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**7** NATION

- Ukrainian drone strikes on Russia kill 4, wound 12 others
- India, Netherlands elevating ties to strategic partnership: PM Modi
- Union Minister's son arrested in POCSO case
- BJP sets 13-point Kerala agenda, focuses on OBC outreach, recalibrates minority engagement

## Tuliram hints at leadership change in KAAC during BJP 'Vijay Utsav'

### 'BJP has no shortage of capable leaders'

HT Correspondent

**KHERONI, May 17:** On the sidelines of the BJP's mega "Vijay Utsav" celebration held at Dongkamukam in West Karbi Anglong on Sunday, incumbent Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and newly elected Rongkhang MLA Tuliram Ronghang hinted at a possible leadership change in the council, stating that there was no shortage of capable leaders within the BJP to run the autonomous body.

The "Vijay Utsav", organised by the BJP West Karbi Anglong District Committee in the Rongkhang Legislative Assembly Constituency, was celebrated with enthusiasm following the BJP's electoral success in the hill districts.

Ronghang, who recently won the newly created Rongkhang Assembly constituency with one of the highest victory margins in Assam, interacted with media persons during the event and said, "The BJP will rule. Team Karbi Anglong will rule. There is no lack of leaders in the BJP."

The programme witnessed the participation of BJP leaders, workers and supporters from across the region.

Those present included BJP West Karbi An-



glong District Committee president Radip Ronghang, Member of Parliament Amar Sing Tisso and newly elected MLAs from Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong — Habbey Teron, Niso Terangpi, Lusing Teron and Sur-

jya Rongphar.

Thousands of BJP supporters attended the celebration, with slogans in support of the party and Dr Ronghang echoing throughout the venue. Political (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Cross-border drug syndicate comes to light

### Myanmar-based trafficker arrested in NCB crackdown

**GUWAHATI, May 17:** A key Myanmar-based drug trafficker, who was operating as a major supplier of methamphetamine and heroin from across the border, was arrested by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), an official statement said here on Sunday.

The arrest was made in Delhi on Saturday following extensive surveillance, intelligence development, interstate coordination and follow-up operations by the NCB in its sustained crackdown on transnational drug trafficking networks operating along the India-Myanmar border, it said.

The accused, identified as Thancintuang alias Chintuang alias Tluanga, is the second major Myanmar-based drug supplier nabbed by the NCB this year, it added.

Chintuang had emerged as one of the most significant traffickers operating along the Myanmar-Mizoram-Manipur-Assam-Tripura corridor, and has been identified as a major international supplier of methamphetamine and heroin from the neighbouring country, the statement said.

Investigations revealed his extensive involvement in organising cross-border trafficking networks routing narcotic consignments through Mizoram, Manipur, Assam and Tripura into various parts of India and Bangladesh.

He was wanted in multiple cases registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act by the NCB and several drug law enforcement agencies.

Chintuang was also accused in

two NDPS cases registered by the Mizoram Police in 2025 relating to the suspected trafficking of methamphetamine and heroin. He was additionally found involved in six NDPS cases registered by the Mizoram Excise and Narcotics Department in 2023, linked to heroin trafficking.

Investigations indicated his involvement in illicit drug trafficking networks valued at approximately ₹ 115 crore, the NCB statement said.

He is linked to seven NDPS cases connected with the Myanmar-Mizoram-Tripura-Assam corridor, and is also suspected in five other cases associated with the Myanmar-Manipur-Assam axis.

Chintuang was the prime accused in a 2024 NCB Agartala zone case (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Vessel carrying 20,000 tonnes of LPG reaches Gujarat crossing Strait of Hormuz



**KANDLA (GUJARAT), May 17:** A vessel carrying 20,000 metric tonnes of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) arrived at Deendayal Port Authority in Kandla in Gujarat after crossing the Strait of Hormuz amid the West Asia crisis, officials said on Sunday.

The Marshall Islands-flagged MV SYMI started its journey from Qatar and docked at the port in Kandla around 11.30 pm on Saturday after crossing the Strait of Hormuz on May 13, they added.

Since early March, 13 India-flagged vessels, comprising 12 LPG tankers and one crude oil tanker, have crossed the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway close to the coast of Oman through which roughly one-fifth of the world's energy supplies pass.

It has been severely disrupted by the conflict in West Asia that started on February 28, with the US and Israel launching joint attacks on Iran, triggering retaliatory strikes. It has resulted in one of the worst energy crisis the world has seen in recent decades.

Incidentally, at a special meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNECOSOC) on safeguarding energy and supply flows, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Parvathaneni Harish said targeting commercial shipping, endangering civilian crew and impeding freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz is "unacceptable".

On May 13, an India-flagged commercial vessel came under attack off the coast of Oman.

Omani authorities rescued all 14 crew members of the vessel sailing from Somalia, but it was not immediately known who carried out the strike. (PTI)

## UNC launches economic blockade in Manipur

Organisation says blockade will continue until remaining six hostages are rescued safely

**IMPHAL, May 17:** The United Naga Council (UNC) on Sunday evening announced the launch of an "inter-district economic blockade" along national highways passing through Naga areas of Manipur following the expiry of the deadline for the safe release of six remaining Naga hostages allegedly held by "Kuki militants".

The UNC stated that the blockade would continue with immediate effect until the safe rescue and release of the remaining hostages were ensured.

According to the organisation, it had earlier issued an ultimatum to the Government of Manipur on May 14 demanding the immediate and safe release of 20 Naga civilians allegedly held hostage at Leilon Vaiphei village and Sapermaina Kuki village within 24 hours.

The UNC said 14 hostages were

released on the morning of May 15, but six persons, including two pastors, continued to remain in captivity.

The organisation further stated that the Manipur government had sought additional time until 2 pm on May 16 to trace and release the remaining hostages. The deadline was later extended again to facilitate search operations and rescue efforts. However, according to the UNC, the six hostages had still not been rescued despite repeated extensions and continued operations by the state machinery.

"Given the situation, we are constrained to launch an inter-district economic blockade along the national highways in the Naga areas in Manipur with immediate effect until the safe rescue and release of the Naga hostages are duly carried out," the organisation said in its statement. (NNN)

## Anti-encroachment drives conducted in Howrah, Sealdah rail stations

**KOLKATA, May 17:** A massive anti-encroachment drive was conducted in Howrah and Sealdah railway station complexes on Sunday, removing illegal stalls and structures, officials said.

Howrah and Sealdah are terminal stations and among the busiest ones in the country, handling lakhs of suburban and express train passengers every day.

Bulldozers were used past midnight to demolish rows of makeshift shops and illegal structures along the stretch from the Ganga ghat to the Howrah station premises, officials said on Sunday.

The operation, conducted jointly by the Railway Protection Force (RPF), Government Railway Police (GRP), railway authorities and Howrah City Police, saw heavy deployment of security personnel across the area to prevent any untoward incident during the eviction drive.

Bulldozers and earthmovers removed many temporary stalls and



structures occupying footpaths and public spaces near the bus stand and Ganga ghat area as part of a railway land clearance initiative for passenger convenience.

Officials and local sources estimated that the operation removed around 150 hawkers and roadside shops from the Howrah station area. The affected establishments included vendors selling food

items, fruits, toys and daily essentials.

The Railways did not issue an official statement. When asked, officials said it was part of a regular cleanup operation.

The encroachments had caused severe congestion and inconvenience for years to passengers entering and exiting the station, one of the country's (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 'PM donning 'Aronai' reflects community's rich heritage'

**GUWAHATI, May 17:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi donning the traditional Bodo scarf 'Aronai' at an official engagement in the Netherlands is a testament to the community's rich handloom heritage, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday.

He expressed gratitude to Modi for ushering in peace and progress in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of the state.

"Aronai reflects the pride and rich handloom heritage of Assam's Bodo community. Proud to see Adarniya @narendramodi Ji carrying it with grace on the global stage in the Netherlands," Sarma said in a post on X.

Modi had worn the Aronai around his neck while addressing the Indian diaspora in The Hague. He had reached the Netherlands on Friday on a two-day visit as part of a four-nation trip to Europe.

"Grateful for our beloved PM for ushering in a new era of peace and prosperity across Bodoland," Sarma added.

The chief minister was referring to the (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## 'Vibrant Democracy': India trashes allegations on declining minority rights, media freedom

**THE HAGUE, May 17:** India has flatly rejected allegations of declining media freedom and erosion of religious and minority rights, asserting that the country is a "vibrant democracy" that guarantees free speech to all.

The remarks were made by Sibi George, Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs, while responding to questions from two Dutch reporters who cited comments reportedly made by the Netherlands Prime Minister Rob Jetten, expressing concern at a perceived slide in freedom of expression in India.

George was speaking to the media on Saturday evening in the Dutch capital regarding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to the Netherlands.



It is not immediately clear whether Jetten had made the remarks.

However, in a social media post, Jetten said: "Both India and the Netherlands attach great importance to democracy, good governance and a world order based on rules and justice."

Rebutting the allegations, George told the press: "We face these kinds of questions basically

because of the lack of understanding of the person who asks the question. India is a country of 1.4 billion people, the largest populated country in the world."

George highlighted how India belongs to a civilisation that is five millennia old and the country's cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. "Look at India, how beautiful it is. There is no other country in the world in which four religions have originated - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. These religions originated in India and continue to flourish in India."

George stressed how major world religions found a home in India and continue to thrive. "India is perhaps only one of those very few countries where the Jewish population (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Experts stress need for better understanding of AAC

Workshop highlights importance of inclusive communication methods for persons with speech impairments

**GUWAHATI, May 17:** More than 50 professionals from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, working in the disability, rehabilitation and education sectors, have stressed the need for enhancing knowledge and practical understanding of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) to support natural speech rather than replace it.

They were speaking in a workshop on building skills and capacities in communication methods for those with a wide range of speech impairments, including people with developmental disabilities, according to a statement.

The special educators, speech therapists and other practitioners from the two states also emphasised person-centred approaches in communication support and rehabilitation, and the growing need for trained professionals equipped to address diverse communication, learning and support requirements.

The two-day Continuing Rehabilitation Ed-

ucation (CRE) workshop on AAC, held here recently, also put the spotlight on enhancing knowledge and practical understanding of AAC strategies and tools to supplement and support natural speech rather than replace it.

AAC enables inclusion in mainstream society and independence in communication using all manners of sign, gestures, objects, pictures, symbols and words. AAC systems can be no-tech, low-tech or high-tech.

Experts and leaders in the field, including Padma Shri awardee Sudha Kaul, founder of the Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy (IICP), Kolkata, conducted the workshop. Other resource persons and speakers included Madhurima Dasgupta, Principal, IICP; Diba Nahin, Director, Training at Shishu Sarothi Centre for Rehabilitation and Training for Multiple Disability and special educator; and Dipam Das, special educator (Deaf and blindness). The workshop featured interactive sessions, demonstrations, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## New York Indian Film Festival

### Assamese flick 'Aakuti' to have world premiere

**GUWAHATI, May 17:** 'Aakuti' (Longing), an Assamese feature film on the emotional journey of an eight-year-old girl haunted by her mother's loss, has been chosen at the New York Indian Film Festival, where the movie will have its 'World Premiere', the filmmaker said on Sunday.

The film marks the directorial debut feature of Snigdha P Roy, and it was also selected for 'Film Bazaar Recommends' section at Waves Film Bazaar 2025.

Written, directed and edited by Roy, 'Aakuti' is part of the official selection of the New York Indian Film Festival 2026 (NYIFF), and it will be screened on May 30.

Commenting on the development, Roy said, "Being selected by the New York Indian Film Festival and nominated alongside some remarkable films is an honour for all of us. It feels like a meaningful acknowledgement of the passion and resilience that went into making the film possible." 'Aakuti' was not an easy film to



make, and filmed on a modest budget, it was brought to life by a small team bound by conviction rather than resources, she added.

The director co-produced the film with Tanuja P Roy under the banner of

PKR Films. The film's cinematography was done by Chida Bora, sound design by Debajit Gayan and background score by Ashutosh Sohoni.

Reflecting on the experience and journey of making 'Aakuti', producer

Tanuja said, "It is the debut feature from PKR Films, and its journey from inception to the international stage at the NYIFF is a significant milestone for our team."

The film is built on a foundation of minimalistic storytelling and raw human connection, she added.

The title role of the film, the child's character, has been portrayed by Kavisha Mahanta. The film also features Nilim Chetia, Anisha Hazarika, Arun Hazarika and Ananya Hazarika in lead roles.

The 1-hour 34-minute film revolves around Lakhi, who lost her mother when she was infant and now constantly longs for her.

To cope with the void, Lakhi fills pages with drawings, trying to imagine her mother's face, but is left frustrated and heartbroken.

Her father, Bishnu, loves her deeply, but Lakhi remains withdrawn, caught in a web of inner turmoil and self-doubt. He tries (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## North America, NE Asia, Latin America account for over 35 pc of India's exports in FY26

**NEW DELHI, May 17:** North America, North-East Asia, and Latin America together accounted for over 35 per cent of India's merchandise exports, which stood at USD 441.78 billion in 2025-26, reflecting a gradual shift towards a more diversified and resilient global trade structure, according to commerce ministry data.

Exports to East Africa increased 13.7 per cent to USD 12.6 billion, accounting for 2.9 per cent of India's exports, while North Africa rose 14.8 per cent to USD 8 billion with a 1.8 per cent share.

"India's exports in 2025-26 reflected increasing geographic diversification, with strong growth across Asia, Africa, and Latin America even amid global trade disruptions," an official said.

According to the data, while North America continued to dominate India's export basket with exports of USD 97.7 billion accounting for 22.1 per cent of total exports, growth remained relatively moderate at 1.3 per cent year-on-year, that indicates to a mature but resilient demand base.

The strongest momentum came from North-East Asia, where exports surged 21.6 per cent to USD 41.6 billion, raising the region's



share to 9.4 per cent of India's total exports.

In this region, there is a rising demand for Indian electronics, engineering goods, chemicals, and industrial products.

The countries in this region include China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Mongolia, and Taiwan. These countries have advanced manufacturing industries.

Latin America maintained healthy expansion as exports rose 7.8 per cent to USD 16.4 billion, contributing 3.7 per cent to India's total exports.

Meanwhile, exports to West

Africa and Other West Asia remained relatively stable around 3 per cent and 2 per cent shares, respectively.

Smaller regions such as Central Africa and Central Asian Republic countries also posted steady double-digit growth, albeit from a lower base.

**EXPORT PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION**

India's export diversification in FY26 was marked by a significant widening of its product-market footprint, with Indian exporters penetrating 1,821 new principal commodities products.

"The trend highlights a gradual shift from traditional commodity-led expansion toward broader participation across high-value manufacturing, engineering, agri-processing, and technology-intensive sectors," the official said.

The strongest value contribution came from advanced engineering and industrial sectors. Ship, boat and floating structures emerged as the single largest contributor, generating USD 57 million across 19 new markets, reflecting India's growing competitiveness in specialised maritime manufacturing.

Similarly, nuclear reactors, industrial boilers and parts recorded a USD 14.3 million across 13 new markets, while telecom instruments expanded into 20 new markets with exports of USD 5.8 million, indicating increasing integration into global industrial and technology supply chains.

Further, several emerging sectors also gained traction in new markets, including aircraft and spacecraft parts, railway transport equipment, graphite and explosives, and consumer electronics, pointing toward a gradual broadening of India's advanced manufacturing export base. (PTI)

## CNG prices hiked by ₹1, second time in a week

**NEW DELHI, May 17:** CNG prices were hiked by ₹ 1 per kg on Sunday, the second increase in rates in less than a week.

CNG now costs ₹ 80.09 per kg in the national capital, according to Indraprastha Gas Ltd, the country's biggest city gas firm. The rate hike comes within days of ₹ 2 per kg increase in rates on Thursday.

Rates of gas piped to household kitchens, called piped natural gas, however, remain unchanged.

IGL said, "The retail selling price of CNG has been increased by ₹ 1/kg w.e.f 6 am on 17.05.2026 in all geographical areas (GAs) of IGL."

"The revision in retail prices of CNG has been effected only to marginally offset the impact of increase in input gas cost along with steep appreciation of USD," it said.

Even after the latest revision, CNG would still offer up to 45 per cent savings towards the running cost when compared to vehicles running on alternate fuel at the current level of prices. (PTI)

## Paramotor Digital Technology files confidential draft papers with Sebi for IPO

**NEW DELHI, May 17:** Paramotor Digital Technology Files Confidential Draft Papers With SEBI For IPO. Paramotor's portfolio includes SpendPro, RewardOn, yayyy.shop, and DevStack.

Paramotor Digital Technology Files Confidential Draft Papers With SEBI For IPO

The company submitted its draft papers under Sebi's pre-filing route, which allows issuers to keep details related to the issue size and other key information confidential until a later stage.

Fintech and enterprise technology firm Paramotor Digital Technology Ltd. has confidentially filed draft papers with markets regulator Sebi for an initial public offering (IPO), according to a public notice issued by the company.

The company submitted its draft papers under Sebi's pre-filing route, which allows issuers to keep details related to the issue size and other key information confidential until a later

stage. This route has been increasingly favoured by companies seeking more flexibility in their IPO preparations and responding to market conditions before a public filing.

In a public notice, Paramotor said it has filed "the pre-filed draft red herring prospectus with Sebi and the stock exchanges... in relation to the proposed initial public offering of its equity shares on the main-board of the stock exchanges".

According to sources, Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors and Equirus Capital are the book-running lead managers to the issue.

Incorporated in 2016, Paramotor Digital Technology operates a diversified technology platform catering to both consumers and enterprises across India. Its business spans consumer spend management, rewards and loyalty solutions, digital gifting and enterprise technology services.

Paramotor's portfolio includes SpendPro, a prepaid card-based

spend management platform; RewardOn, an enterprise rewards and loyalty management solution; yayyy.shop, a direct-to-consumer digital gifting marketplace; and DevStack, its enterprise technology and software development services vertical.

The company's asset-light, technology-driven business model positions it to benefit from increasing digital adoption in consumer spending, enterprise engagement and business process digitisation.

Its yayyy.shop platform offers consumers access to prepaid and branded gift cards across multiple categories, while RewardOn enables enterprises to design and manage digital rewards programmes for employee engagement, customer loyalty and channel incentives.

DevStack focuses on developing business-critical software applications and enterprise platforms, helping organisations build customised and scalable digital solutions. (PTI)

## India's gems, jewellery exports down 9.07 pc in April at \$2,226.45 million

**MUMBAI, May 17:** India's gems and jewellery exports declined by 9.07 per cent at USD 2,226.45 million (₹ 20,825.01 crore) in April following the West Asia conflict, the Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council said.

The total exports were USD 2,448.53 million (₹ 20,952.26 crore) in the same month in 2025, as per the data by the industry apex body GJEPC.

"Decline in exports is mainly due to the ongoing conflict in West Asia, which has caused worldwide disruptions affecting exports. Be-



sides geopolitical tensions, exports to the US, a major export market for the gems and jewellery industry, were also affected because there is still no clarity on the tariffs," GJEPC Chairman Kirit Bhansali told PTI.

Meanwhile, data from the GJEPC revealed that the overall export of cut and polished diamonds declined 19.65 per cent in April at USD 890.91 million compared to USD 1,108.74 million for the same period last year.

Export of polished lab-grown diamonds dipped 15.53 per cent to USD 93.28 million in April from USD 110.43 million last year.

Gold jewellery exports were down 21.77 per cent to USD 841.54 million in April, compared to USD 1,075.67 million for the same period last year.

The total export of plain gold jewellery at USD 341.08 in April 2026 showing a decline of 47.06 per cent against USD 644.33 for the same period of the previous year.

However, the exports of studded gold jewellery grew 16.02 per cent at USD 500.46 in April compared to USD 431.35 for the same period last year.

Silver jewellery exports in the previous month surged by 444 per cent to USD 268.38 million against USD 49.33 million in the same month last year. (PTI)

## Space intel giant ICEYE chooses India for first Asia-Pacific satellite manufacturing hub

**NEW DELHI, May 17:** ICEYE, a global leader in space-based intelligence, is set to establish its first Indian production facility within the next year to manufacture small satellites for defence, surveillance and environmental monitoring.

Rafal Modrzewski, CEO and co-founder of ICEYE, said that the facility will serve as the company's primary manufacturing hub for the Asia-Pacific region, complementing its existing operations in Europe and the US.

The company's satellite constellations currently serve sectors ranging from defence and intelligence to insurance and emergency management. Demand for ICEYE's technology has surged amid rising global geopolitical tensions, including the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.

"There is a strong alignment between what India needs and what we offer. Globally, we are seeing two key trends: increasing defence spending and rapid adoption of space-based capabilities," Modrzewski told PTI in an interview.

"India reflects both these trends. Countries are learning from recent conflicts that space is the next frontier for intelligence and defence. We specialise in defence and intelligence, so naturally, we see India as an important market for our solutions," he said.

Modrzewski said ICEYE specialises in defence intelligence capabilities, particularly national intelligence systems based on space-based data.

Traditionally, intelligence systems relied on multiple data sources, with space-based data being just one layer.

"Today, that is changing as space-based assets are increasingly becoming the primary source of intelligence. We manufacture small satellites at scale, which allows us to deploy large constellations quickly," he said.

"We provide not just satellites, but also ground segment infrastructure and training to

governments globally. Our customers span Europe, Japan, the Middle East, Brazil, Canada and the United States," he added.

Declining to share the quantum of investment that ICEYE is looking to make in India, Modrzewski said the company aims to manufacture around 10 satellites in the first year and will scale it up to 20 to 40 satellites annually in the successive years.

"Investment will be significant, likely in the range of tens of millions of dollars, though exact numbers are still being finalised," he said.

ICEYE owns the world's most advanced SAR (synthetic aperture radar) satellite constellation and provides intelligence and surveillance services to its customers.

"Yes, it is fair to say that India could become our Asia-Pacific hub, alongside Europe and the United States," Modrzewski said.

He said the plan is to put a supply chain and manufacturing facility in place in India within the next six to 12 months.

Modrzewski said ICEYE is keen to have a foothold in India as it represents a strong growth opportunity due to a large and highly skilled talent pool, a rapidly growing economy and increasing complexity of challenges requiring advanced intelligence solutions.

At present, ICEYE produces around 50 satellites annually and it plans to take the number beyond 100 annually by 2028.

"We are planning to deploy hundreds more satellites in the coming years

"Satellites manufactured in India will serve global markets, while also supporting local demand. We are not making our India presence dependent solely on government orders. We are committed to building here regardless of the order book," Modrzewski said.

"We already have customers in India through our existing operations. We are in active discussions with both existing and potential customers, including government stakeholders, but

cannot disclose details at this stage," he said.

Modrzewski indicated that ICEYE is holding talks with the relevant government departments on its ambitious plan.

"We are an established company and can operate independently. However, we value open dialogue and collaboration with the government, especially where there is alignment in capabilities and priorities. So far, we have not encountered any major challenges," he said.

The ICEYE CEO also said that the company is looking at a potential collaboration in India including with satellite launch providers such as ISRO and private players, manufacturers of electronics and other components, technology partners and players in the defence ecosystem such as drones and integrated systems.

Founded and headquartered in Finland, ICEYE operates globally with over 1,000 employees across Poland, Spain, the UK, Australia, Japan, the UAE, Greece and the US.

It has crossed approximately USD 280 million in revenue this year and is aiming to double it.

"India is a priority market for us this year, and we are committed to building a strong presence here," Modrzewski said.

Last week, ICEYE handed over MikroSAR, Poland's sovereign radar satellite reconnaissance system, less than 12 months after contract signing.

According to publicly available data, this marks the fastest deployment of an operational satellite programme in the world.

The sovereign satellite system gives the Polish Armed Forces complete independence in satellite reconnaissance, allowing them to acquire imagery from anywhere in the world, day or night and in any weather.

Each satellite in the constellation carries a SAR radar that emits microwave pulses and turns their reflections into detailed images with a resolution as fine as 25cm. (PTI)

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## 'BJP has no

## Myanmar-based trafficker

observers noted that the event reflected a changing political landscape in the hill districts of Assam following the BJP's strong performance in the Assembly elections.

involved the seizure of 14 kg of methamphetamine and 2.8 kg of heroin. He was also the prime accused in another NCB Agartala zone case of 2025 involving the seizure of 49.1 kg of methamphetamine tablets.

During the investigation, several members of the syndicate and close associates of Chintuang were identified and apprehended by NCB, the statement said.

Among them, Vungkhathawna, identified as a close associate and key facilitator, played a major role in co-ordinating movement and delivery of narcotic consignments linked to the Myanmar-based trafficking network.

He was arrested during follow-up operations and was also found involved in another NDPS case registered by Mizoram Police. Another associate, Lalrampari, functioned as a major hawala operator responsible for handling and channelling proceeds generated through illicit drug trafficking activities of the syndicate. She was arrested by the NCB on August 8, 2024.

Investigation revealed hawala transactions amounting to nearly Rs 100 crore linked to the network, following which the matter was shared with the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Properties suspected to have been acquired through proceeds of drug trafficking were also frozen by the authorities. Further investigation led to the arrest of Abu Saleh alias Saifuddin from Assam's Cachar on November 20, 2025. He was identified as a major Indian operative and logistics coordinator associated with Chintuang's network and was actively involved in the transportation and distribution of narcotic substances across the Assam corridor. He was found linked to multiple NDPS cases registered by Mizoram Police and the Mizoram Excise and Narcotics Department. One of the key accused arrested in the 2025 Agartala zone case was Jabrul from Assam's Karimganj. He was apprehended on December 3, 2025 along with an additional consignment of narcotic drugs. He was found involved in multiple NDPS cases registered by Tripura Police and the NCB.

It further said financial investigation in the cases led to the identification and temporary freezing of multiple bank accounts linked to the accused persons.

Investigations revealed the existence of a highly organised interstate and international drug trafficking network extending from Myanmar to Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Tripura, and Bangladesh.

The syndicate utilised multiple trafficking routes, local facilitators, transport coordinators, hawala channels and financial handlers for smuggling and distribution of methamphetamine and heroin across international and interstate borders. Since 2025, NCB has intensified its network-centric investigations by adopting both "top-to-bottom" and "bottom-to-top" approaches aimed at dismantling entire syndicates rather than merely intercepting consignments, the statement said.

In the northeastern region alone, NCB registered 48 NDPS cases in 2025, resulting in the arrest of 116 drug traffickers and seizure of substantial quantities of narcotic drugs valued at approximately Rs 665 crore in the illicit drug market. In 2026, NCB has already registered 31 NDPS cases so far, resulting in the arrest of 54 drug traffickers and seizure of substantial quantities of narcotic drugs during sustained enforcement operations across the region. (PTI)

## 'PM donning 'Aronai'

2020 Bodo Peace Accord, which increased power and scope of the autonomous council administering BTR and effectively brought to an end the decades-old insurgency problem in the area. (PTI)

## Anti-encroachment drives

busiest railway terminals. Visuals from the spot showed police barricading large sections of the area while bulldozers razed roadside shops selling food items, plastic goods and other daily-use articles.

Some hawkers alleged they were not given adequate prior notice before the demolition drive and claimed their livelihoods were severely affected. Several traders said many of the stalls had existed for decades and demanded rehabilitation or alternative vending arrangements from the authorities.

"There should be beautification and proper management, but poor vendors should also be rehabilitated," one hawker said. "We will have to resort to suicide if no rehabilitation is provided," another stall owner affected by the drive said. Eyewitnesses said tension briefly flared up when some vendors attempted to resist the eviction, leading to heated exchanges and pushing between police personnel and protesters. However, the situation was later brought under control.

In a parallel anti-encroachment initiative, the Sealdah division also cleared hawkers and stalls from platforms 1 to 21 of the railway station to ensure smoother passenger movement inside the terminal, officials said.

An estimated 250 hawkers and stalls were removed from the station premises as part of the drive. Railway authorities said all the platforms had been made hawker-free and would now be reserved exclusively for the movement of passengers. Earlier, areas outside Sealdah railway station had also witnessed eviction drives aimed at clearing illegal encroachments and footpath occupation. (PTI)

## 'Vibrant Democracy': India

never faced persecution. This is the beauty of India. Then again, look at Islam or Christianity."

"Christianity came to India immediately after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (It) Continued to flourish in India," said George, adding that India has more than 30 million Christian citizens. "Christianity came to India much before it came to Europe and it flourished in India. This is the beauty of India. Islam came to India during the time of Prophet Muhammad himself and flourished in India."

The diplomat, citing the recently held assembly elections in several regions in the country, said India is a "vibrant democracy" where "peaceful transition of power" is a key feature.

"Recently we had elections. You know, you need to know what the level of participation was. More than 90% of the electorate voted. This is the beauty of India," he said.

George said India achieved economic success without "compromising" on democratic principles. "We did not go for violence to eliminate poverty. We went through the democratic process to eliminate poverty."

"We are one-sixth of the total population of the world, but not one-sixth of the problems of the world. This is the beauty of India, which makes us proud. So, every minority thrives," he said.

"When we became independent, the minority population in India was 11 per cent. Now it is more than 20 per cent. Name a country where the population of minorities has gone up? You won't find it (anywhere) other than India," the diplomat said in his rebuttal.

"This is the beauty of India. So, I would request you to learn more about India so that you will have more appreciation of what India is, and how it is progressing," he said.

Also, in a social media post after meeting PM Modi on Sunday, PM Jetten mentioned about a long-running child custody dispute that has featured in previous diplomatic engagements between the two countries.

"We also spoke about the case regarding the abduction of Insiya to India by her father," Jetten said.

Insiya Hemani, a Dutch child, was taken from Amsterdam to India allegedly by men acting on behalf of her father around a decade ago when she was a toddler. Dutch courts eventually convicted several people in this case on charge of kidnapping, while custody and legal proceedings linked to the case have continued in Indian courts. When asked about the case, George declined to comment, saying the matter is subjective. (PTI)

## India watching closely

30-year lease and extension provisions. It will provide for the development of 238 hectares of land, comparable in scale to the Chinese-developed Colombo Port City but without any of the political risks, they said.

The land parcel can be used for setting up maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facilities, a flying school, logistics parks, solar installations, industrial parks and resort hotels.

Crucially, the two tracks are independent: investors can enter via landside operations alone, airside alone, or both - allowing meaningful flexibility to build a diversified, de-risked portfolio, the people said.

From India's perspective, they said the project has a strategic dimension against the backdrop of China's increasing attempts to expand its political and economic influence over the island nation.

"An Indian presence in Hambantota will be a tangible expression of India's Neighbourhood First policy and Vision MAHASAGAR commitment to the Indian Ocean region, especially as a confidence-building investment in a close partner," said one of the people. Explaining the importance of the project, they said India's aviation sector is the world's fastest-growing and its MRO industry is under significant capacity pressure.

Mattala's long runways, uncongested airspace and generous land footprint make it a natural candidate for an MRO hub serving Indian carriers, reducing turnaround times and costs while establishing a genuine Indian Ocean base, they said. A flying school here makes equal sense: pilot training capacity in India is stretched and Mattala's uncongested skies are an asset, not a liability, they noted.

The landside opportunity is also highly attractive as it includes 238 hectares of government-leased land perfect for industrial parks, logistics and solar projects, they said.

Because Sri Lanka is actively courting Indian investment and shares preferential trade access with India, a strategic opportunity like this is rare in the region, they added.

The new opportunity comes one-and-a-half years after a planned project close to Mattala by certain Indian investors didn't fructify.

The previous government had nearly finalised a 30-year lease with an Indo-Russian joint venture anchored by Shaurya Aeronautics Pvt. Ltd, but the deal could not materialise following a change in the government.

The current EoI is a clean, fresh start, and the strategic logic is stronger than ever, the people said.

Last month, India's state-run Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) acquired a 51 per cent controlling stake in Sri Lanka's Colombo Dockyard PLC, in a boost to its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

Located in the Port of Colombo, Colombo Dockyard PLC (CDPLC) gives MDL a foothold in the island nation. (PTI)

## Experts stress need

discussions and practical insights on AAC, including communication strategies, multidisciplinary intervention and inclusive practices for individuals with complex communication needs.

Speakers emphasised the importance of collaborative and person-centred approaches in communication support and rehabilitation, while highlighting the growing need for trained professionals equipped to address diverse communication, learning and support requirements.

The CRE workshop also provided participants with a platform to exchange experiences, share best practices and strengthen professional networks across disciplines, the statement said. (PTI)

## Assamese flick 'Aakuti'

his best to understand her, to offer comfort, but finds himself falling short.

Bishnu leans on a close friendship with a woman, who guides him through his difficulties. They also hope for a life together, but are unable to because of the complexities of their situation. And Laxhi remains unaware of this relationship. 'Aakuti' traces the emotional journey of a child and the quiet, and the tender bond between a father and daughter as they try to sail through life. (PTI)

## Party celebrates 41<sup>st</sup> foundation day in Diphu ASDC reaffirms commitment to Autonomous State demand



**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, May 17:** The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) celebrated its 41st foundation day at the Sarsing Teron (Langkung Habe) Memorial Town Hall here on Sunday, reaffirming its commitment to spearhead the movement for the achievement of an Autonomous State.

The celebration began with the hoisting of the party flag at the central committee office by president Sonasing Terang, followed by tributes to departed leaders and members who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the Autonomous State movement.

Addressing a meeting attended

by party members and workers at the Sarsing Teron (Langkung Habe) Memorial Town Hall, party president Terang said the ASDC was formed on May 17, 1986, through the coming together of various social organizations, including student and unemployed groups, to carry out a mass movement for an Autonomous State under Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution, comprising the three hill districts of Assam — Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

Terang stated that the strong mass agitation led to the signing of an MoU on April 1, 1995, with the Central and State governments, re-

sulting in the enhancement of powers of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) to 30 departments. However, he pointed out that the signing of the MoU was not the ultimate solution, as the sole objective of the movement was to achieve Autonomous Statehood under Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution.

He further stated that for the last 40 years, the struggle for Autonomous State led by the ASDC and its allies — the Karbi Students Association and Karbi Nimso Chingthur Asong — has continued despite difficulties and various obstacles and that the spirit of the people associated with the ASDC

has not been dampened.

Terang also mentioned the sacrifices made by the ASDC for the cause of Autonomous Statehood. Referring to the recently concluded State Assembly election, he said the official candidates of the ASDC had withdrawn their nominations after receiving written assurance from the State government that official talks on the Autonomous State demand would resume soon after the election. The ASDC had conditionally supported the BJP in the election solely for the purpose of attaining Autonomous Statehood, he added.

He urged party members and workers to strengthen the Autonomous State movement once again.

ASDC general secretary Jitson Bey also said that despite pursuing the demand for Autonomous Statehood for the last 40 years, the ASDC has not grown tired and continues its movement.

He stated that since the State government has given its assurance, the ASDC would intensify pressure for the resumption of official talks and for arranging a tripartite discussion with the Central government. He added that the ASDC would continue to lead the movement for the long-standing demand of the hill people of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

The meeting was attended by Lumbajong MAC Johnny Timung, MAC Krishna Bhattarai, Karbi traditional king Longsing Ronghang and Forum for Hill Autonomous State Movement joint convener James Hanse.

### Youth killed in road accident

**HT Correspondent**  
**JAGIROAD, May 17:** A youth was killed and two others were seriously injured in a road accident on NH-27 on Sunday near the Tata Semiconductor Project in Jagiroad. The deceased was identified as Arjun Thapa (18) of Palachung village under Jagiroad Police Station. The injured were identified as Hirakjyoti Bardoloi and Arun Bardoloi of nearby Tegheria village. The accident occurred when a speeding truck lost control and hit the youths riding a bike. The vehicle was seized and the driver was arrested.

### Hmar Martyrs' Day observed in Diphu with solemn tributes

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, May 17:** Hmar Martyrs' Day was solemnly observed at Hebron Field, Birla in Diphu on Saturday. The event was marked by prayer services, flag hoisting and heartfelt tributes to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the rights and aspirations of the Hmar community.

The central programme was hosted by Lalbieklien Hmar, secretary of the Hmar Young Association (HYA), Diphu unit. S Thiek, president of the Karbi Anglong Hmar Association (KAHA) and a retired ACS officer, hoisted the martyrs' flag to mark the occasion.

A solemn condolence prayer was offered by retired pastor Rev L Varte. Following this, R H Hming Hmar, president of Arts and Culture, Hmar Society, delivered a keynote address. In his speech, he highlighted the deep historical significance of the day, urging the gathering to remember the monumental sacrifices made by Hmar volunteers and leaders.

The event also featured a poignant solo performance by Miss Elohim Hmar, before drawing to a close with a final prayer led by Rev Zohmingthang Purulote.

Hmar Martyrs' Day is observed annually on May 16 to honour the volunteers and leaders who lost their lives during the movement spearheaded by the Hmar People's Convention (HPC). The movement originally sought greater autonomy and the official recognition of the Hmar identity.

The historical roots of the day trace back to May 16, 1989, during clashes between Hmar volunteers and the Mizoram Armed Police. Prominent volunteers, including Lallhuoplien and Lienhmingthang, lost their lives during the conflict. Subsequently in December 1989, the HPC officially declared May 16 as Hmar Martyrs' Day.

The day is marked by prayer services and memorial gatherings, cultural programmes and traditional songs, community welfare activities and wreath-laying ceremonies at memorial sites. The annual remembrance continues to be observed with deep reverence across Hmar-inhabited regions spanning Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Assam.

## Rainfall triggers artificial flooding in Dibrugarh again

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, May 17:** Even a brief spell of rainfall once again exposed the persistent urban flooding problem in Dibrugarh, as several low-lying areas of the town were submerged under artificial floodwaters on Sunday. Among the worst-affected locations were the premises surrounding the Doordarshan Kendra and the roadside Sunday market area along Mancotta Road, where rainwater accumulated rapidly, disrupting normal life and movement.

The sudden waterlogging caused major inconvenience to commuters, local vendors and residents, with several stretches of the road becoming nearly impassable. Shopkeepers and hawkers at the weekly market struggled to continue business operations as muddy floodwater entered roadside stalls and pedestrian areas. Vehicles were seen moving slowly through inundated roads, leading to traffic congestion in the locality.

Residents alleged that the recurring crisis is primarily the result of poor drainage infrastructure and the lack of regular maintenance of



existing drains. According to locals, clogged drainage channels and unplanned urban expansion have significantly worsened the waterlogging situation in recent years. They expressed frustration that despite repeated complaints and assurances from authorities, no permanent solution has yet been implemented.

Many residents also voiced concern over the vulnerability of the town ahead of the peak monsoon season. They warned that if moderate rainfall can trigger such se-

vere artificial flooding now, the situation could become far more alarming during continuous monsoon showers in the coming months.

Citizens have urged the district administration and municipal authorities to take immediate corrective measures, including proper desilting of drains, strengthening of urban drainage systems and long-term flood mitigation planning to prevent repeated occurrences of artificial flooding across the town.

### 94 recruits inducted into 119 Infantry Battalion TA Assam



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, May 17:** In a solemn and proud milestone for the region, a fresh batch of 94 young recruits has officially been inducted into the ranks of the 119 Infantry Battalion (Territorial Army) Assam. The induction marks the culmination of a highly successful and rigorous recruitment drive across the zone.

Chosen for their exceptional physical endurance and medical fitness, these 94 individuals represent some of the finest young minds ready to transition into battle-ready soldiers.

The fresh recruits are now set to embark on a structured basic military training framework. This transformative journey will instill core military values, tactical skills and the discipline required to serve the nation effectively in challenging operational environments. The unit leadership extended a warm welcome to the incoming batch and expressed absolute confidence in their potential to uphold the stellar heritage of the Terrier Fraternity and the Assam Regiment.

### Free APSC coaching programme launched in Demow

**HT Correspondent**  
**DEMOW, May 17:** Under the initiative of Sushanta Borghain, MLA of 95 No Demow Constituency and in collaboration with the Demow Municipal Board, a one-year free coaching programme for APSC CCE was launched at the Dr Bhupen Hazarika Public Library, Demow on Saturday.

The programme began with a welcome speech by Parishmita Bharali, Community Organiser, NULM. A felicitation programme was also organised on the occasion. Pallabita Baruah Gogoi, Chairperson of Demow Municipal Board, spoke at the event.

Lukumoni Borah, Co-District Commissioner of Demow Co-District, in her speech said that she was impressed by the works done by the Demow Municipal Board. She motivated the students present and said that hard work and sincerity are essential for the APSC examination. She also stressed the importance of reading extensively and encouraged the students to serve and love society.

Debabrat Sarma, Executive Officer of Sivasagar Municipal Board, also motivated the students in his speech. Amit Biswakarma of Suchitra ACS Academic Partner delivered a PowerPoint presentation regarding the APSC CCE examination.

Mrityunjay Bharali, Executive Officer of Demow Municipal Board, delivered the closing remarks. The classes will be held from Monday to Saturday from 2.30 PM onwards. A total of 100 students were present at the programme.

## ABVP Assam concludes three-Day organisational meet in Diphu

**HT Bureau**  
**DIPHU, May 17:** The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Assam unit, successfully concluded its intensive three-day organisational meet in Karbi Anglong. The event featured the state working committee meeting on May 15, followed by comprehensive review and planning sessions on May 16 and 17.

The high-level convergence was held at the conference hall of the Arboretum-cum-Craft Centre in Matipung, Diphu.

More than 100 delegates representing various districts and educational institutional units across Assam participated in the three-day event. The primary agenda focused on reviewing the student organisation's recent activities across college and higher secondary school campuses.

Furthermore, the leadership engaged in extensive deliberations to map out strategic plans and mega programmes for the upcoming 2026 and 2027 academic sessions.

Key areas of focus during the organisational sessions included organisational expansion, with



strategies formulated to strengthen the base of ABVP across the state; campus activism, aimed at enhancing student engagement and systematically preparing for student union elections and membership drives through extensive enrolment campaigns to induct new student members in the upcoming session.

The ABVP is widely recognised as a student organisation affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The three-day brainstorming session saw the active

participation of top-tier central and state leadership, who guided discussions on organisational growth and youth empowerment.

Among the key dignitaries present were North Eastern Zonal Organising Secretary Kamal Nayan and Joint Organising Secretary Monjunath Mangaloi. The state leadership was represented by state president Rita Moni Baishya, vice president Dr Atur Kiri Engti, State Organising Secretary Anup Kumar and State Secretary Manash Pratim Kalita.

### Silver jubilee Shani Jayanti Mahotsav celebrated at Moranhat

**HT Correspondent**  
**DEMOW, May 17:** The Shani Mandir situated at Sewa Singh Path in Moranhat organised the silver jubilee year celebration of the Shani Jayanti Mahotsav on May 15 and 16. The temple is regarded as the oldest Shani Mandir in Moranhat. As per the puja schedule, a procession was taken out from the Shani Mandir on May 15 (Friday). On May 16 (Saturday), the puja began in the morning, followed by Jaagya. In the afternoon, the aarti was performed and prasaad was distributed in the evening. People from various places visited the Shani Mandir and offered puja during the occasion. Bhajans were performed on Saturday evening and the celebration concluded with the evening aarti.

### Police seized 19 cattle heads at Kaliabor

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, May 17:** Based on a secret tip off, Kaliabor police led by Sub-inspector Rituparna Bonia nabbed two cattle smugglers and also seized 19 cattle heads from a vehicle while transporting from unknown places. The identities of those two arrested smugglers have not been disclosed by sources and they are being interrogated by police at Kaliabor PS to surface the detail till the time of filing this report.

Similarly, a team of police personnel from Ambagan police outpost, rescued over 10 cattle heads from a gang of thieves at Putakolong near Ambagan Saturday last. Police also seized a luxurious vehicle along with those cattle heads. Significantly, the gang of the thieves fortunately managed to flee from the scene. The legal proceedings is underway in both cases, sources added.

## AIR Tezpur celebrates 90 years with musical evening

'Suror Sandhiya' highlights broadcaster's cultural contribution in Sonitpur

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, May 17:** To commemorate the 90th anniversary of All India Radio (AIR), the All India Radio Tezpur station organised a musical programme titled "Suror Sandhiya" at the Chandramohan Medhi Auditorium of Tezpur College on Friday evening.

The programme, which began at 6.30 PM, was inaugurated with the ceremonial lighting of lamps. On the occasion, announcers and presenters of AIR Tezpur performed a chorus composed by Pranjal Saikia, celebrating the legacy of the station in the cultural landscape of Sonitpur district. Explaining the significance of the event, AIR Tezpur Programme Head Rupanta Kumar Das highlighted the nationwide celebrations being organised by various AIR stations to mark the broadcaster's



successful 90-year journey. Addressing the gathering, Kartik Sutradhar, Deputy Director of All India Radio Guwahati, spoke about the role played by the Tezpur station since its inception in promoting the talents and cultural heritage

of Sonitpur and neighbouring districts. Senior Administrative Officer Dasarath Sarkar and Programme Executive Indrajit Das also shared their views on different aspects of All India Radio and its contribution to public broadcasting.

The musical evening featured performances by AIR-approved artists Alimpon Choudhury, Pronami Borthakur, Jyotirupa Sharma and Pranjal Saikia, who enthralled the audience with light music presentations. Among those present at

the event were noted lyricist and Baan Theatre president Bankim Sarma, Tezpur College principal Dr Manoj Kumar Hazarika, Darrang College principal Dr Palashmoni Saikia, Tezpur Sahitya Sabha president Dhruvajyoti Das and secretary Dr Pallab Bhattacharya, retired AIR programme executive Pallabi Kalita, retired physics professor Dr Ramesh Chandra Goswami, District Cultural Development Officer Anchumi Basumatary, Sonitpur Journalists' Union president Sanjib Hazarika, senior journalist of News Live Pulak Kumar Deka and noted singer Durgamayee Bora, besides a large number of listeners, artistes and media persons.

The programme was anchored by announcer Priyanka Bora, while the vote of thanks was delivered by AIR Tezpur Transmission Executive Gautam Nath.

## Doctors stage Bhaona on Hari-Hara War in Tezpur

Medical professionals recreate legendary mythological battle through traditional performance



**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, May 17:** Centuries after the legendary "Hari-Hara War" of Tezpur folklore, the epic confrontation between Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva came alive once again on stage here through a grand Bhaona performance enacted entirely by doctors. In a unique confluence of medicine and culture, 32 senior and junior male and female doctors from Tezpur staged the traditional Bhaona titled "Hari-Hara Yuddha" on Saturday night at the Hillbilly Marriage Hall premises in Majgaon, drawing thousands of spectators from across the town and neighbouring areas.

The performance recreated the celebrated mythological episode centred around the romance of Usha and Aniruddha and the ensuing battle between Lord Krishna (Hari) and Lord Shiva (Hara), leaving the audience immersed in heroism, devotion and nostalgia associated with Tezpur's historic identity as the "City of Blood". Organised jointly by the Progressive Doctors' Artists' Society of Tezpur and the Tezpur branch of the Indian Medical Association, the Bhaona showcased the artistic talents of doctors who, despite their demanding medical duties, devoted nearly one-and-a-half months to rehearsals held every evening and late into the night.

The production was directed by noted Sattriya artist Dilip Bora of Da-Parbatia, who also performed as the Sutradhar, with support from other Sattriya artistes. Senior physician Dr Pradip Kumar Sarma portrayed the role of Brahma, while Dr Satyajit Bora, president of the Assam State branch of the Indian Medical Association, enacted the role of Lord Shiva. Popular paediatrician Dr Rupam Das played Lord Krishna and Dr Dipen Mahanta portrayed the powerful King Bana. Dr Atul Kumar Kalita appeared as Bana's commander Prasenjit, Dr Anjumani Chetia portrayed Goddess Bhagawati, and Dr Archana Das enacted the role of Parvati. Dr Pinaki Raj Kalita played Balabhadra, and Dr Ranjan Kumar Mahanta portrayed Indra. Among other notable performances, Dr Ankumani Baruah enacted Aniruddha, Dr Kashmita Bhattacharyya portrayed Usha, Dr Rana Mukut Keot appeared as Vishwakarma, senior gynaecologist Dr Palashmoni Keot played Narada, and physician Dr Piyuz Agarwala enacted the role of Indrasena.

The organisers and participants received widespread appreciation for their efforts to preserve and promote the cultural legacy of Mahapurush Shrimanta Sankardev and Tezpur's legendary folklore among younger generations. Audience members lauded the doctors not only for their dedication to healthcare but also for their commitment to Assamese culture and traditional performing arts. It may be mentioned that the same group of doctors had earlier staged the Bhaona "Karna Parva", which had also earned acclaim across the State.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

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

## Modi's warning about restraint

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's warning about restraint was meant to prepare the public for economic stress, but its immediate effect was to expose how fragile India's external position has become when oil, gold and West Asia move against it at the same time. What sounded at first like a call for voluntary austerity has begun to look less like political theatre and more like an admission that the economy faces a squeeze that cannot be handled only through routine fiscal and monetary tools. The Prime Minister's appeal to curb fuel use, postpone non-essential gold purchases, reduce foreign travel and revive work-from-home practices carried the memory of the pandemic years because it borrowed the language of restraint from a period of emergency. That is why it unsettled households, businesses and markets. For trade and industry, the fear was not merely that consumers would spend less, but that the govt was preparing the ground for administrative controls if external pressures worsened. Ministers and officials moved quickly to soften the message, stressing that no lockdown-style restrictions were being planned and that energy supplies remained manageable. Yet the very need for such reassurance showed that the warning had landed with unusual force.

The underlying concern is straightforward. India remains heavily dependent on imported crude oil, while gold continues to absorb large quantities of foreign exchange. When both prices rise together, the country's import bill expands, the rupee comes under pressure, inflation risks return, and the current account deficit widens. This is not a theoretical chain. It is the same external vulnerability that has forced policymakers in the past to choose between protecting consumers, defending the currency and preserving fiscal space. Oil is the sharper danger because it moves through the entire economy. Higher crude prices raise the landed cost of petrol, diesel, aviation fuel, LPG, fertilisers, plastics, chemicals and freight. Even when retail fuel prices are not immediately raised, the burden shifts somewhere else: to state-owned oil marketing companies, the Budget, or downstream producers. If the government absorbs the shock, fiscal stress increases. If companies absorb it, balance sheets weaken. If consumers absorb it, inflation and demand pressures follow. There is no painless route.

West Asia has made that equation more troubling. The conflict involving Iran, Israel and the United States has turned the Strait of Hormuz and adjoining shipping routes into a live risk for import-dependent economies. India's exposure is especially high because a large share of crude oil and liquefied petroleum gas flows from, or through, the region. Any disruption in shipping, insurance, tanker availability or payment channels can raise costs even before physical shortages appear. A jump in bunker fuel and freight costs would also make non-oil imports more expensive, feeding into manufacturing and consumer prices.

## Scam in residential rental market in Nagaon town

By: H Borah

The rapid urbanization and economic growth of Nagaon Town, a vital hub in Central Assam, has triggered a massive boom in the residential rental market. Thousands of students, working professionals, and families move to the town every year, seeking accommodation. However, beneath the surface of this booming real estate sector lies a thriving, unregulated gray market.

A large section of house owners in Nagaon Town are running lucrative rental businesses completely under the radar, failing to report to local authorities, evading taxes, and inadvertently creating breeding grounds for criminal activities.

The most alarming aspect of this unregulated rental boom is the blatant disregard for mandatory tenant verification. Under existing laws, landlords are legally obligated to submit details of their tenants to the local police station. In Nagaon Town, however, this rule is widely flouted. Many house owners rent out their properties without asking for proper identification documents, let alone submitting them to the administration. This lack of oversight poses a severe threat to public safety.

Anonymity for Criminals: Without police verification, rented houses can easily become safe havens for anti-social elements, drug peddlers, and individuals involved in cybercrimes or insurgent activities.

Lack of Accountability: If a tenant commits a crime and flees, the local administration is left with no paper trail, severely crippling police investigations.

In a growing town like Nagaon, the possibility of illegal operations being carried out from these unverified rented premises cannot be denied or ignored.

Beyond the security risks, these landlords are causing significant losses to the state and central exchequers. It has become a common practice among many house owners in Nagaon to demand rent strictly in cash mode. By avoiding digital payments, checks, or bank transfers, these landlords ensure that no financial footprint is left behind. This tactical move allows them to:

Conceal Actual Income: Landlords grossly underreport or completely hide their rental earnings from the Income Tax Department.

Evade Local Municipal Taxes: By keeping the rental business unofficial, owners also evade correct property and municipal taxes levied by the Nagaon Municipal Board.

While honest taxpayers fulfill their civic duties, these property owners reap massive untaxed profits, running a parallel economy right under the nose of the authorities.

The newly formed BJP-led ministry in Assam, under its strict stance against corruption and lawlessness, has repeatedly emphasized transparency, security, and the rule of law. It is high time this administrative focus turns toward the chaotic rental sector of Nagaon Town. To curb this growing menace, the local administration, Nagaon Police, and the Income Tax Department must coordinate to take immediate legal action:

Mandatory Registration Drives: The district administration should launch a strict, time-bound drive making it mandatory for all landlords to register their rental units and submit tenant verification forms.

Strict Penalties for Defaulters: Heavy financial penalties and legal action should be initiated against house owners who fail to comply with police verification norms.

Crackdown on Cash Transactions: The Income Tax Department should investigate high-value residential properties in Nagaon, auditing landlords who mask their rental incomes through cash hoarding.

Digital Helpline for Citizens: A dedicated portal or helpline should be set up where conscious citizens can report illegal, commercial rental hubs operating secretly in residential zones.

A regulated rental market is essential for both the safety of Nagaon's citizens and the economic growth of the state. Landlords cannot be allowed to prioritize personal profit over community security and national revenue. The Assam government and Nagaon's local administration must act swiftly and decisively to dismantle this illegal network, ensuring accountability, transparency, and peace of mind for the public.

# Indian Citizens have to adapt to continuing threats to energy security

By: T N Ashok

For four years, Indian motorists had been shielded from the brutal arithmetic of global oil markets. Petrol and diesel prices barely moved upwards even as crude swung wildly across international exchanges, governments collapsed elsewhere under inflationary pressure, and energy-importing nations passed costs directly to consumers. In India, the political leadership chose another path: absorb the pain quietly through state-run oil companies and postpone the reckoning. That reckoning arrived this week.

In a move loaded with economic and political significance, India's three state-controlled fuel retailers — Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited — raised petrol and diesel prices by ₹3 per litre, the first such increase in four years. The hike, modest on paper, represents far more than a routine price adjustment. It is an acknowledgment that India can no longer indefinitely insulate itself from the worst global energy shock since the Ukraine war of 2022.

Behind the increase lies a combustible mix of geopolitics, wartime disruption, electoral timing, and fiscal strain. The trigger was the U.S.-Israeli military campaign against Iran and the subsequent paralysis around the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow maritime artery through which a substantial portion of the world's oil flows. For India — the world's third-largest crude importer — the consequences have been immediate and severe.

More than 40% of India's crude imports traditionally moved through Hormuz-linked routes. When the conflict escalated and shipping insurers began pricing war risk into tanker movement, freight costs exploded. Tankers started moving "dark," switching off transponders to avoid detection. LPG carriers bound for India quietly slipped through the Gulf with signals disabled.

Global crude surged past \$120 per barrel before stabilizing around the \$100-105 range. The Indian rupee weakened sharply. Wholesale inflation spiked to 8.3%, its highest level in three and a half years. And yet, Indian fuel prices barely moved. The reason was not economic. It was political.

India had just entered a crucial election cycle across five states. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party understood from bitter historical experience that fuel inflation can reshape electoral moods faster than almost any other economic issue.

Petrol prices are not abstract statistics in India; they determine transportation costs, vegetable prices, auto-rickshaw fares, logistics chains, airline tickets and household sentiment. A visible fuel price increase during campaigning would have handed the opposition an emotionally potent issue at precisely the wrong moment. So the govern-

ment waited.

Instead, the burden was shifted onto the balance sheets of the public-sector oil companies. According to oil ministry estimates cited in April, retailers were losing roughly ₹100 per litre on diesel and about ₹20 per litre on petrol at prevailing global prices. Even allowing for fluctuations in crude and refining margins, the losses were staggering.

India consumes roughly 8-9 million tonnes of diesel monthly and about 3 million tonnes of petrol. Translating those volumes into retail losses suggests that the three state-run retailers together may have absorbed tens of thousands of crores in under-recoveries during the peak of the crisis period.

Industry analysts estimate that cumulative losses since crude crossed the psychological danger \$110-per-barrel threshold may already have crossed ₹75,000 crore to ₹1 lakh crore, depending on the duration of suppressed pricing and forex losses. The ₹3-per-litre increase announced this week barely dents that hole.

In Delhi, diesel now costs ₹90.67 a litre while petrol has climbed to ₹97.77. The increase of roughly 3% is politically calibrated: large enough to signal seriousness to markets and oil suppliers, but small enough to avoid triggering panic or mass public outrage. Economists estimate the direct inflationary impact at around 15 basis points. The indirect impact, however, could be much larger.

Transporters will pass costs to freight operators. Food distribution networks will become more expensive. Manufacturing input costs will rise. Airlines already strained by jet fuel costs may increase fares further. Ride-hailing services and state transport corporations are expected to seek fee revisions.

The deeper concern inside New Delhi is not merely inflation. It is energy security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unusually stark national appeal urging citizens to conserve fuel, reduce unnecessary travel, work from home, and even defer gold purchases revealed the scale of concern within the government.

Indian political leaders rarely ask citizens to alter consumption habits unless the situation is genuinely serious. The comparison Modi invoked — the COVID-19 lockdown era — was deliberate. It was intended to prepare the public psychologically for a prolonged period of economic restraint.

Already, several state governments and public-sector institutions have begun implementing austerity measures: reduced travel, virtual meetings, partial work-from-home schedules, and cuts in administrative fuel use. These are not symbolic gestures. They reflect calculations within the government that the energy disruption may last months rather than weeks. That explains the significance of Modi's urgent outreach to the United Arab Emirates.

Officially framed around strategic coop-

eration and investment, the visit is fundamentally about survival in an unstable oil market. The UAE has emerged as one of the few relatively stable Gulf suppliers capable of rapidly adjusting crude allocations to India. New Delhi is seeking multiple objectives simultaneously: guaranteed long-term crude supply contracts, possible deferred payment mechanisms, enhanced LNG access, and emergency logistical coordination if Hormuz instability worsens.

India is also quietly attempting to preserve access to discounted Russian crude. Washington's temporary sanctions waiver on Russian oil purchases became crucial after Middle Eastern flows were disrupted. Without continued Russian supply, India's energy vulnerability would intensify dramatically. Russian imports already surged to record highs exceeding 2.3 million barrels per day earlier this month. The paradox confronting India is stark. Geopolitically, New Delhi has strengthened ties with Washington, Israel and Gulf monarchies simultaneously. Economically, however, it remains deeply dependent on discounted Russian oil and stable Iranian-region shipping routes. The Iran war has exposed how fragile that balancing act really is.

If the conflict drags on another two to three months, India could face a far harsher economic landscape by the end of 2026. Crude prices sustained above \$110-120 would widen India's current account deficit sharply. The rupee could weaken further, making imports even more expensive. Wholesale inflation would likely spill decisively into retail inflation. The Reserve Bank of India may be forced to keep interest rates elevated longer than expected, slowing investment and consumer demand.

More worrying for policymakers is diesel demand destruction. Diesel powers India's trucking economy, agricultural machinery, rail freight support systems and construction activity. Analysts at ICRA have already revised gasoline demand growth downward from 5-6% to 3-4%, while diesel demand growth may flatten entirely. That signals slowing economic momentum beneath the headline GDP numbers. There is also the political danger of cumulative fatigue.

So far, the BJP has survived the crisis electorally because the full consumer impact was delayed until after state polls. But energy shocks have a delayed political fuse. Voters may tolerate short-term hardship during wartime uncertainty. They react differently when inflation becomes embedded in everyday life. The danger zone for the BJP may not be the immediate aftermath of the fuel hike, but the long build-up toward the 2027 Uttar Pradesh election.

Uttar Pradesh is not merely another state contest. It is the political heartland that anchors national power in India. Rising diesel prices directly affect rural transport, fertilizer movement, irrigation costs and food

prices across the Hindi belt. If inflation remains elevated into 2027, opposition parties could weaponize a narrative that the government protects corporate oil balance sheets and geopolitical ambitions at the expense of ordinary households.

The BJP's calculation appears to be that national security concerns and Modi's personal credibility can contain that anger. The party also hopes that by acting gradually — through staggered hikes rather than sudden shocks — it can avoid the kind of public backlash that toppled governments elsewhere during fuel crises. Yet the risks are multiplying.

Unlike previous inflation episodes, this crisis intersects with several structural vulnerabilities simultaneously: weakening global trade, geopolitical fragmentation, high youth unemployment, and growing public anxiety over household costs. Gold purchases — which Modi explicitly discouraged — are deeply embedded in Indian cultural and financial behavior, especially in southern states. Asking citizens to cut fuel consumption and avoid buying gold may make economic sense, but politically it touches sensitive psychological terrain.

There is another uncomfortable reality beneath the surface: India's fuel pricing system was never fully deregulated in practice. While officially market-linked, retail prices remained politically managed. That model works only when global crude stays within tolerable bands. Once prices surge dramatically and remain elevated for months, somebody absorbs the loss — either consumers, oil companies, or the government budget.

For the last several months, the burden fell largely on state-owned refiners. Now the transfer to consumers has begun. And it may only be the beginning.

Economists believe the current ₹3 increase is insufficient to fully offset ongoing under-recoveries if crude remains above \$100. More staggered hikes may follow in the coming months. That would steadily raise inflationary pressure just as India enters a politically sensitive pre-UP-election phase. In many ways, the fuel hike marks the end of an illusion India successfully maintained for years — that it could remain insulated from geopolitical energy wars through strategic balancing and administrative control. The Iran conflict has shattered that assumption.

India now confronts a difficult future in which every escalation in the Gulf reverberates directly through its economy, politics and social stability. The queues outside petrol stations in Bhubaneswar and the sharply revised price boards in Malvan are not isolated scenes. They are the visible edge of a much larger reckoning: a nation of 1.4 billion people discovering that in a fractured world, energy security is no longer just an economic issue. It is a political destiny. (IPA Service)

## NEET Scandal: How tech, institutions and talent let students down

By: Dipak Kurmi

The quest for a seat in India's premier medical and engineering institutions has long transcended the boundaries of academic ambition, mutating into a high-stakes crucible where family prestige, societal validation, and economic mobility collide. In a culture where securing an elite institutional pedigree is equated with lifelong success, parents regularly exhaust their financial reserves and stretch far beyond their means to secure marginally higher ranks for their children. This desperation has fueled the meteoric rise of a multi-trillion-rupee coaching and admission-counseling industry that thrives on the anxieties of millions. Within this hyper-competitive ecosystem, even systemic failures like examination cancellations and sudden re-examinations are seamlessly monetized. Instead of acting as a deterrent, these disruptions generate fresh commercial opportunities, prompting institutes to launch lucrative crash courses and short-term programs that capitalize directly on the stress, helplessness, and profound uncertainty of vulnerable candidates.

For nearly two successive decades, the gateways to these coveted professional paths — most notably the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for medical admissions and the Joint Entrance Examination for the Indian Institutes of Technology — have exposed a deeply disturbing pattern of structural vulnerability. Despite the deployment of advanced technologies, the oversight of powerful statutory bodies, and the involvement of the finest academic and administrative minds in the country, large-scale admission scams and examination irregularities have repeatedly compromised the integrity of the selection process. The warning signs, ranging from organised paper leaks and sophisticated impersonation rackets to mathematically flawed cut-offs, erroneous answer keys, and preferential treatment for well-connected individuals, have seldom been detected by institutional safeguards. Instead, the burden of exposure has routinely fallen upon desperate whistleblowers who face severe institutional retaliation for their courage, revealing a persistent inability to construct trans-

parent, accountable, and robust examination systems.

The recurring nature of these crises is starkly illustrated by the events surrounding the administration of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test on May 3, 2026. On this frantic day, the central control room of the National Testing Agency was operating under maximum scrutiny as nearly 2.3 million candidates competed for a mere 60,000 highly prized government medical seats, alongside vacancies in private colleges, across more than 5,500 centers spanning 550 Indian cities and 14 international locations. The gravity of the exercise was underscored by the physical presence of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who, alongside the top leadership of the Education Ministry and the testing agency, personally monitored live, artificial intelligence-enabled closed-circuit television feeds broadcasting from thousands of examination halls. Ironically, while this sophisticated surveillance grid was operational, both the automated systems and the assembled academic experts completely failed to notice an extraordinary anomaly visible across hundreds of centers: an unprecedented, stress-free confidence and visible jubilation among a significant cohort of candidates who appeared entirely unphased by the daunting nature of the paper.

This unusual relaxation in a notoriously high-pressure environment was later attributed to the widespread digital circulation of a "guided paper" that had allegedly been moving across encrypted networks weeks prior to the examination, rendering substantial portions of the test completely familiar to select groups. The systemic failure becomes even more egregious when contrasted with the extensive security protocols that the testing agency had aggressively showcased following the highly publicized examination fiasco of 2024. The state-of-the-art framework supposedly relied on encrypted paper-setting, secure portable document format transmissions for regional language translations, and Global Positioning System-tracked movement of question papers from secure bank strongrooms to regional distribution hubs. Yet, despite access to

intelligence and cyber-security inputs from multiple national agencies, this multi-layered surveillance ecosystem remained entirely dormant while unauthorized digital networks brokered large financial transactions, assuring anxious parents that the specific questions being rehearsed would match the official examination.

The immediate aftermath of the May 3 examination further demonstrated the systemic blind spots of the regulatory machinery, as candidates flocked to coaching centers to estimate their percentiles using widely leaked answer keys and optical mark recognition responses. This informal data aggregation revealed an unprecedented inflation of scores, with an anomalously high number of candidates correctly answering nearly 135 questions, triggering widespread celebrations among those who had purchased the leaked materials. Despite a massive network of thousands of official observers, no internal alarms were triggered, and the first genuine alert entered the system from the outside when a Rajasthan-origin medical student studying in Kerala shared a digital copy of a suspected guess paper with his father in Sikar. Realizing that the document matched the actual examination paper, the family initiated a formal whistleblower complaint on May 7, forcing a reluctant machinery into an all-too-familiar cycle of cancellations, emergency re-examinations, and profound emotional heartbreak for lakhs of innocent students, while the deeper institutional linkages of the paper-leak mafia remained unexamined behind the defensive shield of the K Radhakrishnan Committee report.

A historical parallel to this modern crisis exists within the engineering domain, where the advent of the Right to Information Act in 2005 first began to pierce the near-complete opacity that characterized competitive testing for decades. Prior to this legislative shift, candidate evaluation was entirely insulated from public scrutiny; students were denied access to their own marked sheets, question booklets, or the specific mathematical criteria used to determine final rankings, leaving the public to blindly accept arbitrary declarations of selection or rejection. The introduction of

mandatory disclosures forced elite institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology to issue formal mark-sheets, exposing deep procedural irrationalities, such as the balanced evaluation model that required candidates to clear minimum qualifying marks separately across Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry before aggregate merit could be considered.

In 2006, this subjective methodology caused a major public scandal when an internal whistleblower revealed that general-category candidates scoring as high as 279 marks were denied admission, while others with an aggregate score of only 154 were successfully admitted. The institutions initially attempted to defend these exclusions by citing unusually inflated subject-wise cut-offs of 37, 48, and 55 marks for Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry respectively, though they could not provide a mathematically verifiable derivation for these figures. Following sustained legal challenges by the whistleblower, these arbitrary thresholds collapsed into single digits, plummeting to 1, 4, and 3 marks in 2007, and subsequently to 5, 0, and 3 marks out of 182 in 2008. This revelation turned the prestigious entrance examination into a subject of significant public embarrassment, as it became mathematically possible for unreserved candidates with zero marks in Physics to qualify for elite engineering admissions.

The dismantling of this opacity brought to light a plethora of other systemic vulnerabilities, including ambiguous instructions, flawed answer keys, and structural loopholes that permitted candidates to hold seats at multiple institutions simultaneously, thereby wasting national resources and creating artificial vacancies that were later filled through opaque backdoor admissions. The Delhi High Court famously characterized this institutional decay as a proverbial situation of it being darkest beneath the lamp, warning that the preservation of such arbitrary practices would reduce these apex institutions to a laughing stock in the eyes of the public. The subsequent decade-long struggle of this single-person army between 2006 and 2015 ultimately laid the foundation for modern examination reforms, establishing the necessity of fixing cut-

offs prior to the examination, returning question papers to candidates, publishing provisional answer keys for public feedback, and pioneering the centralized counseling frameworks managed by bodies like the Joint Seat Allocation Authority to optimize national seat allocation.

Despite these critical contributions, which were formally lauded by the Supreme Court of India when it designated the individual as an unsung hero and ordered the institutions to offer formal expressions of gratitude, the personal cost to the whistleblower was immense. The specific institution most exposed by the disclosures subjected the academic to severe victimization, utilizing tools of administrative marginalization, prolonged inquiries, and repeated termination attempts to suppress the dissent. This punitive pattern was subsequently sustained by influential administrative figures within the higher-education regulatory framework, ensuring that the professional hostility extended well into the academic's retirement through the systematic misappropriation of his intellectual contributions.

The contemporary landscape suggests that without radical structural reform, the system will continue to prioritize institutional self-preservation over genuine accountability, often choosing to dismiss or ridicule critics rather than addressing the core vulnerabilities they expose. The true path forward for India's high-stakes admission ecosystem lies in recognizing that technological investments, artificial intelligence-driven surveillance, and rigid administrative hierarchies cannot serve as substitutes for absolute operational transparency and the institutional courage to admit systemic failure. Statutory bodies do not diminish their authority by acknowledging operational lapses; rather, they reinforce public trust by actively rectifying them. The definitive challenge facing the nation's educational leadership is not merely the periodic apprehension of low-level operators or localized paper couriers after a public scandal, but the comprehensive dismantling of the deeper culture of complacency, opacity, and institutional protection that allows these crises to recur. (the writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

# The Hospital state and its corporate AI operating system

By: K S Uplabdh Gopal

The modern hospital is becoming a place where care is being reorganised around code. In England, that shift has acquired a political edge through Palantir's role in NHS England's Federated Data Platform (FDP), a system meant to connect hospital data, improve planning, reduce waiting lists, and make the health service more responsive. The National Health Service (NHS), England's publicly funded health system, says that patient data remains under public control. However, the controversy has persisted because the question is larger than data protection. A public health system depends on trust, and that trust becomes fragile when the software at its centre is supplied by a company whose broader reputation has been shaped by defence, intelligence, and surveillance-linked work.

India should pay close attention. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's recent warning about Anthropic's Artificial Intelligence (AI) model 'Mythos' concerned cyber risk and the vulnerability of critical infrastructure, a framework through which health systems should now be viewed. Hospitals, insurance platforms, disease surveillance networks, and electronic health records (EHRs) are no longer ordinary service-delivery tools once they become dependent on AI systems built elsewhere.

Google DeepMind has already announced partnerships with Indian government bodies and local institutions in science and medicine, showing how frontier AI firms are moving closer to sensitive public domains. The issue now at the heart of the hospital state is whether the political character of technology can be separated from the people behind AI companies and the states whose strategic interests they will inevitably inhabit. If hospital systems become part of the nervous system of governance, India must ask who is writing the operating

system. AI sovereignty begins with that question because a health system cannot be fully public if its core logic is shaped beyond public control.

## Health Systems and Governance Through Data Platforms

The NHS controversy begins with the scale of the institution itself. A separate NHS England Secure Data Environment project, Foresight AI, gives a sense of the scale now being organised within this ecosystem, with de-identified records from more than 57 million people, over 10 billion healthcare events, and more than 40,000 event types across admissions, diagnoses, procedures, medications, and vaccinations. The NHS FDP is not the same project, but it exists within the same broader transformation of health records into operational intelligence. The Palantir-led consortium won the FDP contract in 2023, valued at up to £330 million over seven years, with potential coverage across 240 NHS organisations.

Once hospitals plan care delivery through a vendor's architecture, that architecture begins to shape institutional judgement. It determines what appears urgent and what becomes administratively inconvenient.

NHS England has tried to draw a clear boundary around the arrangement. Palantir is described as a data processor. Patient data is to remain under NHS control, processing must take place in the United Kingdom (UK), and the company is not permitted to commercialise NHS data or use it to train its own models. These are meaningful safeguards, but their weakness lies in what they cannot fully measure. Public systems can retain legal ownership of data while losing practical control over the routines and dependencies created by a platform. Once hospitals plan care delivery through a vendor's architecture, that architecture begins to shape institutional judgement. It determines what appears urgent and what becomes administratively inconvenient.

Palantir's reputation sharpens

this concern. The company's history in the intelligence sector makes its entry into healthcare politically charged, even when the contract terms appear restrictive. The recent controversy over its manifesto-style language, described in Westminster as the "ramblings of a supervillain", became potent because it captured a broader discomfort about importing the instincts of hard-power technology into institutions built around care. Australia's calls for audits or limits on Palantir's government contracts show that this anxiety is spreading across democracies.

When the NHS first published the Palantir contract, 417 of its 586 pages were completely redacted, prompting the Good Law Project to launch legal action over the scale of the redactions. The NHS later agreed to republish the contract with fewer redactions, including material on the protection of personal data. For a platform that depends on public trust, this was a damaging way to begin.

The protest around Palantir is more coherent than a generic objection to private technology. Campaigners and civil society groups argue that the NHS is creating a data architecture whose social licence has not been properly earned. The "No Palantir in our NHS" campaign has urged NHS Trusts and Integrated Care Boards to refuse Palantir's technology because of the company's broader military and security work. Medact notes that the British Medical Association (BMA) opposed the FDP rollout at its 2025 annual meeting, while a public petition to Parliament has called for consultation and a clear national opt-out before further expansion. The government's response states that the National Data Opt-Out does not apply where processing is tied to "direct care, is legally required or is anonymised". A patient may accept that their information must move across the NHS so that doctors can treat them safely. It does

not follow that the same patient has accepted a national data architecture built with a company associated with immigration enforcement and military targeting.

A patient may accept that their information must move across the NHS so that doctors can treat them safely. It does not follow that the same patient has accepted a national data architecture built with a company associated with immigration enforcement and military targeting.

Other health-AI failures show how fragile this terrain is. DeepMind's Royal Free episode involved access to 1.6 million patient records and later drew criticism from the UK Information Commissioner over transparency and legal basis. The Epic Sepsis Model, used in United States (US) hospitals, performed poorly when tested independently, recording a hospitalisation-level AUC (Area Under the Curve) of 0.63 in a validation study covering 38,455 hospitalisations. Cigna's PxDx system exposed another risk, with reports that more than 300,000 claims were rejected over two months at an average of 1.2 seconds per case. The lesson for India is that AI in the healthcare domain must also be assessed through the power it concentrates within public systems, the dependencies it creates over time, and the ability of citizens to understand and challenge decisions made in their name.

## India Must Not Mistake Dependence for Innovation

India does not have the luxury of treating AI in health as a future regulatory issue. The market is already moving faster towards the patient's first moment of uncertainty than the state. A Boston Consulting Group (BCG) survey across 15 countries found that nearly 60 percent of internet-connected consumers were using AI tools for health, while a report on the same study placed India much higher, at 85 percent. Patients are already taking medical uncertainty to software before taking it to clinics.



Large technology firms are also moving closer to that encounter. OpenAI introduced ChatGPT Health, citing more than 230 million health-related queries each week and offering users the ability to connect their medical records and wellness apps. Google's MedGemma is already working with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, for outpatient triage and dermatology screening, while Google is working with the National Health Authority (NHA) to convert fragmented medical records into Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR), a standard that enables health information systems to exchange data more easily. Microsoft's Artificial Intelligence Diagnostic Orchestrator (MAI-DxO) reported an 85.5 percent accuracy rate on complex New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) benchmark cases when paired with OpenAI's o3 model, compared with 20 percent for physicians in the same test setting. These figures show that a new layer is forming between patient anxiety and medical judgement. Whoever controls that layer will influence how people

understand risk and the need for care.

No model should enter large-scale use on the strength of a company demonstration, a foreign benchmark, or a small pilot that has not been independently replicated in Indian conditions.

India has begun building safeguards, but they must now become enforceable. The Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India (SAHI) offers a policy framework, while the Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI (BODH), launched with the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur and the National Health Authority (NHA), creates a route for testing models on diverse anonymised real-world health datasets. That route should be made mandatory before any AI system is used at a population scale in public healthcare. No model should enter large-scale use on the strength of a company demonstration, a foreign benchmark, or a small pilot that has not been independently replicated in Indian conditions.

Procurement is where caution has to become enforceable. A foreign vendor should not enter a sensitive health system until the

state can see through the company, its incentives, and the route by which data will move. The contract should give the state real audit powers and make any unauthorised reuse of data punishable. It should also make exit realistic, with money and technical preparation set aside before deployment, so that hospitals can move to another system without disrupting care. Patient-facing AI needs a higher threshold because it reaches people before a clinician can correct it. Such systems must be tested in the languages Indians actually use, with a simple route for patients to report harm.

Sovereignty in health AI should not mean shutting the door on foreign technology. India will need outside expertise, but a public system should not become dependent on a tool whose workings it cannot examine or whose vendor it cannot leave without disrupting care. Regulators must be able to understand how a health platform works, and patients must have a meaningful way to challenge harm when automated systems affect them. Without this discipline, dependence will resemble innovation until its costs become too large to ignore. (Courtesy: ORF)



By: Yasemin Nicola Sakay

With international contact tracing efforts underway to track the passengers who disembarked the Dutch-flagged cruise ship MV Hondius early, concerns among the public about a larger outbreak of hantavirus have been growing.

What began with the confirmed death of a 70-year-old Dutch male Trusted Source onboard the cruise ship has become a hantavirus outbreak that has now spread to several passengers, with multiple in critical condition. That death marked the "index case" of the hantavirus outbreak, currently unfolding.

The ship, operated by Oceanwide Expeditions, was initially held off the coast of Cape Verde, and later authorized to sail toward the Canary Islands in Spain for further investigation.

Medical News Today spoke to three medical experts to learn more about how this virus spreads, what people can do to protect themselves, and whether this outbreak has the potential to turn into a bigger epidemic, similar to SARS-CoV-2:

• William Schaffner, MD, professor of preventive medicine in the Department of Health Policy, and professor of medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Vanderbilt University Medical Center

• Justin Chan, MD, infectious diseases specialist at NYU Langone Health and Director of Infection Prevention and Control at Bellevue Hospital Center

• And Monica Gandhi, MD, MPH, an infectious diseases specialist with the University of California, San Francisco.

## What we know so far about how the outbreak started

The Dutch man who died on April 11, 2026 aboard the MV Hondius had started to exhibit symptoms on April 6. This was 5 days after the ship had departed from Ushuaia, Argentina.

The ship alerted the case to the World Health Organization (WHO) Trusted Source on May 2, 2026, which was later confirmed as hantavirus after laboratory

tests in South Africa.

As of May 11, 2026 Trusted Source, there are at least 7 reported cases of confirmed patients. Three people, including the wife of the first victim, have died. One person remains in critical care in South Africa.

Several passengers have also been reported to have been hospitalized, receiving care in France, South Africa, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Singapore, and Spain.

The cruise ship was allowed to dock at the port of Granadilla, Tenerife on the Canary Islands on May 10. As passengers and crew disembark, they continue to be considered high-risk, regardless of symptoms, and are being medically evacuated to their respective countries of origin via non-commercial flights.

The total number of people on board the ship were 147 people, including crew.

As some passengers quarantine and others fly back to their various home countries, international tracing efforts have gained traction.

The WHO has declared the global risk of spread remains "low" as the outbreak is still confined to a small group of travelers.

Meanwhile, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has activated the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) to alert public health authorities in Europe of the situation.

## What is hantavirus?

The hantavirus Trusted Source refers to a group of zoonotic viruses that are carried by rodents who spread the virus via their saliva, urine or feces.

Health authorities have identified that passengers have been infected with the Andes strain of hantavirus (ANDV). Although hantaviruses rarely spread via human-to-human contact, this particular strain is known to have the ability to be transmitted from person to person.

For this virus to spread between humans, authorities say close, prolonged physical contact is needed.

The initial passengers are thought to have been exposed to infected rodents or droppings before they boarded the ship. This strain of the virus is endemic in South America, indicating that the virus maintains a predictable, low-level presence.

Hantaviruses have been linked to severe disease and death, and can cause a severe respiratory illness called hantavirus cardiopulmonary syndrome (HCPS), for which the case fatality rate is as high as 50% Trusted Source.

## Can the hantavirus spread from person to person?

Schaffner explained how people may get infected with the hantavirus.

"Hantavirus lives in small rodents in certain parts of the world, usually where the climate is rather dry. The virus is shed in the urine and feces of the rodents. People usually become infected when they stir up dried dust that contains the virus, causing an aerosol which is inhaled, thus initiating the infection," he told MNT.

"In this cruise ship incident, the passengers boarded in Argentina. This is relevant, because a hantavirus variant, the Andes strain, occurs there and, different from other hantaviruses, the Andes strain can be spread from person to person," he said.

"Humans can get infected with hantaviruses through contact with the urine, feces, or saliva of infected rodents," Chan told MNT.

"Less commonly, human-to-human transmission has been seen in previous outbreaks involving the Andes hantavirus, which is unique as other hantaviruses are not known to spread human-to-human. Andes hantavirus spread between humans typically requires close and prolonged contact leading to exposure to infectious body fluids," he explained.

Gandhi said this particular strain can spread from person to person as well as through rodent exposure.

"At least in prior outbreaks with the Andes Strain, the contact had to be close

# Is hantavirus the next global threat? Fact-checking the outbreak with experts

contact an infected person for spread, including direct physical contact, prolonged time spent in enclosed spaces, and exposure to the infected person's body fluids," she said.

## Is there a risk of a global outbreak?

With the cruise ship soon to dock in Spain, many people are worried about transmission and further spread. However, experts remain cautiously optimistic, considering the current efforts.

"At the moment, the cruise ship outbreak appears well confined. Some passengers have left the ship and have returned to their homes. At this moment, all are well and are being monitored by local public health personnel," Schaffner said.

"The risk of substantial spread is very low; this should not be the start of another COVID-like epidemic," he added.

Chan reiterated that a concerted effort to control the outbreak is underway.

"Global health agencies have been leading a coordinated response including medical evacuations from the MV Hondius for passengers with severe symptoms. Public health agencies will keep track of other individuals who may have been exposed on the ship to monitor closely for symptoms," he said.

"Though the mortality rate for this virus is high, spread between humans is not common and requires close and prolonged contact with infected individuals. The overall risk to the general public at this time is deemed low," he added.

## What are the main symptoms of infection with hantavirus?

Schaffner said that what makes it hard to identify infections with hantavirus is that it may go undetected for the first few days.

"Hantaviruses cause stealth infections. The initial phase of the illness seems rather mild, with fever, headache, feeling poorly, some muscle aches – it does not alarm the patient," he said.

However, after initial exposure, the virus has a broad incubation period that can last anywhere from a few days to 1 to 8 weeks before the patient starts to feel the symptoms, according to the WHO Trusted Source and the CDC- Trusted Source.

"This can go on for 2 to 4 days and then the patient crashes, becomes seriously ill with hantavirus cardiopulmonary syndrome in which breathing becomes difficult, blood pressure drops and the patient feels very weak and sick," he explained.

Chan said the Andes hantavirus causes symptoms such as fever, muscle aches, back pain, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea.

"Severe illness follows with respiratory distress, pneumonia and drops in blood pressure. Lab testing is required to

confirm hantavirus as the cause of illness," he said.

Gandhi explained that there were two main syndromes caused by hantavirus: the Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS) or Hemorrhagic Fever with Renal Syndrome (HFRS).

"The kidney (renal) syndrome usually occurs in Asia or Eastern Europe and can be marked by fever, low platelets, acute kidney injury where urine production is down. The infected person can go into shock and have bleeding in the severe phases," she said.

"The Andes strain causes lung symptoms and is found in South America generally. This syndrome is hallmarked by fever, shortness of breath, fluid in the lungs and shock. The patient can proceed to severe oxygen deprivation, bleeding, renal failure and require intubation and strong supportive care," she added.

## What MV Hondius passengers are being told to do

The ECDC published new guidance on May 9 for managing passengers linked to the Andes hantavirus outbreak on MV Hondius.

For passengers who are feeling sick and showing symptoms, the ECDC recommends they get tested and seek medical care as soon as possible.

They will also have the option to either stay in isolation in Tenerife, Canary Islands where the ship is docked or be flown to their respective home countries on special medical flights. For those who test negative, the ECDC still recommends quarantining and monitoring for up to 6 weeks to stay safe.

Passengers who are currently not experiencing any symptoms are still being considered high-risk contacts, and hence, are only able to travel via specially arranged transport, not on commercial flights. Self-quarantine at home is also being recommended until they are cleared for risk.

Meanwhile, for staff and healthcare workers tending to passengers or those with suspected hantavirus infection, the ECDC recommends they wear protective gear, including gloves, FFP2 masks and eye protection, as well as proper ventilation and cleaning in treatment facilities.

Passengers are also advised to wear masks to help stop the spread of germs.

## How can I protect myself against hantavirus?

Currently there are no vaccines or antiviral treatments designed to target hantavirus.

"Treatment is supportive care, often in an intensive care unit. There are no specific antiviral drugs that work against hantaviruses," said Schaffner.

Official guidelines from the WHO and the CDC suggest that people "rodent-proof" their homes by sealing any holes

and gaps where animals may get in and setting traps.

They also advise people to wear personal protective gear and HEPA-filtered respirators (N95), while ensuring that the enclosed spaces with rodents are well ventilated and disinfected after they have been removed.

"Everyone who has disembarked should be isolating at home for up to 6-8 weeks to monitor for symptoms and contact public health immediately if there are symptoms so they can be tested," Gandhi said.

"The general public is not generally at risk as hantavirus requires close contact and not more casual contact as with COVID-19 which can be spread by being near someone in a store who is coughing, for example, but the passengers are hopefully isolating at home at this point as encouraged by public health," she added.

## SARS-CoV-2 vs. hantavirus: Detecting the origins

But will identifying the origins of this hantavirus outbreak be as difficult as SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19?

"[H]antavirus is not a new virus to humans as SARS-CoV-2 was so at this point, we think there was exposure from rodents to a few people boarding the ship from activities (such as bird watching in places with rodents) performed beforehand and then there was person to person spread on the ship," said Gandhi.

"The originator of the virus was still likely rodent waste but the concern here is that the strain that led to this outbreak is spread person to person from close contact," she said.

Chan explained that the Andes hantavirus was first discovered in Argentina in 1995, and nowadays, most commonly found in Argentina and Chile.

"While public health investigations are ongoing, given this cruise ship itinerary started in Argentina, it is most probable that at least the initial case was due to exposure to infected rodents found in that region," he said.

Schaffner, meanwhile, underscored the importance of global preparedness in the face of such public health threats.

"This outbreak is a reminder of how small the globe is, how interconnected we are and how important the WHO is to epidemic preparedness," Schaffner said.

"Scientists already are working on identifying the specific virus causing the outbreak. Public health authorities have begun their investigation of how the outbreak started. This still is in its early stages, so stay tuned," he said.

Schaffner also noted that as this event unfolds and more information surfaces, medical experts' recommendations may change, and people exercise caution and diligence. (Courtesy: MNT)

## Ukrainian drone strikes on Russia kill 4, wound 12 others

KYIV, May 17: One of Ukraine's largest drone strikes on Russia killed at least four people, including three near Moscow, and wounded a dozen others, local authorities said Sunday. Debris fell on Russia's largest airport without causing damage.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed the drone strikes, saying that they were "entirely justified".

Russia has repeatedly launched similar attacks on Ukraine's capital and other cities during the war, and an expert said that the strikes appeared to be retaliation for recent Russian attacks on Kyiv.

Russian drone strikes on Ukraine overnight wounded eight people, Ukrainian authorities said.

In Ukraine's strikes on Russia, a woman was killed after a drone hit her home in Khimki, a Russian city just northwest of Moscow, and two men died in the village of Pogorelki, which is 10 kilometers (6 miles) north of the capital, according to local Gov. Andrei Vorobyev.

Ukrainian drones had also damaged unspecified "infrastructure" and several high-rise buildings, Vorobyev said on social media.

One man was also killed after a drone struck a truck in the Belgorod region, which borders Ukraine, according to local authorities.

In Moscow itself, at least 12 people were wounded in the nighttime strike, mostly near the entrance to the city's oil refinery, mayor Sergei Sobyanin reported. Sobyanin reported that the "technology" of the refinery hadn't been damaged.

Russia's largest airport — Moscow's Sheremetyevo — said that drone debris had fallen on its



grounds without causing damage or affecting flights.

Russian defences shot down 81 drones headed for Moscow overnight, state agency Tass reported, citing Sobyanin, marking one of the largest attacks on the city since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Russian air defences destroyed 556 drones over Russia overnight, the country's defence ministry said Sunday morning. Shortly after midday local time, it reported that more than 1,000 drones had been shot down or jammed in the previous 24 hours.

Zelenskyy said that the drones had flown more than 500 kilometers (310 miles) from Ukrainian territory, and that Ukraine was "overcoming" Russian air defence systems concentrated in and around the capital.

"Our responses to Russia's prolongation of the war and attacks on our cities and communities are entirely justified. This time, Ukrainian long-distance sanctions have reached the Moscow region, and we are clearly telling the Russians:

their state must end its war," Zelenskyy said.

**Revenge for Russian attacks, expert says**

Nigel Gould Davies, senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a London-based think tank, said that Ukraine's large-scale attack appeared to be "the retaliation or revenge that President Zelenskyy promised after the fierce attacks that Russia carried out on Kyiv".

Those strikes came immediately after the end of a brief ceasefire that allowed Russia to hold its annual Victory Day parade on May 9 commemorating the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany during World War II. "It brings home the fact Ukraine has the capacity to strike at very significant scale at or around the Russian capital," taking the war home to Russians in a way that would be "most unwelcome" to the Kremlin, Gould Davies told The Associated Press.

"There is no ongoing peace process to disrupt. What (the attack) is more likely to do is add to the darkening cloud of anxiety

over Russia which has developed palpably over the last three or four months," he said.

He cited a combination of factors, including Russia's recent battlefield setbacks, a deteriorating economic situation at home, and the Kremlin's intensifying crack-down on the internet, including in Moscow and Russia's second-largest city, St. Petersburg.

"The fact that Ukraine is reminding the Moscow population that it is vulnerable to these attacks is likely to intensify the mix of concerns now," Gould Davies said.

"I see no prospect though, in the shorter term, that even these factors together will induce Russia to consider the compromises that will be necessary for peace negotiations."

Ukrainian drones are also flying deep into Russia to strike oil facilities, sending up plumes of smoke that can be seen from space and bringing toxic rain to tourist destinations on the Black Sea. The attacks are aimed at slashing Moscow's oil exports, a key source of funding for Russia's grinding invasion of Ukraine.

**8 wounded in Russian drone strikes on Ukraine**

Russia attacked Ukraine with 287 drones overnight into Sunday, 279 of which were shot down or jammed, the Ukrainian air force reported.

The strikes wounded 8 people in Ukraine's central Dnipropetrovsk region: three in the regional capital of Dnipro, four in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown of Kryvyi Rih, and one in the district of Synelkove, Ukraine's state emergency service said.

Residential buildings were damaged in all three locations, the service said. (AP)

## India, Netherlands elevating ties to strategic partnership: PM Modi

THE HAGUE, May 17: India and the Netherlands on Saturday decided to elevate their relationship to the strategic partnership level following extensive talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Dutch counterpart Rob Jetten amid shifting global geopolitics.

Modi began his two-day visit to The Hague on Friday as part of four-nation trip to Europe that is aimed at ramping up bilateral ties in a range of key areas.

India and the Netherlands also inked a number of agreements to further enhance their cooperation in a range of areas.

"There has been significant progress in India-Netherlands ties in last one decade," Modi said in his televised opening remarks during the talks with Dutch PM Jetten.

Netherlands is one of India's largest trading destinations in Europe, with bilateral trade touching USD 27.8 billion in 2024-25. The European nation is India's fourth largest investor with cumulative foreign direct investment of USD 55.6 billion.

In his remarks, the prime minister said India considers the Netherlands among its most important partners as the historical and people to people relations between the two sides are "deep" rooted. "Democratic values, market economy and responsible behavior are part of our common approach. Our cooperation in areas of Water, healthcare and education has been making the lives of our people better," he said.

Modi also highlighted India's economic growth.

The prime minister suggested



that there should be convergence of the Netherlands' expertise and India's "speed and skill" in every sector.

"We need to take our cooperation in areas of innovation, investment, sustainability and defence to new heights. Under this common vision, we are taking India-Netherlands relations to the level of strategic partnership," Modi said. In his comments, Jetten also highlighted various key aspects of growing ties between the two countries and announced elevating the relations to the level of strategic partnership.

Ahead of the bilateral talks, PM Modi, along with Jetten, interacted with prominent CEOs of leading Dutch companies across various sectors such as energy, ports, health, agriculture trade, and technology, among others.

Modi invited Dutch companies to explore opportunities in India, particularly in maritime, renewable energy, digital technologies, semiconductors, artificial intelligence,

and healthcare sectors.

"We are continuously reducing compliance and increasing the ease of doing business. We have recently carried out next-generation reforms in taxation, labour code, and governance," he told the business leaders.

Modi said manufacturing in India is becoming very cost-effective, and in the services sector, it has become the engine of efficiency and innovation.

"We invite all of you to design and innovate in India. There can be no better time for this than today," Modi said.

"Today's India is a symbol of scale and stability. In terms of scale, we are also the fastest-growing major economy in the world and the world's largest talent pool. Infrastructure, clean energy or connectivity — no one in the world can match India's speed," he said.

"And on the subject of stability, I have completed 12 years of serving as the Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy." (AP)

## Pakistan Army criticises Gen Dwivedi's remarks

ISLAMABAD, May 17: The Pakistan Army on Sunday criticised Indian Army Chief Gen Udaya Dwivedi's recent remarks, while urging New Delhi to learn to "co-exist" peacefully.

Gen Dwivedi on Saturday said that if Pakistan continues to harbour terrorists and operate against India, then they have to "decide whether they want to be part of geography or history or not".

Terming Gen Dwivedi's comments as "provocative", the Pakistan Army said that responsible nuclear states reflect restraint, maturity, and strategic sobriety. "Threatening a sovereign nuclear neighbour with elimination from 'geography' is not strategic signalling or brinkmanship; it is sheer bankruptcy of cognitive capacities..." the army said in a statement.

"India needs to reconcile with Pakistan's salience and learn to peacefully co-exist with it," it said.

It said that "any attempt to target Pakistan can trigger consequences that shall neither be geographically confined nor strategically or politically palatable for India". Recalling the four-day conflict in May last year, it said Indian leadership "would be well advised not to attempt to push South Asia towards another crisis or war whose consequences would only be devastating for the complete region and beyond."

India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7 last year in response to the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed. It carried out airstrikes on nine terror infrastructures in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, eliminating at least 100 terrorists.

The action triggered a rapid escalation in tensions, with Pakistan launching retaliatory strikes, though most of them were thwarted by the Indian military. (PTI)

## Nepal's mountaineer Kami Rita Sherpa climbs Mt Everest for 32nd time

KATHMANDU, May 17: Nepal's mountaineer Kami Rita Sherpa made history on Sunday by breaking his own world record for the maximum number of ascents of Mt Everest as he scaled the world's highest peak for the 32nd time.

The 56-year-old veteran climber, popularly known as 'Everest Man', reached the 8,848.86-metre peak (29,032 feet) at 10:12 am, according to the Department of Tourism here. He was leading an expedition operated by 14 Peaks Expedition, it said. The successful ascent was confirmed by the department's field office stationed at Everest Base Camp, reported The Kathmandu Post.

Born in Thame village of Solukhumbu district in Koshi Province in January 1970, Kami Rita started his career as a professional mountaineer in 1992 and climbed Mt Everest for the first time in 1994. The Department of Tourism congratulated Sherpa, saying his achievement reflects a significant contribution to Nepal's mountaineering sector and its international profile. Kami Rita had climbed Sagarmatha, as the peak is known in Nepal, twice each in 2023 and 2024. He scaled it for the 31st time on May 27, 2025. Between 1994 and 2025, Kami Rita also scaled K2 and Mt Lhotse once, Manaslu thrice, and Cho Oyu eight times, all above 8,000 metres.

In a related development, Lhakpa Sherpa, also known as the 'Mountain Queen' and the first Nepali woman to summit Mt Everest, broke her own world record by completing her 11th successful ascent of the peak on Sunday. She reached the peak at 9:30 am, the Department of Tourism said.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah congratulated them and said, "Such historic success can only be achieved through unwavering courage, rigorous self-discipline, and honest dedication to one's work." (PTI)

## Drone strike sparks fire on edge of UAE's nuclear power plant in latest blow to Iran truce

DUBAI, May 17: A drone strike targeted the United Arab Emirates' sole nuclear power plant on Sunday, sparking a fire on its perimeter. There were no reports of injuries or radiological release, but it highlighted the risk of renewed war as the Iran ceasefire remains tenuous.

No one immediately claimed responsibility, and the UAE did not blame anyone. It has, however, accused Iran of launching multiple drone and missile attacks in recent days as tensions have risen over the Strait of Hormuz, a vital energy waterway that Iran still has in a chokehold.

The United States is blockading Iranian ports, and diplomatic efforts aimed at a more durable peace have repeatedly faltered. The UAE has meanwhile hosted air defences and personnel from Israel, which joined the US in the Feb. 28 attack that sparked the war.

US President Donald Trump has suggested hostilities could resume, and Iranian state television has repeatedly aired segments with anchors holding Kalashnikov-style rifles in an effort to prepare the public for war. Fighting has also heated up between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon despite a nominal ceasefire there, further straining the wider truce.

**Barakah plant can provide a quarter of the UAE's energy**

The USD 20 billion Barakah nuclear power plant was built by the UAE with the help of South Korea and went online in 2020. It is the first and only nuclear power plant in the Arab world and can provide a quarter of all the energy needs in the UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms. The UAE's nuclear regulator said the fire didn't affect plant safety. "All units are operating as normal," the organisation wrote on X.

The UAE statement didn't blame any party for the attack. The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, said the strike caused a fire in an electrical generator and that one reactor was being powered by emergency diesel generators.

IAEA director-general Rafael Mariano Grossi expressed "grave concern" about the incident and said military activity that threatens nuclear safety is unacceptable, the



agency said in a statement.

Sunday's strike marked the first time the four-reactor Barakah plant has been targeted in the war. It is near the border with Saudi Arabia, some 225 kilometres (140 miles) west of the UAE's capital city, Abu Dhabi.

Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels, whom the UAE have battled as part of a Saudi-led coalition, claimed to have targeted the plant while it was under construction in 2017, something denied at the time by Abu Dhabi.

**A different programme than Iran's or Israel's**

The UAE signed a strict deal with the US over the power plant, known as a "123 agreement," in which it agreed to give up domestic uranium enrichment and reprocessing of spent fuel to halt any proliferation fears. Its uranium comes from abroad.

That's very different from the nuclear programme in Iran, which is at the heart of its long-running conflict with the United States and Israel.

Iran insists its programme is for peaceful purposes, but it has enriched its own uranium close to weapons-grade levels and is widely suspected of having had a military component to its programme until at least 2003. It has also often restricted the work of UN inspectors.

Israel is widely believed to be the only nuclear-armed country in the region, but has

neither confirmed nor denied having atomic weapons. Iran struck near Israel's Dimona nuclear facility during the war.

Nuclear plants have increasingly been targeted in wars in recent years, including during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. During the Iran war, Tehran repeatedly claimed its Bushehr nuclear power plant came under attack, though there was no direct damage to its Russian-run reactor or any radiological release.

**Ceasefire appears increasingly shaky**

There have been several instances of attacks around the Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf countries in recent weeks. Talks between Iran and the US are at a standstill as the ceasefire threatens to collapse and tip the Middle East back into open warfare, prolonging the worldwide energy crisis sparked by the conflict.

Two people familiar with the situation, including an Israeli military officer, said Israel is coordinating with the US about a possible resumption of attacks. The people spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing confidential military preparations.

Speaking to his Cabinet on Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "Our eyes are also open" when it comes to Iran. He said he planned a chat with Trump later in the day to discuss the president's trip to China and "perhaps" other things. "We are prepared for any scenario," he said. (AP)

## At UN, India flags concerns over targeting of vessels in Strait of Hormuz

UNITED NATIONS, May 17: Targeting commercial shipping, endangering civilian crew and impeding freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz is "unacceptable", India's Permanent Representative to the UN Parvathaneni Harish has said, stressing that international law governing safe passage must be "fully respected".

Harish's remarks at a special meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNECOSOC) on safeguarding energy and supply flows came days after an India-flagged commercial vessel came under attack off the coast of Oman.

Omani authorities rescued all 14 crew members of the vessel sailing from Somalia, but it was not immediately known who carried out the strike.

In a post on X, Harish said that at the UNECOSOC meeting, he shared India's approach to the recent energy and fertiliser crisis caused by the West Asia conflict. "A combination of short-term and

structural measures alongside international cooperation are essential to respond to the crisis," he said.

"Reiterated that targeting of commercial shipping, endangering civilian crew and impeding freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, are unacceptable. International law in this regard must be fully respected," he added.

The attack on the India-flagged vessel on May 13 took place amid the fragile situation in the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway close to the coast of Oman through which roughly one-fifth of the world's energy supplies pass.

It has been severely disrupted by the conflict in West Asia that started on February 28, with the US and Israel launching joint attacks on Iran, triggering retaliatory strikes.

Earlier, India had described the attack as "unacceptable".

At least two other Indian-flagged ships have been attacked since the conflict broke out. (PTI)

## Harshita Brella's family relive her final days in UK, appeal for justice

LONDON, May 17: The family of Harshita Brella, the Delhi woman found murdered in east London held a prayer meeting in her memory nearby on Sunday as they brought their campaign for justice to the UK.

The body of the 24-year-old was found inside the boot of a car in Ilford in November 2024 and her husband, Pankaj Lamba, remains on the run charged with her murder. Harshita's father Satbir Singh Brella, mother Sudesh Kumari and sister Sonia Dabas travelled to her home in Corby, Northamptonshire, where she is believed to have been strangled before her body was discovered four days later in London.

"It has been a heartbreaking visit for us because it felt like Harshita was somewhere around watching us and would suddenly appear with her warm smile to welcome us," Dabas told PTI. "We wanted to pay our tributes to her at the spot where she breathed her last. I would not wish such pain and grief upon anyone. We are here to seek justice for Harshita at all costs."

"Many mistakes have already been made but it is time to fix those errors and ensure no other young girl suffers a similar tragedy due to a failure of the rules and regulations. My sister's murderer must be arrested soon and brought to justice," she said.

The Delhi-based family's UK visit is being supported by the women's rights group Indian Ladies in UK (ILUK) and the Northamptonshire Rights and Equality Council (NREC). "Abuse of migrant Indian women like Harshita Brella is endemic in the UK, as evident by the hundreds of such victims that ILUK has worked with over the years," said Poonam Joshi, founder of ILUK.

"These victims become completely isolated when they travel to the UK and have little or no access to the support that Harshita, for example, tragically needed," she said. (PTI)

## WHO declares global health emergency over Ebola outbreak in Congo and Uganda

ABUJA (Nigeria), May 17: WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared the Ebola disease outbreak in Congo and neighboring Uganda a public health emergency of international concern on Sunday after more than 300 suspected cases and 88 deaths.

In a post on X, the World Health Organization said the outbreak does not meet the criteria of a pandemic emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, and advised against the closure of international borders.

WHO said a laboratory-confirmed case has also been reported in Congo's capital of Kinshasa, which is about 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) from the outbreak's epicentre in the eastern province of Ituri, suggesting a possible wider spread. It said the patient had visited Ituri and that other suspected cases have also been reported in North Kivu province, which is one

of Congo's most populous provinces and borders Ituri.

Ebola is highly contagious and can be contracted via bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen. The disease it causes is rare, but severe and often fatal.

**It's a rare, hard-to-treat variant of Ebola**

Health authorities say the current outbreak, first confirmed on Friday, is caused by the Bundibugyo virus, a rare variant of the Ebola disease that has no approved therapeutics or vaccines. Although more than 20 Ebola outbreaks have taken place in Congo and Uganda, this is only the third time the Bundibugyo virus has been detected.

Congo accounts for all except two of the cases, both of which were reported in Uganda, the WHO said.

The Bundibugyo virus was first detected in Uganda's Bundibugyo district during a 2007-2008 out-



break that infected 149 people and killed 37 people. The second time was in 2012 in an outbreak in Isiro, Congo, where 57 cases and 29 deaths were reported.

WHO's emergency declaration is meant to spur donor agencies and countries into action. However, the global response to previous declarations has been mixed.

In 2024, when the WHO declared mpox outbreaks in Congo

and elsewhere in Africa a global emergency, experts at the time said it did little to get supplies like diagnostic tests, medicines and vaccines to affected countries quickly.

**Conflict and migration complicate the effort to track the outbreak**

Africa CDC Director-General Dr Jean Kaseya said Saturday that a high number of active cases remain in the community, particu-

larly in Mongwalu, where the first cases were reported, "significantly complicating containment and contact tracing efforts."

Violent conflict with militants, some backed by the Islamic State group, as well as constant population movement due to mining, both within Congo and across the border with Uganda, have also posed a major challenge to response efforts. Officials first reported the spread of the disease in Ituri province, close to Uganda and South Sudan, on Friday. On Saturday, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention reported 336 suspected cases and 87 deaths in Congo.

"There are significant uncertainties regarding the true number of infected persons and geographic spread associated with this event at the present time. In addition, there is limited understanding of the epidemiological links with known or suspected cases," Tedros said. (AP)

# Union Minister's son arrested in POCSO case

HYDERABAD, May 17: Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar's son, Bageerath, was arrested on Saturday night in a POCSO case registered against him, and later remanded to judicial custody by a magistrate.

"Police have arrested the accused," a senior police official told PTI.

In a release issued after midnight, the Cyberabad Commissioner of Police announced that various teams were dispatched to Karimnagar, Delhi, and other locations to apprehend Bageerath.

The teams also searched other places he frequented, including the homes of acquaintances.

Acting on reliable information that Bageerath was near the police academy in the city, a police checkpoint (naka bandi) was organised.

Based on reliable information, the Special Operations Team (SOT) of the Cyberabad police eventually apprehended Bageerath at Manchirevula, within the Narsingi police limits, and took him into custody on Saturday night. He was then shifted to the Petbasheerabad police station.

Bageerath was examined by the investigation officer in the presence of "panch witnesses" (unbiased citizens). "The accused admitted to having committed the



offence. Hence, the IO arrested him," the release said.

Following a medical examination, Bageerath was produced before a magistrate, who remanded him to judicial custody. Earlier in the day, the Cyberabad police had issued a lookout circular against Bageerath, and police teams conducted searches across the country to trace him.

As part of the investigation, the statements of the alleged victim (17) and her mother, who is the complainant in the case, were recorded before a magistrate on Saturday.

The statement is recorded to ensure that accounts are reliably documented and to prevent individuals

from changing their testimonies during trial.

However, Bandi Sanjay said he had asked his son to appear before the police and join the probe.

"Satya Meva Jayate. With utmost respect for the law and judiciary, today my son Bandi Bageerath went through the Telangana Police through our advocates for investigation," the Union Minister said in a post on X.

The development came a day after the Telangana High Court refused to grant interim protection from arrest to Bageerath.

In a statement, Bandi Sanjay said he had urged his son to cooperate with the police soon after the complaint was registered last

week.

However, Bageerath, who has repeatedly maintained that he has done no wrongdoing, presented evidence in his favour to his lawyers, the union minister said.

According to Bandi Sanjay, the lawyers opined that the case would be quashed and that Bageerath would get bail, which led to the delay.

Meanwhile, Telangana Rakshana Sena (TRS) president K Kavitha, in a letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanded the removal of Sanjay Kumar, MoS (Home), from the Union Cabinet "to ensure a free and fair investigation in the POCSO case involving his son."

In a setback for Bageerath, the Telangana High Court denied his request for interim protection from arrest on Friday night.

Hearing an anticipatory bail petition filed by Bageerath, the court said it was not inclined to grant any interim relief at this stage.

The counsel for Bageerath had requested interim protection from arrest until orders on the petition were passed.

The case was registered under relevant sections of the BNS and the POCSO Act on May 8 against Bageerath based on a complaint by the mother of a 17-year-old girl, who alleged that he was in a rela-

tionship with her daughter and sexually harassed her.

After recording the girl's statement, more severe charges under the POCSO Act were applied.

Bageerath had also lodged a complaint, alleging that the girl, who had got acquainted with him, had invited him to family functions and group gatherings. An FIR was registered based on his complaint.

In the complaint, Bageerath stated that, believing the girl's family to be trustworthy, he accompanied them on visits to certain holy places as part of a group of friends.

He further alleged that the girl and her parents later pressured him to marry her. When he rejected the proposal, the girl's parents allegedly demanded money and threatened to file false complaints against him if he failed to pay.

Bageerath claimed that, out of fear, he paid ₹ 50,000 to the girl's father, but the family later demanded ₹ 5 crore.

He also alleged that they threatened that the girl's mother would die by suicide if he failed to meet their demands.

The police had earlier appointed IPS officer Ritiraj to monitor the probe following Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's directive to ensure the responsibility to a woman officer. (PTI)

## BJP sets 13-point Kerala agenda, focuses on OBC outreach, recalibrates minority engagement

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 17: Buoyed by its victory in three seats in the April 9 Kerala Assembly elections, the BJP has unveiled a 13-point political agenda that it said would shape its strategy in the state ahead of the next Lok Sabha elections.

The agenda places a clear focus on consolidating support among Hindu backward communities while recalibrating the party's outreach to minority groups.

The agenda was part of a political resolution adopted at a BJP state core committee meeting held on Saturday and chaired by state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar, a party source said.

According to the source, the party's document does not explicitly outline fresh outreach initiatives towards minority communities, particularly Christians, despite earlier attempts to build closer ties with the community ahead of the Assembly elections.

Those efforts, however, were not sustained for various reasons, the source added.

Regarding minority outreach, the source stated that the party has not discontinued its engagement with the Christian community, noting that its members continue to hold organisational positions in several districts. However, it has moved away from attempts to build institutional bridges with Church leadership amid the growing political alignment of bishops with the Congress-led UDF.

The informal shift, according to party insiders, followed the Catholic Church's strong opposition to the Centre's move to introduce the contentious Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) Amendment Bill, 2026, in Parliament—a development that put the BJP on the defensive during the Kerala Assembly election campaign.

At the same time, the BJP's agenda places sharper emphasis on Hindu backward communities, particularly through its position on OBC reservation, stating that it should not be implemented under the guise of religious reservation.

The party is seen as attempting to strengthen its outreach to key social groups, including the numerically significant Ezhava community, which remains a crucial support base for the state's two major Left parties, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India.

On reservations, the BJP said that "religious reservation under the guise of OBC reservation should be completely abolished" and that reservation policies should be restricted to OBC, SC/ST and EWS categories.

The resolution further stated that no group should receive preferential treatment through "appeasement" and stressed the need for equal opportunities for all Malayalis.

"The BJP will not allow backward class reservation to be turned into

ligion-based reservation," Chandrasekhar said, highlighting the issue as part of the party's efforts to further expand its outreach among backward Hindu communities.

The party alleges that a section of the minority community receives a reservation under the OBC category and argues that this practice should be ended.

"Reservation is meant for SC, ST and OBC communities. The BJP will fight against any attempt to convert it into a religion-based reservation to the fullest extent. Our policy is justice for all, appeasement for none. If the state government, under pressure from the Muslim League and Jamaat-e-Islami, adopts appeasement policies, the BJP will strongly oppose it," Chandrasekhar said.

The resolution further reiterates the party's core Hindutva positioning by raising the Sabarimala issue and calling for an audit of temple properties and assets, underscoring its continued emphasis on religious and cultural mobilisation alongside its social outreach strategy.

The party called for legal action in connection with the alleged "Sabarimala gold looting", sought a CBI probe, and demanded the withdrawal of all cases registered during the Sabarimala women's entry protests.

The BJP also called for an audit of temple properties and assets, stronger investment in schools and colleges, and measures to protect children from the influence of "religious fundamentalist organisations, terrorist organisations, and drugs".

The party said that a "third alternative" to the CPI(M)-led LDF and Congress-led UDF had now emerged in the state, claiming that voters had accepted the rise of a new political force.

In a post-poll assessment, the party said the NDA had won three Assembly constituencies, finished second in six others, and secured around 30 lakh votes in Kerala.

The BJP state leadership expressed gratitude to voters across the state, saying their support had helped the NDA achieve what it described as a significant milestone in its growth in Kerala.

The party said the NDA would function as a "true people's opposition" in Kerala, focusing on raising key political and public issues affecting people within the legislature.

However, despite winning three seats in the Assembly elections, the BJP did not record a significant increase in its vote share compared to the 2021 polls, according to Election Commission data.

The party secured 11.42 per cent of the vote (24,66,178 votes) in 2026, slightly higher than the 11.30 per cent (23,54,468 votes) it secured in 2021, falling short of its stated target of crossing the 20 per cent mark to emerge as a major political force in the state. (PTI)

## Aadhaar cards recovered from TMC office in Bidhannagar

### EPICs found strewn in Birbhum field

KOLKATA, May 17: A large number of Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) were found scattered in a field in West Bengal's Birbhum district on Sunday, while over a hundred Aadhaar cards and other documents were recovered from a TMC office in Bidhannagar, triggering political sparring and prompting police investigations in both incidents.

The first incident came to light in Kirmahar area of Birbhum's Nanor block, where locals spotted the voter cards lying across a field on Sunday morning. The field is located adjacent to the residence of a former Booth Level Officer (BLO), triggering suspicion and commotion in the area. Police reached the spot after being informed and began an investigation.

According to local sources, the former BLO, Hiranyaprabha Mete Maji, who earlier served in Purba Bardhaman district's Ketugram block, was questioned by police over the matter. She had reportedly worked as a BLO from 2012 till 2025 before being removed in accordance with administrative norms.

Maji claimed that during her tenure, she used to collect old voter

cards while distributing new ones, but never deposited the discarded cards with the block office. Instead, she kept them in her possession.

"My house was undergoing renovation work, and I had stored the papers in a sack behind the house. Someone may have thrown them out into the open area," she told the people, according to sources.

In a separate incident in Bidhannagar's Ward No. 36 in Basanti Devi Colony, police recovered more than a hundred Aadhaar cards along with PAN cards and land-related documents from a local TMC party office on Sunday morning.

The recovery triggered a political row, with BJP leaders alleging that the office had long been used for illegal activities and that residents' identity documents had been kept there for questionable purposes.

Local BJP leaders claimed they had received complaints for a long time that Aadhaar cards of residents were being stored in the office. They said the premises had been locked by BJP workers after May 4, the day of the announcement of assembly poll results, and the documents came to light after it was reopened. (PTI)

## Why isn't PM sacking Pradhan despite repeated paper leaks, asks Rahul

NEW DELHI, May 17: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi why he was not sacking Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan despite repeated paper leaks in his tenure.

In a post on X, Gandhi also questioned the "silence" of the prime minister on the matter.

"NEET 2024: Paper leaked. Exam not cancelled. Minister did not resign. CBI set up an investigation. A committee was formed.

"NEET 2026: Paper leaked. Exam cancelled. Minister still did not resign. CBI is investigating again. Another committee will be formed," Gandhi posted on X.

The National Testing Agency cancelled the National Eligibility cum Entrance Exam (Undergraduate) held on May 3 amid allegations of irregularities. The re-exam has been scheduled for June 21.

"Mr Modi, the country is asking you some questions - answer them! Why are paper leaks happening repeatedly? Why are you silent time and again on this 'Pariksha pe Charcha'? Why aren't you dismissing the education minister who keeps failing repeatedly?" The Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha asked, using the



hashtag "#SackPradhan".

"Pariksha pe Charcha" is a programme in which the prime minister interacts with students, parents and teachers. The initiative aims to reshape the examination experience of students by fostering confidence, positivity, and holistic well-being.

On Saturday, Gandhi demanded that the prime minister should immediately sack Pradhan or take responsibility himself. He also alleged that the "BJP-RSS nexus" has destroyed India's education system and said the hard work of 22 lakh NEET aspirants has gone to waste.

"The whole country knows that two days before NEET, its question

paper was being distributed on WhatsApp. Dharmendra Pradhan ji says he has nothing to do with the matter. The (Parliamentary) Committee had made recommendations but he put it in the dustbin on the pretext that opposition people were on the committee and that it was of no use," Gandhi said in a video statement.

"The truth is that you (government) have damaged the core of India. This is a nexus of the RSS, the BJP and their people that have been installed in universities, vice chancellors and professors, to mint money," the former Congress president said, adding that all people involved in the alleged paper leak be put in jail. (PTI)

## Cong's appeasement politics led to partition: Adityanath

GORAKHPUR (UP), May 17: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday claimed that Congress began its "appeasement politics" long before the Constitution came into force or the country had its first election, and this led to the country's Partition.

"India's Constitution was framed on November 26, 1949 and adopted on January 26, 1950, when parliamentary democracy came into force in the country. However, even before the first general election, Congress started doing appeasement politics, which led to the Partition of the country," Adityanath said.

"The Constitution had not even been properly implemented when Congress began appeasement politics," he said, addressing the inaugural session of BJP's district training camp at a resort near Tenua Toll Plaza in Gorakhpur.

According to a UP government statement, Adityanath said the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) at the time felt the need for a political party that could contribute towards India's nationalism and a better future.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee who resigned from the Union Cabinet became the founding president of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, he said.

Mookerjee also opposed Article 370 in Kashmir

which was brought by the Congress government at the time, he said. Deen Dayal Upadhyay carried forward the ideals and values of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the chief minister added.

Adityanath said that during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-L K Advani era, Jana Sangh merged into the Janata Party "to save democracy in the country" but the Janata Party experiment was not fully successful for many reasons.

In the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-L K Advani era, the BJP was formed in 1980, but it won only two seats in the first general elections.

"In 1986, the BJP decided to support the construction of a grand temple at Shri Ram's birthplace in Ayodhya to establish cultural nationalism in the country. When the BJP double-engine government came to power, the Ram temple was constructed in Ayodhya," Adityanath said.

The Ram temple is a 'Rashtra Mandir' and it marks the beginning of a new era, giving new hope to people whose civilisation and culture had been suppressed and crushed by invaders.

"If India can fulfil this dream after 500 years, then oppressed communities across the world can also achieve their goals. India has lit a new lamp of hope and has honoured faith," he said. (PTI)

## Fire breaks out in Delhi-bound Rajdhani Express in MP's Ratlam; rail traffic hit

RATLAM/KOTA, May 17: A fire broke out on a Rajdhani Express train heading from Thiruvananthapuram to New Delhi in Madhya Pradesh's Ratlam district on Sunday morning, damaging two coaches and affecting traffic on the Mumbai-Delhi route for several hours, officials said. While no casualties were reported in the fire, a van carrying repair and other equipment to the site later overturned in the district, injuring five railway staffers, they said.

Schedules of more than 10 trains on the Mumbai-Delhi route were affected due to damage caused to the overhead equipment in the incident. Rail traffic was later restored after more than seven hours, even as an investigation was underway into the cause of the blaze.

The Thiruvananthapuram-Hazrat Nizamuddin Rajdhani Express (train no. 12431) had departed from Ratlam Junction at around 3.45 am.

The blaze erupted at 5.15 am in the B-1 coach of the train between Vikramgarh

Alot and Lunirichha stations under the Kota division of the railways and also damaged the luggage-cum-guard van behind the coach. West Central Railway's Chief Public Relation Officer Harshit Shrivastava told PTI over the phone. The coach, carrying as many as 68 passengers, was evacuated within 15 minutes, and there were no casualties, officials said.

Railway authorities immediately switched off the overhead electric supply, and the fire was doused.

The affected coach was later detached from the rake, and the train headed for its onward journey at around 9.45 am, Shrivastava said. Arrangements were made to accommodate the passengers in other coaches for their onward journey up to Kota in Rajasthan, Kota railway PRO Ravindra Lakhara said.

Some trains were halted at different stations following the incident, and the movement was restored after more than seven hours, the officials said. (PTI)

## No 'jealousy' against Vijay, says Rajini

CHENNAI, May 17: Superstar Rajinikanth on Sunday denied he was "jealous" about Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay and clarified that his recent meeting with DMK president M K Stalin was "purely" a friendship call and not done with any political motive.

Talking to reporters at his Poes Garden residence here, and responding to some reports, the top star made it clear that the meeting with the former chief minister Stalin was not an attempt to hinder Vijay's chief ministerial aspirations or merge political parties.

Dismissing that he had any envy towards TVK founder and chief minister Vijay, the "Jailer" star said there was a 25-year generational gap between him and the CM and commended Vijay's impressive achievements at a young age, which he said surpassed even those of the legendary MGR (MG Ramachandran) and NTR (N T Rama Rao). MGR and NTR, the two matinee idols from Tamil and Telugu cinema had gone on to become CM of Tamil Nadu and the then undivided Andhra Pradesh, respectively.

"I have seen Vijay since a young age. Why would I be jealous if he had become CM. That too at a young age of 52, he has achieved more than MGR and NTR... I have no envy at all," he added.

Rajinikanth also congratulated Vijay, whose TVK won 108 seats to form government after getting support from Congress, VCK, Left parties and IUML after the April 23 elections defeating Dravidian majors - DMK and AIADMK. (PTI)

## Time for Gujarat to lead in service sector, compete with top tech hubs: Amit Shah

AHMEDABAD, May 17: Union Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said Gujarat must now elevate itself to the top position in the service sector after performing exceptionally well across key segments like manufacturing, engineering, and green energy.

Speaking at the inauguration of Ganesh Housing's "Million Minds Tech Park", Shah asserted that if Ahmedabad aspired to position itself on par with major tech hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and Gurugram, such modern infrastructure initiatives are essential.

"Gujarat has performed exceptionally well across a wide spectrum of sectors: manufacturing, engineering, pharmaceuticals, ports, logistics, green energy, industrial infrastructure, and investment. However, the time has now come to elevate Gujarat to a position among the top three states in the service sector as well," he said.

Shah stated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision is to attract technology, innovation, knowledge, entrepreneurship, and high-skill-based industries to Gujarat, thereby



fostering job creation and ensuring the state takes the lead nationally in the realm of new-age technologies.

He said that whenever Gujarat steps into a sector with determination, it takes no time at all to secure a spot among the top three, and it will achieve the same success in the IT sector as well.

Traditionally, the people of Gujarat carry the spirit of entrepreneurship in their DNA, and this quality has been further bolstered by the government's support in building robust infrastructure, the Union minister said.

For the government, especially the one led

by then Chief Minister Modi, 'infrastructure' meant policies, the creation of a conducive environment, financial mechanisms, a proactive approach, and the provision of platforms such as 'Vibrant Gujarat', he said.

"Through these concerted efforts, we have propelled Gujarat's industrial growth to unprecedented heights — an achievement acknowledged and acclaimed by the entire world," he added.

He further pointed out that over the past two to three years, PM Modi has placed significant emphasis on developing tech parks and Global Capability Centres (GCCs), leading to a transformation of the entire spectrum of economic activities.

Shah noted that the Million Minds Tech Park, constructed at a cost of ₹ 1,100 crore and spanning 13.5 lakh square feet, will provide an excellent, conducive working environment for 9,000 highly skilled professionals in its first phase.

Upon completion of all seven planned phases, the project is expected to generate over 63,000 high-value jobs, he said.

The GREMI City Campus is also an important initiative for the real estate sector, he added.

"Real estate sector encompasses a multitude of interconnected issues — environmental concerns to urban planning. Yet no one has previously addressed these aspects comprehensively. Furthermore, if urban planning is not executed effectively, cities cannot develop into well-structured and livable spaces," he said.

In this specific domain, the world has advanced significantly in terms of both planning methodologies and technological integration, and the institute marks a monumental step forward in fostering a holistic perspective — one that encourages us to view and address all these interconnected elements in their entirety, he said.

Spanning 30,000 square feet, GREMI City Campus will accommodate a first batch of 300 students. Additionally, a main campus, to be developed on 100 acres near Ahmedabad at a cost of ₹ 500 crore, is currently in the pipeline, Shah said. (PTI)

## WB committed to handover land to BSF within 45 days for border fencing: Minister

BONGAON (WB), May 17: West Bengal minister Ashok Kirtania on Sunday said the state government was committed to handing over land to the Border Security Force (BSF) within 45 days for the erection of fence along the Bangladesh border.

Kirtania, the Food and Supply minister, who represents the Bongaon Uttar constituency in North 24 Parganas district, made the remark after visiting his constituency to review the progress of land acquisition and meet Border Security Force (BSF) officials to assess the ground-level developments. He said land acquisition in most parts of North 24 Parganas district was progressing satisfactorily but flagged resistance in the Basirhat area.

"I had a word with the district magistrate, and I was informed that, except for three mouzas in Basirhat, there are no issues. Some residents of Basirhat are refusing to move from the fencing area, and some families

who will fall inside the fencing are refusing rehabilitation," Kirtania told reporters. The minister said he directed the district magistrate to resolve the impasse within a week. "I have asked the DM to convince them within a week," he said.

The newly elected BJP government in West Bengal, led by Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari, had in its first cabinet meeting on May 11 decided to transfer land to the BSF for completing the fencing of the India-Bangladesh border, with a 45-day deadline for the handover. The cabinet had authorised the transfer of around 600 acres to the BSF.

West Bengal shares approximately 2,217 km of the roughly 4,097 km India-Bangladesh border.

According to Union Home Ministry data, of the 2,217 km in West Bengal, around 1,648 km has been fenced while 569 km remains uncovered, of which 456 km is feasible for fencing. (PTI)

# SRH, CSK look to bolster playoffs qualification quest

**CHENNAI, May 17:** With the playoffs qualification at stake, Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to rise above their batting inconsistencies against an equally desperate five-time champions Chennai Super Kings in their IPL match here on Monday.

Placed third in the points table with 14 points in 12 matches, SRH (NRR 0.331) need to win both their remaining two group stage games to avoid late hiccups in the journey towards the knockouts.

Even if they lose one of these two matches, SRH could still finish in the final four but the 2016 winners will need both Punjab Kings and Rajasthan Royals falter in at least one of their remaining two games.

However, SRH's wobbly run does present the Pat Cummins-led side to put together a unified show especially at the business end of the tournament where they seem to have stuttered, losing two of their last three fixtures. In their last outing against Gujarat Titans, SRH looked in control having restricted them to 168 for five on a tricky wicket but fell apart for a mere 86 against high quality pace bowling.

Before that, SRH had extended Punjab Kings' losing streak with a 33-run victory in a high-scoring game but it came after Kolkata Knight Riders had hammered them by seven wickets.



Meanwhile, the road ahead for CSK is not easy either even as they stand with a chance to finish with 16 points, but for that they will have to win their remaining two matches.

The Ruturaj Gaikwad-led side had slipped to the sixth spot following their loss to Lucknow Super Giants in their last outing, and they cur-

rently have 12 points from as many matches. Even on Net Run Rate, CSK are behind in the race with a tally of 0.027 compared to RR (0.082) — who have three matches left — and PBKS (13 points, NRR 0.355) are also in the fray.

But CSK can still fancy their chances given the gumption their

players and the support staff have shown while facing innumerable obstacles, including injuries to multiple key players. The current bunch looks far different from the resources CSK had entered the IPL with, yet they continue to fight hard with a couple of new signings in the form of Macneil Noronha and Kuldeep Yadav.

Kartik Sharma's emergence as a dependable middle-order batter along with Urvil Patel's explosiveness has added to the firepower that CSK have at the top in Sanju Samson.

But bowling will remain a concern, especially after the last game in which a century opening stand from LSG batters had defied the hosts.

**Teams (from)**

**Chennai Super Kings:** Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), Dewald Brevis, MS Dhoni (wk), Kartik Sharma (wk), Sarfaraz Khan, Urvil Patel (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Aman Khan, Shivam Dube, Dian Forrester, Zak Foulkes, Anshul Kamboj, Macneil Noronha, Matthew Short, Prashant Veer, Rahul Chahar, Shreyas Gopal, Gurjapneet Singh, Matt Henry, Akeal Hoseini, Spencer Johnson, Akash Madhwal, Mukesh Choudhary, Noor Ahmad, Kuldeep Yadav.

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

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

# Svitolina beats Gauff to win Italian Open

## Sinner reaches men's final



**ROME, May 17:** Elina Svitolina claimed a third Italian Open title on Saturday by beating Coco Gauff, who lost in the final in Rome for the second straight year.

In the men's final on Sunday, home favorite Jannik Sinner will face Casper Ruud.

Svitolina took nearly three hours to prevail 6-4, 6-7 (3), 6-2 and win her first WTA 1000 title since lifting the title in Rome in 2018. The Ukrainian also won in 2017.

"It's very hard to believe that it's been eight years when I had this trophy here and very, very, very pleased of course with the two weeks here," Svitolina said on court after her 20th career title.

"I told my coach that it would be nice before I finish my career to have a round number. So he told me that hopefully we're going to get this year. So, I'm very, very happy."

Gauff, who was hoping to become the first American to win in Rome since 2016, lost to Jasmine Paolini last year but went on to win the French Open.

"It's been a great two weeks ... and I definitely feel the momentum going into the French Open," she said. "A lot of lessons learned from this match."

Gauff started brilliantly, breaking Svitolina and holding to love. She also had the chance to go 5-2 up but Svitolina fended off three break points and won four straight games to take the opener.

The third-ranked Gauff struggled on her serve throughout the second set but managed to take it to a tiebreak and level the match.

However, Svitolina dominated the decider and broke Gauff's serve twice to leave her serving for the title. The seventh-ranked Svitolina sealed the result on her third match point with a volley at the net.

**Sinner finishes off Medvedev**  
Sinner beat Daniil Medvedev 6-2, 5-7, 6-4 when their rain-delayed semifinal resumed on Saturday and is one victory away from becoming only the second man after Novak Djokovic to win all nine Masters 1000 titles. Djokovic has won each Masters tournament at least twice.

The top-ranked Sinner led 4-2 in the third set when the match was suspended late Friday. The Italian finished off the match in 15 minutes on Saturday, sealing it on his third match point after Medvedev fended off two on his serve.

"It was a very different challenge and a tough challenge," Sinner said. "Usually, during the night, I don't struggle to sleep but this time it was

not easy. "You are in the third set, nearly done, but you still have to show up again and you never know what is happening. It is like the start of the match as there are nerves again. I am very happy with how I handled this situation and that I am back in the final."

Earlier Friday on the red clay of the Foro Italico, Ruud routed home player Luciano Darderi 6-1, 6-1.

Sinner is also attempting to become the first Italian man to raise the Rome trophy since Adriano Panatta in 1976. Panatta will present the trophy on Sunday, with Italian President Sergio Mattarella also slated to attend the men's final.

**Sinner appeared exhausted**

After winning the first set easily on Friday, Sinner appeared fatigued as Medvedev stepped up his game and started running him around the court with drop shots and groundstrokes to the corners.

After several points Sinner bent over in apparent exhaustion and leaned on his racket for support. Sinner had his right thigh treated by a trainer midway through the second set. Sinner came back from a 3-0 deficit only to be broken again in the 12th game and concede the set to Medvedev.

A bad bounce helped Sinner break Medvedev early in the third and take control for good.

**Sinner 4-0 against Ruud**

Sinner has won all four of his career meetings with Ruud without dropping a set — including a 6-0, 6-1 rout in the Rome quarterfinals last year. "Jannik is chasing history," Ruud said. "I have to be the guy to try to stop him, and it will not be easy playing here in his home country. ... Last year, he really (routed me) here on the same court, so of course I'm looking for revenge. But at the same time I realize that he's an incredible player and a unique talent."

Sinner lost last year's final to Carlos Alcaraz, who is sidelined due to a right wrist injury. Paolini in 2025 became the first Italian woman to raise the trophy in 40 years.

Sinner hasn't lost since Feb. 19 in the Qatar Open quarterfinals. He has won 28 straight matches and a record five successive Masters titles. He could become the second man to win all three Masters tournaments on clay — including Monte Carlo and Madrid — in the same season after Rafael Nadal in 2010.

After Rome for Sinner is the French Open, the only Grand Slam event he hasn't won. The titleholder, Alcaraz, will also miss it. (AP)

## Basketball tournament concludes at CIT Kokrajhar



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, May 17:** A two-day basketball competition concluded on Sunday after a hectic schedule at the Central Institute of Technology Kokrajhar.

The tournament was organised by the Mijing Youth Foundation with the objective of promoting a sporting environment among the younger generation across the region.

More than 20 teams from different states and districts of the Northeast, including Shillong, Guwahati, Udalguri, Baksa, Tamulpur, Chirang and Kokrajhar, participated in the competition. Both boys' and girls' teams took part in the tournament and displayed impressive performances throughout the event. Karneswar Ray, Subhash Basumatary and officers of the ECO Task Force of the Indian Army attended the opening ceremony as special guests.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Basumatary said sports teach discipline and described basketball as an ideal sport for youths aspiring to build a career in athletics. He added that sports help young people develop strong personalities and values in life. Ray said the Bodoland Territorial Council government is giving importance to the development of sportspersons in the region.

The winners and runners-up teams in the final matches were presented with trophies and prize money during the closing ceremony.

# Satwik-Chirag save four c'ship points before finishing runners-up in Thailand Open

**BANGKOK, May 17:** Star Indian pair of Satwik-sairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty saved four championship points before being down fighting against Indonesia's Leo Rolly Candano and Daniel Marthin in a gripping men's doubles final to finish runners-up at the Thailand Open Super 500 tournament here on Sunday.

World No. 4 Satwik and Chirag, champions here in 2019 and 2024, looked off-colour in the opening game but showed great mental fortitude under pressure in the second to almost take the match to the decider before losing 12-21 23-25 in a 53-minute summit clash.

It was another creditable finish for Satwik and Chirag, who have established themselves as India's most consistent doubles pair in recent years. For the Indian duo, who had missed some tournaments due to Satwik's shoulder injury, it was a third final appearance at the USD 475,000 event and their first of the season.

They had also finished runners-up at the China Masters and Hong Kong Open last year. Despite the defeat, Satwik was pleased with the overall progress after the duo's return from injury setbacks.

"Except for today, I am happy with the way we played this week. It is more mental than physical now," he said.

"We need to believe more instead of playing 50-50 badminton. Things have started working for us and hopefully soon we will be on the winning side instead of the losing side."

Satwik admitted the Indian pair took time to adjust to the faster shuttles and Indonesia's attacking game style after being outplayed in the opening game.

"The shuttles were quite fast compared to the rest of the tournament and it was difficult to adjust," Satwik said.

"They took us into their game style and we were always on the back foot in the first game. In the second game, we started taking the shuttle a lot higher and mixed things up better."

"Maybe if we had been a little sharper earlier, we could have won the second game."

While the Indians returned to the podium once again, it proved to be a dream finish for Candano

and Marthin, who reunited for this tournament after two years following the latter's recovery from a long-term knee injury that required surgery.

It was also the Indonesians' first win over Satwik and Chirag, who had entered the contest with a 4-0 head-to-head record against them, with three of those victories coming in three-game matches.

The contest turned into a high-intensity affair marked by quick exchanges at the net and fierce front-court battles.

Chirag appeared to struggle with his serve early on as the Indians slipped to a 1-4 deficit, though they stayed within touching distance at 7-9.

The Indonesians then opened up a four-point cushion after Satwik failed to control one of Marthin's powerful smashes.

Candano and Marthin looked in complete control as they extended the lead to 13-8 before a couple of unforced errors helped the Indians narrow the gap.

However, a sharp smash split the Indian pair, and Chirag then pushed one wide to hand the Indonesians a five-point advantage again.

The Indians won two successive video referrals, but they were erratic and buckled under constant pressure. Chirag found the net once more as they trailed 12-17.

Satwik and Chirag struggled in the service exchanges and were undone by a string of unforced errors as the Indonesians earned eight game points and sealed the opener when Satwik pushed a return into the net.

After the change of sides, Marthin continued to dismantle the Indian defence with his brutal smashes as the Indonesians led 5-3.

A flick serve helped the Indians claw back at 5-5 and go on a run of points as they took a 7-5 lead for the first time in the match with a scything return at the net from Chirag.

The Indonesians drew level at 9-9 before a smash from Chirag and a wide return from their opponents handed the Indians a two-point lead at the interval.

On resumption, it became a contest of who blinks first as a flick serve from Chirag was punished with a thunderous smash as the Indonesians



again made it 11-11 before moving ahead after Satwik found the net after a rapid-fire cross-court exchange.

There was little to separate the two pairs thereafter as the lead kept changing hands in tense service situations, with the scores locked at 14-14 to 19-19. The Indonesians earned their first championship point with Marthin once again targeting Chirag with a fierce push. The Indians saved it after forcing an error from Marthin to make it 20-20. Marthin then secured another championship point, only for Chirag to erase it with a sharp net kill.

A service error from Satwik handed the Indonesians a third championship point, but they failed to convert after sending the shuttle long. Another brutal attacking return from Marthin at the front court earned Indonesia a fourth championship point, but the Indians survived yet again.

Marthin produced another decisive kill shot to bring up a fifth championship point, and this time the Indonesians sealed the match when the Indians found the net.

Chirag said the pair's confidence has grown steadily since their Thomas Cup campaign when they claimed the bronze earlier this month.

"We didn't start the year that well but after the Thomas Cup, we have become a lot more confident in our game," he said. (PTI)

# Dropped catches made the difference: Parthiv Patel KA goalkeeper Gojen Hanse helps Delhi FC win I-League 2 title

**KOLKATA, May 17:** Gujarat Titans assistant coach Parthiv Patel admitted their sloppy catching proved costly as they dropped as many as four catches, including two chances of Finn Allen, who made them pay with a blistering 35-ball 93 in a 29-run loss to Kolkata Knight Riders.

After Allen's explosive start, Angkrish Raghuvanshi (82 not out) and Cameron Green (52 not out) maintained the tempo as KKR posted their highest total of the season — 247 for 2. In reply, GT managed 218 for 4.

"I think catching is something which obviously made a huge difference," Patel said after the defeat. "When you are playing high-scoring games and against quality batters, you don't get many opportunities. As soon as you

get that opportunity, you have to make sure you catch the balls. I thought that was the difference." GT fielders gave chances to all three KKR batters who scored fifties. Allen was dropped 14 by Jason Holder at cover, and when the New Zealand batter was on 33, Mohammed Siraj dropped a sitter. Allen went on to smash 93 off 35 balls. Green, too, got a reprieve on 23 when Arshad Khan dropped him and even parried the ball to the boundary, while Raghuvanshi was dropped on 52.

Despite the defeat, GT remained second on the table with 16 points, though their playoff spot is yet to be sealed. GT next face Chennai Super Kings in their final league game and Patel said the equation for qualification is straightforward. (PTI)



**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, May 17:** Gojen Hanse, a goalkeeper from Assam's Karbi Anglong district, has made his debut season with Delhi FC memorable by helping the club win the 2025-26 I-League 2 title and secure qualification for the I-League first division.

Hanse is a former goalkeeper of Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC (KAMSFC), which also competed in the I-League 2 this season and finished fourth in the points table.

During his stint with KAMSFC, Hanse played a key role in helping the club emerge champions in the Assam State Premier League (ASPL), where he was also awarded the Best Goalkeeper title.

He further contributed to the club's qualification from I-League 3 to I-League 2 and also represented Assam in the Santosh Trophy.

However, Hanse was not retained by KAMSFC for the 2025-26 I-League 2 campaign. Although disappointed by the decision, the goalkeeper soon received an offer from Delhi FC, one of KAMSFC's competitors in the league, and signed with the club for the season.

Delhi FC played their final league match against United SC at Kalyani Stadium in Kolkata on May 15.

The match ended in a 1-1 draw, which was enough for Delhi FC to finish at the top of the table with 17 points from eight

matches and clinch the I-League 2 championship with a three-point lead.

Interestingly, Hanse faced his former club KAMSFC on April 2 during the league season, when Delhi FC defeated the Karbi Anglong side 2-1.

Though he could not continue with his home club, where he began his football career and helped the team reach the national stage, Hanse's move to Delhi FC ultimately saw him become part of a title-winning squad earning promotion to the I-League.

Gojen Hanse is the son of late Baburam Hanse and Kabon Krophi of Narlong Ati Adorsho village in Dokmoka, Karbi Anglong.

# Self-inflicted pressure made me shallower human: Finn Allen on poor IPL start

**KOLKATA, May 17:** Finn Allen feels stepping away from the playing XI helped him rediscover the joy of batting as the KKR opener by his own admission had become a "shallower" person by putting too much "self-inflicted" pressure during the early part of the IPL season.

Coming into the tournament on the back of a blistering 33-ball 100 not out against South Africa in the T20 World Cup semifinal at the same venue, Allen arrived with huge expectations of providing KKR similar starts at the top.

But the aggressive New Zealand opener endured a rough beginning, managing just 81 runs in five innings, including scores of 6, 9 and 1, before KKR benched him for three matches against Gujarat Titans, Rajasthan Royals and Lucknow Super Giants.

Allen on Saturday smashed a 35-ball 93 as KKR posted their season's highest 247/2 in a must-win match against a rampaging Gujarat Titans fresh from a five-match winning streak.

"At the start of the tournament, I was putting far too much pressure on myself to perform. I was prob-

ably a shallower human for a bit there and it was all self-inflicted," Allen said in the post-match media interaction after their 29-run win.

"When you go out of the side, you have time to relax and take a breath and look at things from a different perspective.

"I love playing cricket, I love batting and I probably wasn't enjoying it as much as I should have because I was putting so much pressure on myself."

Since returning against Sunrisers Hyderabad, the opener is back into his destructive best, smashing 240 runs in four innings, including a 47-ball unbeaten hundred and the 93 in his last three knocks.

Allen said the short break helped him return with a clearer mindset.

"Having those few games off really did me a good thing. It's a great learning for sure," he said.

The 27-year-old added that his focus now is on staying relaxed and enjoying the game instead of chasing results. "If I'm relaxed and enjoying myself, then I watch the ball harder, I'm in better positions and I'm a better cricketer for it," Allen said.



"Pressure is just something that I put on myself. There's no real pressure in sport. We're very blessed to do what we do, so the pressure was all me."

He smashed 10 sixes in his knock as 76 of his 93 runs came off boundaries in his impactful knock.

"It's just for me keeping my intent early, trying to get in good positions. If it's there, try and hit it for four or six and if it's not, just try and get off strike, really. I guess for me, I'm just trying to get in stronger positions so I can be more consistent," he said.

**Starboy Raghuvanshi**

After Allen got out, 21-year-old Angkrish Raghuvanshi kept up the momentum in his 44-ball 82 not out as he along with Cameron Green (52 not out; 28b) gave the final flourish in a century-plus unbroken stand.

"Starboy. Yeah, he's an incredible player. I think he's just expanding his game. The more we see him bat, he's got a great base. He can play some incredible shots," he hailed the Mumbai youngster who is KKR's leading rungetter (422) this season with five fifties.

"He's just showing what he's capable of. For such a young fellow to be heavily relied on by the team, I think, just shows how good he is.

"It's really exciting for the franchise to have someone so young performing so consistently and great for Indian cricket probably. "So, yeah, I couldn't speak higher of him. He's a really good kid."

**Will take game by game**

The win has helped KKR keep their slim playoff hopes alive. On 11 points, KKR can go to 15 with wins over Mumbai Indians (May 20) and Delhi Cap-

itals (May 24) but that still cannot guarantee a last-four berth as they would require other results to go in their favour.

"I think as a team what we've done really well this whole tournament is stay composed. You know, we had a tough start and the dressing room was really calm. "Credit to the support staff and Jinx as well feeding that down and some fetches for the rest of the group. We just take it game by game."

"You know, we went four from four through the middle there, lost one, and we're back up again with another win. So, I think, you know, it's pretty simple. We need to win the last two to have any chance of qualifying.

So, for us, we just take it game by game, keep working hard at trainings and doing our thing and hope for the best."

Varun Chakravarthy returned from a left-leg fracture but was far from his best, going wicketless for 47 runs in four overs as a rampant Shubman Gill smashed 85 off 49 balls to keep GT hopes alive in their daunting chase. (PTI)