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Assam CEO submits assembly poll results to Governor

GUWAHATI, May 6: Assam's Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel on Wednesday handed over the assembly poll results to Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya.

A team from the CEO's office, led by Goel, called on the governor at the Lok Bhawan here and submitted the list of elected legislators.

After submission of the official results, the governor will start the process to form the new government in the northeastern state.

The BJP-led NDA had stormed to power for a third successive term in the state with a two-thirds majority.

"A delegation from the Election Commission, led by state Chief Electoral Officer Shri Anurag Goel ji, formally presented the results of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections at the Lok Bhawan today," Acharya said in a post on X.

"Heartfelt appreciation to the entire team of Election Commission for conducting the elections for all 126 assembly constituencies in a peaceful, efficient and well-organised manner," the governor added.

The BJP won 82 seats, while its allies Asom Gana Parishad and Bodoland People's Front bagged 10 each.

The Congress secured 19 seats and its ally Rajior Dal two. Among other opposition parties, the AIUDF won two constituencies and the Trinamool (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta hands over resignation letter as CM to Governor ● New govt to assume charge after May 11

PM invited to oath-taking ceremony

GUWAHATI, May 6: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday resigned along with his cabinet colleagues, paving the way for formation of a new government led by the BJP, officials said.

The BJP-led NDA bagged 102 seats in the 126-member assembly. The elections were held in a single phase on April 9, and counting of votes took place on May 4.

"Following the formal notification of the results of #AssamElections2026 and to enable the formation of the new government, Dr @himantabiswa tendered his resignation as Chief Minister along with that of the council of Ministers to Hon'ble Governor Shri @Laxmanacharya54 today at Lok Bhawan," the Chief Minister's Office said in a post on X.

The Governor has accepted the resignation, and requested Sarma to continue as the caretaker CM till the new government assumes office, it said.

Later, speaking to reporters outside the Lok Bhawan, Sarma said the oath-taking ceremony is likely to take place after May 11.

"As it was a historic win, we have invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to grace the occasion," he said.

The PMO has intimated that Modi is busy till May 11 and he



will be able to visit the state after that date, Sarma said.

Asked about the selection of the chief minister, he said: "The BJP has appointed two central observers. In their presence, the legislature party will nominate the leader to become the next CM. After that, NDA constituents will sit and finalise the name. So, we should wait for the process to complete."

The BJP had on Tuesday appointed Union minister J P Nadda as its central observer for election of the legislative party leader in Assam, while Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini was made

the co-observer.

Accompanied by his cabinet colleague Ranaj Pegu and MLA Manab Deka, Sarma said: "The meeting of the legislature party will take place before May 11. We will get the information from Nadda's office today or tomorrow. The date will be finalised by Nadda and Saini."

Following the meeting of the party MLAs and endorsement of the leader's name by the NDA members, the BJP will stake claim to form the government, he said.

Asked if new faces will get berths in the cabinet, Sarma said: "The leader (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bhupen pats Himanta's leadership

New Bihpuria MLA slams Gaurav saying the party had weakened under his presidency

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, May 6: Former Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on his erstwhile party, saying the Congress was now "reaping what it had sown" after suffering a crushing defeat in the Assam Assembly elections.

Borah, who switched from the Congress to the BJP ahead of the Assembly polls, won the Bihpuria Assembly constituency on a BJP ticket.

Addressing reporters on Wednesday, he credited chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for the BJP's sweeping electoral success and said the people had endorsed



the government's development agenda.

"I must admit that under the leadership of Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam has witnessed unprecedented political success. The people have once again placed their faith in his leadership," Borah said.

The BJP leader said the mandate in Bihpuria reflected public ap-

proval of the work carried out by the BJP government and rejected the Congress' campaign narrative. "The people have proved that the BJP's organisational strength and development politics were genuine. Congress tried to shape a different narrative, but the voters rejected it," he added.

Borah also took aim at Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, alleging that the party had weakened significantly under his leadership.

He claimed that Congress lost support in several of its traditional strongholds and failed to retain the momentum it had gained during the Lok Sabha elections. "When I was (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

AGP proposes Himanta to lead next govt

Atul Bora elected AGP legislature party leader

GUWAHATI, May 6: Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) president Atul Bora was on Wednesday unanimously elected as its legislature party leader by the newly elected MLAs.

The elected legislators also proposed the name of Himanta Biswa Sarma of the BJP to lead the new government.

In the 2026 assembly elections, the ruling BJP won 82 of the 126 seats, and its allies Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and the AGP pocketed 10 seats each.

The first meeting of the AGP legislature party was held here earlier in the day.

"Participants of the meeting expressed gratitude to people of the state for their overwhelming support to the AGP and its allies. Tributes were also paid to the martyrs of the Assam Agitation," Bora said.

The AGP was formed in the aftermath of the six-year-long Assam

Agitation against illegal foreigners. Bora said the legislature party unanimously elected him as its leader, and working president Keshab Mahanta as deputy leader in the assembly.

Bora and Mahanta retained their Bokakhat and Kaliabor seats, respectively, in the elections. They were also cabinet ministers in the two previous NDA governments.

The party president said Dimoria MLA Tapan Das has been chosen as the legislature party's secretary and Bajali legislator Dharmeswar Roy as the chief whip.

Both Das and Roy are first-time legislators.

"Keeping in mind the tremendous developmental work done by Himanta Biswa Sarma as the chief minister in the last government, our legislature party unanimously proposed his name to lead the new government," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Congress to review Assam poll performance on May 9

GUWAHATI, May 6: The Opposition Congress in Assam has convened a meeting of its district units on May 9 to review its poor performance in the recent assembly elections, according to a party circular.

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee general secretary (organisation) Ramanna Baruah issued the circular, asking all leaders concerned to be present in Guwahati.

"As per the direction of Assam PCC president Gaurav Gogoi, all District Congress Committee presidents/in-charge presidents and senior vice presidents are informed that a review meeting has been convened to deliberate upon the outcome of the Assam Assembly Election 2026," he said.

The meeting will assess the party's organisational and electoral performance, Baruah added.

The Congress contested 99 seats in the 126-member assembly but managed to win only 19. The BJP-led NDA secured 102 seats. Gogoi had on (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ULFA(I) cadre arrested at Palengi; arms and ammunition seized



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 6: A senior cadre of ULFA (Independent) was arrested by police from Palengi in Sivasagar district and arms, ammunition and incriminating documents were recovered from his possession.

The accused, identified as Biren Chetia alias Rantu Asom, was apprehended during a raid conducted at Dhyvan Pathar in Palengi, around 20 km from Sivasagar town, late on Monday night.

According to police, the operation was led

by Additional Superintendent of Police Arif Ahmed with support from personnel of Demow Police Station.

Senior Superintendent of Police Papori Chetia said police had received information that the ULFA(I) cadre was hiding in the area and was allegedly attempting to hand over the ammunition to others.

Acting on the input, police raided a house in the early hours and arrested him.

Police recovered one pistol, 10 rounds of ammunition, seven (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Congress has become 'Muslim League' in Assam, says Pijush Hazarika

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, May 6: Minister Pijush Hazarika on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on the Congress following the party's poor performance in the Assembly elections, alleging that the opposition outfit has turned into a "Muslim League" in the state.

Addressing reporters, Hazarika said the Congress leadership had become arrogant and disconnected from the people of Assam, which, according to him, resulted in the party's electoral debacle.

"Whenever a government is formed, our workers become active, but the Congress leaders became overconfident even before coming to power. They started insulting people and speaking arrogantly. Some leaders even questioned who Himanta Biswa Sarma is. The people of Assam have responded strongly to such arrogance," Hazarika said.

The minister also targeted Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi and criti-



cised the party's "New Greater Assam" slogan, alleging that it created confusion among the electorate.

"They talked about building a 'new greater Assam'. People wanted to know what that actually meant. Assam is already Assam. The public rejected this narrative

and shattered the dreams of the Congress," he claimed.

Hazarika further alleged that the Congress was surviving politically only because of minority votes.

Referring to constituency-level voting patterns, he claimed that even Hindu candidates of the Congress (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Oath-taking ceremony of first BJP govt in Bengal on May 9

KOLKATA, May 6: The oath-taking ceremony of the first BJP government in West Bengal will be held at Brigade Parade Ground here on May 9, state BJP president Samik Bhattacharya announced on Wednesday, as the saffron camp prepared to formally assume power after ending the TMC's 15-year rule in the state.

The ceremony, scheduled to begin at 10 am, is expected to witness the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president Nitin Nabin and several union ministers, party sources said.

"The new BJP government will take oath on May 9 at 10 am at Brigade Parade Ground," Bhattacharya told reporters.

Significantly, the swearing-in ceremony will be held on the 25th day of Baisakh in the Bengali calendar-observed across the state as Rabindra Jayanti, the birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore—lending the event a layer of cultural symbolism. According to state BJP (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bangladesh hopes no 'pushback' after BJP's win in elections



DHAKA, May 6: Bangladesh Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed on Wednesday expressed hope that people will not be pushed in his country after the BJP's victory in the recent assembly polls in bordering states.

"I hope no such incident (push backs) will happen," Ahmed told reporters when asked if he feared an increase in cases of people

suspected of being illegal immigrants being pushed from India. Ahmed, however, said that the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) have been asked to "remain alert" along the frontiers.

Ahmed's comments came a day after Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman was quoted in the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party's official Facebook page

saying that Bangladesh will take action if "push-in" incidents occur amid the change of power in the bordering state of West Bengal.

On Monday, assembly election results were announced in West Bengal, where the BJP won with a sweeping majority. In its election campaign, the BJP often accused the Mamata Banerjee-led government of allowing an influx of Bangladeshi people to West Bengal - an allegation that the latter has dismissed.

The party also retained power in the bordering state of Assam for a third term.

The term "pushback" is typically used to describe the action of forcefully sending people, believed to be illegal migrants, across borders. Countries where they are sent often use the term "push in".

In recent years, such cases between India and Bangladesh have largely centred on border areas in some northeastern states. (PTI)

Cong declares support to TVK, says alliance covers future polls as well

CHENNAI, May 6: The Congress party, a long-time ally of the DMK, on Wednesday announced its support to actor-politician Vijay's TVK to form the government in Tamil Nadu and severed ties with the Dravidian major.

The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee and the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) have decided to extend its full support to the TVK to form the government, AICC Tamil Nadu in-charge Girish Chodankar said, citing TVK chief Vijay's request seeking support.

Congress workers burst firecrackers at the party state headquarters Satyamurthi Bhavan here to welcome the announcement.

Chodankar, in a statement, said Vijay has formally requested the Congress party to extend its support for forming a govern-

ment in Tamil Nadu.

The people of Tamil Nadu, especially the youth, have delivered a very clear, strong and overwhelming verdict for a secular, progressive and welfarist government that believes in constitutional principles. They have chosen the TVK led by Vijay to form the next government.

He said: "The Indian National Congress stands for, and is the founding political party for, secular, progressive and welfarist politics in India. It is our constitutional duty to respect, uphold and help fulfil this mandate of the people of Tamil Nadu. Accordingly, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee and the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) have decided to extend its full support to the TVK to form the government."

The Congress, however, came up with a condition and asked the

TVK to ensure that communal forces that do not believe in the Constitution of India are kept out of the alliance fold.

The alliance between the TVK and the Tamil Nadu Congress will strive to bring back iconic leader Perunthalaivar (great leader) Kamaraj's "glory days of Tamil Nadu," with a strong commitment to Periyar EVR's social justice and Dr B R Ambedkar's constitutional ideals in the years and decades to come.

He said: "This alliance - founded on mutual respect, appropriate share, and shared responsibility between the two parties is not only for the formation of this government, but also for future elections to the local body organisations, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha."

Vijay and Rahul Gandhi jointly pledge to respect this historic (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam BJP chief says government will focus on development and protection of Assamese identity

People's mandate has increased NDA's responsibility in Assam: Dilip Saikia

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, May 6: Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia on Wednesday said the massive mandate received by the BJP-led NDA in the Assembly elections has increased the alliance's responsibility towards the people of the state.

Addressing reporters here, Saikia said the NDA government would continue to focus on development while also prioritising the protection of Assam's identity, culture and civilisation.

"The people of Assam have blessed the NDA in this election. Their mandate has increased our responsibility. In the next five years, we will work with greater commitment for the development of Assam and the protection of Assamese culture and civilisation," Saikia said.

He added that the BJP government would implement the promises made in its election manifesto and



work towards resolving key public issues.

"The assurances we gave to the people in our Sankalp Patra and

manifesto will be implemented sincerely. We will move ahead with our development agenda with greater intensity and work towards solutions

to the problems faced by the people," the BJP leader said.

Saikia also described the Congress party's performance in the Assembly polls as a "humiliating defeat" and said accountability should be fixed within the opposition party.

"In politics, when a party performs well, the leadership gets credit. Similarly, when a party suffers defeat, the leadership must also take responsibility," he said, in an apparent reference to Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi.

The Assam BJP chief further said that if the Congress truly believes in "value-based politics", its central leadership should take an "appropriate decision" to improve the condition of the party in the state.

The BJP-led NDA returned to power in Assam with a comfortable majority in the 126-member Assembly, paving (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sensex jumps 940 pts

Stock markets rally as oil prices decline amid progress in US-Iran talks

MUMBAI, May 6: Benchmark Sensex rallied 940 points while Nifty settled above 24,300 on Wednesday following a sharp decline in crude oil prices after US President Donald Trump claimed progress in negotiations with Iran towards an agreement to end the war.

Helped by flag-end heavy buying, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 940.73 points, or 1.22 per cent, to settle at 77,958.52. During the day, it surged 1,004.99 points, or 1.30 per cent, to a day's high of 78,022.78.

The 50-share NSE Nifty rallied 298.15 points, or 1.24 per cent, to end at 24,330.95.

A positive trend in global markets aided the rally in domestic stocks.

Among the 30-Sensex firms, InterGlobe Aviation was the biggest gainer, soaring by 6.6 per cent after a slump in crude oil prices and the announcement of a credit line for airlines hit by the West Asia crisis.

Trent rose by 3.91 per cent, Asian Paints by 3.56 per cent, State Bank of India by 3.38 per cent, HDFC Bank by 3.11 per cent, and Eternal by 2.98 per cent.

Reliance Industries was the biggest loser, shedding 1.8 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Power Grid and NTPC were also among the laggards.

Broader markets also rallied with the BSE SmallCap Select index jumping 2.25 per cent and the Mid-Cap Select index by 2.10 per cent. Among sectoral indices, banking, financials, and realty led the rally, while energy and FMCG remained relatively subdued.

"The trigger was largely global — renewed optimism around a po-



tential US-Iran peace deal led to a sharp decline in crude oil prices, offering immediate relief to an import-heavy economy like India," Hariprasad K, Research Analyst and Founder, Livelong Wealth, said.

Additionally, supportive domestic developments, including the government's credit guarantee scheme for businesses, boosted banking stocks, Ajit Mishra, SVP-Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

US President Donald Trump has suspended "Project Freedom," to escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz, claiming progress in negotiations with Iran towards an agreement to end the war.

In a post on Truth Social on Tuesday, Trump said, "Great progress has been made toward a complete and final agreement with representatives of Iran."

"Based on the request of Pakistan and other Countries, the tremendous Military Success that we have had during the Campaign against the Country of Iran and, additionally, the fact that Great Progress has

been made toward a Complete and Final Agreement with Representatives of Iran, we have mutually agreed that, while the Blockade will remain in full force and effect, Project Freedom (The Movement of Ships through the Strait of Hormuz) will be paused for a short period of time to see whether or not the Agreement can be finalized and signed," Trump said.

Project Freedom was launched on Monday to escort ships, stranded due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, to safety.

Trump's statement on Truth Social came hours after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced that Operation Epic Fury, launched on February 28, had concluded as its objectives had been achieved.

"Operation Epic Fury is concluded. We achieved the objectives of that operation. We're not cheering for an additional situation to occur. We would prefer the path of peace. What @POTUS would prefer is a deal... that is, so far, not the route that Iran has chosen," Rubio told a press conference at the White House on Tuesday.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, tumbled 8 per cent to USD 101.1 per barrel.

"Indian equity markets closed on a positive note as renewed optimism around a US-Iran peace deal and easing energy prices provided the necessary catalyst. The Nifty faced selling pressure through the first half before staging a strong bullish rally in the second, reversing all losses and closing firmly in the green, as improving sentiment drew sustained buying interest through the latter half of the session," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Sectorally, Telecommunication jumped 2.94 per cent, followed by Services (2.89 per cent), PSU Bank (2.81 per cent), Realty (2.76 per cent), Bankex (2.64 per cent), Private Banks index (2.51 per cent), Financial Services (2.47 per cent) and Healthcare (1.99 per cent).

Energy, FMCG, Utilities and Power were the laggards.

A total of 2,862 stocks advanced, while 1,365 declined and 167 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark KOSPI, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended higher. KOSPI surged over 6 per cent.

Markets in Europe were trading sharply higher. US markets ended in positive territory on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 3,621.58 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

On Tuesday, the Sensex dropped 251.61 points or 0.33 per cent to settle at 77,017.79. The Nifty edged lower by 86.50 points or 0.36 per cent to end at 24,032.80. (PTI)

India's services sector growth hits 5-month high in April as domestic market fuels activity: PMI

NEW DELHI, May 6: India's services sector growth climbed to a five-month high of 58.8 in April with new orders and output expanding at quicker rates, as firms indicated a shift from international to domestic suppliers amid the West Asia crisis, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from 57.5 in March to 58.8 in April, showing the strongest rate of expansion since last November.

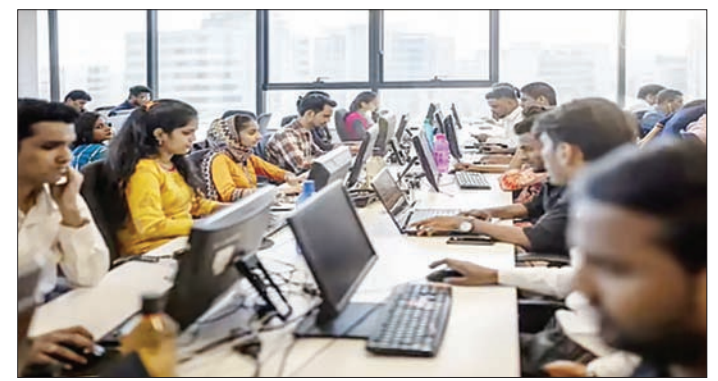
The HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index is based on a single question asking how the level of business activity compares with the situation the month before.

In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

According to survey participants, competitive pricing, e-commerce and particularly strong customer demand for relocation and logistic services boosted sales growth.

"India's services PMI climbed to a five-month high of 58.8 in April. Activity and new orders strengthened, even as new export orders eased, suggesting that demand is rotating from overseas markets to domestic consumers amid the Middle East conflict," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

International demand for Indian services lost strength. Companies indicated that the war in the Middle East and subdued inbound tourism



dampened the expansion.

Service companies reported another substantial increase in their operating expenses. Despite slowing in April, the rate of inflation was one of the highest seen since November 2024. Monitored firms cited food (cooking oil, eggs, meat and vegetables), gas and labour costs, as well as gas shortage.

However, only part of this additional cost burden was transferred to customers, as signalled by an increase in selling prices. The overall rate of charge inflation receded to a three-month low.

"Input cost inflation moderated but remained elevated, while output price inflation stayed subdued, indicating that some firms are absorbing higher costs rather than passing them on," Bhandari said.

Going ahead, Indian services companies were confident of a rise in output over the course of the coming 12 months. However, the level of positive sentiment nevertheless fell from March, dampened

by worries surrounding the West Asia crisis and cost pressures.

On the job front, companies recruited more workers at the start of the first fiscal quarter. According to them, rising volumes of new business boosted the recruitment of short-term staff and junior-level trainees.

Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index was up from 57.0 to 58.2, signalling a historically strong rate of expansion, but the rise was among the slowest in around two-and-a-half years. Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices.

The HSBC India Services PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 service sector companies. The sectors covered include consumer (excluding retail), transport, information, communication, finance, insurance, real estate and business services. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

PM invited to

of the legislature party is yet to be selected. The new CM will decide if there will be new faces in the council of ministers."

In the assembly elections, the ruling BJP won 82 seats, and its allies Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) pocketed 10 seats each. (PTI)

Assam CEO submits

Congress one. Elections to the 126-member Assembly were held in a single phase on April 9, and the counting of votes took place on May 4. (PTI)

Bhupen pats Himanta's

Assam Congress president, the party had won the Jorhat Lok Sabha seat by a margin of over 1.5 lakh votes. But now even that support base has weakened," Borah claimed.

The former Congress leader further alleged that internal divisions and "remote-controlled politics" had damaged the party in Assam.

He also suggested that the Congress may eventually be forced to appoint a minority community leader as the Leader of the party in the state, saying the party's remaining elected legislators were largely from minority-dominated constituencies.

The BJP-led NDA returned to power in Assam with a massive mandate, securing a comfortable majority in the 126-member Assembly.

AGP proposes Himanta

Bora said. "The MLAs also pledged to work for the development of their respective constituencies as well as the state and its indigenous people," he added.

Elections to the 126-member assembly were held in a single phase on April 9, and counting of votes took place on May 4. (PTI)

Congress to review

Tuesday said that all Congress candidates have been called for a feedback discussion on the election results. (PTI)

ULFA(I) cadre arrested

grenades, one bottle grenade, a torchlight and cash amounting to ₹13,500 from his possession. The accused, a resident of Bejapathar under Moran Police Station, was reportedly staying at the house of one Bipul Sensuwa in Palengri.

The SSP said further details would be disclosed after interrogation.

Congress has become

won primarily due to Muslim support.

"If you analyse the booths carefully, you will see that Congress candidates got overwhelming support from Muslim voters. Without those votes, Congress would not exist in Assam today," he said.

In a controversial remark, the minister said the Congress has effectively become a "Muslim League" in Assam.

"Even senior leaders have admitted this reality. Congress has now become a Muslim League in the state," Hazarika alleged.

The BJP leader asserted that the electorate had decisively rejected what he described as the Congress party's "divisive politics" and reaffirmed faith in the leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The ruling BJP-led NDA secured a sweeping victory in the recently concluded Assam Assembly elections, returning to power for a third consecutive term.

Oath-taking ceremony

sources, the choice of the date is being seen in political circles as an attempt by the BJP to embed its historic rise within Bengal's cultural imagination and counter the TMC's long-standing portrayal of the saffron party as a "party of outsiders" disconnected from Bengal's linguistic and intellectual ethos.

A meeting of the newly elected BJP MLAs has been convened on May 8 evening, party sources said, though the leadership remained tight-lipped over the chief ministerial face.

The BJP secured a landslide victory in the recently concluded assembly elections, paving the way for its first-ever government in Bengal after years of organisational expansion and sharp ideological polarisation. (PTI)

Cong declares support

verdict of the people of Tamil Nadu for a secular and progressive government, and to fulfil the dreams and promises of the people, especially the youth of Tamil Nadu, Chodankar underlined in the statement.

AICC In-charge for Tamil Nadu Girish Chodankar, TNCC President K Selvaaperunthagai, Legislative party leader S Rajesh Kumar and party office-bearer Praveen Chakravarthy, called on Vijay at TVK party office at Panaiyur here and handed over a letter of support to form the government. TVK leaders, including K Sengotaiyan were present.

DMK is one of the oldest allies of the Congress party and the two parties joined hands for the first time in 1971 when Assembly and Lok Sabha polls were held together. DMK was part of the UPA regimes from 2004 to 2013. In 2016, the Congress revived its ties with the DMK.

The DMK has dubbed the act of Congress to snap ties with it and join forces with TVK as "backstabbing." Vijay-led TVK secured an impressive 108 seats on its maiden electoral debut and trounced the incumbent DMK led by Stalin, which finished with only 59 seats.

The opposition AIADMK won 47 seats while its allies, the PMK obtained four and the BJP and AMMK clinched one seat each in the election, according to the data available on the Election Commission of India's website.

The DMK's other allies-- the IUML, CPI, CPI (M), and VCK won two seats each and the DMK secured one.

The votes were taken up for counting on May 4 and the final tally was announced on Tuesday. (PTI)

People's mandate has

the way for a third consecutive term for the saffron alliance in the state. The BJP Legislature Party is expected to meet in the coming days to elect its leader, following which the process of formation of the new government will begin.

Indeed expands ChatGPT job search app to India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: Indeed has expanded its job search app within ChatGPT to India and more than 50 other countries, enabling users to access job listings directly through a conversational interface.

The feature, launched earlier in the United States, allows job seekers in India to explore employment opportunities within ChatGPT by initiating searches using natural language or by mentioning "@Indeed" in prompts.

The integration enables personalised job recommendations by linking users' Indeed profiles, allowing the platform to suggest roles based on preferences, qualifications and work history.

Users can also access company insights, including overviews and employee ratings, within the chat interface.

Officials said the new feature is designed to simplify job discovery while maintaining Indeed's website and mobile app as the primary platforms for applying, scheduling interviews and interacting with employers.

Vice President of Product at Indeed, Sol Garger, said the integration would help users translate career exploration into action by combining conversational AI with the company's job-matching technology.

Indeed said it has over 645 million job seeker profiles globally and analyses more than 140 million hiring signals daily to refine its matching systems.

The initiative is part of the company's ongoing collaboration with OpenAI to enhance AI-driven hiring solutions.

Experts stress daily controller therapy for asthma management on World Asthma Day

Awareness, adherence and anti-inflammatory treatment key to better outcomes

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: Medical experts on World Asthma Day 2026 highlighted the need for regular controller treatment and improved awareness to address gaps in asthma care in India.

The focus this year, aligned with the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), is on improving access to anti-inflammatory inhaled treatments and encouraging long-term disease management rather than symptom-based relief alone.

Experts noted that despite the availability of effective and affordable therapies, asthma treatment in India continues to face challenges due to delayed diagnosis, misconceptions surrounding inhaler use and poor adherence to prescribed medication.

Studies indicate that non-adherence to inhaler therapy remains high, affecting overall disease control.

Pulmonologist Dr Manash Jyoti Saikia said asthma care in real-world settings often remains focused on immediate symptom relief, with many patients relying only on quick-relief inhalers instead of regular controller therapy.

He added that concerns about inhaler use among parents and adolescents also contribute to inconsistent treatment practices.

Dr Saikia said the latest GINA guidelines recommend combination anti-inflammatory inhalers that provide both relief and maintenance therapy through a single device, helping simplify treatment and improve adherence.

Experts warned that poorly

controlled asthma can lead to reduced quality of life, missed school and work, increased hospital visits and, in severe cases, life-threatening complications.

They stressed that long-term control through daily controller medications, particularly inhaled corticosteroids, remains essential for preventing asthma attacks and reducing airway inflammation.

Health awareness initiatives such as Cipla's "Berok Zindagi" and "Tuffies" campaigns have been working to promote awareness and encourage timely treatment.

The company's Breathefree initiative and recently launched Lung Wellness Centres in Delhi and Mumbai are also aimed at improving access to diagnostics and structured asthma care support.

Radisson Blu Guwahati to host special Mother's Day brunch

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: Radisson Blu Guwahati will celebrate Mother's Day with a specially curated brunch experience titled "Mom's Day Out" at Café B You from May 8 to May 10.

The celebration is aimed at bringing families together in a relaxed and festive setting, with the offering available during lunch and dinner on May 8 and 9, followed by a special brunch on May 10 from 12.30 pm to 4 pm.

The event will feature a wide range of dishes, including live counters serving pasta, grills and regional specialties. Themed desserts such as cakes, pastries and chocolate creations inspired by Mother's Day will also be part of the menu.

Organisers said the experience has been designed to go beyond dining, with a dedicated children's corner and interactive family activities.

Special games and surprise gifts for winners will also be organised during the Sunday brunch.

The ambience at Café B You will include themed



decor and curated elements to reflect the spirit of the occasion. Speaking about the initiative, General Manager Gurmeet Randhawa said the event was intended to offer families a warm and thoughtful setting to spend time together and celebrate mothers.

Hotel officials said the initiative reflects the property's continued focus on creating memorable hospitality and dining experiences for guests in the city.

Barrierless tolling system - an explainer

NEW DELHI, May 6: The road transport and highways ministry has launched India's first multi-lane free flow (MLFF) barrierless tolling system at the Choryasi Toll Plaza on the Surat-Bharuch section of NH-48 in Gujarat, marking a big shift in highway tolling.

The state-of-the-art system enables seamless toll collection without requiring vehicles to stop, using advanced technologies such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and FASTag.

India's electronic toll collection (ETC) infrastructure was started in 2014. Currently, vehicles need to stop at each fee plaza for payment of the highway usage charge.

Choryasi ranks among the top 10 toll plazas in the country in user fee collection. Indian Highways Management Company Limited (IHMCL), a company promoted by the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), has signed an agreement with ICICI Bank to implement the country's first comprehensive MLFF tolling system at Choryasi Fee Plaza.

State-owned NHAI is planning to roll out MLFF tolling at around 25 national highway fee plazas during the current financial year.

There are a dozen of toll plazas, including the Mundka toll plaza on the newly opened greenfield Urban Extension Road-II, where the multi-lane free flow tolling system is under testing.

BENEFITS OF MLFF

Uninterrupted traffic flow: Vehicles no longer



need to stop or slow down at toll plazas, leading to smoother traffic movement and reduced congestion.

Operational efficiency and cost savings: Reduced reliance on toll booth infrastructure and manpower results in lower operating costs over time.

Environmental benefits: Smoother traffic flow reduces vehicular idling, cutting down emissions and contributing to cleaner air near tolling points.

HOW DOES MLFF WORK?

High-performance RFID readers detect FASTag affixed on vehicles at high speeds. At the same time, ANPR cameras capture licence plate data, while RADAR and LiDAR systems accurately detect and classify vehicles. MLFF equipment creates a toll transaction through reading of the FASTag and/or vehicle number plate, and deducts the fee from the FASTag. With the 'One Vehicle,

One Tag' policy in place, the FASTag is linked to the vehicle number. It also captures evidence of vehicles where payment fails.

CONVENTIONAL TOLLING VS MLFF TOLLING

Conventional fee plazas rely on physical booths, gates, and lane infrastructure. MLFF replaces this with smart overhead gantries — minimising ground infrastructure while maximising efficiency. Where traditional systems cause delays and frustration, MLFF delivers a fast, transparent, and high-integrity revenue process.

ELECTRONIC NOTICE

MLFF also introduces a robust e-notice and grievance redressal mechanism. If a vehicle fails to pay the applicable user fee while crossing an MLFF plaza, an electronic notice, or e-notice shall be issued for recovery of the unpaid fee, as per Rule 14 of the National Highway Fee Rules 2008.

E-notice will be sent via SMS to the registered mobile number of the vehicle owner as per the VAHAN database, and also to the mobile number linked to the FASTag of the vehicle as per the issuer bank's records.

E-notice amount shall be twice the applicable user fee. However, if payment is made within 72 hours of issuance, a 50 per cent discount shall apply, and the amount payable shall be limited to the user fee applicable to the vehicle only.

After 72 hours, the road user shall be required to pay the full e-notice amount. (PTI)

MoS for External Affairs to attend inauguration and hold bilateral meetings during 8-15 May tour

Pabitra Margherita to visit Costa Rica, Honduras, Belize and Dominica

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles, Pabitra Margherita will pay an official visit to the Republic of Costa Rica, Republic of Honduras, Belize and the Commonwealth of Dominica from May 8 to 15, 2026.

In the Republic of Costa Rica, MoS(PM) will represent India at the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony of HE Laura Fernández Delgado on May 8, 2026 in San José. On the sidelines of the inauguration, he is also likely to meet other dignitaries of the Government of Costa Rica. The discussions are expected to cover the full range of bilateral relations and identify areas for further strengthening of the India-Costa Rica partnership.

In Honduras, MoS(PM) is scheduled to hold

meetings with senior dignitaries of the Government of the Republic of Honduras, including the Foreign Minister to review the entire spectrum of bilateral cooperation.

In Belize, he is expected to meet dignitaries of the Government of Belize and visit sites of India's developmental initiatives.

In the final leg of the visit to the Commonwealth of Dominica, MoS(PM) is likely to meet the leadership of Dominica and discuss the entire gamut of bilateral relations. He will also visit project sites being implemented through grant assistance from India. This will be the first ministerial-level visit from India to the country since October 2018.

During the visit, MoS(PM) will also interact with members of the Indian diaspora and friends of India.



NFR holds stakeholder meet to boost tea transport by rail

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: In an effort to enhance the transportation of tea through containerised movement by rail, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) held a meeting with major stakeholders of the tea industry, including logistics operators, tea associations, exporters and producers at the Zonal Headquarters on Wednesday.

Assam produces nearly 160 million kg of export-oriented tea annually. Keeping in view the growing demand for efficient logistics support, the initiative aims to encourage greater movement of tea consignments through rail-based ones nerized services, which offer advantages such as cost-effectiveness, reliability, faster transit, reduced handling loss and eco-friendly transportation. NFR has been consistently working towards strengthening freight infrastructure and developing customer-oriented logistics solutions to cater to the requirements of the tea industry across the North Eastern region and adjoining areas.



During the meeting, senior railway officials, representatives from the tea industry, logistics operators and other stakeholders discussed various measures for improving rail connectivity, operational coordination and container handling facilities for tea movement. Discussions also focused on strategies to attract higher tea traffic to the railways through efficient, seamless and customer-friendly transportation services.

NFR has recorded a commendable performance in freight operations during FY 2025-26 by achieving a total freight loading of 11.4 million tonnes (MT), registering a growth of 6 per cent over the previous financial year. Freight handling operations also witnessed substantial improvement, with unloading increasing by 688 rakes from 12,346 rakes in FY 2024-25 to 13,034 rakes in FY 2025-26. To further strengthen freight logistics

infrastructure in the region, NFR is also developing and operationalising modern freight terminals and multimodal cargo handling facilities.

The new terminals at Sairang in Mizoram and Molvom in Nagaland, along with others are expected to significantly improve freight accessibility and connectivity in the North Eastern states. In addition, the development of Gati Shakti Cargo Terminals across the zone is enhancing the capability for efficient cargo aggregation, container handling and first-mile and last-mile connectivity, thereby creating greater opportunities for industries, including tea producers and exporters, to increasingly adopt rail transportation.

This initiative reflects NFR's continued commitment to strengthening freight infrastructure, promoting sustainable transportation and providing customer-centric logistics solutions to support economic growth and industrial development in the North Eastern region.

KKHSOU student to represent India at World University Championship

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: In a proud moment for Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Vice Chancellor Prof Rajendra Prasad Das felicitated Riya Deuri, a BA 6th Semester learner, for her outstanding achievement at the All India Inter-University Ju-Jitsu (Men & Women) Tournament 2025-26.

The felicitation ceremony was held in the presence of Registrar Prof Pranab Saikia, coaches Balwinder Singh and Mickey Singh and other university officials. Riya Deuri brought immense pride to the university and the state of Assam by securing a gold medal in the under-52 kg category. The tournament was organised from April 20 to 24, 2026 at LNCT University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. She emerged as the only participant from Assam to win a gold medal at the prestigious event.

Adding to her remarkable success, Riya Deuri has been selected to represent India at the 2026 FISU World University Championship in Combat Sports - Ju-Jitsu, scheduled to be held from June 8 to 14, 2026 in Brazil. The FISU World University Championships are major international multi-sport events held in even-numbered years for student-athletes. The 2026 edition will feature 22 different sports across 19 countries, organised by the International University Sports Federation (FISU) to promote athletic excellence, healthy competition and cultural exchange among university students worldwide.

Prof Rajendra Prasad Das congratulated Riya on her achievement and highlighted her dedication and hard work, which have set a shining example for other learners of the university. The Vice Chancellor assured full support from KKHSOU for her upcoming international campaign in Brazil. Riya's success marks a significant milestone for open and distance learning institutions in the field of sports, proving that academic pursuit and sporting excellence can go hand in hand.

NCC cadets visit BN College of Agriculture

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALL, May 6: As part of the ongoing training camp of 5 Assam Battalion NCC, Tezpur, nearly 500 NCC cadets visited BN College of Agriculture, Biswanath Chariali, under Assam Agricultural University on Wednesday. The cadets, representing 13 colleges and 13 schools from the districts of Lakhimpur, Biswanath, Sonitpur, Udalguri and Darrang are presently attending the camp being conducted at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Biswanath from May 3 to 12.



The educational visit was organised with the support of the university authorities, who deputed faculty members to guide and supervise the cadets through various academic and agricultural facilities of the institution. The cadets were divided into groups and taken to different units, including orchards and horticulture sections, organic

farming and biofertiliser units, agro-forestry and water harvesting facilities, vermicompost units, tea and spices gardens, mechanised agriculture sections, animal husbandry and dairy units, medicinal and aromatic plant units, as well as integrated pest management facilities.

The visit provided the cadets with valuable exposure to modern agricultural practices, sustainable farming techniques, entrepreneurship opportunities and scientific innovations in the agricultural sector. Faculty members of the university also interacted with the cadets and highlighted the role of agriculture in national development and rural empowerment.

The initiative formed part of the NCC's broader objective of promoting leadership, discipline, awareness and holistic personality development among youth through experiential learning and nation-building activities. The 5 Assam Battalion NCC expressed gratitude to the authorities of Assam Agricultural University and BN College of Agriculture for extending their support and cooperation in making the visit informative and successful.

PDOT training for overseas job seekers

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 6: Assam Skill Development Mission (ASDM) has arranged a Pre-Departure Orientation Training (PDOT) for candidates from Assam who are going abroad for employment. As per the directives of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), migrant workers are required to undergo this training to ensure that they are aware of all rules and regulations before going abroad.

It is mandatory for every person going abroad, regardless of field of employment or destination, to undergo this free orientation training at the Assam Skill Development Mission headquarters in Guwahati. The District Information Office, through a release on Wednesday, directed eligible candidates to contact the District Commissioner's Office or the District Manager (ASDM) of their respective districts for registration.

ASDM urges candidates to undergo mandatory pre-departure orientation



600 porter posts open at Dirang

Nepal and Bhutan may participate in the recruitment process. Only male candidates between 18 and 39 years of age are eligible to apply. Candidates should be physically fit and free from any contagious disease

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 6: The Office of the District Magistrate, Sonitpur has informed that a communication has been received from the Baisakhi Military Station regarding recruitment for engagement of porters for raising of a Porter Company at Lapon Stadium, Dirang in Arunachal Pradesh.

According to the communication, recruitment will be conducted from May 10 to 13, 2026 at Lapon Stadium, Dirang in Arunachal Pradesh, for engagement of 600 porters for a period of 179 days. Eligible candidates from India, Nepal and Bhutan may participate in the recruitment process. Only male candidates between 18 and 39 years of age are eligible to apply. Candidates should be physically fit and free from any contagious disease.

Candidates appearing for the recruitment process will be required to produce documents including a domicile certificate, Aadhaar card, PAN card, medical fitness certificate, police verification (within six months), a photocopy of bank passbook, civil education certificate and a certificate from the village panchayat certifying bona fide residency, good moral character and that the individual has not undergone imprisonment in police custody. Applicants must also bring four passport-size photographs along with four passport-size photographs of father, mother or wife as next of kin.

For any assistance regarding the recruitment process, candidates may contact the JCO in-charge at 9877858301 or 7986023240 and the clerk in-charge at 9711682289.

Blossom Kochhar Aroma Magic relaunches essential oils in new avatar



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 6: Blossom Kochhar Aroma Magic, the premier aromatherapy company in India, announced the relaunch of its iconic range of essential oils, now presented in an all-new elegant avatar. Dr Blossom Kochhar, Founder and Chairperson of Blossom Kochhar Group of Companies, addressed a press conference in Guwahati and spoke about the essential oils, while also introducing the newly launched Peptide Potion and Vita Boost kits designed for advanced facials in salons.

"Essential oils are said to be the soul of plants—highly concentrated molecules extracted from various parts of plants like leaves, fruits, flowers and seeds. Our essential oils are more than just beauty or wellness products," said Dr Blossom Kochhar. "They have amazing abilities to calm, beautify, energize, balance and harmonise the human mind, body and soul."

She also announced the launch of new facial kits for salon professionals in Guwahati and highlighted the use of the Peptide Potion kit and Vita Boost facial kit. Explaining the kits, Dr Kochhar said, "The Peptide & Ceramide Potion Advanced Serum Mask Kit is my unique signature offering and a special creation for the salon and spa industries. Peptides help build proteins, improve skin elasticity and boost cell regeneration, enhancing the client's skin in just a few steps. Today, I am addressing salon professionals and introducing these kits so that they can give exceptional facials to their clients." The multi-peptide and ceramide complex makes skin more supple by minimising fine lines and wrinkles, boosts hydration and supports collagen production, making it an anti-ageing facial treatment.

While the look of essential oils has evolved, the soul of the product remains unchanged—100% pure, therapeutic-grade essential oils, crafted with care and nature's finest extractions. Fifteen oils are now available in new 10 ml packaging and include Lavender, Basil, Sandalwood, Rose, Neroli, Lemongrass, Tea Tree and Ylang Ylang, among others.

NDA dominates Assam's autonomous council constituencies

Autonomous councils remain loyal to Dispur power centre

GUWAHATI, May 6: The near-clean sweep of Assembly segments across Assam's three autonomous council areas by the ruling BJP-led NDA has reinforced the alignment of political leadership in these Sixth Schedule regions with the power centre in Dispur.

The BJP and its ally Bodoland People's Front (BPF) won 20 of the 21 constituencies spanning eight districts, with the opposition managing to secure just one. In the 2021 polls, the BJP and its then ally United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) had secured a majority in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

The lone opposition victory came in Parbatjhora constituency under BTC, an unreserved minority-dominated seat won by a Congress candidate.

The remaining 14 seats in BTC were shared between the BJP and the BPF. The total six constituencies across the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and NC Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) were secured by the BJP.

The political axis in the Sixth Schedule

areas has traditionally aligned with the ruling dispensation in Dispur, with leaders often switching sides to stay in sync with the government of the day.

Being on the same page as the state government apparently ensures smooth administration under the autonomous bodies, with Dispur controlling the Home department in those areas and holding influence in other crucial sectors too, including Finance.

"It has all along been observed that the political party that is in power in the state either holds power in the autonomous councils or has an ally running the administration there," said senior journalist Monalisa Sharma.

"It ensures better coordination between the two power centres and helps in the formulation and implementation of government schemes in a more coordinated manner," the Kokrajhar-based scribe added.

Prior to the 2023 delimitation, BTC had 12 Assembly segments. In 2021, the BJP had won two seats, UPPL six, and the



BPF four. The UPPL later increased its tally to seven after winning a bypoll.

Though the BPF had been an ally of the BJP during its first term in 2016, the national party had aligned with the UPPL ahead of the 2021 elections as it sought a second term.

The UPPL's victory in the 2020 BTC polls, ending the BPF's long-standing dominance since 2005, was seen as a key factor behind that alliance.

However, after the BPF regained con-

trol of the BTC in 2025, the BJP forged an alliance with it ahead of the current Assembly elections, with the two parties contesting under a seat-sharing arrangement.

The BPF had been a part of the Congress-led governments from 2006 to 2016.

With the seats in BTC increasing to 15 post-delimitation, the BPF contested in 11 and the BJP in four, with the alliance winning in all but one seat.

The BPF nominee, belonging to the mi-

nority community, lost the Parbatjhora constituency as the Congress managed to secure the lone seat after drawing a blank in the previous Assembly elections.

The UPPL, contesting alone across BTC seats, failed to win any, with party president Pramod Boro losing to BJP leader and Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary in Tamulpur.

Boro had been elected to the Rajya Sabha shortly before the polls and has since taken oath.

The six seats under KAAC and NCHAC saw no surprises, with the BJP winning all of them, repeating its 2021 performance.

The number of constituencies under these two councils had increased by one following delimitation.

Regional parties in KAAC and NCHAC, which once held sway in these hill districts, have struggled in recent elections and remained on the fringes despite contesting.

Both councils are currently run by BJP-led administrations. (PTI)

VINYL WRAPPING IN INTERIOR OF TOILETS

E-Tender Notice No.: M-TSK-2026-13; Dated: 04-05-2026. Tender No.: M-TSK-2026-13. Name of work: Vinyl wrapping in interior of toilets, gangway and doorways in 50 LHB Coaches primarily maintained at Coaching Depot Dibrugarh. Location of work: Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. Tender Value: ₹61,45,720/- Earnest Money: ₹1,22,900/-; Last date and time for submission of tender: 25-05-2026 at 13:00 hrs. Date and time of opening of tender: After 15:00 hrs. of 25-05-2026. Website particulars where complete details of the tender can be seen and downloaded: www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DME, Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

"Serving Customers with a Smile"

EPOXY FLOORING IN TOILETS OF 50 LHB COACHES

Tender Notice No.: M-TSK-2026-12; Dated: 04-05-2026; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: Tender No.: M-TSK-2026-12; Name of Work: Epoxy flooring in toilets of 50 LHB Coaches primarily maintained at Coaching Depot Dibrugarh, N.F. Railway. Tender Value: ₹20,66,002/-; Earnest Money: ₹41,300/-; Last date & time for submission of tender at 13:00 hrs. on 25-05-2026. Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DME, Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

"Serving Customers with a Smile"

THE ORIENTAL INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED

Regional Office, G.S. Road, Ulubari, Guwahati-781007

LEGAL NOTICE

IN THE GAUHATI HIGH COURT (The High Court of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram & Arunachal Pradesh) (Civil Appellate Jurisdiction) I.A. (C) No. 1869 of 2020

In MAC Appeal No. 260 of 2020

Oriental Insurance Co. Ltd.

..... Appellant

-Vs-

Mrs. Manju Nath & Others.

..... Respondents

To,

Respondent No. 4, Sri Akash Dhar, S/o: Late Gopesh Dhar, Village: Dumukhya, P.S.: Bokajan, District: Karbi Anglong, Assam.

Whereas the above named appellant has filed an I.A. (C) No. 1869 of 2020 for stay of operation under Order XLJ Rule 5 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 of the impugned Judgement and Award dated 31.07.2019 passed by the learned Member, Motor Accident Claims Tribunal, Nalbari in MAC Case No. 17 (Death) / 2018 and the said case has been fixed for appearance on 25.05.2025.

You are hereby informed to appear either personally or through authorized pleader in this Court on the said date i.e. 25.05.2026 at 10.30 AM positively and to show cause, if any.

TAKE NOTICE that if you fail to appear and show cause as directed, the matter shall be heard and decided ex-parte, in your absence on the aforesaid date or thereafter as the business of the Court may permit.

Given under the seal of this Court on this, the 28th day of April, 2026 at Guwahati.

By Order
Sd/-, Deputy Registrar
Gauhati High Court, Guwahati.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do. -Isaac Asimov

Will Mamata's defiance hold?

Mamata Banerjee's refusal to resign after a decisive electoral defeat is a political act dressed up as constitutional ambiguity. It may create noise, spectacle and temporary uncertainty, but it does not create a sustainable claim to office. A chief minister holds power only so long as she commands the confidence of the elected Assembly. Once the electorate has handed the mandate to another party, the moral, democratic and constitutional course is plain: the outgoing chief minister steps aside and enables a peaceful transfer of power. Her claim of "moral victory" is therefore not merely weak; it is irrelevant to the legal architecture of parliamentary government. Moral victories may have a place in speeches, party meetings and memoirs. They do not decide who governs a state. The Constitution recognises numbers in the Assembly, not emotional interpretations of defeat. A leader may allege irregularities, challenge results through legal channels, or mobilise public opinion, but none of these actions can replace the obligation to vacate office once the mandate has shifted decisively. That distinction is central. Mamata is entitled to dispute the election if she believes there were irregularities. She can file election petitions, present evidence, question administrative conduct and ask the courts to adjudicate. What she cannot do is convert an allegation into a continuing right to govern.

Electoral democracy would become unworkable if every defeated incumbent could refuse to leave office by claiming that the people had voted one way but history, morality or political instinct had voted another. The deeper problem is not that the Constitution lacks remedies. It is that India's constitutional practice has always depended on a minimum level of political restraint. The makers of the Constitution designed institutions, but they also assumed that defeated leaders would observe conventions that do not require coercion at every stage. A chief minister who loses power ordinarily resigns not because someone drags her out of office, but because democratic legitimacy has moved elsewhere. When that convention is broken, the system still has answers, but the dignity of the transition is damaged. The Governor's role then becomes unavoidable. If an outgoing chief minister refuses to resign despite the clear loss of majority, the Governor cannot allow the state to be trapped by personal defiance. The proper course is to invite the leader who can demonstrate majority support in the newly elected Assembly to form the government.

If the outgoing chief minister persists, dismissal becomes a constitutional necessity rather than a partisan choice. Such an outcome would be humiliating for any leader, but the responsibility would lie primarily with the one who forced the office into confrontation. Bengal's transfer of power is unlikely to be stopped by Mamata's resistance. The arithmetic of the Assembly will prevail, and the new government will take shape. The real question is what remains of her moral authority after the confrontation ends.

Leave sugar live longer

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



Excess sugar consumption is driving a silent health crisis. Cutting intake, choosing natural foods, and building balanced habits can improve longevity, boost immunity, and help prevent lifestyle diseases.

Sugar, often referred to as the sweet poison, has become an inseparable part of modern diets. From soft drinks and desserts to processed snacks, its omnipresence has had far-reaching consequences on public health. Many dietitians and medical experts have long emphasized the need to cut sugar consumption. Labeling sugar as one of the four white poisons; alongside refined flour, salt, and potatoes, they advise limiting sugar intake to just one teaspoon a day.

Excessive sugar consumption has been directly linked to chronic conditions like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. These aren't just individual issues but are part of a broader health crisis. A single bottle of aerated drinks like Coca-Cola, Pepsi or Sprite, for instance, contains as much as 20 teaspoons of sugar. Alarmingly, soft drink manufacturers are among the largest consumers of sugar in India, fueling a cycle of addiction and health deterioration.

The dangers of sugar extend beyond weight gain. It accelerates skin aging by breaking down collagen, weakens the immune system, and promotes inflammation. High sugar intake also contributes to insulin resistance, a precursor to Type 2 diabetes. Over time, these effects significantly reduce life expectancy.

A renowned cardiologist recently highlighted that the healthiest individuals share common traits: they stay active, maintain an ideal body weight, and have better social connections. "People who laugh, stay active, and have fulfilling relationships age the best," he stated. Reducing sugar, along with adopting these habits, can lead to a longer, healthier life.

The first step in cutting sugar is awareness. Sugar hides behind multiple names in packaged foods, such as sucrose, fructose, and high-fructose corn syrup, to name a few. Reading labels and choosing whole, unprocessed foods can significantly reduce intake. A simple adjustment, such as replacing sugary beverages with water or herbal teas, can have a profound impact.

The journey to reduce sugar doesn't have to be abrupt. Gradual changes are more sustainable. Start by drinking unsweetened tea or coffee and replacing sugary snacks with fruits or nuts. While jaggery or honey are perceived as healthier alternatives, they should also be used sparingly. Home-cooked meals offer better control over ingredients, helping to minimize hidden sugars.

In my own life, inspired by the above wise advice, I have decided to reduce sugar intake further. For years, I substituted sugar with jaggery, but now I plan to minimize even that. I've also made a switch from white rice to brown rice and reduced salt consumption to maintain better overall health.

Soft drink manufacturers, while generating immense revenue, contribute heavily to India's sugar consumption. The health repercussions of their products are immense, straining healthcare systems and reducing national productivity. Public awareness campaigns and stricter regulations on added sugars in packaged foods are necessary to curb this issue at a systemic level.

Eliminating sugar is not just about diet; it's about transforming the way we approach health. Research shows that those who eat balanced meals, stay physically active, and foster positive relationships, tend to live longer and lead more fulfilling lives. Sugar, with all its allure, is a small sacrifice compared to the immense benefits of a healthier lifestyle.

The journey to a sugar-free life may not be easy, but the rewards are worth it. A life without sugar promises better physical health, increased energy, and an enhanced sense of well-being. By reducing sugar, we not only add years to our lives but also add life to our years. As the doctors remind us, every small step counts. Start today, one teaspoon at a time. Replace sugar with healthier choices, and let your commitment to health pave the way for a brighter, longer future.

What does the election result indicate?

The results of the Assam Legislative Assembly election have marked the beginning of a significant chapter in the political history of the state. According to the official data of the Election Commission, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance has secured 102 seats out of a total of 126, registering a record-breaking victory and successfully retaining power for the third consecutive term. This outcome clearly reflects a distinct and profound shift in the mindset and political preferences of the voters of Assam. Prior to the elections, there were widespread assumptions in various quarters that an anti-incumbency wave might emerge against the ruling party, but the results have completely nullified such notions. While the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party alone secured 81 seats, achieving a clear majority, its allies Asom Gana Parishad and Bodoland People's Front strengthened the alliance further by winning ten seats each. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's victory from the Jalukbari constituency by a margin of nearly 90,000 votes, marking his sixth consecutive win, stands as a testament to his personal popularity and his unchallenged position in the state's politics. The results make it evident that the ruling party has succeeded in establishing a strong and resilient foundation in Assam's political landscape, one that cannot be easily shaken. Despite intense criticism and attacks from the opposition, the ruling party managed to retain the trust of the people, which has become a subject of deep study for political analysts. This election has demonstrated that reliance solely on emotions and traditional political equations is no longer sufficient to secure victory. The future of politics now depends on realistic promises of development and their effective implementation, a task the ruling party appears to have executed in

a highly strategic manner. In a state long burdened with political instability and multiple challenges, the massive support extended by the people for a third consecutive term to the same government is indeed a rare phenomenon in India's democratic history. The collective decision of voters across the state has steered Assam's political trajectory towards a clear and definite direction, where the position of the opposition continues to weaken progressively. A closer and more nuanced analysis of the factors behind the ruling alliance's remarkable success reveals that it is rooted in well-planned strategies, a strong organizational base, and the effective implementation of welfare schemes. Various government initiatives, especially direct financial assistance schemes, have significantly influenced the grassroots population. These schemes have not only provided economic relief to the poor and marginalized sections but have also fostered a sense of dependency and loyalty towards the ruling party. Programs aimed at women's empowerment have successfully consolidated women voters into a major vote bank. Additionally, religious and communal polarization has played a decisive role in this election. During the campaign, the ruling party strategically raised sensitive issues that evoked emotional responses and a sense of security among the majority of voters. The combination of nationalism and religious identity as a political strategy has been clearly reflected in the election outcome. The aggressive and continuous campaign led by the Chief Minister across the state rendered the opposition almost ineffective. His oratory skills, political acumen, and exceptional ability to connect with the masses contributed significantly to tilting the results in favor of the ruling party. Alongside this, the tireless efforts of party workers and their disciplined efficiency in election man-

agement deserve recognition. Functioning like a well-coordinated machinery from the grassroots to the state level, the party succeeded in asserting its dominance across polling booths. This election has also reaffirmed that political success is not achieved merely through campaign efforts during elections, but through continuous engagement with the public and consistent attempts to address their concerns. By offering both economic assurances and emotional security, the ruling party has constructed a fortified political stronghold that the opposition failed to penetrate due to lack of effective strategy.

On the other hand, the results have proved to be a severe setback and a moment of deep introspection for the principal opposition party, the Congress, and its alliance. With only 19 seats, the Congress has delivered one of its worst performances in the past decade. The reasons behind this massive defeat include the absence of strong and widely acceptable leadership, a weak organizational structure, and the complete lack of a compelling alternative agenda capable of winning public confidence. The 'Assam United Alliance' formed by the Congress along with other opposition parties before the election failed to inspire any hope among voters. The defeat of state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi in the crucial Jorhat constituency by over twenty-three thousand votes to the ruling party candidate Hiten Goswami dealt a significant psychological blow to the party. This outcome underscores that reliance on legacy and political lineage is no longer sufficient in today's competitive political environment. The opposition's inability to convert issues such as rising prices, unemployment, and allegations of corruption into a strong public movement further weakened their position. Their campaign lacked direction and remained disconnected from the real concerns of the people. Internal conflicts within the alliance, disputes over candidate selection, and seat-sharing disagreements also significantly damaged their electoral prospects. The resignation of state in-charge Bhawanjitendra Singh, taking moral responsibility for the defeat, highlights the deep sense of despair and uncertainty

within the party. The downfall of a party that once ruled the state for fifteen consecutive years illustrates that political decline becomes inevitable when connection with the masses is lost. Unless the opposition rebuilds its organizational base from the grassroots level and produces new, dynamic, and credible leadership, its survival in the state's political arena will remain an extremely difficult, if not impossible, challenge.

Another important and noteworthy aspect of this election is the gradual decline and diminishing relevance of regional parties in Assam's politics. Once born out of the Assam Movement and having played a decisive role in shaping the state's political landscape, regional parties now find themselves struggling to sustain their existence under the shadow of national political forces. Although alliance partners Asom Gana Parishad and Bodoland People's Front have managed to remain in power by securing ten seats each, their independent political base and influence have significantly weakened compared to the past. Meanwhile, newly formed regional parties in the opposition camp have performed poorly. The defeat of Assam Jatiya Parishad president Lurinjyoti Gogoi and the party's overall dismal performance indicate that emotional appeals based on regional nationalism alone are no longer sufficient to engage the present generation of voters. The victory of Rajiv Dal leader Akhil Gogoi in the Sivasagar constituency remains the only consolation for the opposition, but overall, the performance of regional parties reflects a deep sense of disappointment. This clearly suggests that the people of Assam are now prioritizing tangible development, livelihood security, and stability over emotional politics. With the widespread influence of social media and globalization, the scope of people's thinking has expanded, gradually eroding the appeal of narrow, emotion-driven regional politics. The younger generation now aspires for employment opportunities, quality education, and a modern lifestyle. If regional parties wish to regain relevance, they must move beyond traditional emotional issues and formulate new political agendas centered on economic growth, job

creation, industrial development, and modern infrastructure. Otherwise, the overwhelming organizational strength and resources of national parties may gradually push regional politics in Assam towards irrelevance, which could have serious implications for the state's democratic environment.

Overall analysis indicates that the results of the 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly election will have far-reaching and long-term implications for the state's political, economic, and social landscape. With a massive mandate for the third consecutive term, public expectations from the ruling alliance have risen significantly. The government now carries the responsibility of fulfilling its electoral promises while steering the state towards comprehensive development. Critical issues such as job creation, permanent solutions to flood problems, modernization of agriculture, and industrial growth demand greater efficiency and transparency from the administration. At the same time, the absence of a strong and effective opposition has emerged as a matter of serious concern in a parliamentary democracy. The overwhelming majority of the ruling party in the Assam Legislative Assembly has weakened the voice of the opposition, raising apprehensions about the lack of adequate checks and accountability over the government's actions. A healthy democracy requires a robust opposition capable of critically evaluating policies and decisions. Therefore, in the coming days, the intellectual community, civil society, student organizations, and the media must play the role of vigilant watchdogs. Only through constructive criticism and rational analysis of the government's actions can democratic balance be maintained. The new political trajectory set by this election will determine the effectiveness of Assam's socio-economic development in the years ahead. It is certain that this major political shift has compelled society to rethink its direction, and the state's political and social dynamics in the coming decade will be shaped by this mandate. Respecting the trust and aspirations of the people who delivered this decisive verdict now stands as the greatest challenge and responsibility before the newly formed government.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

implementation of welfare schemes. Various government initiatives, especially direct financial assistance schemes, have significantly influenced the grassroots population. These schemes have not only provided economic relief to the poor and marginalized sections but have also fostered a sense of dependency and loyalty towards the ruling party. Programs aimed at women's empowerment have successfully consolidated women voters into a major vote bank. Additionally, religious and communal polarization has played a decisive role in this election. During the campaign, the ruling party strategically raised sensitive issues that evoked emotional responses and a sense of security among the majority of voters. The combination of nationalism and religious identity as a political strategy has been clearly reflected in the election outcome. The aggressive and continuous campaign led by the Chief Minister across the state rendered the opposition almost ineffective. His oratory skills, political acumen, and exceptional ability to connect with the masses contributed significantly to tilting the results in favor of the ruling party. Alongside this, the tireless efforts of party workers and their disciplined efficiency in election man-

agement deserve recognition. Functioning like a well-coordinated machinery from the grassroots to the state level, the party succeeded in asserting its dominance across polling booths. This election has also reaffirmed that political success is not achieved merely through campaign efforts during elections, but through continuous engagement with the public and consistent attempts to address their concerns. By offering both economic assurances and emotional security, the ruling party has constructed a fortified political stronghold that the opposition failed to penetrate due to lack of effective strategy. On the other hand, the results have proved to be a severe setback and a moment of deep introspection for the principal opposition party, the Congress, and its alliance. With only 19 seats, the Congress has delivered one of its worst performances in the past decade. The reasons behind this massive defeat include the absence of strong and widely acceptable leadership, a weak organizational structure, and the complete lack of a compelling alternative agenda capable of winning public confidence. The 'Assam United Alliance' formed by the Congress along with other opposition parties before the election failed to inspire any hope among voters. The defeat of state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi in the crucial Jorhat constituency by over twenty-three thousand votes to the ruling party candidate Hiten Goswami dealt a significant psychological blow to the party. This outcome underscores that reliance on legacy and political lineage is no longer sufficient in today's competitive political environment. The opposition's inability to convert issues such as rising prices, unemployment, and allegations of corruption into a strong public movement further weakened their position. Their campaign lacked direction and remained disconnected from the real concerns of the people. Internal conflicts within the alliance, disputes over candidate selection, and seat-sharing disagreements also significantly damaged their electoral prospects. The resignation of state in-charge Bhawanjitendra Singh, taking moral responsibility for the defeat, highlights the deep sense of despair and uncertainty

Mandate and Imbalance: Rethinking democracy in Assam after a One-Sided verdict

The recent Assam Legislative Assembly elections have delivered a decisive and unprecedented verdict, firmly reinstating the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for a third consecutive term. With an emphatic 102 seats in the 126-member Assembly, the alliance has secured a position of overwhelming dominance. The BJP alone has crossed the majority threshold with 82 seats, significantly improving its previous tally, while its allies—the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Bodoland People's Front (BPF)—have added to the coalition's commanding strength.

On the other side, the electoral outcome has exposed a visibly weakened opposition. The Congress has been reduced to 19 seats, while regional forces such as Rajiv Dal have managed only limited gains. Parties like the Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP) and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) have failed to make any meaningful impact, and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), once a significant political force, now finds itself restricted to just two seats. The contrast between the ruling alliance's dominance and the opposition's diminished presence is striking and carries deeper implications beyond electoral arithmetic. While victories and defeats are intrinsic to democratic politics, such a concentration of power inevitably raises concerns about the balance and health of democratic functioning. Democracy is not merely about forming governments through elections; it is sustained through continuous accountability, dialogue, and institutional checks. In this framework, the role of the opposition is indispensable. Opposition parties are not adversaries of governance but essential pillars that question, critique, and ensure that those in power remain answerable to the people.

In legislative functioning, the presence of a strong opposition is critical for scrutinising bills, exposing policy gaps, and representing alternative viewpoints. Without this balance, decision-making risks becoming unilateral, reducing the scope for debate and weakening the spirit of democratic engagement. The current political landscape in Assam reflects not only the organisational strength and appeal of the ruling alliance but also the fragmentation and strategic shortcomings of opposition forces. Their inability to present a united and coherent alternative has significantly contributed to the scale of the NDA's victory.

This was particularly evident in regions like Upper Assam, where the ruling alliance dominated almost entirely, barring isolated exceptions such as Sibsagar. Even where leaders like Akhil Gogoi secured victories, these remained individual successes rather than part of a larger political resurgence. Such fragmentation has consequences that extend into the functioning of the Assembly, where numerical strength determines the ability to influence debates, participate effectively in committees, and

hold the government accountable. A weakened opposition can lead to multiple democratic concerns. With fewer representatives, the ability to rigorously examine or challenge legislation is reduced, potentially affecting the quality of laws passed. The absence of sustained scrutiny may also weaken accountability, allowing governments to function with less pressure to justify their decisions. In a state like Assam, marked by rich ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity, opposition parties often serve as important voices for varied communities. Their diminished presence risks leaving certain perspectives underrepresented. Moreover, a one-sided political environment can discourage public engagement and debate, leading to a gradual erosion of participatory democracy.

At the same time, the current situation offers an opportunity for introspection among opposition parties. Electoral setbacks, though discouraging, can serve as moments for renewal. To regain relevance, opposition forces must overcome fragmentation and work towards greater unity based on shared principles rather than short-term calculations. Rebuilding trust at the grassroots level is equally essential, as is the need to articulate a clear and credible vision for the state's future. Focusing on pressing issues such as employment, agriculture, education, healthcare, and regional disparities can help reconnect with the electorate and restore confidence.

In such a scenario, the role of civil society, independent media, and public institutions becomes even more significant. When formal opposition structures are weak, these actors must act as vigilant watchdogs, ensuring transparency and accountability in governance. An informed and engaged citizenry can also play a crucial role in sustaining democratic discourse through active participation and debate. The responsibility, however, does not rest solely with the opposition. A strong electoral mandate places an equally important obligation on the ruling alliance. Political dominance should not translate into majoritarianism or the marginalisation of dissent. Instead, it should encourage responsible, inclusive, and transparent governance that respects differing opinions and strengthens democratic institutions. The true test of leadership lies not just in winning elections but in governing with restraint, humility, and accountability.

Assam today stands at a critical political moment. The scale of the NDA's victory reflects a clear popular mandate, yet it also underscores the urgent need to restore balance within the democratic framework. A vibrant opposition is not a hindrance to governance; it is a safeguard that ensures power remains accountable and responsive. In the final analysis, the strength of a democracy is measured not by the dominance of those in power but by the vitality of those who question it. The future of Assam will depend on how effectively this balance is rebuilt and sustained in the years to come.



AUTHOR

By: Mowsam Hazarika

BJP's historic sweep in West Bengal

By: Dipak Kurmi

The political landscape of West Bengal has undergone a tectonic shift as the Bharatiya Janata Party appears set to secure a monumental victory, with early trends on Monday, May 4, 2026, placing their seat tally at approximately 193. This performance has not only stunned political analysts but has also exceeded the party's own internal projections, which had cautiously estimated a win of around 185 seats. The scale of this sweep marks the end of a fifteen year era under the Trinamool Congress and signals a profound change in the state's socio-political alignment. Party insiders, buoyed by the overwhelming numbers emerging as of 2 pm, have begun to dissect the mechanics of this victory, attributing the success to a sophisticated blend of grassroots mobilization, strategic policy promises, and a relentless narrative centered on security and systemic reform. By examining the five core pillars of their campaign, one can see how the BJP successfully dismantled the TMC's long standing hegemony through a combination of gender-focused outreach, institutional appeals, and a rigorous focus on electoral transparency.

A primary driver of this electoral upheaval was the significant shift in the women's vote, a demographic that was once considered a bedrock of Mamata Banerjee's support base. The BJP's narrative received a substantial fillip following the NDA government's successful push for women's reservation in the legislature just last month, which allowed the party to frame the opposition as inherently anti-women. Insiders suggest that this strategic messaging found deep resonance across the rural and urban belts of Bengal, leading to an estimated swing of at least five percent in the BJP's favor among female voters. This is particularly significant given that the gender ratio in the state is nearly balanced, with 3.16 crore women voters compared to 3.28 crore male voters out of a total electorate of 6.44 crore. This represents a major departure from the 2021 dynamics, where the TMC commanded a dominant 48.02 percent of the overall vote share against the BJP's 38.1 percent. By eroding the TMC's lead among women, the BJP effectively neutralized one of the most potent weapons in the incumbent's arsenal.

The second major factor in the BJP's success was its targeted outreach to the massive cohort of government employees and those aspiring for public sector roles. Drawing parallels to the political climate in Delhi, the party capitalized on a deep seated sense of anti-incumbency and a perceived denial of rights regarding the Seventh Pay Commission. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's high profile promise during the Poribortan Yatra to implement the Seventh Pay Commission within forty five days of assuming power acted as a powerful incentive for an estimated twenty to fifty lakh voters. This group included not only current state and central employees but also a vast number of young job seekers disillusioned by past recruitment scandals. Data reveals that West Bengal held the highest proportion of service electors among all states going to the polls in this cycle, with 1.08 lakh service voters compared to significantly lower figures in Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Kerala. This demographic, often influential in shaping local opinions, proved to be a critical bridge for the BJP to infiltrate

traditional institutional strongholds.

Centralized development projects and the personal branding of Prime Minister Narendra Modi formed the third pillar of this victory, successfully framing the contest as a choice between the Prime Minister's vision and Mamata Banerjee's localized governance. The BJP effectively highlighted the alleged non-implementation of flagship central welfare schemes and a lack of industrial infrastructure as a failure of the TMC administration. This development narrative was not just limited to rural Bengal but was also pitched to urban middle class voters, mirroring the strategy used in the 2025 Delhi elections. The Prime Minister's presence at over a dozen public events, coupled with specific assurances of progress, appealed strongly to first time voters and the younger demographic. With approximately 5.23 lakh first time electors and a staggering 1.31 crore voters aged between 20 and 29, the BJP's dedicated social media and ground level outreach targeted these cohorts with surgical precision, offering a future defined by infrastructure rather than political patronage.

The issues of safety, security, and the physical deployment of forces constituted the fourth essential element of the BJP's winning formula. In a state historically plagued by political violence during election cycles, the party utilized the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's mobilization capabilities to instill confidence in voters regardless of their personal ideology. This grassroots effort encouraged citizens to exercise their franchise without fear of reprisal, a sentiment bolstered by the unprecedented presence of Central Armed Police Forces. The Election Commission of India's decision to maintain 500 companies of CAPFs for post poll duties and 200 companies for EVM security ensured a level of stability that had been missing in previous years. Furthermore, the party leveraged high profile tragedies, such as the RG Kar rape and murder case, to underscore a questionable law and order situation under the TMC. This dual approach of physical security and a narrative of moral failure allowed the BJP to present itself as the only viable custodian of public safety.

Finally, the BJP credits the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise and the aggressive fanning of an "outsider" narrative regarding the electoral rolls as a decisive factor in the final tally. By advocating for the purification of voter lists, the party claimed to be conducting a crusade against logical discrepancies and the inclusion of non-bona fide voters. This exercise led to the removal of over 27 lakh names from the state's electoral rolls, ensuring that the final outcome was determined by what the party termed as bona fide citizens. Interestingly, despite these removals, over 30 lakh more votes were polled compared to the 2021 elections, suggesting a surge in genuine voter participation and engagement. By flipping the TMC's "outsider" narrative on its head and applying it to the electoral rolls themselves, the BJP managed to turn a defensive point into a potent offensive strategy. This multifaceted approach, combining data-driven electoral management with emotional and economic appeals, has ultimately paved the way for the saffron party to establish its first government in the heart of Bengal. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@rediffmail.com)

The human and environmental cost of the Nilgiris Blazes

By: Satyabrata Borah

The scent of parched earth and eucalyptus oil often defines the spring breeze in the Nilgiris, but lately, that fragrance has been replaced by the sharp, suffocating sting of woodsmoke. This change signals a seasonal shift that has moved from a predictable rhythm of nature to a frantic battle for survival. The Blue Mountains, which usually stand as a testament to the lush resilience of the Western Ghats, have recently found themselves draped in a veil of orange and gray. While we often think of wildfires as sudden disasters, the reality unfolding across the hills of Tamil Nadu is far more complex. It is a story of heat, wind, and the delicate, sometimes fractured relationship between the land and the people who call it home.

When the Indian Air Force is called in to douse flames with massive buckets of water suspended from helicopters, it is clear that the situation has moved past the point of routine management. The hillsides around Parsons Valley and Pykara have become theaters of intense heat, where the fires did not just burn but seemed to breathe and leap. In the Singara and Masinagudi ranges, the landscape became a patchwork of blackened earth and flickering horizons. One particularly fierce blaze in Wenlock Downs demonstrated the sheer speed of these events, as it tore through the grasslands with a velocity that felt almost predatory.

These are not just statistics or dots on a satellite map; they are moments where the very skin of the earth is being scorched.

To understand why this happened, one has to look at the unique personality of the Nilgiris during the window between February and May. This is fire season, a time when the moisture leaves the soil and the vegetation becomes brittle. This year, the environment was particularly unforgiving. High temperatures turned the forests into a tinderbox, but it was the wind that acted as the true catalyst. Strong, erratic gusts picked up glowing embers and carried them across firelines, which are the gaps cleared by foresters specifically to stop the spread of flames.

When a fire can jump over its own borders, the traditional methods of containment begin to fail. It creates a sense of helplessness for the crews on the ground who find that their hard-earned boundaries have been rendered useless by a single spark traveling through the air.

In places like Pykara, the fires were not just fast but also incredibly hot. This intensity comes from the heavy accumulation of biomass on the forest



floor. Over the years, invasive plants and thick undergrowth have crowded out the native species, creating a dense layer of fuel that burns with a stubborn ferocity.

These invasive species act like a secondary lung for the fire, feeding it and allowing it to burn for longer periods. Dousing these flames is not a simple matter of spraying water; it requires digging into the earth and breaking apart the heat that lingers deep within the matted roots and fallen leaves. The steep, jagged terrain of the Nilgiris adds another layer of difficulty. When a fire breaks out on a cliffside or in a valley with no road access, the movement of men and equipment becomes a slow, grueling process of climbing and hauling, often while the fire moves at ten times their speed.

While nature provides the fuel and the conditions, the initial spark often comes from a human hand, though rarely with malice. The mountains are a living landscape where people survive

through traditional practices. Some gather wood to craft brooms, a quiet labor that provides a meager but essential income. Others are herders who have practiced the art of controlled burning for generations. They set fire to patches of dry, yellowed grass to clear the way for fresh, green shoots that serve as fodder for their livestock. This is a cycle as old as the hills themselves, but in a year of extreme heat and wind, a small patch of burning grass can quickly transform into an unmanageable wall of fire. Then there are the accidental sparks, such as a discarded cigarette or a match from someone passing through. These small acts of negligence carry heavy consequences when the air is this dry.

There are also instances where the fires cross borders that exist only on human maps. A blaze recently drifted into the Coimbatore division after a controlled burn in neighboring Kerala reportedly went out of bounds. This highlights a gap in communication between different administrative re-

gions. When the wind picks up, it does not respect state lines or forest divisions. Coordination becomes the difference between a managed burn and a regional crisis. Even more troubling are the reports of fires being set intentionally as a form of protest. Tensions between local communities and forest officials over issues like tiger conservation and human-wildlife conflict sometimes simmer beneath the surface. When a community feels unheard or marginalized, the forest can unfortunately become a canvas for their frustration.

It is important to recognize that the people living on the edges of these forests are usually the first to notice the smoke and the first to rush toward the flames. They are the eyes and ears of the mountains. Their deep connection to the land means they understand the behavior of the fire better than many outsiders. However, the management of these hills is moving toward a reality where short-term planning is no longer enough. The authorities did start their preparations early

this year. They set up control rooms, cleared weeds, and ensured that wildlife had access to water holes far from human settlements to prevent further conflict. They held awareness campaigns to educate the public on the risks of fire. These are all necessary steps, but they address the symptoms rather than the root of the problem.

Climate variability is changing the rules of the game. We are seeing a shift where the baseline risk of fire is rising every year. A summer that is just a few degrees hotter or a few weeks longer can undo months of careful preparation. This is not just about the changing climate in a global sense, but about the local shifts in weather patterns that make the Nilgiris more vulnerable. When you combine this environmental pressure with the economic needs of the people, the solution becomes much harder to find. You cannot simply tell a herder to stop burning grass or a wood-gatherer to stay out of the forest if they have no other way to feed their families. These practices are tied to their survival.

Effective long-term management requires a shift in how we view the forest and its people. It means finding alternative livelihoods that do not rely on fire-dependent practices. It means involving local communities in a way that makes them partners in conservation rather than subjects of regulation. If the people feel a sense of ownership and respect from the administration, the likelihood of intentional fires drops significantly. It also means a more aggressive approach to removing invasive species that turn the forest into a high-intensity fuel source. Restoring the native ecology of the Nilgiris would not only protect its biodiversity but also make the landscape more naturally resistant to the kind of runaway fires we have seen recently.

The image of embers dancing in the wind over the Nilgiris is a warning. It tells us that the mountains are changing and that our old ways of responding to them are being stretched to their limits. The bravery of the forest guards and the pilots who fly into the smoke is unquestionable, but we should not have to rely on heroism alone. A sustainable future for these hills lies in a deep, integrated approach that looks years into the future. It requires us to listen to the people of the mountains, to understand the rhythm of the seasons, and to adapt before the next spark catches the wind. The Blue Mountains deserve a management strategy that is as enduring as the peaks themselves, ensuring that the only things spreading through the air in the coming years are the seeds of the forest and the clear, cool breeze of the highlands.

Mumbai's Deonar Landfill: From toxic legacy to climate asset

By: Divya Shah, Dhaval Desai

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) recently floated an INR 2,368 crore tender inviting bids to close India's oldest dumping ground, Deonar, over the next three years. Operating continuously since 1927, the landfill spans 311 acres in the city's eastern suburbs. The site receives an estimated 4,000 tonnes of waste per day, accumulated over nearly a century into a mound that now rises 40 metres, equivalent to a 13-storey building. The waste is typically untreated, making its environmental hazard more significant than landfill volume alone would suggest.

As of 2026, the Maharashtra Coastal Zone Management Authority (MCZMA) has cleared the site for rehabilitation on 124 of the 311 acres, with the project awaiting approval from the Bombay High Court. However, the details of the clearing method and the standards to be upheld to ensure safe rehabilitation remain limited. Experts have received the three-year cleanup timeline with scepticism, noting that making the land fully habitable will require partial scientific closure followed by several additional years of bioremediation — in which living organisms such as bacteria or fungi are used to extract metals from waste — along with bioremediation, which employs similar microorganism-based processes to treat waste that can then be partially converted into energy and construction materials. For this purpose, the BMC is considering a waste-to-energy plant alongside the rehabilitation project. While both have their purposes, neither end use resolves the public health questions that any intervention at this site must address.

Yet alternatives exist that provide essential infrastructure to minimise public health risks, mitigate post-closure toxic emissions rather than simply capping them, and sustain the economic productivity of the land in question. **The Public Health Baseline and the Malad Experience**

The public health argument attached to both current proposals has a concrete local precedent. According to BMC data, M East Ward, where Deonar is located, reports low life expectancy and a high prevalence of tuberculosis. Therefore, any intervention that adds combustion or accelerated decomposition to this environment warrants proportionate caution.

MindSpace demonstrates that subsurface gas migration can persist long after surface-level remediation is declared complete. Without gas capture, Deonar risks repeating the same pattern after closure — subsurface decomposition continuing to generate methane and other gases long after the site is officially shut.

The trajectory of the Malad dumping ground, officially closed by the BMC in 2002, illustrates why. The Malad dumping ground was reclaimed to become what is today known as MindSpace, one of Mumbai's largest IT parks. The release of pollutants, including methane, hydrogen sulphide, and mercaptans from the former dumpsite has caused documented damage to property and electronic equipment in the area. More importantly, leaching pollutants continue to pose significant health risks, causing chronic problems in and around MindSpace. Experts fear that this leaching will continue for over half a decade. MindSpace demonstrates that subsurface gas mi-

gration can persist long after surface-level remediation is declared complete. Without gas capture, Deonar risks repeating the same pattern after closure — subsurface decomposition continuing to generate methane and other gases long after the site is officially shut.

Across much of the world, landfills continue releasing methane for decades after closure, and closure and capping are frequently mistaken for mitigation. The Malad MindSpace experience shows that this is not a theoretical risk in Mumbai's context. With two crore tonnes of legacy waste and a compressed work calendar, the timeline for safe rehabilitation at Deonar extends well beyond what current approvals cover.

The waste-to-energy proposal also carries parallel concerns. Such plants emit toxic by-products, a matter contested by public health experts, particularly when such plants are sited adjacent to densely populated areas rather than designated industrial zones. The question, therefore, is whether there is an approach that addresses public health risks rather than adding to their complexity.

The Ecological Logic of Mangroves at Deonar

The Deonar site sits adjacent to Thane Creek, the existing mangrove cover, and the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary. At least 60 percent of the remaining land not allocated for rehabilitation could be directed toward mangrove afforestation. Mangroves reduce toxic air pollution, benefiting both the rehabilitation zone and adjacent slum settlements. Since the land is state-owned, afforestation can be carried out via state-designated agencies, keeping carbon finance revenues within urban public streams.

The proposal for the closure of Deonar dumping ground pairs afforestation with landfill gas capture. Landfill gas (LFG) is composed of roughly 50 percent methane and 50 percent CO₂. Methane is at least 28 times more potent than CO₂ at trapping heat over a 100-year period. Gas capture must therefore be a core component of both the rehabilitation and afforestation plan.

Local and International Precedents

Since its closing in 2012, the Jardim Gramacho restoration in Rio de Janeiro has been transforming what was once Latin America's largest landfill into an active climate-mitigation site. Following closure and capping, the installation of a landfill gas capture system and large-scale mangrove restoration dramatically reduced methane emissions while restoring coastal ecosystems along Guanabara Bay. The transformation followed a clear sequence: scientific closure first, gas capture second, and mangrove planting across stabilised coastal sections third.

The project avoided an estimated 850,000 tonnes of CO₂e annually, demonstrating that legacy waste sites can be stabilised in ways that simultaneously address methane emissions and restore ecological function. Biocovers placed over capped waste further reduced fugitive emissions, while mangrove root systems stabilised sediment and contributed to blue carbon accumulation. The marshy, tidal-adjacent portions of Deonar that are unsuitable for build development are precisely where this sequencing applies.

A closer precedent exists within Mumbai

itself. A legacy landfill at Gorai, in the city's western suburbs, was closed and retrofitted with a gas capture system comprising 40 engineering-designed extraction wells, converting captured methane into electricity fed to the national power grid. To finance the project, the implementing agency secured carbon co-financing covering 56 percent of the total capital cost, in exchange for a portion of the project's expected Certified Emissions Reductions generated under the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Registered as a CDM project in 2010, it became India's first landfill closure of its kind. The BMC's INR 26 crore in earnings from carbon credit financing established a replicable proof of concept: that the scientific closure of a legacy dumpsite can generate meaningful urban revenue alongside its environmental outcomes.

A credit accruing framework at Deonar would generate verified emission reductions eligible for sale to institutional buyers in India's domestic Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) and to international voluntary market participants.

Similarly, inception work on a coastal mangrove carbon finance project in Gujarat, developed for tidal wetland restoration, provides directly applicable evidence. The carbon sequestration potential across approximately 2,997 hectares of mangrove plantation in coastal Gujarat is estimated at around 1.1 million tonnes of CO₂e equivalent over a 30-year crediting period. Mangrove plantations qualify as an afforestation practice under the Kyoto Protocol, and carbon finance generated through voluntary markets can contribute to state-level carbon neutrality goals.

These precedents lay the groundwork for Deonar. In the decade since the success of these projects, India's carbon market framework has evolved to the point where Deonar's credits could be hosted within its domestic voluntary market.

The Voluntary Carbon Market Opportunity

Deonar presents a viable opportunity to facilitate participation in India's evolving carbon market. A credit accruing framework at Deonar would generate verified emission reductions eligible for sale to institutional buyers in India's domestic Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) and to international voluntary market participants.

Gas capture infrastructure at Deonar could generate renewable energy or flared-methane credits, thereby substituting for the waste-to-energy plan while reducing toxic emissions. Additionally, mangrove restoration above stabilised coastal sections could generate blue carbon credits under an internationally recognised standard. With state ownership of the land, these revenue streams would accrue within urban public finance. Mumbai's natural carbon sinks are already widely recognised as insufficient to offset the city's greenhouse gas emissions.

In light of the recent Supreme Court order permitting the falling of 45,000 mangroves for Mumbai's ambitious coastal road extension, directing Deonar's coastal and ecological characteristics toward a restoration-led approach is a policy avenue that runs in parallel with remediation already underway — and one that turns a long-standing environmental and social liability into a measurable urban asset. (Courtesy: ORF)

Methane leaks wasting gas equal to twice losses from Strait of Hormuz crisis, says IEA

By: Puja Das

Plugging methane leaks could return around 200 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas to global markets each year over the long term, while significantly reducing emissions, according to the International Energy Agency.

This is roughly twice the volume lost due to disruptions linked to the near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the agency said. The near closure of the critical passage for fuel and oil has cut nearly 20 per cent of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply.

Despite growing commitments, methane emissions from the energy sector remained close to record highs in 2025. Commitments now cover more than half of global oil and gas production, but concrete action has been limited, the IEA said.

Global coal mine methane emissions have stayed largely unchanged since 2021 despite rising coal output, reaching about 35 million tonnes in 2023, found a recent report by energy think tank Ember. Of these, 89 per cent went unreported in official inventories.

Methane cuts could boost gas supply

Tackling methane could improve energy security as well as reduce emissions, particularly during ongoing supply disruptions, the IEA said.

In the near term, applying available methane abatement measures in key exporting and importing countries could bring nearly 15 bcm of gas to market. Over the longer term, reducing methane emissions from oil and gas operations could deliver close to 100 bcm annually, while ending non-emergency gas flaring could unlock a further 100 bcm.

Together, these measures could offset supply losses linked to recent disruptions.

In its latest Global Methane Tracker, the IEA estimates that methane emissions from the energy sector could be reduced by nearly 70 per cent using existing technologies. Around 30 per cent of reductions could be achieved at no net cost at current energy prices, as captured gas can be sold.

Overall, available technologies could cut emissions by about 100 million tonnes, or nearly 70 per cent of current energy-sector methane output.

"This is not only a climate issue," said IEA chief energy economist Tim Gould. "There are also major energy security benefits, especially as the world looks for additional supply during the current crisis."

Oil and gas account for more than 60 per cent of total abatement potential, with coal and bioenergy contributing around 20 per cent each. Most low-cost mitigation options lie in upstream oil and gas operations, particularly at high-leakage sites with access to gas markets. A recent satellite analysis found that a small number of oil and gas sites account for some of the most powerful climate-warming emissions globally, with Turkmenistan emerging as the leading emitter.

The IEA added that if all countries matched Norway's emissions intensity, methane emissions from oil and gas operations would fall by more than 90 per cent globally.

Emissions from bioenergy and abandoned assets



Methane emissions also come from sources beyond fossil fuel production. In 2025, inefficient burning of solid biomass for cooking and heating released around 18 million tonnes of methane, mainly in developing economies. Modern bioenergy systems contributed a further 2 million tonnes, the IEA said. Expanding access to clean cooking, including LPG, electricity and improved stoves, could reduce emissions while improving health and livelihoods, the report underlined.

Abandoned infrastructure is another major source. Around 8 million tonnes of methane were released in 2025 from abandoned oil and gas wells and coal mines, including 4.5 million tonnes from coal mines and 3.5 million tonnes from oil and gas wells, IEA stated. Globally, there are about 8 million abandoned onshore oil and gas wells, many of which can leak methane for decades if not properly sealed.

Marginal wells are also a significant source. In the United States, they account for about 80 per cent of wells but produce less than 10 per cent of output, while contributing up to one-third of upstream methane emissions.

Coal emissions under scrutiny

Coal remains a major source of methane but has received less policy attention, analysts said. Sabina Assan, methane analyst at Ember, said coal is a "low-hanging fruit" for methane reduction, but warned that regulations will only be effective with strong enforcement, independent monitoring and penalties for non-compliance.

She added that emissions from Australia's coal sector may be underreported and called for stronger action. In India, Ember's climate and energy analyst Rajasekhar Modadugu said methane from coal mining has not received sufficient global attention, urging producers to use existing technologies to capture and use emissions.

In Indonesia, Dody Setiawan, senior climate and energy analyst at Ember, said the IEA ranks the country as the third-largest emitter of coal mine methane after China and Russia. He noted that emissions may be significantly underreported, with methane intensity estimated to be 12.5 times higher than current government factors, and called for improved measurement

and region-specific emissions factors.

Policy ambition lags targets

Despite growing commitments, implementation remains weak. Existing policies would cut oil and gas methane emissions by about 20 per cent by 2030 and 26 per cent by 2035—well below the Global Methane Pledge (GMP) target of at least a 30 per cent reduction by 2030 from 2020 levels, the IEA said.

Coal-sector ambition is weaker, with emissions projected to fall just 12 per cent by 2030 and 22 per cent by 2035 under current policies. The GMP, launched at 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, now includes more than 150 countries, covering around 80 per cent of global fossil fuel production and over 50 per cent of anthropogenic methane emissions. However, most signatories have yet to implement concrete policies to meet the target.

Satellites expose scale of leaks

Advances in satellite monitoring are improving methane detection. In 2025, satellites identified more than 5 million tonnes of methane emissions from large oil and gas events worldwide.

New high-resolution systems can detect emission sources as small as 1 tonne per hour, helping identify "super-emitters", a small number of sources responsible for a disproportionate share of emissions.

However, response remains limited. Only about 12 per cent of alerts issued through the Methane Alert and Response System, developed by the United Nations Environment Programme, received responses in 2025.

Countries that designate official focal points respond more effectively, with response rates rising to nearly one-third of detected sources, compared to just 2 per cent where no focal point exists. The IEA cautioned that methane estimates remain uncertain due to data gaps and differences between measurement-based and inventory-based approaches, particularly in regions where satellite coverage is limited.

Even so, the agency stressed that tackling methane is one of the fastest and most cost-effective ways to slow near-term warming, while simultaneously improving energy security by bringing otherwise wasted gas back into the market. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Proposed UN resolution threatens Iran with sanctions if it doesn't allow freedom of navigation

UNITED NATIONS, May 6: A proposed UN resolution threatens Iran with sanctions or other measures if it doesn't halt attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz, stop imposing "illegal tolls," and disclose the placement of all mines to allow freedom of navigation.

The draft Security Council resolution, co-sponsored by the United States and Gulf nations and obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press, also demands that Iran "immediately participate in and enable" United Nations efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor in the strait to enable the delivery of vital aid, fertiliser and other goods.

It is the latest diplomatic effort by the US and its Gulf allies after a watered-down resolution aimed at opening the strait was vetoed by China and Russia hours before Washington and Tehran announced a temporary ceasefire in early April.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Tuesday accused Iran of continuing "to hold the world's economy hostage" by trying to



close the strait, threatening to attack ships, laying sea mines, and attempting to charge tolls "for the world's most important waterway."

"The United States looks forward to this resolution being voted on in the coming days and to receiving support from Security Council members and a broad base of co-sponsors," he said in a statement.

US Ambassador Mike Waltz told reporters Monday he believes the new, narrow proposal will gain the necessary support it needs to pass the 15-member council, without triggering opposition or a veto from Iran's allies.

The US and Gulf nations proposed the new draft as the Trump administration tries to restore freedom of navigation in the strait,

which carried about 20 per cent of the world's crude oil before the US and Israel began the war on February 28. A shaky ceasefire remains in effect.

The proposed resolution, which was drafted under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter and thus could be enforced militarily, threatens "effective measures that are commensurate with the gravity of the situation, including sanctions" if Iran doesn't comply. The earlier resolution removed a Chapter 7 reference but was still vetoed.

The new draft resolution reaffirms the right of all countries to defend their vessels from attacks and provocations, and orders all other countries not to assist Iran in closing the strait or levying tolls.

The draft also "welcomes ongoing efforts to deconflict and coordinate safe and secure transit passage through the Strait of Hormuz, expresses support for ongoing efforts to seek a durable peace in the region, and encourages member states in the region to strengthen dialogue and consultations in this regard." (AP)

Russia snubs Ukraine's unilateral ceasefire, firing dozens of drones



KYIV, May 6: Russia fired dozens of drones at Ukraine in nighttime attacks, Ukrainian officials said Wednesday, disregarding a unilateral ceasefire announced by Kyiv that began at midnight.

The Russian Defense Ministry claimed that Ukraine hadn't abided by its own ceasefire, saying that air defenses shot down 53 Ukrainian drones over Russian regions, the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and the Black Sea between Tuesday evening and dawn Wednesday.

There had been no official sign from Moscow that it would heed Kyiv's ceasefire, and there was little

hope for a pause in hostilities as the war stretches into its fifth year following Russia's all-out invasion of its neighbor. US-led diplomatic efforts to stop the war over the past year have come to nothing.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had announced the move after Russia said it would hold its own unilateral ceasefire over two days later this week while it marks the 81st anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. The Ukrainian leader said any breach of the ceasefire would trigger a military response.

Russian forces launched 108 drones and three missiles overnight,

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybha said, with attacks continuing throughout the night and into Wednesday morning.

"Moscow once again ignored a realistic and fair call to end hostilities, supported by other states and international organisations," Sybha said in a post on X.

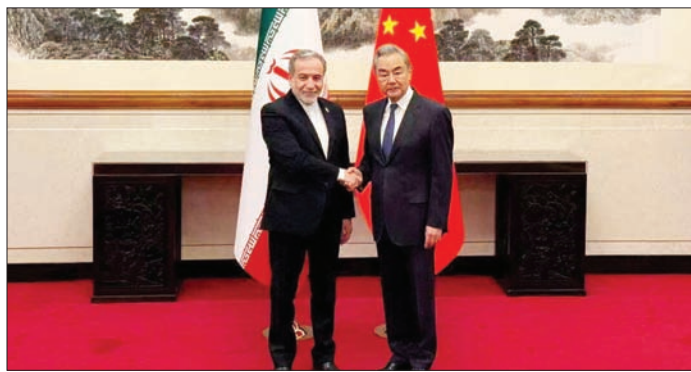
On Tuesday, Russian drone and missile strikes on Ukraine killed at least 22 people and wounded more than 80 others, authorities said.

Moscow's proposal to stop fighting on Friday and Saturday follows a pattern of Russia declaring short unilateral ceasefires during the war timed to coincide with various holidays, most recently Orthodox Easter.

Those suspensions of combat don't produce any tangible results amid deep mistrust between the warring sides. Sybha said Russia's actions exposed its calls for a separate ceasefire around May 9 as insincere. "Putin only cares about military parades, not human lives," he said.

The diplomat called for increased international pressure on Moscow, including new sanctions, diplomatic isolation, accountability measures for war crimes and expanded military and civilian support for Ukraine. (AP)

China asks Iran to reopen Strait of Hormuz 'as soon as possible'



BEIJING, May 6: China on Wednesday called on Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz "as soon as possible" as it appreciated Tehran's commitment not to develop nuclear weapons, a prime demand of US President Donald Trump to end the war against the Islamic Republic.

"On the issue of the Strait, the international community shares a common concern over restoring normal and secure navigation through the Strait, and China hopes relevant parties will respond as soon as possible to the strong call from the international community," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi during their talks here.

Significantly, Wang appreciated Iran's commitment not to develop nuclear weapons. Trump has been demanding Iran hand over stockpiles of enriched uranium and a 20-year commitment from Tehran not to develop nuclear weapons.

China appreciates Iran's not-to-develop-nuclear-weapons commitment, and affirms Iran's legitimate right to peaceful use of nuclear energy, Wang told Araghchi.

The Iranian foreign minister, who is on his first visit to Beijing after the US-Iran war started in late February, briefed Wang on the on-going negotiations with Washington to end the war.

"China believes that achieving a comprehensive ceasefire is an urgent priority, while reopening hostilities would be even more undesirable," Wang said.

According to the Chinese foreign ministry, Araghchi said, "At present, priority can be given to promptly resolving the issue of reopening the Strait of Hormuz."

"Iran will firmly safeguard its national sovereignty and national dignity, while continuing to build consensus through peaceful negotiations and seek a comprehensive and lasting solution," he said.

"Iran looks forward to China

continuing to play a positive role in promoting peace and ending the conflict and supports the establishment of a new post-war regional framework that can balance development and security."

Wang said China believed that countries in the Gulf and the Middle East "should take their future into their own hands", a suggestion seen as an attempt by Beijing to reduce dependence on the US for their security.

"(China) encourages Iran and more Gulf states to engage in dialogue and achieve good neighbourly relations and supports the establishment of a regional peace and security framework led by regional countries, with broad participation, shared interests and common development," he added.

Separately, the Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers discussed regional developments over the phone on Wednesday, stressing the need to continue diplomatic efforts and regional cooperation to avoid renewed tensions, according to the Iranian foreign ministry.

Araghchi's day-long visit comes a week ahead of US President Donald Trump's planned trip to Beijing from May 14 to 15 for talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping to discuss, among other things, a comprehensive trade deal.

Official media reports in Beijing said Wang and Araghchi, who is on his first visit to Beijing after the US-Iran war started, met to discuss the prevailing situation arising from the US blockade of Iranian ports to force Tehran to lift its blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

China is a close partner of Iran, and the biggest buyer of Tehran's crude oil.

Araghchi's visit comes as the immediate backdrop of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's announcement on Tuesday that major US military operations against Iran are over. (PTI)

India-Suriname ties rooted in 'family' bond: Jaishankar

PARAMARIBO, May 6: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said India sees Suriname "not as a distant partner" but as "family", as the two countries mark 50 years of diplomatic relations. Writing in the Times of Suriname newspaper ahead of his visit to the country on Wednesday, Jaishankar said ties had expanded into a "robust, multifaceted engagement" covering infrastructure, trade, training and cultural links.

He said India and Suriname had strengthened cooperation through high-level exchanges, including a visit by former Surinamese President Chandrikapersad Santokhi to India in 2023 for a gathering of the Indian diaspora, followed by a visit to Suriname by Indian President Droupadi Murmu later that year.

Jaishankar said several projects in Suriname

were completed through Indian Lines of Credit, including a 161 KV electrical transmission line from the industrial port city of Paramaribo to capital city Paramaribo, water pumping stations, construction machinery, power infrastructure upgrades and the supply and maintenance of three Chetak helicopters.

India has also supplied 425 metric tonnes of food items worth USD 10 million to Suriname last year to help with its food security, he wrote. The minister said India-backed grant projects in Suriname included flood warning systems, a stadium and community initiatives linked to education, sport and technical training.

Jaishankar also said he would attend the commissioning of a passion fruit processing and packaging unit funded by an Indian grant. "This will empower local farmers and build Suriname's

self-reliance through value-added industry," he wrote.

At the international level, Jaishankar said India and Suriname shared similar positions on issues including reform of the United Nations Security Council. He also highlighted Suriname's participation in India-backed initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and the International Big Cat Alliance.

Despite the geographical distance between the two countries, Jaishankar said they remained connected through a shared history dating back to the arrival of Indians aboard the ship Lalla Rookh in 1873. He said the community has become an integral part of Suriname's society while preserving cultural traditions including Sarnami Hindustani language, Baithak music and festivals such as Diwali and Phagwa. (PTI)

US to close consulate in Peshawar

WASHINGTON, May 6: The US has announced the phased closure of its consulate in Peshawar, citing a commitment to the safety of its diplomatic personnel.

"The US Department of State is announcing the phased closure of the US Consulate General in Peshawar. Responsibility for diplomatic engagement with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will transfer to the US Embassy in Islamabad," a US State Department spokesperson said in a statement here on Tuesday.

"This decision reflects our commitment to the safety of our diplomatic personnel and efficient resource management," the statement said, adding that the US administration's policy priorities in Pakistan remain steadfast despite the change in physical presence in Peshawar.

The State Department spokesperson said the US will continue to engage meaningfully with the people and officials of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to foster economic ties, promote regional security, and advance the interests of the American people.

"The Department, through the US Mission to Pakistan, remains dedicated to advancing the US-Pakistan relationship through our remaining diplomatic posts in Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore," the spokesperson said. (PTI)

Pakistan PM thanks Trump for announcing pause in Strait of Hormuz operation

ISLAMABAD, May 6: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday thanked US President Donald Trump for announcing a pause in the operation in the Strait of Hormuz.

His statement came hours after President Trump suspended "Project Freedom" to escort ships through the Strait of Hormuz, claiming progress in negotiations with Iran toward an agreement to end the war.

"I am grateful to President Donald Trump for his courageous leadership and timely announcement regarding the pause in Project Freedom in the Strait of Hormuz," PM Shehbaz, who is making efforts for permanent peace between the countries, said in a social media post on X.

President Trump's gracious response to the request made by Pakistan and other brotherly countries, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will go a long way towards advancing regional peace, stability and reconciliation during this sensitive period, he said.

Shehbaz also said that Pakistan "remains firmly committed to supporting all efforts that promote restraint and a peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy".

He hoped that "the current momentum will lead to a lasting agreement that secures durable peace and stability for the region and beyond".

Separately, Prime Minister Shehbaz expressed hope that talks between the US and Iran would lead to lasting peace. He made the remarks while addressing the 6th International Paigham-e-Islam Conference in Islamabad. (PTI)

Three patients evacuated from cruise ship with hantavirus outbreak, new case confirmed in Switzerland

GENEVA, May 6: The cruise ship at the centre of a deadly hantavirus outbreak and which is stuck off the coast of Cape Verde with nearly 150 people on board was waiting Wednesday to head to Spain's Canary Islands.

Meanwhile, health authorities in South Africa and Switzerland identified a strain of the virus that can be transmitted between humans in rare cases. Three passengers have died and several others have been sickened by hantavirus on board the Dutch-flagged MV Hondius cruise ship. Hantavirus usually spreads by inhaling contaminated rodent droppings.

The ship left Argentina on April 1 on an Atlantic cruise and was scheduled to include stops in Antarctica, the Falkland Islands and other locations. However, the itinerary appears to have changed because of the situation on board.

The head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said three patients with suspected hantavirus cases have been evacuated from the ship and are on their way to the Netherlands.

He said the UN health agency is working with the operators of the cruise ship to closely monitor the health of passengers and crew.

"At this stage, the overall public health risk remains low," he wrote on his X account.

Among the patients is the ship's doctor, Spain's health ministry has said. The ministry said on Wednesday that the doctor, who was initially scheduled to be flown to the Canary Islands, is now being evacuated directly home to the Netherlands "after his health had improved."

Authorities in Switzerland also announced Wednesday that a man who returned from a trip to South America and traveled on the cruise ship has tested positive for the virus and is receiving treatment.

Spain's health ministry said in a statement late Tuesday that it would receive the MV Hondius vessel in the Canary Islands after a request from the World Health Organization and the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control. Despite some opposition from leaders in the region, the government insisted that it would ultimately make the call.

For now the luxury cruise ship remains marooned off the coast of Cape Verde, an island nation off West Africa in the Atlantic. The World Health Organization said passengers are isolating in their cabins.

South African tests first confirm the Andes virus

South African health authorities said they identified the Andes strain of hantavirus in two passengers who were on the ship, and Swiss authorities said they identified the same virus in their affected patient.

The World Health Organization says the Andes virus, a specific species of hantavirus, is found in South America, primarily in Argentina and Chile.

The Andes virus can be spread between people, though this is rare and the spread of the disease is typically contained because it would spread only through close contact, such as by sharing a bed or sharing food, experts say.

The South African Department of Health said its results came from tests performed on the passengers after they were removed from the ship and flown to South Africa.

One of the passengers, a British man, is in intensive care in a South African hospital. Tests were performed on the other passenger posthumously after she died in South Africa.

A Swiss man is infected

A statement from the Federal Office of Public Health said that the man "returned to Switzerland after traveling on the cruise ship on which there were a number of hantavirus cases." It said his case also involved the Andes virus.

The Swiss health office initially said the patient hospitalized in Zurich had "returned from a trip to South America" with his wife at the end of April, without specifying. Simon Ming, a spokesperson for the office, clarified in an email that the patient got off during its stop in St. Helena, in the South Atlantic Ocean.

It was not immediately clear when that was or how he was returned to Switzerland.

The patient's wife hasn't shown any symptoms but is self-isolating as a precaution, the statement said.

The public health office said that "there is currently no risk to the Swiss public."

The WHO said in a social media post that the man responded to "an email from the ship's operator informing the passengers of the health event" and went to the hospital.

The cruise ship is waiting to sail to Spain

The cruise ship will be welcomed to Spain's Canary Islands, according to Spanish authorities, as the vessel waited off the coast of West Africa for a third day Wednesday for sick passengers to be evacuated. (AP)

Pope Leo XIV comforts 13 priests from southern Lebanon with a surprise video call from Rome

BEIRUT, May 6: Pope Leo XIV surprised 13 priests from southern Lebanon, near the border with Israel, by joining a video call from Rome on Wednesday, telling them they were in his prayers and that he hoped peace would soon prevail along the tense frontier.

The Lebanese Catholic and Maronite priests were asked to attend an online morning meeting with the Vatican's ambassador to Lebanon, Archbishop Paolo Borgia. Once online, Borgia told them Leo was also present and would like to speak with them.

Leo makes an online appearance
The 13 holy men, from southern villages and towns, including Rmeich, Ain Ebel, Debel, and Marjayoun, were pleasantly surprised.

"(The pope) gave us peace and his blessings," said Father Najib al-Amil, the parish priest of Rmeich, who attended the online meeting.

"His words were reassuring, particularly as we live in constant worry over here," Al-Amil told The Associated Press. Christian villages along the border with

Israel have been mostly spared intense Israeli bombardment that has caused wide destruction in other parts of predominantly Shiite southern Lebanon.

However, the situation remains tense in southern Lebanon despite a ceasefire that went into effect on April 17, as Israel and the militant Hezbollah group have continued their attacks despite the truce.

Al-Amil said the pope spoke in French with the priests during the video call that lasted about a minute and urged them to stay in their hometowns.

"Pray with me so that peace prevails. God willing, peace is near," al-Amil quoted the pope as saying.

The Vatican spokesman didn't immediately respond when asked for details of the call.

The Vatican did say that Leo had a meeting on the agenda Wednesday with the Holy See's ambassador to Lebanon, though no details are ever released of such audiences.

When Pope Francis used to call the parish priest in Gaza, as he was known to do every evening during Israel's attacks on



the Palestinian enclave, the Vatican always declined to provide details, describing the initiative as a personal pastoral act by the pope.

Israeli actions in southern Lebanon worry Christian faithful

A few days before Wednesday's call, the Israeli military demolished a Catholic convent in the border village of Yaroun, according to officials.

The military says it does not intentionally target religious institutions. However,

in a statement Saturday, it stated it damaged a house without religious signs while destroying Hezbollah infrastructure in Yaroun, without realizing it was a church building.

The Israeli military said the building in Yaroun was part of a compound that Hezbollah militants had used in the past to fire rockets toward Israel, and it released photographs of an intact building at the site.

Two local officials from Yaroun and a nun who spent time at the convent in photos posted in the Israel statement were of another building next to the convent that housed a clinic and archbishopric, and that the Israeli military had bulldozed the convent.

Lebanon's state news agency also reported that the convent was demolished.

The convent demolition also came days after images of an Israeli soldier wielding an ax against a fallen statue of Jesus on the cross in the village of Debel sparked widespread condemnation.

Christians make up around a third of

Lebanon's 5 million people, giving the small nation on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean the largest percentage of Christians in the Middle East.

In November, Leo flew to Lebanon from Turkey on his first trip abroad since being elected in May last year. The pope has recently revealed that he carries a photo of a young Lebanese Muslim boy who had held up a sign welcoming Leo to Lebanon. The boy was killed during Israel's recent war with Hezbollah.

Maronite Catholics are the largest Christian group in Lebanon and the Lebanese president is always a Maronite, according to the country's power-sharing agreement.

The latest war between Israel and Hezbollah began on March 2, when Hezbollah fired rockets into northern Israel, two days after the United States and Israel launched a war on its main backer, Iran.

Israel has since carried out hundreds of airstrikes and launched a ground invasion of southern Lebanon, capturing dozens of towns and villages along the border. (AP)

Fire at a shopping centre in Iran kills 8 people and injures 36



TEHRAN, May 6: A fire in a shopping centre near Iran's capital killed eight people and injured 36, state TV said Wednesday.

The fire started Tuesday in the Arghavan shopping centre in Andisheh town in Tehran province. It was not clear what caused the blaze, and state television IRIB said authorities were investigating.

Television footage showed fire-fighters battling the flames as large plumes of black smoke billowed from the multistory building.

There was no indication the blaze was linked to the war, where a shaky ceasefire with the United States has been holding for around three weeks. (AP)

Governor praises dedication and restraint at Unit Citation ceremony

Security forces stood firm as pillars of strength while operating in Manipur: Bhalla

IMPHAL, May 6: Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Wednesday said the security forces stood firm as pillars of strength while operating under demanding conditions and maintaining law and order in the state.

Speaking at the investiture ceremony for the Governor's Unit Citation 2026, Bhalla paid tributes to the dedication, courage and exemplary service of the armed forces for working tirelessly to uphold peace and stability.

He presented the Governor's Citations to outstanding units of the Army, Assam Rifles, CRPF, BSF, BRTF and the Manipur district police in recognition of their service.

Referring to the challenges faced by the state in recent years, the governor said, "The security forces stood firm as pillars of strength, operating under demanding conditions while maintaining law and order and restoring a sense of security among the people."

Bhalla also acknowledged the support and sacrifices of the fami-



lies of personnel, saying their strength and encouragement remain integral to service.

He noted that the Governor's Unit Citation recognises collective excellence, teamwork, discipline and an unwavering commitment to

duty.

Bhalla also emphasised that true strength lies in the judicious and restrained use of force, noting that the conduct of the forces has strengthened public confidence and aided the return of normalcy.

He also highlighted the need for continued synergy between the security forces and civil administration, while congratulating the awardees for setting benchmarks of excellence.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh also commended the contribution of both the central and state forces in providing humanitarian services and saving the lives of people from different communities.

Acknowledging the crucial role played by the security forces in maintaining law and order, the CM stressed the need for public support and cooperation in the government's efforts to strengthen the bonding among different communities.

Recipients of the Governor's Unit Citation 2026 included 19 Garhwal Rifles, 17 Assam Rifles, 38 Assam Rifles, 40 Assam Rifles, 2 Mahar Regiment, 25 BRTF, Kakching District Police, Senapati District Police, Churachandpur District Police, 10 BSF and 143 CRPF. (PTI)

Mizoram minister discusses development of sports in state with Union Sports secretary

AIZAWL, May 6: Mizoram Sports minister Lalinghlova Hmar met Union Sports Secretary Hari Ranjan Rao in New Delhi and discussed the development of sports in the state, an official statement said on Wednesday.

The discussion also centred on reviving Mizoram's legacy in hockey and expanding the footprint of training facilities across the state, it said.

During the meeting on Tuesday, Hmar expressed Mizoram's keen interest in establishing a men's hockey academy to nurture the talents of Mizo youths, the statement said.

He said that while Mizos are naturally talented in hockey, the game has seen a decline in recent years.

"While Mizos are naturally talented in hockey, the game has seen a decline in recent years. Hockey is one of the most viable routes to securing international medals for India," Hmar was quoted as saying in the statement.

While highlighting the success of the women's hockey academy in Thenzawl in Serchhip district, the minister expressed the state's keen interest in establishing a similar model for men.

He also proposed setting up ad-



ditional SAI training centres in Mizoram under the "Empowering Mizoram Sports" programme, covering four disciplines- hockey, badminton, archery and wrestling. Rao, who also serves as Director General of SAI, assured Hmar that all possible efforts would be made to promote hockey in Mizoram and optimise existing facilities to enhance training standards.

He reaffirmed the Centre's commitment to promoting hockey as a priority sport discipline. Praising Mizoram's clear vision for sports development, Rao said the state has the potential to emerge as a key contributor to India's sporting success if it main-

tains its current trajectory.

The Union Sports Secretary commended Mizoram's clear vision for sports development and said that the state could occupy an important position in India's sporting progress if the vision is pursued consistently.

He further expressed appreciation for Mizoram's recent progress in badminton and noted that the success achieved by Mizo athletes in football could be replicated in other sports as well.

Rao added that various sports training initiatives in Mizoram are well-aligned to become Khelo India-accredited training centres. (PTI)

New board of AMC led by ZPM to be sworn today

AIZAWL, May 6: The new board of Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) led by Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) will be sworn in on May 7, officials said on Wednesday.

The swearing-in ceremony of the new board will take place at the AMC's Board of Corporators' meeting hall and the oath of office will be administered to newly elected corporators by Aizawl Deputy Commissioner and District Municipal Officer Lalhratpuia, who has overseen the arrangements for the ceremony, they said.

Last week, the ZPM named H Lalremtuanga as the Mayor, while R Lalawmpui will be the deputy mayor. The party had also appointed four executive corporators, comprising a woman and three men.

The AMC was established in 2010 under the Mizoram Municipalities Act, 2007. There are 19 wards in the municipal body, of which 6 wards are reserved for women.

In the recent polls held on April 21, the ZPM won a landslide victory, bagging 17 seats, while the Mizo National Front (MNF) and Congress won one seat each. (PTI)

Nagaland team visits Dawki land port to explore trade avenues

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 6: An official delegation from Nagaland's industries & commerce department and members of the Business Association of Nagas undertook a visit to the Dawki land port in Meghalaya to explore avenues for enhancing trade linkages and understanding the operational mechanisms of the port.

The delegation, led by the industries and commerce department director, P Tokugha Sema, carried out on-site assessments of infrastructure, logistics and trade facilitation systems on May 4, with a view to identifying best practices that could be adapted for Nagaland, an official statement said on Wednesday.

During the visit, the team held an interactive meeting with the officials of the land port, including the regional administrator, port administrator and other stakeholders, to gain insights on the existing trade processes, regulatory frameworks and opportunities for expanding export and import activities.



Particular emphasis was placed on assessing the feasibility of establishing a similar framework in Nagaland to promote market access for local entrepreneurs, farmers and businesses.

To further strengthen their understanding of integrated trade and logistics systems, the delegation also visited the inland container depot at Amingaon, Guwahati, on May 5.

The visit enabled the team to gain insights into containerised cargo handling, customs clearance procedures and logistics management systems. It also provided a broader perspective on inland trade

infrastructure and its role in facilitating efficient movement of goods, complementing the observations made at the Dawki Land Port.

The initiative is part of the department's continued efforts to strengthen economic connectivity, promote regional trade integration and facilitate the development of robust trade-enabling infrastructure in Nagaland, thereby promoting export in the State and contributing to sustainable economic growth and increased participation in cross-border commerce.

Strict reporting norms for foreigners enforced in Kohima

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 6: The Kohima district administration on Wednesday ordered strict compliance with reporting norms for foreigners under the provisions of the Immigration & Foreigners Act, 2025 and the Immigration & Foreigners Rules, 2025.

According to the order, under Sections 8(1) and 10 of the Act, all keepers of accommodations, including hotels, guest houses, homestays and private rentals, as well as medical institutions such as hospitals and nursing homes under Kohima district are legally obligated to report the arrival and presence of any foreigner or overseas citizen of India cardholder to the registration officer - the foreigners regional registration officer, Kolkata.

As per Rule 17(1), all accommodation providers will maintain proper records of foreigners, including relevant details, which shall be preserved and produced upon demand by the registration officer, district magistrate or any police officer not below the rank of head constable. In terms of Rule 17(5) and Rule 18(5), the keeper of the accommodation or medical institution will transmit duly filled Form-III electronically within 24 hours of the foreigner's arrival through the designated online portal <https://indianfro.gov.in> or through the mobile application "Indian Visa Su-Swagatam".

This order applies to all boarding houses, clubs, dak-bungalows, hostels, paying guest accommodations, religious institutions, charitable trusts and any rented or furnished premises of a social or public nature.

Further, under Rule 16, all universities and educational institutions admitting foreign students will furnish information electronically in Form-III regarding students residing in hostels.

The order said failure to comply with these provisions will constitute a serious breach of national security protocols. Any violation or failure to submit Form-III within the stipulated time will attract penal action under the extant laws and regulations of the Immigration & Foreigners Act, 2025, it added.

Four Myanmar nationals held for 'involvement' in drug trafficking in Manipur



IMPHAL, May 6: Four Myanmar nationals were arrested for allegedly being involved in the trafficking of drugs in Manipur's Churachandpur district, police said on Wednesday.

Acting on a tip-off, security forces intercepted a motorcycle and apprehended two persons from Bualkot village under the Behiang Police Station limits after 22 soap cases, suspected to contain heroin, were seized from their possession on Tuesday, a police statement said.

In another operation, two more persons were arrested from Behiang village with 44 soap cases of heroin seized from them, it said.

The value and quantity of the narcotic substances could not be ascertained as the operations were conducted in the remote areas, a police officer said.

The arrested persons have been identified as Thangsawmung (56), Kamkhenmung (56), Jhonmung (31) and Haukhul (55). All of them hail from Chikha village in Myanmar, the police statement said.

FIRs have been filed at the Behiang Police Station under the provisions of the Foreigners Act and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act for further investigation, it said.

Former chief minister N Biren Singh, who has been raising issues related to the influx of drugs and illegal immigrants from Myanmar, lauded the Behiang police and the Assam Rifles for the arrest and seizure of drugs.

In a post on X, he said, "I appreciate the coordinated action of the joint team of Behiang Police Station & 37 Assam Rifles for arresting four Myanmar nationals with 66 soap cases of suspected heroin from the Behiang in Churachandpur district."

These arrests once again highlight how Manipur is "being infiltrated by illegal immigrants actively involved in drug trafficking", Singh added. (PTI)

GIS-based solution to address soil erosion in NE

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 6: A Nagaland University study has taken a scientific approach to mitigate the impacts of soil erosion in the hilly region of the Northeast, using geospatial technology.

The researchers emphasise that such an approach not only helps control erosion but also supports long-term environmental sustainability, improves agricultural productivity and enhances water availability.

The study focuses on the Siji watershed, a part of the Gai river basin in Assam, which represents one of the most erosion-prone regions in the Northeast. Using the revised universal soil loss equation (RUSLE) integrated with GIS-based modelling, the research assesses soil erosion and sediment transport by analysing key factors such as rainfall intensity, soil characteristics, slope, land use patterns and conservation practices.

The findings show that areas with dense forest cover and gentle slopes experience minimal erosion, while regions with steep slopes, croplands, barren land and human disturbances such as road construction and mining are at significantly higher risk.

In some cases, erosion rates were found to be extremely high, indicating serious threats to land stability and local ecosystems.

The research paper was co-authored by Prof MS Rawat, department of geography, School of Sciences, Nagaland University, along with his research scholar Tulumoni Gogoi and Dr Pradeep Kumar Rawat, consultant professor, Asian International University, Manipur.

Elaborating on how this study proposes addressing these challenges, Prof Rawat said, "We recommend an integrated watershed management approach. This includes developing sustainable land use plans and implementing mechanical and biological measures such as contouring, terracing and vegetation cover to reduce soil loss and improve water management."

Arunachal govt announces hike in DA, DR by 2 per cent

ITANAGAR, May 6: The Arunachal Pradesh government on Wednesday announced a hike in dearness allowance (DA) for serving employees and dearness relief (DR) for pensioners by 2 per cent, raising the rate to 60 per cent of basic pay/pension.

The enhancement of DA and DR will be effective January 1, 2026, a statement from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said.

The enhanced DA will apply to All India Service Officers serving under the Arunachal Pradesh government, central government employees on deputation to the state government and all regular state government employees.

This revision follows the Centre's decision regarding the enhancement of DA and DR for central government employees and pensioners.

The enhanced DR will apply to

all pensioners and family pensioners.

The statement said the benefit will cover 69,248 regular employees and 40,477 pensioners across the state.

The annual financial implication on account of this enhancement is estimated at ₹ 100.54 crore.

Arrears for the period from January to April will be paid in cash. The total financial implication on arrears is estimated at ₹ 33.51 crore.

The enhanced DA and DR from May 2026 onwards will be paid along with the monthly salary and pension, the statement said.

Congratulating the government employees, Chief Minister Pema Khandu expressed optimism that they would reciprocate and give their best to the welfare of people, reaching the last man in the queue. (PTI)

Sangma says expansion will boost tourism and connectivity

Centre awards contract for Shillong airport runway project: Meghalaya CM

UMIAM, May 6: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday announced that the Centre has awarded a contract for the runway expansion at Shillong airport, describing the project as a major boost for tourism and connectivity in the state.

Addressing the Empowerment of Tourism Champions of Meghalaya event at Orchid Lake in Umiyam, Sangma said the project is expected to be completed within around 15 months and would enable larger aircraft to operate.

"This will be a game-changer for tourism in Meghalaya," the chief minister said.

He said improved connectivity was essential for strengthening the state's position as a leading tourist destination and attracting more visitors from across the country and abroad.

Organised by the tourism department, the programme brought together tourism stakeholders, entrepreneurs, artisans, students, community leaders and beneficiaries from different parts of the state.

Sangma said tourism can succeed only

when every stakeholder works together as part of a larger ecosystem.

"Tourism cannot succeed through the efforts of the government alone, nor through the efforts of individual hotel owners, taxi operators, restaurant owners or other stakeholders working in isolation. Tourism thrives only when every stakeholder plays their part," he said.

Describing the programme as an important milestone in Meghalaya's tourism journey, the chief minister congratulated the tourism department, entrepreneurs and tourism stakeholders for their role in placing the state firmly on the national tourism map and increasingly on the global tourism landscape.

Emphasising the government's long-term vision, Sangma said tourism was not merely about organising events or constructing hotels, but about creating a complete ecosystem that inspires travellers to choose Meghalaya.

"When a family sits together and decides where they want to travel, Meghalaya must be visible. Meghalaya must be attractive. Meghalaya must be a destina-



tion that naturally comes to mind," he said.

The chief minister said tourists also consider infrastructure, connectivity, safety, comfort and overall experience before selecting destinations.

"Our goal is simple: every tourist who visits Meghalaya should leave with mem-

ories of a lifetime," he said.

Highlighting the state's tourism roadmap, Sangma said several major projects are currently underway, including the Shillong Ropeway, Mawdok Skywalk, Rain Museum in Mawsynram, Living Root Bridge Museum, and tourism centres in Sohra, Mandalgre and Siju.

Tourism Minister Timothy D Shira said tourism has emerged as one of the strongest pillars of Meghalaya's economy, with provisional figures indicating nearly 18 lakh tourist arrivals in 2025.

"When tourism was identified as a priority sector, the vision was to make it a strong driver of economic growth and a meaningful source of livelihood for the people," he said.

Shira said over 150 tourism projects are currently being implemented across the state with investments worth thousands of crores, alongside growing participation from the private sector.

He said Meghalaya was now working towards developing Umiyam as a global tourism destination and had established a dedicated Destination Management Organisation for professional destination planning and sustainable tourism management.

"We are not only creating destinations, we are building systems that will support tourism growth for generations to come," he said.

During the programme, the chief minister announced new beneficiaries under

the Chief Minister's Meghalaya Homestay Mission and recognised successful beneficiaries under the Chief Minister's Homestay Scheme-PMEGP.

Launched in September 2025, the mission aims to create 3,000 new homestays by 2028 and generate over 15,000 employment opportunities across the state.

Officials said 80 homestay applications have so far been approved, with 55 beneficiaries from Khasi, Jaintia and Ribhoi regions receiving financial assistance amounting to ₹ 3.85 crore.

Sanction letters were also distributed under the Community-Led Infrastructure Scheme to support villages, cooperatives and tourism societies in developing tourism infrastructure.

The programme also featured presentations on Meghalaya's participation at the Surajkund International Crafts Mela and exposure visits of tourism stakeholders from Sohra to Ekta Nagar.

A bravery award was presented by the chief minister to Teiborlang Pakma for rescuing a drowning person at Ward's Lake. (PTI)

Oppn parties back Mamata; her decision not to quit a protest against Centre & EC, says Raut

MUMBAI, May 6: Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Wednesday backed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's decision not to quit after her defeat in the assembly polls, calling it a part of her protest against the Centre and the Election Commission of India.

The Opposition NCP (SP) also came out in support of Trinamool Congress (TMC) head Banerjee, alleging that democratic processes were subverted in West Bengal, and central agencies and administrative machinery were used to influence the electoral outcome.

Speaking to reporters, Raut asserted that it is necessary to unite against the "dictatorship of the Centre and partisan behaviour of the Election Commission". The poll body has become a "slave" of the Centre, the Rajya Sabha member charged. The Opposition has to decide whether it has to contest the polls or not, he said.

"Mamata Banerjee not resigning is part of her agitation against the government (Centre), the Election Commission (EC) and a series of acts against democracy," Raut said. It has to be seen what direction the agitation takes, he added.

Alleging that the West Bengal assembly poll verdict was "not a



people's mandate but a conspiracy", Banerjee on Tuesday refused to resign as chief minister.

The BJP on Monday sealed a landslide victory with 207 seats in the 294-member assembly, ending the TMC's uninterrupted 15-year rule. Banerjee dismissed the outcome as "engineered" and asserted that her party was fighting the Election Commission, not the BJP. The TMC could only manage 80 seats.

In a post on Facebook, Raut said Banerjee's decision not to quit is fully justified. He also sought to draw a parallel with the 2022 Maharashtra political crisis.

The then Chief Justice of India had observed during hearings on petitions seeking the disqualification of rebel MLAs of the undivided Shiv Sena that Uddhav Thackeray, who headed the party at the time, could have been reinstated as chief minister had he not resigned, Raut pointed out.

The parliamentarian said Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray called up Banerjee after the recently concluded polls and extended support. Almost all the INDIA bloc leaders have called Banerjee and extended their support to her.

"We have to come together if we

have to unite against the dictatorship of the Centre and the partisan behaviour of the EC or the way the poll body has become slaves of the government," Raut said.

He claimed that even many in the government do not agree with the "degradation of democracy".

NCP (SP) spokesperson Mahesh Tapase claimed that democratic processes were undermined in West Bengal, and central agencies and administrative machinery were used to influence the poll outcome. Speaking to reporters, he stressed the need for a detailed analysis.

Institutions such as the Election Commission and agencies like the CBI, Income Tax Department, Enforcement Directorate and CRPF were used in a manner that put pressure on the electoral process, the leader from Sharad Pawar's party alleged.

Drawing a parallel with Maharashtra, he said similar circumstances had prevailed there earlier and were now being witnessed in West Bengal.

Tapase claimed voters were prevented from exercising their franchise freely due to the presence and actions of central forces and agencies, raising concerns over the fairness of the election. (PTI)

Mann should give proof or resign: Punjab BJP on CM's accusation on blasts



CHANDIGARH, May 6: As Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann blamed the BJP for the twin blasts, alleging this was how the party was preparing for the 2027 assembly polls, its state unit hit back, daring him to give proof or resign from his post.

Calling Mann's statement "reckless and irresponsible", the BJP leaders in Punjab said that the state DGP was pointing towards the involvement of Pakistan's ISI behind the explosions but the CM was putting the blame on the BJP to "escape his responsibility".

On Tuesday night, two back-to-back explosions occurred outside the headquarters of the BSF's Punjab Frontier in Jalandhar and near the army cantonment in Amritsar's Khasa.

DGP Gaurav Yadav said the blasts could be part of Pakistan's ISI designs to cause disruptions in Punjab on the Operation Sindoor anniversary.

In Anandpur Sahib, Mann alleged that the BJP was trying to create an atmosphere of fear in Punjab ahead of the assembly elections.

"The BJP is a communal party. The assembly elections are over in West Bengal, and they (the BJP) have said that now it is Punjab's turn, which indicates that these minor blasts are part of their preparation for the Punjab assembly elections," Mann told reporters.

Punjab BJP chief Sunil Jakhar described the two blasts in Jalandhar and Amritsar as a matter of serious concern. He said that even more worrying is the statement made by the chief minister.

"While the Punjab DGP is pointing towards the involvement of Pakistan's ISI behind these incidents, the chief minister, driven by politics, is making irresponsible statements. His remarks reflect panic and fear of losing his chair."

"It would be better if he stopped worrying about his position and instead allowed the police to do their actual job, rather than using them to keep track of MLAs. Because if the MLAs have decided to leave, no amount of police deployment will be able to stop them," said Jakhar.

BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh said that Mann's remarks were "irresponsible and immature".

The AAP government has failed to provide safety to the people of the state, he said and alleged that the law and order had collapsed in the state.

"On one side, the DGP is saying that Pakistan's ISI was behind blasts and, on the other hand, Mann was making reckless statements," said the senior BJP leader.

"Either Bhagwant Mann brings proof to support his claim or tender resignation from the chief minister's chair," said Chugh.

The BJP leader pointed out that several grenade blast incidents have occurred, including outside police stations and near the office of the Punjab BJP headquarters in Chandigarh. Union Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu too slammed Mann for his accusation against the BJP and dared him to file an FIR against the BJP.

"There are reports of blasts every day in Punjab. grenades are being hurled, IEDs are being planted," said Bittu.

"If you (the CM) have the gumption, then register an FIR against the BJP for these blasts. Have some shame. Your DGP is saying these blasts are the handiwork of Pakistan's ISI and you are saying something else," said Bittu.

Speaking to reporters about the Amritsar blast incident, DGP Gaurav Yadav said no outfit has taken responsibility for it.

"We assume that as today is the Operation Sindoor anniversary, this is part of Pakistan's ISI designs to cause disruptions in Punjab. Punjab is fighting a proxy war on behalf of the nation against Pakistan," Yadav said.

Punjab BJP working president Ashwani Sharma said, "Neither does God strike with fists nor with kicks; whenever He punishes, He takes away one's wisdom."

"Bhagwant Mann ji, it appears that your mental condition is not stable. You should resign and seek proper medical treatment," Sharma said.

He said that Punjab is a border state and its security, peace and communal harmony should be the highest priority, but the Mann government has completely "failed" on every front.

He said that throwing mud at the BJP to hide its own "failures" reflects "cheap and irresponsible politics". "For the BJP, Punjab's peace, security, and brotherhood remain paramount. The BJP has always stood firmly with Punjab and its people and will continue to do so in the future as well," said Sharma. (PTI)

Jammu: BJP opposes anti-encroachment drive, seeks regularisation of illegal structures

JAMMU, May 6: The BJP has opposed the ongoing anti-encroachment drive carried out by the Jammu Development Authority (JDA), demanding a halt to the operation, regularising existing constructions and action against "erring" officials.

On May 4, the JDA demolished more than 15 structures built without permissions on the Ring Road, along the Jamm-Samba belt, to curb illegal constructions and enforce planning norms.

Tensions escalated when BJP MLA Rajeev Kumar Bhagat, along with locals, intervened and stood in front of bulldozers in the Bisnaha area to stop the demolition of a three-storey structure. Several party leaders joined the protest.

Later, a delegation of BJP leaders, comprising Rajeev Kumar Bhagat, Garu Ram Bhagat, Surinder Bhagat and former MLA Chander Prakash Ganga, met JDA Vice Chairman Rupesh Kumar on May 5 and sought suspension of demolition drives and called for registration and regularisation of existing structures.

Addressing reporters, Rajeev Kumar Bhagat alleged that JDA's enforcement wing failed in its duty and accused the lower-level staff of misleading people.

"We have repeatedly said JDA should inform people where construction is permitted. Instead, staff took money, allowed structures to come up, and then demolished them when the buildings reached the third floor (exceeding permitted height limits)," he said.

He questioned the timing of the drive, saying, "What kind of emergency was it that officials arrived at 4 am to carry out demolition?"

Bhagat also cited the case of a farmer whose land was partly acquired for the Ring Road, leaving him with limited land on which he had begun construction.

The MLA demanded strict action against JDA officials, including suspension of enforcement staff, alleging that illegal constructions had flourished due to administrative lapses.

He also sought a probe by the Anti-Corruption Bureau into alleged irregularities by them. (PTI)

Akhilesh says SC should take cognisance of WB election

LUCKNOW, May 6: Days after the thumping victory of the BJP in West Bengal, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday raised doubts about the fairness of the poll process, and demanded that the Supreme Court order the video recording of vote counting to be made public.

"When court proceedings have gone live, why can't vote counting go live?" Yadav said, addressing a press conference here.

"Why is CCTV not live? Why are they so afraid of it? We demand the Supreme Court immediately take cognisance of the West Bengal polls and put the video of the counting in front of the people of the country," he said.

Yadav also dismissed SP leader Kironmay Nanda's statement that he (Akhilesh) did not go to West Bengal, as he had given him feedback that Mamata Banerjee was sure to lose.

"I did not go campaigning anywhere. We (SP) did not have the resources to campaign (in other states). We are here in Uttar Pradesh and take care here," he said. Yadav refused to give a direct reply on DMK calling the Congress a "backstabber" after the latter announced it would back Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK). "Why should I tell you whom I will rely on or not!" he said. (PTI)

Former Norwegian diplomat hails BJP's win in WB, Assam polls

NEW DELHI, May 6: Former Norwegian diplomat Erik Solheim on Wednesday praised the BJP's massive victory in the West Bengal and Assam polls, saying that it was time "the West appreciates Indian democracy".

He also criticised sections of Western media for portraying Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a threat to democracy and describing his policies as "Hindu extremism".

In a series of posts on X, Solheim said that at a time when US and European democracies are threatened, India should be looked at for inspiration, not fear.

"Big victory for Prime Minister Modi in India's state elections. It's time the West appreciates the strength of Indian democracy!" he said.

Solheim also highlighted the high voter turnout in polls, saying the BJP won a massive victory in state elections in West Bengal and Assam. "The turnout was extraordinary high, more than 90 per cent, far above normal participation in European and American elections," he said.

"With a population of 106 million, West Bengal is much larger than any nation in the European Union, so this matters!" he added.

He said the assembly elections produced "surprising results" in West Bengal and Kerala and a "shocking one" in Tamil Nadu.

"The result should give western media a pause. They very often present prime minister Modi as a threat to democracy and his policies as some sort of Hindu extremism. The reality is exactly the opposite," he said.

"Indian is not only the world's largest democracy in size, it is also one of the most solid in content because its not a western transplant but rooted in Indian traditions and history," he added.

Further praising the BJP's performance, Solheim said, "When BJP performed below expectations in the 2024 parliament elections, many western media wrote as if it was the beginning of the end for Modi ji. Since then, the



BJP has won state elections in Odisha, Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra, Bihar, and now Assam and West Bengal. What a revenge!"

He also congratulated actor-turned politician Vijay, describing him as "the man who upended Tamil politics!"

"As long as anyone can remember, Tamil Nadu has been dominated by the DMK and AIADMK, the parties formed by the two giants of Dravidian politics, Karunanidhi and MGR," Solheim said.

The former Norwegian politician said this week, the voters of Tamil Nadu delivered a "shock result" and with a wide margin they elected Joseph Vijay Chandrasekhar, a 51-year-old Tamil cinema superstar known to fans as Vijay, or simply as "Thalapathy" (commander).

"This is the most seismic electoral debut in Tamil Nadu's modern history. His party, TVK, got 108 seats, close to a simple majority. Let's wish Vijay success complete in taking Tamil Nadu to the next level. Tamil Nadu is already one of India's most successful states, with high living standards and vibrant business. The aim is a 1 trillion USD economy," he said.

Solheim said that as a member of the Governing Council of the Tamil Nadu Climate Change Mission, he would be honoured to support the conservation efforts of the state's environment. "I will be happy to continue to give support in the future," he said. (PTI)

Nitish Kumar's son may join Bihar cabinet today

PATNA, May 6: JD(U) president Nitish Kumar's son Nishant has agreed to join the Samrat Choudhary government in Bihar, and he is likely to be sworn in at the cabinet expansion function on Thursday, according to a source close to both the ex-CM and his son.

The 45-year-old leader, who joined the JD(U) less than a couple of months ago, gave in to persuasions by senior functionaries of the party.

"Ever since he had joined the party, it has been the wish of cadres that Nishant join the government. He could have been appointed as a deputy chief minister last month, but he was hesitant. Finally, he has agreed," the source told PTI on Wednesday. The entry of Nishant Kumar, an engineering graduate, into politics took place soon after his father decided to step down as the chief minister, after becoming a Rajya Sabha member.

When a new government headed by BJP leader Samrat Choudhary was installed following Kumar's resignation, speculations were rife that the JD(U) supremo's heir apparent would be in the council of ministers.

However, Nishant reportedly declined, declaring that he wanted to earn his spurs as a party worker before accepting a post. Consequently, veteran JD(U) leaders Vijay Kumar Chaudhary and Bijendra Prasad Yadav got inducted as ministers and were designated as deputy CMs. JD(U) sources also claimed that around a dozen party leaders were likely to take oath as ministers on Thursday when Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president Nitin Nabin will attend the function, which is being seen as a belated celebration of the saffron party heading a government in Bihar for the first time.

Earlier, JD(U) state president Umesh Kushwaha had said that the party would like to have up to 16 ministers in the state cabinet, which can have a maximum strength of 30, in the state with a 243-member assembly.

Prominent among those likely to be inducted from the JD(U) quota are Ashok Choudhary, Shrawan Kumar, and Leshi Singh, all of whom were ministers in the Nitish Kumar government formed after the assembly polls held in November last year. (PTI)

Land dispute pits BJP MLAs against each other in UP's Unnao

UNNAO (UP), May 6: A land dispute in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district has pitted two Bharatiya Janata Party MLAs against each other, with allegations of encroachment, abuse and physical altercation from both sides.

Mohan MLA Brijesh Rawat has accused Sadar MLA Pankaj Gupta and his sister Deepti Gupta of attempting to occupy his land, abusing him and engaging in a scuffle, police said on Wednesday.

Responding to the allegations, Gupta denied any personal involvement and said the dispute is related to the land owned by his sister. The dispute involves a parcel of land located near Naveen Mandi on the Kanpur-Lucknow highway in Wazidpur (Rajapur village).

Rawat claimed he inherited around six bighas of land from his maternal family, and alleged that an adjoining plot purchased by Gupta in his sister's name was being used as a pretext to encroach upon his property.

According to Rawat's side, the matter had earlier reached a civil court, which granted a stay order. He alleged that on Tuesday, pillars were being erected on the disputed land by Deepti Gupta's side, and when he reached the spot, he was subjected to abuse and manhandled by those present there.

The Mohan MLA said he has submitted a complaint to senior officials and at the Sadar police station, seeking action in the matter.

Gupta, however, denied any personal involvement and alleged that his name was being dragged into the matter to tarnish his image.

"There is a dispute regarding a



piece of land involving my sister. Dragging my name into it is wrong. At the time of the alleged incident, I was present at a programme," he said. He added that proper measurement of the land by the tehsil administration would establish the truth.

"In land matters, demarcation is the most important thing. Let the authorities conduct the measurement, and it will become clear who is right and who is wrong. Land and documents are not going anywhere," he said. Gupta also alleged that the construction being carried out by his sister was demolished by opponents through hooliganism. He said he has written to the district magistrate requesting a fair probe into the matter based on records and evidence.

"If there is any illegal encroachment on Brijesh Rawat's land, it should be removed immediately after proper measurement, irrespective of who is responsible. I have no personal connection with this dispute. Some people are trying to tarnish my image, which is unfortunate," he added.

Sadar Kotwali in-charge Chandrakant Mishra said complaints have been received from both sides and are being examined by senior officials. "Action will be taken as per the directions of higher authorities," he said. (PTI)

UP serves 'One District One Cuisine' thali but skips non-veg classics

LUCKNOW, May 6: In a push to promote local delicacies with better branding and market reach, the Uttar Pradesh government has rolled out a district-wise 'One District One Cuisine' list. But the absence of many famed non-vegetarian dishes -- like Lucknow's Galouti kebabs and biryani -- has raised eyebrows.

Several iconic non-vegetarian, long synonymous with the state's culinary identity, and celebrated nationally and globally, do not find mention in the ODOC list.

Besides its famous kebabs, Lucknow's Awadhi biryani and nihari also did not find a place in the list. Mutton korma and seekh kebabs from Rampur's rich Rampuri cuisine and Bareilly's popular mutton preparations were also missing from the list.

Like Lucknow, Varanasi and Alahabad (Prayagraj) are also

known for distinctive non-vegetarian street foods and curries that draw food enthusiasts from across the country. President Cuisine Society of India and well-known food historian Pushpesh Pant described the all-vegetarian ODOC platter as "half baked" measure.

Talking to PTI on phone, Pant said, "This seems to be a half baked move that smacks of bigotry. In short, ignorant nonsense."

Pant made it clear that he was all for vegetarian dishes. "I love all dishes. All I am saying is why engage in selective discrimination?" According to the ODOC list, each district has been mapped with its signature dishes.

In Agra, petha and dalmoth have been identified, while Firozabad is known for potato-based dishes such as tikki and kachori. Mainpuri features sohan papdi and boiled potato preparations, and

Mathura is recognised for peda, khurchan and mishri-based sweets.

Aligarh has been tagged with dairy products and kachori, Hathras with asafoetida (hing)-linked items and khurchan, while Kasganj is associated with moong dal halwa and snacks made from singhoda flour.

In central Uttar Pradesh, Ayodhya's kachori, peda and kulhad dahi-jalebi, Sultanpur's peda and savoury items, Barabanki's chandrakala, and Amethi's samosa and jaggery-based sweets have been listed. Ambedkar Nagar is known for batasha and khoya-based items.

Eastern districts also feature prominently, with Azamgarh known for teleri and carrot halwa, Ballia for sattu-based dishes, and Mau for litti-chokha. Varanasi's diverse offerings include tiranga barfi, thandai, lassi, kachori and Banarasi paan, while Jaunpur is known for imarti



and its unique sweets.

In western Uttar Pradesh, Meerut's revdi and gajak, Ghaziabad's papad-based preparations, Gautam Buddha Nagar's bakery products, Hapur's papad, and Bulandshahr's kachori and peda have been included. Bagpat is associated with balushahi and include.

Other notable entries include

Prayagraj's kachori, samosa and rasmalai, Fatehpur's bedmi puri and sweets, Kaushambi's jaggery-based products, and Pratapgarh's amla-based items. Saharanpur is known for honey-based products, Muzaffarnagar for jaggery sweets, and Shamli for jaggery-based snacks. Officials said the initiative seeks to systematically catalogue

and promote local cuisines across all districts of the state.

Advisor to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Awanish Awasthi, highlighted the initiative in a post on X on Tuesday, stating that Uttar Pradesh is set to give global recognition to its traditional dishes through modern branding and improved packaging.

"This step will empower local artisans while giving a boost to employment and entrepreneurship. Under the leadership of the chief minister, Uttar Pradesh is creating a new identity in taste, culture and economy," he said in the post.

The ODOC initiative was also emphasised by Chief Minister Adityanath during the Budget 2026-27 discussions in the state assembly on February 20.

He said that the scheme envisages focused efforts on quality improvement, packaging, branding,

marketing and training for traditional food items, drawing parallels with the successful 'One District One Product' model.

The chief minister had cited examples such as revdi and gajak of Meerut, hing of Hathras, papad of Hapur, guava of Prayagraj, halwa of Ballia and imarti of Jaunpur, noting that these would be given a new identity under the scheme.

He added that the initiative would also be linked to women's empowerment, with Self Help Groups and women entrepreneurs to be provided training, financial support and market access.

Officials said the broader objective of the scheme is to promote skill development, encourage investment, strengthen branding of local cuisines and generate employment, positioning Uttar Pradesh as a hub of culinary entrepreneurship. (PTI)

India, Vietnam elevate ties to enhanced comprehensive strategic partnership

NEW DELHI, May 6: India and Vietnam on Wednesday elevated their ties to an enhanced comprehensive strategic partnership and set a USD 25 billion annual trade target by 2030 as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vietnamese President To Lam held talks focusing on expanding bilateral ties in areas of trade, defence, and critical minerals in the face of increasing geopolitical upheavals.

Following the Modi-Lam meeting, the two sides signed as many as 13 agreements which will provide for deeper two ways engagements in a range of areas including digital payments, rare earth minerals, pharmaceuticals, education, banking and culture.

Modi and Lam also deliberated on the situation in the Indo-Pacific amid China's increasing assertiveness in the region, and agreed to continue to contribute to the rule-of-law, peace, stability, and prosperity.

It is understood that China's growing military

muscle-flexing in the South China Sea also figured in the delegation-level talks between the two sides.

Elected as president earlier this month, Lam began his first state visit to India on Tuesday, leading a high-level delegation for a three-day trip.

"A decade ago, Vietnam became India's first comprehensive strategic partner in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Since then, our relations have made rapid and comprehensive progress," Modi said in his media statement.

"Building on this strong foundation, today we are elevating our relations to the level of Enhanced Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. We will now advance our partnership to even higher goals," he said.

"Our cooperation will reach new levels in every area — culture, connectivity, and capacity building, as well as security, sustainability, and supply chain resilience," Modi added.

He noted that the bilateral trade between India and Vietnam has doubled in the last decade to



reach USD 16 billion and that the target now is to increase it to USD 25 billion by 2030.

Modi also cited a plethora of agreements signed between the two countries to emphasize that the economic engagement is expected to witness a significant upswing going forward.

"The MoU between our drug authorities will now increase access to Indian medicines in Vietnam. Exports of Indian agricultural, fisheries, and

animal products to Vietnam are also set to become easier. Very soon, Vietnam will taste India's grapes and pomegranates," he said.

The two sides also agreed to update the India-ASEAN trade agreement by the end of this year.

"This will provide a new impetus to trade and investment between India and all ASEAN countries. New initiatives in critical minerals, rare earths, and energy cooperation will ensure the economic security and supply chain resilience of both countries," Modi said.

"To boost financial connectivity, we have today decided to enhance cooperation between our central banks. India's UPI and Vietnam's fast payment systems will soon be linked. Furthermore, we are strengthening state-to-state and city-to-city cooperation between the two countries," he noted. Modi said India is grateful to Vietnam for its strong condemnation of the Pahalgam terrorist attack and standing with India in its fight against terrorism.

"In this era of global turmoil and economic

challenges, thanks to their talent, good governance, and economic reforms, India and Vietnam are emerging as the world's fastest-growing economies," he said.

"Now, through our enhanced strategic partnership, we will support each other's rapid growth. As the Buddha's teachings say, 'If you light a lamp for someone else, it also illuminates your own path,'" Modi said.

He also described Vietnam a key pillar of India's Act East Policy and Vision Ocean.

"In the Indo-Pacific region as well, we share a common outlook. Through our strengthening defence and security cooperation, we will continue to contribute to the rule-of-law, peace, stability, and prosperity," he said. The prime minister said India will broaden its relations with ASEAN with Vietnam's cooperation.

In his remarks, Lam said both sides agreed to deepen political trust and elevate security cooperation. (PTI)

Twin blasts near security establishments in Punjab, police suspect ISI hand

CHANDIGARH, May 6: Two back-to-back explosions near security establishments rocked Punjab Tuesday night, triggering panic and a political blame game with police suspecting a plot by Pakistan's ISI to cause disruptions ahead of Operation Sindoor anniversary.

The first explosion went off around 8 pm in Jalandhar outside the headquarters of the Border Security Force's Punjab Frontier, while the second blast occurred around 11 pm near the army cantonment in Amritsar's Khasa. No injuries were reported, police said.

Last night, police had said a scooter parked near the BSF Chowk in Jalandhar district caught fire causing panic in the area even though locals claimed they heard a blast-like sound from the vehicle.

DGP Gaurav Yadav on Wednesday said the Amritsar blast was a low-intensity explosion and no group has claimed responsibility for it. However, he suspected Pakistan's ISI to be behind the incident. "We assume that, as today is the Operation Sindoor anniversary, this is part of Pakistan's ISI's designs to cause disruptions in Punjab. Punjab is fighting a proxy war on behalf of the nation against Pakistan," he said.

On the Jalandhar explosion, he



said the Khalistan Liberation Army (KLF) has claimed responsibility, adding "we are verifying" this.

In the Jalandhar incident, the blast ripped apart a scooter, damaged a traffic signal pole and windowpanes of a nearby shop. Locals recounted that the scooter, which was parked outside the BSF headquarters caught fire shortly after a loud sound. The scooter belonged to Gurpreet Singh, who regularly delivers parcels in the area.

CCTV footage showed an unidentified man running for cover following the blast.

Jalandhar Police Commissioner Dhanpreet Kaur said an FIR has

been registered and initial investigations suggest some form of explosive material was used in the Jalandhar blast. "Our forensic teams have collected explosive swabs from here, which have been sent to a forensic laboratory for examination. We believe that the blast was carried out using explosives here," she said, adding technical investigations and camera reviews are ongoing and 3-4 leads are being currently pursued.

Amritsar (Rural) SSP Suhail Mir Qasim said police received reports of a loud sound around 11 pm on a road in Khasa. Preliminary inspections indicated someone threw the

explosive device towards the boundary wall, leading to the blast. Police mentioned that a piece of a tin sheet covering the boundary wall fell as a result of the blast.

A team of forensic and bomb disposal squad visited the sites to collect samples.

Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday termed the blasts "minor" and targeted the BJP, saying this was how the party was preparing for the upcoming assembly elections in the state. He said those responsible would soon be exposed and brought to justice.

"BJP is a communal party. The assembly elections are over in West Bengal, and they (BJP) have said that now it is Punjab's turn, which indicates that these minor blasts are part of their preparation for the Punjab assembly elections," he alleged.

Later, in a statement, he also alleged that the blasts were part of a deliberate strategy to destabilise the state after the passage of the anti-sacrilege law.

The BJP hit back with national spokesperson Sambit Patra terming Mann's remarks "condemnable" and accused him of making politically motivated allegations without waiting for the investigation findings. (PTI)

Red lines redrawn; need for stronger air, cyber warfare capabilities: Experts

NEW DELHI, May 6: Operation Sindoor has not only redrawn red lines when it comes to India's response to acts of terrorism, but also offered some key military lessons, including joint and cohesive use of air power, bolstering of drone technology and building a robust communication system, say experts.

Recalling the decisive military action launched exactly a year ago on the intervening night of May 6-7, several defence and strategic affairs experts concurred that the military operation also emphasised that future conflicts would play out not only in airspace, but also in cyberspace and information and cognitive domains.

And, indeed, the Indian military wasn't just battling against a barrage of hostile drones that came from across the western border, from Leh to Sir Creek, in multiple waves during the nearly four-day conflict, but also countering an intense misinformation campaign that sought to damage the morale of the forces and the masses.

Air Commodore Gaurav M Tripathi (retired), who also played a role during the operation, while acknowledging the criticality of air power in deciding the outcome of a conflict, underlined that in any future scenario, "combined air power" of the three services should be leveraged so that it can work cohesively against a "capable adversary."

"During (Operation) Sindoor, we saw a mass of drones used by Pakistan. Most of them were harmless, just to engage Indian weapons and munitions so that attack drones could come in later. "But the enemy is smart. Next time, what they will send will be hardened drones, which will probably be more difficult to jam... have better navigation at the end, might not need GPS, (and) they might have electro-optical homing devices. And, they will probably collaborate as a swarm," Air Commodore Tripathi told PTI.

The former IAF officer, who took an early retirement last August, has flown multiple kinds of fighter

jets and commanded a Hawk Mk 132 squadron, and also served as a chief operations officer of a fighter base.

In the IAF, there has already been some investment in anti-drone capabilities, "but anti-drone capabilities will really have to be proliferated, and cover all important points," he said, on the military lessons learned from the operation.

The former air officer praised the S-400 and Akash weapon systems, BrahMos and other missiles, in securing the Indian skies and dealing a potent blow to the adversary, which also allowed Indian fighter jets to play their role.

"We used them (S-400 system) very offensively; we moved them around very frequently. We camouflaged them as well and used their decoy forms to deceive the adversary. This technique in military parlance is called camouflage, concealment and deception or CCD," he said.

Sharing his own experience of being part of the operation last year, the former IAF officer underlined that what was "probably pioneered in this operation, and I think it will become part of IAF's concept of operations, is offensive utilisation of long-range surface-to-air missiles". Military experts said another lesson from the operation is to "expedite and complete the networking of aerial assets", which the Indian Air Force would draw from it.

Former Army officer Lt Gen Dushyant Singh (ret'd) said Operation Sindoor has demonstrated that "red lines have been pushed further" when it comes to counter-terrorism stance of India, and New Delhi is ready to "call the nuclear bluff of the adversary."

"One of the major military lessons from Op Sindoor is that we moved from strategic restraint to strategic proactiveness. We have to be prepared to respond in a very, very quick time, in case something like that happens next time," he told PTI. (PTI)

Will vacate one of two seats in 10 days, says Suvendu

KOLKATA, May 6: Senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari, who defeated outgoing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her Bhabanipur seat while retaining Nandigram in one of Bengal's most politically significant electoral victories, on Wednesday said he would vacate one of the two constituencies within 10 days, leaving the final decision on which seat to retain to the party's leadership.

Standing in Nandigram, which he often describes as his political "bhadrasan" (citadel), Adhikari struck a careful balance between sentiment and party discipline, signalling both his emotional attachment to the constituency in Purba Medinipur district and the political significance of his victory in Kolkata's Bhabanipur.

"I will vacate one seat within 10 days. The party will decide which one I retain. Whatever my personal opinion may be, I will convey that to the leadership. I will not forget my responsibility towards the people of Bhabanipur and Nandigram," he told supporters.

The statement came amid intense speculation over whether Adhikari would retain Nandigram, the epicentre of the 2007 anti-land acquisition movement that transformed him into a mass leader, or hold on to Bhabanipur, where he handed Banerjee a stunning defeat in what had long been considered her safest political pocket borough.

The two victories carry sharply different political meanings for Adhikari. Nandigram's anti-land acquisition movement against the then Left Front government eventually paved the way for the TMC's rise to power in 2011.

At that time, Adhikari was among Mamata Banerjee's closest political lieutenants and key organisers on the ground, handling mobilisation in Nandigram and adjoining areas while Banerjee spearheaded the movement at the state level.

The movement not only dismantled the Left Front's 34-year rule but also transformed Adhikari from a regional organiser into one of the most influential political figures in coastal Bengal. It was from the larger Tamruk region, of which Nandigram is a part, that Adhikari first entered Parliament. In 2021, months after joining the BJP, he had defeated Banerjee from Nandigram in a fiercely fought contest that dramatically altered Bengal's political equations.

Over the years, Adhikari has

continued to treat Nandigram as the emotional and political anchor of his career, routinely visiting the constituency during key anniversaries linked to the anti-land acquisition movement and major religious occasions.

But Bhabanipur has opened a different political chapter for the former TMC leader. His victory over Banerjee by more than 15,000 votes in the south Kolkata constituency on Monday punctured the aura around the TMC supremo's home turf and handed the BJP a massive psychological breakthrough alongside its sweeping electoral victory in the state.

For the BJP, Adhikari's victory in Bhabanipur went beyond electoral arithmetic. A leader from Purba Medinipur defeating Banerjee in her own political neighbourhood became one of the defining images of the BJP's breakthrough in Bengal.

Reflecting that balancing act, Adhikari repeatedly thanked the voters of Bhabanipur during his address in Nandigram and assured supporters in both constituencies that he would continue discharging his responsibilities irrespective of which seat he formally retained.

"Whether formally or otherwise, I will fulfil my duty towards both constituencies," he said.

As Adhikari addressed gatherings in Reyapara, Haripur and other parts of Nandigram on Wednesday morning, supporters repeatedly shouted slogans urging him not to leave the constituency.

"Don't leave us," some supporters were heard telling him during the interaction. The BJP leader, however, used the occasion to underline organisational discipline.

"I have been disciplined since childhood. Everything cannot be decided alone. I will repay your debt. Please remain assured," he told supporters, indicating that the final decision would rest with the BJP high command.

Invoking the political transition underway in Bengal, Adhikari said, "I was part of the 2011 'poribartan' (change), and now I am part of the real change," drawing a contrast between the TMC's rise to power in 2011 and the BJP's ascent in 2026.

Addressing party workers and supporters, Adhikari also urged them not to take out immediate victory processions, and instead maintain restraint till the swearing-in ceremony of the new government on May 9. (PTI)

SC refuses to adjourn hearing on pleas against EC law, says this matter is more important

NEW DELHI, May 6: The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to accede to the Centre's request to adjourn the hearing on pleas challenging the constitutional validity of a 2023 law that removed the CJI from a committee responsible for appointing the chief election commissioner and the deputies, saying the matter is "more important" than the Sabarimala case.

A nine-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant is currently hearing petitions regarding discrimination against women at religious sites, including the Sabarimala temple in Kerala, as well as the scope of religious freedom across various faiths.

A bench comprising justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma turned down the request by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, to adjourn the hearing on the ground that he was currently occupied before a nine-judge bench in the Sabarimala reference case.

Referring to the gravity of the current challenge to the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, Justice Datta said, "This matter is more important than any other matter."

"Let your (solicitor general's) associates take notes today. Let the petitioners start. All matters are important. We read in the newspapers that there is an observation that the PIL in Sabarimala should not have been

entertained by the court. So, with due respect to the judges, nine judges are occupied in a matter where there is an observation that it should not have been entertained in the first place," Justice Datta said.

The bench then directed the petitioners to conclude their arguments by Thursday, allowing the Centre to present its submissions on a subsequent date. The bench then proceeded with the hearing which is underway.

Earlier on March 20, CJI Surya Kant recused himself from hearing the petitions. "I will be accused of conflict of interest. There is a conflict of interest," the CJI had said. The law, enacted by Parliament in December 2023, came months after a landmark verdict by which the apex court directed that election commissioners be appointed by a committee comprising the prime minister, the leader of the Opposition, and the chief justice of India.

The bench had said that the system will remain in force till a law is enacted.

Under the 2023 Act, the selection committee consists of the prime minister, a Union minister nominated by the prime minister and the leader of Opposition (or leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha).

The PILs said the exclusion of the CJI from the panel undermines the independence of the appointment process. (PTI)

Op Sindoor: India marks first anniversary of its most expansive multi-domain combat mission in half a century

NEW DELHI, May 6: Operation Sindoor, launched weeks after the dastardly Pahalgam terror attack last year, marked a paradigm shift in India's national security calculus through the extensive use of drones, networking and the integration of artificial intelligence in target analysis and acquisition.

The operation, billed as the Indian military's most expansive multi-domain combat mission in half a century to punish Pakistan for its relentless support to cross-border terrorism, redefined India's overarching security and strategic goals.

India's action was largely seen as a statement of its "political will" to inflict a blow to Pakistan for supporting terrorism, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that India will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail by Islamabad.

In the course of the last one year after the operation, India's three services have drawn up extensive plans, strategy and policy initiatives to bolster their combat readiness by acquiring new platforms, missiles and a variety of long and short-range drones, and boosting the overall air defence apparatus.

In response to the Pahalgam ter-

ror attack on April 22 in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed, India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7 last year, carrying out airstrikes on nine terror infrastructures in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir eliminating at least 100 terrorists.

The strikes at the terror camps included the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) headquarters at Bahawalpur, the Lashkar-e-Taiba's base at Muridke and terrorist infrastructure in Mehmoona Joya in Sialkot, Sawai Nala and Syed Na Bilal in Muzaffarabad, Gulpur and Abbas in Kotli, Barnala in Bhimber, and Sarjal. The action triggered a rapid escalation in tensions with Pakistan launching retaliatory strikes, though most of them were thwarted by the Indian military.

The hostilities ended with an understanding on halting the military actions on May 10 following talks over the hotline between army officials of the two sides, but the episode brought into focus the need to enhance India's military might.

While India delivered a befitting response to Pakistan, the three services analysed the hostilities to refine operational strategies and integrate advanced technologies



and platforms.

The three services have been specifically focusing on procurement of unmanned platforms and infusion of high-end technologies, including artificial intelligence for target acquisitions and surveillance. India has added significant military might in the last one year, and the credit goes to a whole-of-government approach to bolster military prowess.

Definitely, lessons learned from Operation Sindoor are being implemented, said a senior military official. The months following the conflict saw the government greenlighting several mega pro-

Democracy in Bengal 'held at gunpoint': Dharmendra Pradhan

NEW DELHI, May 6: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Wednesday alleged that democracy in West Bengal was being "held at gunpoint" and accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of refusing to accept the spirit of the electoral mandate.

In a post on X, Pradhan said mandates were being treated "less like the people's voice and more like suggestions open to rejection", raising questions over whether power was being treated as a responsibility or an entitlement.

"Democracy in Bengal is being held at gunpoint, and the refusal to accept the electoral verdict lays this reality bare. Mandates are being treated less like the people's voice and more like suggestions open to rejection. The refusal of Mamata Banerjee to accept the spirit of the mandate raises a serious question: Is power being treated as a responsibility or merely as an entitlement?" he said.

He further alleged that the Trinamool Congress leadership was resisting accountability and, in the process of "clinging to power", attempting to erode the credibility of institutions such as the Election Commission and security forces.

"In the process of clinging to power, Mamata Banerjee is not just rejecting the people's mandate but also attempting to erode the credibility of institutions like the Election Commission and security forces, undermining the very pillars that ensure free, fair and secure elections," he said.

Pradhan also claimed that governance in the state had long been marked by intimidation and entrenched political patronage, adding that ignoring the mandate would undermine democratic legitimacy.

"This mandate of Bengal is a rejection of fear, a rejection of coercion and a demand for accountability. To ignore it is to undermine the very foundation of democratic legitimacy," he said. (PTI)

ernment framework with France, nearly two decades after the plan was originally rolled out to boost the Indian Air Force's combat prowess.

The defence ministry also approved buying six US-made Boeing P8-I surveillance aircraft for the Indian Navy to enhance the force's surveillance and anti-submarine warfare capabilities.

The Rafale jets are capable of carrying a range of potent weapons. European missile maker MBDA's Meteor beyond visual range air-to-air missile and Scalp cruise missile will be the mainstay of the weapons package of the Rafales.

The government is also in the process of sealing a Euro 5 billion deal for the supply of six stealth submarines to the Indian Navy. The submarines will be built by German defence major ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) and Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL).

In April, India commissioned its third indigenously-built nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, INS Aridaman, significantly bolstering the naval component of the nation's nuclear triad. (PTI)

For actor-filmmaker Riteish Deshmukh, the decade-long struggle to bring his dream project, "Raja Shivaji", to life wasn't easy. He says the wait ultimately proved to be a blessing in disguise as it allowed him to make it "bigger and better".

Released on May 1, the historical epic chronicles the life of the Maratha Empire's founder, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Deshmukh not only stars in the titular role but has also co-written and directed it.

The film was first announced in 2016, then stalled, revived again in 2019, only to be pushed back due to the COVID-19 pandemic until 2023, when Deshmukh decided to give it a "final shot".

Acclaimed directors like Ravi Jadhav and Nagraj Manjule were attached as directors, but eventually Deshmukh decided to take on the responsibility of directing it as well.

"I feel relieved because this ten-year journey was pretty long. Many a times one gave up on it, but it came back to you. Had it started in 2016, this would not be the film, it would be a different film, a different star cast. The fact that it started in 2023, the vision changed a bit, perspectives changed and then we just thought why not make it

slightly bigger and more ambitious," Deshmukh told PTI in an interview.

"The journey changed course over time, and now that the film is out and the way it's received, I'm just truly humbled and I just want to thank God and the people of Maharashtra for receiving this film so well," he said.

Looking back, the actor-director said the multiple delays worked in the film's favour.

He credits actor-wife Genelia D'Souza, who stars opposite him in "Raja Shivaji" and has also produced the film, for making it a grand Marathi-Hindi bilingual epic by roping in Bollywood stars.

The film boasts of a star-studded cast including Sanjay Dutt as Afzal Khan, Abhishek Bachchan as Sambhaji Shahaji Bhonsale, Vidya Balan as Badi Begum, and Salman Khan in a cameo.

"Then Jio (Studios) came on board, Jyoti Deshpande backed the vision and then Genelia, as a producer, told me, 'Apart from fantastic actors from the Marathi industry, why don't we look at casting from the Hindi film industry, make it really big, let the legs stretch a bit beyond the boundaries of this Maharashtra, Marathi-speaking population',"

Making a film on Chhatrapati

Almost gave up, but it kept coming back: Riteish Deshmukh on decade long journey of 'Raja Shivaji'



Shivaji Maharaj came with a lot of responsibility, Deshmukh said, adding that the writing process took nearly two years. He and Genelia have co-produced the movie via their banner Mumbai Film Company.

The team carefully researched multiple historical books including Veddhamanawacha, Shree Raja Shivcharitra, Shivcharitra, and Shree Shivbharat, among others.

"This (film) is not based on just one book, it is basically extractions of incidences from various history books. (It's) placed and weaved into a narrative that maintains the dignity of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and explains his journey that starts from his birth to eventually the killing of Sardar (Afzal Khan), played by Sanjay Dutt," Deshmukh said.

The actor described the legendary Maratha ruler as a childhood "superhero", whose legacy has been passed down through generations of his family.

"The first story that every Maharashtra boy hears is of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. When my dad (late Vilasrao Deshmukh) was sworn in as the chief minister for the first time, when he went to Mantralaya, the first namaste is to the portrait of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, that's how it's ingrained into everyone's lives and veins and blood. That's what he means to us."

"There would be discussions about his valour (at home), and one of my earliest stories on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was told to me by my mother and father," said Deshmukh, who debuted as a producer in Marathi cinema with "Balak Palak" (2013) and made his acting debut the subsequent year with "Lai Bhaari" (2014).

"Raja Shivaji" has received praise for its performances and emotional depth, but some criticism has been directed at certain technical aspects, including visual effects. (PTI)

Korean star Lee Byung-hun to headline Joseon-era martial arts film



South Korean actor Lee Byung-hun, known internationally for Netflix's "Squid Game", has signed on to star in an upcoming martial arts action film set in the early Joseon Dynasty.

According to Deadline, the movie is currently titled "Nambeol" and is backed by renowned South Korean production banner Hive Media Corp.

Described as a hard-boiled martial arts action flick, the movie follows nine warriors who travel to Tsushima Island to rescue Korean captives kidnapped by Japanese pirates.

Lee, also known for movies such as "I Saw The Devil" and "No Other Choice", will play the leader of the group.

Though not based on specific historical events, the story is set during a period when Korea faced frequent Japanese pirate raids.

"Nambeol" marks the directorial debut of veteran cinematographer Lee Mo-gae, whose credits as director of photography include "A Tale of Two Sisters", "Asura: The City of Madness" and "Exhuma".

He previously collaborated with Lee Byung-hun on "The Good, the Bad, the Weird" and "I Saw the Devil".

Lee Byung-hun is currently filming Disney+ series "The Koreans", a reimagining of the FX series "The Americans".

His most recent film, Park Chan-wook's "No Other Choice", premiered at the Venice film festival last year and was selected as Korea's submission for the Academy Awards. (PTI)

Ashutosh Gowariker to helm docu-drama series 'Temple Raiders'

Filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker will direct "Temple Raiders", a four-part docu-drama series on the theft and global trafficking of India's sacred temple artefacts, producers announced Wednesday.

The series is produced by Tudip Entertainment and Riverland Entertainment, in association with Ashutosh Gowariker Productions.

Raghav Khanna, known for his association with titles such as "The Elephant Whisperers", "The Mumbai Mafia" and "The Hunt for Veerappan", has written, created and will showrun the series.

The project marks Gowariker's first outing in the docu-drama format. He is known for making critically-acclaimed and commercially-successful films such as "Lagaan", "Swades" and "Jodha Akbar".

"I have been watching documentaries across different genres for several years now, and the documentary form has always intrigued me deeply. I have often thought about making one, but never quite found a subject that truly engaged me—something I felt a strong connection to and could do justice to."

When Raghav Khanna approached Gowariker with the concept of "Temple Raiders", the



filmmaker said he immediately agreed to it.

"It is a subject that has been quietly simmering for years—the theft of our idols from countless temples across the country, and the larger story behind it. I would like to present this as a four-episode docu-series, positioned in the space of an expository and participatory docu-drama, bringing together facts, personal engagement, and storytelling in a compelling way," Gowariker said.

The series will be mounted on a large scale, blending drama-driven storytelling with cinematic production values across different visual styles and art forms.

Khanna said the series aims to

push the scale of the format.

"From the outset, the ambition was to create a series that expands documentary dramas on their scale, tension and emotional immersiveness. Temple Raiders is a layered and character-driven thriller where faith and greed collide.

"Ashutosh sir has directed the series with empathy towards the story sensitivities while putting on the forefront the many gripping and fantastical elements associated with the series," he said.

Dipti Agrawal, Tushar Apathankar, Jaishree Khanna and Khanna serve as producers, with Priyanka Chaudhari as co-producer. (PTI)

Film Heritage Foundation returns to Cannes with restored version of Malayalam classic 'Amma Ariyan'

"Amma Ariyan", the cult Malayalam masterpiece from 1986, is the only entry from India to be screened in the Cannes Classic segment this year after its 4K restoration by the Film Heritage Foundation.

The screening of the film marks the return of the non-profit organisation, run by Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, to Cannes for the fifth consecutive year.

"Amma Ariyan" (Report to Mother), is widely regarded as one of the most radical voices in Indian cinema. It was his last film before his death in 1987.

The 115 minute-long film was produced by the Odessa Collective, a group of film enthusiasts co-founded by Abraham, who sought to break free from mainstream production and distribution systems.

In a radical experiment, members of the collective travelled from village to village beating drums, performing street plays and screening films to raise funds directly from the public. The film was not intended for conventional theatrical release but for a travelling cinema model that brought it back to the communities that made it possible. In 2001, the British Film Institute included the film in its list of the ten greatest Indian films of all time.

The film will be presented at Cannes by Dungepur, Joy Mathew (lead actor), Venu ISC (cinematographer) and Bina Paul (editor).

"Amma Ariyan" is set against the political turbulence of 1970s Kerala and follows Purushan, who sets out to inform a mother of her son's death, gath-



ering companions along the way in a journey that becomes both personal and political.

"The selection of Film Heritage Foundation's restoration of John Abraham's 'Amma Ariyan' for a world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival is a strong validation of the work we've been doing. This marks our fifth consecutive year at Cannes with a restored film. This year, we've brought back a rare gem of Indian cinema that was in danger of being lost," Dungarpur, director of Film Heritage Foundation, said in a statement.

He said the foundation is looking forward to introduce contemporary global audiences to "John Abraham's iconic cinematic vision".

"With no original camera negative and only a single surviving unsubtitled print, the restoration was particularly challenging. John Abraham was a true original, with a cult following among film students when I was at the Film Institute in Pune. We had all heard stories

about this maverick filmmaker, and 'Amma Ariyan' left a lasting impression on us. Shot in a cinema verite style by Venu, the film blurs the boundaries between documentary and fiction," he added.

Joy Mathew said he is happy that a film, which was made over 40 years ago, is being showcased at the Cannes Film Festival this year.

"The film marked my first lead role, making this recognition especially meaningful... To me, the film stands out in three ways: it challenged commercial filmmaking by being funded entirely through small public contributions; it rejected conventional theatrical release in favour of screenings in public spaces; and it adopted a distinctive docu-fiction form that reflects the socio-political climate of the 1970s and 1980s, including the complexities of leftist movements of that period."

Editor Bina Paul said the restoration of "Amma Ariyan" is as historic as the film itself.

"From securing permissions to locating viable source material, it required immense perseverance and a deep belief in the importance of presenting the film in its original form to new audiences. The commitment of Shivendra Singh Dungarpur and the Film Heritage Foundation is what ultimately made this possible. Seeing the film as it was conceived reaffirms John Abraham's genius and the spirit of the Odessa Collective," Paul said.

Cinematographer Venu said Abraham treated the making of "Amma Ariyan" as a rebellion as he was unable to find a producer despite two successful films in the past. Abraham decided to forgo the conventional model and The Odessa Collective was formed to fund the film and distribute it through non-traditional means.

"This spirit shaped how we shot the film. We chose 35mm black-and-white and worked largely handheld, in a near-documentary mode. I would often be behind the camera while John pushed me into real crowds—people who were not just actors, but participants," he said.

Gerald Duchaussoy, Head of Cannes Classics called "Amma Ariyan" as one of the best films they received this year.

"I was blown away by the intensity which spread throughout the film, the camera movements, the black and white imagery and the political atmosphere. I felt I was watching a 16mm-feature from South America from the 60s or the 70s but set in India in the 80s. That immediately felt right for us at Cannes Classics, a discovery you really want audiences to see. A trip in itself, 'Amma Ariyan' needs to be restored and seen in proper condition.

Cannes will be a good start for the future."

The restoration process of the film began in 2023 but there were challenges along the way as the only available version was a poor-quality online copy.

After locating surviving members of the Odessa Collective and securing their permission, a global search through the International Federation of Film Archives (IFIAF) yielded just two 35mm prints at the National Film Archive of India—one subtitled and one unsubtitled.

No original camera negative had survived and the prints, accessed in 2024, showed significant deterioration, including scratches, broken splices and emulsion damage. After initial conservation work in India, restoration was carried out at L'Immaginaire Ritrovata (Bologna) and Digital Film Restore Pvt. Ltd.

The unsubtitled print served as the primary source, with the subtitled version used to fill gaps. The restoration required extensive manual work, particularly in sound, with over 4,000 interventions to address noise, dropouts and inconsistencies. Work-in-progress was closely supervised by Venu and Bina Paul to ensure fidelity to the film's original aesthetic, the foundation said.

Film Heritage Foundation's previous restorations such as "Thamp" (Aravindan Govindan), "Ishanou" (Aribam Syam Sharma), "Manthan" (Shyam Benegal), "Aranyer Din Ratri" (Satyajit Ray) and "Gehenu Lamai" (Sumitra Peries) have all had red-carpet world premieres at Cannes between 2022 and 2025. (PTI)

Kangana Ranaut's new film 'Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata' to release on June 12

Actor-politician Kangana Ranaut's thriller "Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata", inspired by the true story of hospital staff who saved 400 lives during the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, will release in theatres on June 12, the makers announced on Wednesday.

Written and directed by Manoj Tapadia, the film is set inside Cama Hospital on the night of the 26/11 attacks and chronicles how nurses, ward boys, cleaners, lift operators, security staff and administrative workers held their ground as terror unfolded outside.

"We usually celebrate big, dramatic acts of heroism, but real courage is much quieter, it steps in, stays back, and does what needs to be done. 'Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata' tells an untold story of courage, sacrifice, humanity, and unity—of ordinary people who stood between terror and life itself.

"This is desh bhakti in its truest sense, where duty turns into action. I feel proud to be part of a story that pays tribute to those who held the city together in its toughest moments," Ranaut said in a statement.

Producer Jayantilal Gada of Pen Studios said the film reflects the spirit of the country through its people. "It brings that out through a story of a vulnerable time and strong women," he added.

Tapadia said the film is "about the triumph of courage over fear, compassion over chaos, and sacrifice in the face of danger," adding that it honours ordinary people—especially women—who made life-and-death choices when it mattered most.

The ensemble cast features Girija Oak, Smita Tambe, Amrutha Namdev, Esha Dey, Priya Berde, Asha Shelar, Suhita Thatte, Rasika Aghase, Aditya Mishra and Zahid Khan alongside Ranaut.

Presented by Pen Studios, the film is produced by Pen Studios, Manikamika Films and Paramhans Creations in association with Eunoia Films LLP and Floating Rocks Entertainment. It will be distributed by Pen Marudhar. (PTI)

Arsenal reaches its first Champions League final in 20 years as Saka's goal seals win over Atletico

Atletico's Champions League dream ends amid penalty decisions that didn't go its way



LONDON, May 6: Arsenal is back in the Champions League final for the first time in 20 years thanks to a late first-half goal from Bukayo Saka that secured a 1-0 win over Atletico Madrid on Tuesday.

The Gunners' stinging defense did the rest as Arsenal has now kept a clean sheet at home in all three knockout rounds. The team also conceded a competition-low four goals in winning all eight of its matches in the league phase.

It will be only Arsenal's second final in Europe's premier competition, having lost the 2006 title match to Barcelona. This time it will face either defending champion Paris Saint-Germain or Bayern Munich in Budapest, Hungary, on May 30. PSG won the pulsating first leg of their semifinal 5-4, and the second leg is in Munich on Wednesday.

Atletico had a chance to equalise in the 51st when Giuliano Simeone chased down a poor backward header from William Saliba to round goalkeeper David Raya, but center back Gabriel did just enough to make him put his effort wide. Atletico was then denied a possible penalty when Arsenal defender Riccardo Calafiori stepped on the foot of Antoine Griezmann in the area, as referee Daniel Siebert awarded a free kick to the hosts for an earlier incident instead. Atletico coach Diego Simeone, clad in his customary all-black attire, grew increasingly agitated on the sidelines as the decisions went against his club and the search for an equaliser proved fruitless. He was eventually booked for his remonstrations in stoppage time. Simeone led his team to the Champions League final in 2014 and 2016, losing both times to Real Madrid, but will have to wait for a third chance to deliver the club's first European Cup.



LONDON, May 6: Atletico Madrid's hopes of winning the Champions League title for the first time ended in a semifinal loss to Arsenal in which two second-half penalty decisions didn't go its way Tuesday. Arsenal won 1-0 to advance to its first final in two decades 2-1 on aggregate. Atletico was trying to return to the final for the first time since 2016.

Atletico was looking for an equalizer when Giuliano Simeone felt he was fouled inside the area in the 51st minute. The Atletico player got past goalkeeper David Raya and was taking his shot when defender Gabriel came from behind to disrupt his attempt. Simeone fell and loudly complained to German referee Daniel Siebert. Video review maintained the referee's decision on the field to not award the penalty.

"It was all very fast but what I felt was that when I was taking the shot he destabilized me and I couldn't shoot well. It's what I felt," Simeone said. "The referee didn't even go to check the VAR. The same happened in the play with Antoine (Griezmann)." The play with Griezmann came five minutes later when the France forward appeared to be stepped on by Arsenal defender Riccardo Calafiori inside the area. The step on Griezmann's foot appeared to be clear, but the referee called an earlier foul by Atletico's Marc Pubill on Gabriel as both players went for the ball. Atletico did not think Pubill fouled Gabriel.

Marta Kostyuk withdraws from the Italian Open



ROME, May 6: Fresh off the biggest title of her career, Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine withdrew from the Italian Open due to hip and ankle issues.

Kostyuk won the Madrid Open on Saturday and is up to a career-best No. 15 in the rankings this week. Having also won another clay-court title in Rouen, France, the week before Madrid, Kostyuk is on an 11-match winning streak. "After the best stretch of my career, I was looking forward to Rome. But sometimes your body has other plans, and over the past few days I've been dealing with a hip issue. With my ankle still not fully at 100%, it's just not smart to keep pushing right now, so I won't be competing there this year," Kostyuk posted on Instagram on Tuesday as the tournament in Rome began.

"Now it's time to recover and get ready for Paris," Kostyuk said, referring to the French Open, which starts May 24. (AP)

British government eyes possible bid for Olympics in 2040s

LONDON, May 6: The British government wants to get the country "event ready" to potentially host another Olympics.

Discussions are happening "about supporting potential bids" for the Olympics and Paralympics in the 2040s, as well as bids for the Ryder Cup and Solheim Cup in the 2030s, according to an announcement Wednesday by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

"Initial work examining whether the UK could host the Olympic and Paralympic Games for the first time since London 2012 will assess key factors such as potential cost, socioeconomic benefit and any bid's chance of success," the statement read.

London has hosted the Summer Olympics three times, most recently in 2012.

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy said in the announcement that the government aims to "continue attracting the most prestigious events in sport."

The next two Summer Olympics are set: Los Angeles is hosting in 2028 followed by Brisbane, Australia in 2032.

There's a long list of countries interested in hosting the 2036 Games. It includes India, Qatar, Turkey, Hungary, Germany, and Chile. (AP)

AITA general secretary Sunder Iyer promises new era of transparency and inclusiveness

NEW DELHI, May 6: The All India Tennis Association (AITA) on Wednesday said it will usher in a new era of transparency and inclusiveness in its functioning as it welcomed the Delhi High Court's decision to declare the results of its September 2024 elections.



The federation said that the court's move brings much-needed administrative clarity and formally hands over charge to the newly elected office-bearers and executive committee, marking a key step in restoring normalcy in Indian tennis administration.

Welcoming the development, AITA Secretary General Sunder Iyer termed it "an important step towards ensuring transparency and stability in the functioning of the federation."

He reiterated the body's commitment to undertaking time-bound constitutional amendments in line with the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, aimed at strengthening governance, ensuring transparency and enabling collective decision-making with player participation.

"We are fully committed to ensuring that AITA's framework is in line with modern governance standards and statutory requirements," Iyer said in a press release.

The AITA said "it remains committed to ushering in a new era of transparency, inclusiveness and overall growth for Indian tennis."

He added that the federation's long-term plans include improving infrastructure, upgrading coaching standards and increasing the number of domestic and international tournaments in India.

Outlining the federation's roadmap, Iyer said AITA is working towards creating a roster of Sportspersons of Outstanding Merit (SOM) and forming an athletes' committee to ensure representation of players, both men and women, in its functioning as per the National Sports Governance (National Sports Bodies) Rules, 2026.

"Our goal is to create a system that benefits all stakeholders, from grassroots-level junior players to elite professionals. Special emphasis will be placed on nurturing junior tennis, which remains the foundation of the sport's future in the country," he said.

He added that the federation's long-term plans include improving infrastructure, upgrading coaching standards and increasing the number of domestic and international tournaments in India.

Pandya stays as one batch of MI players move to Raipur

MUMBAI, May 6: Skipper Hardik Pandya on Wednesday was not a part of a large first batch of Mumbai Indians players and support staff who travelled to Raipur from here for their next Indian Premier League game.

With a five-day gap between their last game on May 4 against Lucknow Super Giants and their next game against Royal Challengers Bengaluru on May 10, the Mumbai Indians players and staff will make their way to Raipur in separate batches.

Pandya missed MI's last game on Monday against LSG due to a back spasm. However, his niggle is said to be a minor one and a team source said he was advised rest for the game against LSG.

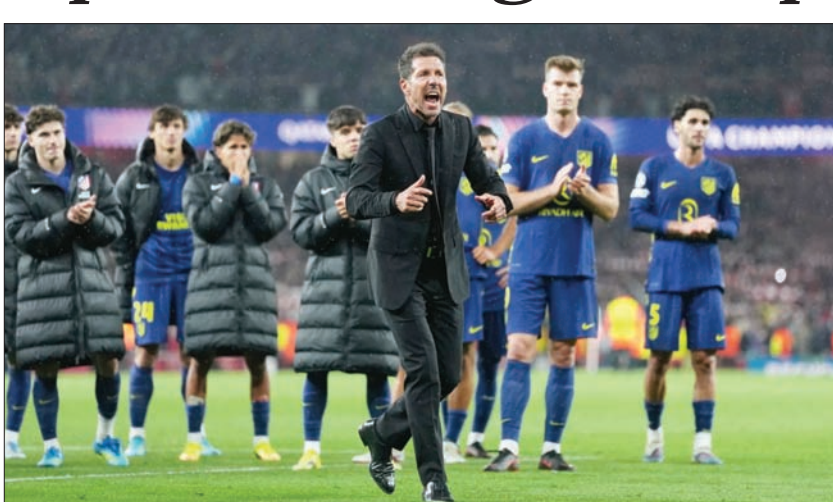
There are logistical reasons as well with only a few flight options being there between Mumbai and Raipur. The batch which travelled on Wednesday will not be training in Raipur on Thursday.

With seven defeats and three victories, Mumbai Indians are languishing at the ninth spot in the points table and need to win each of their remaining matches to keep their slim playoff hopes alive.

It also remains to be seen how Pandya, who has missed two games due to health-related issues in this edition of IPL, pulls up for the must-win clash against defending champions RCB at Raipur's Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Cricket Stadium. (PTI)

Atletico Madrid's Simeone proud and 'peaceful' after Champions League hopes dashed yet again

MADRID, May 6: After yet another Champions League elimination, Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone rallied with his players in front of the team's fans. He yelled, pumped his fists and applauded as the Atletico fans chanted support despite a 1-0 semifinal loss to Arsenal that ended the team's hopes of winning the European competition for the first time.



There was no desperation, no anguish, no extreme sadness. Simeone was at peace, proud of how far Atletico made it. "No one expected that we would be here," Simeone said. "We competed with a team that had so much strength and power. We gave it our all and now we have to accept the place that we're in. I'm grateful to our supporters and our players. I feel proud to be where I am right now."

Simeone wasn't even complaining with the refereeing despite two penalty calls that didn't go Atletico's way in the second half.

"I feel calm and peaceful. The team gave absolutely everything." since it lost the final to rival Madrid in 2016.

It was the only Spanish team to reach the last four of the European tournament this season, eliminating five-time champion Barcelona in the quarterfinals.

Atletico ended the season without lifting a trophy after not reaching the final in the Spanish Super Cup, losing the final of the Copa del Rey to Real Sociedad, and struggling in the Spanish league, where it sits in fourth place, 25 points behind leader Barcelona with four games remaining.

"There were high hopes for us in the Copa and in the Champions League," Atletico midfielder Koke Resurrección said. "We were not consistent in the league, we were not at the level we should have been. But we lost the Copa in a penalty shootout and in the Champions League we were this close to advancing."

"This group has been improving a lot and we have very young players who certainly will help this team fight for many great things in the near future," added the 34-year-old Koke, whose future with Atletico remained unclear.

Griezmann's European dream over
The loss to Arsenal likely put an end to Antoine Griezmann's hopes of adding a

Champions League title to his career achievements. The France forward is joining MLS club Orlando City after the season.

The 35-year-old Griezmann missed a penalty kick in the 2016 Champions League final that Atletico lost to Real Madrid.

"He has been an amazing player," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak said. "We are sad not just for him but for all the fans of Atleti, too. Everyone was looking for this final but we didn't reach it, so it's a difficult moment."

Simeone praised both Griezmann and Koke after the loss.

"We competed well with Barcelona in the quarterfinal, and in the semifinal against Arsenal. We have done incredibly well, and that's down to the hard work by players, including Antoine Griezmann," the coach said. "I hope the fans appreciated what we've done in the last few games. Koke was incredible, he's a real master, he shows leadership and talent despite his age." (AP)

RCB look to rediscover batting rhythm against struggling LSG

LUCKNOW, May 6: Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look to rediscover their batting rhythm after a rare collapse in their previous outing as they aim to strengthen their play-off push against bottom-placed Lucknow Super Giants in a reverse leg IPL match here on Thursday.

RCB are currently placed second on the table but remain tied on 12 points with four other teams. They will need to regroup quickly after suffering a four-wicket defeat against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad.

RCB's batting imploded dramatically in that match, slipping from 79 for 2 to 96 for 6 in the space of three overs before being bowled out for 155.

Despite the collapse, RCB's batting this season has largely revolved around aggressive intent. Virat Kohli has been in sublime form with 379 runs, while Devdutt Padikkal and skipper Rajat Patidar have also made important contributions.

With regular opener Phil Salt ruled out due to a finger injury, the responsibility of providing explosive starts alongside Kohli will rest on Jacob Bethell.

Bethell showcased his immense talent during the recent T20 World Cup and it is only a matter of time before unleashes his full range of strokes in the IPL.

Having had a week's break, RCB will head into the contest fresher than their opponents.

In contrast, LSG are languishing at the bottom of the standings after losing their last six matches.

They were beaten by Kolkata Knight Riders



via a Super Over in a tied game, and then failed to arrest their slide as they were comprehensively beaten by Mumbai Indians by six wickets in their previous outing.

LSG's campaign has unravelled due to inconsistent performances, tactical instability and repeated failures to close out matches.

Key batters such as Mitchell Marsh, skipper Rishabh Pant, Aiden Markram and Nicholas Pooran have struggled for consistency, while frequent reshuffling of the batting order has further compounded their problems. Pant, in particular, finds himself under scrutiny over his white-ball form.

LSG's batting line-up now faces a formidable RCB bowling attack spearheaded by

veteran Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood.

The experienced duo have operated effectively in tandem this season, notably dismantling Delhi Capitals for just 75 on April 27. Seamer Bhuvneshwar has been among the leading wicket-takers, making the most of the new-ball, while Hazlewood has consistently delivered high-impact spells.

Krunal Pandya too has enjoyed an impressive campaign, claiming nine wickets and troubling batters with an effective bouncer variation.

Suyash Sharma and Romario Shepherd also impressed in the previous game, although RCB's batting collapse proved deci-

sive in the defeat to GT.

For LSG, Prince Yadav and Mohsin Khan have been the standout bowlers with 13 and 10 wickets respectively. Mohammed Shami started the season strongly but has struggled for consistency and leaked runs in recent matches.

LSG's pace attack has repeatedly lost control in the death overs, allowing opponents to accelerate sharply and will face a tough task when they face RCB batters.

RCB had defeated LSG by five wickets in the first leg and will come into the match with a lot of confidence.

Teams:

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

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 at 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

IGU to send three-member team for Queen Sirikit Cup

NEW DELHI, May 6: Young golfer Guntas Kaur Sandhu will spearhead the Indian challenge at the Queen Sirikit Cup after the IGU named a three-member squad for the prestigious Asia-Pacific amateur team championship to be held in Indonesia from May 12 to 15.

Organised by the Asia-Pacific Golf Confederation (APGC) in association with The R&A (world golf rules governing body), a total of 15 countries, including defending champions South Korea, will be competing in the tournament.

The other countries include Australia, China, Chinese Taipei, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

India will be led by Sandhu, the 2025 Ladies Order of Merit champion. The Chandigarh golfer has been consistent in 2026 as well with six wins under her belt and 17 top-10 finishes from 20 starts in the 2025-26 Indian Golf Union (IGU) season.

The other members of the team are Haryana's Ceerat Kang and Keya Badugu of Delhi. (PTI)

Disappointed that IPL playoff matches, including final, have been allotted to other centres: KSCA

BENGALURU, May 6: The Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) on Wednesday expressed its "disappointment" after the IPL 2026 final was shifted from Bengaluru to Ahmedabad by the BCCI. Bengaluru was to host the final going by convention as Royal Challengers Bengaluru are the defending champions, but the BCCI shifted the venue to Ahmedabad without specifying the exact reason.

The Board, however, said that final venue was shifted "owing to certain requirements from the local association and authorities that were beyond the scope of BCCI's established guidelines and protocols".

At the start of IPL 2026, KSCA president Venkatesh Prasad announced that the BCCI had decided to allot seven matches to Bengaluru -- five home matches of Royal Challengers Bengaluru along with a play-off and the final.

"At the outset, KSCA expresses its disappointment that the IPL Playoff matches have been allotted to other centres. KSCA president Venkatesh Prasad was in touch



with the BCCI in this regard and had also formally conveyed KSCA's preparedness, willingness, and keen interest in hosting the IPL Playoffs at the iconic Chinnaswamy Stadium," said Vinay Mruthyunjaya, KSCA's official spokesperson.

Mruthyunjaya said the BCCI is yet to convey the "specific reasons" to shift the play-off matches to other centres.

"Despite our preparedness and willingness to host the Playoffs, we understand that the BCCI has taken

a decision to allot these matches to other venues.

"While the specific reasons for the same have not been formally communicated to KSCA, we fully respect the prerogative and decision-making authority of the BCCI in this regard," he added.

The KSCA, in association with RCB and other state government authorities, undertook large-scale renovation and security enhancement works ahead of IPL 2026 after 11 fans were killed in a stampede during the franchise's victory celebrations last year.

Both the state government and the Board were satisfied with the efforts made before green lighting the return of cricket to the venue.

The five IPL matches held in the city too went without any incidents and there was a marked improvement in security and crowd management.

"The IPL matches conducted in Bengaluru during the current season were widely appreciated for their smooth execution, crowd management, operational efficiency, and overall spectator expe-

rience.

"In this regard, KSCA had addressed a detailed communication to the BCCI outlining its preparedness and explaining the operational framework under which the current IPL season was conducted in Bengaluru," he said.

Despite the non-allocation of IPL play-off matches, Mruthyunjaya reiterated that the KSCA is now "fully prepared" to host matches at all levels.

"KSCA would like to reiterate that it remains fully prepared to host matches of national and international importance and will continue to extend its fullest support and cooperation to the BCCI, franchises, government authorities, and all stakeholders for the successful conduct of cricketing events in India," he said.

However, international cricket will return to the Chinnaswamy later this year, as it will host the fifth T20I between India and the West Indies on October 17.

The second ODI between India and Sri Lanka too will also be played here on December 16. (PTI)

PCB sends legal notices to defaulting broadcast and business partners to clear dues

LAHORE, May 6: The Pakistan Cricket Board has launched a strong campaign to recover dues to the tune of billions from defaulting franchisees, broadcast and business partners in order to fill up organizational coffers.

According to a PCB source, recently legal notices were sent to various PSL franchises, business and broadcast partners asking them to clear their pending dues to avoid facing any legal action which could lead to cancellation of their respective contracts.

"Initially some defaulting franchisees of the Pakistan Super League were also sent notices to clear their outstanding annual fees or face action.

These franchisees have now cleared their dues but also asked the board to clear their share from the central pool for the franchisees pending since 2010," the source said.

He said in response to a franchisee's grievance that their annual fees

were delayed since the board had not cleared their full share of around PKR 96 crores from the central pool for the PSL 10th edition, the franchise was told bluntly that unless contracted parties don't honor their commitments how can the board clear dues.

The source said the board still owed some franchisees 40 to 45 crores from the central pool of the PSL for 2025.

The source said the biggest defaulter of the board was a company which was involved in securing broadcast, other media and business rights from the PCB for not only PSL but other international cricket but declared they had sustained huge losses and were yet to clear dues of around 4.5 billion PKR.

"Because of this the board has not been able to keep its financial records up to date and audit their accounts," the source said.

He confirmed that the two new franchisees in the PSL and the new owners of Multan Sultans had all paid their annual franchise fees and other dues before the start of the PSL 11 which concluded last Sunday.

"The thing is that while these new franchisees are in the clear the board now has to pay them a guaranteed minimum amount of 85 crores PKR from PSL 11 and next four editions from the central pool," the source added.

"The problem is they are also other defaulting parties who have brought various sponsorships, advertising and media spots from the board," he said.

The fact remains that when PCB sold its broadcasting and streaming rights of the PSL 11 to a new party which also owns the Rawalpindi franchise they in turn sublet rights to the same party which remains a defaulter of billions of rupees. (PTI)

Akeal Hosein bosses powerplay overs with 'skill and mental fortitude'

NEW DELHI, May 6: For a spinner who bowls majority of his overs in the powerplay, Chennai Super Kings' West Indian import Akeal Hosein relies as much on mental fortitude as his skills to excel in the most unforgiving phase of the game.

With just two fielders in the deep in the first six overs, the margin for error is minuscule and the pressure is sky high.

However, Hosein thrives in this tense environment. The left-arm spinner returned with frugal figures of 3-0-15-1 in the powerplay to play a crucial role in his team's eight-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in an IPL match here on Tuesday.

"You need both of them (skill and mental toughness). Especially when you come upon pitches that aren't conducive to spin and it's just about being disciplined as well," he said. "Having two fielders out in the power play. It's not a job that you can go searching for wickets or you can be too greedy. It's just about sticking to the plan," he explained.

Hosein got the all-important wicket of an in-form K L Rahul, who was foxed by the West Indian as he stepped out to smash him for an inside out six. (PTI)

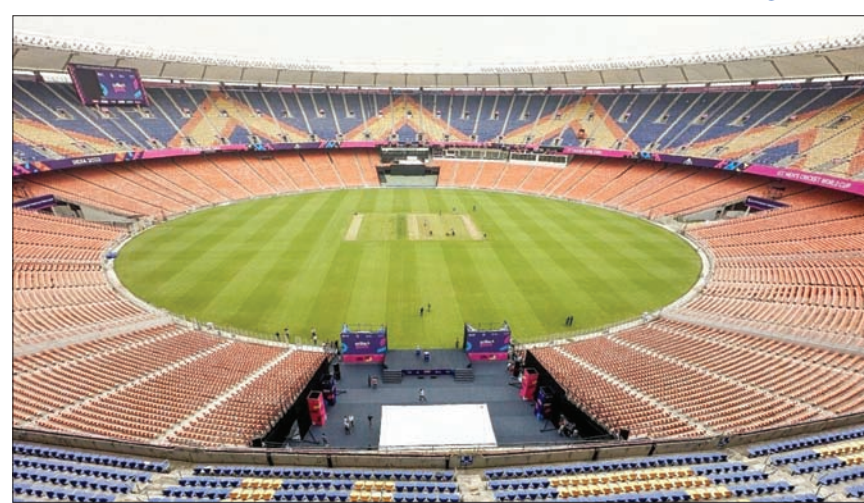
Ahmedabad to host IPL final, Dharamsala and New Chandigarh also get playoff games

NEW DELHI, May 6: Ahmedabad will host the IPL final for a second successive season on May 31 replacing the "originally designated" Bengaluru, the BCCI announced on Wednesday while allotting Qualifier 1 to Dharamsala and two other playoff games to New Chandigarh.

Bengaluru was to host the final going by convention as Royal Challengers Bengaluru are the defending champions. Apart from last year, Ahmedabad has previously hosted the IPL finale in 2022 and 2023.

"Bengaluru was originally designated to host the Final. However, owing to certain requirements from the local association and authorities that were beyond the scope of BCCI's established guidelines and protocols, the venue has been shifted and reassigned," the Board stated in a press release without specifying the exact requirements in the Karnataka capital. The Board also said it is increasing the playoff stage venues to three as a special case this year "owing to certain operational and logistical considerations."

"Qualifier 1, featuring the top two teams in the standings, will be played on May 26 at the HPCA Stadium in Dharamsala, with a direct



berth in the Final at stake," the BCCI stated in the press release.

"The action will then move to the New International Cricket Stadium in New Chandigarh, which will host the Eliminator on May 27 between the third and fourth-placed teams. The same venue will also stage Qualifier 2 on

May 29," it added.

Dharamsala would be hosting an IPL play-off game for the first time.

Qualifier 2 will feature the loser of Qualifier 1 and the winner of the Eliminator to determine the second finalist.

"The season will conclude with the grand

Ban on bilateral sports with Pak to continue, multinational events exempted: Ministry



NEW DELHI, May 6: The Sports Ministry on Wednesday said the blanket ban on bilateral sporting ties with Pakistan that was imposed last year will remain in force but athletes from across the border will not be stopped from coming here for multi-lateral events.

The ministry also reiterated its commitment to simplify the visa process for sportspersons, team officials, technical personnel, and office-bearers of International Sports Governing Bodies to position India as a "preferred sporting destination".

"In so far as bilateral sports events in each other's country are concerned, Indian teams will not be participating in competitions in Pakistan. Nor will we permit Pakistani teams to play in India," the ministry stated in a circular issued to all National Sports Federations (NSFs), the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) among others.

"With regard to international and multilateral events, in India or abroad, we are guided by the practices of international sports bodies and the interest of our own sportspersons.

"Accordingly, Indian teams and individual players will take part in international events that also have teams or players from Pakistan. Similarly, Pakistani

players and teams will be able to participate in such multilateral events hosted by India," it added.

The policy was first announced last year in August after an uproar over India's participation in cricket's Asia Cup in the UAE that also featured Pakistan, within months of the Pahalagam terror attack that killed 26 people.

At that point, the Ministry had stated that it would not come in the way of multi-lateral cricket engagements unless the host country is Pakistan.

The policy makes it clear that India, which is aspiring to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games and the 2036 Olympic Games, will abide by the Olympic Charter and its philosophy of inclusivity to present itself as an amiable host of global events.

"To position India as a preferred destination for hosting international sporting events, the visa process for sportspersons, team officials, technical personnel, and office-bearers of International Sports Governing Bodies shall be simplified," the ministry said.

"In respect of office-bearers of International Sports Governing Bodies, a multi-entry visa shall be granted on priority basis for the duration of their official tenure, subject to a maximum period of five years."

"Due protocol and courtesies, as per established practice, shall be extended to the Heads of International Sports Governing Bodies during their visits to India."

MYAS shifts from Shastri Bhawan

In another development, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has shifted its office from Shastri Bhawan to its newly constructed premises in Netaji Nagar. (PTI)

We would want Kuldeep to be better than this: DC head coach Badani

NEW DELHI, May 6: Delhi Capitals head coach Hemang Badani wants premier spinner Kuldeep Yadav to rediscover his best form with the franchise's playoff hopes hanging by a thread following the loss to Chennai Super Kings.

Defending a below par 155, DC were able to apply some pressure in the powerplay but Samson smashed Kuldeep for three sixes in his three overs that went for 34 runs. Kuldeep was brought in to get the breakthrough, instead he ended up releasing the pressure on the opposition. Eventually, CSK coasted to the target in 17.3 overs.

Kuldeep's overall IPL economy rate has hovered around eight, but this season it has crossed the 10-run mark while the wickets too have dried up, with the spinner managing only seven scalps in 10 matches.

"We would ideally want Kuldeep to be better than this. But we will rally around him. He's been somebody who's been a part of this side for many many years. He's done well for many many years. He can turn this around," said Badani. (PTI)

Shanghai World Cup: Compound teams flop, return empty-handed; reach last-32 in individuals

SHANGHAI, May 6: Indian compound men's and women's teams, considered strong medal contenders, endured a disappointing outing in Stage 2 of the Archery World Cup, failing to secure a podium finish after crumbling in crunch situations here on Wednesday.

The biggest setback came from the women's team, who had won India's only gold medal at the season-opening World Cup in Mexico last month.

The trio of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Pragati and Aditi Swami crashed out in the quarterfinals, losing 227-233 to Turkey.

The Indian trio failed to match the consistency of Hazal Burun, Defne Cakmak and Emine Rabia Oguz, who seized control from the second end and never let go, sealing a comfortable six-point win.

The men's team of Ojas Deotale, Sahil Jadhav, and Kushal Dalal raised hopes by reaching the semi-finals but faltered when it mattered the most, returning empty handed after back-to-back defeats under pressure.

In the bronze medal match, India lost to China in a dramatic shoot-off after scores were tied at 234-234.

Even the shoot-off ended level

with three perfect arrows each, but the Chinese had two arrows closer to the centre (X) compared to India's one, clinching the contest.

India had led by one point (118-117) at the halfway stage, but Shi Jingyu, Liu Jinyu and Qi Xiangshuo fought back to level scores in the third end.

A tense final end saw both teams tied at 58, with India dropping crucial points under pressure.

The semifinal defeat was equally telling.

The third-seeded Indians lost 234-235 to seventh-seeded USA despite leading through the first three ends. (PTI)

Final on May 31 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad -- setting the stage for a spectacular finale," the Board said.

Sources in the BCCI said the Ahmedabad was preferred because of its massive capacity, which would ensure higher footfalls.

It is also learnt that the Board does not agree with the Karnataka government's decision to have a quota of three complimentary IPL tickets each for the state's MLAs, MLCs and MPs this season given the relatively low capacity of the venue.

The M Chinnaswamy Stadium can hold around 35,000 spectators and it was the site of a deadly stampede last year in which 11 people lost their lives during RCB's trophy celebrations.

Playoffs Schedule:
Qualifier 1 -- May 26 -- HPCA Stadium, Dharamsala
Eliminator -- May 27 -- New International Cricket Stadium, New Chandigarh
Qualifier 2 -- May 29 -- New International Cricket Stadium, New Chandigarh
Final -- May 31 -- Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad. (PTI)