

6 NATION

- Bengal awaits poll results today
- Nine dead as massive fire breaks out in residential building in east Delhi

7 NORTHEAST

- Rallies, shutdown mark 3rd anniversary of ethnic conflict in Manipur
- TPCC chief slams Manik Saha govt for cancelling appointment process for special executives



27 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

www.thehillstimes.in

THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXVII

Issue No. 109

RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, MONDAY, MAY 4, 2026

PAGES 8 PRICE ₹ 8

Counting to take place at 40 centres across all 35 districts amid tight security

Verdict on electoral fate of 722 candidates today

GUWAHATI, May 3: The battle for Assam will enter its final stage with the counting of votes on Monday, determining whether the BJP-led NDA gets a third term or the Congress wrests power after weeks of wrangling marked by identity politics, welfare delivery and regional aspirations.

EVMs, holding the electoral fates of 722 hopefuls from 126 assembly constituencies of the state, will be opened at 40 counting centres across all 35 districts amid tight security arrangements.

Among the contestants, 59 are women. Counting in Nagaon district will be held in three separate centres, while in Kokrajhar, Tinsukia and Jorhat it will be held at two centres each.

Twenty-five companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) have been deployed to guard the counting centres and the strongrooms, housing the electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The authorities will deploy 800 more unarmoured police personnel to move the EVMs from strongrooms to the counting centres.

Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel had



said that two additional CAPF companies will be kept on static duty. On the other hand, 93 companies of state armed police have already been deployed in the districts, he said.

The support of 85 Assault Groups has also

been sought on the counting day to deal with any untoward incident.

Polling in the state was held on April 9, with 85.96 per cent of the over 2.50 crore electorate exercising their franchise.

Among the 722 candidates, Congress has

the highest 99, followed by BJP with 90, AIUDF with 30, NDA allies Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) with 26 and Bodo Peoples' Front (BPF) with 11 nominees.

In the opposition alliance, Rajiv Dal contested in 13 seats, Assam Jatiya Parishad in 10, CPI(M) in three, and All Party Hill Leaders Conference in two.

The Aam Aadmi Party and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) each contested in 18 seats, the TMC in 22, the JMM in 16. Besides, there are 258 Independent candidates.

Among the high-profile candidates whose electoral fate will be decided on Monday are Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Congress' state unit chief Gaurav Gogoi, assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary, Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia, AIUDF Chief Badruddin Ajmal, Rajiv Dal Chief and MP Akhil Gogoi, and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) chief Lurinjyoti Gogoi. Several cabinet ministers, including the AGP's Atul Bora and Keshav Mahanta, and the BPF's Charan Boro, are also in the fray.

The ruling BJP-led NDA's main constituents are the (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Akhil feels threat to life ahead of counting



HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, May 3: Akhil Gogoi, Rajiv Dal candidate from the 96 Sivasagar constituency, on Sunday alleged that a conspiracy was being hatched to kill him and his associates following the counting of votes.

Addressing a press conference, Gogoi claimed that he, along with Amlanjyoti Gogoi and Arup

Kumar Kalita, was being targeted and alleged that the conspiracy was linked to his political rival Kushal Duwori of the BJP.

He said he had received information about the alleged plan from sources within the BJP and claimed that an attempt could be made on his life on the day of counting. Gogoi further stated that he had (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Canada declares Khalistan extremists as 'national security threat'

OTTAWA, May 3: Canada's intelligence agency has declared Khalistani extremists a "national security threat", adding that the group uses institutions to promote its "violent extremist agenda" in the country.

Canadian Security Intelligence Service, in its 2025 Public Report, highlighted that involvement of Canada-based Khalistani extremist (CBKE) in violent activities "continues to pose a national security threat to Canada and to Canadian interests."

"Some CBKEs are well connected to Canadian citizens who leverage Canadian institutions to promote their violent extremist agenda and collect funds from unsuspecting community members that are then diverted toward violent activities," the report issued on Canadian Government's website on Friday said.

Khalistani extremist groups demand the creation of a sovereign state within India and are designated as terrorist organisations by New Delhi because of their involvement in separatist activities.

The report comes a year after the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Air India Flight 182, whose suspects were members of the CBKE groups.

"It remains to this day the deadliest terrorist attack in Canadian history, with 329 people killed, most of them Canadians," it said.

The report, however, said that non-violent advocacy for the creation of a state of Khalistan is not considered extremism, and some Canadians participate in legitimate and peaceful campaigning to support the Khalistan separatist movement.

"Only a small group of individuals who use Canada as a base to promote, fundraise, or plan violence primarily in India are considered Khalistani extremists," it said.

The India-Canada relations hit rock bottom in 2023 when then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged a potential Indian link to the killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada. India rejected the charges. Under Prime Minister (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

2026 WB poll battle

EC deploys 432 counting observers across Bengal



KOLKATA, May 3: The Election Commission has deployed 432 counting observers (COs) across all the 294 assembly constituencies in West Bengal to ensure transparent and smooth counting of votes on Monday.

The poll panel, in a statement, said that several districts have been

assigned additional observers in view of their sensitivity and electoral significance.

While North 24 Parganas district has been allocated 49 observers for its 33 constituencies, South 24 Parganas has 45 observers for 31 seats.

Murshidabad has been assigned 33 observers for 22 constituencies,

reflecting heightened monitoring arrangements.

In districts such as Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Uttar Dinajpur, each constituency has been provided with an additional observer.

Meanwhile, enforcement agencies have carried out extensive seizure drives during the election period from February 26 to May 2 to curb illegal inducements and the total value of seizures stands at approximately ₹ 561 crore, the statement said.

The seizures include ₹ 30.79 crore in cash and over 55 lakh litres of liquor valued at ₹ 145.07 crore.

Drugs and narcotics worth ₹ 127.02 crore have also been confiscated, along with precious metals valued at ₹ 37.52 crore.

In addition, freebies and other items, including foreign currency, worth ₹ 189.86 crore have been seized during the period. The EC said (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Bomb blast in Manipur on third anniversary of ethnic conflict; no casualty

IMPHAL, May 3: Suspected militants triggered a bomb explosion in Imphal West district near the Imphal airport on Sunday, the third anniversary of ethnic conflict between Meitei and Kuki communities in the state, officials said.

No casualty or damage to property was reported in the blast that occurred near a crematorium at Malom under Singjamei police station, less than a kilometre from the Imphal Airport.

The incident site is also close to a camp of the Territorial Army.

Following the explosion, the area has been secured, and the situation remains under close monitoring, officials said, adding that an investigation has been underway.

The Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), a banned outfit, claimed responsibility for the 11.50 am blast.

In a statement, the KCP said that it triggered the explosion to protest frequent bandhs, blockades and shutdowns in the state, which have been affecting normal life.

Ethnic clashes have left at least 260 people dead and thousands of residents homeless since 2023.

The violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities started on May 3, 2023, after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribes status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts.

President's rule was imposed in the state on February 13 last year after the BJP-led government headed by Biren Singh resigned on February 9, following months of ethnic violence.

The 60-member assembly, which has tenure till 2027, had been put on suspended animation after President's rule was imposed. It was revoked on February 4, hours (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Advance Neurological Operation Theatre Facility inaugurated at AIIMS, Guwahati

GUWAHATI, May 3: The Advanced Neurosurgical Operation Theatre Facility was inaugurated at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Guwahati on Sunday to strengthen super-specialty healthcare services in the North East region.

The state-of-the-art facility was formally inaugurated by AIIMS, Guwahati Executive Director Prof (Dr) Ashok Puranik in the presence of Power Grid Corporation of India Limited's (PGCIL) Senior General Manager Surendra Kumar Majhi.

The advanced neurosurgical OT was established with financial support of Rs 6.5 crore from Power Grid Corporation of India Limited under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, an official release said. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Iran sends new proposal to US over stalled peace talks

LAHORE, May 3: Iran has conveyed a "multi-layered proposal" to Washington in an attempt to break the deadlock over peace talks, a senior official familiar with the development said on Sunday.

US President Donald Trump says he is still not satisfied with Iran's new offer to end the West Asia conflict. He has also indicated that Washington is unlikely to accept any framework that does not include firm guarantees preventing Tehran from developing nuclear weapons.

The Iran war — triggered by joint strikes by the US and Israel on February 28 — has been on hold since April 8, with one round of peace talks having taken place in Islamabad since then.

Pakistan is mediating the peace talks between the US and Iran.

The Pakistani official told PTI that the fresh Iran proposal is a

phased de-escalation framework, seeking to separate immediate conflict management from the more complex and long-standing dispute over Tehran's nuclear programme.

There are three broad components of it.

"The first component of the plan focuses on urgent de-escalation measures," the official said.

"Iran has indicated willingness to ease tensions in and around the strategic Strait of Hormuz, provided Washington reciprocates by scaling back its military posture and easing economic pressure, including restrictions affecting Iranian oil exports," he said.

The Strait of Hormuz — through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil and gas pass — remains a major sticking point in the talks. Shippings through the narrow Gulf waterway have been severely disrupted by the conflict, triggering

sharp increase in oil prices and energy shortages in several countries.

Tehran views confidence-building steps as essential before entering substantive negotiations, the official said.

"Secondly, Iran is seeking to decouple the restoration of maritime trade and oil flows from nuclear negotiations, arguing that economic normalisation should precede any binding commitments on its nuclear activities," he said.

The third component concerns "conditional flexibility" on the nuclear front.

"While reaffirming its position on the right to peaceful nuclear energy, Iran has indicated openness to discussing limits on uranium enrichment and enhanced monitoring mechanisms — but only within a broader agreement that guarantees tangible sanctions relief," he said. Another (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Admiral Tripathi embarks Myanmar Navy vessel



NEW DELHI, May 3: Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi embarked on a Myanmar Navy warship and held talks with senior military leadership, aiming to bolster bilateral maritime cooperation during his ongoing visit to the neighbouring nation.

Admiral Tripathi also visited Myanmar's Naval Training Command where he formally handed over some military hardware including containerised small arms simulator and 'rigid inflatable boat', according

to Indian Navy.

The Navy chief began his four-day trip to Myanmar on Saturday with an aim to enhance operational-level cooperation between the two navies and explore new avenues for collaboration.

The chief of naval staff was scheduled to hold bilateral talks with the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar's armed forces, General Ye Win Oo, Defence Minister General U Htun Aung and Myanmar Navy's Commander-in-Chief Admiral Htein Win.

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

The country is considered crucial under India's 'Neighbourhood First', 'Act East' and 'MAHASAGAR' (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) policies.

As part of the ongoing visit to Myanmar, Admiral Tripathi embarked on Myanmar Navy's Frigate UMS Kyan Sit Thar (F12), on May 2, the Indian Navy said on social media.

He was received onboard the ship by Captain Kyaw Thet Naing, the No.1 Fleet Commander with a ceremonial Guard of Honour. Admiral (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Indian startup's 'Drishti' satellite launched aboard SpaceX rocket



NEW DELHI, May 3: Bengaluru-based space start-up GalaxEye's Mission Drishti satellite was launched on Sunday aboard SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket from California.

Mission Drishti is the world's first OptoSAR satellite, integrating electro-optical (EO) and synthetic aperture radar (SAR) sensors into a single operational platform, according to the company.

While EO sensors capture high-resolution images during sunlight and clear skies, SAR sensors provide all-weather and all-time images, using radar pulses.

In a statement, Suyash Singh, founder and

CEO of GalaxEye, said, "With the satellite (Mission Drishti) now successfully in orbit, our immediate focus is on completing its commissioning. As we move through this phase, we are already witnessing strong global interest in the differentiated datasets enabled by our OptoSAR payload."

The satellite will help address long-standing limitations of conventional systems and enable more reliable and consistent data acquisition across diverse environmental conditions, the company said.

As a dual-use Earth observation satellite, the mission will support use cases across defence, agriculture, disaster management, maritime monitoring, and infrastructure planning.

The satellite is also expected to complement India's broader initiatives, including the 29 active Earth Observation satellites outlined in ISRO's recent annual report.

The launch came after five years of indigenous research and development, and extensive environmental testing and performance validation of the Mission Drishti.

In a statement, Lt Gen AK Bhatt (Retd), director general of Indian Space Association (ISPA), said, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

GUWAHATI, May 3: 'Moi Eti Nixhasor', an Assamese film on the life of a thief in the backdrop of the state's social and political landscape, has won the 'best dark comedy' and the 'best editor' awards at the WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival 2026, its filmmaker said on Sunday.

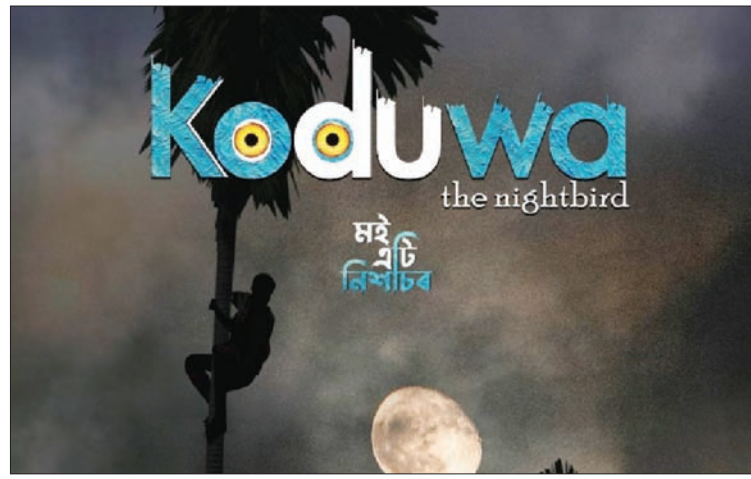
Directed by National Award-winning filmmaker Bidyut Kotoky, the movie revolves around Koduwa — a cunning village thief who navigates social unrest and prejudice with wit and heart.

"Moi Eti Nixhasor (Koduwa the nightbird) is a dark Assamese comedy about a man, who is trying to make a living as the village thief. And going by the response we received, it appears that Koduwa has successfully stolen the heart of the audiences at Houston WorldFest too," Kotoky told PTI from the US.

The WorldFest-Houston had awarded and recognised amazing creatives such as Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Ang Lee, Ridley Scott and

WORLD FEST-HOUSTON

'Moi Eti Nixhasor' wins best dark comedy, editing awards



Oliver Stone, among others, in their earlier editions, he added.

The full-length Assamese feature film was written and directed by Kotoky, while the editing was done by his wife Pallavi.

Kotoky received the 'Platinum Remi

Award' for best dark comedy, while Pallavi bagged 'Gold Remi Award' for her editing of the film.

"Getting selected in such a historic festival itself is a big honour, and getting awarded there is just overwhelming for us. This festival is considered as

one of the oldest independent film festivals in the world, founded in 1961 as a film society and evolving into a competitive international festival in 1968," the director said.

'Moi Eti Nixhasor' was chosen at 59th Annual WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival 2026 as an 'official selection'. It was also nominated to receive one of the prestigious WorldFest Remi awards at the US-based festival, held from April 24 to May 3.

Kotoky said that the recognition at the WorldFest 2026 reinforces the belief that human emotions speak the same language, without showing any respect towards the man-made boundaries.

"Although based in a remote village of Assam and in the not-so-distant past, this story reminds us time and again of the social and political challenges we all face in nearly every country in the time we are living in today," he added.

'Moi Eti Nixhasor' is a poignant exploration of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Upper-floor eligibility in Dharavi rehab tied to ground-floor status, documents

MUMBAI, May 3: Eligibility for upper-floor residents under the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP) is contingent in part on the status of ground-floor occupants, with affidavits accepted only if the lower unit qualifies, officials said.

A government resolution dated October 4, 2024, extends benefits to upper-floor residents who can prove occupancy before a November 15, 2022, cut-off, offering 300 sq ft homes outside Dharavi but within the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. Beneficiaries can opt for a hire-purchase model, paying nominal rent for 25 years before ownership transfers, or choose early ownership by paying a pre-approved sum.

Officials said the policy marks a departure from past slum rehabilitation schemes, which typically excluded upper-floor occupants.

Eligibility is determined through a hierarchy of documents, including electricity bills, registered rent or purchase agreements, and government-issued IDs showing the upper-floor address prior to the cut-off date.

Affidavits - classified as the lowest priority - require certification from an eligible ground-floor resident. If the ground-floor household is disqualified, upper-floor applicants relying on affidavits will also be ineligible, officials said.

"An affidavit will not be considered in such cases," a DRP official said, adding that a majority of upper-floor applicants are currently applying under this category, indicating limited availability of higher-priority documents.

The project has also received claims involving multiple units on a single upper floor. Officials clar-



ified that each unit must submit separate documentation under higher-priority categories, or collectively file as a single unit under the affidavit provision, subject to ground-floor certification.

The policy allows one home per family and bars multiple claims from spouses or children. Applicants who already own property under other housing schemes in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region are not eligible, the resolution states.

The Dharavi Redevelopment Project is doing what no slum rehabilitation scheme in India has done before, offering homes to upper-floor residents. But whether an upper-floor family gets a home depends, in part, on whether the family living on the ground floor is eligible.

The Dharavi redevelopment project is setting a precedent by including these unit holders, making

this the most humane and inclusive urban renewal project of all time, the official added.

Eligibility rests on documentation. The family head must prove upper-floor residency before the cut-off through documents submitted in a priority order as laid out in the October 4, 2024, government resolution (GR).

At the top of the priority list is the electricity bill in the family head's name, showing the upper-floor address, one dated before the cut-off and one recent.

This is followed by registered rent agreement citing the upper-floor address, one pre-cut-off and one recent, and registered purchase agreement with the upper-floor address plus a notarised consent letter, one pre-cut-off and one recent.

Aadhaar, passport, ration card, driving licence, or voter ID showing the upper-floor address before

the cut-off will be at priority no. 4. At No. 5 will be an affidavit from the upper-floor family head, backed by certification from the eligible ground-floor family head.

Priority 5 is where the ground-floor link comes into play. If the ground-floor unit holder fails to prove his own eligibility and gets disqualified, the affidavit route to own a home closes for the upper-floor resident too.

"An affidavit will not be considered in such a case," the DRP official said.

He further added that most upper-floor residents are providing affidavits (under Priority 5), which indicates that they do not have any document from Priority 1 to 4, as mentioned in the GR.

The DRP has also received documents from multiple huts on a single upper floor unit mentioned as F1/1 and F1/2.

Clarifying the issue, the DRP official said, "As per the GR of Oct 4, 2024, if there are multiple units on any slum upper-floor structure, the HOH for each such unit must submit documents under Priority 1-4.

"However, if they consider all such units as one single unit, then they can submit documents under Priority-5, which is an affidavit declaring their floor number and time of residency duly certified by the eligible ground-floor resident."

The GR makes it clear that there would be one house per family, and spouses and children cannot file separate claims for homes. Anyone already holding property under another scheme in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region will not be considered under the Dharavi rehabilitation project scheme. (PTI)

Ramkrishna Forgings set to foray into forged wheel production next month



NEW DELHI, May 3: Ramkrishna Forgings is gearing up to start commercial operations of its Chennai facility from June this year, a development that will mark the company's foray into forged wheel manufacturing business.

The company has been setting up the facility at an estimated cost of ₹ 2,000 crore after receiving a Letter of Award (LOA) from the Indian Railways in 2023, Naresh Jalan, the Managing Director of Ramkrishna Forgings, said.

Kolkata-based Ramkrishna Forgings has posted a consolidated net profit of ₹ 72 crore and income of ₹ 4,251.19 crore in FY26.

Speaking further about the Chennai project, Jalan said it has been set up in a joint venture with a private entity, in which his company holds a majority stake.

He said the facility would be Asia's 2nd largest wheel manufacturing unit with an annual production capacity of 2,28,000 forged wheels.

The project has been executed in two phases - Phase I, costing ₹ 1,810 crore and Phase II (₹ 370 crore) - through a combination of debt and equity, Jalan said.

Ramkrishna Forgings is a manufacturer and supplier of closed-die forgings of carbon and alloy steel, micro-alloy steel, and stainless steel forgings.

During the fourth quarter of FY26, the company secured new orders worth ₹ 594 crore, of which 56 per cent of the orders were from the automotive segment and the remaining 44 per cent from the non-automotive segment.

As of March 31, the company's total orderbook was at ₹ 9,635 crore to be executed over 4 years.

About the outlook, Jalan said, "FY27 is poised to be a strong year for the company. A healthy order book provides strong revenue visibility, while improving demand conditions, better operating leverage, continued diversification, and disciplined capital allocation position us well for continued long-term value creation for all stakeholders." (PTI)

Tata Motors posts 28% YoY growth in April CV sales

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 3: Tata Motors reported a 28 per cent year-on-year growth in its commercial vehicle (CV) sales for April 2026, with total sales reaching 34,833 units compared to 27,221 units in April 2025. Domestic sales stood at 32,965 units, up 27.9 per cent from 25,764 units in the same month last year, while international business recorded sales of 1,868 units, marking a 28.2 per cent increase over 1,457 units in April 2025.

Among segments, SCV cargo and pickup vehicles registered the highest growth at 40.2 per cent, with sales rising to 12,799 units from 9,131 units a year ago. Passenger carriers grew by 22.6 per cent to 5,743 units, compared to 4,683 units in April 2025.

Heavy commercial vehicle (HCV) truck sales increased by 23.4 per cent to 8,969 units, up from 7,270 units last year, while intermediate and light commercial vehicle (ILMCV) truck sales rose by 16.5 per cent to 5,454 units from 4,680 units.

Ceigall India says its joint venture CIL-SAM bags ₹ 918-cr order from Jaipur Metro

NEW DELHI, May 3: Infrastructure company Ceigall India Ltd on Sunday said its joint venture CIL-SAM India has bagged a ₹ 918.04-crore project from Jaipur Metro Rail Corporation Ltd for design and construction works.

The contract awarded to CIL-SAM involves the design and construction of an elevated viaduct and ten elevated metro stations (excluding architectural finishing) under Jaipur Metro's Phase-II expansion covering 10.8 km, Ceigall India said in a statement.

Ceigall India holds a 74 per cent stake in CIL-SAM, while the remaining 26 per cent is owned by SAM India Builtwell Pvt Ltd.

The total bid cost of the project stands at ₹ 918.04 crore (inclusive of 18 per cent GST), with an execution timeline of 34 months, it stated.

The ten stations to be constructed under the package are Prahladpura, Manpura, Bilwa Kalan, Bilwa, Goner Mod, Sitapura, JECC, Kumbha Marg, Haldighati Gate, and Pinjrapole Gaushala. Ramneek Sehgal, Chairman & Managing Director, Ceigall India, said in the statement, "Winning this Jaipur Metro Phase-II package marks an important milestone for Ceigall as we continue to diversify our infrastructure portfolio beyond roads and highways into urban mobility projects."

Ceigall India is an infrastructure engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) company, which has been engaged in the development of highways, expressways, bridges, flyovers, railway overbridges, tunnels, and runways. (PTI)

NAME CHANGE

I hitherto known as P JAMES SEB alias JAMES RENGMA S/O PENLO SEB, R/O Diphu, PO & PS, Diphu, District, Karbi Anglong, Assam- 782460, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as JAMES RENGMA.

Spirit Airlines shuts down, says it can't keep up with higher oil prices

WEST PALM BEACH, May 3: Spirit Airlines, an impish upstart that shook the industry with its irreverent ads and deep discount fares, announced Saturday that it has gone out of business after 34 years.

The ultralow cost airline that once operated hundreds of daily flights on its bright yellow planes and employed about 17,000 people said it had "started an orderly wind-down of our operations, effective immediately."

Although Spirit had gone bankrupt

twice before, the company said high oil prices, which have been rising because of the war with Iran, made it impossible to stay afloat.

The airline said on its website that all flights have been canceled and customer service is no longer available. Some passengers arrived Saturday for flights and were stunned to find them canceled, while workers learned overnight they were out of jobs.

"We are proud of the impact of our

ultra-low-cost model on the industry over the last 34 years and had hoped to serve our guests for many years to come," Spirit's announcement said.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said Saturday that Spirit had a reserve fund set up for customers who bought directly from the airline to get refunds. People who bought from third-party vendors like travel agents would have to seek refunds from them. (AP)

Axis Bank opens first digital locker-focused branch in New Delhi

Tech-enabled facility aims to address rising demand for secure locker services



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 3: Axis Bank on Sunday inaugurated its first digital locker-focused branch at Capital Green, DLF Midtown Plaza in New Delhi, marking a step towards enhancing secure banking services through advanced technology and automation.

The branch was inaugurated by M Nagaraju, Secretary, Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, Government of India, along with Ashok Tyagi, in the presence of senior bank officials including Amitabh Chaudhry and Munish Sharda.

The initiative comes at a time when India is witnessing a widening gap in the availability of safe-deposit lockers, particularly in high-density urban centres.

Industry estimates suggest that by 2030, nearly six crore affluent Indians are expected to require bank lockers, while the current supply stands at approximately 60 lakh lockers.

The shortage is more acute in large cities, where urban

living is increasingly concentrated in gated residential developments.

Axis Bank's digital locker-focused branch has been designed as a compact, technology-enabled facility that offers automated locker services within premium residential ecosystems.

The model integrates advanced security systems with customer-centric features to provide enhanced privacy, convenience and control over access.

The bank said the new format also reflects a shift towards reimagining branch infrastructure to align with evolving urban lifestyles and customer expectations.

Speaking at the inauguration, Amitabh Chaudhry said, "At Axis Bank, our focus on customer obsession drives a culture where we anticipate the evolving needs of our customers and design innovative solutions to address them. As customers seek greater control, transparency and convenience in safeguarding their valuables, our digital locker-focused branch reimagines the experience by placing access, privacy and security firmly in their hands, supported by advanced technology."

He added, "This proposition reflects our intent to build a more embedded, ecosystem-led banking model aligned with modern, urban and premium lifestyles. It brings to life our vision of a future-ready branch network built around how our customers live, work and bank today."

The bank said the initiative is part of its broader strategy to strengthen its presence in densely populated urban locations while offering differentiated services that go beyond traditional banking formats.

Contd. from Page 1...

Verdict on electoral

Asom Gana Parishad and the Bodo Peoples' Front, while the opposition alliance comprises the Congress, Rajiv Dal, BJP, CPI(M), All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) and CPI(ML).

The ruling BJP's strength in the outgoing assembly is 64, while its allies -- the AGP has nine, the UPPL seven and the BPF, which rejoined the alliance, has three MLAs.

In the opposition camp, the Congress has 26 members, the AIUDF has 15, the CPI(M) has one, and there is also an Independent legislator. (PTI)

Akhil feels threat

informed senior police officials, including the DGP and ADGP of Assam Police, but alleged that the response had been indifferent.

Police have deployed security personnel outside his residence since Sunday afternoon.

Commenting on the upcoming results, Gogoi expressed confidence that the opposition alliance would form the next government, claiming it would secure more than 70 seats in the Assembly.

Bomb blast in

before the formation of a new state government with BJP leader Y Khemchand Singh as the chief minister. (PTI)

EC deploys 432

personnel of the state police and the state excise department led the crackdown on illegal cash and liquor. Central agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Border Security Force (BSF) and Customs, also played a key role in the enforcement efforts.

The Election Commission said the extensive deployment of observers, coupled with large-scale enforcement actions and seizure reflects its commitment to ensuring free, fair and inducement-free elections in the state. (PTI)

Canada declares Khalistan

Mark Carney, who took charge last year, India and Canada have sought to rebuild their bilateral ties. (PTI)

Advance Neurological Operation

The funding enabled procurement of cutting-edge neurosurgical equipment aimed at enhancing precision, safety, and outcomes in complex brain and spine surgeries.

Prof Puranik highlighted the importance of such collaborations in advancing healthcare infrastructure in emerging institutions and emphasised the institute's commitment to delivering high-quality, accessible care to the people of the North-East.

Majhi pointed out PGCIL's commitment to contributing towards societal development through impactful CSR initiatives, particularly in the healthcare sector.

The newly established facility is expected to significantly improve the management of complex neurosurgical conditions and cater to the growing patient load at AIIMS Guwahati, a major referral centre for the entire North-East region, the release added. (PTI)

Iran sends new

source said Iran is seeking formal recognition of its right to develop nuclear technology for civilian use under international rules. Tehran also wants assurances that any agreement on this would be durable and not subject to unilateral withdrawal.

"The proposal further includes demands for security guarantees, reflecting heightened concerns in Tehran over the risk of future military action," he said, adding that Iran has sought commitments that would prevent renewed strikes or escalation by the US or its regional allies.

Pakistan's role has been described by officials as facilitative rather than substantive, with Islamabad relaying messages and exploring the possibility of hosting indirect talks.

While no formal talks have been scheduled, it is believed that both sides have not ruled out an Islamabad-hosted engagement if initial understandings are reached between the US and Iran.

"At this moment, I'm not satisfied with what they're offering," President Trump has said in reaction to Iran's fresh proposal.

Asked why he was unsatisfied with the Iranian offer, he said: "They're asking for things that I can't agree (with)."

When asked what he would do if there was no deal, Trump said, "Do we want to go and just blast the hell out of them and finish them forever -- or do we want to try and make a deal? I mean, those are the options."

He added that he would "prefer not" to launch a huge offensive. Trump said Iran had "made strides in negotiations", but added that there was "tremendous discord" in the Islamic Republic's leadership.

Iranian authorities, however, insist that their latest proposal placed priority on halting hostilities and creating space for a broader political process, before engaging on more contentious issues.

Responding to Trump's remarks, Iran said that it is up to the US if it wants to pursue a negotiated settlement or return to war. "Now the ball is in the United States' court to choose the path of diplomacy or the continuation of a confrontational approach," Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi has said.

"Iran, with the aim of securing its national interests and security, is prepared for both paths," he added.

Pakistan hosted the first round of direct talks between Iran and the US in Islamabad on April 11, but the two sides failed to reach an agreement to end the war.

Last week, Trump extended the two-week ceasefire with Iran indefinitely to give Tehran more time to prepare a unified proposal to end the war. (PTI)

Admiral Tripathi embarks

Tripathi also visited the Central Naval Command Headquarters in Yangon. The Navy chief held discussions with Rear Admiral Aung Aung Naing, Commander, Central Naval Command, and Rear Admiral Khun Aung Kyaw, Commander, Naval Training Command.

Issues related to strengthening Navy-to-Navy cooperation, bolstering existing defence partnership, augmenting operational engagements, maritime security, and promoting shared goals for a stable and secure maritime environment were discussed, the Indian Navy said.

"Aspects related to enhancing training cooperation and future avenues of collaboration were deliberated, emphasising the commitment to enhancing interoperability, and training exchange programmes," it said.

It said Admiral Tripathi formally handed over "various projects executed with the Government of India's assistance, including the containerised small arms simulator and the rigid inflatable boat, for augmentation of maritime security in the Bay of Bengal region.

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 the 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 longstanding 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)

Indian startup's 'Drishti'

"GalaxEye has achieved what only a few global players have, which is seamlessly combining optical and SAR capabilities on a single platform to enable persistent, all-weather intelligence."

What stands out is not just the technology, but its broader impact on how downstream applications will increasingly define value in the space economy, particularly in Earth observation, where timely, decision-grade insights are critical," he added.

ISpA is the premier industry association of space and satellite companies in the country.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh also took note of the Mission Drishti launch, saying the development marked a significant milestone in India's space journey.

In a post on X, the minister said, "The successful launch of the world's first OptoSAR satellite, and the largest privately-built satellite in the country, reflects the immense potential of our young innovators driving nation-building."

GalaxEye aims to scale up Mission Drishti to a constellation of 10 satellites by 2030, developing a robust and sovereign Earth observation infrastructure for India. (PTI)

'Moi Eti Nixhasor' wins

resilience and moral ambiguity. It follows the story of Koduwa, a cunning village thief, who navigates social unrest and prejudice with wit and heart.

"By the time our story ends, the audience is confronted with a poignant question -- who is actually the real thief?" Kotoky said.

"Moi Eti Nixhasor" recently won the 'Award of Excellence Special Mention' at the Accolade Global Film Competition in the USA. It was earlier selected at Covellite International Film Festival 2026 of the USA as well.

The lead cast is played by noted theatre actor Gunomoni Baruah, while several senior and junior artistes of Assamese film industry have enacted other important characters.

Based on a true story written by senior journalist Anuradha Sharma Pujari, the film has been produced by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) and production house 'red river & blue hills'. (PTI)

Comprehensive arrangements in place; counting to begin today at 8 AM

West Karbi Anglong gears up for smooth vote counting

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 3: The District Election Administration of West Karbi Anglong has put in place comprehensive and well-coordinated arrangements to ensure smooth, transparent, and secure counting of votes for the ensuing General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, 2026, in strict adherence to the guidelines of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The counting process will commence at 8:00 AM on May 4, 2026, at the new building of the Office of the District Commissioner, Hamren.

Dedicated counting halls have been established for 111-Rongkhang (ST) LAC and 112-Amri (ST) LAC, each designed with a 14+1 table layout to facilitate systematic, accurate, and efficient tabulation of votes.

The second randomisation of counting personnel was conducted on May 3, 2026, in the presence of appointed observers, ensuring transparency and fairness in deployment.

Stringent access control measures have been implemented, with entry to the counting premises regulated through QR-based ID cards issued to authorised personnel, candidates, and counting agents, thereby maintaining discipline and security within the venue.



Robust and multi-layered security arrangements have also been deployed to uphold the integrity of the entire counting process and ensure a safe and orderly environment.

To assist stakeholders and the general public, a dedicated helpline (1950) has been activated to address counting-related queries and provide

timely support. The District Election Administration expressed confidence in its preparedness and appealed to all political parties, candidates, media representatives, and citizens to extend full cooperation to ensure that the counting process is conducted peacefully, efficiently, and successfully.

Cachar imposes Section 163 BNSS ahead of vote count



HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, May 3: The Cachar district administration has imposed prohibitory restrictions under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, ahead of the counting of votes for the Assam Legislative Assembly Election, 2026, scheduled on May 4.

The order, issued by District Magistrate Ayush Garg, IAS, aims to ensure peaceful and incident-free counting amid concerns over possible disturbances and election-related violence.

Under the restrictions, carrying of weapons, including lathis, spears, daos, sticks or any objects that could be used to cause harm, has been prohibited.

The sale, purchase and use of crackers, explosives and other materials capable of producing sound or chemical effects have also been banned.

Toy guns and imitation weapons have similarly been disallowed. The administration has also prohibited all forms of victory celebrations, including processions, public gatherings and celebratory events by political parties, candidates or supporters across all seven Assembly constituencies in the district.

The order has been issued exparte considering the urgency of the situation and applies across the entire district until further notice.

The administration has appealed to citizens and political stakeholders to cooperate and maintain peace and discipline during the counting process.

The information was provided in a press release issued by the Regional Office of Information and Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone, Silchar.

Adarsha Senior Secondary School felicitates achievers

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, May 3: Adarsha Senior Secondary School in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, organised a felicitation ceremony to honour its high-achieving students.

The institution has consistently recorded strong results in the Higher Secondary examinations since the 2011-12 academic session.

The school maintained its performance this year with notable results in both streams.

In the Arts stream, it recorded a pass percentage of 99.59%, with 245 out of 246 students clearing the examination.

In the Commerce stream, the school achieved a 100% pass rate, with all 39 candidates passing.

Among the toppers in the Arts stream, Sanam Kumari Singh secured 90.60%, followed by Mira Kumari Burma with 89.80%.

In the Commerce stream, Lal Bahadur Chetry topped with 87.80%, while Priyanka Chauhan scored 86%.

School authorities and members of the local community expressed satisfaction over the results, attributing the performance to the efforts of students and faculty.

Free newspapers, Prantik, Hemkosh distributed as lucky draw prizes in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 3: Prizes for a free lucky draw held on the occasion of the Assamese New Year were distributed by the Nagaon Nagarik Sabha at Matiram Bora Kshetra, in front of Jubin Tower near Nagaon University. Over 150 residents of Nagaon participated in the free lucky draw.

Four winners received a one-year free subscription to Asomiya Pratidin or The Assam Tribune as the first prize.

Four others won a one-year free subscription to Prantik magazine as the second prize.

The third prize, bundles of magazines, was awarded to four winners, while three winners received the Hemkosh dictionary as a special prize.

The event was hosted by Nagaon Nagarik Sabha Secretary Birinchi Bora.

He inaugurated the programme by handing over Asomiya Pratidin to winner Anju Bezbaruah, who received the one-year newspaper subscription.

Other prize recipients present included newspaper winners — Anju Bezbaruah, Wasif Zaman, Jibananda Das, Ajay Patar, Bipul Das, Rajiv Kalita, Naren Chandra

Sharma, Mosabir Zakaria, Muruli Bora, and a representative of LB Primary School.

Speaking at the event, Secretary Birinchi Bora said that the Nagaon Nagarik Sabha remains committed to the Assamese language and literature.

He criticised political parties and leaders who threaten to undermine the media, stating that "an educational environment with newspapers and magazines at home, rather than buildings and bank balances, is the true mark of dignity."

Winners, including teacher Anju Bezbaruah, Naren Chandra Sarma, Bipul Das, and Wasif Zaman, unanimously praised the Sabha's initiative.

Bezbaruah noted that "even if small, this beginning is a significant step towards commitment to Assamese language and culture."

Founded in October 2022, the Nagaon Nagarik Sabha has become known in the region for its initiatives.

The organisation has consistently raised its voice against flawed government policies and for the rightful dues of Nagaon and Central Assam.

Dibrugarh set for counting of six Assembly seats

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, May 3: Dibrugarh district is fully prepared for the counting of votes across six Assembly constituencies on May 4, with all arrangements in place at the designated counting centre at Dibrugarh Polytechnic in Lahowal.

The constituencies going to the count are Dibrugarh, Chabua-Lahowal, Duliajan, Tingkhong, Naharkatia and Khowang. Counting of postal ballots will begin at 8 AM, followed by counting of votes recorded in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) from 8:30 AM onwards.

"We have made comprehensive arrangements at the counting centre. Adequate staff has been deployed, security is in place, and all logistical requirements have been met to ensure the process is conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner. I urge all candidates and their supporters to maintain peace and cooperate with the administration," said Dibrugarh Deputy Commissioner and District Election Officer Bikram Kairi. The counting is expected to draw political attention in the district.

State Power Minister Prasanta Phukan is

seeking a fifth consecutive term from Dibrugarh. In Tingkhong, Industries and Commerce Minister Bimal Borah is aiming for a third successive win.

Assam Jatiya Parishad president Lurinjyoti Gogoi is contesting from the newly formed Khowang constituency. Prohibitory restrictions under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, have been imposed from 5 AM on May 4 until the conclusion of counting.

Gatherings and vehicle parking have been prohibited within a 100-metre radius of the counting centre, with entry restricted to authorised personnel carrying valid identity cards.

Across the district, carrying weapons, use of loudspeakers, setting up temporary stalls, and organising victory rallies or celebrations have been banned.

A blanket prohibition on firecrackers has also been imposed.

Violations will invite action under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023.

Security has been strengthened at the counting centre, with personnel deployed to ensure orderly conduct of the process.

Meritorious students felicitated at Nagsankar

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 3: A total of 68 students from the greater Nagsankar area who excelled in the recently declared HSLC and Higher Secondary final examinations were felicitated by Alok, a socio-cultural, literary and environmental organisation, at a public meeting held at Nagsankar Natya Mancha recently.

The students were honoured with citations, gamosas, book packets and saplings.

The programme was presided over by Alok president Parmeshwar Saikia, while former president Putul Bora delivered the welcome address.

Atul Chandra Bora, principal of Gyan Bharati Public School, Soota, attended as the chief speaker and urged students to remain vigilant and develop multidimensional skills to cope with a changing world.

He emphasised the need for acquiring in-depth knowledge across subjects.

Dr Jitu Tamuli, assistant professor at THB College, also addressed the gathering, highlighting the importance of meritocracy and advising students to utilise their time effectively for future success.

The meeting was also addressed by Hitesh Barua, vice president of Sonitpur Zilla Parishad, Lakhi Kanta Bora, president of Madhya Nagsankar Gaon Panchayat, and Anjan Baskota.

Alok also felicitated Pallabi Bhagawati Baruah, who won three gold medals at the Master Para Champions held in Thailand, and Kaushik Saikia, who cleared the APSC and is currently serving as DTO.

Hiya Saikia recited an Assamese poem during the programme.

The toppers of the HSLC and Higher Secondary examinations were presented with the Late Shankar Bhuyan and Kamal Koch Memorial Awards.

The proceedings were conducted by Raktim Sapun Neog, while Alok secretary Biman Saikia delivered the vote of thanks.

Kokrajhar set for secure vote counting today

DC dismisses breach claims, says authorised staff installed CCTV systems

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 3: The district administration of Kokrajhar has put in place comprehensive arrangements for smooth and secure counting of votes on May 4 across five counting centres in the district.

District Commissioner and District Election Officer Dr P Uday Praveen, addressing a press conference at the DC Conference Hall on Sunday, briefed mediapersons on the preparedness for counting of votes for the Assam Legislative Assembly Election, 2026.

He informed that counting will commence at 8:00 AM with postal ballots, followed by counting of votes recorded in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

Around 500 personnel, including counting supervisors, counting assistants and micro-observers, have been deployed to ensure an orderly process.

Five counting observers appointed by the Election Commission of India have reached Kokrajhar and are stationed at the



Circuit House.

They include Krishan Kumar Singh for 01-Gossaigaon, Ramji Mishra for 02-Dotma (ST), Pardeshi Siddhartha Komal for 03-Kokrajhar (ST), Daya Kishan Sharma for 04-Baokhungri, and Saurav Kumar Sinha for 05-Parbatjhora Assembly constituencies.

Providing details, the DC said 01-Gossaigaon constituency will have 11 rounds of counting, 02-Dotma (ST) 13 rounds, 03-Kokrajhar (ST) 14 rounds, 04-Baokhungri 16 rounds, and 05-Parbatjhora 17 rounds.

Highlighting security arrangements, he said prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the BNSS have been imposed.

Restrictions include a ban on gatherings within 100 metres of counting centres, regulated entry with valid identity cards, and prohibition on carrying mobile phones and electronic devices within designated areas.

Dr Praveen also dismissed reports of a security breach at the counting centre, clarifying that there was no unauthorised entry into the strong room.

Section 163 BNSS imposed in Morigaon ahead of vote counting

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, May 3: Ahead of the counting of votes for the Assembly Election, 2026 on Monday, the district administration of Morigaon has imposed prohibitory restrictions under Section 163 of the BNSS to ensure peaceful and smooth conduct of the counting process.

According to an order issued by the District Magistrate, the restrictions have been imposed as a precautionary measure to prevent any breach of peace, disturbance of public tranquillity, mass gatherings, victory processions, and noise pollution during and after the counting process.

As per the order, processions and sloganeering of any kind will not be allowed within the premises of the counting centre.

The use of public address systems, loudspeakers, and any form of celebration by political parties or candidates has also been prohibited at the counting venue.

The administration has further banned the carrying of sticks, flags, lathis, firearms, and the holding of processions or large gatherings within a radius of one kilometre from the counting centre.

Victory processions or rallies after the declaration of results will also not be permitted without prior approval from the district and police administration.

Further, entry into the counting hall will be restricted only to persons carrying valid identity cards issued by the District Election Officer and Returning Officers.

Mobile phones and cameras will not be allowed inside the counting centre, except for duly authorised media personnel as per Election Commission guidelines.

The order came into force with immediate effect and will remain in force till the completion of the counting process.

Violators will face legal action under the relevant provisions of law, the order stated.

Historic Longtong Sema Naga Village seeks development push

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, May 3: Longtong Sema Naga Village, located about 31 km from Margherita in Tinsukia district, remains a significant heritage settlement reflecting resilience, sacrifice and living history in Assam.

Established in 1904 during the British India period, the village was inhabited by Sema Naga labourers brought as part of the Political Labour Corps.

They contributed to the region's development by working in the Namdang coalfields, participating in oil exploration in Digboi and assisting in the construction of the Stilwell Road during World War II.

With a population of over 4,000, the village is predominantly inhabited by the Sema Naga community, with agriculture as the primary occupation.

The village falls under Khumchai Gaon Panchayat in the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency.

Despite its historical importance, the village continues to face several challenges, including poor road infrastructure and connectivity, lack of safe drinking water, absence of a proper health centre and limited access to higher education.

Residents have also raised concerns over social discrimination affecting students.

Kahoto Sema, chairman of the All Assam Sema Naga Council, said the community has

RPF rescues minors, aids distressed passengers across network

Operations conducted at multiple stations between April 24 and 30

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 3: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) carried out a series of rescue operations across its jurisdiction between April 24 and April 30, ensuring the safety of passengers and vulnerable individuals.

During the period, RPF personnel rescued several vulnerable persons, including runaway minors and distressed passengers, from various railway stations and trains.

At Dibrugarh railway station, RPF personnel rescued 12 minor boys from a train and handed them over to Childline authorities for care and protection.

Similar operations were conducted at stations including Guwahati, Lumding, Kishanganj, Kokrajhar, Hasimara, Mariani and New Alipurduar, where several runaway minors were traced and rescued.

At Mariani railway station, three minor girls were rescued, while at Guwahati railway station, minors were reunited with their families



following timely intervention.

In separate incidents at Kishanganj, Lumding, Dimapur and Kokrajhar, rescued minors were handed over to Childline and other authorised agencies for safe custody and rehabilitation. RPF personnel also assisted passengers in distress.

At New Jalpaiguri, a passenger suffering from breathing difficulties was shifted to hospital for

treatment.

In separate incidents at Raiganj and Barsoi, injured passengers were provided medical aid following accidental falls.

The operations reflect the role of the RPF in safeguarding passengers, preventing human trafficking, and ensuring the safety of vulnerable individuals across the NFR network.

Man detained in father's death at Uriagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 3: A man has been detained in connection with the death of his father at Uriagaon under Nagaon Sadar Police Station on Sunday morning. The incident occurred around 9 AM.

According to reports, Anjan Bora informed his elder brother, who lives outside the village, that their father, 70-year-old Nandeswar Bora, had died. On reaching the spot, the elder brother found his father lying in a pool of blood.

Police from Nagaon Sadar Police Station reached the scene and launched an investigation with the assistance of a forensic team. The younger son, Anjan Bora, has been detained and is being interrogated.

A blood-stained stick was recovered from the spot, and police are probing the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Police sources said Anjan Bora, 35, had earlier been involved in a murder case in Hyderabad in 2023 and had served a jail term.

After his release, he had been residing in Nagaon. The motive and sequence of events are yet to be ascertained. Police said further details would emerge after completion of the investigation.

Former CSIR-NEIST officer Debeswar Bora passes away at 84

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 3: Debeswar Bora, a retired Technical Officer of CSIR-NEIST (formerly RRL), passed away at his residence in Charingia village, West Jorhat, on Sunday due to age-related ailments. He was 84.

He is survived by his wife, son, daughter, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, grandchildren, and a host of relatives and well-wishers.

Bora was one of the founders of the employees' union of CSIR-NEIST and was actively involved in social, cultural, and religious activities. Prior to joining the scientific research institute, he worked at the Jorhat Municipal Board and at the Dainik Janambhumi newspaper. He also took part in the Assam Agitation and was jailed during the movement.



long been seeking government support for development and preservation of the heritage village.

He stated that memoranda have been submitted to both the Union and State governments, but little progress has been made.

He also highlighted the historical significance of the village's name, stating that the area was initially settled near the Tirap river, where "Lom" means stone and "Tong" means place, eventually forming the name "Longtong."

The Longtong Chinese Cemetery in Udaipur,

built in memory of Chinese soldiers who died during World War II, has also been neglected and requires restoration, he added.

The village has been visited by several dignitaries over the years, including former President APJ Abdul Kalam, who visited in 2003 and unveiled a commemorative stone.

With the Assembly election results set to be declared on May 4, residents expressed hope for renewed attention to development initiatives that would preserve the village's heritage and improve living conditions.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If you're alive, there's a purpose for your life. -Rick Warren

Trump-XI summit in May 14-15

Just two weeks before the scheduled summit of U.S. President Donald Trump with the Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing on May 14-15, the report of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) on the status of AI related applications, has unnerved the U.S. administration as the latest Chinese supremacy in robot related patent applications, will have impact on President Trump's bargaining power in his talks with the Chinese President Xi Jinping. The WIPO report says that China holds over 60 per cent of global AI patent applications and about two-thirds of robot-related patent applications. Further, by the end of 2025, the number of high value invention patents in China reached 2.292 million of which 70 per cent are in strategic emerging industries. Further China's GPU related patent applications increased over ten-fold over five years. The US is still the leading country with high tech capability and its AI applications are leading to high growth in big industries, though it has also generated turmoil leading to rationalization of the work force and even layoffs. The US was much ahead of China in the year 2021 in AI applications but in the last five years, China has bridged the gap very fast.

Trump advisers thought of using this AI tech supremacy in getting more concessions from China at the coming Beijing summit on May 14-15. China is allowing supply of its critical minerals to the US following the last meeting, but it has to be renewed and that depends on a package deal linked to US high tech technology to China in some key areas. This was expected to be a part of the full scale trade deal which both the leaders are scheduled to conclude at the Beijing summit. China has nearly closed its gap to the U.S. in AI bot performance, while continuing to best global competition in number of patents, publications, and rollout of robots, according to the Stanford University Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI) 2026 AI Index report released recently.

The report found a shrinking gap in Arena scores—a metric indicating relative performances of large language models—between the top AI bots in the U.S. and China. In May 2023, the U.S.'s top model, OpenAI's GPT-4, led with more than 1,300 Arena points compared with China's fewer than 1,000. By March 2026, that gap shrank to just 39 Arena points, with the top U.S. model, Anthropic's Claude Opus 4.6, leading China's Dola-Seed 2.0 by just 2.7%. While the U.S. still beats China in the number of top AI models—50 compared with 30—China has more publication citations than the U.S., accounting for 20.6% of AI citations in 2024 compared with the U.S.'s 12.6%. Trump very recently had a long meeting with the leading high-tech honchos of the USA and discussed the nature of competition with China.

POST BAG

The sound of survival readiness

The recent cell broadcast test reaching over billion people via a unified pulse marks a tectonic shift from reactive to proactive governance. With 70% of India's coast vulnerable to cyclones & 60% of its landmass earthquake prone a ten second alert can bridge the gap between life & loss. However technology is merely the skeletal frame but public trust is the heartbeat. Without literacy campaigns a life saving buzz is easily mistaken for a digital glitch. We must integrate these alerts with localized evacuation routes & community led response teams. Let this be startling sound evolve into a digital lifeline ensuring that in our densest cities & remotest hamlets resilience is never silenced by the clutter of misinformation.

Dr Vijaykumar H K

The silent wave: Waiting for Assam's political earthquake

The streets of Guwahati are usually loud, but today the air feels different. It is a thick, heavy kind of anticipation that only comes when a state is sitting on the edge of a massive decision. Everyone is looking at their phones, clusters of people are gathered around tea stalls, and the hum of conversation is entirely focused on one thing: the counting of votes. We are finally at the moment where the rhetoric of the campaign trail meets the cold, hard reality of the numbers.

For months, Assam has been a theater of high-intensity politics. If you walked through the Brahmaputra valley or the Barak valley recently, you could feel the push and pull of two very different visions for the future. On one side, we have the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, led by the high-energy and often polarizing presence of Himanta Biswa Sarma. They are banking on a narrative of development, stability, and a very specific brand of identity politics that has resonated deeply with a large section of the electorate. On the other side, the Congress, with Gaurav Gogoi at the helm, has been trying to tap into a sense of fatigue and a desire for a return to what they call a more inclusive and traditional Assamese social fabric.

The question of who will win is not just about which party gets more seats. It is about which version of Assam the people believe in right now. The BJP is chasing a historic third term. In the past, Assam was seen as a Congress bastion, a place where the grand old party held sway for decades under leaders like Tarun Gogoi. When the BJP broke that streak, it was a tectonic shift. Now, they want to prove that their hold on the state is not a fluke but a permanent change in the political DNA of the region.

The campaign this time around felt personal. You could see it in the way the leaders spoke. The BJP leans heavily on their growth story, pointing to new bridges, improved roads, and direct benefit transfers that have reached the rural poor. They have also been very vocal about protecting the interests of the indigenous communities, often using sharp language that draws clear lines in the sand. This approach has clearly energized their base, making their supporters feel like they are part of a larger movement to reclaim the state's heritage.

Congress, however, did not just sit back. Gaurav Gogoi has emerged as a significant challenger, carrying the weight of his father's legacy while trying to project a modern, youthful image. Their campaign focused on the bread-and-butter issues that affect daily life like inflation, unemployment, and the concerns of the tea garden workers who have always been a crucial voting bloc. They tried to build a Grand Alliance that could consolidate the anti-BJP vote, hoping that by bringing different smaller parties together, they could overcome the BJP's formidable organizational strength.

One of the most interesting things about this election is the sheer volume of people who turned out to vote. We saw record-breaking numbers at the booths. Usually, a high turnout is interpreted as a sign of anti-incumbency, a signal that people are angry and want change. But in recent years, that old political rule has been flipped on its head. Sometimes a high turnout means that the incumbent has successfully mobilized its supporters to protect the status quo.

The exit polls have already started painting a picture, and if they are to be believed, the BJP seems to have the upper hand. Most projections suggest that the ruling alliance is headed for a comfortable majority. They suggest that the BJP might even improve its individual tally, potentially crossing the majority mark on its own for the first time in the state's history. If these numbers hold true, it would be a massive validation of the current leadership style and the party's strategic focus on the grassroots level.

But as anyone who follows Indian politics knows, exit polls are not the final word. There have been plenty of times when the experts got it wrong because they failed to catch a silent wave or a hidden undercurrent of dissatisfaction. The Congress is holding onto the hope that there is such a silent wave. They believe that the rural voters, the people away from the camera crews and the big rallies, have voted for a return to the old ways. They are looking for a comeback that would not only give them power in Dispur but also provide a much-needed boost to the party's morale nationally. The regional parties are the wild cards in this deck. Groups like the AGP, which is allied with the BJP, and the various smaller factions in the Barak Valley and the hills, hold the keys to specific pockets of influence. Their performance will determine how stable the next government is. If the BJP falls short of a clear majority on its own, these allies will become extremely powerful, demanding significant roles in the cabinet and a say in major policy decisions.

Identity remains the most potent ingredient in the Assamese political cauldron. The issues of the NRC and CAA, while perhaps less vocal in the national headlines lately, remain deeply personal here. People care about who is considered a citizen and who isn't. They care about the protection of their language and their land. The BJP has managed to frame itself as the only true protector of these interests, while the Congress has accused them of using these issues to divide people for electoral gain.

As the rounds of counting progress throughout the day, the map of Assam will start to change colors. Each constituency tells a story. In the tea belts, we will see if the traditional Congress loyalty has finally eroded completely in favor of the BJP's welfare schemes. In the urban centers like Guwahati and Dibrugarh, we will see if the middle class remains firmly behind the promise of infrastructure and development. In the minority-dominated areas, the battle will be about whether the Congress and its allies managed to keep their flock together or if there was a fragmentation of the vote that helped the ruling party.

The atmosphere in the party offices is a study in contrasts. At the BJP headquarters, there is an air of quiet confidence, with workers preparing for celebrations, stocking up on sweets and saffron powder. They feel the momentum is with them. At the Congress office, the mood is more guarded, a mix of anxiety and a stubborn hope that the people's mandate will surprise the pundits.

Winning an election in a state as diverse as Assam is like solving a complex puzzle. You have to appeal to the plains, the hills, the various ethnic tribes, the religious minorities, and the linguistic groups all at once. It requires a massive logistical machine and a message that can be

Assam's indigenous economy and external aggression

Assam's social life and economy are currently passing through a deep and complex transitional phase, where the indigenous economic structure is facing an unprecedented and overwhelming challenge. Although the state's economy was primarily based on agriculture and rural resources, in recent times this structure has undergone extensive and rapid changes. Our indigenous production system, which was once largely self-reliant, is gradually moving under the complete control of external forces and outside capital. This transformation of the market has not only taken away our economic independence, but has also led to a situation where the local population is increasingly becoming economically weak and dependent within their own land. When we speak of external aggression, it is generally limited to population change or territorial encroachment, but its most dangerous and silent form is economic aggression. Capitalist groups and shrewd traders from outside have turned Assam's market merely into a vast consumer base, where instead of proper utilization and development of local resources, a one-sided competition for profit extraction is ongoing. The monopolistic dominance of external trading groups over Assam's natural resources, agricultural products, minerals, and local industries has pushed our economy into a parasitic condition.

In such a scenario, employment opportunities for the local youth are shrinking steadily, and they are facing immense obstacles in establishing their own enterprises. At the same time, since supply chains, wholesale trade, and capital flow have completely slipped out of the hands of the local people, wealth from Assam is continuously flowing outward, severely hindering the process of capital formation within the state. For rapid development, a cycle of savings and investment is essential, but in Assam's case, this cycle has been disrupted due to the constant outflow of money. The local population is compelled to spend the majority of their income on purchasing external goods, leaving little or no scope for savings, thereby raising serious concerns about future economic security.

The agricultural sector, which forms the backbone of Assam's economy, is currently engulfed in the deepest crisis. A silent process of transfer of agricultural land from indigenous farmers to others is continuously taking place. Due to economic hardship, floods, soil erosion, and the lack of fair market prices for their produce, many farmers are losing interest in cultivation and are forced to migrate to cities in search of daily wage labor. Taking advantage of this situation, migrant laborers and farmers from outside are leasing or purchasing these abandoned lands and initiating large-scale commercial farming. The most unfortunate aspect is that indigenous farmers do not even have the authority to determine the price of the crops they produce through their hard labor; this entire process is controlled by middlemen based in urban centers, most of whom are outsiders. From daily vegetable markets to large wholesale markets of rice, jute, mustard, betel nut, and other commodities, these middlemen have established such monopolistic dominance that local farmers are deprived of fair value for their produce, while consumers are forced to pay inflated prices. A crop sold by a farmer at ten rupees is often purchased by consumers at fifty rupees, with the significant margin being pocketed by middlemen. Additionally, the markets for fertilizers, high-quality seeds, and agricultural machinery are also dominated by external companies and traders. Thus, a substantial portion of the income generated from agriculture is siphoned out of the state through these intermediaries. Unless local farmers can take control of supply chains, storage facilities, and distribution systems, the dream of economic self-reliance through agriculture will never be realized. The lack of modern agricultural practices and proper storage facilities has further pushed indigenous farmers into a disadvantaged position.

A closer look at the commercial environment of urban and semi-urban areas reveals an even clearer picture of the dire condition of the indigenous economy. In almost every small and large town in

Assam today, major business sectors such as machinery, medicine, clothing, electrical goods, and construction materials are almost entirely controlled by external traders.

Local people are generally confined to small grocery shops, tea stalls, or petty businesses, as they lack the large capital and business networks required to start bigger ventures. The lending policies of banks and financial institutions often indirectly favor large capitalists, enabling them to secure substantial loans without significant obstacles. An external trader can procure goods on credit with ease, while a new local entrepreneur struggles to access similar facilities. As a result, the competitive environment in the market becomes inherently unequal, forcing local entrepreneurs to withdraw prematurely. Moreover, large government contracts and infrastructure projects are also dominated by big companies and contractors from outside, sidelining local entrepreneurs. This economic aggression has gradually transformed Assam's indigenous society into an emotional consumer base that knows only how to purchase from the market, but not how to produce or control it. The more dependent we become on external goods and traders, the more our independent identity diminishes. To survive in the competitive market, local entrepreneurs must move beyond emotional appeals and slogans and instead focus on quality, market understanding, and professional strategies. The business world does not accommodate sentiment; it rewards only hard work, foresight, and sound economic strategies.

Employment and the labor market form another critical dimension of this economic analysis, often overlooked. At present, Assam is facing a significant shortage of both skilled and unskilled labor, which is being easily filled by millions of migrant workers from outside. From construction work and masonry to carpentry, plumbing, electrical services, and even basic manual labor, the presence of local workers has become negligible. A flawed social perception regarding

the dignity of labor and a sense of social ego have led many local youths to hesitate in taking up physically demanding jobs, preferring instead to chase low-paying desk jobs in government or private offices. This deep-rooted aversion to labor has opened the doors of Assam's economy to external workers. Every day, these workers earn substantial amounts of money and remit it back to their home states, leading to a continuous outflow of wealth. Simultaneously, the local youth are lagging behind in acquiring modern technical skills required in today's competitive market.

Due to the lack of vocational education and practical skill development aligned with evolving technologies, they are unable to secure employment in industrial sectors. If the economy is to be safeguarded, it is essential to change this feudal mindset towards labor and prioritize technical and skill-based education. Without proper utilization and recognition of local labor, dependency on external workers cannot be reduced, and this will eventually lead to severe socio-economic consequences. The younger generation must understand that earning through one's own labor is not a matter of shame; rather, living dependently like a parasite is the true disgrace.

The aspect of land and property transactions has added another alarming dimension to economic aggression in Assam, gradually shrinking the geographical rights of indigenous people. Land prices in urban areas have risen abnormally, placing them beyond the purchasing capacity of ordinary locals. Wealthy capitalists and external traders are acquiring large tracts of land in prime locations as future investments, constructing massive commercial establishments and residential projects. In contrast, local people, due to financial pressures such as medical expenses or educational costs, are compelled to sell their ancestral lands at minimal prices and relocate to peripheral areas. Consequently, control over urban economic assets, particularly land, is slipping away from indigenous hands, making them feel like refugees within their own cities. Land is not merely a place of residence; it is a fundamental pillar of economic advancement. Without

ownership of land, access to financial services like bank loans or business expansion becomes severely restricted. The real estate sector is largely dominated by external builders and construction groups, who exploit local regulations for profit, while locals remain mere sellers rather than stakeholders in profit generation. While strict legal measures for land protection are necessary, it is equally important to strengthen the economic base of local people so that they are not forced to sell their land. Economic vulnerability has enabled this aggression to take root, and only comprehensive economic development can counter it.

To overcome this severe economic aggression permanently, mere emotional slogans, street protests, or political promises are insufficient; a realistic and long-term strategy is essential. The first step must be to build financial literacy and economic awareness among the indigenous population. It must be acknowledged that markets are not governed by emotion or patriotism, but by supply, demand, quality, and capital. Local farmers, artisans, and small entrepreneurs must be organized into strong cooperative enterprises to compete effectively with large capital groups. From production to packaging, marketing, and distribution, local control must be established at every stage. As consumers, we also bear a significant economic responsibility to prioritize purchasing goods from local producers, ensuring that money circulates within our society and strengthens the economy. Government policies must be aligned to support local industries, and banks must ensure easy access to business loans for local youth. Furthermore, the education system must shift from being job-oriented to truly enterprise-oriented, equipping the younger generation with the courage and practical skills to pursue independent ventures. If these deep economic challenges are not addressed in time through increased productivity, financial discipline, and a transformed outlook towards labor, the indigenous population of Assam risks becoming economically incapacitated and irrelevant within their own homeland. A strong, self-reliant, and resilient economy remains the only effective safeguard against external aggression.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan



There are many misconceptions prevalent in society today about the PhD (Doctor of Philosophy). Some consider it merely a "degree," some consider it a means to obtain a job, while others consider it a symbol of prestige. Articles and comments periodically appear on social media, debating the usefulness, difficulty, and true meaning of a PhD. In reality, a PhD is not merely a certificate, but a continuous intellectual journey to push the boundaries of knowledge. It is not a process that ends with the writing of a thesis, but rather a continuous pursuit of research, reflection, analysis, and socially useful contributions.

The primary purpose of a PhD is not to reiterate established knowledge in a subject, but to add to it. At the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, students typically study, understand, and validate existing knowledge through examinations. However, the PhD goes beyond that point, where the researcher formulates questions, identifies problems, chooses methods, gathers evidence, and presents conclusions. In this sense, the PhD is more about "creating something new" than "learning."

Many people think that a PhD simply means submitting a lengthy thesis. This thinking is incomplete. A thesis is a written document of a long journey, completed over many years of study, fieldwork, experimentation, data analysis, critical reflection, and revision. A good thesis is not just about word count, but about originality of ideas, integrity of research, and usefulness of findings. Only if the researcher has deeply understood the problem, employed appropriate methodology, and produced unbiased conclusions is their research considered meaningful.

A PhD teaches researchers patience. Research often doesn't yield immediate results. Sometimes months of effort are thwarted, but the researcher keeps surviving over. Experiments in a science lab may fail, surveys in the social sciences may not yield the expected results, and literature may be incomplete. Yet, the researcher never gives up. This persistence is what transforms them from ordinary students into researchers.

It's also true that a PhD is not just a personal achievement, but also a social responsibility. When someone conducts research on topics related to education, agriculture, health, economics, language, environment, technology, or policy, their findings can guide society. For example, research on rural education can improve the condition of government schools; research on water conservation can help in policymaking; research on Indian languages can preserve cultural heritage. Therefore, the value of a PhD is not limited to the university campus.

However, it must also be acknowledged that the research world is currently beset by numerous challenges. In some places, the quality of research is being questioned. In some places, there is a lack of guidance, in others, a lack of resources, in others, unnecessary administrative burdens on researchers, and in others, a tendency to simply fulfill formalities. Some people consider a PhD merely a qualification for promotion or employment. This affects the essence of research. When the objective is not knowledge but only profit, research becomes superficial.

The solution to this problem lies not in criticizing PhDs, but in improving their quality. Universities must strengthen research infrastructure, providing laboratories, libraries, digital databases, financial support, and competent mentors. Researchers must receive appropriate training in writing, research methodology, ethics, and publication. Furthermore, research should be evaluated not just on page counts

PhD: Not a degree, but a continuous journey of knowledge creation

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh



or formal presentations, but on actual contributions. The role of a supervisor in a PhD is crucial. A good mentor encourages independent thinking, points out errors, provides direction, and provides mental support. However, if guidance is weak, even a talented student can be misled. Therefore, the system for mentor selection and accountability must be strong.

In today's digital age, the nature of research is also changing. Artificial intelligence, big data, interdisciplinary studies, open access journals, online databases, and global collaboration have opened up new possibilities for PhDs. Research is no longer confined to library shelves. Indian researchers can access world-class content and communicate internationally. This is an opportunity, but it also poses the challenge of maintaining quality and originality in the face of a glut of information.

The greatest virtue of a PhD is critical thinking. The researcher questions every fact. They don't simply accept, they examine. They don't simply repeat tradition, they demand reason. This perspective is invaluable to society. Democracy, policymaking, education reform, and social discourse require trained minds that think with evidence, not emotion.

People often ask, "What does a PhD entail?" The answer goes beyond salary, position, or degree. A PhD imparts discipline, patience, writing ability, presentation skills, problem-solving abilities, and deep intellectual maturity. They learn to approach complex questions systematically. This ability is useful in every aspect of life.

Strengthening a research culture is crucial in a young country like India. If we remain mere consumers and don't generate new knowledge, we will fall behind in global competition. Indigenous research is essential in every field—technology, health, agriculture, defense, environment, language, and social policy. Therefore, making PhDs respectable, qualitative, and useful is a national imperative.

Society must also move beyond the two extremes of either honoring PhD holders by simply calling them "doctor" or ridiculing them. Not every PhD is excellent, but not every PhD is useless either. The correct approach is to evaluate research based on its contribution, integrity, and quality.

Ultimately, a PhD is a journey beyond the thesis. It begins with curiosity and doesn't end with knowledge creation, but rather a journey that continues. The thesis is not the destination, but the milestone. A true researcher never stops asking questions even after receiving the degree. They read, write, think, and contribute to improving society.

So the next time someone asks what a PhD is, the answer should be—it's not just a degree, but a test of thought; not just a thesis, but a quest for truth; not just a title, but a long-term responsibility to society and knowledge.

Parental conflict, when left unaddressed, can reshape a child's emotional world in lasting ways

By: Chitta Ranjan Pani

Across India, in thousands of homes that appear ordinary from the outside, a quiet and deeply distressing reality is unfolding. Marital conflict, prolonged disputes, and family breakdowns are increasingly shaping the emotional lives of children. In many such situations, children grow up distanced from one parent—not by circumstance alone, but through layers of conflict, mistrust, and systemic gaps.

At the heart of this issue lies a difficult truth: when relationships between parents deteriorate, the child often becomes the unintended casualty. In high-conflict separations, access to the child can become a site of control, negotiation, or even retaliation. The result is a gradual weakening—or in some cases, complete severance—of the child's relationship with one parent.

This is not merely a "family matter" to be dismissed informally. Increasingly, it is being recognised as a serious child welfare and mental health concern. While the scale of the problem in India remains under-documented, its presence is widely acknowledged by mental health professionals and legal practitioners.

Why this is happening

The causes of such situations are complex and layered. One important factor is the erosion of traditional support systems. The decline of the joint family structure has reduced the presence of mediating voices—grandparents, extended family members, and community elders—who once played a stabilising role during marital disputes.

At the same time, persistent parental conflict—often aggravated by misunderstandings, unresolved grievances, or prolonged litigation—creates an environment where the child is exposed to emotional tension. In many households, interference or pressure from extended family members, including in-laws, further complicates relationships, sometimes reinforcing divisions rather than resolving them. These dynamics can make cooperative parenting extremely difficult.

Legal processes, while essential, can sometimes intensify adversarial positions between parents. Allegations and counter-allegations, regardless of their outcome, often shape perceptions and deepen mistrust. In such contexts, the child's access to one parent may become restricted, either directly or indirectly.

Research from the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Ben-

galuru, highlights factors such as unresolved emotional conflict, insecurity, and interpersonal tensions as contributing to such family dynamics. These are rarely one-sided situations; rather, they emerge from a combination of relational breakdown, legal complexity, and social pressures.

The Supreme Court of India, in Vivek Singh v. Romani Singh (2017), acknowledged the phenomenon of parental alienation and its psychological implications for children. However, systemic mechanisms to address it—such as structured mental health assessments or child-focused interventions—remain limited.

The non-custodial parent

In many cases, especially within the current legal and social framework in India, young children tend to remain in the primary custody of one parent—most often the mother. While this arrangement may be appropriate in several circumstances, it can also result in the other parent experiencing a profound sense of loss when meaningful contact is reduced or disrupted.

There are numerous instances where non-custodial parents, particularly fathers, struggle to maintain regular communication with their children. Missed calls, limited visitation, or prolonged legal delays can create emotional distance over time. For a parent who was once actively involved in a child's daily life, this separation can be deeply distressing.

This dimension of suffering often remains less visible in public discourse. The emotional toll of absence—of not being present in milestones, conversations, or everyday moments—can have long-term psychological consequences for both the parent and the child.

International studies, including research from the United States, suggest that millions of parents experience varying degrees of estrangement from their children following separation. While contexts differ, the underlying emotional realities are comparable.

The child — at the centre of the conflict

The most significant impact, however, is borne by the child. Exposure to sustained parental conflict can shape a child's emotional and psychological development in lasting ways.

Research from NIMHANS documents patterns observed in such situations, including:

- Persistent negative attitudes towards one parent
- Rationalisations that may not align with the child's age or experience
- Emotional withdrawal or confusion

- Influence of adult narratives in the child's language and responses
- Strained relationships with extended family members

It is important to understand that these behaviours do not emerge in isolation. They are often shaped by the child's environment, experiences, and the dynamics they are exposed to over time.

Global research indicates that children caught in high-conflict parental disputes may experience anxiety, low self-esteem, difficulties in trust-building, and challenges in social adjustment. These outcomes underline the need to view such situations through a child rights and mental health lens, rather than a purely legal one.

India, as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognises the principle of the "best interest of the child." However, practical mechanisms to ensure that children's voices are heard and their emotional needs are prioritised in custody disputes remain limited.

The international scenario

Globally, there is increasing recognition of the complexities involved in addressing parental alienation and high-conflict custody disputes.

In December 2024, the UK Family Justice Council issued guidance on "alienating behaviours," emphasising the need for courts to carefully assess whether a child's resistance to a parent is justified or influenced by external factors. At the same time, the guidance cautions against misuse of such claims in cases involving genuine abuse.

Brazil's experience offers an important lesson. Its 2010 parental alienation law was intended to address the issue but has faced criticism for unintended consequences. In 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur recommended its repeal, noting concerns about misuse in sensitive cases.

These examples highlight that while recognition is important, legal responses must be carefully designed to avoid unintended harm.

The Indian scenario

India has taken initial steps in recognising the issue, but systemic responses remain limited. There are no standardised guidelines for identifying or addressing such situations, and training for judges, counsellors, and law enforcement personnel is still evolving.

One promising initiative is the Child Legal Assistance Programme (CLAP) by the Kerala State Legal Services Authority, which ensures independent legal representation for children in custody disputes. Such models demonstrate how child-centric approaches can be integrated into the



legal system.

At the same time, existing legal frameworks, including the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and the Guardian and Wards Act, 1890, do not fully address the complexities of shared parenting or relational dynamics post-separation. This creates gaps in ensuring balanced and sustained parental involvement where appropriate.

Measures for reform

Addressing this issue requires a balanced, child-centred, and systemic approach:

- Legal reforms: Encourage shared parenting frameworks where feasible, ensuring that both parents remain involved in the child's life unless there are clear risks. Strengthen child protection provisions to recognise emotional harm arising from prolonged conflict.
- Judicial reforms: Introduce specialised training for family court judges. Mandate child-sensitive procedures, including mental health assessments where necessary. Promote faster resolution of custody and visitation cases.
- Institutional mechanisms: Expand child representation models like CLAP across states. Establish family counselling centres linked to courts to support conflict resolution.
- Mental health support: Develop a network of trained professionals to support children and parents. Encourage therapeutic interventions aimed at rebuilding trust and communication.
- Community and family awareness: Promote awareness about the impact of parental conflict on children. Encourage responsible engagement by

extended families, recognising that interference can sometimes deepen divisions rather than resolve them.

The child cannot wait

Parental conflict, when left unaddressed, can reshape a child's emotional world in lasting ways. The issue is not about assigning blame to one parent or the other; it is about recognising how systemic gaps, social pressures, and unresolved disputes can converge to the detriment of the child.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the emotional pain experienced by separated parents—particularly those who struggle to maintain contact with their children—is real and significant. Addressing this issue requires empathy for all stakeholders, but a clear prioritisation of the child's well-being.

India stands at a critical juncture. With growing awareness, evolving legal frameworks, and increasing engagement from mental health professionals, there is an opportunity to build a more responsive and child-centric system.

The question is not whether reform is needed, but how quickly and thoughtfully it can be achieved. Every delay risks deepening the emotional distance between children and parents. A balanced, humane, and systemic response is no longer optional—it is essential.

(Chitta Ranjan Pani is an independent researcher on livelihood, natural resource governance and mental health. Courtesy: Down To Earth)

GenomeIndia and the Future of Precision Medicine in India

By: Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

The discovery that DNA is the genetic blueprint for life emerged over 70 years ago. This has since fueled exploration into the genetic basis of human disease and the development of personalised treatment strategies. Despite being one of the most genetically diverse populations in the world, India remains underrepresented in genetic studies, limiting the application of genomics to human medicine. New insights from the GenomeIndia Project—a Department of Biotechnology-funded initiative—highlight that both socio-cultural factors, such as ethnolinguistic diversity, and genetic factors shape health outcomes. Expanding these efforts through broader data generation will enhance access to genomic technologies.

The GenomeIndia Project

The GenomeIndia Project was launched by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) in 2020 as a pan-India endeavour to identify the genetic diversity of the Indian population. A consortium of 20 national institutes, including the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (CSIR-IGIB), Delhi; Centre for Brain Research (CBR), Bangalore; CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad; and Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council-National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (BRIC-NIBMG), Kalyani, working on this project. As of 2025, around 20,000 samples from unrelated healthy Indians have been collected, and 9,768 have undergone genotyping. This includes 83 population groups across India, comprising 32 tribal groups and 53 non-tribal groups, out of 4,600 distinct population groups. The study has taken representation across four main linguistic families, including Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Burman.

The collected information will be available to researchers in India and globally through the Indian Biological Data Centre Portal (IDBC). Its use and sharing will be governed by guidelines, including Biotech-PRIDE (Promotion of Research and Innovation through Data Exchange) and the Framework for Exchange of Data (FeED), that facilitate secure genomic data sharing.

A core objective of the project is to build a catalogue comprising genetic data, phenotypic characteristics such as biochemical parameters, and socio-demographic information. The collected information will be available to researchers in India and globally through the Indian Biological Data Centre Portal (IDBC). Its use and sharing will be governed by guidelines, including Biotech-PRIDE (Promotion of Research and Innovation through Data Exchange) and the Framework for Exchange of Data (FeED), that facilitate secure genomic data sharing.

The most recent findings from GenomeIndia demonstrate that the risk of metabolic disease varies across eth-

nolinguistic groups. For instance, higher levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL)—a protein associated with the transport of lipids such as cholesterol—typically observed among women relative to men across age groups are absent in Indian tribal populations. This difference may be attributed to genetic, lifestyle, or environmental factors, which state-level surveys do not adequately capture, necessitating their incorporation to enable targeted healthcare and lifestyle interventions. Such findings indicate that preventive strategies cannot be applied uniformly and should instead be tailored to specific population groups.

A study of Korean adults found that lifestyle factors significantly reduced the risk of metabolic disease, despite genetic predisposition. From an Indian perspective, this suggests that as GenomeIndia identifies population-specific disease risk patterns, genomic insights can be combined with targeted lifestyle interventions and screening strategies. As the largest population-level genetic study of Indians to identify genetic variation within the population, GenomeIndia marks a significant step forward in sequencing efforts.

The Genetic History of India's Population

India's genetic diversity is long and complex. A study carried out by the University of California, Berkeley; the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi; the University of Southern California (USC); and the University of Michigan through the Longitudinal Aging Study in India-Diagnostic Assessment of Dementia (LASI-DAD)—a population-based study of individuals aged 60 years or older—demonstrated that Indian ancestry can be traced to a migration event about 50,000 years ago out of Africa, followed later by movements of communities from Central Asia.

India's population history is important to healthcare because founder effects—a kind of genetic drift or variation that occurs when a segment of the population breaks away (usually geographically) to form a new population—and cultural practices like endogamy, or marrying within specific social groups, have increased the frequency of certain genetic variants. This can raise the incidence of certain inherited disorders, making population-specific genomic datasets essential for targeted screening and earlier diagnosis. For instance, a mutant form of the butyrylcholinesterase (BChE) gene, which causes muscle paralysis due to an inability to metabolise certain anaesthetic drugs, is highly prevalent in certain communities, such as the Vysya community in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, but not found at high frequencies in other populations in India. This demonstrates that population-specific genomics knowledge is significant in clinical care.

Genome-wide association studies (GWAS)—a research methodology used to identify genetic variations asso-



ciated with specific diseases—have been dominated by participants of European descent, with limited representation from South Asia and Africa.

Population-level genomic studies aimed at improving disease understanding and advancing personalised medicine lack diversity. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS)—a research methodology used to identify genetic variations associated with specific diseases—have been dominated by participants of European descent, with limited representation from South Asia and Africa. According to the NHGRI-EBI GWAS Catalogue, a publicly available human GWAS database, samples from individuals of South Asian ancestry account for 0.9 percent, African ancestry 1.1 percent, and East Asian ancestry 5.9 percent, compared to 86.3 percent European ancestry. Genetic diversity varies significantly across populations, yet global efforts to catalogue this variation have failed to capture its full extent.

Genomics in Personalised Medicine

The World Health Organization (WHO)'s Science Council has emphasised the utility of genetic information for public health technologies; it will enable an understanding of the genetic basis of certain diseases and can provide information on an individual's resistance, susceptibility, and response to disease. This will enable a deviation from a "one-size-fits-all" approach to human medicine towards a more personalised treatment strategy. From a healthcare perspective, underrepresentation of Indian populations in global databases can affect the accuracy of diagnostics, drug metabolism, and therapies. Pharmacogenomics databases like the Pharmacogenetics Knowledge Base (PharmGKB), which provide information on drug-gene interactions, consist of more than 60 percent samples from individuals of European descent. Clinically, understanding drug metabolism across diverse populations can provide valuable information to help improve health outcomes. For instance, a study examining the impact of psychiatric medications on drug metabolism in Indian patients highlighted the need for comprehensive genetic screening so that clinicians can prescribe medications better suited to their genetic makeup. This shows how ge-

netomics can improve clinical decision-making, reduce adverse drug reactions, and improve treatment efficacy.

Genomics is invaluable for cell and gene therapies, including sickle cell disease (SCD). In 2023, India contributed to 14.5 percent of the global SCD burden. Consanguinity or marriages between close relatives is a major factor that continues to drive the persistence of high prevalence of SCD in Indian populations. Most studies have highlighted a high prevalence of SCD amongst tribal communities; however, recent studies, including one carried out in Chamara Nagar, Karnataka, have demonstrated that non-tribal groups also show a high prevalence of SCD.

Birsa-101—a CRISPR-based gene therapy—is an example of a new therapy for SCD, in which gene-editing technology corrects mutations in the defective HBB (haemoglobin subunit B) gene in SCD patients. In Saudi Arabia, studies have aimed to determine suitable drug candidates for the treatment of SCD, where the prevalence is 27 percent. Collectively, these examples show how genomic data are used to guide both curative therapies and population-specific treatment strategies for a genetic disease.

The Way Forward

Increasing the genomic diversity of datasets would improve understanding of the genetic basis of disease, enhance risk mapping, and support the development of personalised therapeutic targets, thereby promoting equity in genomic healthcare. DNA sequencing platforms, such as next-generation sequencing (NGS), have advanced technologically, leading to improvements in accuracy, reduced costs, and opportunities for population-scale studies. The use of computational methods to study biological data and generate clinical insights has been driven by bioinformatics and has expanded significantly. Artificial intelligence (AI) tools can distinguish between normal and disease-causing genetic variants, predict disease likelihood, and reduce the time required for manual analysis. These advances can accelerate diagnosis, improve disease risk prediction, and make precision medicine more scalable.

Collectively, advances in DNA sequencing, bioinformatics, and AI, combined with national efforts like the GenomeIndia project, can transform genomics from a research domain into a scalable healthcare capability. Countries that invest in genomic capacity will be better placed to deliver affordable and personalised healthcare to their population. For India, this path begins with developing an understanding of the genetic diversity of its own people. (Courtesy: ORF)

From fear to fightback: MDR-TB Survivor's handbook lights the path to recovery

By: Swapna Majumdar

"Hello! I'm Deepti Chavan and I am an MDR-TB survivor. I know how it feels to hear the words 'drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB)'. When I heard them, my whole world changed. It can be scary and overwhelming. But let me assure you, you can recover. Like I did!" By pegging itself on the journey of Chavan, a well-known multi-drug-resistant (MDR) TB survivor, a recently launched handbook for DR-TB-affected individuals manages to stand out among the many resource materials on TB. It simplifies how to navigate the complexities of TB diagnosis and treatment through the lens of a survivor, thus resonating with scores of people, both affected and those afraid they may be affected. Incidentally, about 64 per cent of people with TB symptoms do not seek care due to stigma, ignorance, or affordability issues, leading to delayed diagnosis and continued transmission.

This is probably one of the reasons why TB continues to be India's biggest infectious disease challenge. India contributes about 25 per cent of the global TB burden, with five countries together accounting for over half of all cases worldwide, according to the government's 2026 Tuberculosis Fact Sheet.

While TB services have expanded in the country, there is a lack of awareness that, despite being an infectious disease caused by a bacterium called Mycobacterium tuberculosis, TB can be completely cured with proper diagnosis and timely treatment. In this scenario, knowledge and information are key. This is where the 16-page guide, developed by Survivors Against TB (SATB), a survivor-led network, can bridge the information gaps.

Besides drawing on tools and insights from the Stop TB Partnership, including resources such as the OneImpact DR-TB module and the TB Champions Toolkit, it has been enriched by the inputs of survivors like Chavan, advocates, healthcare providers, and medical professionals.

This makes it both factual and reliable, since it is a collaborative effort by those who have gone through the emotional roller coaster of fear, misgivings, and self-pity and have also managed to overcome

these hurdles. Though 55,000 cases of DR-TB were reported in 2024, requiring longer and more complex treatment, the bigger positive picture underlined by the booklet is that there is no giving up, no matter how hard or long the journey may be, because there is always light at the end of the tunnel. The handbook not only lays out the TB roadmap, outlining how TB is transmitted and explaining treatment options, it also provides practical tips for TB-affected people and their caregivers. While addressing the most often asked question—"Why did it happen to me?"—the handbook makes it clear that it is nobody's fault and that it can happen to anybody. Chavan, being an MDR-TB survivor, explains in simple language the main types of drug resistance.

Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) means the TB bacteria are resistant to rifampicin and isoniazid, the two most important anti-TB drugs used in treating TB.

If a person is diagnosed with rifampicin-resistant TB (RR-TB), this means their TB is resistant to rifampicin, with or without resistance to other drugs. In practice, RR-TB is treated in a similar way to MDR-TB. The third type is extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB). This is a more serious form of drug-resistant TB, in which the bacteria are resistant to several key TB medicines, including those used to treat MDR-TB.

Chavan reiterates that while dealing with drug-resistant TB can be overwhelming, and it takes more effort to treat than drug-sensitive TB, with the right medicines, consistent check-ins, and strong support, it is possible to recover, just as she did.

But for this, patients must access services. While scrolling to the "Health Facilities" section in the TB Aarogya Saathi app will aid in locating the nearest health centre, calling the RNTCP toll-free number (1800-11-6666) will help in finding testing and treatment locations and information on the nearest microscopy centre or DOTS centre. One of the most important facts underscored is the need for proper nutrition during the treatment journey. A balanced, nutritious diet rich in protein, vitamins, and minerals is crucial to fight the infection. The handbook points out that the government's Nikshay Poshan Yojana offers ₹1000 a month to help with nutrition costs during treatment. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)



Bengal awaits poll results today

TMC looks to retain power, BJP aims historic win after record turnout

KOLKATA, May 3: West Bengal heads into verdict day on Monday after over a month of frenzied campaigning, as it waits with bated breath to see whether the TMC manages to hold on to power or the BJP makes a historic breakthrough and claims the state for the first time.

As the EVMs open at 8 am, the CPI(M) and the Congress will be watching with equal keenness, hoping to reclaim a foothold in the state's electoral map after five years in the wilderness, following their wipeout in the 2021 polls.

Counting of votes will take place across 77 centres in the state, with elaborate security arrangements and a charged political atmosphere setting the stage for the declaration of results in 293 of the 294-seat House.

The Election Commission countermanded polls in the entire Falta constituency in South 24 Parganas district, citing "severe electoral offences and subversion of democratic process during polling in a large number of polling stations".

The fresh poll in that seat and the counting will take place on May 21 and May 24, respectively.

The two-phase polls in the state ended on April 29, with what the election watchdog said was the state's highest-ever voter turnout of 92.47 per cent since Independence.

Repolling in 15 booths in South 24 Parganas concluded on Saturday, with around 87 per cent turnout recorded, officials said.

The state's political climate bordered on the vicious, even after the conclusion of polls, leading to fervent anticipation ahead of the announcement of results, with both primary contenders TMC and BJP, claiming they were dead certain about their victory prospects.

Courtesy the tight security arrangements — with over 2.5 lakh central paramilitary personnel on the ground, besides the presence of a thoroughly reshuffled state



police force — electoral violence remained at a minimum, and no deaths were reported for the first time in the state's election history of recent decades.

This was also the first election held in the state in twenty years, conducted after an extensive, albeit controversial, SIR exercise that revised the electoral rolls, removing over 9 million voters.

The jury is out on the impact of the exercise on the electoral fortunes of all parties across the board, prompting pollsters to burn the midnight oil to make sense of the likely choice of voters and keeping the public greatly enthused about what verdict the result day would deliver.

The campaigns recorded the BJP unleashing its full might, with top leaders like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh launching all-out attacks on the TMC over corruption, law and order, infiltration, women's safety and unemployment, while promising welfare measures.

The TMC's retaliation, with the CM and party MP Abhishek Banerjee leading the charge, focused on SIR harassment, Bengali persecution and 'outsider' plank,

accusing the BJP of failing to deliver on its national commitments and upholding TMC's development report card.

Polling for the elections was held on April 23 and April 29, with a total electorate of over 3.21 crores.

The poll body has scaled down the number of counting centres this year to 77 from 87 announced earlier, and 108 in 2021, while putting in place a multi-layered security grid.

"Comprehensive security arrangements have been made to ensure that counting is conducted in a peaceful, transparent and orderly manner," a senior EC official said.

The run-up to counting, however, has been marked by high political drama, with TMC leaders, helmed by CM Mamata Banerjee, rushing to strongrooms in Kolkata, apprehending counting malpractice and alleging attempts to tamper with the sealed EVMs.

The EC rejected those allegations, maintaining that all electronic voting machines are kept under strict surveillance with round-the-clock security and CCTV monitoring.

"Strongrooms are secured under a three-tier security system, and

candidates or their representatives are allowed to keep watch as per protocol. There is no scope for any tampering," another poll panel official said.

Closer to the counting date, security outside strongrooms has been further tightened, with the EC deploying 165 additional counting observers and 77 police officers to oversee the process and ensure adherence to norms.

In Kolkata, counting for 11 assembly constituencies will be conducted across five locations — Ballygunge Government High School, Baba Saheb Ambedkar Education University, Shakhawat Memorial School, Netaji Indoor Stadium and St Thomas Boys' School.

Counting for the Bhabanipur seat, arguably carrying the highest symbolic weight where Mamata Banerjee is taking on senior BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari in a prestige fight on her home turf, will be held at the Sakhawat Memorial centre.

The EC has introduced stringent access control measures, mandating entry only through QR code-based photo identity cards issued via its ECINet system. Mobile phones have been barred inside counting halls, except for returning officers and observers.

The counting exercise will be conducted under a framework upheld by the Supreme Court, which on Saturday declined to pass further directions on a TMC plea challenging the deployment of central government personnel.

The elections saw the TMC contesting in 291 seats and its ally Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGP), led by Anit Thapa, fielding candidates in three seats in the Darjeeling hills. The BJP, Congress and the Left Front are gunning for all 294 segments, with parties like Humayun Kabir's AJUP and Asaduddin Owasi's AIMM also trying their luck in some crucial pockets. (PTI)

Nine dead as massive fire breaks out in residential building in east Delhi

NEW DELHI, May 3: A fire ripped through a residential building in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar early Sunday, leaving nine people from two families dead, including a toddler, officials said.

The incident was reported at 3.48 am at a four-storey building in Vivek Vihar Phase-I, following which police, fire and disaster management teams rushed to the spot.

The blaze engulfed flats on the second, third and fourth floors of the building, prompting frantic rescue efforts.

With the terrace door locked, the building occupants found it difficult to escape the leaping flames.

Twelve fire tenders were pressed into service, while teams from the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), traffic police and local police assisted in evacuation and rescue efforts.

The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained.

According to the Delhi Fire Service (DFS), nine charred bodies were recovered from different parts of the building. "One body was recovered from the first floor, five from the second floor and three from the staircase which was found locked," a DFS officer said.

Those killed on the second floor were identified as Arvind Jain (60), his wife Anita Jain (58), their son Nishant Jain (35), daughter-in-law Anchal Jain (33) and grandchild Akash Jain.

On the third floor, three members of another family — Nitin Jain (50), his wife Shailey Jain (48) and their son Samyak Jain (25) — were found dead. On the first floor, a woman identified as Shikha Jain (45) was found dead, while her husband Navneen Jain (48) sustained injuries.

A senior police officer said around 10 to 15 people were rescued from the building during the operation. Two persons with minor injuries were shifted to the Guru



Teg Bahadur Hospital.

Flames had engulfed large portions of the structure, with thick plumes of smoke spreading across the locality and reducing visibility.

Fire fighters said screams could be heard from those trapped inside the building as they battled for hours to bring the blaze under control.

A firefighter involved in the operation said the intensity of the blaze was significantly higher in the rear portion of the building.

"The fire intensity was higher in the four flats at the rear as compared to the front portion. So far, we have recovered nine bodies and handed them over to Delhi Police. It is difficult to provide details at this stage. The cause of the fire is still under investigation," he said.

He said access constraints worsened the situation.

"Three bodies were found near the terrace level. The access to the roof was locked, and because of this, they could not save their lives. If it had not been locked, they might have survived," he said.

"There is a central staircase which serves as both entry and exit. The rear side gate was covered with a grille, due to which we had to cut it using tools to carry out

rescue operations. We deployed five ladders from different sides and also used a turntable ladder vehicle to rescue around 15 people," the firefighter added.

Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta condoled the loss of lives in the fire tragedy, and said immediate medical assistance and relief are being provided to the affected people.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva along with Union Minister of State Harsh Malhotra, local MLA Sanjay Goel, Councillor Pankaj Luthra and BJP Shahdara district president Deepak Gaba, met the bereaved families around 10 am and extended condolences to them on behalf of the ruling party.

The BJP leader said Goel reached the spot within minutes of receiving the information and helped save 18 to 20 people while monitoring the rescue operations.

While talking to reporters, Malhotra described the incident as extremely tragic.

Lauding the prompt response of the fire brigade and police personnel, Malhotra said due to their timely action, around 20 people were rescued. (PTI)

All arrangements in place for vote counting: Patnaik

CHENNAI, May 3: All arrangements are in place, including a comprehensive three-tier security plan, for counting of votes on May 4 at the 62 designated counting centres across the state, Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu, Archana Patnaik has said.

Elections to 234 Assembly segments were held in the state on April 23.

The incumbent DMK regime has fought big to retain power, and its archrival AIADMK has slogged to win power after five years as the principal opposition party. Actor-politician Vijay-led TVK's entry into the electoral arena has made predictions about the winning prospects tough and the Tamil nationalist Seeman's NTK is another factor in the polls.

The counting of votes will commence at 8 AM with the postal ballot counting and at 8.30 AM, counting of votes recorded in EVMs will commence. Approximately 1.25 lakh personnel which includes officials, and micro-observers on vote-counting duty and police have been deployed.

Polling was held on April 23 in all the 75,064 polling stations for the Tamil Nadu Assembly election. For the purpose of counting of votes recorded in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), 234 counting halls have been arranged.

An additional 240 halls have been designated for the counting of Postal Ballots and Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballots

(ETPBs). A total of 3,324 counting tables will be used for the counting of polled votes, Chief Electoral Officer Patnaik said in an official release. (PTI)

Great Nicobar project concerns must be debated in Parl forum; govt rattled by Rahul visit: Cong

NEW DELHI, May 3: The Congress on Sunday flagged in detail concerns related to ecology, tribal rights, transparency and security, over the Great Nicobar project, and asserted that these considerations must be debated in a parliamentary forum.

The opposition party claimed that the Modi government is "rattled" and in damage control mode after Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's visit to Great Nicobar last week.

In a statement, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The Modi Government, clearly in damage control mode after the hugely impactful visit of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, to Great Nicobar on April 28 2026, issued a press note on the Great Nicobar Island Development Project three days later."

This press note does not address any of the serious concerns that have been raised on it by local affected communities, environmentalists, anthropologists, academics, civil society experts and other professionals, Ramesh said.

"These concerns had already been conveyed in detail by me to the Union Minister of Environment, Forests & Climate Change on September 10, 2024 and in a follow-up on September 27, 2024," the former environment minister said.

During his visit to Great Nicobar, Gandhi last week alleged that the Great Nicobar project at Campbell Bay in Andaman and Nicobar Islands was "one of the biggest scams and gravest crimes against the natural and tribal heritage of the country". The government on May 1 released a detailed statement with answers to FAQs (frequently asked questions).

"The Great Nicobar Project is a strategic initiative to strengthen India's presence in the Andaman Sea. It seeks to balance port-led growth with calibrated environmental safeguards. Protection of indigenous communities remains central to its planning,"

the government statement had said.

"The project combines strategic, economic, and ecological priorities. This ensures that development is sustainable, inclusive, and aligned with national interests," it had said.

In his four-page detailed statement, Ramesh spelt out the key concerns over the Great Nicobar project.

Flagging ecological concerns, Ramesh said the Great Nicobar is unique and distinctly different from all other islands in the Andaman and Nicobar group.

"The Government's claim that only 1.82% of the total land of the island group is being used for the project is irrelevant and misleading. It ignores the ecological and biological richness of the Great Nicobar ecosystem, which is unique both in the island group and in the world," he said.

"Galathea Bay, the site of the port, is unequivocally a Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) is a site where port construction is not allowed. As per records of the Zoological Survey of India, Galathea Bay is home to more than 20,000 coral colonies, a key marker of a CRZ-1a categorisation. Similarly, the beach here is the most important nesting site of the Giant Leatherback turtle in the Northern Indian Ocean," Ramesh said.

The recently concluded turtle nesting season saw record turtle nesting at Galathea Bay, he pointed out.

Ramesh alleged that institutions like the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) were literally coerced to play a key role in the environmental clearance and related process for the project.

"These very institutions have now been awarded projects for biodiversity research and monitoring in Great Nicobar. There is a clear conflict of interest here," he argued.

In addition, a couple of reputed and independent-minded institutions that have been very critical of the project have been blacklisted by the Modi government, he said. Similar is the case with the high-pow-

ered committee (HPC) constituted by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in the matter of the challenge to the project's environmental clearance granted, he said.

All the HPC's members either represented the project proponents or agencies which granted the clearances, Ramesh said.

He said the proposal for compensatory afforestation in Haryana is a travesty of ecological principles.

Flagging tribal rights concerns, Ramesh said the Nicobarese Tribal community has expressed concerns multiple times about the project and its impact on their forests, rights, and way of life.

"In November 2022, they withdrew the NoC they had granted for forest diversion saying that they were rushed to sign by concealing the extent of tribal areas to be affected by the project. Representatives of the Nicobarese community also stated in a recent press conference that they were being forced to voluntarily surrender their land for the project," he pointed out.

The claims stand even more exposed in the matter of the Shompen, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), that lives a life of hunting and gathering in the deep forests of Great Nicobar, Ramesh said. The Shompen are a primarily non-contacted community and there are no Shompen speakers of their language, he pointed out.

"It is not clear then how the project authorities have taken their informed consent, which is both ethically appropriate and legally mandated," Ramesh said.

Pointing out that government release has claimed that the airport in Great Nicobar will eventually handle 10 million passengers annually, Ramesh said this appears prima facie to be a huge over-estimation given that the current airport at Port Blair handles 1.8 million passengers annually. "The deliberations of the Forest Advisory Committee for granting the project's forest clearance were not made public." (PTI)

Kerala leaders express confidence ahead of Assembly election results today

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 3: Political leaders and candidates across party lines on Sunday expressed confidence of victory ahead of the Kerala Assembly election results on May 4.

Polling for the 140-member Assembly was held on April 9.

Speaking to reporters, Kerala Minister P A Mohamed Riyas said the situation was favourable for the CPI(M)-led LDF across the state.

Riyas, who is contesting against UDF-backed Independent PV Anvar from Bepore in Kozhikode district, said the front would secure a comfortable victory both in his constituency and statewide. "There will be a good victory for the LDF in Bepore as well as across Kerala," he said.

He claimed that the state had witnessed development, welfare measures, clean governance, and internal unity within the front during the LDF's 10-year tenure.

"We did not merely make promises but implemented them. The government stood with the people on their issues. There were no communal riots. People have realised this and want the LDF to continue," he said.

Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly V D Sathesnan, who was present in his constituency (North Paravoor) on Sunday, declined to comment and said he would speak after the results were announced. Former Union minister and BJP leader V Muraleedharan, contesting from Kazhakoottam constituency, said feedback from voters indicated growing support for the BJP-led NDA.

Muraleedharan is in the fray against CPI(M) sitting MLA Kadakampally Surendran and Congress candidate T Sharath Chandra Prasad.

"Though the contest was initially expected to be triangular, it later turned into a fight between the LDF and NDA. The BJP has a clear upper hand in the constituency," he said.

However, Surendran asserted that he had earned the confidence of voters and

that his victory was assured.

"The BJP deserves to be hopeful after its campaign. It will not be surprising if they spent Rs 10-20 crore. They (the BJP) also ran fake narratives (against the LDF)," he told a news channel.

Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chenithala said the UDF would emerge victorious in the election.

"Our assessment is that the Congress-led UDF will emerge victorious," he said. Apu John Joseph, son of Kerala Congress (Joseph) leader P J Joseph and contesting from Thodupuzha, said the UDF was headed for an easy victory.

"The UDF fought this election as a united team, and that was reflected during the campaign. The result of that effort will certainly be seen in the counting. We expect a comfortable-margin victory," he said. Senior BJP leader Kummanam Rajasekharan, contesting from Aranmula, said the party was confident of winning the seat. He also said the BJP expected to open its account in the state.

"Our estimate is that Kerala may deliver a hung Assembly as people are fed up with both the UDF and LDF," he said.

Rajasekharan said the election results would bring a decisive change in Kerala's political landscape.

Congress leader K Muraleedharan, contesting from Vattiyoorakavu, said he was confident of victory.

"I know the constituency well and am confident that people will not abandon me. We expect to take an early lead. Though there may be some fluctuations in later rounds, we will make up in the final rounds of counting," he said.

His rival and sitting CPI(M) MLA V K Prasanth said public response indicated that he would retain the seat by a margin of over 10,000 votes. He said development activities undertaken in the constituency would ensure his victory. "I will get votes from people across all sections of society. The opponents will face disappointment," he said. (PTI)

Centre launches national childhood diabetes screening, treatment framework

NEW DELHI, May 3: The Union Health Ministry on Sunday released a guidance document providing a framework for screening, diagnosis, treatment and long-term management of childhood diabetes.

According to the ministry, the document, for the first time, establishes a structured and standardised national framework, positioning India among a select group of countries that have integrated childhood diabetes care into the public health system. The "Guidance Document on Diabetes Mellitus in Children" was released at the National Summit on Best Practices in Public Healthcare Service Delivery, concluded on May 1-2.

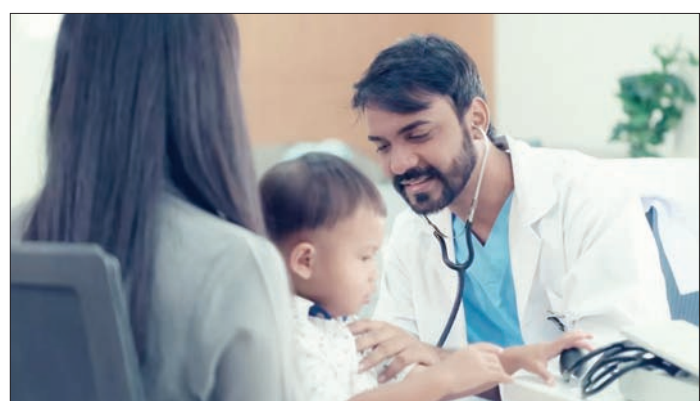
According to a statement by the

ministry, the framework aims to ensure universal screening of all children from birth to 18 years through community and school-based platforms for early identification of diabetes.

Suspected cases will undergo immediate blood glucose testing and be referred to district-level health facilities for confirmatory diagnosis and treatment, it said.

A key feature of the initiative is the provision of a comprehensive free-of-cost care package at public health facilities, including screening, diagnostic services, lifelong insulin therapy, glucometers, test strips and regular follow-up care.

The initiative seeks to reduce the financial burden on families and ensure uninterrupted treatment for



children diagnosed with diabetes.

The document also lays down an integrated continuum of care linking community-level screening with district hospital-based man-

agement and advanced care at medical colleges to ensure seamless follow-up and treatment.

To strengthen early detection, the guidance promotes the "4Ts"

awareness framework -- Toilet, Thirsty, Tired and Thinner -- to help parents, teachers and caregivers recognise early warning signs of type 1 Diabetes.

Besides clinical protocols, the document focuses on family and caregiver empowerment through structured training on insulin administration, blood glucose monitoring, emergency response and daily disease management.

The statement stated the initiative is expected to reduce mortality through early detection, prevent complications and improve the quality of life of affected children while strengthening the public health system's capacity to manage non-communicable diseases among children. (PTI)

Two held for 'firing' at BJP leader's house in Bengal

KOLKATA, May 3: A day before the counting of votes for the West Bengal assembly elections, two persons were arrested on Sunday for allegedly being involved in a firing incident outside the residence of a BJP leader in North 24 Parganas district, police said.

BJP leader Kundan Singh lodged a police complaint, alleging that a few gunmen fired at his house in the Noapara constituency around Saturday midnight. Based on the CCTV footage, the two accused were apprehended, a senior officer said.

BJP's Noapara candidate Arjun Singh, in a post on social media, claimed that around 12.05 am, two armed miscreants arrived on a motorcycle at the residence of Kundan Singh, a BJP functionary and secretary of the Barrackpore organisational district, with an "intent to kill him".

According to the BJP leader, the accused are residents of Garulia and are known criminals. Their names as offenders had been submitted to the Election Commission, he said.

The police officer did not specify whether the two arrested persons were the same individuals named by Arjun Singh.

According to the complaint, one round of firing took place outside Kundan Singh's house, triggering panic in the area.

The BJP candidate also questioned the role of the police, claiming that one of the accused had been detained by the police on the polling day but was later released in the evening. (PTI)

Rallies, shutdown mark 3rd anniversary of ethnic conflict in Manipur

Events held across valley and hill districts to commemorate victims, press demands

IMPHAL/CHURACHANDPUR, May 3: Rallies, meetings and a shutdown marked the third anniversary of ethnic conflict between Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur, which witnessed the death of at least 260 people, the displacement of thousands of residents and imposition of President's Rule for a year.

The violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities started on May 3, 2023, after a "Tribal Solidarity March" was organised in the hill districts to protest the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribes status.

Meitei groups organised processions in several Imphal Valley districts seeking implementation of the NRC before the census and protection of Manipur's administrative and territorial integrity on Sunday, while the Kuki Zo organisations observed a shutdown in Kangpokpi district and held meetings in Churachandpur district to commemorate the victims of the violence.

Hundreds of people took part in a rally at Nambol in Bishnupur district, organised by the United Protection Committee.

"The rally was organised to highlight the ongoing suffering of the people and to demand accountability and justice for the victims



of the conflict," Convenor of United Protection Committee, Th Lamjingba, said.

At Iboiyama Shumang Leela Shanglen in Imphal East district, representatives of women's organisation Meira Paibis and COCOMI took part in a public meeting on 'three years on Manipur crisis'.

"The public discourse is being held on the occasion of three years of conflict in the state in the context of armed attacks on the indigenous people of Manipur by Kuki terrorists," said Shanta Nahakpam,

spokesperson of the Coordination Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), an umbrella body of several Meitei civil society organisations.

Floral tributes were also offered to the photos of more than 100 Meiteis killed in the conflict at separate events held across five valley districts.

In the Kuki-majority Kangpokpi district, business activities remained closed due to the 12-hour shutdown called from 6 am by the Committee on Tribal Unity

(COTU) in the district, officials said. The COTU is demanding a separate administration for the Kuki people, claiming that it has become impossible for the Kukis to live with the Meiteis.

Floral tributes were also offered at Martyrs' Cemetery in Phaijang to honour more than 100 Kuki Zo victims of the conflict.

A 'Separation day from Meiteis' was also observed by Kuki Zo groups at two places in Churachandpur.

The Indigenous Tribal Leaders

Forum (ITLF) held the programme at Peace Ground, and the Zomi Council (ZC) organised an event at Martyrs Park.

Prayers were held for the victims of the violence at both places.

ITLF Spokesperson Ginza Vualzong claimed that about 250 Kuki people were killed, 40,000 others were displaced, more than 7,000 houses were burnt, and about 360 churches were destroyed.

"We can never forget these atrocities that we have faced," Ginza said.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts.

President's rule was imposed in the state on February 13 last year after the BJP-led government headed by Biren Singh resigned on February 9, following months of ethnic violence.

The 60-member assembly, which has tenure till 2027, had been put on suspended animation after President's rule was imposed.

It was revoked on February 4, hours before the formation of a new state government with BJP leader Y Khemchand Singh as the chief minister. (PTI)

TPCC chief slams Manik Saha govt for cancelling appointment process for special executives



AGARTALA, May 3: Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president Asish Kumar Saha on Sunday criticised the BJP-led Manik Saha government for cancelling the entire process for appointment of 6,367 special executives without citing any reason.

The state Home department has issued a notification seeking applications for appointment of special executives to assist the police force in 2022. In a fresh notification on Saturday (May 2, 2026), it has cancelled the entire process and invited fresh applications for filling up of 6367 posts.

"This is nothing but cheating the unemployed youth of the state. When the recruitment drive was about to be completed, a notification was issued announcing that the entire interview process was cancelled without citing any reason," Saha told reporters.

He said the police have invited fresh applications for the same number of posts of special execu-

tives by May 20.

"It is a ridiculous move by the BJP government. The government must tell the people why the entire process has been cancelled, ending a four-year wait. It seems the government uses the appointment drive as an election gimmick to win the electoral battle," Saha said.

Accusing the government of reducing employment in the government sector, Saha said the Manik Saha government is pursuing the same policy adopted by the Modi government of slashing the government workforce by any means.

The TPCC chief claimed the number of state government employees has been downsize from 1,51,000 in 2017 to below one lakh in 2026.

"It shows the government's lack of willingness to address the unemployment problem, which has become a core issue in the northeastern state where industrialisation is yet to take place," he said. (PTI)

All arrangements made for counting of votes of Koridang Assembly bypoll

KOHIMA, May 3: All arrangements have been made for the counting of votes for the Koridang Assembly Constituency by-election in Nagaland's Mokokchung district, scheduled to be held on May 4, an official said on Sunday.

The bypoll, necessitated by the demise of sitting BJP MLA Imkong L Imchen, witnessed a voter turnout of 82.21 per cent on April 9, with 18,400 of the 22,382 registered electors exercising their franchise across 30 polling stations.

Six candidates are in the fray for the seat, including BJP nominee Daochier I Imchen, who is also the consensus candidate of Peoples' Democratic Alliance (PDA) government led by Naga Peoples' Front (NPF), Congress candidate T Chalukumba Ao, NPP's I Abenjang, and Independents Imchatoha Imchen, Imtiwapang, and Toshikaba.

Returning Officer of Koridang Assembly constituency, Nockpai Konyak, told PTI that the counting centre has been fully prepared with a structured stage setup, including designated ta-

bles for counting personnel, observers, and agents of contesting candidates to ensure a smooth and transparent process.

He said that counting will start at 8 am in the Mokokchung Deputy Commissioner's office in 10 tables for 3 rounds.

Elaborate security arrangements have been put in place in view of the election-related violence reported on April 5 and 6, which claimed one life and led to damage of vehicles.

Multi-layer security deployment, CCTV surveillance, and strict access control will be enforced at the counting venue.

The Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), currently stored in strong rooms under round-the-clock security, will be opened in the presence of candidates or their authorised agents on the counting day, following Election Commission guidelines.

Officials stated that counting personnel have been adequately trained and all necessary protocols are in place to ensure accuracy and transparency.

Results are expected to be declared by afternoon. (PTI)

Cement cos in M'laya imported nearly 3 lakh mt of coal without valid papers: HC-appointed panel

SHILLONG, May 3: Two cement companies in Meghalaya have been accused of violating prescribed norms in the transport of over 2.93 lakh metric tonnes of coal, a high court-appointed committee said in its latest report.

The single-member panel of retired judge B P Katakey pointed out that the two companies transported the dry fuel from outside the state between February 2025 and February this year "without obtaining mandatory approvals under the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), 2024".

Justice (Retd) B P Katakey heads the committee, appointed by the high court to oversee compliance with its directions on curbing illegal coal mining and transportation.

In its report submitted to the court on Friday, the panel noted that although the companies had applied on April 8 last year, seeking permission to transport coal for the period from April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026, no approval was granted by the competent authority. The committee found that the transport of over 2.93 lakh metric tonnes of coal violated several provisions of the SOP, including the failure to obtain prior approval and non-filing of mandatory weekly returns.



The single-member panel also flagged the absence of crucial documents, such as mineral transport challans, tax invoices, e-way bills, certificates of origin and weightment details, indicating serious procedural lapses in the movement of the consignments.

Referring to an accident on March 4 this year in East Jaintia Hills district, the panel said the coal was also being transported without approval.

The report highlighted gaps in enforcement, noting that investigating agencies had failed to probe the role of landowners in areas where illegal mining activities were detected.

The committee recommended strict enforcement of SOP provisions, verification of documents related to coal transported by the companies, and a detailed investigation into violations.

It also called for the introduction of GPS tracking of vehicles, colour-coded identification systems, designated transport routes and smart integrated check-points to prevent illegal movement of coal. The committee recommended expansion of the enforcement strategies adopted in East Jaintia Hills district to other coal-bearing regions of the state to curb the menace of illegal mining and transportation. (PTI)

Tight security arrangements for counting of votes for Dharmangar bypoll

AGARTALA, May 3: The counting of votes for the byelection to the Dharmangar Assembly constituency in North Tripura will be held on May 4 amidst tight security cover, an official said on Sunday.

"All necessary arrangements for tomorrow's counting commencing at 8 am have been completed. The counting process will take place on 14 tables in the counting hall under CCTV surveillance," Returning Officer (RO), Debjani Choudhury said.

Prohibitory order under section 163 BNS will come into force at 6 am on Monday within a 100-metre radius of the counting hall to ensure peace, she said, adding that adequate security measures have also been made available for the counting day.

DIG, Northern Range Rati Ranjan Dhar on Sunday visited Dharmangar to review the security arrangements for the counting

process.

"A three-layer security arrangement has been put in place for the counting of votes for the byelection. Besides tight security in and around the counting hall, additional forces will be deployed in key locations to control the crowd," he told reporters.

An average of 79.84 per cent of 46,142 voters exercised their democratic right on April 9.

Although six candidates, Jahar Chakraborty (BJP), Amitabh Datta (CPIM), Chayan Bhattacharjee (Congress), Bibash Ranjan Das (Amra Bangalee), Brajalal Debnath (Independent), and Sanjoy Choudhury (SUCI) are in the electoral fray, the contest is mainly between the BJP, CPI (M) and Congress. The by-election was necessitated following the death of the Speaker of Tripura Legislative Assembly, Biswa Bandhu Sen, in December 2025. (PTI)

Khandu congratulates Joram Aniya for appointment as full-time Niti Aayog member Mizoram HM expresses concern over low representation from state in central services

ITANAGAR, May 3: Arunachal Chief Minister Pema Khandu has congratulated academican Joram Aniya for being appointed as a full-time member of the Niti Aayog, saying her engagement will bring valuable insights into national policymaking. The Centre on Saturday appointed Aniya and scholar-author R Balasubramaniam as full-time members of the Niti Aayog, taking

the total number of such members in the government think tank to seven, along with a vice-chairman. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the chairman of the Niti Aayog. In a post on X, Khandu said, "An eminent academican, writer, and folklorist, Aniya has made pioneering contributions to Hindi literature and the preservation of Nyishi culture. Her remarkable journey as the first

woman to earn a PhD in Hindi from the Nyishi community reflects dedication, scholarship, and a deep commitment to society." The chief minister said her rich experience in education, research, and grassroots engagement will bring valuable insights to national policy, particularly in strengthening indigenous knowledge systems and inclusive development. (PTI)

AIZAWL, May 3: Mizoram Home Minister K Sapdanga has expressed concern over the low number of Mizos entering central government services and called for collective action to improve representation in key sectors such as the Civil Services and Staff Selection Commission (SSC). While acknowledging that some Mizos are serving in central government offices and contributing effectively, he emphasised that a stronger presence in national cadres is not just about employment, but about regional influence. "Having Mizo officials within the central

government machinery is incredibly advantageous when the state needs to navigate and coordinate with New Delhi. There is a pressing need to encourage more Mizo youth to compete and succeed in Central services," Sapdanga said. Addressing the "Career Fair" here on Saturday, the minister pointed out specifically to the Civil Services and SSC as areas where Mizo participation has reached a critical low. He urged stakeholders, parents, and students to work together to bridge this gap, ensuring that local youth are competitive at the national level. (PTI)

New Arunachal Niwas in Delhi to aid patients, students: Khandu



ITANAGAR, May 3: Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Sunday said the newly inaugurated Arunachal Niwas in New Delhi will significantly benefit patients and students from the state by providing accessible accommodation and support facilities.

The chief minister made the remarks after inaugurating the newly constructed Arunachal Niwas at Dheerpur in New Delhi, terming it a major milestone in the state government's efforts to support citizens residing and travelling outside the state, an official statement said here.

Khandu said the facility includes dedicated provisions for patients seeking medical treatment in the national capital and, owing to its proximity to the North Campus area, would serve as a convenient and safe stay option for students during university admission periods. Reaffirming the government's focus on infrastructure development, he said a comprehensive review of newly created districts such as Pakke-Kessang, Kamle, Lepa-Rada and Shi-Yomi has been scheduled to assess infrastructure gaps and manpower requirements.

Similar reviews would also be carried out in older districts to ensure balanced development, he added.

The chief minister also acknowledged the support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Centre in strengthening infrastructure in the state, noting that Arunachal Pradesh has received around Rs 4,900 crore under the 15th Finance Commission to bridge critical gaps and accelerate development.

Emphasising sustainability, Khandu advised exploring avenues for revenue generation to ensure the long-term viability of such facilities.

With the addition of the Dheerpur facility, the Arunachal Pradesh government now has its fourth property in the national capital, part of a broader effort over the past decade to establish support infrastructure outside the state.

Similar establishments have been set up in cities such as Guwahati, Tezpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Bodo Gaya, Bengaluru and Mumbai.

Spread over 2,600 square metres with a built-up area of 7,198 square metres, the G-plus-eight building houses eight dormitories with six beds each, 18 double-bedded rooms, 35 twin-bedded rooms, six specially designed rooms for persons with disabilities, a staff dormitory, office space, a medical room and a dining hall, officials said.

It also provides parking facilities across basement, ground and first floors.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Union Minister Kiren Rijiju, Rajya Sabha MP Nabam Rebia, legislators, senior officials and people from the state residing in Delhi. The Arunachal Niwas at Dheerpur is aimed at enhancing accessibility and support for people of the state staying or travelling outside Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

Himalayan Buddhism key to cultural strength, national identity: Arunachal CM

ITANAGAR, May 3: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu has underscored that India's true strength lies not merely in physical infrastructure or borders but in its deep-rooted cultural identity, highlighting the enduring role of Himalayan Buddhism as a civilisational anchor for frontier regions.

Khandu, who travelled to Leh on Saturday, shared in a series of social media posts on Sunday that while material capabilities are essential, they represent only the "outer shell" of national strength.

"We often define a nation's strength by its borders, infrastructure and material capabilities. While these are vital, they are only the visible aspects. The real strength of a nation lies in something far deeper, in its culture, identity and the values that bind its people together across generations," he said in a series of posts on X.

Addressing an international conference on "Contribution of Himalayan Buddhism to the Spiritual and Cultural Heritage of India and Beyond" at the Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, the chief minister emphasised that Himalayan Buddhism has for cen-



turies shaped the social and cultural fabric of India's border regions.

"Himalayan Buddhism is not just a spiritual tradition; it is the heartbeat of our frontier communities. It provides a sense of belonging, continuity and resilience. In regions that are geographically remote and strategically sensitive, culture becomes the strongest thread that holds so-

ciety together," he observed.

He further stressed that the idea of national security must go beyond conventional definitions.

"True security is not only built through defences and physical preparedness. It is equally reinforced by the strength of our cultural roots, by the unity of communities, and by a shared conviction in our civilisational values," Khandu said.

During his visit, the chief minister also called on Ladakh Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and held discussions on development experiences in Himalayan regions, focusing on infrastructure, tourism and avenues for cultural exchange between states.

Khandu also participated in a cultural evening at Leh Market, where he joined locals in singing "Chhodo Kal Ki Baatein, Kal Ki Baat Purani... Hum Hindustani", describing the moment as a celebration of unity and shared national identity.

Khandu had travelled to Leh to take part in the exposition of the sacred Buddha relics, an event of deep spiritual significance that draws devotees and scholars alike.

The exposition was inaugurated on Friday by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, marking a major cultural and religious gathering in the region.

Describing Ladakh as a land of "hope, harmony and cultural vibrancy", Khandu said such engagements reinforce the shared heritage of Himalayan states and strengthen bonds rooted in spirituality and tradition. (PTI)

Hardik Pandya, Suryakumar Yadav in focus

Mumbai Indians to take on Lucknow Super Giants in IPL

MUMBAI, May 3: Struggling former champions Mumbai Indians will hope their embattled stars Hardik Pandya and Suryakumar Yadav come good in a clash against bottom-ranked Lucknow Super Giants even though the chances of qualifying for the play-offs in this edition of IPL has evaporated for good.

Pandya (146 runs and 4 wickets) and Suryakumar (186) have had forgettable campaigns so far, which has hampered MI's journey, more so in the absence of former skipper Rohit Sharma, who remains on a comeback trail after a hamstring injury earlier this season.

Only two wins in nine matches have consigned the five-time IPL winners Mumbai Indians to the penultimate spot in the points table.

While their hopes to remain in contention for the IPL playoffs are all but over, there still remains an outside chance of qualification.

But before all that, MI will have to have their Indian stars doing the heavy lifting, which has not been the case so far.

Pandya's leadership has come into focus as MI have endured a tough campaign. Tactically he has been way off the mark.

The batters have collectively misfired, and so have their bowlers, but in between have been Pandya's ordinary performances both with the bat and the ball, combined with certain calls on the field which did not yield desired results.

With the ball, Pandya has been on and off in terms of execution, but his batting leaves a lot to be desired, especially when he carries a lot of responsibility in that heavily depleted lower order from the past.



When he carries a lot of responsibility in that heavily depleted lower order from the past.

Suryakumar has not been able to convert starts while being caught off his trademark strokes, which has indeed been a growing concern as he no longer dominates bowling like he used to.

The five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians and LSG have eerily had a similar run in this edition, grappling with the issue of collective batting failures which has heavily marred their chances of making it to the final four.

LSG skipper Rishabh Pant desperately appealed for a break for his side, which has lost five matches on the trot to slip to the bottom of the points table.

LSG began with a loss in the first match but bounced back with two consecutive wins. But their fortunes plummeted from the point they were expected to take off, as ordinary batting could not be masked by some strong showing by their bowlers collectively.

Even in their last game, Mohsin Khan's 5/23 for the best bowling figures in the tournament were undone by LSG's erroneous call to send a struggling Nicholas Pooran in the Super Over.

Skipper Rishabh Pant finds himself at a crossroads with questions being posed on his white-ball game in general. The maverick Indian wicket-keeper-batter too will face the challenge of turning it around for his side as LSG head into a busy week of having three crucial games in a span of seven days.

Teams (from): Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Ryan Rickelton (wk), Quinton de Kock (wk), Danish Malewar, Robin Minz (wk), Rohit Sharma, Sherfane Rutherford, Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, Raj Bawa, Corbin Bosch, Will Jacks, Mayank Rawat, Naman Dhir, Shardul Thakur, Ashwani Kumar, Trent Boult, Jasprit Bumrah, Deepak Chahar, AM Ghaz-anfar, Krish Bhagat, Keshav Maharaj, Mayank Markande, Mohd Iqbal, Raghu Sharma.

Lucknow Super Giants: Rishabh Pant (c&wk), Abdul Samad, Akshat Raghuvanshi, Ayush Badoni, Mukul Choudhary, Himmat Singh, Josh Inglis (wk), Aiden Markram, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Arshin Kulkarni, George Linde, Mitchell Marsh, Shahbaz Ahmed, Akash Singh, Avesh Khan, Mohammed Shami, Mohsin Khan, Anrich Nortje, Prince Yadav, Digvesh Rathi, Manimaran Siddharth, Arjun Tendulkar, Naman Tiwari, Mayank Yadav.

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

Difficult to replace Amanjot: Muzumdar

'India on right track for T20 World Cup preparations'



MUMBAI, May 3: India Women's head coach Amol Muzumdar on Sunday said it will be difficult for his side to replace all-rounder Amanjot Kaur but added the team is on the right track for next month's T20 World Cup in England with a preparatory camp in Bengaluru.

The Indian team is scheduled to prepare at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru from May 10-16 before flying out to England for a long haul, which includes three T20Is against the hosts before the T20 World Cup.

India will also play a one-off Test against England after the mega event.

"She is injured and it is very difficult to replace somebody like Amanjot. She has been doing consistently well for India," Muzumdar told reporters here on the sidelines of the IISM Degree Distribution Ceremony 2026.

"We will miss her for sure, but injuries are part of the game and she has had a bad one and she will be out of cricket for at least 4-5 months. I hope she recovers well and comes back stronger. She is difficult to replace but that is the way it goes," he added. Muzumdar said the team is on the right track as far as preparations are concerned.

"It (having a camp) has always been an integral part of this team. We believe in preparing well for every challenge that is in front of us. I believe this team is on the right track and we would be hoping to have a very good camp before we set off for the World Cup," he said.

"Travelling to England is always a challenge but this set of players is ready for it."

"We had a very good series last year, we went on to win against England and that was the first time in history we had beaten England in England in a T20I series. The experience and confidence is there, all we need to do is travel well and do well there," the head coach added.

India batter Jemimah Rodrigues said the team is keen to add more World Cup trophies to the cabinet after winning its maiden ODI title last year.

"I think it's a bit of a motivation now. Since we won one, we want to win two," Jemimah said.

"After winning a World Cup you can get complacent but this team is even more hungry to win it again and again and again. That's the plan and that is the entire motive," she added.

Jemimah, who captained Delhi Capitals to their fourth final in the Women's Premier League this year, said Nandini Sharma will benefit from the experience of the national team's players.

The right-arm seamer Nandini was named in India's 15-member squad along with Bharti Fulmali here on Saturday.

"Nandini has been a great player for us throughout the WPL. To be honest when we got her, we didn't know what to expect; we knew she had the talent," Jemimah said.

"When she came on to the bigger stage of WPL in front of the world, the way she delivered, not just that five-wicket haul (5/33 vs Gujarat Giants), in every single game she was consistent."

"I know this team, it is going to welcome her, prepare her well and there is a lot of experience in this team and that is going to get the best out of her," Jemimah said.

Muzumdar said the team management will decide on Bharti Fulmali's role soon.

"She has been picked as a middle-order player and we still have to discuss and come up with a role for her and we will do it very soon," he said.

Jemimah said India are taking a 1-4 hammering by South Africa in their recent away T20I series in the "right spirit".

"It's a good learning. It gave us a realisation that failures teach you a lot than winning everything and I know that this is going to be very good for the team," Jemimah said.

"The team is taking it in the right spirit, working hard, preparing well and we are going to come back strong for the World Cup," she added. (PTI)

Mittal Family buys 75 pc stake in Rajasthan Royals

NEW DELHI, May 3: Renowned industrialist Lakshmi N. Mittal and his son Aditya Mittal, along with Adar Poonawalla, have acquired a majority stake in Rajasthan Royals with a bid of USD 1.65 billion (approximately Rs 15,600 crore) after the Kal Somani-Rob Walton-Sheila Ford Hamp consortium pulled out of the race.

The transaction consideration (USD 1.65 billion) represents the enterprise value of Rajasthan Royals' men's franchise, Paarl Royals and Barbados Royals.

Completion is subject to customary closing conditions, including approvals from the BCCI, the CCI, the IPL Governing Council and other applicable regulatory authorities.

The deal is expected to close in third quarter (Q3) of 2026.

Earlier, the US-based consortium led by Somani had offered USD 1.63 billion but as per sources it didn't pass due diligence due to multiple issues.

"Lakshmi N. Mittal and Aditya Mittal today announce that a definitive agreement has been reached to acquire the Rajasthan Royals, in partnership with Adar Poonawalla, from Manoj Badale and consortium," a press release issued by Mittal family stated.

As per the release, the Mittal family will own approximately 75 per cent of Rajasthan Royals, with Adar Poonawalla holding around 18 per cent.

The remaining approximately 7 per cent will be held by approved existing investors, including Manoj Badale.

The restructured Rajasthan Royals board will comprise Lakshmi N. Mittal, Aditya Mittal, Vanisha Mittal-Bhatia, Adar Poonawalla and Badale.

"Badale will continue to support Rajasthan Royals, acting as a bridge between the past and the present, and bringing his deep knowledge and experience of cricket to the franchise," the release stated.

In addition to the IPL team, Rajasthan Royals also owns Paarl Royals in South Africa and Barbados Royals in the Caribbean.

Lakshmi N. Mittal, who was born in Sadulpur in North of Rajasthan, said, "I love cricket and my family is from Rajasthan, so there is no IPL team that I would rather be part of than the Rajasthan Royals."

Mittal's son Aditya said: "The Royals is well known for developing new talent - that resonates deeply with me, and we are determined that legacy will continue, harnessing the best of talent in the world for future success."

"I want to thank everyone who has helped build the Rajasthan Royals into a global sporting institution - the players, coaches, leadership team, and above all the fans."

Adar Poonawalla, who had earlier bid for RCB, said: "I am delighted to partner with Aditya Mittal on this investment. Rajasthan Royals is a premier IPL franchise with a strong legacy, and I look forward to supporting its continued growth and long-term success." (PTI)

Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine shine as KKR bowl SRH out for 165

HYDERABAD, May 3: Varun Chakravarthy continued his resurgence with a three-wicket haul while veteran Sunil Narine grabbed his 200th wicket in the Indian Premier League as Kolkata Knight Riders came back strong in the middle overs to bowl Sunrisers Hyderabad out for 165 in 19 overs here on Sunday.

Opting to bat, SRH were in their usual menacing batting form, reaching 77 for 1 after powerplay and 107 for 2 at the halfway mark, courtesy Travis Head's (61 off 28 balls) second consecutive half century. But they collapsed spectacularly in the second half of their innings, as they lost nine wickets in 10 overs for the addition of 60 runs.

This was the first time SRH were bowled out in the IPL 2026.

Chakravarthy returned with 3/26 while Narine took two wickets for 31. Kartik Tyagi chipped in with 2/30. Head's innings was laced with nine fours and three sixes, and he was well supported by Ishan Kishan (42 off 29 balls). This was the third successive match SRH had scored more than 100 runs inside first 10 overs.

The explosive Australian batter stitched 44 runs in just 3.4 overs with Abhishek Sharma (15 off 10 balls) for the opening wicket and then had an alliance of 61 runs with Kishan for the second wicket. Head was at his destructive best in the second over bowled by Vaibhav Arora, hitting four boundaries. Head did not let Narine off also, hitting a six and four in the third over. He also punished his Australian team-mate Cameron Green with three fours in the fifth over of the innings.

But once Head was out in the final ball of the ninth over, off the bowling of Chakravarthy, SRH's batting fell apart.

Dangerous Heinrich Klaasen (11) was dismissed, courtesy a spectacular fielding effort from Rovman Powell off the bowling of Green. The



West Indian moved to his right at deep midwicket and then leapt to pluck the ball out of thin air with his right hand. In the process, he struck his head on the ground. This was Klaasen's lowest score of the season. Chakravarthy got rid of Ravichandran Smaran and Aniket Verma in his back-to-back overs to complete his three-wicket haul before veteran West Indies off-spinner Narine removed well-set Kishan in the 16th over for his 200th wicket.

City Cricket Club thrash Darrang Rhinos by 120 runs

HT Bureau GUAHATI, May 3: In the 11th Sitaram Chhaharia Memorial Under-19 Cricket Tournament, being played under the aegis of Bud Cricket Club, City Cricket Club secured a 120-run victory over Darrang Rhinos on Sunday at the NFRSA Stadium, Maligaon.

Darrang Rhinos won the toss and elected to field first. Due to overnight rain, the match was curtailed to 40 overs per side.

City Cricket Club posted a total of 154 runs in 38.3 overs. Hiyen Kashyap continued his fine form, scoring 59 runs off 84 balls, studded with four fours and two sixes. Abhinav Das contributed 25 runs.

For Darrang Rhinos, Subhankar Sharma claimed five wickets for 18 runs, while Chinmoy picked up two wickets.

Chasing the target, Darrang Rhinos could manage only 34 runs in 17.4 overs.

For City Cricket Club, Mayuresh Basfore and Arion Barhoi took three wickets each, while Krishna Gupta claimed two wickets.

Hiyen Kashyap earned his second consecutive



Guwahati outplay Tezpur Barnil to lift Chalchali title

HT Correspondent NAGAON, May 3: The Guwahati City volleyball team clinched the champion's title at the historic 'Invitational Day-Night Volleyball Tournament' held in Chalchali.

The tournament was organised by the Greater Chalchali Anchalik Yuva Somaj with the cooperation of local residents.

Seven top teams from across Assam participated in the event, including Tinsukia Volleyball Team, Jorhat Volleyball Team, Tezpur Barnil Volleyball Team, Guwahati City Volleyball Team, Ferenga Bijnai Volleyball Team, LNP Sonapur, and the Indian Army 503 Regiment Volleyball Team.

In the final, the Guwahati City Volleyball Team emerged victorious, while the Tezpur Barnil Volleyball Team finished as runners-up. Organisers stated that the tournament has been held annually for many years and continues to receive overwhelming support from sports-loving locals.

The day-night format and participation of reputed teams from across the state made this year's edition a major success.



Haven't seen anyone else like him: Ashwin hails Dhoni's keeping to spinners



NEW DELHI, May 3: Ravichandran Ashwin has rated MS Dhoni's wicketkeeping as the finest he has experienced, saying he hasn't seen "anyone else" operate like the former India captain behind the stumps to spinners.

Having shared a long association in the Indian team and at Chennai Super Kings, Ashwin recalled how Dhoni's glove work and clarity of thought stood out beyond his celebrated leadership.

"His glove work has always amazed me. People talk a lot about his captaincy, and rightly so, the titles speak for themselves," Ashwin said on JioStar's 'The Ravichandran Ashwin Experience'.

"But for me, two things stand out -- one, how good a middle-order batter he was, someone who could take

the game deep and finish it. "And the second is his keeping against spinners. I haven't seen anyone else like him."

Ashwin also highlighted Dhoni's hands-off approach that empowered bowlers. "He never set the field for me. I would set my own field, and he would just say, 'Don't double-guess. Don't pre-empt. If you get hit, it's fine. If someone takes a risk, let it be. Just bow to your field.' He trusted that."

The veteran off-spinner fondly remembered dismissing Chris Gayle for a three-ball duck in the 2011 IPL final, crediting Dhoni for a sharp take behind the stumps.

"You can talk about the set-up and the dismissal, but how well MS took that catch. It wasn't easy."

"Only regret" With 187 wickets across 221

matches in a long IPL career (2009-25) spanning five franchises, Ashwin admitted he couldn't quite make Punjab Kings his own despite leading them in 2018-19, but described his time at Rajasthan Royals as the most fulfilling. "When Punjab picked me in 2018, I knew I was moving on... I spent two years there and honestly gave it everything."

"But I have a slight feeling that I couldn't make that team my own. At an auction, you get the chance to build your team... the team couldn't quite be built around me. I may not have achieved much as a Captain, but the learnings were immense."

On his Rajasthan stint, he added: "I spent three years there, and that stint helped me make a comeback to the Indian team. The way RR utilised me was first-class, and I enjoyed my

cricket there like nowhere else. "My only small regret is that I couldn't win a title with RR... That was one small regret."

Not ashamed Ashwin also revisited the much-debated non-striker run-out of Jos Buttler during his Punjab captaincy, maintaining he did nothing wrong.

"If the ICC felt this was an honesty problem, they wouldn't keep it in the rules. If you need two runs off one ball and you start running early, whose fault is it?"

"People say I did it to win. Of course, I did it to win. What is there to be ashamed of?"

"After I ran him out, I told the team... 'don't worry about the reaction, I will handle the media, we just have to win.' And we won. So, there is no issue of character in this." (PTI)