128-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. BXJMPS-3 at Platform 2 of Bokajan Railway station for a period of 5 (five) years only. Reserved for OBC category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/12	MPS-LMG-JMK-MPS-126-26-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (JMKMPS-5) at PF-2 of JAMUNAMUKH Railway Station. (Sketch plan uploaded)
AA/13	MPS-LMG-BHRB-MPS-107-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (BHRBMPS-1) at platform-1 of Bhairabi Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only (Unreserved category). Sketch plan uploaded.
AA/14	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-111-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose Stall No. NHLGMPS-4 at PF-2 of New Halfong Railway station ('D' category) for a period of 5 (five) years only. Open to all category. (Sketch plan uploaded.)
AA/15	MPS-LMG-KTX-MPS-102-25-1 (MPS - Multi Purpose Stalls)	Provision of Multipurpose stall (KTXMPS-2) at Katakhal Railway station for a period of 5 (Five) years only. Sketch plan uploaded.

Auction Start Date & Time: 10.00 hrs. **and closing** at **12:50** hrs. of **29-05-2026.** Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Lot wise closing time can be viewed in e-Auction module of IREPS.

Note: Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website **www.ireps.gov.in** for more details.

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Initiatives aimed at strengthening farmer producer organisations and rural economy

Foundation stones laid for MMUY-supported agricultural projects in Hojai

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 14: The District Commissioner of Hojai and the Chief General Manager of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) jointly laid foundation stones for several projects supported under the Mukhya Mantri Utkarsh Yojana (MMUY) in Hojai district on Wednesday.

The projects are aimed at strengthening Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and improving the economic condition of small and marginal farmers through aggregation and value addition initiatives.

According to officials, four Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) associated with NABARD in Hojai district recently received the first instalment of financial assistance under the MMUY scheme launched by the Assam government.

As part of the projects, Thaisu Valley AFPCL will establish a jaggery processing plant at Tilabazar-Kaki in

Lumding block, while Dakhin Hojai Milk PCL will set up a maize grinding unit at Bhimarali in Dhalpukhuri block.

Similarly, NABA Unnayan APCL will establish a mustard oil extraction unit at Pub Nabhanga in Jugijan block.

The foundation stones for these units were laid jointly by Hojai District Commissioner Deba Prasad Misra and NABARD CGM Loken Das. During the programme, fertilisers were also distributed among selected farmers and a solar-based Short Depth Tube Well supported under SOPD was inaugurated at a farmer's plot in Tilabazar.

The events were organised by NABARD District Development Manager Rajendar Perna and attended by representatives of ISAP India Foundation, Gramya Unnayan Sanstha and Hojai Unnayan Mancha along with ADC Pritam Raja Sarma, DAO Altab Hussain and SDAO Jumur Goswami, among others.

Speaking on the occasion, Loken Das highlighted that formation of FPOs and establishment of processing units would help farmers secure better prices for their produce while also generating local employment opportunities and reducing migration of youth from rural areas.

District Commissioner Deba Prasad Misra said the MMUY scheme was introduced to strengthen the FPO ecosystem and modernise Assam's agriculture sector by providing grant-in-aid support of ₹15 lakh in two instalments to selected high-performing FPOs across the state.

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THE HILLS TIMES

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

'Happiness depends upon ourselves.' - Aristotle

Vijay survives trust vote

The rise of Vijay from Tamil cinema's "Thalapathy" to Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu crossed its most decisive constitutional milestone this week when his government survived a dramatic trust vote in the Assembly with 144 MLAs backing him and only 22 voting against. In the process, Tamil Nadu may have witnessed not merely the birth of another coalition govt, but the possible beginning of a post-Dravidian political transition. The numbers themselves tell a story far larger than arithmetic. Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), which stormed into power in its very first election, was supported not only by allies such as the Congress, CPI(M), VCK, IUML and smaller regional players, but crucially by a rebel bloc within the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). Around 25 AIADMK legislators, reportedly aligned with leaders like SP Velumani and C Ve Shanmugam, defied the official stand of party chief Edappadi K. Palaniswami and effectively ensured Vijay's stability in office. Equally striking was the conduct of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Rather than aggressively oppose the confidence motion, the party staged a walkout. Udhayanidhi Stalin declared that the DMK would "not create hurdles" for the new government and urged Vijay to continue welfare schemes initiated by the previous administration of M. K. Stalin. That single gesture revealed how profoundly Tamil Nadu politics has changed.

For nearly six decades, the state revolved around a bipolar Dravidian axis- DMK versus AIADMK - a political inheritance shaped by giants such as M. G. Ramachandran, J Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi. Vijay's emergence has punctured that structure in a way not seen since MGR himself broke away from the DMK in 1972. The symbolism of Vijay's trust vote speech was therefore closely scrutinised. Unlike Stalin's technocratic and administrative tone during his 2021 assumption of office, Vijay's address blended cinematic emotionality with populist urgency. He framed his government as a "people's corrective" to decades of entrenched political culture, repeatedly invoking youth aspirations, corruption-free governance and welfare delivery. There were echoes of MGR in the language of emotional bonding with ordinary people. MGR's early speeches as Chief Minister focused heavily on welfare legitimacy -the idea that the government existed to visibly protect the poor. His noon meal expansion programme transformed Tamil Nadu socially and politically, embedding welfare as the moral core of governance.

Vijay now inherits elements of all three traditions. Like MGR, he enters office with extraordinary emotional capital among the masses. Like Jayalalithaa, he commands a near-cult personal following. Like Stalin, he faces the practical demands of governance in a state deeply integrated into global manufacturing, technology and services. The immediate challenge before him is whether rhetoric can survive contact with administration.

Prime Minister's warning and the nation's economic challenges

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The present global political and economic climate has reached an extremely complex crossroads, the direct impact of which has entered even the kitchens of every household in India. The wars and conflicts taking place across different parts of the world, especially the unstable situation in the Middle East, have created a severe disruption in the global supply chain, and as a result, the prices of fuel and fertilizers are moving towards unprecedented heights. Recently, the warning issued by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the people of the country is, in reality, an indication of an impending severe economic crisis. The tension surrounding Iran in the Middle East and some controversial decisions associated with America's Donald Trump have created such uncertainty in the global market that crude oil prices may go beyond control at any moment. For a country like India, which is dependent on imported oil, this is a major signal of danger, because an increase in oil prices does not remain confined only to transportation costs; rather, it negatively affects everything from essential daily commodities to agricultural expenses. The government has realized that if austerity measures are not adopted immediately, preserving the economic stability of the country may become impossible. It is in this context that not only the Central Govt but also the state governments have been asked to remain cautious, and the decision taken by the Assam Government to restrict vehicle purchases and luxurious expenditures in the coming days is actually a reflection of deep economic alertness.

A look into the history of the global economy reveals that whenever military conflict begins in any powerful region, the first victims are ordinary people and their purchasing power. The current situation in the Middle East, particularly the conflict involving Iran and Israel, has transformed the entire region into a volatile environment. The policies of former American President Donald Trump, especially the tendency to withdraw from international agreements or take abrupt decisions, have intensified this crisis further. The sanctions imposed on Iran and the possibility of war have disrupted the global oil supply, making it impossible for anyone to prevent the rise in crude oil prices at present. India has to import more than eighty percent of its oil requirements from abroad, and therefore even a slight fluctuation in the international market imposes a huge burden on the national treasury. The Prime Minister's remarks made it clear that buying gold or travelling abroad may be personal luxuries for a small wealthy section of society, which may affect the economy but do not directly hurt ordinary citizens. However, when the prices of petrol, diesel, and fertilizers increase, the impact reaches even the poorest sections of society. Farmers are forced to spend more money to buy fertilizers, and when fuel expenses for trucks and transport vehicles increase, the prices of vegetables and essential commodities rise as well, making even two meals a day a challenge for the lower middle class and poor families.

Keeping this frightening economic picture of the country in mind, the courage and farsightedness shown by the new Assam Government immediately after taking oath deserve appreciation. The government has clearly stated that no new luxury vehicles will be purchased for the next six months and no public money will be spent on purchasing foreign goods. This decision is not merely about saving money; it also sends a message to society that giving up luxury during times of national crisis is also the responsibility of the government. Furthermore, the target set to save twenty percent more fuel compared to the previous year will encourage ordinary citizens to adopt austerity as well. We must understand that merely announcing policies and regulations will not be enough to rescue the country from the present economic distress; proper implementation is equally necessary. Due to the rise in fertilizer prices, the cost of agricultural production is increasing rapidly, creating fears that farmers may not receive fair returns. On the other hand, the rising prices of cooking oil and all other essential goods have pushed middle-class families towards financial exhaustion. Government employees may receive some degree of relief because they have fixed monthly incomes, but for daily wage labourers and small traders, the future appears dark. This is a time when every rupee must be spent after careful thought, because the storm of global politics is threatening to shake the foundations of the Indian economy.

The chain reaction caused by the fuel shortage over the last several months has not remained limited only to transportation. The industrial sector has also suffered adversely because the increase in energy costs has raised production expenses. As a result, there may be shortages of goods in the market along with the growth of black marketing tendencies. The Prime Minister's appeal for austerity contains a profound truth—if we fail to utilize present resources properly, future generations may face a bankrupt economy. The restrictions or limitations the government wants to impose on the purchase of foreign goods are aimed at protecting the country's foreign exchange reserves. India requires dollars to purchase crude oil, and if unnecessary luxury goods continue to be imported, sufficient funds may not remain available for emergency fuel or medicine purchases. This economic discipline must be cultivated not only within govt departments but also among every citizen. The promptness shown by the Assam Govt indicates how severe the situation could become. If the commitment to save twenty percent fuel can actually be implemented, the burden on the state economy may be reduced significantly. At the same time, the government must remain vigilant so that dishonest traders do not exploit price rises to loot ordinary people. A deeper analysis reveals that in an agricultural country like India, fertilizer shortages or price increases may create a severe food crisis as well. From the Russia-Ukraine war to unrest in the Middle East, every event has disrupted the supply of raw materials required for fertilizer production. Since most farmers in India belong to the small and marginal categories, even a slight increase in fertilizer prices turns agriculture into a loss-making activity for them. The direct impact of this will fall upon the country's food security. If cultivation declines, the prices of rice, pulses, and vegetables will become uncontrollable, and at that point even free rice distributed by the government may not be enough to manage the situation. The increasing cost of running pump sets or tractors due to fuel price hikes is also a matter of concern. The Prime Minister's warning includes all these dimensions. He intends to convey that to resist the economic storm approaching Indian markets because of global instability, India must prioritize indigenous products and reduce dependence on foreign countries. In the case of edible oil, India depends heavily on countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, but as the supply chain has been disrupted by war, prices have doubled. This situation has proved that without economic self-reliance, protecting the people of the country is impossible.

Although government employees remain comparatively secure during these difficult times, even they are not free from indirect consequences. If salaries do not increase in accordance with rising inflation, their standard of living will inevitably decline. However, the people who will suffer the most are those who survive on daily wages. Economic slowdown will reduce employment opportunities in the private sector, and unemployment will intensify further. The war in the Middle East and Donald Trump's diplomatic stance may discourage large global corporations from making investments. Under such circumstances, strengthening domestic production is the only available path for India. Responding to the Prime Minister's appeal, the steps taken by the Assam Government should serve as a model for other states as well. If government departments can reduce fuel and other expenditures by twenty percent, the money saved can be used to continue welfare schemes for the poor. It must be remembered that economic crisis is not merely about numbers; it is connected to the emotions and survival of millions of people. Therefore, the coming months will resemble a testing ground where our patience and austerity will determine our survival.

In conclusion, it can be said that the cold as well as active conflict between Iran and America is pushing the world in a direction from which India cannot remain isolated. The rising prices of petrol and fertilizers may drag the country into a new cycle of poverty unless society becomes conscious immediately. Along with governmental initiatives, society must also abandon luxury and move towards a simple lifestyle. The Prime Minister's warning and the strict measures adopted by the Assam Government clearly indicate that the situation is genuinely alarming. Expenses such as gold purchases or foreign travel may be stopped by a few people, but every citizen requires fertilizers and fuel to secure a plate of rice. Therefore, if international unrest continues, dark days are certainly ahead for the country. This crisis has taught us that no nation remains isolated in the global economy, and the wrong decisions of a single world leader can make ordinary people across the globe suffer. Hence, to confront the present economic challenges, the only sharp and rational path is for both the government and the people to unite in adopting the principles of austerity.

The NEET crisis and the credibility of the examination system

By: Dr Satyawan Saurabh

India's competitive examination system is not just an admission process, but the foundation of social justice, opportunity, and talent testing. When irregularities, doubts, or cancellations occur in a national examination like the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), it impacts not just one exam but also the trust, time, and mental balance of millions of students. An examination is not merely a technical event; it symbolizes the trust the state ensures that hard work, ability, and preparation are properly rewarded. Therefore, the credibility of the examination system is the backbone of any democratic education system.

The most worrying aspect of cases like NEET is not just the fact that a single incident occurred, but why such incidents keep recurring. When a national exam comes under scrutiny, public confidence is shaken. Students, parents, teachers, coaching institutes, and the administration—all grapple with a question that cannot be answered by mere press releases. The question is: is our examination system truly robust enough to simultaneously deliver on all three fronts: transparency, fairness, and security? If not, the problem isn't just with one exam, but with the entire system.

Crises in examination systems don't arise suddenly. They stem from small weaknesses that aren't addressed in a timely manner. If even one link at all these levels—question paper preparation, confidential material protection, logistics transportation, examination center monitoring, technical verification, identification procedures, and answer sheet handling—is weak, the entire system can be put under scrutiny. In modern times, examinations are no longer merely a pen-and-paper affair; they have become a system interconnected with a highly complex network of information, security, and control. Therefore, negligence at any level directly impacts the future of students. It must also be understood that trust in the examination system is built not only on transparency, but also on consistency. If a student lacks assurance that the value of their hard work is stable and secure, their preparation becomes uncertain. Even before an honest student reaches the examination center, many questions arise—will the question paper be secure? Will no one gain unfair advantage? Will the entire process be fair? When such questions become commonplace, it should be understood that the crisis is not merely administrative, but also moral. The fundamental objective of education is equality of opportunity, and if this is weakened, the system deviates from its purpose.

This concern becomes even more acute in an examination like the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, as it is not merely a professional entrance exam but the center of the socio-economic dreams of millions of families. Students from rural areas, lower-middle class candidates, and youth from small towns dream of advancing on the strength of their merit despite limited resources. But when the integrity of the examination is questioned, these same students suffer the most. Those with influence, resources, or networks often circumvent the system's weaknesses; but those with only hard work are the most affected. Therefore, examination transparency is not just a matter of administrative reform, but also a question of social justice.

The crisis in the examination system also has a profound impact on students' mental health. Preparing for competitive exams is already extremely stressful. Students endure long periods of strict discipline, limited social life, family expectations, and uncertainty about their future. When the future of the exam itself becomes uncertain, the mental pressure increases exponentially. Some students become frustrated, some repeatedly change their strategies, and some even fall into deep depression. Therefore, the examination administration must understand that it is not simply announcing dates or establishing centers, but is also handling the future of young people.

The digital age has brought both convenience and new challenges to examination administration. Systems like online registration, digital identity, CCTV surveillance, encrypted data, and centralized control have modernized the examination system. However, this has also increased technological risks. Data leaks, software tampering, internal collusion, cyber intrusions, and the spread of misinformation have all emerged as new challenges. Therefore, simply adopting technology is not enough; its security, audit, and accountability must also be equally robust. If the technology itself is weak, claims of transparency will prove hollow.

Improving the examination system requires establishing accountability first. When an examination becomes controversial, attention often focuses solely on the incident. But the real question is whose negligence allowed the incident to occur. A review of the role of everyone—the exam-organizing body, the relevant ministry, security agencies, central-level officials, and local administration—is essential. Accountability means not just removing individual officials, but re-evaluating the entire system. If the culprits are not caught, the shortcomings in the process are not made public, and corrective steps are not taken, the same crisis will repeat itself.

The second requirement is independent and timely audits. Secure records must be maintained at every stage, from question paper preparation to exam completion. To ensure immediate investigation in the event of any suspicious activity, a system is needed that is both transparent and swift. Additionally, a multi-layered monitoring system must be developed in exam management, where no single individual or department has a monopoly over the entire process. Decentralization of control and centralization of oversight—this balance can form the foundation of a secure examination system.

The third requirement is a reliable communication system. In the age of social media, rumors spread rapidly. Therefore, institutions must provide not only accurate information but also timely information. Ambiguity breeds doubt. If students are unclear about their next steps, when their results will be released, or whether re-examinations will be held, they become unnecessarily stressed. Therefore, examination administrations must transform their communication from formality to a reliable public service. The fourth and most important requirement is a strict and definitive punishment system. Mere moral condemnation of irregularities such as question paper leaks, cheating, burglary, or internal complicity is insufficient. Unless perpetrators receive swift and definitive punishment, systemic reform will remain incomplete. Punishment in the education sector should aim not at retribution but at deterrence. The system should ensure that those who commit irregularities understand that they will suffer immediate harm, not benefit. Only then will honest students be assured that their hard work is protected.

India now needs an examination culture in which students feel secure, not doubtful; in which the administration is not merely a mere dispenser of orders but a responsible guardian; and in which transparency is not merely a rhetoric, but a manifestation of every process. This is the only way to restore trust in the education system. If reforms are not made now, each new examination will simply rekindle old doubts. And when trust is repeatedly broken, it undermines not just one examination but the confidence of a generation.

Therefore, dismissing the NEET crisis as a mere incident will not be the solution. It must be understood as a warning. It warns that if the examination system is left to the mercy of technological brilliance, formal announcements, and immediate reactions, future crises will only deepen. The time has come to transform the examination system into an institution not just of control, but of justice, trust, and accountability. This reform is essential for future generations and also the state's moral responsibility towards current students. ***(Dr Satyawan Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)***

Modi govt's latest coal gasification incentive is a welcome step for economy

By: R Suryamurthy

The Union Cabinet's approval of a ₹37,500-crore incentive scheme for coal and lignite gasification must be understood not as an isolated industrial subsidy, nor merely as another attempt to revive India's coal economy under a different technological vocabulary, but as part of a far larger and increasingly visible restructuring of India's economic-security doctrine, where energy resilience, import substitution, fiscal conservatism and geopolitical risk management are beginning to merge into a single state strategy shaped by the uncomfortable realities of a fragmenting global order.

For years, India's energy policy rested on an implicit assumption that global commodity markets, despite periodic volatility, would remain broadly accessible, liquid and dependable enough to sustain the country's growth ambitions. That assumption is now collapsing under the weight of successive geopolitical shocks. The Russia-Ukraine conflict had already exposed the fragility of fertiliser, crude and gas supply chains; the ongoing West Asia crisis has deepened those vulnerabilities further by threatening one of the world's most critical hydrocarbon corridors, while simultaneously sending freight, insurance and energy costs sharply upward across Asia.

It is within this context that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent appeal for fuel conservation and reduced dependence on imported products acquires a meaning far more structural than rhetorical. The government's coal gasification push effectively converts that austerity messaging into industrial policy, seeking to transform India's enormous domestic coal reserves into a strategic hedge against the country's mounting exposure to imported LNG, methanol, ammonia, fertilisers and petrochemical feedstocks.

The numbers alone explain the urgency. India imports nearly 89 per cent of its crude oil requirement, over half its LNG demand, almost all of its ammonia requirement and roughly 80-90 per cent of methanol consumption, while continuing to rely on imports for nearly one-fifth of its urea needs. Collectively, India's annual import burden for LNG, LPG, methanol, ammonia, coking coal, urea and associated chemical feedstocks has climbed to nearly ₹2.77 lakh crore, creating a strategic vulnerability that becomes particularly dangerous during periods of geopolitical disruption and currency instability. Coal gasification, in essence, is being projected as the industrial chemistry capable of partially rewriting that equation.

By converting coal into syngas — a synthetic mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide — India hopes to domestically manufacture products that currently drain billions of dollars from its foreign exchange reserves every year. Methanol, synthetic natural gas, ammonia, dimethyl ether, hydrogen and downstream petrochemical products could theoretically emerge from a domestic coal-to-chemicals ecosystem, reducing dependence on external suppliers whose reliability increasingly depends not on economics alone, but on wars, sanctions, shipping lanes and global strategic alignments.

What is striking, however, is not merely the technological ambition of the programme, but the ideological shift it represents. For decades, Indian economic policy oscillated uneasily between market liberalisation and strategic protectionism, often importing energy dependence along with growth. Today, however, policymakers appear increasingly convinced that supply-chain dependence itself has become a macroeconomic threat.

That thinking is now openly reflected in strategic assessments emerging from global institutions themselves. In its recent "India Forward" report, S&P Global argued that geopolitical instability is forcing India to rethink industrial policy around the concept of "strategic self-sufficiency," describing self-reliance as the country's "strategic insurance" against supply disruptions and external shocks. The report warned that the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz had already triggered one of the largest energy shocks in modern history, affecting nearly 16 per cent of global oil supply alongside major disruptions in LNG, LPG and fertiliser supply chains. Within that framework, energy available within national borders is increasingly being viewed not simply as an economic resource, but as a geopolitical stabiliser. This is precisely why coal gasification has moved from being a niche industrial discussion to a Cabinet-level strategic priority. The attraction of the model lies partly in China's experience. China currently operates nearly 350 million tonnes of coal gasification capacity — more than three times India's entire 2030 target — and used that infrastructure during recent global disruptions as a domestic industrial buffer against LNG shortages, fertiliser shocks and petrochemical volatility. Indian policymakers increasingly view China's coal-to-chemicals ecosystem not through the narrow prism of emissions, but through the broader lens of economic resilience and industrial sovereignty. Industry executives, consultants and policy analysts are now articulating the same argument with unusual bluntness. Balasaheb Darade, founder of New Era Cleantech Solutions, has argued that without a large domestic coal gasification ecosystem, India cannot build long-term resilience against global energy shocks, while Kapil Bansal of EY-Parthenon has described coal gasification as a pathway toward "energy security, fertiliser resilience and industrial stability" in a world increasingly defined by volatile supply chains.

Similarly, Anish Mandal of Deloitte India has pointed out that India imported nearly 90 per cent of its methanol requirements and about a quarter of its urea needs because natural-gas-linked production economics remain unfavourable, arguing that coal gasification and liquefaction could become central to India's import-substitution strategy across petrochemicals and fertilisers.

Yet the deeper paradox underlying India's coal gasification ambition is impossible to ignore: the country is attempting to solve a twenty-first century energy-security crisis through a nineteenth-century fossil fuel resource, albeit using twenty-first century chemistry.

That contradiction sits at the heart of the debate. Supporters present coal gasification as a pragmatic transition technology capable of coexisting with renewable expansion while reducing import dependence during the long and uneven path toward net-zero emissions. Critics, however, argue that the programme risks locking India into another generation of carbon-intensive infrastructure precisely when renewable energy, battery storage and green hydrogen are becoming economically competitive. The criticism is not entirely misplaced. Coal gasification may produce fewer particulate emissions than direct coal combustion, and its carbon streams are easier to capture through CCUS systems, but the process still generates substantial carbon dioxide emissions and remains fundamentally fossil-fuel dependent. Without large-scale carbon capture infrastructure — which itself remains commercially uncertain and expensive — the environmental economics of the programme remain deeply contested.

Then there is the engineering problem. Indian coal is among the most technically difficult feedstocks for gasification because of its extraordinarily high ash content, often ranging between 35 and 45 per cent, far above the levels for which most global gasification technologies were originally designed. High ash creates severe operational problems, including slagging, reactor choking and efficiency losses, forcing India either to indigenise gasification technology or spend heavily adapting foreign systems. That explains why the government's policy architecture now extends beyond subsidies alone. The Cabinet has simultaneously offered 30-year coal linkage assurances, encouraged indigenous technology development through entities such as Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, and attempted to create long-term investment certainty for projects involving extraordinarily high capital expenditure and long gestation periods.

Even then, the economics remain risky. Coal gasification plants are among the most capital-intensive industrial assets in the energy sector, requiring massive investments before generating commercially viable output. Without guaranteed offtake mechanisms, tax concessions, concessional financing and integration with fertiliser and chemical procurement policies, many projects could struggle to achieve commercial viability despite government incentives. (IPA Service)

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Growing support for Far Right in Europe has been eroding democracy

By: Francesca De Benedetti

Last summer, Giorgia Meloni's Italian government approved a so-called "anti-Gandhi law," which criminalizes even nonviolent protests and passive resistance. The highly controversial "Security Decree" was recently followed by a further one, introducing measures such as preventive detention during public gatherings and signalling a shift toward police-state measures. Civil society organizations warn that these "security packages" constitute "one of the most serious attacks on the right to protest in recent republican history."

When Hungary was still governed by Viktor Orbán, it presented itself as a champion of illiberalism. Yet it was not an outlier. By the end of last year, it had been joined by Italy, Germany, and France in what watchdogs call a common deterioration of civic space. This trans-European trend coincides with efforts to prevent civil society organizations from participating actively in the EU's political life.

This downward spiral is bound up with a political turn. For this exclusion of civil society from decision-making processes goes hand in hand with pro-corporate politics at the expense of the vulnerable, while reducing once-inalienable rights to privileges that belong only to a few. My recent report "Shrinking Civic Space in the European Union" identifies key political tactics and narrative strategies that have been deployed to scale up attacks on civil society around the EU.

Growing support for the far right in the EU has bolstered the political actors who are driving this erosion of fundamental freedoms.

Indeed, many of the attacks on civil society were first systematically tested in states with autocratic tendencies and in areas where a tactical alignment between the EU center-right establishment and the far right was already explicit. This was especially true with regard to migration and environmental policy.

Yet such moves have increasingly been replicated all over the EU. Many examples can be seen even in France, which considers itself the home of human rights. For instance, the controversial "global security law," enacted in 2021, embodies a form of meta-repression of dissent, evident both in its content and in the repression of protests against the bill itself.

The downgrading of this space across the EU reflects a broader process in which restrictions on civil society organizations, limitations on protest and workers' rights, and mounting pressure on independent media, all feed into one another. From legal harassment and political pressure to more intrusive forms of surveillance, "there has been an increase in threats and intimidation against journalists," as the 2025 Media Pluralism Monitor states about Italy. Attacks on media freedom are no merely collateral phenomenon but a central mechanism in the restriction of civic space.

These developments signal a shift in how dissent, collective organization, and public scrutiny are treated by state authorities: not as essential components of democratic life but simply as risks to be neutralized. This includes three major trends across Europe: the growing use of "emergency" frameworks to restrict civic freedoms and collective action; sustained smear campaigns aimed at delegitimizing civil society; and forms of repression that undermine democratic participation.

Emergency frameworks have increasingly been used to bypass democratic safeguards, criminalize humanitarian aid, and, in some cases, restrict or effectively ban the work of NGOs and independent media. In Poland in 2021, for example, the declaration of a "state of emergency" at the border with Belarus, after reports of migrants being pushed across the border into the EU, created a legal and political blind spot. Journalists were barred from the area, while the work of lawyers, NGOs, and activists monitoring human rights violations was obstructed.

Even in the absence of a formally declared state of emergency, the pattern of exception increasingly shapes governance, enabling the de facto suspension of rights through securitization, criminalization, and the arbitrary enforcement of the law. This trend is accompanied by sustained campaigns of vilification and delegitimization, which prepare the ground for repression by portraying civil-society actors as dangerous or extremist.

All over Europe, a whole arsenal of restrictive instruments — security decrees, anti-terrorism and anti-extremism laws, anti-LGBTQ legislation, and "foreign agent" frameworks — has been deployed to this end, often combined with the use of surveillance technologies and violence to stifle dissent. Orbán's Hungary long represented the most advanced and systematic crystallization of these trends.

The contraction of civic space does not stop at civil-society organizations and social movements; it also extends into the workplace, where collective organization and the right to strike are a central form of democratic counterpower. The 2025 Global Rights Index, an annual study of violation of workers' rights, shows Europe recording its worst scores since the index's inception in 2014.

Attacks on the right to strike are a deliberate strategy to neutralize collective power at a moment of social conflict and must be understood as part of the wider erosion of civic space. When workers tried, in recent years, to mobilize against the rising cost of living and the inadequacy of their wages, European right-wing and far-right governments made a series of attempts to restrict the right to strike. In the UK, 2022 was a year of unprecedented strikes, followed by a Strike Act introduced by the Tory government obliging workers to provide minimum service levels (it was only repealed in December 2025).

In Orbán's Hungary, teachers had no option but civil disobedience to protest for the right to strike; the government dismissed some of them for "unlawfully refusing to work." In Italy, Meloni's government has also attacked the right to strike, both by attempting to limit its duration to a few hours and by delegitimizing trade union action, accusing unions of "calling strikes on Friday to get a long weekend."

The repressive push against strike action must also be seen alongside the exclusion of workers from the EU policy agenda, the marginalization of European trade unions in EU decision-making and the erosion of labour protections through deregulation. At the EU level, an informal alliance between the traditional conservative right and far-right parties normalized this latter's role in powerful positions and helped to marginalize progressive forces, workers' organizations, and civil society in general. Yet while they are excluded from EU decision-making processes, corporate actors gain ever-more influence.

My report — a joint publication by the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation's Brussels Office — also analyzes how illiberal narratives are lifted from the national to the EU level. It traces the convergence between far-right and conservative forces as well as the political tactics that help shift the power balance through which the shrinking of civic space in Europe is rendered legitimate and, ultimately, normalized.

This right-wing convergence at the EU level has not only reshaped political alliances. It has also helped mainstream narrative strategies that delegitimize dissent and representation, reframing critical voices as threats and paving the way for their exclusion. To understand how this demonization works, it is useful to revisit what has become known as the "Finkelstein formula," a strategy first tested in Europe by Orbán in the election campaign that returned him to power in 2010, before being widely replicated. The principle is simply to "project all kinds of evil onto your opponent" as a crucial instrument for both gaining power and retaining it.

Having proven effective under illiberal leadership, this formula has evolved into a transatlantic playbook not only to stigmatize dissent but also to prepare the ground for criminalization and repression. Its circulation between Europe and the United States amplifies its impact, boosting attacks on civic space on both sides of the Atlantic. Donald Trump's cuts to development assistance, demonization of civil society, and escalating rhetoric have also emboldened Europe's illiberal leaders. This has paved the way for increasingly aggressive repression of dissent, as attacks on NGOs show.

The deployment of the Finkelstein strategy can also be seen in the abuse of notions such as "extreme left" or simply "the Left," stretched to include a wide range of civil-society organizations, social movements, and critical actors, prefiguring their delegitimization or criminalization. See what happened at the European Parliament: the attack on NGOs by the European People's Party (the main center-right grouping) can be traced back as far as 2016. But more recently, teaming up with the far right, members of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control have argued that the EU should not provide funding to NGOs if they take action on EU policies or legislation. While the alliance between conservative and far-right parties is scaling up at the EU level, the logic of the cordon sanitaire has actively been redirected against the Left — whether this means left-wing parties or civil society groups labelled as leftist in order to delegitimize them. These attempts at silencing also extend to social movements, climate activists, NGOs, trade unions, and, more generally, a civil society that challenges the emerging right-wing bloc and its corporate-first agenda.

Through this discursive reversal, the boundaries of legitimate political participation are narrowed and democratic representation itself is recast as a threat. Here, demonization functions as a critical enabling condition: it prepares the ground for exceptional measures, emergency governance, deregulation, and the exclusion of civil society from decision-making.

The normalization of alliances between the far right and centrist forces, together with the demonization of dissent, isn't just about discourse. It is connected to a practical agenda in which a corporate-first approach and the systemic use of emergency framing reinforce one another, narrowing opportunities for democratic oversight. This past November, the EU ombudsman confirmed these concerns, finding "maladministration" in how the European Commission prepared its deregulation packages. It framed them as "urgent legislative proposals" and managed the process without transparent and inclusive preparation, while also failing justify what was so "urgent."

Blatant attacks on civil society are integral to a political project that redefines whose interests count and how decisions are made at an EU level. The deregulation, pro-business agenda has brought conservatives into open convergence with far-right forces such as Meloni's post-fascist Fratellid' Italia party. EU Parliament groups including the European People's Party, European Conservatives and Reformists, Patriots for Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations increasingly unite around this agenda, as seen when the first "omnibus" package was passed by the parliament. Framed as a means of legislative "simplification," the omnibus package bundles together wide-ranging rollbacks of social, environmental, health, and equality protections.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has explicitly adopted Italian premier Meloni's narrative that the state "should not bother those who have a business" — a refrain that has become emblematic of von der Leyen's current orientation. This logic is pushed to the extreme, with business allowed to "bother" the policy process through the open legitimization of powerful industrial lobbies as privileged interlocutors.

Deregulation packages are inspired by demands from Business Europe, the lobby group representing European companies; von der Leyen has even publicly claimed credit for incorporating industry proposals into EU legislation. The warm welcome given to corporate lobbyists is inversely proportional to the attention paid to those whose rights these deregulation packages undermine.

"There is a growing chill wind coming from America towards Europe, which is that solutions for working people are no longer guaranteed in laws," European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) General Secretary Esther Lynch warned in mid-2025, complaining that the ETUC had not even been consulted on crucial policy dossiers that impact workers.

A new balance of power is reshaping the European Union's governance and, ultimately, its institutions. Civil society organizations, trade unions, and other public-interest actors are increasingly constrained, with their space for participation narrowed. At the same time, decision-making processes are becoming more arbitrary and less transparent, favouring the interests of large corporations at the expense of European citizens and workers' rights. As a result, a structural imbalance is quietly redefining how power is exercised in the EU.

The convergence between corporate-first agendas, militarized framing, and permanent emergency has begun to reshape the conditions under which political participation takes place. While this democratic participation is not formally abolished, it surely is hollowed out. In such a political environment, the space for deliberation and organized counterpower is structurally constrained. Yet while illiberal forces have a transnational playbook, it's far less clear that their opponents do too. (IPA Service)

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee: Reassessing his political vision

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee the son of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee , known as Tiger of Bengal emerged as one of the most influential political thinkers and nationalist leaders in modern Indian history whose life combined scholarship, patriotism, courage, and sacrifice. His contribution to India's political consciousness remains enduring and powerful even decades after his untimely death. A visionary educationist, parliamentarian, lawyer, and nationalist statesman, he represented a political philosophy rooted in national unity, cultural identity, and democratic conviction. His legacy continues to shape India's political discourse and ideological framework.As the youngest Vice Chancellor of University of Calcutta, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee displayed remarkable intellectual courage, administrative brilliance, and cultural vision during a crucial phase of India's colonial history. His appointment itself was historic. At only thirty-three years of age, he assumed one of the most prestigious academic positions in British India, proving that scholarship, leadership, and patriotism could coexist in a single personality. At a time when colonial educational institutions remained heavily dominated by English influence and European intellectual frameworks, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee sought to restore dignity and prominence to Indian languages, literature, and culture, particularly Bengali heritage.

Today, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's name evokes images of patriotism, ideological clarity, and national commitment. Roads, educational institutions, and public programs across India commemorate him. More importantly, his ideas continue to inspire debates on nationalism, federalism, cultural identity, and constitutional integration.His life story reflects the journey of a scholar who entered politics not for personal gain but from a profound sense of duty toward the nation. He belonged to that rare category of leaders who shaped not merely policies but political imagination itself. In the grand narrative of Indian democracy, Syama Prasad Mukherjee occupies a significant and enduring place — a statesman whose golden political legacy continues illuminating India's public life.

Even amid his later political career, his identity as an educationist and cultural thinker remained strong. His association with Tagore and his advocacy for Bengali language continue to be remembered as shining examples of academic nationalism rooted in dignity rather than exclusion. Syama Prasad Mukherjee understood that political freedom without cultural confidence would remain incomplete. His contribution to Bengali culture and education therefore forms an important and enduring dimension of his golden legacy.

Born on July 6, 1901, in Calcutta, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee belonged to an illustrious Bengali family renowned for intellectual brilliance and public service. His father, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, famously known as the "Tiger of Bengal," was one of India's greatest educationists and Vice Chancellor of the University of Calcutta. The atmosphere of learning, discipline, and patriotism at home deeply influenced young Syama Prasad. He demonstrated extraordinary academic excellence from an early age. Brilliant in studies, eloquent in speech, and disciplined in conduct, he soon established himself as one of Bengal's brightest young minds.His educational achievements were remarkable. He graduated with distinction from the University of Calcutta and later pursued law. At a very young age he entered the Senate of Calcutta University and subsequently became the youngest Vice Chancellor of the university at only thirty-three. His tenure reflected intellectual dynamism and administrative courage. He emphasized Indian languages, cultural heritage, and academic expansion at a time when colonial educational structures remained deeply Eurocentric. He believed education must not merely produce clerks for the British Empire but responsible citizens rooted in India's civilization and values.

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's entry into politics emerged from his concern for Bengal's social and political condition during the turbulent decades preceding independence. Initially associated with the Indian National Congress in limited ways, he gradually developed an independent nationalist perspective. He opposed communal politics and the dangerous divisions that threatened India's unity. During the 1930s and 1940s Bengal witnessed severe communal tensions, economic instability, and political fragmentation. Mukherjee emerged as a fearless voice advocating Hindu interests while simultaneously defending democratic principles and constitutional politics.He served as Finance Minister in Bengal under Fazlul Huq's coalition government. During this period he displayed administrative competence and courage in confronting crises. The Bengal famine of 1943 and the communal disturbances of the era deeply affected him. He criticized both British indifference and political opportunism that intensified human suffering. His speeches in the Bengal Legislative Assembly reflected sharp intellect, clarity of thought, and passionate nationalism. One of the defining aspects of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's political life was his opposition to the Partition of India on communal lines. He foresaw the tragic consequences of dividing the country based on religion. Yet when Partition became inevitable, he fought determinedly to ensure that Hindu-majority regions of Bengal remained within India. His efforts played a significant role in the creation of West Bengal as part of the Indian Union. Without his political intervention and mobilization, the map of eastern India might have looked dramatically different.

One of his most memorable and culturally significant initiatives was inviting Rabindranath Tagore to deliver lectures in Bengali at Calcutta University during the British period. This act carried deep symbolic and intellectual importance. In colonial India, English enjoyed overwhelming dominance in higher education, administration, and elite discourse. Indian languages were often treated as secondary or unsuitable for serious academic engagement. Mukherjee challenged this colonial mindset boldly and elegantly. By encouraging Tagore to speak in Bengali within the university's prestigious academic space, he affirmed that Indian languages possessed equal intellectual richness, philosophical depth, and literary sophistication. Tagore's presence at the university under Mukherjee's leadership represented more than a literary event; it symbolized cultural self-respect and intellectual decolonization. Bengali was not merely a regional language for Mukherjee. It was a livingd carrier of history, imagination, spirituality, and collective identity. He believed education divorced from native language and culture weakened national consciousness. Through such initiatives he sought to reconnect higher education with India's civilizational roots.

Mukherjee worked tirelessly to promote Bengali language and culture within academic institutions. He encouraged research in Bengali literature, history, philosophy, and indigenous intellectual traditions. He supported the inclusion of Indian perspectives in curricula that had long remained excessively Eurocentric under British educational policy. His efforts reflected a balanced vision: he appreciated modern education and global knowledge, yet he refused to allow Indian cultural identity to be marginalized within its own land. Under his vice chancellorship, the university witnessed significant expansion in academic activities and intellectual participation. He promoted accessibility and encouraged students from diverse social backgrounds to pursue higher studies. He understood that education was not merely an administrative system but a cultural force capable of shaping national destiny. In many ways, Mukherjee anticipated later debates on cultural nationalism and educational reform.His admiration for Bengali culture was deeply influenced by the Bengal Renaissance, which had produced towering figures in literature, science, spirituality, and social reform. He regarded Bengal not only as a geographical region but as a vibrant center of intellectual awakening. By promoting Bengali language in higher education, he defended the broader principle that India's progress must emerge from confidence in its own cultural inheritance rather than blind imitation of colonial models.

After independence, Mukherjee joined independent India's first cabinet under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as Minister for Industry and Supply. His inclusion reflected recognition of his intellect and national stature despite ideological differences. As minister, he emphasized industrial growth, self-reliance, and economic planning rooted in national priorities. However, differences soon emerged between Mukherjee and Nehru, particularly regarding minority policies, relations with Pakistan, and the special constitutional status accorded to Jammu and Kashmir. Mukherjee strongly believed that national unity must remain absolute and uncompromising. He opposed what he considered appeasement politics and warned against policies that could weaken India's integration. His famous slogan regarding Kashmir — "One nation cannot have two constitutions, two prime ministers, and two flags" — became a powerful nationalist rallying cry. He resigned from Nehru's cabinet in 1950, demonstrating rare political courage and ideological integrity. For Mukherjee, principles outweighed power.

In 1951 he founded the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which later evolved ideologically and organizationally into the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Jana Sangh under his leadership advocated cultural nationalism, national integration, economic self-reliance, and strong democratic institutions. Mukherjee provided a coherent ideological alternative within Indian politics at a time when Congress dominance appeared nearly absolute. He believed democracy required a vibrant opposition rooted in national values and constitutional accountability.

Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was not merely a politician; he was also an intellectual nationalist. His speeches reflected deep understanding of Indian civilization, constitutional principles, and international affairs. He admired India's spiritual heritage while embracing modern governance and democratic frameworks. Unlike narrow sectarian leaders, he envisioned India as a culturally rooted but inclusive nation where all citizens could flourish under equal laws and national unity.

His final political struggle centered on Jammu and Kashmir. At that time, special permit requirements prevented Indian citizens from entering the state freely. Mukherjee launched a movement against this arrangement, arguing that Kashmir must be fully integrated with India constitutionally and symbolically. In 1953 he entered Jammu and Kashmir without a permit and was arrested. During detention under controversial circumstances, he fell ill and died on June 23, 1953. His death at the age of fifty-two shocked the nation and generated widespread controversy and grief. To many supporters, Mukherjee became a martyr for national integration. His death transformed him from a political leader into a symbol of uncompromising nationalism and sacrifice. Across decades, his ideas continued influencing generations of political activists and thinkers. The later political rise of nationalist politics in India often traced ideological inspiration back to Mukherjee's vision and organizational groundwork.

His legacy remains multidimensional. As an educationist, he modernized academic institutions while preserving cultural identity. As a parliamentarian, he elevated democratic debate through reasoned argument and fearless opposition. As a nationalist, he defended India's unity during one of the most turbulent periods in its history. As a political organizer, he created an enduring ideological movement that reshaped Indian politics over time. Critics and admirers may differ in interpreting aspects of his politics, yet few can deny the depth of his influence on India's national life. He represented a generation of leaders who combined intellectual accomplishment with public service and personal sacrifice. Unlike many politicians driven by ambition alone, Mukherjee remained guided by conviction and vision.

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India will ensure zero casualty during heat waves: Shah

GHAZIABAD (UP), May 14: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said his ministry has prepared a plan to ensure that no lives are lost in the country during heat waves in the next few years with the underlying principle of the Modi government being "proactive" rather than "reactive" towards disasters.

The minister spoke after he presented the President's Colour to the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) at its 8th battalion campus here.

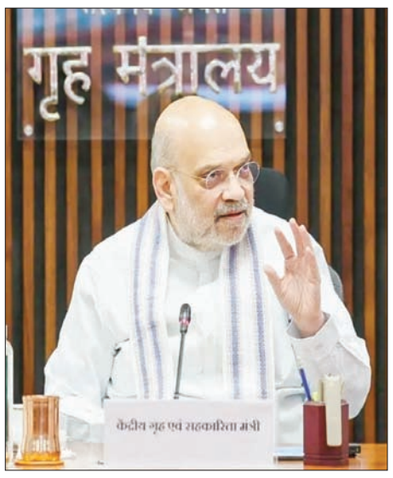
The recognition, given in the form of a flag, is awarded to a military or police unit for rendering exceptional service.

The honour was bestowed to the NDRF in the 20th year of its establishment after it was raised in 2006 as a federal contingency force to undertake relief and rescue operations during natural and man-made disasters.

The President's Colour is not just an "acknowledgement" for the service of the NDRF but also of all the state disaster response forces, the state machinery down to the level of the panchayats, the NCC (National Cadet Corps), NSS (National Service Scheme), 'Apda Mitras' (civil defence volunteers) among others, Shah said.

The minister said the aim of the Modi government was to ensure "zero casualty and minimum property damage" during tragedies and calamities that included cyclones, earthquakes and floods.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is well prepared to combat the "serious challenge" of heat waves in the country and we will be able to ensure "zero casualty" and no loss of lives over the next few years, Shah said.



Every year, numerous people lose their lives in various states due to heat strokes and health conditions emerging due to heat waves.

Our approach and policy has been "proactive" against disasters rather than being just "reactive", he said.

"Under Prime Minister Modiji's leadership, we are in a situation where we can move towards the aim of zero casualty," he said.

The minister said before the Modi government took charge in 2014, the approach towards disasters was rehabilitation and relief oriented.

"Earlier the approach was that disasters struck, those who survived were rescued, relief was sent and the job was done. Modiji brought a different approach, he incorporated the concept of safety to ensure and minimise loss of life and property," he said.

We have successfully travelled the course from ensuring minimum to zero casualty, Shah said.

Shah said India has made its name as an "undisputed global leader" in disaster management and being the "first responder" during calamities. He stressed that the role of NDRF is going to be "vital" as disaster incidents rise due to global warming and climate change.

Shah added that the NDRF has earned the "love and trust" of the people of the country and even abroad through its operations.

He said the government has actively brought about community participation for creating a disaster resilient society and ecosystem and the states were made "self reliant" as NDRF has trained numerous state disaster response forces.

The minister also inaugurated infrastructure projects of the NDRF worth Rs 111 crore during the event.

NDRF Director General (DG) Piyush Anand said the force has undertaken more than 12,000 operations since its creation and has saved 1.5 lakh lives and rescued nine lakh people till now.

Anand said for better synergy between the central force and its counterpart state units, they have started a new "co-location" initiative in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh where personnel of the two units will live together while being on duty and as a result will learn from each other.

The NDRF has 16 operational battalions deployed across the country with an overall strength of about 18,000 personnel. *(PTI)*

Woman gang-raped in sleeper bus in Delhi; driver and conductor arrested

NEW DELHI, May 14: Recalling the horrors of the 2012 Nirbhaya case, a 30-year-old woman was allegedly dragged inside a private sleeper bus and raped by the driver and conductor in northwest Delhi's Mangolpuri area, police said on Thursday. The two men have been arrested.

The assault, which brought back memories of the Delhi gangrape-murder of the 23-year-old who came to be known as Nirbhaya, took place on May 11. The arrests took place the following day.

Recapping the events of the night, police sources said the woman was returning home after working at a factory in Mangolpuri. When she reached near the B-Block bus stand in Saraswati Vihar, she saw a man standing near the bus door and asked him the time. The man then allegedly dragged her inside the bus, drove the vehicle towards Nangloi and raped her.

According to the statement of the woman, who is married and has three children, both the men raped her in turn.

The sources said there was a dispute over money.

The bus was stationed near the Nangloi metro station while the woman was assaulted, a police officer told PTI.

The bus has been seized.

"The Rani Bagh police station received information regarding the alleged rape of a woman. Her statement was recorded immediately and an FIR registered without delay," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Vikram Singh said in a video statement.

Based on the woman's statement, the FIR was lodged under sections 64(1) (rape), 70(1) (gang-rape) and 3(5) (common intention) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) on May 12, the DCP said.

Police received information about the incident in a PCR call from the victim who alleged that she was sexually assaulted by two men.

Multiple teams were formed to nab the accused. While one of them was arrested immediately after the FIR was registered, the other was nabbed four hours later.

"Both the accused were produced before a city court and sent to judicial custody. Our teams are investigating the matter from all possible angles. The teams are collecting every single CCTV footage clip to make a strong case against the accused," a police officer said.

The investigators are also probing if the bus had automatic doors.

"We have asked the forensic teams to collect evidence from the bus. The forensic and medical reports will also be examined thoroughly. We are verifying the sequence of the events. The teams are also probing that whether the bus was in operation at the time and if any other passenger was present during the alleged crime," the officer said.

Sahil Malhotra, owner of Royal Traveller and Cargo Bus, said after being informed about the incident involving the driver, he assisted police in reaching the driver's house, from where the accused was arrested. Malhotra said the accused was working under him for the last year and a half and had no previous police record against him.

The husband of the victim told reporters that she was assaulted during the incident and had received minor injuries on her face and hands.

"One of her relatives dropped her near S Block. We got to know that she was dragged inside the bus and two men raped her. We are getting complete support from police," he said.

He said the victim got immediate help from the on-duty officers after she reached the police station. The officers recorded her statement, rushed her to a hospital and arrested the accused.

"We request for strict punishment for the accused," the husband of the victim said.

The sources said police are planning to map the entire route followed by the bus from the moment the victim was dragged inside it and trying to ascertain if anyone else was present when the incident happened. *(PTI)*

CUET has increased diversity at Delhi University: VC Yogesh Singh

NEW DELHI, May 14: With the admission season just around the corner, Delhi University VC Yogesh Singh stressed on the importance of the CUET and said it has led to greater diversity by drawing students from across boards, states and socio-economic backgrounds.

In an interview with PTI, Singh defended the centralised entrance examination system, saying the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) had created a "level playing field" for students from different education boards and regions.

"This system is definitely better than the previous system. CUET is providing a level playing field to all students," Singh said.

He said the university was earlier seeing admissions concentrated from a few boards, as there is no uniformity in how different boards give marks. But the CUET has broadened representation, according to the VC.

"Now, we are getting students from most states, from large cities, small cities and villages also. Delhi University is mini India, so we are for it," he said.

Singh's remarks come amid a

nationwide controversy over alleged irregularities and paper leaks in the NEET-UG 2026 examination, which has revived the debate around centralised entrance tests.

While acknowledging the concerns surrounding NEET, he said issues related to examination management would be resolved, while maintaining that CUET had benefited universities by bringing in "very intelligent and bright students" from diverse backgrounds.

The vice chancellor also spoke about the rollout of the four-year undergraduate programme under the National Education Policy (NEP), whose first batch is set to graduate in the coming months.

"About 25,000 students are in the fourth year this time. We admit around 70,000 students in the first year," Singh said, adding that the number of students continuing with the fourth year is expected to increase.

Under the NEP, undergraduate-level students who have completed six semesters are eligible to exit with a three-year degree. About 45,000 students from the first batch availed this option, according to the VC.

He said students in the fourth year could choose from multiple tracks, including entrepreneurship, research projects and outreach activities, adding that many had found the opportunities meaningful and useful.

"Last week we had an exhibition of their projects," he said.

Singh acknowledged that the implementation of the new undergraduate structure had posed infrastructural challenges, especially as colleges were traditionally designed around teaching-learning processes rather than research and innovation. *(PTI)*

Congress names Satheesan as next Kerala chief minister

NEW DELHI, May 14: The Congress on Thursday named VD Satheesan as the next chief minister of Kerala, ending days of suspense and speculation over the post.

The decision was announced here at a press conference by AICC in-charge of Kerala Deepa Dasmunsi and the party's central observers for the state Ajay Maken and Mukul Wasnik, as well as Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh.

"Based on all the discussions, it has been decided that VD Satheesan be appointed as the leader of the CLP," Dasmunsi told reporters.

The three main contenders for the post of chief minister were Satheesan, KC Venugopal and Ramesh Chennithala.

"The Congress Legislature Party had met in Thiruvananthapuram on May 7, 2026 and had unanimously resolved to authorise Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge to appoint the new leader of the CLP in the state," Dasmunsi said.

Accordingly, the Congress president has held extensive discussions with Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party Sonia Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, AICC observers who had met with the newly-elected MLAs and many other leaders, including MPs, and former Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee chiefs, she said.

Asked when the swearing-in will take place, Dasmunshi said she will be going to Kerala and after that it will be decided. She also brushed aside any talk of divisions within the party and said all were united.

Dasmunshi along with the two observers - Maken and Wasnik -- will be going to Kerala later in the day.

Sources said after her arrival in Kerala, the Congress Legislature Party in the state would meet the Governor and stake claim for government formation. Leaders of like-minded parties are likely to attend the swearing-in of the chief minister.

Sources add that Kharge spoke with UDF allies this morning and informed them that an announcement of the CLP leader in Kerala will be made at noon in Delhi on Thursday.

A senior Congress leader brushed off talk of delay in the selection of the CM, saying the process was extensive and intensive with everybody participating in the discussions.

There were many able people for the CM post and their views were considered, the leader said. *(PTI)*

Red Fort area blast case: NIA files 7,500-page chargesheet against 10 accused

NEW DELHI, May 14: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a 7,500-page chargesheet against 10 accused in the Red Fort area car bomb explosion case, in which 11 people were killed, officials said on Thursday. The high-intensity Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) blast that rocked the national capital on November 10 last year had also left several injured and caused extensive damage to property.

All 10 accused, including the main perpetrator, Dr Umer Un Nabi (deceased), were linked to Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGuH), an offshoot of the Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), as per the chargesheet filed before the NIA special court at Patiala House Courts here, a statement issued by the central agency said.

The AQIS and all its manifestations were notified as terrorist organisations by the Ministry of Home Affairs in June 2018.

The NIA, which unravelled a major "jihadi conspiracy" through a detailed scientific and forensic investigation, found the accused, some of whom were radicalised medical professionals, to have been inspired by AQIS/AGuH ideology to carry out the deadly attack, an official statement said.

The chargesheet has been filed under relevant provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Explosive Substances Act 1908, Arms Act 1959, and Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act 1984, it said. Charges against Pulwama-based Dr Nabi, an ex-assistant professor of medicine at Al-Falah University in Faridabad (Haryana), have been proposed to be abated, the statement said. *(PTI)*

Regular Amrit Bharat Express service between Amritsar and New Jalpaiguri introduced

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 14: Indian Railways has introduced the regular weekly service of the Amrit Bharat Express between Amritsar and New Jalpaiguri to enhance rail connectivity between North India and North Bengal. The regular service of the train from Amritsar Junction was flagged off on Thursday by Ravneet Singh at Amritsar station.

According to railway officials, train no 14664/14663 Amritsar–New Jalpaiguri–Amritsar Amrit Bharat Express will operate on a weekly basis.

Train no 14664 will depart from Amritsar every Thursday at 12:45 pm with effect from May 14 and reach New Jalpaiguri at 4:15 am on Saturday.

In the return direction, train no 14663 will depart from New Jalpaiguri every Saturday at 8 am with effect from May 16 and arrive at Amritsar at 2:20 am on Monday.

During its journey, the train will halt at several important stations including Siliguri Junction, Bagdogra, Araria, Raghopur, Sakri Junction, Raxaul Junction, Narkatiaganj Junction, Gorakhpur, Barhni, Gonda Junction, Sitapur Junction, Bareilly, Saharanpur Junction and Ludhiana Junction, among others.

The Amrit Bharat Express will consist of 22 coaches aimed at providing affordable and comfortable travel facilities to passengers.

The train will also pass through the newly constructed Araria–Galgalia railway route, improving rail connectivity in parts of Bihar and North Bengal.

AIADMK tussle: Shanmugam-Velumani camp seeks disqualification of Palaniswami

CHENNAI, May 14: The AIADMK faction led by senior party leaders C Ve Shanmugam and SP Velumani on Thursday claimed that they had the majority MLAs on their side and accused party chief Edappadi K Palaniswami and his supporting legislators of "defying" its whip regarding the floor test of the TVK government, and sought their disqualification. C Vijayabaskar, 'whip' of the faction, told reporters that the legislature party is decided based on majority numbers and indicated that the Shanmugam-Velumani faction enjoyed that. His instruction to vote in favour of the C Joseph Vijay-led TVK government during its confidence vote on Wednesday was duly communicated to all the AIADMK MLAs through Whatsapp and e-mail, he said.

"Of the 47 MLAs, 25 abided by the instruction. As many as 22 party MLAs, including Edappadi Palaniswami, did not comply with the instructions issued by me, who is the whip and went contrary to that. So we have met the Assembly Speaker today and sought their disqualification under the anti-defection law," he said. "Majority of MLAs under Velumani followed the whip order. So only majority is valid," he said. Velumani, citing precedents, said that when a split emerges in a party due to difference of opinion, no decisions can be taken; neither can someone be appointed or removed from party posts or the organisation.

"We are clear--(Palaniswami should) convene party General Council to discuss the reasons for the poll defeat. He is the general secretary," he said.

Further, hitting out at the party chief, he said his actions pertaining to sacking functionaries from party posts and and making new appointments were "not valid." "Our intent is to strengthen the party. Bring back those who had gone, who had been sacked from party. Why did MGR star the party-- to oppose DMK," the former minister said. Palaniswami's decisions regarding removing people from their party positions are not valid and "they continue in their posts," he added. The AIADMK chief had removed from party posts, Shanmugam, Velumani and others in the wake of the rift and cross-voting in the TVK government's confidence vote on Wednesday that the ruling party won comfortably.

Meanwhile, Palaniswami met with senior leaders to discuss their next steps.

Amid the simmering tensions in the AIADMK, the party headquarters, Puratchi Thalaivar MGR Maaligai, came under a heavy police security cover, apparently in anticipation of trouble. Violence had broken out and the AIADMK headquarters was targeted and damaged during the heightened differences between Palaniswami and then party leader O Panneerselvam over leadership struggle in 2022. *(PTI)*

EC announces staggered rollout of SIR phase 3 in 16 states, 3 UTs

NEW DELHI, May 14: The Election Commission on Thursday announced the rollout of phase 3 of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in 16 states and three Union Territories involving 36.73 crore voters in a phased manner beginning May 30.

The states and UTs where the SIR will be carried out are Delhi, Odisha, Mizoram, Sikkim, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh, Telangana, Punjab, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Tripura, Dadar and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. Punjab, Jharkhand, Karnataka and Telangana are opposition-ruled among the states where the SIR exercise will be held.

Over 3.94 lakh booth level officers (BLOs) will go house-to-house of 36.73 crore electors during the latest poll roll revision exercise. They will be assisted by 3.42 lakh booth level agents (BLAs) appointed by political parties during the enumeration phase.

The schedule for the SIR in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh will be announced later keeping in view weather conditions in snow-bound areas, the EC said in a statement. *(PTI)*

Alzheimer's Lormalzi therapy offers hope; doctors for early diagnosis, close monitoring

NEW DELHI, May 14: The launch of Eli Lilly's Alzheimer's therapy Lormalzi (donanemab) in India marks a significant shift in the treatment of the neurodegenerative disorder, with experts describing it as one of the first therapies aimed at slowing progression of the disease in its early stages rather than merely managing symptoms.

Dr Manjari Tripathi, head of Neurology at AllMS, Delhi, said while the availability of such drugs was "good news", these were suitable only for patients in the earliest stages of Alzheimer's disease or mild cognitive impairment.

"Patients have to come to us very, very early. Most patients in India are brought to us in the middle stage of the disease, so this requires a paradigm shift in diagnosis," she said.

Dr Tripathi cautioned that the therapy is expensive and not free from adverse effects, including brain swelling and microbleeds in some patients, making proper counselling and informed consent essential.

"The diagnosis has to be made not just on clinical features, but also on biomarker detection through plasma or cerebrospinal fluid tests," she said, adding that recent meta-analyses showed the benefits, though meaningful, may not be "very dramatic".

The injectable therapy, approved for patients with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or those in the early stage of dementia due to Alzheimer's disease, is expected to be introduced in India later this month.

Unlike conventional Alzheimer's drugs that largely manage memory loss and behavioural symptoms, donanemab targets amyloid-beta plaques ' abnormal protein deposits linked to the disease.

According to Eli Lilly, Lormalzi is administered once every month and treatment can be stopped after plaque reduction reaches the desired level.

The company has priced the 350 mg vial at Rs 91,688 per month and said patient access programmes would also be introduced.

Neurologists, however, cautioned that the treatment is not a cure and is suitable only for carefully selected patients diagnosed at an early stage of the disease.

Dr Vinit Suri, senior consultant of neurology at Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, said the new generation of Alzheimer's

drugs offered a fundamentally different treatment strategy.

"Instead of only helping manage symptoms, these therapies are designed to slow the progression of the disease by targeting the underlying changes in the brain," he said.

"The potential benefit is that they may help preserve memory and cognitive function for a longer period, especially when used in patients with mild cognitive impairment or very early memory decline," he added.

Experts noted that identifying the right patients remains critical.

Patients are generally required to undergo amyloid testing through positron emission tomography (PET) scans or cerebrospinal fluid analysis before starting treatment.

Dr Vinit Banga, director of neurology at Fortis Hospital, Faridabad said the treatment is specifically meant for patients with mild cognitive impairment or mild dementia due to Alzheimer's disease.

Before initiating therapy, proper patient selection is extremely important, he emphasised.

"Patients need confirmation of amyloid pathology through CSF or serum beta-amyloid biomarkers, and a baseline MRI brain is necessary prior to starting treatment. The drug is administered as monthly intravenous infusions and can be continued for a maximum duration of around 18 months.

"Periodic MRI brain monitoring is also required during treatment because of potential complications such as amyloid-related imaging abnormalities (ARIA), including brain edema or microbleeds," Dr Banga said.

Side effects may include headache, dizziness, nausea and confusion, although these have largely remained manageable in most patients, Dr Suri said.

He Suri pointed out that amyloid PET imaging is still not widely available in India, which could limit adoption.

In the context of the Indian healthcare ecosystem, where 10 million people are living with dementia, which is projected to double by 2036, the availability of such biologics is noteworthy, said Dr M V Padma Srivastava, chairperson of neurology at Paras Health.

She explained that donanemab is a monoclonal antibody that helps clear amyloid plaques from the brain, making it fundamentally different from older therapies.

"What also makes this treatment different is that it is not meant to be taken forever. It is usually given as a monthly infusion for about 18 months, or until scans show that the plaques have reduced to a target level," she said, describing it as a 'treat-to-target" approach.

She, however, stressed that "its effectiveness is heavily dependent on proper diagnosis in a timely manner, with patients

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Arunachal Cabinet approves anti-paper leak rules, ILP reforms and austerity measures

ITANAGAR, May 14: The Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet on Thursday approved a series of major policy and administrative decisions, including new anti-paper leak rules for recruitment examinations, stricter Inner Line Permit (ILP) regulations, and a set of austerity measures for ministers and government officials.

The cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pema Khandu deliberated on several governance, recruitment, urban development, welfare and institutional reform proposals concerning multiple departments of the state government.

The cabinet announced austerity measures following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal, including a one-year ban on foreign travel by ministers and officials, a 50 per cent reduction in VIP convoys, adoption of a "virtual first" meeting policy, restriction on new vehicle purchases, promotion of e-office systems, energy-saving measures and encouragement of organic farming and "buy local, buy swadeshi" initiatives.

Among the key decisions, the cabinet approved the framing of the "Arunachal Pradesh Public Examination (Measures for Prevention of Unfair Means in Recruitment) Rules, 2026" to strengthen safeguards against question paper leaks and other malpractices in recruitment examinations, a statement from the CMO said.

The rules operationalise provisions of the Arunachal Pradesh Public Examination Act, 2024, and provide for monitoring mechanisms, reporting procedures for examination-related offences, and

engagement of examination authorities and functionaries.

The cabinet also approved amendments to recruitment rules for administrative officers, chief engineers and several other categories of posts to streamline recruitment procedures and update service conditions.

In the Agriculture department, amendments to the planning officer group 'B' recruitment rules were approved to regularise changes relating to pay scales, promotion criteria and consultation procedures with the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission. The revised rules will now be known as the General Arunachal Service 'Planning Officer Group 'B', Gazetted, Non-Ministerial Rules, 2026". Recruitment rules were also approved for 20 newly-created Group-C posts under the land management department, including 10 computer assistants and 10 senior computer assistants.

The cabinet approved a Home department proposal to merge the lone post of compounder at the Police Training Centre, Banderdewa, with the pharmacist cadre under the directorate of Health Services.

The move seeks to remove pay anomalies and ensure compliance with the Pharmacy Act, 1948, the statement said.

A one-time exemption from physical efficiency test and physical standard test was also approved for eligible candidates who had already qualified the physical tests and later appeared in the written examination conducted by the Arunachal Pradesh Staff Selection Board in July 2025 for recruitment of constables in civil Police, Arunachal Armed Police Battalion and India Reserve Battalion.

On ILP reforms, the cabinet was informed about new 2026 guidelines introducing a fully digital e-ILP system with QR-code verification, Aadhaar-based authentication, police verification for work permits, stricter penalties for violations and district-level enforcement drives.

In the urban affairs sector, the cabinet approved the Arunachal Pradesh Tenancy Rules, 2026, aimed at creating a transparent rental housing system through the establishment of Rent Authorities, Rent Courts and Rent Tribunals.

The cabinet also discussed the proposed "Arunachal Pradesh Airport Area Development Authority Bill, 2026" for planned urban development around airport regions, including areas adjoining Donyi Polo Airport at Hollongi, Tezu and Pasighat.

The proposed law seeks to incorporate modern urban planning concepts such as land pooling and sustainable aero-city development.

The finance department received approval for amendments to recruitment rules for assistant auditors and framing of new rules for sub-treasury accountants to strengthen financial administration. The cabinet further approved the enhancement of cash grants for gallantry award recipients from the state.

Assistance for Param Vir Chakra awardees was increased from Rs 50 lakh to ₹ 1 crore, while recipients of the Ashok Chakra and Maha Vir Chakra will now receive ₹ 50 lakh instead of ₹ 30 lakh.

Recruitment rules were also approved for newly-created posts of principals and wardens in nursing colleges and schools under the Health and Family Welfare department. The cabinet additionally directed the constitution of a committee to examine upgrading five ANM schools into GNM institutes within a month. The government also approved revised guidelines for financial assistance from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, the statement added. (PTI)

Centre launches ₹ 189.79 crore Mizoram Ginger Mission

AIZAWL, May 14: The Centre has launched Mizoram Ginger Mission, a ₹ 189.79 crore convergence-led initiative for ginger cultivation and value chain development for the northeastern state, officials said on Thursday.

The project was jointly unveiled via virtual mode by Union DoNER Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Wednesday, they said.

The launch event held at the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) in Aizawl was also attended by state Horticulture Minister C Lalsawivunga, and important officials.

The initiative will be implemented under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

Speaking on the occasion, Scindia underscored Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to ensure that farmers become true stakeholders in the entire agricultural value chain "from farm to fork." He emphasised that the objective is not merely crop cultivation, but enabling farmers to participate meaningfully in processing, branding, packaging, export-led value addition, and global market integration.

The Union minister noted that while Mizo Ginger contains 6-8 per cent oleoresin against the global average of around 3 per cent, farmers today receive only ₹ 8-15 per kilogramme, even as the value chain reaches over ₹ 500 per kilogramme in international markets.

Calling for a decisive effort to "disintermediate the intermediary" and strengthen cooperative and FPO structures, he described the initiative as the "Mizo Ginger Movement", anchored on four strategic pillars of Convergence, Value Addition, Branding, and Market Integration, and designed through convergence among the Ministries of DoNER, Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Food Processing Industries, and Rural Development, along with APEDA, NABARD, the government of Mizoram, and industry stakeholders.

Scindia also highlighted that the mission will deliver one integrated processing hub and three spoke centres, over 30 strategic interventions, and the integration of nearly 20,000 farming households into a unified value-chain ecosystem built on traceability, distinctiveness, quality assurance, and farmer-led value creation.

He set out a clear global vision for Mizo Ginger, with targeted entry into South-East Asian, Middle Eastern, and European markets, and stated that success

would be realised the day Mizo Ginger is available on global shelves, traceable to individual farmers, and delivering direct economic benefits to them.

The Union minister assured farmers that the Centre stands "side by side" with them, describing the initiative as a long-term movement expected to deliver a six-fold increase in farmer value realisation, sharp reduction in post-harvest losses, international branding of Mizo Ginger, sustainable rural livelihoods, and a robust export and processing ecosystem for the region.

Lalduhoma said that the project will focus on sustainable cultivation, quality control and food safety, farm mechanization and solarisation, and post-harvest management and processing.

The post-harvest management and processing component, in particular, will receive gap funding support from the NEC's Focused Development Component (FDC), he said.

Among the three main ginger varieties cultivated in Mizoram, Thingpui and Thinglaidum received the Geographical Indication (GI) Tag in 2021, he said.

In 2025, chemical residue testing conducted by Eurofins Analytical Services, Bengaluru, confirmed that Mizoram ginger successfully met quality standards, he said.

The CM added that the recent recognition as a USP further strengthened the crop's potential and identity.

Ginger is the flagship crop of Mizoram and the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government headed by Lalduhoma provides minimum support price to farmers for five key crops, including ginger.

Last year, Mizoram was declared the "Ginger capital of India." (PTI)

State, Centre's inability to exercise Constitutional power causing violence in Manipur: Cong

IMPHAL, May 14: The Manipur unit of the Congress on Thursday alleged that the frequent violence in the state was due to the state and Union government's inability to properly use their constitutional powers in addressing vexing issues.

This came a day after three suspected militants gunned down as many church leaders in Kangpokpi, while a man was killed in the Noney district.

Addressing a press conference, state Congress chief O Ibobi Singh said, "We strongly condemn the killings. Three persons belonging to one community were killed on Wednesday morning, while a civilian of another community was killed in the evening in what appears to be a retaliatory act."

"How long will the Central government remain a mute spectator to the series of killings happening in the state. It appears as if the state has been left on its own, and the different communities are being allowed to engage in killings," said the three-time former chief minister. Referring to the ethnic violence in 2023, Singh said, "Even the Supreme Court had previously said the law and order in the state has completely collapsed."

"Killings between communities will never bring any solution. It's time to shun revengeful," the Congress leader said, reiterating that law and order is the responsibility of the state government.

"Constitutional powers given to the government are not being rightly used by both the state and union governments. This, I believe, is the cause of the unrest," he said. (PTI)

Centre allocates ₹ 4,900 crore to Arunachal under 'Pride of Hills' initiative

ITANAGAR, May 14: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the Centre allocated ₹ 4,900 crore to the state under the newly introduced "Pride of Hills" initiative aimed at addressing critical infrastructure and developmental gaps in Himalayan and hill states.

The chief minister described the allocation as a major boost for Arunachal Pradesh, particularly in improving connectivity, infrastructure creation and long-term economic development in remote and difficult terrains.

"Grateful to Hon'ble Prime Minister @narendramodi Ji for the ₹ 4,900 crore allocation to Arunachal Pradesh under the 'Pride of Hills' initiative, which will help bridge critical infrastructure gaps across the state," Khandu said in a post on X.

The "Pride of Hills: Special Development Assistance for Hill States" initiative was introduced earlier this year under the Centre's Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) framework for the financial year 2026-27, with a total outlay of ₹ 25,000 crore earmarked for nine hill and Himalayan states, officials said.

Arunachal Pradesh emerged as the highest beneficiary under the scheme with an allocation of ₹ 4,900 crore, followed by Himachal Pradesh with ₹ 3,920 crore and Nagaland with ₹ 3,880 crore. Other beneficiary states include Uttarakhand, Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Mizoram.

Earlier, while welcoming the Centre's decision after the scheme was announced in March, Khandu had termed the initiative a "timely and visionary intervention" acknowledging the unique challenges faced by hill states such as difficult terrain, sparse population, weak connectivity and limited revenue-generation capacity.

The CM said that the allocation will help the state improve fiscal stability and invest further in creating revenue-generating assets.

According to official details, the scheme has been designed to address structural and geographical disadvantages faced by hill states, including high infrastructure costs, low population density, difficult terrain and weaker fiscal indicators. The initiative seeks to boost capital expenditure, improve infrastructure, strengthen connectivity and support long-term economic sustainability in these regions.

Officials said the additional allocation, over and above existing SASCI provisions, is expected to help hill states undertake major infrastructure projects, improve public utilities, support committed liabilities and accelerate overall development. (PTI)

Dimapur ranks 10th in NER District SDG Index

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 14: Dimapur district recorded a composite score of 76.29 in the 2023-24 North Eastern Region (NER) District SDG Index and secured Rank 10 out of 121 districts, showing a significant improvement from the 2021-22 score of 63.67 and Rank 76 out of 103 districts.

Presenting the SDG profile of the district at a review meeting on SDG India Index 4.0 and NER District SDG Index 2.0 at Dimapur DC's conference hall on Thursday, Imtijungla Lemtur, extra assistant commissioner, Dimapur, said the Index assessed SDG progress using 84 indicators mapped to 50 SDG targets and followed the SDG India Index methodology with equal weightage across all goals.

The districts were classified as aspirants, performers, front-runners, and achievers based on their scores.

Goal-wise performance showed that Dimapur scored strongly in SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) with a score of 91, SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) with 97, SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) with 86, SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) with 87, and SDG 13 (climate action) with 88.

The report also highlighted improvements in several indicators, including 100% electrified villages, 100% mobile network coverage in villages, 100% households using improved water sources, and 100% GPS/villages verified ODF status.

In the education sector, the district recorded improvement in schools with computers, trained teachers at the secondary level, and reduced secondary school dropout rates.

In health-related indicators, institutional delivery and skilled birth attendance remained high, while further attention was needed in areas such as infant mortality rate and healthcare infrastructure.

The district profile further noted progress in sanitation, infrastructure, banking access, PMAY housing completion, and internet connectivity. However, areas requiring continued focus included reduced inequalities, healthcare services, forest cover, and municipal solid waste treatment.

The meeting was attended by heads of departments and officials from various departments under Dimapur district.

In her opening remarks, Dr Diana Patton, ADC, Dimapur, stated that the SDG India Index 2023-24 covered 17 goals, 70 targets, and 115 indicators.

Patton urged all heads of departments to provide accurate and updated data and work collectively to improve the district's overall SDG targets and rankings.

Rare musk deer captured on camera for first time in Arunachal sanctuary

ITANAGAR, May 14: Researchers have captured the first-ever camera-trap image of a musk deer inside the Yordi Rabe Supse (YRS) wildlife sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh's West Siang district, marking a major milestone in documenting the rich biodiversity of the eastern Himalayan region.

According to forest department officials from the district, the rare animal was photographed recently through a camera trap installed deep inside the forested terrain of the sanctuary, a protected area known for its rugged mountainous landscape and dense vegetation in the district.

Wildlife experts consider the sighting significant as musk deer are extremely shy, nocturnal and difficult to detect in the wild. Their presence is often regarded as an indicator of a healthy and relatively undisturbed high-altitude ecosystem.

Expressing delight, Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, in a social media post, described the sighting as a "significant breakthrough in wildlife conservation" for the

state. "The first-ever camera-trap image of a musk deer from Yordi Rabe Supse (YRS) Wildlife Sanctuary is a significant breakthrough in #WildlifeConservation for Arunachal Pradesh," Mein said in a post on X. He said the discovery underlines the ecological importance of Arunachal Pradesh's remote mountain forests and the urgent need for sustained conservation efforts.

"This discovery reflects the rich biodiversity of our high-altitude forests and highlights the importance of continued conservation and scientific research in the eastern Himalayas," the deputy chief minister said. Mein appreciate the dedicated efforts of the researchers, forest officials, and all stakeholders involved in documenting and protecting the precious wildlife heritage.

Researchers believe the latest photographic evidence could pave the way for more intensive ecological surveys and long-term conservation planning in the region.

Musk deer are among the most ancient and primitive deer species found in the Himalayan region. Unlike other deer, male musk deer do not possess antlers but are known for their elongated canine teeth and the musk gland from which they derive their name. The species inhabits alpine scrub forests and steep mountainous terrain at high elevations. (PTI)

Mizoram churches, Cong condemn killing of three leaders in Manipur

AIZAWL, May 14: Several churches in Mizoram and the state Congress unit on Thursday strongly condemned the killing of three church leaders in an ambush in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on May 13, describing the attack as a heinous act of violence and a grave loss to the Christian community.

In a statement, the Council of Churches in Mizoram (CCM), a conglomerate of nine major churches, expressed "profound grief" over the ambush in which two vehicles carrying religious leaders were attacked between Kotzim and Kotlen villages in Kangpokpi district.

The CCM said the attack had deeply affected the sentiments of Christians across the Northeast who share in the grief of the bereaved families and the wider church community. Condemning the violence, the CCM stated that such acts only deepen divisions, prolong suffering, and weaken communal harmony.

The council appealed to Christians to pray for peace and for the restoration of normalcy in Manipur. It also conveyed heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims, the church community and the people of Manipur.

Meanwhile, the Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) also issued a condolence message mourning the deaths of three leaders of the Thadou Baptist Association of India (TBAI), who were attacked by armed miscreants on Wednesday morning.

The Congress described the slain pastors as "messengers of peace and reconciliation" who had been working tirelessly amid the ongoing unrest in Manipur.

"Their sacrifice in the pursuit of peace is an immense and painful loss," the party said, adding that it hoped their deaths would become a foundation for lasting peace, harmony, and reconciliation in the violence-hit state. The MPCC also expressed solidarity with the bereaved families, colleagues, and the entire TBAI community, while praying for the speedy recovery of those injured in the attack.

Three church leaders were killed and four others injured in an attack by suspected militants in Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Wednesday, police said.

The incident happened at a place between Kotzim and Kotlen villages when members of the Thadou Baptist Association (TBA) were returning from Churachandpur after attending a religious congregation.

Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh condemned the incident, stating that such "senseless acts of violence" against innocent civilians threaten peace in Manipur, which has been rocked by ethnic violence since 2023.

Following the killings, a total shutdown was imposed in Kangpokpi district where Kukis are in the majority. (PTI)

Sikkim CM cuts his motorcade size by half; announces host of austerity measures

GANGTOK, May 14: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Thursday announced cutting the number of vehicles in his motorcade by 50 per cent following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to curb the use of petrol and diesel.

In a social media post, he said the other austerity measures include withdrawal of pilot vehicles assigned to the Assembly speaker and deputy speaker, a 20 per cent cut in fuel consumption in vehicles allotted to ministers and MLAs, and pooled vehicle services in government departments.

"In compliance with the appeal made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for adopting austerity measures, and to demonstrate our commitment towards the national service and responsible governance, I have decided to reduce the number of vehicles in my official carcade by 50 per cent. It will significantly contribute towards fuel conservation," Tamang said.

The chief minister also shared that he has urged all district collectors and superintendents of police

not to undertake protocol duties during his inter-district tours.

He said the decision on austerity measures was taken at an emergency meeting with Cabinet ministers, legislators, the chief secretary, the state police chief, heads of departments, district collectors, and superintendents of police on Thursday.

After detailed deliberations, several temporary measures have been adopted in the larger interest of fuel conservation, administrative efficiency, and national responsibility, the chief minister said.

Among other measures, public servants have been urged to use public transportation and rely on virtual meetings and digital coordination.

Tamang said that 50 per cent of government employees should be asked to work from home wherever feasible, suspend foreign travel for one year, and maintain Saturdays and Sundays as non-working days during which government vehicles shall not ply.

Additionally, the odd-even vehicle rule will be implemented across all districts, he said while pointing out that these measures are temporary and aimed at promoting resource conservation.

However, emergency services shall remain exempt from these restrictions.

A detailed notification in this regard will be issued separately by the home department, the chief minister said and appealed to the people of Sikkim to wholeheartedly support and abide by these decisions.

"Let us come together to conserve resources, reduce unnecessary fuel consumption, and set an example of unity and patriotism for the rest of the country," the chief minister said.

PM Modi recently called for austerity and fuel-saving measures, warning that the ongoing military conflict in West Asia could trigger a crisis "bigger than the global Covid pandemic". (PTI)

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CSK currently placed fifth in pecking order with six wins from 11 matches

CSK look to continue playoffs push against eliminated LSG

LUCKNOW, May 14: Still in the hunt for a playoff berth despite an erratic campaign, Chennai Super Kings will look to continue their recent resilient run when they take on the already-eliminated Lucknow Super Giants in an IPL match here on Friday.

While CSK have managed to stay afloat with timely wins in the second half of the season, LSG's campaign has unravelled due to a string of ordinary performances.

For Chennai, the equation remains straightforward -- win remaining matches and hope other results end up in their favour.

CSK are currently placed fifth in the pecking order with six wins from 11 matches.

Despite frequent criticism over their lack of finishing firepower, the five-time champions have shown fight through crucial contributions from Sanju Samson, Urvil Patel, captain Ruturaj Gaikwad and a few other emerging players.

Young batter Urvil's fearless approach at the top has added much-needed momentum to CSK's powerplay scoring. On Friday, Shivam Dube, Kartik Sharma and Dewald Brevis also have key roles to play in the middle overs on a surface expected to aid stroke-making.

The bowling unit, however, has received a big blow recently with all-rounder Jamie Overton ruled out of the remainder of IPL due to a thigh injury and returning to the UK for further assessment.

This significant blow affects CSK's playoff push, marking yet another injury setback this season.

CSK's bowling was largely defined by the standout performances of Overton before his injury. He was providing crucial middle-overs breakthroughs and took 14 wickets in 10 matches to emerge as one of CSK's top bowlers this season.

However, despite a campaign beset by injuries to important players, a disciplined, and varied attack, including Akeal Hosein, has helped the side register vital wins.

More often than not, Mukesh Choudhary and Anshul Kamboj have done the job expected of them and Afghanistan's left-arm spinner Noor Ahmad has also been effective.

Lucknow, on the other hand, have little except pride to play for after failing to build any momentum through the season.

Captain Rishabh Pant's prolonged poor form has hurt the side badly, while their bowling attack has struggled to defend totals or contain opposition batters in crucial phases, including in their first-leg game against CSK, when they failed to defend 203.

Josh Inglis, Nicholas Pooran and Mitchell Marsh have provided sporadic moments of brilliance, but LSG's inability to perform as a collective unit has left them languishing at the bottom of the 10-team table.

With the pressure of qualification no longer hanging over them, LSG could nevertheless prove dangerous at home, especially with the Ekana track increasingly favouring batters.

CSK will also be wary of complacency against a side that now has the freedom to play without fear, and the home team will also back itself to exploit familiar conditions better than CSK.

Teams:

Chennai Super Kings: Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), Dewald Brevis, MS Dhoni, Urvil Patel, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Ayush Mhatre, Shreyas Gopal, Jamie Overton, Khaleel Ahmed, Anshul Kamboj, Gurjapneet Singh, Mukesh Choudhary, Noor Ahmad, Akeal Hosein, Prashant Veer, Matthew Short, Sarfaraz Khan, Matt Henry, Rahul Chahar, Zakary Foulkes, Spencer Johnson, Kartik Sharma, Aman Khan.

Lucknow Super Giants: Rishabh Pant (c&wk), Abdul Samad, Akshat Raghuvanshi, Ayush Badoni, Mukul Choudhary, Himmat Singh, Josh Inglis (wk), Aiden Markram, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Arshin Kulkarni, George Linde, Mitchell Marsh, Shahbaz Ahmed, Akash Singh, Avesh Khan, Mohammed Shami, Mohsin Khan, Anrich Nortje, Prince Yadav, Digvesh Rathi, Manimaran Siddharth, Arjun Tendulkar, Naman Tiwari, Mayank Yadav.

Match starts: 7.30pm IST. *(PTI)*

Soyez replaces Sreejesh as junior men's hockey team coach

NEW DELHI, May 14: India on Thursday officially appointed decorated Frenchman Frederic Soyez as the chief coach of the national junior men's hockey team, replacing two-time Olympic medallist PR Sreejesh.

Sreejesh, a former star goalkeeper, was removed from his role just after 17 months following the expiry of his contract after guiding India to a bronze medal-finish at last year's FIH Junior World Cup in Chennai and Madurai.

In a strongly-worded social media post, Sreejesh vented out his frustration, saying his tenure was brought to an end despite winning five medals in as many tournaments during his stint, but Hockey India argued that the decision was taken considering long-term vision of building a sustainable high-performance ecosystem aligned with India's ambitions for hosting the 2036 Olympic Games.

One of the most accomplished coaches in European hockey, Soyez brings over three decades of elite coaching experience, including 15 years as an international player for France and over 15 years as a head coach at the highest level.

Soyez, who enjoyed an illustrious playing career with France from 1995 to 2010, earning 196 international caps and scoring an impressive 195 goals for the team, coached the national men's hockey teams of both France and Spain.

He has coaching experience at three Olympic Games, having guided Spain at the Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 Olympics before leading France at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

During his tenure with Spain, he guided the team to a silver medal at the 2019 European Championships, while also steering them to quarterfinal finishes at the Rio and Tokyo Olympics.

A proven developer of young talent, Soyez coached France to a historic silver medal at the FIH Junior Men's World Cup in Delhi in 2013 and most recently guided the French U-18 men's team to a silver medal at the 2025 European Championships.

He additionally served as the High-Performance Director of the French Hockey Federation from 2021 to 2024, overseeing the country's broader high-performance and athlete development structure.

His coaching resume also includes participation in two FIH Men's Hockey World Cups (2018, 2023) and six European Championships (2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023), underlining his extensive experience at the elite international level.

At the domestic level, Soyez guided Lille MHC to French Indoor and Outdoor Championship titles in 2012, along with Euro-Hockey Trophy Indoor and Outdoor titles in the same year.

Widely regarded for his expertise in high-performance systems, athlete development, and penalty corner strategy, Soyez has consistently built teams with strong tactical structure and competitive consistency across all levels.

Hockey India's long-term strategy also places significant emphasis on developing Indian coaches alongside international experts.

To ensure knowledge transfer and continuity, Indian coaches have been integrated across the senior, junior, and sub-junior national camps, with designated Indian coaches working closely alongside the respective head coaches at every level.

Welcoming Soyez to Indian hockey, Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey said, "We warmly welcome Frederic Soyez to the Hockey India family. Frederic comes with outstanding international credentials, having coached at multiple Olympic Games, World Cups, and European Championships, while also successfully developing young talent and high-performance systems.

"We believe his experience and skill set will greatly benefit Indian hockey as we continue to work towards a bigger long-term vision for the 2036 Olympics."

"Our focus is not only on immediate results but also on building a deep talent pool and a coaching structure that remains aligned from sub-junior to senior level. By integrating Indian coaches alongside international experts in every national camp across all levels, we are ensuring continuity in coaching philosophy, player development, and tactical understanding.

"This collaborative approach will also play a vital role in strengthening the capabilities of Indian coaches and creating a more self-sustaining high-performance ecosystem for the future," he added. *(PTI)*

Sooryavanshi named in India A squad for SL tri-series

NEW DELHI, May 14: Teenage batting prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was on Thursday named in the 15-member India A squad for the tri-nation 50-over series in Sri Lanka, starting June 9.

Apart from the hosts, the other team in the tournament is Afghanistan A. The matches will be played in Dambulla. India A will also play two multi-day (4-day) 'Tests' in Galle but the squad for that will be announced later.

It is understood that Sooryavanshi has been included as selectors wanted to give him a chance to check him out with the Pathways squad (India A) before he is picked for the senior team for the upcoming tour of the United Kingdom (Ireland and England) starting June 26. The tri-nation series ends on June 21.

A look at the 15-member squad indicates that average age of the team is around 23 years. Only the pace bowlers Arshad Khan, Yudhvir Singh and Yash Thakur are the ones who are above 25 years of age. None of the players in the squad are above 30 and all have been performers in Vijay Hazare Trophy (National One Day Championship) apart from being contracted with IPL squad.

Apart from Tilak and vice-captain Riyan Parag, who are the mainstays for MI and Rajasthan Royals respectively, Sooryavanshi (Rajasthan Royals), Priyansh Arya, Prabhsimran Singh, Suryansh Shedge (both PBKS), Harsh Dubey (SRH), Nishant Sindhu, Arshad Khan (both GT), Badoni (LSG) have been first team regulars at various points during this edition of IPL.

In the squad, Anshul Kamboj (Test), Riyan Parag and Tilak Varma (T20Is and ODIs) have already played for the senior team while Ayush Badoni was picked in the Indian squad earlier this year although he didn't get a game.

Tilak has earlier led India A squad while Arya had scored a hundred against Australia A last year.

The spinners include Dubey, Shedge, Vipraj Nigam while Prabhsimran and Kumar Kushagra are the two wicketkeepers.

India A will play Sri Lanka A (June 9 and 15) and Afghanistan A (June 11 and 17) twice and the top two teams will meet in the final slated on June 21. *(PTI)*

Renuka Singh Thakur: I am studying my own videos to rediscover swing bowling

MUMBAI, May 14: India fast-bowling spearhead Renuka Singh Thakur on Thursday said she has been putting in efforts including studying her own videos from the past to rediscover swing bowling after a tough tour of South Africa last month.

The world No. 3 Indian team suffered a huge 1-4 defeat in the five-match T20I series against South Africa in a crucial away assignment in the build-up to the T20 World Cup next month in England.

Renuka too had found it tough as she managed a mere two wickets in four matches.

"I practice every day but it's not like I swing the ball every time. I struggled a lot with my bowling when I played in South Africa. But now I have a time of 10-15 days to bring my swing back," Renuka told PTI in an exclusive interview ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup 2026 beginning from June 12.

The tournament will be livestreamed and broadcast on JioHotstar and Star Sports Network.

"When you don't perform well, a lot of things do not work for you. I haven't been able to swing for a some time so I am trying to bring my swing back. I am checking my old videos to see what I used to do and hoping that it comes back," she said.

Renuka said swing bowling is her strength and she understands wickets at the top are crucial for her side.

"I am working on my swing bowling since it is my strength. It is always beneficial for the team if the ball swings and I can get 2-3 wickets at the top for the team," Renuka said.

"I back myself to bowl with the new ball but since the same movement is not coming through, I am trying to work with the new ball to try and take wickets with it," she added.

The Indian team is engaged in a training camp at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru from May 10-16 and will soon leave for England for a bilateral series and the T20 World Cup.

India will play a three-match T20I series against England before the T20 World Cup, and will also take on the hosts in a one-off Test at Lord's later.

"We try to set up as many camps as possible where planning is also involved. If something has not happened in the last series, we come into the camp and prepare on it for next series or tournament," Renuka said.

"Before any assignment, we have a camp of at least 10 days so that we get time to work on ourselves."

"We are focussing on all areas from fitness to skills and we are also working on all those things where we had lacked in South Africa. We are giving importance to all aspects because we know that we will not get time after this, so it is better to go on the tour fully prepared," Renuka added.

Recalling her journey to top-flight cricket, Renuka said she became a fast bowler only because of the rule requiring them to bowl with a ball made of cloth.

"When I used to play cricket as a kid, there was a rule that you can only bowl pace. I used to play with my friends in the village. They used to play with balls made of cloth and slow bowling was not allowed with it," she said.

"After that, I saw a lot of bowling of Zaheer Khan and I used to think 'he bowls so well'. I had this mindset that I also want to become Zaheer Khan and bowl like him. He used to swing it both ways," Renuka added.

Renuka, who made her India debut in October 2021, said a stint with Indian players in 2019 made her realise how far behind she was from international players.

"When I was not being selected, I used to think why it is not happening for me. But later I realised that I wasn't ready for it. In 2019, I participated at an Indian camp. I realised that I wasn't ready," Renuka said.

"You don't have much idea until you have trained and played with these players. When I played with these players like Harmanpreet (Kaur), I realised that I needed to work hard."

"I had found a path for myself from there in terms of how much I needed to improve so that whenever I come into the Indian team, I can have a long stint," Renuka added. *(PTI)*

Sindhu, Lakshya enter Thailand Open quarters, Srikanth out

BANGKOK, May 14: Indian shuttlers PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen advanced to the quarterfinals of the USD 500,000 Thailand Open Super 500 tournament with straight-game wins in their respective matches here on Thursday. Two-time Olympic medallist and sixth seed Sindhu needed just 28 minutes to outclass Denmark's Amalie Schulz 21-13, 21-15 in the women's singles second round.

Seventh seed Lakshya, the 2021 World Championships bronze medallist, defeated China's Zhu Xuan Chen 21-12, 21-13 in a men's singles clash that lasted 39 minutes.

Sindhu will next face top seed and world No. 3 Akane Yamaguchi of Japan, while Lakshya will take on Thailand's second seed Kunlavut Vitidsarn. India's top-seeded men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also marched into the last-eight stage with a 21-12, 21-19 win over Malaysia's Bryan Jeremy Goonting and Muhammad Haikal in 44 minutes.

The world No. 4 Indian duo will next meet the sixth-seeded Japanese combination of Takumi Nomura and Yuichi Shimogami.

However, former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth crashed out after going down 16-21, 21-11, 18-21 to Chinese Taipei's world No. 47 Su Li Yang in a hard-fought contest lasting one hour and 10 minutes.

It was also the end of the road for young Devika Sihag, who had clinched her maiden Super 300 title at the Thailand Masters earlier this year. She lost 21-23, 11-21 to Thailand's Pitchamon Opatniputh.

Lakshya made a brisk start against Chen, racing to a 6-2 lead before the Chinese player fought back to draw level at 11-11.

The Indian, however, shifted gears immediately, winning six consecutive points to take firm control of the opening game.

In the second game, Lakshya looked sharper and more assured as he surged to an 11-5 advantage at the interval and never allowed Chen a way back, capitalising on pressure-induced errors from his opponent. *(PTI)*

What led to end of Sreejesh's tenure? Murmurs of discontent among players

NEW DELHI, May 14: A fairly successful stint has ended on a rather bitter note and despite the talk of an expired contract, P R Sreejesh' exit as India's junior men's hockey coach does not seem to be a straightforward call.

The two-time Olympic bronze-medallist's tenure ended just 17 months into the job following the end of his contract after guiding India to a bronze medal finish at the Junior World Cup in Chennai and Madurai last year.

Sreejesh re-applied for the job but the goalkeeping stalwart was ignored. On Thursday, the Hockey India officially appointed decorated Frenchman Frederic Soyez as the junior men's team coach.

The national body maintains that there was nothing sinister to be read in its decision to not renew Sreejesh's contract.

But the celebrated former goalkeeper did not hold back when he took to the social media to say that the national body had ignored him to accommodate a foreign coach being demanded by senior men's coach Craig Fulton.

Caught in the arguments and counter-arguments are the players and when PTI reached out to a few of them, it was learnt that there was a level of dissatisfaction as well.

"Some players of the junior team were not happy with Sreejesh's working style, they couldn't reach him when needed over phone when camps were not in progress," a well-placed source told PTI.

However, another source said Sreejesh was available whenever needed and his record as a coach was proof enough. During his tenure India won five medals in as many tournaments.

But Hockey India argued that the decision to let him go was taken considering long-term vision of building a sustainable high-performance ecosystem aligned with India's ambitions of hosting the 2036 Olympic Games.

"We have not fired Sreejesh. His contract expired in December 2025 and we followed the due process of and advertised for the position. He also applied and applicants were short-listed and finalised as per a proper selection process basis merit," said HI President Dilip Tirkey.

"We never wanted him to come out of the coaching programme, we offered him to lead the developmental programme, India A and beyond that. Besides that we offered him to guide our goalkeepers at the national level with his vast experience, but he refused," he asserted.

"But the doors are always open for him and other Indian coaches."

Sreejesh's transition from an Olympic medal-winning goalkeeper to junior India coach was a rare privilege, an appointment made straight from the field with zero formal coaching experience.

Having mostly played under foreign coaches -- Roelant Oltmans, Terry Walsh, Graham Reid, and Craig Fulton -- it was also puzzling to witness the India vs Foreign coach narrative from Sreejesh in his social media outburst, where he stated that the decision to appoint a foreign coach for junior side was taken at the behest of Fulton.

But Tirkey vehemently denied that claim.

"We have never conveyed to him that the chief coach of the men's team has given a preference to appoint a foreign coach for the junior side. As a federation, we are collectively working towards the vision of our government to build a pathway towards 2036 and a big part of that process is to develop our Indian coaching talent."

Sreejesh is also the mentor and Director of Hockey India League franchise Delhi SG Pipers. *(PTI)*

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