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- 20 killed in Balochistan shuttle train explosion; banned outfit BLA claims responsibility
- Rahul Gandhi trying to create 'anarchy' to topple Modi gov't: BJP
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TMC candidate forfeits deposit

BJP cliches Bengal's repolled Falta Assembly seat

KOLKATA, May 24: The BJP on Sunday swept the repoll to Bengal's Falta Assembly seat with a victory margin of more than one lakh votes in the constituency long seen as a citadel of the TMC, whose nominee slipped to fourth place and forfeited his deposit.

Polling 1,49,666 votes, the BJP's Debangshu Panda defeated his nearest rival, the CPI(M)'s Sambhu Nath Kurmi, by a margin of 1,09,021 votes. Kurmi secured 40,645 votes while the Congress' Abdur Razzak Molla finished third with 10,084 votes.

TMC's Jahangir Khan, once among the most talked-about faces of the Falta campaign, slipped to fourth place with just 7,783 votes and forfeited his deposit.

Two days before polling, Khan had announced that he was stepping aside "for Falta's interest", a move the BJP mocked as an attempt to "run away" from the bat-



tle. However, since withdrawal of nomination was not possible at that time, his name remained on the EVMs.

The Falta Assembly seat had been held by the TMC since 2011. The party retained the constituency

in 2021 with around 57 per cent of the votes polled.

Sunday's verdict, however, marked a dramatic collapse in the party's support base.

The BJP secured 71.2 per cent vote share in the repoll, a sharp jump from 36.75 per cent in 2021,

while the TMC's vote share crashed to just 3.7 per cent.

The result came days after the BJP ended the TMC's 15-year rule and scripted a regime change in West Bengal earlier this month, lending the Falta contest significance far beyond the boundaries of South 24 Parganas and turning it into an early test of the state's altered political landscape.

With the Falta victory, the BJP's tally in Election Commission records for the 2026 Assembly polls rose to 208 from 207, though its effective Assembly strength remained 207 after Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari vacated Nandigram upon retaining Bhabanipur.

Adhikari described the verdict as proof that "reality had come to light" when people were allowed to vote freely.

In a post on X, Adhikari said he bowed "in salutation to the people of Falta" (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Assam tea estate bets on immersive tea tourism

Bid to reconnect consumers with beverage

KOLKATA, May 24: Amid falling auction prices, climate-related disruptions and changing beverage preferences, an Assam-based tea estate is seeking to reposition tea from a daily commodity to a cultural and experiential product through factory visits, tasting sessions and immersive consumer engagement initiatives.

Amchong Tea Estate has launched 'Amchong Leaf', which it claims is India's first dedicated tea experience centre, offering visitors guided estate walks, factory tours, tea-tasting sessions, interactions with workers involved in the manufacturing process, and audio-visual presentations.

The initiative comes at a time when India's tea industry is facing mounting pressure from rising input costs, erratic weather conditions and stagnant auction price realisations despite record exports in 2025.

Amchong Tea Director Ananya Khemka told PTI that the idea be-



hind the experience centre was about reconnecting consumers with tea than generating immediate commercial returns.

Located on the outskirts of Guwahati, the centre seeks to familiarise visitors with the journey of tea from leaf to cup.

The Khemka family-run estate, operational since 1958, spans

around 1,782 acres near Guwahati and produces over 1 million kg of tea annually.

The estate has engaged architect Yashaswini Apte, known for projects such as Mumbai Airport Terminal 2 and the Jio World Centre, to design the space. The facility incorporates bamboo screens, woven partitions (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Assam Police busts inter-state terror funding network; 5 held

TINSUKIA, May 24: Assam Police has unearthed a suspected inter-state terror funding network and arrested five people, including a students' union leader here and an accused in Maharashtra, officials said on Sunday.

They said investigations are on to ascertain the motive behind the extortion and funding network, and the organisation for which the funds were being collected.

Addressing a joint press conference here, additional superintendent of police (HQ) Mrinmoy Das and Dinesh Pratap Singh Rathore, Crime Branch, said intelligence inputs were received from a central agency that extorted money from Tinsukia district was being channelled outside the region.

During the investigation, the name of one Debashish Gohain, working as a journalist with a news portal, surfaced, following which he was apprehended.

The officers said that during interrogation, Gohain revealed that a substantial amount of money had

been transferred to Sheikh Wasim, a resident of Maharashtra.

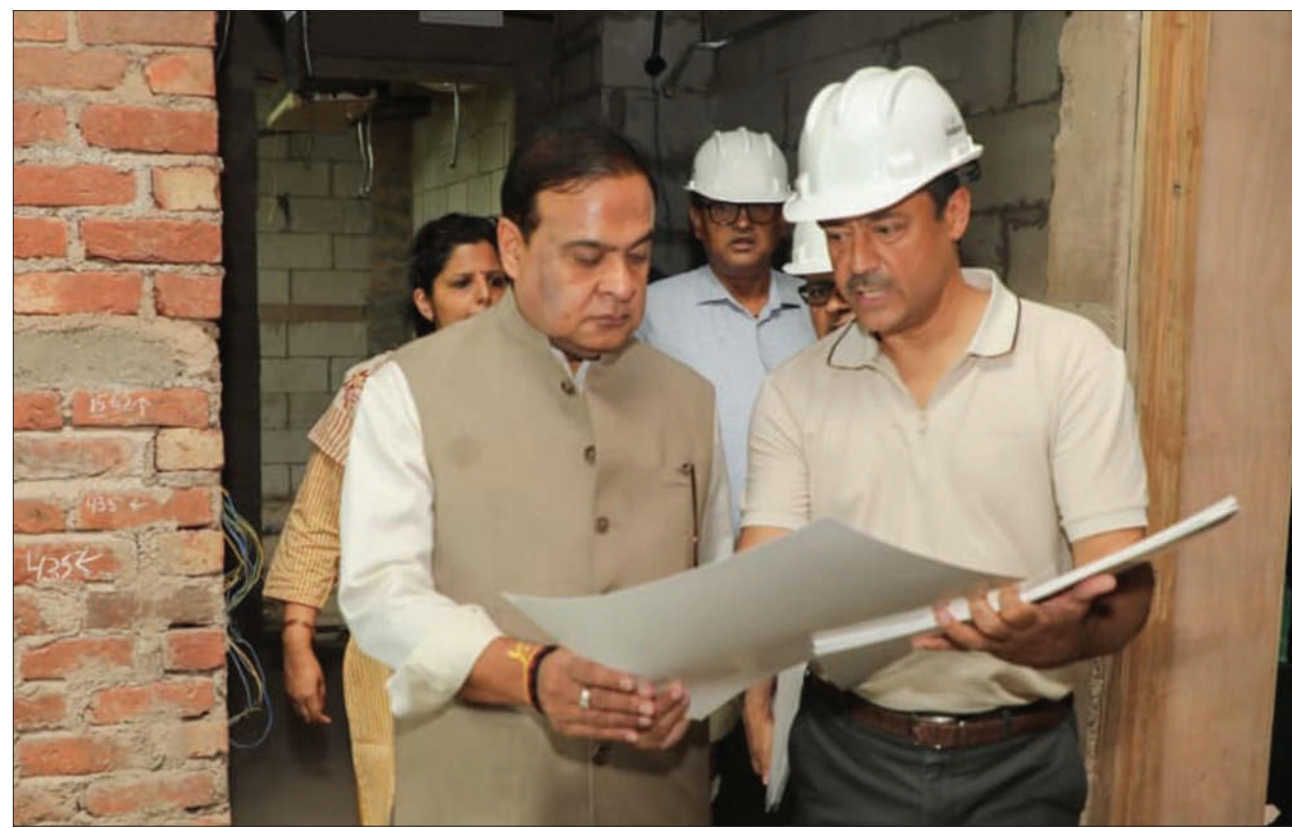
Wasim, who had travelled to the North Eastern region several times in the past, has been arrested by Tinsukia Police with assistance from Maharashtra Police in the western state, and will be brought here for further questioning.

Based on the investigations so far, police have also arrested Deepu Chetia Patra of Jorhat, Mrityunjay Konwar of Naharkatia (Dibrugarh) and Samar Jyoti Gohain of Tinsukia, a students' union leader.

Police said the accused were involved in collecting funds and transferring them outside the state, with investigators suspecting links to extremist activities.

"Only after detailed interrogation of all the accused, the exact motive behind the alleged funding network and the organisation for which the funds were being collected will become clear," the two officers said.

The accused have been booked under multiple sections of the Bharatiya (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)



Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inspecting the progress of the upcoming Assam Bhawan in New Delhi and reviewed various aspects of the construction work on Sunday. -HT Photos

Banned codeine-based cough syrup worth over ₹ 2 cr seized in Assam, 2 held

GUWAHATI, May 24: Two persons were arrested after bottles of banned codeine-based cough syrup worth over ₹ 2 crore were seized from their possession in two separate operations in Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The two operations were carried out on Saturday in Cachar and Kokrajhar districts.

Codeine is strictly regulated in India. Over-the-counter sales of codeine-based medicines are prohibited, and possessing, manufacturing or selling them without a valid medical licence is illegal under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.

Sarma, in a post on X, said a consignment of the banned syrup was seized from a truck in Cachar.

"Based on reliable inputs, a truck was intercepted by @cacharpolice leading to the recovery of ₹ 2.1cr worth of banned Codeine Phosphate Syrup," he said on Saturday.

One person has been arrested, Sarma added, affirming that efforts to dismantle the drug network will continue.

The Chief Minister's Office (CMO), also in a post on social media on Sunday, said another consignment was seized in Kokrajhar.

"Intercepting a truck carrying cattle feed at a naka checkpoint yesterday, @KokrajharPolice uncovered and (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Counter-radicalisation cell on anvil: Himanta 'Assam will give it back firmly'

GUWAHATI, May 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said his government will set up a counter-radicalisation cell to "protect vulnerable youth from extremist influence".

He asserted that Assam will "give it back firmly" to anyone trying to mislead the youth of the state.

"We will not allow any group or individual to mislead our youth and ruin their future by radicalising them. Assam will give it back firmly," Sarma said in a post on X.

"A counter radicalisation cell will be established to protect vulnerable youth from extremist influence," the chief minister said. Sarma, however, did not elaborate on the proposed cell. (PTI)

'If Zubeen Garg doesn't get justice, who will?' Garima Saikia Garg visits Zubeen Garden in Nagaon



HT Correspondent
NAGAON, May 24: Garima Saikia Garg, accompanied by members of the Jantra band, visited Zubeen Garden at Kolongpar in Nagaon on Saturday night.

She had arrived in the town to attend a cultural programme. In the presence of local MLA Rupak Sarma, Garima offered floral tributes at the statue of Zubeen Garg and became emotional during the

ceremony.

She thanked Rupak Sarma for installing a statue of Zubeen Garg in Nagaon town and for developing a garden in his name on the banks of the Kolong River.

Garima said people should continue to remember and promote the works and creations of Zubeen Garg across the country and abroad so that his legacy remains alive forever.

Speaking about justice for the singer, she said, "Zubeen Garg must get justice. If Zubeen Garg doesn't get justice, then who will? If he doesn't get justice, the word 'justice' should be removed from our dictionary."

She also urged authorities to begin construction of 'Zubeen Kshetra' in Sonapur at the earliest and said (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

India, US signal thaw as Jaishankar and Rubio hold candid talks to re-energise relations

NEW DELHI, May 24: India and the US on Sunday sought to signal a reset in their strained ties as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his American counterpart Marco Rubio held frank discussions on thorny issues such as trade, visas, energy security, cross-border terrorism and the implications of the West Asia conflict.

Rubio, who is on a four-day visit to the country, described New Delhi as a major power and dismissed observations that the US-India relationship has lost its two-decade momentum, firmly asserting that the engagement will grow much stronger by the end of the current administration's tenure.

In a clear statement of India's foreign policy priorities, Jaishankar outlined a strategic five-point blueprint for global stability, asserting

that India advocates dialogue and diplomacy to address conflicts, supports unimpeded maritime commerce, demands respect for international law and is against "weaponisation" of market shares and resources.

In their first comprehensive dialogue after the India-US ties witnessed major downturn, the two sides primarily focused on vigorously bolstering cooperation in areas of defence, critical minerals, high technology and economic engagement.

"The US-India relationship has not lost any momentum. I understand why some people might say that. I don't understand, but I understand some people say that. This is not about India. This is about the United States in terms of trade," Rubio said at a joint press confer-

ence with Jaishankar while responding to a question from PTI.

Rubio called India an important strategic partner of the US and stressed that both sides are aligned on a range of key issues. "India is an important strategic partner of the United States, one of our most important strategic partners in the world," he said.

The relations between the two countries witnessed a major downturn after Washington imposed punitive tariffs on India and President Donald Trump made controversial assertions regarding his role in de-escalating the India-Pakistan military clashes last May.

"Let me state India's broad position... And I would make five points here. One, that we advocate dialogue and diplomacy to address conflicts. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Yoga becoming global soft power tool, key to preventive healthcare: Ayush secy

NEW DELHI, May 24: Yoga has emerged as one of India's most powerful instruments of cultural outreach and global soft power, while also becoming a central pillar of preventive healthcare in the fight against lifestyle diseases, Ayush Ministry Secretary Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha said.

Ahead of the International Day of Yoga on June 21, Kotecha told PTI in an exclusive interview that yoga is increasingly being recognised not merely as a traditional wellness practice, but as a scientifically supported public health intervention integrated into healthcare systems, educational institutions, workplaces, and digital platforms worldwide.

"Yoga has emerged as one of India's most powerful instruments of cultural outreach and global soft power," he said.

"Its acceptance in over 190 countries reflects its universal relevance beyond geography, language, and culture. In the coming decade, yoga is expected to play a greater role in promoting preventive healthcare, mental wellness, and holistic living globally," he added.

Kotecha said India's diplomatic missions and international collaborations have helped strengthen yoga's role in fostering people-to-people ties and contributing to global well-being.

"India sees yoga not only as a cultural heritage, but

also as a practical and inclusive approach to healthier societies worldwide," he said.

Highlighting the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), stress-related illnesses, and mental health disorders, Kotecha said the ministry is working to shift healthcare from a treatment-driven system to a prevention-focused model with yoga playing a central role.

"In response to the increasing burden of lifestyle diseases, the ministry is working to reposition healthcare from a treatment-based model to a prevention-focused approach, with yoga at its core," the official said.

As part of this strategy, the ministry has introduced a comprehensive "Yoga Protocol for Non-Communicable Diseases and Target Groups", based on scientific evidence and clinical research.

The protocols include structured modules comprising asanas, pranayama, meditation, and relaxation techniques tailored for specific health conditions and age groups.

He said the initiative follows a lifecycle-based approach, with specialised yoga modules designed for children, adolescents, women, pregnant mothers, and senior citizens. "We have developed targeted yoga modules for different stages (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

GUWAHATI, May 24: Union Minister Raksha Khadse on Sunday exhorted sportspersons to strive for excellence in their respective disciplines with commitment and perseverance.

She affirmed the Central government's focus on strengthening sports infrastructure at all levels to encourage young talents to pursue their dreams with world-class training facilities.

The Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports was speaking during a visit to Khelo India State Centre of Excellence (KISCE), Assam, and the High Performance Centre in Guwahati, where she interacted with athletes, coaches, sports science experts and officials.

Interacting with the athletes, Khadse appreciated their dedication and commitment and encouraged them to continue striving towards excellence with discipline and de-



termination.

She emphasised the government's continued focus on strengthening grassroots sports infrastructure and creating world-class training environments for athletes across the country.

Khadse said that under the lead-

ership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is witnessing a transformative expansion in sports infrastructure, athlete support systems and scientific training methodologies.

She maintained that centres such as KISCE and the High Perform-

ance Centre are playing a crucial role in nurturing talent and preparing athletes for international success.

During the visit, Khadse toured various training and rehabilitation facilities at the High Performance Centre, including sports science laboratories, recovery and rehabilitation units, physiological and biomechanical assessment facilities, and athlete support systems.

She also reviewed ongoing athlete development programmes under the Khelo India initiative and discussed the importance of strengthening pathways for young athletes from the North East to compete at national and international levels.

Earlier in the day, Khadse participated in a special edition of 'Sundays on Cycle' initiative of the Sports Authority of India (SAI), Regional Centre Guwahati, in collaboration (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

NCLAT rejects pleas against Kerala's liquor procurement agency; upholds CCI order

NEW DELHI, May 24: Appellate tribunal NCLAT has upheld an order of fair trade regulator CCI for closing a complaint alleging abuse of dominant position by Kerala's state-owned liquor procurement agency, citing a lack of evidence.

A two-member NCLAT bench dismissed an appeal filed by the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) and the Association of Distillers, Brewers and Vintners of India (ADBVI), alleging abuse of dominant position by the Kerala State Beverages (Manufacturing and Marketing) Corporation (KSBC) in the state.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI), on October 21, 2021, declined to order a probe into allegations against KSBC Ltd and Travancore Sugar and Chemicals Ltd. This order was challenged before the NCLAT, which is an appellate authority over the orders passed by the CCI.

The applicants had alleged that KSBC, which has exclusive control over wholesale liquor procurement and distribution in Kerala, abused its dominant position by unilaterally fixing purchase prices, imposing arbitrary tender conditions, delaying payments, and favouring state-owned brands over private manufacturers.

However, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) observed that both the appellants failed to provide "concrete evidence" of anti-competi-



tive conduct.

"We find that the CCI evaluated the limited evidence and the documents furnished by the Informants before concluding that a prima facie case did not exist. The informants did not make out any case as to the harm or loss occasioned on account of the alleged conduct, which is an essential ingredient, even at the prima facie stage," said NCLAT.

It also consented with CCI findings that Clause 11(c) of its rate contract, dealing with the control of the liquor price in Kerala, does not prima facie appear to be an abuse, and it is not for the competition authority to determine what the appropriate price ought to be.

NCLAT also rejected the allegations of discriminatory treatment towards the state-owned 'Jawan' rum brand supplied by Travancore Sugar and Chemicals Ltd (TSCCL),

and noted that the appellants failed to show any distortion in consumer choice or market competition or that they received any preferential treatment.

"It is observed that Respondent No 3 (TSCCL), being a wholly state-owned entity, manufactures only a single brand of rum, namely 'Jawan', and has been operating under significant constraints, including past closures and labour disputes," the NCLAT said in its 43-page order.

The benefit extended is minimal in nature, amounting to a discount of approximately Rs 20, and does not materially distort market competition, it said.

"Further, large IMFL (India-made foreign liquor), beer, and wine manufacturers cannot reasonably claim an inability to compete with such a small-scale entity," said the NCLAT bench

comprising justices Mohammad Faiz Alam Khan and Naresh Salecha.

The industry body had alleged that KSBC abused its dominant position through a series of unfair and unilateral trade practices, including unilateral fixation of purchase prices, arbitrary tender conditions, discriminatory treatment between government and private manufacturers, delayed payments, and the imposition of additional charges without justification.

NCLAT, in its order, noted down CCI's observations that KSBC provides cash discounts to manufacturers ranging from approximately 7 per cent to 22 per cent, with lower discounts being more favourable to manufacturers. These discounts are applied to the wholesale price, which is determined by KSBC, based on cost sheets submitted by the manufacturers.

NCLAT said that CCI has justified the differential discount structure by distinguishing between fast-moving and slow-moving brands, with lower discounts for fast-moving brands and higher discounts for slow-moving ones.

Such a structure was stated to be commercially justified, as it partly offsets the distribution costs incurred by KSBC.

"In the view of above detailed discussions, we do not find any error in the Impugned Order. The Appeal fails and stands rejected," the NCLAT said. (PTI)

Classic Legends launches 9-day 'Legends' Care Camp' across dealership network

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 24: Classic Legends has launched a 9-day nationwide "Legends' Care Camp" across its authorised Jawa, Yezdi and BSA dealership network from May 23 to May 31, 2026, reaffirming the company's focus on customer satisfaction and after-sales service experience.

The service camp will be organised across multiple cities, offering customers comprehensive vehicle health check-ups along with exclusive benefits on service, spare parts, labour and genuine accessories.

As part of the initiative, trained technicians will conduct a detailed 72-point motorcycle inspection covering engine performance, brakes, clutch, electrical systems, tyres, suspension, battery health and overall vehicle condition to ensure optimum riding performance and safety.

Customers visiting authorised dealerships during the campaign period will also be able to avail special offers on periodic maintenance, spare parts and genuine accessories, along with expert consultation on motorcycle upkeep and riding readiness ahead of the monsoon season.

Commenting on the initiative, Jayapradeep Vasudevan, Head of National Business Operations at Classic Legends, said customer experience and rider satisfaction remained at the core of the company's approach.

He said the "Legends' Care Camp" aimed to provide riders with expert service support and proactive vehicle care to ensure their motorcycles continued to deliver performance, reliability and riding experience associated with the brands.

Customers can visit their nearest authorised Jawa, Yezdi and BSA dealership to participate in the campaign and avail finance and exchange benefits offered as part of the initiative.

Bandhan Life sharpens focus on protection, affordable insurance segments

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 24: Bandhan Life is strengthening its focus on protection-led offerings and affordable, small-ticket insurance solutions aimed at expanding financial security for underserved customers.

The company said it is increasingly focusing on accessible protection products designed to align with the evolving needs and income patterns of emerging customer segments.

These offerings are intended to make life insurance simpler, more flexible and easier to adopt for first-time insurance buyers.

Satishwar B, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Bandhan Life, said affordability and simplicity are increasingly shaping customer purchase decisions in life insurance.

He said the GST waiver has helped improve affordability and strengthened insurance adoption as an essential financial planning tool.

According to him, the company is also witnessing growing interest from the self-employed segment alongside salaried customers, reflecting a broader shift in how different customer groups view financial pro-

tection.

He added that the company remains focused on designing solutions aligned with diverse income profiles and evolving customer expectations, while continuing to strengthen distribution capabilities and expand reach across emerging customer segments.

Apart from its growing focus on protection and affordable insurance solutions, Bandhan Life offers products across key life insurance categories, including term protection plans such as iTerm Prime and market-linked ULIP offerings like iInvest Ultima and iInvest Advantage aimed at long-term wealth creation and retirement planning.

The company also provides savings-oriented, retirement and group insurance solutions tailored for varying customer profiles and financial goals.

It said improved affordability, supportive policy measures and rising awareness around financial security are contributing to stronger insurance adoption across customer segments.

The company further stated that it continues to leverage digital engagement to improve customer access and support informed decision-making.

OPPO launches 'Camera King' Find X9 Ultra in Guwahati

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 24: OPPO has unveiled its latest flagship smartphone, the Find X9 Ultra, under the campaign theme "Let the World See Assam & Northeast with Camera King Find X9 Ultra."

The smartphone was launched during a ceremony held at City Centre on GS Road in Guwahati on Saturday evening in the presence of Assamese film actress Preety Kongana and a large gathering of people.

The campaign aims to celebrate the beauty, culture, traditions, landscapes and stories of Assam and the Northeast through advanced smartphone photography and videography.

According to OPPO, the Find X9 Ultra is designed for creators, travellers, photographers and users who wish to capture cinematic visuals and detailed imagery.

The smartphone features a next-generation Penta Camera Setup co-developed with Hasselblad, offering professional-level photography with true-to-life colours, cinematic portraits, ultra-clear zoom and advanced image detailing.

The company stated that Hasselblad is globally recognised for its professional imaging technology and

was famously associated with the cameras used during the Apollo 11 Moon Landing mission.

Highlighting the camera features of the Find X9 Ultra, the company said the smartphone comes with the industry's first 50MP 10X optical inbuilt teleconverter camera, a dual 200MP camera system, cinematic 8K 30FPS video recording, a true colour sensor and a flagship penta camera setup designed for multiple photography scenarios.

The company said the device has been developed to help users capture the essence of Assam and the Northeast with enhanced clarity and professional-grade imaging.

Speaking at the launch, representatives of OPPO Northeast said the region is filled with breathtaking beauty, culture, emotions and inspiring stories, and the company wants users to showcase the Northeast to the world through flagship-level photography.

The campaign will include creator collaborations, photography experiences, retail activations and consumer engagement initiatives across the Northeast under the company's brand philosophy, "Make Your Moment."

ICAI to set up advanced forensic lab for small, medium practitioners

NEW DELHI, May 24: Chartered accountants' institute ICAI will be setting up an advanced forensic auditing lab in Hyderabad to help small and medium practitioners, its President Prasanna Kumar D has said.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has more than five lakh members, including small and medium practitioners.

In a recent interview to PTI, Kumar said that forensic audit is a new area, and small and medium chartered accounting firms are not able to participate in large auditing works as they do not have the forensic audit capabilities.

Against this backdrop, the institute will be setting up an advanced forensic lab, which will be a "pay and use model". It will offer assignment-specific tools. "We are establishing an advanced forensic auditing lab at the Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Hyderabad. In next 2-3 months, we will launch it," Kumar said.

Meanwhile, there are larger government efforts to have homegrown big accounting firms that can help create more opportunities in the country's growing economy and also compete at the scale of global players.

In February, the institute notified the global net-

working guidelines, paving the way for creating large home-grown domestic chartered accountant firms, wherein they can also collaborate with global networks.

Separately, ICAI is preparing to embed artificial intelligence, data analytics, and other subjects in its curriculum as it works to keep pace with the evolving technological and professional changes.

The institute has recently formed the Committee for Review of Education and Training (CRET), which is expected to finalise its recommendations, including updates for the curriculum, in the coming months. (PTI)

Gold, silver likely to remain rangebound as US-Iran negotiations near key stage: Analysts

NEW DELHI, May 24: Gold prices are likely to remain rangebound in the coming week as traders await more clarity on the evolving US-Iran negotiations, while silver is expected to retain a positive bias amid persistent geopolitical uncertainty and elevated energy rates, analysts said.

Apart from geopolitical developments, investors will also track US housing data, GDP numbers, consumer confidence readings and Personal Consumption Expenditure (PCE) inflation data for further clues on the Federal Reserve's policy outlook, they added.

"Gold price momentum next week looks sideways, while silver still looks positive as focus will

again be on the peace negotiations between the US and Iran to end the war," said Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG - Commodity & Currency Research, JM Financial Services Ltd.

Domestic futures markets will remain closed during the morning session on Thursday for Bakri Id.

Gold futures rose marginally to close the previous week at ₹ 1.58 lakh per 10 grams, while silver edged lower to settle at ₹ 2.71 lakh per kilogram, on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

"Gold traded in a range-bound manner last week, posting marginal gains of around 0.40 per cent on the MCX to close near ₹ 1,58,670 per 10 grams," Jateen Trivedi, VP Re-

search Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

The week witnessed sharp profit booking in crude oil, with prices correcting nearly 7 per cent from higher levels, easing some inflation concerns globally, he added.

"At the same time, the rupee recovered from weaker levels of 97 against the US dollar to strengthen near 95.70, which limited upside momentum in domestic gold prices despite stable international bullion trends," Trivedi said.

In the international markets, Comex gold futures slipped 1 per cent to end the week at USD 4,523.2 per ounce, while silver fell nearly 2 per cent to close at USD 76.20 per ounce. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

BJP cliches Bengal's

for giving a "resounding mandate" to BJP candidate Debangshu Panda and noted that he had appealed for a victory margin of one lakh votes, a target that had been crossed.

Promising to repay the "debt through development" and build a "golden Falta", he launched a sharp attack on the TMC, alleging that the party, while in power, had transformed itself into a "mafia company" that abused state machinery, looted public funds and fostered a culture of syndicates and intimidation.

Without naming anyone directly, Adhikari referred to a "fraudster who parachuted in and claimed the title of commander", alleging that democracy had been throttled and asserting that the previous election had been reduced to a "farce".

He was apparently referring to TMC general secretary and Diamond Harbour MP Abhishek Banerjee.

Claiming that Falta voters had regained the freedom to vote independently after 15 years, Adhikari said the "reality has come to light", and asserted that "this was just the beginning" of what he called a wider political rejection of the TMC.

He further claimed that in future elections, the TMC leadership could face a battle even against "NOTA", arguing that the people of West Bengal were waiting to witness such a contest unfold.

After the result, Panda said, "People have been able to cast their vote freely and fairly. I want to thank the people of Falta for the victory."

The result also cast a shadow over what the TMC had long projected as the politically impregnable "Diamond Harbour model", as the BJP sought to convert a local repoll into a larger political message.

The scale of the BJP's victory transformed what was expected to be a straightforward electoral exercise into a politically loaded outcome carrying significance far beyond the constituency.

Until a few weeks ago, Falta had been described by TMC leaders as one of the symbols of the party's organisational dominance in the Diamond Harbour belt. The constituency witnessed aggressive political mobilisation and became central to a bitter face-off between the BJP and TMC.

Khan, who cultivated a larger-than-life "Pushpa"-style persona during the campaign and emerged as one of the most recognisable faces of the contest, dramatically announced two days before polling that he was stepping aside "for Falta's interest".

The constituency saw little sign of an active TMC campaign during the repoll. Party offices largely remained inactive, and Khan himself stayed away from public view.

Residents said that on polling day, his residence remained locked and local party workers were conspicuous by their absence.

The BJP sharpened its attack and repeatedly claimed that the repoll would reveal what a "free election" in Falta looked like.

A close confidant of Abhishek Banerjee, Khan had delivered a lead of over one lakh votes from the Falta assembly segment to the TMC general secretary during the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

The Assembly constituency had become the centre of controversy after the April 29 polling when complaints surfaced over alleged use of perfume-like substances, ink marks and adhesive tapes on EVMs at multiple booths.

The Election Commission ordered a repoll in all 285 booths on May 21, held under an unprecedented security blanket. (PTI)

Assam tea estate

and exposed brick finishes inspired by the surrounding landscape. Khemka said visitors can participate in tea blending and tasting sessions, observe tea processing through viewing galleries and take vehicle rides across estate routes. The estate's restaurant, Steep House, also serves tea-infused food and beverages prepared using ingredients sourced from its kitchen garden. "We wanted to open up tea to the world and allow people to experience tea at the source, not just consume it as a packaged product," Khemka said.

"Most consumers know tea only as a daily beverage. Very few understand the journey from garden to cup. Tea as an industry has traditionally focused more on production than consumer engagement, and we felt there was a need to bridge that gap," he said.

Industry observers said tea tourism and experiential consumption have been gaining traction globally, particularly in premium beverage segments where origin, wellness and lifestyle value increasingly influence consumer choices. Experiential tea tourism could help create greater appreciation for orthodox and speciality teas, especially among younger urban consumers increasingly drawn towards the cafe culture and premium coffee experiences, they said. Khemka said formats such as 'matcha' and 'bubble tea' have demonstrated globally that tea can evolve beyond traditional consumption patterns while retaining its cultural roots.

"Through curated experiences, we see that when young consumers go beyond 'chai' and experience tea at the source, their understanding becomes much deeper from how it is grown and made to its flavours and craftsmanship. This often changes how they see tea," he said. Khemka added that wellness-oriented blends and speciality teas are also finding favour among health-conscious younger consumers.

Since 2016, the estate has diversified from conventional CTC tea into orthodox whole-leaf varieties, reflecting a broader industry shift towards premium and speciality teas.

India is the world's second-largest tea producer and third-largest exporter, contributing nearly 19 per cent of global tea output. However, organised tea estates continue to face pressure from shrinking margins, rising labour and input costs, and weather volatility. (PTI)

Banned codeine-based

seized 30,000 bottles of illicit Codeine syrup at Gossaigaon and apprehended the driver," it said. "HCM Dr. @himantabiswa has applauded the operational team for their sharp vigilance," the CMO added. Codeine is strictly regulated in India. Over-the-counter sales of codeine-based medicines are prohibited, and possessing, manufacturing or selling them without a valid medical licence is illegal under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act. (PTI)

Assam Police busts

Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the Explosive Substances Act and the Arms Act in connection with Tinsukia PS Case Nos. 98/2026 and 110/2026. (PTI)

Garima Saikia Garg

the singer should be remembered for eternity. Several musicians associated with the Jantra band and who had worked closely with Zubeen Garg were present during the tribute programme.

India, US signal

Two, we support safe and unimpeded maritime commerce," Jaishankar said. "Three, we demand scrupulous respect for international law. Four, we are against the weaponisation of market shares and resources. And five, we believe in the value of trusted partnerships and resilient supply chains to de-risk the global economy," he said. In the talks, Jaishankar forcefully mentioned about how the West Asia crisis has significantly hit India's energy security and brought economic woes, people familiar with the matter said.

The external affairs minister also underlined the importance for India to have multiple sources of energy, emphasising that the energy market should not be "distorted".

"The way we will deal with the current situation in Hormuz and frankly, going forward as well, is to diversify our energy sources, because that is at the heart of our energy security, and that is why we feel strongly that the energy market should not be distorted, should not be constrained. "It is important to keep energy prices down for global growth," he said. Jaishankar said India is one of the very few countries that have very good relations with the United States, Israel, Iran and the Gulf countries.

"So we have real interest there. For us, the challenge in this situation is how to maintain all these relationships, how to protect our equities, how to advance our interests. We don't look at it as a zero-sum game," he said. "We have to manage and take care of all these accounts. I would say there are some general principles by which we would approach this region. "Obviously, we want peace and stability in the region," he said.

The external affairs minister said India is very much in favour of safe and unimpeded maritime commerce in the Strait of Hormuz. (PTI)

Yoga becoming global

of life to ensure Yoga remains relevant across age groups, including geriatric care and mental wellness," the official said. Emphasising that the ministry wants yoga to evolve into a sustained public movement rather than remain limited to an annual observance, Kotecha said the government is promoting a "Yoga 365" approach to encourage daily practice. "Through the 'Yoga 365' approach, we are promoting regular Yoga practice in schools, colleges, workplaces, villages, and community institutions," he said.

Grassroots outreach is being strengthened through Panchayats, wellness centres, youth organisations, NGOs, and certified yoga volunteers. At the same time, digital platforms, awareness campaigns, and community-led initiatives are helping deepen participation across age groups, Kotecha said.

"Our emphasis is not only on increasing participation numbers, but also on encouraging long-term behavioural change and preventive healthcare through daily Yoga practice," he added.

The official said the ministry is also exploring digital platforms and AI-enabled wellness tools to make yoga more accessible, personalised, and data-driven in the coming years.

On measuring Yoga's public health impact more than a decade after the United Nations recognised International Day of Yoga in 2014, he said the ministry tracks indicators such as participation levels, institutional adoption, research output, healthcare integration and health outcomes linked to lifestyle disorders and mental wellness.

Research studies conducted by institutions, including the Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy, have shown positive outcomes of yoga in stress reduction, diabetes management, cardiovascular health, and overall well-being, he said.

"Over the next five years, the ministry aims to deepen yoga's integration into preventive healthcare, strengthen scientific research, expand access to certified Yoga professionals, and encourage sustained daily practice through initiatives like 'Yoga 365'," Kotecha said.

With the rapid expansion of yoga institutes and instructors across the country and abroad, the secretary said ensuring standardisation and quality control remains a priority. (PTI)

Khadse urges sportspersons

with IIT, Guwahati. The 75th edition of 'Fit India Sundays on Cycle' formed part of one of the nationwide celebrations promoting fitness and sports participation.

Khadse was joined by Olympians and Commonwealth Games medallists archer Jayanta Talukdar and judoka Sushila Devi Likmabam, and director of IIT-Guwahati Devendra Jalihaal, among others.

Addressing the gathering, Khadse emphasised the importance of such initiatives in building a sports-loving and fitness-conscious nation.

She expressed confidence in India's preparedness and capability to host a world-class Commonwealth Games in 2030. (PTI)

NAME CORRECTION

Army No.14632577-F Rank: EX. NAIK Name: PRAKASH SINGHA, age about 49 years and resident of Vill. South Baluhandar, P.O. Laskar Pathar, P.S. Hojai, Dist. Hojai, Assam, Pin-782446, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare via an affidavit executed before Executive Magistrate, West-Karbianglong, Hamren on February 9, 2026, that my both son's actual and correct name is POWNA MEETEI and PREM SINGHA which is mentioned in their Aadhar Card, Pan Card, School certificates and all other relevant documents, but in army records their name is inadvertently recorded as M. POWNA MEETEI and M. PREM SINGHA. I declare that both are Son of Army No. 14632577-F Rank: EX. NAIK Name: PRAKASH SINGHA and BIBI DEVI are one and same person having same identity and entity.

D Raja and Rama Krushna Panda to address sessions on terrorism, peace and global solidarity

CPI delegation leaves for Russia Anti-Terror Forum

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 24: A two-member delegation of the Communist Party of India (CPI), led by General Secretary D Raja and National Secretary and Head of the CPI International Department Rama Krushna Panda is visiting Moscow, Russia, from May 23 to 27 to participate in the International Anti-Terrorist Forum.

The forum is deliberating on the theme, "The Struggle against International Terrorism, Arbitrariness and Aggression: For Peace and Security", bringing together progressive, Left and anti-imperialist forces from across the world.

Comrade D Raja will address the first session on "Imperialism and International Terrorism in the 21st Century: Causes, Goals,



Methods", while Comrade Rama Krushna Panda will address the second session on "Solidarity in the Struggle against International

Terrorism and its Manifestations: The Role of the Progressive Forces of the Left".

The CPI delegation will interact

with progressive leaders, communist and workers' parties, peace activists and anti-imperialist forces from different countries.

The delegation will also hold bilateral discussions with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation on issues of mutual concern, international developments, peace, democracy and strengthening solidarity among progressive forces globally.

The CPI reiterated its firm commitment to the struggle against terrorism, imperialist aggression, war and divisive politics and called for greater international unity in defence of peace, sovereignty and people's rights, as received from Kanak Gogoi, Secretary of the Assam State unit of the CPI.

NFR GM inspects electrification and NJP redevelopment works



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 24: Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), carried out a comprehensive inspection of the ongoing electrification works in the Araria-Galgolia section on Friday, along with a review of redevelopment and upgradation works at New Jalpaiguri (NJP) station. He was accompanied by senior officials from the NFR Headquarters and Katihar Division during the inspection programme.

During the visit, the General Manager inaugurated the newly developed Boot Laundry facility at

Rautara under Katihar Division to enhance maintenance and cleaning arrangements for railway staff equipment and operational gear. Shrivastava also participated in a plantation drive by planting saplings, reaffirming NFR's commitment towards environmental sustainability and the promotion of green initiatives across railway premises.

The General Manager reviewed the progress of electrification works aimed at enhancing operational efficiency, facilitating seamless electric train operations and promoting energy-efficient railway infrastructure in the Araria-Gal-

galia section. He also undertook a window trailing inspection to assess track conditions, signalling systems, bridges, level crossing gates and passenger amenities along the route.

At New Jalpaiguri (NJP), Shrivastava conducted a detailed inspection of the ongoing station redevelopment works under the World Class Station project. NJP is being transformed into a world-class station and international terminus with modern facilities, state-of-the-art platforms, enhanced passenger amenities and improved circulating areas. He also reviewed redevelopment initiatives being undertaken under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme aimed at creating a modern, efficient and future-ready travel hub for passengers.

The General Manager emphasised the timely completion of all ongoing projects while maintaining the highest standards of quality, safety and operational excellence. He appreciated the dedicated efforts and professionalism of railway officials and staff in ensuring continuous modernisation, infrastructure development and safe, reliable and passenger-friendly railway services across the zone.

Borghat bypass road mishap

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 24: Nagaon Police on Sunday arrested the driver of a dumper truck involved in a fatal road accident on the Borghat bypass in Nagaon on Saturday's afternoon. A horrific accident occurred on the Borghat bypass on Friday afternoon when a speeding dumper truck rammed into a two-wheeler, killing two people, a husband and wife. The deceased have been identified as Kabita Ingtipi, 32 and Mayaram Singnar, 35 from Boipani village, Anjukpani, Karbi Anglong district. Kabita Ingtipi died on the spot. Her husband, who was critically injured, died last night while being shifted to Guwahati for advanced treatment. Their 6-month-old child sustained minor injuries in the crash. The driver of the dumper, Nur Ahmed, a resident of Bheleoguri, Doboka has been arrested by police. The incident has caused widespread shock in the area. Notably, the couple met with the accident while returning after visiting their six-year-old son at Rangolu Plan Karbi Mission English School in Rangolu, Nagaon, where he studies.

ANSS executive meeting held at Panpur

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 24: The 8th executive meeting of the Sonitpur district committee of the Assam Nepali Sahitya Sabha (ANSS) was held at Hakama, Panpur in the southern part of Jamugurihat on Sunday with Anil Gautam, president of the district committee of the literary body, in the chair. The executive meeting was held in collaboration with the Dakshin Jamuguri branch of the district committee. Dr Chintia Mani Sharma, president of the central committee of ANSS, unveiled 'Panash', the mouthpiece of the district committee. Mahim Acharya, secretary of the district committee, conducted the proceedings. The programme began with the hoisting of the institutional flag in the morning. A series of organisational resolutions were adopted in the meeting.

Two schoolgirls drown in Kokrajhar, two held

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 24: Two schoolgirls drowned in a pond near Lalkura Tea Estate at Dholmara in Kokrajhar district, police said. The bodies of the two girls were later recovered from the pond.

Two persons have so far been arrested in connection with the incident following a thorough investigation.

The incident took place on Thursday at Lalkura Tea Estate near Dholmara under Salakati police outpost in Kokrajhar district.

Addressing reporters at a press conference held at the conference hall of the SP office on Sunday, SSP Kokrajhar Akshat Garg said that the two girls had gone missing since 10.30 AM while returning home from school. He said the girls drowned in a nearby pond from where their bodies were recovered later in the day.

SSP Garg said that according to



the preliminary post-mortem report, no injury marks were found on the bodies of the two students. He also said that no injuries were found on the private parts of the victims.

He added that the lungs were enlarged and had increased in weight, indicating that the two girls died due to drowning. Police have registered a case (No. 71/26) in connection with the incident.

According to police, local residents had long been requesting that

the pond be fenced or filled up.

Police arrested two persons from the area in connection with the incident. They were identified as Golam Mustafa, manager of the tea estate and his associate Ejahan Ali. Due to alleged negligence in ignoring those requests, the tea garden manager and his associate were arrested and sent to judicial custody. Police have also appealed to the public not to spread false news or misinformation regarding the incident.

Karbi Film Fraternity meets in Diphu to chart future of regional cinema



HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 24: In a major push to revitalise regional cinema, the Karbi Film Society (KFS) successfully organised a special "Get Together with the Karbi Film Fraternity" programme on Saturday. The landmark event took place at the iconic Rangina Sarpoo Cultural Hall, located within the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) complex at Taralungso, Diphu.

The grand gathering served as a dynamic platform for local creatives, bringing together an array of filmmakers, actors, directors,

producers, technicians and cultural enthusiasts. The core objective of the initiative was to foster collaboration, strengthen mutual unity and map out a strategic roadmap for the future growth of the Karbi film industry.

Throughout the session, participants engaged in vibrant interactions and exchanged critical ideas regarding the challenges and opportunities facing local cinema. A central theme of the discussions was the powerful role cinema plays as a tool for cultural preservation. Attendees strongly emphasised that collective, structured efforts are vital to safeguarding and promoting the Karbi language, traditions and unique identity through films and creative media.

Crucially, the fraternity highlighted the pressing need to nurture the next generation of storytellers. The gathering called for robust support systems to encourage young, upcoming talents and argued for the creation of better opportunities and infrastructure to elevate regional cinema across Karbi Anglong. The high-profile event was graced by Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) General Secretary Sunil Tokbi, who attended as the chief guest. He was accompanied by KCS Secretary in-charge of Publicity Hingchong Tisso and Office Secretary Longmukrang Terang. The event also saw a significant turnout of veteran actors, directors, producers and key production dignitaries, all pledging their commitment to taking Karbi cinema to new heights.

KKHSOU learners shine at WFFYS Assam Yogasana Championship

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 24: Learners of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Guwahati, achieved remarkable success at the 4th WFFYS Assam State Yogasana Sports Championship 2026 held at Sivasagar, Assam.

In the Traditional Yogasana event under the 23-26 years age category, Sahin Sultana se-

secured 3rd position and won the Bronze Medal. Owing to her outstanding performance, she was also selected for the upcoming National Championship, bringing pride to the university and the state. Another KKHSOU learner, Murchana Gogoi of Sivasagar, also delivered an impressive performance and secured the 5th position in the same category.

The championship was organised under the

aegis of the World Federation for Yoga Sports (WFFYS) and witnessed participation from talented yogasana athletes across Assam.

The achievement of the KKHSOU learners reflects the growing excellence of the university in the field of yogasana and sports activities. University officials and faculty members congratulated both participants for their dedication and success.

Initiative launched to document historic cities of Northeast

Heritage project to cover seven cities and associated cultural sites across the region

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 24: An initiative has been undertaken for the comprehensive documentation of seven historically significant cities of Northeast India and their associated heritage sites under the aegis of the Northeast Zone of ICOMOS India.

The initiative seeks to preserve the region's historical, cultural, archaeological and religious heritage while fostering public awareness. Titled "Historic Cities Series (2026-2028)", the project aims to conserve, study and present the multidimensional heritage of the region for posterity and on the global stage. The series is a nationally supported undertaking led by Dronah Foundation, National Institute of Urban Affairs and ICOMOS India.

The Northeast Indian cities included in this initiative are Agartala, Pragjyotishpur (Guwahati), Hajo, Imphal, Jowai, Shillong and Tezpur. The documentation will encompass temples, mosques, churches, archaeological sites, historic buildings, sattras, monuments, caves, sacred groves, cultural traditions and other sites of outstanding her-



itage significance. Notable heritage sites covered under the initiative include Ujjayanta Palace in Agartala; the Kamakhya Temple Complex and Ambari Archaeological Site in Guwahati;

Hayagriva Madhava Temple and Powa Mecca in Hajo; Kongla Fort in Imphal; the Nartiang Monoliths in Jowai; the sacred groves and cave systems of Shillong; and Da-Parbatia Gate and Bamuni Hills in

Tezpur.

Furthermore, living cultural heritage such as the bell-metal craft tradition of Hajo and the wild-rice biodiversity heritage site at Borjuli near Tezpur have been accorded special emphasis under the initiative.

This documentation exercise is expected to play a pivotal role in heritage conservation, cultural tourism, academic research and community-based stewardship of heritage in the future.

Heritage researchers, cultural enthusiasts and local communities have welcomed the initiative, expressing optimism that numerous historic sites of Northeast India will receive greater national and international recognition in the years ahead.

The works for the seven cities will be co-ordinated respectively by M K Pragya Dev Barman (Agartala), Jayanta Sharma (Guwahati), Dr (Prof) Hari Prasad Agarwal (Hajo), Dr Homen Thangjam (Imphal), Ar Ibynta Bakmen Tiwsoh (Jowai), Er Karpagam Bala (Shillong) and Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti (Tezpur), stated a press note issued by ICOMOS.

Army recruitment CEE 2026 to be held from June 1

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 24: As informed by the Recruiting Office (Headquarters), Shillong, Meghalaya, the All India Online Common Entrance Examination (CEE) for recruitment of Agniveers and JCOs/OR in the Indian Army for the year 2026 is scheduled to be held from June 1 to 12, 2026.

The admit cards for candidates appearing in the online CEE have already been uploaded on the official website of the Indian Army, www.joinindianarmy.nic.in. All registered candidates have been advised to download and take a print-out of their admit cards before May 29, 2026. Candidates will be permitted to appear in the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) only on production of the admit card.

For further information, candidates from the four districts of Central Assam — Nagaon, Morigaon, Sonitpur and Biswanath — may contact the Recruiting Office (HQ), Shillong, at telephone number 0364-2504177 or through email at rohqshillong@gmail.com.

Adivasi community meritorious students felicitated

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, May 24: Under the patronage of the All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA), Demow Regional Committee, a special felicitation programme was organised at the auditorium of Demow College on Sunday, where meritorious students of the Adivasi community from the Demow area who passed the recently declared HSLC and HS Final examinations with first division were felicitated.

A meeting was organised at the auditorium of Demow College on Sunday with Lalit Tanti, president of AASAA, Demow Regional Committee, in the chair. Bitu Tanti, an AASAA leader, anchored the programme. A total of 84 meritorious students from the Adivasi community were felicitated with citations.

Among those present in the programme were Krishna Koiri, a social worker; Uday Dutta, Headmaster of Demow Girls High School; Gauranga Chaura, an educationist; Dr Pranjal Bezboruah, Chief Adviser of the Managing Committee of Science Academy, Demow; Junaki Pandav, leader of the AASAA Sivasagar District Committee; representatives of AASU, AJYCP, ATASU and AYM; Diganta Barua, a lyricist and composer and members of the Demow Press Club.

Donak Natya Vidyalaya student wins Central Young Artist Scholarship

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, May 24: Akankshita Mahanta, a student of Donak Natya Vidyalaya in Mangaldai, has been selected for the prestigious Central Young Artist Scholarship in the Theatre category.

Akankshita, a student of the Guwahati Uzanbazar branch of the institute, secured her place in the final list of successful candidates for the 2025-26 session, announced by the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, on May 22.

She received her theatre training under the guidance of noted theatre artist and Principal of Donak Natya Vidyalaya, Rituparna Kalita.

Her achievement has brought immense joy to theatre enthusiasts across Darrang district. The success further highlights the consistent excellence of Donak Natya Vidyalaya, which has been producing talented young artists year after year.

Notably, in the previous year, out of the five young theatre artists selected from Assam for the scholarship, three were students of Donak Natya Vidyalaya.

For over two decades, Rituparna Kalita has been imparting systematic training in acting and theatre through Donak Natya Vidyalaya, nurturing a new generation of emerging artists.

Sivasagar Govt HS School alumni observe Kancha's adyashrarddha

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 24: The adyashrarddha of Sudarsan Chetri, lovingly called 'Kancha', the poor food vendor who migrated from his native village in faraway Nepal during his childhood and spent his entire life selling betelnut, fried pulses, mixtures and ghugni to thousands of students of Sivasagar Government HS School from his makeshift shed in front of Sivasagar Natya Mandir, was observed with utmost solemnity by the alumni students of the school, cutting across religious and other divisions.

Kancha, who was loved by one and all in the town, died of age-related ailments on May 15. Pabitra Bora, Rupak Bhunya, Partha Pradip Bora, Raja Borthakur, Sarat Hazarika, Bakul Bijay Chutia, Brazil Chutia and a host of former students took the initiative to bid a heartfelt farewell to their beloved Kancha and paid glowing tributes to the deceased at a memorial meeting held on the occasion.

The generous gesture of the alumni students in remembering a poor homeless person with dignity has been widely appreciated by the people.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

'Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.' - Winston Churchill

Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo

The Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo has been declared to be an international public health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO). It is much more than a timely medical alert. It is a call to seal "viral frontiers". The epidemic in fragile states are no longer local tragedies. This is an age of migration, conflict, informal economies and porous borders. Aided by these factors, public health failures travel faster than the government can respond. Ebola is a rare but severe and often fatal viral illness. It causes hemorrhagic fever, intense inflammation and organ failure. Average fatality rate is 50 per cent. But past outbreaks have seen death rates range between 25 per cent to 90 per cent. Its symptoms can range from sudden fever to fatigue, malaise, muscle pain, headache and sore throat. It is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, rash and symptoms of impaired kidney and liver functions. The geography through which Ebola is spreading now is troubling. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda are currently experiencing an Ebola outbreak. The affected regions sit at the intersection of armed conflict, mining economies, weak governance and mass population movement. These are the conditions in which containment becomes difficult.

Delayed detection becomes deadly. Epidemiology becomes geopolitical, once a virus enters urban corridors or transit routes. The outbreak also exposes the uneven global architecture of healthcare preparedness. During the Covid-19 pandemic, wealthy nations promised to strengthen international disease surveillance. They also pledged to invest in a resilient health system in poorer countries. But much of the urgency evaporated once the immediate emergency passed. Africa's health infrastructure remains chronically underfunded, overstretched and heavily dependent on external agencies for crisis response. The consequences are now visible again. The situation of the outbreak faces a challenge of medication as this strain of ebola lacks approved vaccines or targeted treatments. That transforms what could have been a regional flare-up into a race against time. Even more worrying is the uncertainty surrounding the actual number of infections. Epidemics become dangerous when the virus outran the data. Moreover, it is a mistake to treat outbreaks in conflict-prone African regions as humanitarian problems rather than strategic ones.

Any infectious disease today is inseparable from national security, migration management, trade stability and global economic continuity. The Covid era demonstrated how quickly local outbreaks can destabilise supply chains, political systems and public trust across continents. The lesson which was supposed to have changed global priorities was not learnt as the world reverted to complacency. Ebola is not Covid-19. But that should not encourage indifference. The WHO declaration is a pointer that the window for containment still exists but it may not remain open for long. The world has entered an era in which climate pressures, conflict zones, collapsing healthcare systems and human mobility increasingly overlap. Future epidemics will emerge from these fault lines. The international system must respond before a crisis turns into a catastrophe.

Tricho Cards: A smart, Eco-friendly tool for natural pest management



By: Mowsam Hazarika

In the face of rising concerns over excessive pesticide use, environmental degradation, and increasing resistance among crop pests, sustainable alternatives are becoming essential for modern agriculture. One such effective and nature-based solution is the use of Tricho Cards—small cards carrying beneficial insects that offer big protection to crops.

Tricho Cards contain Trichogramma species, tiny parasitic wasps that play a crucial role in biological pest control. These insects are known as egg parasitoids, meaning they lay their eggs inside the eggs of harmful crop pests. As a result, the pest eggs are destroyed before they can hatch, effectively breaking the pest life cycle at its earliest stage. This method not only reduces pest populations but also minimizes the need for chemical interventions.

The use of Tricho Cards offers several advantages. They are eco-friendly and safe for humans, animals, and the environment. Unlike chemical pesticides, they do not leave harmful residues on crops or in the soil. By naturally controlling pest populations, they help reduce crop damage and contribute to higher yields. Additionally, Tricho Cards are cost-effective and easy to use, making them accessible to farmers across different scales. Their compatibility with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and organic farming practices further enhances their relevance in sustainable agriculture.

Proper installation of Tricho Cards is key to achieving the best results. The cards should be taken out of their protective pouch just before use and handled carefully. They are then hung in the crop field using the string provided, preferably at the mid-canopy level—avoiding placement that is too low or too high. Maintaining a spacing of about 10 to 15 meters between cards ensures effective coverage across the field. For optimal performance, it is recommended to install the cards during the morning or evening hours. Farmers should also avoid spraying insecticides before or after installation, as this can harm the beneficial insects. To maintain continuous protection, the cards should be replaced every 7 to 10 days.

Tricho Cards are particularly effective against a wide range of lepidopteran pests that attack various crops. These include stem borers such as Chilo partellus and Scirpophaga species, leaf folders like Cnaphalocrocis medinalis, and destructive caterpillars such as Spodoptera litura and Helicoverpa armigera. They are also useful in controlling shoot and fruit borers, along with other similar pest species. By targeting the egg stage of these pests, Trichogramma ensures early and efficient pest suppression.

To ensure effectiveness, certain precautions must be followed. The cards should be stored in a cool place away from direct sunlight and used within their expiry period. Careful handling is important to maintain the viability of the beneficial insects. Above all, Tricho Cards should be used as part of a broader IPM strategy, combining biological, cultural, and mechanical practices for holistic pest management.

In conclusion, Tricho Cards represent a simple yet powerful innovation in sustainable agriculture. By harnessing the power of beneficial insects, they provide an environmentally responsible alternative to chemical pesticides. As farmers increasingly move towards safer and more sustainable practices, Tricho Cards stand out as tiny protectors working quietly towards a healthier and more productive future.

Industrialisation of Assam: Possibilities and challenges

A vast potential for industrial development lies hidden in Assam, and its proper utilisation can transform the economic landscape of the state and elevate the standard of living of its millions of people to a new height. This geographical region is enriched with abundant natural resources and diversity, which provide a favourable foundation for industrial development. Fertile land, abundance of water, huge reserves of mineral resources, and immense biodiversity have empowered Assam to emerge as a natural industrial hub. Since the past, Assam has been known for its oil, gas, tea, and timber industries, all of which have played a significant role in the economy of the state. However, in today's age of globalisation, dependence only on these limited industrial sectors will not be sufficient. For sustainable and comprehensive development, it is extremely necessary to open the doors to new industries and modernise the existing ones. Industrialisation is an indispensable instrument for improving the quality of life of the people and creating employment opportunities for the younger generation, through which economic self-reliance can become possible. Therefore, a deep and thoughtful analysis of all the possibilities and challenges lying in the path of Assam's industrialisation is highly necessary in the present time, as it will help determine the future direction of the state. Through such analysis, policy makers will be able to take far-sighted and effective decisions.

Among the industrial possibilities of Assam, the role of agro-based industries must be given the highest importance, because a large part of the state's economy is still dependent on agriculture. The full potential of this sector can be utilised only by going beyond traditional crop production and adopting modern technology and quality processing to add value to agricultural products. Assam is a leading producer of rice, tea, jute, fruits, and vegetables. If these agricultural products are processed and transformed into high-quality food products, beverages, textiles, and other practical goods, there is a strong possibility of gaining access to larger markets. For example, the tea industry carries a long and glorious history, but instead of producing only ordinary tea leaves, greater emphasis on organic tea, specialty aromatic tea, and tea-based products can significantly expand its market size and profitability. In this regard, the development of advanced cold storage facilities and transportation systems is extremely necessary, so that agricultural products can be preserved for a long time without getting spoiled and supplied to markets on time. Industries based on the production of organic energy and related products from agricultural waste can also open a new horizon, which will not only be economically profitable but also environmentally sustainable. Likewise, the bamboo and cane industry also represents an important part of Assam's identity. If these natural resources are transformed into high-quality furniture, decorative items, and construction materials with the help of modern design and technology instead of merely producing traditional products, a huge demand can emerge in domestic and international markets. With the help of new technology, bamboo can be used as a strong alternative to timber, which can bring a revolution in the construction industry. These industries can play a decisive role in strengthening the rural economy and generating employment, because they generally develop as small and medium-scale industries and depend heavily on local labour. If the government provides as-

sistance in training, financial support, and market linkage, the growth of these industries will accelerate significantly. Assam's traditional handicraft and textile industries, especially muga and pat silk fabrics, also occupy a special place in the global market. Their market reach can be expanded further through modern design, quality control, and digital marketing.

Assam is also immensely rich in mineral resources. Petroleum, natural gas, and coal form the backbone of the state's economy. Through proper and environmentally responsible extraction and refining of these resources, there is enormous potential for the development of related industries. Gas-based industries such as petrochemicals, fertilisers, and power generation industries can be established not only to meet the demands of the state but also to supply other states. Products generated from petrochemical industries can support the development of a chain of ancillary industries producing plastics, rubber, and other chemical products, which can provide employment opportunities to a large number of people. Auxiliary industries related to these minerals, such as pipeline construction, repair works, and associated services, can also create substantial employment. However, these resources must be utilised very carefully and with minimal impact on the environment, especially through the use of advanced technologies in mineral extraction to keep pollution levels under control. Alongside the proper utilisation of resources, technological modernisation and innovative thinking alone can ensure the long-term success of these industries.

Industrialisation occupies a special place as a decisive component of Assam's economic progress, and in this field, the state's water resources and biodiversity can form the basis of a new kind of industrialisation. The abundance of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries carries immense potential for hydroelectric power generation. Reducing dependence on conventional thermal power and increasing the use of renewable energy sources like hydropower can provide industries with uninterrupted and low-cost energy supply. Existing industries often face the problem of rising production costs due to high energy expenses. The availability of affordable and environmentally friendly energy can encourage large industries to invest in Assam, enabling the state to emerge as an energy-rich industrial centre. Abundant energy resources can particularly benefit energy-intensive industries such as metal production, chemicals, and medium-scale industries. The proper utilisation of water resources should not remain confined only to electricity generation, but should also play an important role in improving water transport infrastructure. If inland waterways and international water routes are properly connected, transportation costs can be reduced significantly, enabling industries of the Brahmaputra Valley to supply products to global markets with greater ease.

Assam also possesses unparalleled potential for the development of biotechnology industries. The state is a unique reservoir of biodiversity, where many rare medicinal plants and species are found. By using these natural resources through modern biotechnology, it is possible to produce new medicines, cosmetic products, health supplements, and other high-value goods. This requires greater investment in research and development, along with encouragement for universities and research institutions to collaborate closely with

industries. Biotechnology-based industries not only generate high value addition but are also more environmentally conscious and respectful towards the traditional knowledge of local communities. These industries can create new and high-quality employment opportunities for the educated youth of Assam. If proper attention is given to this sector, Assam can secure a special place on the biotechnology map of India, where knowledge and innovation will function as the principal driving forces.

Despite these possibilities, Assam faces several significant challenges on the path of industrialisation, and without overcoming them, it will not be possible to realise the state's full potential. Among these, the most important challenge is weak infrastructure. Unless communication systems, especially roadways, railways, and water transport infrastructure, are improved, industries will continue to face major difficulties in production and distribution. If products cannot be transported to markets on time and at low cost, production expenses increase, causing Assam's industries to lag behind industries of other states in competition. Due to its geographical distance from the central regions of the country, the absence of efficient transportation systems significantly increases the price of manufactured goods. Furthermore, the lack of quality electricity supply and advanced communication systems also creates obstacles in establishing new industries. Smooth and cost-effective communication and transportation systems are essential for industrial success, and greater government investment in this sector is urgently needed. The development of roads, bridges, railway connectivity, and logistics hubs is a prerequisite for industrial growth.

Another major challenge is the shortage of capital and the reluctance of investors. Since Assam is geographically distant from the country's central regions, large industrialists often hesitate to invest in the area. High transportation costs, uncertain markets, and earlier perceptions of political instability create a sense of fear regarding large-scale investments. Moreover, local entrepreneurs also face difficulties in arranging the required capital and obtaining loans from banks, because financial institutions themselves often remain hesitant to provide credit in this region. To solve this problem, it is absolutely necessary for the government to formulate investor-friendly policies, provide special incentives and financial support, and create a secure and convenient business environment for investors. Financial institutions must also introduce special loan schemes and financial assistance for local entrepreneurs, with more flexible collateral policies. Only the availability and efficient utilisation of capital can open the doors for new industries and assist in the modernisation of existing ones.

The lack of skilled human resources is another major challenge in industrial development. There is a visible shortage of skilled workers, technical experts, and managers capable of meeting the needs of present-day industries. It is extremely necessary to align the education system with industrial requirements and place greater emphasis on vocational training. The younger generation must not be equipped only with book-based knowledge but also with technical and professional skills, so that they can easily find positions in industries and contribute to productivity. This problem can be solved only if universities and technical institutions work closely with industries to modernise their curricula. Industries must also provide regular training to employees so that they can adapt themselves to new technologies and methods. Only a skilled workforce can guide industries towards high-quality production and innovation.

Despite all these challenges, the industrial future of Assam remains bright. Through col-

lective efforts by the government and the people, along with proper policies and effective planning, overcoming these challenges is not impossible. The present "Act East" policy has provided Assam with a huge opportunity to emerge as a central hub of trade and industry with Southeast Asian countries. Geographically, Assam stands at the gateway to India's eastern region, opening access to international markets. To utilise this advantage properly, it is necessary to develop infrastructure suitable for international trade, such as modern ports, road connectivity, and border trade centres. Greater trade and cultural exchange with these countries will create new markets for Assam's products and infuse fresh momentum into its economy. Assam possesses immense potential to become a logistics hub for importing products manufactured in Southeast Asia into India and exporting Indian products to those countries.

The tourism industry can also become an important pillar of Assam's industrial development. The state's enchanting natural beauty, diverse wildlife, and rich cultural history have made Assam an attractive tourist destination. By improving tourism infrastructure, enhancing service standards, and developing specialised tourism sectors, this industry can create vast employment opportunities. Greater emphasis on sectors such as river tourism, wildlife tourism, tea garden tourism, and health tourism can attract a larger number of visitors. Ancillary industries connected to tourism, such as handicrafts, food processing, and transport services, will also flourish. In addition, Assam has significant potential for the growth of information technology and service industries. The number of educated and skilled youths is increasing, and with proper training they can be employed in these high-technology industries. Through government patronage and policy support, these service sectors can be encouraged, bringing qualitative transformation to the state's economy.

Beyond all these aspects, another major social challenge associated with industrialisation is the protection of local interests and the environment. Industrial development should not remain confined only to economic gains, but must work for the welfare of society as a whole. Strict supervision and regulations are required to ensure that industries do not negatively affect the cultural life, livelihood, and environment of local people. Industries must be encouraged to increase their social responsibility and participate in the development of local communities. It is extremely necessary to make the use of modern green technologies mandatory and place greater importance on pollution control for environmental protection. Only by implementing the concept of sustainable industrialisation can both Assam's natural resources and the quality of life of its people remain protected. A socially sustainable model of development will become possible only when local people are made stakeholders in industrial projects and are guaranteed fair compensation for their land and assured employment opportunities. This thoughtful journey alone can transform the hopes and dreams of millions of people of Assam into reality.

Overall, industrialisation in Assam is a complex yet hopeful journey, whose success requires a strong bond of cooperation among the government, entrepreneurs, and the people. If the government gives importance to improving power and communication infrastructure, creating an investment-friendly environment, and focusing on skill development, Assam can emerge in the near future as a powerful industrial force in eastern India. As a result of this development, not only will the state's economy grow, but the standard of living of every citizen residing here will also attain a new dimension, and Assam will shine as a prosperous and self-reliant state.

NEET-UG Crisis: Is decentralisation the answer?

By: Dr Vijay Garg

In India, the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET-UG) has become one of the most significant examinations for students aspiring to enter the medical profession. Introduced with the aim of creating a single, transparent, and merit-based system for admission to medical colleges across the country, NEET-UG replaced multiple state-level and private entrance examinations. The idea was simple: "One Nation, One Medical Entrance Test." While the system brought uniformity and reduced the burden of appearing in numerous examinations, the debate over whether NEET-UG should remain centralized or be decentralised has intensified in recent years.

Understanding the Centralised System

At present, NEET-UG is conducted at the national level by the National Testing Agency (NTA). Students from every state and union territory appear for the same examination, and admissions are based largely on a common merit list. Supporters of this system argue that it ensures fairness and uniform standards for medical admissions across India.

A centralized examination prevents corruption and arbitrary admissions by private institutions. It also allows talented students from rural or economically weaker backgrounds to compete at the national

level. In theory, every student, whether from Delhi, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, or Assam, gets an equal opportunity.

However, practical realities are far more complex.

The Growing Concerns Around NEET-UG

One of the biggest criticisms of the centralized NEET system is the enormous pressure it places on students. Every year, more than twenty lakh students compete for a limited number of government medical seats. A single examination determines the future of millions of young minds. One bad day, illness, anxiety attack, or technical issue can destroy years of hard work.

The repeated allegations of paper leaks and irregularities have further shaken public confidence. Whenever there are reports of leaked papers or unfair practices, students begin to question whether a single national examination is too large and vulnerable to manipulation. In such a high-stakes exam, even minor irregularities can affect thousands of careers.

Another issue is the dominance of the coaching industry. NEET-UG has increasingly become a coaching-driven examination. Students from affluent families often spend lakhs of rupees on coaching institutes, online platforms, and study materials. Meanwhile, many rural or government-school students struggle due to limited access to quality preparation resources. As a result, the exam sometimes measures access to coaching more than actual talent or passion for medicine.

Language and educational diversity also create inequalities. India is a country with different state boards, teaching methods, and languages. A student studying under a regional board may face difficulties compared to students from CBSE or

urban institutions that are more aligned with the NEET pattern. Critics argue that a single national paper cannot fully accommodate the diversity of India's educational landscape.

Arguments in Favour of Decentralisation

Those who support decentralisation believe that states should have greater control over medical admissions. Under a decentralised system, states could conduct their own entrance examinations or create admission methods suited to their educational systems and regional needs.

One advantage of decentralisation is that it may reduce the overwhelming pressure associated with a single national examination. Students could have multiple opportunities through state-level tests, thereby reducing dependency on one exam. Decentralisation may also improve representation of local students. Many states invest heavily in school education and healthcare infrastructure and want medical admissions to reflect local educational realities. State-specific exams can better align with local syllabi, languages, and teaching patterns.

Another important argument is that decentralisation could reduce the risk associated with large-scale paper leaks or technical failures. When one exam serves the entire nation, any mistake affects millions. Smaller state-level examinations may be easier to manage securely and efficiently.

Supporters also argue that healthcare challenges differ from state to state. States may want to prioritize students familiar with local languages, cultures, and rural health conditions. Doctors trained within a state are often more likely to serve local communities after graduation.

The Risks of Decentralisation

Despite these arguments, decentralisation also carries serious challenges. Before NEET was introduced, students often had to appear for numerous entrance exams conducted by different states and private colleges. This created financial burdens, travel difficulties, and mental stress. Multiple examinations also increased opportunities for corruption and non-transparent admissions.

A fully decentralised system could revive these old problems. Wealthy students might gain unfair advantages by appearing in several exams across states, while economically weaker students may struggle with application fees and travel costs.

There is also the concern of varying standards. A centralized examination ensures a common benchmark for medical admissions. If states conduct separate examinations with different difficulty levels and evaluation methods, maintaining uniform national standards in medical education may become difficult.

Furthermore, India's healthcare system increasingly requires mobility. Doctors often study in one state and serve in another. A purely state-based system may reduce national integration in medical education.

Is There a Middle Path?

Rather than choosing between complete centralization and complete decentralisation, India may need a balanced approach.

One possible solution is a hybrid system. NEET-UG could continue as a national eligibility examination while states receive greater flexibility in admissions, counseling, and additional evaluation criteria. States could also be allowed to give weightage to school performance, rural background, or local service com-

mitments.

The examination process itself must become more transparent, secure, and student-friendly. Stronger cybersecurity, better paper protection systems, regional language support, and strict action against malpractice are essential.

The government must also reduce the excessive dependence on coaching culture by strengthening school education, especially in rural and government institutions. Equal access to quality science education is more important than the format of the examination itself.

Most importantly, policymakers must remember that medical education is not merely about selecting toppers. Future doctors require empathy, communication skills, ethical understanding, and emotional resilience—qualities that cannot always be measured by a single competitive examination.

Conclusion

The debate over decentralising NEET-UG reflects a larger question about fairness, equality, and the future of education in India. Centralization offers uniformity and transparency, but it also concentrates pressure and risk. Decentralisation promises flexibility and regional representation, but it may create inconsistency and inequality.

The real goal should not simply be centralization or decentralization. The real goal should be creating a system that is fair, accessible, transparent, and humane for every student.

India needs a medical admission system that rewards talent without crushing young minds under unbearable pressure. Whether through reforms in NEET-UG or a more balanced hybrid model, the future of medical education must place students, integrity, and public trust at its center.

Reimagining health systems for sustainable food futures in the Global South

By: Subhasree Ray

Health systems and food systems are deeply interconnected, yet they continue to function in relative isolation across much of the Global South. Food systems are increasingly recognised as one of the most powerful determinants of population health, environmental sustainability, and social equity. Far beyond the linear chain of food production and consumption, they encompass interconnected processes of cultivation, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management, all embedded within wider ecological, economic, and political structures. Contemporary evidence suggests that food systems contribute nearly one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, while unhealthy diets are linked to approximately 11 million preventable deaths annually. These burdens are disproportionately concentrated within countries of the Global South, where environmental vulnerability, structural inequality, and fragile governance systems intersect.

Despite the centrality of food systems to population health, health systems have historically remained focused on downstream biomedical care rather than the upstream structural conditions shaping nutrition and dietary outcomes. Across these settings, multiple forms of malnutrition coexist simultaneously. Persistent undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies increasingly overlap with rising rates of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and other diet-related non-communicable diseases. This evolving "triple burden of malnutrition" reflects broader transformations in food environments driven by urbanisation, industrial food systems, and globalised supply chains. At the same time, climate change, biodiversity loss, agrarian distress, and market instability continue to undermine the resilience of local food production systems, particularly those dependent on small-holder agriculture and informal food economies.

Despite the centrality of food systems to population health, health systems have historically remained focused on downstream biomedical care rather than the up-

stream structural conditions shaping nutrition and dietary outcomes. In many low- and middle-income countries, health systems evolved around vertical disease-control programmes and curative service delivery models, often influenced by donor-driven priorities. While these approaches improved specific health outcomes, they also reinforced fragmented institutional responses that insufficiently engage with food environments, agricultural systems, or market dynamics. Consequently, interventions addressing malnutrition frequently remain confined to supplementation, treatment, and behavioural counselling, with limited capacity to influence the broader systems that shape access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods.

This disconnect is especially consequential within contexts marked by poverty, informality, and social exclusion, where food access is mediated by complex interactions between livelihoods, local markets, ecological vulnerability, and governance structures. The absence of coherent institutional linkages between health systems and food systems limits policy effectiveness and constrains efforts to advance nutrition security and health equity. As climate change intensifies pressures on both agriculture and public health, the need for integrated, systems-oriented approaches has become increasingly urgent.

Agriculture, health, nutrition, climate, and social protection policies frequently operate in silos, limiting the capacity of governments and public institutions to respond effectively to overlapping burdens of food insecurity, malnutrition, and environmental degradation.

A growing body of literature now recognises food systems as interconnected socio-ecological systems in which agriculture, nutrition, health, environment, and economic structures continuously interact. Contemporary nutrition challenges are closely linked to broader food system transitions occurring across low- and middle-income countries. Rapid urbanisation, rising incomes, market integration, and industrial food production have accelerated di-

etary shifts toward energy-dense and highly processed foods. These changes have increased the burden of diet-related non-communicable diseases while failing to eliminate undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Existing institutional responses, however, remain fragmented. Agriculture, health, nutrition, climate, and social protection policies frequently operate in silos, limiting the capacity of governments and public institutions to respond effectively to overlapping burdens of food insecurity, malnutrition, and environmental degradation.

Governance emerges as a central determinant of food system resilience and equity. The literature repeatedly highlights the importance of multi-sectoral coordination, policy coherence, and rights-based approaches that prioritise participation, food sovereignty, and local control over food systems. Yet implementation gaps remain substantial, particularly in contexts shaped by institutional fragmentation, weak regulatory systems, and competing economic priorities. Similarly, financing structures strongly shape food environments and nutritional outcomes. Subsidies, procurement systems, taxation policies, and market incentives continue to favour industrial food systems and ultra-processed foods in many settings. At the same time, evidence suggests that strategic public financing and procurement mechanisms can help redirect food systems toward healthier and more sustainable outcomes.

Community-based and primary healthcare platforms are increasingly recognised as important interfaces linking food systems with population health. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture, local food initiatives, community nutrition programmes, and preventive healthcare models demonstrate significant potential, although integration remains fragmented and uneven. Accountability also emerges as a critical dimension of equitable food system transformation. Weak enforcement mechanisms, fragmented monitoring systems, and limited institutional responsiveness continue to undermine food and nutrition policy implementation across many Global



South contexts.

In response to these challenges, the Health Systems as Food System Anchors (HSFSA) framework is proposed as a conceptual model for repositioning health systems as active institutional actors within sustainable and equitable food systems. The framework is grounded in the understanding that health systems are not merely providers of clinical services, but complex institutional arrangements embedded within broader social, economic, political, and ecological systems. Health systems possess regulatory authority, financing capacities, institutional legitimacy, and extensive community reach – attributes that enable them to influence food environments, dietary practices, and population-level nutrition outcomes. In response to these challenges, the Health Systems as Food System Anchors (HSFSA) framework is proposed as a conceptual model for repositioning health systems as active institutional actors within sustainable and equitable food systems.

The HSFSA framework conceptualises health system engagement with food systems through four interconnected domains: governance, financing, service delivery, and accountability. Within governance, health systems can function as convening and coordinating in-

stitutions capable of aligning food, agriculture, nutrition, social protection, and environmental objectives. Through multi-sectoral governance platforms, health systems can strengthen policy coherence, harmonise regulatory standards, and integrate nutrition and sustainability priorities within broader food system strategies. Within financing, health systems can shape food systems through strategic procurement and resource allocation mechanisms. Public institutions, including hospitals, schools, and community health programmes, can prioritise nutritious and sustainably produced foods, thereby influencing local food economies and market incentives. Nutrition-sensitive financing can also strengthen preventive approaches to addressing malnutrition and diet-related diseases.

The framework further expands service delivery beyond conventional biomedical care to include interventions addressing food access, dietary practices, and local food environments. Community-based nutrition initiatives, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, local food programmes, and culturally relevant dietary counselling can function as integrated components of preventive healthcare. Community health workers, in particular, can bridge formal healthcare sys-

tems with local food economies and culturally specific dietary practices.

Finally, accountability mechanisms are essential to ensuring equitable and sustainable food system transformation. Integrated monitoring systems, participatory governance mechanisms, citizen engagement, and regulatory oversight related to food quality, marketing, and equity can strengthen institutional responsiveness and transparency. The concept of "anchoring" is particularly relevant within the Global South, where food systems are frequently characterised by volatility, informality, climate vulnerability, and structural inequities. By leveraging their institutional legitimacy, financing capacities, and community-level reach, health systems can provide continuity, coordination, and direction within these systems. Importantly, the HSFSA framework addresses three major systemic gaps identified across the evidence base: the weak integration of food systems within health system structures; the marginalisation of agro-ecological and community-based food practices within mainstream policy systems; and the insufficient operationalisation of equity and climate justice within food and nutrition governance.

The HSFSA framework addresses three major systemic gaps identified across the evidence base: the weak integration of food systems within health system structures; the marginalisation of agro-ecological and community-based food practices within mainstream policy systems; and the insufficient operationalisation of equity and climate justice within food and nutrition governance.

The converging crises of malnutrition, climate change, ecological degradation, and widening social inequities require a fundamental rethinking of how health systems are conceptualised and governed. Sustainable and equitable food systems cannot be achieved through isolated sectoral interventions alone. By extending the remit of health systems beyond downstream clinical care toward broader engagement with food environments and structural determinants of health, the HSFSA framework offers a systems-oriented approach for advancing nutrition security, climate resilience, and social justice. Rather than functioning solely as reactive institutions responding to disease, health systems can become proactive institutional actors shaping healthier, more resilient, equitable, and environmentally sustainable futures. (Courtesy: ORF)

India's fossil-fuel subsidy bill now exceeds its health budget; The Lancet just told us why that matters

By: Pallavi Mishra

Delhi crossed 43.4 degrees Celsius on May 18, the hottest day of its 2026 summer so far. The India Meteorological Department's yellow alert runs through May 24. Hospitals across the National Capital Region are logging a measurable rise in admissions for heatstroke, cardiac distress and dehydration, concentrated among outdoor workers, construction labour and the elderly. In late April, the Union Health Ministry instructed every state to stand up Heat Stroke Management Units, keep ambulances on standby, and report heat-related illness in real time through the Integrated Health Information Platform.

For corporate India, the state governments financing public health, and the finance ministries underwriting energy subsidies, this is no longer a meteorological story. It is a balance-sheet story. The most rigorous global accounting of that balance sheet, the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change, has just published numbers India can no longer treat as someone else's problem.

What the Countdown actually measures

Running since 2016, the Countdown is a collaboration of 128 experts across 71 institutions, including the World Health Organization. Every year, it publishes hard indicators (heat exposure, vector-borne disease, food insecurity, air pollution, labour productivity, fossil-fuel finance) and reports what the data say. Its 2025 global report, released this October, finds that 12 of 20 indicators tracking health threats have reached record levels.

The figures are not forecasts. They are last year's accounts.

The numbers India's CFOs should be reading

Globally, heat-related mortality is up 23 per cent since the 1990s. An average of 546,000 deaths a year are now attributable to extreme heat, which works out to roughly one death every minute of the year. In 2024, the average person was exposed to 16 additional days of dangerous heat that would not have occurred without climate change; for infants and those above 65, the figure crossed 20 heat wave days. Drought and heat waves pushed an additional 124 million people into food insecurity in 2023.

The labour-market numbers are the

ones boardrooms should be staring at. The global economy lost 640 billion potential labour hours in 2024 to heat exposure, an output loss the Countdown values at US\$ 1.09 trillion, equivalent to almost 1 per cent of global GDP. Thirty-nine per cent of that loss occurred in agriculture. A further US\$ 261 billion was lost to heat-related mortality among older adults alone, a 208 per cent increase over the 2000 to 2004 average.

India, with one of the world's largest exposed workforces (construction, agriculture, logistics, street vending, delivery, brick-kilns), carries a disproportionate share of that loss. The Countdown's South Asia regional brief documents that least developed nations lost the equivalent of 6 per cent of GDP to heat-induced labour reductions in 2024. India's share is in the same order of magnitude.

That is not a climate cost. That is a competitiveness cost.

The fossil-fuel paradox

The Countdown's most uncomfortable finding for finance ministries is this: global fossil-fuel subsidies reached US\$ 956 billion in 2023, exceeding global climate finance, and in 15 of 87 countries responsible for 93 per cent of global emissions, exceeding the national health budget. Governments are paying twice. Once to burn the fuel. Once to treat the illnesses that follow.

India's Union Budget for 2026-27 allocates Rs 1,06,530 crore (approximately US\$ 12.8 billion) to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. India's direct fossil-fuel subsidies on LPG, kerosene, diesel under-recoveries, and the tax concessions on petroleum products, run into multiples of that figure in any honest accounting. The implicit fiscal transfer from health to hydrocarbons is the single largest, and least examined, line item in India's climate ledger.

Where the data turns hopeful

The Countdown is not a counsel of despair. The same indicators show climate action working when it is funded. Between 2010 and 2022, the global retreat from coal prevented an estimated 160,000 premature deaths a year by cutting fine-particulate air pollution. Renewable energy generation reached a record 12 per cent of global electricity and now supports 16 million jobs worldwide. Two-thirds of medical students worldwide received climate-and-

health education in 2024. The trajectory is reversible, and the cost of reversing it is lower than the cost of absorbing it.

The Indian policy ask

Three interventions follow directly from the Countdown's framework.

First, redirect fossil-fuel subsidies into health-system resilience. Even a 25 per cent reduction in current subsidy outlays, redirected to State-level Heat Action Plans, hospital cooling, ORS and IV-fluid stockpiles, and primary-health-centre upgrades, would transform monsoon and summer surge capacity within two budget cycles. The Bio Pharma Shakti initiative announced in the 2026-27 Budget, with an outlay of Rs 10,000 crore over five years, is a useful precedent for ring-fenced health investment; the same logic can be extended to climate-resilient public health.

Second, re-frame India's Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement around health outcomes. The Countdown's authors have argued, correctly, that mitigation pledges denominated in tonnes of carbon are politically inert. The same pledges denominated in deaths averted, hospital admissions reduced, and labour hours preserved would mobilise constituencies that current NDC language cannot reach. India, as a leading voice in multilateral health-and-climate negotiations, is uniquely placed to lead that re-framing at COP31 in Antalya this November.

Third, make heat a notifiable occupational hazard. Defined wet-bulb temperature thresholds for outdoor work, mandatory hydration breaks, and employer liability for heat-related illness on construction sites would internalise costs currently externalised onto public hospitals and household savings. The compliance burden on industry would be real. It would also be smaller than the productivity loss currently absorbed silently.

The bottom line

Climate change is no longer only an environmental story, or even an economic one. It is a clinical one. Every tonne of carbon avoided is, somewhere, a hospital admission averted. Every rupee of fossil-fuel subsidy redirected is, somewhere, a heatstroke bed funded. That is a calculus policymakers, and voters, would do well to internalise before the next yellow alert turns red, as it surely will. (Courtesy: Dawn To Earth)

The growing market takeover of public health

By: Dr. Priyanka Saurabh

In a vast and diverse country like India, public health is not just a question of medical care, but also a matter of social justice, economic equality, and democratic accountability. A nation's progress is measured by the health status of its citizens. If large segments of society are deprived of treatment, medicines, nutrition, and primary health care, claims of economic development prove hollow. Unfortunately, over the past few decades, the health sector has been rapidly commercialized in many countries around the world, including India. Healthcare, which should have been fundamentally a human right, has gradually transformed into a profit-making industry. Private hospitals, expensive medicines, insurance-based treatments, and corporate medical systems have alienated ordinary citizens, especially the poor and rural communities, from healthcare. At this juncture, the role of the Indian state becomes crucial to strengthen the public health system and ensure its access to the grassroots.

The biggest problem in India's healthcare sector is inequality. While metropolitan cities have state-of-the-art hospitals and super-specialty facilities, even primary health centers in remote rural areas lack adequate doctors, medicines, and equipment. According to the World Health Organization, the availability and accessibility of healthcare is a primary responsibility of any democratic state. However, in India, millions of people are unable to access treatment solely due to financial constraints. The cost of private hospitals is so high that a serious illness can push an entire family into poverty. National Health Accounts reports indicate that out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare in India remains very high. This means that people have to pay a significant portion of their treatment costs out of their own pockets. This is the most dangerous consequence of marketization.

To expand public health services, the state must first strengthen the primary health care system. Primary Health Centers (PHCs) and Community Health Centers (CHCs) are considered the backbone of the health system in India's villages and small towns. However, most centers face problems such as a shortage of doctors, lack of medicines, poor buildings, and inadequate equipment. The government should substantially increase the health budget and equip these institutions with modern facilities. Every primary health center should be mandated to have a regular doctor, trained nurses, lab facilities, and essential medicines. If primary health care becomes easier to diagnose and treat, it will reduce pressure on larger hospitals and prevent poor people from migrating to cities.

Additionally, decentralization of health

services is essential. Relying solely on district hospitals poses significant challenges for people in remote areas. State governments should expand health services down to the Panchayat level. Strengthening ASHA workers, Anganwadi services, and community health volunteers can promote health awareness and primary care in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of locally trained health workers. If these workers are provided with better training, respectable salaries, and resources, they can play a significant role in delivering health services to every household.

The use of technology in the health sector can also be an effective means of increasing access at the grassroots level. Systems like telemedicine, mobile health units, and digital health records can help provide specialized services in remote areas. India has many villages where specialist doctors are difficult to reach. Online consultations and digital diagnostic services can play a vital role in such areas. However, technology must be developed as a complementary medium, not a substitute for human contact. Digital health services require the presence of local health workers so that even people with low literacy can benefit from these services.

Affordable and universal drug availability is also an essential aspect of public health expansion. Drug prices in the private market are constantly rising. The state should expand Jan Aushadhi Kendras and effectively implement the price-control policy for essential medicines. Availability of free or very affordable medicines for the poor and lower middle class can play a significant role in reducing health inequalities. Essential diagnostic facilities and medicines should also be made available free of charge in government hospitals so that people do not have to rely on private laboratories and medical stores.

Lack of human resources is also a major challenge for expanding healthcare services in India. Rural areas face a severe shortage of doctors and specialists, as most physicians prefer to work in urban areas. To address this problem, the government should develop policies that encourage rural service. Making rural service mandatory for medical students, providing better salaries, housing, and security facilities, and providing opportunities for local youth in medical education could be useful steps. Training doctors and health workers from the local community in rural areas would enhance both the sustainability and reliability of healthcare services.

Preventive health care must also be prioritized in the public health sector. India's health system still focuses heavily on post-disease treatment, while investment in areas such as sanitation, nutri-

tion, vaccination, and health education remains relatively low. If states strengthen programs such as clean drinking water, nutrition programs, mental health awareness, and regular health checkups, many diseases can be prevented at an early stage. This will not only improve public health but also reduce the financial burden on the health system.

The state must also play an active role in regulating the private health sector. Exorbitant fees, unnecessary testing, and commercial exploitation by private hospitals have become commonplace. Patients' helplessness is often exploited as a means to profit. The government must develop a robust regulatory framework that monitors treatment fees, drug prices, and medical ethics. Leaving healthcare solely to the market would be an abdication of the democratic state's responsibility.

It is also important to increase the effectiveness of health insurance schemes. Schemes like Ayushman Bharat have provided relief to poor families, but a large number of people remain outside their reach. Insurance schemes often limit hospital-based treatment to primary health services, and primary health services are underserved. The state must ensure that health insurance schemes cover not only treatment but also prevention, nutrition, and primary care.

Additionally, public-private partnerships in the health sector must be balanced and transparent. While leveraging private sector expertise and resources can be beneficial, public interest must remain paramount. If profit-making becomes the primary objective, the poor and vulnerable will once again be marginalized. Therefore, the government must formulate policies that focus on social responsibility and equitable access.

Ultimately, public health is a fundamental responsibility of any democratic society. It cannot be allowed to become a commodity of the market. Expanding healthcare services in India is not simply a question of increasing the number of hospitals, but rather a matter of social justice, equal opportunity, and protecting human dignity. The state must increase investment in the health sector, strengthen the primary health infrastructure, make balanced use of technology and human resources, and establish effective controls on uncontrolled private sector marketization.

If India truly wants to become an inclusive and developed nation, it must recognize that healthy citizens are the greatest asset of any strong democracy. Strengthening the public health system is not just a government responsibility, but also a national responsibility towards future generations. (Dr Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

Iran says team's base camp for World Cup moved to Mexico from US

PHOENIX, May 24: Iran's soccer team says it has moved its base camp for the World Cup to Mexico from the United States after getting approval from FIFA, the president of the Iran Football Federation said Saturday in a statement.

FIFA has not confirmed the move. Team IR Iran was originally scheduled to train in Tucson, Arizona, but a move has been a possibility because of uncertainty surrounding the war in the Middle East and security concerns. Officials in Tucson had no comment.

The team says it will now be based in Tijuana, Mexico, which is just across the border from the US. "All team base camps for the countries participating in the World Cup must be approved FIFA," said a statement attributed to Mehdi Taj, president of the Iran Football Federation.

"Fortunately, following the requests we submitted and the meetings we held with FIFA and World Cup officials in Istanbul, as well as the webinar meeting we had yesterday in the Tehran with the respected FIFA Secretary General, our request to change the team's base from the United States to Mexico was approved."

Iran is in Group G in the World Cup and will face New Zealand in Inglewood, California, in its first game on June 15. (AP)

Russia uses hypersonic Oreshnik missile in mass attack on Kyiv

KYIV, May 24: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Sunday that Russia used the powerful hypersonic Oreshnik ballistic missile during a mass drone and missile attack on Kyiv on Sunday that killed at least two people, marking the third time the weapon has been used in the four-year war.

The intense aerial assault damaged buildings across the Ukrainian capital, including near government offices, residential buildings, schools and a market, Ukrainian authorities said. At least 83 people were wounded in the attack.

The Oreshnik, which is capable of carrying nuclear or conventional warheads, struck the city of Bila Tserkva in the Kyiv region, Zelenskyy said in a post on Telegram. The target was not immediately clear.

Russia's Defence Ministry on Sunday confirmed it used the Oreshnik, as well as other missile types, to strike Ukrainian military command and control facilities, air bases and military industrial enterprises. It did not specify where the targets were. Ministry officials later told Russian media that no civilian sites were targeted in the overnight strike, the Tass state agency reported on Sunday.

In a statement on social media, the ministry said the attack was retaliation for Ukrainian attacks on "civilian facilities on Russian territory," without immediately giving details.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday denounced a drone strike on a college dormitory in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine, which Moscow blames on Kyiv, and ordered the Russian military to submit its proposals for retaliation. He said there were no military or law enforcement facilities near the college.

The death toll from the strike in Starobils had risen to 21 as search-and-rescue operations closed, the press service of Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations said late on Saturday. It said 42 other people had been wounded in the attack the previous night. The Kremlin-installed authorities of the Luhansk region announced two days of mourning on Sunday and Monday to honour the victims.

At a UN Security Council emergency meeting on the strike, held at the request of Russia, Ukrainian Ambassador Andrii Melnyk denied his Russian counterpart's accusations of war crimes, calling them a "pure propaganda show" and asserting that the May 22 operations "exclusively targeted the Russian war machine."

Earlier, Zelenskyy warned that Russia was planning to use the Oreshnik, citing intelligence from the US and Western partners.

Kyiv's European allies condemned the Russian strikes and use of the Oreshnik.

"Russia hit a dead-end on the battlefield, so it terrorises Ukraine with deliberate strikes on city centres. These are abhorrent acts of terror meant to kill as many civil-



ian city of Dnipro in November 2024. It was used a second time in January in the western Lviv region.

The latest combined attack included 600 strike drones and 90 air, sea and ground-launched missiles, according to Ukraine's Air Force. Ukrainian air defences destroyed and jammed 549 drones and 55 missiles. Around 19 missiles failed to reach targets, the Air Force said.

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"Russia hit a dead-end on the battlefield, so it terrorises Ukraine with deliberate strikes on city centres. These are abhorrent acts of terror meant to kill as many civil-

ians as possible," Kaja Kallas, the European Union's foreign policy chief, posted on X.

She added that top diplomats from EU states will meet within days to "discuss how to dial up the international pressure on Russia."

President Vladimir Putin earlier said the Oreshnik, which means "hazelnut tree" in Russian, streaks at 10 times the speed of sound, or Mach 10, and is capable of destroying underground bunkers "three, four or more floors down."

The weapon travels "like a meteorite" and is immune to any missile defence system, Putin said, adding that several such missiles, even fitted with conventional warheads, could be as devastating as a nuclear strike.

Night raid sirens blared through the night as smoke billowed across the city from strikes. Associated

Press reporters heard powerful explosions near the city centre and close to government buildings.

Attack highlights Ukraine's air defence missile shortage

Zelenskyy said not all the ballistic missiles were intercepted and that most of the strikes hit Kyiv, which was the primary target of the attack.

The attack and the apparent interception failures underscored Ukraine's chronic shortage of air defence missiles capable of downing ballistics. Kyiv relies heavily on US Patriot air defence systems to intercept such weapons, but interceptor missiles remain in critically short supply and are among Ukraine's most urgent requests to its Western partners.

Developing a domestically produced alternative has become a top priority for Ukraine's Defence Ministry, though doing so will require significant time and funding.

By saturating Kyiv with large numbers of ballistic missiles on Sunday, Russia may also be seeking to deplete Ukraine's limited stocks ahead of what could be an even more intense wave of attacks this summer.

Kyiv residents who have stayed until now consider relocating

Damage was recorded in 50 locations across several districts of the capital, including residential buildings, shopping centres, and schools, Ukraine's emergency service said in a Telegram post. Police department buildings were

also damaged, it said.

Fires continued to rage into the morning, complicating rescue efforts as buildings collapsed from the blasts.

"It was a terrible night, and there had never been anything like it in the entire war," said Kyiv resident Svitlana Onofrychuk, 55, who had worked in the market that was damaged for 22 years.

"I am very sorry that I have to say goodbye to my home, I am not staying there anymore, there is no possibility," she added. "My job is gone, everything is gone, everything has burned down."

Yevhen Zosin, 74, a Kyiv resident who witnessed the attack, said the moment he heard the explosion, he rushed to grab his dog.

"Then there was another explosion, and she and I were thrown back like a pin by the shock wave. We both survived, she and I. My apartment was blown to pieces," he said.

In Kyiv's Shevchenko district, a five-story residential building was hit, which caused a fire, and one person was killed, Ukraine's state emergency service reported.

A school building was damaged by an attack while people sheltered inside, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. Local authorities reported supermarkets and warehouses across the city were also damaged.

Multiple communities recorded damage throughout the Kyiv region, according to Mykola Kalashnyk, the regional governor. (AP)

Details of US-Iran deal begin to emerge after Trump announces progress

CAIRO, May 24: US President Donald Trump said a deal with Iran on the war in the Middle East, including opening the Strait of Hormuz, has been "largely negotiated" after calls with Israel and other allies in the region over the weekend.

But other officials counselled caution on Sunday, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio noting that "significant progress, although not final progress has been made" in the negotiations.

Rubio, on a four-day visit to India for meetings with Indian, Australian and Japanese officials, said he hoped that there would be good news in the coming hours.

The negotiations have succeeded in one of Trump's main aims, Rubio said, "that is a world that no longer has to be in fear or worry about an Iranian nuclear weapon."

Trump said on Saturday he had spoken with leaders from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan and Bahrain, and separately with Israel.

"Final aspects and details of the Deal are currently being discussed, and will be announced shortly," Trump said on social media, with no details.

The announcement capped a week in which the US weighed a new round of attacks on the Islamic Republic that would break a fragile ceasefire.

The potential deal will include Iran's commit-

ment that it won't pursue a nuclear weapon, and Tehran agreed to give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, according to two regional officials.

One official, with direct knowledge of the negotiations, said how Iran will give up its highly enriched uranium is a subject of further negotiations over the course of a 60-day period.

It's highly likely that a part of the amount will be diluted, while the rest will be transferred to a third country, potentially Russia, he said.

Iran has 440.9 kilograms of uranium that is enriched up to 60 per cent purity, a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The Strait of Hormuz will be gradually open in parallel with the US ending its blockade of Iran's ports, said the official.

The US will also allow Iran to sell its oil through sanctions waivers, said the second official who has been briefed on the negotiations. Sanctions relief and release of Iran's frozen funds will be negotiated during the 60-day time frame, he said.

Both officials said the draft deal includes an end of the war between Israel and Hezbollah, as well as a commitment of not interfering in the domestic affairs of countries in the region. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to dis-

miss closed-door deliberations.

Twelve weeks have passed since the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, killing top Iranian officials including its supreme leader and interrupting nuclear talks between the US and Iran for the second time in less than a year.

Iran fired at Israel and at neighbours hosting US forces, shaking Gulf nations that had considered themselves safe havens in a tough region.

A ceasefire has held since April 7. But Iran's decision to effectively close the Strait of Hormuz for ships carrying regional oil, natural gas and other critical supplies has been a focal point of global concern and economic pain.

Israeli officials are concerned that Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant group allied with Iran, remains a serious threat to Israel and that Lebanon is ill-equipped to disarm it.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Trump that Israel "maintains freedom of action against threats in all arenas, including Lebanon," according to an official familiar with the conversation. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

The official said Trump made it clear to Netanyahu that he will not sign any final agreement without the conditions that Iran dismantle its entire nuclear programme and remove all enriched uranium from the country. (AP)

20 killed in Balochistan shuttle train explosion; banned outfit BLA claims responsibility



KARACHI, May 24: At least 20 people are feared dead and many injured after a powerful explosion ripped through a shuttle train in Pakistan's Balochistan province on Sunday, officials said.

The banned Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) has claimed responsibility for the blast.

The shuttle train was heading from Quetta Cantonment to the railway station in the city when it was targeted near Chaman Phatak, the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

A BLA spokesperson has said the attack was carried out as the train was transporting military personnel from the cantonment area.

While the government has officially confirmed 14 deaths so far, including three personnel of the Frontier Corps, officials say that the toll is likely to increase.

Local police officials, however, have said that 20 people are feared dead, even though some media re-

ports have already reported a higher toll.

Pakistan's Railways Minister Hanif Abbasi has said there were civilian passengers in the shuttle train and the explosion hit the engine and three coaches.

The noise and impact of the explosion were so loud that windshields of vehicles in the area and window glasses of nearby buildings were left shattered.

A large number of passengers in the train were people looking forward to catching connecting trains to their home stations for the upcoming Eid festival, officials said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has condemned the incident and said, "Such cowardly acts of terrorism cannot weaken the resolve of the people of Pakistan."

He further said, "We remain steadfast in our determination to eliminate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations."

Railway authorities, according to a report in Geo News, stopped the Peshawar-bound Jaffar Express at Quetta Railway Station after the blast as a precautionary measure.

Babar Yousafzai, the spokesperson to the home ministry, said that all relevant institutions have been placed on high alert following the explosion, as he urged the public not to gather near the blast site to ensure safety and allow emergency teams to carry out rescue operations without obstruction.

The region has witnessed a few such incidents in the past several years. In November 2024, at least 32 people were killed, and scores were injured when a suicide bomber hit the Quetta Cantt Railway Station. (PTI)

US lawmakers, immigration advocates slam new green card policy, seek reversal

WASHINGTON, May 24: US lawmakers and immigration advocates have sharply criticised as "reckless and wrong" the Trump administration's new policy that requires green card seekers to make their applications from their home country.

Democratic lawmakers said they will pursue every avenue to fight against the "reprehensible decision" of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and push for its reversal.

The USCIS did not spell out which groups would be exempted, only suggesting that the policy may not apply to persons seeking asylum.

In a statement late on Friday, USCIS spokesperson Zach Kahler said that people who provide an economic benefit or otherwise are in the national interest will likely be able to continue on their current path.

It was not immediately clear whether these exceptions would extend to skilled foreign workers on H-1B visas.

"This puts 1.2 million Indian Americans and their

families in limbo after they followed every law, paid taxes and waited legally for decades," Ajay Bhutoria, former White House Advisor to President Biden and Immigration Advocate on the Trump administration's new Green Card processing policy, told PTI Videos.

Bhutoria said different groups will be filing lawsuits challenging this new policy.

The earlier policy allowed foreign workers to change from non-immigrant to immigrant by applying for "adjustment of status" from within the US.

"Indian origin immigrants and their families constitute 1.5 per cent of the US population but pay six per cent of the taxes. Sixty per cent of US hotels are owned by Indian immigrants, creating four million jobs."

"Indian origin scientists are instrumental in obtaining 10 per cent of all American patents, and our community's doctors serve 30 per cent of America's patients," Sanjeev Joshupura, Executive Director, Indian diaspora, a non-profit organisation, told PTI. (PTI)

Pakistan hopes to host next round of Iran-US peace talks very soon: PM Sharif

ISLAMABAD, May 24: Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said that Islamabad hopes to host the next round of peace talks between Tehran and Washington very soon.

He praised US President Donald Trump for "his extraordinary efforts to pursue peace" in West Asia, while he committed that Pakistan will continue efforts for peace in the region.

Trump, on Saturday, held a phone call with the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain and Pakistan.

For Pakistan, it was Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir who was on the call, said Sharif.

Sharif, who is currently on a visit to China, also praised the field marshal, saying: "I greatly appreciate his tireless efforts during the entire process."

The Pakistan PM said in a statement on X: "The discussions provided a useful opportunity to exchange views on the current regional situation and how to move the ongoing peace efforts forward to bring lasting peace in the region. Pakistan will continue its peace efforts with utmost sincerity and we hope to host the next round of talks very soon."

Munir was in Tehran till late Saturday evening, holding talks with top Iranian leaders on accelerating

efforts to achieve a "conclusive agreement" between the US and Iran to bring peace in West Asia.

As Munir wrapped up his trip, Trump said in a statement on Truth Social: "An agreement has been largely negotiated, subject to finalisation between the United States of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the various other countries."

Trump also said that he had a separate phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "which, likewise, went very well".

He added that the "final aspects and details of the deal are currently being discussed, and will be announced shortly". (PTI)

Serbian protesters clash with police after anti-govt rally in Belgrade

BELGRADE, May 24: Clashes erupted between groups of protesters and riot police after a huge anti-government rally on Saturday in the Serbian capital Belgrade attended by tens of thousands of opponents of the country's autocratic President Aleksandar Vucic.

While the rally at a central square in Belgrade passed largely peacefully, groups of young demonstrators later split and clashed with riot police after the main gathering, throwing flares, rocks and bottles at police cordons, who responded with pepper spray as they charged forward to disperse them.

The demonstrators, believed to be mostly soccer hooligans, rolled trash canisters to the streets as shield-carrying riot police tried to surround them.

Police parked anti-riot vehicles in a central Belgrade area to block the demonstrators from returning.

Protesters earlier on Saturday streamed into central Belgrade, many carrying banners and wearing T-shirts inscribed with the "Students win" motto of the youth movement.

Columns of cars drove into Belgrade from other Serbian towns earlier in the day.

Vucic has sought to curb student-led mass demonstrations that have shaken his hard-line rule in the Balkan country.

Protester Maja Milas Markovic said students "managed to gather us here with their youth and wonderful energy; I really believe that we have right to live normally."

The students led a nationwide wave of mass anti-corruption street protests demanding accountability for a train station tragedy in Serbia's north in November 2024 that killed 16 people.

Those protests forced then-Prime Minister Milos Vucic to resign before authorities pushed back hard against the protesters. (AP)

Nine-story building under construction in Philippines collapses with 24 surviving, 21 missing

ANGELES (PHILIPPINES), May 24: A nine-story building under construction in a city north of the Philippine capital of Manila collapsed before dawn and at least 21 people were missing Sunday morning, authorities said.

Rescuers were "hearing voices" in the rubble, while 24 workers managed to dash to safety or were rescued, police and other officials said.

The building collapsed after a fierce thunderstorm in Angeles City in Pampanga province. More than 100 police and other government personnel were scrambling to rescue those believed to be trapped in the rubble, police Brig. Gen. Jess Mendez said. Mendez and other officials at the scene said there were no immediate reports of deaths but some of those who got out safely sustained injuries.

Among the 21 people who remained unaccounted for, most were believed to be workers at the building, according to Francis Pangilinan, who heads Angeles City's disaster mitigation office and was at the scene. Two other people, includ-

ing a Malaysian tourist, were injured when their lodgings were hit by debris from the collapsed building, officials said.

Rescuers including firefighters, police and disaster-response teams used their hands and sniffer dogs in a dangerous scramble to search for the trapped survivors. Public Works Secretary Vinzon Dizon told reporters near the rubble of concrete slabs, twisted iron bars and other debris. "There are some signs of life ... There are voices that are being heard," Dizon said, adding that rescuers were moving with extreme caution. "It's a very very unstable site and the priority is to get the people out."

Angeles City hosted one of the largest US Air Force bases outside of the American mainland until it closed in the early 1990s, helping develop Angeles and outlying cities and towns into entertainment and commercial hubs in the main northern Philippine region of Luzon.

The former air base, now called the Clark Freeport Zone, is about 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of Metro Manila. (AP)

China-Nepal team extracts first full-depth ice core from Everest summit

BEIJING, May 24: A joint China-Nepal scientific expedition has completed the first full-depth ice core drilling at the summit of Mt Everest to collect samples for understanding climate and environmental changes in ultra-high-altitude areas.

Members of the joint expedition conducted scientific sampling work, including ice core drilling, on the world's tallest mountain at an altitude of 8,848.86 metres.

It took about two hours for the expedition team on Thursday to complete the first-ever full-depth ice core extraction from the summit, China's state-run Global Times reported.

The team collected ice core and snow core samples across multiple altitude gradients on the way down.

The samples will be transported to laboratories under low-temperature preservation conditions for research on climate and environmental changes in the world's



highest region, cryosphere evolution, and atmospheric records at extreme altitudes, the newspaper said.

The collected samples are expected to help researchers better understand climate and environmental changes in ultra-high-altitude areas, the boundary of the

Indian monsoon's influence, the transport pathways of pollutants into high-altitude regions, and differences in climate responses between the northern and southern slopes of Mt Everest, the report quoted Chinese scientists as saying.

Studying the Earth's tallest

Rahul Gandhi trying to create 'anarchy' to topple Modi govt: BJP

'Beneficial and Sustainable' Rubio signals imminent US-India trade agreement

NEW DELHI, May 24: The BJP on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of conspiring to destabilise the Narendra Modi government by "creating anarchy" in the country, alleging that he was acting at the behest of foreign forces.

Several BJP leaders, including Union minister Piyush Goyal, claimed that Gandhi's "plan" was exposed after the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha reportedly said at a meeting of the advisory council of the Congress Minority Department on Tuesday that the Modi government will fall within a year.

In a post on X in Hindi, Goyal said Gandhi's statement pointed to a "massive conspiracy" involving the Congress, several opposition parties, and what he described as a "toolkit gang", which he alleged harboured dreams of destabilising India.

"This is no ordinary statement. Rather, it constitutes a grave conspiracy aimed at spreading anarchy in the country," the senior BJP leader said, sharing a media report which claimed that Gandhi had said at the party meeting that the Modi government would fall within a year.

Goyal alleged that Gandhi and his "associates" were attempting to "incite violence" across the country after realising that the Congress could not defeat the BJP in a direct electoral contest or dislodge the Modi government, as people held the prime minister in high regard.

"Their hatred against India runs so deep that they simply cannot



bear to witness anything positive happening in the country," he charged. "The people of this country are discerning. They fully understand the true nature of Rahul Gandhi, the opposition, and the toolkit gang that is working against the national interest. Time and again, the people have responded strongly to these elements. The INDI Alliance's conspiracy to set India on fire will never succeed," Goyal added.

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi alleged that Gandhi's remarks reflected not just "political desperation" but also a public display of a "dangerous mindset aimed at destabilising India".

"Whenever India has strengthened its position on the global stage, its economy has reached new heights and the world has acknowledged Prime Minister Modi's leadership, anti-India international forces have launched

campaigns to defame the country and the Congress has lent them support," the BJP national spokesperson said.

Trivedi claimed that the Congress had resorted to the "politics of anarchy" after repeated electoral defeats due to Gandhi's "dream of winning polls without putting in efforts".

During the recent state elections, Gandhi undertook foreign trips and addressed only a "negligible" number of rallies in poll-bound states, the BJP leader said.

"Putting India's institutions in the dock from foreign soil, fuelling anti-national narratives, and prophesying instability in India -- this is no coincidence, but part of a calculated 'toolkit politics'," Trivedi said in a post in Hindi on X.

Slamming Gandhi over his reported remarks, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra also accused the Congress leader of

hatching a conspiracy to dislodge the Modi government by inciting riots in the country.

"Leader of Opposition (in the Lok Sabha) Rahul Gandhi has once again shown audacity. At a meeting yesterday, he said the Modi government will fall within a year. Rahul Gandhi is trying to dislodge the (Modi) government by inciting riots and through anarchy," the BJP MP said in a video message.

The BJP leader further alleged that Gandhi's remarks made it absolutely clear that he was pursuing a "foreign agenda" at the behest of his "masters" like George Soros and foreign companies that fund his overseas travel, with an intent to end democracy in India.

"People of the country are wise. There is a spiritual consciousness among the people of India. Will you be able to incite riots by provoking the people of India? No, Rahul ji. You have seen what happened in West Bengal and Assam (assembly polls)," he said.

"In India, the Constitution prevails and democracy triumphs. This is the government of the 140 crore people of India. Your foreign masters, including Soros, can't do any harm to this country," he added. Patra said that India is "progressing" under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, even as several countries are facing problems due to ongoing conflicts in different parts of the world.

"As long as this government enjoys the blessings of the people, it will continue to serve the country," the BJP leader said. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, May 24: India and the US are poised to soon firm up the much-awaited trade agreement that will be both "beneficial" and "sustainable" and will advance the mutual interests of both nations, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Sunday while asserting that the overall bilateral ties are set to witness an upward trajectory.

Rubio, currently on a four-day visit to India, made the remarks after holding wide-ranging talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar that focused on boosting two-way cooperation in areas of trade, critical minerals, energy and defence.

The US Secretary of State's maiden trip to India is largely seen as an attempt to repair bilateral relations that came under severe strain in the last one year over Washington's trade and tariff policies.

"We've made tremendous progress, and I think we're going to wind up with a trade agreement between the US and India that is going to be enduring and is going to be beneficial to both sides and sustainable in a way that addresses national interests that we have," Rubio said at a joint media briefing with Jaishankar. Rubio forcefully argued that the Trump administration's policy on trade is driven by a greater aim to recalibrate Washington's overall approach to global trade and it is not directed against any specific country.

"This is about the United States in terms of trade. The President did not say: 'Let's figure out a way to create friction with India over trade'. The President came in and said: 'We have a trade situation involving the US economy that doesn't work moving forward'," he said. "There's a huge imbalance that's built up, and it needs to be addressed. He pursued it from a global perspective," Rubio said.

The Secretary of State said there was virtually no country in the world that he had travelled where the trade issue was not flagged. "The President said we have to rebalance US trade. This is not about India."

"The good news is that through this rebalancing, we are ultimately seeking and believe we will arrive at trade arrangements around the world that are good for the United States, but also good for our trade partners," he said.

"And one of those we hope will be India. In fact, we are on the verge of making that happen. We are



hopeful that our trade representative can visit here very soon," he added. The US Secretary of State also cited how the US had problems related to trade with its allies, including the European Union.

"The difference is that India is a massive economy. This is a big economy where you're the leading trade partner. We do a lot of trade with India, and so obviously, there's a big difference between rebalancing trade with a country of this size and magnitude," he said. Rubio said the India-US relationship "continues to be strong and in fact, I believe by the end of this administration, it will be stronger than it has ever been. That's certainly our goal."

The US Secretary of State also made a mention of India joining the US-backed 'Pax Silica' initiative.

The Pax Silica initiative was launched in December to build a secure, resilient, and innovation-driven supply chain for critical minerals and artificial intelligence (AI). The Pax Silica Summit was held in Washington on December 12, where partner nations signed the Pax Silica declaration.

India joined the initiative in February. To a question on the US's increasingly warm relations with China and Pakistan, Rubio said Washington does not view its engagement with other countries at the expense of its strategic alliance with India.

"As far as our relations with other countries, we have relations, and we work at the tactical level, for example, and in many other ways with countries all over the world, so does India." (PTI)

India, US looking at firming up trade deal soon

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Rubio said. (PTI)

Tiger kills woman, injures 3 in MP's Bandhavgarh reserve

UMARIA (MP), May 24: A tiger strayed into a residential area near the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) in Madhya Pradesh's Umaria district early on Sunday, killing a woman and injuring three others before dying during a rescue operation, officials said.

The attack occurred around 3 am in the Kherwa Tola locality of Panpatha village near the reserve, following which angry locals allegedly assaulted a forest ranger and manhandled a woman staffer while protesting against repeated tiger attacks in the area. Talking to PTI, the reserve's Field Director Anupam Sahay said the tiger entered the village and attacked residents, killing Phool Bai Pal (40) and injuring three others.

He said the animal later entered the victim's house, where it died amid the rescue operation.

"When we darted the big cat to

tranquillise it, it remained unresponsive, suggesting it was already dead," Sahay said, denying that the tiger died due to a tranquilliser overdose. A postmortem is being conducted to ascertain the exact cause of death, he added. The official said angry villagers, protesting repeated tiger attacks in the area, allegedly assaulted forest ranger Prateek Shrivastava, injuring him, and also manhandled a woman forest staffer.

According to villagers, forest officials failed to respond promptly despite repeated calls for help after the tiger entered the locality. The protest delayed the rescue operation, and officials were allegedly prevented from taking the woman's body for postmortem examination for over two hours. Sahay said the injured persons would receive free treatment and ₹ 500 per day for hospitalisation expenses. (PTI)

Centre pushed country into economic crisis: Akhilesh Yadav

LUCKNOW, May 24: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday accused the BJP-led central government of failing to control inflation and unemployment, claiming that it has pushed the country into a "serious economic crisis".

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister also attacked the Centre over rising prices of petrol and diesel and asked who was accountable for the state of the economy after 12 years in power, according to a Samajwadi Party (SP) statement. Yadav made the remarks while addressing SP leaders and workers from different UP districts at the party's state headquarters here. He also targeted the Yogi Adityanath gov-

ernment and alleged that the BJP was following the "path of falsehood" and had pushed UP "into darkness", claiming that inflation, unemployment and corruption had reached their peak under the present dispensation.

Attacking the state government over power supply, Yadav said the BJP was responsible for the electricity crisis in UP and alleged that people were suffering due to unannounced power cuts amid severe heat. He further claimed that no new power plant had been established during the BJP government's tenure and that the electricity currently being supplied in the state was being generated from power projects set up during the SP government. (PTI)

Delhi Red Fort blast: NIA chargesheet reveals abuse of AI platform for 'terror engineering'

NEW DELHI, May 24: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe into the Red Fort area car blast case in Delhi has found that a chargesheeted accused, linked to an offshoot of global terrorist outfit Al-Qaida, allegedly misused an artificial intelligence (AI) platform for "terror engineering", official sources said on Sunday.

They said the accused persons had also made rocket Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and tested them in the Qazigund forest in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district. The glaring findings are part of a voluminous 7,500-page chargesheet filed by the NIA on May 14 in connection with the high-intensity vehicle-borne IED blast that rocked the national capital on November 10 last year.

The chargesheet, submitted before a special NIA court here, details what officials described as a meticulous, "almost laboratory-grade" approach adopted by the accused pin the fabrication and use IEDs. One of the charge-sheeted accused emerged as the "in-house engineer" of the Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGUH) interim terror module, linked to Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).

AQIS and all its offshoots have been notified as terrorist organisations by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The accused, Jasir Bilal Wani, had stayed at the Al Falah University campus in Faridabad, Haryana, on two to three occasions during 2024-25 to provide "technical support" for the conspiracy, the chargesheet said.

The University's role came under the scrutiny of law enforcement agencies after the probe revealed that three doctors employed there were allegedly involved in the blast.



Jasir was introduced to Dr Umer un Nabi, another key accused and the driver of the explosive-laden car, by Dr Adeel Ahmed Rather. The explosion had resulted in the death of 11 people and left several others injured, according to the chargesheet.

The NIA findings state that Adeel was instrumental in supplying IED ingredients, including powdered sugar and potassium nitrate in the form of NPK fertiliser, to Jasir, while Dr Umer is said to have conducted research on improvised rocket IEDs and provided guidance.

The chargesheet brings on records that Jasir had turned to YouTube and ChatGPT, searching for "how to make a rocket and in what proportion should the mixture be", highlighting the alleged misuse of digital and AI platforms for terror engineering.

Jasir allegedly prepared rocket IEDs and tested them in the Qazigund forest along with Dr Umer, Dr Muzammil Shakeel, and other co-accused, the chargesheet mentions.

Remnants of the devices were recovered from deep inside the forest by NIA teams during extensive field investigations based on disclosures made by Jasir.

According to the chargesheet, Dr Umer, seeing the potential in Jasir, also provided him two drones (UAVs)

with instructions to improve their flying range and payload capacity, the NIA probe reveals.

He had planned to weaponise the drones by fitting them with explosives to carry out attacks on security installations in Kashmir and other parts of the country, it said.

In another instance, the group tested a cylinder-based IED in the Youshurg forest near Mattan in Anantnag, involving Dr Umer, Jasir, Dr Muzammil, and Dr Adeel, the chargesheet states.

The remnants of these tests were later seized by NIA teams from the locations at the instance of Dr Adeel.

In a controlled simulation conducted by the NIA as part of an investigation, Jasir demonstrated his ability to fabricate functional rocket IEDs using commercially available materials before a bomb detection and disposal squad expert team, sources said.

The most chilling forensic finding relates to the trigger mechanism of the vehicle-borne IED used by Dr Umer, they said.

Between December 2023 and January 2024, Jasir allegedly placed orders through his Flipkart account for various components used in trigger mechanisms, including a sensor-inductive proximity switch, a heat gun, a piezo plate, a remote control relay-switch RF (radio frequency) transmitter and receiver kit, a flameless rechargeable pocket lighter, a soldering kit, and an LED electronic kit, according to the NIA chargesheet. The procurement was funded by Dr Umer, with Jasir receiving the items through cash-on-delivery orders, it said. These components were later assembled and handed over by Jasir to Dr Umer for use in making IEDs. (PTI)

AIIMS Delhi team concludes 2nd autopsy of Twisha

BHOPAL, May 24: A team of doctors from AIIMS Delhi completed the second postmortem of former model-turned-actor Twisha Sharma in Bhopal on Sunday, a lawyer representing her family said.

Her last rites will be held here in the evening, 12 days after her death, the lawyer said, as Twisha's family appealed to the people of Bhopal, including women and social workers, to join her funeral procession.

Her family had requested the medical team to adopt a multidisciplinary forensic, pathological and radiological approach and independently examine concerns they claimed were not adequately addressed during the first post-mortem conducted in Bhopal.

Twisha (33) was found hanging at her matrimonial home in Bhopal's Katara Hills area on May 12, with her family accusing her in-laws of dowry harassment and abetment to suicide. Her in-laws, however, claimed she suffered from drug addiction.

Acting on a May 22 order from the Madhya Pradesh High Court, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, constituted a four-member team of senior doctors to conduct a second autopsy.

The medical team arrived here on Saturday night and reached AIIMS Bhopal at around 10 am on Sunday. About an hour or so later, Twisha's second post-mortem began after her brother and his wife identified her, advocate Ankur Pandey, who was with a technical team at the facility, told PTI.

The autopsy was completed by 3.40 pm, he said.

Earlier, Twisha's father, Navnidhi Sharma, told PTI that her last rites would be performed at Bhadbhada Vishram Ghat in Bhopal at 5 pm.

"Today, we are going to bid farewell to a daughter, a sister, a friend and an innocent life. The daughter who had begun a new phase of life with dreams has left us all untimely. The vacant eyes of parents, shattered dreams and every passing moment spent waiting for justice raise a silent question before society," he said.

Twisha's father appealed to the residents of Bhopal, social workers, mothers, sisters and youth to join her funeral procession.

"Please join us, pray for the peace of her soul and stand with the grieving family," he said.

"Today, when Twisha merges with the five elements, it will not be just one family that mourns, but every heart that believes in the safety, dignity and justice for daughters will feel the pain," he added. (PTI)

Post-Covid hip damage fuels 40 pc rise in surgeries among young Indians: Experts

NEW DELHI, May 24: A worrying post-pandemic orthopaedic trend has emerged across India, with doctors reporting a significant rise in cases of hip arthritis and avascular necrosis (AVN), a painful condition caused by disruption of blood supply to the hip bone, particularly among younger and middle-aged adults.

Experts at the 2nd DELHI HIP 360 Conference, held at Crown Plaza New Delhi on Sunday, warned that the post-Covid era has accelerated hip joint damage and increased the demand for Total Hip Replacement (THR) surgeries across the country.

The Delhi Orthopaedic Association organised the conference in association with the Indian Arthroplasty Association.

The conference brought together leading orthopaedic surgeons, arthroplasty specialists, fellows, and residents from across India to deliberate on the latest advances in Total Hip Arthroplasty (THA), complex hip reconstruction, robotic-assisted surgery, rehabilitation, and management of

post-Covid hip complications.

Experts at the conference said that hospitals are witnessing a notable increase in patients presenting with severe hip pain, limping, stiffness, and difficulty in walking due to AVN and early hip arthritis.

Several recent studies globally have suggested a correlation between high-dose or prolonged steroid use during COVID-19 treatment and osteonecrosis of the femoral head, especially among patients who already had underlying vascular or metabolic risk factors. Medical experts noted that AVN, once largely seen in older adults or trauma patients, is now increasingly affecting individuals in their 30s and 40s.

In many cases, delayed diagnosis allows the disease to progress silently until the hip joint collapses, eventually requiring total hip replacement surgery to restore mobility and quality of life.

Dr L Tomar, organising Chairman of DELHI HIP 360 and Director, Department of Orthopaedics and Joint Replacement at Max Hospital, Delhi, said, "We are ob-



servicing a 40 per cent rise in hip replacement surgeries in younger people. Steroids played a life-saving role during the Covid pandemic. Still, indiscriminate or prolonged use in some patients has been associated with a rise in osteonecrosis and early degenerative changes in the hip joint."

"We are now seeing relatively younger patients coming with severe hip damage, collapse of the femoral head, and advanced arthri-

tis requiring early hip replacement surgeries," he said.

Dr Tomar further stated that early diagnosis is critical because if AVN is detected in the initial stages, joint-preserving procedures may still be possible before complete destruction of the hip occurs.

Research published in international orthopaedic journals has shown that steroid-induced AVN may develop within months after exposure, with the hip joint being

the most commonly affected site.

Dr Karun Jain, Organising Secretary of the conference and a senior orthopaedic surgeon at Pushpanjali Medical Centre in Delhi, said that one of the biggest challenges with AVN is that patients often ignore early symptoms such as groin pain or stiffness, assuming it to be muscular pain.

"By the time they seek medical advice, the hip joint may already have undergone irreversible collapse. Awareness, timely MRI evaluation, and early intervention can help reduce disability," Dr Jain said.

The conference featured extensive scientific discussions on complex primary and revision hip arthroplasty, robotic and navigation-assisted hip surgery, infection prevention, difficult hip reconstructions, dysplasia management, and enhanced recovery protocols.

Surgeons also discussed how advancements in implant design, minimally invasive approaches, and precision-based technologies are improving surgical outcomes and reducing recovery time. (PTI)

Jofra Archer powers Rajasthan Royals into IPL playoffs with 30-run win over Mumbai Indians

MUMBAI, May 24: Rajasthan Royals rode on Jofra Archer's all-round brilliance to book the fourth and final play-off berth with a 30-run victory over Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Archer returned with splendid figures of 4-0-17-3 after his 15-ball 32 helped Royals reach a fighting 205 for 8 after 20 overs.

It was 73 runs in the last five overs bowled by Mumbai Indians which proved to be decisive as Mumbai Indians could manage only 175 for 9 in 20 overs.

The victory lifted Rajasthan Royals to the fourth position in the IPL points table with 16 points, effectively knocking out Punjab Kings, Kolkata Knight Riders, and even Delhi Capitals — latter two had slim outside chances.

Mumbai Indians' reply was spruced with a timely half-century from Suryakumar Yadav — 60 off 42 balls with four sixes and three fours — as well as skipper Hardik Pandya's 15-ball 34 and Will Jacks' 33 off 18 balls.

But none of these efforts were enough to revive the five-time winners, who had slipped to 38 for four with Archer's two-wicket burst at the start.

The collapse began when Archer produced a jaffa — a perfect outswinger which darted sharply away from Rohit Sharma (0) who went on a fishing expedition away



from his body. The resultant edge settled into wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel's gloves.

Archer then got one to nip off the surface to hit the wickets and see the back of Naman Dhir (6) in the third over, but the body blow came for MI in the form of Ryan Rickelton's (12) dismissal off Burger, who found Vaibhav Sooryavanshi at square leg.

A disappointing season had no different end for Tilak Varma with the bat when the India batter was undone by a Brijesh Sharma delivery which kept low while he attempted to flick it.

In a season marred by poor powerplay returns, Mumbai Indians had no respite in their final outing where they finished at 49 for four

after six overs. Suryakumar also rode his luck, getting two reprieves en route to his second half-century of the season.

Brijesh missed a run-out chance on either ends when both Ryan Rickelton and Suryakumar were caught in a mix-up with an awful throw, and then dropped a catch at mid-wicket when the MI batter on 27 off Yash Raj Punja in the eighth over.

Suryakumar and Jacks put on 63 for the fifth wicket in an impressive turnaround for the hosts, but it was Pandya's dismissal off Archer in the 16th over — when MI were still in the chase — that shut them out of the game.

With 59 needed off 30 balls and

Archer steaming in for his final over, MI could have opted against going after the English pacer but Pandya took the punt that fell flat.

A mis-hit ended Pandya's quick-fire innings during which he made animated gestures, while also sharp caught-and-bowled from Nandre Burger (2/43) of Suryakumar in the 18th over sealed the deal.

Earlier, Archer (32 off 15 balls) and Ravindra Jadeja's (19 no off 11 balls) vital contributions late in the innings lifted Rajasthan Royals to an under-par 205 for eight on a benign wicket.

Needing a win in this contest to book the final berth in the IPL playoffs, RR added 73 runs in the last five overs to stage a late comeback after their specialist batters cut a sorry figure.

Archer smacked three sixes and a four to collect 32 off 15 balls while Jadeja, coming down at No 9, hit three boundaries in the last two overs to push the total beyond the 200-run mark.

All eyes were pinned on the explosive pair of Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (4) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (27) but while teenager was dismissed cheaply, Jaiswal showed a lot of promise during his brief stay before Will Jacks outfoxed him.

Sooryavanshi went for a big swipe on the first ball and connected well which looked a certain six off Deepak Chahar (2/43), but Will Jacks at deep extra cover

pulled the ball in spectacularly from beyond the ropes.

As if that save had some cascading effect, Sooryavanshi failed to connect with rest of the deliveries he faced. Another wild slog off an outswinger from Chahar saw Sooryavanshi hitting high in the air towards backward point where Naman Dhir took a smart catch springing forward.

Sooryavanshi fell immediately after Jaiswal, who had made a flying start but paid the price of playing one shot too many.

Jaiswal hit a couple of towering sixes off Chahar and even showed impeccable movement to hit Jacks over long-off for his third six, but couldn't prevent a leading edge off the MI spinner when he lured him with a fuller delivery.

In a spot of bother at 33 for two, Rajasthan neither counter-attacked nor managed any recovery. Skipper Riyan Parag failed to convert a start while Jurel could not make a strong dent either.

Parag did well to put a few loose balls away for boundaries but just when he looked to impose himself on the game, a mis-hit resulted in a well executed bunny-hop catch from Tilak Varma off AM Ghazanfar (1/45) in the sixth over.

However it was Archer and Ravindra Jadeja, who used to long handle to a good effect which proved to be game-changer in the end. (PTI)

Need to consider a reset: Tom Moody hints at leadership change at LSG



LUCKNOW, May 24: Lucknow Super Giants are set to consider a leadership overhaul after enduring two dismal IPL campaigns, with Director of Cricket Tom Moody admitting skipper Rishabh Pant has struggled to handle the pressures of captaincy.

After finishing seventh in 2025, LSG are set to end the 2026 season in either ninth or 10th place, depending on Mumbai Indians' final result. Under Pant's captaincy, the franchise managed only 10 wins in 28 matches across two seasons.

"From a captaincy point of view, you know, he's found it challenging, obviously, and the results reflect that," Moody said told reporters after the seven-wicket loss to Punjab Kings on Saturday.

"And you do have to wonder whether that is a pressure that is reflected with his performance with the bat. I know that this season has been a difficult season for us, but we will reflect on it, we'll take time, we'll reflect on it. We'll consider all things."

Pant, already under intense scrutiny after being brought for a record breaking ₹ 27 crore, has also struggled to make a significant impact with the bat.

Widely regarded as one of India's most destructive batters, the wicket-keeper-opener enjoyed stellar seasons in 2018 when he scored 684 runs at a strike rate of 173.60, and in 2019, when he amassed 488 runs at 162.66.

However, he has failed to recreate that impact at LSG, scoring 581 runs at a strike rate of 135.74 across two seasons, below his career strike rate of 144.18.

Mody's comments come days after Pant lost India's Test vice-captaincy to KL Rahul and was dropped from the ODI squad.

"But certainly we haven't lived up to the expectation or the standard that we expect of ourselves. And certainly when it comes to the leader-

ship of the franchise, it's certainly something that we'll be taking some very serious consideration to, you know, what it looks like in the future.

"Like every department, when you do reflect on a season, we will be making some considered decisions, but it certainly looks like that we're needing to consider a reset." Despite the disappointing campaign, Moody refrained from singling out individuals and instead accepted collective responsibility for the team's struggles.

"We're all responsible (for the disappointing season)," Moody said. "I don't think it's a time to point the finger at any individual. We all take accountability, and now's not the time to be apportioning blame in any particular department."

"We all need time to reflect on it in a calm manner, but there's certain things that we do need to address, and that will be addressed."

Meanwhile, Punjab Kings snapped a seven-match losing streak with a seven-wicket victory over LSG to keep their playoff hopes alive.

However, PBKS' qualification chances now depend on Sunday's clash between Rajasthan Royals, who are on 14 points, and the already-eliminated Mumbai Indians.

A win for Rajasthan would take them to 16 points and seal the final playoff spot, knocking Punjab out of contention.

Captain Shreyas Iyer led from the front with an unbeaten 101, while opener Prabhsimran Singh chipped in with 69.

"In these matches, you want your best players to stand up" PBKS Assistant coach Brad Haddin said.

"These are the matches you want to play where everything is on the line. The captain for the last couple of days had that look in his eye. He wanted to be the one that made the difference and turned things around and gave us an opportunity to play in the finals." (PTI)

AFC Grassroots Football Day celebrated in Diphu

HT Bureau
DIPHU, May 24: The Asian Football Confederation Grassroots Football Day was observed at KASA Stadium in Diphu on May 23 with enthusiastic participation from young footballers and sports enthusiasts.

The event was organised with the support of the Karbi Anglong Sports Association and aimed at promoting grassroots football and nurturing local talent.

A total of 110 young athletes participated in the day-long programme across various age categories. Exhibition matches for boys and girls were held in the Under-10, Under-13, Under-15 and Under-18 segments, displaying promising talent and competitive spirit.

One of the highlights of the event was the participation of a team from the Khelo India Centre Hanjlangso, which played a special match against the Under-13 boys' selection team.

Following the matches, refreshments were distributed to participating children and their parents who attended the event in large numbers.

The programme was attended by several officials and dignitaries associated with the Karbi Anglong Sports Association, including General Secretary Dr Pankaj Teron, Assistant General Secretary Prodir Ronghang, Football Secretary Horen Engti, Adventure Sports Secretary Edward Rongchecho, Basketball Secretary Moniram Gogoi, Referee Board Secretary Sunil Engjai, active members Melina Terangpi and Eva Singpho, and Coach Jamno.

Organisers said grassroots initiatives such as the AFC Football Day play an important role in identifying young talent and strengthening football culture in Karbi Anglong.

BCCI, foreign boards need to align on overseas players' availability through IPL: Mohit Burman

NEW DELHI, May 24: Calling foreign players' availability in the IPL a sensitive issue, Punjab Kings co-owner Mohit Burman observed that BCCI, foreign boards and other stakeholders can do better to ensure that overseas players are available through the world's biggest T20 league's duration.

The BCCI has a two-year ban in place for foreign players who pull out of the IPL after being bought in the auction with an exception made for injured cricketers. Yet, foreign player availability, especially of star players, remains an issue. For example, Mitchell Starc was only cleared by Cricket Australia for the second half of this season's tournament and by that time Delhi Capitals' fate in the tournament was more or less sealed.

Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood too were not available for their respective IPL teams from day one of the tournament due to niggles. Speaking to PTI, Burman spoke his mind on the touchy topic.

"It is a sensitive issue because international cricket calendars are extremely crowded, and players also have commitments to their national boards. But ideally, when a player commits to a franchise, there should be as much clarity as possible around availability. "From a franchise perspective, planning becomes difficult when key players are



unavailable for significant portions of the tournament despite being major auction investments.

"Fans also expect to see marquee players from the start of the season. At the same time, solutions have to come through collaboration rather than confrontation. The BCCI, franchises, players and international boards all need to align schedules better and create clearer commitments," said Burman, who owns 48 percent share of the Punjab franchise.

When asked earlier this month, Delhi Capitals head coach Hemang Badani had expressed his frustration on player availability especially when that team member is a trump card like Starc.

"Ideally, I would want my players to be available to me from day one. But if there are certain things decided by associations and governing bodies, there's very little that we can do," he had said. (PTI)

Pranavi slips to Tied-17th as Diksha finishes Tied-20th in Morocco

RABAT (MOROCCO), May 24: Pranavi Urs stumbled on the final day to finish T17 and while Diksha Dagar was T20 at the Lalla Meryem Cup, here.

Pranavi finished the week with a total score of 4-under par (70-71-74) while Diksha finished with a score of 3-under par (75-70-71).

Pranavi, the lead Indian all week, had a great start as she was in Tied-second after the first round and still in the Top-10 after two days.

She had above par card of the week at 1-over 74 and slipped down the order to finish at T-17.

That prevented her from securing her first top 10 finish since the Hero Women's Indian Open last year. Diksha had a difficult start to the week before she found form and a final round of 2-under 71 saw her to move up to T-20 at the end of the final round.

Earlier, Avani Prashanth and Hitaashree Bakshi missed the cut. Canadian Teen sensation Anna Huang secured the title after carding a final round 7-under 66 to record her first win of the 2026 season.

The 17 year old started the final round six shots behind the leader Kelsey Bennet but put together an impressive performance to rally back from behind as Kelsey struggled to replicate her form from the first

two day during the final round.

Anna Huang finished the week with a score of 14-under par (70-69-66) while Kelsey Bennet played and even par final round to finish the week at 13-under par (68-65-73). Pranavi began her final round with an early birdie on the second hole and picked up a second stroke by the fifth.

However, starting with her first bogey of the day on the ninth hole Pranavi dropped three shots in five holes as she made bogeys on the 11th and 13th holes in addition to the ninth.

She made birdie on the 15th hole before a late bogey on the 17th saw her finish the day at 1-over par. Diksha started the final round with three birdies in the first five holes and was 3-under par before the turn. But things went downward on the back nine.

She double bogeyed the 10th hole and then dropped another shot on the 12th hole with a bogey before stabilising with a pair of birdies on the 15th and 16th holes to close the round with a score of 2-under par.

The eventual winner Anna Huang had a stellar final day which saw her make six birdies, one bogey and an eagle to record her strongest round of the week and claim the title. (PTI)

Mandaviya inaugurates integrated sports infrastructure facility at SAI NCoE

GANDHINAGAR, May 24: Sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Sunday inaugurated several new sports infrastructure facilities at SAI NCoE Gandhinagar, reaffirming the government's commitment towards building world-class high-performance sporting ecosystems across the country.

The minister inaugurated the newly developed Para Athlete Hostel, Centralized Dining Hall, Strength & Conditioning Hall, Multipurpose Training Hall and Meditation Park at the centre.

The facilities have been developed to strengthen athlete preparation through integrated support in training, recovery, nutrition, sports science and mental wellbeing.

"Our record performances in recent international events are not accidental achievements. They are the result of sustained investment in ath-

letes, scientific training, modern infrastructure and a strong belief that India can become a global sporting powerhouse," Mandaviya was quoted as saying in a PIB release.

The minister observed that SAI NCoE Gandhinagar, which has been notified by the ministry as a 'Nodal Centre for Para Sports', is emerging as one of the country's leading high-performance centres for para-athlete development.

The centre presently supports six para sports disciplines including Athletics, Badminton, Table Tennis, Powerlifting, Swimming and Fencing. The facilities are also being utilised for training in Handball, Kabaddi and Kho-Kho.

Mandaviya also interacted with athletes attending National Coaching Camps being hosted at the centre for Kabaddi, Para Sports, Volleyball and Basketball.

"Facilities such as the Para Athlete Hostel, Strength & Conditioning Hall and Centralized Dining Hall are not merely buildings; they are investments in India's future champions."

"These integrated high-performance ecosystems will play a defining role in India's sporting excellence journey in the coming years," the minister added.

The newly inaugurated Multipurpose Training Hall will primarily be utilised for Kabaddi training and is expected to support year-round high-intensity practice, match simulation and tactical preparation for athletes.

The modern Strength & Conditioning Hall has been designed to enhance athlete performance, endurance, recovery and injury prevention through scientific training methodologies. (PTI)

Mandaviya, Ayushmann cycle to mark 75th 'Fit India Sunday'

AHMEDABAD, May 24: Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya joined a grand cycling event here on Sunday to mark the 75th edition of 'Fit India Sundays on Cycle' and Commonwealth Games Day, urging people to adopt bicycles for short commutes and to cycle to stay fit.

The event, which began at 6 am at the iconic Sabarmati Riverfront here, drew massive participation across more than 8,000 locations nationwide as the initiative commemorated Commonwealth Games Day and built momentum towards the historic 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad.

Leading the national celebrations, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi, Bollywood actor Ayushmann Khurrana and Olympic medal-winning shooter Gagan Narang joined 5,000 cyclists, athletes, youth volunteers and fitness enthusiasts in a vibrant showcase of community participation and sporting spirit.

Former CWG medallists and Olympians, including Gurjit Kaur, Rajani Etimarpu, Sonika

Tandi, Anjum Moudgil, Ankur Mittal and Trupti Murgunde, were also present along with other athletes and members of the sporting fraternity in a show of support for India's preparations for the 2030 Commonwealth Games.

The Ahmedabad edition, themed "A New Icon for a Fitter India — Pedalling to 2030," featured a grand 5km cycling rally alongside yoga and zumba demonstrations.

A major highlight of the event was the inauguration of a special Commonwealth Games-themed exhibition by Mandaviya, showcasing India's sporting achievements, the growth of sports infrastructure under the Khelo India Mission and the country's expanding sports ecosystem in the lead-up to the centenary CWG in 2030.

Addressing the gathering, Mandaviya said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a developed India could only be realised if citizens remained physically fit and healthy, Mandaviya said. He also said that Gujarat hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games was a matter of pride for the country.



Mandaviya said the 75th edition of the nationwide 'Sundays on Cycle' initiative coincided with Commonwealth Games Day and reflected India's growing sporting ambitions ahead of the 2030 Commonwealth Games, which Ahmedabad is set to host.

"Today is the 75th edition of 'Sundays on Cycle' and also 'Commonwealth Day'. It is a matter of pride for all of us that Gujarat is going to

host the Commonwealth Games in 2030," he said.

Highlighting the benefits of cycling, Mandaviya said it was among the best exercises for maintaining fitness, helped reduce pollution and supported the Centre's fuel conservation efforts by encouraging people to use bicycles for short-distance travel.

"In view of all these benefits, I urge people of Gujarat to use a bicycle to commute between their home and place of work if the distance is not much. You can also remain fit by cycling every Sunday," he said.

Deputy CM Harsh Sanghavi praised the large turnout of youngsters at the event and said the 'Fit India' campaign had evolved into a people's movement beyond politics and government programmes.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Fit India' campaign is not a government or political programme, but it is our own mass movement to bring positive changes in the lives of all of us," he said.

Actor Ayushmann Khurrana called for greater encouragement and support for sports other than

cricket, and expressed hope that fitness initiatives such as these would inspire future Olympic and Commonwealth Games champions from among the country's youth. He said that under the guidance and encouragement of PM Modi, programmes promoting fitness and sports culture were helping create awareness among young people across the country.

The event also featured a wide range of engaging activities, including pickleball, box cricket, volleyball, tug of war and several interactive community games, creating a festival-like atmosphere for participants across all age groups.

Indian Olympic Association Senior Vice President Ajay Patel, Deputy Director General Khelo India Mayank Srivastava and Athletics Federation of India President Adille Sumariwalla also graced the event. As part of the larger build-up to the 2030 CWG, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) will continue organising grand, interactive and community-driven initiatives across the country to deepen public participation and strengthen India's sporting ecosystem. (PTI)