

**6** **NATION**  ● Strong maritime capability deciding factor for country's economic, strategic influence: Modi

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# West Asia peace initiative back on track US, Iran and mediators hold talks

**ZURICH, June 21:** Delegations led by US Vice President JD Vance and Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf initiated talks aimed at restoring peace in West Asia in the Swiss mountain resort of Burgenstock on Sunday.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and senior Qatari leaders were also present as mediators in the quadrilateral talks – termed as the Lake Lucerne Summit.

The discussions are focused on implementing key provisions of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed last week by US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Peshkhan, with Sharif signing as a guarantor.

The MoU marked the beginning of a 60-day negotiation window to restore peace in West Asia with focus on key areas that include Iran's nuclear programme, sanctions imposed on it and Israel's offensive in Lebanon.

Discussions on the technical aspects of the negotiations were supposed to begin on Friday, but were delayed, primarily due to fresh rounds of firing between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah.

On Sunday, it was the first time in 10 weeks that top leaders from the US and Iran gathered in the



same room for direct negotiations – after their last meeting in Islamabad in April when they failed to clinch a deal.

Other top negotiators who are participating in Sunday's talks include envoy Steve Witkoff and adviser Jared Kushner from the US side, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and diplomat Esmail Baghaei from the Iranian side, and Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces Asim Munir.

"The opening of the Strait of Hormuz, the ending of the Iranian nuclear programme, all of these things have already been accomplished," said Vance ahead of the

quadrilateral talks on Sunday.

"The question before us now is how much more can we accomplish together? Can we turn over a new leaf? Can we change relations in the Middle East permanently or do we go back to doing things the old way, which is not our preference." Calling it a "historic" meeting, he said: "Never before has the Iranian and American leadership met at such a high level."

Ahead of the talks, Baghaei said in a post on X: "The Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to meticulously and seriously pursue the process of implementing the other party's commitments."

Baghaei highlighted that the implementation of the MoU demands the end of the war "on all fronts", without which "entry into the negotiation phase for the final agreement is not possible".

Ahead of the quadrilateral meeting, Pakistan PM Sharif praised Trump and appreciated the roles of Iranian leaders.

"Hopefully when we go back to our homes, we'll have some wonderful paper in our hand which will promote peace, progress and prosperity around the globe," he said in a press briefing, standing alongside Vance and Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani.

The Qatari prime minister said: "Hopefully, this is just the beginning, and I wish everyone all the best. Qatar will stay dedicated to this partnership to support these mediations until the end, until we reach a solution. We will always be a partner in bringing more peace, prosperity, and hopefully a better future for our region."

It has been widely reported that Lebanon is expected to dominate discussions after recent clashes between Israel and Hezbollah threatened the fragile US-Iran ceasefire agreement, while Vance has indicated that the US hopes to make advancements on negotiations surrounding Iran's nuclear stock.

On Sunday, Rafael Mariano Grossi, the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said that he met Ignazio Cassis, vice president of the Swiss Federal Council, in Burgenstock "to take stock of recent developments regarding Iran, the path ahead and the important role" of the agency, as he also shared photographs with Cassis on X. Cassis also met Araghchi on the sidelines of the negotiations on Sunday.

After the meeting, he posted: "At the Lake Lucerne Summit, we offer the framework for discussion and dialogue. In a challenging context, the relationship of trust between Switzerland and Iran, reflected in our protecting power mandate, remains in the service of diplomacy and for peace and security in the Middle East."

The talks represent a continuation of diplomatic efforts to ease tensions in the region following weeks of escalating military exchanges involving the US, Iran and Israel. Its aim is to formally launch negotiations over curbing Tehran's nuclear programme and advancing the fragile (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Lakhs appear for NEET re-test amid tight security



**NEW DELHI, June 21:** Over 20 lakh medical aspirants took a second shot at the NEET (UG) examination on Sunday after the original test was cancelled due to paper leaks, an issue that became a hot potato for the government and also triggered a popular protest movement.

Abhishek Singh, the director General of the National Testing Agency (NTA), which has been receiving flak following the paper leak row, said the whole-of-government approach helped it to conduct the mammoth exercise in record time.

In a statement, NTA said more than 20 lakh candidates appeared for the NEET (UG) 2026 re-examination across 5,440 centres in India and 14 centres abroad. The exam was conducted in 13 languages, including Hindi and English. "This was not the NTA acting alone. It was Team Bharat - a chain of people across the country who showed up so that, for each candidate, the only thing that mattered that morning was the paper in front of them," the agency said.

"In all, around 7 lakh officials - police teams, observers and examination staff - were mobilised across India to conduct this examination, and it was done in a record 37 days. NTA is especially grateful to the experts from academic institutions across the country who gave their personal time to help prepare multiple sets of question papers," the NTA said.

Union Education minister Dharmendra Pradhan reviewed arrangements for the smooth conduct of the re-examination at the NTA headquarters in Delhi's Okhla.

"NTA apprised the minister of the logistical and technical arrangements put in place for the efficient and transparent conduct of the examination," the Ministry of Education said.

The NTA said extensive arrangements were made for all

candidates, including more than 10,000 Persons with Disabilities.

"Special arrangements were put in place for around 81 candidates with medical conditions, among them a child who had been in a road accident, and a child undergoing chemotherapy, who were determined not to miss an exam they had prepared for years," it said.

The agency said Aadhaar-based biometric and face authentication, CCTV surveillance, jammers and two-layer frisking with the support of state police were deployed at examination centres. "Command and control centres for CCTV monitoring were established at the national level - at the NTA and at the Ministry of Education, at 34 Centrally Funded Institutions of the Department of Higher Education, in every State, and at District Collectorate," it said.

"There were some minor reports regarding people coming with wrong admit cards, people coming with some forged admit cards at a few places; impersonation cases were also found out," NTA DG Abhishek Singh said.

"At a few places, somebody was trying to take a mobile phone; action has been taken on that because that's the purpose of putting frisking, when you put CCTV cameras, when you put handheld metal detectors, to not allow any unfair means... and there were a few people who were trying to do that, but they were not able to," he said.

While a probe is underway into the alleged paper leak, the newly formed Cockerroach Janta Party led by Abhijeet Dipke, which started as an online campaign, has been holding protests in the country, demanding the education minister's resignation over the alleged examination irregularities.

The NTA said the conduct of the examination drew on the support of CAPF, the Ministry of External Affairs, the Department of Posts, the Indian (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# 'Yoga offers a path to inner stability, mental clarity'



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma along with others take part in 12th International Day of Yoga (IDY) Eastern Air Command Headquarters in Shillong on Sunday. HT Photo

**SHILLONG, June 21:** Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh led the Defence Forces and the Ministry of Defence in celebrating the 12th International Day of Yoga (IDY) by performing various asanas & breathing exercises with around 1,000 soldiers of the Indian Air Force and the Indian Army at the Eastern Air Command Headquarters in Shillong on Sunday.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Air Command Air Marshal Indrapal Singh Walia, and General Officer Commanding of Headquarters 101 Area Lieutenant General Mohit Wadhwa also performed Yoga along with Raksha Mantri. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Himanta urges all to make yoga part of daily lives

**GUWAHATI, June 21:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday urged all to make yoga a part of their daily lives, calling the traditional practice "India's gift to the world".

He said yoga is being promoted as a way to achieve an active and disease-free lifestyle.

Sarma participated in the state-level celebration of the 12th International Day of Yoga at the Brahmaputra Riverfront here, along with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

As part of the Yoga Day, simultaneous sessions were organised across 23,498 villages at 37,383 venues, with participation of over 32 lakh women self-help group members, under a joint initiative by National Ayush Mission and Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission, officials said.

"Rooted in the timeless wisdom of Bharat, Yoga continues to guide millions towards a healthier, more



balanced and mindful life. On International Yoga Day, let us celebrate this ancient tradition and resolve to make it a part of our daily lives," Sarma said in a post on X.

In a series of social media posts, he said yoga is India's gift to the world and an ancient ingredient for a fit and healthy lifestyle. "Under the stewardship of Adarniya @narendramodi ji, this healthy practice is now a global movement. This morning, I joined Smt. @nitharaman ji for a yoga session by the Brahmaputra," he added.

Sarma said over the last 12 years, the way to an active and disease-free lifestyle is being promoted through Yoga Day. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Army Chief stresses role of Yoga in soldiers' well-being

**TEZPUR, June 21:** Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, accompanied by his wife, participated in the International Yoga Day programme organised at Meghna Stadium in the Solmara Army cantonment here on Sunday.

The event, held under the aegis of the Indian Army, witnessed the participation of senior army officers from Delhi along with personnel from the Fourth Corps based in Tezpur. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Sitharaman participates in Yoga Day celebration in Guwahati

**GUWAHATI, June 21:** Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman joined Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in observing Yoga Day at the Brahmaputra riverfront here on Sunday.

The Union minister has been in the northeastern region for the past four days on various official engagements.

At the yoga session held at the Brahmaputra riverfront, state Cabinet ministers Ajanta Neog and Ashok Singhal, along with people from various walks of life, were present besides Sitharaman and Sarma.

"Nirmala Sitharaman participated in



the celebrations of the 12th International Day of Yoga at the Brahmaputra River-

front in Guwahati, Assam," her office said in a post on X.

"This year's theme is 'Yoga for Healthy Ageing', which emphasises the importance of yoga for all ages. It highlights the need to enhance not only lifespan but also 'healthspan', i.e. the period of life spent in good health," it added.

Sitharaman reached Guwahati on Thursday and attended various programmes in Meghalaya over the next two days, including a seminar on "Leveraging Externally Aided Projects (EAPs) in the North-Eastern States". She had returned to Guwahati on Saturday night. (PTI)

# Noted sports organiser, journalist Rajen Borkakoti passes away

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, June 21:** A pall of gloom descended over Nagaon following the demise of noted sports organiser, journalist and social worker Rajen Borkakoti on Saturday morning.

He was 95.

Borkakoti, a resident of New Amolapatty in Nagaon town, breathed his last at his residence due to age-related ailments.

Born at Shenchowa in Nagaon district, Rajen Borkakoti earned repute as a prominent sports organiser. He played a pi-



oneering role in establishing basketball in Assam and was the founder secretary of the Assam Basketball Association. Associated with the Nagaon Sports Association since its inception, he also formed the Nagaon Wrestling Association and popularised the sport in the district. In recognition of his contribution to sports, he was awarded the sports pension by the Government of Assam.

A retired employee of the Nagaon Deputy Commissioner's office, Borkakoti was associated with journalism (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Modi leads Yoga Day celebrations in Kolkata, Murmu performs 'asanas' at Jabalpur

'Yoga brings people together. I congratulate the people of the world on this occasion'

**KOLKATA/JABALPUR, June 21:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the country in celebrating the 12th International Day of Yoga (IDY) on Sunday, participating in an event along with thousands of people at Kolkata's iconic Red Road, while President Droupadi Murmu joined the member of the public in performing "asanas" at Jabalpur.

Similar events were held across the country, with Union ministers, chief ministers and governors taking part.

Dressed in a white T-shirt and a white pair of trousers, Modi was seen walking among the participants during the 40-minute session, closely observing the performance of yoga protocols and ensuring that those were being followed correctly.

At several points, he also assisted the participants in correcting their postures.

Addressing the nation on the oc-

casional, the prime minister said yoga has become the world's largest community celebration, bringing people together from across countries and cultures.

"June 21, which marks the longest day on earth, has now become the largest community celebration day because of yoga. Yoga brings people together. I congratulate the people of the world on this occasion," he said.

Referring to this year's IDY theme -- "Yoga for healthy ageing" -- Modi said the ancient practice plays a crucial role in promoting physical health, mental well-being and active ageing, thereby improving the quality of life.

"Our target is to be more flexible at 40 than we were at 20. We aim to be more energetic at 50 than we were at 30. Our target must be to be more resistant to lifestyle-related diseases at 70 than we were at 50. This is where yoga can help us," he added.



Since its inception in 2015, when the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted India's proposal to observe June 21 as the International Day of Yoga, Modi has led the celebrations from various locations, including New Delhi, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Mysuru, New York, Srinagar and Visakhapatnam.

Murmu said yoga is an invaluable gift of India's cultural heritage to the world, playing a vital role in guiding humanity towards peace and harmony amid multiple global challenges.

The president took part in a mass yoga session at Jabalpur's Garrison

Ground. Dressed in a white salwar-kurta, she performed various "asanas" on a blue mat.

Addressing the gathering, Murmu said, "We are celebrating India's great tradition that has shown humanity the path to a healthy, balanced and meaningful life. Yoga is an invaluable gift of our cultural heritage to the global community. It is the result of thousands of years of penance by our sages and seers."

Vice President C P Radhakrishnan joined hundreds of yoga enthusiasts at the Astro Turf Stadium in Ladakh's Spituk. The celebrations featured a mass yoga session, with the participants performing various "asanas" against the scenic backdrop of the Himalayan mountains.

Celebrating the IDY at the Indian Air Force's Advanced Landing Ground in Meghalaya's Upper Shillong, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh extended greetings to people and described yoga as "not

merely the foundation of a healthy body, but a path to living a balanced and disciplined life".

"Through the continuous efforts and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, this cultural heritage of India has today become a global people's movement," he said in a post on X.

While Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman joined Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in observing the Yoga Day at the Brahmaputra riverfront in Guwahati, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath performed "asanas" at the Jhansi Fort complex in Jhansi.

Similar events were organised in Delhi, Imphal, Ranchi, Gangtok, Chandigarh, Vijayawada, Itanagar, Thiruvananthapuram, Chennai, Coimbatore, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Bhujaneswar and Jaipur, among other places, with governors and chief ministers taking part. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)





## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Winter is not a season, it's an occupation.  
- Sinclair Lewis

## B'desh PM's China visit and India

Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman is visiting China on a three-day visit beginning June 23, the outcome of which is expected to be of big importance to Bangladesh having special consequences on the relationship with neighbouring India also. Initially, soon after the elections were over in Bangladesh and the new government under Tarique Rahman took over, Bangladesh gave enough indications about taking immediate steps to improve relations with India which was under tremendous strain during the tenure of the interim head of the government Dr Mohammad Yunus. Indian PM Narendra Modi congratulated Tarique soon after elections and he was invited to visit India. It was expected earlier that the new Bangladesh PM would be visiting India first to be followed by his visit to China. But things did not proceed smoothly. Bangladesh foreign ministry was angry at some of the actions by the Indian government in the preceding months. The Bangladesh government gave priority to the PM visit to Beijing before New Delhi. Only last month, Bangladesh foreign minister Khalilur Rahman visited China and had a meeting with the Chinese President Xi Jinping. Interim head Dr. Muhammad Yunus visited China in March 2025 and discussed a lot of projects including Teesta Comprehensive Economic Cooperation. The talks were non conclusive. Now Rahman will take forward those talks seeking to impart a wider dimension to the collaboration between the two countries in infrastructure projects including setting up of dams and bridges on rivers.

In Beijing, Rahman is expected to emphasise on infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative while also seeking fresh investment in technology, renewable energy, agriculture and healthcare. There had been talks about Chinese investment in setting up industrial clusters in different districts of the country. This proposal may be given final shape. But the most ambitious project is on Teesta development which was originally scheduled to be taken up with Indian collaboration. Tarique Rahman is expected to focus in a big way on the pros and cons of this huge investment project and how Chinese investment and technology can be used for that. As of now, Bangladesh sources make the point that Tarique is firm on his Bangladesh First policy and he will try to make use of relations with both China and India to develop Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh PM is now fully concentrating on modernization of industries, setting up new industrial units and creation of adequate jobs to deal with the present unemployment problem. Bangladesh will not align fully with any country China or India. Efforts should be made by New Delhi to ensure that the Bangladesh PM visits India soon after concluding the China visit. Time is still there to improve bilateral relations if there is political goodwill in the leaderships of both the countries.

## Modi-Trump meeting At G7 conclave brought no cheers to India

By: Dr Arun Mitra

After nearly 15 months, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was invited as a special guest to attend the G7 meeting, since India is not a member of this group. During the event, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump held a brief conversation. The pro-government media and 'Andh Bhaktis' are making grand claims about the meeting, but the facts tell a different story.

Commenting on his meeting with Prime Minister Modi, Donald Trump said, "PM Modi is a very attractive-looking and tough man. He is a very tough negotiator—one of the toughest, in fact. He is the most attractive-looking man. He looks very nice. He looks like an angel, but he is actually as tough as they come. He looks so good that it surprises you. There are very few people like that. People say, 'What a nice man he is.' I say, 'He is very tough.' ... We will visit India sometime in the future."

There was little seriousness in these remarks. The entire world knows that Trump often contradicts himself within hours of making a statement. His claim that "if India is attacked, the United States will stand with India" is rather surprising. Over the past period, he has repeatedly invited Pakistan's Prime Minister and Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, to the United States and hosted them. He even initiated discussions on an agreement with Iran through Pakistan's mediation. Many countries today acknowledge that Pakistan has played a significant role in these developments. Yet India has had no place in this process, despite the fact that India's role in promoting world peace was once considered among the foremost in the world.

On February 25, Prime Minister Modi visited Israel and, while addressing its Parliament, stated that India had always stood with Israel and would continue to do so under any circumstances. In such a situation, why would any other country place its trust in India? This is also why, when the question of oil supplies arose, Iran stated that it was providing oil out of concern for the Indian people, not because of the Indian government. The Indian government was given no special importance. Narendra Modi expressed no condolences regarding the death of Ayatollah Khamenei, nor about the nearly 170 children who were killed, nor about the sinking of an Iranian vessel and the deaths of sailors allegedly caused by an American submarine attack. Under such circumstances, why would any country attach importance to India?

We also know that after Operation Sindoor, Donald Trump repeatedly claimed that he had mediated between India and Pakistan and brought the conflict to an end. Narendra Modi did not challenge this statement even once. If Operation Sindoor was truly launched in response to the killings in Pahalgam resulting from a Pakistani attack, then where was the United States at that time? Why did it not support India? Why did India have to send delegations around the world to explain the truth about Operation Sindoor? It is another matter that those delegations received little attention in most countries.

During his meeting with President Trump, the Prime Minister raised the issue of the safety of working sailors only in a general manner. He did not specifically protest the killing of three sailors by American security forces even once. He merely expressed the hope that the safety of sailors would be given priority. In response, Donald Trump said that it was a very difficult job and involved many risks. He neither expressed regret nor offered any firm assurance.

America's primary interest is business. Trade negotiations between India and the United States have been ongoing for some time, and now the moment to finalize them has arrived. That is perhaps why Narendra Modi suddenly appears angelic to Donald Trump.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not utter a single word regarding the killing of Indian sailors by the United States, even when U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio had, in effect, justified those killings. Nor did he clearly ask Trump to condemn or oppose them.

One point for which Donald Trump thanked Narendra Modi was that Modi was bringing Indian investment into the United States. This seems rather ironic. On the one hand, the Prime Minister says that the country is facing an economic crisis; on the other hand, he is encouraging Indian capital to be invested in America.

What was even more troubling was that Narendra Modi repeatedly addressed Donald Trump as "Your Excellency." At the same time, Modi was holding slips of paper in his hand and repeatedly looking at them to remember what he had to say. One wonders whether he is now beginning to forget things? It appeared as though Prime Minister Narendra Modi was sitting under considerable pressure. During the press conference, Donald Trump answered all the questions, while Modi did not respond to a single one. (IPA Service)

## Kamakhya Temple and the Ambubachi Mela

The architecture of the temple is regarded as a unique example of Indian temple-building traditions. A distinctive blend of the Nagara style and indigenous Assamese architectural elements gives the structure its special character. Its harmony with the geographical setting of Nilachal Hill creates a tranquil and contemplative atmosphere. One of the temple's most remarkable features is the absence of an idol in the sanctum sanctorum. Instead, a natural rock formation resembling the yoni is worshipped as the symbol of the Goddess. A natural spring emerging from this rock is considered a representation of the Goddess's sanctity. This feature distinguishes Kamakhya from other Shakti Peethas and establishes it as an exceptionally sacred centre. The dome-like structure, stone carvings, and natural beauty of the hill inspire profound spiritual feelings among devotees

A symbol of Assam's pride and identity, Kamakhya Temple has earned worldwide recognition as one of the holiest centres of Shakti worship in India. The temple is not confined merely to the role of a religious pilgrimage site; rather, it stands as an extraordinary symbol of India's cultural, historical, artistic, and environmental heritage. The depth of its mythological origin, the significance of Tantric practices, the unique beauty of its architecture, the sanctity of its religious rituals, its social influence, and its continuing relevance in the modern context have established Kamakhya as a complete and multifaceted pilgrimage destination. Furthermore, the Ambubachi Mela, held every year during the Assamese month of Ahaar, illuminates the temple's spiritual and cultural importance before the world. This fair is not merely a religious festival; it is a remarkable expression of nature's regeneration, the glory of feminine power, and the agrarian way of life of Assamese society.

The mythological origin of Kamakhya Temple is deeply intertwined with the tradition of Shakti worship in Hinduism. According to mythology, the temple stands at the site where the yoni of Goddess Sati fell. Following the insult of Lord Shiva at Daksha's yajna, Sati immolated herself. Overwhelmed by grief, Shiva lifted her body upon his shoulders and began the Tandava dance, creating the possibility of universal destruction. To save the world from this catastrophe, Lord Vishnu used his Sudarshana Chakra to dismember Sati's body. The severed parts fell at different places across India, and those sites came to be revered as Shakti Peethas. Kamakhya is among the most significant of these sacred centres and is regarded as one of the highest seats of Shakti worship. The profundity of this mythological narrative lends a unique spiritual dimension to the temple's significance. Goddess Kamakhya is worshipped as the embodiment of creative energy, the magnificence of nature, and the cycle of life. This belief elevates the temple beyond the status of a religious site and transforms it into a sacred centre connecting devotees with the fundamental force of existence. Through this narrative, devotees experience a deep spiritual connection that inspires them to seek answers to life's philosophical questions. The significance of this myth extends beyond religion, reflecting profound philosophical ideas associated with creation, destruction, and regeneration. The faith born from this legend enables devotees to establish a profound relationship with divine energy, making Kamakhya an unparalleled pilgrimage destination. The depth of this mythological foundation has firmly established the temple as a universal spiritual centre where pilgrims not only perform religious observances but also seek the deeper meaning of life. Through its mythological background, Kamakhya Temple inspires spiritual awakening among devotees, encouraging them to understand the cyclical nature of existence and the greatness of divine energy. In this way, Kamakhya has secured its place as a major centre of Shakti worship where seekers find opportunities to explore life's profound philosophical dimensions. The richness of this mythology has transformed Kamakhya into a universal pilgrimage site where devotees discover inner peace and self-realisation through their connection with divine power.

References to the temple can be traced back to the reign of the Varman dynasty of the ancient Kingdom of Kamarupa. The accounts of the Chinese traveller Xuanzang also mention Kamakhya, describing it as a temple dedicated to a goddess worshipped by the non-Brahmanical Kirata people. Inscriptions from the ninth century likewise refer to Kamakhya. During the medieval period, the temple suffered repeated destruction during Muslim invasions, but it was rebuilt in the sixteenth century by Koch King Naranarayana. The patronage of the Koch, Ahom, and several other dynasties played an important role in its development and preservation. This historical background has made Kamakhya a symbol of Assam's political and cultural history. From a historical perspective, the temple is not merely a religious institution but a living witness to various phases of Assam's past. Its history reflects the social, political, and cultural transformations that have shaped the region over centuries. The restoration and protection of the temple under royal patronage demonstrate the commitment of Assam's rulers toward religious and cultural preservation. This historical significance has made Kamakhya an inseparable part of Assam's cultural identity. The depth of its historical legacy has transformed it into a living example of the region's religious and cultural heritage, reflecting different layers of Assam's evolution through time. Through its historical foundation, Kamakhya Temple presents a remarkable picture of Assam's cultural and religious traditions.

The architecture of the temple is regarded as a unique example of Indian temple-building traditions. A distinctive blend of the Nagara style and indigenous Assamese architectural elements gives the structure its special character. Its harmony with the geographical setting of Nilachal Hill creates a tranquil and contemplative atmosphere. One of the temple's most remarkable features is the absence of an idol in the sanctum sanctorum. Instead, a natural rock formation resembling the yoni is worshipped as the symbol of the Goddess. A natural spring emerging from this rock is considered a representation of the Goddess's sanctity. This feature distinguishes Kamakhya from other Shakti Peethas and establishes it as an exceptionally sacred centre. The dome-like structure, stone carvings, and natural beauty of the hill inspire profound spiritual feelings among devotees. The aesthetic richness of the architecture makes Kamakhya not only a religious destination but also a priceless heritage of Indian art and culture. The integration of the temple's architecture with the natural environment of Nilachal Hill creates a unique setting that allows devotees to experience a deep connection with nature. The influence of local artistic traditions is clearly visible in the temple's design, reflecting the richness of Assam's cultural heritage. The selection of the hilltop location itself is closely linked with the temple's spiritual significance. Surrounded by nature, the site fosters a peaceful and meditative state of mind among visitors, enhancing the importance of the temple's architectural character. Through this structure, an extraordinary union of spirituality and nature has been achieved, elevating Kamakhya into a universal pilgrimage destination. The architectural depth of the temple establishes it as both an artistic and spiritual centre where devotees engage not only in worship but also in an appreciation of natural beauty and artistic excellence. Through its design and construction, Kamakhya Temple has secured its place as a living representation of Assam's cultural and artistic legacy.

Kamakhya Temple has gained worldwide fame as one of the foremost centres of Tantric worship. According to Tantric scriptures, Kamakhya is among the principal seats of the Dasa Mahavidyas, where the Goddess is worshipped as Tripura Sundari. The central philosophy of Tantric practice lies in attaining self-realisation through union with divine energy. The sacred stone in the sanctum and the water spring flowing from it are regarded as symbols of this power. Practitioners who undertake spiritual disciplines at this site seek to harmonise physical, mental, and spiritual energies. The mystery and depth of Tantric worship have made Kamakhya especially important not only to ordinary devotees but also to Tantric practitioners. This aspect lends a distinctive dimension to the temple's spiritual atmosphere, enabling devotees to establish a deeper connection with the Goddess. The significance of Tantric traditions has elevated Kamakhya into a sacred centre of spiritual wisdom. According to Tantric philosophy, the integration of all aspects of life—both physical and spiritual—awakens a profound awareness within the practitioner. The atmosphere of Kamakhya's sanctum provides an ideal environment for such spiritual pursuits, allowing seekers to connect with their inner energy and move toward self-realisation. The



depth of this Tantric heritage has transformed Kamakhya from a mere religious site into a centre of spiritual practice where seekers are inspired to explore the deeper meaning of existence. This importance has established Kamakhya as a universal spiritual destination where followers of different traditions gather to connect with divine energy. The richness of these Tantric practices encourages devotees not only to perform rituals but also to discover their own inner strength. Through this heritage, Kamakhya Temple inspires profound spiritual awakening and motivates seekers to pursue answers to life's deepest philosophical questions.

The spiritual significance of Kamakhya extends beyond the boundaries of Shakti and Tantric traditions. The site is also important to followers of Buddhism, Jainism, and various branches of Hinduism. Its atmosphere transcends religious divisions and offers a profound spiritual experience. This universality has transformed Kamakhya into a cultural bridge that brings together people from diverse communities while conveying a message of harmony. The combination of peace, sanctity, and divine energy inspires devotees to seek answers to life's deeper philosophical questions. Through its spiritual environment, Kamakhya Temple instils a profound sense of peace and self-realisation in visitors. The surroundings provide an ideal setting for meditation and introspection, encouraging individuals to search for life's deeper meaning. This universal spirituality has established Kamakhya as a global pilgrimage destination where people from different traditions come together to connect with divine power. Such spiritual depth allows devotees not only to fulfil religious obligations but also to discover inner peace and personal understanding. Through this atmosphere, Kamakhya Temple creates a sense of awakening that inspires individuals to pursue answers to life's profound mysteries.

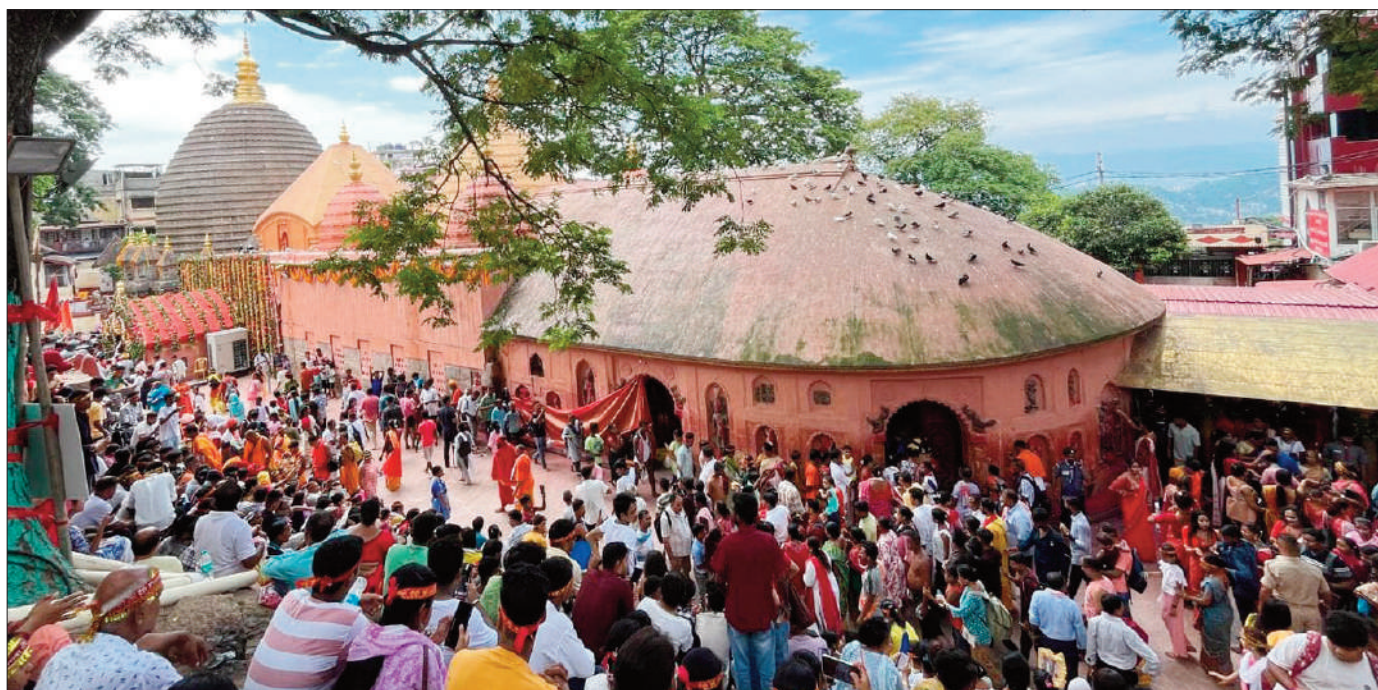
The social traditions, festivals, and rituals associated with the temple have enriched Assam's cultural identity. Its significance as a tourist destination has strengthened the local economy, creating positive developments in trade, transportation, and hospitality. The artistic, musical, and dance traditions connected with the temple have introduced Assam's cultural heritage to the global stage. These cultural expressions reflect the richness and diversity of Assamese traditions. The various festivals and rituals associated with the temple present a vivid picture of the social and cultural life of Assamese society. These traditions not only preserve the state's heritage but also help transmit it to younger generations. The temple's tourism value has had a beneficial impact on Assam's economy, improving the quality of life within local communities. This social and economic influence has made Kamakhya an inseparable component of Assam's cultural and economic identity. Through its cultural and economic contributions, the temple presents a remarkable picture of Assamese society where tradition and modernity coexist in harmony.

The Ambubachi Mela represents one of the most significant aspects of Kamakhya Temple's spiritual and cultural importance. The festival symbolises the menstruation of the Goddess and expresses reverence for feminine power and the regenerative processes of nature. During this period, the sanctum of the

temple remains closed, while devotees offer prayers outside. This tradition reflects respect for womanhood and emphasises the importance of humanity's connection with nature. Millions of devotees gather at Nilachal Hill during Ambubachi, hoping to receive the blessings of the Goddess. The festival has become an inseparable part of Assam's social and cultural identity. Various religious and cultural programmes are organised during the event, showcasing the depth of the temple's traditions and beliefs. This vibrant atmosphere presents an extraordinary picture of Assam's cultural heritage and religious tolerance. The symbolic celebration of nature's regeneration during Ambubachi reflects the close relationship between Assamese agrarian life and the natural world. During this period, the earth itself is imagined as menstruating, and certain agricultural activities are traditionally suspended. These customs encourage respect for nature and foster environmental awareness. The gathering of people from different communities highlights Assam's cultural diversity. The splendour and significance of the festival have introduced Assam's cultural heritage to the world. To accommodate the immense number of pilgrims, the government arranges special facilities, including shelters, sanitation services, drinking water, and security measures. Such arrangements contribute to the orderly conduct and success of the festival while enhancing its international appeal. The richness and diversity of Ambubachi have established it as a major spiritual and cultural celebration where devotees experience not only religious devotion but also a profound connection with nature. Through this festival, Assam's cultural heritage and spirit of religious coexistence are presented before the world in a remarkable manner.

The traditions of the Ambubachi Mela represent a unique fusion of Assam's religious, cultural, and agrarian heritage. Through the symbolic observance of the Goddess's menstruation, the festival honours nature's regenerative power and the sanctity of womanhood. The reddish colour associated with the water emerging from the sacred stone serves as a living representation of this belief. During this period, Tantric practitioners engage in special disciplines to connect with the Goddess's energy, while ordinary devotees seek peace and blessings through worship. The festival's connection with Assamese agricultural life is particularly evident. The earth is regarded as menstruating, and several farming-related activities are temporarily prohibited. Such practices promote respect for nature and environmental consciousness. Special vows and rituals observed in rural communities further reflect the close bond between cultivators and the natural world. The cultural significance of Ambubachi is a living expression of Assam's heritage. Pilgrims and tourists from different parts of India and abroad gather during the festival, creating a diverse and vibrant atmosphere. This diversity showcases Assam's cultural richness and spirit of religious tolerance. The importance of Ambubachi has brought international recognition to Assam's cultural traditions. Government initiatives to provide accommodation, sanitation, drinking water, and security ensure the comfort and safety of pilgrims. These arrangements further enhance the festival's global appeal. The depth and diversity of Ambubachi have transformed it into a major spiritual and cultural event where devotees experience both religious fulfilment and a profound connection with nature. Through the festival, Assam's cultural heritage and values of coexistence are presented to the world in a remarkable and enduring manner.

Ultimately, Kamakhya Temple and the Ambubachi Mela establish a profound connection between nature, divine energy, and devotion, offering insight into the deeper meaning of life. Their relevance remains undiminished even in the modern age, continuing to attract people from across the world. Kamakhya Temple will remain a priceless treasure within India's spiritual landscape. Through the temple and the festival, Assam's cultural and spiritual heritage will continue to shine before the world. The depth and diversity of this legacy have transformed Kamakhya into a universal pilgrimage destination where devotees experience not only religious observance but also a profound connection with nature. Through this temple and its associated festival, Assam's cultural and spiritual heritage is presented to the world as a truly remarkable and enduring legacy.



# GLP-1 drugs show early promise for improving fertility in males and females

By: Peter Morales-Brown

Fertility is closely linked to metabolic health, with obesity being a significant factor that can negatively affect reproductive function in both males and females.

Having overweight or obesity can contribute to hormonal imbalances, insulin resistance, chronic inflammation, and altered reproductive hormone signaling, all of which may impair fertility.

In females, obesity is often associated with conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PMOS), formerly known as PCOS, while in males, it can reduce testosterone levels and adversely affect sperm quality.

Thus, lifestyle changes, such as adopting balanced dietary plans, engaging in regular physical activity, and maintaining a healthy weight, can help enhance reproductive outcomes and support fertility.

While the findings add to growing interest in the relationship between metabolic health, weight management, and reproductive function, the study authors advise caution and note that further research is necessary to investigate this association.

Semaglutide improved reproductive outcomes in PMOS

In a proof-of-concept study, researchers from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus evaluated a subset of participants enrolled in the ongoing RESTORE clinical trial.

The RESTORE study is investigating whether semaglutide or metformin can help restore ovulation and improve reproductive health in adolescents and adults with PMOS and obesity.

PMOS is a common endocrine and metabolic condition associated with infertility and obesity. Many

“Finally, a higher BMI changes the uterine lining which can make it harder for an embryo to attach and therefore increases the risk of miscarriage,” she added.

“GLP-1 medications can help a patient to lose weight safely which can kick start their fertility by regulating the hormone balance again which may cause regular ovulation to occur, resulting in an increased chance of pregnancy,” Thompson noted.

However, “there are many other reasons a female may be overweight other than simple lifestyle choices, such as PMOS, which primarily reduces fertility by disrupting ovulation,” she further explained.

“It describes a scenario where the hormone imbalance causes a relative rise in androgens (male hormones) alongside insulin resistance, which stalls egg development. Without regular ovulation it becomes difficult to conceive and predict when a woman’s fertile window is for reproduction. Some PMOS patients also experience lower egg quality and viability or even issues with their uterine lining, which can make implantation harder.”

— Clare Thompson, MBBS, BSc, nMRCGP

How might semaglutide improve fertility in PMOS?

The analysis focused on participants ages 12 to 35 years who achieved at least 10% weight loss while receiving injectable semaglutide.

Investigators reported that improvements in reproductive markers appeared earlier than anticipated, prompting the publication of preliminary findings before completion of the larger study.

According to the researchers, the findings suggest that semaglutide could potentially address both aspects of the condition simultaneously, by improving metabolic health while also supporting reproductive function.

However, the study authors emphasized that the current analysis is preliminary and involved only a subset of participants. The RESTORE trial is ongoing, and longer-term data will be necessary to determine whether the observed reproductive benefits are sustained.

“The researchers concluded that substantial weight loss during semaglutide treatment was linked to considerable improvements in reproductive health among women with PMOS and obesity,” Thompson highlighted.

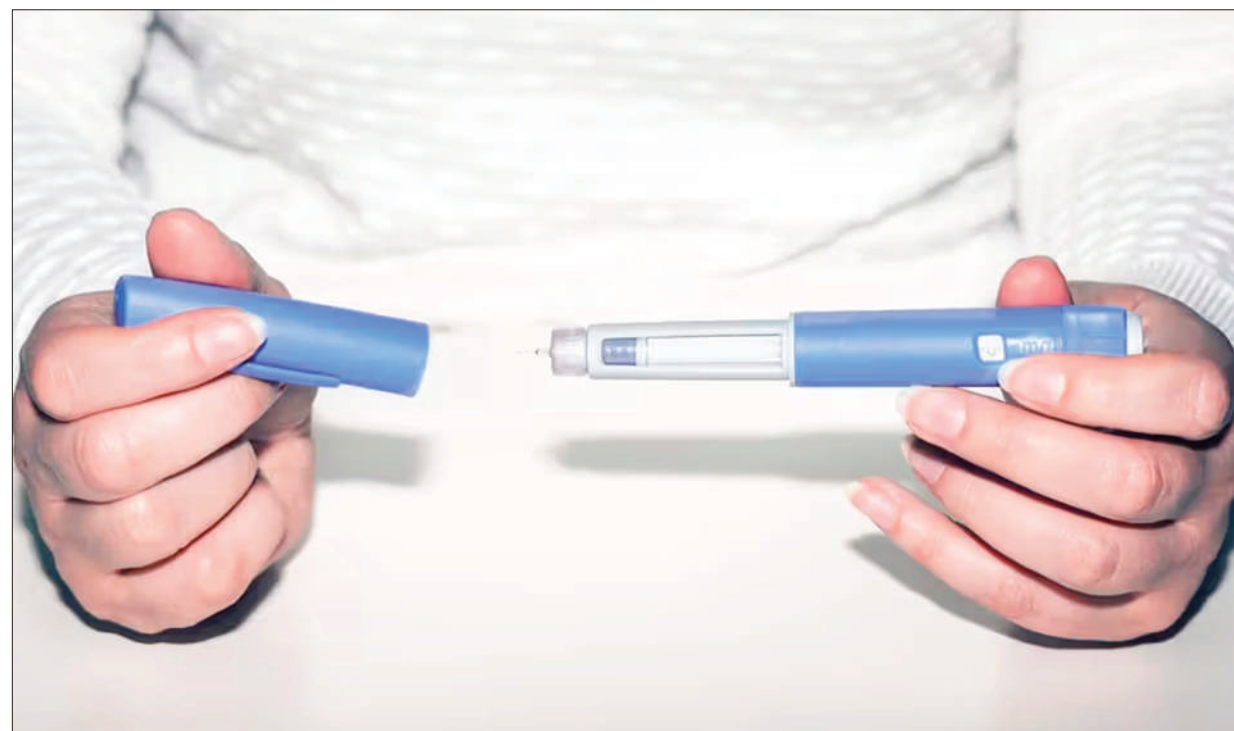
“The results suggest that addressing excess weight and the underlying metabolic dysfunction associated with PMOS can help restore hormonal balance and improve reproductive function. The findings deliver early evidence that semaglutide may offer a dual benefit, targeting obesity and key reproductive challenges associated with the condition, including irregular menstruation and impaired fertility.”

— Clare Thompson, MBBS, BSc, nMRCGP

What about fertility in men?

Separately, a review of five randomized controlled trials presented at ENDO 2026 found that GLP-1 drugs, such as semaglutide and liraglutide, do not appear to harm male fertility and may even improve testosterone levels and sperm quality in some men with obesity.

“The relationship between obesity, metabolic health, and fertility has been well established for many years,” Philip Werthman, MD, board-certified urologist, men’s health specialist, and director



of the Center for Male Reproductive Medicine and Vasectomy Reversal in Los Angeles, CA, who was not involved in the study, told MNT.

“In both men and women, obesity can disrupt normal reproductive hormone signaling, impair fertility, and negatively affect reproductive outcomes. In men, we commonly see lower testosterone levels, functional hypogonadism, erectile dysfunction, and poorer semen parameters,” Werthman explained.

Researchers from the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire and Warwick Medical School in the United Kingdom conducted a review of trials examining GLP-1 medications in men ages 18 to 65 years, comparing GLP-1 therapies with placebo or alternative treatments.

Across the studies, GLP-1 drugs showed no evidence of negatively affecting testosterone levels, reproductive hormones, sexual function, or sperm quality.

Notably, a 24-week semaglutide trial reported improvements in sperm morphology and cholesterol levels while maintaining stable hormone levels. Another 16-week study found that liraglutide increased testosterone and related reproductive hormones in males with obesity-related low testosterone.

The researchers note that health outcomes in these men were superior to those achieved through testosterone replacement therapy alone.

This suggests a potential shift from testosterone replacement in males with obesity and low testosterone, instead treating excess weight and metabolic health, which can restore hormone levels and preserve fertility.

“The male fertility data are also becoming increasingly compelling,” Werthman added.

“Obesity-related hypogonadism is one of the most common reversible causes of low testosterone that I see in practice. Several studies have demonstrated improvements in testosterone levels and certain semen parameters following treatment with GLP-1 receptor agonists.”

“Reports involving liraglutide have shown improvements in sperm concentration, motility, morphology, and testosterone levels. More recent semaglutide data suggest improvements in sperm

morphology and testosterone while preserving normal gonadotropin signaling.”

— Philip Werthman, MD

“One of the most important clinical distinctions is that GLP-1 therapies appear fundamentally different from testosterone replacement therapy for men who wish to preserve fertility,” he noted.

“Exogenous testosterone can suppress sperm production by shutting down the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis. In contrast, GLP-1 receptor agonists improve metabolic health and may improve endogenous testosterone production without impairing spermatogenesis,” Werthman explained.

Why might GLP-1 drugs affect fertility?

While the exact mechanism is not fully understood, researchers suggest the reproductive benefits from GLP-1 drugs may be driven by improvements in metabolic health.

Obesity is known to affect hormone regulation, ovulation, sperm production, and overall reproductive function. Weight loss can help restore hormonal balance and improve fertility outcomes in both males and females.

GLP-1 drugs can improve blood sugar regulation, reduce appetite, and often produce substantial weight loss. These metabolic improvements may indirectly support reproductive health by reducing inflammation, improving insulin sensitivity, and restoring hormone production.

In those with PMOS, insulin resistance is a major contributor to hormonal imbalances and ovulatory dysfunction. Addressing these underlying metabolic problems may help restore regular ovulation and improve fertility.

“The evidence suggests that weight loss is the primary driver of the reproductive improvements seen with semaglutide, as substantial weight reduction is known to improve hormone balance, ovarian function and fertility in women with PMOS.”

— Clare Thompson, MBBS, BSc, nMRCGP

“However, GLP-1 drugs may also have direct effects on reproductive health via mechanisms such as insulin signalling and ovarian function. Further studies are needed to determine how much of the benefit comes from weight loss versus the medication itself.”

Thompson noted.

Similarly, obesity-related low testosterone is often linked to metabolic dysfunction rather than primary testicular disease. This means that weight reduction may help restore natural hormone production.

“As a male fertility specialist, I view these findings as highly encouraging,” Werthman emphasized. “The broader benefits of GLP-1 therapy—including improvements in body composition, insulin resistance, cardiovascular risk factors, sleep apnea, and overall metabolic health—can all positively influence reproductive function.”

“Because infertility, obesity, metabolic syndrome, and low testosterone frequently coexist, treating the underlying metabolic disease may have substantial downstream reproductive benefits. Overall, I believe most of the fertility benefits observed with GLP-1 therapies are currently best explained by weight loss and metabolic improvement,” he told us.

“However, the consistency of emerging data in both men and women raises the possibility that these medications may ultimately prove to have direct reproductive effects as well. Larger prospective studies specifically designed to evaluate fertility outcomes will be needed to answer that question definitively,” Werthman added.

More research is necessary. Despite the encouraging findings, both research teams emphasize that the evidence remains preliminary.

The semaglutide study in females represents an early proof-of-concept analysis from the RESTORE clinical trial, while the male fertility findings were based on a relatively small number of studies with varying methodologies.

While the findings are promising, neither semaglutide nor other GLP-1 receptor agonists have been approved specifically as fertility treatments. Future studies may examine whether these reproductive improvements translate into higher pregnancy rates, improved live birth outcomes, and long-term reproductive benefits. For now, the findings provide early evidence that the fertility conversation surrounding GLP-1 medications may be more nuanced than previously thought. (Courtesy: MNT)



GLP-1 receptor agonists, such as Wegovy, which contain the active ingredient semaglutide, are a class of medications widely used for obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Now, emerging research suggests these medications may also have positive effects on reproductive health. Two studies indicate that GLP-1 drugs may offer reproductive benefits, in addition to supporting weight loss and metabolic health.

Firstly, an analysis published in Fertility and Sterility found potential improvements in fertility-related outcomes among women with PMOS.

Secondly, a review of clinical trials presented at ENDO 2026—which is yet to appear in a peer-reviewed journal—found that GLP-1 drugs may improve testosterone levels and sperm quality in some men with obesity.

females with the condition are unable to find treatments that effectively address both reproductive symptoms and metabolic complications.

“Raised body mass index (BMI) reduces fertility by causing hormonal imbalances, which can disrupt ovulation in women,” Clare Thompson, MBBS, BSc, nMRCGP, General Practitioner at the Cadogan Clinic, where she leads the Weight Management Service, who was not involved in the study, explained to Medical News Today.

“Excess fatty tissue produces oestrogen, which changes the natural hormone balance required for regular menstrual cycles and egg release. A higher BMI can also alter the fluid surrounding developing eggs, affecting their quality and ability to be fertilised by sperm,” Thompson explained.

## Conflict as a disease multiplier: The DRC’s Ebola outbreak

By: Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

The intersection of armed conflict and infectious disease has once again placed global health security at risk. The current Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) highlights a convergence that is challenging to manage. The DRC and nearby Uganda declared the outbreak on 15 May 2026, while the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern just 48 hours later. The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) followed suit, declaring it a Public Health Emergency of Continental Security (PHECS). The outbreak likely began much earlier, with reports of a mysterious disease in the gold-mining town of Mongbwalu and nearby regions emerging as early as April. Current estimates report 138 deaths and 695 confirmed cases. The ongoing outbreak is characterised by three main factors: weakened community-based disease surveillance, the effects of conflict and displacement on health system functioning, and the lack of an approved vaccine or specific therapeutic agent. Collectively, these factors render the outbreak susceptible to becoming unmanageable and underscore the need for better preparedness.

Bundibugyo virus and Delayed Detection

Ebola virus disease occurs when a person is infected with a virus that causes haemorrhagic fever, severe tissue inflammation and damage, and, if left untreated, can be life-threatening. In humans, three different viruses—Ebola virus, Sudan virus, and Bundibugyo virus—are known to cause large-scale Ebola outbreaks. The largest

and most severe outbreak, caused by Ebola virus, was the 2014–2016 West Africa outbreak, during which over 28,600 cases were reported. The current outbreak is attributed to Bundibugyo virus (BDBV), marking the third time it has been detected in humans; previous outbreaks occurred in 2007 and 2012. The fatality rate for BDBV is reported to be between 30 and 50 percent, lower than that of the West Africa outbreak, which had a fatality rate of 63 percent.

This highlights the need for point-of-care BDBV-specific or pan-filovirus diagnostics as part of an Ebola preparedness system. Delayed detection of BDBV, coupled with its non-specific clinical presentation, led to undetected transmission events.

These viruses are of zoonotic origin, and studies suggest that fruit bats in the family Pteropodidae are their natural reservoir. Transmission occurs when humans are in close contact with blood or secretions of animals that carry the virus. Human-to-human transmission occurs in close contact settings such as healthcare settings, when a person comes into direct contact with the blood or bodily fluids of a sick individual or from a deceased individual, as well as through contaminated inanimate objects and surfaces. Symptoms appear between 2 and 21 days after infection and initially overlap with other viral haemorrhagic fevers and diseases such as malaria, complicating diagnosis.

Reports of a mysterious illness in the remote gold-mining town of Mongbwalu in Ituri Province, DRC, which had already claimed lives, emerged in April 2026, but surveillance and diagnostic limitations delayed recognition of an Ebola outbreak. GeneXpert diag-

nostic kits failed to detect BDBV as they were designed to detect Ebola virus, potentially allowing undetected transmission. Later, pan-filovirus PCR assays—assays that detect a broad range of viruses—alongside sequencing approaches, were used to detect BDBV cases. Obtaining diagnostic kits and reagents for sequencing faced logistical delays because they required specialised equipment and trained personnel. This highlights the need for point-of-care BDBV-specific or pan-filovirus diagnostics as part of an Ebola preparedness system. Delayed detection of BDBV, coupled with its non-specific clinical presentation, led to undetected transmission events. This is concerning because delayed detection events have previously been associated with larger and longer Ebola outbreaks.

Spillover Risks

The outbreak also points to the need for a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between humans, plants, animals, and the planet, or the One Health approach. While fruit bats are considered the natural reservoir of BDBV, there is a lack of definitive scientific evidence to explain how zoonotic spillover events occur, whether any intermediate hosts exist, and the precise mechanisms of transmission from hosts to humans. Ituri Province possesses rich bat biodiversity, with caves and dense forest canopies that act as roosting sites for bats. Further, the region contains artisanal gold-mining communities and is densely populated. Habitat loss and degradation have likely contributed to biodiversity loss and are likely to be responsible for frequent spillover events in the region.

Cross-border mobility through this porous region has likely resulted in

the spread of the outbreak to Uganda, which has reported 19 BDBV cases and two deaths as of 10 June 2026. Studies on virus-human interaction show that a tightly linked ecosystem between bats and humans can facilitate spillover events. For instance, close physical contact with bats through droppings, contaminated fruits, or bushmeat can facilitate transmission.

Conflict and the Erosion of Health Security

The DRC is also marked by conflict and insecurity since the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Ethnic tensions and political violence, particularly in Ituri, located along the DRC–Rwanda border, over land resources and mineral extraction among militant and ethnic organisations, dominate the region. Large reserves of rare-earth metals and minerals have incentivised more groups, including American and Chinese multinational mining companies, to become involved in the conflict. In addition to the six million deaths since 1996, approximately 5.6 million people have been displaced within the DRC, and an estimated 26.5 million people suffer from food insecurity. Against this backdrop, the DRC has also experienced repeated Ebola outbreaks; the ongoing outbreak is the 17th Ebola outbreak in the DRC.

Large reserves of rare-earth metals and minerals have incentivised more groups, including American and Chinese multinational mining companies, to become involved in the conflict. In addition to the six million deaths since 1996, approximately 5.6 million people have been displaced within the DRC, and an estimated 26.5 million people suffer from food insecurity. Despite a peace agreement—the

Washington Peace Accords for Peace and Prosperity—between the DRC and Rwanda being signed in 2025, clashes between M23, a Rwanda-backed militant group, and the DRC are ongoing. Cycles of conflict have weakened the health infrastructure and road connectivity needed to access health services. Security measures hamper the movement of health workers, food, and medical supplies, while attacks on healthcare facilities have prevented access to critical health needs. The DRC was the most affected African country by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) cuts, creating gaps in disease surveillance and monitoring measures. Displacement of people from the conflict-affected region makes contact tracing difficult. Disruptions in economic activity, such as trade and agriculture, have exacerbated poverty, contributing to the country’s severe food insecurity. Political violence has created an environment of fear, mistrust, misinformation, and disinformation, hampering measures to contain viral spread.

For instance, mistrust has fuelled debate over the origin of BDBV—questioning its existence, casting suspicion over whether aid workers’ presence in the region is to help local communities or to gain access to the region’s minerals, and whether the outbreak is a result of a deliberate bioweapon attack. As a result, suspected individuals have fled Ebola triage stations, making contact tracing and attempts to minimise transmission difficult. These tensions have resulted in attacks on medical professionals and hospital infrastructure. Previous Ebola outbreaks emphasised the importance of detection and surveillance, where

strong, coordinated, community-centric responses helped contain and stop the spread of the virus. This is essential as early supportive care is the only life-saving intervention for BDBV infection.

The importance of communicating precautionary measures within cultural contexts was highlighted in Dorothy Crawford’s book, *Ebola: Profile of a Killer Virus*.

The importance of communicating precautionary measures within cultural contexts was highlighted in Dorothy Crawford’s book, *Ebola: Profile of a Killer Virus*. This includes educating people about the need for safe burial practices, implementing triage systems with transparent dividers, promoting behaviours that minimise exposure to potential sites of transmission, and providing reassurance that spread can be relatively easily contained compared to airborne viruses.

Closing the Preparedness Gap

There are no approved vaccines or therapeutics for BDBV. This demonstrates a paradox in preparedness: the licensed Ebola vaccine (for Ebola virus), Ervebo, offers limited cross-protection against other ebolaviruses, while the limited number of BDBV outbreaks has provided little opportunity or incentive to develop and evaluate candidate vaccines. The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) models have predicted that the ongoing outbreak could become as large as the 2014–2016 West Africa outbreak. Until a safe and efficacious vaccine is approved for use against BDBV, community-centric public health interventions must take primacy. The DRC poses a unique challenge, where severely weakened health infrastructure, armed conflict, and displacement can thwart efforts to contain a viral outbreak. Employing rapid, point-of-care diagnostics for BDBV to enhance surveillance and detection, alongside raising awareness of behaviours and practices that facilitate transmission to and among humans, remains critical at this juncture. (Courtesy: ORF)





