



WORLD

- Alarmed ASEAN leaders discuss crisis plan to mitigate backlash from Middle East war
- North Korea to deploy new artillery guns targeting Seoul, commission its 1st destroyer

NATION



- TN govt formation: Vijay gets CPI's support, to meet Guv again
- BJP says AAP's 'clean politics' claim exposed after ED raids in Punjab



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भारत सरकार

सोमनाथ

सोमलिङ्गं नरो दृष्ट्वा सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते।
लभते फलं मनोवाञ्छितं मृतः स्वर्ग समाश्रयेत्॥



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Shri Somnath Temple Complex, Prabhast Patan | 8th - 11th May 2026

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than the power of destruction ” - Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (Chairman, Shri Somnath Trust)



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SATURDAY, MAY 9, 2026

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Condemnation pouring in Cong member's house attacked in Jorhat

JORHAT, May 8: Unidentified persons allegedly set on fire a food joint on the residential premises of a Congress worker in Assam's Jorhat district in the early hours of Friday, police said. The incident happened around 1.30 am at Rangajan in Titabor police station area. "A probe has begun following a complaint by Rupali Das. More details will be known as the investigation progresses," a police officer said. "The food joint and some spare parts of a vehicle, estimated to be worth around Rs 10,000- Rs 15,000, were gutted, according to the family," he added. This is the second reported incident of an alleged attack on opposition members after the Assembly election results were declared on Monday, in which the BJP-led NDA secured a third consecutive term with a two-thirds majority. Unidentified persons had al-

legedly hurled petrol bombs at the house of a Congress candidate in Diphu in Karbi Anglong district late on Monday night, though none of the explosives exploded. In the latest incident, Das said passersby noticed the flames and alerted the family, who were asleep at the time. "Around 1.30 am, we heard banging on our door and people shouting. We were initially hesitant to open the door, but when we heard the voice of our neighbours, we rushed out," Das said. Das said her food joint at the front of the premises was completely gutted, with damage also caused to spare parts of a commercial passenger vehicle that her husband operates. The fire was brought under control with the help of locals before it could spread, she said. After the fire was doused, Das said she found a glass bottle with petrol and an attached wick.

Das's residence is located in the vicinity of former chief minister Tarun Gogoi's ancestral home. She routinely posts videos in support of the opposition party on social media. Chairman of Congress' social media and IT department Rituparna Konwar condemned the incident and demanded the arrest of the culprits. "Until now, we had only seen videos of post-poll violence in West Bengal. But today, some people are bringing such a dangerous political culture into Assam, which is a very alarming sign for the social fabric of the state," Konwar said. "I strongly condemn the incident and urge police to immediately apprehend the culprits and ensure strict punishment," he added. Sibsagar MLA and opposition Rajjor Dal president Akhil Gogoi also condemned the incident. In a post on Facebook, he said, "I strongly (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP government now stretched 'from Gangotri to Gangasagar': Shah Suvendu to take oath as Bengal CM today

KOLKATA, May 8: Senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari will be the first BJP chief minister of West Bengal, marking a watershed moment in the state's political history after decades of resistance to saffron politics. Adhikari has been unanimously elected leader of the BJP legislature party. Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced on Friday after a meeting of newly elected BJP MLAs and senior leaders here, formally sealing the BJP's emphatic capture of power in Bengal in the assembly polls. Shortly after his election, Adhikari drove to Raj Bhavan and met Governor R N Ravi to stake a claim to form the new government. The governor invited him to take the oath as chief minister at Brigade Parade Ground on May 9. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shah, chief ministers of NDA-



closest political aide and organisational troubleshooter, represents not merely a change of government but the culmination of a dramatic political rupture that has reshaped Bengal's political landscape over the past five years. Addressing the legislature party meeting, Shah said, "eight proposals were received, and all of them had only one name. Adequate time was given for a second name, but no other name was proposed. Therefore, I announce Suvendu Adhikari as the chief minister of West Bengal." Congratulating Adhikari, Shah said he was confident the BJP leader would provide stable governance and fulfil the aspirations of Bengal's people. "I have known Suvendu ji for a long time. He is a fighter. He understands administration, and he has fought TMC at every (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

West Bengal is the second state to have a BJP chief minister for the first time. Last Month, Samrat Chaudhary took the oath as Bihar Chief Minister as the state got its first BJP-led government. The elevation of 55-year-old Adhikari, once Mamata Banerjee's

Outmaneuver adversaries with strategic surprise

JAIPUR/NEW DELHI, May 8: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday directed the top military commanders of the three services to integrate an "element of surprise" into modern warfare to outmaneuver India's adversaries and bolster strategic posture. In his address at the joint commanders conference in Jaipur, Singh also described the Operation Sindoor as a testament to the "swift, precise, and joint response" of the Indian armed forces to safeguard national interests and called upon the military to remain ready to deal with any security challenges. In their two-day deliberations, the commanders carried out a comprehensive review of the combat preparedness of the military in the wake of the evolving regional security situation. Operation Sindoor was a demonstration of India's growing capabilities and a symbol of the nation's collective resolve and new military ethos, Singh said, a day after the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor. He also unveiled a 'Joint Doctrine for Integrated Communication Architecture' that is aimed at strengthening doctrinal clarity, interoperability and integrated communications across the armed forces in future multidomain operations. The joint commanders' conference, themed 'Military Capability in New Domains', brought together the top leadership of the defence ministry and the three services to deliberate on emerging security challenges and future readiness. Comprehensive deliberations were held on future warfare, multidomain operations, technological transformation and joint capability development. The conference witnessed extensive discussions on cognitive warfare, cyber resilience against evolving quantum and AI-enabled threats, military capability development in emerging domains, indigenous innovation and AI-enabled warfighting concepts. It was attended by Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, Chief of the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Stage set for NDA to elect leader tomorrow

GUWAHATI, May 8: The process for formation of the new NDA government in Assam will formally begin on May 10 with the election of the BJP Legislature Party leader, while the swearing-in ceremony of the new government will be held on May 12 in Guwahati. Outgoing chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the BJP Legislature Party meeting would be held at 10 am on May 10 to elect the party's leader in the Assembly. "The BJP Legislature Party meeting will take place at 10 am on May 10. The leader of the BJP Legislature Party will be elected there," Sarma told reporters on Friday. He said the meeting would be held in the presence of Union minister J P Nadda, who will attend as the party's central observer, and Haryana chief minister Naib Singh Saini, who has been appointed co-observer. According to Sarma, a joint meeting of NDA legislators comprising the BJP, Asom Gana Parishad and Bodoland Peoples' Front will be held at 11 am to formally endorse the NDA leader.



"After the BJP leader is elected, it will be ratified by NDA allies — the BPF and AGP. Following that, the elected BJP leader will stake claim to form the government before Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya," he said. The NDA delegation is scheduled to meet Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at 12 noon on May 10 to formally submit its claim to form the government. Sarma said the swearing-in ceremony would be held on May 12 at 11 am at the Veterinary Field in Khanapara. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend the ceremony along with chief ministers from several states, Union ministers, industrialists, Vaishnavite religious heads and Sattradhikars. He said BJP and AGP booth committee presidents from across Assam, along with elected representatives (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP government to focus on development of indigenous communities: Jayanta

GUWAHATI, May 8: Assam Cabinet Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah on Friday said the BJP-led government would continue to focus on the development of indigenous communities and backward regions of the state, asserting that the NDA's electoral success reflected growing public confidence in its governance model. Speaking to reporters, Baruah said the people of Assam had strongly endorsed the government's development agenda, particularly its efforts to strengthen infrastructure, welfare schemes and inclusive growth across different communities and regions. "The people of Assam have developed confidence that the present government is committed to the overall development of the state and its indigenous communities. This support has been reflected in the election results," he said. The minister stated that the



government remained committed to addressing the concerns of various indigenous groups, including Rabha, Bodo and other ethnic communities living in different parts of Assam. He said the BJP government had consistently worked towards resolving long-standing issues affecting indigenous populations and ensuring balanced development in remote and backward areas. Baruah highlighted the government's welfare initiatives and said several schemes launched over the past few years had directly benefited the people.

Referring to the Orunodoi scheme, he said the government had significantly expanded its outreach. "Last year, around 1.5 lakh beneficiaries received support under this cash benefit transfer scheme. This year, the government aims to further widen the coverage of welfare schemes so that more people can benefit," he added. The minister also underlined the importance of safeguarding the rights and identity of indigenous communities while ensuring economic progress and better connectivity in rural and border areas. According to Baruah, the BJP-led administration has adopted a policy of engaging directly with communities and stakeholders in order to resolve issues through discussion and consensus. "After the election victory, we have continued holding discussions with people from different communities and regions. We are interacting with local organisations (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India, Singapore resolve to jointly target terror financing, radicalisation

NEW DELHI, May 8: India and Singapore have vowed to jointly work to combat the challenge of terrorism including cross-border movement of terrorists, radicalisation, and financing of terrorism. Both sides deliberated on bolstering their anti-terror cooperation at the fifth meeting of their Joint Working Group (JWG) on combating terrorism and transnational crime, held in New Delhi on Thursday. According to a joint press release, the JWG unequivocally and strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism and reaffirmed the principle of "zero tolerance" toward terrorism. In the meeting, both sides condemned, in the strongest possible terms, the heinous terrorist attack in Pahalgam last April and the terrorist incident near Red Fort in November. They stressed that those responsible for terrorism must be

held accountable, the release said. "The JWG discussed a wide range of traditional and emerging threats and challenges, including terrorist recruitment, cross-border movement of terrorists, radicalisation, abuse of technology for terrorist purposes, and financing of terrorism," it said. The two sides also exchanged views on regional and global terrorism threat assessments, cybercrimes, drug trafficking and the nexus between transnational organised crime and terrorism, and agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation in dealing with these challenges, it said. "They also agreed on further cooperation and collaboration, particularly in the sphere of sharing of information and best practices, law enforcement, and capacity building to counter terrorism and transnational crimes," the release added. The JWG also agreed that confronting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP's victory shows growing trust of people: Ranoj Pegu

GUWAHATI, May 8: Assam Education Minister Ranoj Pegu on Friday thanked the people of his Dhemaji assembly constituency for electing him and said the BJP's emphatic victory in the state Assembly elections reflected growing public confidence in the alliance and its leadership. Speaking to reporters, Pegu said he was deeply grateful to the people for placing their trust in him and assured that he would continue to work for the development of the constituency and welfare of its residents over the next five years. "I express my heartfelt gratitude to the people of my constituency for electing me. I consider this not just as gratitude but also as a responsibility and duty. In the coming years, I will work for the development of the constituency and provide various services to the people," he said. Referring to the NDA's perform-



ance, Pegu said the alliance's prospects had strengthened significantly in Assam and that there was a strong possibility of the new Council of Ministers taking oath on May 12. He said the BJP-led alliance would first hold a meeting of the legislature party after the arrival of the party's central observers on May 10, during which the leader of the legislature party would be elected. "The elected leader of the legislature party will become the Chief

Minister. It is the Chief Minister's prerogative to constitute the Council of Ministers. However, there is already a broad expectation among the people that former Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, who is currently serving as caretaker Chief Minister, will once again assume the top post," Pegu said. On the question of ministerial berths, the senior BJP leader said the issue should not be viewed as the most important aspect of governance. "In a 126-member Assembly, everyone cannot become a minister. This is a complex process where representation of different communities and groups is also taken into consideration. Becoming a minister is not the biggest issue. We have always worked as Team Assam, and every MLA has an important role to play," he added. Pegu also said preparations were underway (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India carries out maiden flight-trial of new weapon system

NEW DELHI, May 8: India has successfully carried out the maiden flight-trial of an indigenously developed glide weapon system off the coast of Odisha. The Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation (TARA) system, developed to convert unguided warheads into precision guided weapons, was tested on Thursday, according to the defence ministry. "The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) successfully conducted the maiden flight-trial of TARA weapon off the coast of Odisha," it said. It said TARA is India's first indigenous glide weapon system to convert unguided warheads into precision guided weapons. The weapon system has been designed and developed by Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Hyderabad (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tiger returns to Arunachal's D Ering sanctuary after nearly two decades

ITANAGAR, May 8: A tiger has been photographed for the first time in Arunachal Pradesh's D'Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary, confirming the return of the big cat to the protected area after nearly two decades, forest officials said on Friday. The tiger (Panthera tigris) was captured in a camera trap during the latest phase of wildlife surveys conducted in the sanctuary with technical support from the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE). Officials said photographic evidence conclusively established the presence of the species in the landscape after months of systematic monitoring and field surveys.



According to forest officials, movement over the past year, prompting multiple rounds of camera trapping and scientific monitoring.

While initial efforts did not yield photographic evidence, the surveys were continued with intensified efforts. Officials said the latest surveys also recorded the Critically Endangered Chinese Pangolin (Manis pentadactyla) and the Endangered Hispid Hare (Caprolagus hispidus), a rare grassland specialist species, highlighting the rich biodiversity and conservation significance of the sanctuary. Calling it a landmark moment, Divisional Forest Officer Kemp Ete said the tiger's return reflected the resilience of the ecosystem and the impact of sustained conservation efforts (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India pushes for inclusive migration, stronger anti-trafficking laws at UNGA

NEW YORK, May 8: India endeavours to build an inclusive, humane, and future-ready framework for migration while addressing the challenges of irregular migration and trafficking, Union Minister Kirti Vardhan Singh has said at the United Nations General Assembly here. "Migration is ultimately about people, their aspirations, resilience, and contributions," Singh said at the plenary of the second International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) on Thursday. "We endeavour to build an inclusive, humane and future-ready framework, while addressing challenges such as irregular migration, trafficking and gaps in social protection," he said.

Singh stated that India manages migration through a "holistic and pragmatic" framework focused on protecting migrants, overseeing every stage of the migration process, and fostering international cooperation. "India, home to one of the world's largest and dynamic diaspora of over 34 million and a leading recipient of global remittances, is witness to how migration can transform lives, communities, and nationalities," he said. India has also concluded comprehensive bilateral mobility agreements and MoUs with 23 countries, and is pursuing several more, to create sustainable pathways for fair and ethical mobility, he said. "This is the key to ensuring migrant welfare through safe and regular

migration pathways," he added. The minister highlighted the various extensive initiatives undertaken by India, including the use of digital technologies, to support its nationals abroad. Consular protection has also been strengthened through the 'MADAD' grievance redressal portal and Migrant Resource Centres. India's Passport Seva online portal further ensures timely and accessible services for Indian citizens overseas and at home. The Indian Community Welfare Fund has provided emergency assistance, legal support, and repatriation services to Indian nationals since its inception in 2009, he said. "We have strengthened skilling initiatives and expanded pre-departure (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Keep your friends rich and your enemies rich, and find out which is which. -Ultron

Bihar Cabinet expansion

Making JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar's son Nishant Kumar a minister in the CM Samrat Choudhary led BJP government in Bihar made headlines. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also present during oath-taking, which is seen as his approval of dynastic politics if practiced under his political umbrella, though he has been a strong critic of dynastic politics of other political parties in opposition. All critics of dynastic politics were present there apart from PM Narendra Modi – Union Minister of Home Amit Shah, Union Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh and Union Minister J P Nadda. The worst, Nishant has never even contested an election. He was not even in JD(U) till recently. He joined the party after his father was shifted to Rajya Sabha last month after a deal with PM Narendra Modi to vacate CM's post for the BJP in Bihar. Thirty-two ministers including Nishant Kumar took oath at Patna's historic Gandhi Maidan on Thursday, as part of expansion of CM Samrat Choudhary's government. The leaders of other allies of the BJP in the NDA, the HAMS and RLM also got the ministries for their sons. HAMS chief Jitan Ram Manjhi's son Santosh Manjhi and RLM's chief Upendra Kushwaha's son Deepak Prakash were made ministers.

Son's and daughter of politicians are in considerable number in the entire political spectrum in the country across the states and among all political parties. There is nothing new in it. However, dynastic politics have been criticized by the BJP leadership for a long time in reference to Congress, Samajwadi Party, Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar), RJD especially during elections. BJP leadership have claimed a party with difference, but we have several examples even within the BJP of dynastic politics under which the party gave tickets to son's and daughters of their political leaders. As for Nitish Kumar is concerned, he has also been against dynastic politics, but he has done the same dynastic politics when it came to his son, and accepted sons of other politicians in the NDA as ministers. The incident has exposed the double standard of both the PM Narendra Modi and Nitish Kumar on dynastic politics along with their political parties.

During the Bihar elections in November 2025, both PM Modi and CM Nitish attacked RJD and its leader Lalu Prasad Yadav and criticized their dynastic politics, because RJD leader Tejaswi Yadav was the CM face of the INDIA bloc (Mahagathbandhan). In this backdrop, one can just go through the statements made by PM Narendra Modi on dynastic politics, parivarvad, and nepotism made against several politicians chiefly against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, SP leaders Akhilesh Yadav, and RJD leader Tejashvi Yadav. He has been criticizing them and attacking them from family-based political parties.

Bihar cabinet expansion exposes PM's double standard

By: Dr Gyan Pathak

Making JD(U) Leader Nitish Kumar's son Nishant Kumar a minister in the CM Samrat Choudhary led BJP government in Bihar made headlines. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also present during oath-taking, which is seen as his approval of dynastic politics if practiced under his political umbrella, though he has been a strong critic of dynastic politics of other political parties in opposition. All critics of dynastic politics were present there apart from PM Narendra Modi – Union Minister of Home Amit Shah, Union Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh and Union Minister J P Nadda. The worst, Nishant has never even contested an election. He was not even in JD(U) till recently. He joined the party after his father was shifted to Rajya Sabha last month after a deal with PM Narendra Modi to vacate CM's post for the BJP in Bihar.

Thirty-two ministers including Nishant Kumar took oath at Patna's historic Gandhi Maidan on Thursday, May 7, 2026, as part of expansion of CM Samrat Choudhary's government. The leaders of other allies of the BJP in the NDA the HAMS and RLM also got the ministries for their sons. HAMS chief Jitan Ram Manjhi's son Santosh Manjhi and RLM's chief Upendra Kushwaha's son Deepak Prakash were made ministers.

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Approving parivarvad and dynastic politics in Bihar now is not the only example. BJP is doing the same thing in other states too. They supported Chirag Paswan the son of Ramvilas Paswan in Bihar, Poonam Mahajan the daughter of Pramod Mahajan, Varun Gandhi the son of Maneka Gandhi, Jayant Sinha the son of Yashwant Sinha, Dushyant Singh the son of Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Anurag Thakur the son of Prem Kumar Dhumal, Parvish Verma the son of Sahib Singh Verma, B Y Raghavendra the son of B S Yediyurappa, Pritam Munde the son of Gopinath Munde, Raksha Khadse the daughter in law of Eknath Khadse, Heena Gabit the daughter of Vijaykumar Gavit, Akash Vijayvargiya son of Kailash Vijayvargiya and so on. The list is bigger and these are only examples to show how within the BJP dynastic politics exists.

In this backdrop, one can just go through the statements made by PM Narendra Modi on dynastic politics, parivarvad, and nepotism made against several politicians chiefly against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, SP leaders Akhilesh Yadav, and RJD leader Tejashvi Yadav. He has been criticizing them and attacking them from family-based political parties. Against the RJD, PM Modi had said, "RJD means 'jungle raj' and family rule ... In Bihar, one family treated the entire government as private property ... Those involved in corruption and dynastic politics cannot develop Bihar ... Some parties exist only to promote sons and daughters."

In his Independence Day speech in 2022, PM Modi had said, "When I talk about nepotism, people think I am only talking about politics. Unfortunately, this evil has spread into every institution in India." In the next year's Independence Day speech in 2023, he said, "Dynastic parties work with the mantra of 'party of the family, by the family and for the family.'" In February 2025 in Rajya Sabha he said, "Congress prepared such a model of politics in which there was a blend of lies, fraud, corruption, nepotism, and appeasement."

During his Lok Sabha election speech he said, "Congress is a party which has become confined to one family. ... For Congress, the party is above the nation and one family is above the party ... the Congress model is 'family-first', while our model is 'nation first' ... Congress promoted dynastic politics for decades and damaged India's democratic spirit. ... In Congress, talent does not mat-

Election Results: Beneficiary schemes and the decisive influence of women voters

The recently declared Assembly election results, in which the ruling party managed to secure an overwhelming and massive victory, represent not merely an ordinary electoral success, but rather a clear reflection of a profound transformation in Assam's social structure and the psychology of its voters. In previous elections, political parties were generally seen placing greater emphasis on emotional issues such as caste, religion, language, or illegal immigration in order to attract voters. However, the atmosphere of this election was entirely different. Emotional issues were completely overshadowed by the question of realism and economic security. The direct impact of the welfare schemes implemented by the ruling party through long-term planning gave rise to a new political perception among the common people of the state. This victory is not merely the success of election campaigning; it is the ultimate outcome of a close relationship built between an organized administrative machinery and the grassroots-level needs of the people. From a politically neutral perspective, it becomes evident that the present-day voter gives greater importance to the politics of direct benefit than to the politics of promises. The ruling party understood this simple yet profound reality with remarkable precision and accordingly succeeded in taking its governmental schemes to every village and every household. The election result proved that in modern politics, the proper implementation of development and welfare schemes is the most dependable weapon for acquiring and retaining power, where the traditional attacks or criticisms of the opposition fail to create any meaningful impact.

The beneficiary schemes have initiated a silent yet deep revolution in the rural and semi-urban economy of Assam, and this became the most significant deciding factor in the election. The direct cash transfer schemes that included families living below the poverty line brought unprecedented financial relief to people at the lowest strata of society. Earlier, government assistance generally meant receiving some materials or token aid through middlemen, where corruption and favoritism were widespread. But

the system of transferring money directly into the bank accounts of beneficiaries brought transparency to the entire process. The money that reached the bank accounts of ordinary families on a fixed date every month was no longer merely a government subsidy; rather, it became an extremely important component of their daily survival. This financial security generated a deep sense of trust and respect towards the ruling party in the minds of the people. Before the election, opposition parties harshly criticized these schemes, describing them as a waste of public funds and a cheap strategy to purchase votes. However, the common people did not accept the opposition's arguments at all. For families that depended on government assistance at the end of the month to buy medicines or educate their children, the economic theories of the opposition were far less important than the future of their own households. As a result, beneficiaries felt that if the present government were replaced, there existed a major risk that these benefits would stop. This fear united them, and on election day they spontaneously came forward to vote in favour of the present government, thereby proving all the political calculations of the opposition wrong.

The most striking and decisive aspect of this election was the unprecedented awareness and unified support of women voters. Traditionally, Assam's social structure followed an unwritten rule where the women of a family voted for the same party supported by the male head of the household. But in the recently concluded Assembly election, this old perception changed completely. Most of the welfare schemes introduced by the ruling party were centered around women. The system of sending government funds directly into the bank accounts of women as heads of households not only made them financially self-reliant, but also gave them a new sense of dignity and self-respect. Alongside this, the massive network of women created through self-help groups in rural areas transformed into an impregnable fortress during the election. From waiving small loans for women to encouraging them to become entrepreneurs, the steps taken by the government left a deep impact on



DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

the minds of rural women. Women felt that the present administration had understood their struggles and hardships and was sincerely working towards solutions. Because of this realization, women voters ignored all other political temptations and campaign rhetoric during the election and cast their decisive votes while thinking only about their economic security and future. Statistics from various constituencies clearly show that regions with higher percentages of women voters also witnessed significantly larger victory margins for ruling party candidates. This proves that women voters are no longer a force directed by others; they have now emerged as an independent and most powerful group capable of determining the political destiny of Assam.

Behind this massive victory of the ruling party lay not only government schemes, but also its subtle political strategies and strong organizational foundation. The disciplined structure built by the ruling party in the sphere of political management was almost unimaginable for the opposition. From the grassroots level of village panchayats to Assembly constituencies, the uninterrupted communication network they established ensured that every message of the government reached every voter with precision. Party workers in every village visited the homes of beneficiaries to check whether they had received the benefits of the schemes and arranged immediate solutions whenever problems arose. This constant interaction created a deep emotional bond between the people and the party. On the other hand, the condition of the opposition camp was completely opposite. Leadership conflicts, lack of coordination, and the absence of

any definite roadmap were clearly visible among them. Opposition parties were seen approaching the people only during the election period, and their campaigns remained mostly confined to criticizing the government and pointing out its faults. Against the welfare-oriented model presented by the ruling party before the people, the opposition failed to provide any improved or credible alternative. The public did not merely want to hear criticism; they wanted assurance of a secure future.

The ruling party skillfully combined this agenda of development with the cultural and security identity of Assam's indigenous people and built an invincible political narrative. Because of this strategic superiority, all political attacks of the opposition became ineffective even before reaching the voters, and the ruling party once again succeeded in retaining power with an absolute majority.

Another profound political aspect of this election was the drastic transformation in voting patterns across Assam's diverse demographic and geographical regions. In previous elections, Upper Assam, Lower Assam, tea tribe-dominated regions, and hill districts displayed distinct voting equations. But this time, the influence of beneficiary schemes transcended all traditional geographical and ethnic boundaries and created a common vote bank. Particularly among the tea tribe community, which was once considered important only during elections, the continuous measures taken by the government to improve their standard of living became decisive this time. Free rice distribution, improved healthcare facilities, financial assistance for pregnant women, and housing grants provided to tea garden workers brought visible changes to their lives, and they responded through their votes. Similarly, the impact of the government's developmental activities was clearly visible in Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe dominated regions as well. Opposition parties attempted to use old grievances and emotions within these communities to divide votes, but those efforts failed. People realized that emotional politics could not solve their fundamental problems. What they needed were better roads,

bridges, drinking water, and uninterrupted electricity supply. The large infrastructure projects completed across the state over the past few years provided visible evidence of development before the eyes of the people. They felt that the government had not merely designed schemes on paper, but had actually implemented them in reality. This beautiful combination of visible development and direct financial benefit ultimately led people to rise above divisions of caste, religion, and language and unite under a single umbrella in support of the ruling party.

A comprehensive analysis of the entire electoral process and its outcome leads to the conclusion that this Assembly election has marked the beginning of a new chapter in Assam's political history. The election proved that today's voters are highly conscious and mature. They can no longer be misled merely through false promises or communal polarization. Beneficiary schemes are not simply tools for securing votes; they are a carefully designed economic process for bringing backward sections of society into the mainstream. The sense of dignity and entitlement generated in the minds of ordinary people through this process had never before been witnessed in Assam's politics. Particularly, the political awakening among women that emerged during this election will serve as a major driving force in policy-making in the years ahead. From now onwards, any political party aspiring to gain or retain power in Assam will not succeed merely through political slogans; it will have to adopt a clear and practical roadmap for ensuring economic security and women's empowerment. The recently declared election results delivered the message that a government which keeps the kitchen fire burning in people's homes and protects the dignity of the weakest sections of society is never rejected by the public. This is the clearest sign of a healthy, strong, and progressive democracy where a beautiful and complete harmony exists between the needs of the people and the goodwill of the government. In the future, this welfare-oriented political model has the full potential to play a decisive role not only in Assam but across the political landscape of the entire country.

China's Growing Footprint Near India's Most Sensitive Border

The decision by the government of Bangladesh led by Tarique Rahman to formally seek the support of China for the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project marks a defining moment in the shifting landscape of South Asian geopolitics. This move carries immense weight because the Teesta River is not just a body of water but a lifeline for millions of people and a flashpoint for diplomatic tension between Dhaka and New Delhi. By inviting Beijing to take a lead role in a project situated so close to the sensitive borders of India, Bangladesh is signaling a departure from its traditional foreign policy balance and leaning into a new era of strategic partnerships. The implications of this choice ripple far across the plains of Bengal and into the corridors of power in both India and China.

To understand the magnitude of this development, one must first look at the geography of the river itself. The Teesta originates in the high altitudes of the eastern Himalayas, cutting through the rugged terrain of Sikkim and the lush foothills of West Bengal before crossing into the northern plains of Bangladesh. For the people living along its banks, the river dictates the rhythm of life, providing water for the vast irrigation networks that sustain rice cultivation and supporting local fisheries.

For decades, the management of this transboundary river has been a source of friction. Bangladesh has long argued that the construction of dams and barrages on the Indian side has severely restricted the flow of water during the dry season, leading to drought conditions and economic hardship for its farmers. Conversely, during the monsoon, the sudden release of excess water often causes devastating floods and erosion.

The Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project was conceived as a holistic solution to these recurring disasters.

The plan involves massive dredging to deepen the riverbed, the construction of embankments to prevent flooding, and the creation of a series of reservoirs and satellite towns along the riverbanks. It is an ambitious undertaking that requires billions of dollars in investment and high level technical expertise. For several years, China has expressed a keen interest in financing and executing this project as part of its broader Belt and Road Initiative. The recent meeting in Beijing be-

tween Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi confirms that this interest has now translated into a formal request for assistance.

The timing of this request is particularly notable given the recent political changes in Dhaka. The transition from the administration of Sheikh Hasina to the interim leadership of Muhammad Yunus and now the government of Tarique Rahman has brought a visible change in how Bangladesh engages with its neighbors. While the previous government maintained a delicate act of balancing the interests of India and China, the current leadership appears more willing to embrace Chinese investment even when it touches upon India's most sensitive security concerns. This shift is viewed with significant apprehension in New Delhi.

India's concern is rooted in the location of the project. The Teesta flows near the Siliguri Corridor, a narrow strip of land often referred to as the Chicken's Neck. This corridor is the only land link between the main part of India and its eight northeastern states. Any significant foreign presence in this area, especially that of a strategic rival like China, is seen as a potential threat to India's territorial integrity. If Chinese engineers, technicians, and workers are stationed along the Teesta for a long term project, New Delhi fears that this presence could be used for surveillance or to gain a tactical advantage in a region that has seen historical border disputes. The thought of Chinese footprints so close to this vital artery is a nightmare scenario for Indian defense planners.

In an effort to prevent this outcome, India made a proactive offer in 2024 to provide its own technical and conservation assistance for the Teesta basin. This was a clear attempt to provide Dhaka with an alternative to Chinese involvement. By offering to help manage the river, India hoped to address Bangladesh's water security needs while keeping the project within the sphere of bilateral cooperation.



AUTHOR
By: Satyabrata Borah

The fact that the Rahman government has chosen to move forward with China suggests that the Indian offer did not meet the specific financial or structural requirements of the project, or that Dhaka is making a conscious choice to diversify its dependencies.

The dialogue between Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman and Wang Yi highlights the deepening of the China Bangladesh Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Partnership. China has positioned itself as a reliable partner for infrastructure development, offering a model of high quality cooperation that aligns with Bangladesh's national strategies. Wang Yi's statement that China's ties with South Asian countries do not target any third party is a standard diplomatic refrain, but it does little to ease the anxieties of those in New Delhi who see a pattern of encirclement. From the development of ports to the building of bridges and power plants, Chinese capital is now woven into the fabric of the Bangladesh economy.

Bangladesh is currently facing significant economic pressures, and the lure of large scale investment is strong. China is already the fourth largest lender to the country, and the promise of further investment in traditional areas like infrastructure and trade is a compelling proposition for a government looking to stabilize the economy and deliver on development promises. The commitment by Dhaka to the One China principle and its opposition to Taiwan independence are part of the diplomatic price for this economic support. This alignment shows a high level of mutual trust and a shared vision for the future of the region.

The water sharing issue remains the most emotional and politically charged aspect of the relationship between India and Bangladesh. The 1996 Ganges Water Treaty is nearing its expiration, and the lack of progress on a formal Teesta treaty has left many in Bangladesh feeling that bilateral negotiations with India have reached a dead end. In this context, the Chinese project is seen by some in Dhaka as a way to take control of their own water destiny. Instead of waiting for a treaty that

may never come, they are looking to engineering and management solutions to mitigate the impact of water scarcity. This approach prioritizes immediate internal needs over the sensitivities of a neighbor.

The relationship between India and Bangladesh has historically been described as a golden chapter of diplomacy, characterized by cooperation on security, connectivity, and trade. The fall of the Hasina government and the subsequent rise of a leadership that is perceived to be closer to China and Pakistan has strained this bond. India now finds itself in a position where it must navigate a much more complex and perhaps less friendly political environment in its backyard. The decision to bring China into the Teesta project is a physical manifestation of this new reality.

As the project moves from the stage of formal requests to implementation, the regional dynamics will continue to evolve. China's role as a primary developer in South Asia is expanding, and its ability to offer massive financial packages makes it an attractive partner for nations seeking rapid growth. For Bangladesh, the Teesta project represents a chance to transform a region that has long suffered from the whims of nature and the delays of diplomacy. For India, it represents a challenge to its traditional influence and a test of its ability to offer viable alternatives to its neighbors.

The conversation between Dhaka and Beijing reflects a world where middle powers are increasingly assertive in choosing their partners based on pragmatic interests. The historical ties of culture and geography that bind India and Bangladesh are being tested by the hard realities of modern geopolitics and the vast resources of a global superpower. The Teesta River, once a symbol of shared heritage and natural beauty, is now a stage for a high stakes game of influence. The decisions made in the coming months will determine whether the river becomes a bridge for regional cooperation or a fault line for future conflict. The people living in the Teesta basin care most about the water in their fields and the safety of their homes, but their future is now being shaped by decisions made in distant capitals where the maps are drawn with a focus on power and strategy. This is the reality of a changing world where the flow of a river can change the course of history.

Alarmed ASEAN leaders discuss crisis plan to mitigate backlash from Middle East war

CEBU (PHILIPPINES), May 8: Southeast Asian leaders met in an annual summit Friday under intense pressure to mitigate the impact on their people and economies from the Iran war, which one top minister said, "should not have occurred in the first place."

The alarm by the heads of state of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is underscored by their decision to focus discussions on a contingency plan to ensure their fast-growing region, which imports most of its oil and gas from the Middle East, will have stable fuel and food supplies.

The Philippines is hosting the summit in the central island province of Cebu. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered the summit to be stripped of the traditional pomp and pageantry in keeping with the economic headwinds worldwide.

A key dilemma of the ASEAN leaders is how to carry out large-scale evacuations from the Middle East, where more than a million of their citizens work and live, if widespread hostilities flare up again.

Several Southeast Asian citizens

China confirms its support to Pak during four-day conflict with India

BEIJING, May 8: China, for the first time, has confirmed that it provided on-site technical support to Pakistan during the four-day conflict with India last year, official media reports here said.

China's state broadcaster CCTV on Thursday aired an interview with Zhang Heng, an engineer from the Aviation Industry Corporation of China's (AVIC) Chengdu Aircraft Design and Research Institute, a key developer of China's advanced fighter aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicle design.

Zhang had provided technical support to Pakistan during the four-day war last May, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported, quoting CCTV.

Pakistan's air force operates a fleet of Chinese-made J-10CE jets, produced by an AVIC subsidiary.

"At the support base, we frequently heard the roar of fighter jets taking off and the constant wail of air-raid sirens. By late morning, in May, the temperature was already approaching 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit). It was a real ordeal for us, both mentally and physically," Zhang said.

What drove his team was the "desire to do an even better job with on-site support" and to ensure their equipment could "truly perform at its full combat potential", Zhang told CCTV. (PTI)



have been killed since the United States and Israel launched military strikes on Feb. 28 against Iran. The hostilities have continued sporadically despite a month-old ceasefire, especially in the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

A draft of a joint declaration by the leaders, which outlines a contingency plan and was seen by The Associated Press, called on the regional bloc's 11 state members to

share information and strengthen coordination with international organisations "to ensure the safety and welfare of ASEAN nationals in affected areas."

Known for their conservative and careful rhetoric, top delegates to the ASEAN summit avoided blunt expressions of their disappointment over the continuing hostilities, but Thailand's foreign minister, Sihasak Phuanketkeow,

was more emphatic and called for the current ceasefire between the US and Iran to be indefinitely extended and the safe passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz assured.

"This war should not have occurred in the first place," Sihasak told AP in a brief interview and added that all ASEAN states were alarmed. "We don't know what the objectives are, right?"

"The peace talks seem to be moving, but we want the war to end," Sihasak said.

ASEAN's contingency plan calls for actions including the ratification, possibly this year, of an agreement that will pave the way for coordinated emergency fuel sharing, planning a regional power grid, diversifying the region's sources of crude oil, promoting the use of electric vehicles and studying the use of new technologies, including civilian nuclear energy.

Despite the focus on the Middle East and its shortened summit to cut costs, the leaders will take up major regional flash points, including the South China Sea territorial disputes involving Beijing, a five-year civil war in Myanmar and a

recent border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia.

In a separate statement by the leaders on maritime issues that will be made public after the summit, they pledged to "endeavour to conclude the negotiation of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea."

Negotiations on the proposed non-aggression pact between ASEAN and China have dragged on for more than a decade as increasingly tense confrontations intensified in recent years, particularly between Chinese and Philippine coast guard and naval forces.

That has stoked criticisms of ASEAN as an ineffective "talk shop," where leaders show up each year in their native shirts and pose for a group handshake to project unity despite deep divisions.

ASEAN members Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines are involved in the decades-long territorial standoffs in the South China Sea. The other members of the regional bloc are Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand. (AP)

North Korea to deploy new artillery guns targeting Seoul, commission its 1st destroyer



SEOUL, May 8: North Korea said on Friday it will deploy new long-range artillery systems this year that are capable of striking South Korea's capital region and will commission its first naval destroyer in the coming weeks.

The announcement comes days after South Korea said North Korea's newly revised constitution drops all references to Korean unification, in line with leader Kim Jong Un's vows to terminate ties with South Korea and establish a two-state system on the Korean Peninsula.

Kim visited a munitions factory on Wednesday to inspect the production of 155-mm self-propelled gun-howitzers to be deployed at an artillery unit in the southern border area within this year, the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported.

KCNA cited Kim as saying the striking range of this large-calibre rifle gun is over 60 kilometres (37 miles). He said that "such a rapid extension of striking range and remarkable improvement of striking capability will provide a great change and advantage in the land operations of our army," according to KCNA.

Kim said various operational and tactical missile systems and powerful multiple rocket launcher systems are also scheduled to be deployed along the border.

North Korea's artillery systems draw less outside attention than its ballistic missiles, whose launches are banned under UN Security Council resolutions. But the country already deploys many artillery guns near the border with South Korea, posing a serious threat to Seoul, the South Korean capital that has 10 million people and is about 40 to 50 kilometres (25 to 30 miles) from the border.

KCNA said Kim on Thursday rode on the destroyer Choe Hyon to review its manoeuvrability off North Korea's west coast. Kim ordered authorities to hand over the ship to the navy in mid-June as scheduled, after appreciating that all the tests for the destroyer's opera-

tional commissioning progressed smoothly, according to KCNA.

KCNA photos showed Kim's teenage daughter on the destroyer as well, in the latest public activity with her father. One photo showed her standing behind her father as he spoke to navy sailors, and another showed them eating a meal with the crew on the destroyer. South Korea's spy service said last month she could be considered Kim's heir.

The destroyer, which was unveiled with great fanfare last year, is North Korea's largest and most advanced warship. North Korea later unveiled a second destroyer of the same class, but it was damaged during a botched launching ceremony. Kim has called for building two more destroyers.

Kim's latest military inspections came after South Korea said Wednesday that the new North Korean constitution dropped previous commitments to peaceful unification with South Korea and redefined its territory only as the northern half of the Korean Peninsula.

The changes reflected Kim's increasingly hard-line stance toward South Korea, which he has declared his country's permanent and most hostile enemy, while diplomacy is stalled and tensions rise over his nuclear ambitions. In January 2024, Kim ordered the rewriting of the constitution to eliminate the idea of shared statehood with South Korea, a step that would break away from his predecessors' long-cherished dreams of peacefully achieving a unified Korea on the North's terms.

Kim's vilification of the South has been a major setback for Seoul's liberal government, which desires reengagement and has taken preemptive steps to ease tensions, including shutting down propaganda broadcasts along the border.

North Korea has shunned dialogue with South Korea and the US and focused on expanding its nuclear and missile arsenals since Kim's broader, high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with President Donald Trump collapsed in 2019. (AP)

UAE reports drone, missile attack after US says it traded fire with Iran

DUBAI, May 8: The United Arab Emirates said it responded to another Iranian missile barrage on Friday, hours after the US said it traded fire with Iranian forces in the Strait of Hormuz, in the latest blows to a shaky month-old ceasefire.

The UAE's Defence Ministry said three people were wounded after air defences "engaged" two ballistic missiles and three drones launched by Iran. It was not clear if all were successfully intercepted. Authorities told people to stay away from any fallen debris.

The US said it thwarted attacks on three Navy ships and struck Iranian military facilities in the strait. Iran has mostly blocked the critical waterway for global energy since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on February 28, causing a global spike in fuel prices and rattling world markets.

US President Donald Trump Thursday called the US strikes a "love tap" in a phone call with ABC. But he reiterated threats to resume full-scale bombing if Iran doesn't accept an agreement to reopen the strait and roll back its nuclear programme.

Iran's Foreign Ministry said the US strikes were a "clear violation" of the ceasefire. Tehran had previously said

it was examining the latest US proposals for ending the war delivered via Pakistan, which is mediating.

US says it responded to an attack in the strait

The US military said it had intercepted Iranian attacks on three Navy ships in the Strait of Hormuz Thursday and "targeted Iranian military facilities responsible for attacking US forces". The US military said none of its ships were hit.

Iranian state media said the country's forces exchanged fire with "the enemy" on Qeshm Island in the strait. It also reported loud noises and continuous defensive fire in western Tehran late Thursday.

Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning what it called "hostile" US military action against two Iranian oil tankers near the Iranian port of Jask and the strait, as well as strikes on nearby coastal areas.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said his country has been in contact with the US and Iran "day and night" in an effort to extend the ceasefire and reach a peace deal.

Meanwhile, direct talks between Israel and Lebanon were scheduled to resume next week in Washington, according to a US official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss

plans for the closed-door meetings. The official said talks will be held May 14 and 15.

A nominal ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group has also been repeatedly challenged, including by ongoing fighting in southern Lebanon.

Iran creates agency to control shipping through strait

A Chinese-crewed oil tanker was attacked near the strait, in the first such targeting of a vessel affiliated with the country, which has continued to import oil from Iran despite the effective closure of the strait.

China's Foreign Ministry expressed concern, saying the tanker was registered in the Marshall Islands with Chinese crew on board. There were no casualties reported.

On Thursday, Lloyd's List Intelligence, a shipping data company, reported that Iran has created a government agency to vet and tax vessels seeking passage through the strait.

The Iranian effort to formalise control over the channel raised new concerns about international shipping, with hundreds of commercial vessels bottled up in the Persian Gulf and unable to reach the open sea.

The agency, called the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, is "positioning itself as the only valid authority to grant permission to ships transiting the strait", Lloyd's said.

On Friday, an oil tanker that passed through the Strait of Hormuz in mid-April arrived off South Korea's coast with 1 million barrels of crude. South Korea, which last year imported more than 60 per cent of its crude through the strait, has capped prices of gasoline and other petroleum products.

Iran has effectively closed the strait, a vital waterway for the shipment of oil, gas, fertilizer and other petroleum products, while the US is blocking Iranian ports.

Maritime law experts say Iran's demands to vet or tax vessels violate international law. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea calls for countries to permit peaceful passage through their territorial waters. The US has threatened to impose sanctions on companies that pay tolls to Iran. The US and its Gulf allies are pushing for the UN Security Council to support a resolution that condemns Iran's chokehold on the strait and threatens sanctions. A prior resolution calling for reopening the strait was vetoed by Iran's allies Russia and China. (AP)

South Africa's top court revives Ramaphosa cash scandal, paving way for impeachment

JOHANNESBURG, May 8: South Africa's highest court has set aside lawmakers' vote to reject a report that found credible evidence of wrongdoing by President Cyril Ramaphosa related to a long-running cash scandal, paving the way for impeachment proceedings against him.

Ramaphosa survived a motion to face impeachment proceedings in 2022, when lawmakers from his African National Congress party voted to reject a scathing report that recommended a full investigation into the theft of approximately USD 580,000 that was found stashed in a couch at his Phala Phala game farm.

The Constitutional Court ruling means the report must now be referred to an impeachment committee for a full investigation, which may decide to vote on impeaching Ramaphosa.

"In the event that the panel (of inquiry) concludes that sufficient evidence exists, the matter must be referred to the impeachment committee," said Chief Justice Mandisa Maya.

Julius Malema, the leader of the opposition

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), has called for Ramaphosa to immediately resign and for impeachment proceedings against him to begin.

His party was one of the opposition parties that took the matter to court, accusing ANC lawmakers of using their parliamentary majority to shield Ramaphosa from accountability.

"Ramaphosa is going to jail. With the amount of shenanigans and evidence that will come out of that impeachment process, there is no way that Ramaphosa is not going to jail," Malema told a crowd of supporters after the ruling was delivered. Ramaphosa has denied any wrongdoing, claiming that the cash was proceeds from the sale of buffalo at his farm.

He said he had reported the theft to the head of his security, but a parliamentary inquiry that probed the incident rejected his version and recommended a full investigation by an impeachment committee.

The long-running scandal has been a political problem for Ramaphosa, with opposition parties

calling for his resignation.

He survived the motion while his party still had a parliamentary majority, which it lost in the 2024 elections for the first time since it came to power in 1994. He is currently serving his last term as president.

He has also been accused of tax evasion, money laundering and breaching currency laws, with questions about why money for a legitimate business would be hidden in a couch.

Ramaphosa's spokesperson, Vincent Magwenya, said Friday that the president had been consistent in providing his full assistance to the various inquiries into this matter, and would continue to do so.

"President Ramaphosa maintains that no person is above the law and that any allegations should be subjected to due process without fear, favour or prejudice," Magwenya said.

Two previous probes by the Reserve Bank and a public watchdog cleared Ramaphosa of wrongdoing. (AP)

At least 3 hikers killed by volcano eruption on Indonesian island

JAKARTA, May 8: An explosive eruption of Mount Dukono on a remote Indonesian island killed three hikers, authorities said Friday.

About 20 climbers set out Thursday to ascend the nearly 1,355-meter (4,445-foot) volcano on the island of Halmahera, in defiance of the island's restrictions, said North Halmahera police chief Erlinichon Pasaribu.

They became stranded when Dukono erupted at 7:41 am local time, spewing a thick ash column that rose about 10 kilometres (6.2 miles) above the summit. The eruption was recorded on seismographs for more than 16 minutes, Indonesia's Geological Agency said.

"They were aware that climbing was prohibited as the mountain is a restricted zone due to its high alert status, but insisted on going ahead,"

Pasaribu said in a television interview. Rescue teams were deployed after receiving an emergency signal from the mountain area. Three men — two Singaporean and one Indonesian national — died at the scene, Pasaribu said.

As of Friday afternoon, 14 climbers, including seven foreign nationals, had been safely evacuated. Five of those evacuated were reported injured. Rescue teams continued to search for other climbers believed to be attempting to descend.

The bodies had not yet been recovered because continued eruptions and dangerous conditions prevented rescue teams from reaching the location.

The Centre for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation has long banned activities within a 4-kilometre (2.5-mile) radius of Dukono's

crater, citing hazards such as volcanic bombs, ashfall and toxic gases. Officials believe the hikers were inside the restricted zone at the time of the eruption. Despite warnings on social media and signs at the site, "many people remain determined to climb, driven by the desire to create online content," Pasaribu said.

Mount Dukono is one of Indonesia's most active volcanoes and has been erupting almost continuously since 1933. Indonesia sits along the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an area of intense seismic and volcanic activity, and is home to more than 120 active volcanoes. Authorities also warned of possible secondary hazards, including volcanic mudflows, especially during heavy rain, which could travel along rivers flowing from the volcano's slopes. (AP)

Italy tells Rubio that Europe needs America, vice versa

ROME, May 8: Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said he told US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday that Europe needs the United States, and vice versa, as America's top diplomat wrapped up two days of fence-mending talks in Italy and the Vatican following weeks of tensions over the US-Israeli war in Iran.

Tajani reaffirmed strong trans-Atlantic ties and said he hoped "tensions have been calmed" with Rubio's visit. He said the two discussed the Iran war and spillover into Lebanon, as well as the situation in Venezuela and Cuba. The US secretary of state also met Friday with Premier Giorgia Meloni.

"I believe things can go in the right direction," Tajani said. "I am convinced Europe needs America — Italy needs America — and the United States also needs Europe and Italy."

President Donald Trump's tariffs, his complaints about Europe's unwillingness to help the US with the Iran war and his attacks on Pope Leo XIV have fueled weeks of sharp disagreements over trade and defence cooperation between the two traditionally strong allies.

Tajani reaffirmed Friday that Italy

stood ready to send in its navy to help demine the Strait of Hormuz once a permanent ceasefire is reached with Iran, and to maintain its already strong presence in Lebanon with the UN peacekeeping mission. He said he told Rubio that Italy considers the presence of US troops in Europe to reinforce NATO important, a reference to Trump's threats to pull back America's troops. The State Department, for its part, said Rubio raised efforts to "promote freedom of navigation and maritime security," as well as a need for an end to the war in Ukraine, and for Western nations to protect their economic interests.

Trump has criticised both the Pope and Italy's government for opposing the Iran war. Meloni has called the US-Israeli bombing "illegal" and rebuked Trump's remarks about the pontiff as "unacceptable."

Trump has responded by accusing Meloni of lacking courage and being "negative" on helping the US with the war. Meloni had long been seen as one of Trump's top allies in Europe, but Trump has openly said their relationship has cooled.

Italy remains firmly opposed to the war with Iran

The US has announced a decision

to pull 5,000 military personnel from Germany, and Trump has threatened to withdraw more troops from Italy and Spain over their stance on the war.

Italy, a key logistics hub for US and allied operations in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa, could see its role affected if troop levels are reduced, raising concerns about NATO's posture in southern Europe. Defence cooperation was already tested in late March, when Italy declined to allow US bombers bound for the Middle East to land at Sigonella base in Sicily without parliamentary approval.

Italy's Constitution and treaties lay out the precise ways in which the bases can be used: They allow logistics and training operations within a NATO framework, but generally exclude direct offensive operations, such as bombing, unless specifically authorised.

Meloni and Tajani have repeatedly said Italy doesn't want to participate in the Iran conflict, and that if the US seeks permission to use Italian bases for offensive purposes, any decision must be approved by Parliament, where opposition to the war is strong. (AP)

A massive 11,000-carat ruby unearthed in Myanmar's war-scarred gemstone heartland

BANGKOK, May 8: Miners in Myanmar have discovered a rare ruby of enormous size, considered to be the second-largest by weight ever found in the conflict-battered Southeast Asian nation, state media reported Friday.

The ruby, measuring 11,000 carats (2.2 kilograms, or 4.8 pounds), was unearthed near the town of Mogok, in the upper Mandalay region, the heartland of the lucrative gem-mining industry that has recently experienced intense fighting in the country's wide-ranging civil war.

According to a report from the state-run Global New Light of Myanmar, the newly found rough ruby was discovered in mid-April, just after the traditional New Year festival.

While it weighs roughly half the weight of a 21,450-carat (4.29 kilograms, or 9.45 pounds) stone found in 1996, the new discovery is considered more valuable due to its superior colour and quality.



It is described as having a purplish-red hue with yellowish undertones, a high-quality colour grade, moderate transparency and a highly reflective surface.

Myanmar produces as much as 90 per cent of the world's rubies, primarily from the areas of Mogok and Mong Hsu. Gemstones, both legitimately traded and smuggled,

are a major source of revenue for Myanmar. Human rights activists and organisations such as the Britain-based research and lobbying group Global Witness have urged jewellers to stop purchasing gems sourced from Myanmar, as the industry has served as a vital revenue stream for its military government over several decades.

A new, ostensibly civilian government was installed this year, but it followed elections described by human rights and opposition groups as a sham. The vote returned to power President Min Aung Hlaing, the army chief who led the most recent military takeover in 2021. He and his Cabinet recently examined the giant ruby at his office in the capital, Naypyitaw.

Gemstone mining also serves as a primary source of funding for ethnic armed groups fighting for autonomy, a factor that has helped fuel decades of internal conflict.

The security of these mining regions remains volatile. Mogok was captured in July 2024 by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, or TNLA, a guerrilla force representing the Palaung ethnic minority. Although the TNLA took over and operated the mines, control was eventually transferred back to Myanmar's army as part of a China-mediated ceasefire agreement concluded late last year. (AP)

Police suspect wider network after rescue of victim in Dibrugarh-Tinsukia joint operation Illegal organ trafficking racket busted in Assam, four arrested in Margherita

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, May 8: In a major breakthrough against alleged illegal human organ trafficking, Dibrugarh Police and Tinsukia Police jointly busted a suspected organ supply racket and apprehended four alleged brokers from Margherita on Thursday night in Dibrugarh.

The arrested accused have been identified as Zakir Hussain (53), Shankar Chentanu (28), Samir Paul (37) and Gopal Roy (31).

Police said Samir Paul and Gopal Roy are residents of Dibrugarh, while Zakir Hussain is a resident of Makum Pathar in Margherita and Shankar Chentanu is from the Vineer Mill area in Margherita.

According to investigators, the accused were allegedly attempting to take a 35-year-old man identi-



As a case (No 44/2026) under sections 61(2)/112/143(1)/318(4) BNS was registered at Margherita Police Station. All four accused have been sent to judicial custody.

allegedly caught red-handed during the operation.

Police suspect that a larger illegal human organ trafficking network may be operating across Assam, exploiting economically vulnerable individuals through false promises and financial inducements.

Investigators are now probing whether any hospitals, medical staff, or doctors were connected to the alleged racket.

The case has triggered concern among the public, with many demanding strict legal action against those involved in exploiting poverty and endangering human lives through illegal organ trade activities.

The operation was launched following a complaint lodged by the victim's family members. The special operation was led by Tinsukia District Police DSP (Crime) Fayed Ahmed, with support from Dibrugarh Police, resulting in the arrest of all four accused

as Rajiv Dey from Margherita to sell his kidney after luring him with promises of money and employment.

The operation was launched following a complaint lodged by the

allegedly caught red-handed during the operation.

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The operation was launched following a complaint lodged by the

allegedly caught red-handed during the operation.

Police suspect that a larger illegal human organ trafficking network may be operating across Assam, exploiting economically vulnerable individuals through false promises and financial inducements.

MLA Maheswar Boro thanks voters after Bhergaon victory

Senior BPF leader promises focus on development, calls absence of opposition 'unfortunate'



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 8: Maheswar Boro, newly elected MLA from the Bhergaon constituency in Udalguri district, extended his gratitude and sincere thanks to all citizens of the Bhergaon LAC for his victory.

Notably, Boro has been elected as the first MLA from the newly created Bhergaon constituency following the delimitation of the Assembly constituencies in the district. Earlier, he was elected twice as MLA from

the then Kalaigaon LAC to the Assam Legislative Assembly.

With a few days left for the oath-taking ceremony of the new government in Assam, MLA Maheswar Boro expressed his views in Kokrajhar on Friday.

Through the media, he conveyed his gratitude and thanks to the people of the Bhergaon constituency. He said that since the people placed their trust in both him and the BPF party and ensured his victory, he

would give top priority to the development and welfare of the constituency.

Replying to another question, senior BPF MLA Maheswar Boro expressed hope that if three or four members from the BPF party are given ministerial positions in the new Assam Cabinet, it would be more effective in carrying out developmental works for both the BTC region and the people of Assam. He also stated that whether it is the Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha, or Rajya Sabha, the presence of an opposition political party is extremely important.

He said that opposition parties play a crucial role in properly running a government through constructive criticism and by pointing out shortcomings and mistakes of the ruling government. However, BPF MLA Maheswar Boro described the absence of an opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly this time as unfortunate for democracy.

Fake online lottery racket busted

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, May 8: Jagiroad Police, acting on a tip-off, arrested three members of a fake lottery gang on Thursday for allegedly cheating customers by conducting fake lottery games through social media.

The police arrested Ali Akbar, Ashraf Islam and Mirazul Islam from areas under Batadrava Police Station in Nagaon district. Another accused, identified as Jiaul is currently absconding.

Jagiroad Police Officer-in-Charge Bhadrashwar Pegu told the media that the fake lottery gang had been promoting lottery games through various social media platforms for a long time.

Police seized five mobile phones and several lottery-related items from the three accused based on complaints received from customers. Further investigation is underway.

Dilaji Mithiphang HS records improved HSLC result, urges provincialisation

HT Bureau
DIPHU, May 8: A felicitation programme for the successful HSLC Examination 2026 candidates was held on Friday at Dilaji Mithiphang High School in the presence of teachers, School Management Committee members, parents, Government Gaonburas, village elders, students and other dignitaries.

The meeting was presided over by Dipanjay Daulaguphu, president of the School Management Committee and Retired Assistant General Manager of Oil India Limited, Duliajan. In his speech, he congratulated the successful students and encouraged them to continue their studies with dedication, discipline and determination. He also appreciated the continuous support of parents and the tireless efforts and sacrifices made by the teachers for the betterment of the students. This year, out of 10 students who appeared in the HSLC Examination 2026, 9 students successfully passed, marking a significant improvement from last year's zero pass result. The achievement was credited to regular monitoring, proper planning, extra classes and continuous guidance provided by the teachers despite limited facilities and irregular salaries in the government-recognised venture school.

During the meeting, all members present shared valuable views on the importance of education, the role of parents and the bright future of the students. Speakers expressed concern that despite years of dedicated service and improving academic performance, the school has still not been provincialised. They appealed to the Government for immediate provincialisation of Dilaji Mithiphang High School to strengthen educational development in the area.

College principal detained over alleged sexual harassment of minor

HT Bureau
DIPHU, May 8: In a shocking development for the educational community of Karbi Anglong, Dr Dipak Kumar, the Principal of Model Government College, Deithor has been detained following allegations of sexually harassing a minor girl.

The matter came to light after the Karbi Anglong Women Justice Forum (KAWJF) intervened. According to members of the forum, they were alerted to the situation by college staff on Thursday.

The organisation alleges a disturbing pattern of abuse, claiming the victim, an under-18 girl living with the Principal's family has reportedly been harassed for nearly a year.

The abuse allegedly occurred during periods when the Principal's wife was away from the residence.

Following the formal complaint, police detained Dr Kumar. He was produced before the District

Court in Diphu on Friday for statement recording and the initiation of legal proceedings.

Outside the courtroom, the atmosphere was tense as KAWJF members addressed the media. The forum issued a strong call for justice, emphasising two key points. They demanded the accused be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law and the forum warned against any attempts by influential figures to shield or protect individuals involved in such heinous crimes.

The local authorities have confirmed that a formal investigation is actively underway. As of Friday evening, Dr Kumar remains in custody as police gather further evidence and witness statements.

The case has sparked significant outrage in Diphu with many calling for a fast-tracked trial to ensure the safety and dignity of the minor involved.



The case has sparked significant outrage in Diphu with many calling for a fast-tracked trial to ensure the safety and dignity of the minor involved.

DPS Nagaon holds Investiture Ceremony

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, May 8: Delhi Public School, Nagaon, successfully organised its Investiture Ceremony - 2026 Thursday with great enthusiasm, discipline and dignity. The grand occasion celebrated leadership, responsibility and the spirit of excellence among students, reflecting the school's commitment to nurturing future leaders.

The ceremony commenced with the introduction of the investiture, setting a formal and inspiring tone for the event. This was followed by an insightful presentation on the role of the Student Council, highlighting the importance of leadership, accountability and service in school life.

The Chief Guest, Partha Protim Das, IPS, Senior Superintendent of Police, Nagaon and the Guest of Honour, Shreya Agarwal, APS, Deputy Superintendent of Police were formally introduced and accorded a warm welcome. The presence of esteemed dignitaries, including Divya Chhawharia, Director, DPS Nagaon, Binay Chhawharia, Rahul Jain, Mukesh Rijal, Administrative Head of DPS Nagaon, Principal Ritu Rajnish, Headmaster Dhruvajyoti Das and Administrator Anwar Pervez, added immense grace and prestige to the occasion.

RPF/NFR recovers over ₹ 2.45 crore in enforcement drives in April

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 8: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) continued its sustained efforts towards strengthening passenger security, curbing unlawful activities and ensuring a safe railway environment across the zone during April 2026.

During the month, RPF/NFR registered 3,081 cases under various sections of the Railways Act and prosecuted more than 3,000 offenders for unlawful activities across railway premises. The force also assisted in ticket checking drives, leading to detection of 1,074 ticketless travellers and recovery of fines exceeding ₹ 10 lakh.

In a major enforcement achievement, RPF/NFR detected 33 narcotics smuggling cases involving ganja, brown sugar and cough syrup, collectively valued at over ₹ 2.35 crore. Additionally, 15 persons were arrested in connection with illicit liquor smuggling cases.

In anti-touting operations, four touts were arrested with the seizure of 47 railway tickets worth over ₹ 1.43 lakh. Further, 32 persons involved in theft of railway property were apprehended with recovery of stolen materials valued at more than ₹ 2.10 lakh.

As part of its passenger safety initiatives, RPF/NFR apprehended 28 persons involved in theft of passenger belongings and recovered stolen items, including 44 mobile phones worth over ₹ 6.19 lakh. The force also arrested three persons involved in stone-pelting



incidents on running trains and apprehended 16 illegal immigrants during the month.

Additionally, 113 left-behind luggage items worth around ₹ 1.40 crore were recovered and returned to passengers after proper verification. On average, 53 trains were escorted daily by RPF personnel to ensure passenger security across the zone.

Demonstrating humanitarian commitment alongside enforcement, RPF rescued 80 minor boys and girls along with four women, who were safely handed over to Childline, NGOs, parents and police authorities.

RPF/NFR also remained actively engaged in cleanliness and public assistance initiatives, during which 1,596 persons were prosecuted for littering railway premises. Anti-encroachment drives were also carried out at several locations across the zone to ensure smooth and safe railway operations.

KASAFCC felicitates students for academic success in Diphu

HT Bureau
DIPHU, May 8: In a bid to encourage children to excel in academics alongside sports, the coach of the Karbi Anglong Sports Association Football Coaching Centre (KASAFCC), Horen Engti Kathar on his own initiative organised a felicitation ceremony for KASAFCC boys and girls who successfully passed the HSLC and Higher Secondary final examinations conducted by SEBA and the Assam State Education Board (ASSEB), the results of which were declared recently.

The felicitation ceremony was held at the KASA Stadium on Friday and was attended by Kenning Engti, Badminton Secretary of KASA, Melina Terangpi, retired Additional Director of District Industries and Commerce and member of KASA, along with parents of the students of KASAFCC.

Altogether 15 students from KASAFCC successfully cleared the examinations, of whom three passed the Higher Secondary final examination while the remaining students cleared the HSLC examination.

As a mark of encouragement, the successful students were felicitated with bouquets and extended best wishes for their higher studies and future endeavours.

Speaking on the occasion, coach Horen Engti Kathar said that education is the backbone of a child's overall development.

Pramila Devi Memorial Quiz held at Jagiroad

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, May 8: The prize distribution ceremony of the Pramila Devi Memorial Quiz Competition was held at Ghunucha Primary School, Jagiroad on Thursday.

Attending the session, Chief Executive Officer of Morigaon Zila Parishad, Anant Kumar Gogoi, said that the quiz competition was aimed at the socio-academic upliftment of the student fraternity.

Speaking at the event, Dr Apurba Thakuria, Inspector of Schools, Morigaon district and the District Primary Education Officer, said that the quiz competition was conducted by schools from the primary level to pave the way for success in various competitive examinations in the future.

The event was also attended by Madhulekha Deka, Resource Person of Mayang Education Circle and Sagar Dhungel, Coordinator of Jagiroad Zonal Resource Centre.

The quiz competition was conducted by Riju Sharma, Headmaster of Amkata Primary School. The first prize was bagged by Manha Primary School, while Purana Bangalbari Primary School and Ghunucha Primary School secured the second and third positions respectively.

The school has been organising the competition since the retirement of teacher Pramila Devi in 2017 with the special support of her daughter, Professor Barna Sharma and son, Jyoti Prasad Sharma.

32 smuggled cattle seized along with two vehicles

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, May 8: The police crackdown on cattle smuggling continues in Rupahihat.

Acting on a tip-off, Rupahihat Police conducted a raid against cattle smuggling in Saidoria on Friday morning. During the operation, police seized 32 smuggled cattle along with two vehicles.

The registration numbers of the seized vehicles are NL-01-M-0791 and AS-12-CC-1889. Police have arrested the two drivers of the vehicles, identified as Wasim Akram and Salman Ali. The cattle traders fled after sensing the arrival of the police. It is suspected that the cattle were being taken to Bangladesh via Meghalaya from Rupahihat.

Rupahihat Police are continuing to interrogate the two arrested drivers for more information.

Assam Women's University conducts English speaking workshop

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 8: The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in collaboration with the Department of English of Assam Women's University organised a week-long English Speaking Skill Enhancement Workshop from May 4 to May 8 at Jyoti Pratap Gyanmang School for the students of Classes V, VI and VII.

During the workshop, English language trainee experts and faculty members from the Department of English conducted interactive sessions on spoken English, pronunciation, vocabulary and communication skills through various activity-based learning methods. The concluding day of the programme drew special attention as students interacted with "Maya," a humanoid robot developed by System Analyst Prakash Jyoti Das. The students found the interaction highly engaging and informative.

Students sensitised on Census 2027 digital exercise and participation process Pre-Census awareness programme held at Bodoland University

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 8: In a houseful gathering at the Jwhlwao Nileswar Brahma Auditorium, a Pre-Census Awareness Programme on Census 2027 was organised by the Directorate of Census Operations, Assam in association with the NSS Cell of Bodoland University.

Besides the presence of teachers and students of the university, the programme was attended by students and teachers of St Anns College, UN Brahma Academy, Aronai College, Commerce College, Kokrajhar and Science College, Kokrajhar.

The programme was anchored jointly by Programme Officers Dr Joydip Narzary and Dr Hemaprobha Saikia.

The lighting of the lamp ceremony was performed by Vice-Chancellor Prof Babu Lal Ahuja, Srimiti Bharati Chanda (Deputy Registrar General, DCO) as Special Guest and Bikash Nath (Joint Director, DCO) as Special Guest.

A group song was presented under the leadership of Prof Arabinda Debnath, Head of Department, Commerce, BU in which students and teachers participated.

The welcome address was delivered by Prof Hilloljyoti Singha, Programme Coordinator, NSS Cell, BU.

In his brief speech as Chief Guest, Vice-Chancellor Prof Ahuja emphasised awareness among the masses about the population census through students. He also pointed out that a student or any person can act as an Assistant Enumerator during the process. He further said that as a Sixth Schedule area, BTR has immense importance and everyone should come forward in the process.

Guest of Honour Anis Rasul Mazumdar, Additional District Commissioner (Census), also spoke about the duty of citizens and the functioning of the government.

Deputy Registrar General, DCO Srimiti Bharati Chanda, gave a detailed presentation on the entire census process, including the two-phase census after 2011. She was assisted by Bikash Nath, Joint Director, DCO, who also conducted hands-on training through an online demonstration. He urged students to actively participate in the census and avoid rumours.

A Bodo folk dance was performed by students of Bodoland University led by Dwimu Rani Brahma and a solo Bhupendra song was performed by Bhupen Nath, Assistant Professor, Department of Music, Sobharam Brahma Music & Fine Arts College, Kokrajhar.

An interactive quiz on census was con-

ducted by Dr Laheram Mushahary, Associate Professor, Department of Bodo, Girls' College, Kokrajhar and Bikash Nath, Joint Director, DCO. Instant prizes were awarded to students who answered correctly, making the programme highly engaging.

The vote of thanks was delivered by Dr Joydip Narzary, Programme Officer.

Meanwhile, a press release noted that Pre-Census Awareness Programmes on Census 2027 were organised simultaneously in three universities of Assam—Assam University, Bodoland University and Dibrugarh University.

The programme aimed to sensitise students, faculty members and officials about the importance of Census 2027, which will be India's first fully digital census exercise.

It highlighted that Census 2027 will include a Self-Enumeration facility from August 2 to August 16, 2026, followed by House Listing Operation from August 17 to September 15, 2026.

Officials also emphasised that all census data will remain strictly confidential under the Census Act, 1948. The official mascots, Pragati and Vikas were also highlighted as symbols of national progress and development.

No. TECH-05/SE(B)/E-Tender/2021-22/Pt-IV/14, Dated Kokrajhar 07/05/2026.
Tender No. 568 of 2026-27
PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
The Superintending Engineer, PWD Kokrajhar Building Circle, Kokrajhar on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from approved and eligible Contractors registered with Public Works Department (Building), Assam/Contractors registered with Bodoland Territorial Council in the category of Class-I(A,B&C), Class-II & Class-III for 4 (four) nos. of works amounting to Rs.1,81,19,234.00 (Rupees one crore eighty one lakh nineteen thousand two hundred thirty four) only with a bid validity of 180 (one hundred eighty) days from the date of opening of the tender.
Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.
The Press Notice will be a part of the Bidding Documents.
Note: i) N.I.T Value is inclusive of GST, Labour cess etc.
ii) Pre-Bid Meeting will be held on 22.05.2026 at 11.00 A.M. in the office chamber of the undersigned.
iii) Bid submission closing date 29.05.2026 upto 1.00 P.M.
Sd/-
Superintending Engineer, PWD
Kokrajhar Bldg. Circle, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/40

Ref No-174/15th FC/2025-26/012948, Date: 18th Feb, 2026.
NOTICE FOR EXTENSION OF DATE OF TENDER
Sealed Tender are invited for the works to be drawn in F-2 Form with affixing Non-refundable Court Fee of Rs.8.25 (Rupee Eight and Twenty Five Paise) only from the intending Registered Contractor of Class-II and Class-I (A, B&C) Category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under 1st FC for the year 2022-23 during 2025-26, only in a prescribed Forms. The Tender will be received on 13/05/2026 up to 2.00 P.M. in the Office of the undersigned and will be opened at 2.30 P.M. on same date and will be submitted to the P& Rd BTC, Kokrajhar for approval.

Name of work	Estimated Amount	Bid Security		Cost of Tender appear	Time of Completion
		Others (2%)	ST/SC/OBC/ MOBC (1%)		
Construction of RCC Box Culvert at Sahajuri village near Sahajuri LP school under 15 th (Untied Grant-2 nd Inst) for the year 2022-23 During 2025-26.	₹19,00,000.00	₹38,000.00	₹19,000.00	₹500/-	6 (Six) Months from the date of issue of work Order.

Detailed N.I.T may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 05/05/2026 to 12/05/2026 in office of the undersigned on payment.
Sd/-Block Developer Officer
Hatidhura Dev. Block, Hatidhura
IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/29

Manik Saha to join oath-taking events in West Bengal and Assam

Tripura CM to attend BJP swearing-in ceremonies

AGARTALA, May 8: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday said he will attend the swearing-in ceremonies of BJP-led governments in West Bengal and Assam on May 9 and 12, respectively.

In the recently concluded Assembly polls, the BJP came to power in West Bengal for the first time by winning 207 seats in the 294-member House. The party improved its performance in Assam to win 82 seats in the 126-member Assembly and retain power for a third straight consecutive term.

Interacting with reporters, Saha said, "I am going to Kolkata to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the first BJP government on Saturday. I will also join the oath-taking ceremony of the BJP-led NDA



government in Assam on May 12." He said the BJP's streak of wins in states under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has special significance in the country's political spectrum. (PTI)

"I have visited some places in West Bengal as part of an election campaign and sensed a wind of change. It was ultimately a landslide victory for the BJP, which seems beyond expectation," he said.

Saha also took a swipe at Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee for not tendering her resignation from the chief minister's post after the defeat.

"Despite a humiliating defeat at the hands of the BJP in the crucial Assembly election, Mamata Banerjee has refused to resign! It will also be remembered as a historic event," he said.

Earlier in the day, the Tripura chief minister distributed 115 appointment letters among the eligible job aspirants. (PTI)

Large cache of arms, ammo recovered in Manipur

IMPHAL, May 8: A huge cache of arms, ammunition and explosives were seized in Manipur's Senapati and Churachandpur districts, police said on Friday.

In a joint operation conducted on Thursday at the Maramei hill range in Senapati district, personnel of the Assam Rifles, Manipur Police and CRPF recovered 15 weapons along with a large quantity of ammunition, they said.

The seized arms included an AK-47 rifle with a magazine, an MP-52 rifle with a magazine, a .303 rifle, two .22 rifles, four locally made bolt-action rifles, three .32 pistols, two .22 pistols and a locally made shotgun. More than 70 live rounds of various calibres were also recovered, they added.

Police said the recovery of such a large cache of weapons was a significant step towards disrupting illegal arms supply networks operating in the region and would act as a deterrent against insurgent activities.

In another operation carried out in the Hengkapkot area of Churachandpur, security forces recovered additional arms and explosives. The seized items included three single-barrel rifles, one .303 rifle, a pumpi, four rocket shells, a 500-gram cylindrical IED and a 4-kg conical IED. (PTI)

COCOMI condemns border attacks

Committee demands national response over alleged cross-border armed aggression in Kamjong district



IMPHAL, May 8: Strongly condemning the attack on Tangkhul Naga villages on Thursday, the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a major conglomerate of civil society organisations has demanded an immediate "national response" to the alleged cross-border armed aggression along the Indo-Myanmar border in Kamjong district of Manipur.

The COCOMI expressed grave concern over the recent armed attacks targeting Tangkhul Naga villages and civilian areas along the Manipur-Myanmar international border, particularly in Kamjong district, including Namlee, Wanglee and adjoining areas.

The COCOMI said the situation has now assumed an extremely serious dimension following the public statement made by a sitting MLA from the affected border region alleging that the attackers were cadres of the Myanmar-based Kuki National Army (KNA-B) and allied People's Defence Forces (PDF) operating from across the international boundary.

"If these allegations are verified, the incident can no longer be casually dismissed as a mere 'communal clash' or an 'ethnic conflict'," the COCOMI said. "It would amount to a serious case of cross-border armed aggression involving foreign-based armed groups launching attacks against Indian citizens residing within Indian territory," it added.

The COCOMI strongly asserted that such a development directly concerns India's national sovereignty, territorial integrity, border security and internal security architecture. The Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Defence and all central security agencies extensively deployed across Manipur since May 2023 must urgently clarify the situation before the people, the COCOMI further demanded.

It then raised several critical questions and asked, "If armed groups based across the Myanmar border are capable of launching co-ordinated attacks into Indian territory, what is the actual status of border security, surveillance and intelligence preparedness in these sensitive frontier zones?"

The COCOMI also asked, "Why have repeated warnings from local border communities regarding infil-

tration, armed movement, narco-terror activities and foreign militant presence not been adequately addressed despite nearly two years of instability in Manipur?"

The COCOMI further asked, "How were heavily armed cross-border elements able to infiltrate and operate freely in the hill regions bordering Myanmar despite the continuous deployment of central armed forces and security agencies?"

The COCOMI then asked whether the Government of India continues to officially describe such incidents merely as "ethnic violence" even when "serious allegations now point towards foreign-origin armed actors breaching India's international boundary".

The COCOMI reiterated that the people residing in vulnerable border regions of Manipur deserve immediate protection, a transparent investigation and a firm national response. It added that any external armed intrusion into Indian territory must be treated with utmost seriousness under the framework of national security and territorial sovereignty.

The COCOMI said the "continued failure" to contain such incidents risks further destabilising already fragile border communities and severely undermines public confidence in the ability of the State to protect its citizens and defend the nation's territorial integrity.

In view of the gravity of the situation, the COCOMI demanded immediate enhancement of security measures along vulnerable Indo-Myanmar border sectors. It also demanded a transparent and impartial high-level inquiry into the recent attacks.

The committee further demanded an investigation into the alleged involvement of cross-border militant groups and allied armed networks. It also demanded an examination of possible intelligence and operational failures. The COCOMI then sought "public clarification from the Government of India regarding the true nature of the incident and the security situation along the border".

The COCOMI urged the Government of India to act with urgency, seriousness and transparency before the situation escalates further and causes irreversible damage to peace and stability in the region. (NNN)

Mizoram education board's new result format to demoralise students: Private school owners' body

AIZAWL, May 8: A private school owners' body in Mizoram has expressed disappointment over the state's education board not publishing the merit list of its Class 10 and 12 results, even as officials claimed the move was to discourage intense competition among the young minds.

Mizoram Independent Schools' Association (MISA) President Lalnunkunga Sailo strongly criticised the new results format, alleging that the move would negatively affect students' motivation and academic competitiveness.

The Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE) has stopped publishing merit lists, distinctions, or divisions in its results from this year, which officials said would discourage competition among students through rote memorisation and focus on quality and competency-based education.

Speaking to reporters during a press conference here, Sailo said the board's decision not to publish the merit list, subject topper list, letter marks and division classifications from the results had not only demoralised the students but also disappointed the people of Mizoram.

"The move will undermine healthy academic competition among students, which is essential for encouraging excellence," he said.

The new format, he argued, removes distinctions between high-performing institutions and academically driven schools, and also places all schools on the same level regardless of performance. (PTI)

2 held for abduction, extortion in Dimapur

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 8: Two persons have been arrested on charges of kidnapping and extorting a businessman here, the Dimapur commissioner of police said in a release on Friday.

The release said an FIR was lodged at East police station by one Ruhon Das, a resident of Sematilla, Dimapur, on April 21 that he was followed and wrongfully restrained by two unidentified persons near Murgipatti area while returning home after closing his shop at Hongkong Market at around 7 PM on April 20.

He was then forcibly taken toward the highway near the Dimapur Municipal Council office by the accused. They also took the victim's mobile phone and compelled him to disclose his Google Pay password.

Thereafter, the accused persons took him to an IOC petrol pump located at Ghorapatti area, from where an amount of ₹ 6,000 was withdrawn from the victim's account.

Nagaland college students' union warns govt of stir over delay in girls' hostel project

KOHIMA, May 8: The All Nagaland College Students' Union on Friday warned the state government that they would launch an agitation if the delay in the construction of the proposed girls' hostel at Kohima Science College was not addressed within a week.

The union's president, Kivika Yephtho, alleged the government's failure to utilise the ₹ 3.53 crore provided by the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) Limited under its corporate social responsibility scheme has put the project at a crucial juncture.

The company is now reportedly seeking a refund of the sanctioned amount, Yephtho claimed. "The students' community will not stay silent if the government and the department concerned fail to use this CSR-sanctioned amount," Yephtho said, adding the union would start an agitation if no action is taken within a week.

According to the All Nagaland College Students' Union (ANCSU), the proposal for the girls' hostel was submitted by the Investment and De-

velopment Authority of Nagaland (IDAN) to REC Limited for CSR funding in October 2022 with an estimated cost of ₹ 3.53 crore.

The project was approved in March 2023, and the first instalment of ₹ 1.5 crore was released in April that year, it said.

However, the project failed to take off after the IDAN reportedly decided to upscale the hostel into an "international standard facility", leading to a revised detailed project report of ₹ 6 crore, the union said.

Yephtho alleged that three years have passed since the release of the first instalment, but the amount remains unutilised, while REC has now initiated steps for a refund due to the expiry of the project timeline.

ANCSU also questioned the lack of transparency in the proposed "international standard hostel", stating that no blueprint or detailed facilities plan had been shared with the student body despite repeated queries.

Maintaining that the original CSR sanction

was specifically meant for the construction of the girls' hostel, the union said the state government and the department concerned failed to act despite repeated representations, reminders and appeals.

The ANCSU president said female students constitute the majority at Kohima Science College and currently depend on a single 100-bedded hostel that has been accommodating students for many years.

He further said the union had recently appealed to the Chief Secretary to intervene and persuade REC to extend the project timeline on May 1, but was informed that the government was "not in a position to convince" the company for further extension.

Terming the delay a failure on the part of the state government, ANCSU demanded immediate commencement of the project to safeguard the sanctioned amount and address the accommodation challenges faced by women students of the college. (PTI)

Meeting focuses on infrastructure and youth participation in Arunachal Pradesh

AAPGA discusses promotion of gymnastics with AOA chief

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 8: A team of the All Arunachal Pradesh Gymnastics Association (AAPGA), led by its president-cum-Arunachal Front Editor Nani Kojin on Thursday called on Arunachal Olympic Association (AOA) president and former Education Minister Taba Tedir at his residence in Itanagar.

During the meeting, the AAPGA team held cordial and constructive discussions with the AOA president on various issues, ranging from challenges to infrastructure development for gymnastics in Arunachal Pradesh.

The members also discussed various ways to popularise the sport in the State.

The meeting was attended by AAPGA president Nani Kojin, vice-president Tadar Kayu and former State gymnast Dr Byabang Rana.

Arunachal Olympic Association president Taba Tedir offered various suggestions and advice to the All Arunachal Pradesh Gymnastics Association team so that gymnastics could emerge as a prominent sport in the State, attracting the attention of youth from all corners of Arunachal Pradesh.

Tedir also assured his full support to the All Arunachal Pradesh Gymnastics Association in its vision of empowering youth through gymnastics and extending assistance whenever needed to realise its goal of producing top players from the State.

The All Arunachal Pradesh Gymnastics Association is affiliated with the Gymnastics Federation of India.

'Walk for Humanity' marks World Red Cross Day in Kohima

KOHIMA, May 8: The Indian Red Cross Society Nagaland state branch (IRCSN) on Friday observed World Red Cross Day with a 'Walk for Humanity' here, reaffirming the spirit of compassion, unity and service to humanity.

The participants, including children, youths and elders, walked from Red Cross Complex to Old NST here, covering a little over 2 km, highlighting this year's global theme, 'United in Humanity,' to promote humanitarian values and social responsibility.

Speaking at the event, MLA Tseihoutuo Rhuso called upon people, especially the youths, to carry forward the spirit of humanity in their daily lives.

Recalling the legacy of Red Cross founder Henry Dunant, Rhuso narrated how Dunant mobilised villagers to help over 40,000 wounded soldiers during the Battle of Solferino in Italy despite not being a medical professional himself.

"When it comes to humanity, religion does not come into the picture. There is no age bar, no race bar. Humanity begins in the heart," he said.

He stressed that humanitarian service is not limited to large acts alone but can begin with simple gestures in everyday life, such as honesty in one's profession or helping classmates and neighbours in need.

IRCSN general secretary Akhale Khamo read out the message of the secretary general of the Indian Red Cross Society, who emphasised that compassion, solidarity and service transcend all boundaries.

The message lauded the efforts of volunteers, youth, staff and supporters for their dedication in responding to disasters, supporting health initiatives, organising blood donation drives, strengthening first-aid services and reaching out to people during crises. (PTI)



NSF demands action against NISCE MD, associates for 'fraud'

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 8: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has demanded immediate action on a complaint lodged against National Institute of Civil Services Examinations (NISCE) managing director Suman Saha and his associates for alleged cheating, financial exploitation and mental harassment of students and abrupt closure of NISCE coaching centres operating in Kohima, Dimapur and Chumoukedima.

In a representation to the Nagaland DGP on Thursday, the NSF expressed serious concern and deep displeasure over the inordinate delay in delivering justice to the affected students in connection with the complaint lodged against Saha and his associates on February 3.

The federation said despite the lapse of considerable time since the filing of the FIR, no visible progress or concrete action has been witnessed.

It appealed to the DGP to intervene personally in the case and ensure that justice is delivered at the earliest.

It said the accused individuals reportedly collected full course fees from students while failing to provide the promised educational services as assured in the institution's prospectus.

Besides, the NSF said, the centres were shut down without prior notice, adding repeated appeals by the students for refund or completion of the course had allegedly been ignored through a series of excuses and evasive responses.

The federation demanded that the investigation into the case be expedited with immediate effect. It also said all accused persons involved must be traced and brought under the purview of the law without further delay.

Marathon to promote fitness, public participation and national unity

Akashvani Kohima holds 'Akashvani Marathon' to celebrate 90 years of broadcasting

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 8: Akashvani Kohima organised the 'Akashvani Marathon' in Kohima on Friday as part of the nationwide celebration marking 90 years of broadcasting in India.

The marathon, which began at Old MLA Hostel junction and concluded at High School junction was organised to promote fitness, public participation and national unity in line with the vision of a healthy and active India.

Kohima DC B Henok Buchem flagged off the marathon.

Speaking on the occasion, Buchem said the event symbolised a marathon of voices, music, news and stories that have reached millions of people through broadcasting over the decades.

He stated that the occasion was not only a milestone in the history of broadcasting but also a celebration of unity fostered through shared narratives and songs.



The DC thanked Akashvani for its many decades of innovation and dedicated public service, connecting people across the country through news and programmes.

Director of youth resources and sports Kethosituo Sekhose attended the closing ceremony as a special guest.

Addressing the gathering, he said the

radio has connected generations and continues to remain an important source of information, particularly in rural areas.

Congratulating Akashvani Kohima for its longstanding service, Sekhose lauded the participants of the marathon.

Also speaking at the closing ceremony, programme executive, Akashvani Kohima, Khriesaneisa Rutsa highlighted the significance of the 90-year milestone of Akashvani.

He said Akashvani Kohima completed 63 years of service in January 2026.

Since June 2025, the station has been organising a series of activities to commemorate 90 years of broadcasting, including special programmes featuring former broadcasters and experts, essay competitions for schools, folk song competitions involving Naga tribal student bodies and Hindi film song competitions.

Altogether, 180 students from six government schools participated in the marathon.

We fought like mother and son: Adnan Sami on Asha Bhosle



Her voice to his songs. A month after Asha Bhosle died, singer-composer Adnan Sami says there is nothing more precious to him than that. Nothing else matters.

"Her love is priceless," Sami said about his relationship with the music legend who died on April 12 at the age of 92.

Their collaboration began with the 2000 hit album 'Kabhi To Nazar Milao' and soon evolved into a deep bond, almost like that of mother and son.

"She and I would fight over the smallest of things. Her biggest complaint would be, 'Tum dikhte nahi ho, kabhi aate nahi ho' (You are never seen; you never visit)," Sami told PTI.

"I would tell her, 'You are living in town and I'm living in the suburbs, in Lokhandwala.' With the kind of traffic Mumbai has, it is not easy for someone to visit regularly. It was the typical fight a mother and son might have," he remembered fondly.

The relationship between Sami and Bhosle, who sang more than 12,000 songs in an eight-decade career, including classical, jazz and pop, extended beyond the recording studio. They worked on indipop numbers such as 'Kabhi to Nazar Milao' and

'Aao Na', their disagreements stemming from mutual affection and a desire for each other's attention.

"Sometimes, I would fight with her because of some 'gila-shikwa' (complaints) I had... Missing her call by mistake was extremely rare. But if I saw her call, 'sar aankhon pe' (it was a priority); I would leave everything to attend to her. She was sensitive about a lot of those things."

Pakistani-born Sami, who moved to India in 2001, said Bhosle spoke her mind without holding her emotions back. "Whatever was in her heart, she would just say it. Afterward, she'd say, 'Aacha, maine jo kehna tha maine keh diya, ab mein theek hoon' (Okay, I've said what I had to say, now I'm fine)."

"She never kept things inside; she was exactly who she appeared to be on the surface, which is a beautiful thing. From that perspective, she was a simpleton," he added.

Sami, who was born in London and became an Indian citizen in 2016, credits the veteran vocalist for a life-altering piece of advice that led him to move to India and build his career in the music industry.

It was Bhosle who encouraged him to release his 2000 album 'Kabhi To Nazar Milao' in Mumbai instead of London. (PTI)

RITEISH DESHMUKH SAYS SALMAN KHAN WAS KEEN TO STAR IN 'RAJA SHIVAJI'

Riteish Deshmukh says Salman Khan insisted on being part of "Raja Shivaji", prompting him to craft a special role that justified the actor's stardom. 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.

In "Raja Shivaji", Salman is seen in a cameo appearance as Jiva Mahala, a brave warrior who saved Shivaji Maharaj's life in the battle of Pratapgad.

"He (Salman) told me one day that he has to be in the movie ('Raja Shivaji'). I had not thought about it, but he said, 'You cannot make a movie without me, I've to be part of the film'. I told him, 'Give me some time' because if he's coming on screen, then it has to be worth something. People should enjoy it because it's Salman Khan eventually," Deshmukh told PTI in an interview.

The actor-director said he didn't want Salman to simply be himself on screen but to embody a character that would resonate with the audience.

"I did not want him to be Salman; I wanted him to be a character. The character has to be bigger than Salman Khan and at the same time, the fans should enjoy. So, we had this part. I knew that I needed one line that fit... When it appeared on screen, and when it landed the way we wanted, it was just wonderful."

Salman has previously made cameo appearances in Deshmukh's 2022 directorial debut "Ved" in a special song and in "Lai Bhaari", which marked Deshmukh's debut in Marathi cinema.

"Raja Shivaji" boasts of a star-studded cast including Salman, Sanjay Dutt as Afzal Khan, Abhishek Bachchan as Sambhaji Shahaji Bhonsale, Vidya Balan as Badi Begum, Fardeen Khan as Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, Amole Gupte as Adil Shah, among others.

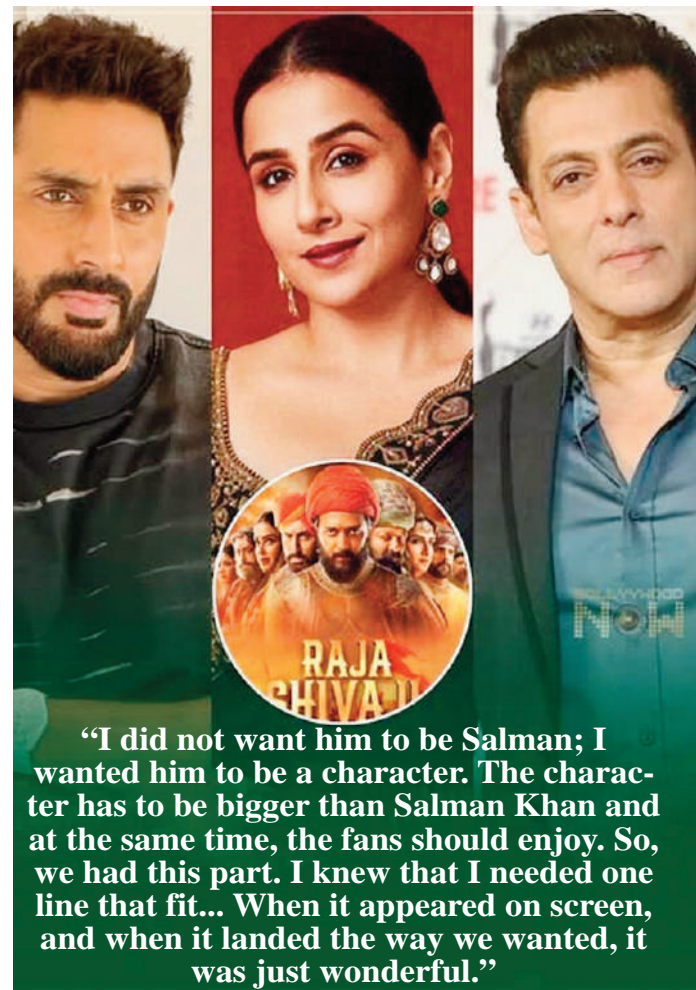
Deshmukh said his actor friends from Hindi movie industry came on board for the movie purely out of love and respect and without charging any penny.

"I don't think one can describe what kind of bond this is. This is just unsaid and unconditional kind of love and respect that you have for each other. Like, if tomorrow Abhishek or Salman Bhai tells me, 'What about this?' I'll say yes without even thinking. If he has thought of me, then I have to be there. So, that's the bond we have for each other, I respect that."

He recounted that Abhishek Bachchan was the first actor he approached for the "Raja Shivaji", and he agreed without even asking about his character.

"...So, that kind of love and respect (is) what I've earned in 23 years. I'm truly indebted to all of them for being a part of this film because they wanted to, and not (even) charge a penny. So, we have Salman Khan, Abhishek Bachchan, Vidya Balan, Fardeen Khan, Boman Irani, Genelia and I didn't charge. So, we all have worked completely pro bono for this film to be what it is today," Deshmukh said.

The film earned Rs 52.66 cr nett at the domestic box office in both Marathi and Hindi version, according to Sacnilk. Actors Mahesh Manjrekar, Sachin Khedekar, Bhagyashree, and Jitendra Joshi, round out the cast of "Raja Shivaji". (PTI)



"I did not want him to be Salman; I wanted him to be a character. The character has to be bigger than Salman Khan and at the same time, the fans should enjoy. So, we had this part. I knew that I needed one line that fit... When it appeared on screen, and when it landed the way we wanted, it was just wonderful."



Rapper king says acting in 'Lukkhe' gave him his spark back

Indian rapper King, who made his series debut with Prime Video's "Lukkhe", says acting came as a welcome break from music and gave him his spark back. "Lukkhe" is a fictional musical drama set in Punjab where a sportsman, Lucky and Sanobar, a musician, find their romance caught in the crossfires between police officer Gurbani and upcoming rapper, MC Badnaam.

King stars as MC Badnaam in the eight-episode drama, directed by Himank Gaur and produced by Vipul D Shah and Rajesh Bahl.

It's (acting) a very good learning experience for a person like me. When all this was over, I realised that it was a very interesting thing as I learned a lot as a human. I think people gave me a free course for my development in a way... I'm able to breathe where there's good art and humanity," King told PTI in an interview.

After spending years immersed in music, the rapper, known for hits such as "Maan Meri Jaan", "Tu Aake Dekh Le" and "Legends", said he was looking for something new when the series was offered to him.

"I said yes because I was doing the same thing for a long time in my life. I was getting bored. This thing (acting) gave me a spark. In fact, if you act, you get a chance to do things that you've never done in your life," he added.

Despite stepping out of his comfort zone, King says he did not overthink the process and just enjoyed the ride.

"If you start thinking too much, you lose the fun... There were 10 people who trusted me before I could trust them. So, there was nothing to worry about. You just had to get up and perform. That's it," he said.

The 30-year-old rapper said he does not even have photos from his younger days at his home as there were no cameras, but he grew accustomed to them easily when he found fame.

"Cameras are the same. It's like I'm standing as an actor (here). On other days, I'm standing (in front of it) as a rock star. Initially, when I was introduced (to cameras), I was very scared and then one day, I don't know, I woke up and my fear was gone. (Generally), I'm very scared of things. I'm shy and I like to stay back. So, I'm just enjoying everything that is coming to me in my life as an opportunity."

The scenario for children growing up today is completely different though, he said.

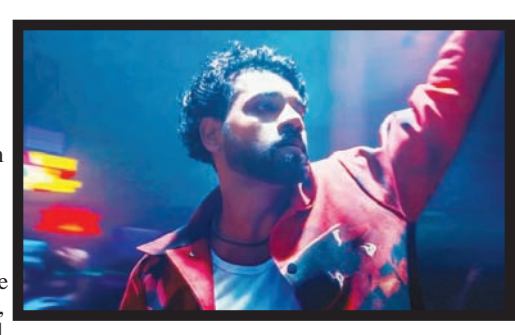
"They know that this is cinema, not reality. At a very young age, the kids know a lot of things. They all are connected with the internet," he said.

Born Arpan Kumar Chandel and known professionally as King or King Rocco, the Indian singer-songwriter, rapper, and music producer rose to fame as a finalist on the music reality show MTV Hustle.

King, whose other hits are "Ghumshudaa", "Oops" and "Pablo", has a massive following among youngsters but he does not feel pressured to be a role model as he believes his work speaks for itself.

"(I'm lucky) I had art in my life, good art. Whoever is watching or listening to me in the long run, I want them to know that I have worked hard and that hard work can really open doors for you. They should learn this and I don't think I have any more responsibility than that. I am just an artist having fun here. We are all growing up together," he added.

King's idols are superstar Shah Rukh Khan and rapper Badshah as he believes they worked really hard to achieve success. (PTI)



King on Shreya Ghoshal's criticism of current Punjabi music: Songs are subjective things

Shreya Ghoshal's comment that many Punjabi songs revolve around themes of "bungalow, car and women" has sparked a debate online, but rapper King says he is fan of the singer and would not want to get drawn into this debate.

Ghoshal's remark, made during a podcast, triggered a varied response on social media and music circles.

"I have worked with Shreya ma'am... I grew up listening to Shreya ma'am. I don't listen to songs from Shreya ma'am's ears (perspective), so I can't tell you whether I agree with her or not," King told PTI in an interview.

"She is Shreya Ghoshal, so I am not going to say what I feel. Whatever ma'am feels is right. It's ma'am's world. I am a fan. I can't judge anyone else's songs like that. I can only judge my own."

The rapper, known for singles such as "Ghumshudaa", "Tu Aake Dekh Le", "Oops", "Pablo", and "Maan Meri Jaan", said music is subjective.

"Songs are subjective things. You listen, you like some particular songs, you keep some in the grey area. You listen to some because you get the vibe. Some things you can't make sense of, some things are very deep, and sometimes you feel something is not right," he said. (PTI)

When Mahesh Bhatt ignored 'suicidal climax' warning for 'Arth', refused to conform



The climax of Mahesh Bhatt's "Arth" in which the protagonist walks away from her "wayward" husband rather than reconciling with him was dismissed as suicidal by distributors and exhibitors with even top filmmakers warning the director that the film was headed for box office doom.

But Bhatt, reveals a new book, "The Ashes are Warm: Memories of a Lifetime Spent With UG Krishnamurti", refused to conform. And the 1982 Shabana Azmi, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Smita Patil starrer went on to become a critical hit still remembered for its unconventional storyline.

The film, which gave his career a new lease of life after a "decade of flops" such as "Vishwasghaat" and "Naya Daur", was nearly reshaped to fit conventional expectations, Bhatt tells author Sunita Pant Bansal in the book.

"Arth", which also stars Raj Kiran, is a semi-autobiographical drama centred on infidelity, abandonment, and a woman's journey to self-discovery.

In the end, Pooja (Shabana Azmi) chooses to walk away from the husband (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) and also the empathetic friend (Raj Kiran) who wants a life with her.

"Screening after screening, distributors came, shook their heads, and said: 'No, it won't work. Change the ending. Change the ending,'" he wrote. The final print, despite stellar

performances by the cast and music by Jagjit Singh, was treated like an "orphan".

According to the 77-year-old, even filmmakers he admired, including his "guru" Raj Khosla and star director Vijay Anand, joined the chorus and urged him to modify what they termed a "suicidal climax".

"India, they said, is a traditional country. A wayward husband, when he returns like a prodigal child, must be embraced by the wife. That is what the culture demands. Anything else will be rejected," he added.

The filmmaker drew strength from the radical ideas of philosopher UG Krishnamurti, whose critique of tradition and social conditioning shaped Bhatt's resolve.

"Tradition is only a high-sounding word behind which you hide to protect your patriarchal worldviews. Tradition is your unwillingness to change. All these assurances -- God, ideology, society -- they exist only to prevent the release of what is already there," Bhatt said quoting Krishnamurti.

"Arth" finally released in 1983, the very day India won the World Cup, at Plaza in Delhi.

Bhatt recalled the day in detail. "I remember pacing through Connaught Place during intermission, July heat pressing down, heart clenched with doubt. By the time I returned, the defining moment had arrived. Shabana asks, 'If I had

done the same thing, would you take me back?' He says 'no'. She says goodbye.

"From the front rows came applause -- not from the balcony, too refined for that, but from the heart of the audience. And in that applause I felt it— Mahesh Bhatt had made it! The suicidal climax had worked."

Bhatt also credited producer Kuljit Pal for backing his vision despite the risks and described the film as a "turning point" in his career.

Priced at Rs 495 and published by Rupa, "The Ashes are Warm" is Bhatt's private jottings, recounting his memories of his "anti-guru" Krishnamurti with what he describes as a "ruthless and unflinching honesty". (PTI)

From Grandoli to the World Cup: The neighborhood club where Messi's journey started

ROSARIO (ARGENTINA), May 8: The breeze off the Paraná River brings a chill to the afternoon in Rosario. As the kids warm up, the clatter of their tiny cleats intensifies until the referee signals for the players to enter the pitch.

They're wearing the orange and white-striped jersey of Abanderado Grandoli, the neighborhood club where Lionel Messi's soccer journey started 34 years ago. From a nearby building, a mural of a young Messi watches over the children as they chase the ball.

Just maybe, years from now, one of them will be compared to Rosario's most famous son, arguably the best soccer player of all time.

"I watched him when I was little and it made me want to play like him," said Julián Silvera, an 11-year-old who particularly admires Messi's free kicks. The final chapter of Messi's glorious soccer career has yet to be written — in a few weeks, the 38-year-old Inter Miami captain is expected to play in his sixth World Cup for Argentina, though he hasn't officially confirmed it. That story began here, in a lower-middle-class district of Rosario, Argentina's third-largest city and an industrial hub that was also the birth place of revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

It was in 1992 when his maternal grandmother,

Celia, took 5-year-old Lionel to watch his older brother, Matías, play for Grandoli in one of Rosario's youth leagues.

How Messi ended up on the pitch has become part of the club's lore: One player was missing for a seven-a-side match for 6-year-olds, and Celia saw an opportunity for her tiny but gifted grandson. She argued with the coach, Salvador Aparicio, to put him on.

"Aparicio didn't want him because he was too young for the age group," Ezequiel Assales, who was Messi's teammate at Grandoli in those early years, told The Associated Press. "The grandmother insisted. They put him on, and everyone said, What a player! That's how it all started."

According to Spanish journalist Guillem Balagué, author of the only authorized biography of Messi, the coach thought the game would be too rough for the little boy, who already was showing signs of the growth impediment for which he would later seek treatment. He decided to put Messi on the right wing, where he could be close to his grandmother.

"If you see him cry or get scared, take him out," Aparicio told the woman, according to Balagué's account.

Aparicio, who died in 2008, described in sev-



eral interviews how Messi failed to control the ball the first time it came his way. But the next play, he received it with his left foot and dribbled past a series of opponents. A legend was born.

Soccer fans watching young Messi saw a new Maradona

In Argentina, so-called "baby fútbol" clubs serve as training grounds for kids between the ages of 4 and 13. Unlike youth teams for teenagers, they don't receive a cut of the transfer fees when players change clubs later in their careers. Those so-called solidarity payments are an important source of income for clubs around the world that developed talented players before they

turned professional.

Instead, they depend on monthly fees paid by families and ticket sales on match days. In Grandoli's case, the club has been able to leverage Messi's fame to generate additional income from advertising for energy drink and beer brands.

In the club's locker room, a display case with trophies and photographs of Messi's youth team chronicles the left-footed maestro's time at the club and serves as inspiration for the hundred or so children who train there.

"He was a different kind of player; you just had to give him the ball and support him. You could already see he had a future," recalled Assales, who now has two sons playing for the club. "He'd leave three or four players in his wake. We'd wait for the rebound, or he'd finish the goal."

As the goals added up, growing numbers of spectators came to the pitch on weekends to watch the "new Maradona," born a year after Argentine soccer icon Diego Maradona lifted the World Cup trophy in 1986.

"What everyone else got to see as an adult, we were lucky enough to see from the very beginning. He was fantastic," said David Treves, one of Grandoli's coaches.

At 7, Messi moved to Newell's Old Boys, one

of the most popular clubs in Rosario. When the club declined to finance treatment for his growth hormone deficiency, which was threatening his career, the Messi family moved to Spain where soccer giant Barcelona welcomed the 13-year-old prodigy to its academy and offered to pay his medical bills.

During his trophy-laden career with Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and now Inter Miami, Messi has never returned to Grandoli. But some of his gestures hark back to his beginnings there.

Messi points to the sky with his index finger during goal celebrations as a tribute to his grandmother, who died in 1998 and whom he gives credit for pushing him to start playing soccer.

After winning the World Cup with Argentina in Qatar in 2022, Messi posted a heartfelt message on social media: "From Grandoli to the Qatar World Cup, almost 30 years have passed. Nearly three decades in which the ball has given me many joys and also some sorrows. I always dreamed of being a World Champion and I didn't want to stop trying."

The message was not lost on his childhood club. The phrase "From Grandoli to the Qatar World Cup," is written on the jerseys of the kids playing soccer on a brisk afternoon in May. (AP)

Spain earns bonus 5th Champions League entry

Real Betis in line to benefit

GENEVA, May 8: Spain has clinched a bonus fifth entry into the Champions League next season, UEFA confirmed Friday, with Real Betis on course to earn the spot through the La Liga standings.

Rayo Vallecano's win against Strasbourg in the Conference League semifinals Thursday gave Spain an insurmountable edge over Germany in the race for an extra Champions League place.

Since the Champions League was revamped into a 36-team format in 2024, UEFA has awarded bonus entries to the two countries whose teams have the best collective record across the three European competitions in the previous season.

Standings leader England had already clinched the first bonus entry for next season's Champions League, which is worth tens of millions of euros (dollars) in prize money to that club.

Spain and Germany had been in a tight race for the second spot.

Real Betis is fifth in La Liga with



four rounds left and is six points ahead of Celta Vigo in sixth.

Betis played just one season in the Champions League 20 years ago, failing to advance from the group stage behind Liverpool and Chelsea.

The Champions League bonus entries went to Borussia Dortmund of Germany and Bologna of Italy for the 2024-25 season. This campaign it was Newcastle and Villarreal.

England could yet have a record-

tying six entries in the next Champions League just as it did this season.

Europa League path

The Europa League winner gets a direct entry to the next Champions League, and Aston Villa will play in the final against Freiburg on May 20 in Istanbul.

Villa is fifth in the Premier League with three rounds left. If coach Unai Emery's team finishes fifth and win the Europa League, then the sixth-place team in the Premier League will get the UEFA bonus entry. Bournemouth is currently sixth and would be a debutant in Europe.

Last season, Tottenham won the Europa League and entered the Champions League despite placing 17th in the Premier League.

England and Spain also will contest the Conference League final. Crystal Palace and Rayo Vallecano play for the third-tier title on May 27 in Leipzig, Germany. The winner gets direct entry to the Europa League next season. (AP)

Aston Villa routs Nottingham Forest to reach Europa League final against Freiburg

LONDON, May 8: John McGinn scored twice as Aston Villa routed Nottingham Forest 4-0 in the Europa League to reach its first major European final in 44 years.

McGinn's second-half goals on Thursday were almost identical left-footed shots from the edge of the area to cap a dominant display at Villa Park in the second leg of the all-English semifinal to the delight of roaring fans, including Prince William, who joined in singing "Sweet Caroline" after the final whistle.

Villa advanced 4-1 on aggregate and will face German club Freiburg in the May 20 final in Istanbul. Freiburg beat 10-man Braga 3-1 on Thursday to advance 4-3 on aggregate. It's Villa's first major European final since it triumphed over Bayern Munich in the European Cup in 1982.

Villa coach Unai Emery has won the Europa League title four times — three with Sevilla and one with Villarreal. Emiliano Buendía was involved in the opening two goals. The midfielder left behind several defenders on the left side of the area and sent



a low cross for Ollie Watkins to tap in the opener in the 36th minute. Watkins scored just minutes after he got his head bandaged from a cut sustained in a clash of heads with Forest defender Morato.

Buendía added the second goal from the penalty spot in the 58th minute. McGinn made it 3-0 on the night in the 77th and doubled his tally three minutes later.

Freiburg beats Braga

Freiburg overturned a 2-1 deficit from the opening leg.

Mario Dorgeles, who scored the winner for Braga last week in Portugal, was shown a straight red in the seventh minute after fouling

Jan-Niklas Beste, who would have had only goalkeeper Lukáš Horníček to beat.

It took the Bundesliga team only 12 minutes to punish the visitors when Lukas Kübler scored the first of his two goals. A clearance attempt bounced off Kübler's knee and ended up in the net.

Before halftime, Johan Manzambi added the second for Freiburg with a curling shout from outside the area.

Kübler's second goal, in the 72nd minute, made it 3-0 on the night before Pau Víctor had a consolation goal for Braga. It will be Freiburg's first Europa final.

Crystal Palace into Conference League final

In the third-tier Conference League, Crystal Palace advanced to its first European final by beating Shakhtar Donetsk 2-1 in the semifinal second leg and 5-2 on aggregate.

That means English clubs will compete in all three European title matches. Arsenal will face Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final. (AP)

Cristiano Ronaldo scores his 100th Saudi Pro League goal



RIYADH, May 8: Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 100th Saudi Pro League goal as Al-Nassr beat Al-Shabab 4-2 to move five points clear at the top of the table.

The 41-year-old forward converted a Sadio Mané cross at the near post with 15 minutes remaining to record the 97th goal of his career on Thursday. It was also his 26th league goal of the season.

"Ronaldo is always dangerous going forward and we saw that again today," Al-Nassr coach Jorge Jesus said.

João Félix, signed from Chelsea in July, scored three goals for the league leaders.

The win took Al-Nassr to 82 points from 32 games, five ahead of Al-Hilal, which has three matches, one more than Nassr, left to play. Al-Hilal meets Al-Kholod on Friday and faces Nassr on Tuesday in what could be a title decider against its Riyadh rival.

"Now we have a derby match against our rival, which is a difficult encounter," Jesus said.

"We are fully aware of its importance, and we are dealing with it with complete focus as we know that small details could decide the result."

Ronaldo, a five-time Ballon d'Or winner, has yet to secure a major trophy in Saudi Arabia since signing with Al-Nassr in December 2022. (AP)

I know cricket is India's No 1 sport but basketball has potential too: NBA legend Vlade Divac

NEW DELHI, May 8: He is well aware that cricket is India's "number one sport" but NBA great Vlade Divac is nonetheless hopeful that basketball too will find its space in the country.

The 7'1" tall Sacramento Kings great was at the American Centre here on Friday for some dribbling and passing with over 100 children from various schools and academies in the national capital.

"I have to tell you, I am surprised, (the kids) they are pretty good," he said after the 'Freedom 250 Slam Dunk Experience' event organised by the US Embassy and Sacramento Kings.

Divac stood next to the makeshift hoop set up on the front lawns of the American Centre and encouraged the young aspirants with a warm smile and some high fives as they queued up to take a shot at the basket for an appreciative glance from the 58-year-old legend.

The owner of two Olympic silver medals (1988 and 1996) and two world championship golds (1990 and 2002) was generous in his support, even lifting one kid to help him complete his attempt.

"I was very impressed with the girls, they were good at shooting the ball. It's a big country and a lot of kids around. India should be a power in the world if they do the right thing."

"NBA is a global brand and in future, we can have some NBA players from India," said the

former player, who has also dabbled in administration besides engaging in humanitarian work for homeless refugees in Africa and his native Serbia.

India has had presence in the NBA in the past when Canada-born Sim Bhullar became the first player of Indian descent to sign up for the league in 2015. Incidentally, it was Sacramento Kings who pencilled him in with Divac as the team's Vice President of Basketball Operations at that time.

Bhullar didn't play much during that stint and moved back to Canada before trying his hand in the leagues of China and Taiwan.

Satnam Singh became the first Indian to feature in the NBA, also in 2015 when he was signed up by Dallas Mavericks. He eventually bid adieu to the game and became a professional wrestler in the USA.

Both Bhullar and Satnam Singh were an inch or two taller than the imposing Divac, who is hopeful of seeing more Indian talent doing well internationally.

"India is a great big country with beautiful people. And we would love to help them develop kids for basketball. I know they love different sports, number one obviously is cricket and they should always do love that sport because it's the national sport," he said, mistaking cricket's well-documented popularity in India with the status

of national sport that it does not have.

Divac's understanding of India's sporting preferences perhaps stems from a past visit here for an exhibition match for the Kings.

"It's been many years since I travelled around the world promoting NBA because basketball is a sport that brings people together. In 2018, I came here with the Sacramento Kings to play an exhibition game in Mumbai because our owner Vivek Ranadive is a native from Mumbai," he said.

Ranadive is the founder of two US-based software companies — TIBCO and Teknekon.

Divac, who was the first European player to create a buzz in the NBA when first drafted in by Los Angeles Lakers for the 1989 season, headed the Serbian Olympic Committee from 2009 to 2017 after completing his playing career. He said he is a living example of the power of sport in changing lives.

"I was born in Yugoslavia, which is today's Serbia. When I was 21, I moved to the United States to play basketball and in today's game, more than 30 per cent players are international players."

"Basketball brings people together. I remember when we had conflict in my country, the NBA created 'Basketball Without Borders' which brought kids together. And that's what it's about, bring kids together." (PTI)

Akshay Bhatia tied 13th after first round of Truist Championship

CHARLOTTE (USA), May 8: Akshay Bhatia opened his week at the Truist Championship with a three-under 68 to tie tied 13th, five shots behind first-round leader Matt McCarty, who fired a superb 63 here.

Fellow Indian-American Sahith Theegala was tied 30th at one-under after completing 15 holes before play was suspended, while Sudarshan Yellamaraju carded an even-par 71 to be placed tied 33rd.

Bhatia began his round on the back nine and returned a bogey-free card, picking up the birdies on the second, 15th and 18th holes.

Theegala mixed three birdies with two bogeys before play was halted. He started brightly with a birdie on the third hole but dropped shots on the eighth and ninth to close the front nine.

On the back nine, Theegala birdied the 10th and 12th holes be-

fore play was suspended with three holes remaining.

He will return in the morning to complete his round.

Sudarshan Yellamaraju started his round on the back nine and made two birdies and two bogeys for his even-par score and was T-33.

Leader Matt McCarty carded a round of 8-under 63, which included nine birdies and one bogey. Having begun on the back nine, McCarty made five birdies on the back nine before making four straight pars followed by a birdie on the fifth and a bogey on the sixth followed by three straight birdies to finish the front nine.

Rory McIlroy, back from a short break and playing his first event since defending his Masters title, carded a round of 1-under 70 after starting on the back nine. He had 17 straight pars followed by a birdie on the final hole to be placed tied 30th. (PTI)



Don't want money or grand parades, just want to know our country is watching: Satwik

NEW DELHI, May 8: Ace doubles badminton player Satwiksairaj Rankireddy on Friday said his recent comments on the muted public reception after the Indian team won Thomas Cup bronze medal were not intended to seek "money or grand parades" but to urge the people "to celebrate every win, big or small" in all sports.

The world No.4 pair of Satwik and Chirag Shetty, the Asian Games champions, were part of the Indian team that recently claimed a bronze medal in the Thomas Cup in Denmark but the former had expressed his emotions on social media on the lack of recognition for their effort.

After returning home from Denmark, Satwik wrote, "Back home now. As usual, no one knows what happened over the past two weeks, and it seems like no one really cares."

On Friday, 25-year-old Satwik put out another social media post to elaborate his thoughts.

"The last few days have



brought a lot of attention to my recent comments regarding the lack of a reception for our Thomas Cup bronze medal.

While I am grateful for the overwhelming support and encouragement, I want to clarify my intent because I see many people deviating from the original point," Satwik wrote.

"My words did not come from a place of wanting personal fame or taking credit away from anyone

Global Chess League returns to India for fourth season

NEW DELHI, May 8: The fourth season of the Global Chess League (GCL), a joint initiative of Tech Mahindra and FIDE, will be held in India, aiming to leverage the country's booming chess culture, the tournament organisers announced on Friday.

The host city will be revealed soon, the GCL said. The third season of the event was held in Mumbai last December, in which Alpine SG Pipers emerged triumphant.



The league has already changed the format of the game, and it will continue its emphasis on rapid-fire matches, mixed-gender teams, and high-intensity competition to promote chess as a premier spectator sport.

Gourav Rakshit, commissioner, Global Chess League, said, "India's passion for the game and its rapidly growing chess ecosystem make it a natural destination for the league. We look forward to another exciting season that brings together the world's best players and a global fanbase."

The Season 4 will once again bring together the world's leading players in a team-based format.

Arkady Dvorkovich, president, FIDE, said, "The Global Chess League has introduced a new energy to the sport by combining world-class competition with an engaging team format that appeals to new and existing audiences alike." (PTI)

see their success being "met with silence".

"Whether it is a World Cup medal or a podium finish in a global championship like the Thomas Cup, these moments represent years of sacrifice and hard work," he wrote.

"When such milestones are met with silence, it feels disheartening not just for us, but for the future generations of Indian athletes who are watching."

"We don't want money or grand parades; we just want to know that our country is watching and that our efforts are seen. Let's come together to support all sports with the same passion and 'angle'."

Satwik, whose sentiments were also seconded by his partner Chirag earlier, urged the sports fans in the country to celebrate every sports person who wears an Indian jersey.

"Next time, let it not be about who won more or less, but about celebrating everyone who wears the India jersey," he said. (PTI)

Simranjeet, Sahil keep India in medal hunt amid inconsistent show at Archery World Cup



SHANGHAI, May 8: Recurve archer Simranjeet Kaur and compound shooter Sahil Jadhav emerged as India's surprise standout performers in an otherwise patchy campaign, staying on course for their maiden Archery World Cup medals here on Friday

Asian Games team bronze medalist Simranjeet, who narrowly missed a place in the Indian women's team after finishing three points behind Deepika Kumari in the qualification round, made the most of her individual opportunity by storming into the semifinals at the Stage 2 of the World Cup.

The 27-year-old from Haryana defeated Taiwanese teenager Fong You Jhu 6-0 (27-24, 28-26, 29-26) in straight sets to move within one win of her maiden World Cup medal.

Fong had earlier stunned India's top-ranked archer Ankita Bhakat in the second round.

Simranjeet was at her consistent best, dropping just six points from nine arrows against the 19-year-old from Chinese Taipei in the quarters.

She now faces the toughest test of her career against world No. 1 Kang Chaeyoung of South Korea in the semifinals. Even if she loses, she will still have a chance to secure bronze through the playoff.

India's experienced campaigner Deepika Kumari and teenager Kumkum Mohod reached the pre-quarterfinals before running into stronger opponents.

Deepika lost to familiar South Korean rival Chaeyoung, the reigning world champion and Tokyo Olympics team gold medalist, while Kumkum went down to Mexican veteran Alejandra Valencia, a two-time Olympic team bronze medalist.

In the men's recurve section, Dhiraj Bommadevara was the best among the Indians, reaching the pre-quarterfinals before suffering a 0-6 defeat to Frenchman Jean-Charles Valladont.

Valladont produced two perfect rounds in a dominant display. Dhiraj had an opportunity to bounce back in the second set after the Frenchman slipped to 25 with two 8s and a 9 following a perfect 30 in the opening set.

But the Indian himself faltered with a 24 after shooting into the seven-ring.

Valladont then sealed the contest with another perfect 30-27 set.

Among the other Indians, veteran Tarundeep Rai lost to Korea's Seo Mingi in the third round, while Yashdeep Bhoghe was outclassed by former Olympic champion Mete Gazoz of Turkey in straight sets in the second round.

Gazoz later went on to eliminate five-time Olympic gold medalist Kim Woojin to enter the semifinals.

Former India No. 1 Atanu Das

endured the poorest outing among the Indian men, crashing out in the opening round against unfancied Mohammad Mishad Prodan of Bangladesh.

Sahil-show The compound section, traditionally India's strength, had earlier turned into a major disappointment as none of the Indian teams could reach the medal rounds.

India failed to make the podium in men's, women's and mixed team events, raising concerns ahead of the Asian Games in less than four months time.

After the team setbacks, all hopes rested on the individual competitions where Sahil emerged as the lone Indian left in medal contention.

The 25-year-old, who made his World Cup debut only last month in Puebla, Mexico, advanced to the men's compound semifinals after edging Austria's Nico Wiener in a gripping shoot-off.

The match remained neck-and-neck throughout, with both archers dropping just three points across 15 arrows.

After identical perfect opening rounds, Sahil moved ahead by one point with another flawless second end. Wiener drew level at 88-all in the third after Sahil dropped two points.

Both shot 29 in the fourth end and followed it up with perfect 30s in the final round to force a shoot-off. Sahil then held his nerve brilliantly, clinching it 10-9 with another perfect arrow.

Sahil, now one win away from a maiden World Cup medal, will face France's Nicolas Girard in the semifinals.

Seeded directly into the third round after finishing eighth in qualification, he defeated experienced teammate Abhishek Verma 149-147 in the round of 32 and then beat Germany's Sven Fluss 149-146 in the pre-quarterfinals.

Kushal Dalal too showed promise before bowing out in heartbreaking fashion in the quarterfinals.

He lost to Denmark's Martin Damsbo 147-147 (10-10*) in a shoot-off decided by the arrow closest to the centre.

Former world champion Ojas Deotale, India's top-ranked compound archer in qualification with a seventh-place finish, disappointed with a first-round exit after losing 146-150 to Estonia's Robin Jaatma.

In the women's compound section, former world champion Aditi Swami also suffered a narrow shoot-off defeat in the quarterfinals against Estonia's Lisell Jaatma 147-147 (10-10*).

Like Kushal, Aditi lost on the closest-arrow rule despite both archers shooting perfect 10s in the shoot-off.

Lisell had earlier shocked multiple World Cup medalist Jyothi Surekha Vennam, while the other Indians Madhura Dhaman-gaonkar and Pragati exited in the third round. (PTI)

Gujarat Titans look to leapfrog wobbly Rajasthan Royals in mid-table IPL battle

JAIPUR, May 8: An upbeat Gujarat Titans will be determined to continue their winning streak and leapfrog a wobbly Rajasthan Royals in their mid-table Indian Premier League clash here on Saturday.

Only the net run rate separates the 2022 edition winners Gujarat Titans (-0.147) from the fourth-placed 2008 champion Rajasthan Royals (0.510) in the points table as the two teams have fared alike so far. Both GT and RR have six wins and four defeats in 10 matches each.

But the Shubman Gill-led side will fancy their chances against the wobbly Royals, who have suffered three defeats in their last five matches. The Titans have racked up three wins on the trot and looking to break into the top four.

Royals captain Riyan Parag struck 90 in RR's first-innings score of 225 for six but it was not enough against Delhi Capitals who overhauled it with seven wickets and five balls to spare. It was the second such instance in a row when a first-innings total in excess of 220 could not be defended by the Royals.

While Rajasthan Royals are indeed top-heavy with Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (404 runs), Yashasvi Jaiswal (312) and even Dhruv Jurel (290) doing the heavy lifting, they will need their skipper to fire big in the lower order, which has only Donovan Ferreira (229) hitting at 150 or above.

Jurel has undoubtedly been a vital cog in the Royals' batting line-up, but the right-handed batter has been guilty of not accelerating at the top.

In his last three outings, Jurel has scored 42 off 30 balls, 16 off 20 balls, and 42 off 30 balls at No. 3 and these numbers certainly warrant further improvement in a season where no total, batting first, is safe.

While IPL 2026 has been even more severe on the bowlers, the Royals will have to find solutions of their bowling woes, especially in the middle overs.

On their part, the Titans will be pleased at



how they are peaking at the right time.

Gill (378 runs) has been a consistent run-getter and will be keen on converting his start into a big score, while Sai Sudharsan (385) will also be determined to make the most of his form, having struck two fifties and a hundred in his last four outings.

Jos Buttler's (335) return to consistency once again makes the Titans extremely dangerous at the top, while they also have finishers with requisite skills to see off tough situations in the lower order.

However, like any top-heavy sides, a collapse piles pressure down the order, and the Titans had failed miserably -- bowled out for 100 against Mumbai Indians earlier -- when that happened.

Kagiso Rabada (16 wickets) has undoubtedly been the leader of a high-quality pace attack. The Titans will be pleased at how the trio of Rabada, Prasad Krishna (12) and Mohammed Siraj (11) have been performing.

With 220-plus totals being successfully chased down twice at the Sawai Mansingh Sta-

dium here, both the teams would prefer batting second.

The Teams:

Rajasthan Royals: Riyan Parag (c), Aman Rao, Shubham Dubey, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Lluan-dre Pretorius, Ravi Singh, Donovan Ferreira, Ravindra Jadeja, Dasun Shanaka, Jofra Archer, Brijesh Sharma, Nandre Burger, Tushar Deshpande, Kwena Maphaka, Adam Milne, Sushant Mishra, Vignesh Puthur, Ravi Bishnoi, Sandeep Sharma, Kuldeep Sen, Yash Raj Punja, Yuvraj Singh.

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), Anuj Rawat, Jos Buttler (wk), Connor Esterhuizen, Kumar Kushagra (wk), B Sai Sudharsan, M Shahrulkhan, Jason Holder, Glenn Phillips, Rashid Khan, Nishant Sidhu, Manav Suthar, Rahul Tewatia, Washington Sundar, Arshad Khan, Ashok Sharma, Gurnoor Brar, Kulwant Khejroliya, Mohammed Siraj, Prasad Krishna, Kagiso Rabada, R Sai Kishore, Ishant Sharma, Luke Wood, Jayant Yadav.

Match starts at 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

Super Rapid and Blitz: Gukesh beats Caruana in final round of Rapid event

WARSAW (POLAND), May 8:

World champion D Gukesh defeated American Grandmaster Fabiano Caruana in the ninth and final round to be tied fourth in the Super Rapid and Blitz Tournament's rapid competition here, sustaining a welcome return to form after struggling for the past few months.

The Indian is tied fourth with 18 more rounds to come in the blitz section that follows the rapid event.

The 19-year-old Gukesh had started the final day of the rapid section with a loss against French Grandmaster Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and then in the penultimate round drew with Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia.

Wild card American Hans Moke Niemann yet again proved his detractors wrong by emerging as the surprise winner of this section on 13 points in all. Niemann edged out compatriot Wesley So by a full point who ended second ahead of Fedoseev on 11.

"My rapid event was inconsistent. I was playing well, but I missed a few chances. There were also games where I was in trouble and managed to save. The tournament could have been better," Gukesh told 'Saint Louis Chess Club'.

Gukesh, Caruana and Duda Jan-krzysztof of Poland tied for the fourth spot on nine points apiece and the main battle is likely to be between these six players once the blitz competition begins.

"In blitz, all you have to do is play fast and pray. That's going to be my strategy," he said.

Gukesh got in to some initial trouble against Caruana who played the black side of a Benoni defense. The American won a pawn in the early middle game but Gukesh kept himself in the hunt by creating counter play on the queen side. (PTI)

I felt good after Virat Kohli's wicket, but more important is LSG won the game: Prince Yadav

LUCKNOW, May 8: Lucknow Super Giants pacer Prince Yadav dismissed Royal Challengers Bengaluru batting stalwart Virat Kohli with a peach of a delivery during their IPL match here but the youngster does not want to play it up, saying that he was just happy that his team won.

In the second over of RCB's run chase of 210, Prince Yadav produced a sensational delivery to bamboozle Kohli. The 140-kmph ball nipped back in to crash into Kohli's off stump. It marked Kohli's first IPL duck since a first-ball dismissal against Rajasthan Royals in April 2023.

LSG, who had posted 209 for 3 courtesy Mitchell Marsh's 111, went on to win by nine runs under

the DLS method, stopping RCB at 203 for 6 in 19 overs.

"I felt good after the (Kohli) wicket, but I am most happy that we won the match. If I had taken the wicket and we had lost, it wouldn't have been so (good)," Prince, who took three wickets for just 33 runs, said at the post-match press conference.

"Whether it's a different way or one way, when a bowler takes a wicket, it feels good. But as I said earlier, if the situation was such that we could have won the match only if we had taken the wicket, that's what happened and I am feeling good."

Some commentators felt that Prince's delivery to oust Kohli could be considered as one of the



best in the tournament.

Prince is having a breakout season with 16 wickets, just one off the Purple Cap table-toppers Bhuvneshwar Kumar (17) and Anshul Kamboj (17).

The 24-year-old said he learnt a

Southampton accused of 'unauthorized filming'

LONDON, May 8: England's second-tier Championship has been hit with another spying controversy.

Southampton has been contacted by the English Football League following a complaint by Middlesbrough "relating to alleged unauthorized filming" ahead of the teams' meeting in the Championship playoffs, the EFL said in a statement sent to The Associated Press.

"The alleged incident is said to have taken place on Middlesbrough's private property by an individual identified to be associated with Southampton," the statement continued.

The EFL said it was treating this matter as "potential misconduct" and has requested Southampton's observations.

The first leg of their playoff semifinal is on Saturday, at Middlesbrough's Riverside Stadium. The second leg is on Tuesday in Southampton.

In 2019, the EFL fined Leeds 200,000 pounds (\$259,000) for spying on one of Derby's training sessions ahead of a game between the teams.

Marcelo Bielsa, who was manager of Leeds at the time, accepted responsibility for having a club employee spy on Derby's practice. In a detailed, hour-long news conference, Bielsa later admitted to having watched at least one of each of his opponents' training sessions.

In handing out the fine, the EFL said Leeds' conduct "fell significantly short of the standards expected by the EFL and must not be repeated." (AP)

KSCA requested for additional 10,057 complimentary IPL tickets: BCCI source

BENGALURU, May 8: The Karnataka State Cricket Association's request for additional 10,057 complimentary tickets led to the shifting of IPL final and playoff matches from the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here, a BCCI source has said.

Bengaluru was to host the final going by convention as Royal Challengers Bengaluru are the defending champions.

But IPL chairman Arun Dhimal told PTI that it became "untenable" to have the finale here due to high demand for complimentary tickets at the relatively low-capacity venue, which can only accommodate 35,000 fans.

This season's playoff fixtures will be held in Dharamsala (May 26) and New Chandigarh (May 27 and 29) while the title clash (May 31) will be staged at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad.

"The KSCA is entitled to complimentary tickets amounting to 15 per cent of the stadium capacity. However, KSCA requested for an additional 10,057 tickets," the source revealed to PTI. In that, the association needed around 900 passes to meet the demands of the state legislature members alone.

"KSCA agreed to provide three complimentary passes each to MLAs/MLCs (approximately 900 passes in total).

"Further, the Expert Committee and the additional commitments with the Government of Karnataka would have required an additional 750 complimentary tickets in addition to a limited number of hospitality complimentary passes beyond the standard 15 per cent." (PTI)

The document also highlighted breaches by unspecified team owners, alleging that they have not maintained the sanctity of Players' And Match Officials Access (PMOA).

"Specifically instances have been observed of IPL franchisees owners attempting to communicate with, approach, hug, or otherwise physically interact with players during live match situations.

"Such conduct however well-intentioned, directly contravenes established protocol and may constitute interference with team dynamics and match proceedings," the Board asserted.

The BCCI has therefore banned owners from interacting with the players while a match is on.

"IPL franchise owners and their representatives are strictly prohibited from communicating with or physically accessing players or team officials in the dugout, dressing room or playing area during course of the match, except through designated and approved channels.

"All franchise owner level access to re-

stricted zones must strictly conform to the PMOA Protocol as communicated by the IPL operations divisions. Any deviation shall be treated as serious violation."

Prohibition of Vaping Rajasthan Royals skipper Riyan Parag was seen vaping in the dressing room balcony during a match, causing a uproar. Without naming Riyan, Saikia said indulging in a banned activity as per Indian law will not be tolerated by the Board.

"It is pertinent to note that vapes and electronic cigarettes is prohibited under applicable Indian Law.

"Any individual found engaging in such conduct within tournament premises is not only violating BCCI and IPL regulations but may also be committing a cognisable offence under applicable statutory framework," he said.

"Accordingly the use of vapes, e-cigarettes, and all prohibited substances is strictly banned within all IPL tournament venues, including dressing rooms, dugouts, team hotels and practice facilities." (PTI)

IPL: BCCI bans 'unauthorised' entries in players' rooms; warns of honey traps, security risk

NEW DELHI, May 8: Warning of potential "honey traps, legal liability and security risks", the BCCI has banned unauthorised visitors from the hotel rooms of players, support staff and team officials in the IPL after incidents of "misconduct and protocol violations" were flagged by the Board's Anti-Corruption Unit.

In an elaborate advisory for the 10 IPL franchises, the BCCI has said that written authorisation from the team managers would be a must for guests to have access to the players' and officials' rooms.

"The advisory has been issued in light of certain incidents observed during ongoing season and is intended to reinforce the standards of professionalism, discipline, security awareness and protocol compliance expected from all stakeholders associated with IPL." BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said in a communication to the CEOs of the franchises, a copy of which is in possession of PTI.

"It has come to the attention of the



BCCI that certain incidents of misconduct and protocol violation have occurred involving players, support staff and team officials during the course of the current IPL season.

"These incidents if left unaddressed, carry the potential to cause significant reputational harm to the tournament, the franchise concerned and the BCCI as the Governing Body. They may further expose individuals and franchises to legal liability and security risks of serious nature," he went on to warn in the preamble of the document.

The Board noted that certain players and support staff members have permitted unauthorised persons to access their hotel rooms without the knowledge or approval of the concerned Team Manager.

"In a number of instances, Team Manager was entirely unaware of the presence of such visitors. The practice is strictly prohibited with immediate effect," the notification ordered.

All players and support staff have now been given a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that needs to be followed for the duration of the tournament.

"No guest shall be escorted to private hotel rooms unless Team Manager has specifically authorised the same in writ-

ing. The BCCI draws attention to all franchises to the well documented risks of targeted compromise and honey trapping that pervade high profile sporting environments.

"The possibility of incidents giving rise to serious legal allegations, including those under applicable Indian laws on sexual misconduct cannot be discounted. IPL franchisees must remain vigilant and proactive in mitigating such risks at all times," the Board stated.

It also banned players and support staff from leaving team hotels at "irregular hours" without informing their designated Security Liaison Officer (SLO) and Team Integrity Officer (TIO).

Saikia said periodic checks might be conducted by the BCCI or the IPL Operations Team to ensure compliance with the guidelines and breaches would invite sanctions ranging from financial penalties to suspension or disqualification of the concerned player, support staff and team official.

Owners barred from player interaction during games