



Glorious 16<sup>th</sup> Year

# The Assam Post

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DELHI

Always with Truth & Justice

RNI REGD. NO. ASSENG 2010/34729 THE ASSAM POST

Vol- XVI Issue No. 298 ■ Tuesday, June 02, 2026 ■ Guwahati Edition

E -Paper: centralread.com

Total Pages -12 Rs. 6.00



## Brief Post

**Heroin seized**  
**City Correspondent, Guwahati,**  
**June 1:** An East Guwahati Police District team from Basistha Police Station arrested Mukammil Howue alias Moja (24) of Rangia following a raid at Indira nagar.

The operation led to the recovery of 3 soap boxes containing 26 grams of Heroin. Police also seized a mobile phone and a Scooty bearing Registration No AS 01 GJ 3661. Legal action initiated, informed by Police Commissionerate Guwahati.

**Reform Push**  
**New Delhi:** The Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India, held a regional review meeting with the southern States and Union Territories including Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Telangana to review implementation of reforms introduced under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009 through the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2026, with the Centre strongly emphasising the need for faster implementation of regulatory reforms aimed at simplifying compliance.

## Dr. Anil Saikia Conferred the Title “Akul Chatak” at Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Birth Centenary Celebration

**Khairuddin Ahmed, Staff Reporter Sivasagar, Jun 1:** The voluntary organization “Agantuk” of Sivasagar organized a programme marking the birth centenary of globally renowned artist Dr. Bhupen Hazarika at Bantung Nagar Higher Secondary School in Tengapukhuri under Nazira subdivision. The programme was inaugurated by the school's Principal Pulin Borgohain, while the proceedings were conducted by Jog Gogoi, President of Agantuk. At the beginning of the event, Debajit Mohan, **Contd to PG 11.**



## IIT Madras research group calls for strategic push to create 2 million high-value 'eXtended Reality' jobs by 2030

**Rajib Borgohain CHENNAI, 1st June 2026:** Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) researchers have released a new report outlining a roadmap to



position India as a global leader in Extended Reality (XR) technologies and innovation.

Titled 'Bolstering India's XR Startup and Innovation Ecosystem: A Case Study of the TN AVGC-XR Policy 2026', the report analyses the recently-announced Tamil Nadu AVGC-XR Policy

2026 and presents recommendations for both State and Central policymakers to build a sustainable and globally-competitive XR ecosystem.

Among its key recommendations is the call to recognise XR hardware manufacturing as a strategic sector. The researchers recommend leveraging Tamil Nadu's existing electronics manufacturing corridors to build indigenous capabilities in Head-Mounted Displays, trackers and haptic interfaces, thereby reducing import dependence and strengthening India's position in the global XR hardware value chain.

The report, brought out by Metaverse **Contd to PG 11.**

## CM Sarma meets VP Radhakrishnan, highlights Assam growth story

**New Delhi, Jun 1:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma called on the Vice President of India, C.P. Radhakrishnan, in New Delhi and presented a comprehensive overview of Assam's remarkable growth story, highlighting the transformative changes that have reshaped the state in recent years. The meeting reflected the strong engagement between national leadership and the Government of Assam as the state continues its journey towards becoming a major driver of economic growth and development in the North-east. During the cordial interaction, Chief Minister Sarma briefed the Vice President on the extensive progress achieved across various sectors, emphasizing how Assam has steadily emerged as one of the fastest-transforming states in the country through a combination of visionary leadership, focused governance, infrastructure expansion, investment promotion, and people-centric welfare initiatives. The Chief Minister described the Vice President as an embodiment of humility, dedication, and hard work in public life and remarked that every interaction with Shri Radhakrishnan offers valuable lessons in public service, administration, and nation-building. He expressed gratitude for the Vice President's guidance and support, noting that such interactions provide important insights that help strengthen the state's development agenda and contribute to the realization of the vision of a Viksit Assam. During the meeting, Chief Minister Sarma presented detailed updates on Assam's economic progress and highlighted several development initiatives that have significantly improved the state's growth trajectory. He informed the Vice President about the major achievements recorded in infrastructure development, industrial expansion, connectivity enhancement, social welfare, investment attraction, and governance reforms. These achieve-



ments, he explained, are helping position Assam as a leading growth

strengthened links between urban and rural areas, ensuring that development reaches every corner of the state. The expansion of highways, construction of bridges, modernization of railway stations, and enhancement of logistics networks have together improved mobility and increased economic activity. These efforts have also played a crucial role in reducing geographical barriers and integrating Assam more closely with regional and national markets. Highlighting the state's growing attractiveness as an investment destination, Chief Minister Sarma informed the Vice President that Assam has successfully cultivated a business-friendly environment supported by transparent governance, streamlined approvals, and investor-focused policies. These measures have significantly boosted investor confidence and attracted interest from companies across diverse sectors. The Chief Minister explained that investment proposals announced during major summits are steadily translating into projects on the ground, creating employment opportunities and stimulating economic growth. He emphasized that strong governance mechanisms, political stability, and a commitment to ease of doing business have made Assam an increasingly preferred destination for industrial investment. The Chief Minister also discussed the state's progress in promoting industrialization and manufacturing, sectors that

engine in the Northeast while contributing to the larger national objective of building a Viksit Bharat. The Chief Minister outlined how Assam has witnessed substantial improvements in road, rail, air, and inland waterway connectivity, creating new opportunities for commerce, trade, tourism, and industrial development. Massive investments in transportation infrastructure have

## Tinsukia Division Achieves Record Progress of Sleeper Renewal Works in May 2026

**Maligaon, Jun 1:** Northeast Frontier Railway's (NFR) Tinsukia Division has achieved a significant milestone in infrastructure maintenance by recording remarkable progress in Through Sleeper Renewal (TSR) works during May 2026. A total of 10.61 kilometres of sleeper renewal was successfully carried out using the Track Relaying Train (TRT) machine in the Moranhat-Dibrugarh section, marking one of the division's remarkable performances during recent times.

The achievement was made possible through the effective utilization of 21 traffic blocks during the month, including 9 night blocks, ensuring uninterrupted progress of the renewal works. Close coordination among various departments, efficient deployment of manpower and machinery, smooth shunting operations and simultaneous execution of signalling and overhead traction works played a crucial role in accomplishing the target within the stipulated timeframe. **Contd to PG 11.**



are expected to play a pivotal role in driving future growth. He noted that the government is actively working to strengthen industrial infrastructure, encourage entrepreneurship, and facilitate the establishment of new manufacturing units. These efforts are aimed at creating sustainable **Contd to PG 11.**



A parrot bird seen inside an enclosure at the Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden in Guwahati Monday, June 1, 2026. PIX BY - RUPJYOTI SARMAH

## Livestock Vehicle Overturns at Mazbat

**Tapan Sen Gupta, Correspondent, Orang, Jun 1:** A major road accident involving a livestock transport vehicle took place early Monday morning on the Or-



ang Rupa road near Kankata Primary School under **Contd to PG 11.**

## Madhavdeva Janmotsav Celebrated with Religious Fervour at Bordowa Than

**Staff Reporter, Nagaon, Jun 1:** The birth anniversary of Mahapurush Madhavdeva was celebrated with great religious devotion and traditional grandeur at the sacred Sri Sri Bordowa Than, the birthplace of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev, on Monday.

The day-long observance began in the morning with traditional Taal Kobowa, followed by Aai Sokolor Naam and Khol Prasanga. Devotees and Vaishnavites from different parts of Assam gathered in large numbers to participate in the celebrations.

A special Kirtan was held in the afternoon in the presence of nearly a thousand devotees. On the occasion, several devotional hymns were rendered, including the renowned **Contd to PG 11.**



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# Assam leads sustainable development in Northeast India

**Guwahati:** Assam is making remarkable strides toward sustainable development under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, embracing a comprehensive approach to minimize its carbon footprint while aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 on climate action through its "Assam 2030 Initiative," launched in 2016. This initiative outlines a well-defined strategy aimed at sustainable development, focusing on critical areas such as climate change mitigation, sustainable consumption, innovation, and environmental conservation. A significant step taken by the state government is the establishment of the Centre for Sustainable Development Goals, which acts as a key institution providing research, technical support, and strategic advice for the successful implementation of SDG-related initiatives. Additionally, Assam has implemented an institutional framework that ensures a systematic approach to SDG implementation, concentrating on capacity building through specialized training workshops while creating robust monitoring and evaluation systems to assess progress effectively. These efforts are supported by SDG-based outcome budgets, ensuring that public funds are allocated efficiently toward sustainability efforts, thereby maximizing the impact of investments made in this crucial area. Conclaves and conferences are regularly held to finalize strategy papers and action plans, reflecting Assam's steadfast commitment to achieving its ambitious sustainability goals. The state's dedication to sustainable development transcends mere policy frameworks, as evidenced by its active participation in various national and international forums. These platforms allow Assam to showcase its progress in achieving SDGs and share success stories with other regions, further enhancing its reputation as a leader in sustainable practices. Among the notable achievements under the Assam 2030 Initiative is the launch of the "Assam Climate Change Management and Adaptation Programme," which focuses on preparing the state for the challenges posed by climate change through comprehensive planning and community engagement. This program emphasizes the importance of local adaptation strategies, which are crucial for enhancing the resilience of vulnerable communities in the face of climate-related impacts. Furthermore, Assam has made significant strides in promoting renewable energy, particularly through the establishment of solar power plants across the state, which are pivotal in reducing dependence on fossil fuels and increasing the share of renewable energy in its overall energy mix. This initiative aligns with the state's goal of achieving energy security while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Eco-friendly transportation is another critical area where Assam is making considerable advancements, with the state government introducing various initiatives aimed at reducing vehicular emissions. This includes promoting electric vehicles (EVs) and constructing supporting infrastructure such as EV charging stations, which are essential for encouraging the adoption of cleaner transportation alternatives. The push for eco-friendly transportation is not only aimed at reducing carbon emissions but also at ensuring a sustainable urban environment, thereby improving air quality and public health. Moreover, the state has been actively promoting sustainable agricultural practices, encouraging farmers to adopt methods that are environmentally friendly and resource-efficient. This approach not only aids in preserving the state's rich biodiversity but also ensures food security and livelihood sustainability for Assam's rural population, thereby addressing socio-economic disparities. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has consistently been a vocal proponent of sustainable development, reiterating the necessity of striking a balance between economic growth and environmental conservation. "Our goal is to create a harmonious balance between economic growth and environmental stewardship," he stated during one of the state's sustainability conclaves, emphasizing the integral role of sustainable practices in the state's developmental narrative. Assam's success in sustainable development has been bolstered by its strategic partnerships with national and international organizations,

facilitating knowledge sharing, capacity building, and resource mobilization. These collaborations have yielded impressive results, including a 45% increase in forest cover, a 30% reduction in carbon emissions, a 25% growth in the state's renewable energy sector, and a 20% increase in the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, all standing as a testament to Assam's unwavering commitment to its sustainability goals. As Assam continues its journey toward a sustainable future, the state serves as a model for other regions to emulate. Its approach, which prioritizes both environmental conservation and economic development, demonstrates that sustainable growth is not only possible but essential for the long-term prosperity of its citizens. Assam's commitment to sustainability, backed by strong leadership and collaborative efforts, positions the state as a beacon for environmentally conscious development, inspiring other regions to pursue similar paths toward a thriving and sustainable tomorrow. This journey toward sustainability is not without its challenges; however, Assam is tackling them head-on by fostering a culture of innovation and resilience. The government is keenly aware that the effects of climate change and environmental degradation are multifaceted issues that require comprehensive solutions involving all sectors of society. To this end, Assam is engaging local communities in sustainability efforts, ensuring that they have a voice in decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods and environment. By empowering citizens through education and awareness programs, the state is fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards sustainable practices, enabling communities to play an active role in achieving SDG objectives. Educational institutions, NGOs, and local organizations are pivotal in disseminating information and promoting sustainable practices among the populace, thereby creating a more informed and engaged citizenry. Furthermore, Assam is leveraging technology to enhance its sustainability initiatives, utilizing data-driven approaches to monitor environmental changes and the effectiveness of various programs. This technological integration facilitates timely interventions and policy adjustments, ensuring that sustainability efforts remain responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities. The Assam 2030 Initiative is not merely a governmental agenda but a comprehensive framework that involves active participation from all stakeholders, including businesses, civil society, and academia. By creating an inclusive platform for dialogue and collaboration, Assam is ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in its sustainability strategies, enhancing the effectiveness of interventions while fostering social cohesion. As the state moves forward, it remains committed to building resilient infrastructure, promoting sustainable urban planning, and ensuring the conservation of natural resources for future generations. The integration of sustainable practices into all sectors of the economy is essential for ensuring long-term viability and prosperity, and Assam is leading by example in demonstrating how proactive measures can yield substantial benefits for both the environment and the economy. The state's holistic approach encompasses a range of initiatives, from waste management and pollution control to biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation, all of which are interconnected and critical for achieving comprehensive sustainable development. In addition to these efforts, Assam is prioritizing the enhancement of water management systems to address the challenges posed by floods and droughts, which are increasingly becoming common due to climate variability. Initiatives aimed at improving irrigation practices and promoting rainwater harvesting are integral to safeguarding water resources and ensuring the agricultural sector's resilience against climate-induced stresses. By investing in smart water management technologies and infrastructure, Assam aims to create a sustainable framework for managing its water resources effectively, thereby contributing to both food security and ecological balance. The state's efforts also extend to community-led conservation initiatives that empower local populations to take charge of preserving

their natural environments. These grassroots movements not only enhance biodiversity conservation but also foster a sense of stewardship and responsibility towards the environment among community members. The role of indigenous knowledge in environmental management is being recognized and integrated into mainstream practices, ensuring that traditional ecological practices are preserved and promoted. In promoting sustainable tourism, Assam is also capitalizing on its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, developing eco-tourism initiatives that generate employment while conserving the environment. This approach not only attracts tourists but also raises awareness about the importance of protecting natural ecosystems among visitors and locals alike. The Assam Tourism Development Corporation is actively working to create sustainable tourism models that align with the state's broader sustainability goals, showcasing the rich biodiversity and cultural diversity of the region while ensuring minimal environmental impact. The integration of sustainability into educational curricula at all levels is another critical aspect of Assam's development strategy. By incorporating environmental education into school programs, the state is instilling a sense of responsibility and awareness in young minds, preparing the next generation to be proactive stewards of the environment. This educational focus is complemented by community outreach programs that encourage active participation in sustainability initiatives, fostering a culture of environmental consciousness among all age groups. Moreover, the state government is committed to creating a legal framework that supports sustainable development initiatives, ensuring that policies and regulations are conducive to achieving long-term sustainability goals. This involves not only enacting laws that promote environmental protection but also ensuring that these laws are effectively enforced and implemented at all levels of governance. The establishment of environmental courts to expedite the resolution of cases related to environmental violations is a significant step in this direction, reinforcing the government's commitment to upholding environmental standards and ensuring accountability. As Assam continues to advance its sustainability agenda, it is also keeping an eye on the global commitments under international agreements like the Paris Agreement, aiming to fulfill its obligations while showcasing its efforts in combating climate change. The state is actively participating in global dialogues on sustainability, contributing its experiences and learning from other regions to refine its approaches. This engagement not only enhances Assam's visibility on the global stage but also facilitates knowledge exchange and collaboration on sustainability initiatives. Looking ahead, Assam envisions a future where sustainable development is woven into the fabric of everyday life, transcending beyond government initiatives to become a shared responsibility among all stakeholders. By fostering a culture of sustainability that encourages innovation, collaboration, and community engagement, Assam aims to build a resilient and sustainable society capable of navigating the challenges of the future. This holistic vision for sustainable development positions Assam as a trailblazer in the Northeast, showcasing how strategic planning, community involvement, and innovation can work in tandem to create a sustainable future. The state's commitment to environmental stewardship, social equity, and economic viability reflects a growing recognition that sustainable development is not just an option but a necessity for ensuring the long-term well-being of its citizens and the planet. As these initiatives unfold, Assam's story serves as an inspiring example for other regions to emulate, proving that with the right strategies, partnerships, and dedication, a sustainable future is not only achievable but within reach for all. The collective efforts of government, civil society, and the private sector in Assam demonstrate that sustainability can drive progress, create economic opportunities, and improve the quality of life for all, marking the state as a leader in the sustainable development movement.

## Skill-Based Education to Empower Students for Better Futures

**Guwahati:** Skill-Based Education to Empower Students for Better Futures has received a significant boost in Assam as Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya passionately advocated for its implementation, emphasizing the transformative impact it can have on students' employability and entrepreneurial abilities. This initiative aligns closely with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes the urgent need for vocational training, industry-specific skills, and holistic development, thus preparing students to thrive in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing job market. The key highlights of this initiative include the vocationalization of school education, the establishment of skill hubs specifically aimed at addressing the needs of dropouts and students who have fallen out of the education system, and the introduction of impactful programs such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and the Employability Enhancement Training Programme. These programs aim to equip young people with the necessary skills to succeed in various sectors, ensuring that they are well-prepared for the demands of the workforce. During the 11th convocation of Assam Down Town University, held at its Panikhaiti campus, Governor Acharya reiterated the importance of skill-based education as he addressed a gathering of graduates, faculty, and dignitaries. He urged universities to evolve into pivotal centers for developing students' intellectual and practical abilities, ultimately transforming them into job creators rather than mere job seekers. In his address, the Governor articulated the critical role of higher education institutions, stressing that their responsibilities extend beyond merely making students employable; they should strive to cultivate an environment where graduates emerge as innovators and entrepreneurs who can contribute significantly to the economy and society at large. As the Visitor of Assam Down Town University, he underscored that the landscape of employment is undergoing significant changes, and institutions like Assam Down Town University should take the lead in equipping their students with a comprehensive skill set—intellectual, cognitive, and physical—to meet these new challenges effectively. He remarked that education should not only focus on material upliftment but should also aim to enhance moral and intellectual growth, thereby fostering a generation capable of navigating the complexities of modern society. Drawing attention to the graduates, Governor Acharya highlighted education's crucial role in driving societal progress, encouraging students to recognize that knowledge is not merely a tool for personal success but also a potent instrument for community upliftment and transformation. He acknowledged the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, attributing significant advancements in the academic sector to his initiatives aimed at revitalizing India's educational framework, which have paved the way for a more skilled and capable workforce. Referring to India's illustrious educational heritage, Governor Acharya pointed to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as a transformative blueprint with the potential to invigorate the nation's academic vigor. He made it clear that the NEP is the first educational policy of the 21st century, encompassing a comprehensive approach to enhance educational quality and accessibility across India. Furthermore, he reminded the audience of India's rich historical legacy in education, citing ancient universities like Takshashila and Nalanda as exemplars of the country's longstanding commitment to learning and knowledge dissemination, which attracted scholars from all over the world. He expressed delight in the university's diversity, noting that students from various states and countries are pursuing their education at Assam Down Town University, which reflects both the cultural richness of the region and its educational strengths. In this context, the Governor also urged the graduating students to honor the contributions of their communities and work towards social betterment, underscoring the importance of giving back to society and addressing the needs of underprivileged populations. This call to action resonated strongly during the convo-

cation, echoed by Minister of Tourism Jayanta Mallabaruah, who urged the graduates to leverage their skills for the betterment of Assam and its people. The convocation ceremony also witnessed the conferring of honorary degrees, including a D.Litt awarded to Prof. Achyuta Samanta, the founder Chancellor of KIIT and KISS, recognizing his immense contributions to education and social service. A total of 1,610 students received degrees during the ceremony, including 1,202 undergraduates, 382 postgraduates, and 26 PhDs among the recipients. The event not only celebrated academic achievements but also marked a significant milestone in the lives of the students as they prepare to enter the workforce or pursue further studies, reinforcing the essential role of education in shaping future leaders. In summary, the 11th convocation of Assam Down Town University served as a vital platform for promoting the essential role of skill-based education in contemporary society. Governor Acharya's insights underscored the need for educational institutions to adapt to the evolving job market while fostering a sense of responsibility among graduates to contribute positively to their communities. The celebration of the students' achievements reflects a broader commitment to enhancing educational standards and promoting inclusive growth within Assam and beyond, laying the foundation for a generation of skilled professionals poised to meet the challenges of tomorrow. The emphasis on community engagement and social responsibility aligns seamlessly with the overarching goals of national development, ensuring that education remains a driving force for progress and empowerment in India. As these graduates embark on their respective journeys, they carry with them the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to effect meaningful change, embodying the spirit of service and commitment to societal upliftment that Governor Acharya passionately advocated during the convocation. The event underscored the transformative power of education and its capacity to inspire individuals to become catalysts for change within their communities. The vision articulated

## Awareness program Held in Pangkang: Multiple Households Engage in Two-Day SUMP Awareness Drive

**Pangkang :** In a continued effort to strengthen regional understanding of the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), a two-day public awareness and community engagement programme was successfully conducted across the villages of Pangkang. Spanning May 25 in Pangkang (Jorkong) and May 26 in Pangkang (Kumku), the initiative witnessed active participation from multiple villagers and households. Participants engaged deeply in discussions centered around infrastructure, regional development, and community welfare associated with the project. The grassroots drive commenced at Pangkang (Jorkong) on May 25, focusing on public understanding of SUMP's potential developmental benefits. The session was held in the presence of Chief Guest Mr. Tamyo Mingki, President of the Village Development and SUMP Development Committee. Meaningful public interaction was further encouraged

by the attendance of Mr. Tamo Jerang, Vice President, SUMP, and Mr. Omak Tali, Secretary, Village Development Committee (VDC). Building on this momentum, the outreach continued on May 26 at Pangkang (Kumku). Ensuring absolute clarity in project leadership and representation, the event was held in the

tered a welcoming, transparent environment for public dialogue and community engagement. At both venues, the organizing teams facilitated open interaction sessions, providing multiple villagers with the opportunity to directly raise queries and share local insights. To ensure transparent communication and sustained understanding, comprehensive SUMP information booklets were distributed among the villagers by the respective leadership following the discussions. By prioritizing direct dialogue with accurate local representation and residents, these consecutive programmes successfully promoted awareness, encouraged informed participation, and strengthened community engagement regarding the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project in the Pangkang region.



# Soul Aesthetics & Academy marks first anniversary

**Guwahati:** Soul Aesthetics & Academy, located at FORT Complex, 5th Floor, Kachari Basti, Guwahati, proudly celebrates its first anniversary, marking a successful year of excellence in

Soul Aesthetics & Academy has evolved from a dedicated aesthetic centre into a comprehensive destination for advanced beauty and wellness treatments. The academy now offers



aesthetic, beauty, wellness, and professional training services. Founded and led by Mr. Vikaas Aggarwal, the academy was inaugurated last year by renowned Bollywood actress Ms. Urmila Matondkar, whose presence added prestige to the launch and set the tone for the institution’s vision of bringing world-class aesthetic and wellness solutions to the people of Assam and the Northeast. Over the past year,

a wide range of specialized services, including Advanced Skin Care, Scalp and Hair Treatments, Laser Procedures, Permanent Makeup, Nail Services, and Wellness Therapies. The trust and support of hundreds of satisfied clients have played a vital role in the institution’s remarkable growth and success. The centre operates under the expert guidance of Dr. Dipanjali Boro (Plastic Surgeon), Dr. Mimangsha Kalita

(Aesthetic Doctor), and Mrs. Indrani Dutta (Dietician and Gut Microbiome Expert), supported by a team of trained and skilled professionals. Every treatment is designed to provide safe, personalized, and result-oriented care while maintaining the highest standards of professionalism and client satisfaction. As part of its commitment to innovation and holistic wellness, the academy introduced Gut Microbiome Testing and Probiotic Supplement Solutions during the year, helping clients improve their overall digestive health and well-being. In response to growing customer demand, Professional Nail Extension Services were also added to the academy’s expanding portfolio. Speaking on the occasion, Founder and Owner Mr. Vikaas Aggarwal expressed heartfelt gratitude to clients, students, well-wishers, and team members for their continued trust and support. He stated that the successful completion of the first year is not only a celebration of achievements but also a foundation for greater growth, innovation, and service excellence in the future. As Soul Aesthetics & Academy enters its second year, the institution remains committed to delivering advanced treatments, expert consultations, cutting-edge technology, and an exceptional customer experience. With a strong focus on beauty, health, wellness, and professional education, the academy aims to continue setting new benchmarks in the aesthetic industry. Recalling the memorable inauguration ceremony held last year, the management expressed its appreciation to Ms. Urmila Matondkar for her encouragement and best wishes, which continue to inspire the team in its journey toward excellence.

# NBWCCC hosts Scientific Symposium 2026, bringing together leading experts to redefine future of women’s healthcare

**Guwahati:** Neotia Bhagirathi Woman and Child Care Centre (NBWCCC), Guwahati, in association with the North East Obstetrics & Gynaecological Society, hosted a Scientific Symposium 2026. This brought together distinguished clinical experts, including Dr. Panchanan Das, President of the North East Obstetrics & Gynaecological Society, as Guest of Honour, along with members of the management and senior leadership of Ambuja Neotia Healthcare Venture Limited, including Mr. Parthiv Neotia, Joint Managing Director; Mr. P. L. Mehta, Vice Chairman & Managing Director; and Ms. Ruma Banerjee, Joint President and Chief Operating Officer. The symposium convened a diverse group of specialists, clinicians, and healthcare professionals, facilitating focused discussions on key developments in obstetrics and gynaecology, including high-risk pregnancies, fertility, minimally invasive procedures, and environmental influences on health. The symposium featured Dr. Panchanan Das, President of the North East Obstetrics & Gynaecological Society, as the Guest of Honour. The scientific sessions reflected a wide and comprehensive spectrum of subjects shaping contemporary obstetrics and gynaecology, underscoring both the complexity and evolving nature of women’s healthcare. Expert lectures included Prof. Dr. Krishnendu Gupta on the impact of climate change and environmental pollution on women’s health, Dr. Swagata Baishya on infertility, and Dr. Sujata Dutta on advancements in laparoscopic procedures. Complementing these were panel discussions on high-risk pregnancy, precision fertility through personalised treatment approaches, and endometriosis management, alongside deliberations on timely intervention strategies and improving clinical outcomes. The breadth of topics highlighted the growing need for multidisciplinary engagement, enabling clinicians to address diverse and complex patient scenarios through informed, evidence-based approaches. The symposium also witnessed valuable academic deliberations and expert moderation from several distinguished clinicians including Dr. Arun Madhab Boruah, Dr. Ratul Dutta, Dr. Yashodhan Deka, Prof. Dr. Saswati Sanyal Choudhury, Dr. Ayona Barthakur, Dr. Hemanga Baishya, Dr. Kalpana Choudhury, and Dr. Alok Deb, whose insightful perspectives, clinical expertise, and valuable academic inputs significantly enriched the scientific discussions and knowledge-sharing sessions throughout the event. The academic sessions were structured to reflect the evolving scope and complexity of obstetrics and gynaecology, with focused discussions across a broad spectrum of clinical areas. Expert-led sessions examined the impact of climate change and environmental factors on women’s health, while deliberations on high-risk pregnancies emphasised the importance of early diagnosis, timely intervention and coordinated care pathways. Discussions on fertility explored both conventional and advanced treatment options, underscoring the need for personalised approaches, while sessions on minimally invasive gynaecological procedures highlighted advancements in laparoscopy and robotic techniques that support improved clinical outcomes and faster recovery. Further deliberations on endometriosis addressed challenges related to delayed diagnosis and evolving management strategies. A dedicated session reflecting on the institution’s 25-year journey further underscored the need to continuously evolve care models through a multidisciplinary and patient-centric approach, reinforcing its long-term commitment to advancing

ing women’s healthcare. Together, the sessions reinforced the importance of continuous medical exchange and evidence-based practices in

Woman and Child Care Centre, Guwahati, we believe advancing women’s healthcare goes beyond clinical capability—it requires continu-



adapting to changing patient needs. Across geographies, healthcare needs vary significantly, shaped by distinct environmental, lifestyle, and demographic factors—an insight particularly relevant for a region as diverse as the North East. In this context, continuous clinical dialogue becomes essential to ensure care that is both contextual and responsive. As a key healthcare hub for the region, Guwahati provides a critical platform for such engagement. Scientific Symposium 2026 brought together experts and clinicians from across disciplines to share perspectives, exchange clinical experiences, and collectively address evolving challenges in women’s healthcare. With over 25 years of experience, NBWCCC Guwahati reaffirmed its commitment to patient-centric care through ongoing dialogue, collaborative learning, and a strong emphasis on evidence-based practices, ensuring consistency in quality across its network. “At Neotia Bhagirathi

ous learning, shared insights, and adaptability. With nearly 25 years of experience, we focus on blending clinical expertise with evolving knowledge, addressing the diverse needs of regions like the Northeast. As a key healthcare hub, Guwahati enables vital knowledge exchange, helping us uphold consistent standards of clinical excellence, collaboration, and patient-centric care,” said Mr. Parthiv Neotia, Joint Managing Director, Ambuja Neotia Healthcare Venture Limited. The symposium reinforced the institution’s continued commitment to advancing women’s reproductive healthcare through shared knowledge, clinical collaboration, and the adoption of evolving medical practices. As the landscape of obstetrics and gynaecology continues to transform, initiatives such as Scientific Symposium 2026 are integral to fostering informed, evidence-driven care and strengthening the quality of clinical outcomes across the region.

# Dr. Ganesh Jaishetwar brings advanced hematology & bone marrow transplant

**Guwahati:** In a major boost to healthcare accessibility in Northeast India, renowned Hemato-Oncologist and Bone Marrow Transplant specialist Dr. Ganesh Jaishetwar addressed a press conference at Dibrugarh today, announcing the extension of his expert services to Assam. Dr. Ganesh Jaishetwar, Lead Consultant Hematologist, Hemato-Oncologist, and Bone Marrow Transplant Physician at Yashoda Hospitals, Hitec City, Hyderabad, highlighted the alarming rise in blood-related disorders including Leukemia, Lymphoma, Myeloma, and immunodeficiency conditions in the region. With over 25 years of experience, he stressed the critical importance of early

diagnosis and advanced interventional treatments to improve patient outcomes. “Many patients in the Northeast still travel long distances to metros for specialized hematology care. My aim is to bridge this gap by making world-class treatment accessible closer to home,” said Dr. Jaishetwar. He has successfully performed over 500 Bone Marrow Transplants (BMT) and is credited with several landmark achievements at Yashoda Hospitals. These include performing the first Haploidentical Bone Marrow Transplant (Haplo BMT) in the twin Telugu states in 2015 and the first ex-vivo T-Cell depleted Haplo BMT for adults in India in 2016. Dr. Ganesh Jaishetwar completed his MBBS from

Nagpur University in 2001, MD in Pathology from the University of Mumbai, and DM in Clinical Hematology from WBUHS, Kolkata. He is fluent in English, Hindi, Telugu, and Bengali. Starting now, patients in Assam and the Northeast can consult him at Mrityunjay Healthcare, Swarna Complex, AMC Road, Paltan Bazar, Dibrugarh. This initiative is expected to significantly reduce the financial and emotional burden on patients who previously had to seek treatment outside the region. Local healthcare professionals and patient groups have welcomed Dr. Jaishetwar’s decision, viewing it as a transformative step toward strengthening specialized medical services in Northeast India.

# Coca-Cola and Google reimagine Coke Break with Gemini experiences

**Guwahati:** Coca-Cola India is making every pause a lot more fun with the launch of “Coca-Cola Halftime Surprise”, a new AI-powered experience developed in collaboration with Google and built with Google Gemini. Bringing together two iconic labels, the experience unlocks three distinct AI-led journeys designed to turn everyday Coke breaks into playful moments of surprise, creativity, and self-expression. Inspired by Coca-Cola’s global “Halftime” philosophy, consumers can scan the QR code on any special Coca-Cola pack to step into imaginative new worlds. By unlocking one of three unique labels, users enter a themed, gamified interface on Google Gemini where quick taps, swipes, and personality-led inputs turn an everyday pause into a personalized journey of self-expression. Using Gemini’s Canvas feature, new creative experiences unfold with every interaction across cinematic comic-strip universes, imagined timelines, and music-inspired alter egos. One moment could place consumers inside dramatic visual narratives with evolving characters and aesthetics, while another could transport them across prehistoric eras with dinosaurs, medieval castles, or futuristic realities imagined through AI-powered creativity. Alongside uniquely generated creations, consumers will also get the chance to unlock rewards and win vouchers. To step into these worlds, consumers can scan a pack and choose from three distinct adventures: 1) Be a Rockstar: Users tap through a nostalgic jukebox interface to turn a selfie into a personalized album cover with custom tracks, unlocking a chance to win concert tickets. 2) Be a Movie Star: Users swipe through a movie vending machine interface to star as the main character of a custom six-panel comic strip, unlocking a chance to win movie vouchers. 3) Travel Through Time: Users

pilot a digital time machine to build an aesthetic, vision-board style collage around their selfie, unlocking a chance to win flight and hotel vouchers. Greishma Singh, Vice President, Marketing, Coca-Cola India and Southwest Asia said, “For Gen Z consumers today, self-expression is fluid, visual, and deeply shaped by music and digital culture. With Coca-Cola Halftime Surprise, we wanted to reimagine the Coke pause as something more participative, playful, and personal to them. What makes this especially exciting is that every single interaction is unique with the help of Google Gemini. Whether you are creating your own comic strip, time-travelling to a world only AI can take you to, or designing your album cover, the experience feels entirely yours. The collaboration with Google brings together creativity and technology in a way that transforms a simple scan on a Coca-Cola pack into a moment of genuine discovery.” Shekar Khosla, VP - Marketing at Google India, said: “Brand engagement is most memorable when it is interactive, personal, and fun. We’re glad to collaborate with Coca-Cola so that Coca-Cola Halftime Surprise gives people an engaging way to play, create, and share using Google Gemini. What makes this engagement so exciting is the ability to generate truly personalized experiences. With Gemini as a creative companion, people can seamlessly think up new visual narratives and turn everyday moments into a fun showcase of self-expression.” The launch builds on the success of Festicons, Coca-Cola’s generative AI-led activation during Diwali that enabled consumers to create personalized festive expressions at scale. With Coca-Cola Halftime Surprise, Coca-Cola India takes that spirit of creativity into an always-on experience designed to make everyday moments more expressive, interactive, and full of surprise.

# Mother’s Recipe celebrates Indian traditions in a new campaign for its iconic pickle range Brand campaign celebrates mothers love through India’s diverse pickle heritage

**Guwahati:** Mother’s Recipe has launched a new national campaign for its iconic pickle range and unveiled a new identity for the portfolio, marking the first such change since the range was introduced. For the first time ever, the brand’s iconic pickle range is being presented through a new visual language, opening a new chapter for the portfolio. At the centre of the campaign is a simple thought. Pickle may be made differently across homes and regions, but mother’s love behind it feels familiar everywhere. The film places mothers at the heart of the story and follows the journey of the pickle making process through different homes across India, where it is prepared in regionally distinct ways before arriving at the family table. It is here that Mother’s Recipe emerges as the common thread that ties together these many expressions of love, home, and flavour. Visually, the campaign draws inspiration from the authentic rituals of pickle-making in Indian homes. From the careful selection of raw mangoes to a mother’s hands that slice, dry, spice, and preserve, the film unfolds through moments that feel universally familiar across regions, while still retaining the distinct character of each tradition. The campaign is designed to celebrate the richness of India’s pickle traditions through imagery that is authentic, rooted and recognisable, while giving the brand a more relevant and emotionally resonant expression. The film’s music is deeply inspired by the richness of traditional Indian melodies and folk textures, creating a soundscape that feels rooted, warm, and emotionally familiar. Blending authentic Indian instrumentation with a light, playful rhythm, the track mirrors the everyday joy and affection woven into the ritual of pickle-making across homes in India. While nostalgic at its core, the music carries a contemporary energy that makes the narrative feel fresh and engaging, culminating in Mother’s Recipe’s iconic flute melody that leaves behind a lasting sense of comfort and recall. The campaign also marks a shift in how the Mother’s Recipe pickle range is being expressed in the market. It moves beyond product communication into a broader brand story shaped by memory, regional mothers and the emotional place maa and pickles continues to hold in Indian homes. In doing so, it brings a more contemporary voice to the category while staying close to the familiarity that has made Mother’s Recipe a trusted name across generations. Alongside the campaign, Mother’s Recipe has introduced a new identity for its pickle range. This visual refresh marks a significant moment in the journey of the range. The new identity reflects the warmth and authenticity of pickles crafted by a mother’s hands, brought alive through thoughtfully embedded regional details. From regional bangles worn by mothers to

label palettes inspired by the rich hues of traditional sarees, and brass utensils reminiscent of age-old kitchens, every element has been designed to celebrate the cultural roots and homemade essence of pickle-making across India. Further strengthening this regional connection, all 64 pickle variants now feature their names in regional languages on the labels, making the packaging feel more personal, familiar, and rooted in local food traditions. The design direction draws from Swaad Mamta Ka, regional traditions, and a contemporary take on Indian aesthetics. Rooted in tradition yet expressed through modern design, the packaging brings alive regional cues and familiar kitchen elements to strengthen the connection between pack, place, and taste. Speaking on the launch of the integrated 360-degree campaign, Sanjana Desai, Executive Director, Desai Foods Pvt. Ltd., “For generations, Mother’s Recipe pickles have stood for authenticity, nostalgia, and the unmistakable flavours of mother’s love. As we unveil our refreshed identity, the new campaign celebrates the deeply personal and regional rituals of pickle-making across India—where every mother brings her own love, care, and signature touch to the recipe. Through this campaign, we wanted to capture that rich diversity of authentic regional flavours and bring alive the emotion of ‘Swaad Mamta ka’ that Mother’s Recipe has always represented.” Vihar Patkar, Group Creative Director, 82.5 communications pvt ltd (WPP Group) added, “This was a rare opportunity to revisit how the Mother’s Recipe pickle range shows up, both visually and emotionally. The creative thought was to build from a truth that is deeply familiar across India, that while every home may make pickle differently, the love, patience and care behind it remain universal. That gave us a campaign rooted in memory, while the new packaging gave the portfolio a stronger and more contemporary identity in market.” The campaign is being amplified across digital, television, out of home, in store and on ground consumer touchpoints, with visibility planned across key markets including Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Delhi NCR and the North East. Together, the film and the packaging create a more cohesive brand world for the range across platforms. For Mother’s Recipe, the combined launch of the campaign and the new packaging marks a deliberate step in carrying forward a well-loved range in a way that feels sharper, more visible and more contemporary, while remaining true to the emotional role the category has always played in Indian kitchens. The new Mother’s Recipe pickle campaign is being rolled out nationally, with the new pickle range identity being introduced across markets in line with product availability.

# Editorial

## Energy Security



In a comprehensive and coordinated response to the evolving situation in West Asia, the Government of India has reiterated its commitment to ensuring uninterrupted energy supply, safeguarding maritime operations, and extending full support to Indian nationals residing or working in the affected region, reflecting a proactive and multi-layered approach aimed at maintaining national stability while addressing international uncertainties, as the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas outlined a series of measures that underscore both preparedness and adaptability in the face of potential disruptions, emphasizing that continuous monitoring and swift enforcement actions are being undertaken to prevent any form of supply chain irregularities, particularly in the domestic liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) sector, where more than 2,300 raids have been conducted across the country to curb hoarding and black marketing, thereby reinforcing the government's zero-tolerance policy towards malpractices that could impact consumers, while also highlighting significant improvements in transparency and efficiency through digital adoption, with online LPG cylinder bookings reaching an impressive 98 percent across the industry, a figure that not only reflects increased consumer confidence in digital systems but also contributes to better tracking and distribution management, alongside the noteworthy delivery of approximately 49.8 lakh domestic LPG cylinders against bookings of around 41.6 lakh, indicating a surplus delivery capacity that ensures timely access to essential fuel for households, further strengthened by the widespread implementation of Delivery Authentication Code (DAC)-based systems, which have now reached about 93 percent adoption, effectively minimizing diversion and leakages in the supply chain, thereby enhancing accountability and ensuring that subsidized fuel reaches its intended beneficiaries, while the availability of smaller 5 Kg Free Trade LPG (FTL) cylinders has also been scaled up to cater to diverse consumer needs, with approximately 21.7 lakh units sold during the month of February and over 79,000 cylinders successfully delivered, demonstrating the government's focus on inclusivity and accessibility, particularly for economically vulnerable sections and transient populations, in parallel with efforts to stabilize commercial energy demand, where total commercial LPG allocation has been raised to nearly 70 percent of pre-crisis levels, including a 10 percent reform-linked allocation designed to incentivize efficiency and compliance among stakeholders, thereby ensuring that industries and businesses dependent on LPG continue to function without significant disruption, while the expansion of Piped Natural Gas (PNG) infrastructure has also been accelerated, with around 5.88 lakh new connections gasified since March and infrastructure developed for an additional 2.68 lakh connections, a move that not only diversifies energy sources but also reduces dependence on traditional fuel distribution mechanisms, contributing to long-term sustainability and resilience, even as the government remains vigilant about maritime safety in the region, confirming that all Indian seafarers operating in or near the affected zones are safe and secure, with no incidents reported involving Indian-flagged vessels in the past 24 hours, a reassurance that highlights the effectiveness of continuous monitoring and coordination between relevant authorities, including the Directorate General of Shipping, whose control room has been actively managing communication and assistance requests, handling over 8,200 calls and more than 17,000 emails since its activation, including 113 calls and 295 emails in the most recent 24-hour period, reflecting both the scale of concern and the responsiveness of the system in addressing queries and providing real-time support, while the Ministry of External Affairs has also maintained a dedicated special control room to assist Indian nationals and their families, ensuring that concerns related to safety, evacuation, and logistics are promptly addressed, further complemented by tangible evacuation efforts such as the facilitation of movement for 2,490 Indian nationals out of Iran through land border routes, demonstrating the government's commitment to citizen welfare beyond domestic boundaries, while the aviation sector has shown signs of stabilization with additional flights being operated from the region to various destinations in India, improving connectivity and enabling smoother transit for those seeking to return home, thereby easing logistical challenges and reducing uncertainty for affected individuals, as the government continues to adopt a holistic approach that integrates energy security, citizen safety, and international coordination, ensuring that both domestic and overseas challenges are managed with efficiency and foresight, ultimately reinforcing confidence in the nation's ability to navigate complex geopolitical situations while safeguarding essential services and the well-being of its people.

# The Tehran trap: Intelligence ops look spectacular but are not enough to win wars

“They weren’t supposed to go after all these other countries in the Middle East. They hit Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Nobody expected that. We were shocked.” This statement from the US President on March 16 pretty much sums up what has happened so far in the war in Iran. When we add the closure of the Strait of Hormuz to the equation, it becomes aptly clear how grossly the war has been misread by Israel and the US. When Israel and the US launched pre-emptive strikes into Iran, it was based on two important factors. One, that there was a small but very crucial window of opportunity to take out the Supreme Leader of Iran along with many of his top generals because the intelligence inputs confirmed the time and location of the meeting that the Supreme Leader was going to chair. Second, the presumption that, once the Supreme Leader is dead and Iran is pounded by the overwhelming military superiority of Israel and the US, Iran will capitulate and surrender in no time, four to five days at the most. The war has now entered the third week, and there is no sign of Iran capitulating or its people coming out on the streets seeking a regime change. On the contrary, Iran has a new Supreme Leader in Mojtaba Khamenei, who, by most calculations, would not have become the Supreme Leader in the normal course. His first proclamation on taking the fight to Israel and the US and to any country which supports or facilitates the war is more threatening than reconciliatory. His close ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) may not only have been instrumental in him becoming the Supreme Leader but may now result in a bloody and protracted military campaign, the worst that the region has ever experienced. And Iran, despite being overwhelmed militarily, continues to fight back. Its missiles are still penetrating Israeli and American air defences in sufficient numbers to cause the required damage. Its arsenal of missiles, drones and launchers, despite claims of being degraded to more than 75 per cent, continues to emerge from nowhere and fire back. Their numbers too are not dwindling, although the strike rate per day has definitely sobered down. Why has it happened? Why did the estimation by the world’s top intelligence agencies go so wrong? Has this miscalculation trapped America once again into another ‘forever war’? The answer to some of the questions lies in how the operational plans were conceived and based on what kind of intelligence assessments.

### Intelligence Operations: Spectacular but Less Decisive

The current military operation, and many more before this, conducted by the US and Israel, were based on the success of intelligence operations providing the initial but decapitating success which would be followed by a short, precise and overwhelming military campaign to ensure victory.

The targeted assassination of the Supreme Leader along with more than 40 top generals before the first aerial strikes went in on 28th February was meant to deliver a shock from which it would have been very difficult for the

Iranian regime to regroup and survive. Whatever semblance of resistance would have been left, it was eliminated by the sheer weight of aerial and missile strikes, targeting the heart of Iran’s military, political and energy infrastructure. It is not the first time that such an intelligence operation has been launched. Taking out key leadership at the top has been a key mantra to success in American thinking for a long time. Gaddafi in Libya, Saddam Hussein in Iraq or even the recent capture of Venezuelan President Maduro had given them enough empirical logic that this theory will prevail in Iran too. Sadly, the lessons from recent incidents in the region were ignored. Israel took out Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasarullah in September 2024 in a targeted intelligence-based operation. It was preceded by a series of strikes, including the ‘pager attacks’ on top leadership of Hezbollah too. Did it result in the collapse of Hezbollah? The answer is sad. ‘No.’ The ceasefire with Hezbollah in November 2024 happened not entirely because Hezbollah begged for mercy but because Israel’s operational priorities had shifted to Syria. Meanwhile, Hezbollah got a new leader and has steadily consolidated. The proof is being witnessed in the missile and rocket barrages which have recommenced from Southern Lebanon onto Israel and the tough fight that Hezbollah is giving to Israeli ground forces in Southern Lebanon currently. Even in the case of Iran, the previous instance of intelligence operations was spectacular, but was it decisive? Did they expose structural fragilities in the Iranian regime? The answer is again, ‘No’. Among those killed on 13th June 2025 when Israel launched ‘Operation Rising Lion’ into Iran were the IRGC chief, Maj Gen Hossein Salami; Armed Forces Chief Maj Gen Mohammad Bagheri; Emergency Command head Maj Gen Gholam Ali Rashid; Brig Gen Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force; Ali Shamkhani, who was the top adviser to Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei; and many more. Also killed were six nuclear scientists who were key figures in Iran’s nuclear programme. But the Iranian regime prevailed, not because the Supreme Leader was alive but because the multilayered structures within the military and politics did not rely on singular authority and had enough well-trained replacements.

Where are the US and Israel failing in this war? It is definitely not due to a lack of military capability but perhaps due to either ignoring or grossly underestimating the very basic military maxim ‘Know your enemy’.

### Operational Intelligence

Operational intelligence is all about ‘knowing your enemy’, and it relies on not only the numbers in the adversary’s armed forces and its arsenal but also many more facets like operational deployments, military doctrine, likely war strategies, and contingencies that may arise during the conflict. It also includes important inputs on how the regime is likely to react to given war situations and what measures, other than military, the adversary can undertake to swing the momentum back in its favour. Another important factor to be considered at the apex level is how

the population in the adversary country is likely to react, as also the kind of support or resistance the neighbouring countries and other major external powers are likely to extend during the conflict. In the current conflict, all these vital aspects have been grossly underestimated with regard to Iran. It was estimated that Iran would have a few thousand (3,000 to 5,000) missiles which require a few hundred mobile launchers, and with sustained pressure of almost unopposed military strikes, the capability would be eliminated in a few days. After 17 days of war, Iran continues to fire missiles and drones, and the numbers are not going down. Plus, the lethality and technology of missiles are increasing by the day. As has been admitted by President Trump himself, they did not expect Iran to fire at American bases and assets in the Gulf nations. As a result, the focus of air defence was on incoming missiles into Israel, leaving a vital flank exposed. Not only has the US resultantly suffered huge losses in the region but also has been left embarrassed at not being able to protect the Gulf countries despite decades of investment, military deployments and security guarantees. The possibility of forced closure of the most vital choke point in the region, the Strait of Hormuz, either was not considered or was underplayed as an unlikely event. Also, the fact that despite decimating the Iranian navy, the US navy led by two aircraft carriers has been unable to secure a safe passage for oil tankers is a gross underestimation of not only the ability of Iran to instil fear in the region militarily but also the dynamics that play out in the shipping industry, especially insurance. It is not known whether the US and Israel had taken into consideration how the Gulf countries and other allies would react to contingencies, especially where the US-Israel required help. Despite many Gulf countries allowing strikes into Iran originating from their territory, none have joined the war actively in their support. Also, the fact that none of the Nato members is willing to deploy naval assets to secure the narrow passage in the Strait of Hormuz despite threats from President Trump is also an indication of another underestimation by the US-Israel combo. At the apex level is obviously the failure in the assessment that taking out the top leadership would lead to the collapse of the regime. Not only has the regime survived, but it is rallying together in a collective resolve to fight and survive. The war in Iran is a classic lesson on how operational military intelligence is absolutely vital for a military victory, especially against an adversary like Iran, which does not rely on a single powerful autocratic leader but has a complex and interwoven system of leadership. While intelligence-based targeted operations may look spectacular, they cannot deliver military victory unless they are backed by a realistic assessment of the enemy, based on operational intelligence. It also is a lesson in warfighting, where a country which is pitched against the mightiest and technologically most superior military is giving an equal fight by adopting a strategy of survival rather than outright military victory.

Col Rajeev Agarwal

# From Kabul to Balochistan: Pakistan’s strategic brutality against Afghan and Baloch civilians

The Pakistan Air Force has been bombing Afghanistan’s cities and other places for the past three weeks. This began after a series of strikes within Pakistan by the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan and the Baloch groups struggling to shake off the Pakistani yoke. Defence Minister Khwaja Asif declared that his country was at war with Afghanistan. Pakistan claims that its precision bombing attacks against ‘terrorist’ targets and its support infrastructure. This is completely wrong because, in an unforgivable act, the Pakistan Air Force bombed the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital on the evening of March 16. The facility is located at Pul-e-Charki in Kabul and is near a complex created by the US military during their 20-year stay in Afghanistan. That Pakistan bombed a civilian health-related centre is borne out by reports in the Western media. In a long account about the incident, a leading Western newspaper noted, “Pictures taken throughout the night and shared by emergency workers... showed no sign of weapons, ammunition or military equipment in the targeted building. Other buildings adjacent to the large structure, each containing 20 to 30 bunk beds, also caught fire. White and blue gowns and identical sandals that looked like part of uniforms distributed to patients, as well as bottles of syrup and pills, could be found in the debris.” The newspaper also published pictures of the destruction caused by the Pakistani bombing. This report and the reports of NGOs in the Afghan capital conclusively establish that the Pakistani bombing led to deaths and injuries. According to Afghan officials, 400 inmates of the facility died in the Pakistani strike. The dead and the injured were taken to Kabul hospitals. What is particularly noteworthy is that these deaths of the innocent occurred in the month of Ramadan, which is holy to Muslims, and when the Eid festival is only a few days away. Instead of showing remorse for this tragedy caused by its bombing, Pakistan has asserted that the Afghan statements are false. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar stated in posts on X, “All targeting has been done with precision only at those infrastructures (sic) which are being used by the

Afghanistan Taliban regime to support its multiple terror proxies, including Fitna-al-Khawarij and Fitna-al-Hindustan, as can be clearly seen in the accompanying footage. False claims made by the propagandists (sic) Taliban regime cannot befool the Afghans and the world about their heinous actions supporting and sponsoring terrorism in the region. Operations under Ghazab Lil Haq to safeguard Pakistani citizens against terrorism waged by Master Terrorist Proxy will continue until the desired objectives are fully achieved.” Tarar has added only insult to injury. Pakistan has released what it claims is the camera footage of the strike. This cannot, however, obscure the photographs of the destruction of the facility or the bodies and the injured lying in Kabul hospitals. The Pakistani authorities’ insensitivity is unimaginable. The least Islamabad and Rawalpindi could have done was to announce, at the highest military and civilian levels, that the Pakistani military will investigate the bombing. It should also have expressed regret at the death and injury suffered by the Afghans, even though it qualified that by saying that it would take no responsibility till its investigation was completed. That has not been the Pakistani reaction till now. Such a careless attitude, especially during the month of Ramadan, shows the depth of Pakistan’s hostility towards Afghanistan. Pakistan would be aware that during the 20 years of the US presence in Afghanistan, the Afghan people were most offended by two actions of the American military: The first was its failure to ensure that its bombing was confined to only Taliban targets. It did not take care to avoid the use of wrong targeting information. Consequently, US aircraft caused numerous deaths in bombing civilian facilities which had nothing to do with the Taliban. They also bombed congregations of Afghans which they thought were gatherings of the Taliban but were not so. Sometimes even marriage parties were struck, turning happy occasions into those of intense grief. The second was the military going into family quarters, or the ‘zenana’, of residential buildings in search of the Taliban. This was most offensive to the Afghans. The Afghans were

outraged by these American actions. They complained to their presidents – first Hamid Karzai and later Ashraf Ghani. The presidents put pressure on the US military. In time the Americans ensured that their intelligence improved. Besides—and this is what the Pakistanis should emulate—they quickly carried out their investigations, and if they had made a mistake which led to the loss of innocent lives, US commanders in Afghanistan expressed regret. This was only a gesture, but the acknowledgement of a mistake is the least which a civilised armed force can do. Obviously, the Pakistanis are reluctant to do so. This reveals their true nature. India did well in its statement of March 17 to call out this act as an affront to civilised conduct in interstate relations. Its statement noted, “This is a cowardly and unconscionable act of violence that has claimed the lives of a large number of civilians in a facility which can by no means be justified as a military target. Pakistan is now trying to dress up a massacre as a military operation.” The statement went on to correctly add, “There is no faith, no law, and no morality that can justify the deliberate targeting of a hospital and its patients. India also called upon “the international community...[to] hold the perpetrators of this criminal act accountable and ensure that the wanton targeting by Pakistan of civilians in Afghanistan ceases without delay.” It is doubtful if Pakistan would act with restraint towards Afghanistan. It has been emboldened by the Americans supporting its action as part of ‘self-defence’. This attack will harden Afghan attitudes towards the mediation of China to stop a further slide in Pakistan-Afghan relations. Before the attack, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was in contact with his Pakistani counterpart, Ishaq Dar, and the Afghan Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi. He urged both to adopt dialogue and negotiation to address their disputes. China wants a stable and peaceful region to the west of Pakistan because it fears that unrest there can spread and impact its interests in Xinjiang. It also does not want these differences to provide what it feels will be opportunities for India to strengthen its position in Afghanistan. Vivek Katju

# Madhabdeva and the Cultural Foundations of Assam



Siddharth Roy

Assam celebrates the Janmotsav of Sri Sri Madhabdeva on 1st June. It is an occasion not merely for religious observance but for reflecting upon one of the greatest architects of Assamese civilisation. More than four centuries after his passing, Madhabdeva remains a towering presence in the cultural, literary and spiritual life of Assam. Along with his guru, the saint-reformer Srimanta Sankardeva, he laid the foundations of a social and cultural renaissance that transformed medieval Assam and continues to shape the region's identity.

Born in 1489 at Letekupukhuri in present-day Lakhimpur district, Madhabdeva lived during a period of profound social and religious ferment. Assam was then marked by sectarian divisions, ritualism and rigid social hierarchies. Initially a devotee of the Shakta tradition, Madhabdeva underwent a transformative encounter with Sankardeva. What began as a theological debate evolved into one of the most consequential guru-disciple relationships in Indian religious history. Convinced by Sankardeva's exposition of devotion centred on a single supreme deity, Krishna, Madhabdeva embraced the Ekasarana Nama Dharma movement and became its most

devoted disciple and eventual successor.

If Sankardeva was the founder of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam, Madhabdeva was its greatest organiser, interpreter and consolidator. The success of many reform movements depends not only on visionary founders but also on capable successors who can institutionalise ideas and carry them across generations. Madhabdeva performed precisely that role. Following Sankardeva's death in 1568, he provided leadership to the movement and ensured its spread across the Brahmaputra valley. Through the network of satras and namghars, the movement acquired a durable institutional framework that survives to this day.

Madhabdeva's greatest contribution perhaps lies in the realm of literature. Assamese literature owes an immense debt to him. His masterpiece, Namghosha or Hazari Ghosa, consisting of around a thousand devotional verses, occupies a place in Assamese society comparable to that of other great devotional texts in different regions of India. It distilled complex theological ideas into language accessible to ordinary people. Through its verses, Madhabdeva propagated the ideals of humility, devotion, compassion and surrender to the divine. Even today, passages from the Namghosha are recited daily in homes, namghars and satras across Assam.

His literary genius, however, extended far beyond a single work. Madhabdeva authored the celebrated Bhakti Ratnavali, a profound exposition of devotional philosophy that became one of the foundational texts of Assamese Vaishnavism. The work systematically elaborates the principles of bhakti and spiritual surrender and remains central to the religious life of the Vaishnava community. So revered are the texts of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva that many Assamese Vaishnavas place them on the altar as objects of worship in place of idols.

Equally significant was Madhabdeva's contribution

to Assamese music. He composed nearly two hundred Borgeets, the devotional songs that constitute one of the finest achievements of Assamese classical music. These compositions combine spiritual depth with remarkable lyrical beauty and musical sophistication. Long before the modern concept of cultural preservation emerged, Madhabdeva and his contemporaries created a living musical tradition that continues to be performed in satras, namghars and cultural institutions throughout Assam.

His dramatic works also enriched Assamese culture. Through one-act plays and devotional dramas, he employed theatre as a medium of moral education and spiritual awakening. These works helped make religious teachings accessible to common people and contributed significantly to the development of Assamese dramatic traditions. Together with Sankardeva's innovations in theatre, music and dance, Madhabdeva helped create a uniquely Assamese cultural ecosystem whose influence extends into contemporary performing arts.

Yet Madhabdeva's significance cannot be measured solely through his literary and artistic achievements. He was also a social reformer whose teachings challenged many of the inequalities of his age. The Ekasarana movement emphasised devotion rather than birth, inner spirituality rather than ritual complexity, and ethical conduct rather than social status. Its institutions brought together people from diverse backgrounds and encouraged collective participation in religious and cultural life. In a society often fragmented by caste and sectarian distinctions, this message carried profound transformative potential.

The broader impact of Madhabdeva on Assamese identity is difficult to overstate. The Assamese language, literature, music, theatre and religious institutions all bear his imprint. The satra institution evolved into centres not only of worship but also of education, manuscript pres-

ervation, artistic training and social cohesion. Through these institutions, Madhabdeva's ideas became embedded in the everyday life of Assam. His contribution was therefore civilisational rather than merely religious.

In contemporary India, Madhabdeva's legacy retains remarkable relevance. At a time when societies across the world grapple with polarisation, identity conflicts and social fragmentation, his emphasis on devotion, ethical conduct, inclusiveness and community life offers enduring lessons. His writings remind us that spirituality can serve as a force for social harmony rather than division. His life demonstrates how cultural creativity can become a vehicle for social transformation.

For Assam in particular, Madhabdeva remains a unifying figure. In an age of rapid economic change and technological disruption, the preservation of cultural memory becomes increasingly important. The continued vitality of the Namghosha, the Borgeets, the satras and the namghars testifies to the enduring strength of the values he espoused. They connect contemporary Assam to a rich civilisational inheritance that spans more than five centuries.

As the state commemorates his Janmotsav today, the most fitting tribute to Sri Sri Madhabdeva lies not merely in ceremonial observances but in a renewed engagement with his ideas. His life was a testament to the transformative power of faith, learning, culture and service. Few individuals have left such a deep and lasting imprint on the soul of a people. In remembering Madhabdeva, Assam remembers one of the principal architects of its identity and one of the greatest saint-poets of the Indian Bhakti tradition.

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## Sooryavanshi wins Orange Cap, MVP and Emerging Player awards in IPL 2026

*The 15-year-old batter was first to win both the MVP and Emerging Player awards in the same season*

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi might have missed winning the IPL 2026 trophy, but has won everything else he could: the Most Valuable Player (MVP), the Orange Cap (for most runs), and Best Emerging Player. All after becoming the



talk of the tournament for his 776 runs in 16 innings at a strike rate of 237.30. And all at 15 years of age. Gujarat Titans (GT) quick Kagiso Rabada won the Purple Cap for topping the wickets' chart. He took 29 wickets from 17 games at an economy rate of 9.68. This was his second Purple Cap, having won it previously in 2020 when he took 30 wickets for Delhi Capitals. Bhuvneshwar Kumar of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) was a close second with 28 wickets. Sooryavanshi, 15, is the first player to win both the MVP and Emerging Player awards in the same season. He was the first since Chris Gayle in 2011 to top both the runs and strike rate charts (min. 20 balls faced) in the same season. Sooryavanshi hit 72 sixes in IPL 2026, breaking Gayle's record of most sixes (59) in an IPL season, and played a key role in RR making it to the playoffs. They eventually lost to GT in Qualifier 2 in New Chandigarh. "It feels nice, but there is pressure because I am doing interviews. It is a proud moment and I will try and do well next season too," Sooryavanshi said after collecting his awards at the end of the final. "I try to back my game and if the ball is there to be hit, I go all out for it and just try to play that way. "How to play the pressure game, how to change myself every game, you can't play every game in one mode, you need to read the game situation and play according to the team's requirements. These are my learnings from this season. [On fitness] Yes, my focus is on that. If I have to play long, I have to stay clear of injuries and work on my fitness and have to focus more." GT captain Shubman Gill was second on the Orange Cap list with 732 runs. He was followed by his team-mate and opening partner B Sai Sudharsan, who finished with 722. At the Cricinfo Honours awards on the eve of the IPL final, Sachin Tendulkar had called Sooryavanshi "truly special". "Everyone is talking about Sooryavanshi, and I watched him bat - it was magnificent. I mean he is something truly special," Tendulkar said. "And not just the ability to hit the ball, but what also fascinated me was the wrist work that he has. To be able to play in all directions of the ground, you need good wrist work. And he is not slogging the ball. He is just picking the line and length earlier than the rest of

the guys and he is able to clear the rope comfortably." It's a turbulent time for the human race. Even if we sidestep wars, geopolitics and growing inequality for a moment, temperatures in some Indian cities alone have risen beyond human endurance and are claiming lives in one state, only days after hundreds fell prey to storms in another. None of this slows down our destruction of nature. Part of this destruction feeds artificial intelligence, which is resulting in losses of jobs, creating more inequality and, much lower on the list of things to worry about, a whole lot of slop. We must be thankful for sport in such times. While it also contributes to global warming, sport continues to be an endeavour to push the limits of human excellence. Yes, athletes use science and technology to prepare better, but under the bright lights it is human versus human, testing themselves against the elements, against tactics, pushing themselves to the limit of what's legal. How fortunate we are then that this era of cricket has a prodigy of its own. We who grew up not knowing what it felt like to watch Sachin Tendulkar the boy take on men twice his age, facing a ball has the ability to kill. All we have is some grainy footage from the late '80s. That interview with Tom Alter is gold dust. For Bradman, we have literature. Viv might not even make this category.

We, the spoilt lot, are getting to watch Vaibhav Sooryavanshi in the streaming age, with riveting episodes dropping two-three times a week. We won't need to tell stories of him to the next generation, we could just show them the faces of Pat Cummins or Mitchell Starc after having tried everything against this boy less than half their age without success. There is no breather, no sighter, just six-hitting of the highest quality that has given him, at 15, arguably the greatest season anyone has ever had in the IPL: 680 (most runs),



242.85 (highest strike rate), 65 (most sixes in any season). Are we truly appreciating the enormity of what we're witnessing? A small example of it is the incredulity in the voices of seasoned broadcasters who end up infantilising Sooryavanshi in interviews. It is, of course, not easy to get over that he is just 15, but he is also much more. Such a range of sixes has never been hit with

such regularity against bowling of this pace. What Sooryavanshi is doing is beyond the wild fantasies we had at his age. In the Eliminator in New



Chandigarh, Sunrisers Hyderabad tried the ultimate desperate act: bowl yorkers from ball one. To no avail. Cummins tried every kind of funky field, but fielders didn't matter until Sooryavanshi attempted one shot where he said he played the field rather than the ball. It resulted in a top edge to deep third. Had he upper-cut or ramped it, he would have got a six, he said. It would have been his 13th to bring up a hundred off 29 balls. The high back lift, the quick eye, the inexplicable balance for someone swinging so hard, the lean onto the off side, the coil of the torso, the split-second decision making, everything came together as it has been coming together all IPL, and in the Under-19 World Cup before that, and in the previous IPL. There is ability of course, more research will tell us about the unique natural attributes that make Sooryavanshi, but what we already know is that he has put in the proverbial 10,000 hours into his batting. He continues to put more hours into his training to be able to produce such gems. And he needs all that work because so much can go wrong with how deep and high his back lift is. Technology of course played a role in the making of Sooryavanshi but in an unexpected way. It gave a boy in Samastipur, Bihar access to old videos of Brian Lara. Everything else is the human pursuit of excellence, and it's got even the most jaded cricket follower to tune into Rajasthan Royals' matches this season. Every time Sooryavanshi bats, it feels like a chance to see what is humanly possible in our sport. He's already told Kevin Pietersen in an interview that he feels he can score 200 in a T20 innings. For a while against SRH, it seemed he might do it even before that full interview was released. It could be on Friday, in Qualifier 2 against Gujarat Titans. If not, we will hope RR qualify for the final on Sunday. We will then wait for the next time Sooryavanshi plays. To know how much he can achieve. He is, ironically, a reason to say: what a time to be alive, even if only when he is batting. Sachin Tendulkar called the 15-year-old sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi "truly special" and said no one should "play around with his natural instincts". Sooryavanshi had a record-breaking IPL 2026, scoring 776 runs at a strike rate of 237.31 for Rajasthan Royals. Along the way, he smashed 72 sixes, beating Chris Gayle's record (59) of most sixes in an IPL season.

## Aarohan Artist Guild Honours 22 Distinguished Personalities with Aarohan Awards at 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Bohag Samarani Programme

**Meser Ali, Guwahati, June 1:** The 26th Annual Special Programme and Bohag Samarani (Bohag Concluding Ceremony) organised by Aarohan Artist Guild, a leading educational, literary, social and cultural organisation of Assam, was held with great enthusiasm on May 30 at Kumar Bhaskar Natya Mandir, Uzan Bazar, Guwahati. On the occasion, 22 distinguished personalities from diverse fields across the state were honoured with the prestigious "Aarohan Awards" in recognition of their outstanding contributions to society.

The main meeting and award presentation ceremony, held at noon, was formally inaugurated through the lighting of ceremonial lamps before the portraits of legendary artist Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and popular singer Zubeen Garg by noted artist Manas Sharma of Dhekiajuli, Sonitpur, and eminent artist and editor of Janakalyan Barta, Kumud Nath of North Guwahati. Welcoming the gathering, Dr. Dilip Nath, President of Aarohan Artist Guild, noted singer and President of the Kamrup District Committee of the All Assam Journalists' Association, said that the organisation has been identifying and honouring dedicated individuals who have been working tirelessly in the fields of education, literature, culture, social service and other sectors, with the objective of encouraging and recognising their contributions. The programme was attended by renowned artist and physician Dr. Anjan Jyoti Choudhury as Chief Guest. Distinguished guests included playwright and President of the Guwahati Metropolitan District Committee of Assam Sahitya Sabha Prafulla Barman, litterateur and Chief Adviser of the All Assam Journalists' Association Manoranjan Bhattacharya, former Secretary of Asom Natya Sanmilan Giridhar Roy, cultural activist Dr. Nabajyoti Saikia, social worker Rajib Sharma, artist and social worker Bholaram Kr. Lal, National Award-winning artist Hemanta Das, Principal of West Point Art & Dance Academy Kshiroj Medhi and social worker Brajen Kalita, among others. Among the award recipients were Dr. Montu Kumar Das, Dr. Nityananda Kalita and Munindra Bharali (Aarohan Shiksha Ratna Award); Pabitra Kumar and Kamal Prasad Sharma (Aarohan Educational Coordination Award); Binod Chaharia and Tulsi Borthakur (Aarohan Social Coordination Award); Nipon Nath (Aarohan Social Welfare Award); Dipen Deka (Aarohan Rural Journalism Award); Mridul Kumar Deka (Assam Shilpi Pran Award); Dr. Pulin Kumar (Aarohan Cultural Coordination Award); Rajendra Sharma and Tapan Chandra Kalita (Aarohan Distinguished Teacher Award); Deepjyoti Das (Aarohan Administrative Coordination Award); Dr. Deep Jyoti Shyam (Aarohan Health Coordination Award); Jiban Saikia (Aarohan Literary Award); Rupak Kalita and Bijoy Baran (Aarohan Artist Award); Harmohan Kalita (Aarohan Social Coordination Award); and Sajira Begum (Aarohan Social Service Award). On the same occasion, the Artist-Literary-Journalist Protection Forum, Assam, conferred the "Assam Jan Hitaishi Award" upon noted artist, actor and journalist Sujit Kataki of Sirajuli, Sonitpur. The cultural segment of the programme featured a Zikir performance by artist and journalist Mesher Ali under the direction of Bipin Das, a dance recital by child artiste Ban Smita Nath, and special performances by students of West Point Art & Dance School.

The event concluded successfully with a vibrant cultural programme comprising songs, music and dance performances.



# Indian Haj Mission earns prestigious Saudi Awards for Excellence

**New Delhi:** India's Haj management efforts received significant international recognition after Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju announced that, for the first time, the Indian Haj Mission has been honoured with two prestigious Labbaytum Awards by the Saudi Minis-

dian Haj Mission, operating on the ground in Saudi Arabia, worked in close coordination with local authorities and service providers to address operational challenges and facilitate smooth movement, accommodation and welfare support for pilgrims. The role of the In-



try of Hajj and Umrah for excellence in Haj coordination and communication, marking a notable achievement for the country's pilgrimage administration and reflecting the growing reputation of India's efforts in ensuring a smooth and well-organised Haj experience for thousands of pilgrims travelling to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia each year. Sharing the development through a social media post, the Minister said that the successful conduct of the core phase of Haj 2026 was the result of seamless coordination among the Ministry of Minority Affairs, the Haj Committee of India and the Indian Haj Mission, which was led by India's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and the Consul General in Jeddah. The recognition comes as a testament to the extensive planning, logistical management and continuous support provided by Indian authorities throughout the pilgrimage season, ensuring that pilgrims received timely assistance, guidance and essential services at every stage of their journey. The Haj pilgrimage remains one of the largest annual gatherings of people in the world and requires meticulous coordination between host country authorities and participating nations. In this context, the awards received by the Indian Haj Mission underline the effectiveness of collaborative efforts undertaken by various stakeholders to manage the complex requirements associated with transporting, accommodating and assisting thousands of Indian pilgrims. According to the Minister, the successful execution of Haj arrangements this year demonstrates the strength of institutional coordination and the commitment of all agencies involved in serving pilgrims. The Ministry of Minority Affairs, working closely with the Haj Committee of India, played a central role in overseeing preparations, monitoring services and ensuring that pilgrims were able to undertake the sacred journey with confidence and convenience. The In-

dian diplomatic establishment was also highlighted, with the Mission being led by India's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and the Consul General in Jeddah, whose efforts contributed significantly to the overall success of the operation. The awards from the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah serve as an acknowledgment of the dedication and professionalism displayed by the Indian team in managing one of the most important religious pilgrimages for the country's Muslim community. Minister Kiren Rijiju expressed gratitude to Saudi Arabia for its continued support and excellent arrangements for pilgrims, emphasizing the strong cooperation between the two countries in facilitating the annual pilgrimage. His remarks reflected appreciation for the assistance extended by Saudi authorities, whose coordination and hospitality have played an important role in ensuring the comfort, safety and well-being of visiting pilgrims. The recognition also highlights the importance of effective communication systems, which have become increasingly crucial in managing large-scale pilgrimages. Timely dissemination of information, coordination between different agencies and rapid response mechanisms contribute significantly to the overall pilgrimage experience, and the awards specifically acknowledging excellence in coordination and communication indicate that these aspects were handled efficiently by the Indian Haj Mission. The achievement is expected to further strengthen confidence among future pilgrims and reinforce India's reputation for effective pilgrimage management. Over the years, the Government of India has continued to focus on improving services for Haj pilgrims through better planning, technological support, streamlined administrative processes and enhanced coordination with Saudi authorities. These efforts have aimed at reducing difficulties faced by pilgrims while ensuring greater transpar-

ency and efficiency in the management of pilgrimage-related services. The latest recognition from the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah represents an important milestone in this ongoing journey of improvement and service delivery. The Labbaytum Awards are regarded as prestigious acknowledgments within the Haj ecosystem, recognising missions and organisations that demonstrate exceptional performance in serving pilgrims. Receiving two such awards simultaneously underscores the quality of work undertaken by the Indian Haj Mission and reflects the collective dedication of officials, administrators and support personnel involved in the operation. The successful conduct of Haj 2026 also demonstrates the value of sustained cooperation between governments, diplomatic missions and religious pilgrimage management bodies. Such coordination is essential for addressing logistical complexities, ensuring compliance with regulations and maintaining high standards of service delivery during the pilgrimage season. The recognition further serves as encouragement for continued innovation and excellence in pilgrimage administration. For thousands of Indian pilgrims, the efforts of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, the Haj Committee of India and the Indian Haj Mission translate into practical support that helps make the spiritual journey more accessible and comfortable. From pre-departure preparations in India to assistance upon arrival in Saudi Arabia and throughout the pilgrimage process, a wide range of services are coordinated to meet the needs of pilgrims. The awards therefore not only recognise institutional achievement but also acknowledge the positive impact of these efforts on the experiences of individual pilgrims. The Minister's announcement has been welcomed as a moment of pride, highlighting India's growing stature in the field of Haj management and reinforcing the importance of international cooperation in facilitating one of the world's most significant religious gatherings. As Haj operations continue to evolve with changing requirements and increasing expectations, the recognition received by the Indian Haj Mission is likely to serve as a benchmark for future efforts and a reminder of the importance of dedication, coordination and communication in delivering successful pilgrimage services. By securing two prestigious Labbaytum Awards from the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, the Indian Haj Mission has achieved a historic distinction that reflects the combined efforts of the Ministry of Minority Affairs, the Haj Committee of India, Indian diplomatic representatives in Saudi Arabia and numerous officials working behind the scenes to ensure that pilgrims receive the highest possible standards of support and care. The achievement stands as an affirmation of India's commitment to serving its Haj pilgrims with efficiency, professionalism and compassion while strengthening bilateral cooperation with Saudi Arabia in the spirit of mutual respect and shared commitment to facilitating a safe, smooth and spiritually fulfilling pilgrimage experience for all.

**Shillong:** Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports Raksha Khadse chaired a comprehensive review meeting with Meghalaya Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Wailadmiki Shylla and Commissioner and Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya Dr. Vijay Kumar D to assess ongoing sports and youth development initiatives in the state and to explore new avenues for strengthening collaboration between the Centre and the State Government. The meeting brought together senior officials from the Government of Meghalaya, representatives of the Sports Authority of India, members of the Meghalaya State Olympic Association and several stakeholders associated with sports and youth development in the state. Discussions during the meeting focused on strengthening sports infrastructure, promoting grassroots talent development, encouraging youth engagement and ensuring enhanced Centre-State collaboration for the long-term growth of sports in Meghalaya and the wider North East region. Officials held detailed discussions on Meghalaya's sports ecosystem, athlete development programmes, infrastructure projects and youth engagement initiatives aimed at strengthening grassroots participation and creating stronger pathways for sporting excellence. The State Government highlighted several initiatives being implemented to support sports clubs, associations and athletes across the state through grant-based support mechanisms for youth and sports-related activities, targeted youth development schemes and scholarship programmes designed to nurture young talent. During the discussions, officials informed that nearly 900 athletes are currently receiving support under the State Sports Scholarship Scheme, which has become one of the major pillars in encouraging aspiring sportspersons to continue their training and competitive participation. The meeting also focused extensively on Meghalaya's flagship grassroots football initiatives under the Chief Minister's Football Mission, which has drawn inspiration from successful football development models followed in several South American countries. Officials stated that the initiative currently functions through 125 grassroots centres spread across the state and supports nearly 10,000 athletes, while also contributing towards the emergence of several international footballers from Meghalaya. The programme was highlighted as an example of how structured grassroots sports initiatives can create opportunities for young athletes while strengthening the sporting culture in rural and urban areas alike. Raksha Khadse appreciated the efforts being undertaken to promote football at the grassroots level and emphasised the importance of building sustainable sports ecosystems capable of identifying and nurturing

talent from an early stage. Discussions also covered Meghalaya's plans for expanding and strengthening sports infrastructure, including progress related to the Mawkanu Football Stadium, which is envisioned as one of the largest football stadiums in the region and is being considered as a potential venue for the opening ceremony of the National Games. Officials shared updates on infrastructure projects including the Umsawli Sports Complex and the Slalom Course at Umtham, both of which are expected to significantly enhance the state's sporting infrastructure and create better facilities for athletes across multiple disciplines. The Slalom Course at Umtham received particular attention during the review, with officials highlighting that it is emerging as one of the country's premier facilities for water sports and slalom training. The development of such specialised infrastructure was viewed as an important step towards diversifying sporting opportunities in Meghalaya and positioning the state as a centre for adventure and water sports activities. Raksha Khadse stressed the importance of strengthening grassroots sports ecosystems and promoting youth participation through coordinated efforts between the Central Government and State Governments so that sports development initiatives can deliver maximum impact. She underlined the need for convergence between Central and State programmes in order to ensure that athletes, coaches and sports institutions receive the necessary support and resources required for sustained development. The meeting also reviewed several youth-focused initiatives being implemented in Meghalaya, including the Youth Engagement and Empowerment Scheme for Students, popularly known as YESS Meghalaya, under which support is being extended to clubs and organisations carrying out youth-related programmes and activities across the state. Officials explained that such programmes are playing an important role in engaging young people in constructive activities, promoting leadership and volunteerism and strengthening community participation in sports and youth development initiatives. The role of MY Bharat in expanding youth participation and volunteer engagement also formed a major part of the discussions, particularly with regard to creating volunteering opportunities for upcoming sporting events including the National Games through the MY Bharat portal. Officials noted that the platform can help mobilise youth volunteers and encourage greater community involvement in sporting events while also creating opportunities for skill development and civic participation among young people.

## India Korea talks

**New Delhi:** India and the Republic of Korea have intensified efforts to strengthen their economic partnership as the 12th round of negotiations for the upgrade of the India-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IK CEPA) concluded in New Delhi, reflecting the commitment of both countries to modernise the existing trade pact and create a more balanced and mutually beneficial framework for future cooperation. The negotiations were held pursuant to the Joint Declaration signed on 20 April 2026 by Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and Korean Trade Minister, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Resources, Mr. Yeo Han-koo during the State Visit of the President of the Republic of Korea to India, where both sides had committed themselves to accelerating the IK CEPA upgrade negotiations in view of the rapidly evolving global economic environment and the growing importance of deeper bilateral engagement between the two nations. The latest round of talks was co-chaired by Ms. Kapil Chaudhary, Joint Secretary, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, and Mr. Park Geun-oh, Director General for Trade Agreement Policy, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE), Republic of Korea, with officials from both countries participating in detailed discussions covering a broad range of trade and investment issues aimed at strengthening the economic architecture between India and Korea. The discussions took place in a constructive and cooperative spirit and reflected the strong bilateral relationship and the "Futuristic Partnership" envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the Republic of Korea Mr. Lee Jae-myung, underlining the growing strategic importance of India-Korea relations in the Indo-Pacific region as both countries seek to diversify trade partnerships, improve supply chain resilience and expand industrial cooperation. During the current round of nego-

tiations, both sides reviewed the progress achieved so far in the IK CEPA upgrade negotiations and held extensive deliberations on key areas including Trade in Goods (TiG), Trade in Services (TiS), Rules of Origin (RoO), Origin Procedures (OP), Investment, and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards, indicating the broad scope of the proposed upgrade and the determination of both governments to address longstanding concerns while creating new opportunities for businesses and industries in both countries. Officials from India and Korea also discussed the need to align the agreement with emerging economic realities, technological advancements and evolving patterns of international trade, especially at a time when countries across the world are focusing on secure supply chains, digital trade and strategic industrial collaboration to strengthen economic resilience. Both sides acknowledged India's bilateral trade deficit, which has risen significantly since the IK CEPA came into force in 2010, and agreed to address the issue within the overall IK CEPA framework, a move seen as important from India's perspective as the country continues to seek more equitable market access and balanced trade outcomes through its bilateral and regional trade agreements. The issue of the widening trade deficit has remained one of the major concerns for India over the years, with policymakers and industry stakeholders repeatedly emphasising the need for greater access for Indian goods and services in the Korean market as well as stronger cooperation in areas that can help improve manufacturing competitiveness and export growth. The negotiations also reflected the shared understanding that a modernised trade agreement should not only facilitate greater trade flows but also encourage investments, innovation, technology partnerships and industrial cooperation that can contribute to economic growth and job creation in both countries.

## Govt strengthens Fuel Security amid continuing West Asia conflict

**New Delhi:** The government has directed public sector oil marketing companies to create Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) reserves sufficient for at least 30 days as the ongoing conflict in West Asia continues to disrupt global energy supplies, underscoring India's efforts to safeguard fuel availability and strengthen energy security amid evolving geopolitical uncertainties. The announcement was made during an inter-ministerial press briefing on the West Asia conflict, where Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Sujata Sharma, outlined a series of precautionary measures being implemented to protect the country against potential supply shocks and maintain uninterrupted access to essential petroleum products. Speaking to reporters, Ms Sharma said that, in addition to building LPG reserves, India is actively working to enhance its crude oil storage capacity in order to improve resilience against external disruptions and ensure that domestic energy requirements continue to be met effectively. She emphasized that the government is strengthening fuel security through strategic reserves while simultaneously ensuring uninterrupted supplies across the country and continuing efforts to curb hoarding and prevent any artificial shortages in the market. As part of this broader strategy, state-run oil marketing companies, including Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), have been asked to prepare plans for creating additional storage capacity over and above their regular commercial inventories, thereby providing an extra layer of protection against unforeseen disruptions in global supply chains. The move reflects the government's proactive approach to energy management at a time when developments in West Asia remain under close observation due to their potential implications for international oil and gas markets. Reassuring consumers and industry stakeholders, Ms Sharma stated that the country currently has adequate stocks of petrol, diesel, LPG, crude oil and natural gas, and that there is no immediate cause for concern regarding fuel availability. She noted that refin-

eries across the country are operating at optimum levels, helping maintain stable production and supply chains. Highlighting recent achievements in domestic energy production, she said that LPG production has reached an all-time high of around 92,000 metric tonnes per day, a milestone that reflects the capacity and efficiency of the country's refining and distribution network. She further informed that no dry-out has been reported at any LPG distributorship, indicating that supplies remain stable and accessible across regions. The government also shared data demonstrating the strength of the current LPG distribution system. According to Ms Sharma, 1.78 crore LPG refill bookings were received during the last four days alone, while approximately 1.8 crore cylinders were delivered during the same period. She noted that 96 per cent of these deliveries were authenticated digitally, highlighting the increasing use of technology in improving transparency, efficiency and accountability within the fuel distribution ecosystem. The figures underline both the scale of LPG consumption in the country and the capacity of oil marketing companies to meet demand even during periods of heightened concern regarding energy supplies. To prevent disruptions and discourage malpractices, enforcement agencies and oil marketing companies have intensified inspections across the country. These efforts have resulted in fuel seizures, the registration of First Information Reports (FIRs), arrests and disciplinary action against errant dealers and distributors found violating regulations. Officials said such measures are essential to ensure that fuel reaches genuine consumers without diversion or hoarding and that market stability is maintained during periods of uncertainty. The government also indicated that commercial LPG supplies remain robust, ensuring that businesses and commercial establishments continue to receive adequate fuel support. Furthermore, natural gas supply has been restored to 99 per cent for industrial and commercial consumers, providing reassurance to sectors dependent on gas for manufacturing, production and operational activities. The inter-ministerial briefing also included updates

from other departments involved in monitoring developments arising from the situation in West Asia. Additional Secretary (Gulf) in the Ministry of External Affairs, Aseem Mahajan, said that the government is closely monitoring developments in the Gulf and West Asia region and remains committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of Indian nationals residing, working or travelling there. He stated that Indian Embassies and Consulates across the region are operating round-the-clock helplines to provide timely assistance and support to citizens whenever required. According to Mr Mahajan, diplomatic missions remain in constant contact with local authorities and community networks to respond effectively to emerging situations and facilitate assistance where necessary. He added that the overall flight situation continues to improve, with additional flights operating from the region to various destinations across India. The increase in air connectivity is expected to provide greater flexibility and convenience for Indian nationals seeking to travel between the Gulf region and India while also helping maintain stable transportation links despite the challenging regional environment. The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways also provided an update on maritime operations and the welfare of Indian seafarers in the region. Director in the Ministry, Opesh Kumar Sharma, said that the Ministry continues to coordinate closely with the Ministry of External Affairs, Indian Missions and maritime stakeholders to ensure both the safety of seafarers and the uninterrupted functioning of maritime operations. Given the strategic importance of maritime routes in transporting crude oil and other essential commodities, maintaining secure and efficient shipping operations remains a key priority. Mr Sharma informed that the merchant vessel Nissos Keros, a crude oil tanker, has safely transited the Strait of Hormuz and is expected to arrive in Visakhapatnam on 3 June. The vessel is carrying around 2.7 lakh metric tonnes of crude oil, making its successful passage particularly significant at a time when global attention remains focused on the security of major energy shipping routes.

# RCB’s Era of Dominance



**By: Shashanka Das**  
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The Indian Premier League has often been defined by cycles of dominance. For years, franchises like Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians established benchmarks of sustained excellence. In IPL 2026, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) firmly entered that elite conversation by defeating Gujarat Titans by five wickets in the final and successfully defending their title. The victory was not merely another championship; it was a statement that RCB have evolved from a star-driven side into the most complete team in the tournament.

RCB’s triumph over Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium highlighted the transformation of a franchise that was once criticized for inconsistency despite possessing some of cricket’s biggest names. Chasing 156, RCB displayed composure and tactical clarity, reaching the target with two overs to spare. Virat Kohli’s influential knock ensured there were no late stumbles, while the bowling unit had earlier restricted Gujarat Titans to a below-par total.

What makes this title particularly significant is that it confirms RCB’s evolution from champions to a dynasty in the making. Defending an IPL title is arguably harder than winning one. Teams spend the following season studying weaknesses, opposition strategies become more targeted, and expectations increase dramatically. Yet RCB not only defended their crown but often looked like the strongest side throughout the competition. Captain Rajat Patidar captured this sentiment after the final when he remarked that the team did not merely participate but “dominated” the season.

At the center of this success story stands Rajat Patidar. His leadership has become one of the most remarkable narratives in recent IPL history. A player who once went unsold in the auction has now joined an exclusive group of captains alongside MS Dhoni and Rohit Sharma by winning back-to-back IPL titles. More impressively, he became the first captain to win championships in each of his first two seasons as skipper.

Patidar’s captaincy differs from the charismatic styles often associated with IPL leaders. He is calm, understated, and intensely process-driven. Throughout the season, he repeatedly emphasized planning, execution, and clarity of roles. Those principles were evident in the final. RCB’s bowling plans against Gujarat’s bat-

ting lineup were precise, and the chase was managed with calculated aggression rather than emotional momentum. The captain’s influence was visible not only in tactical decisions but also in the confidence displayed by younger players.

A deeper analysis of RCB’s campaign reveals that this success was built on structural strength rather than individual brilliance alone. Earlier versions of RCB were heavily dependent on Virat Kohli, AB de Villiers, or Chris Gayle to produce extraordinary performances. The current team, however, functions as a balanced unit. Different players stepped up in different phases of the tournament, creating a system that could absorb pressure and adapt to varying conditions. According to reports examining the franchise’s transformation, RCB shifted its focus from merely collecting star players to building a squad capable of succeeding across venues and match situations.

That philosophy was reflected in the play-



offs as well. In Qualifier 1 against Gujarat Titans, RCB produced one of the most dominant displays in IPL knockout history, posting 254/5. Patidar’s unbeaten 93 from just 33 deliveries showcased his ability to assess situations before accelerating decisively. The performance effectively announced RCB’s superiority before the final had even begun.

Another important factor behind RCB’s title defense was the continued excellence of Virat Kohli. While the franchise has become less dependent on one player, Kohli remains its emotional and competitive heartbeat. In the final, he delivered a match-winning innings that anchored the chase and demonstrated why he continues to be one of the league’s most influential performers. His ability to balance aggression with control allowed RCB to maintain command throughout the pursuit.

The bowling attack deserves equal recognition. Championship teams are often defined by their ability to defend modest totals and control high-pressure moments. RCB’s bowlers consistently executed plans, re-

stricted scoring opportunities, and prevented Gujarat from building meaningful partnerships in the final. Their performance reinforced a broader trend throughout the season: RCB had become one of the tournament’s most tactically disciplined units.

Beyond the statistics and tactical achievements lies a larger symbolic victory. For years, RCB carried the reputation of being cricket’s great underachievers. Despite massive fan support and iconic players, trophies remained elusive. The 2025 title ended that drought; the 2026 title erased any lingering doubts about legitimacy. Winning once can be explained by momentum or favorable circumstances. Winning twice consecutively establishes credibility and confirms a culture of excellence.

The significance of this achievement also extends to Indian cricket’s leadership landscape. Patidar’s rise challenges traditional assumptions about captaincy pedigree. Unlike many celebrated leaders before him, he did not

arrive with a long international résumé or a superstar reputation. His success demonstrates that tactical intelligence, clarity of communication, and trust in systems can be as valuable as celebrity status.

As IPL 2026 concludes, the question is no longer whether RCB belong among the league’s great franchises. That debate has effectively ended. The more relevant question is whether this team can sustain its dominance and pursue a third consecutive title. Given the squad depth, management structure, and leadership framework currently in place, such an ambition no longer appears unrealistic.

RCB’s five-wicket victory over Gujarat Titans was more than a championship win. It was the culmination of a carefully constructed sporting project—one built on planning, adaptability, and collective excellence. In a tournament often driven by star power, Royal Challengers Bengaluru have shown that modern dynasties are built not just on talent, but on systems. And in IPL 2026, those systems proved unstoppable.

## Why your athlete’s foot won’t go away – and how to finally clear it

Long after you’ve dropped off your old army uniforms and swapped boots for executive-appropriate dress shoes, you may still be hanging on to one last vestige of National Service (NS)—athlete’s foot. Not that you want to, of course, but the itchy, scaly or cracked skin on your feet, particularly between the toes, is as tenacious as your desire to book out all those months ago. Despite your best efforts to medicate, air your toes, and avoid going barefoot on suspicious surfaces such as the locker room, the infection is just not going away. So, why does athlete’s foot persist long after you’ve cleared your ORD (operationally ready date)? For some, it’s even affecting the toenails that thicken and become yellow, brittle, or in extreme cases, crumbly. Have fungi become resistant to medications the way certain bacteria do not succumb to antibiotics?

**HOW COMMON IS ATHLETE’S FOOT?** Athlete’s foot, medically known as tinea pedis, is a common concern among military personnel with a global incidence of 17 per cent. And it doesn’t discriminate between uniformed individuals and civilians. In Singapore, athlete’s foot was the most common skin infection, according to a National Skin Centre study that looked at patients between 1999 and 2003. “Tinea pedis accounted for more than one in four fungal skin infections treated during that period,” said Dr Isabelle Yoong Rui Wen, a family physician and clinical member with SingHealth Polyclinics’ Infection Prevention and Infectious Disease Committee Workgroup. There isn’t more recent local research, she added, to show how common tinea pedis is in Singapore today. In the clinics, podiatrists such as Nur Ashikin Ismail, who heads SingHealth Polyclinics’ Podiatry Services, see about two or three cases a day on average. “It adds up to roughly 40 to 60 cases each month. I also notice that cases tend to increase during hotter, more humid periods, when people perspire more.” Over at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, its Podiatry Service receives 20 to 30 cases monthly on average, “with a notable increase during Singapore’s wetter monsoon periods”, said podiatrist Eunice Yang. “Tinea pedis is more common in men than women with the peak age of incidence between 16 and 45 years old.” So yes, it’s not only NS men who are likely to get infected. “Despite the name, the infection is not confined to athletes either, and can affect people of all ages and activity levels,” said Nur Ashikin. “Certain groups are more prone to developing tinea pedis,” she continued, including diabetics with com-

promised immune systems, individuals who are required to wear enclosed footwear for prolonged periods in non-air-conditioned or wet work environments, and those with hyperhidrosis, a condition that leads to excessive sweating. **WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG TO HEAL?**

Tinea pedis is caused by dermatophyte fungi, most commonly, Trichophyton rubrum, Trichophyton interdigitale and Epidermophyton floccosum, said Nur Ashikin. And these dermatophytes are highly resilient. “Their cell walls contain mannans, which suppress the immune system and slow down the natural skin cell renewal process,” Yang explained. “When skin turnover is reduced, the infected skin takes longer to shed, allowing the infection to persist.” Then, when it spreads and infiltrates the nails, “the nails serve as fungal reservoirs, creating a reinfection cycle”, said Yang. Many patients also stop their antifungal medication once the symptoms disappear. You should complete the full recommended course and continue for an additional two weeks after symptoms resolve, said Yang. “This premature discontinuation allows small reservoirs of dermatophytes to survive and eventually cause symptom relapse.” There is another worrying factor. “Some fungi have changed over time and no longer respond to the usual creams and pills that doctors have relied on for decades,” revealed Dr Yoong. “These drug resistant fungi behave much like superbugs, making common skin infections harder to treat.” She highlighted Trichophyton indotineae as one of the most concerning new strains affecting the skin and feet. “It causes a particularly itchy, fast spreading form of athlete’s foot, and does not respond well to terbinafine, the standard, first line medication commonly prescribed by doctors,” said Dr Yoong. The culprits, she believed, are over the counter combination creams that mix antifungal medication with strong steroids. “While the steroids temporarily reduce redness and itching, they do not kill the fungus,” said Dr Yoong. “Instead, they mask the symptoms, allowing the fungus to survive, spread and gradually become resistant to treatment. Medical journals have confirmed that this resistant strain has already been detected in Singapore, meaning infections that look routine may be harder to clear.”

**HOW DO YOU TELL IF YOU HAVE ATHLETE’S FOOT?**

The infection does not always look serious at first, said Nur Ashikin.

## ‘Pieces of art for kings’: The watchmaker that makes fewer than 100 masterpieces a year

In the watchmaking world, high horology exists in a realm where timekeeping transcends utility and becomes an intricate dialogue between art, engineering and philosophy. In these rarefied ateliers, artisans labour over movements composed



of hundreds of minuscule components, each painstakingly finished by hand. There’s an obsession over the smallest of details too, and to wear such a watch is less about telling the time and more about carrying a legacy on the wrist. Occupying a place in this world is Swiss watch brand Jaquet Droz. It was founded in 1738 by Pierre Jaquet-Droz, who created clocks, timepieces and automata for European royalty, including King Ferdinand VI of Spain, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette of France, as well as for Chinese emperors captivated by European artistry. The brand was acquired by Swatch Group in 2000, and in 2022, it underwent a radical reinvention, spearheaded by CEO Alain Delamuraz. The new strategy involved closing all 176 points of sale, including both multi-brand retailers and single-brand boutiques, instead focusing on making bespoke orders directly with high-profile clients. Today, the only way to purchase a Jaquet Droz watch is directly through the manufacture itself. The modern-day Jaquet Droz is known for its exceptional metiers d’art and highly complex automata, often blending traditional craftsmanship with contemporary artistic expression. The Imperial Dragon

Automaton, for instance, features 19 moving parts on the dial that animate nine distinct movements, from the dragon’s undulating spine and opening jaw, to the flick of its tongue and constant rotation of its claws grasping a ball of red jasper.

The Petite Heure Minute Red Gold Japanese Garden achieves a striking three-dimensional effect, its dial meticulously carved from mother-of-pearl to depict a serene landscape of water lilies, koi carp and a tranquil Japanese garden. Meanwhile, the Rolling Stones Automaton fuses pop culture and technical artistry. A tribute to the iconic band of the 1960s, it features miniature replicas of each member’s instrument, from Keith Richard’s five-string guitar, Mick Jagger’s harmonica

and microphone and the drum set of the late Charlie Watts. Encircling these mini instruments are the band’s album covers on a vinyl record, which functions as an automaton. When activated by the pusher on the crown, the vinyl disc spins for at least 30 seconds, while the band’s signature red tongue emblem sways rhythmically. Jaquet Droz produces less than 100 watches a year, an anomaly at a time when brands are increasingly driven by scale and visibility. The average price of a piece? Around 300,000 CHF (US\$380,159; S\$485,175). As Delamuraz puts it: “We are doing exactly what Pierre-Jaquet Droz did, creating pieces of art for kings. Our customers are the kings of today. They may not wear crowns anymore, but they are kings.” Delamuraz reflects on the philosophy shaping Jaquet Droz today, the human connection between artisan and collector, and what it means to create heirloom watches meant to be passed down through generations.

If you could describe the DNA of Jaquet Droz in three words, what would they be? Authenticity, passion and emotion. Authenticity means we don’t cheat. We have the legacy, the know-how to make a movement, an automaton and metiers d’art.

## Can you really ‘detox’ from plastic – and does it make a difference to your health or fertility?

In The Plastic Detox, a new documentary on Netflix, six couples with unexplained infertility work to rid their lives of plastic in the hopes that doing so will improve their chances of having a baby. They toss out air fresheners and cutting boards, and try adopting bamboo toothbrushes and deodorant packaged in paperboard. “Will we get pregnant because of it?” one participant asks. “I have no idea.” Their

guide on this journey is Shanna Swan, an 89-year-old epidemiologist who has spent much of her career studying the effects of environmental chemicals on reproductive health. In the film, Dr Swan, a professor of environmental medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York, inventories the sources of plastic in the participants’ daily lives and identifies alternatives. Over a three-month “intervention period,” she measures concentrations of chemicals in their urine and sperm counts. The premise of the documentary is appealing: Cut plastic chemicals out of your life, and improve your fertility. But it’s not that straightforward. “It’s not a quote unquote ‘scientific study,’” Dr Swan acknowledged in the film. “We have no control group, it’s very small,” she said. And it’s not clear that reducing daily exposure to such chemicals the way these participants did can increase an individual adult’s fertility. In the film, Dr Swan said she didn’t want to scare people but instead educate them. “This is also something we have to pay attention to,” she said.

### A PLASTICS PRIMER

If you want to take a hard look at the plastics in your life, it helps first to understand what exactly you need to worry about. It’s important to distinguish between microplastics and “plasticisers,” said Matthew Campen, a professor of pharmaceutical sciences at the University of New Mexico. Microplastics are tiny pieces of plastic, commonly shed through wear and tear on larger plastics – for example, single-use plastic bags or clothes made from synthetic fabric. Plasticisers are chemicals like bisphenols and phthalates that are often added to plastics,

such as reusable bottles or bath toys, to make them rigid or flexible. Based on the research, plasticizers are the bigger concern for reproductive health. Bisphenols (including BPA) and phthalates are part of a class of chemicals called endocrine disruptors because they interfere with hormones, said Andrea Gore, a professor of pharmacology and toxicology at the University of Texas at Austin.

**IS IT POSSIBLE TO CUT OUT PLASTIC ENTIRELY?** Probably not, Dr Swan said. Plastic is everywhere – in our coffee makers, clothes, couches and the materials used to build our homes. But you can make changes that lower your exposure. A good place to start is food and water. Buy fresh food when possible to

reduce your exposure to phthalates in food packaging. Heat your food in glass or ceramic containers instead of plastic, which can transfer chemical additives into your food when heated. Drink tap instead of bottled water to avoid chemicals that can leach into the water and to reduce plastic waste. Avoid personal care and home products that list “fragrance” or “parfum” on their labels. These ingredients can signal the presence of phthalates, which are used in items like laundry detergent, hand cream and perfume to retain scents, Dr Swan said. Be mindful of less obvious sources, too, such as liners in canned goods and paper receipts, both of which may contain bisphenols. Not everyone has the resources to make these changes, and reducing exposure broadly will require policy changes, experts noted. Dr Campen compared it to the systemic change that happened when scientists realised the health harms of lead. “We took lead out of gasoline and paint,” he said. “There’s no quick fix,” he added.

### WILL CUTTING OUT PLASTICS CHANGE YOUR HEALTH OUTCOMES?

A large body of evidence has linked endocrine disruptors to a variety of negative health outcomes, Dr Gore said. In addition to infertility, these include cardiovascular disease and neurodevelopmental disorders such as ADHD. Some research suggests that reducing your exposure to plastic and the chemicals in it may

not be enough to stop these harms. “Even very, very low-dose exposure during sensitive developmental periods can have effects, and those effects can be permanent,” Dr Gore said. A 2015 study by Dr Swan of nearly 1,000 pregnant women, for example, suggested that exposure to phthalates in utero could interfere with reproductive development in male babies. What microplastics mean for health is less clear. Some studies, including Dr Campen’s, have linked them to dementia and cardiovascular disease. Other research has suggested they affect reproductive health. But at this point, that research is “not even in the same ballpark” as the evidence of harm from phthalates and bisphenols, he said. Three of the five couples in the film did have babies. But it’s nearly impossible to ascribe cause and effect because of the small sample and the fact that the intervention wasn’t a controlled experiment. Dr Swan doesn’t want to stop there. She is now planning to apply for a grant to run a larger randomised trial that she hopes will provide more definitive answers.

## (Hope is My Guide)

The thick, dark clouds of the night  
Have covered everything around me.  
My steps are stopping again and again,  
And loneliness quietly fills  
Every quiet moment with sadness.  
?Even at the end of this darkness,  
There is no one to answer or help.  
Still, in a small corner of my heart,  
A tiny ray of the morning sun  
Is still burning softly.  
?In the last part of the night,  
This deep silence must go away,  
And the bright light must shine.  
?Even if I lose my way one day,  
Hope will be the only guide of my life.  
It will destroy the darkness and bring  
The beautiful red smile of a new morning.  
Munmii Bhattacharya  
Ph- 8486731180  
Guwahati

# Russia kills 4 in massive Ukraine attack using nuclear-capable missile

**Kyiv:** Russia pounded Kyiv with a massive bombardment that killed four people, authorities said Sunday with Moscow unleashing its nuclear-capable hypersonic Oreshnik missile in one of the largest barrages in the more-than-four-year war. Multiple rounds of loud explosions were heard in the Ukrainian capital throughout the early hours of the morning, AFP journalists reported, as residents took shelter in underground stations. Daylight revealed rescue workers extinguishing fires and sifting through debris of heavily damaged buildings - houses, shopping centres, museums, theatres, schools and universities. Russian President Vladimir Putin had earlier threatened retaliation for Ukrainian strikes in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine that killed 21 people in a vocational school. In Kyiv, Sofia Melnychenko, 21, thought she was safe in the subway, "but then there were three loud explosions, and after the fourth one the ceiling in the metro started crumbling," she told AFP. "There was complete chaos. Children started screaming, people were panicking," she added. "It was a very frightening night." The Ukrainian air force said the raid involved 600 drones and 90 missiles, of which 549 drones and 55 missiles were intercepted. GENUINELY DERANGED Kyiv has been grappling with an acute air defence missile deficit since the US-Israeli air campaign against Iran drove up demand for US-made Patriot rounds. European leaders reacted by saying the salvo showed Russia's desperation. "Terror against civilians is not strength, it's despair," EU chief Ursula von der Leyen said on X. French President Emmanuel Macron said the strikes signalled "the dead end of Russia's war of aggression", while German Chancellor Friedrich Merz called the use of Oreshnik a "reckless escalation". Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged more action from allies. "I am grateful to everyone now expressing words of support. But concrete steps to bolster air defence are also needed - missile deliveries must not stop for a

single day," he said on social media. He earlier said the Russians hit dozens of residential buildings, schools, a water supply facility and a market in a "genuinely deranged" attack. Russia's army confirmed it had launched the Oreshnik at Ukraine for the third time in the war, saying it was "in response to Ukraine's terrorist attacks on civilian infrastructure on Russian territory". The missile was used without a nuclear warhead. Moscow denied targeting civilians, saying it had struck command posts of the Ukrainian army and intelligence. Four people were killed, and more than 100 were wounded in Kyiv and the surrounding region, local officials said. Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko said damage had been recorded in every district of the capital. The residence of the Albanian ambassador was also hit, and the Balkan country summoned the Russian envoy in protest. Buildings housing a studio of German broadcaster ARD and an office for German outlet DW were also damaged, the companies said in statements. Both premises were empty of people at the time. Projectiles also hit other Ukrainian regions, with dozens of wounded reported in the Kharkiv, Cherkasy and Dnipropetrovsk regions. Attacks continued during the day, with a shelling killing two and wounding 17 in the frontline city of Kherson. RETALIATION Ukraine had been expecting a major strike after its own forces launched a drone barrage on Starobilsk, in the Russian-occupied east of the country, which Moscow said hit a college dormitory and killed 21 people, most of them young female students. Launched overnight on Thursday to Friday, the drone salvo - one of Ukraine's deadliest such strikes in months - also wounded dozens in the city, located in the occupied Lugansk region. Ukraine denied targeting civilians, saying it had hit a Russian drone unit stationed in the area. Ukraine regularly targets Russian-controlled areas of the country with drones, arguing that the strikes are retaliation for Russian attacks.

# Trump says US will not 'rush into a deal' with Iran

**Washington:** United States President Donald Trump said on Sunday that he had told his representatives not to rush into any deal with Iran, as his administration played down hopes of an imminent breakthrough in the three-month-old war that had been raised a day earlier. The US blockade on Iranian ships in the Strait of Hormuz would "remain in full force and effect until an agreement is reached, certified, and signed", Trump wrote on Truth Social. "Both sides must take their time and get it right", he added. There was no immediate response from Iran's government. But Tasnim news agency, which is linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, said the US was still obstructing parts of a potential deal, including Tehran's demand for the release of frozen funds. A day earlier, Trump said Washington and Iran had "largely negotiated" a memorandum of understanding on a peace deal that would reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which before the conflict carried one-fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments. The two sides remain at odds on several difficult issues, such as Iran's nuclear ambitions, Israel's war in Lebanon with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militia and Tehran's demands for the lifting of sanctions and the release of tens of billions of dollars of Iranian oil revenues frozen in foreign banks. WORKING OUT DEAL'S DETAILS A senior Trump administration official told reporters an agreement would not be signed on Sunday, saying that the Iranian system did not move fast enough. But he outlined what he said were the latest contours of what was being negotiated. The official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said Iran had agreed "in principle" to open the Strait of Hormuz, in exchange for the United States lifting its naval blockade, and to dispose of Tehran's highly enriched uranium. He said the US understood Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei had endorsed the broad template of the deal. There was no immediate confirmation from Iran or elaboration on what an "in principle" agreement meant. The US official said Washington envisioned first reopening the strait and lifting the US naval blockade. Negotiating the details of the nuclear measures would take more time, he said. He pushed back on suggestions that Iran has not accepted disposing of its stockpiled enriched uranium. "It's a question about how," the official said. A second senior administration official said on Sunday that the proposed

framework would give negotiators 60 days to reach a final deal. Iranian sources had told Reuters that in future stages, "feasible formulas" could be found to resolve the dispute over

you should stop digging, and that sounds like maybe what we're doing finally." Trump, who has also faced criticism from hawkish conservatives over his willingness to com-



its highly enriched uranium stockpile, including diluting the material under the supervision of the UN nuclear watchdog. Iran has long denied US and Israeli accusations that it is pursuing nuclear weapons and says it has a right to enrich uranium for civilian purposes, although the purity it has achieved far exceeds that needed for power generation. DEAL DRAWS OUT US CRITICS Trump, whose approval ratings have been hit by the war's impact on US energy prices and who has faced congressional efforts to curb his war powers, has repeatedly played up the prospect of an agreement to end the conflict that the US and Israel started on Feb 28. A tenuous ceasefire has been in place since early April. As details of the possible agreement emerged over the weekend, critics, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Democratic lawmakers, argued that it offered little beyond the 2015 Iran nuclear deal negotiated by former President Barack Obama, from which Trump withdrew during his first term. Chris Van Hollen, a Democratic member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the deal's reported outlines would amount to little more than "the pre-war status quo" with Iran. "I think this was a blunder," Van Hollen said on the Fox News Sunday program. "When you're digging a hole,

promise with Iran, pushed back. "If I make a deal with Iran, it will be a good and proper one ... So don't listen to the losers, who are critical about something they know nothing about," Trump said in a Truth Social post on Sunday. In another potential stumbling block, an Iranian military adviser to Khamenei said Tehran had the legal right to manage the Strait of Hormuz, though it was not clear if that meant continuing to decide which ships can go through. Iran's Revolutionary Guards said 33 vessels had passed through the strait over the past 24 hours after getting permission from Tehran, still far short of the 140 on a typical day before the war. Any deal reinforcing the current fragile ceasefire would bring relief to markets but not immediately quell a global energy crisis, which has driven up costs of fuel, fertiliser, and food. Even if the war ends now, full flows through the strait will not return before the first or second quarter of 2027, the head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company said last week. The US-Israeli bombing of Iran killed thousands of people in Iran before it was suspended in early April. Israel has also killed thousands more and driven hundreds of thousands from their homes in Lebanon, which it invaded in pursuit of Hezbollah. Iranian strikes on Israel and neighbouring Gulf states have killed dozens

# Why Russia's nuclear-capable hypersonic Oreshnik missile is drawing attention in the Ukraine war

Russia launched what Ukrainian officials said was a nuclear-capable hypersonic Oreshnik missile in one of its largest aerial barrages on Kyiv since the war began. It is the third reported use of the intermediate-range ballistic missile in Ukraine since 2024, underscoring Moscow's growing willingness to deploy its most powerful experimental weapons in the conflict. While Russia has used an assortment of missiles throughout its more than four-year war, military analysts said none have the same range, speed and destructive potential as the Oreshnik. Here's what we know about the weapon, and why it is significant. The Oreshnik, named after the Russian word for hazel tree, is an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), meaning it can strike targets roughly 3,000km to 5,500km away. This puts all of Europe within range. Ukrainian military officials said in 2024 that the missile can reach speeds of up to Mach 11 (about 13,580kmh), or 11 times the speed of sound. Russian state media has claimed that the missile could take just 11 minutes to reach an air base in Poland and 17 minutes to reach NATO's headquarters in Brussels. According to the Kremlin, the Oreshnik is a "state-of-the-art" weapon that cannot be intercepted. Russia's President Vladimir Putin said in 2024 that the missile's destructive elements could reach a temperature close to the surface of the sun. "Therefore, everything in the epicentre of the explosion breaks up into fractions, into elementary particles, essentially into dust," he said. Most significantly, military experts said the Oreshnik could be equipped to carry nuclear warheads. The US defence department has described Oreshnik as an "experimental" IRBM, believed to be derived from Russia's RS-26 Rubezh intercontinental ballistic missile. Why is it considered so powerful? Experts said Oreshnik's significance lies in its combination of speed, range and warhead design. It is a Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) system, meaning each warhead can split and hit different targets in a single strike footprint. In the case of the Oreshnik, Ukraine's military intelligence has said the missile has six warheads, each carrying six submunitions. This means it could deliver up to 36 separate strikes across a target area, said Dr Nah Liang Tuang, research fellow at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS). This makes it "very destructive" even without nuclear payloads, he said. "Even if each warhead was only conventional high explosive, many targets can potentially be gutted, making it a 'one air raid' missile," Dr Nah explained. "Worse still, the Oreshnik arrives at faster than hypersonic speeds, making interception extremely difficult or impossible given the anti-ballistic missile capabilities Ukraine currently has." Putin has claimed that

the Oreshnik is capable of destroying even underground bunkers "three, four or more floors down", and is immune to any missile defence system. How does it compare with other Russian missiles? Apart from the Oreshnik, Russia has also used the hypersonic Kinzhal air-launched ballistic missile for particularly important targets. Its high speed (up to Mach 10) and ability to manoeuvre in flight help it evade air defences, although Ukraine claims to have shot down a few of them. Oreshnik is said to be more difficult to intercept than Kinzhal. Still, some experts said that while the missile can travel at hypersonic speeds, it cannot be manoeuvred in the same way as typical hypersonic missiles. "As with other intermediate and intercontinental ballistic missiles, its warheads enter the atmosphere and reach their targets at hypersonic speeds," Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski, analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), said in 2024. "But unlike the hypersonic weapons, Oreshnik's warheads did not perform any manoeuvres at hypersonic speeds, which would complicate the operation of anti-missile defences," he added. What damage has the Oreshnik caused? The Oreshnik has been used without a nuclear warhead in all three strikes on Ukraine so far. The first strike was in Dnipro in 2024 with limited visible damage, suggesting that it had been equipped with dummy warheads. AFP saw a building roof blown off and scorched trees, while residents reported a "hellish noise" and bright bursts of light. In January this year, the missile hit a major gas depot in the Lviv region in western Ukraine, local officials said. During Sunday's strike in the Kyiv

region, which also involved drones and other missiles, four people were killed. Rescue workers were extinguishing fires and sifting through debris of heavily damaged buildings, including houses, shopping centres, museums, theatres, schools and universities. A Ukrainian resident recounted the ceiling in the metro "crumbling" after residents took shelter underground. Why Oreshnik matters beyond Ukraine Unlike most Russian battlefield weapons, Oreshnik's range places all of Europe within striking distance, including US bases on the continent. That makes it a new instrument of escalation, giving Moscow the ability to threaten strategic targets without formally resorting to nuclear weapons. At the same time, experts said there is no way to determine whether an incoming Oreshnik missile carries a nuclear or conventional payload until impact, heightening uncertainty in any scenario of further escalation. Analysts said the use of the Oreshnik is as much a psychological weapon as a battlefield one. It reflects "classic sabre rattling", Dr Nah said, referring to overtly threatening actions intended to intimidate the enemy. By deploying it, Moscow is signalling it is willing to escalate strikes deep into Ukraine using conventional warheads that mimic nuclear-level destructive potential. Putin may also be suggesting that the European Union should abandon Ukraine before he uses the missile on them, or for a nuclear strike on Ukraine, Dr Nah added. He noted that with Russia facing setbacks on the battlefield and a weakening economy, the country faces no chance or "very low" chances of winning the war in Ukraine. "Moscow is quite frankly, out of options," Dr Nah said.

# Oil slips 5% on hopes of US-Iran deal

**Singapore:** Oil prices hit two-week lows on optimism that the United States and Iran were moving closer towards a peace deal, even though they remained at odds over key issues, including blockades on the Strait of Hormuz that continued to restrict oil supply from the Middle East. The price of North Sea Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate slipped close to 5 per cent to US\$99.41 and US\$92.49 a barrel, respectively. Tokyo soared more than 3 per cent in early trade on Monday, while Hong Kong and Seoul were closed for public holidays. Shanghai inched upwards, with Taipei, Manila, Bangkok, Jakarta, Singapore, Sydney and Wellington also climbing. Kuala Lumpur was down 0.1 per cent. But sticking points in their negotiations have tempered hopes of a swift resolution to restore the transit of oil and gas through the Strait of Hormuz. US President Donald Trump said on Sunday he had informed US negotiators "not to rush into a deal". One of the main sticking points has been whether Tehran is willing to hand over its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. The release of Iran's frozen assets held under longstanding US sanctions and whether Lebanon, repeatedly targeted by Israeli strikes, will be included in any peace deal are also key issues. Nick Twidale, chief market analyst at ATFX Global, said that he expects the market to embrace more risk on Monday but not to surge higher until there is confirmation that the Strait of Hormuz will reopen. "We will need to see an agreement out in place in the coming sessions as we know there are

still some major sticking points," he said. The most important issues for financial markets are when the Strait of Hormuz will reopen, Commonwealth Bank of Australia strategists said in a note. "Under what conditions the Strait will reopen and how long it will take to repair production facilities and infrastructure to ramp up production of energy and other goods to pre war levels," they said. MST Marquee analyst Saul Kavonic said: "Notwithstanding all the caveats and risks that remain to the peace deal and Strait of Hormuz, there is now some light at the end of the tunnel, which will bring some near-term oil price relief." However, analysts expect that it will take months for oil flows through the strait to return to normal and for damaged oil and gas facilities to be repaired. Investors will also be keeping an eye on how the US Federal Reserve and its new chief chair Kevin Warsh react to Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) data this week, as well as European inflation metrics. "The inflation story remains central to the entire setup," said SPI Asset Management analyst Stephen Innes. "Investors will receive another critical read on Thursday with the release of the Personal Consumption Expenditures index, the Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge. "After several hotter-than-expected consumer and producer inflation reports earlier this month, markets are increasingly concerned that elevated oil prices and supply disruptions tied to the Middle East conflict are beginning to seep into the broader inflation pipeline."

# Possible Iran-US deal: What we know

**Tehran:** The United States and Iran appear closer than ever to a deal that would end a war that has engulfed the Middle East and disrupted the global oil market. However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had agreed with US President Donald Trump that any final deal must fully end Iran's "nuclear threat". Iran's Tasnim news agency said its information was that key clauses of a possible agreement remained unresolved, including the issue of frozen Iranian assets. What do we know about the possible agreement? NUCLEAR QUESTION Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said the nuclear issue was not part of an initial framework. It will rather be "subject to separate discussions" later. But the New York Times, citing two unnamed American officials, said a key element of the proposed agreement was an apparent commitment by Tehran to give up its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. The question of how Iran would do so would be discussed in a "later round of negotiations over Iran's nuclear program", the paper said. But Iran's Fars and Tasnim news

agencies reported that Iran made no commitments regarding its nuclear programme. "Iran has made no commitment in this agreement to hand over nuclear stockpiles, remove equipment, shut down facilities or even commit not to build a nuclear bomb," Fars said. Both agencies said nuclear-related issues would be negotiated within 60 days of the understanding being signed. Netanyahu said that in a conversation on Saturday, "President Trump and I agreed that any final agreement with Iran must eliminate the nuclear threat entirely". "This means dismantling Iran's uranium enrichment facilities and removing enriched nuclear material from its territory," he added. HOW WILL HORMUZ REOPEN? A key sticking point in the talks is traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, the vital global conduit for oil shipments that has come under Iranian control since the outbreak of the war. Iran has insisted that vessels must obtain permission from its armed forces. Trump said Saturday that "in addition to many other elements of the Agreement, the Strait of Hormuz will be opened", a development that would bring relief to

global energy markets. But, Fars news agency said that, if finalised, the potential agreement would preserve Iran's management over the strategic waterway. Tasnim reported that "the status of the Strait of Hormuz would not revert to its pre-war situation". It added that the "the naval blockade, according to the reported framework, would also need to be fully lifted within 30 days", referring to the US blockading Iranian ports. FUNDS AND SANCTIONS Iran has long demanded the release of its frozen assets held under longstanding US sanctions. According to Tasnim, "Iran has insisted that any initial understanding must be conditional on at least partial access to the assets". It quoted an informed source as saying that Iran "has stressed that there will be no agreement unless a specified portion of Iran's frozen assets is released at the very first stage". A clear mechanism must also be "established to guarantee the continued release of all blocked funds". Tasnim's source warned that "disagreements over this matter are among the reasons why no final understanding has yet been reached".

## Awareness program Held in Pangkang: Multiple Households Engage in Two-Day SUMP Awareness Drive

**Pangkang, Arunachal Pradesh | May 28:** In a continued effort to strengthen regional understanding of the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), a two-day public awareness and community engagement programme was successfully conducted across the villages of Pangkang. Spanning May 25 in Pangkang (Jorkong) and May 26 in Pangkang (Kumku), the initiative witnessed active participation from multiple villagers and households. Participants engaged deeply in discussions centered around infrastructure, regional development, and community welfare associated with the project.

The grassroots drive commenced at Pangkang (Jorkong) on May 25, focusing on public understanding of SUMP's potential developmental benefits. The session was held in the presence of Chief Guest Mr. Tamyo Mingki, President of the Village Development and SUMP Development Committee. Meaningful public interaction was further



encouraged by the attendance of Mr. Tamo Jerang, Vice President, SUMP, and Mr. Omak Tali, Secretary, Village Development Committee (VDC).

Building on this momentum, the outreach continued on May 26 at Pangkang (Kumku). Ensuring absolute clarity in project leadership and representation, the event was held in the presence of SUMP Development Committee (SUMPDC) Chairman Mr. Bakin Tali and SUMPDC Vice Chairman Mr. Omin Tamut. Their active involvement and guidance fostered a welcoming, transparent environment for public dialogue and community engagement.

At both venues, the organizing teams facilitated open interaction sessions, providing multiple villagers with the opportunity to directly raise queries and share local insights. To ensure transparent communication and sustained understanding, comprehensive SUMP information booklets were distributed among the villagers by the respective leadership following the discussions.

By prioritizing direct dialogue with accurate local representation and residents, these consecutive programmes successfully promoted awareness, encouraged informed participation, and strengthened community engagement regarding the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project in the Pangkang region.

## Gen Z travellers ditch annual holidays for spontaneous getaways: Airbnb

**Guwahati:** A new Airbnb report finds that India's Gen Z has quietly retired the annual holiday -and replaced it with a more frequent, more personal, and more spontaneous approach to travel. Never the Same: The New Rules of Gen Z Travel in India reveals a generation for whom travel is no longer about seeing the most, but about feeling the most like themselves. “Travel for Gen Z is as much an act of self-expression as it is exploration and that makes them the most intentional, most engaged travellers we've seen. The defining thing about this generation isn't how often they travel. It's why - to feel most like themselves. What we're seeing at Airbnb is a generation for whom travel has become the most personal decision they make - where they go, who they bring, and crucially, where they choose to stay. Every choice is a statement about who they are. At Airbnb, that's exactly the shift we're built for, and it opens up a new chapter for how India gets to be discovered,” said Amanpreet Bajaj, Airbnb's Country Head, India and Southeast Asia. For decades, the Indian holiday meant one big trip: planned months ahead, tightly scheduled, and saved for. Gen Z has broken that rhythm entirely. 7 in 10 Gen Z travellers would rather take three short trips than one long annual holiday. 87% prefer trips that last under a week. Airbnb data reflects this growing shift in travel behaviour among young Indians. Searches by Indian Gen Z for the summer period were up over 0% year-on-year<sup>2</sup>, with shorter getaways of 2-6 nights emerging as the fastest-growing trip format - rising nearly 80% for domestic travel. Travel, for this generation, is less a planned event and more a reflexive response - to stress, to an open weekend, to a friend who simply said let's go. 66% book within days or weeks of travel. 67% say no two trips they've taken have ever looked the same. The annual escape hasn't disappeared - it has multiplied, diversified, and become something much more alive. For Gen Z in India, travel has become one of the primary ways they express who they are. 87% agree that the way they travel reflects who they are as a person, and 92% say it matters that their destination or stay reflects their personal taste - not just a popular option. 95% say it matters that their trip feels personal and unique rather than typical or pre-planned. The algorithm is not their travel guide: 90% say they are likely to seek out places that haven't been widely recommended online or gone viral. This conviction shapes how they spend time once they arrive. 80% say small moments on a trip matter more to them than famous attrac-

tions. They are more likely to be found in a local market or a neighbourhood grocery store than at the nearest landmark. The most significant shift the report identifies is in the role of accommodation itself. 6% of Gen Z travellers have chosen a destination specifically because of a stay they discovered - not because of the destination itself. 82% say accommodation is very or extremely important when planning a trip, and 78% spend at least half their total trip time at their stay. More than half say where they stay either shapes the whole experience or is often the highlight of the trip entirely. What they look for is not a hotel checklist but a home wishlist - a terrace for slow mornings, enough space for everyone to have their own corner, a living room to return to at the end of the day. Airbnb data reflects this: The most memorable moments from their recent trips were not the places they visited: they were a conversation that lasted hours, a slow morning that became the highlight, a meal cooked together at the stay. Travel for Gen Z is fundamentally about connection. The destination matters, but the company matters more. in 4 agree that who they travel with matters more than where they go - and when planning a trip, companion comes first, destination second, and experience third. Friends are the most common travel companions, followed by family. More than half prefer one shared home over separate hotel rooms when

### Organic India highlights herbal digestive wellness solutions on World Digestive Health Day

**Guwahati:** Organic India has marked World Digestive Health Day by highlighting its range of certified organic herbal products designed to support digestive wellness and overall gut health. The company said its products are sourced directly from more than 2,000 organic farmers and undergo over 600 quality checks. According to Organic India, all herbs are grown in chemical- and pesticide-free soil and formulated using whole herbs to preserve the complete spectrum of natural plant actives and nutrients. Among the products promoted for digestive health is Triphala,

available in powder and capsule forms. Made from Amalaki, Bibhitaki and Haritaki, the traditional formulation is known for supporting digestion, detoxification and bowel regularity, while also helping relieve constipation. The company also highlighted its Psyllium Whole Husk Isabgol, a natural source of dietary fibre that helps maintain bowel regularity, supports digestive function and may assist in cholesterol management and weight control. Organic India's Sat Isabgol Pre & Probiotic Fibre Powder combines psyllium husk with prebiotic fibre and 1.5 billion

CFU of *Bacillus coagulans* probiotics to support gut microbiome health. The sugar-free product is available in Orange and Cinnamon flavours. Another product featured is Revitalise Gut Tea, a caffeine-free blend of organic herbs including spearmint, ajwain, cumin, ginger and black pepper. The tea also contains 1 billion CFU of *Bacillus coagulans* per three servings and is designed to support everyday digestive comfort. The company said the initiative aims to encourage consumers to prioritise gut health through natural and organic wellness solutions.

# Sanskar Bharati Forms Nagaon District Committee, Emphasises Cultural Preservation

**Staff Reporter, Nagaon, Jun 1:** A dignified and well-attended meeting was held at the Nagaon heritage. “Strengthening our cultural roots and linking the youth with art and culture is the

the Champawati Cultural Group under the guidance of Nayanjyoti Bora, captivated the audi-



Shilpi Mancha auditorium on Sunday to formally constitute the Nagaon District Committee of Sanskar Bharati, a national cultural organisation dedicated to preserving and promoting Indian art, literature, music, dance and cultural values.

The meeting featured fruitful discussions on the role of culture, literature and social development, with participants stressing the need to strengthen cultural awareness and connect the younger generation with the nation's rich

core objective of Sanskar Bharati,” speakers observed.

The programme was attended by Dr. Alekhya Barua, Dr. Dhananjay Kushre and Nilmani Barua, who highlighted the organisation's ideals and the importance of strengthening cultural values in society.

Adding colour to the occasion, a vibrant cultural programme featuring traditional Negera, Dhol and Bahi performances, along with a folk music and dance presentation by

ence.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Nagaon District Committee of Sanskar Bharati was formally constituted with Ranjit Kumar Bora elected as President, while Plabita Hazarika and Baran Bikash were chosen to lead the organisation's administrative affairs.

The newly formed committee pledged to work collectively for the promotion and development of culture, literature and the arts across Nagaon district.

## Sightsavers opens applications for 2026 Fellowship Program for ophthalmologists

Having screened over 100 million people across multiple states in India, are open to Indian nationals holding an MS, DNB or DO degree in Ophthalmol-

ing best practices. Sightsavers India also known as Royal Common-



Sightsavers India recognises the importance of supporting young professionals at a critical stage of their careers and helping bridge the transition from postgraduate education to independent practice through immersive learning and real-world experience. The Fellowship offers a rigorous and hands-on learning experience. Over 18 months, fellows go through a carefully structured journey starting with four months of intensive surgical training at leading institutions. This is followed by a 14-month posting at a partner hospital in one of eight states- Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, or Rajasthan. Through these placements, the Fellowship contributes to strengthening the availability of skilled ophthalmologists in rural areas where access to specialised eye care can be limited. It also provides fellows valuable experience of working in high-volume settings, managing diverse clinical cases and understanding the realities of delivering eye care in resource-constrained settings. Fellows receive one-on-one mentorship, progressive clinical and surgical exposure, opportunities to strengthen leadership and management capabilities and experience across both hospital and community eye care settings. The program is designed to develop confident, independent practitioners who are not only equipped to perform quality clinical care but are also prepared to contribute to strengthening India's broader eye health ecosystem. Applications

ogy. The programme seeks candidates with a strong learning orientation, adaptability to diverse environments, professional ethics and a demonstrated commitment to serving high-need communities. Speaking on the announcement, RN Mohanty, CEO, Sightsavers India, said: "There is a moment in every young doctor's career when training meets real responsibility and how that transition is supported makes all the difference. The Sightsavers India Fellowship is built around that moment. It equips passionate ophthalmologists with surgical excellence, confidence and grounding to deliver quality eye care where it is needed most. We look forward to welcoming the 2026 cohort and supporting them every step of the way." Selected fellows will receive a monthly stipend along with benefits including completion incentives, mediclaim, accident insurance and professional indemnity insurance. Sightsavers India also known as Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind, is a development organisation working with partners to reduce avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. Sightsavers India collaborates with various departments of the respective state governments to scale up operations for Social Inclusion, Eye Health and Inclusive Education— our three core areas of work. We work in a sustainable way to promote lasting change by strengthening existing health systems, seeking to engage with the governments and demonstrat-

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# Curacao's Dutch connection suggests they should not be underestimated

**June 1 :** Curacao will be the smallest country to compete at the World Cup but all their squad hail from the Netherlands, whose national team have a proud history at the tournament, meaning they must not be underestimated. Of the 26 players selected for the Caribbean island's debut finals appearance, only one was born on the island, but Tahith Chong left at the age of 10 for the Netherlands, where the other 25 were born. Curacao is a self-governing part of the Netherlands, with a population of just over 150,000 and a land area of 171 square miles (442.89 square kilometres). All their players are Dutch nationals and it was in northern Europe rather than the Caribbean that their historic qualification was forged. Much of the credit lies with veteran coach Dick Advocaat, who initially turned down the job because the football association on the island was grappling with an administrative crisis and under the scrutiny of the world football governing body FIFA. He eventually took up the post in January 2024 and began recruiting Dutch players with roots on the island, vastly strengthening their prospects. Advocaat, who quit the job in February because of his daughter's illness

and handed the reins to Fred Rutten only to be reappointed in May, had to adjust his own approach, polished through three spells as Netherlands coach plus taking South Korea to the 2006 World Cup. Although initially irked by the players dancing and singing before games, he realised that he should not take the Caribbean soul out of the squad, telling reporters he thought this was the best way for his players to achieve top performance. "We started building, but by first going back to the basics," explained Advocaat. "We never had anything to complain about regarding the passion and commitment of those guys. But we had to provide a foundation, to establish organisation. It was pleasing to see that this was quickly picked up and yielded results." A dramatic goalless draw away in Jamaica last November secured top place in their group and qualification, with a team that will pose problems for Group E opponents Ecuador, Germany, and the Ivory Coast. But Advocaat is also realistic about their prospects. "We have proven that we are difficult to beat," he said. "But the opponents in this group are of a different quality, of course. We know it will be very difficult, but nothing is impossible."

# Humble roots fuel Ecuador's World Cup hopes

**Quito :** Dusty pitches tucked amid poverty and childhood dreams of wearing Ecuador's jersey shaped the early steps of several national team players who will now fulfil their ambition of representing their country at the World Cup. Jordy Caicedo, Joel Ordenez and Nilson Angulo are some of the players sharing similar back stories marked by hardship and perseverance. Caicedo, 28, grew up in a marginal and dangerous neighbourhood in the southern city of Machala. "I'm a kid from the streets of Ecuador who basically had to cling to soccer to help my family move forward," he told ESPN in January. Ordenez, 22, lived in a suburb of Guayaquil. He now plays for Club Brugge, and media reports have linked him with a post-World Cup move to Juventus. His family made sacrifices so that he could swap improvised street pitches for a training centre an hour away. The most emblematic rise, however, is that of Chelsea midfielder Moises Caicedo, 24, who will play at his second World Cup after starting out on a humble pitch known as "El Hueco" in Santo Domingo. "Moises was among the kids who always had their goals very clear," said Galo Rodriguez, a former youth coach of Caicedo at Independiente del Valle who also managed Paris St-Germain defender William Pacheco and Arsenal's Piero Hincapié. "The kids who succeeded were those who always thought big, were very disciplined and

worked for it," Rodriguez told Reuters. The dreams of Pacheco and Sunderland forward Angulo were forged in Quinde, near the Colombian border, where soccer represents a path out of poverty. "It's a dream. I'm

players' humility and family support for their historic second-place finish in South American qualifying, behind world champions Argentina. "Reaching this level reflects remarkable strength of spirit," said the 45-year-old



achieving things I once saw in other players," said Pacheco, who wears number 51 in tribute to his mother, who died on the day he made his professional debut. Playing in their fifth World Cup, Ecuador hope to surpass their last-16 finish at Germany 2006. Coach Sebastian Beccacece has credited the

Argentina. Ecuador reached the 2024 Copa America quarter-finals but were eliminated by eventual winners Argentina in a penalty shootout. The South American side start their Group E campaign against Ivory Coast on June 14 in Philadelphia before facing Curacao in Kansas City and Germany in New Jersey.

# Netherlands aim for World Cup glory despite lack of star power

**June 1 :** The Netherlands consider themselves World Cup contenders but head for the 2026 finals with a squad that contains few of the outstanding individual stars and little of the overall quality that has marked their previous appearances at the tournament. The Dutch have been runners-up three times, most recently in 2010, and at the last finals in Qatar in 2022 were eliminated in the quarter-finals on penalties by eventual winners Argentina. This time they have set themselves the minimum goal of a semi-final place. "If that could happen, everyone would be happy to sign up for it," said former Netherlands international Nigel de Jong, now technical director at the country's FA, in an interview with the Dutch daily Algemeen Dagblad last month. But coach Ronald Koeman has already made clear his ambition. "Our goal is to win the World Cup," he said during the March international window. Whether Koeman has the necessary tools to deliver remains to be seen. The Dutch will rely heavily on midfield playmaker Frenkie de Jong, whose injury woes at Barcelona have continued this season, and still see Memphis Depay as their lead striker,

even if his club career has been rapidly stalling at Corinthians in Brazil. DOUBTS ABOUT FORM OF KEY PLAYERS There are also doubts about the form of other key players such as Tijjani Reijnders, who had a promising start to the season after signing for Manchester City but is no longer a regular, and captain Virgil van Dijk, whose

this could be a key factor in their favour. "We have such a good feeling within the squad right now that I think we can get everything out of this tournament," he said. The Dutch qualified comfortably enough at the top of their group, three points ahead of Poland and unbeaten. Their World Cup begins in Group F with a game against Japan on June 14 in Dallas followed by Sweden in Houston and Tunisia in Kansas City, where they will be based during the tournament. Critics have accused Koeman of being too predictable in his tactical approach. But the coach has adapted his formations when necessary in recent years, upsetting the purists who insist on the traditional 'Hollandse school of football'. That put the emphasis on dominant, attacking football in a 4-3-3 formation that their great player and coach Johan Cruyff perfected and most Dutch coaches slavishly followed. "I've always admired Cruyff for his vision of the game and his desire to play attractive football but I was a defender; I had to solve problems and that influenced my ideas," said Koeman, who must be flexible to achieve his target.



dip in form was reflected in a disappointing campaign with Liverpool. Injury has ruled out Tottenham Hotspur attacker Xavi Simons and there are doubts over the fitness of defender Jurrien Timber, whose groin injury curtailed his season at Arsenal. Koeman feels, however, that he has a core of players who have been together for several years and

# Turkey's new generation eyes World Cup impact after 24-year absence

**Istanbul :** Turkey return to the World Cup for the first time in 24 years buoyed up by gifted young players - including Real Madrid midfielder Arda Guler - and by memories of their run to the 2002 semi-finals, but doubts over consistency and big-match temperament persist. Coach Vincenzo Montella guided Turkey through qualification with a series of narrow victories and restored optimism after an encouraging Euro 2024 campaign, with Guler emerging as the face of a team many Turkish fans believe could become the country's strongest in decades. The squad also features Juventus forward Kenan Yildiz and several Europe-based players who have raised expecta-

tions that Turkey can finally build on the legacy of the side that finished third at the 2002 World Cup under Senol Gunes. Yet Turkey's qualification campaign also exposed familiar weaknesses. A 6-0 home defeat by European champions Spain in Konya last September was a defining reality check, suggesting deficits compared to the world's elite sides despite the growing excitement around the team's attacking talent. The loss reinforced a reputation that has long followed Turkey: capable of upsetting stronger opponents on their day, but equally vulnerable to emotional collapses and defensive disorganisation. Montella has sought to bring greater tactical discipline and calm to a squad that has often struggled with inconsistency over the past two decades. Turkey impressed at times during Euro 2024 with their aggressive pressing and technical quality, but they also relied heavily on moments of individual brilliance and rode their luck in several matches. Turkey are in Group D alongside hosts the United States, Paraguay and Australia, and will be based in Mesa, Arizona, for the tournament. Much of Turkey's hopes are expected to rest on the creativity of Guler, whose rapid rise at Real Madrid has made him one of the country's biggest sporting talents and raised expectations that he can lead a new era for the national team.

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# Paraguay bank on Alfaro's psychology-driven approach at World Cup

**Asuncion :** Gustavo Alfaro is being hailed in Para-



guay as the key figure behind the rapid turnaround of a team who had struggled in South American qualifying and are now World Cup-bound, with many cred-

iting a strategy rooted in psychology. Since taking over in August 2024, the 63-year-old Argentine manager has won over both players and fans with results and a motivational style, often drawing on authors and historical figures to reinforce soccer-related ideas. Alfaro led Paraguay to a sixth-place finish in the South American qualifiers, securing the continent's final automatic World Cup berth and the country's first appearance on international soccer's biggest stage since 2010. Alfaro has said he keeps a notebook of reflections to use when he wants to strengthen a concept within the group, having cited the likes of Albert Einstein and five-times Formula One world champion Juan Manuel Fangio. Quotes such as "We triumph and fail less than we think," by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, are among those he has used during a career that has included spells with Ecuador, Costa Rica and Boca Juniors. Alfaro urged players to rediscover the "grit" long associated with Paraguay and to believe they can compete with powerhouses such as Brazil and Argentina, echoing their historic 2010 campaign in South Africa, when they reached the quarter-finals before losing to eventual winners Spain. He brought a psychologist into his coaching staff for individual sessions tailored to each player and forged a strong connection with fans as results improved - the coach was once hugged by a supermarket worker in tears and had his face tattooed by another fan. Paraguay's remarkable qualifying campaign under Alfaro included climbing from the bottom of the standings, a nine-match unbeaten run and victories over Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. After defeating Brazil, Alfaro told reporters: "All I had to do was shake the tree a little so the spiders would fall off and we could realise the tree was full of fruit." He described the win over Uruguay as "the mother of all battles". Results dipped later in qualifying and friendlies, raising questions over whether his approach will be enough on the global stage, as Paraguay prepare to debut against co-hosts the United States in Los Angeles on June 12. Also facing Australia and Turkey in Group D, the South American team will rely on a solid defensive system led by 33-year-old captain Gustavo Gomez to reach the knockout stage, after conceding only 10 goals in 18 qualifying matches.

# ICC suspends Cricket Canada's membership but keeps teams eligible for events

**June 1 :** The International Cricket Council has suspended Canada over breaches of the national board's membership obligations, weeks after the global governing body's anti-corruption unit launched an investigation into Cricket Canada. The Canadian national team will still be able to participate in ICC events, and funding to operate the teams will be provided through a controlled mechanism, the global governing body said on Monday. A documentary aired in April by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation had made allegations of corruption in the governance of Cricket Canada involving several players and officials, including match manipulation and threats of violence. Media reports said the anti-corruption investigation was launched soon after. "The ICC board resolved to suspend Cricket Canada from ICC member-

ship with immediate effect due to serious breaches of its membership obligations," the global body said in a statement a day after a meeting in Ahmedabad, India. Cricket Canada will have to follow a set of conditions, aimed at fixing its governance and administrative issues, to restore membership, the statement added. "The progress against these conditions will be monitored by the ICC normalisation committee, supported by ICC management, with reinstatement of membership subject to the board being satisfied that the conditions have been fully met," the ICC said. The ICC also suspended the United States national body, USA Cricket, over membership rule breaches last year. The U.S. national teams continue to participate in ICC events and are set to compete at the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

# Fit De Jong offers an extra dimension to the Dutch

**June 1 :** For the Netherlands, doing without talismanic midfielder Frenkie de Jong has become a regular occurrence over the last two years, but they are always a better team with him in the lineup. The 29-year-old has battled with a succession of niggling injuries, notably an ankle complaint that kept him out of Euro 2024 and more recently a hamstring tear that meant he missed the last two internationals in March. His tally of 64 caps could have been a lot more had it not been for the setbacks, and the Dutch will be keenly awaiting a fit De Jong for the World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the United States. He is the engine of the side, dictating the tempo of play and directing the flow and direction from his deep-lying role in the heart of the midfield. His incisive passing adds an extra dimension to the Netherlands' attacking prowess. It was no wonder that when he missed a handful of games for Barcelona as they retained the La Liga title last month concern over his availability heightened again, although Netherlands coach

Ronald Koeman moved quickly to quell any angst. "We are not worried, although it would have been better had he played," Koeman said. De Jong has been to two major tournaments but missing Euro 2024 in Germany proved a major blow. His ankle injury meant he spent almost a half year out of action. "For someone like me, that is eternity. It was the toughest period of my life," he said. "I missed some games at Ajax in 2018, which was when Ronald Koeman was about to call me up for the national team. He was actually at the training when it happened. "I tried to block a ball and landed wrong, and I tore my ligaments in my other ankle. But that was nothing compared to this one," he said. De Jong returned to help the Netherlands qualify for the World Cup and last month became the Dutch player with the most appearances for Barca (293), which revealed his worth to the club, who have had a long succession of such greats from Johan Cruyff and Johan Neeskens to Patrick Kluivert and Koeman.

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IIT Madras research group...

India Policy and Standards (MIPS) Committee of Experiential Technology Innovation Centre (XTIC), IIT Madras, comes at a time when India’s XR ecosystem is witnessing rapid growth, with more than 1,000 startups and 1,000 SMEs currently operating in the sector.

While appreciating Tamil Nadu’s ambition to capture 20 per cent of India’s XR market and generate 200,000 service-oriented jobs, the report cautions that relying solely on a “service provider” model could limit long-term value creation and global competitiveness.

The full report can be accessed from - <https://xtic.org/policy-and-standards-committees/#xr-policy-committee>

Elaborating on the role of infrastructure as a critical enabler, Prof. M. Manivannan, Faculty Head, XTIC, IIT Madras, said, “We propose the creation of a State-level compute infrastructure such as a ‘TN-XR Cloud’, which would provide subsidised access to high-end Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) for startups, researchers and academic institutions working on compute-intensive AI and XR applications.”

Prof. M. Manivannan, also a faculty in the Department of Applied Mechanics and Biomedical Engineering, IIT Madras, added, “As a natural extension to the current AI wave, XR Wave is imminent, which is also called Physical AI and Embodied AI. We have also identified major Education Gap within the sector and have recommended making academia the anchor of the XR innovation ecosystem. Our key suggestions include introducing a State-wide XR Curriculum Framework along with AI and launching a dedicated ‘TN XR Fellowship’ to support MS and PhD researchers working in specialised domains such as haptics, spatial computing and sensor integration.”

One of the key recommendations of the report is the adoption of a “50-50 workforce design principle,” which advocates ensuring that at least half of the projected 2 million XR jobs by 2030 are focused on high-value areas such as original Intellectual Property (IP) creation, game engine development, AI-driven immersive technologies and advanced research and development.

The report also recommends establishing an integrated “XR Corridor” or “XR Superhighway” framework, combining XR Innovation Centres, Skill Development Centres and Manufacturing Hubs into a coordinated ecosystem capable of supporting long-term growth and technology leadership.

The analysis also highlights several policy “blind spots” that require urgent attention, including the absence of dedicated frameworks for AI-generated XR assets, generative immersive environments, metaverse governance and child safety standards.

Ø Real-world applications

The report outlines several transformative real-world use cases for common people, ranging from enhanced medical access in rural areas to immersive educational tools even in online courses. These applications leverage XR (Extended Reality), haptics, and AI to solve practical challenges

Ø Student and youth participation

The report shows clear pathways for students and youth. They need to learn not just XR application development but also the fundamentals of XR. The NPTEL Course “Foundations of Virtual Reality,” which is currently open for registrations, is one of the very few fundamental courses in XR globally, offered every fall semester ([https://onlinecourses.nptel.ac.in/e-learning/preview/noc26\\_cs140](https://onlinecourses.nptel.ac.in/e-learning/preview/noc26_cs140)). Every student and working professionals interested in a career in XR are encouraged to take the course.

Ø Opportunities in the XR ecosystem

The XR ecosystem presents a massive opportunity for India to pivot from a service-oriented digital workshop to a global leader in deep-tech innovation. Key growth areas include developing high-value applications for healthcare (remote surgeries), defence (simulators), and manufacturing (digital twins), while leveraging AI-GenAI - AgenticAI pipelines to drastically compress production cycles. Additionally, there are significant prospects in treating XR hardware manufacturing as a strategic priority and establishing state-level compute infrastructure to anchor the next generation of immersive startups

Ø Economic impact on ordinary citizens and MSMEs

For ordinary citizens, these technologies democratize access to high-quality services, such as reducing medical errors in rural clinics by 50% through remote diagnostics and slashing the time required to acquire new professional skills by 40–75%. MSMEs are poised to benefit from dedicated financial incentives, subsidized access to high-end GPU compute infrastructure, and participation in a strategic market aiming for a \$1 trillion economy contribution.

Dr. Anil Saikia Conferred the...

President of Bantung Nagar Yuva Sangha, lit the ceremonial lamp and paid floral tribute before the portrait of the legendary singer.

The chief guest, noted artist, litterateur and educationist Dr. Anil Saikia, delivered a lecture on “Humanism in the Songs of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika.” In his speech, he stated that Bhupen Hazarika’s scholarship and personality were as vast and lofty as the sky. According to him, each of Hazarika’s creations shines like a radiant star, while his personality symbolizes strength, inspiration, courage, optimism and resilience. Dr. Saikia described Hazarika as a great hero, visionary philosopher, youthful spirit and a “Neelkantha” who bore immense hardships for society.

He further said that every creation of Bhupen Hazarika carries a message capable of guiding humanity, awakening social consciousness, sharpening perspectives and inspiring progressive thinking. Hazarika envisioned a society free from discrimination based on caste, class, wealth or status, and through his songs promoted humanism, secularism and a society free from superstition and blind faith. Dr. Saikia also enthralled the audience by playing several songs composed by Bhupen Hazarika during his childhood using a gramophone.

During the cultural programme featuring songs, dance and recitation, organized with the hospitality of the school and Bantung Nagar Yuva Sangha, Agantuk, which is dedicated to the younger generation, conferred upon Dr. Anil Saikia, a researcher of folk culture, educationist and litterateur, the honorary title “Akul Chatak.” Several local organizations and students also felicitated him with gifts and tokens of appreciation.

The programme commenced with a procession song of Dr. Hazarika directed by musician Prabhat Konwar. Students of the school along with Agantuk’s young members Tanusha Priyam Chetia, Jyotishman Phukan, Arohan Mili, Liza Sandikai, Orchid Chetia, Anweshika Chetia and Satrishna Lahon performed some of Bhupen Hazarika’s timeless songs. Senior singers Prabhat Konwar and Pali Mohan also presented musical performances. Distinguished guest and folk singer Sushil Lahon created a unique atmosphere by rendering two songs of Bhupen Hazarika using traditional leaf music. Arhi Chetia participated as the child speaker of the event. The objective of the programme was explained by Dilip Saikia, Chief Editor of Agantuk, while Kumud Kalita, Editor of the organization, conducted the proceedings. Among those present were Rohini Mohan, Baikuntha Barkakati, Bisheshwar Mohan, Ila Mohan, Biren Tamuli, Robin Phukan, Chanchal Konwar, Sailendra Borchetia, Manoj Phukan, Mintu Chetia, Ramen Baruah, Bipin Hazarika and several other distinguished personalities. Teacher Robin Phukan of the school delivered the vote of thanks. The colourful programme concluded with all participants joining together in a chorus rendition of Bhupen Hazarika’s iconic song “Manuhe Manuhor Babe” (Humans for Humanity).

Tinsukia Division Achieves...

The successful completion of the sleeper renewal works has significantly enhanced track safety and operational reliability in the Moranhat-Dibrugarh section of Tinsukia Division of NFR. The renewed track infrastructure will contribute to smoother train operations and improved ride quality for passengers, reaffirming NFR’s commitment towards maintaining high standards of safety, efficiency and passenger comfort during train journeys, informed by CPRO of NFR Kapinjal Kishore Sharma.

Madhavdeva Janmotsav...

kirtan titled “Krishna Surya Bhailanta Udit...”, commemorating the birth anniversary of Mahapurush Madhavdeva.

The festive atmosphere was further enhanced as hundreds of devotees offered Naivedya, Xorai and earthen lamps at the Kirtanghar, Uttar Podshila, Dakshin Podshila, and Doul Mandir within the Bordowa Than premises. The sight of devotees participating in the rituals with deep faith and reverence created a spiritually uplifting and visually captivating ambience.

The celebration reflected the enduring legacy of Mahapurush Madhavdeva and reaffirmed the deep-rooted Vaishnavite traditions cherished by the people of Assam.

Livestock Vehicle...

Mazbat, resulting in the death of one livestock animal and injuries to several traders and caretakers travelling in the vehicle.

According to reports, a Mahindra Supro van bearing registration number AS-13-AC-2098 was transporting six livestock animals from No. 1 Naharbari area of Mazbat to the Orang Weekly Market when the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle around 6 AM, causing it to overturn on the roadside.

In the mishap, one livestock animal died on the spot while the remaining five sustained serious injuries. The injured animals were immediately shifted to the Mazbat Veterinary Hospital for treatment.

Several livestock traders and caretakers travelling in the vehicle also suffered injuries in the accident. Altogether six persons were reportedly injured, with some stated to be in critical condition. They were initially admitted to the Mazbat Mohaliapara Model Hospital, while three critically injured persons were later referred to Tezpur Medical College and Hospital for advanced medical treatment.

Soon after the incident, personnel from Mazbat Police Station rushed to the accident site and brought the situation under control. The damaged vehicle was later shifted to the police station premises, and necessary assistance was provided to the injured victims. Authorities also buried the dead animal after completing required formalities.

CM Sarma meets VP Radhakrishnan...

employment opportunities, enhancing productivity, and supporting the broader objective of economic transformation. According to the Chief Minister, Assam’s industrial growth strategy is closely aligned with the vision of developing the state into a major production and investment hub in eastern India. A significant portion of the discussion focused on the government’s commitment to empowering farmers, youth, and women through targeted development initiatives. Chief Minister Sarma highlighted several programs designed to improve livelihoods, expand economic opportunities, and strengthen social inclusion. He explained that the government has prioritized skill development initiatives that equip young people with industry-relevant capabilities and enhance their employability. Such programs are helping prepare Assam’s workforce for emerging opportunities in manufacturing, services, technology, and entrepreneurship. The Chief Minister also elaborated on financial assistance schemes aimed at empowering women and promoting their participation in economic activities. These initiatives are designed to strengthen financial independence, encourage entrepreneurship, and improve living standards across communities. The meeting further highlighted Assam’s success in maintaining peace, stability, and social harmony, factors that have created a conducive environment for development and investment. Chief Minister Sarma informed the Vice President that sustained efforts to strengthen law and order, promote social cohesion, and address long-standing challenges have contributed significantly to the state’s progress. Peace and stability, he noted, have enabled the successful implementation of development projects and encouraged greater private sector participation in economic activities. The Chief Minister emphasized that inclusive governance and community engagement remain central to the state’s approach toward ensuring sustainable growth. The discussion also covered the government’s ambitious plans to strengthen human resource development through expanded educational infrastructure. Chief Minister Sarma informed the Vice President about proposals and initiatives aimed at establishing medical colleges, universities, engineering colleges, and other higher educational institutions across districts. These efforts are intended to improve access to quality education, develop skilled human capital, and create opportunities for young people within the state. By investing in education and healthcare infrastructure, the government seeks to build a strong foundation for long-term development and ensure that future generations are equipped to contribute to Assam’s economic and social advancement. The Chief Minister also emphasized Assam’s growing importance within India’s Act East Policy framework. Owing to its strategic location and improving connectivity, Assam is increasingly emerging as a gateway to Southeast Asia and neighboring countries. He informed the Vice President about ongoing efforts to strengthen cross-border trade links, improve logistics infrastructure, and enhance transportation networks that connect Assam with regional and international markets. These initiatives are expected to generate significant economic benefits while positioning the state as a key hub for trade, tourism, and investment. Assam’s strategic role in advancing India’s engagement with the broader eastern region was highlighted as an important component of the state’s development vision. In addition to trade and connectivity, Chief Minister Sarma discussed opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, tourism, petroleum, renewable energy, and defence manufacturing. He noted that Assam possesses substantial natural and human resources that can support diversified economic growth. The government is working to unlock this potential through sector-specific policies, infrastructure investments, and partnerships with industry stakeholders. The Chief Minister stressed that these efforts are expected to create jobs, attract investment, and generate sustainable economic opportunities across both urban and rural areas. The meeting also served as an opportunity to reinforce the strong coordination between the Centre and the State Government. Chief Minister Sarma expressed gratitude for the continued support provided by the Union Government in advancing development projects across Assam. He noted that central assistance and policy support have played a crucial role in accelerating infrastructure expansion, improving public services, and facilitating economic growth. The Chief Minister emphasized that the collaborative approach adopted by both governments has helped ensure effective implementation of key initiatives and strengthened the overall development ecosystem in the state. During the interaction, Chief Minister Sarma extended an invitation to the Vice President to visit Assam and witness firsthand the transformative changes taking place across the state. He expressed confidence that a visit would provide an opportunity to observe the impact of various welfare schemes, infrastructure projects, and development initiatives that are improving the lives of people throughout Assam. The invitation reflected the government’s commitment to transparency and its desire to showcase the progress achieved through collective efforts. Symbolic gestures added warmth to the meeting, with Chief Minister Sarma presenting a floral basket and a traditional silver rhino memento to the Vice President. The rhino, one of Assam’s most recognizable symbols, represents the state’s rich biodiversity, cultural heritage, and commitment to balanced development. The presentation of the memento reflected Assam’s pride in its unique identity while underscoring the state’s aspiration to achieve growth that is both inclusive and environmentally sustainable. The meeting demonstrated the proactive governance approach adopted by the Assam Government, which places significant emphasis on engaging with national leaders, sharing development achievements, and seeking guidance on future priorities. By maintaining regular dialogue with key constitutional authorities and policymakers, the state leadership is ensuring that Assam remains closely aligned with national objectives while advancing its own ambitious development agenda. Such engagements also provide opportunities to showcase Assam’s achievements and strengthen support for initiatives that can further accelerate progress. Chief Minister Sarma reiterated that the vision of a Viksit Assam is being pursued through concrete actions, transparent administration, and inclusive policies aimed at benefiting every section of society. He emphasized that development is not merely measured through infrastructure projects and economic indicators but also through improvements in the quality of life experienced by ordinary citizens. Accordingly, the government’s efforts continue to focus on expanding access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, financial inclusion, and social welfare programs. The Chief Minister highlighted that the state’s development journey is guided by the principle that no citizen should be left behind. The discussion also reflected confidence in Assam’s future prospects as the state continues to build upon recent achievements. Strong governance, enhanced connectivity, industrial growth, social stability, and strategic investments have together created a foundation for sustained progress. The Chief Minister noted that Assam is increasingly being recognized as a model of transformation within the Northeast and that continued collaboration with national leadership will help unlock even greater opportunities in the years ahead. As the meeting concluded, it reinforced the shared commitment of both the national and state leadership toward promoting development, strengthening institutions, and improving the lives of citizens. The interaction highlighted Assam’s remarkable progress across multiple sectors and underscored the state’s determination to continue moving forward on the path of growth and prosperity. With strong leadership, effective governance, and continued support from the Centre, Assam is steadily advancing toward its vision of becoming a developed, inclusive, and economically vibrant state. The briefing presented to Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan served not only as an update on the state’s achievements but also as a reaffirmation of Assam’s aspirations to contribute meaningfully to India’s development story. As the state continues implementing transformative initiatives and expanding opportunities for its people, the dream of a Viksit Assam is steadily becoming a reality, offering renewed hope, confidence, and prosperity for millions while strengthening India’s journey toward becoming a leading global power.

# 1<sup>st</sup> Foundn Day of Assam College of Astrology celebrated

City Correspondent, Guwahati, June 1: The 1st Foundation Day of Assam College of Astrology was celebrated at Bishnu Nirmala Hall at



Latasil here on 31st of May. The meeting, on the occasion, was presided over by the principal of the College Mihir Kr. Baruah. The programme was started with 'Saraswati Prayer' which was sang by the students of Pundit Pulaskar Music College and the programme was inaugurated by the Director of Nemcare Hospital Dr. (Physician) Hitesh Baruah singing Assamese folk song(s). The object of the meeting and welcome address were delivered by the Secretary of the College Dr. Barnil Bikash. The souvenir 'Jyotishbani' was released by the vc of Cotton University Ramesh Kr. Deka. As guests of the meeting the MLA Dr. Bijoy Kr. Gupta, ex Addl. DGP Fatik Dutta Goswami, astrologers Dr. Hanshadhar Sarma, Dr. Tarun Bhattacharyya, social worker Naba Kr. Mazumdar etc delivered their speeches on the occasion.

# Books Unveiled, Literary Awards Presented at Anil Bora Memorial Silver Jubilee Event in Nagaon

Safiqur Rahman, Nagaon, June 1: Marking the Silver Jubilee Year of language-



medium movement martyr Anil Bora, the Nagaon District Committee of Akoni Sahitya Sabha organized a vibrant literary programme celebrating literature,

language and children's education. Speaking at the event, noted story-teller Shivananda Kakoti remarked that "the true inauguration of any book takes place in the hands of its readers," emphasizing that stories, poems and all forms of art emerge from intellectual and emotional growth.

On the occasion, Kakoti formally unveiled young writer Jyotirmoyee Baruah's short story collection

"Bhagaruwa Xopon Etar Xopon", while former Nagaon College Principal Dr. Sarat Barkotoki released poet Hemendra Sharma's poetry anthology "Hridayor Anubhuti." The programme also honoured eminent children's writers Dr. Namita Kalita, Binu Laskar Thakuria and Meena Bora with the Shishu Siksha Sahitya Award for their significant contributions to children's literature and education. A unique attraction of the event was the inauguration of a "Bookshop Without a Shopkeeper", promoting a culture of reading and trust among book lovers. Attended by literary figures, journalists, educators and literature enthusiasts, the event highlighted the vital role of literature in nurturing young minds and preserving Assamese language and culture.

# Painting Competition Jointly Organized by Assam Pollution Control Board and Sammilita Seva, Sivasagar

Khairuddin Ahmed, Staff Re-



porter, Sivasagar, Jun 1: A painting competition for students was successfully organized on May 31 at Sivasagar Government Higher Secondary Multipurpose School through a joint initiative of the Regional Office of the Assam Pollution Control Board (APCB), Sivasagar, and Sammilita Seva, Sivasagar, the voluntary service wing of the Sivasagar Sammilita Rongali Bihu Sammilan.

The competition was organized in connection with the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Assam Pollution Control Board and World Environment Day 2026. More than 200 students from different parts of the district participated in the event.

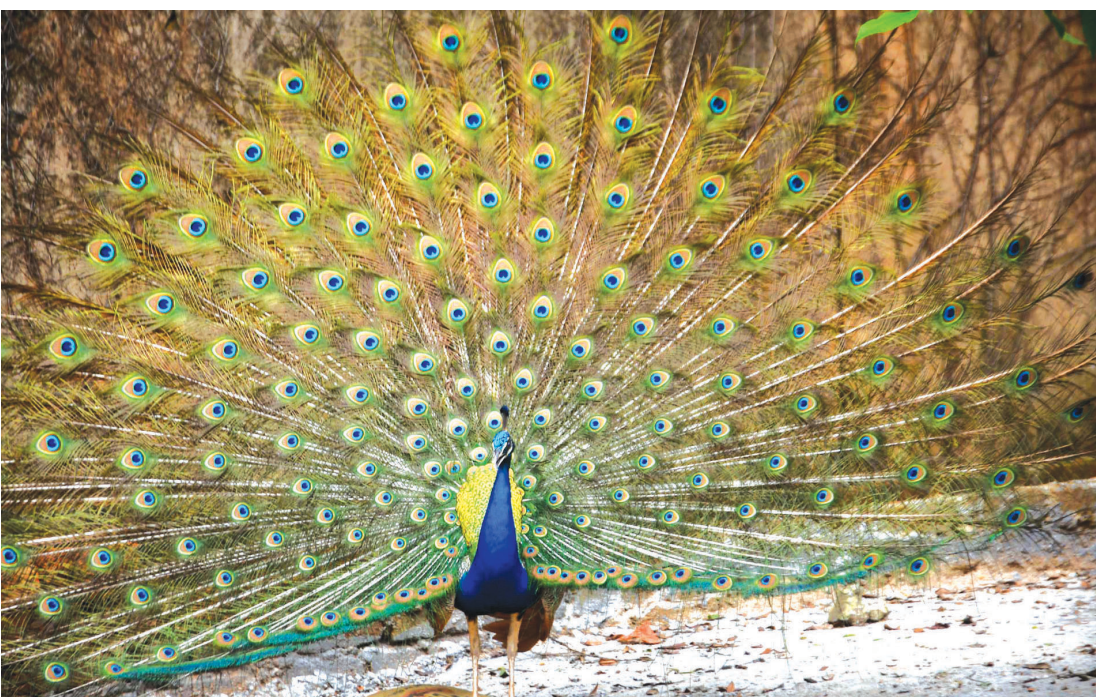
The theme of the competition was "Climate Change," inspired by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) theme for World Environment Day: "Inspired by Nature. For Climate. For Our Future." Participants expressed through their paintings how humanity can make better use of the present to ensure a healthy environment for future generations.

The event was inaugurated by Jayanta Dutta, Regional Head Officer of the Assam Pollution Control Board's Sivasagar Regional Office. In his inaugural

address, he emphasized that encouraging students to connect with nature and engage in environmentally friendly activities today would sow the seeds for a healthier environment in the future. He stated that creating environmental awareness among students was the primary objective of the competition. During the inaugural session, Dr. Utpal Dutta, President of Sammilita Seva and Dean of the Science Faculty at Sivasagar University, delivered a goodwill speech. He highlighted the dangers of environmental pollution and stressed the need to minimize it as much as possible.

Sharad Hazarika, General Secretary of Sammilita Seva, said that the competition was one of the many public welfare activities regularly undertaken by the organization. He noted that Sammilita Seva has already established a weaving unit for the production of traditional Assamese gamosas through local artisans, organized

scientific conservation and plantation workshops for orchid species such as the Foxtail Orchid (Kopou Phool), provided relief to flood-affected people, and promoted integrated farming initiatives. The competition was judged by renowned artists from Sivasagar — Mukul Gogoi, Aftabuddin Ahmed, and Prashanta Gogoi. Winners Group A 1st: Liyan Jyoti Gogoi 2nd: Enaya Hussain 3rd: Priyanshu Mondal Group B 1st: Anirban Gogoi 2nd: Rupankrita Baruah 3rd: Areyee Sharma Group C 1st: Louis Baruah 2nd: Tamanna Ahmed 3rd: Sarfaraz Amin Rahman The prize distribution ceremony was attended by Dr. Prabuddha Prasad Chetia, Pradip Kanti Das, Manoj Kumar Bhagawati, Bibhuti Chetia, Zakir Hussain, Jyoti Prasad Kalita, Surajit Baruah, and Himangshu Neog, Secretary of the Sivasagar Press Club. The winning students were awarded certificates along with cash prizes totaling Rs 15,000.



A peacock displays its iridescent feathers inside an enclosure at the Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden in Guwahati Monday, June 1, 2026. PIX BY - RUPJYOTI SARMAH

# Warm Farewell Accorded to OC, Orang Police Station, Hirakjyoti Das

lice Officer of Rowta Police Circle, Utpal highlighted various the Bodoland Jour-



Sharma, while the objective of the gathering was explained by Sub-Inspector Surajit Hazarika. Speakers at the event fondly recalled the sincere service, discipline, and administrative efficiency displayed by Hirakjyoti Das during his tenure at Orang Police Station.

Addressing the gathering, Circle Officer Utpal Sharma, Sub-Inspector Jitumoni Kalita, Secretary of Orang Village Defence Party Shiv Ram Deka, and Sub-Inspector Surajit Hazarika

achievements and commendable contributions of the outgoing officer towards maintaining law and order and strengthening police-public relations in the area.

As a mark of respect and appreciation, police personnel, battalion members, and representatives of several Village Defence Parties felicitated Hirakjyoti Das with traditional Assamese gifts including xorai and gamosa.

The programme was attended by Central Advisor of

nalists' Association Naba Kumar Deka, Sub-Inspector Diganta Kumar Bora, Majarchuba Village Defence Party Secretary Abdul Jalil, Nishilamari Women Village Defence Party Secretary Anurupa Deka, Garubandha Women Village Defence Party Secretary Jahnabi Deka, Lance Naik Biswajit Sutradhar, women police constables Bhanita Medhi and Kanjana Rabha, among others, who extended their support and cooperation in making the event successful.

# Felicitations of Meritorious Students by Kurmi Society in Dibrugarh :: Philanthropist Jyoti Prasad Kanai Honoured with 'Gyanshree' Award

M Hashim Ali correspondent Dibrugarh, Jun 1: A felicitation ceremony for the meritorious students of the Dibrugarh District Kurmi Society for the academic year 2025-26 was held at the Srimanta Sankardeva Auditorium of Kanai College (Autonomous), Dibrugarh. The event was jointly organized by the Dibrugarh District Kurmi Society, the Dibrugarh District Kurmi Youth Students' Council, and the Dibrugarh District Kurmi Women's Council. Attending the programme as the chief guest, Dr. Sashikanta Saikia, noted writer, litterateur, former president of the Dibrugarh Sahitya Sabha, convener of the Interstate and International Friendship Sub-Committee of the Assam Sahitya Sabha,

and principal of the historic Kanai College (Autonomous), emphasized that hard work is essential for achieving

hoisting of the flag, followed by a tribute to departed souls and the offering of floral tributes to the portrait of

provided to the three highest scorers of the current year's High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) and Higher



success in life. Addressing the students, he stated that success can never be attained without sincere effort. He further encouraged them to remain constantly eager to acquire knowledge, saying that a thirst for learning is what ultimately helps a person achieve true success. The programme, conducted by Jagat Kurmi, Secretary of the Dibrugarh District Kurmi Society, was presided over by Harit Kurmi, President of the Society. Distinguished guest Raju Gopal, Principal of the Industrial Training Institute (ITI), Tinsukia, informed the students about various educational opportunities and facilities available in industrial training institutions. Professor Barindra Das of Borhat Bhawani Prasad Barua College spoke about the precautions and important steps students should take in their future lives and shared valuable insights on achieving success. The event began with the

the late renowned singer Zubeen Garg. A group song was then presented by artists from Timona Gaon Sabha. On the occasion, noted social worker and Director of the Jyoti Lalita Kanai Foundation, Jyoti Prasad Kanai, was honoured with the 'Gyanshree' Award. The award was presented in recognition of his generous contributions to education and social development in Dibrugarh. Among others who addressed the students were Prabin Kurmi, Central General Secretary of the Assam Kurmi Society; Dayanand Shah, proprietor of SKS English Academy, Lahowal; and Bimal Bagh, President of the Dibrugarh District Kurmi Committee of the Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association. They delivered thoughtful and inspiring speeches. It may be mentioned that during the programme, special felicitation and financial assistance for future education were

Secondary examinations in the Arts and Science streams Ridip Kurmi, Leena Kurmi, and Sukanya Kurmi. In addition, nearly 150 meritorious students from Dibrugarh district were felicitated. Other distinguished guests present included Ratul Burhagohain, Secretary of the Greater Dibrugarh Press Club; Dimbeswar Kurmi, President of the Assam Kurmi Youth Students' Council; Mantush Kurmi, President of the Dibrugarh District Committee of the Tea Community National Convention; Moon Shah, Director of SKS English Academy, Lahowal; and Belimai Kurmi, Vice-President of the Assam Kurmi Women's Council. The programme also felicitated three blood donors Raju Kurmi, Pona Kurmi, and Ajay Kurmi for their contribution to blood donation. The event concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Jagat Kurmi, Secretary of the Dibrugarh District Kurmi Society.