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Opposition confident of 'silent vote'; vows vigilance during counting

Exit polls 'manipulated to mislead voters', alleges Gaurav Gogoi



GUWAHATI, May 2: Assam Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi on Saturday alleged that exit polls are being manipulated by the BJP to create confusion among voters.

Addressing a press conference after a meeting of opposition alliance leaders here, Gogoi said the BJP may try to mislead people, but will not succeed.

"Neither the opposition parties nor the people of the state have fallen into the trap of exit polls,

and this will be evident on the day of counting on May 4," he said.

Gogoi said there is a "silent vote" and an "undercurrent" in favour of the opposition, which exit poll surveys have not captured.

Many voters, especially women, have voted based on real issues like price rise and governance, he claimed.

Gogoi alleged that the BJP has been trying to create anomalies in the strongrooms, but our

candidates and alert public have gone to the administration on several occasions to prevent such misdeeds.

"All sections of society across the state want a change of government in the state. They have voted for this on April 9, and the results will be known on May 4," he added.

The Congress candidate from Jorhat said opposition leaders met to discuss preparations for counting and to remain alert on counting day.

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said the exit polls are misleading and that the "party is confident about its survey, which indicates the opposition will form the government after May 4".

The BJP is making efforts to derail the counting process, but "we are prepared to deal with the situation with legal rooms in both Delhi and Guwahati to deal with the situation".

"We are prepared to protect our candidates and to ensure that the state machinery is not used for any mischief," he added.

He further alleged that the BJP had approached several opposition candidates after the polls, questioning why it would do so if it were confident of victory.

"This proves that they are not confident, but the people of Assam are, and there is going to be a change of government in the state," he added.

He also alleged that the exit polls were manipulated by the BJP. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Exit polls often failed to reflect final mandate: Debabrata Saikia



Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, May 2: Leader of Opposition in Assam Legislative Assembly and Debabrata Saikia on Saturday expressed doubts over the reliability of exit polls forecasting the outcome of the Assam Assembly elections, saying such projections have often failed to reflect the final mandate of voters.

Speaking to reporters here, Saikia, who is also the Indian National Congress candidate from Nazira Assembly constituency, said he does not place much faith in exit poll predictions, citing previous elections where estimates were proven wrong once ac-

tual counting took place.

Referring to the West Bengal Assembly elections, Saikia said several surveys had forecast a decisive victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party, but the final results turned out very differently.

He said such examples show that pre-result projections cannot always capture the true mood of the electorate.

The senior Congress leader claimed that the political atmosphere in Assam this time appeared significantly different from previous elections.

According to him, many voters had chosen to remain guarded about their preferences during polling, making it difficult for agencies to accurately assess public sentiment through post-vote surveys.

Saikia asserted that the silence among a section of voters could indicate an undercurrent in favour of political change in the state.

He suggested that people dissatisfied with the present administration may have preferred to keep their decisions private rather than openly discuss them in public.

He further alleged that some voters were hesitant to reveal their choices because of fear of possible backlash from local BJP workers.

Saikia also claimed that issues such as alleged misgovernance, public (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Oppn to form next govt in Assam: Akhil Gogoi

Claims alliance will cross majority mark despite exit poll projections

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, May 2: Opposition leader in Assam, Akhil Gogoi on Saturday exuded confidence that the opposition alliance would form the next government in the state, claiming that anti-incumbency sentiment and post-poll assessments pointed towards a decisive mandate against the ruling dispensation.

Speaking to reporters here, the Rajior Dal chief said there was "no doubt" that opposition parties were on course to secure a majority in the Assam Assembly elections and would comfortably cross the required mark to form the government.

"We will form the government. There is no doubt about that. We will win in more than 70 Assembly

seats and comfortably form the government," Gogoi said while expressing optimism over the prospects of opposition parties in the state.

He said a review meeting was held earlier in the day to assess the likely performance of opposition candidates across constituencies. According to Gogoi, several prominent leaders from the opposition camp attended the meeting and shared feedback gathered from different districts after completion of polling.

The Rajior Dal leader claimed that the collective assessment of those present indicated that opposition parties together were poised to win more than 76 seats in the 126-member Assembly.

He said the figures were based

on inputs received from grassroots workers, local organisers and constituency-level leaders.

Gogoi asserted that public dissatisfaction over issues such as governance, unemployment, price rise and alleged administrative failures had contributed to a strong pro-opposition mood across the state. He added that voters had shown their desire for change through the ballot.

According to him, the final picture would emerge once counting of votes takes place on May 4, but the opposition remained fully confident of forming the next government in the state.

"On May 4, everything will be clear and the next government in Assam will be formed by the opposition (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Karbi Anglong under tight security ahead of May 4 vote counting

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 2: The Karbi Anglong District Administration has imposed stringent security measures ahead of the May 4 counting of votes for the Assam Legislative Assembly elections, enforcing prohibitory orders and declaring a district-wide dry day to maintain law and order.

Acting under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), the District Magistrate has created a high-security zone within a 100-metre radius of the counting centre at Diphu Government College.

The restrictions will remain in force from the morning of May 4 until completion of the counting process.

According to the order, entry into the restricted zone will be permitted only to individuals carrying valid identity cards.

The use of mobile phones and other electronic devices—except by authorised personnel—has been banned.

Gathering of crowds, setting up temporary stalls, and parking of vehicles within the area have also been prohibited.

Additionally, bursting of firecrackers, use of loudspeakers, and holding of victory processions without prior permission have been strictly barred to prevent any disturbance during the counting process.

In a parallel move, the District Commissioner has declared May 4 as a "Dry Day" across Karbi Anglong. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Three more NSCN Cadres nabbed; ops intensified in Eastern Arunachal

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, May 2: Security forces have apprehended three more active cadres of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh, even as intensified counter-insurgency operations continue across the eastern districts.

The arrested individuals have been identified as SS Lt. Bewang Tangha and Manseng Jugli, both

linked to NSCN (KYA), and Kamnong Pangtha of NSCN-KK.

According to Arunachal Pradesh Police, the arrests were made during a series of coordinated operations conducted over the past few days along the Indo-Myanmar border based on credible intelligence inputs.

"On April 29, SS Lt. Bewang Tangha, an active cadre of NSCN (KYA), was successfully apprehended. Earlier, an operation at New Putok village on April 27 led to the arrest of Manseng Jugli, followed by the apprehension of Kamnong Pangtha during subsequent investigation," the police said in a statement.

A case has been registered at Nampong Police Station, and further investigation is underway. Officials said the crackdown on insurgent (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

hended. Earlier, an operation at New Putok village on April 27 led to the arrest of Manseng Jugli, followed by the apprehension of Kamnong Pangtha during subsequent investigation," the police said in a statement.

A case has been registered at Nampong Police Station, and further investigation is underway.

Officials said the crackdown on insurgent (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Karbi groups oppose MoS clauses on proposed Kuki Council in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 2: A coalition of Karbi civil society organisations has strongly opposed certain provisions of the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between the Government of Assam and Kuki groups on March 15, 2026, particularly those relating to the proposed creation of a Kuki Regional Council in Karbi Anglong.

The organisations—including Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), Karbi Students Association (KSA), Karbi Lamet Amei (KLA), Karbi Anglong Women Justice Forum (KAWJF), Joint Action Committee of Autonomous State (JACAS), Hills Tribal League (HTL), All India Karbi Students Union (AIKSU), and several others—voiced their concerns at a joint press conference held at the KCS Central Committee office in Taralanso.

KCS president Humsing Bey alleged that Karbi political leadership and civil society were excluded from the negotiation

process. "The Karbi people were completely ignored in an accord that directly concerns Karbi Anglong's land and polity. The Assam Government cannot and should not represent the Karbi community without its explicit consent," he said.

The organisations demanded immediate removal of all clauses in the agreement that pertain to Karbi Anglong, warning that failure to do so would lead to strong democratic resistance.

They also accused the state government of undermining the autonomy provisions guaranteed under the Sixth Schedule.

While describing the Karbi community as peace-loving, the groups cautioned against any move that could create tension or disrupt the region's political and social stability.

They also urged residents to remain vigilant against developments that may affect the territorial integrity (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Navy Chief Admiral Tripathi begins 4-day visit to Myanmar

NEW DELHI, May 2: Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi on Saturday began a four-day visit to Myanmar to enhance operational-level cooperation between the two navies and explore new avenues for collaboration in the maritime security sphere.

Admiral Tripathi's visit reaffirms the long-standing friendship between India and Myanmar, which is anchored in mutual respect, trust and a shared commitment to maritime security and stability in the Indian Ocean Region, the Indian Navy said in a statement.

The Chief of Naval Staff will hold bilateral talks with Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's armed forces General Ye Win Oo, Defence Minister General U Htun Aung, Myanmar Navy's Commander-in-Chief Admiral Htein Win and other senior military officials, it said. "These interactions will provide an opportunity to review ongoing bilateral maritime cooperation, enhance operational-



level linkages, and explore new avenues for collaboration between the two navies," the Navy said.

Myanmar is one of India's key strategic neighbours and shares a 1,640-kilometre border with several northeastern states, including Nagaland and Manipur.

The country is considered crucial under India's 'Neighbourhood First', 'Act East' and 'MA-

HASAGAR' policies.

PM Modi announced vision MAHASAGAR or 'Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions' for India's engagement with the Global South during his visit to Mauritius in March last year.

During his visit, Admiral Tripathi is also scheduled to visit the Myanmar (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Woman drug peddler held with 3 Kg cannabis in Khatkhathi raid

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, May 2: In a major crackdown on narcotics, Khatkhathi Police apprehended a woman drug peddler and seized over 3 kg of suspected cannabis during a targeted raid in the Lahorian area of Karbi Anglong district on Saturday.

Acting on specific intelligence inputs, the police team conducted the operation around 4:00 PM at a rented accommodation near Lahorian Line Hotel.

The raid was led by Officer-in-Charge Surya Bora, along with Sub-Inspector Debashish Bora, Priyanka Bordoloi and other personnel.

During the search, police recovered approximately 3 kg 36 grams of cannabis, packed into 97 small packets allegedly meant for distribution.

A cash amount of ₹66,200, suspected to be proceeds from drug sales, was (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Zubeen Garg's drowning in Singapore highlights vessel operators' responsibility: Legal experts

SINGAPORE, May 2: The drowning of Indian singer-composer Zubeen Garg has brought the spotlight on rules and regulations that concern responsibilities of vessel operators when dealing with intoxicated passengers, according to a media report that cited legal experts.

A cultural icon in India's northeastern region, 52-year-old Garg travelled to Singapore in September 2025 to perform at a live event. A day before his performance, he went on a yacht trip with a group of people. He drowned while swimming in the sea near Lazarus Island, which is a popular diving spot.

His death shook his home state Assam, where millions came out on the streets mourning. Later, police cases were registered against the organiser of the event, his manager and some others.

Nico Lee, managing director of the Triangle Legal law firm, told The Straits Times that Singapore has Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (Port) Regulations under which there are provisions to debar drunk passengers.

The owner, agent or captain of the ves-

sel must not allow persons under the influence of alcohol or drugs onboard if they are intoxicated to a point where they endanger safety of the vessel, its crew or any person in it.

"In terms of civil liability, it could be argued that a yacht captain is negligent, as he owes a prima facie duty of care to guests on board under general negligence principles," Lee was quoted as saying by the newspaper.

The singer and his entourage of about 15 individuals were partying on a chartered vessel, which they had boarded at Marina at Keppel Bay.

A death certificate issued by the Singapore General Hospital listed his cause of death as drowning.

An autopsy report suggested that Garg had 333 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood in his system, which was four times the legal limit for driving in Singapore and is likely to have impacted his coordination.

Citing Garg's case, Lee said the circumstances were serious, as the controller of the vessel knew that the guest



was intoxicated. Also, he may not have understood or processed a safety briefing

for all passengers. "That combination makes reliance on

an ordinary briefing inadequate. If intoxication reaches a level that endangers the safety of the vessel or persons on board, the person in charge should not permit boarding at all," he said.

According to Lee, the vessel's operators could also have assigned a crew member to directly supervise him or ensure that he received a one-to-one explanation when he was capable of understanding.

Part of the responsibility could be attributed to the guest if he chose to enter the water and ignore instructions or behave dangerously despite the yacht owner or charterer's best efforts, Lee said.

Vanessa Sandhu from Clifford Law LLP told The Straits Times that a key question is whether the yacht captain or operator owed a "duty of care" to the passenger and, if so, whether a breach of that duty caused the death.

"A yacht captain and operator generally owe passengers a duty to take reasonable care for their safety while on board, including swimming or water ac-

tivities. This may include providing safety equipment and issuing appropriate safety instructions," the daily quoted Sandhu as saying.

"However, the standard of care is an objective one, based on what a reasonable captain or operator would have done in the circumstances. It is not an absolute obligation to prevent all harm," she said.

During the coroner's inquiry, the operators of the vessel had said that no one had forced the singer to consume alcohol or enter the water, and that the entire entourage was informed on the yacht about the necessity of wearing life jackets before going for a swim.

A coroner's inquiry on March 25 ruled Garg's death as accidental drowning. On April 1, the police said that investigations into the singer's death had concluded, with no evidence of foul play.

However, in Assam, seven persons were arrested in connection with Garg's case, and some of them charged with murder, the matter is being heard in the court. All the suspects have denied any wrongdoing. (PTI)

India should create strategic buffers to navigate 'most difficult' energy shock: CEA Nageswaran

NEW DELHI, May 2: Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran on Saturday said India needs to create strategic buffers in the face of the "most difficult" energy shock that the country is facing amid the West Asia crisis.

Nageswaran also said the rising prices of fertiliser and petroleum products globally due to the crisis will make it challenging to achieve the 4.3 per cent fiscal deficit target for the current fiscal, while below normal monsoon and pass-through of higher energy prices could lead to "potential inflation spike".

He also said India has employment challenge emanating from AI, and there is a need to ensure that IT sector becomes more competitive and not lose jobs to AI, and instead create jobs that use AI within the IT sector or in other services.

Speaking at the ICPW Growth Conference organised by the Ashoka University, Nageswaran said the current account deficit (CAD) in the current fiscal could rise to over 2 per cent of GDP, from less than 1 per cent in FY'26.

"The ... priority for us is to create strategic buffers. This energy shock is the most difficult one compared to any other previous energy shock in terms of energy lost as a percent-



age of total global energy supply, not just oil, including gas.

"And we also need to use this occasion to think about other areas where we are vulnerable in terms of import dependence, nickel, tin, and copper. We need to build strategic buffers if we have to make a shot at manufacturing and becoming indispensable," Nageswaran said.

Since the beginning of the war in West Asia on February 28, crude oil prices soared to a four-year high of USD 126 per barrel on Thursday, from about USD 73 level be-

fore the war.

Stating that geopolitics will compel policymakers to be nimble and flexible and shed old model of thinking, Nageswaran said India is better prepared than many other countries to deal with the crisis because of the fiscal leeway that the country has due to lowering of fiscal deficit ratio to 4.4 per cent of GDP in FY'26.

Nageswaran said the West Asia conflict is more of a price shock than supply shock for India as the government is managing the supply side deftly.

"This particular conflict, which is going to be on a low simmer or a high flame situation, whatever it is, it is going to be there with us in some form or the other because the military conflict may be over, but the strategic conflict is well and truly alive. It will be so for some time," Nageswaran said.

He said the conflict has four channels of shock: price and supply shock, trade impact, sticky logistics costs and remittance shock. India imports 60 per cent of its LPG usage and of that, 90 per cent flows through the now closed Strait of Hormuz.

Nageswaran said the pass-through of high global energy prices would have to be a "balancing act". He said some pass-through is already happening in commercial LPG, and the levy of export duty on diesel and ATF.

The government has cut excise duty on petrol and diesel to shield customers from the impact of the rise in petroleum prices. "We are coming around to arriving at a certain modus vivendi with respect to burden-sharing between the fiscal policy side, inflation, households and the oil marketing companies. So it has to be a balancing act," Nageswaran said. (PTI)

Nashik court denies pre-arrest bail to TCS employee Nida Khan; custody of 4 extended till May 5



NASHIK, May 2: A court in Nashik on Saturday rejected the anticipatory bail application of Nida Khan, an accused in a case related to alleged sexual harassment and forcible religious conversion at the Nashik unit of TCS, after the prosecution stressed the need for her custodial interrogation.

"The offence is a serious one, Nida Khan is one of the prime accused and therefore her custodial interrogation is necessary. The court rejected Nida Khan's bail applica-

tion today. The final order will be uploaded soon," public prosecutor Ajay Misar told reporters.

According to the FIR, Khan allegedly advised women employees to dress and behave in accordance with Islamic traditions.

Khan had sought pre-arrest bail, citing her pregnancy.

A search is underway for Khan in different parts of Maharashtra, police had said.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Nashik Police is prob-

ing nine cases of sexual harassment of some female employees at the IT major's Nashik unit by their male colleagues. The SIT has arrested eight persons, including a female operations manager, by registering nine FIRs.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) had last month stated that the firm has adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment and coercion of any form for a long time.

Meanwhile, the police custody of four other accused in the case, Raza Rafiq Memon (35), Tausif Bilal Attar (37), Danish Ejaz Sheikh (32) and Shahruck Husain Shaikat Qureshi (34), was extended till May 5 on Saturday.

They were taken into custody by the SIT on April 23, and produced in court the next day, which had then remanded them in police custody till April 29. They were again produced in court on April 29, and were remanded in police custody till May 2.

The prosecution told court there was need for further custody as more investigation needs to be done in the case. (PTI)

NPCI shares 5 simple tips to ensure safer digital payments

Urges users to stay alert as digital transactions become widespread

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 2: National Payments Corporation of India has issued a set of five key safety tips to help citizens make secure digital payments, as the use of online transactions continues to grow rapidly across the country.

Emphasising that safe practices are easy to follow, NPCI said a few mindful habits can significantly reduce the risk of fraud and ensure a secure payment experience.

The first and most important step, it noted, is to always verify the recipient's name before making any payment. Users should carefully check the details displayed on the screen to avoid sending money to the wrong person or entity.

NPCI also advised users to rely only on trusted and official payment apps and websites.

Downloading unknown apps or clicking on suspicious links shared by unverified sources can expose users to financial risks.

Another critical precaution is to never share confidential details such as UPI PINs, OTPs or bank information.

NPCI reiterated that no legitimate authority, including banks or government agencies, will ask for such sensitive data.

The advisory further cautioned against rushing into payments under pressure.

Users are encouraged to pause and verify any urgent requests for money or personal details, especially from unknown individuals.

Additionally, NPCI stressed the importance of keeping payment alerts and notifications enabled.

Regularly checking transaction messages can help users quickly identify and report any suspicious activity.

In case of fraud or suspicious transactions, users have been advised to report immediately through the national cybercrime helpline by dialling 1930 or by using the Department of Telecommunications' Sanchar Saathi portal.

Maintaining records such as messages and screenshots can also assist authorities during investigations.

NPCI said that with increased awareness and responsible usage, digital payments can remain a safe, reliable and empowering part of everyday life.

Dollar Industries founder Dindyal Gupta dies at 88

KOLKATA, May 2: Dindyal Gupta, founder and chairman emeritus of hosiery major Dollar Industries Limited, died on Saturday due to age-related ailments, a statement said.

He was 88. Gupta is survived by his wife, four sons and grandchildren, who now manage the Dollar Industries business. Born on September 13, 1937, in Manheru village of Haryana's Bhiwani district, Gupta moved to Kolkata in 1962 and began manufacturing and selling hosiery products tailored to customer requirements, gradually building manufacturing facilities, retail networks and markets overlooked by competitors.

He laid the foundation of Dollar Industries Limited in 1972, and over five decades steered it from modest beginnings into one of India's leading hosiery and apparel manufacturers with revenues exceeding ₹ 1,700 crore. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the West Bengal Hosiery Association and the Sanmarg Business Award, among other recognitions. (PTI)

PhonePe crosses 50 million merchant milestone across India

Fintech platform deepens reach into small businesses and digital economy

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 2: PhonePe has surpassed 50 million lifetime registered merchants on its platform as of April 28, 2026, marking a significant milestone in the digitisation of India's economy.

The company said its merchant network now covers more than 98 per cent of India's postal codes, reflecting its expansion beyond payment solutions into a broader suite of business services

tailored for merchants.

PhonePe attributed this growth to its sustained efforts to simplify digital adoption for small businesses, particularly through QR code-based payment systems that reduce entry barriers and costs.

The PhonePe Business app has enabled merchants to manage transactions efficiently while also accessing additional services such as loans,

SmartSpeakers and Point-of-Sale (POS) devices.

Over the years, the platform has scaled rapidly through a combination of on-ground sales networks, channel partners and local language support, helping it penetrate deep into smaller towns and rural markets.

This has enabled millions of small traders and kirana store owners to transition from cash-based transactions to digital payments.

Finance Ministry notifies 100 pc FDI in insurance sector

NEW DELHI, May 2: The Finance Ministry on Saturday notified 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector under the automatic route.

While 100 per cent foreign investment will be allowed in insurance companies and intermediaries, including brokers, under the automatic route, the cap

is 20 per cent for Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), said the Foreign Exchange Management (Non-debt Instruments) (Second Amendment) Rules, 2026.

The Parliament had passed the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (amendment of insurance laws) Bill, 2025, in December, 2025, paving the way for hiking the FDI cap in the insurance sector to 100

per cent under the automatic route, from 74 per cent earlier.

Subsequently, after the President's assent, the Bill became law.

Thereafter in February, 2026, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Commerce and Industry Ministry had notified 100 per cent FDI in the insurance sector. (PTI)

Gautam Adani emphasises worker welfare, local hiring at LGBIA on Labour Day

GUWAHATI, May 2: Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group, on Saturday outlined a growth strategy centred on worker welfare, local employment and entrepreneurship while addressing around 3,000 workers and employees at the Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport on the occasion of International Labour Day.

Highlighting the role of workers in nation-building, Adani said the Group's progress would be measured not only by assets created but also by livelihoods generated and communities strengthened.

"You are not just employees, you are nation builders. When we complete a project, we are shaping the future of the country," he said.

The Group announced that it will prioritise local hiring at project sites, offering employment opportunities first to nearby communities, followed by candidates from within the state and then from outside, if required.

Worker welfare was highlighted as a key pillar of the strategy.

The company is developing air-conditioned accommodation for 50,000 workers in Mundra and Khavda, along with a centralised cloud kitchen in Gujarat capable of serving up to 100,000 meals daily.

"This is not a privilege. It is a necessity. Every worker has the right to live and work with dignity," Adani said.

The strategy is anchored in three pillars—worker welfare, stronger partnerships and skill development—supported by robust liquidity and capital access to accelerate project execution.

A new three-layer organisational structure is being introduced to streamline decision-making and enhance accountability, reducing delays at project sites.

Adani also spoke about strengthening partnerships with contractors by working with a smaller number of large, reliable partners to improve coordination and execution speed. "We don't just want to sign contracts, we want to build long-term partnerships," he said.

Highlighting grassroots entrepreneurship, he cited examples of local partners who have grown alongside the Group's projects, generating employment and economic activity in their regions.

The third pillar focuses on training and development through upcoming Adani skill centres, aimed at helping workers transition from unskilled roles to supervisory and leadership positions.

Linking major infrastructure projects such as Mundra Port, the Khavda renewable energy park, Navi Mumbai International Airport and the Ganga Expressway to national progress, Adani said these initiatives are strengthening India's logistics, energy and infrastructure backbone.

NEW DELHI, May 2: Mobile phones across the country went abuzz after Union Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia launched the cell broadcast alert system on Saturday that will warn citizens about emergency and natural disasters in their area.

The Department of Telecom had already alerted citizens about the trial run of the service on April 29 to avoid panic, with an appeal to ignore any alerts they receive.

The test message read: "Extremely Severe Alert. India launched Cell Broadcast using indigenous technology, for instant disaster alerting service for its citi-

zens. Alert citizens, safe nation. No action is required by the public upon receipt of this message. This is a test message- Government of India".

The alert system was sent across the network of all telecom operators across the country, except in poll-bound states.

"Union Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region, Jyotiraditya Scindia, today launched the Cell Broadcast Alert System, developed indigenously by C-DOT in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), under the guidance of Home Minis-

ter Amit Shah," an official statement said.

Through this system, critical information related to disasters, emergencies, and public safety will be transmitted directly and instantly to citizens' mobile phones, the statement said.

The system is based on the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) as recommended by the UN body International Telecommunication Union. It is currently operational across all 36 States and Union Territories of India and delivers disaster and emergency-related alerts via SMS to mobile users within geo-targeted areas. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Exit polls 'manipulated'

The meeting was attended by leaders of the Congress, Rajiv Dal's Akhil Gogoi, Assam Jatiya Parishad's Lurinjoyoti Gogoi, All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC), CPI(M), CPI and CPI(ML), among others.

AICC general secretary Jitendra Singh, former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel and the party's election observer Bandhu Tirkey were also present at the meeting. (PTI)

Exit polls often

resentment and anti-incumbency sentiment could weigh heavily on the ruling party when votes are counted. Maintaining confidence in his party's prospects, Saikia said the eventual verdict would depend largely on the role of "silent voters", whose choices, he added, often remain hidden until counting day.

He said the final outcome may therefore differ substantially from the trends suggested by exit polls.

Oppn to form

parties," he said. The remarks come amid competing claims by both the ruling alliance and opposition groups following the conclusion of polling in the state.

While various parties have projected confidence over the outcome, all eyes are now on the counting day when the electoral verdict will determine whether Assam witnesses a continuation of the present regime or a shift in power.

Notably all the exit poll surveys predicted a landslide win for the BJP and its allies in the assembly polls.

Three more NSCN

groups will continue as part of sustained efforts to restore stability in the region.

In a related development, three cadres of the NSCN-K (Nikki Sumi) were also apprehended in Tirap district under a joint operation by Assam Rifles and Arunachal Pradesh Police.

The arrested cadres—Wingan Agan (35), Jhonny Riba (21) and Rajapeyu Khechan Khetey (30)—were held in the Wancho Colony area of Khonsa.

Security forces recovered two 7.65 mm pistols with magazines, nine live rounds of ammunition, mobile phones, SIM cards, GPRN-related documents and a small quantity of suspected contraband from their possession.

Officials said large-scale operations have been launched across eastern Arunachal Pradesh, particularly along the border areas, to flush out insurgent elements.

"Operations against insurgents are ongoing, and several cadres have been apprehended and sent to jail. The crackdown will continue," an official added.

Karbi Anglong under

All wholesale liquor warehouses, IMFL retail outlets, bars, hotels, clubs and country spirit shops will remain closed until counting is completed.

Authorities have placed enforcement agencies on high alert and warned that any violation of the orders will attract strict penal action under the Assam Excise Act and other relevant laws.

The district administration described the measures as precautionary steps to ensure a peaceful and orderly counting process and urged political parties, candidates and the public to cooperate fully with the authorities.

Karbi groups oppose

and unity of Karbi Anglong.

Raising environmental concerns, the organisations highlighted the ecological and cultural importance of the Singhason and Khonbamon hills, calling them critical to the region's biodiversity and water security.

They opposed any extension of the accord to these areas, citing their deep cultural and ancestral significance.

The groups further expressed concern over increasing environmental degradation due to deforestation and unregulated activities, stressing the need for stronger conservation efforts and community participation to ensure sustainable development in East Karbi Anglong.

Navy Chief Admiral

Navy's Central Naval Command and its Number One Fleet.

"These engagements will cover a wide range of defence cooperation matters, with a particular focus on maritime security, capacity building, capability enhancement and training," the Navy said.

The Indian Navy regularly engages with the Myanmar Navy through staff talks, training exchanges and operational interactions, including under the framework of the India-Myanmar Naval Exercise (IMNEX), Indo-Myanmar Coordinated Patrol (IMCOR) and hydrography surveys.

Myanmar has participated in all recent events hosted by the Indian Navy such as Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, MILAN naval exercise, International Fleet Review, and Goa Maritime Conclave, among others.

"The visit by the Chief of the Naval Staff reaffirms the long-standing India-Myanmar bonds of friendship, anchored on mutual respect, trust and a shared commitment to maritime security and stability in the Indian Ocean Region," the Navy said. (PTI)

Woman drug peddler

also seized from the premises. The accused has been identified as Uma Devi, a resident of New Settlement area in Lahorijan.

She has been taken into custody.

Police officials described the operation as a significant breakthrough in the ongoing efforts to curb drug trafficking in the region.

"This operation marks a major success in our continued drive against narcotics," a police spokesperson said. A case has been registered, and further investigation is underway to trace the supply network and identify other individuals involved in the illegal trade.

सेवा रत GREF कर्मी की पुत्री के नाम परिवर्तन हेतु

मैं कुमारी बिन्दा बनिवा, पुत्री GS-175012L MSWCOOK शिबा बहादुर बनिवा, निवासी—गौरी पर्व डाकघर: चिंग हला, जिला: दिब्रुगढ़, असम-786101, ने अपना नाम कुमारी बिन्दा बनिवा से बदलकर बिन्दिब बनिवा कर लिया है, जो दिनांक 30 अप्रैल 2026 को प्रथम श्रेणी सविट्टेड, दिब्रुगढ़ के समक्ष दिव्य गृह पत्र के अनुसार किया गया है।

HIRING OF EARTH MOVING MACHINERIES

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/27 of 2026. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:
Name of work: Hiring of Earth moving machineries for early mobilization at breaches site at vulnerable location during pre/post monsoon in Lumding-Chandranathpur hill under the jurisdiction of Sr. DEN/III/Lumding (For 1 year). **Tender Value:** ₹1,08,65,510.80/-
Earnest Money: ₹2,13,300/- **Date & time of closing of tender:** At 15:00 hrs. on 25-05-2026 & opening at 15:00 hrs. on 28-05-2026. The complete information with tender documents of above e-Tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 25-05-2026 in www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

E-AUCTION FOR PARKING CONTRACT AT BORDOLONI & DIBRUGARH

E-Auction is invited for parking contract at Bordoloni & Dibrugarh station over Tinsukia Division. **Catalogue No.: TSK-PARKING-05.** **Description:** Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three Wheelers & Four Wheelers. **Rate Unit:** Annual Licensing Fee. **Auction Start Date & Time (All Lots):** At 11:00 hrs. on 15-05-2026.

Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Days
AA/1	PARKING-TSK-BDLN-MX-37-26-1 (Parking-Mixed)	1096
AA/2	PARKING-TSK-DBRG-MX-49-25-1 (Parking-Mixed)	1096

E-Auction Close Date & Time: At 11:40 hrs. on 15-05-2026. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Successive lots closing interval 10 minutes. **Note:** Prospective bidder are requested to visit e-Auction leasing module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in for more details.

Sr. DCM, Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Civil bodies warn of resistance over proposed council Karbi groups oppose MoS provisions

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 2: A coalition of Karbi civil society organisations has strongly opposed certain provisions of the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between the Government of Assam and Kuki groups on March 15, 2026, particularly those related to the proposed creation of a Kuki Regional Council in Karbi Anglong.

The organisations include the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), Karbi Lamet Anei (KLA), Karbi Students Association (KSA), Karbi Nimso Chingthar Asong (KNCA), Karbi Anglong Women Justice Forum (KAWJF), Joint Action Committee of Autonomous State (JACAS), Hills Tribal League (HTL), Karbi Anglong Rong Asar Anei (KRAA), Karbi Rong Asar Anei (KRAS), Rasiya Asong, All India Karbi Students Union (AIKSU), Karbi Film Society (KFS), Karbi Employees Association (KEA), Karbi Unemployed Youth Association (KUYA) and All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC).

At a joint press conference held at the KCS Central Committee office in Taralanso on Saturday,



KCS president Humsing Bey said the primary objection lies in the exclusion of Karbi political leadership and civil society from the negotiation process.

"The Karbi people were completely ignored in an accord that directly concerns Karbi Anglong's land and polity," Bey stated. "The Assam Government cannot and should not represent the Karbi community without its explicit consent. This domineering approach is unacceptable and will be strongly resisted."

The organisations collectively demanded the immediate removal of all clauses in the agreement that pertain to Karbi Anglong, warning that failure to do so would trigger "strong democratic mass resistance."

They also accused the state government of undermining the autonomy granted under the Sixth Schedule. "We are a peace-loving people, but we urge the government to refrain from actions that provoke tension and threaten our political and social stability," Bey

added.

Calling for vigilance, the groups urged residents of Karbi Anglong to remain alert against any developments that could compromise the region's territorial integrity, unity and autonomy.

Bey further highlighted the ecological and cultural significance of the Singhason and Khonbamon hills, describing them as the "lungs of East Karbi Anglong." He noted that these hills are the source of major rivers and are critical to maintaining biodiversity, water security and livelihoods in the region.

"These landscapes are not just ecological assets but also hold deep cultural and ancestral value for the Karbi people," he said, opposing any attempt to extend the accord to these areas.

The organisations also raised concerns over environmental degradation due to deforestation and unregulated human activities. They stressed the need for stronger conservation measures and community participation to protect the fragile ecosystem and ensure sustainable development in East Karbi Anglong.

Nasha Mukht rally concludes in Kokrajhar

Brahma Kumaris campaign promotes drug-free society

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 2: The 13-day-long Nasha Mukht Rally for building a decent society, organised by the Brahma Kumaris Centre, Kokrajhar, concluded on Saturday.

As part of the programme, the Nasha Mukht rally fostering a drug-free society was brought out in Kokrajhar town. The rally, joined by students, parents and residents of Kokrajhar town, started at the Kokrajhar Govt HS&MP School playground and moved towards Green Field, Bodofa Nwgr. A symbolic Ravana made of drug substances was burnt at Green Field, with students pledging to stay away from alcohol and other intoxicants. Students also performed street dramas highlighting the ill effects of drugs on youth and society.

Speaking to media persons, BK Rajiv of the Medical Wing of the International Brahma Kumaris Centre, Mount Abu, Rajasthan, said the noble initiative was organised by the Kokrajhar Brahma Kumaris Seva Kendra for the well-being of society. He said the sole objective of the rally was to build a drug-free and decent soci-



ety. He added that drugs and alcohol have a negative impact on society and urged youth to stay away from them.

It may be mentioned that the Brahma Kumaris Seva Kendra, Kokrajhar has been actively working for a drug-free society through mobile van rallies and awareness meetings, encouraging youth and civil society to stay away from drugs and alcoholism since April 19.

Sources from the Kokrajhar Brahma Kumaris Seva Kendra informed that awareness programmes began at the indoor stadium of the All-Bodoland Taekwondo Association and were held

across multiple institutions and public places including Kendriya Vidyalaya Kokrajhar, Mainao Taxi Stand, Debargaon Higher Secondary School, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Sikha Jhwaloo Tata Mobile Taxi Stand, Chandrapara Bihutali, Maspara local market, Saint Auxilleum School, TSME School, Dotma, Dotma HS School, Dotma Girls' HE School, Moonstars English Medium School, Chandrapara ME School, Titaguri ME School, Little Flower English Medium School and DN Himatsingha HE School, involving teachers, students, parents and local residents.

Darrang readies for secure vote counting on May 4

HT Correspondent

DALGAON, May 2: The Darrang district administration has completed all necessary preparations for the counting of votes for the Assam Legislative Assembly elections, scheduled for May 4. Along with other parts of the state, counting in Darrang district will be conducted in a systematic and secure manner.

The counting process will be held at Mangaldai College premises, where three separate counting halls have been set up for the district's three Assembly constituencies. Hall No 1 will be designated for Sipajhar constituency, Hall No 2 for Mangaldai constituency and Hall No 3 for Dalgaon constituency. Each hall will have 14 counting tables.

The counting will be conducted in multiple rounds—21 rounds for Sipajhar, 18 rounds for Mangaldai and 26 rounds for Dalgaon. Additionally, a total of 10 tables have been arranged for counting postal ballots, with three tables each for Sipajhar and Dalgaon and four tables for Mangaldai. The counting process will commence at 8:00 AM on May 4.

Around 300 officials and staff engaged in the counting process have already been provided with required training.

Addressing a press conference at 4:00 PM on Friday at her office conference hall, District Commissioner Ayushi Jain briefed the media on the preparedness. She highlighted the various arrangements made and appealed to media personnel for cooperation to ensure the counting process is conducted smoothly and peacefully.

As per official data, voter turnout in the district was significant. In Sipajhar constituency, 1, 77,390 voters cast their votes across 290 polling stations. Mangaldai constituency recorded 1, 81,156 voters across 251 polling stations, while Dalgaon constituency saw 3, 03,268 voters casting their votes across 366 polling stations.

To oversee the counting process, election observers have already arrived in the district. AB Karki will supervise Sipajhar, PB Rathore will oversee Mangaldai and Ankit Anand will be in charge of Dalgaon constituency. The district administration has assured that all necessary arrangements are in place to ensure a free, fair and peaceful counting process.

Sati Radhika Memorial Day observed

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 2: Sati Radhika Memorial Day was observed with a day-long programme at Radhika Udyan, Thanamukh here on Saturday. District Development Commissioner Pabitra Kumar Das, speaking as the chief guest at the function, said there is a need to include the story of Sati Radhika in school textbooks so that the younger generation can learn about her contribution to Assamese society. He added that the present government has been significantly aiding SC communities through various schemes, but many people are still deprived.

The function, organised by the Dr BR Ambedkar Foundation Assam, was presided over by Pranjal Das. In his speech, he said that SC communities living in 39 villages in the Sivasagar constituency have been contributing substantially in various fields, but this fact is not recognised by political parties.

The event was attended by journalist Sumesh Deka, Officer-in-Charge of Sivasagar Police Station Babul Kumar Medhi, Ward Member Banti Das and several other dignitaries. The meeting felicitated Dr Binapani Hazarika, Chakra Sanghathak Aben Chandra Das, journalists Himanshu Neog, Ratu Kumar Das, Munna Agarwal, Pranjal Pujia and Moni Gogoi, retired teacher Hemchandra Das and social workers Balin Das, Prabin Das and Sunil Singh. In the evening, a lantern-lighting ceremony was held at the statue of Sati Radhika. The meeting was attended by Hemen Das, Pares Das, Upen Das, Subhadra Hazarika, Kusheshwari Das, Kalpana Hazarika, Diganta Das, Seemanta Hazarika, Bidyut Das, Bhaskar Kumar Das, Fatik Hazarika, Jayant Das and Manik Das.

Bodo Album marks 25-year milestone

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 2: The silver jubilee of the first-ever Bodo video album Angni Gwswni Gwdwi Rao was celebrated with great enthusiasm on the banks of the Gourang River in Kokrajhar on Saturday.

The producers marked the glorious 25-year journey of the album by cutting a commemorative cake during the celebration. The historic production holds a special place in the evolution of Bodo music and video culture and is widely regarded as a milestone in the growth of the Bodo entertainment industry.

The jubilee celebration brought together several senior artistes and cultural personalities associated with the early days of the Bodo music scene. BTC EM for Cultural Affairs Maheswar Basumatary, veteran singers including Sulekha Basumatary, Bigrai Brahma and Gautam Brahma attended the event, along with many senior actors and actresses who were part of the album's journey.

The artistes shared memories and reflected on the struggles and achievements of the Bodo entertainment industry over the past 25 years. Speakers highlighted that "Gwswni Gwdwi Rao" played a pioneering role in popularising Bodo video albums and inspiring a new generation of artistes and producers.

Cultural performances and interactions marked the celebration, making the event a nostalgic reunion for the Bodo artistic community. Organisers expressed hope that the album's legacy will continue to inspire young talents and strengthen Bodo cultural heritage in the years to come.

Liquor ban imposed in Tezpur on counting day

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 2: In view of ensuring the smooth and peaceful conduct of vote counting for the State Assembly elections scheduled on May 4, the Excise Department of the State Government has declared the day as a "Dry Day" in Sonitpur district. According to an official statement, the prohibition will remain in force until the completion of the counting process. It further stated that in the event of any re-poll being conducted, that day too will be observed as a "Dry Day". During the period of restriction, all licensed establishments in the district, including IMFL retail 'off' and 'on' shops, hotels, clubs, country liquor outlets, wholesale IMFL depots and country liquor warehouses, shall remain closed. The sale, consumption and distribution of liquor in any form have been strictly prohibited across the district.

NFR partners IIT Guwahati for smart rail safety system

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 2: In a significant step towards enhancing railway safety and adopting modern technology, Northeast Frontier Railway has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati for the development and deployment of a plug-and-play fleet-wide onboard vibration IMU-GPS event camera system.

The system is designed as a plug-and-play onboard solution, allowing easy installation across locomotives and coaches without major modifications, thereby enabling fleet-wide deployment. It uses advanced Inertial Measurement Unit (IMU) sensors along with GPS technology to continuously monitor track conditions with high accuracy.

The system also incorporates event-based camera technology to detect and analyse track abnormalities in real time. This will enable continuous mapping of track defects across the railway net-

work and generate real-time alerts, allowing immediate response to potential safety risks.

The collaboration aims to leverage the research expertise of IIT Guwahati to develop a scalable and cost-effective solution. It will facilitate predictive and condition-based maintenance, reducing dependence on manual inspections and helping prevent failures before they occur.

The initiative is expected to improve operational efficiency, reliability and passenger safety, while supporting the broader vision of data-driven and technology-enabled infrastructure management. The project also promotes the development of indigenous technology through strong collaboration between Indian Railways and academic institutions.

The partnership marks an important step by NFR towards modernising railway infrastructure and strengthening safety systems through innovation and real-time monitoring.



DPS Nagaon celebrates Mom & Dad Day

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 2: Delhi Public School, Nagaon joyfully celebrated Mom & Dad Day 2026 for students of Grades III to V with great enthusiasm and warmth, embracing the theme "We Value Parenthood."

The event was thoughtfully organised to honour the unconditional love, care and sacrifices of parents while strengthening the emotional bond between children and their families.

The celebration was graced by the esteemed presence of Director Divya Chhahvchharia, Administrative Head Mukesh Rijal, Principal Ritu Rajnish, Headmaster Dhrubajyoti Das and Administrator Anwar Parvez.

The programme commenced with a warm welcome address by the Principal, who highlighted the invaluable role of parents as a child's first teachers and lifelong guides. This was

followed by a series of vibrant and engaging performances by students of Grades III to V, who showcased their talents through dance and musical presentations.

A special highlight of the event was a heartwarming musical drama presented by the students of Grade V, which beautifully depicted the love, care and sacrifices of parents. The performance deeply resonated with the audience and added emotional depth to the celebration.

A distinctive feature of the programme was the active involvement of parents, making the occasion even more meaningful. Various competitions were organised for parents, including ramp walk, poem recitation, singing, dancing and speech, where they confidently showcased their talents and expressed their experiences of parenthood.

The ramp walk segment emerged as a delightful highlight, with parents and children walking together, celebrating their unique bond with confidence and pride.

The performances were evaluated and participants were honoured with first, second and third prizes, along with consolation awards. As a mark of respect and cultural appreciation, all participants were felicitated with Phulam Gamosa, symbolising dignity and gratitude.

The event concluded on a joyful note with a formal vote of thanks, expressing sincere appreciation to all dignitaries, parents, participants and organisers. The celebration left behind cherished memories and reaffirmed the school's commitment to nurturing not only academic excellence but also strong values, cultural awareness and meaningful family connections.

Memo submitted on trade license issue

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 2: Ward Councillor of Guwahati Municipal Corporation, Ward No 15, Saurav Jhunjhunwala, on Saturday personally met the Mayor of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation and submitted a memorandum regarding the mandatory requirement imposed on applicants for new trade licenses.

In the memorandum, he highlighted that making it compulsory for applicants to enter into agreements with NGOs engaged in primary garbage collection is creating unnecessary procedural hurdles. While appreciating the intent of ensuring proper waste manage-

ment, he pointed out that the current system is not delivering the desired results.

He further stated that this requirement is becoming a barrier to ease of doing business, especially for small and aspiring entrepreneurs, who are facing avoidable difficulties due to this condition.

As a public representative, Jhunjhunwala urged the Mayor to review and remove this mandatory condition in order to promote a more business-friendly environment in Guwahati.

He expressed confidence that the Guwahati Municipal Corporation will take necessary steps in the larger public interest.

Drugs, cash seized in Nagaon operation

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 2: In a major success, Nagaon Police seized a large quantity of drugs along with cash exceeding ₹ 2 lakh during an operation on Friday night.

Acting on specific intelligence, a team from Nagaon Police Station conducted the operation near the Chalchali area on the Nagaon-Dhing PWD Road, close to Nagaon town.

Police intercepted a four-wheeler that was allegedly transporting drugs from Dhing to Nagaon town. During the raid, police arrested a suspected drug peddler and recovered a large quantity of drugs from his possession. The arrested individual has been identified as Haybur Islam. Police also recovered ₹ 2, 16,000 in cash from him.

The vehicle used for smuggling, a Hyundai i20 bearing registration number AS 02 Q 6141 has been seized.

According to police, Islam has been involved in drug trafficking in Nagaon town and adjoining areas for a long time.

Two women arrested in Jorhat drug cases

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 2: Two women were arrested by Jorhat Police in separate incidents on Friday on charges of drug peddling.

According to police sources, a woman was apprehended from a house in the Bashbari area near Jorhat Town Railway Station on Friday evening following the recovery of 12.8 grams of suspected narcotics from her possession.

The woman reportedly brought the contraband from Dimapur by train to deliver it to a local con-

tact. A mobile phone was also seized and legal action has been initiated against her. Further investigation is underway.

In a second incident later that night, another woman was apprehended at her house in Borigaon after 12.3 grams of suspected narcotics were recovered from her possession, along with Rs 67,270 in cash. Several CCTV cameras were also seized during the drive.

Legal action has been initiated against her as well and further investigation is in progress.

Moatsu Festival celebrated in Guwahati

Ao community highlights culture, youth empowerment

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 2: The Ao community in Guwahati celebrated the Moatsu Festival with great enthusiasm and cultural vibrancy at Naga Chokka on Friday. The event was organised by the Ao Senso Welfare Telungiem, Guwahati.

The programme was graced by guest speaker K Temjen Jamir, Editor of Tir Yimiyim, who emphasised the importance of preserving cultural heritage and strengthening community bonds. He also reflected on the traditional six-day celebration of Moatsu in earlier times. In his address, he observed that many youths leave Nagaland in search of employment opportunities despite the state's abundant natural wealth, particularly in agriculture, horticulture and allied sectors. He encouraged the youth to recognise and harness these local resources, noting that with dedication and hard work, they can emerge as successful entrepreneurs. He urged the youth to look inward for opportunities rather than seeking them elsewhere.

Exhorting the gathering, Rev Dr Toshiresha stressed the significance of the festival and its rele-

vance in contemporary society. He highlighted the need for the younger generation to stay connected to their roots not merely through traditional attire, but by embracing cultural values, ethics and proper conduct.

A key attraction of the celebration was the farmers' market, which showcased local produce and traditional items, promoting community-based livelihoods and sustainability. The market also served as a platform for fundraising for the Senso.

The cultural segment comprised a traditional folk dance performed by Ao Kaketshir Telungiem, Guwahati, along with a traditional song presentation by Ao women of Guwahati, rendered in the customary style with drum accompaniment. Children also took part in a cultural presentation showcasing traditional Ao attire.

Other attractions included curated T-shirts and caps sold as part of the cultural showcase.

The event witnessed active participation from members of the Ao community and other attendees, making it a memorable and meaningful celebration.



Editor's pick

The Children's Newspaper: Nurturing young minds through words

By: Dr Vijay Garg

In an era dominated by fast-moving digital content, the idea of a newspaper designed especially for children may seem old-fashioned. Yet, the concept of The Children's Newspaper holds immense relevance even today. More than just a source of information, it is a powerful educational tool that nurtures curiosity, builds awareness, and shapes young minds into informed, responsible citizens.

A children's newspaper is not simply a simplified version of an adult newspaper. It is thoughtfully crafted to match the cognitive level, interests, and emotional maturity of young readers. Its language is clear, engaging, and age-appropriate. Complex global issues are explained in simple terms, allowing children to understand the world without feeling overwhelmed. From science and environment to culture and current events, it opens a window to knowledge in a friendly and accessible manner.

One of the greatest strengths of a children's newspaper is its ability to cultivate the habit of reading. At a time when screens often dominate a child's attention, a newspaper offers a refreshing alternative. The tactile experience of holding a newspaper, turning its pages, and discovering new stories fosters concentration and imagination. Unlike digital scrolling, reading a newspaper encourages deeper engagement with content, helping children develop comprehension and critical thinking skills.

Moreover, a children's newspaper plays a crucial role in building awareness about the world. It introduces young readers to current events in a balanced and non-threatening way. For instance, topics like climate change, technological advancements, or cultural diversity are presented with sensitivity and clarity. This early exposure helps children become more aware of global issues and inspires them to think about their role in society. Creativity is another area where children's newspapers excel. Many such publications include sections for stories, poems, drawings, puzzles, and quizzes contributed by children themselves. This not only boosts their confidence but also gives them a sense of ownership and participation. When a child sees their name or work published, it can be a deeply motivating experience, encouraging them to express themselves more freely. In addition, children's newspapers often highlight inspiring stories of young achievers, scientists, artists, and social workers. These stories serve as role models, showing children what is possible with dedication and effort. They also help break stereotypes by presenting diverse examples of success, encouraging children to pursue their own passions.

The educational value of a children's newspaper extends beyond academics. It fosters essential life skills such as empathy, communication, and ethical thinking. Articles on social issues, kindness, teamwork, and problem-solving help children develop a broader perspective. They learn to respect different viewpoints and understand the importance of cooperation and responsibility.

In the classroom, a children's newspaper can be a valuable teaching resource. Teachers can use it to make lessons more interactive and relevant. For example, a science article can complement a textbook chapter, while a news story can spark discussions in social studies classes. Activities like debates, presentations, and creative writing can be built around newspaper content, making learning more dynamic and enjoyable.

In the Indian context, the importance of children's newspapers is particularly significant. With a diverse population and a rapidly changing society, there is a need to educate young citizens about their culture, values, and responsibilities. Newspapers designed for children can bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern realities. They can promote multilingual learning, celebrate local stories, and encourage a sense of national identity while fostering global awareness.

However, the success of children's newspapers depends on their ability to adapt to changing times. While print remains valuable, integrating digital platforms can enhance reach and engagement. Interactive features, audio-visual content, and online participation can make newspapers more appealing to today's tech-savvy generation. The goal should not be to replace print but to complement it, creating a balanced and enriching experience. Parents also play a crucial role in encouraging children to read newspapers. By setting aside time for reading, discussing articles, and showing interest in their child's opinions, they can create a positive learning environment at home. When children see adults valuing reading and staying informed, they are more likely to develop similar habits.

Despite its many benefits, the culture of reading newspapers among children is gradually declining in some areas. This trend needs to be addressed through collective efforts by educators, parents, publishers, and policymakers. Making children's newspapers affordable, accessible, and engaging is essential to ensure their continued relevance. In conclusion, The Children's Newspaper is far more than a collection of stories and facts. It is a gateway to knowledge, creativity, and awareness. It shapes how children see the world and their place within it. By encouraging reading, critical thinking, and self-expression, it lays the foundation for lifelong learning.

In a world filled with information, what children need is not just access, but guidance. A well-crafted children's newspaper provides that guidance, helping young readers grow into thoughtful, informed, and responsible individuals. It is, in every sense, an investment in the future—one page at a time.

Assam Tea - A Glorious two-hundred-year Heritage

Every day begins with a refreshing cup of tea. This beverage, prepared by mixing dried tea leaves with hot water, a little milk, and a measured amount of sugar, is today consumed by almost everyone across the world. After working tirelessly or traveling for long hours, a cup of tea brings a renewed sense of energy to both mind and body, enabling a person to regain the mental readiness to work with fresh enthusiasm. Assam has long been enriched by its deep amber-colored tea. Bright, strong, and invigorating in character, Assamese tea is considered the perfect drink to awaken from drowsiness or to remain refreshed. The distinctive second flush orthodox tea of Assam is valued for its rich taste and bright liquor, and therefore, Assam tea is regarded as one of the finest teas in the world. There is a popular saying associated with tea: "You have not woken up fully if you have not sipped Assam tea."

The word 'tea' is derived from a Chinese term; in China, it is called 'cha.' In English, it is known as tea. In the Singhpo language, it is called 'phalap' or 'phalap', while in the Ahom language, it is referred to as 'nam-phalap,' where 'nam' means water and 'phalap' means tea. It is perhaps from this that the beverage prepared by boiling tea leaves in water came to be known as tea-water in Assam. For the past two centuries, Assam has been closely intertwined with tea. This heritage began in the early nineteenth century through an accidental discovery, which has now evolved into one of the most renowned tea industries in the world. The rich aroma and unique flavor of Assam tea have captivated tea lovers across the globe. However, behind this golden beverage lies a story deeply rooted in history, culture, and resilience. From the wild tea plants of the Brahmaputra Valley to the vast tea gardens of today, from colonial exploitation to post-independence revival, and from economic success to present challenges, this journey is extensive and profound.

Assam tea, now globally admired, has a long and colorful history behind its discovery. It is noteworthy that in 1823, Robert Bruce discovered the tea plant growing in the forests of Assam. In 1822, Robert Bruce had learned about the tea plant in Assam from Maniram Dewan. At that time, the Singhpo community was cultivating tea, a fact that was largely unknown to the outside world. Upon arriving in Assam, Robert Bruce observed the Singhpo people consuming a beverage made from the leaves of an unknown plant, which resembled the Chinese *Camellia sinensis*. In 1823, he traveled to Rangpur, the capital of the Ahom kingdom, with the aim of meeting the Singhpo chief Bessa Gam to learn more about the plant. The information provided by Maniram Dewan greatly encouraged him in this endeavor. In the same year, at Gargaon, the Singhpo chief Bessa Gam agreed to supply him with samples of the plant. However, Robert Bruce died in 1824. Although his name is associated with the discovery of tea, it was his brother, Charles Alexander Bruce, who later played a crucial role in identifying the plant as a refreshing beverage, commercializing Assam tea, and establishing it in

the global market. After Robert Bruce's death, the plant samples were handed over to Charles Alexander Bruce, who sent them to David Scott, the Commissioner of Assam. Eventually, the plant was identified as a variety of *Camellia sinensis*, distinct from the Chinese variety *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis*. The credit for initiating tea cultivation in Assam is therefore given to Charles Alexander Bruce. Official cultivation of tea in Assam began in 1830, and in 1839, the East India Company formally started tea production in the region. The first tea garden in Assam was the Chabua Tea Estate. Maniram Dewan was the first Indian to begin tea cultivation in Assam. He served as the chief administrative and financial officer of the Assam Company until he resigned in 1841, after which he established his own tea gardens. In 1853, he founded two tea estates—Chinamora and Seleng. However, due to his participation in the Revolt of 1857, he was executed by the British in 1858. Following his pioneering efforts, many individuals, primarily Assamese, voluntarily took up tea cultivation. Assam tea gradually carved out a distinct identity in the global market. It is said that the British introduced railway transport in Assam in 1885 primarily to support the tea industry.

Today, tea is cultivated on approximately 230,000 hectares of land in Assam, with around 850 tea estates spread across the state. Recognized as the second-largest tea-producing region in the world, nearly one million people in Assam are directly associated with the tea industry. Among the districts, Sivasagar has 85 tea estates, Tinsukia 122, Golaghat 74, Karbi Anglong 15, Jorhat 88, Dibrugarh 177, Dhubri 3, Bongaigaon 1, Goalpara 2, Udalguri 24, Kokrajhar 3, Baksa 4, Chirang 1, Kamrup (Metro) 3, Kamrup (Rural) 3, Nagaon 21, Sonitpur 59, Lakhimpur 9, Dhemajai 2, Cachar 56, Dima Hasao 2, and Karimganj 23 tea estates. In addition, there are lakhs of small privately owned tea gardens. The Monabari Tea Estate in Biswanath Chariali is the largest tea estate in Assam.

When the British realized that the climate and soil of Assam were ideal for large-scale tea cultivation, they began expanding plantations across the region. In 1839, the Assam Tea Company was established, which attracted European planters. Forests were rapidly cleared to make way for extensive tea gardens. By the mid-nineteenth century, Assam tea had entered British markets, where its strong and malty flavor quickly gained popularity. Unlike the lighter and more floral Chinese tea, Assam tea's full-bodied liquor made it ideal for blending, leading to its widespread use in English and Irish breakfast teas.

It is important to note that after establishing tea plantations, the British faced a shortage of labor. To address this issue, they brought workers from various parts of India, including Bihar, Odisha,

West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. These workers belonged to numerous communities such as Tanti, Oraon, Bauri, Munda, Bhumij, Karmakar, Telenga, Badhai, Panika, Pradhan, Bania, Gonda, Gajalu, Gobala, Majhi, Chand, Nagbanshi, Tasa, Kairi, Dhanwar, Teli, Ghatwar, Mala, and Nania,

among others, forming a composite tea tribe community in Assam. Most of them were economically deprived and struggled for basic sustenance. They were often lured with promises of a better life but ended up facing harsh working conditions, low wages, and social isolation. Over time, these communities settled in Assam and became an integral part of its social fabric. They embraced Assamese language and culture, and today their children study in Assamese-medium schools, adopting the language as their own. Their contribution to the tea industry is immense, and their cultural expressions, particularly the Jhumur dance, have become a defining feature of Assam's tea heritage.

Another notable aspect is that tea gardens in Assam do not follow Indian Standard Time. Instead, they observe a local time known as "Tea Garden Time" or "Bagan Time," which is one hour ahead of IST. This system was introduced during the British era, considering the early sunrise in the region. It has proven effective, as workers can complete their tasks before dusk, thereby increasing productivity. The working hours in tea gardens typically range from 9 a.m. (8 a.m. IST) to 5 p.m. (4 p.m. IST), although slight variations exist.

Tea in Assam is produced through different methods, including orthodox and CTC (Crush, Tear, Curl). By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Assam had secured a strong position in the global tea industry. The introduction of the CTC method in the 1930s revolutionized tea processing, making Assam tea more accessible. This mechanical process enhanced the strength and consistency of tea, ensuring its stable presence in both domestic and international markets. Research institutions like the Tocklai Tea Research Institute in Jorhat contributed significantly to advancements in cultivation techniques, pest control, and soil management, thereby improving both yield and quality.

The process of tea cultivation begins with the preparation of seedlings. Sandy or moderately sandy soil is ideal for this purpose. Seedlings are prepared either from cuttings or seeds. The soil is enriched with organic manure well in advance, and the prepared soil is filled into small containers. The seedlings are protected from direct sunlight using bamboo shades or plastic nets. Cuttings from selected mother plants are treated with rooting hormones and planted. Once they develop roots, they are transferred to the main field, which is prepared with proper plowing, fertilization, and drainage systems. Shade trees such as *siris* and *neem* are planted alongside. After a few

years, the plants mature and begin producing leaves. The plucking process, known as plucking, involves collecting the bud and two leaves to maintain quality. The harvested leaves are collected in baskets, weighed, and transported to factories, where they undergo processes like withering, rolling, fermenting, drying, and sorting before being exported worldwide. Assam tea is available in various types, each offering a unique experience. Black tea is known for its strong, malty flavor and deep amber color. Green tea is lighter and less oxidized, retaining its natural freshness. White tea is rare and delicately processed, preserving its natural sweetness and floral aroma. Organic tea is cultivated without chemical inputs, ensuring sustainability and environmental friendliness. All these varieties offer significant health benefits, including antioxidants that combat free radicals, improve heart health, boost immunity, and enhance mental alertness.



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After India gained independence in 1947, the tea industry underwent major changes. British planters gradually left, and Indian entrepreneurs took over many estates. Despite challenges such as price fluctuations, labor disputes, and modernization needs, Assam tea maintained its global significance. The establishment of the Tea Board of India in 1953 further supported regulation and marketing. Assam orthodox tea also received Geographical Indication (GI) status, affirming its authenticity.

Beyond its economic importance, tea has profoundly influenced Assam's cultural and social life. Tea gardens, colonial bungalows, and processing factories shape the region's landscape. Tea is not merely a crop but a way of life. The vibrant festivals, traditional attire, and customs of tea tribes enrich Assam's cultural heritage. The Jhumur dance, performed during celebrations, symbolizes unity and resilience. The participation of thousands of artists in a record-setting Jhumur performance reflects recognition of this heritage.

Despite its rich legacy, the Assam tea industry faces several challenges today. Climate change has emerged as a major concern, affecting production and quality. Rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, and soil degradation have increased pest infestations and reduced yields. Sustainable practices such as organic farming,

shade-grown tea, and improved water management are being encouraged. Another pressing issue is the condition of tea garden workers, many of whom still face low wages and inadequate living conditions. Efforts are being made to improve wages, housing, and healthcare, but much remains to be done.

The rise of small tea growers has been a significant recent development. Unlike traditional large estates, these growers operate on smaller scales, contributing nearly 50% of Assam's total production. Their emergence has brought innovation and competition, with boutique brands and organic teas opening new avenues in global trade.

In recent times, the industry has focused on innovation, sustainability, and global outreach. Specialty teas such as white, green, and handcrafted orthodox teas are gaining popularity among health-conscious consumers. Digital marketing and experiential tourism have also enhanced branding, attracting younger audiences and international buyers.

Assam's tea industry stands at a crucial juncture where tradition meets modernity. Its story is one of resilience—of land, people, and a beverage that has captured hearts worldwide for two centuries. Assam tea is not just a drink; every sip carries heritage, every leaf holds history, and every moment reflects potential for the future.

The journey of Assam tea demonstrates that its success must be measured not only by commercial gains but also by its impact on lives, culture, and the environment. From plantation workers to global markets, it has touched countless lives. Moving forward, sustainability, equity, and innovation must remain central. Addressing climate challenges, improving workers' conditions, and preserving quality are essential.

Having completed two hundred years, Assam tea enters a new chapter. Balancing its glorious past, present challenges, and future opportunities will determine its continued success. Assam tea has already connected the world not just through a beverage, but through stories of struggle and achievement. Preserving this heritage and carrying it forward requires collective effort. Assam tea is not merely a drink; it is an inspiration, a tradition, and a symbol of hope. Its journey must continue, spreading its influence across the world.

A Fragile peace in the high Himalayas

The shifting sands of India's strategic relationship with China tell a story that is far more complex and perhaps more troubling than the polished speeches delivered at global summits would suggest. For years, the world was sold a vision of India as the ultimate democratic counterweight to China, a rising titan ready to reclaim its historical place as a peer competitor in the heart of Asia. This wasn't just a dream for the Indian middle class; it was a geopolitical necessity for a West increasingly wary of Beijing's shadow. But as we look at the reality on the ground today, that vision feels less like a roadmap and more like a fading memory. What we are seeing now is a quiet, almost resigned pivot toward accommodation. The fire of competition hasn't been extinguished by a single grand defeat, but rather by the slow, grinding weight of economic reality and a decade of policy choices that favored the immediate optics of power over the difficult, unglamorous work of building it from the floor up.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping met in 2024 to signal a normalization of ties, the news was greeted with a sense of relief in some diplomatic circles. After the brutal clashes in the Galwan Valley in 2020, the two nuclear-armed neighbors had been locked in a cold, high-altitude standoff that drained resources and kept the threat of war constantly hovering in the background. But this return to a tactical calm feels fragile because it is built on a foundation of silence. It is a peace bought by ignoring the very causes of the friction. While New Delhi talks about a return to the status quo, Beijing continues to assert its presence along the border through the steady, bureaucratic aggression of renaming villages and landmarks in territories India calls its own. These aren't just names on a map; they are markers of intent. By allowing these actions to pass with only the most perfunctory of diplomatic protests, India is signaling a new kind of tolerance. The priority has shifted from defending every inch of sovereign dignity to ensuring that nothing disrupts the economic engine that remains so deeply

reliant on Chinese fuel.

This shift is most visible in the way the domestic conversation is managed. There is a palpable fear within the halls of power that the truth of the border situation could derail the delicate diplomatic reset currently underway. Take the curious case of the cinematic treatment of the Galwan clash. A film intended to honor the sacrifice of the twenty Indian soldiers who died in that freezing valley found itself caught in the gears of government sensitivity. Reports indicate that the project, starring one of the country's biggest icons, Salman Khan, was subjected to intense scrutiny and eventually forced into a massive overhaul.

More than forty percent of the footage was supposedly scrapped and reshot to turn a historical tragedy into a fictionalized, sanitized tale. This is not just about movie business; it is about the state deciding which facts the public is allowed to digest. When a government feels the need to rewrite the recent past to protect its current diplomatic standing, it reveals a profound lack of confidence in its own strategic position.

The economic numbers provide a cold, hard explanation for this timidity. We have lived through a decade of slogans like Self-Reliant India and calls to decouple from the Chinese supply chain. These were popular on the campaign trail and made for stirring television, but the actual ledgers tell a different tale. Trade between the two nations has not shrunk; it has exploded. In 2025, the bilateral trade volume climbed to over \$155 billion, and the trade deficit reached a staggering \$99 billion. This is not just a gap; it is a structural dependency. The Indian economy is not pulling away from China; it is becoming more tightly woven into its fabric every single day. Recent shifts in policy, such as the easing of investment norms and the welcoming back of Chinese technicians, are a quiet admission of this reality. The government

has realized that its own industrial ambitions are stuck in the mud without the very expertise and capital it once tried to banish.

This dependency goes right to the heart of India's future. Think about the sectors the country is pinning its hopes on. The pharmaceutical industry, often called the pharmacy of the world, relies on Chinese active ingredients to make the generic drugs that fuel India's exports. The solar revolution, which is supposed to lead the country into a green future, is built almost entirely on Chinese-made cells and modules. Even the push for electric vehicles is stuck at the starting line without Chinese battery technology and the minerals that Beijing has spent decades securing. By failing to build a local manufacturing base for these critical components, India has effectively handed the keys to its energy and healthcare security to its primary rival. This creates a situation where any move toward a truly independent or aggressive foreign policy can be instantly neutralized by the mere threat of a supply chain disruption.

The failure to turn the manufacturing sector into a global powerhouse is perhaps the greatest missed opportunity of the last decade. India's share of global manufacturing has hovered around three percent for years, while China commands nearly a third of the world's factory output. The government's flagship incentive programs have certainly brought in investment, but look closer and you see that most of it is focused on low-end assembly.

We see millions of iPhones being put together in Indian factories, which looks great in a press release, but those factories are still importing the high-value components from China. It is a circular trap. Every time India exports a finished high-tech product, it often has to import more from China to make it possible. Instead of replacing the Chinese factory, India is becoming its final assembly line, often using taxpayer subsidies to pad the margins of these operations. This is not the behavior of a peer competitor; it is the behavior of a secondary player in a system designed by someone else.

India's focus on the low-value end of the chain is a path toward long-term stagnation. While Beijing pours billions into artificial intelligence, advanced semiconductors, and quantum computing,



India remains a consumer and an assembler of that innovation. The indigenous base required to compete on a technological level simply hasn't materialized. This creates a disconnect between the official narrative of a rising global power and the reality of a nation that is increasingly tethered to the very hegemony it claims to oppose. Other countries in the Indo-Pacific are watching this very closely.

They once looked to New Delhi as a reliable partner that could help balance out Beijing's weight, but as they see India making concessions and deepening its economic ties with China, they are forced to recalibrate their own strategies. If the supposed balancer is herself being pulled into the orbit of the hegemon, the regional balance of power shifts irrevocably.

It is easy to blame outside forces for this turn of events. The unpredictable nature of global politics and the shifting priorities of various administrations in Washington have certainly made the environment more challenging. But the truth is that India's drift toward a subordinate position is largely a result of internal weaknesses. For years, domestic political optics have been given priority over the slow, difficult work of state-building. It

is far easier to win an election with a catchy slogan about self-reliance than it is to fix the underlying issues in education, infrastructure, and bureaucracy that actually make a country self-reliant. When national interest is defined by the immediate political needs of the moment rather than a calculated, multi-generational strategy, the result is a slow and steady decline.

The exceptionalism that defined Indian foreign policy after independence is being replaced by a much more transactional and subservient reality. For a nation with such vast potential and such grand ambitions, this is a profound strategic miscalculation. The window to establish India as a distinct, competitive global power is closing. In its place is a country that manages its own decline while trying to maintain a facade of strength for the benefit of a domestic audience. The hard truth is that being a great power requires more than just a large population and a fast-growing GDP; it requires an industrial and technological independence that India has simply failed to build. We have reached a point where the choice between being a leader or a follower has effectively been made, not through a single decision, but through a thousand small surrenders to the easy path of dependency.



Author

By: Satyabrata Borah

The Creative Machine: AI and India's AVGC Industry

By: Purushraj Patnaik

In April 2026, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting confirmed an INR 250 crore allocation under the Union Budget 2026-27 to establish AVGC Content Creator Labs in 15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges. The Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT) in Mumbai, operational since July 2025, has launched 18 courses through the Train-the-Trainer programme. These mark the state's most direct intervention yet in building a creative workforce for an industry whose scale demands it. The sector currently employs roughly 2.6 lakh professionals and could generate over 23 lakh direct and indirect jobs by 2032.

The Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) sector, spanning animation, visual effects, gaming, comics, and extended reality, is among India's fastest-growing industries. The AVGC Promotion Task Force, constituted in April 2022, projected a requirement of close to two million skilled professionals by 2030. AI has entered the production pipeline not as a prospect but as a present reality, accelerating timelines, reshaping workflows, and compressing content creation costs. The structural gaps that could constrain it are equally real.

India's AVGC Landscape and the AI Inflexion
The global AVGC-XR market is valued at approximately US\$ 800 billion. India's share, US\$ 2.3 billion in 2019, could grow 2.2 times to constitute 1.5 percent of that total. A CII GT report projects Animation and VFX rising from \$1.3 billion in 2023 to US\$ 2.2 billion by 2026, with on-line gaming reaching US\$ 4.6 billion by the same year. The generative AI animation segment is projected to grow from US\$ 61.6 million in 2023 to US\$ 931.5 million by 2033, at a CAGR of 47.9 percent. Studios are deploying these tools to automate repetitive tasks such as rigging and in-betweening, freeing artists for higher-order creative work.

The credibility of India's AVGC ambition rests not on the number of Content Creator Labs it establishes but on whether the professionals and studios that emerge from them operate in a governance environment that enables sustainable competition.

When Netflix launched Eyaline Studios in Hyderabad, the fifth location in a global network covering Los Angeles, Vancouver, Seoul, and London, it signalled that global studios regard India not as a low-cost outsourcing base but as a

contributor to high-end digital storytelling pipelines. WAVES 2025 reinforced this shift, convening technology leaders from over 100 countries under the "Create in India, Create for the World" initiative, with the Create in India Challenge drawing over one lakh creators across Tier-II and Tier-III cities. The institutional architecture for a creative economy of scale is being built. The governance architecture has yet to catch up.

Three Structural Gaps in the AVGC Ecosystem
The credibility of India's AVGC ambition rests not on the number of Content Creator Labs it establishes but on whether the professionals and studios that emerge from them operate in a governance environment that enables sustainable competition. Three structural gaps risk undermining this outcome.

1. The Infrastructure Gap

High-performance computing, including GPU clusters, low-latency networks, and specialised rendering infrastructure, remains concentrated in metropolitan facilities. By May 2025, the IndiaAI Mission's national compute capacity had crossed 34,000 GPUs, yet deployment to Tier-II and Tier-III cities, where creative talent is being directed, is not matched by investment in production infrastructure. Though the "India AI infrastructure market" is expanding rapidly, AVGC-XR workflows are compute-intensive in ways that general-purpose infrastructure does not address. Maharashtra's AVGC-XR Policy 2025 identifies Nagpur, Nashik, and Kolhapur as potential regional clusters. Rising AVGC demand, driven by compute-intensive rendering, simulation, and generative workflows, will require substantially more distributed GPU access than current deployments provide. For these clusters to function as production hubs rather than training outposts, compute access must follow the geography of creative talent, not precede it.

The challenge is less institutional absence than alignment: existing programmes have not kept pace with AI-augmented workflows, leaving a gap between foundational training and industry-current competencies.

2. The Skill Gap

India hosts the world's largest base of AI learners at 1.3 million, yet a 50-55 percent gap persists between projected demand and qualified supply. In AVGC, the gap is compounded by the sector's specificity: it needs professionals combining creative and technical competencies, artists who understand machine learning pipelines, engineers who understand narrative form, producers who

understand generative workflow economics. India does not lack institutional presence here. The country has over 1,450 animation colleges, including 900-plus private institutes such as Arena Animation, MAAC, and Toonz Academy, alongside public institutions like the National Institute of Design (NID), the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), and the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute. Industry bodies such as FICCI, CII, ABAI, and SAIK have long contributed to capacity building. The challenge is less institutional absence than alignment: existing programmes have not kept pace with AI-augmented workflows, leaving a gap between foundational training and industry-current competencies. The IICT's 136 students are orders of magnitude below what the two-million-professional target by 2030 requires. Content Creator Labs in 15,000 schools can build foundational literacy, but do not yet constitute a full pipeline from creative exposure to industry-ready talent.

3. The Intellectual Property Gap

India's Copyright Act 1957 does not address AI-generated works, assign authorship to AI systems, or guide the use of copyrighted material in AI model training. In December 2025, DPIIT published a Working Paper on Generative AI and Copyright proposing a hybrid licensing model, but foundational questions on authorship and ownership remain unresolved. The Delhi High Court admitted ANI Media v. OpenAI (2024), the country's first significant generative AI copyright case, without providing definitive guidance. For an industry where IP is the primary export commodity, this ambiguity is not merely a legal inconvenience. It is a structural disincentive to original IP creation and a vulnerability in every co-production negotiation with studios in more settled regimes.

Framework of Priorities

The following three recommendations provide a framework:

1. Build a distributed compute infrastructure for AVGC clusters:

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the IndiaAI Mission, could designate AVGC-XR as a priority sector for distributed compute access. A portion of the shared compute infrastructure being developed by IndiaAI Mission's infrastructure could be allocated to designated AVGC production nodes and regional clusters identified under state AVGC-XR policies, providing GPU-as-a-service access that lets studios compete on global pipelines without the cap-



ital cost of proprietary compute.

2. Modernise existing institutions while scaling the IICT and Content Creator Labs network:

The Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (IICT) and Content Creator Labs offer a promising template for a sector-specific AI talent pipeline. That template must extend to the modernisation of India's existing public and private AVGC training infrastructure, so that a democratised pipeline emerges across both streams rather than a parallel system operating apart from them. Bringing public and private institutions onto a common standard is essential for scaling the workforce the sector requires.

The IICT could develop a modular curriculum sequencing foundational creative skills with AI-augmented production competencies, covering generative design, virtual production workflows, AI-assisted editing, and prompt engineering. The Train-the-Trainer programme, currently at 15 participants, could scale into a national faculty development scheme, with IICT partnering with leading public and private institutions to accredit AI-AVGC instructors across both public and private institutions. Industry partnerships on the WaveX Startup Accelerator model could ensure curriculum development is paced to the sector's workflow evolution rather than academic cycles.

3. Legislate clarity on AI-generated IP before the ambiguity compounds:

India could operationalise the DPIIT working paper's central proposal: a single-window system

that abstracts the negotiation between copyright holders and AI model trainers, securing fair compensation for creators while granting developers a collective licence to use lawfully accessed material without negotiating with individual rightsholders.

Unlike an absolute exemption, this approach is creator-compensating by design, balancing creator autonomy with the imperatives of innovation. India could also institutionalise the paper's AI Training Data Disclosure requirement, so AVGC studios can track when their work enters training datasets, and build out the centralised royalty collection mechanism it envisages. Asian peers offer reference points: Japan's Article 30-4 grounds its AI-training exception in "non-enjoyment use", a human-centric standard rather than a technical carve-out, while Singapore's Section 244 permits computational data analysis on lawfully accessed works.

Conclusion

India's AVGC sector is at an inflexion point. The institutional groundwork, encompassing IICT, the AVGC Task Force, WAVES, and the Content Creator Labs initiative, is stronger than at any previous moment. What remains to be built is the governance layer that converts creative capacity into a durable competitive advantage: compute infrastructure that follows creative geography, a talent pipeline calibrated to AI-augmented workflows, and an IP framework that gives Indian studios the confidence to own what they create. (Courtesy: ORF)

Bricks without blueprints: The cost of India's silicon dependency

By: Nishant Sahdev

While India is pouring concrete in Odisha but the rules for what goes inside those factories are redrafted here in Washington. From Gujarat to Odisha, new semiconductor packaging plants, assembly lines, and data centers are rising across the country. Every inauguration is presented as evidence that India has entered the front rank of technological powers. In New Delhi, with a message that the India's age of silicon has arrived.

This optimism has value. Manufacturing creates jobs, builds technical discipline, and reduces pressure from India's vast electronics import bill. But a dangerous confusion has entered the national conversation. We are mistaking infrastructure for control. There is a major difference between hosting technology and owning it. A country can build factories, consume huge subsidies, and still remain dependent on systems designed, licensed, and governed elsewhere.

While bilateral frameworks like the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) are sold to Indian institutional investors as a triumph, the numbers tell a harsher story.

In February, Washington imposed a uniform 10 per cent tariff. In March, the USTR launched aggressive Section 301 investigations into industrial capacities across 16 economies. These are not accidents of diplomacy. They are the new baseline of American trade policy, which is growing highly protectionist. India is building the physical hardware for the future, but the United States holds the rules for how that hardware can be used. We are building a house on a rented foundation.

The Fallacy of Linear Progress

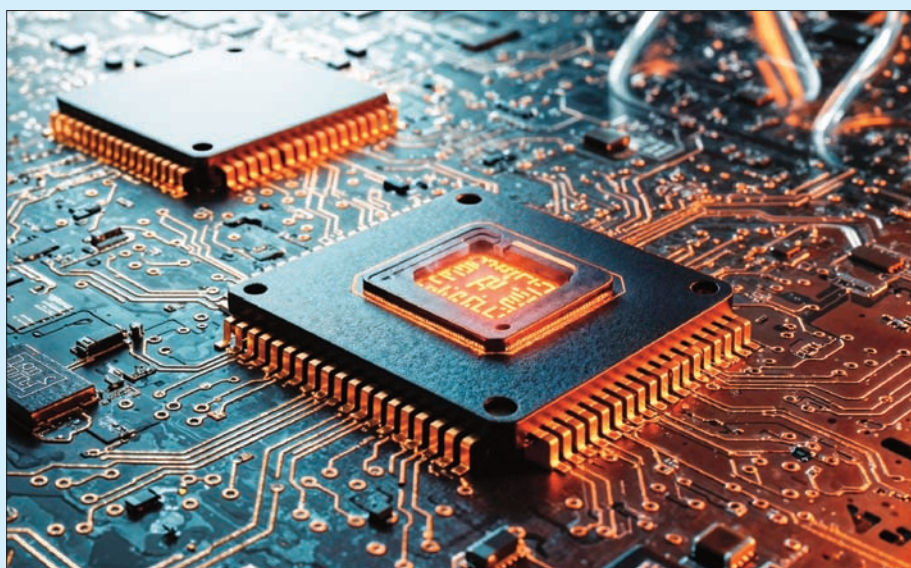
New Delhi suffers from the assumption of linear progress. Policymakers believe geopolitical alignment with the U.S. guarantees technology transfers, which fuels manufacturing, ending in export dominance. This ignores how modern supply chains are actually work. Trade policy today is a highly volatile market. If a domestic facility's viability can be erased overnight by a sudden pivot in foreign export controls, it is not an independent Indian asset. It is a leveraged project dependent on external permission.

The Packaging Trap and the Margin Deficit

Washington's playbook in the Indo-Pacific is economically rational: onshore the high-margin, intellectually rigorous work of chip design and AI research, while outsourcing the lower-margin, ecologically demanding labor of assembly, testing, and packaging (ATP) to partner nations.

Look at the underlying economics. In the global semiconductor value chain, fabless design and core intellectual property capture nearly 50 per cent of the industry's total profit. Assembly and packaging yield less than 10 per cent. By focusing state incentives primarily on ATP and legacy manufacturing, India walks into a high-investment, low-yield trap. A fab without design capability is a factory with rent to pay. The 3D Glass Solutions partnership in Odisha creates vital employment, but it cannot be the final destination. Without a corresponding surge in indigenous chip design and intellectual property ownership, India will remain a highly capable subcontractor.

This is the Silicon Shackle: achieving the status of being physically indispensable to the global supply chain, while remaining fundamentally dependent on the original architect. If India owns the building but not the operating system, sovereignty is cosmetic.



The Token Tax and the USD 120 Billion Ledger

This dependency extends into the digital sphere. A new zone of influence is being drawn by the U.S. Department of Commerce that prioritizes American technological hegemony over global market access.

Under these rules, acquiring the compute-dense GPUs necessary for India's 10,000-chip National AI Mission requires navigating National Validated End-User (NVEU) authorizations. For Indian data centers, these mandatory audits act as a silent embargo. They delay time-to-market by months. India subsidizes the power and constructs the data centers, but the computing power humming inside them remains audited and overseen by a foreign capital.

Compute dependence is the new oil dependence. Furthermore, we must confront the hidden economic drain of our current AI ecosystem. Over 80 per cent of Indian AI startups today build their applications on top of U.S.-hosted, proprietary foundational models. This creates a perpetual Token Tax. Every time an Indian enterprise utilizes an American API to process a prompt or analyze data, a micro-payment of capital—and crucially, behavioral data—flows outward.

India's electronics import bill is already projected to cross a staggering \$120 billion by the end of this fiscal cycle. Now, factor in the cost of artificial intelligence. A single cluster of top-tier Nvidia GPUs costs tens of millions of dollars, and Indian enterprises are currently forced to rent this compute power by the hour from American hyperscalers. If we do not cultivate our own foundational model weights, we will add a crippling digital trade deficit to that ledger. We risk becoming a vast workforce of diligent, prompt engineers rather than the architects of original systems.

The Closing Window on Data Leverage

Historically, India's greatest leverage in technology negotiations has been its demographic scale. We represent the largest open data market in the world, processing over 13 billion digital public infrastructure transactions every single month. Global AI giants have extracted this Indian data to train their models for free. This is where India should worry. The frontier of artificial intelligence is moving away from scraping raw human data. The next generation of models increasingly relies on synthetic data—data autonomously generated by algorithms training themselves. As this happens, our demographic advantage will precipitously diminish. Once algorithms no longer need our data to become smarter, our primary

bargaining chip disappears.

We must urgently enforce a Data-for-Tech framework. If foreign entities wish to utilize the high-quality datasets generated by the Indian populace, they must be compelled to provide more than localized software services. They must share the underlying blueprints: the model weights and the source code. Access to our digital market must be priced as a high-value geopolitical trade.

A Hard-Headed Policy Blueprint

If India wants to transition from diplomatic optimism to hard-headed execution, it must adopt an uncompromising approach:

1. A Sovereign GPU Reserve: India must establish a state-backed stockpile of high-end compute. This requires unlocking institutional capital to secure long-term, non-revocable licenses for cutting-edge hardware, insulating domestic startups from sudden export control shocks.

2. IP Co-Development Mandates: Any foreign firm receiving taxpayer-funded incentives under the India Semiconductor Mission must be legally required to enter into binding IP co-development agreements with Indian entities. We need the design blueprints, not just the assembly instructions.

3. Targeted Chip Design Scaling: India must aggressively scale up its Design Linked Incentives (DLI), offering massive R&D tax credits specifically for fabless chip design firms. The objective is clear: own the intellectual architecture of the chips we are currently paying to package.

4. The "Indi-LLM" Initiative: We require a heavily funded national mission to build foundational models trained explicitly on Indian languages and legal frameworks, with the core weights stored domestically. This guarantees that if external APIs are ever restricted, India's digital nervous system continues to function.

The global technological order is currently being recalibrated. The margin for error is zero. Ribbon cuttings are easy. Technological leverage is harder.

To move beyond the role of a diligent subcontractor, India must recognise that true autonomy is the product of calculated hedging and aggressive IP ownership. We must ensure that when we build for the future, we are building on ground that we unquestionably control.

Author is a physicist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a columnist on AI, infrastructure, and global systems; Views presented are personal. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

The Geography of a Mistake: When cultural pride collides with scientific fact

By: CP Rajendra

The prime meridian is the imaginary 0-degree longitude line passing through Greenwich, London. Established in 1884 at the International Meridian Conference in Washington DC, it serves as the global reference for measuring east-west distance, defining time zones, and dividing the earth into Eastern and Western hemispheres.

It aids international navigation and sets Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). Synonyms include the Greenwich Meridian or Geographic Longitude. Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan declared on April 6 that it is time to establish "Mahakal Standard Time" (MST) in place of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), claiming that Ujjain is "the original centre of time calculation." Inaugurating the three-day "Mahakal the Master of Time International Conference," he stated that Ujjain, Kashi, Kanchi, and Puri Dham are "living laboratories" where science, art, culture, literature, and spirituality converge.

The minister asserted, "Ujjain is the place where the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer meet, and ancient world time calculations were made. Therefore, the time has come to logically establish 'Mahakal Standard Time' (MST) in place of 'Greenwich Mean Time' (GMT). Even modern AI tools recognise that the original centre of time calculation is the area around Ujjain." Therefore, the need is to re-establish the country's scientific pride globally, he said.

The scientific correction

His specific geographical claim: "Ujjain is where the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer meet," is scientifically untenable.

The Equator (0° latitude) and the Tropic of Cancer (approximately 23.5° N) are parallel circles. By definition, they never intersect. While the Tropic of Cancer does pass through India, the Equator lies entirely south of the country, running through Indonesia, Kenya, Somalia, and Brazil – but not India. India lies between 8°4' N and 37°6' N latitudes, and the Tropic of Cancer (23°26' N) passes through its centre. The southernmost point of mainland India, Kanyakumari, is approximately 870 km north of the Equator.

Even the southernmost territory of India, Indira Point in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, is approximately 750 km north of the Equator. Ujjain is located well north of the Tropic of Cancer, in the state of Madhya Pradesh. For the Equator to meet the Tropic of Cancer at Ujjain, the Equator would have to shift thousands of kilometres north – a geographical impossibility.

The historical context

The minister is correct that Ujjain holds historical significance.



Crucially, the choice of Greenwich was not predetermined by geography. Any meridian could have been chosen. Historically, different civilisations adopted their own prime meridians based on culturally significant locations.

Ancient Indian texts, such as the Surya Siddhanta, treated Ujjain as a reference meridian. This was part of a common global tradition: the Greeks used Alexandria, Islamic scholars used Baghdad, and the French used Paris as their respective primary meridians. Longitude is an arbitrary reference system – any meridian can serve as the zero line, though the Greenwich meridian has been internationally adopted as the 0-degree standard. There is no inherent geographical privilege attached to any specific longitude.

Unlike the Hellenistic reliance on the "Great Year" to align planetary systems, Indian traditions – such as those in the Surya Siddhanta and the works of Aryabhata – focused on ascertaining the mean planetary motions and on using distinct methods to determine latitude and longitude.

As scholars such as Amartya Sen have noted, there was an outburst of mathematical insights emanating from India from the fifth to the 12th century. But they also add that nothing develops in geographical isolation. There is substantial evidence that ancient Indian mathematical schools were influenced by, and in turn influenced, exchanges with other cultures and learned from the mathematical reasoning of the Greeks, Romans, Chinese, and Babylonians.

In the context of cultural exchange in the ancient world, the name of the 11th-century Central Asian scholar al-Biruni (973-1048 CE) recurs frequently. While he accompanied the military campaigns of Mahmud of Ghazni to the Indian subcontinent, his legacy is that of an impartial scholar. Al-Biruni – a polymath and one of the greatest scientists of the Islamic Golden Age – studied Indian astronomical and geographical traditions extensively.

He engaged deeply with Indian texts to refine methods for measuring latitude and also advanced methods for calculating longitudes

and differences, building on the Indian frameworks he had studied. His monumental work, the Kitab al-Hind (or Tahqiq ma-li-Hind), written around 1030 CE, is an 80-chapter, objective Arabic study of Indian culture, science, and philosophy.

Based on firsthand observations and Sanskrit texts, it offers a rare, detailed look at medieval India's caste system, religion, and scientific achievements. Al-Biruni is regarded by many historians of science as a precursor to the European Renaissance, a figure whose empirical rigour, comparative methodology, and commitment to objective observation placed him far ahead of the scientific thought prevailing in Europe at the time. Al-Biruni was a "cultural ambassador" who bridged Islamic and Indian scientific knowledge systems and introduced them to the other side of the world.

Conflation of cultural pride with scientific fact

What transforms a historical curiosity into a matter of concern is the conflation of cultural pride with scientific fact. The minister's assertion about the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer is not a matter of interpretation or perspective; it is demonstrably false. Such claims, made by a cabinet minister responsible for the nation's education system, risk undermining scientific credibility – not of Ujjain's rich heritage, but of the government's commitment to evidence-based discourse.

The irony is poignant. An education minister, standing at a conference celebrating Ujjain's ancient scientific traditions, chose to embellish its legacy with a claim that contradicts basic geography taught in middle school. In doing so, he inadvertently demonstrated why grounding policy in verifiable fact matters – not just for credibility, but for the integrity of the very traditions he sought to honour. Ujjain deserves recognition for its genuine historical contributions to astronomy and timekeeping. It does not need fictional geography to validate its legacy. The Minister would have served both science and culture better by celebrating what is true, rather than asserting what is not. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Trump says deadline for Congress to approve Iran war doesn't apply

WASHINGTON, May 2: The White House asserted to Congress in a letter Friday that hostilities with Iran have "terminated" despite the continued presence of U.S. armed forces in the region.

The message from President Donald Trump effectively skirts a May 1 legal deadline to gain approval from members of Congress to continue the war with Iran. That deadline was already set to pass without action from Republican lawmakers who are deferring to the president.

The letter brings into stark relief the bold but legally questionable assertion of presidential power at the heart of Trump's war, which he began without congressional approval two months ago.

"The hostilities that began on February 28, 2026, have terminated," Trump wrote House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, the Senate president pro tempore.

He also made it clear in the letter that the war may be far from over.

"Despite the success of United States operations against the Iranian regime and continued efforts to secure a lasting peace, the threat posed by Iran to the United States and our Armed Forces remains significant," the Republican president said.

Under the War Powers Resolution of 1973, Congress must declare war or authorize the use of force within 60 days — Friday was the deadline — or within 90 days if the president asks for an extension. This Congress made no attempt at en-

forcing that requirement, leaving town Thursday for a week after the Senate rejected a Democratic attempt to halt the war for a sixth time.

The Trump administration has shown no interest in seeking congressional approval at all. It contends the deadlines set by the law do not apply because the war in Iran effectively ended when a shaky ceasefire began in early April.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said Thursday he did not plan on a vote to authorize force in Iran or otherwise weigh in.

"I'm listening carefully to what the members of our conference are saying, and at this point I don't see that," Thune said.

The reluctance to defy Trump on the war comes at a politically perilous time for Republicans, with public frustration mounting both over the conflict and its impact on gas prices. Still, most GOP lawmakers say they are supportive of Trump's wartime leadership or are at least willing to give him more time amid the fragile ceasefire.

Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., said he would vote for an authorization of war if Trump asked for it. But Cramer questioned whether the resolution passed during the Vietnam War era as a way for Congress to claw back its power was constitutional.

"Our founders created a really strong executive, like it or not like it," Cramer said.

Some GOP senators did make clear that they eventually want Congress to have a say.



Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski said in a floor speech Thursday that she will introduce a limited authorized use of military force when the Senate returns from the one-week recess if the administration had not presented what she called a "credible plan."

"I do not believe we should engage in open-ended military action without clear accountability," Murkowski said. "Congress has a role."

Some Republicans signal they want a vote </hl2>A handful of GOP senators have said for weeks that Congress should assert its authority over the war at some point. One of those, Maine's Susan Collins, voted for the first time with Democrats on Thursday to halt the war. She said in a statement that she wants to see a defined strategy for bringing the conflict to a close.

"The president's authority as commander in chief is not without limits," Collins said, adding that the 60-day deadline is "not a suggestion, it is a requirement."

In addition to Collins and Murkowski, Republican Sens. John Curtis of Utah, Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Josh Hawley of Missouri, among others, have said they would eventually like to see a vote.

Curtis said he would not support continued funding for the war until Congress votes to authorize it.

"It is time for decision-making from both the administration and from Congress — and that can happen in league with one another, not in conflict," Curtis said.

Thune suggested the White House step up its outreach to lawmakers with briefings and hearings if it wants continued support from Capitol Hill.

"Obviously, getting readouts from our military leadership on a somewhat regular basis I think will be helpful in terms of shaping the views of our members about how comfortable they are with everything that's happening there, and the direction headed forward," Thune said.

Administration argues the deadline doesn't apply

The War Powers Resolution of 1973 states that the president has 60 calendar days after notifying Congress that the U.S. is engaged in military hostilities to either end the military campaign or gain

approval from Congress. The White House can use a 30-day extension to safely withdraw forces, but Congress must be notified.

With the 60-day window expiring Friday, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said during a congressional hearing Thursday, "We are in a ceasefire right now, which our understanding means, the 60-day clock pauses or stops."

The administration is making that argument even though Iran maintains its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz and the U.S. Navy is maintaining a blockade to prevent Iran's oil tankers from getting out to sea.

Democrats scoffed at the suggestion that May 1 was not the real deadline. "I do not believe the statute would support that," Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine told Hegseth in the hearing.

Sen. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., argued that the military was operating warships and other military assets even though it has stopped bombing Iran during the ceasefire.

"Ceasing to use some forces while using others does not somehow stop the clock," Schiff said.

The development came as little surprise to at least one House Democrat who oversees the military.

Washington Rep. Adam Smith, the ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, told The Associated Press: "Is the expectation that the Trump administration is going to follow the law? I do not have that expectation." (AP)

US to withdraw 5,000 troops from Germany in next 6-12 months



WASHINGTON, May 2: The United States will withdraw about 5,000 troops from Germany in the next six to 12 months, the Pentagon said Friday, fulfilling President Donald Trump's threat as he clashes with the German leader over the US war with Iran.

Trump had threatened to withdraw some troops from the NATO ally earlier this week after Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the US was being "humiliated" by the Iranian leadership and criticised Washington's lack of strategy in the war.

Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement that the "decision follows a thorough review of the Department's force posture in Europe and is in recognition of the requirements and conditions on the ground."

The US has several major military facilities in Germany, including the headquarters for US European Command and US Africa Command, Ramstein Air Base, and Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, the largest American hospital outside the United States.

The number of troops leaving Germany would be 14 per cent of the 36,000 American service members stationed there.

Nico Lange from the Center of European Policy Analysis told The Associated Press earlier this week that they primarily serve US interests, including "the projection of American power globally," rather than helping with the defence of Germany.

Trump ignored questions from reporters about the withdrawal on Friday as he boarded Air Force One in Ocala, Florida, following a rally to tout his economic agenda.

Trump made a similar threat in his first term, saying he would pull about 9,500 of the roughly 34,500

US troops who were then stationed in Germany, but he didn't start the process and Democratic President Joe Biden formally stopped the planned withdrawal soon after taking office in 2021.

The mercurial US leader has mused for years about reducing the American military presence in Germany, and has railed against NATO for its refusal to assist Washington in the war, which began on Feb 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Trump wrote Wednesday on social media that the US was reviewing possible troop reductions in Germany, with a "determination" to be made soon. On Thursday, he was still thinking about Merz, posting that the German leader should "spend more time on ending the war with Russia/Ukraine" and "fixing his broken Country" than concerning himself with Iran.

American allies in NATO have braced for a US troop withdrawal since just after the Trump administration took office, with Washington warning Europe would have to look after its own security, and that of Ukraine, in the future.

Depending on operations, exercises and troop rotations, around 80,000-100,000 U.S. personnel are usually stationed in Europe. NATO allies have expected for more than a year that US troops deployed after Russia launched its all-out war on Ukraine in February 2022 would be first to leave.

Germany hosts several US military facilities, including the headquarters of its European and Africa commands, Ramstein Air Base and a medical centre in Landstuhl, where casualties from wars in places like Afghanistan and Iraq were treated.

US nuclear missiles are also stationed in the country. (AP)

US warns shipping firms over paying Iran to transit Strait of Hormuz

BEIRUT, May 2: The United States is warning shipping companies they could face sanctions for making payments to Iran to safely pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

The US Office of Foreign Assets Control alert posted Friday adds pressure in the standoff between the US and Iran over control of the strait at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, where about a fifth of the world's trade in oil and natural gas typically passes.

Iran effectively closed the strait by attacking and threatening ships after the US and Israel launched a war on Feb 28. It later began offering some ships safe passage by detouring them through routes closer to its shore, charging fees at times.

That "tollbooth" effort is the focus of the US sanctions warning, which said payment demands could include transfers not only in cash but also "digital assets, offsets, informal swaps, or other in-kind payments," including charitable donations and payments at Iranian embassies.

The US responded to Iran's closure of the strait with a naval blockade of Iranian ports on April 13, preventing Iranian tankers from leaving and depriving Tehran of oil revenue it needs to shore up its ail-



ing economy.

The US Central Command has said 45 commercial ships have been told to turn around since the blockade began.

Nobel laureate Mohammadi's health at very high risk

Imprisoned Nobel Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi remained hospitalized in Zanjan in northwestern Iran after being transferred there from prison late Friday. Her foundation described the condition of the rights lawyer as "very high risk", with fluctuating blood pressure and severe nausea.

But medical teams in Zanjan have

requested her medical records before performing any treatment, though it has recommended that she be transferred to Tehran for treatment by her own doctors, the foundation said.

However, "the Intelligence (Ministry) is still opposing the transfer of Narges to a hospital in Tehran for angiography," her husband, Taghi Rahmani, said, referring to an imaging of blood vessels.

"Until the angiography is done, it is not possible to determine what her main illness currently is," Rahmani, who is based in Paris, said in a voice message shared with The Associated Press by the foundation.

Mohammadi's brother, Oslo-based Hamidreza Mohammadi, said in a voice message shared with the AP that the doctors have not been able to treat her fluctuating blood pressure.

Mohammadi was urgently transferred from prison late Friday. The foundation said her legal team is pursuing the matter with the General Prosecutor's office.

Trump rejects latest Iranian proposal

US President Donald Trump has rejected Iran's latest proposal to end the war.

"They want to make a deal, I'm not satisfied with it, so we'll see what happens," Trump said Friday. He didn't elaborate but expressed frustration with Iran's leadership, calling it "very disappointed".

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency said Tehran handed over its plan to mediators in Pakistan on Thursday night.

The shaky three-week ceasefire between the US and Iran appears to be holding, though both countries have traded accusations of violations.

Negotiations continued by phone after Trump called off his envoys' trip to Pakistan last weekend, the

president said. Trump this week floated a new plan to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran hangs two men convicted of spying for Israel

Iran on Saturday said it hanged two men convicted of spying for Israel.

The Iranian judiciary's news outlet, Mizanonline, identified the men as Yaghub Karimpour and Nasser Bekrzadeh. It said they were hanged after the Supreme Court upheld death sentences.

The news outlet said Karimpour was accused of sending "sensitive information" to an officer in Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, while Bekrzadeh was alleged to have sent details about government and religious leaders as well as information about Natanz.

The central Iranian city is home to a nuclear enrichment facility bombed by Israel and the US last year.

Iran has hanged more than a dozen people over alleged espionage and terrorist activities in recent weeks.

Rights groups say Iran routinely holds closed-door trials in which defendants are unable to challenge the accusations they face. (AP)

Ghana becomes latest African country to reject US health deal

ACCRA (GHANA), May 2: Ghana has rejected a proposed health deal with the United States over concerns about data privacy and is now seeking a new agreement, an official said Friday. It was the latest African country to walk away from the deal over similar concerns.

The deal included provisions that would have allowed US entities access to Ghana's sensitive health data without necessary safeguards, according to Arnold Kavaarpoo, executive director of Ghana's Data Protection Commission. The scope of the data access that was requested under the deal "went far beyond what would typically be required," Kavaarpoo told The Associated Press.

A US State Department spokesperson said the department does not disclose details of bilateral negotiations. "We continue to look for ways to strengthen the bilateral partnership between our two countries," the spokesperson added, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter.

Under the Trump administration's "America First" approach to global health funding, the US has struck such health deals with more than 30 countries, most of them in Africa. The new approach that kicked off late last year replaces previous health agreements under the now-dis-

mantled United States Agency for International Development.

The deals offer hundreds of millions of dollars in US funding to some of the African countries worst hit by the US aid cuts to support their public health systems and help fight disease outbreaks.

The agreements, however, have raised questions about data privacy concerns. In February, authorities in Zimbabwe said they rejected the proposed deal over issues around health data, fairness and sovereignty. Zambia is also reported to have pushed back on a section of its deal, although no decision has been made there.

Activists in Africa say the agreements often lack adequate safeguards for the use of the data and are sometimes limited in who is being helped, such as in Nigeria, where the US committed to supporting mainly Christian faith-based healthcare providers.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention Director General Jean Kaseya had also cited "huge concerns" regarding data sharing in comments to reporters about the deals.

Ghana says no prior approval for data use

Under the proposed agreement worth around USD 300 million, Kavaarpoo said Ghana would have received about USD 109 million in

US funding over five years, with supplemental investments coming from the Ghanaian government.

Kavaarpoo, whose agency was directly involved in the talks, cited one caveat where individuals could be identified as deemed necessary for sensitive health data.

"That, in effect, was outsourcing the health data architecture of the country to a foreign body," he said. "The proposed data sharing agreement looked at access not only to health data sets, but also to metadata, dashboards, reporting tools, data models and data dictionaries."

The proposals would have also allowed up to 10 US entities access to such data with no prior approval needed from Ghana for whatever the data is needed for, he said.

"We did not get a sense that Ghana had any real governance oversight when it came to how the data was going to be utilised. It was more or less that if they undertook an exercise, they would notify the country. So it was not a prior approval arrangement," he said.

Kavaarpoo added that Ghana has communicated its decision to reject the proposal to the US and sought improved conditions for a better deal. (AP)

Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon kill 7 amid fragile ceasefire

BEIRUT, May 2: Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon killed at least seven people and wounded others on Saturday as hostilities continued between Israel and Hezbollah despite a ceasefire.

The Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon Saturday came as Israel's military issued a new warning for residents of nine southern villages to evacuate.

Israel's military and Lebanon's Hezbollah have kept up their attacks despite a ceasefire in place since April 17.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported an airstrike on a car in the village of Kfar Dajal that killed two people, while another hit a home in the village of Lwaizeh killing three. NNA also reported a strike on the village of Shoukin that killed two people.

Israel's military Arabic-language spokeswoman, Lt. Col. Ella Waweya, posted on X that the Israeli air force carried out about 50 airstrikes over the past 24 hours, saying that they targeted Hezbollah infrastructure and members.

Hezbollah said that it attacked on Saturday Israeli troops who gathered inside a house in the coastal village of Bayed with a drone. (AP)

Pope Leo XIV encourages wealthy US Catholics to keep donating

ROME, May 2: Pope Leo XIV on Saturday encouraged some of the wealthiest US Catholics to keep on giving to support his charitable works, in an audience that confirmed how the election of the first US-born pope has invigorated American Catholics and their donations.

The Chicago-born Leo met with members of The Papal Foundation, a major funder of papal development projects in the developing world, in the Apostolic Palace at the end of their annual pilgrimage to Rome.

In his remarks, Leo thanked the foundation stewards for their generosity, which he said had allowed "countless people to experience in a concrete fashion the goodness and kindness of God in their own communities."

He noted in particular the priests and nuns from poor countries who are able to study at Rome's pontifical universities to earn advanced degrees thanks to scholarships funded by foundation's grants, which combined over the past four decades have totalled more than USD 270 million.

While The Papal Foundation con-



tributions to the Vatican remained strong during Pope Francis' 12-year pontificate, other donations to the Holy See tanked during the global financial crisis, COVID-19 and other strains. Some US Catholics also soured on donating to the Holy See following years of unrelenting stories of mismanagement, corruption and scandal, as well as Francis' known criticism of American-style capitalism.

The election of Leo seems to have

reinvigorated the US church, especially the donor class. On Saturday The Papal Foundation announced that its members had approved more than \$15 million in grants for 2026, a record in the foundation's 38-year history.

The foundation also announced that 25 new families had joined it in the year since Leo's election, in the strongest sign yet that the election of an American, English-speaking pope — and a math major with an eye to

the Vatican's balance sheet — has been good news for church fundraising. "The growth we're seeing is incredibly encouraging, as it reflects a shared commitment to serve, to give, and to bring the church's mission to life in meaningful ways across the globe," David Savage, the foundation's executive director, said in a statement.

The foundation was created by the late Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia in 1988, as a way for wealthy US Catholics to directly fund charitable initiatives of the pope.

To become a steward requires a \$1 million gift to a fund that then helps support papal projects, such as building orphanages or monasteries.

For 2026, for example, some of the approved projects include the construction or renovation of a safe school for marginalised tribal children in India, and professional technical training for vulnerable women in the Philippines.

The foundation currently has as its members all the US cardinals, and is governed by a board of trustees made up of Catholic laypeople and bishops. (AP)

Starmer urges tougher action against Gaza protests in UK following antisemitic attacks



LONDON, May 2: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer warned Saturday that tougher action was needed against people chanting certain phrases at pro-Palestinian protests, as concerns grew over the safety of British Jews after the stabbings of two Jewish men in London.

Starmer said he would always defend the right to protest, but said there may be instances where some marches protesting the war in Gaza should be banned.

He suggested that repeated pro-Palestinian marches have had a "cumulative effect" linked to the rise in antisemitic incidents in the UK.

"When you see, when you hear some of those chants — globalise the intifada' would be one I would pick out — then clearly there should be tougher action in relation to that," Starmer told the BBC. The Arabic word intifada is generally translated as "uprising."

A 45-year-old man was charged Friday with attempted murder after two Jewish men were stabbed and wounded Wednesday in Golders Green, a London neighbourhood that's an epicentre of Britain's Jewish

community. Police called the attack an act of terrorism. It was the latest in a string of incidents including recent arson attacks on synagogues and other Jewish sites in the British capital.

The UK's senior police officer warned Friday that British Jews are facing their greatest ever threat, and blamed social media for making antisemitism more mainstream than before. Mark Rowley, the head of the Metropolitan Police, said British Jews are now the target of every extremist group spreading hate.

"The ghastly fact is that Jews are on everybody's list, all of those hateful groups, whether you're extreme right, whether you're extreme left, whether you're Islamist terrorist, whether you're right-wing terrorist, and some hostile states as well now with some sort of Iranian-related threats," he told The Times. "There's a ghastly Venn diagram that they're at the middle of."

Britain's official terror threat level was raised from substantial to severe after Wednesday's stabbing attack. Severe is the second-highest on a five-point scale and means intelligence agencies consider an attack highly likely in the next six months. The government said the change was not due solely to the Golders Green attack but also due to increased danger "from Islamist and extreme right-wing terrorist threat from individuals and small groups based in the UK."

The number of antisemitic incidents reported across the UK has soared since the attack by Hamas-led militants on southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, and the subsequent war in Gaza, according to the Community Security Trust charity. The group recorded 3,700 incidents in 2025, up from 1,662 in 2022. (AP)

Government stresses compliance with new SWM Rules, 2026 Nagaland government calls for effective implementation of solid waste management rules



HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 2: The Nagaland government on Friday called for effective implementation of the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026, in light of the Supreme Court's directions. Chairing a meeting on the mat-

ter in Kohima, chief secretary Sentyanger Imchen highlighted that the ministry of environment, forest and climate change notified the SWM Rules, 2026, on January 27, 2026, superseding the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 from April 1, 2026.

He underscored the critical importance of sustainable solid waste management. He emphasised that adherence to the provisions of the Rules is not optional but a statutory mandate. All departments were directed to ensure strict compliance.

Imchen stressed that a comprehensive roadmap and time-bound action plans must be developed in coordination with district administrations, urban local bodies, rural local bodies and communities.

Reiterating the seriousness of the matter, he cautioned that failure to comply with the Rules and directions of the Supreme Court will have serious legal repercussions for the state.

He said the court order has mandated accountability, holding concerned authorities and officers liable for any lapses.

All departments were directed to act with urgency, diligence and a strong sense of responsibility.

Principal secretary Y Kikheto Sema also called for public awareness, segregation at source, convergence, inter-departmental coordination, timely compliance of the court order and active collaboration at all levels to ensure effective planning, execution and monitoring of Solid Waste Management Rules 2026.

The meeting was attended by administrative heads of departments and heads of departments.

Security forces destroy 23 illegal bunkers

IMPHAL, May 2: Security forces have destroyed 23 bunkers illegally constructed in Manipur's Ukhrul and seized 18 IEDs in Tengenoupal district in separate operations, a police statement said on Saturday.

The bunkers were destroyed on Thursday in the hill villages of Mongkot Chepu, Shongphel, Mulam, Sirakhang and Ringue in Litan police station area, it said.

A 12-bore pump action gun, 17 cartridges of different calibres and 111 empty cases of fired bullets were also seized. At least seven people have been shot dead in different firing incidents and more than 30 houses have been torched since violence broke out between Tangkhul Naga and Kuki communities in Ukhrul district in February this year.

Meanwhile, in a separate operation on Wednesday, security forces seized a cache of arms and explosives in T Bongmou village in Moreh police station area in Tengenoupal district. (PTI)

SKM's Tshering Palden Bhutia new Gangtok Mayor

GANGTOK, May 2: Newly elected councillors of Gangtok Municipal Corporation (GMC) on Saturday elected Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's (SKM) Tshering Palden Bhutia as Mayor and Sara Lama as Deputy Mayor of the municipal body.

Earlier in the day, the Gangtok District Magistrate administered the oath of office and secrecy to the newly elected councillors of GMC.

The municipal elections were held on April 24 and the results were declared on April 4. The opposition parties had boycotted the elections.

In the 21-ward Gangtok Municipal Corporation, the SKM has 19 councillors.

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, in a congratulatory message, noted that the electoral mandate reflects public trust and places a significant responsibility on the representatives to deliver effective governance. He emphasised the importance of transparency, accountability and people-centric policies in addressing urban challenges.

The public representatives were also urged to prioritise infrastructure development, sanitation and sustainable urban growth, while working collaboratively with stakeholders.

"Your role will be central to shaping inclusive and resilient urban communities across the state," said Tamang.

The CM wished all representatives success in their tenure and expressed confidence that their leadership will contribute to the overall progress and well-being of citizens. (PTI)

Nagaland Dy M Patton calls for Naga unity

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 2: Nagaland deputy chief minister Y Patton on Friday made a clarion call to Naga tribal leaders, civil society organisations and the Naga political groups to unite.

"I specifically urge the Naga political groups to unite and resolve the issue with the Government of India," Patton stated while addressing the Moatsu festival of the Ao Naga community at Chuchuyimlang village in Mokokchung district.

Underscoring the urgency of resolution of the Naga political issue, Patton reminded the public that the current "oppositionless government" is specifically formed to expedite a resolution to the issue.

He further appealed to church leaders to sensitise their members against election violence and to champion the cause of "clean elections".

Patton paid glowing tribute to Ao pioneers such as P Shilu Ao, Dr T Ao, and Dr SC Jamir, acknowledging their monumental contributions to the Naga society, Christianity, politics and sports.

Chuchuyimlang village erupted in vibrant festivity with deep cultural reverence during the celebration. Traditionally dedicated to honouring the gods of nature and seeking blessings for a bountiful harvest, this year's celebration served as a powerful platform for



cultural exchange and a call for political solidarity.

The festival witnessed a unique display of Naga brotherhood with participation from 19 villages across the Mon, Tuensang and Longleng districts.

Patton expressed his delight at seeing these tribes celebrate together.

The celebration featured a grand showcase of traditional dances and folk songs, concluding with a community feast that embodied the spirit of joy, unity and thanksgiving.

Nagaland to mark World Red Cross Day with 'Walk for Humanity' on May 8

KOHIMA, May 2: The Indian Red Cross Society Nagaland State Branch (IRCSN) is set to commemorate World Red Cross Day on May 8 with a major public outreach event titled "Walk for Humanity", aligning with this year's global theme, "United for Humanity".

The day marks the 198th birth anniversary of Jean Henri Dunant, the visionary founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

World Red Cross Day is observed worldwide to honour Dunant's legacy and recognise the humanitarian services rendered by Red Cross volunteers across conflicts, disasters and crises.

This year's theme, "United for

Humanity", emphasises solidarity in the face of increasing global challenges, including conflicts and attacks on humanitarian workers.

Speaking at a press briefing, officials of IRCSN, led by its general secretary Akhale Khamo, highlighted that the theme seeks to "reclaim the narrative in the face of dehumanising trends", reminding society that both volunteers and beneficiaries are "human beings, not statistics".

In a departure from previous years' indoor observances, the Nagaland state branch is organising a Walk for Humanity to increase public visibility and participation.

Convener of the Organising Committee, Khyochano TCK, said the event will begin at 7 AM from the Red Cross Complex in Ko-

hima, proceeding to the Old NST, Main Town area. At the culmination point, she said, local MLA Dr Tselhouuto Rhtuso would share a motivational health talk on health as a medical professional.

The event has drawn support from multiple stakeholders, including Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority, Nagaland Voluntary Blood Donors Association, Kohima Village Youth Organisation, Health-focused NGOs such as Kripa Foundation and Family Planning Association of India.

The organisers stressed that the walk is more than a symbolic event as it marks the beginning of a broader campaign to strengthen humanitarian awareness and volunteerism in Nagaland. (PTI)

2 Naga villages celebrate 25 years of brotherhood

Villages adopt Ungma Declaration to strengthen unity

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 2: Two Naga villages – one belonging to the Angami Naga tribe and the other the Ao Naga tribe – celebrated the 25th year of brotherhood at Ungma village under Mokokchung district on Saturday.

To cement their commitment for the future, the two villages formally adopted the 'Ungma Declaration', pledging to continuously strengthen and carry forward their unique bond of friendship.

Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio, who belongs to the Angami Naga tribe and former chief minister SC Jamir, who belongs to the Ao Naga tribe, attended the ceremony, held under the theme 'To Bolster Amity', as the chief guest and honoured dignitary respectively.

Nagaland Speaker Sharingain Longkumer was the chief host of the historic event.

Addressing the programme, Rio shared the background of the brotherhood between the two villages, revealing that the bond was the brainchild of himself and Jamir.

"The core vision was to build a bridge of friendship with all Aos through Ungma and with all Angamis and Tenimias through TuopHEMA, ultimately radiating that peace to all Nagas," he stated.

Rio urged the gathering to introspect, retrospect and carry forward the legacy established by the two villages, pushing them to expand this friendship to the rest of the



Naga family.

Rio expressed his deep satisfaction at seeing the younger generation actively carrying forward this tradition through various exchange programmes and social engagements.

In his address, Jamir provided valuable insights of the brotherhood between the two villages, calling for urgent peace and unity among the Nagas.

Reflecting on his long and storied political career, Jamir lamented that there was no 'ism' among the Nagas in the past, noting that there was only one apex body under which all tribal hohos (bodies) worked in perfect harmony.

Expressing deep concern over

the current state of the Naga society, Jamir warned that tribalism has gone to extremes, factions, both underground and overground, have multiplied and materialism is crushing morality.

He made a fervent appeal for a drastic change in outlook and attitude among the Nagas, urging a renewed vision to build a stronger, more peaceful and prosperous Nagaland.

In a highly symbolic move toward wider integration, Ungma village donated three plots of land during the programme. These were officially handed over to the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation, the Central Nagaland Tribes Council and the Tenimia Union Nagaland by Rio.

Cease all benami business practices immediately: NSF

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, May 2: The inner line regulation commission (ILRC) of the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Saturday made a firm demand for the immediate cessation of all benami business practices, including all forms of 'rent-a-local' arrangements in Naga areas.

It warned that any entity violating this directive will be subject to public exposure in defence of 'Naga rights' and 'lawful economic order'.

In a statement, the ILRC expressed serious concern over the continued proliferation of benami business practices, commonly understood as 'local fronting', 'proxy ownership', or 'nominee arrangements', within the Naga areas.

It said that through these practices, non-local people operate commercial establishments under the names of local Naga citizens to circumvent established regulations, which is a direct violation of the legal and customary safeguards that protect Naga land, trade and economic rights.

The ILRC reiterated that such activities undermine not only statutory frameworks, including inner line regulations and trade licensing norms, but also the collective socio-economic security of the Naga people.

It said the NSF has been consistently objecting to and actively campaigning against the menace of benami businesses since the 1990s.

The ILRC noted that despite repeated warnings, representations and public awareness efforts spanning decades, the persistence and in some areas, the expansion of such illegitimate arrangements reflect a blatant disregard for both law and community settlement.

"This continued defiance necessitates a firmer and more direct course of action," the statement said.

The ILRC asked all non-Naga individuals presently engaged in any form of benami business practices to stop them immediately. It warned that attempts to exploit legal loopholes or misuse the names and identities of Naga citizens for commercial gain will not be tolerated.

It further warned all local Naga individuals who knowingly enable such arrangements.

As part of its intensified enforcement approach, the ILRC said it will, through its organisational mechanisms and in coordination with relevant authorities where necessary, initiate surprise inspections and spot checks across various commercial sectors to identify and expose benami operations.

"These measures are intended not merely as symbolic actions, but as concrete steps toward dismantling entrenched systems of illegal proxy business activity," it added.

Three NSCN-K (Niki Sumi) militants arrested in Arunachal's Tirap

ITANAGAR, May 2: Security forces have apprehended three insurgents belonging to the banned NSCN-K (Niki Sumi) outfit in Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap district, an official statement said.

The arrests were made during a joint operation by Assam Rifles and the state police in Wancho Colony in Khonsa area on Friday.

The nabbed militants were identified as Wingan Agan (33), Jhonny Riba (21) and Rajapeyu Khechan Khetey (30).

Security forces also seized two 7.65mm pistols with magazines, nine 7.65mm cartridges, three mobile phones with SIM cards and brown sugar worth ₹ 500.

The apprehended militants, along with the seized items, were handed over to Khonsa police station for further investigation. (PTI)

Manipur: Mortal remains of children killed in bomb attack handed over to family

IMPHAL, May 2: The mortal remains of two children, who were killed in a bomb attack in Manipur's Bishnupur district in April, were handed over to family members on Saturday, officials said.

The bodies of the five-year-old boy and his six-month-old sister were kept in the morgue for 25 days, as the family members had refused to accept the mortal remains, demanding that the perpetrators be brought to book at the earliest.

On April 25, Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh had appealed to the family members of the children to accept the bodies. Singh had also said that all efforts were underway to find the culprits.

The two children were killed in a bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district on April 7. Their bodies were kept in the morgue at the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal.

The incident had triggered widespread protests in the five valley districts of Manipur and the case was subsequently handed over to the NIA.

Hundreds of people lined up along the way to Tronglaobi to offer floral tributes, as the mortal remains were taken for the last rites in an open vehicle earlier in the day. (PTI)

ITANAGAR, May 2: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Saturday inaugurated a series of road and bridge projects constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY-III) in Arunachal Pradesh's Lohit district.

Mein described rural connectivity as the foundation of economic transformation, noting that the journey of PMGSY since its launch has fundamentally reshaped access, opportunity and mobility across remote regions of the state, an official report said.

Reflecting on the evolution of infrastructure development in the state, Mein emphasised that Arunachal has moved from a phase of limited road-building capacity to one defined by strict quality control, modern engineering practices and robust monitoring systems.

"Today, every road constructed under PMGSY undergoes multiple levels of quality checks, ensuring durability and long-term performance," he said.

The deputy chief minister also acknowledged the unique challenges of the state - difficult terrain, high rainfall and increasing



vehicular load and stressed the importance of building resilient infrastructure and ensuring proper maintenance.

"Connectivity must not only reach the last village, but it must also sustain the needs of

the future," he said.

Highlighting the broader impact of improved connectivity, Mein observed that better road networks are already contributing to reverse migration, expansion of agriculture

and the growth of local enterprises.

He urged citizens to leverage enhanced connectivity to promote small-scale industries, value addition and tourism-based livelihoods.

On the occasion, the deputy chief minister outlined a forward-looking vision where road connectivity, power infrastructure and economic development move in tandem.

"With major investments in hydropower and continued support from the central government, Arunachal is poised for accelerated growth in the coming years," Mein said.

During the day, Mein inaugurated the 193-metre Kamphai bridge on Khare-Tillai road, constructed using advanced Cement Treated Base technology. The bridge will improve access to Kathan belt villages like Tillai, Kamban, Tumba and Kathan while reducing travel time to Wakro and strengthening regional connectivity.

He also inaugurated the NH-15 to Samblu road, along with bridges over Phal Nallah, Namgo Nallah and several road stretches over Phai Nallah and Khraipong Nallah. (PTI)

Bengal: Repolling in 15 booths of 2 assembly seats concludes, nearly 87 pc turnout till 5 pm

KOLKATA, May 2: Repolling in 15 booths of two assembly constituencies in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district concluded at 6 pm on Saturday, with around 87 per cent turnout recorded an hour before the close of voting, an official said.

A voter turnout of 86.90 per cent was recorded till 5 pm, with the figure from one booth still awaited, he said. Voting began at 7 am and continued till 6 pm.

Polling was more or less peaceful at 11 polling booths of Magrahat Paschim assembly constituency and four in Diamond Harbour. The Election Commission had ordered a repoll on Friday, following reports of electoral malpractices.

However, in booth number 179 at Chanda Primary School of the Diamond Harbour seat, the Trinamool Congress alleged that a specially abled voter and his mother were harassed by central forces. The incident sparked protests by party workers and locals. The TMC claimed that the voter's mother, who had entered the booth to assist him, and her son were detained for a consider-



able time by central forces over alleged rule violations.

"TMC leaders Manmohini Biswas and Pratik Ur Rahman reached the spot and led the protests. The matter was taken care of by our officers there," an official of the poll body said.

Polling was otherwise peaceful across 15 booths, he said.

The Commission said that every person standing in queue before the close of polling hours would be permitted to vote.

Magrahat Paschim registered

86.11 per cent voter turnout, while in Diamond Harbour, the figure was 87.60 per cent, the official said.

Voting in these two assembly constituencies was held in the second phase of the assembly elections on April 29.

The repoll order was based on reports received from returning officers and observers of the two constituencies and "material circumstances", he said.

In Magrahat Paschim, TMC's Md Samim Ahamed Molla is pit-

ted against BJP nominee Goursundar Ghosh, while Abdul Majid Halder of the Congress and ISF candidate Abdul Aziz Al Hassan are also in the fray.

TMC candidate Panna Lal Halder is contesting against Dipak Kumar Halder of the BJP in the Diamond Harbour seat. Goutam Bhattacharya of the Congress and CPI(M)'s Samar Naiya are among other candidates.

The BJP had alleged rampant electoral malpractices in certain polling stations of both the assembly seats under the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency, which is represented by TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

The EC had deputed its special observer, Subrata Gupta, to fact-check the allegations from the ground.

The poll panel will decide on repolling in the Falta assembly constituency on Saturday.

The West Bengal assembly elections were held in two phases - April 23 and April 29 - amid unprecedented security arrangements. Counting of votes will take place on May 4. (PTI)

DoP releases special cover Buddha relics exposition in Leh

LEH/JAMMU, May 2: The Department of Posts in Jammu and Kashmir Postal Circle on Saturday released a special cover to commemorate the grand exposition of the holy relics of the Tathagata Buddha at Leh in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday inaugurated the exposition of the holy relics of Tathagata Buddha and the 2569th Buddha Purima celebrations in Leh during his two-day visit to Ladakh.

Officials said the special cover was unveiled at a function organised by the Union Territory Administration of Ladakh at Jivetsal in the Choglamasar area.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu released the cover in the presence of Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra. The event was organised under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, in partnership with the All Ladakh Buddhist Association and the All Ladakh Gonpa Association, under the theme "Peace Beyond Borders".

Officials said the sacred exposition of the Holy Relics is being held for the first time since the authentic relics of Lord Buddha were excavated from the Piprahwa Stupa in Uttar Pradesh in 1898.

Thousands of devotees, many dressed in traditional Ladakhi attire, lined the streets from Leh airport to catch a glimpse of the relics.

Officials said releasing the special cover would preserve the historic ceremony in the Department of Posts' philatelic records. Arvind Kher, Superintendent of Post Offices, Ladakh Postal Division, was also present on the occasion.

The revered Piprahwa relics of Tathagata Buddha, ancient sacred remains and associated objects linked to Gautama Buddha discovered at Piprahwa in present-day Uttar Pradesh near the Nepal border, arrived in Leh on Wednesday.

Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche and Khenpo Thinlas Chosal of Matho Monastery brought the relics from Delhi to Leh in a special Indian Air Force aircraft. Officials said the relics would be available for public veneration at Jivetsal from May 2 to 10. They will then be exhibited in Zanskar on May 11 and 12, followed by an exposition at the Dharma Centre in Leh from May 13 to 14, before being flown back to Delhi on May 15. (PTI)

Mamata, Abhishek hold meeting with all TMC counting agents ahead of Bengal poll results

KOLKATA, May 2: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Saturday told counting agents on Saturday during a meeting that it will secure over 200 of the 294 assembly seats, two days ahead of the counting of votes polled.

The two leaders, who held a virtual meeting with counting agents of 291 assembly seats, also told them that they should regularly update the leadership about the prevailing situation at counting centres and must remain there till the end of the exercise. The Anit Thapa-led Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGPM) contested the remaining three seats in the Darjeeling hills.

The two-phase assembly polls were held on April 23 and April 29, with counting of votes scheduled

for May 4.

The CM, who asserted that the "TMC will at least win 200-plus seats if not more", also asked counting agents not to give importance to the "propaganda and campaign by the BJP and its allies" about the number of seats they would secure.

She said that the TMC will stand beside counting agents who had been allegedly assaulted by central forces during voting or campaigning.

"Do not give importance to the numerous exit polls telecast on TV channels and the social media," she told the agents, according to a senior TMC leader.

"Such exit polls have no value. The 2021 and 2024 exit polls were way off the mark. I think most such polls are meant to influence the share market," the TMC

supremo said.

She also said that in case of any TMC candidate losing a seat by "a margin of 200-300 votes", the counting agents must insist on recounting.

"No one should leave the counting centres till the process is over," the chief minister said.

Abhishek Banerjee, who also interacted with the counting agents virtually, asked them to insist on recounting, particularly for postal ballots, in case of defeat of TMC nominees by a narrow margin.

"All unusual activities inside counting centres, like the sudden power outage at the Nandigram counting centre in 2021, must be immediately reported to the party's top brass," he said.

The virtual meeting, which began at 4 pm, lasted for nearly two hours. (PTI)

'India must turn global crises into opportunities, strengthen supply chains'

SURAT, May 2: Union Minister JP Nadda on Saturday said India must convert prevailing global uncertainties into opportunities to build domestic strength, calling for higher manufacturing capacity, resilience and self-reliance to achieve the goal of a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047.

Addressing the valedictory function of the two-day Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference for south Gujarat, Nadda said recent global developments underline the need to reduce strategic dependencies and strengthen supply chains.

"The recent global uncertainty is an indication that we must turn crises into opportunities. We must give maximum attention to our manufacturing sectors through regional conferences," he said.

The Union health minister said economic strength is not just about growth, but also about resilience, self-reliance and strategic autonomy.

India must convert global uncertainty into domestic strength, and "build and innovate more within the country, and reduce critical vulnerabilities," he said.

Nadda noted that the pathway to a developed India by 2047 requires "sustained high growth, deeper industrial capacity, an expansion of exports, and stronger integration into global supply chains". He also stressed the need to resolve issues such as supply chain disruptions, technological controls and resource choke points.

Speaking about governance, the Union minister compared the present government's approach to industries with the mindset that prevailed before the launch of



the Vibrant Gujarat initiative in 2003 under then chief minister Narendra Modi.

"If you recall, at the beginning of the 21st century, the relationship between industrialists, politicians, and bureaucrats was very distant. People viewed industrialists with suspicion, wondering, 'What is their hidden agenda? What do they want to take from us?'" he said.

He claimed that at the time, politicians and bureaucrats often thought about creating hurdles for businesses.

Nadda said that the first Vibrant Gujarat Summit in 2003 marked a paradigm shift.

"From there, a new thought process developed, with focus on dialogue, discussion, investment, MOUs, removing bottlenecks, and working hand in hand," he said, adding that the model has since been replicated by states including Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Karnataka.

Highlighting outcomes of the south Gujarat conference, Nadda said the region is poised for rapid growth.

He said that the two-day deliberations at the south Gujarat conference have generated "confidence, ambition, and energy" for the next phase of development.

"Very meaningful and grounded discussions have taken place, which I believe will certainly yield very good results," he added. Nadda lauded Gujarat's economic performance, saying that the state has emerged as a globally competitive engine of growth. "Today, the nation and the world look at Gujarat as a globally connected, competitive economic engine," he said, attributing the transformation to policy continuity, improved connectivity, and a strong focus on quality competitiveness.

He described south Gujarat as a strategic economic hub with global relevance, referring to Surat's prominence in diamond cutting and polishing and textiles, as well as the industrial ecosystems in Bharuch, Dabai and Ankleshwar, spanning chemicals, fertilisers, energy, food processing and MSMEs. Nadda further said that India's growing credibility as an investment destination is the result of closer collaboration between government and industry.

"To ensure our economy, state, and nation grow, we brought together the very industries we once kept at a distance, worked with them to remove bottlenecks, and moved forward together," he said.

He pointed to large-scale initiatives such as GIFT City, the Statue of Unity, the Ahmedabad-Mumbai High-Speed Rail and renewable energy parks as outcomes of this approach, combining economic growth with global ambition. (PTI)

Census operations director in UP says exercise to include caste enumeration

LUCKNOW, May 2: Caste enumeration will be done along with census operations, the chief principal census officer in Uttar Pradesh said on Saturday.

Sheela Verma, who is also the director of census operations in the state, was speaking to reporters in Lucknow.

She said, "We reach out to every ordinary citizen and enumerate them. We conduct a count of households and gather information regarding household assets. When we go to Phase 2, which is scheduled for February 2027, we will focus on a wide range of individual characteristics and personal attributes.

"For instance, we collect data on fertility, literacy levels and the nature of one's occupation. This time, a caste enumeration will also be conducted. A caste-based census will indeed be carried out."

She added that the census that is about to be conducted will be the eighth since Independence and 16th in the series that started in 1880s.

In 1881, a nationwide census was conducted simultaneously across the entire country.

"In the context of population, if you are ordinarily residing in a particular location, you are considered part of that area's population and will be enumerated. Unless you possess diplomatic immunity or are a citizen of another country, you will be counted as part of the population," Verma said, adding that territory refers to the geographical area, the boundaries of which are effectively "frozen" for the purpose of the exercise.

As of December 31, 2025, all revenue and administrative units across the entirety of India have been frozen and until March 31, 2027, and "no new tehsil will be created, no new state will be formed, no new revenue village will be established, and no new administrative block will be constituted," she said.

"The rationale behind this measure is that once the population enumeration is complete, the resulting data is published revenue-village-wise and ward-wise," the officer told reporters.

Census is the only operation of its kind that is truly universal, she noted.

"We reach out to every single



citizen, to every individual and account them," Verma said.

Later, in a statement issued here, she said the Census 2027 exercise will be conducted digitally for the first time in the country, with self-enumeration available as an option -- which can be undertaken between May 7 and 21, ahead of the house-listing operations in the state.

Under the self-enumeration option, individuals can fill in their details online -- at se.census.gov.in. However, self-enumeration is voluntary and not mandatory, she noted.

For this task in the state, approximately 5.25 lakh officers and employees have been deployed, comprising 18 divisional census officers (divisional commissioners), 75 principal census officers (district magistrates), 17 additional principal census officers (municipal commissioners) and 600 district-level officers, and others, in addition to enumerators and supervisors, according to the statement.

It will cover 1,04,000 villages spanning 75 districts, 783 urban local bodies, and 350 tehsils, the statement said.

The houselisting questionnaire seeks details under 34 questions: Line Number, Building Number, Census House Number, Material of Floor, Material of Wall, Material of Roof, Use of Census House, Condition of Census House, Household Number, Total Persons, Name of Head of Household, Sex of Head, SC/ST/Other (of the head of the family), Ownership Status, Number of Dwelling Rooms, Number of Married Couples, Main Source of Drinking Water, Availability of Drinking Water Source,

Source of Lighting, Latrine Access, Type of Latrine, Waste Water Outlet, Bathing Facility within Premises and Kitchen and LPG/CNG connection, the statement added.

On March 30, the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India Mritunjay Kumar Narayan had asked people to provide accurate information to census enumerators, assuring them that individual data will remain confidential and cannot be used as evidence or to obtain any benefit under any scheme.

It cannot be shared with any organisation, be it government or private, under the Right to Information Act, or used as evidence in a court, Narayan said.

Only statistical aggregate data will be used for tabulation purposes, he added.

Asked about caste being included in the Census and the apprehension that people may not furnish correct information, Narayan said the data related to caste will be collected during the second phase, and the questions will be decided after exhaustive discussions.

The last comprehensive caste-based count was done between 1881 and 1931.

Caste was excluded from all census operations conducted since Independence. The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, decided to include caste enumeration in the upcoming census on April 30 last year.

Narayan said that strict measures are in place for digital security, in conformity with the norms set by the Indian agencies. (PTI)

BJP accuses Kejriwal of 'political vendetta' as MP Sandeep Pathak booked

NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH, May 2: The BJP on Saturday accused AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal of indulging in vendetta politics and misusing the Punjab Police after two FIRs were registered against Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak, who recently defected to the party along with six others.

It also alleged that law and order in the state has deteriorated. BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi claimed that the police action reflects misplaced priorities. "Punjab Police went to Pathak's residence and attempted to carry out a raid. We want to ask if the law and order situation has become so weak that the police are unable to act against drug traffickers, but are being used in this manner?" he told reporters.

Targeting Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Trivedi said, "Those who claim to represent a new kind of politics should explain how, in their state, law and order has completely collapsed."

Referring to the opposition's allegation that Mann was under the influence of alcohol in the Punjab assembly on Friday, Trivedi accused the AAP government of failing to maintain governance.

"I want to clearly say to the AAP, the Punjab government, and especially Kejriwal that this is a fragile facade," he said.

Another BJP national spokesperson, Shehzad Poonawalla, claimed that Kejriwal is misusing the Punjab Police to settle political scores, and Mann has become a party to it.

"Two FIRs have been filed against

Sandeep Pathak, who until recently was in the Aam Aadmi Party as a Rajya Sabha MP and general secretary (organisation). What is baffling is the shameless, brazen vendetta politics being pursued by Arvind Kejriwal, with Bhagwant Mann complicit in it," Poonawalla said on X.

"It is clear this has been done out of vendetta politics by Kejriwal, who is extremely vengeful and vindictive, and misuses the Punjab Police to pursue such political vendetta," he alleged in the post.

Questioning the timing of the FIRs, Poonawalla asked, "If these cases existed from the beginning, why were FIRs not filed earlier? If he was corrupt, why was he kept in the party for so long, especially when he was the general secretary (organisation)? Has any new material surfaced in the last few days, or has the alleged corruption occurred only now?" He alleged that Kejriwal has an "old habit" of targeting political opponents and dissenters.

"We have seen how he has used the police against rivals, including Congress leaders. This is his old habit," Poonawalla said, referring to the withdrawal of Rajya Sabha MP Harbajan Singh's security.

He claimed that several leaders who had left AAP over the years, including Yogendra Yadav, Mayank Gandhi, Ashish Khetan, Ashutosh and Alka Lamba, were "hounded". The BJP leader accused the AAP of failing to introspect.

"Instead of introspecting on how they have changed -- from Anna to Lalu, from Lokpal to corruption -- they are indulging in vendetta politics, trying to victimise people using the strong arm of the law." (PTI)

ED's arrests decline; highest-ever raids, attachments during FY26: Annual report

NEW DELHI, May 2: Arrests effected by the ED in money laundering cases have reduced by about 27 per cent during the last financial year, but the value of attached assets recorded an all-time high at over 81,000 crore for the period, official data stated.

Searches or raids conducted by the central agency under the stringent provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) almost doubled to 2,892 during the 2025-26 fiscal that ended on March 31.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has sweeping powers under the PMLA in connection with the definition of the proceeds of crime, power of arrest, search and seizure and attachment of properties. The provisions of the Act also make securing bail extremely difficult because the court must be satisfied

that the accused is not guilty, as well as not likely to commit another crime while on bail.

In the past fiscal, the ED breached its set target of restoring attached assets to victims of fraud by double, as it restituted properties worth more than ₹ 32,000 crore during the said time period. The agency had set a target of restoring assets worth ₹ 15,000 crore at the start of the FY26 in April 2025.

PTI accessed the data furnished by the agency in its annual report (FY 2025-26) and found that the ED arrested 156 persons during the fiscal as compared to 214 in 2024-25, a decline of about 27 per cent. During 2023-24, the number stood at 272.

The ED reasoned that the arrests were reduced because it was undertaking "more targeted and evi-



dence-based investigations".

Elaborating on the "highest-ever" provisional attachment of assets done by it in a single year (FY26) -- a whopping 171 per cent increase in value of attachments at

₹ 81,422 crore under 712 orders -- the agency said this was a "central instrument" through which it ensures that criminals are deprived and stripped of the fruits of crime generated "illicitly".

In comparison, the agency had issued 461 provisional attachment orders with assets valued at ₹ 30,036 crore frozen during FY25.

As the name suggests, these attachment orders are provisional and are confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority of the PMLA, a quasi-judicial body.

The raids undertaken by the ED, often covered extensively in television news and newspapers, jumped to more than double at 2,892 during FY26, compared to 1,491 during the previous year.

The report added that the ED was not relying "entirely" on physical searches but its investigators were "triangulating" financial intelligence from multiple databases simultaneously, tracing cryptocurrency flows through block chain analytics and accessing corporate and property records in real-time.

This led the ED to successfully file a "record" 812 chargesheets during FY26 as compared to 457 such complaints for prosecution filed before courts during the previous year.

That is why, the report said, ED has been able to "significantly" reduce the life cycle of cases from the earlier three-four years to 1-1.5 years now.

Data showed that the number of Enforcement Case Information Reports (ECIRs) registered to trigger PMLA probes, jumped 39 per cent to 1,080 cases during the last fiscal as compared to 775 cases filed during FY25.

The most critical data was reflected in the restitution of assets category where the ED restores assets attached by it under the PMLA to the victims of fraud such as investors, homebuyers and banks.

The agency restored assets worth ₹ 32,678 crore during the last fiscal as compared to ₹ 15,263 crore handed over to the victims of fraud during FY25.

ED Director Rahul Navin had set a target of restoring assets worth ₹ 15,000 crore at the start of FY26, PTI reported last year.

The report said that the ED could "double" this figure as it got a major success in the PACL "ponzi" case in which the amount of assets restored was 15,582 crore, almost half of the total restored amount of ₹ 32,678 crore.

The report also included figures of legal requests, like Letters Rotatory (LR) and Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLATs) requests, sent by the ED to countries for assistance in money laundering cases has grown "considerably". (PTI)

Bengal polls: Sibal says state govt employee at each counting table necessary for level playing field

NEW DELHI, May 2: Former law minister Kapil Sibal on Saturday said that a state government employee at each table for the counting of votes for the West Bengal Assembly polls is absolutely necessary to ensure a level playing field.

Sibal, a senior advocate, said he argued in the Supreme Court that the Election Commission's circular on the deployment of staff for vote counting in West Bengal must be implemented in letter and spirit as it states that a state government employee shall also be appointed at each table.

Sibal's remarks came soon after the Supreme Court said that no further order was necessary on a Trinamool Congress plea challenging the Calcutta High Court's dismissal of its petition against the Election Commission (EC) circular on the deployment of Central government personnel for vote counting in West Bengal.

A special bench of Justices P S Narasimha and Joydip Bagchi said the EC can choose the counting personnel, and its April 13 circular, which provides for deployment of state government employees as well, cannot be said to be incorrect.

The poll body said the apprehensions of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) of any wrongdoing is misplaced, as the circular very



clearly states that there will be a mix of Central and state government employees.

Addressing a presser after the Supreme Court ruling, Sibal, who appeared for the TMC, said, "I normally don't not go for a press conference when I have appeared in a case but in this particular case I had to do it because the outcome of West Bengal polls depends on what happens in the counting rooms."

"When the TMC went to the high court, it was on the basis that the EC had issued a circular on April 13 which was not known to the party till April 29. On April 29, they moved the high court where

they contended that in the absence of the TMC not knowing about it, the circular should not have been issued, which was not accepted by the court," he said.

"Then the TMC asked what is the reason that the Centre or the EC are of the opinion that there would be some problem at the time of counting and that at every counting station would have additional nominees of the Central government," he said.

In the counting room, there are counting agents of political parties and supervisors. Now the EC, through this circular, has stated that in addition, a Central government employee or a PSU official

would be present at each table in the counting room, Sibal pointed out. "That is surprising because there is already a Central government employee at the counting table, who is called a micro observer. So, that is a bit unfortunate."

"The high court said we will not interfere because the EC has wide powers. In the Supreme Court, we did not argue about the constitutionality of the circular, we merely said that whatever the circular states should be implemented," the Independent Rajya Sabha MP said.

Citing the circular, Sibal said there should be a Central government employee and a state government employee at the counting table, and this must be followed.

"We now expect that through a randomisation process, a state government employee would be appointed in each of the counting stations and tables," Sibal said.

To ensure a level playing field, there should be a state government employee at each counting table, Sibal said, adding that this "is absolutely necessary".

"People should not get the feeling that a political party is being targeted by another political party at the Centre. There are more CAPF personnel present there (in Bengal) than in Manipur. There is no war going on, there is an election. If the EC is in control of the security during the polling and the

counting process, how are they afraid that other forces will interfere?" Sibal asked.

"All the proceedings are being recorded. You can't have a fear of irregularity unless you want to do some irregularity," he said.

Earlier, the EC assured the Supreme Court that the circular would be implemented in letter and spirit, and there would be state government employees also during the counting of votes on May 4.

At the outset of the hearing, Sibal, appearing for the TMC, said the circular was dated April 13, but the party came to know about it on April 29.

He said there are four issues: One, the circular appointing Central employees was issued to the DEOs on April 13, but it came to their knowledge only on April 29; two, the Election Commission says it has apprehensions of irregularity, despite having a Central nominee in the counting process; three, the poll body already has a Central government official at each counting table in the form of a micro observer; and four, the EC has not appointed state nominees even though the circular provides so.

Sibal submitted that the chief electoral officer's communication stated that there were apprehensions from various quarters on possible irregularities during vote counting. (PTI)

SC declines to intervene in TMC plea on vote counting personnel deployment in WB



NEW DELHI, May 2: The Supreme Court on Saturday declined to pass further directions on a plea filed by Trinamool Congress (TMC) challenging the deployment of central government personnel during vote counting in West Bengal by the Election Commission (EC).

Effectively upholding the framework outlined by the poll panel, a special bench comprising justices P S Narasimha and Joydip Bagchi said that the EC's April 13 circular, which provides for a mix of central and state government employees in the counting process on May 4, was not contrary to law.

It said that the poll body has the discretion to appoint counting personnel from either pool.

"No further orders are necessary in this case except to record the statement of Mr D S Naidu, appearing for the poll panel, that the Election Commission will implement the circular dated April 13 in true letter and spirit. With these clarifications, the special leave petition stands dismissed," the bench said in its order.

Polling for the 294-member West Bengal assembly were held in two phases on April 23 and April 29. Votes will be counted on Monday. In its April 30 judgment, the Calcutta High Court had rejected the TMC's contention that the EC's directive was issued without jurisdiction or based on vague apprehensions. The high court also dismissed allegations that central government or PSU employees could be influenced by the Union government, noting the presence of multiple layers of oversight in the counting process.

The TMC rushed to the top court to appeal against the directive leading to the special hearing on a Saturday, a court holiday.

During the hearing, the poll panel said the apprehensions of TMC of any wrongdoing is misplaced, as the circular very clearly states that there will be a mix of central and state government em-

ployees. The EC assured the court that the circular would be implemented in letter and spirit, and there would be state government employees also during the counting. At the outset, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the TMC, said the circular was dated April 13, but they came to know about it on April 29.

He said there are four issues: One, the circular appointing Central employees was issued to DEOs on April 13, but came to their knowledge only on April 29; Two, the Election Commission says it has apprehensions of irregularity, despite having a Central nominee in the counting process; Three, the poll body already has a Central government officer at each counting table in the form of a micro observer, and four, the commission has not appointed state nominees even though the circular provides so.

Sibal submitted that the Chief Electoral Officer's communication states that there are apprehensions expressed from various quarters regarding possible irregularities in counting.

"That is like pointing a finger at the state government..." Sibal said, adding, "There must be some data. Where is (the proof of) the apprehension (raised) from each booth? They have not disclosed this. And why not tell us that they are going to have a Central government nominee?" The bench told Sibal that even if the EC's circular had provided for the appointment of central employees as both the counting supervisor and the counting assistant, the court could not have faulted the decision.

"The option is open for the Election Commission: whether the counting supervisor and assistant may be of the Central or the state government. When that option is open, we cannot hold that the notification is contrary to regulations. Even if the EC says that both of them can be Central government employees, we could not have faulted them." (PTI)

Punjab BJP holds mock Assembly session, passes 'no-confidence' motion against Mann govt

CHANDIGARH, May 2: The BJP's Punjab unit on Friday held a mock assembly session, with "no-confidence" motion being passed against the Bhagwant Mann government.

During the mock session that was organised when the Mann government convened a special one-day session of the Assembly, the BJP leaders took on the AAP government, alleging it has failed on all fronts.

Claiming that the Mann government does not permit the opposition to raise issues in the Assembly, the BJP leaders said they decided to hold the "Janta Ki Vidhan Sabha" (mock session).

In the mock session near the Punjab BJP office here, senior party leaders, including state BJP president Sunil Jakhar and working president Ashwani Sharma, were present.

During the mock session -- which was presided over by Atwal, 89, a former Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha -- a no-confidence motion against Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann-led AAP government was also passed, with members raising the slogan, "Punjabi Kare Pukaar, Satta Chhade, Mann Sarkaar."

Before the session began, BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh charged that the Mann government has failed on all fronts and various mafia were calling the shots.

Notably, in the Punjab Assembly on Friday, the confidence motion moved by the Bhagwant Mann government was unanimously passed, and AAP MLAs reaffirmed that they "stand like loyal soldiers" of the party. The opposition MLAs were not present in the Assembly when the motion was passed.

The two BJP MLAs in the 117-member state Assembly did not attend Friday's special session. Earlier this week, the Punjab cabinet had summoned a special one-day session of the state Assembly

on the occasion of Labour Day on May 1.

The development to summon the session came days after the ruling AAP's seven Rajya Sabha MPs, six of them from Punjab, quit the party and joined the BJP.

At the BJP event, presenting the motion in the mock assembly, Punjab BJP Working President and Pathankot MLA Ashwani Sharma alleged that crucial issues like drugs, deaths due to drugs, gangsterism, and law and order collapse are not being debated in the Vidhan Sabha.

"AAP's politics is built on untruth, and its promise to make Punjab drug-free has completely failed," he added.

Targeting Arvind Kejriwal, he accused the AAP leadership of misleading people and diverting attention from real governance failures.

Punjab BJP President Sunil Jakhar also slammed the chief minister's "conduct" in the Assembly, alleging that he has lowered the dignity of a constitutional office. He also alleged that Mann is "unfit" to be the chief minister.

"It is a black day in Punjab's democratic history...the party will meet the Punjab Governor to demand that Bhagwant Mann is unfit for the position," Jakhar said.

Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, while replying to reporters on the questions on opposition targeting Mann, said that the opposition Congress has levelled false and baseless allegations to defame the chief minister under a conspiracy.

Notably, Leader of Opposition in Punjab Assembly, Partap Singh Bajwa, on Friday wrote to Assembly Speaker, saying that an incident that occurred on Friday during the special session of the Assembly, as raised by Congress MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira, has brought forth serious concerns "regarding the conduct of the chief minister". (PTI)

Four police personnel killed as IED goes off during demining operation in Chhattisgarh

KANKER, May 2: Four police personnel, including an inspector of the District Reserve Guard (DRG), were killed after an improvised explosive device (IED) went off while they were trying to neutralise it during a demining operation in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on Saturday, police said.

This was the first blast incident linked to Naxalite activity in the state since it was declared free from armed Maoism on March 31. It was also the first instance this year in which security personnel engaged in anti-Naxal operations have lost their lives.

The explosion occurred around 11.30 am in a forest area of Aadnar village under Chhotethiya police station limits, near the Narayanpur district border, when a joint team of security personnel was conducting a demining operation to locate and defuse IEDs planted earlier by Naxalites. Inspector General of Po-



lice, Bastar Range Sundarraj Patilgama told PTI. Based on the inputs received from surrendered Maoist cadres and other intelligence over the past few months, security forces had recovered and neutralised hundreds of IEDs planted earlier by Naxalites across the Bastar range, which comprises seven districts including Kanker, he said. Saturday's operation was launched following similar inputs about Maoist dumps in the Chhotethiya area. The team, led by the

DRG, also included personnel from the Bastar Fighters and the district force, he said. During the operation, the team first detected a Maoist dump and recovered materials belonging to the ultras. Around 11.30 am, they found another dump containing an IED concealed beneath the ground, he said.

However, the explosive went off while personnel were attempting to retrieve it for defusal, critically injuring four personnel, the official said. (PTI)

4-year-old girl sexually assaulted, murdered in Pune district; 65-year-old man arrested

PUNE, May 2: A 65-year-old man with criminal record has been arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting and murdering a four-year-old girl in Borheshi of Pune district, police said on Saturday, as the incident led to angry protests in the area.

The accused, who works as a labourer, allegedly lured the girl with the promise of food on Friday and took her to a cattle enclosure where he sexually assaulted her and later killed her by hitting her with a stone, said a police official.

He was arrested on the basis of CCTV footage from a private residence which captured him with the child. A case was registered against him under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. He was later produced before the sessions court in Pune which remanded him in police custody till May 7. Members of Maratha organisations tried to block the police vehicle carrying the accused on the court premises.

The incident triggered massive outrage in Borheshi, with hundreds of vil-

lagers rushing to the local police outpost and demanding action against the accused. They also staged a blockade on the Mumbai-Bengaluru Highway, Pune (Rural) Superintendent of Police Sandip Singh Gill assured the villagers that a charge sheet will be filed in the case within 15 days and the trial will be expedited.

"The accused has criminal history, with cases registered against him in 1998 and 2015. He was acquitted in both cases. He is a labourer and typically wanders around the village and occasionally takes up jobs," he told reporters.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who also heads the home department, said the incident was "extremely shameful and deeply painful" and promised a fast-track court trial.

"We will request the High Court to appoint a special public prosecutor. Efforts will be made to ensure capital punishment for the accused in the shortest possible time," he said, while also stating that politicisation of the incident is insensitive. Fadnavis also expressed con-

ferences for the deceased child's family and said the government stands with them in this difficult time.

Termining the incident "extremely outrageous", NCP (SP) leader and former state home minister Anil Deshmukh demanded death sentence for the accused.

"How do such criminals roam freely in society? When I was home minister in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government, we brought in the Shakti Act (which provided for stringent punishment for crimes against women), which is pending final nod from the Central Government. When there is an urgent need for this law, the Centre and state government are passing the buck to each other instead of implementing it," said Deshmukh.

"Had this strong law been in force, this monster (accused) would have received death penalty within 15 days," he said.

Fadnavis had earlier said that the Shakti Bill was passed by the state legislature in 2020 and sent to the Centre for the President's assent, but the President sent it back. (PTI)

UP Cong chief Ajay Rai hospitalised after fainting, stable

LUCKNOW, May 2: Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Rai was hospitalised here after he fell unconscious due to low sodium levels, party leaders said on Saturday.

They said he was admitted to Medanta Hospital on Friday evening and is stable. "Ajay Rai was admitted to Medanta Hospital in Lucknow at around 6 pm on Friday after he fell unconscious as his sodium levels had dropped. He fell unconscious at his residence in Lucknow. For the entire day, he was engaged in party programmes and had also gone to the airport," Uttar Pradesh Congress spokesperson Anshu Awasthi told PTI.

Congress in-charge of Uttar Pradesh Avinash Pande told PTI, "Now, he (Ajay Rai) is stable." Medanta Hospital Director Dr Rakesh Kapoor said Rai collapsed at his home on Friday evening and was subsequently admitted to the hospital's emergency ward.

Medical examinations revealed that Rai was suffering from a sodium deficiency and elevated blood pressure. Doctors administered immediate treatment and he is significantly better now, Kapoor told PTI.

A team of doctors is monitoring his health. Rai is conversing with others and his condition is stable, he added. (PTI)

India-Ecuador exploring preferential trade deal to boost economic ties

NEW DELHI, May 2: India and Ecuador are looking at the possibility of firming up a preferential trade pact, besides agreeing to shore up cooperation in areas of healthcare, agriculture and digital technology.

Ways to further solidify bilateral relations were the focus of talks between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Ecuadorian counterpart Gabriela Sommerfeld Rosero this week, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

The two-day visit of Foreign Minister Sommerfeld, along with her deputy Alejandro Davalos, to India marked a "new chapter" in strengthening bilateral ties between the two nations, the MEA said on Saturday.

The ministry said that in their talks on April 29, Jaishankar and Sommerfeld "reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation in multiple areas, including healthcare and pharmaceuticals, agriculture, trade and investment, digital technology, cultural relations, capacity building and cooperation in multilateral institutions".

It said Sommerfeld handed over formal letters to the Indian side marking Ecuador's decision to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA).

Jaishankar and Sommerfeld also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Indian grant assistance to implement 'Quick Impact Projects' (QIPs)

in Ecuador.

Under this agreement, India will provide grant assistance worth up to Rs 12 crore to Ecuador over a period of five years for the implementation of various socio-economic development projects.

"The implementation of these projects in the identified areas will enhance the well-being and quality of life of local communities in Ecuador, fostering development and public trust," the MEA said.

Sommerfeld also met Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and the two leaders discussed a roadmap for a preferential trade agreement (PTA) between the two countries, it said. The discussions also focused on scaling up Indian pharmaceutical exports to Ecuador and supply chain partnerships for critical minerals like copper and gold, it added.

Sommerfeld also met Union Health Minister J P Nadda to discuss advancing bilateral health cooperation, specifically focusing on affordable healthcare solutions and high-end medical systems.

"The discussions centred on establishing an institutional technical mechanism to advance various initiatives, including the recognition of Indian Pharmacopoeia (IP) by Ecuador to exchange information and promote regulatory cooperation, with the aim of strengthening bilateral relations in the field of medical products," the MEA said. (PTI)

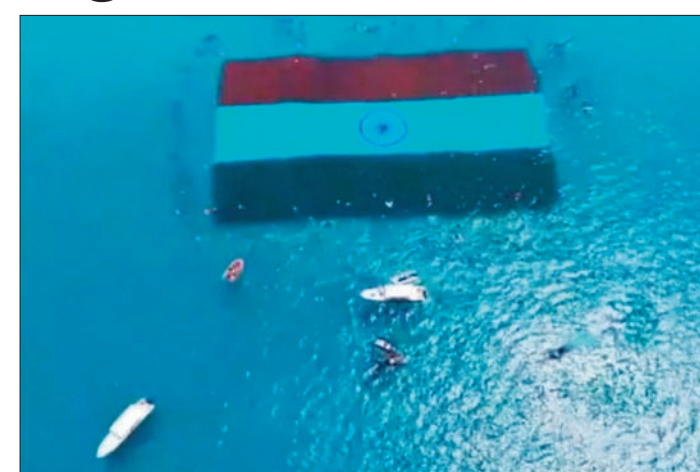
Andaman sets Guinness World Record by unfurling largest underwater national flag

SRI VIJAYA PURAM, May 2: The Andaman and Nicobar administration on Saturday set a new Guinness World Record by unfurling the world's largest underwater national flag at Radhanagar beach, officials said.

The massive Tricolour, measuring approximately 60 by 40 metre, was deployed beneath the sea in a complex, tightly coordinated operation, involving multiple agencies and trained divers at Swaraj Dweep (Havelock Island), they said.

Lieutenant Governor D K Joshi, Chief Secretary Chandra Bhushan Kumar, and Director General of Police H S Dhaliwal, along with senior officials, were present to witness the event.

Personnel from the Andaman and Nicobar Police, Forest Department, Indian Navy, and Indian Coast Guard, as well as scuba divers from various diving centres,



collaborated to execute the intricate underwater unfurling.

Three school children - Fateh Jahaan Singh (16), Lavanya Eira (15) and Ranvijay Singh (14) - were the youngest participants among more than 200 divers.

At 10.35 am, Rishi Nath, adjudicator from Guinness World Records, formally confirmed the achievement and presented the certificate to Joshi, the officials said.

Addressing the gathering, Joshi praised the teams involved for

their coordination and commitment, calling the feat a significant addition to the islands' record of unique accomplishments.

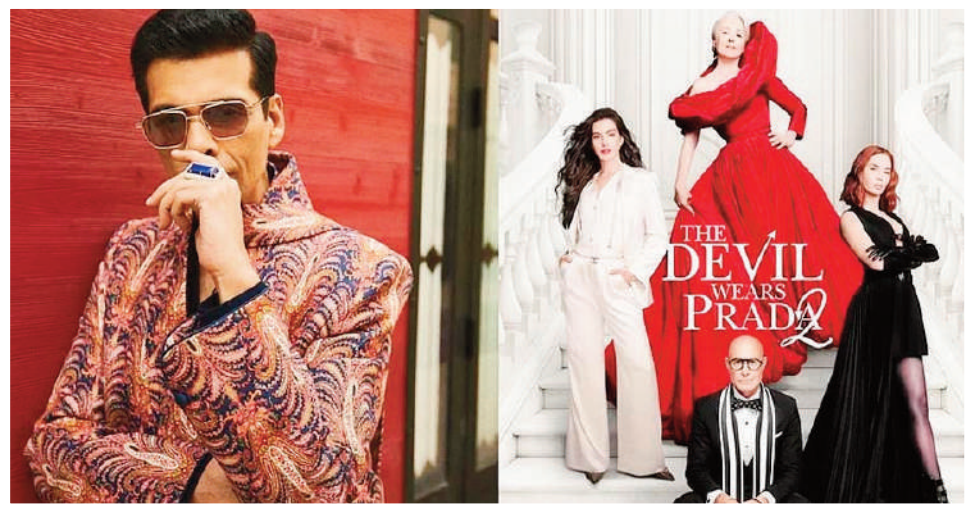
The achievement highlights the growing stature of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a destination for adventure tourism, marine activities, and globally recognised events, the officials said.

Fateh, a Class-12 student of the Shri Ram School in Gurugram, told PTI: "I don't have words to express how beautiful the marine world is. I am feeling so proud to have become a part of this event."

He is a trained equestrian who has participated in many international events.

Lavanya and Ranvijay - students of Class-11 and Class-10, respectively, at Rishi Valley School in Bengaluru and Sardar Patel Vidyalaya in New Delhi - were equally thrilled over the achievement. (PTI)

Karan Johar reviews 'The Devil Wears Prada 2'



Filmmaker Karan Johar lauded Meryl Streep, Emily Blunt and Anne Hathaway-starrer "The Devil Wears Prada 2" and said the film made him go back to his 33-year-old self.

"The Devil Wears Prada 2", a sequel to the 2006 blockbuster with the same title released on Friday. Featuring Blunt, Hathaway, and Streep reprise their roles, the film is directed by David Frankel.

Johar shared a poster of the film on his Instagram handle as he reviewed it. The filmmaker said he won't be comparing the sequel to the original release and went on to laud the efforts by the makers to highlight how digital override is consuming print.

"Nostalgia is powerful... It keeps the present hopeful... my memory of watching #devilwearsprada is embedded in my heart... I walked out more in love with Meryl Streep (if that was possible) and understanding the pursuits of Miranda Priestly... even though she was a tough leader, even though she was aesthetically judgmental and raising eye brow elitist to a fault... But I understood her for her chase to attain excellence and perfection... I wondered how I would feel revisiting Andy, Nigel, Emily and Miranda," he wrote in the caption.

The filmmaker said "The Devil Wears Prada 2" is relevant in today's time. "Right at the top let me not compare the two films as the first has a massive heads up of cumulative nostalgia... This sequel speaks of our times, the (sadly) emerging irrelevance of serious journalism... the digital override Mania that is eating into the beauty of print... the powerlessness of the artistically powerful forces at the hands of corporations... the need for consolidations over ideations... all that in a Comedy? Yes... that's the solid strength of Part 2, it makes u think of the travesty of our times... Miranda is more vulnerable... Andy is more hopeful... Nigel is more amiable, and Emily is just wonderful! I ate my pop corn and sat back on my red hot seat and went back to my 33-year-old self who believed that visions can't be replaced by vendors!!! That's all," he wrote.

The first film revolved around Andy Sachs (Hathaway), a smart but fashion-clueless journalism graduate who moves to New York City with dreams of becoming a serious writer. Desperate for work, she lands a job as a junior personal assistant to Miranda Priestly, the cold and tyrannical editor-in-chief of the elite fashion magazine Runway.

The story of "The Devil Wears Prada 2" follows Streep's character, Miranda Priestly, navigating the decline of traditional print media, forced to face off against her former assistant, Emily Charlton (Blunt), who is now a high-powered luxury group executive controlling vital advertising funds.

It is produced by Wendy Finerman with Michael Bederman, Karen Rosenfelt and McKenna serving as executive producers. (PTI)

'Gladiators', documentary on Ajith Kumar's motorsport journey, announced

Tamil superstar Ajith Kumar's team has unveiled "Gladiators - In Pursuit of Challenges", a documentary chronicling the actor's motorsport journey, on his 55th birthday. The documentary, which will be released in theatres soon, is presented by Ajith Kumar Sports Services LLC. Its teaser was launched on Friday evening.

"Gladiators" is a film on Ajith Kumar's motorsport journey, chasing the impossible. The race begins soon," read the official social media announcement by the actor's team.

The documentary, directed by AL Vijay, focuses on Ajith's life as a professional racer -- the preparation, the challenges and the emotion that go into competing at the international level. One of Tamil cinema's biggest stars, Ajith has been pursuing professional motorsport alongside his acting career for several years, competing in international racing series including the Asian Le Mans Series and the 24H Series European Series.

The approximately 90-minute film features exclusive footage from races Ajith participated in across Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Europe. Music has been composed by GV Prakash Kumar, with editing by Anthony.

Among the racing highlights likely to feature in the documentary is Ajith's podium finish at the Dubai 24H 2025, where his team Ajith Kumar Racing secured third place at the Dubai Autodrome.

The gruelling 24-hour race tests speed, strategy and endurance, and the result came days after Ajith's car crashed during a practice session ahead of the event, though the actor escaped unhurt.

He participated in the race alongside teammates Mathieu Detry, Fabian Duffieux and Cameron McLeod.

On the acting front, Ajith was last seen in "Good Bad Ugly," directed by Adhik Ravichandran. He will reportedly reunite with Ravichandran for his 64th feature film. (PTI)



Saif Ali Khan starrer 'Kartavya' to premiere on Netflix on May 15

"Kartavya", a new Netflix movie featuring Bollywood star Saif Ali Khan in the lead role, will make its debut on May 15, the OTT platform announced on Thursday.

Described as a tense heartland story of a police officer pushed to his limits in a morally complex world, the movie is directed by Pulkit, best known for "Bhaskhak", and produced by Gauri Khan under Red Chillies Entertainment.

The cast includes Rasika Dugal, Sanjay Mishra, Zakir Hussain and Manish Chaudhari, alongside Saurabh Dwivedi, who makes his acting debut with the film.

"Kartavya" follows a police officer, played by Khan, as he navigates rising threats while grappling with the weight of his duty and the safety of his family.

"As the lines between right and wrong begin to blur, the film unfolds as a layered exploration of power, guilt, and the consequences of silence, inviting audiences to question morality and the true cost of justice," read the official logline.

Venky Mysore, CEO of Red Chillies Entertainment, said "Kartavya" asks difficult questions about duty, conscience and the choices people make when there are no easy answers.

"Pulkit's nuanced storytelling, elevated by compelling performances from Saif Ali Khan, Sanjay Mishra, Rasika Dugal, Zakir Hussain, Manish Chaudhari, and a striking debut by Saurabh Dwivedi, lends the film a powerful and authentic voice. We are proud to bring this layered film to Netflix, further strengthening our partnership to bring thought provoking narratives to the fore," he added.



Ruchikaa Kapoor Sheikh, director of original Films at Netflix India, said the film draws from the lived realities of the Indian hinterlands while speaking to themes that travel far beyond its immediate setting.

"Kartavya is a thought-provoking story that explores the complexities of making the 'right' choices. Produced by Red Chillies Entertainment and directed by Pulkit in our second association with him following the success of Bhaskhak, the film builds on our ongoing creative partnerships with the two powerhouses whose high-quality and socially relevant storytelling brings a distinct authenticity to the film," she said. (PTI)

I'm getting to play layered characters on OTT: Gautam Rode

Actor Gautam Rode says he is in an "interesting phase" of his career where he is getting to experiment with diverse and layered characters on streaming platforms.

Rode, a popular actor on Indian television, has worked on shows like "Baa Bahoo Aur Baby", "Saraswatchandra", "Mahakumbh", and hosted the dance-reality show "Nach Baliye".

On OTT, he has appeared in "State of Siege: Temple Attack" and most recently in the second season of hit Netflix comedy "Maamla Legal Hai". He now appears in the new season of crime thriller show "Undekhi".

"It's an interesting phase for me in my life. I'm trying different characters. For instance, I got to play a ho-



mosexual character in 'Maamla Legal Hai 2' and this one ('Undekhi') is a different story altogether, there's an-

other (project) in which I'm again trying a different character," the actor told PTI in an interview.

Rode brushed aside the perceived divide between television and OTT, asserting that an actor's core craft remains unchanged regardless of the medium.

"Acting is acting, you put in the same sincerity. The only difference is that here (on OTT), you get a bit more time to prepare for the character because you're there with the script, you get the script in advance."

Rode will be seen playing a pivotal role in the fourth season of the acclaimed series, "Undekhi: The Final Battle", which he bagged via auditions. The show is currently streaming on SonyLIV.

The crime thriller series, set in Manali, follows the cat-and-mouse chase between DSP Ghosh (Dibyendu Bhattacharya) and the Atwal family, with Harsh Chhaya playing the leading role of Papaji.

"It's a very layered character. I've never played a character like this before, I'll not call it a challenge but it was different. I did few things which I've never tried before," Rode said.

"As an actor, you get that excitement that I'm learning something, I'm getting better, and I'm feeling good about it," he said.

NEW DOCUMENTARY SHOWS BHUPEN HAZARIKA RECITING FEW OF HIS UNPUBLISHED POEMS

Bharat Ratna
Dr Bhupen Hazarika
Singer - legendary musical maestro



ভূপেন দা
আনকাট..

BHUPEN DA
UNCUT...

Producer
Sangita Advertising

Concept & Direction
Bobbeeta Sharma

Language : Assamese | Duration : 64 Minutes
Documentary : Dr Bhupen Hazarika

Documentary filmed in England on
legendary singer-musical maestro Dr Bhupen Hazarika

A new documentary made entirely from footage of candid conversations its director had with Bhupen Hazarika 27 years ago captures the maestro reflecting on a bevy of subjects -- from music and childhood to relationships -- and also reciting some of his unpublished poems. Director Bobbeeta Sharma says "Bhupen Da Uncut" is an unfiltered portrait of Hazarika and offers an intimate window into his creative process, thoughts, feelings, and philosophy of life.

Devoid of conventional narration and reconstruction, the nearly one-hour documentary relies solely on the raw material recorded at that time, presenting what the makers describe as "an untouched dialogue with the legend".

In 1999, on an invitation from an Assamese doctors' alumni group for a cultural programme, Hazarika had travelled to the UK, where Sharma and her husband Chinmoy Sharma got an opportunity to spend some time with him.

What followed was a series of intimate, unscripted moments captured by Chinmoy on his Hi-8 camera using tapes at their shared residence in London.

Hazarika spoke at length about his childhood, his association with cultural stalwarts such as Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnu Prasad Rava, his years of higher studies in New York, and his relationship with his wife Priyamvada Patel.

Hazarika was also filmed performing his iconic song "Manuhe Manuhor Baabe" on the banks of the Thames and at Tower Bridge.

In a key highlight, Hazarika is also seen reciting several of his poems from handwritten notes, some of which, the makers say, remain unpublished.

In the documentary, Hazarika is seen cooking his own version of a prawn curry.

Sharma says they almost forgot about the tapes until her husband's uncle found them in his cupboard in 2024 while shifting homes in the UK. Luckily, the tapes remained in pretty good condition.

"We somehow managed to digitise them. Because of the archival value and because we wanted to keep the footage as raw as possible, we didn't do any editing to enhance the video quality or insert any background music. We wanted to retain the vintage element," says Sharma, who has been associated with the cultural world of Assam since the late 70s.

Sharma acted as a child artiste in Bhabendranath Saikia's national award-winning film "Anirbaan" in 1978. She later went on to make a serial on Assamese NRIs titled "Bidexot Apun Manuh" (Our Own People Abroad) which ran on DDK Guwahati (2001-2008).

"Bhupen Da Uncut" was screened at the Press Club of India here on Thursday and at the Asian Academy of Film & Television in Noida a day earlier. Last year, it was screened at the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), Goa. (PTI)

exploring new creative avenues, like writing and producing.

He revealed that he is working on a feature film based on a real-life story, for which he has acquired the rights.

"I felt since I have health issues, I have one-and-a-half years so let me do something else. It took us three years to get a script that I feel is decent. I'm writing and producing; that's my goal. For me that was another chapter," Rode said, adding that the experience of writing enhanced his understanding of characters and storytelling.

"Undekhi", directed by Ashish R Shukla, the show stars Surya Sharma, Varun Badola, Ankur Rathee, Shivjioti Rajput, and others. It is produced by Applause Entertainment in association with Banijay Asia. (PTI)

The actor, however, said transitioning from television to OTT platforms wasn't "easy", having built a strong identity on the small screen.

"When you are a popular face of TV, to bring you on OTT, everyone has their own inhibitions. But at the same time, you need to take that break, you need to give yourself (time).

"It takes time to get into OTT; some are lucky that they are able to transition from TV to OTT. For me it took time but I believe if I keep at it, things will open up," he said, adding that after a not-so-great experience on his last television project, he was prompted to reassess his acting career.

The actor revealed that health issues, including a back surgery, gave him the time and space to focus on

Punjab Kings look to bounce back, GT target third straight win

AHMEDABAD, May 2: Their perfect run finally halted, Punjab Kings will look to ensure the slip does not turn into a slide when they take on Gujarat Titans, who will be targeting a third straight win, in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

The Kings were handed a bitter first defeat of the season by Rajasthan Royals earlier this week. Although Punjab Kings continue to lead the standings with 13 points from eight games, Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Sunrisers Hyderabad and Rajasthan Royals are just a point behind them.

For a side that had set the early pace with six wins on the trot, the loss has brought a few concerns, especially with the ball.

Punjab's bowling has not quite matched the consistency of their batting. In fact, their strong bat-

ting displays have often masked the shortcomings of the bowling unit.

Even in victories, Punjab's bowlers have allowed opposition teams to score freely at stages, and the recent loss once again exposed those issues.

Their inability to close out innings has put added pressure on the batters, who have often had to chase bigger targets or set above-par totals.

With the tournament entering a more competitive phase, Punjab will need sharper execution and clearer plans, particularly against a Gujarat top order that thrives on momentum.

Their fielding has also been a concern with plenty of dropped catches and misfields.

The batting, however, remains Punjab's biggest strength. Opens

Priyansh Arya and Prabhsimran Singh have provided solid starts, while Cooper Connolly has also been among the runs. The middle order, led by skipper Shreyas Iyer, has shown enough depth to push totals or finish chases.

Gujarat Titans, meanwhile, come into this match on a two-game winning streak, though their campaign has largely been stop-start.

They have struggled to string together consistent performances, but the recent wins suggest they may be settling into a rhythm.

With back-to-back wins, first over Chennai Super Kings and then RCB, the Titans are fifth on the table with 10 points.

Much of Gujarat's success with the bat has revolved around their top three -- Sai Sudharsan, captain Shubman Gill and Jos Buttler --



but over dependence on the trio remains a concern.

Washington Sundar has shown

promise in the middle order, but finishers like Shikhar Dhawan and Rahul Tewatia are yet to make a

consistent impact.

Jason Holder has also been slotted into the middle order to add balance, and his all-round contribution was evident in the win over defending champions RCB.

The West Indian picked up two wickets for 29 runs from his four overs and also grabbed three catches, underlining his value across departments.

Another encouraging sign for Gujarat has been their bowling in the previous match. The attack looked far more disciplined, with better control over lengths and improved execution in key phases, as they bowled out RCB for an under-par 155.

Teams:
Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), Jos Buttler, Kumar Kushagra, Glenn Phillips, Rashid Khan, Manav Suthar, Nishant Sindhu,

Washington Sundar, Gurnoor Brar, Arshad Khan, Mohammed Siraj, Prasad Krishna, Kagiso Rabada, Ravishrinivasan Sai Kishore, Jayant Yadav, Ishant Sharma, Ashok Sharma, Jason Holder, Tom Banton, Luke Wood, Sai Sudharsan, M Shikhar Khan, Anuj Rawat, Kulwant Khejroliya, Rahul Tewatia

Punjab Kings: Shreyas Iyer (c), Priyansh Arya, Harnoor Singh, Prabhsimran Singh, Mitchell Owen, Nehal Wadhwa, Azmatullah Omarzai, Marco Jansen, Musheer Khan, Shashank Singh, Marcus Stoinis, Suryansh Shedge, Arshdeep Singh, Xavier Bartlett, Yuzvendra Chahal, Lockie Ferguson, Harpreet Brar, Vijaykumar Vysakh, Yash Thakur, Cooper Connolly, Ben Dwarshuis, Praveen

Chahal, Vishal Nishad, Pyla Avinash, Vishnu Vinod.
Match starts 7:30 pm. (PTI)

Lando Norris wins pole for the Miami Grand Prix sprint race

MIAMI GARDENS, May 2: Reigning Formula 1 champion Lando Norris won the pole for Saturday's sprint race at the Miami Grand Prix, beating current F1 points leader Kimi Antonelli of Mercedes.

Norris' McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri was third, only 0.017 seconds behind Antonelli, ahead of the second sprint race of the season.

Friday was the first time drivers were able to test changes made by FIA, the sports governing body — during a five-week hiatus. The organization implemented changes to the regulations after drivers heavily criticized how the electrical battery power has changed the cars and competition.

"It was great," Norris said. "Perfect result for us, nice way to reward the team. We've got a lot of new upgrades on the car, so nice to feel some grip again. ... I've always loved Miami."

Charles Leclerc of Ferrari finished fourth, ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

Sergio Perez and Valtteri Bottas qualified 19th and 20th, respectively, in Cadillac's debut on North American soil.

Max still thinking about his future
Max Verstappen has "nothing new" to say regarding his future racing plans and whether the four-time world champion is seriously considering quitting Formula 1.

The Dutchman first suggested he could walk away after the Japanese Grand Prix in March. He's been vocal about his dissatisfaction with new regulations and called changes made to the cars ahead of this weekend's Miami Grand Prix "a tickle" of a fix.

He said in Miami he has not considered his future because he's been "busy with other things," which included racing at the Nordschleife in Germany to prepare for a 24-hour race later in May.

"I still have time and I'm taking my time," he said. "The rest, I mean, also for myself, I don't know at the moment. What I said in Japan is still the same, but I also still have a lot of time."

Miami is the first race in five weeks because two Middle East events were called off due to the war in Iran. During that time, Verstappen's



race engineer Gianpiero Lambiase said he is leaving for McLaren by 2028 at the latest. The duo has been together since 2016.

Verstappen had previously claimed he would not want to work with another race engineer, but has backtracked on that now.

"Otherwise I don't get to drive, I will have to work with someone else," added Verstappen. "But I think times change and the offer that he got, I would be an idiot to try and keep him. It's not only about me all the time, it's also about his career and moving forward. So for me, it was a no-brainer to be honest. But the future, that's what we're looking at now with a different race engineer. I'm sure we'll find a solution for that as well."

American born
Colton Herta is not the only American in the junior F2 series racing at Miami this weekend — also in the field is Sebastian Montoya, who was born and raised in this city before moving to Europe to pursue his racing career.

The 21-year-old is the son of former F1 driver Juan Pablo Montoya. He races under the Colombian flag, but has American citizenship by birthright.

He is thrilled to be racing in his former hometown.

"It's really emotional because I grew up here. I think the first time I drove a go-kart was 15 minutes away," Montoya said. "So to see how far it's actually come is amazing and obviously I dreamed of hopefully one day racing here in F1. I didn't expect to be here in F2, but it's a really pleasant surprise."

Crossovers everywhere
Antonelli posed on top of the shoulders of Miami Dolphins defensive tackle Jordan Phillips. Dolphins running back Ollie Gordon clutched a football as he danced near a small obstacle course. Inter Miami veteran Luis Suarez took turns kicking soccer balls with Charles Leclerc.

There were all kinds of crossovers at the Miami Grand Prix — where entertainment, culture and sports collide each year in Miami Gardens, Florida.

Players from the Dolphins, who play their regular season at Hard Rock Stadium, on the Miami International Autodrome's campus drove mini F1 race cars around a small course, while drivers like Antonelli tried a series of football obstacles.

"I feel great," Dolphins quarterback Quinn Ewers said in his mini car. "Couldn't be more prepared for this scenario."

Paddock upgrade
The Miami Grand Prix announced Friday that it is adding a 115,000 square foot extension to its Paddock Club building at the Miami International Autodrome, set to be ready in time for the 2027 race.

The new structure, which will extend to Turn 1, will be able to hold more than 9,000 attendees and includes 300,000 square feet of space, making it one of the largest paddock clubs in Formula 1.

"The expansion of our Paddock Club is another example of innovation and investment in our event and growing Formula 1 in the United States," said Tom Garfinkel, managing partner of the Miami Grand Prix. "We wanted to not only make the Paddock Club bigger to meet demand, but differentiate the experience into something new and unique." (AP)

Manas Dhamne makes maiden ATP Challenger final

NEW DELHI, May 2: India's rising tennis talent Manas Dhamne scripted a breakthrough run by storming into his maiden ATP Challenger final with a straight-sets win over France's Antoine Ghibaud in Shymkent, Kazakhstan on Saturday.

The 18-year-old Indian produced a composed and aggressive display to pip Ghibaud 6-4, 6-3 in the semifinals of the clay court tournament.

After edging a tight opening set with a late break, he raised his level in the second, dictating rallies from the baseline and closing out the contest without much trouble.

The victory marks a significant milestone in Dhamne's young career, making him one of the few Indian teenagers to reach an ATP Challenger final.

His run this week is expected to give a substantial boost to his ranking and confidence as he continues his transition from junior to professional circuit.

He is likely to break into the top-400 on Monday. (PTI)

Alex Zanardi dies at 59 after life-altering accidents

ROME, May 2: Alex Zanardi, the Italian auto racing champion-turned-Paralympic gold medalist whose career was marked by two life-altering accidents, has died. He was 59.

Zanardi's family announced his death on Saturday, saying that he passed away on Friday night. "Alex died peacefully, surrounded by the affection of those closest to him," the family said in a statement without providing a cause of death.

In 2020, Zanardi was seriously injured in a handbike accident after crashing into an oncoming truck during a relay event in Tuscany. Zanardi suffered serious facial and cranial trauma in the crash and was put in a medically induced coma.

Nearly 20 years earlier, Zanardi lost both of his legs in an auto racing crash.

"Italy loses a great champion and an extraordinary man, capable of turning every challenge of life into a lesson in courage, strength, and dignity," Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni said on X.

"Alex Zanardi knew how to bounce back every time, facing even the toughest challenges with determination, clarity, and a strength of spirit that was truly exceptional," Meloni added. "With his sport-

ing achievements, with his example, and with his humanity, he gave all of us much more than a victory: he gave hope, pride, and the strength to never give up. On behalf of myself and the government, I extend my heartfelt thoughts and the sincerest closeness to his family and to all those who loved him. Thank you for everything, Alex."

Zanardi won two championships in CART — 1997 and 1998 — in the United States before a brief move to Formula One. He returned to America and was racing in Germany in a CART event in 2001 when both of his legs were severed in a horrific accident the weekend after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. CART raced only because the series was already in Germany at the time of the attacks and could not return to the U.S.

During his recovery, Zanardi designed his own prosthetics — he joked that he made himself taller — and learned to walk again. He then turned his attention to hand cycling and developed into one of the most accomplished athletes in the world. He won four gold medals and two silvers at the 2012 and 2016 Paralympics, competed in the New York City Marathon and set an Ironman record. (AP)



40 boxers left out of SAI sanction

CWG, Asian Games selection trials pushed back

NEW DELHI, May 2: As many as 40 boxers face uncertainty after being omitted from the sanction letter issued by the Sports Authority of India for the national camp, casting doubt on their participation in the selection assessment process for this year's Commonwealth Games and Asian Games.

According to the selection policy of the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), the top two finishers across 20 weight categories -- 10 each in men's and women's sections -- at the Chief of Army Staff Cup (COAS), held from March 30 to April 5, were to be included in the national camp that was scheduled to begin on April 25.

The policy, released in December last year, states that these 40 boxers would be eligible for the assessment trials, which will determine India's squads for the Commonwealth

Games, Asian Games and the World Boxing Cup 2.

However, the sanction letter received by the BFI on April 29 did not include the names of these boxers.

"The sanction was received on 29th April 2026, and 40 names are currently missing from the list," the federation said in a notification on Friday.

It is understood that the BFI has been in constant communication with SAI to resolve the issue but is yet to receive a response.

The assessment process, originally scheduled to begin on May 5, has now been pushed back by a day and will commence from May 6 due to the uncertainty surrounding the missing names.

"We were told winning the COAS Cup will get us to the camp. It is the same policy as last year so



I don't know what the issue is. This is the only way of getting into the camp and vying for the CWG and Asian Games as I missed the Nationals due to injury.

"I am just hoping the sanction letter arrives over the weekend so that I can reach the camp on time and take part in the assessment," one of the 40 boxers told PTI.

Under the revised schedule, the assessment will be conducted in two phases. Strength & Conditioning tests will be held on May 6 and

7, followed by sparring bouts from May 11 to 15, conducted in a knockout format to determine final standings across weight categories.

The evaluation carries a total of 200 marks, combining both technical and non-technical parameters. Non-technical components, including attendance, weight management, health management, international potential, and strength and conditioning, will contribute to the overall score alongside technical assessments conducted by a panel of evaluators.

Rankings within each weight category will be determined through a structured knockout format.

The CWG will take place in Glasgow from July 23 to August 2 while the Asian Games is scheduled from September 19 to October 4 in Aichi and Nagoya in Japan. (PTI)

Yellamaraju in Top-20 as Bhatia and Theegala slip on second day

DORAL (US), May 2: Akshay Bhatia dropped a double bogey on his closing hole and slipped to tied 26th at the Cadillac Championship after two rounds, while Sudarshan Yellamaraju (66) was tied 16th after looking good for a top-5 placement.

Yellamaraju was 9-under through 16 holes and dropped three shots, including a double bogey on the 17th.

Sahith Theegala also dropped a double on the eighth and bogeys on the third, ninth and the 18th for a 76 and was T-48th. It was a day when the closing holes were tough, particularly the 18th.

Overall Theegala had just one birdie against three bogeys and a double bogey.

Bhatia, who like Theegala is supported by Hero, had a roller coaster of a round with six birdies, four bogeys and a double bogey in his even par 72.

Yellamaraju was 9-under for the round through 16 holes before dropping three shots on his final two holes and finishing with a 66. He is now at 4 under for the week. Yellamaraju was in the first group of the day and made good use of the calm conditions till he ran into trouble at the finish.

Cameron Young finally made his first bogey of the week but it barely affected his lead going into the weekend. Young shot a 53 under 67 on Friday to get to 13 under and take a five-shot lead at the midway point of the USD 20 million Signature Event at Trump National Doral.

Young's lone blemish was a bogey at the par-4 14th, where his chip from an awkward side-hill lie didn't reach the putting surface. Other than that he was flawless — just as he had a bogey-free 64 a day earlier to grab the lead.

Young played with Scottie Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player had a bogey-free 67 but ended the day exactly where he started it — seven shots off the lead and in tied sixth place.

Nick Taylor (70), Alex Smalley (71) and Jordan Spieth (71) were tied for second. Gary Woodland (69) was alone in fifth at 7 under and Scheffler was in a logjam of players — Alex Fitzpatrick among them — at 6 under.

Spieth rolled in a birdie at the par-4 18th, an absolute rarity through the first two rounds at Doral.

The 18th on the Blue Monster course is a serious test, with water lining the left and seriously narrowing the fairway for all but the biggest hitters. Spieth's birdie was the sixth on the 18th through the tournament's first two days. (PTI)

We hear Indian athletes running away when there's doping control: Int'l Testing Agency head



NEW YORK, May 2: The head of the International Testing Agency (ITA), the body that manages anti-doping programme in Olympic Games and other major global events, has expressed concern at the high rate of doping cases in India and athletes getting "advance notice prior to testing" and avoiding furnishing samples if there is doping control.

ITA Director General Benjamin Cohen said in a report that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has passed on the message that if India wants to host the 2036 Games, the country needs to undergo "a lot of governance and structural reforms".

"We're concerned in general with the state of doping in India and we're hearing a lot of things happening on the ground," Cohen was quoted as saying by 'The Athletic', which covers sports for 'The New York Times'.

"We also hear stories of athletes running away when there is a doping control, and we hear of advance notice (given to athletes prior to testing)."

Besides overseeing anti-doping tests on behalf of the IOC, the Lausanne-based ITA also manages the anti-doping programme of around 50 international sports federations.

Cohen said he met with the officials of the New Delhi-based National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) and Indian Olympic Association (IOA) at the recent Winter Olympics in Milano Cortina in Italy, and he was warmed by their apparent willingness to "team up with the ITA".

But, he also admitted that getting India to join forces with ITA won't be an easy task as that could be perceived (by India) as an admission of failure of its (anti-dop-

ing) system. "I'm going to be frank: there is still some resistance to engage with the ITA, as there can be a perception in India that this is almost an admission of failure of the system, or that they're not going to be seen as competent enough to deal with their own problems, so they have to join forces with an independent international organisation."

"There's a bit of scepticism as to how it's going to be perceived in the Indian community. But I think they (India) are on the right track in that it is now known that the IOA and the Ministry of Sports want to do something; they want to invest. They have the resources, so I think it's just a matter of time," he said.

The ITA works with an increasing number of National Anti-Doping Organisations (NADOs) around the world to exchange intelligence and information, coordinate testing plans, and collaborate on specific cases or areas such as sample collection and education.

India has been topping the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) list of dope offenders for three consecutive years with the highest positivity rate among major nations.

The country is scheduled to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad and is aspiring to become an Olympic host in 2036 in the Gujarat capital.

Doha, the capital of Qatar, is also in the running to host the 2036 Olympics, and the host city for that edition is expected to be known before 2028 Games in Los Angeles. Last month, WADA President Witold Banka said at the sidelines of a conference on Global Anti-Doping Intelligence and Investigations Network (GAIIN) held in New Delhi that "nobody is blind" to India's serious doping problem but acknowledged that there have been "sincere efforts" to address it.

He had also said India is the biggest producer of Performance Enhancing Drug (PEDs) and steroids in the world.

ITA was created in 2018 as a non-profit foundation under the supervision of the WADA and the IOC to promote independence, expertise and transparency in the global fight against doping. (PTI)

AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup India suffer 0-2 defeat against formidable Australia



SUZHOU (CHINA), May 2: India went down fighting 0-2 against formidable Australia in their opening group match of the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup football tournament here on Saturday.

Theodora Moutithys put Australia ahead in the 25th minute before Indian defender Abhista Basnett scored an own goal in the 59th minute in the opening Group B match.

India face four-time champions Japan on May 5 before taking on Lebanon on May 8.

It was India's first appearance at the U17 Women's Asian Cup since 2005, marking the end of a 21-year wait at this level.

Australia are one of the established football countries in Asia and they have reached the semifinals of the tournament on two earlier occasions. They will be looking to take one of the four spots for the 2016 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in Morocco.

The top two teams of each of the three groups and the two best third-placed teams qualify for the quarterfinals. (PTI)

Batting-heavy SRH look to continue winning run against resurgent KKR

HYDERABAD, May 2: A power-packed batting unit at their disposal, Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to continue their winning streak and climb up the ladder when they take on a resurgent Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL here on Sunday.

SRH are on a five-match winning streak and are placed third in the IPL standings with 12 points from nine matches, that includes six wins and three defeats.

KKR, on the other hand, have been struggling all season under Ajinkya Rahane's captaincy but have won their last two games. They are placed eighth in the 10-team tournament.

SRH boast of a strong batting line-up in the form of tournament's second and third highest run-scorer in Abhishek Sharma and Heinrich Klaasen. In Ishan Kishan, SRH has an explosive batter who can change the complexion of the match in any given day and he has proved that this season.

Australian opener Travis Head also got back among runs with 76 against Mumbai Indians in SRH's last match while chasing an imposing 243 for 5 with six wickets in hand in 18.4 overs.

Nitish Kumar Reddy and Salil Arora have also risen to the occasion with the bat for SRH when called for.

Considering the firepower of SRH's batting unit, KKR's bowling department will have to raise their standards by leaps and bounds to



contain their opponents.

On the bowling front, SRH have been boosted by the return of their skipper Pat Cummins.

Besides Cummins, Praful Hinge, Eshan Malinga, Reddy and Sakib Hussain too have been playing their part.

SRH would also be high on confidence, having defeated KKR by 65 runs at the Eden Gardens in the first leg.

It promises to be an exciting contest as KKR are on a comeback trail with consecutive wins after five losses and one washed out match.

KKR's bold decision to continue with Rahane as the captain after a

woeful IPL 2025 campaign has been the talk of the town as the right-hander has so far failed to inspire his side.

Rahane has shown a transformative approach with flashes of positive intent -- a 67 off 40 against Mumbai Indians and a brisk 41 off 24 against LSG but his leadership and decisions on the field have been questionable.

It needs to be seen whether KKR finally includes Rachin Ravindra in the scheme of things as he was warming the bench.

Finn Allen and Tim Seifert have also failed to live up to the expectations, while the likes of Angkrish

Raghuvanshi, Cameron Green and Rovman Powell are yet to fire.

KKR haven't been helped by a depleted pace attack and a quiet start from spin spearhead Varun Chakravathy.

The former champions are mainly reliant on domestic players like Anukul Roit, Vaibhav Arora and Kartik Tyagi.

Teams:
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Salil Arora (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Travis Head, Ravichandran Ashwin, Aniket Verma, Abhishek Sharma, Harsh Dubey, Krains Fuletra, Liam Livingstone, Kamindu Mendis, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Harshal Patel, Shivam Mavi, Shivang Kumar, Amit Kumar, Gerald Coetzee, Praful Hinge, Sakib Hussain, Dilshan Madushanka, Eshan Malinga, Onkar Tarnale, Jaydev Unadkat, Zeeshan Ansari.

Kolkata Knight Riders: Ajinkya Rahane (c), Manish Pandey, Rovman Powell, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Ramandeep Singh, Rinku Singh, Sunil Narine, Anukul Roy, Vaibhav Arora, Umran Malik, Varun Chakravathy, Cameron Green, Matheesha Pathirana, Rahul Tripathi, Tim Seifert, Tejasvi Dahiya, Rachin Ravindra, Akash Deep, Blessing Muzarabani, Navdeep Saini, Prashant Solanki, Finn Allen, Daksh Kamra, Kartik Tyagi, Sarthak Ranjan, Saurabh Dube.

Match starts at 3:30PM IST. (PTI)

India to miss Lakshya Sen in Thomas Cup semifinal vs France due to swollen elbow

HORSENS (DENMARK), May 2: A swollen right elbow has ruled out Lakshya Sen from India's Thomas Cup semifinal clash against France on Saturday night and world No. 30 Kidambi Shrikant will compete in his absence.

The 24-year-old Lakshya had saved two match points to script an 18-21 22-20 21-17 victory over world No. 6 Chou Tien Chen in a marathon clash lasting one hour and 28 minutes, helping India notch up a commanding 3-0 win over Chinese Taipei in the quarter-finals on Friday.

However, the Commonwealth Games champion hurt his elbow while diving for a shot during an intense rally.

"Lakshya sustained an impact to his elbow following an intense quarterfinal match that involved multiple dives. Following a thorough evaluation by the team's medical staff, the decision has been taken as a precautionary measure to allow Lakshya adequate recovery time and ensure he is in optimal condition for the final, should India progress," Badminton Association of India (BAI) General Secretary Sanjay Mishra said in a statement.

"He is currently under close medical observation and receiving all necessary support. The team remains confident and optimistic about his swift recovery and return to peak form."

"Lakshya is also struggling with blisters on his feet," former India coach and his mentor Vimal



Kumar told PTI.

With Lakshya unavailable, young Ayush Shetty will play the opening singles against world No. 4 Christo Popov, who had defeated the Indian in their only meeting at the Hylo Open in 2024.

Srikanth, who had won six matches during India's title run in 2022, will feature in the second singles against world No. 10 Alex Lanier.

HS Prannoy, who has delivered as a third singles player, will then take on world No. 17 Toma Junior Popov, who has a 1-0 head-to-head record against the Indian, having beaten him at the All England Championships in 2025.

If the tie extends beyond the singles, Hariharan Amsakarunan and M R Arjun are slated to face Eloi Adam and Leo Rossi in the first doubles.

In the concluding match, world No. 4 pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will take on the Popov brothers.

"I don't think it is a set back, we have a good team, every one is confident and if we can pull this match, hopefully Lakshya will be available for the final," Badminton Association of India (BAI) secretary Sanjay Mishra said.

Under tournament regulations, ties generally follow player rankings, with the highest-ranked singles and doubles players from each team facing their counterparts.

However, if players are scheduled to compete in both singles and doubles, they must complete their singles matches before pairing up in doubles.

In France's case, this means all three singles matches will be played first, followed by the doubles.

India are assured of a medal after reaching the semifinals. The country had won the Thomas Cup in 2022 and claimed bronze medals in 1952, 1955 and 1979. (PTI)

I enjoy being a finisher for my team: Ashutosh Sharma



JAIPUR, May 2: Delhi Capitals batting all-rounder Ashutosh Sharma said he relishes his role as a finisher after his side snapped a three-match losing streak with a seven-wicket win over Rajasthan Royals in an IPL match here.

Ashutosh struck an unbeaten 25 off 15 balls, hitting four boundaries, as Delhi successfully chased down a daunting 226-run target with five balls to spare on Friday.

"I enjoy being a finisher for my team. The team has trusted me to bat in these situations and I enjoy playing in these moments. I always feel that as long as I am at the crease, I can win the game for my team," Ashutosh said at the post-match press conference.

Chasing a stiff total, Delhi were laid a solid foundation by KL Rahul and Pathum Nissanka, who stitched together a 110-run opening partnership.

"In T20 cricket nowadays, a lot depends on the opening partnership and the powerplay. Our players played really well and because of that we were in the game throughout and could take it till the end," Ashutosh said.

Delhi's overseas pace duo of Mitchell Starc and Kyle Jamieson had earlier set the tone by removing Rajasthan's explosive openers Yashasvi Jaiswal and Vaibhav Sooryavanshi inside the first two overs.

"We wanted to get their opening partnership out early, as they have been doing well in previous matches. That was our plan and it worked, which was good for us."

Meanwhile, Rajasthan Royals batting coach Vikram Rathour admitted that poor execution with the ball cost his side the match. (PTI)

Yuvraj Sandhu in Top-10 in Turkey, Sharma also makes cut

BELEK (TÜRKIYE), May 2: India's Yuvraj Sandhu played a steady round of 1-under 71 and was inside Top-10 at the halfway stage of the Turkish Airlines Open on DP World Tour title here. Also making the cut was Shubhankar Sharma, despite a nightmarish finish as he dropped five shots in a span of five holes between the 13th and the 17th with three bogeys and a double bogey. He shot 3-over 75 and was now 1-over and Tied-57th. He had four birdies and two bogeys before that and he is now tied 57th, after sneaking inside the cut line, which fell at exactly 1-over. Sandhu, playing his first season on the DP World Tour, birdied the fourth, eighth, 11th and the 14th while dropping shots on the seventh, 13th and 17th.

Gregorio De Leo will take a one-shot lead into the weekend as the Italian, playing in the morning, carded five birdies and just one bogey in his second round 68 to set the clubhouse target at seven under at National Golf Club.

The 26-year-old was briefly joined at that mark by afternoon starters Alejandro Del Rey and Jens Dantorp, but they both fell back into the tie for second alongside Kazuma Kobori and Sam Birstow on six under. De Leo secured his first 68-hole lead on the DP World Tour and is now chasing a maiden win after regaining his playing privileges at Qualifying School after a rookie campaign which featured two top-five finishes.

First-round leader Mikael Lindberg sits at five under in solo sixth after a second round 73, while defending champion Martin Couvra was among those to make the cut on the number at one over. (PTI)

We'll look at condition and pick best side: Southee keeps suspense over Pathirana KKR debut

HYDERABAD, May 2: A settled Kolkata Knight Riders are weighing their options on handing a much-anticipated debut to Matheesha Pathirana for their away clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday, even as the Sri Lankan pacer has been with the side for two weeks after clearing his fitness test back home, said bowling coach Tim Southee.

The slinky pacer had injured his calf during Sri Lanka's T20 World Cup match against Australia on February 16 and joined the KKR squad ahead of their home fixture against Rajasthan Royals on May 1 to give a much-needed boost to their depleted pace attack.

KKR have played another match against Lucknow Super Giants since his arrival, but Pathirana who was long awaited by the franchise, is yet to get a look-in. "He's been around the group for a little bit now. We'll look at conditions and make a decision on the side that we think is best for tomorrow's game," said Southee during the pre-match media interaction.

"He's been bowling well at training and it's great to have him a part of the side." The dilemma could stem from KKR's reluctance to tinker with a winning combination, having finally put together two consecutive wins after struggling to post a victory for seven matches this season.

Sunil Narine has remained indispensable for KKR since 2012, while Aussie all-rounder



Cameron Green is their marquee overseas recruit this season.

That leaves the team to choose between Tim Seifert and Rovman Powell if Pathirana is to be accommodated. Big-hitting Powell has not quite fired with a highest of 39 not out off 24 balls and a modest strike rate of just over 134 in five innings.

New Zealand opener Seifert on the other hand has struggled after his T20 World Cup exploits, returning scores of 19, 0 and 0 in three outings for KKR.

It has been two weeks since Pathirana joined the squad and has been training regularly, but his lack of competitive match practice -- he hasn't played since the February 16 World Cup game -- could also be a factor.

With KKR placed eighth on the table, they can ill afford missteps at this stage in their push for the playoffs.

Southee agreed that multiple factors go into team selection. "Yes, you take a number of things into consideration for se-

lection. Obviously, the balance of a side, the makeup of your team.

"Here with the IPL, your makeup with the overseas has to change when you make those changes. Those decisions will be taken into account along with the conditions that we're looking to be faced with tomorrow," he said.

Up against a top-heavy SRH line-up featuring Travis Head, Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen, KKR's focus will be on winning the Powerplay, Southee said, adding that the bowling group is upbeat after a decent showing in the earlier meeting.

In their previous encounter, Head and Abhishek fell short of fifties, while Kishan was dismissed cheaply. Klaasen, however, struck a half-century as SRH posted a winning score of 226/8.

"We probably bowled reasonably well to them in the first fixture against them. As a bowling group, they're excited for a big opportunity tomorrow," said Southee. (PTI)

Yastika, Nandini uncapped for women's T20 WC

MUMBAI, May 2: India on Saturday drafted in uncapped Nandini Sharma and wicketkeeper batter Yastika Bhatia in the 15-player squad for the upcoming Women's T20 World Cup, beginning June 12 in England and Wales.

Pratika Rawal was excluded and all-rounder Amanjot Kaur missed out on selection owing to injury. Harmanpreet Kaur will lead all the squads with Smriti Mandhana being her deputy.

Pratika, however, has been in the squad for the one-off Test against England to be played at the Lord's between July 10 and 13.

Nandini is a medium pacer, who played 10 matches for Delhi Capitals in the Women's Premier League. She has 17 wickets from ten matches.

She was also part of the India squad that played in the Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars tournament in Bangkok in February this year.

The squad picked for World Cup will also compete in the preceding three-match T20I series against hosts England, starting May 28.

India squad for England T20Is and T20 World Cup

Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Bharti Fulmali, Deepti Sharma, Richa Ghosh (wk), Sree Charan, Yastika Bhatia (2nd wk), Nandini Sharma, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Thakur, Kranti Gaud, Shreyanka Patil, Radha Yadav.

India squad for one-off Test against England

Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Pratika Rawal, Richa Ghosh, Sree Charan, Yastika Bhatia, Nandini Sharma, Harleen Deol, Renuka Singh, Kranti Gaud, Sayali Satghare, Sneha Rana. (PTI)

In IPL, bowlers need to be aggressive while trying to find way to get batters out: PBKS' Ferguson



AHMEDABAD, May 2: Punjab Kings pacer Lockie Ferguson says bowlers will get some stick in a high-scoring tournament like IPL but they need to find ways to remain aggressive and restrict the flow of runs to be successful in the gruelling league.

The domination of batters has been so

absolute in IPL 2026 that even a target in excess of 230 or even 250 often did not feel safe.

"IPL is just sort of a new competition on its own in the style of cricket that's played here. It's obviously high-scoring. So, you're going to get hit for boundaries. That's part of being a bowler," Ferguson told media ahead of Punjab's match against Gujarat Titans.

"It's how do you bounce back the next ball and try to execute again. So, as long as the bowlers are being aggressive, trying to find ways to get batters out whilst also restricting runs, then they're going to be in a good mindset," he added.

So how does a bowler do that — depending on raw pace or variations?

"I mean, extra pace comes with its benefits. Sometimes the faster you bowl, the faster it goes to the rope. But it's an X-factor. You know, if you can get extra pace, then obviously the batter has less time to react."

"And then, you know, every modern-day cricketer has variables. They change the pace of the ball. They have different change-ups. So, it's about adapting as much as possible and trying to learn

what's working on that particular day," he said.

Ferguson joined PBKS a wee bit late after being with his wife — Emma — to welcome their first child — Beau.

The Kiwi quick thanked the franchise for allowing him some family time. "I chose to have some time at home with my family, my newborn. And, you know, I can't thank Punjab Kings enough for allowing me to do that. It's obviously a hard decision from a cricket point of view to take time out to spend it at home," he said.

But the 34-year-old admitted that joining IPL midway was not an easy job.

"Obviously, it's not that easy coming from training at home straight into the IPL. It's a tough competition at the best of times. But, yeah, this is the challenge we face."

The PBKS suffered their first defeat of IPL 2026 when Rajasthan Royals scaled down a 223-run target for a six-wicket win at Mullanpur.

But Ferguson did not read too much into that result.

"Execution is the key, right? So, we're trying to execute. Some days, not so good.

But at the same time, the skill sets that are involved with this bowling attack led by Arshdeep and Chahal, I thought the spinners were fantastic last game.

"So, trying to make little adjustments, trying to tighten up in areas. We know how within the IPL, how small margins can look a lot bigger on TV. But, you know, we're just trying to tighten up on areas, try to double down on our planning," he added.

The Delhi Capitals' pacer Kyle Jamieson's animated celebration after dismissing RR's Vaibhav Sooryavanshi on Friday has opened up heated debates in social media.

But Ferguson supported his pace bowling colleague from New Zealand.

"Kyle's a good mate of mine. He got pretty fired up, which is pretty understandable. It's not easy to get wickets in this part of the world and that was a big one. So it's part of the game."

"Fans like to see the passion. As a fan of the game, you like to see players getting passionate, players showing emotion. He's obviously a big guy too. So when a big guy has a lot of emotions, it looks even bigger," he said. (PTI)