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HT BRIEFS

Four arrested

GUWAHATI: Four persons, including a woman, have been arrested and gold worth over ₹ 28 lakh seized from their possession in Assam's Kamrup (Metro) district on Thursday, police said. Acting on specific information, a team of special task force (STF) and Guwahati Police launched an operation and intercepted a vehicle in Jorabat area, bordering Meghalaya. During the operation, gold wires rounded into five pieces, weighing 518 gm, were found in their possession. The value of the seized gold is estimated to be ₹ 28,93,030. Further investigation is underway. (PTI)

Militant killed

ITANAGAR: An NSCN-IM militant was killed in an encounter with security forces in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh on Wednesday night, officials said. The militant was killed in a gunfight at Kali Mandir area that falls under Miao Police Station in Changlang district of the northeastern state, Changlang deputy commissioner (DC) Sunny Singh informed on Thursday. The rebel was killed by personnel of 11 Assam Rifles during an exchange of fire that broke out after two armed militants of the outfit shot at a patrolling party, which was moving from Miao Ghat to Dharampur via Kali Mandir, officials said. (PTI)

Tuliram-led KAAC team meets KHADC on border issue

Peace, harmony to be maintained in Block II

HT Bureau

SHILLONG, Sept 14: The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) on Thursday unanimously decided to work together for maintaining peace and harmony in areas under the disputed Block II.

The decision was taken at a joint meeting held between the KHADC chief Pyniaid Sing Syiem and KAAC chief Tuliram Ronghang in the presence of Karbi Anglong MP Horen Singh Bey.

The meeting was also attended by the executive members from both the autonomous councils.

Addressing the media after the meeting, Syiem said that the KHADC and KAAC have decided to work together for maintaining peace and harmony among the two communities residing on the border. Syiem has also expressed concern over the alleged harassment against Khasi-Pnar people residing in the Block II areas.

"Since yesterday, I had already appraised the KAAC chief on the matter and requested his interven-



tion to ensure Khasi-Pnar people do not face any kind of harassment especially when the two state governments are in the process of settling the boundary dispute," he said.

On the demand to retransfer the Block II areas to Meghalaya, KHADC chief, however, said that discussion by the two state governments on the matter is on.

"Therefore, the two district

councils have decided to work together. We will listen to the voice of the people from both communities before giving our suggestion to the regional committees of both the States," he said.

Meanwhile, Syiem informed that both district councils have decided to work together to preserve and promote the rich culture and heritage of the two communities.

Modi fires fresh salvo at 'ghamandia' INDIA block

PM credits Indians for success of G20 summit

BINA (MP), Sept 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday termed the Opposition's INDIA grouping as "ghamandia" (arrogant), and alleged that it wants to "destroy" Sanatan Dharma and push the country into "a thousand years' slavery."

The credit for the G-20 summit's success goes to the people of the country, he said, adding that it has boosted the self-confidence of even children in the villages. The Prime Minister was speaking after laying the foundation stone of a ₹ 49,000-crore petrochemicals complex at Bina Refinery in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh along with ten other industrial projects in the BJP-ruled state where assembly elections are due by the year-end.

"The 'ghamandia' alliance met in Mumbai recently. They have neither any policies, nor issues, nor a leader. They have a hidden agenda of attacking Sanatan Dharma which they want to de-

stroy," Modi said. Mahatma Gandhi drew inspiration from Sanatan Dharma and his struggle for freedom was centred around it, the Prime Minister further said. Gandhi followed Sanatan Dharma all his life and his last words were "Hey Ram", Modi noted.

Great historical personalities like Indore ruler Ahilyabai Holkar, Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi, Swami Vivekananda and Lokmanya Tilak also drew inspiration from Sanatan Dharma, he added.

"They (the Opposition) have started speaking openly. They are going to sharpen their attack on us. Every follower of Sanatan Dharma in every nook and corner of the country and the nation-lovers have to be watchful," Modi said. "The INDIA' alliance wants to abolish Sanatan Dharma and push the country into a thousand years' slavery. But we have to stop these forces unitedly. With our unity, we (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)



'Hindu Diwas' celebrated in West KA

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, Sept 14: The Nehru Yuva Kendra in collaboration with Social Development Organization organized the 'Hindu Diwas' at the Modern English School in West Karbi Anglong on Thursday.

The 'Hindu Diwas' was celebrated across the country under the aegis of the Union ministry of youth affairs and sports.

The celebration was chaired by Chandan Sahu, principal of the Modern English School. A floral tribute was offered on the portrait of Swami Vivekananda and traditional lamps were lit by guests and resource persons present.

Vice principal of the school, Manoj Chetry said that Hindi is an Indo-Aryan language, written in the Devanagari script and recognized as the official language of India. It is one of the Union government's two official languages, alongside English, and one of the 22 scheduled languages of India. Hindi Diwas aims to promote and propagate this official language, while serving as a patriotic reminder of the country's shared roots and unity among its diverse population. The programme was graced by assistant teachers of the school Vivek Rajbhar and Vikash Chauhan, Nehru Yuva Kendra member Sanjit Harijan and president of Social Development Organization, Dhanraj Harijan.

Assam to get 6 new universities

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: The Assam Assembly has paved the way for the creation of six new universities, passing as many legislations for the purpose during its ongoing autumn session on Thursday.

Assam education minister Ranaj Pegu moved the Bills, seeking to upgrade existing colleges to varities.

The House passed through voice vote 'The Nagaon University Bill, 2023', 'The Gurucharan University Bill, 2023', 'The Bongaiyaon University Bill, 2023', 'The Jagannath Barooah University Bill, 2023', 'The North Lakhimpur University Bill, 2023' and 'The Sib-sagar University Bill, 2023'.

Replying to issues raised during discussion on the Bills, Pegu said minimum 100 bighas and five departments with qualified faculty are required, among other prerequisites, for starting a new university.

He said the University Grants Commission is making some relaxations in these provisions for the time being, but the government has to meet the requirements soon. He said the existing infrastructure of the colleges that are being upgraded is being used and funds have already been allotted for expansion.

The minister accepted an amendment moved by the AIUDF for inclusion of two MLAs, each in the varieties' top decision-making bodies.

The House also gave assent to seven amendment Bills, which will empower the Comptroller and Auditor General of India to check and audit accounts of

these universities. The amendment Bills were for Bodoland University, Assam Science and Technology University, Assam Women's University, Cotton University, Gauhati University, Madhadev University and Kumar Bhaskar Varna Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University. Among other Bills passed by the Assembly was 'The Assam Panchayat (Amendment) Bill, 2023', which was moved by state panchayat and rural development minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass and 'Assam Motor Vehicle Taxation (Amendment) Bill, 2023', moved by state transport minister Parimal Suklabaidya.

'The Mobility of Employees of State Government and other Establishment (for Optimum Utilization of Available Manpower for Efficiency) Bill, 2023', moved by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who also holds the personnel department, was also given the nod. State finance minister Ajanta Neog's 'The Assam Micro-Finance Institutions (Regulation of Money Lending) (Amendment) Bill, 2023' and 'The Assam Goods & Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023' also got the assent of the House.

'The Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2023' and 'The Assam Public Safety (Measures) Enforcement (Amendment) Bill, 2023', both moved by state housing and urban affairs minister Ashok Singhal, were also passed by the Assembly. (PTI)

Green tea produced by small growers sold at ₹ 15 to ₹ 38 per kg last fiscal: Assam minister

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: Tea leaves produced by small growers in Assam fetched prices ranging from ₹ 15 to ₹ 38 per kg in the last fiscal, said Industry, Commerce and Public Enterprise Minister Bimal Borah in the Assembly on Thursday, adding these gardens account for over 47 per cent of tea produced in the state.

He said various measures have been taken to ensure fair price is paid to small tea growers. Replying to a question by Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi, Borah said according to the Tea Board India, there are 1,25,484 small tea growers in the state as on March 31, 2023.

A total of 1.17 lakh hectares are under cultivation of small tea growers and they contribute 47.77 per cent of the total tea produced in the state, he said.

The green tea leaves produced



by small growers sold for a minimum of ₹ 15.83 per kg and a maximum of ₹ 38.71 per kg in 2022-23, as per data from Tea Board India.

In the current fiscal (till July),

the minimum price fetched by small tea growers' produced green leaves is ₹ 19.02 per kg and maximum is ₹ 36.59 per kg.

Borah said the central government had formed district-level committees comprising the district commissioner, representatives of bought leaf factories, small tea growers and estate factories and an official of the Tea Board to fix the minimum price of green leaves.

Also, there is a provision of fixing the green tea leaf price on basis of a price sharing formula taking into account tea manufactured by bought tea leaf factories and price fetched during auction.

Replying to BJP legislator Rupesh Gowala's query, Borah said green leaves produced by small tea growers sold at an average price of ₹ 24.56 per kg in 2022 and ₹ 25.52 kg this year so far. (PTI)

15 people arrested for involvement in child marriage

HAILAKANDI, Sept 14: The police have arrested 15 people in Assam's Hailakandi district for allegedly conducting child marriages by preparing fake documents.

Acting on a complaint filed by a registered qazi that 16 people were involved in conducting child marriages by posing as qazis, the police on Wednesday launched an operation in different parts of the district, police sources said.

Although 16 persons were taken into custody, one was let off due to lack of evidence, additional superintendent of police, Shamir Daptari Baruah said. The arrested persons are accused of conducting child marriages by preparing fake documents, he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Trial run on B'desh side for Agartala-Gangasagar rail link conducted successfully



AGARTALA, Sept 14: The technical trial run on the newly constructed railway tracks from Bangladesh's Gangasagar to Tripura's Nischintapur was carried out successfully on Thursday, paving the way for strengthening connectivity between India's northeast region and the neighbouring country, an official said.

The 6.7-km stretch is part of the 15-km rail link connecting Tripura's capital Agartala with Gangasagar in Brahmanbaria district of Bangladesh.

Texmaco Rail & Engineering Ltd has been engaged to construct the railway tracks from Gangasagar to Nischintapur railway station.

"The 20-minute journey from Gangasagar to zero point at Nischintapur was smooth and there was no difficulty. The speed of the train was 30 km per hour. Now, the track is ready for train service. The government will decide when it will introduce train service on the newly built tracks," Texmaco Rail & Engineering Ltd vice president Sarat Sharma told reporters here.

The construction work on the route was taken up in 2018 but the Covid pandemic has delayed the project, he said.

"Now, we are happy that the tracks are ready for train service," he said. The train service is expected to be delayed for a few days because modification work inside the Nischintapur railway yard has been taken up, following recommendations from immigration and customs departments, another official said.

As part of the 15-km rail link between Agartala and Gangasagar, IRCON was constructing the tracks on the Indian side.

"To introduce train service, immigration and customs facilities are required. Now, we are working to modify some rooms of the railway yard and it will be completed by the next couple of days", an IRCON official said.

Notably, Tripura Transport Minister Sushanta Chowdhury had in April said that the rail link between Agartala and Bangladesh's Gangasagar would be completed by September. (PTI)

Over 17,000 teaching posts in schools, colleges vacant in Assam: Minister

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: More than 15,000 teaching posts at the school level and 1,300 in colleges and universities are lying vacant in Assam, state education minister Ranaj Pegu said in the assembly on Thursday.

He also said the gross enrolment ratio (GER) at the higher secondary level has been on a downward trend compared to the figures at the elementary level in 2021-22.

Replying to a question by Congress MLA Reikibuddin Ahmed, Pegu said a total of 15,752 teaching posts are lying vacant in different schools.

A total of 2,830 non-teaching posts are also yet to be filled in schools, he said.

In reply to a question by AIUDF's Rafiqul Islam, Pegu said in provincialised high schools and higher secondary schools, 1,686

posts of head teacher, 320 posts of principals and 499 posts of vice-principals are lying vacant.

The minister, in response to another query by CPI(M) legislator Manoranjan Talukdar, said 860 posts of assistant professors are lying vacant in different colleges and 465 teaching posts in 12 universities of the state.

Pegu, replying to a question by Congress MLA Bharat Chandra Narah, said as per Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) 2021-22 data, the GER in elementary education in Assam was 109.9 per cent.

It showed that the GER in secondary education for the same period was 74.5 per cent and in higher secondary education, it was 40.1 per cent (PTI)

Revamped administrative structure to enhance efficiency: Assam CM

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: Assam Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the state's administrative structure is being revamped to make it more people-friendly.

He said more powers are being delegated at the sub-district level to both civil and police administrations for efficiency.

Informing the assembly about the notification of 79 sub-divisions, which shall be known as sub-districts, Sarma said, "We are trying to give a new look to the administration."

People will be able to get most of the work done at the sub-district level, for which they had to earlier travel to the district commissioner's (DC) office, he said.

While an additional district commis-

sioner (ADC) will deal with civil matters, an additional superintendent of police will be posted at the sub-districts to take care of the police side, he added.

The DCs and SPs will have more of a supervisory role, Sarma added. An official notification had said on Tuesday that Governor Gulab Chand Kataria sanctioned the creation of 79 sub-divisions or sub-districts within their respective administrative districts. The geographical limits of the sub-districts shall be co-terminus with the boundaries of the legislative constituencies, Sarma said, adding that the legislative constituencies as per the recent delimitation process have been taken into consideration. He said different departments like water resources, irrigation (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Indian-origin Shanmugaratnam takes oath as Singapore's President

Indian-origin leaders shine in world politics

SINGAPORE, Sept 14: Several leaders of Indian-origin are now dominating world politics, with each making their mark. The latest to join the list is Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who took oath as Singapore's ninth president on Thursday.

Shanmugaratnam, 66, was declared the winner of the September 1 election after he received 70.4 per cent of the votes polled in the predominantly Chinese and economically prosperous country.

His victory signifies the rising influence of Indians across the globe.

In the US, the growing influence of the Indian-American community can be seen in the success of Kamala Harris, who became the first woman and the first coloured Vice President of the country.

She was a senator for California from 2017 to 2021. Harris, a Democrat, also served as the attorney

general of California from 2011 to 2017. She was born to Indian and Jamaican parents in California.

In the crucial midterm elections in November, a record five Indian-American lawmakers from the ruling Democrat Party -- Raja Krishnamoorthi, Ro Khanna, Pramila Jayapal, Ami Bera and Shri Thanedar -- were elected to the US House of Representatives.

Harmeet Dhillon, a prominent politician in California, recently contested the election for the chairmanship of the Republican National Committee (RNC).

Indian-origin leaders like Nikki Haley, and Vivek Ramaswamy have launched their bid for the White House in 2024.

Rishi Sunak became Britain's first Indian-origin Prime Minister last year. He is the youngest British prime minister in 210 years. He is also Britain's first Hindu Prime



Minister. Goan-origin Suella Braverman is serving as his Home Secretary.

Claire Coutinho is the second Goan-origin minister after Braverman in the Sunak Cabinet.

She recently got a big promotion as his new Energy Security and

Net Zero Secretary.

Under Sunak's predecessor, Boris Johnson's Cabinet, Priti Patel was the Home Secretary. Alok Sharma was the International Development Secretary in the Johnson Cabinet.

Ireland's Prime Minister

(Taoiseach) Leo Eric Varadkar is also of Indian origin. Varadkar is the third child and only son of Ashok and Miriam Varadkar. His father, a doctor, was born in Mumbai and moved to the United Kingdom in the 1960s.

Antonio Costa has been the Prime Minister of Portugal since 2015. He is half Indian and half Portuguese.

Anita Anand is the first Hindu to become a federal minister in Canada. Anand assumed the role of President of the Treasury Board on July 26, 2023, as part of a major cabinet shuffle.

Anand's parents were Indians. Her father was from Tamil Nadu and her mother was from Punjab.

Apart from Anand, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Cabinet has two more Indian-origin members-- Harjit Sajjan and Kamal Khera. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Tesla looking at sourcing components worth about USD 1.9 bn from India: Goyal



NEW DELHI, Sept 14: US-based electric vehicle maker Tesla is looking to source components worth around USD 1.9 billion from India this year against USD 1 billion last year, commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday.

The minister said that going forward, demand for electric vehicles will increase and it will help in pushing the growth of the sector.

"Tesla already last year bought one billion dollars of components from I think all of you sitting here... I have the list of companies who supply to Tesla. This year their target is nearly USD 1.7 billion or USD 1.9 billion what they mentioned," he said here at an event of auto component makers.

Earlier the government had stated that it is not looking to frame a separate policy for providing incentives to Tesla, and the company can apply to avail support measures under existing schemes like PLI for auto and advanced chemistry cells.

The government has rolled out the production-linked incentives (PLI) schemes (PLI) for advanced chemistry cell (ACC) battery storage with an outlay of ₹ 18,100 crore and ₹ 26,058 crore PLI scheme for auto, auto-components and drone industries.

The world's largest electric car producer Tesla Inc's chief Elon Musk met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June in New York.

Musk, after meeting the Prime Minister, said he plans to visit India in 2024.

When asked whether the government is considering duty concessions on completely built-up units to attract certain sections of electric cars into India, the minister said: "Everything we have done has been done equally without any differentiation, without any preferences".

"This is the government which provides equal opportunity to everybody. So we will come out with a policy. A policy which will be in consultation with all the stakeholders - SIAM and ACMA - both will have a role in helping us draft a good policy," he added.

The government is continuously making efforts to attract newer in-

vestments and newer opportunities for the sector.

"Very clearly, we can see that going forward there will be a natural demand and an increasing demand or shift driven by an economic story by which we will see the electric auto industry grow," he said.

The electric auto industry, he said, is growing worldwide and it will see that growth in India also.

He added that the demand gap between electric vehicles and other vehicles has reduced and "narrowed quite significantly".

"My own sense is that going forward, that delta (gap) will get further squeezed and compressed," he said adding in taxis, public transport, and buses, "we already see electric vehicles becoming a very compulsive investment case".

"In this situation, we would like to see more investments and a larger production output in India of electric vehicles as soon as possible in the near future," the minister said, adding with increasing demand and production, the Indian auto component industry will not only produce for a larger India demand, but also export.

Citing some meetings with auto industry participants, he said players have indicated that they have an interest in coming to India.

"And therefore, I am convinced that this is the future and this is something we must try to attract," Goyal said.

It will be a compulsive business case by 2030 for consumers to go in for electric vehicles and it will not be any by policy or artificial intervention.

When asked about foreign firms looking to invest in India as part of their China plus one strategy, Goyal said that global companies are coming to India because of its attractiveness.

"I totally debunk and reject the China plus one theory. That's not what is going to drive India... India of today stands on its own feet. The India of today has offerings for the rest of the world... both for investment and trade," he said.

Goyal added that India provides them good business environment, skills, managerial talent, a big market, and demand generated by 1.4 billion people.

"It's a rules-based economy... it's a young democracy... one of the fastest growing large economies. All of this makes it a compulsive investment destination."

"Therefore companies around the world have gone beyond the China-plus-one story, they have gone beyond the ABC philosophy of anything but China, they have gone beyond friend-shoring or near-shoring and are looking at India as a trusted partner," he added. (PTI)

WPI inflation in negative for fifth month in a row at (-) 0.52 pc in Aug

Wholesale inflation in vegetables was 48.69 per cent in August, against 62.12 per cent in July

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: Wholesale price inflation remained in negative territory for the fifth straight month in August at (-) 0.52 per cent, though it rose sequentially from the previous month on account of firm prices of food items, especially vegetables, onion and pulses.

The wholesale price index (WPI) based inflation rate has been in the negative since April and was (-) 1.36 per cent in July.

In August last year, WPI inflation was 12.48 per cent.

According to economists, fading base effects and elevated food inflation led to a (-) 0.52 per cent WPI in August, which came in higher than July numbers.

Inflation in food articles remained in double digit for the second straight month at 10.60 per cent in August, lower than 14.25 per cent in July.

Wholesale inflation in vegetables was 48.69 per cent in August, against 62.12 per cent in July.

In pulses, inflation was 10.45 per cent, while in onion it skyrocketed to 31.42 per cent in August.

"Within food, prices of vegetables, which surged in July, moderated sequentially in August, but year-on-year, inflation remains high. Additionally, a small sequential increase in prices of manufactured products (which have the largest weight in WPI) also contributed to the slower headline deflation," Barclays MD & Head of EM Asia Economics Rahul Bajoria said.



Fuel and power basket inflation was at (-) 6.03 per cent in August, against (-) 12.79 per cent in July.

In manufactured products, inflation rate was (-) 2.37 per cent, as against (-) 2.51 per cent in July.

"The negative rate of inflation in August 2023 is primarily due to fall in prices of mineral oils, basic metals, chemical & chemical products, textiles and food products as compared to the corresponding month of previous year," the commerce and

industry ministry said on Thursday.

Acuite Ratings & Research Chief Economist Suman Chowdhury said "we expect WPI inflation to be in the positive territory over the next few months, given healthy industrial and consumer demand and the backdrop of increasing prices of crude oil, cereals and pulses."

"This is set to hold CPI inflation in the range of 5.5-6.5 per cent over the next two quarters and not allow it to come down sharply. RBI MPC will have limited option

but to wait and watch the price scenario till the end of the current fiscal," Chowdhury said.

The softer pace of decline in WPI in August follows the larger than expected moderation in CPI inflation, data for which was released earlier this week.

Retail inflation data for August came in at 6.83 per cent in August, lower than 7.44 per cent in July.

"We expect CPI inflation to moderate further in September, supported by reversal in vegetable price shock and price cuts for LPG... Currently there is limited pressure on consumer prices, resulting in broadly stable CPI core inflation. This is likely to comfort the RBI; however, we expect it to remain on hold for longer, as it monitors risks to inflation from generalisation of food price pressures and El Niño," Bajoria said.

Fitch Ratings in its Global Economic Outlook also raised 2023-end retail or CPI inflation projection to 5.5 per cent, from its previous forecast of 5 per cent. It, however, maintained RBI's benchmark interest rate forecast at 6.5 per cent for end 2023.

The RBI expects annual CPI inflation to moderate in coming months given the short-term nature of vegetable price shocks. Nevertheless, the threat of El Niño means that inflation could exceed our forecasts, although the impact on consumers and the economy is likely to be temporary, Fitch said. (PTI)

Wholesalers & big chain retailers amid uptick in prices

Govt further cuts stock limit on wheat traders

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: The government on Thursday further reduced the stock limit on wheat traders, wholesalers and big chain retailers to 2,000 tonnes from 3,000 tonnes with immediate effect amid uptick in prices.

Announcing the decision, Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra said: "Keeping in view of recent uptick in the prices, we have had a review of the stock limits and effective today the stock limit on traders, wholesalers and big chain retailers stand reduced to 2000 tonne."

Three months back on June 12, the government had imposed a stock limit of 3,000 tonnes on these wheat players till March 2024.

The stock limit has been reduced to 2,000 tonnes as the government found there is an "an uptick in the wheat prices on the NCDEX by 4 per cent to ₹ 2,550 per quintal in the past one month."

"Although there is adequate availability of wheat in the country, I think there are some elements which are trying to create some artificial scarcity," Chopra told reporters. (PTI)

NE India embarks on a culinary journey with 'CII Foodpro North East'

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Sept 14: North East India's culinary prowess takes center stage with the launch of the inaugural "CII Foodpro North East" event, a significant milestone in the region's food processing sector.

Organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the event commenced on September 14, at the prestigious Maniram Dewan Trade Centre in Guwahati. In his keynote address, Manavendra Pratap Singh, IAS, managing director of Assam Industrial Development Corporation Limited, highlighted the vital role of "Food Pro" events in positioning North East India as a burgeoning food processing destination.

Tiranga Borah, director of the department of horticulture and food processing, Government of Assam, detailed efforts to fortify the supply chain for horticultural produce.

The department has established



training facilities for aspiring food processing enthusiasts and initiated cluster-based projects and mega food parks to promote the sector. Collaborations with industry giants ITC and Mahindra, along with the possibility of partnerships with Bangladesh, demonstrate Assam's commitment to excellence.

With the theme "Growing the Market for Food Processing in North-East," Foodpro North-East 2023, chaired by B Thiagarajan, managing director of Blue Star Ltd, positions the North East Region as a promising

hub for food processing.

Government incentives are set to benefit not only agricultural producers but also create employment opportunities in transportation, packaging, advertising, and marketing. The event features a dynamic 3-day exhibition showcasing over 50 exhibitors from across India, complemented by sectoral conferences, B2B, B2G, and B2C meetings. Anticipating over 6,000 business and trade visitors from across the nation, the event promises networking and growth opportunities.



Tea Board has modified the rule and made it optional for sellers", she stated.

She had also said that the suggestion of producers if taken on board

will make the platform attractive to all the stakeholders.

An official of CTTA said that in the present auction system, division of lots are not allowed for which

smaller buyers are not able to participate.

"In the previous English auction system, division of lots were allowed. One lot is more than 30 packets. If these lots are divided, then the smaller buyers would be able to participate. But they are not able now in the present model. As a result, competition is less and hence price discovery is not to the optimum extent", the official said.

He said the main thing is participation by all stakeholders. "If that happens, then only optimum price discovery will take place", he said.

Tea Board implemented the Bharat auction system in North India as the mandate was given to it for a pan-India auction. The Bharat auction was in South India before it was implemented in North India.

Despite attempts no comments were available from the Tea Board on the issue. (PTI)

PhonePe to now offer voice notifications in Assamese

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: In a bid to enhance the convenience of merchants, PhonePe SmartSpeakers is gearing up to introduce voice payment notifications in Assamese.

This update signifies a major step forward for merchants across Assam, who will now have the ability to access PhonePe smart speakers in their preferred language through the PhonePe for Business app.

One of the standout advantages of this feature is the ability for merchants to promptly validate customer payments in Assamese, eliminating the need to check the customer's phone screen or await payment confirmation SMS from the bank. This capability proves especially valuable during peak business hours.

Notably, PhonePe smart speakers boast up to four days of battery life, ensuring uninterrupted operation. They feature data connectivity, a dedicated battery level LED indicator for user-friendly functionality, audio alerts for low battery levels, and a convenient replay button for accessing the details of the last transaction. This development promises to simplify and expedite payment processes for merchants in Assam and beyond.

Present tea auction system not helping in optimum price discovery in North India: Producers

KOLKATA, Sept 14: Tea producers have opined that the new Bharat auction system introduced in North India from April this year is not helping in the discovery of optimum prices of the brew.

According to Tea Board data, average price realisation in North India from April to July in 2023-24 was lower at ₹ 205.10 per kilogramme as compared to ₹ 220.74 per kilogramme in the same period of 2022-23, when auctions were conducted using the English system.

The Bharat auction system was introduced in Kolkata, Guwahati and Siliguri from April this year replacing old the English auction system.

Anish Bhansali, immediate past chairman of Calcutta Tea Traders Association (CTTA), which provides the auction platform in Kolkata, said "the English auction system was better for the users. He said the auction prices have been

lower in the current year because of the poor demand conditions.

"At the end of the day, the issue boils down to the question of demand and supply. Having said that, I feel the English auction system should be again brought back as the brokers, buyers and sellers have been used to this for so many years since online auction was introduced".

The issue was also flagged by the apex tea producers' body, the Indian Tea Association (ITA).

Immediate past chairperson of ITA Nayantra Pal Choudhuri had pointed out that the Bharat auction did not have the desired impact of aiding fair price discovery.

"The price rediscovery session (PRS) at the auctions is hardly attracting participation and declaration of base price weeks in advance is impacting market trends. Pursuant to our request for discontinuation, the


Govt launches Skill India Digital platform

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: The government on Wednesday launched the Skill India Digital Platform to bring all skilling initiatives under a single umbrella and provide skill development and entrepreneurial support to people. More than 264 skilling courses from 42,623 centres from across the country will be available under the platform, which will also provide opportunities for job exchange, apprenticeship, and entrepreneurship. Skill India Digital Platform application can be downloaded on the app store and Google Play Store and is available in multiple Indian languages, according to an official statement.

E-AUCTION LEASING FOR PARCEL SPACE			
E-Auction contract for leasing out of VPH & SLR. Description: Parcel Space in SLR Coach for a period of 3 years. (Single compartment), Rate Unit: Per Trip Licensing Fee.			
Auction Catalogue No. TSK-SLR-VP19			
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Trips/Days	
AA/1	15604-SLR-F2-LEDO-GHY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	1096	
AA/2	15670-SLR-F2-DBRT-GHY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	1096	
AA/3	20505-SLR-F1-DBRG-NDLS-22-1(Parcel-SLR)	314	
AA/4	15928-SLR-F2-NTSK-RNY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	627	
AA/5	15604-SLR-F1-LEDO-GHY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	1096	
AA/6	15968-SLR-F1-LEDO-RNY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	470	
AA/7	15928-SLR-R1-NTSK-RNY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	627	
AA/8	15930-SLR-F1-NTSK-TBM-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	157	
AA/9	15968-SLR-F2-LEDO-RNY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	470	
AA/10	15670-SLR-R1-DBRT-GHY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	1096	
AA/11	15962-SLR-F1-DBRG-HWH-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	313	
AA/12	15642-SLR-R1-NTSK-SCL-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	157	
AA/13	15604-SLR-R1-LEDO-GHY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	1096	
AA/14	15968-SLR-R1-LEDO-RNY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	470	
AA/15	12423-SLR-F1-DBRG-NDLS-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	1096	
AB/1	20505-20506-VP-1-DBRG-NDLS-22-1 (Parcel-Parcel Van)	314	
Auction Start Date & Time: 10.30 hrs. of 04.10-2023. Auction Close Date & Time: 13.30 hrs. of 04-10-2023.			
Auction Catalogue No. TSK-SLR-VP20			
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Trips/Days	
AA/1	22502-SLR-F1-NTSK-SMBV-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	157	
AA/2	15903-SLR-F1-DBRG-CDG-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	313	
AA/3	13281-SLR-F1-DBRG-RJPB-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	157	
AA/4	15946-SLR-F1-DBRG-LTT-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	314	
AA/5	15642-SLR-F2-NTSK-SCL-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	157	
AA/6	15670-SLR-F1-DBRT-GHY-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	1096	
AA/7	15933-SLR-F1-NTSK-ASR-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	157	
AA/8	15909-SLR-F1-DBRG-LGH-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	1096	
AA/9	15960-SLR-F1-DBRG-HWH-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	523	
AA/10	15642-SLR-F1-NTSK-SCL-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	157	
AA/11	20503-SLR-F1-DBRG-NDLS-22-1 (Parcel-SLR)	783	
AA/12	22504-SLR-F1-DBRG-CAPE-23-1 (Parcel-SLR)	626	
AA/13	15928-SLR-F1-NTSK-RNY-22-2 (Parcel-SLR)	627	
AB/1	15933-15934-VP-1-NTSK-ASR-22-1 (Parcel-Parcel Van)	157	
AB/2	13281-13282-VP-1-DBRG-RJPB-22-1 (Parcel-Parcel Van)	157	
AB/3	15930-15929-VP-1-NTSK-TBM-22-1 (Parcel-Parcel Van)	157	
Auction Start Date & Time: 10.30 hrs. of 05-10-2023. Auction Close Date & Time: 13.30 hrs. of 05-10-2023.			

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Divisional Commercial Manager (IC), Tinsukia



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Pranabjit Chaliha's funeral held with state honours in Sivasagar



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Sept 14: The mortal remains of the esteemed 'Rangpur Ratna', Romuda, also known as Pranabjit Chaliha, were laid to rest in the Phukanagar Crematorium on Thursday. The funeral ceremony saw the participation of hundreds of his followers, friends, and family members. Prior to the cremation, Chaliha's body was taken from his residence in Phukan Nagar to the crematorium in a grand procession that passed through various significant locations, including Rangpurjyoti Club, Doulmukh Chari, Mukti-nath Chari, AASU office, and Peoli Phukan Stadium, making stops for people to pay their respects along the way.

The Sivasagar district administration, led by DDC Bitupan Neog, paid their respects by laying a floral wreath after a police salute. Several prominent figures also bid their final farewell to the departed social activist.

Haren Chetia, vice president of

Sivasagar Sports Association and a classmate of Pranabjit Chaliha, expressed, "Romuda's death is an irreparable loss not only for Sivasagar but for the entire Assam."

Rupam Kakoty, former AGP leader, recalled that it was Romuda who led the Sivasagar AASU to host the Central Executive Meeting in Sivasagar in 1979, and despite repeated requests from AASU leaders, Romuda declined the offer of AASU presidency. Social activist Pradip Borgohain noted that Romuda never compromised on anything that could be detrimental to the interests of the Assamese people.

Chaliha passed away at AMCH, Dibrugarh, on Wednesday at 2:45 pm, and his body was brought to his Phukan Nagar residence in the evening. It was kept there overnight for the public to pay their respects. In honour of the departed leader, all shops and business establishments observed a half-day closure.

Students of Gyan Bharati Public School excel in CBSE Science Challenge 2023 competition

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Sept 14: The students of Gyan Bharati Public School, Sootea, have once again displayed their excellence in the 'CBSE Science Challenge-2023' competition organised by CBSE, New Delhi. This national-level competition, which involved affiliated schools from across the country and abroad, was conducted in two phases spanning over two months from April 2023 to May 2023.

In the initial phase, held on April 20, 2023, fifty-one students from Class 8 to 10 participated in an offline test. Following this, six students advanced to the second phase, which included an online test conducted on May 12, 2023. In the final merit list, two students from Class 10, Purbashree Bormudi and Khanjan Hazarika, demonstrated exceptional performance and earned the prestigious 'Certificate of Merit' from CBSE, New Delhi.

The school recently received the certificates, which were presented to the students during the morning assembly.

Jatiyatabadi Yuva Sanmilan bestows prestigious awards upon school heads

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Sept 14: A delegation from the All Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuva Sanmilan, led by Anil Bora, secretary of the Central Committee, and including Anupam Hazarika, president, Pulak Bora, Secretary, and Ankur Hazarika, vice president of the Naduar Regional Committee of All Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuva Sanmilan, visited Chatia HSS, Gyan Vikash Academy, and Dakshin Nagsankar HS. During their visit, they honoured the principals and headmasters of these schools in the presence of teaching staff and students. Additionally, they conducted small meetings in each of the schools and engaged with the teachers and students, as per a press release.

TDSA launches Rajen Borthakur Memorial Tezpur Challenge Football Tournament

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Sept 14: The Tezpur District Sports Association (TDSA) kicked off the Rajen Borthakur Memorial Tezpur Challenge Football Tournament at Tezpur Polo field with an exciting match between Udalguri Football Eleven and Jorhat Town Club. The opening ceremony commenced with the hoisting of the Tezpur District Sports Association flag by Jien Borthakur, president of TDSA. This was followed by a heartfelt tribute program dedicated to the memory of Rajen Borthakur, the former president of TDSA and former MLA of Tezpur and Rangpara Legislative Assembly Constituency. Seema Borthakur, the wife of late Rajen Borthakur, inaugurated the tribute program in the presence of esteemed individuals from the city, including retired professor Mahendra Nath Keot, additional district commissioner Sonitpur Pankaj Bora, chairman of Tezpur Municipality Prajyantu Bhattacharya, former chairman of Tezpur Municipality Puspika Deka, retired professor Minu Devi, former student leader Dadul Borkakati, and TDSA offi-



cials. Former minister and Assam Football Association member Naba Kumar Doley extended his best wishes to the players of both teams and welcomed them by shaking hands before the inaugural match. The event featured a captivating performance by Tezpur artists who presented a chorus of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's 'Ei Prithibi Ek Krirangan, Krira Hol Shantir Prangon' (The world is a playground, sports is the ground of peace), accompanied by a band performance by a group from Assam Rifle. The entire inaugural program was conducted by TDSA's vice president, Mridul Kumar Sarma.

In the opening match, Udalguri Foot-

ball Eleven secured a victory with a score of 2-0 against Jorhat Town Club, and Arluis Daimari from Udalguri Football Eleven was named the best player of the match. TDSA officials announced that the tournament's final match will take place on September 24. A total of ten football teams, including Tezpur FC, Durgapur FC from Kolkata, Land Rover Football Eleven of Silchar, New Model Town Club, PFR Academy Shillong, Oil India, Sirang Dubar FC, Morning Star, and Diphu Football Team, have confirmed their participation in the Rajen Borthakur Memorial Tezpur Challenge Football Tournament.

State's crime situation improving, possible AFSPA removal by October: GP Singh

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Sept 14: The state police chief, GP Singh, visited Sivasagar and met with SP Sivasagar Subhrajyoti Bora and senior police officers of Sivasagar and Charaideo. During the hour-long discussion, the DGP assessed the law-and-order situation, the performance of the district police in Sivasagar and Charaideo, and other related issues. He expressed satisfaction with their performance but urged them to further improve, as the state police is currently falling behind the national standards in this regard.

When asked about the high crime rate in the state, Singh informed the media that the crime scenario in the state is gradually improving. He mentioned that the conviction rate was slightly above



5.7% in December 2021 and has increased to 14.8% in August 2023. Additionally, there has been a concerted effort to root out corruption. Bringing down the overall crime rate will take some more time, as it is influenced by various complex factors. Singh also noted that Assam Police has recommended the lifting of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from Assam, as the security situation is well under control. The Centre may officially lift AFSPA from Assam starting in October.

Regarding the accused ASP Subhalakshmi Dutta, the DGP emphasised that the police must have all the necessary evidence to establish a crime, and as a result, the investigation is ongoing and may take some time to conclude.

AGP kicks off preparations for upcoming IS elections

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Sept 14: In a proactive move, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a key ally of the BJP, has signalled the beginning of preparations for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. A significant development took place on Thursday, as a general meeting convened at the AGP office in Margherita, organised by AGP Margherita Zilla Parishad.

The meeting witnessed the participation of prominent figures, including Jyoti Moni Moran, the president of AGP Tinsukia Zilla Parishad; Pramod Bhengra, president of Asom Cha Parishad Central Committee; Sanjib Borah, AGP central executive member; representatives from Asom Mahila Parishad, Asom Yuva Parishad, Asom Cha Parishad, Asom Minority Parishad; as well as delegates from all 13 panchayats under the 124th number Margherita Constituency and representatives from the Margherita Municipal Board.

Labon Kumar Dohotia, the president of AGP Margherita Bidhan Parishad, hoisted the party's flag and presided over the meeting.

Successful completion of three-day training on agricultural machinery

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Sept 14: A comprehensive three-day training program on combine harvesters, reapers, and threshers was successfully conducted by Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Kokrajhar under the project APART in collaboration with IIRI. The training program, which began on September 11, concluded on September 13.

The training saw the participation of 30 individuals, with 6 attendees each from Jwlwi Agro Producer Company, Kokrajhar, Bhairavchora FPC Bongaigaon, Manikpur Joha Rice FPC Bongaigaon, Seuj Biplap FPC Ltd. Dhubri, and Mohabbat Krishi Farmer Producer Company Ltd. Dhubri. The program commenced with a welcome address by Mridupol Handique (APS, CIP).

Dr Sunil Kr Paul (senior scientist and head KVK, Kokrajhar) provided insight into the aims and objectives of the training program, while Akhoy Jyoti Bharadwaj (junior researcher IIRI) initiated the training with a pre-evaluation test to assess the farmers' basic knowledge regarding threshers, reapers, and combine harvesters.

Following the test, Akhoy Jyoti Bharadwaj elaborated on the machines (reapers, combine harvesters, and threshers), and Dharmendra Das (IIRI Mechanic) conducted a practical class, explaining each machine's parts and how to repair and maintain them.

Raju Sheikh (IIRI Mechanic) also conducted a practical session, providing detailed information about the parts of the combine harvester, as well as repair and maintenance procedures. The participants were highly satisfied and motivated to use the reaper, thresher, and



combine harvester.

At the end of the program, a post-evaluation test was conducted to assess the participants' overall progress in both theory and practical aspects related to reapers and combine harvesters throughout the training session. The program concluded with the distribution of certificates to the participants and a vote of thanks by Narzina Parvin, APS, APART.

During the three-day program, the active involvement of Dr Sunil Kr. Paul (senior scientist and head KVK, Kokrajhar), Vipin Kumar (associate scientist, Agronomy), Poma Sarma (SMS, Community Science), Akhoy Jyoti Bharadwaj (junior researcher, IIRI), Narzina Parbin (assistant project scientist, APART), PK Mahapatra (RT, IIRI), and Gopal Ch Roy (RT, APART) contributed to its success.

Wife colludes with lover to murder husband

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Sept 14: In a shocking and sensational incident, a wife conspired with her adulterous lover to kill her husband last night in Silbhanga, located under the jurisdiction of Jagiroad Police Station. The husband, Asadur Rahman, met his tragic end inside a car after being drugged, according to sources. Subsequently, his lifeless body was disposed of on the side of the highway in an attempt to make the incident appear as an accident.

The accused individuals, the wife Firoza Khatun and her illicit boyfriend Shafiqul Islam, were apprehended overnight. Additionally, the driver, Rantu Bardoli, is also in police custody. The police are actively conducting investigations into this disturbing incident.

Ayushman Bhava Abhiyan commences in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Sept 14: The launch of the Ayushman Bhava Abhiyan, a nationwide initiative aimed at improving healthcare accessibility for every citizen, took place on Wednesday at 104 health centres across the Sivasagar district, including the Sivasagar Civil Hospital.

This program, inaugurated centrally in New Delhi by the honourable Present Drupadi Murmu and led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, seeks to make healthcare facilities easily accessible to all individuals.

In Sivasagar, Geetali Duwora, additional commissioner (Health), had the honour of inaugurating the program at the Sivasagar Civil Hospital. The ceremony was graced by the presence of Dr Makhan Kalita, superintendent; Dr Udayaditya Rajkonwar, joint director health (in-charge); Dr Manoshi Bora, senior medical officer; and dedicated staff members.

Aditya Vikram Yadav, the commissioner of Sivasagar, expressed his best wishes for the success of the program in the district and called for the cooperation of the local community in its implementation.

Astrophysicist and nuclear physicist deliver presentations in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Sept 14: Dr Payaswini Saikia, an astrophysicist from New York University, and Dr Praseon Raj, a nuclear physicist from MIT, delivered presentations at Salt Brook Senior Secondary School in Jorhat in collaboration with the Jorhat Astronomical Society (JAS).

Dr Payaswini Saikia, an expert in astrophysics and cosmology with a focus on black holes, explained complex phenomena related to astrophysics, including black holes, dark matter, and the expansion of the universe, using visual aids. She also shared images of the Pale Blue Dot.

Dr Praseon Raj, who is married to Dr Payaswini Saikia, delivered a presentation on the design of nuclear reactors, providing insights into the topic.

Both Dr Saikia and Dr Raj engaged in an interactive session with the audience, which included students, teachers, educationists, and prominent citizens.

The event began with felicitations for the scientists by Jehirul Ahmed, director of Salt Brook Jorhat, and Bhriputati Hazarika, secretary of JAS.

Labourers' Signature Abhijan 2023 commences

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Sept 14: The Labourers' Signature Abhijan 2023 program commenced under the patronage of ATTWA, Sivasagar district, ATTWA, Demow Regional Committee, ATTSA, Demow branch, as well as sub-branches, in association with Tea Labourers People at Athabari Tea Estate Kaliapani Branch on Thursday. The labourers' demands included providing Bhumi Patta (land ownership rights) to tea labourers who have been residing in their quarters for an extended period. They also called for an increase in the daily wages of tea labourers to ₹351. Biswanath Nag, secretary of ATTSA, Demow branch, stated that this program would be conducted in every tea estate.

Sonitpur dist committee commemorates freedom fighter Prasad Singh Subba on his 116th birth anniversary

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Sept 14: The Sonitpur district committee paid tribute to the renowned freedom fighter Prasad Singh Subba on his 116th birth anniversary through a day-long commemorative program held at the auditorium of the North East Chambers of Commerce in Tezpur.

The event was attended by president and secretary of the All Assam Gorkha Students Union, Dipak Subba, and Hitesh Parajuli, respectively, along with other office bearers of the organisation and invited guests. MLA Tezpur, Prithiraj Rabha, vice chairman of AMTRON, Ritubaran Sarma, literati Chandramani Upadhyay, Gyan Bahadur Chettry, Kharga Bahadur Kaushik, editor of Hamro Prajashakti Anjan Upadhyay, retired vice principal of Tezpur College Kamal Chandra Upadhyay, social activist Basundhara Sarma, Sonitpur Zila Nepali Sahitya Sabha president Anil Gautam, and Prasad Singh Subba Sewa



Sanman Awardee noted journalist, lawyer, and social activist Subhash Chandra Biswas were among those who paid rich tributes to the eminent freedom fighter Prasad Singh Subba and highlighted his contributions to society.

Prasad Singh Subba was not only a notable freedom fighter but also a pioneer in the agri-business field. He was a member of the All Assam Grazier's Association and established a dairy farm in Tezpur to promote self-re-

liance through milk production and dairy business.

During the program, the Prasad Singh Subba Sewa Sanman Award, instituted by AAGSU in 2020 to honour the memory and remarkable contributions of the noted social worker and freedom fighter Prasad Singh Subba to the freedom movement and nation-building, was presented. This year, the award was conferred on Subhash Chandra Biswas, a prominent journalist, lawyer, and social worker. The award included

cash, a citation, and anga-bas-tra.

Subhash Chandra Biswas, a noted lawyer of the Guwahati High Court, has made significant contributions to society, the media, the legal field, and the literary world. Hailing from Tezpur, he has contributed to numerous national and local English dailies, including UNI. Currently, he serves as the executive editor of the Nepali weekly 'Desh Barta', published in Tezpur, where he contributes to Nepali language and journalism. Since 1989, Subhash Chandra Biswas has been dedicated to maintaining the popularity and readership of the Nepali Weekly in Assam, Nepal, West Bengal, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim, and Dehradun. He has also been actively involved in providing legal aid and financial assistance to the poor and needy, and he has taken on the responsibility of plantation work in the Maligaon area as a social responsibility.

Seed development issues of Assam highlighted in national event

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: Mowsam Hazarika, director of the Assam Seed and Organic Certification Agency (ASOCA), actively participated in a side event centred on the theme 'Seed Development - Public and Private Seed Sector in India: Way Forward for Self-Reliance' during the Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights. The symposium was organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, government of India, on Thursday, at the ICAR Convention Hall, IARI-PUSA Campus, New Delhi.

In his participation, he shed light on several crucial points within the discussion:

Assam has established a Seed Vertical under the World Bank-financed Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project (APART). This initiative is led by the Assam Seeds Corporation Limited (ASCL). Under the Seed Vertical, activities encompass breeder to foundation seed production within ASCL's seed farms. Simultaneously, large-scale certified seed production is being undertaken in collaboration with Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs). The primary aim is to achieve self-sufficiency in seed production for key crops, involving farmer organisations. The Seed Vertical has also conducted various training and capacity-

building programs related to seed sampling, testing, seed production, and certification at national and international institutes.

The state has renewed its focus on engaging the private sector in seed sector development. There are plans to outsource quality seed production on select ASCL and Directorate of Agriculture farms to leading private seed companies through a competitive and transparent process.

Recognising the private sector's role in seed business, the state is reinforcing regulation at the district level. This involves strengthening the capacity of agriculture development officers to handle seed sampling, testing, reporting, and related activities.

To streamline the seed sector further, the state is in the process of formulating a seed policy. This policy covers various aspects, including new varieties development, registration and release of new varieties, seed testing, certification, tracking, and tracing, alternative seed distribution channels, and training and capacity building.

Quality seeds of different crops and notified varieties are produced by registered growers under the Assam Seed & Organic Certification Agency (ASOCA). The entire process, from registration to tagging, is conducted through the SATHI portal, recently launched by the govern-

ment of India. This portal streamlines seed traceability, authentication, and inventory management. It encompasses activities like registration, field verification, seed processing, storage, and seed quality analysis in ASOCA's seed testing laboratories. The seed growers under ASOCA include Assam Seeds Corporation farms, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, ICR farm, Farmer Producer Company, individual growers, and private firms. So far, the state has registered a total area of 8306 hectares for winter paddy (2023-24) certified seed production of various notified varieties. Additionally, crops like black gram, green gram, finger millet, and mustard will also be registered under ASOCA.

With the initiation of the Assam Millets Mission (AMM), the state has commenced millet seed production, particularly focusing on foxtail millet, followed by finger millet and foxtail millet.

The event witnessed the participation of numerous national and international dignitaries, including Dr Ricardo Bocci from the University of Florence, Mary Ann Balbin Guerrero from the National Seed Industry Council in the Philippines, and Dr S Rajendra Prasad, former vice chancellor of GKVK, Bangalore.

It's noteworthy that the government of India will consider adopting seed development measures based on the recommendations stemming from this event.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The secret of business is to know something that nobody else knows. - Aristotle Onassis

India's push into Semiconductor Manufacturing

The Indian government is seizing the global opportunity to reduce reliance on China by offering substantial incentives, totalling billions of dollars, to establish a complete semiconductor ecosystem on vast, undeveloped land. In his New Delhi office, Ashwini Vaishnav, India's Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, proudly displays a 12-inch silicon semiconductor wafer on the wall. It gleams like a precious platinum record, positioned alongside a portrait of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These semiconductor circuits, measured in nanometers and too small to be seen with the naked eye, are among the most advanced and intricate creations ever manufactured. They rival oil as one of the most valuable traded commodities globally. The Indian government's vision is to produce microprocessor chips, the core components behind all digital technology, entirely within India. This aspiration, both audacious and improbable, reflects Prime Minister Modi's unwavering belief in India's potential to excel in advanced technology manufacturing. In July, a multitude of enthusiastic foreign entrepreneurs gathered on stage alongside PM Modi in his native state of Gujarat. Approximately \$10 billion in subsidies is on the table, covering up to 70 percent of a company's expenses. Anil Agarwal, the chairman of Vedanta, a British mining and metals conglomerate, announced plans for "Vedanta made-in-India chips" by 2025. They are eyeing a vast, empty area in Gujarat called Dholera, equivalent in size to Singapore. Straight roads, offices, power stations, canals for freshwater, and the outline of an international airport have been built in this otherwise empty grid.

PM Modi is taking a chance, hoping to attract private companies to this remote location, which is considered quite isolated even in the Indian context. The traditional technology hubs in India, particularly around Bengaluru, have positioned the country within the global semiconductor network through chip design expertise but not chip manufacturing. However, the government has recently invested heavily in subsidies to transform India into an electronics manufacturing hub. Since 2020, Modi has used "production-linked incentives" to encourage mobile phone manufacturers to assemble units in India, surpassing all countries except China. But chip manufacturing is far more complex. Presently, most advanced logic chips are made in Taiwan. With growing concerns about China and the importance of chips, this reliance on Taiwan seems risky. India lacks experience and specialized engineers.

Vedanta aims to commence chip production within two and a half years, recruiting experts from East Asia and Europe, offering three times their current salaries. Amenities in Gujarat are under development, but India's abundant local talent is an advantage. To manufacture microchips, custom ingredients are essential. India's largest chemical facilities near Dholera can produce the specialized gases and liquids required. Seaports and railheads ensure excellent connectivity. India's tech industry is thriving. In late August, Chandrayaan-3 successfully landed on the moon's south pole. India aims to showcase its robust digital-public infrastructure at the Group of 20 summit. The enthusiasm for India's semiconductor manufacturing is linked to changing dynamics in China. China is no longer as attractive for investment, and India offers a reliable supply chain. While some argue that India's logic-chip foundry pursuit is ambitious, it aligns with the nation's goal to enhance its position in the global chip supply chain.

Modi-Biden's economic corridor boosts political clout of Middle East countries

By: K Raveendran

The proposed India, Middle East, Europe economic corridor is expected to go a long way to increase the political clout of Middle East countries, particularly the Gulf countries, which the West has hitherto been looking at mainly as a market for arms as well as the security might of US and allies, apart from a dependable source of oil supplies.

The ambitious plan to link three continents with the help of sea and rail networks is seen to usher in a new era of connectivity and as a counterweight to China's aggressive Belt and Road Initiative in the region offers the scope for greater political participation for Middle East countries in the western geopolitical algorithms. The proposal has been hailed as a major achievement for both US president Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the prime movers of the idea. European Union, India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the U.S. and other G20 partners signed the deal on the sidelines of the Delhi G20 summit. The deal seeks to link the Middle East by railway and connect them to India by port, helping the flow of energy and trade from the Gulf to Europe, by cutting shipping times, costs and fuel use. The corridor envisages that cargo from India would reach the ports of Gulf countries and the Israeli Mediterranean ports and from there transported to Europe by rail. Already a trans-Gulf rail network is under development, while rail and road networks between the Israeli and the Arabian peninsular ports with links to Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, Sudan and Libya are progressing.

The route will also enable electricity and digital connectivity, as well as pipes for clean hydrogen export. It will be an alternative to the Chinese project, which Biden has described as a 'noose and debt' programme, taking cue from the 'Belt and Road' name of the Chinese initiative. Countries like Sri Lanka and Pakistan have experienced the bitter taste of Chinese economic assistance.

The new arrangement serves Joe Biden very well as he has been trying to bring rivals Israel and Saudi Arabia, both staunch supporters of the United States, together on the same page. The US has been watching with concern the growing Chinese influence in Middle East as well as Africa as well as the Gulf countries, which have been trying to maintain a balance between their traditional western partners and the emerging new superpower China. At least three Gulf countries in the new corridor are already members of China's BRI and these include Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Beijing launched the massive infrastructure project in 2013 and has poured around \$1 trillion into its projects so far. China has claimed that it has signed up more than 150 countries for its ambitious scheme, besides over 30 international organisations.

The growing Chinese clout has also led to a certain distrust between some of the Gulf countries and the United States, particularly Saudi Arabia under the leadership of crown prince Mohammed bin Salman. There is a love-hate relationship between Biden and the crown prince over the US allegation connecting Bin Salman to the killing of prominent Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

It is noteworthy that Israel, which has made it a priority to normalize ties with Saudi Arabia, has hailed the project, saying it "changes our global and historical situation" and advances the vision of "joining Israel to the world," as per a CNN report.

The new Asia-Europe economic corridor is in a way a revival of a train route that extended from Paris in Western Europe to Istanbul, the junction between Asia and Europe. It was used to transport raw materials to Europe and industrial products in the reverse direction. Cargoes and people from Morocco, Egypt and Israel reached Beirut and Tripoli by ship enroute western Europe via Aleppo and Istanbul.

The revival of the old route was first mooted at the recently formed I2U2 forum of India, Israel, US and the UAE. The US quickly realised its potential to bring arch rivals Israel and Saudi Arabia, which Joe Biden has taken to the next level at the Delhi G20 summit, pledging American investment for the development of the new economic corridor. (IPA Service)

The battle over 'INDIA' and 'Bharat' in Indian politics

The central government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has proposed the elimination of the colonial-era moniker 'INDIA' in favour of the historically rooted 'Bharat' as the official name for our nation. This initiative has already resulted in the rechristening of the presidential title, now referred to as the 'President of Bharat.' However, it is worth noting that this endeavor entails a multitude of challenges, particularly in the context of numerous government agencies and institutions that currently incorporate the term 'INDIA' in their names. Notably, the venerable institution known as the Reserve Bank of India, prominently featured on our currency notes, also bears the term 'INDIA' in its title. The prospect of altering these nomenclatures is fraught with the potential to incite a contentious and polarizing discourse within the country, akin to a modern-day Kurukshetra.

A contentious debate has erupted in the nation surrounding the call to discontinue the usage of the term 'INDIA.' Notably, leaders within the opposition coalition known as the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) have asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) may be hesitant to embrace this change, as they have been closely associated with the existing nomenclature. The opposition coalition leaders have raised a pertinent question: if they were to initiate the transition from 'INDIA' to 'Bharat,' would the Modi government reciprocate by altering 'Bharat'? They have levied allegations against Prime Minister Modi himself, citing his previous use of the term 'INDIA' in high-profile initiatives like 'Make in India' and various government schemes. The crux of the matter, as they argue, is that while they advocate for a single, unified 'India,' the motivation behind this endeavor is purportedly rooted in their opposition coalition's name, 'INDIA.'

The primary catalyst behind the nation's movement to disengage from the usage of the term 'INDIA' lies deeply entrenched within the political landscape, particularly within the ambit of the opposition coalition's acronym, I.N.D.I.A. While the surface discourse might suggest a mere linguistic transition, a closer examination reveals a more profound motive animating the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government's stance. The BJP seeks to foster a unifying vision for our country, striving to transform it into a singular Indian nation-state. It is crucial to recognize that the term 'INDIA,' having been bestowed by the British colonial legacy, carries with it a connotation of pluralism and diversity. This association resonates significantly with the myriad nations to our South and the hill regions of our Northeast, where linguistic and cultural diversity holds prominence. In the South, particularly, a pronounced inclination toward anti-Hindi sentiments prevails, and English is often preferred over Hindi as the national language. Consequently, the name 'INDIA' is not merely a label; it serves as a psychological anchor, invoking sentiments of distinct ethnic security and safeguarding separate identities. This sentiment does not align seamlessly with the BJP's vision of a homogenized, one-language, one-nation, one-country paradigm. The BJP's overarching objective is to reshape the narrative around the coexistence of India's diverse populace, necessitating the cultivation of a unified national psyche.

The historical context of British colonial rule in India sheds light on a significant aspect of this debate. It was indeed the British who, through political annexation, incorporated the entire Northeastern region, including Assam, into what was known as 'INDIA.' During the British colonial era, 'INDIA' represented the administrative entity that engendered economic and political ties, strengthening and expanding its influence throughout the Northeast. Prior to the British arrival, Assam had longstanding economic and cultural connections with the broader Indian subcontinent, albeit somewhat sporadic. However, it's crucial to recognize that this 'India' was, for the people of Assam and the Northeast, a foreign entity, not their own homeland. In effect, it was under the aegis of British rule that the region began to coalesce with 'INDIA,' not 'India.' The alternative identity for 'India' was not 'INDIA' for the residents of Assam and the Northeast; rather, it was 'India.' Therefore, the question arises: if the BJP were to disavow the British-imposed 'INDIA' nomenclature for the country, could this potentially extend to a reconsideration of the Northeast's status? This region, acquired and annexed by the British as part of their colonial inheritance, might be perceived as a foreign addition to 'INDIA.' The notion of liberation, or at least a reevaluation of the region's integration, could emerge as a subject of discussion within the broader context of redefining national identity and historical legacies.

Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, recently put forth an argument suggesting that the revered saint and scholar, Sankardev, used the term 'Bharat' rather than 'INDIA.' This argument, however, may appear somewhat perplexing when scrutinized in historical context. It's essential to recognize that



during Sankardev's era, the British colonial presence had not yet cast its shadow over India, and Assam did not constitute a political component of the Indian subcontinent.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

Consequently, if we were to transpose the India of Sankardev's time onto the contemporary map, it would necessitate the exclusion of Assam and the Northeast from its political boundaries. This raises a critical question: Is the Honorable Chief Minister prepared to advocate for such a radical realignment? It is important to acknowledge that while considering this hypothetical scenario, cultural ties between India and Assam would ideally endure undisturbed. Nevertheless, the realignment of political boundaries would carry profound implications for the regional and national dynamics, warranting thoughtful deliberation and extensive dialogue.

The BJP staunchly adheres to a vision that refutes the notion of India as a conglomerate of diverse nationalities, instead emphasizing the cultivation of a singular, unified Indian national identity. This unwavering commitment seeks to fortify a cohesive and robust Indian nation-state by consciously eschewing all forms of regionalism or 'casteism.' While the BJP may engage in strategic alliances with regional-nationalist parties to attain power in certain states, it is important to discern that these collaborations primarily serve the purpose of diluting regional-nationalism, ultimately assimilating it into the overarching framework of Indian nationalism, rather than strengthening it. This approach remains a persistent endeavor.

In line with this perspective, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has openly articulated the imperative for Assamese individuals to broaden their perspective and consider fellow Indians from other regions as compatriots. This brand of Indianism, as championed by the BJP and the Dr. Sarma government, may contribute to the prominence of Hindi and Bengali speakers in Assam and the growing influence of North Indian Hindu culture. However, this trajectory also carries with it the potential peril of eroding the distinct cultural identity of the Assamese. The delicate balance between fostering a cohesive national identity and preserving the rich tapestry of regional cultures in India remains an ongoing challenge that demands nuanced consideration.

The BJP's ambitious agenda of forging a unified Indian nation characterized by one country, one nation, one language, one culture, one education, and one mentality is fraught with uncertainties about its eventual realization. The formidable challenge lies in the enduring specter of India's intrinsic pluralism and the diverse identities that define its people. This innate diversity, which has been integral to the fabric of India for centuries, may prove to be a formidable obstacle that resists the BJP's journey toward a singular national identity. The intricate interplay between unity and diversity in India's national narrative is likely to remain a complex and evolving dynamic, one that may not easily yield to the singular vision articulated by the ruling party.

There exists a compelling discourse in favour of disavowing the name 'INDIA,' underpinned by the laudable aim of shedding colonial symbols from the nation's identity. The term 'India,' conversely, carries with it a profound sense of dignity and heritage intrinsic to the Indian populace. It is worth noting that our national anthem, a quintessential embodiment of our nation's ethos, explicitly proclaims 'India,' not 'INDIA.' This anthem resonates as a cultural touchstone.

Moreover, political leaders have further underscored the polarity surrounding this debate. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, through various schemes labeled 'INDIA,' has laid claim to this nomenclature, while Congress leader Rahul Gandhi opted for 'Bharat' in his nationwide campaign, 'Bharat Jodo,' rather than 'INDIA Jodo.' This diversity of opinion generates a multifaceted discourse, leading to contentious deliberations over the prospect of boycotting 'INDIA.'

The government's steadfast adherence to altering English names remains a noteworthy aspect. However, the extent to which these changes can be effectively implemented remains to be seen. Should there be a change in government; reversals of the BJP's renaming endeavors are not unlikely. Names like 'President of India,' 'Government of India,' and the 'Reserve Bank of India,' could conceivably revert to their prior designations. In essence, the heart of the matter lies in the nexus between power and politics, with both the government and opposition fervently engaging in this dialogue to advance their respective political agendas.

The ongoing debate is thus likely to persist as an enduring feature of the Indian political landscape. The haste with which the government is pursuing the removal of the name 'INDIA' appears somewhat perplexing to us, despite the articulate arguments and explanations presented by its representatives. Our approach, thus far, has not entailed an absolute renunciation or overhaul of the linguistic and infrastructural legacy left by the British colonial era. Rather, we have chosen to engage in the restoration and enhancement of these resources as necessary, whether they be factories, plantations, roads, bridges, houses, doors, railways, postal services, or banking facilities.

It is imperative to recognize that the contributions and innovations stemming from the talents and intellect of the British have evolved into shared assets of human civilization. The English language, the toponyms conferred by the British, and even the nations or territories delineated by them no longer remain exclusive dominions of British origin. Within this context, the notion that the name 'India,' as bestowed by the British somehow diminishes the dignity of our people becomes increasingly difficult to substantiate.

While remnants of colonialism do indeed persist, it remains a challenging proposition to implicate the name 'INDIA' as a contributing factor to this legacy. In our pursuit of acknowledging and addressing the vestiges of colonial rule, a more nuanced and comprehensive approach may be required, one that refrains from hasty alterations to nomenclature and instead focuses on addressing the substantive and enduring issues associated with colonialism.

The motivation behind the opposition coalition's embrace of the country's name appears to be rooted in electoral considerations, seeking to leverage it for political advantage. Their strategic adoption of the name 'INDIA' aims to convey a semblance of profound commitment to the nation. However, there is an undertone of deception, a calculated attempt to mislead the electorate by creating the impression that they inherently embody the essence of the nation, India. This stratagem draws parallels to the era of Indira Gandhi, where the slogan "Indira is India, India is Indira" pervaded the political landscape, raising concerns about the people's sentiments and their perception of such claims.

The opposition coalition's alignment with 'INDIA' may be interpreted as a modern-day manifestation of a similar tendency. This deliberate association with the nation's name raises questions about the genuineness of their commitment and the underlying intentions. It is essential to scrutinize whether the coalition's approach genuinely resonates with the core principles and values of the nation or if it predominantly serves as a political maneuver aimed at securing electoral support. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

No talk on nuclear weapons abolition in the G20 Summit is disappointing

By: Dr. Arun Mitra

The G20 summit publicized with much fanfare ended without any commitment for disarmament and abolition of nuclear weapons. There were several expectations from this summit since it was held in the background of ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine; and it was held in India which has been a strong protagonist of a nuclear weapon free world. Therefore, it was felt that some concrete decisions will be taken on the issues of disarmament and peace.

Concern has been expressed in the declaration over the humanitarian consequences of war. The declaration says in point 7 on page 2 'we note with deep concern the immense human suffering and the adverse impact of wars and conflicts around the world'. On the same page in point No. 8 the declaration mentions 'The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible'. So it was imperative to expect that some concrete steps would be taken to end the Russia Ukraine war and for abolition of nuclear weapons which pose an existential threat to the mankind today.

The G20 summit is the meeting of heads of the states or their representatives. They have the authority to take concrete decisions to end Russia Ukraine war. But the declaration released reads on page 2 point 8 'concerning the war in Ukraine...we reiterated our national positions and resolutions adopted at the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly (A/RES/ES-11/1 and A/RES/ES-11/6)' These resolutions condemn the Russian invasion but nowhere mention the explicit involvement of US and NATO who are supplying huge consignments of arms to Ukraine to let the war continue and create a situation that no meaningful dialogue is held to end the war.



In the G20 there were 6 nuclear weapons possessing countries out of total of nine. The USA and Russia together possess about 90% of the world's nuclear weapons. This was the opportunity where thrust of the discussion could have been on steps to be taken to abolish nuclear weapons and avoid existential threat.

'Nuclear Famine', a study by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) in collaboration with Physicists, Biologists, Climatologists and other scientists has shown with evidence that even a limited nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan using

100 nuclear weapons would put two billion people at risk of survival. A nuclear exchange between Russia and USA-NATO would kill over 5 billion people and mean end of the modern civilization built through thousands of years of human labour.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) passed by an overwhelming majority of the members of the UN General Assembly on July 7 2017 and which has already entered into force is an opportunity not to be lost. The countries present could have decided to join the TPNW and taken concrete steps to abolish nuclear weapons.

The summit also failed to elaborate steps to check proliferation of small arms. Many areas of the world are involved in large scale armed conflicts particularly in the African continent. Point 74, on page 28 in the declaration expresses concern about illicit trafficking and diversion of small arms and light weapons and calls for international cooperation among states to combat these phenomena, including export, import controls, and tracing. However, there is no mention of state sponsored terrorism, nor a word on controlling legal arms supplies which are ultimately used in violence around the world. Many countries gathered at this G20 meet have gun producing industries located on their land. These governments can very well take steps to check the proliferation and trading of small arms.

The final declaration on this score is very disappointing. India could have easily taken a lead on this as India had been

the founder member of the on Aligned Movement (NAM). The seventh summit of the NAM held in Delhi in 1983 had 117 heads of the states and 20 observers. It was much bigger an event than the present one. The NAM summit held serious discussions on disarmament, peace, human rights, on the issue of Palestine and economic development of the underdeveloped world through mutual cooperation. But such issues were not given due importance in the debate in the G20.

The G20 failed to take cognizance of the growing lust for profit by the Military Industrial Complex. A day before the event, US President Joe Biden on arrival said that this is a good opportunity for defence deals with India. Shri Manish Tiwari Member Parliament has raised scepticism on the India-US joint statement after the bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US president Joe Biden on 8th September 2023.

The statement says, "The leaders applauded the conclusion of a second Master Ship Repair Agreement, with the most recent agreement signed by the U.S. Navy and Mazgaon Dock Shipbuilders, Ltd., in August 2023. Both sides recommitted to advancing India's emergence as a hub for the maintenance and repair of forward-deployed US Navy assets and other aircraft and vessels...." With this India would emerge as a 'hub for the maintenance and repair of forward-deployed US Navy assets and other aircraft and vessels.' So far India has not provided its space for any such activity. (IPA Service)

Are the Nagas of Manipur finally taking a stand in the Meitei-Kuki conflict?

By: Arunabh Saikia

Manipur's second largest community, the Nagas, have been steadfast in professing their neutrality in the ongoing ethnic clashes between the Meitei and the Kuki-Zo communities.

Hence, when the United Naga Council, the community's apex body, on August 21, issued a scathing statement hitting out at the "blatant lies, lopsided history and fabricated information contained in every statement and memorandum issued by the Kuki-Zo community", it raised several eyebrows.

What made the rebuke even more conspicuous was the fact that it came on the heels of eight legislators from the community making common cause with their Meitei counterparts in opposing the "separate administration" demand of the Kukis, and allegations that Naga armed groups were aiding the Meiteis.

As the civil war in Manipur spills over into its fifth month, these developments have led to speculation over whether the Nagas have finally chosen a side.

Scroll spoke to a range of politicians and civil society activists from the community to find the picture is far more complex, one that points to a long and complicated road ahead.

The warring groups in Manipur may be the Meiteis and the Kukis, but peace would invariably involve the Nagas. As Malvjo J Waba, the convenor of the Working Group for Naga Rights in Manipur, said: "For any solution, there has to be consultation with and consent from the Nagas."

An old feud
The Nagas account for about a quarter of Manipur's population. Most of them live in the hills that circle the valley, home largely to the Meiteis, the state's largest ethnic group.

The Kukis, the third largest community in the state, also call the hills their home.

This has often led to conflict

between the Nagas and the Kukis over land. While there were reports of clashes since colonial times, the crystallising of political identity and aspirations has made the feud even more bitter. Much of the imagined Naga homeland or Nagalim – that spans India and Myanmar, with vast swathes of the current Kukis claim to be their territory.

In 1993, this dispute spiralled into ferocious ethnic clashes, killing hundreds, and emptying villages.

Simultaneously, the idea of a Naga homeland also has been a constant cause of friction with the Meiteis who are vehemently opposed to the idea of the state's map being altered. In fact, the Meitei insurgency demanding a separate nation-state of Manipur partly arose as a counterweight to Naga militancy.

A 'neutral' third party?

In the early days of the current conflict, the Nagas' interventions were largely limited to civil society groups and church bodies issuing statements condemning the violence and urging both sides to restore peace. In July, even when a Naga woman was killed by a Meitei mob that purportedly mistook her to be a Kuki, the response of the community's civil society outfits and representatives was tempered.

The first signs of a departure from neutrality came on August 9 when eight Naga MLAs landed at the Prime Minister's residence along with 32 of their valley-based colleagues to submit a representation. Part of it were several demands that the Meiteis have repeatedly echoed since the outbreak of the conflict on May 3, including the implementation of the National Register of Citizens in Manipur, restrictions on the operational jurisdiction of the Assam Rifles, and the abrogation of the ceasefire agreement with the Kuki militant groups.

Most significantly, it said that the demand for a 'separate administration for the Kukis was



"absolutely unacceptable under any circumstances". This was widely seen as a tacit endorsement of the Meitei position on the "territorial integrity" of Manipur.

The UNC, and the Isak Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland or NSCN (I-M), the largest and most influential of the Naga insurgent groups, are currently in talks with the Centre for a separate Naga administrative unit encompassing parts of Manipur's hill districts. Both came down heavily on the Naga legislators.

"Whilst the Nagas are all out reiterating for an inclusive, acceptable, and honourable solution to the Indo-Naga political issue, submitting representation with some contradictory demands to the PM is highly uncalled for," the UNC said in a stinging statement.

The NSCN (IM), for its part, said the "representation to the Prime Minister is in totality against the voice of the Naga people demanding early implementation of the framework agreement of 3rd August, 2015 to meet the political right and legitimate aspiration of Naga people".

The NSCN (IM), which first started a dialogue with the Union government in 1997,

signed a fresh "framework agreement" with the Narendra Modi-led government in 2015. The pact, which recognises the "unique history and position of the Nagas" and suggests "sharing the sovereign power", was said to have given fresh momentum to the floundering negotiations – but talks between the Nagas and Centre again started faltering starting 2019.

One of the Naga legislators who signed the representations said the opposition to a separate Kuki administration did not amount to subscribing to the Meitei position. It was a "misconception" that stemmed from the petition being "drafted by the Meiteis", said the MLA. "What we meant to say is that a Kuki separate administration should not affect Naga areas," said the MLA. "That should have been conveyed more clearly, I admit that."

This explanation was conveyed to the UNC and the NSCN (IM), said the MLA.

In a subsequent statement, the UNC declared that "all the lapses and differences on the matter have been sorted out objectively in the greater interest".

The plot thickens

But in another twist, a video emerged on August 19 seemingly implicating the NSCN (IM) itself. In the video, a young

man, purportedly an NSCN (IM) cadre, is seen to be admitting to supplying weapons to the Prepak, a Meitei insurgent group.

In it, he is heard claiming that he was asked by his superior, stationed in the NSCN (IM)'s general headquarters in Hebron, to go to Imphal and hand over assault rifles in exchange for cash.

The NSCN (IM) dismissed the video as a "scripted production". A top Naga leader from Manipur with close ties to Hebron, however, said there was likely some truth in the contents of the video, purportedly leaked by the Army. There was, he said, a section among the outfit's leadership who was sympathetic to the Meiteis.

But the NSCN (IM), as an institution, had not taken a side, he insisted.

"There could be some differences within, but IM is not supporting any one side and it will remain like that till uncle is there," he said, referring to Muivah, the ageing supremo of the group.

Players galore

However, he was quick to add that there were several Naga armed factions which are not under the control of UNC and IM. "They will do things to suit

their interests," he said.

One such group, the Manipur Naga Revolutionary Front, has been accused of assisting Meitei insurgents in the killing of three Kuki men in a village in a Naga-majority area on August 19.

In a statement condemning the killings, the NSCN (IM) warned the MNRF. "Under no circumstances Nagas want the Meitei-Kuki-Zo violence spilled into Naga areas," the outfit said.

The MNRF, for its part, has denied the allegation.

Even so, security officials say that Naga groups, not directly aligned to the NSCN (IM), had played a key role in providing safe passage to militants from the Meitei underground groups who have crossed over from Myanmar, where most of them are currently based, to help their community in the civil war. "They cannot possibly cross the border and come to the valley without Naga support," said an intelligence officer.

Another senior Naga politician from Manipur attributed this support to old alliances. "It is an open secret that some Naga groups like the MNRF are funded, mentored, armed, and groomed by the Meitei UGs," he said. "That is because they need forests to hide and operate from and there are none in the valley."

Such arrangements, he said, did not amount to community-level cooperation as these groups barely had any legitimacy in the community.

Of 'ancestral lands'

But what explains the UNC's rather hostile statement accusing the Kuki-Zos of distorting history? The UNC, after all, is no fringe group – it is the most influential of Naga civil society groups with close ties to the NSCN (IM).

Naga leaders say it all boiled down to the basics: land.

The separate administration envisioned by Kuki-Zo groups encompassed areas Nagas claim as theirs.

"If they claim ancestral lands, we will not take it lying down," said the UNC's general secre-

tary Vareijo Shatsang.

While there is a fair amount of consensus on the district of Churachandpur being Kuki territory – the Nagas in private say they are willing to concede Kangpokpi too – Chandel and Tengnoupal are hotly contested with both sides claiming them.

"If they want a separate administration with Churachandpur, we are fine with it," said a Naga MLA. "Kangpokpi is mixed; Tengnoupal and Chandel are fundamentally Naga areas."

The MLA said the UNC's stern statement stemmed from concerns that these three districts "are slipping out of our hands" because of the current circumstances.

The statement, he said, was directed as much at the Centre as the Kuki-Zo groups. "We feel that the interlocutor is favouring the Kukis," he said.

The Centre is currently engaging in negotiations with both the Kukis and Nagas through the same interlocutor.

An understanding

The public belligerence notwithstanding, the Nagas do seem to be willing to negotiate with the Kukis.

"We are not saying they are not there [in the contested districts]...overlapping of territories is everywhere," said Shatsang. "We have to sit down and understand each other. We don't want violence anymore."

Naga leaders also acknowledge that their own aspirations were more in sync with the Kukis. "Nagas may be using a different word, but we also want something separate ultimately," said Waba of the Working Group for Naga Rights in Manipur. "Isn't that what talks are going on for? And eventually, as tribals, many issues are common for us – we are the hill people."

The Naga MLA seemed to concur. He said: "We can have one tribal entity too, independent of the Meiteis, and after that, we can maybe have a gentleman's agreement since we are both Christians and tribal."

(Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Simultaneous elections: Why now? Seabed warfare, Australia, India and the Indian Ocean

By: Ajay K. Mehra

With the constitution of a committee of seven chaired by former president Ram Nath Kovind to make recommendations on simultaneous elections at each of the three levels, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken the first step towards concretising an idea which had featured in the 2014 election manifesto of his party.

For the first time, an ex-president is chairing a panel on an intensely political and already decided issue. The pliable president has been a feature ever since Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad and endorsing the prime minister's stand is constitutionally and politically problematic.

Ram Nath Kovind, who joined the BJP in 1991 and has donated his ancestral home in Paraunkh to the RSS, became president at Modi's behest. We have to wait to know the stand of the other seven.

Modi secured the recommendation of a parliamentary standing committee on the issue of simultaneous polls in December 2015. However, the committee had thought of streamlining elections into two phases – one concurrent with Lok Sabha elections, the other in the mid-term of the Lok Sabha, at two levels, not three. It considered such a reform 'important for India' to focus on the country's development agenda to compete with other nations.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has responded positively. Now, the new panel is tasked with the legitimisation of simultaneous elections at the three levels of the Union, states and local bodies.

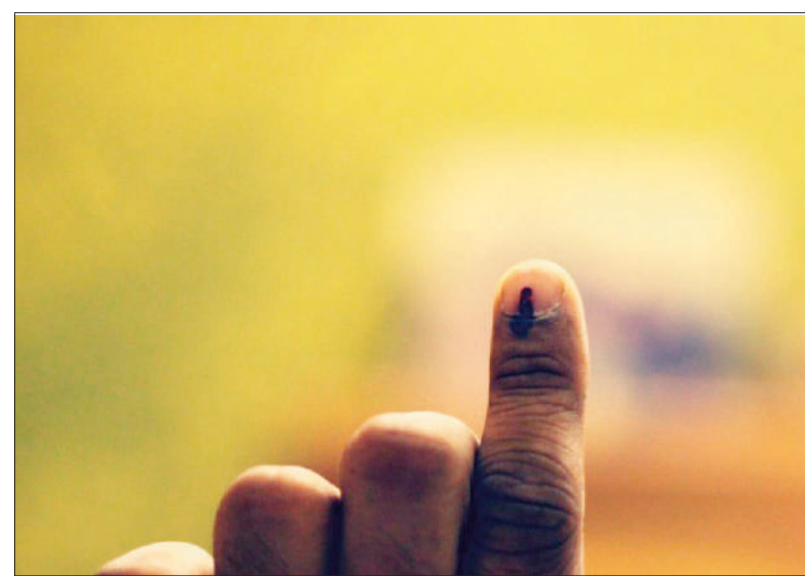
The separation

Indira Gandhi broke the simultaneity of elections after 1971 to neutralise the satraps in the Congress, and the decline of the party followed in 1989-1996. But the 'one-party-dominant system' and 'the Congress system' that functioned alternately in governance and the Opposition, despite the existence of several ideologically diverse dynamic parties, fractured. It caused instability in 1977-80, 1989-90, and 1996-99, until a federalised coalition system emerged as a bipolar/binodal configuration around the Congress and the BJP between 1999 and 2014.

The 2014 and 2019 absolute majority for the BJP and a two-thirds majority for the National Democratic Alliance crushed the Congress, and Opposition strength contracted to a third.

Ever since the 1967 elections, unstable coalition governments in the states didn't last their term, and mid-term elections were frequent until 1971, when the Fourth Lok Sabha was dissolved to hold a mid-term poll and the rupture in simultaneous elections was complete.

In 1972, Indira Gandhi dissolved and re-elected 18 Legislative Assemblies. The extension of the Lok Sabha for a year (1975-76), the dissolution of the state as-



semblies by the Morarji government in 1978, and Indira Gandhi returning the compliance in 1980, only intensified it. The following years witnessed an increasing scattering of the election process as the fracturing of the party system intensified since 1989; state/regional parties proliferated, consolidating in their strongholds and upping their stakes in New Delhi as they coalesced with national formations.

Elections in India have thus become year-round 'event management', a continual exercise that is the world's biggest, especially counting local body elections. No wonder the 170th report (1999) of the Law Commission of India suggested comprehensive political, institutional and electoral reforms along with measures to 'achieve the desired goal of one election for Lok Sabha and to all the Legislative Assemblies simultaneously.'

The proposal
A NITI Aayog paper in 2017 argued for 'one nation one election'. It reasoned that since in the parliamentary system the legislative bodies do not have a fixed tenure, the two sets of elections could be synchronised in two phases between the 2019 17th general election and the mid-term of the 17th Lok Sabha in 2021, by adjusting the tenure of legislative assemblies.

In case of a mid-term dissolution of the Lok Sabha, "there could be a provision for the President to carry out the administration of the country, on the aid and advice of his Council of Ministers to be appointed by him till the time the next House is constituted". With the local bodies' elections added this time in the suggested process, major constitutional issues are at stake in the initiative, whatever the proposed panel of loyalists suggests.

The Law Commission's 170th Report, quoted to justify the NITI Aayog's proposals, lays greater emphasis on the reform of the party system in the perspective of the proliferation and weakening of the parties and deinstitutionalisation of the party sys-

tem. Anomalies in party funding and its impact on the electoral and political processes are highlighted and streamlining is suggested. If undertaken, these would strengthen the party system and remove causes of instability.

Experiences

The question is, what prompted PM Modi and the BJP to push for simultaneous election at full throttle?

International and Indian experiences could provide possible answers, for the government's rationale economics of elections, time management, better coordination and governance is not credible. Let us begin with the international experience.

Available evidence, particularly from the UK, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Germany, the US and Europe suggest that simultaneous elections yield more aligned results between national and regional elections. Simultaneous elections also appear to contribute over time to the nationalisation of party systems and bring greater cohesion in them. But on the contrary, in 2000 in Ukraine, with simultaneous elections, differences persisted at the two levels.

The late scholar and journalist Pran Chopra suggested in 1999 that 'simultaneous votes of no-confidence in the incumbent and confidence in the alternative' would be 'much safer' and 'would eliminate the need for a mid-term poll.'

Obviously, if the political reforms and institutionalisation of the party system is initiated by this government with the active support and participation of the Election Commission of India, the number of elections would certainly be reduced. In the interim, instead of the complex road-roller system proposed, elections to the Legislative Assemblies each year, as also to the Lok Sabha in the year it falls, could be clubbed, making the process annual. Slowly, but surely, simultaneity would emerge with stability in the system. (Courtesy: The Wire)

By: Samuel Bashfield

Seabed warfare is now proliferating in Europe and has the potential to reach the Indian Ocean. A newly released ORF Issue Brief Indian Ocean Seabed Defence: Lessons from Europe looks at military operations in Europe that have targeted seabed cables (data and power), sensors and energy transmission and extraction infrastructure, and how Australia and India should be preparing for the seabed warfare threat.

Seabed warfare

The Russia-Ukraine conflict and wider Russia-Europe tensions have, in part, played out on the seabed. The sabotage of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines in September 2022 represented a return to the past, in which seabed infrastructure were targets for military operations. Three explosions were reported on 26 September 2022, which destroyed three of the four pipelines running from Russia to Germany. Nord Stream is no longer operational, exacerbating Europe's energy crisis.

Earlier, in January 2022, a communications cable servicing Norway's Svalbard Satellite Station was cut under mysterious circumstances. France also experienced several instances of cable sabotage in 2022.

Russia is conducting surreptitious and unauthorised surveys of critical seabed infrastructure across Europe, potentially as a prelude to disruption operations. Russia's Yantar intelligence collection ship was tracked loitering off the Irish coast in August 2021 in the vicinity of the future Celtic Norse communications cable (which will connect Ireland and Norway), as well as AEOConnect-1 that links Ireland the United States (US). In November 2022, a Russian oceanographic ship was found loitering near offshore wind farms and an oil field in Denmark and the United Kingdom (UK). When approached by journalists at sea, masked men appeared on deck with Russian-style rifles and bullet-proof vests.

In addition to this publicly-reported Russian activity, it should be noted that all sides are playing offense in this new deep sea frontier.

Seabed infrastructure in the Indian Ocean

There is no reason to believe that the seabed warfare operations currently taking place in Europe won't reach the Indian Ocean, should re-

gional tensions heighten.

The Indian Ocean is a conduit for submarine cables that both connect Indian Ocean nations and send data further afield. But just as shipping is concentrated at oceanic choke points such as the Malacca Strait and Bab el-Mandeb Strait so too are submarine cables, making them vulnerable to attack at these locations.

Subsea pipelines will also be of increasing importance in the Indian Ocean, especially for India. India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation already operates thousands of kilometres of subsea pipelines off India's west coast, connecting major fields including Mumbai High, Neelam and Heera, Bassein. Iran is currently considering extending its subsea natural gas pipeline from Oman to India, which would connect to Porbandar in Gujarat. Further, a US\$5 billion undersea United Arab Emirates-India gas pipeline was proposed in May 2023, which would also connect to Gujarat.

Australia already has extensive gas pipelines of its North West Shelf in the Indian Ocean, connecting offshore extraction facilities to the mainland. But it will also become vulnerable to seabed warfare in new ways.

Australia is prioritising establishing offshore renewable infrastructure, including offshore wind and solar farms, wave energy plants and undersea interconnectors at various sites around Australia's coast, including the Indian Ocean. Australia may soon begin exporting solar power to Singapore via the world's longest undersea high voltage direct current cable, the Sub Cable Australia-Asia PowerLink.

Seabed mining exploration is also being undertaken in the Indian Ocean, where polymetallic nodules are in abundance. Such mining will involve a whole new range of players and seabed activities.

Indian Ocean solutions

It is clear that Australia and India share many interests in seabed security in the Indian Ocean.

This will require public discussion and debate on the implications of seabed warfare and how it should be integrated into respective Australian and Indian defence strategies. These should include governance arrangements for seabed warfare responses, capability requirements (e.g., vessels, unmanned and/or autonomous underwater vehicles, sensors, etc.),

as well as articulating how human resources and partnerships in seabed warfare should be developed. France recently released its seabed warfare strategy in 2022, which may provide a useful model.

The Indian Ocean comprises various littoral and island nations, many of which do not possess sophisticated navies or coast guards, and there is no overarching grouping such as NATO to coordinate responses. As littoral Indian Ocean states with sophisticated navies and coast guards, Australia and India should take the lead in coordinating with less capable regional nations to monitor seabed infrastructure and develop plans for responses to disruptions. Australia and India can also assist these nations to consider seabed defence as part of regular defence reviews. Such cooperation could also include capability building in underwater domain awareness, capacity building programmes targeting seabed defence techniques, and adding seabed incident response scenarios to joint regional military exercises and drills.

In May 2023, the Quad announced plans to create a Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience, through which Australia will establish an Indo-Pacific Cable Connectivity and Resilience Program. The United States agreed to provide capacity building and technical assistance via its 'CABLES program,' which is worth US\$5 million.

It is uncertain whether this programme will be confined to communication cables or whether it will be extended to other types of seabed infrastructure. These initiatives should engage with the wider issue of seabed warfare, and not be limited to communication cables. While the Quad could be an avenue for cooperation, Australia and India should take the lead in working with Indian Ocean neighbours.

Conclusion

Australia and India need to watch seabed warfare developments in Europe closely as a harbinger to potential developments in our region. These two influential Indian Ocean maritime powers need to coordinate to secure Indian Ocean seabed critical infrastructure. As more critical infrastructure traverses the Indian Ocean seabed, a coordinated approach will best protect these assets from catastrophe. (Courtesy: ORF)

Washington has warned that the summit between Kim & Putin could lead to a deal to supply ammunition for Moscow's war in Ukraine

SKorea expresses 'concern and regret' over military cooperation talks between Kim and Putin

SEOUL, Sept 14: South Korea on Thursday expressed "deep concern and regret" over a meeting between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin that was apparently focused on expanding military cooperation as the two isolated, nuclear-armed leaders align over their escalating confrontations with the United States.

Washington has warned that the summit on Wednesday between Kim and Putin could lead to a deal to supply ammunition for Moscow's war in Ukraine. There's widespread concern in Seoul that the North in return would receive advanced weapons technologies from Russia, including those related to military spy satellites, which would increase the threat posed by Kim's military nuclear program.

"We express our deep concern and regret that despite repeated warnings from the international community, North Korea and Russia discussed military cooperation issues, including satellite development, during their summit," said Lim Soo-suk, South Korea's Foreign Ministry spokesperson.

"Any science and technology cooperation that contributes to nuclear weapons and missile development, including satellite systems that involve ballistic missile technologies, runs against UN Security Council resolutions," he said in a briefing.

Lim also pointed out that Kim's delegation in Russia included several individuals sanctioned by the Security Council over involvement in illicit North Korean weapons development activities, including Korean People's Army Marshal Ri Pyong Chol and Jo



Chun Yong, a ruling party official who handles munitions policies. Lim said Moscow should realise there will be "very negative impacts" on its relations with Seoul if proceeds with military cooperation with Pyongyang.

Seoul's Unification Minister Kim Yung-ho, who handles affairs with North Korea, warned that potential arms transfers between Pyongyang and Moscow would only invite stronger responses from South Korea, the US and Japan, which have been stepping up their trilateral security cooperation to cope with regional threats.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday that North Korea would face consequences if it supplies arms to Russia.

"No nation on the planet, nobody, should be helping Mr. Putin kill innocent Ukrainians," Kirby said. If the countries decide to move forward with an arms deal, the US will take measure of the arrangement and "deal with it appropriately," he said. He said that any deal

that would improve North Korea's military capabilities "certainly would be of significant concern to us."

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said on Thursday that Kim invited Putin during their meeting to visit North Korea at a "convenient time" and that Putin accepted with "pleasure and reaffirmed his will to invariably carry forward" the history of friendship between the nations.

Putin told Russian state TV after the summit that Kim will visit two more cities in Russia's Far East on his own, flying to Komsomolsk-on-Amur, where he will visit an aircraft plant, and then go to Vladivostok to view Russia's Pacific Fleet, a university and other facilities.

During their meeting on Wednesday at Russia's spaceport in the Far East, Kim vowed "full and unconditional support" for Putin in what he described as a "just fight against hegemonic forces to defend its sovereign rights, security and interests," in an apparent reference to the war in Ukraine.

The decision to meet at the Vostochny Cosmodrome suggested that Kim is seeking Russian help in developing military reconnaissance satellites. He has previously said that it is crucial to enhancing the threat of his nuclear-capable missiles, and North Korea has repeatedly failed to put its first military spy satellite into orbit.

The aircraft plant in Komsomolsk-on-Amur would be another location that possibly hints at what Kim seeks to gain from Russia in exchange for help fuelling Putin's war on Ukraine. (AP)

US court declares DACA illegal; WH says it is disappointed

WASHINGTON, Sept 14: A federal judge in Houston has declared illegal a federal policy that prevents the deportation of hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants, including hundreds of Indians, brought to the US as children, but noted that the government can continue to process renewals of its current recipients.

The major setback to the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals programme or DACA came from a ruling from US District Court Judge Andrew Hanen on Wednesday. "The Court, as it did before, hereby stays the effective date of the vacatur as to all DACA recipients who received their initial DACA status prior to July 16, 2021," the judge wrote.

"The defendants may continue to administer the programme as to those individuals, and that administration may include processing and granting DACA renewal applications for those individuals," Hanen ruled. At the same time, Judge Hanen refrained from ordering the termination of deportation protections and work permits of nearly 580,000 Dreamers.

According to a 2019 report by South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), there are at least 630,000 Indians who are undocumented, a 72 per cent increase since 2010.

There are currently at least 4,300 active South Asian DACA recipients. As of August 2018, there are approximately 2,550 active Indian DACA recipients. Only 13 per cent of the overall 20,000 DACA-eligible Indians have applied for and received DACA, SAALT said. Since 2012, DACA has allowed hundreds of thousands of immigrants who crossed the US southern border illegally or overstayed visas as children to live and work in the country without fear of deportation if they meet certain requirements. The White House said it is disappointed with the court's ruling on Wednesday.

"We are deeply disappointed in today's DACA ruling from the District Court in Southern Texas. On day one of his administration, President (Joe) Biden issued a memorandum directing the federal government to take all appropriate actions to "preserve and fortify" the DACA policy," White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a late-night statement.

Consistent with that directive, the administration has defended the DACA policy from legal challenges and issued a final rule codifying this longstanding policy. During this administration, hundreds of thousands of DACA recipients have been able to live and work lawfully in our country without fear of deportation, she said.

Libya buries thousands after deadly floods that killed at least 5,100

DERNA, Sept 14: The Libyan city of Derna buried thousands of people in mass graves as search teams scoured the area after devastating floods that killed at least 5,100 people, a health official said on Thursday. Mediterranean storm Daniel caused deadly flooding in many eastern towns, but the worst-hit was Derna.

As the storm pounded the coast Sunday night, Derna residents said they heard loud explosions when the dams outside the city collapsed. Floodwaters washed down Wadi Derna, a valley that cuts through the city, crumbling buildings and washing people out to sea. Health authorities have put the death toll in Derna at 5,100 as of Wednesday. The number of deaths was likely to climb as there are at least 9,000 people still missing, said Osama Ali, a spokesman for an ambulance centre in eastern Libya.

The floods have displaced at least 30,000 people in Derna, according to the UN's International Organisation for Migration, and several thousand others were forced to leave their homes in other eastern towns, the UN agency said. The floods damaged or destroyed many access roads to Derna, hampering the arrival of international rescue teams and humanitarian assistance.

The startling devastation reflected the storm's intensity, but also Libya's vulnerability. The country is divided by rival governments — one in the east, the other in the west — and one result has been widespread neglect of infrastructure. The dams that collapsed outside Derna were built in the 1970s and have not been maintained for years, local media reported. (AP)

India-US strategic partnership has never been more dynamic: Blinken

WASHINGTON, Sept 14: The strategic relationship between India and the US has never been so dynamic as they team up on everything from advanced semiconductors to defence cooperation, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said.

Speaking days after India successfully hosted the G-20 Summit and President and Prime Minister Narendra Modi held bilateral talks in New Delhi, Blinken said that both India and the US will benefit from several collaborations they have entered into. "The US-India strategic partnership has never been more dynamic, as we team up on everything from advanced semiconductors to defence cooperation," Blinken said on Wednesday in his remarks on "Power and Purpose of American Diplomacy in a New Era" at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) here.

Blinken said the Biden administration has elevated the Quad partnership with India, Japan, and Australia to deliver for the countries and the world on everything from manufacturing vaccines to strengthening maritime security to addressing climate challenges. In November 2017, the four nations gave shape to the long-pending proposal of setting up the "Quad" to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence.

"And just this past week at the G20, President Biden and Indian Prime Minister Modi announced another ambitious transportation, energy, and technology corridor that will connect the ports of Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Germany, Italy, and the EU will team up with the US and India to turbocharge clean energy production, and digital connectivity, and strengthen critical supply chains across the region," Blinken said. (AP)

Cambodia's new PM Hun Manet visiting close ally China on his first official trip abroad

BEIJING, Sept 14: Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet arrived in Beijing on Thursday on his first official trip abroad since taking office last month. The visit is a demonstration of his country's warm relations with China, its closest political and economic ally.

He is expected to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping and other officials during a three-day state visit and then attend a trade and investment expo in southern China, according to Cambodia's Foreign Ministry. A statement said the two countries' leaders will discuss tightening relations for a shared future with the building of a "Cambodia-China Community," strategic directions for their bilateral relations and regional and international matters.

Photos posted on Chinese social media by state broadcaster CGTN showed Manet and his wife Pich Chanmony walking down the stairs from the plane to a red carpet on the tarmac, where they were greeted by two children, a Chinese official and others. Cambodia is a key Chinese diplomatic partner and supporter in regional and international forums. It helps dampen criticism of Beijing within the 10-member Association

of Southeast Asian Nations, several of whose members are engaged in territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea.

China has gained important influence in Cambodian politics and its economy, as seen in the numerous Chinese-funded projects, hotels and casinos in the capital Phnom Penh and elsewhere around the country. China's state banks have financed airports, roads and other infrastructure built with Chinese loans. More than 40 per cent of Cambodia's USD 10 billion in foreign debt is owed to China. After his meetings in Beijing, Manet will go to the 20th ASEAN-China Expo in Nanning, a regional capital in southern China not far from the border with Vietnam, the Cambodian Foreign Ministry said.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang will also attend the expo, along with the prime ministers of Malaysia, Vietnam and Laos and senior government officials from Indonesia and Thailand, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said. The expo promotes cooperation between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in trade, investment and tourism. (AP)

Vivek Ramaswamy says he would fire 75 pc of federal workforce if elected US President

WASHINGTON, Sept 14: Indian American-Republican presidential aspirant Vivek Ramaswamy has said he would fire more than 75 per cent of the federal workforce and shutter several major agencies like the FBI if he wins the 2024 elections, as he continued to put forward strident proposals that have helped him stand out in the crowded primary field.

In an interview with American news website Axios, Ramaswamy said that his targets would be the Department of Education, the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the (Internal Revenue Service) IRS, and the Commerce Department.

"We would start on day one, and we want a 50 per cent reduction by the end of year one," he was quoted as saying.

"Keep in mind that 30 per cent of these employees are eligible for retirement in the next five-year period," Ramaswamy, 38, said. "So it is substantial — no doubt about it — but it's not as crazy as it sounds," he said. According to Axios, Ramaswamy says his eventual goal would be to cut the federal civil workforce of 2.2 million people by 75 per cent after four years. Ramaswamy made a strong case in a speech at the America First Policy Institute.

"In order to actually get this job done, we're going to have to confront several myths that have been perpetuated in this



town by advisers and members of the very bureaucracy that we're trying to shut down that we're going to have to confront and overcome," Ramaswamy asserted.

"It's like the equivalent of working at a company. The HR department does not actually determine the rules without reporting to the CEO. It works the same way for the federal government, as well," he said. His pitch was another echo of former President Donald Trump, whom he has modelled himself after and who sought to expand political control over the federal workforce near the end of his term.

"Good presidents, excellent presidents from (Ronald) Reagan to (Donald) Trump have spoken to the same ideal, and I'll give credit to Donald Trump for taking more steps than have been taken in a generation in the direction," he said.

About 2.25 million people work for the federal government in civilian roles. Cut-

ting more than 75 per cent of that workforce would result in more than 1.6 million people being fired, saving billions of dollars in the federal budget but also shutting down critical functions of the government, The New York Times said. Ramaswamy's harsh proposals have helped him stand out in the crowded primary field.

Ramaswamy has garnered attention after his maiden Republican presidential primary debate held on August 23.

The first poll that came out after the debate said that 28 per cent of the 504 respondents said that Ramaswamy performed the best. He was followed by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis with 27 per cent, and former vice president Mike Pence (13 per cent). Indian-American Nikki Haley received seven per cent of the votes.

According to Fox News, Ramaswamy was the most Google-searched GOP candidate for the first Republican presidential debate. He was followed by fellow Indian-American Haley. Following the debate, The Wall Street Journal wrote that Ramaswamy is not a nobody anymore and that the other candidates have taken notice of him. Trump, 77, described Ramaswamy as being a "smart," "young guy" and a "very intelligent person" who has "a lot of talent" and "good energy." He also advised him to be "a bit more careful" with what he says. (PTI)

Son of Aung Sang Suu Kyi is worried about her health in detention

BANGKOK, Sept 14: The younger son of ousted Myanmar leader Aung Sang Suu Kyi says he has always avoided talking to the media, but this time is different. He's increasingly worried about his imprisoned 78-year-old mother's health and about Myanmar's violent political crisis, which he calls desperate.

"I'd just really like to have some form of contact with her so that I know that she's OK, because at the moment she has no access to her legal counsel," Kim Aris said Wednesday in a video interview with The Associated Press from his home in London. "She has no access to her personal doctors. She's not allowed

any visitors, as far as I'm aware. She's not even allowed to mingle with the other prisoners, which means she's basically under a form of solitary confinement."

Suu Kyi was arrested in 2021 when the army seized power from her democratically elected government. She has since been prosecuted and convicted on more than a dozen charges for offenses her supporters say were concocted to keep her out of politics. She is serving a prison term

of 27 years.

The military takeover triggered massive public resistance that was brutally suppressed, triggering a bloody civil war that has killed thousands of people.

Aris, 46, said he has tried to keep out of the spotlight for decades, seeking to avoid any political activism and "just trying to keep my head down and get on with my family life."

"I've always tried to avoid

speaking to the media and (have been) avoiding social media all my life. But the situation in Burma at the moment is absolutely desperate," he said, referring to Myanmar by its former name.

"The fact that I've not been allowed to communicate with my mother at all for over two and a half years now" is another reason he is speaking out, he said.

"So now I'm doing all I can to try and help the situation and bring awareness of this situation to the wider world," he said. He is getting active on social media and said he plans a campaign to "bring awareness and funding for humanitarian purposes." (AP)

Thailand's govt, seeking return of tourists from China, approves visa-free entry for 5 months

BANGKOK, Sept 14: Thailand's new government on Wednesday approved a measure granting temporary visa-free entry to Chinese tourists, signalling that the recovery of the country's tourism industry is a top economic priority.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin said the visa exemption, which will also apply to visitors from the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan, will be effective from September 25 until February 29 next year. He said the relevant authorities had been consulted to ensure they are ready to handle the expected surge in travellers. China more than a decade ago became a major source of tourists to Thailand, with almost 11 million visitors in 2019, accounting for 27.6 per

cent of all arrivals the year before the coronavirus pandemic devastated the tourist market.

The government proposed the measure due to concerns that the number of Chinese tourists this year might not reach the initial target of 5 million due to strict visa requirements. The Tourism Authority of Thailand reported that around 1.4 million Chinese tourists came in the first six months of this year.

Thailand's economy slumped during the pandemic as its huge tourism industry virtually collapsed. The country received about 40 million international visitors in 2019 who the government estimated generated 1.9 trillion baht (USD 53.2 billion) in revenue, an

amount that plummeted by more than 99 per cent by 2021, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

Chai Wacharonke, a spokesperson for the Office of the Prime Minister, said Thailand received 15 million international visitors in the first seven months of this year. He said the government aims to draw 28 million international visitors and generate 1.4 trillion baht (USD 39.2 billion) in tourism revenue in 2023. Chai praised the visa exemption scheme, saying the tourism industry is "the only economic machine remaining that can be driven with hope to generate new income quickly for Thailand." (AP)

Outrage in US over death of Indian student; US assures prompt action and investigation

WASHINGTON/SEATTLE, Sept 14: The Biden administration has assured the Indian government of a quick investigation into the death of Indian student Jaahnavi Kandula in Seattle after being struck by a speeding police patrol car and bringing to justice the police officers who were responsible for it.

The US government swung into action after India's Ambassador to the US, Taranjit Singh Sandhu, strongly raised the issue at the highest level in Washington and sought prompt action on the killing of Kandula, and the highly insensitive behaviour of the police officer in Seattle in Washington state.

Kandula was killed in January after she was struck by a police vehicle driven by Officer Kevin Dave. He was driving 74 mph (more than 119 kmph) on the way to a report of an overdose, the Seattle Times newspaper reported on Monday. In bodycam footage released on Monday by the Seattle Police Department, Officer Daniel Auderer laughed about the deadly crash and dismissed any implication Dave might be

at fault or that a criminal investigation was necessary. US lawmakers and Indian-Americans have expressed outrage over the death of Kandula. The Biden administration has assured the Indian government of a quick investigation into the incident and bringing to justice the police officers who were responsible for it.

Senior administration officials are believed to have assured the Ambassador and the Indian government that the entire incident has been taken very seriously by them. They are monitoring its investigation from Washington DC the progress of the case to ensure that there is adequate accountability. Officials said that they were "shocked" and "horrified" at this incident. The Consulate General of India in San Francisco on Wednesday termed the handling of Kandula's death as "deeply troubling".

"We have taken up the matter strongly with local authorities in Seattle and Washington State as well as senior officials in Washington DC for a thorough investigation and action against

those involved in this tragic case," the mission said in a post on platform X. "The Consulate & Embassy will continue to closely follow up on this matter with all concerned authorities," it added.

"Jaahnavi Kandula came here for graduate work from India. She was killed on a crosswalk by a speeding police car, and officer Auderer said her life had 'limited value.' I thought of my dad who came here in his 20s. Mr. Auderer, the life of every Indian immigrant has infinite value," Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna said.

"Anyone who thinks that a human life has 'limited value' should not be serving in law enforcement," Khanna said. Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal said: "This is appalling. I hope to see justice for Jaahnavi Kandula's family and accountability for those involved." In a letter to the Kandula family, Seattle City Mayor Bruce Harrell said that the comments made by one person do not reflect the feelings of the city or the communities that call it home. (PTI)

UNITED NATIONS, Sept 14: The father of imprisoned Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich called on world leaders meeting at the United Nations next week to stand up for freedom of the press and urge Russia to release him.

Mikhail Gershkovich came to UN headquarters with his wife and daughter at the invitation of US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield on Wednesday to spotlight his son's nearly six months in a Russian prison on charges of espionage, which the Journal's lawyers call "patently false".

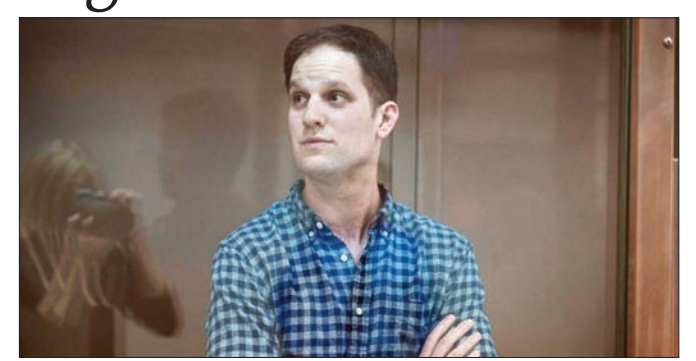
Their appearance came a day after the paper's lawyers asked the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to urgently issue an opinion that Evan has been arbitrarily detained by Russia on the false charges. The request says "Russia has failed to produce a shred of evidence in support of its accusations" since the 31-year-old journalist was arrested on March 29 on a reporting trip to the city of Yekaterinburg, almost 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) east of Moscow.

Mikhail Gershkovich said Evan "is strong, but the past several months have been a nightmare for our family".

His wife, Ella Milman, echoed the difficulties for the family but said they have been able to send letters back and forth to Evan "and it gives me comfort to see how strong he is".

"We are glad he's kept his sense of humour — teasing me that the prison food reminds him of my cooking," she told UN correspondents.

Danielle Gershkovich, Evan's sister, said the family should be planning for his birthday next month. "Instead, we are here to remind the world that Evan is in-



nocent and journalism is not a crime," she said.

"We ask that world leaders help find a solution to secure Evan's release," she said. "If this can happen to my brother, it can happen to any journalist trying to report the news."

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield urged all UN member nations "to join this call for Evan's release, and the release of all those who have been wrongfully

detained". She said the United States "will not rest" until Evan, Paul Whelan, who is serving a 16-year sentence on an espionage conviction that both he and Washington dispute, and all other wrongfully detained Americans "are home safe and sound".

"And we urge the international community and the United Nations to stand with us," the US ambassador said. (AP)

Nagaland House passes resolution against implementation of amended forest Act in state

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Sept 14: The Nagaland Legislative Assembly passed a 11-point resolution on the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023, saying the Act would only be applicable to the state subject to the constitutional guarantees provided in Article 371(A) of the Constitution of India.

Environment, forest and climate change minister CL John moved the resolution on the floor of the House on the last day of the second session of the 14th assembly in Kohima on Thursday.

The House was of the view that the term 'land and its resources' mentioned in Article 371(A) include forest lands and its resources and that the application of Section 1(A)(2) of the amended Act to Nagaland would jeopardise the existing rights of tribal communities on their forest lands and its resources.

It resolved that the government



of India must assure that provisions contained in Section 1(A)(2) of the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023 shall not be used to the detriment of the state and its people.

It was also resolved to explore various options including the state enacting its own Act for the purpose of having its own compensatory mechanism wherein any diversion of even private or community-owned forest land for non-forestry

purposes and damage to the environment is suitably compensated by the user agency, in addition to availing of benefits of the existing schemes of the central government in this regard.

According to the resolution, the amended Act had inserted a new Section, Section 1(A)(2), which exempted from the operation of the principal Act such forest lands situated within a distance of 100 km

along international borders, Line of Control or Actual Line of Control, as the case may be, proposed to be used for construction of strategic linear project of national importance and concerning national security.

The exempted area of 100 km from international borders will cover most parts of Nagaland where the ownership of most of the forest lands vests with tribal communities, it said.

The resolution added that a consultative meeting with various stakeholders on the Act was held on September 1, 2023, where the representatives of the various Naga tribal hohos/organisations expressed their strong objection to the application of Section 1(A)(2) of Act in Nagaland on the ground that it is likely to infringe on traditional ownership and usage of forest lands and its resources in the state of Nagaland.

COCOMI rejects AFSPA demand by Manipur tribal bodies in Imphal valley areas

IMPHAL, Sept 14: The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), an umbrella body of multiple civil bodies based in Imphal valley, has termed the demand for re-imposition of AFSPA in the valley areas as "totally absurd" and "not logical."

In a statement by its media coordinator Somendro Thokchom, COCOMI said, "Ransoms, extortions and killings are happening in Kuki dominated areas...there is reasonable peace in all areas where AFSPA was lifted long time back."

COCOMI said rampant extortion, looting in highways and kidnappings have increased after the outbreak of the present crisis in Kuki dominated hill areas.

This development comes after Churachandpur-based Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) and Kangpokpi based Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) demanded imposition of AFSPA in Imphal valley in the wake of killing of three per-



sons by unidentified gunmen near Kharang Vaiphei on Tuesday.

In April 2022, the central government had removed the disturbed areas tag under AFSPA from 15 police station areas of Imphal valley. In March this year, chief minister N Biren Singh announced

withdrawal of AFSPA from another four PS areas.

Manipur government had last extended the Disturbed Areas Act on April 1, 2023 for a period of six months in the entire state except for areas under the jurisdiction of the 19 police stations. (PTI)



A dedicated team from IIT Guwahati including three Japanese students under the guidance of Dr Siddhartha Singha visited the University of Science and Technology (USTM) on Wednesday. UB Photos

Mizoram woman jailed for 10 years for killing niece

AIZAWL, Sept 14: A district court in Mizoram on Thursday sentenced a 38-year-old woman to 10 years in jail for killing her niece, a court official said.

Champhai district additional and sessions judge Sylvie Zomuanpui Ralte convicted and sentenced Chingsianzovi to 10 years in jail and slapped a fine of ₹ 5,000, the official said.

Chingsianzovi will have to undergo an additional imprisonment of one year if she fails to pay the fine, he said.

Chingsianzovi from east Mizoram's Khawzawl town strangled her 13-year-old niece Catherine T Biaksiami to death in February last year.

The two were camping at a farmhouse to collect firewood at the time of the incident.

Chingsianzovi asked Catherine to collect firewood during the day and became livid after seeing that her niece failed to collect firewood up to her satisfaction.

The two quarreled and in a fit of



rage, Chingsianzovi choked her niece to death with the help of 'Hnam' (a traditional strap for carrying loads).

Initially, Chingsianzovi denied killing her niece and told police that an unidentified man had attempted to kidnap Catherine and that she caught the culprit and tied him with a rope.

However, when the police team reached the crime scene, they found the girl lying dead in the

farmhouse.

Later, police detained Chingsianzovi and subsequently she confessed to her crime.

The prosecution upheld that Chingsianzovi accidentally killed her niece since she was drunk. She was convicted her under Section 304 and Section 182 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Catherine was an orphan and she was living with her aunt Chingsianzovi in Khawzawl town. (PTI)

Manipur police recovers SLR, magazines during operation

IMPHAL, Sept 14: Manipur police recovered one SLR and 12 magazines during a search operation at Yairipok Malom village under Yairipok police station of Thoubal district this morning. A police source said that a strong team of Thoubal district comprising units of the state police commandos conducted the search operation after cordoning the village (Yairipok Malom) around 6am. (NNN)

Drugs peddlers arrested in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, Sept 14: Two drug peddlers were arrested along with heroin from Umpling in Meghalaya on Tuesday night, according to police. They have been identified as Wantie Manbha Lyngdoh (24) and Freddy Bantei Dhar (29), the police said. From their possession, heroin - 1.13 gm, 417 empty vials, 39 unused syringes, 2 mobile phones and 1 Tata Intra pick-up (vehicle) were seized, the police added. A case has been registered with the Rynjah police station. (NNN)

Manipur JDU urges MLAs going to Delhi to return with concrete measures

IMPHAL, Sept 14: The Manipur unit of Janata Dal (United) on Thursday urged the delegation of the ruling MLAs, who had rushed to Delhi on Wednesday from Imphal, to come back with a concrete measure to end the violence in Manipur after meeting with the central leaders including the Prime Minister.

Addressing the media at JD(U) office in Imphal on Thursday, party spokesperson and former minister Nimaichand Luwang urged the ministers and MLAs of the ruling parties to ensure returning to Imphal with a concrete measure to end the crisis in the state.

He said that the delegation should not return empty handed to Imphal. While camping at the national capital, the delegation should also meet the Prime Minister besides other Central leaders. The former minister said that the crisis unfolding in the state might have been ended within two days if the Centre had acted with a commitment. However, it was not done, he alleged.

The JDU spokesperson also said that there had been many crises that crippled the state in the past. However, the then state governments consulted with the leaders of all the political parties and exerted strong

political pressure on the Centre to resolve the crises.

"However, in the present case, the state government did nothing to resolve the crisis", he further alleged. "This showed that the BJP has no desire to end the crisis", he added.

Meanwhile, Nimaichand said the demand raised by the people to withdraw Assam Rifles from the state is in the hands of the state government.

He asked the reasons for the state government not to lodge an FIR against the personnel of the Assam Rifles who are behind the "brutal crackdown" against the civilians. The JDU leader also said the incumbent government is unable to maintain law and order. "There is no law and order in the state. The lives and properties of the people could not be protected in the state", he said.

The JDU spokesperson then said that ministers and MLAs of the ruling parties had rushed to Delhi on the pressure of the youths of Manipur (YoM) to meet central leaders and press them to end the crisis.

He appreciated the members of the YoM for bringing the MLAs of the ruling parties together to protect the territorial integrity of Manipur. (NNN)

Manipur ruling party MLAs to pressurise centre to end Manipur crisis

IMPHAL, Sept 14: A delegation of MLAs of ruling parties including two ministers left Imphal for New Delhi recently reportedly to put a strong pressure on the Centre for ending the crisis plaguing Manipur for the last more than four months.

Sources said that the delegation comprising 17 MLAs and two ministers will seek appointment to meet the Prime Minister besides meeting with other Central leaders including Union Home minister Amit Shah and BJP national president JP Nadda and press them to take up steps for ending the prevailing crisis in Manipur.

The delegation will convince the Central leaders on various demands raised by the people of the state, the sources added.

The two ministers included in the delegation are education minister Th Basanta Kumar and Social Welfare minister H Dingo.

Health minister Dr Sapam Ranjan and works minister K Govindas will also join the delegation, the sources disclosed.

It is said that the delegation will not return to



Imphal until the Centre gives a concrete commitment to end the crisis unfolding in the state since May 3 last, within a time bound period.

The Delhi visit of the ministers and MLAs came days after as many as 23 MLAs of the ruling parties including some ministers have signed a resolution, pledging to protect the territorial integrity of the strife-torn state while responding to campaign by Youths of Manipur (YoM), a newly form organisation of youths.

The MLAs also resolved that they would soon proceed to Delhi to persuade the Central leadership to find a solution to the present crisis at the earliest.

The MLAs signed the resolution drafted by the YoM when they (YoM members) met them in their respective residences or quarters in the last few days.

The resolution read, "It is unanimously resolved by all the undersigned members of the Legislative Assembly that we would stand for the territorial integrity of the State of Manipur and no form of separate administration will be agreed to by us."

The YoM leaders also met with the chief minister last Monday as a part of their campaign and pressed him (CM) to take up legal action against the 10 Kuki MLAs who demanded separate administration in Manipur.

They also raised the demands like convening of a special Assembly session to discuss the matter and the National Register of Citizens exercise in the state. (NNN)

M'laya govt plans to promote fruit wine industry in state

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma on Thursday said that the Government has charted out a plan to promote fruit wine industry in the state.

He said that a robust policy has been put in place to promote a thriving ecosystem that links tourism, agriculture, entrepreneurship, and job creation through the promotion of local fruit winemakers.

Speaking at the launch of North East Wine Incubation Centre at Mawdiangdiang in Shillong, the chief minister recalled moment when he encountered a homemade pineapple wine with a simple, handcrafted label on a beer bottle, which stemmed the idea to devise strategy to promote professional wine making and packaging.

"Despite the unimpressive packaging, the wine inside was exceptional. This experience, combined with discussions and observations, led to the realization that there is immense potential in the fruit wine industry in Meghalaya," the chief minister added.

"This entire activity that we are trying to do, it links tourism, agriculture, and job creation. It has the potential to unlock a vast capacity that is lying dormant," he added.

On comprehensive framework to promote the industry, the chief minister informed on the importance of establishing a proper system, policy, and support structure for local fruit winemakers. This initiative is not only aimed at boosting the wine industry but also at benefiting farmers, tourists, and entrepreneurs in the state.

"I am in public life to make a positive difference in even a single individual's life. That is my driving force," he said, while



adding, "The activity that we are trying to do here is going to make a huge positive difference in people's lives."

He further envisioned to make Meghalaya the fruit wine capital of the country. He expressed confidence in achieving this goal with the collaboration of all stakeholders involved.

He hoped that the wine incubation centre will provide a platform for aspiring entrepreneurs to test and utilize machinery, encouraging innovation and economic growth through wine making.

Addressing concerns about licensing and accessibility for winemakers, he assured the public that the licensing fees would remain nominal. He also informed that the Government is in the process to streamline the registration process to facilitate ease of access for local winemakers.

The inauguration of the wine incubation centre, which is first of its kind in the entire North East, was also attended by agriculture minister Ampareen Lyngdoh and excise minister Kyrmyn Shylla.

In September 2020, the Government of Meghalaya amended the Meghalaya Excise Rules (Assam Excise Rules 1945) through a notification dated September 29 2020 (No. ERTS (E)/2020/52), to legalise the production and sale of homemade wines under license to provide a legal avenue for local winemakers to carry out winemaking as a commercial venture. This amendment was adopted with the intent of not only creating an opportunity for wine tourism but also to provide an impetus to the horticulture sector to undertake cultivation and production of indigenous fruits on a commercial scale. This move has created new opportunities for

wine makers, entrepreneurs, and farmers in the state.

The First Batch of Wine Appreciation & Wine Making Certification Courses were held in June to July 2023 for 68 trainees and for the Second Batch of 25 trainees in August 2023. A total of 93 winemakers have been trained so far with 16 of them currently undergoing internship in the winery of Hill Zill wines, Bordin, Maharashtra.

The courses offered guided tastings, educational workshops, and interactive sessions with sommeliers and winemakers making it an immersive and enriching experience for wine enthusiasts, connoisseurs, and industry professionals looking to enhance their knowledge, indulge their senses, and connect with fellow wine enthusiasts.

The Wine Appreciation & Wine Making Certification Courses have been organised by MFEC with the aim of encouraging local winemakers to transition from the traditional art of winemaking to modern winemaking techniques to ensure that the quality of wine produced in the state matches nationally and internationally recognized wine standards.

Having been actively involved in the formulation of the current policy, the Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission (MFEC) has now taken on the yoke of responsibility to provide an impetus not only for winemakers but also for consumers and businesses to actively undertake the promotion and consumption of local fruit wines and meads in the country to ensure that Meghalaya is at the forefront of fruit wine and mead production and refinement throughout the northeast.

ABVP Jowai unit organises 'U Kiang Nangbah Best Student Award-2023'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Jowai unit organised 'U Kiang Nangbah Best Student Award-2023' recently at District Library Auditorium, Mynthong, Jowai.

The occasion was graced by cabinet minister of Meghalaya Kyrmyn Shylla, minister of revenue and disaster management, excise department as the chief guest, Puramon Kynjing, Pa Dalloi Jowai Elaka as guest of honour and Nibiang Sumer, East Khasi Hills, district organising secretary of ABVP as the speaker of the Programme.

The felicitation programme was attended by more than 80 toppers along with parents of SSLC and HSSLC examination 2023 from the secondary and higher secondary schools of the Jaintia Hills who have excelled in their respective institution.

Speaking on the occasion, Kyrmyn Shylla lauded the achievement of the young achievers and motivated them to work for the uplifting of Nation. He mentioned that like ABVP give priority to the time, students also must prioritise time and complete their assignments in time.

He said that to achieve success in life discipline and hardwork is very important. He mentioned that students are the driving forces to bring positive development in the state and the country.

Puramon Kynjing gave a brief history about the life of U Kiang Nangbah who despite facing hurdles took the courage to fight against the Britishers and help in the freedom struggle of the country.

The Speaker, Nibiang Sumer spoke about the various activities of ABVP and mentioned how ABVP is contributing in the national reconstruction by channelling the students power in positive direction. She mentioned how being a student organisation, ABVP had rendered its service for the social cause of the Nation thereby giving proper guidance to the students and the youth through its various activities and forum.



Special discussion on Parliament's 75-yr journey on first day of upcoming session

NEW DELHI, Sept 13: The government on Wednesday listed a special discussion on Parliament's journey of 75 years starting from the Samvidhan Sabha on the first day of the five-day session of Parliament beginning September 18.

During the session, the government has also listed the bill on the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other election commissioners to be taken up for consideration and passage. The bill was introduced in Rajya Sabha during the last Monsoon session.

"Discussion on 'Parliamentary Journey of 75 years starting from Samvidhan Sabha - Achievements, Experiences, Memories and Learnings'" will be held on September 18 besides other formal business like laying of papers.

The session is likely to see the proceedings of Parliament moving from the old building to the new Parliament building.

The other listed business for Lok Sabha includes 'The Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023' and 'The Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023', already passed by Rajya Sabha on 3 August 2023.

Besides, 'The Post Office Bill, 2023' has also been listed in the Lok Sabha business, according to an official bulletin. The bill was earlier introduced in Rajya Sabha on 10 August 2023.

The list of business is tentative and more items can be added.

The government has also convened a



meeting of the floor leaders of all political parties on September 17, a day before the start of the five-day session, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said.

The invitation for the meeting has been sent to all leaders concerned through e-mail, Joshi posted on social media platform X.

On August 31, Joshi had announced a "special session" of Parliament for five days from September 18 but did not spell out any specific agenda for it.

"Amid Amrit Kaal, looking forward to having fruitful discussions and debate in Parliament," Joshi had posted on X.

Sharing the agenda for the special Parliament session on X, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said it "is much ado about nothing" and all this could have waited till the Winter session in November, but added that the government could be having "legislative grenades" up its sleeves.

"Finally, after pressure from Smt. Sonia Gandhi's letter to the Prime Minister, the Modi Govt has condescended to announce the agenda for the special 5-day session of Parliament beginning September 18th," he said.

"The agenda as published at the moment,

is much ado about nothing — all this could have waited till Winter session in November.

"I am sure the legislative grenades are being kept up their sleeves to be unleashed at the last moment as usual. Parde ke peeche kuch aur hai! (there is more behind the curtains)," he said on the agenda.

"Regardless, the INDIA parties will steadfastly oppose the insidious CEC Bill," Ramesh also said.

Former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi when no agenda was listed for the session.

Ramesh also earlier in the day listed several previous special Parliament sessions and said each time the agenda was listed in advance.

The government had in the last session tabled in Rajya Sabha the contentious Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill that seeks to replace the Chief Justice of India with a cabinet minister in the panel for selection of the chief election commissioner and election commissioners.

The move will allow the government to have more control over the appointments of members of the poll panel.

The Bill was moved by the Law Minister amid an uproar by the opposition parties, including the Congress, Trinamool, AAP and the Left, that accused the government of "diluting and overturning" a Supreme Court Constitution bench order. (PTI)

Indian troops defending every inch of border with China: Ladakh LG

JAMMU, Sept 14: Indian troops are defending every inch of the border with China and not even a single inch of land has been taken over by the neighbouring country in recent years, Ladakh Lt Governor Brig (Retd) B D Mishra said on Thursday. He said infrastructure development is taking place at a rapid pace across Ladakh with roads, helipads, airfields, tunnels and bridges being built, and India will catch up with China in that regard within next four-five years. Brig Mishra (Retd) was in Jammu in connection with a three-day north-tech symposium which concluded at IIT Jammu on Wednesday. The event provided a platform for engagement between the academia and industry to devise unique solutions to meet the army's operational requirements in northern command, while promoting self-reliance in defence production and technology proliferation.

"If there is any match to them (China) in Asia, it is India. China is a nefarious country. So right from the very beginning, they have been having this policy to contain, to threaten and to coerce India. So they have been doing it for last two, three decades," the LG told PTI-Video in an exclusive interview here. Mishra said India started infrastructure development in the region about six seven years back. "But the way we are developing our infrastructure

like roads, helipads, airfields, tunnels and bridges, during next four or five years we will catch up with China and we will be as good, if not better, on infrastructure on our borders as China," the Lt Governor said. Asked about Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's remarks last month that every individual in Ladakh knows that China has "taken away our land", he said the fact on the ground is that the neighbouring country has not occupied even one square inch of Indian land in the recent years.

"I would not comment on what a particular person has said or what a particular person is saying. I would give you an answer based on my own tour, observation and on seeing the facts on the ground. The fact is they (Chinese) are not in occupation of even one square inch of land of India," the Lt Governor said. Brig Mishra (Retd) said Indian troops are defending the borders and they are defending every inch of it.

"Anybody who says what is well up to him, but the fact is that not even a single inch of land of India is under Chinese occupation. What ever has happened in 1962 (during the India-China war), that is a past story... That is a separate issue but when I am talking to present and according to our own definition of Line of Actual control, we are present there," he said. (PTI)

Cong takes jibe at PM after he attacks opposition

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: The Congress on Thursday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi after he dubbed the INDIA bloc parties as "ghamandia", accusing him of using a government function to abuse the opposition.

"The PM is back to doing what he does best—insult. He repeated his abuse of INDIA parties as so-called Ghamandia parties," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on X.

"Look, who's talking! The man who uses the occasion of a government function to abuse the opposition. Stooping to his level, one could easily say he heads the GA-NDA coalition—Gautam Adani's NDA," the Congress leader alleged.

The Congress has been attacking the BJP over the Adani issue and accusing the prime minister of not initiating a probe against the Adani Group after allegations of irregularities and stock price manipulation cropped up in the wake of a US research report, a charge denied by the Adani group.

Prime Minister Modi on Thursday termed the opposition INDIA alliance as "ghamandia" (arrogant) and alleged that it wants to destroy Sanatan Dharma. He was speaking after laying the foundation stone of a ₹ 49,000 crore-worth petrochemicals complex at Bina refinery in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh along with 10 industrial projects in the state.

"The 'ghamandia' (INDIA) alliance (leaders) met in Mumbai recently. They neither have any policies or issues nor a leader. They have a hidden agenda of attacking Sanatan Dharma, which they want to destroy," he said. His statement comes in the wake of remarks made by DMK leader and Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, who said Sanatan Dharma is against social justice and that it should be eradicated. A Raja, another DMK leader, likened Sanatan Dharma to diseases such as leprosy. (PTI)

BJP passes resolution hailing PM Modi for 'historic, unprecedented' success of G20 Summit



NEW DELHI, Sept 14: The BJP on Wednesday passed a resolution hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the "historic and unprecedented" success of the G20 Summit and said India's presidency of the grouping will always be celebrated as "People's G20".

In the resolution, the BJP parliamentary board noted with "great pride the impeccable leadership and unwavering commitment" showcased by Prime Minister Modi at the summit.

The G20 Delhi summit stands as a monumental chapter in India's diplomatic annals and marks a transformative moment in how India is perceived and engaged with on the global stage, it added.

"We, BJP karyakartas, extend our deepest appreciation and warm congratulations to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Government of India for the successful G20 Summit held in New Delhi on 9-10th September, 2023," the

resolution read.

"As representatives of the people, we stand resolute in our belief that under PM Modi's leadership, India will persistently chart a course marked by growth, cooperation, and global leadership, crafting a legacy that future generations will look upon with hope and positivity," it said.

India's G20 presidency will always be celebrated as "People's G20—a truly people-driven endeavour and a testament to India's enduring spirit", the resolution noted.

Over 60 cities playing host to 200 meetings, and with a staggering participation of 1.5 crore people, this initiative ensured that the voices of "our people reverberated in these pivotal discussions, infusing them with grassroots perspectives and aspirations," it said.

The G20 Summit brought the world together on a wide range of issues be it economics, geopolitics or technology, the BJP resolution said.

"We compliment PM Modi for his efforts in ensuring an extensive and visionary G20 New Delhi Declaration. The declaration is a testament to foresight, acting as a guiding beacon for our times and beyond," it said.

The resolution complimented Modi for showcasing to the world a "human-centric" model of development, moving beyond the conventional GDP-focused growth trajectory taken in the previous years.

"This model, emphasising sustainability, inclusivity, and shared prosperity, resonated deeply among participating nations, reaffirming India's stance as a champion for the collective good of humanity," it said.

India was also at the forefront of championing paradigms like Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Mission LIFE, which will be the guiding factors for policymakers while framing their policies, the resolution added.

Mission LIFE is an India-led global mass movement to nudge individual and community action to protect and preserve the environment.

The BJP resolution said the coming generations will remember the 2023 summit as the one in which the African Union was given full membership of the G20.

This is in line with Prime Minister Modi's vision to ensure that the Global South has strong representation in such bodies, it underlined.

The inclusion of the African Union in the G20 has been met with great appreciation particularly by all those who are passionate about serving those on the margins of the global conversation on development, it added.

"PM Modi's desire to deepen engagement with Africa was seen during the 2015 India-Africa Summit in New Delhi, in which all African heads of state/government took part. Among the first endeavours of India's G20 presidency was to hold the Global South Summit," the resolution read.

"It has equally gladdened us to see India take the lead in the Global Biofuels Alliance, which will go a long way in furthering sustainability," it said.

The myriad of bilateral meetings helmed by the prime minister not only fortified existing relations but also paved the way for newer, promising avenues of collaboration and commerce, which are set to bear fruit in the foreseeable future, the resolution said. (PTI)

Udhayanidhi hits out at Shah for his 'Hindi unites' comment



CHENNAI, Sept 14: Slamming union home minister Amit Shah for his remark that "Hindi unites", Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Thursday said it is "absurd" to claim that Hindi, spoken in just four to five states, unites the entire Indian union.

Udhayanidhi said the union minister has as usual shown his love for Hindi by commenting that only "Hindi unites people and empowers regional languages."

"This view is only an alternative form of a clamour for Hindi; that if it is learnt, a person can develop," the minister said in Tamil on social media platform X. "In Tamil Nadu it is Tamil, and Malayalam is the language in neighbouring Kerala. How is Hindi uniting these two states?"

How it is empowering?" he asked.

Further, he said: "It is absurd to say that Hindi, spoken in four to five states, is uniting the whole of the Indian Union."

Amit Shah should stop relegating non-Hindi languages to the status of provincial languages and insulting them, Udhayanidhi said in Tamil on X and added the hashtag #StopHindiImposition.

The union home minister on Thursday said that Hindi unites the diverse languages in India and it has honoured different Indian as well as global languages and dialects.

In a message on the occasion of 'Hindi Diwas', Shah said Hindi has never competed nor would compete with any other Indian language and that a strong country would emerge only by strengthening all its languages.

The home minister expressed confidence that Hindi would become a medium to empower all the local languages. (PTI)

Anti-Pakistan protests in Jammu

JAMMU, Sept 14: Anti-Pakistan protests were held on Thursday in various parts of the Jammu city against the killing of four security personnel by terrorists during an encounter in South Kashmir's Anantnag district the day before.

The Panun Kashmir and the Eik Sanatam Bharat Dal (ESBD) paid homage to the personnel and demanded a massive operation against the terrorist ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir.

On Wednesday, a Colonel of the Indian Army's Rashtriya Rifles, an army Major and a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP) were killed during a fierce encounter with terrorists in the Kokernag area of the Anantnag district.

The officers -- Colonel Manpreet Singh and Major Ashish Dhonach, a deputy superintendent of 19 RR and DySP Muhammad Hamayun Muzamil Bhat of the Jammu and Kashmir Police -- are believed to have been killed by LeT terrorists.

Scores of BJP youth workers, led by Jammu and Kashmir unit president Arun Prabhat, held a protest at Pacca Danga assailing Pakistan for aiding and abetting terrorism in J&K.



They raised slogans against Pakistan and burnt posters of the country's flags. "Pakistan is rattled by the popularity of Bharat after the success of G20 Summit. That is why they are trying to disturb peace in J&K. They want to create trouble in the region," Prabhat told reporters here.

He urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to deal with the source of terrorism across the border sternly.

Dogra Front Shiv Sena (DFSS) workers staged a protest march in Jammu and demanded fresh strikes on terror infrastructure in PoK. They shouted anti-Pakistan slogans and set Pakistani flags on fire.

"The latest martyrdom of officers is the fourth major incident in J&K this year. Though the overall security situation is under control and militancy is almost finished, such attacks cannot be tolerated at all", DFSS President Ashok Gupta said.

He called for fresh strikes on terrorist infrastructure in PoK.

He expressed hope the Centre and the J&K administration would take necessary measures to ensure such incidents are not repeated.

The Yuva Rajut Sabha also took out a massive protest rally in Jammu to express anger over the killings. (PTI)

Col Manpreet Singh preferred his men when offered peace posting

SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, Sept 14: "No Sir" was the prompt reply of Colonel Manpreet Singh when he was offered a peace posting upon his promotion in 2021. Instead, he volunteered to stay and command the 19 Rashtriya Rifles, a battalion credited with major kills of terrorists including Hizbul Mujahideen poster boy Burhan Wani.

Col Singh, who is survived by his wife, a six-year-old son and a two-year-old daughter, was a combat veteran and was awarded Sena Medal during his tenure as second-in-command of the 19 Rashtriya Rifles, a battalion tasked with ensuring security in South Anantnag, Kokernag and Verinag Achabal including its higher reaches, which have been highly infested with terrorists especially foreign mercenaries in the past.

Col Singh who was in his early 40s, along with Major Ashish Dhonach, Deputy Superintendent of Jammu and Kashmir Police Humayun Bhat and one soldier, was killed in an encounter with terrorists on Wednesday in the higher reaches of Kokernag. One soldier is still missing. Major Dhonach, 34, who had a close brush with death only a month ago, is remembered as an enthusiastic officer who used to go into the nitty gritty of every operation.

After his promotion in 2021 as a Colonel, Singh was given a choice to opt for peace area posting.

"No Sir. I would like to be posted in my 19 RR (Rashtriya Rifles) and be with my own men," was his prompt response, politely rejecting the offer that had been made to him. (PTI)

Don't know what's in the mind of Modi, Shah on BJP's alliance with JD(S) for LS polls, says Yediyurappa

BENGALURU, Sept 14: Veteran BJP leader B S Yediyurappa on Thursday said he doesn't know as to what is in the minds of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah regarding the saffron party having an understanding with JD(S) for 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The former CM, who was in New Delhi on Wednesday to take part in the meeting of the BJP's central election committee, of which he is the member, made it clear that no discussion took place regarding the alliance, during the visit.

"Amid election and other issues, other subjects (BJP-JD(S) poll understanding) did not come up for discussion. After the meeting I have come back. Neither did they (BJP national leadership), nor did I raise any other subjects," Yediyurappa said in response to a question. Speaking to reporters here, he said he doesn't know what was in the minds of Modi and Amit Shah regarding the poll alliance.

Asked whether there were any reservations from the state BJP about the alliance with JD(S), Yediyurappa, who is also the member of the BJP's all important parliamentary board, said, "what Delhi leadership says is more important. This issue did not come up for discussion yesterday during my Delhi visit." Certainly, whatever decision is taken by high command in Delhi will be after due consultation with the state leadership, he said.



But, so far no such discussions have taken place with regard to poll understanding and other issues. To a query on his personal opinion regarding the alliance, he said, "... we will all abide by whatever decision the party takes."

Yediyurappa, who is also a BJP parliamentary board member, had last week said that his party will have an understanding with JD(S) for the Lok Sabha elections. The regional party will contest in four LS seats in Karnataka, which has a total of 28 constituencies. However, he subsequently said that discussions in this regard have not reached finality yet, and that Modi and Shah, who are busy with other responsibilities, may discuss and decide on the issue in a couple of days and decide.

On his part, JD(S) leader H D Kumaraswamy said discussions on BJP and his party contesting the Lok Sabha polls together are still in the initial phase. (PTI)

IIT Guwahati researchers develop pharmaceutical and food products from tea factory waste

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: Researchers from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati have developed pharmaceutical and food products from tea factory waste, according to officials. As per a recent study, tea is one of the most widely consumed beverages worldwide with world tea consumption reaching 6.3 million tonnes and is expected to rise to 7.4 million tonnes by 2025.

"This huge increase in tea consumption leads to an increase in industrial tea waste generation which leads to non-utilisation of valuable agricultural resources and deterioration of environment. Because of its high lignin and low inorganic content, efficient utilisation of tea industry wastes demands scientifically advanced

techniques," said Mihir Kumar Purkait, Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering, IIT Guwahati.

"Addressing these waste utilisation and management issues becomes paramount as it aligns with sustainable practices and innovative solutions, ensuring both the industrial growth and ecological preservation," he added. Purkait said in order to address these issues, his team has carried out cutting age research on the diversified application of tea factory waste to various pharmaceutical and foods products. These carbonaceous pharmaceutical materials form the basis for a broad spectrum of application-based commodities. The findings of these studies have also been published in various international

journals including International Journal of Biological Macromolecules, Chemosphere, Critical Reviews in Biotechnology etc. This research has been carried out by Somnath Chanda, Prangan Duarah, and Banhisikha Debnath as a part of their PhD thesis work in the Centre for The Environment of IIT Guwahati.

"The convenience and health benefits of catechin-based capsules open a promising avenue, offering users access to the advantages of catechins without the necessity of multiple cups of green tea. This caters to the increasing demand for antioxidant-rich supplements in our daily routines."

"The lignin-rich spent tea leaves are transformed into activated carbon through a spe-

cialised reactor. This involves a dual-step procedure: first, carbonisation, which converts lingo-cellulosic biomass into a carbon-rich matrix; then, activation, which creates a porous structure, enhancing adsorption properties for wide range of applications that includes," he said. Some of the applications include -- food grade activated carbon as an alternative to synthetic food colorant to impart blackish, hues; natural based mild abrasive material in toiletries such as tooth paste and body washes; low density and light weight pharma-grade and chemically inert carbon as a pharmaceutical ingredient in solid-dosage forms as diluents; non-selective adsorptive properties of microporous carbon used in anti-pollution masks and as a deodorant in

socks and use in packaging to prevent moisture assisted degradation or spoilages.

"The commercial potential of these products is substantial. For instance, the demand for catechin based health supplements and organic preservatives are on the rise among health-conscious consumers and food processing companies. The immediate future plans for the project involve advancing towards advanced pilot stage leading to the imminent Transfer of Technology (ToT) phase to potential industry partners."

"These value-added products not only enhance the economic viability of tea cultivation but also encourages sustainable practices by reducing waste and promoting resource efficiency," Purkait said. (PTI)

INDIA slams BJP for 'celebrations' at HQ on day security personnel killed by terrorists in J-K

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: Several INDIA bloc parties slammed the BJP on Thursday for holding "celebrations" to mark the success of the G20 Summit on a day security personnel were killed by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, with the Congress saying Prime Minister Narendra Modi cannot postpone receiving accolades no matter what happens.

Colonel Manpreet Singh, Commanding Officer of 19 Rashtriya Rifles; Major Ashish Dhonack, and Deputy Superintendent Humayun Bhat were killed in the gunfight with terrorists in the Garol area of Anantnag district early Wednesday. An army jawan was also killed.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here, Chairman of the Congress' Ex-Servicemen Department Col (ret) Rohit Chaudhary alleged the prime minister displayed "shameless insensitivity" towards the martyred officers and soldiers by going ahead with his "self-praising celebrations" at the BJP headquarters while the news of the incident was being



flashed at the same time.

"While the country was shocked with grief as the news of the martyrdom of Col Manpreet Singh, Major Ashish Dhonack and DSP Humayun Bhatt, flashed all over, the Prime Minister was busy getting himself showered with flowers at the BJP headquarters," he said.

He asked why the PM did not stop the function and express solidarity with the country in general and the soldiers in particular.

The Army and the country were feeling hurt over such "shameful behaviour" of the prime minister who has otherwise always claims to

be a nationalist, Chaudhary said. The AICC Ex-Servicemen Department Chairman claimed that more than 30 terror incidents have occurred in Kashmir this year so far and this particular incident was a "deliberate ambush" where the officers and soldiers were apparently lured into action and then ambushed.

He called for extra-caution, saying this was an election year and the country's enemies would be ready with their nefarious designs.

In a post on X, the Congress called the prime minister "insensitive" and shared juxtaposed videos of mourning family members of a deceased soldier and Modi being given a rousing welcome at the BJP headquarters on Wednesday evening following the successful G20 meeting under India's presidency.

In a post in Hindi on X, Congress media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said that at a time when the sad news of the martyrdom of three army officers of

army was coming, a "celebration was organised for Badshah" at the BJP headquarters.

"No matter what happens, the Prime Minister cannot postpone receiving accolades," he said.

Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said three army and police officers were martyred in an encounter in Kashmir.

"It breaks my heart to see pictures of their small children. And here the celebration hasn't stopped? He had not stopped shooting even after the martyrdom of 40 brave men in Pulwama. There is unimaginable insensitivity," Shrinete said and shared pictures of the welcome at the BJP headquarters.

Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray faction) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi also shared the video of the rousing welcome accorded to the PM at the BJP headquarters, and said "this could have been postponed, expected more sensitivity, especially on a day when our security forces have fought a fierce fight with militants in Kashmir". (PTI)

PM dedicates Railway Projects worth ₹ 6,350 crore to the nation in Chhattisgarh

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 14: The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi dedicated railway projects of national importance worth around ₹ 6,350 crores to the nation in Chhattisgarh on Thursday. The projects include Chhattisgarh East Rail Project Phase-I, 3rd rail line between Champa to Janga, 3rd rail line between Pendra Road to Anuppur and MGR (Merry-Go-Round) system connecting Talaipalli Coal Mine to NTPC Lara Super Thermal Power Station (STPS). Addressing the gathering the Prime Minister remarked that a new chapter is being written in the development of Chhattisgarh's rail network today. This rail network will reduce the congestion in Jharsuguda - Bilaspur section of Bilaspur-Mumbai rail line. Similarly, the other railway lines that are being started and the rail corridors that are being built will give new heights to the industrial development of Chhattisgarh. When the work on these routes is completed, it will not only provide convenience to the people of Chhattisgarh, but will also create new employment and income opportunities here, the PM added.

Chhattisgarh East Rail Project Phase-I is being developed under the ambitious PM Gati Shakti - National Master Plan for multi-modal connectivity and consists of a 124.8 km rail line from Kharsia to Dharamjaygarh including a spur line to Gare-Pelma

and 3 feeder lines connecting Chhal, Baroud, Durgapur and other coal mines. The rail line, built at a cost of around ₹ 3,055 crores, is equipped with electrified broad gauge level crossings and free part double line with passenger amenities. It will provide rail connectivity for coal transportation from Mand - Raigarh coalfields located in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh. The third rail line between Pendra Road to Anuppur is 50 km long and is built at a cost of about ₹ 516 crore. The 98 kilometers long third line between Champa and Janga rail section is built at a cost of about ₹ 796 crore. The new rail lines will improve the connectivity in the region and lead to increase in both tourism and employment opportunities. The 65 km long electrified MGR (Merry-Go-Round) System will deliver low-cost, high-grade coal from NTPC's Talaipalli coal mine to 1600 MW NTPC Lara Super Thermal Power Station in Chhattisgarh. This will boost the generation of low cost and reliable power from NTPC Lara, thus strengthening energy security of the country. The MGR system, built at a cost of more than ₹ 2070 crore, is a technological marvel for improving the coal transportation from coal mines to power stations.

These rail projects will provide impetus to socio-economic development by facilitating movement of passengers as well as freight traffic in the region.

'Adani scam' exposed role of tax havens in hiding violation of Indian regulations: Cong

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: The Congress on Thursday alleged that the "Adani scam" has exposed the role tax havens play in hiding large-scale violation of Indian laws, and said the issue should have been discussed at the recent G20 Summit.

It also said that if a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe is ordered into the allegations against the Adani Group, it will have to make sure that any loopholes for round-tripping and money-laundering are effectively shut.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the rise in Indian outward direct investment in the past 25 years has been a sign of deepening globalisation.

"However, it is disturbing that offshore tax havens like Bermuda, Jersey and Cyprus rank among the top 10 destinations for Indian investment, according to the RBI," he said. This is in addition to Mauritius which has long been suspected as a preferred destination for Indian money-laundering and round-tripping, the Congress leader noted.

"The Adani MegaScam has exposed the critical role such tax havens play in hiding the large-scale violation of Indian laws and regulations. These violations are hollowing out our economy and affecting the credibility of our stock markets," Ramesh said.

"The G20 was the right forum to take up this issue and ensure concrete action against tax havens. But the Prime Minister was busy projecting his own image rather than protecting India's interests," he claimed.

"A JPC into the Adani MegaScam will have to make sure that any remaining loopholes for round-tripping and money-laundering are effectively shut," the Congress leader said.

The Congress and other opposition parties have been demanding a JPC probe into the Adani issue and will take up the issue during the upcoming special session of Parliament from September 18 to 22.

US short-seller Hindenburg Research, in a report released on January 24, alleged accounting fraud, stock price manipulation and use of tax havens by the Adani Group, triggering a stock market rout. (PTI)

Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act to come into effect from October 1

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: A new amended law will facilitate use of birth certificate as a single document for a host of works and services like admission to educational institutions, issuance of driving licenses, applying for Aadhaar card or passport and registration of marriage and will come into effect from October 1.

The Parliament passed the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023 in the last monsoon session while President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent on August 11.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of section 1 of the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023 (20 of 2023), the central government hereby appoints the 1st day of October, 2023, as the date on which the provisions of the said Act shall come into force," according to a notification issued by Mritunjay Kumar Narayan, registrar general and census commissioner.

The law will provide for use of the birth certificate as a single document to prove the date and place of birth of a person born on or after the date of commencement of the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Act, 2023, for admission to an educational institution, issuance of driving licence, preparation of voter list, marriage registration, appointment to a post in central or state government or a local body or public sector undertaking or in any statutory or autonomous body under the central or state government.

It will help create a national and state-level database of registered births and deaths which eventually would ensure efficient and transparent delivery of public services and social benefits, and digital registration.

The legislation will facilitate the insertion of provisions for digital registration and electronic delivery of certificates of births and deaths for the benefit of the public at large to create a national and state-level database of registered births and deaths which would help in updating other databases resulting in efficient and transparent delivery of public services and social

benefits. The law will provide for the issuance of a passport, Aadhaar number and any other purpose as may be determined by the central government to enhance public convenience and to avoid multiplicity of documents to prove date and place of birth in the country, according to the statement of objects and reasons of the legislation.

The Act provides for change of the ordering authority from magistrate of the first class or presidency magistrate to district magistrate or sub-divisional magistrate or an executive magistrate authorised by the district magistrate in the case of delayed information of any birth or death to the registrar after one year of its occurrence and submission of self-attested document instead of an affidavit made before a notary public in the case of delayed information of any birth or death to the registrar after 30 days but within one year of its occurrence.

The legislation provides for facilitating the registration process of adopted, orphan, abandoned, surrendered, surrogate child and child to a single parent or unwed mother and makes it mandatory for all medical institutions to provide a certificate as to the cause of death to the registrar and a copy of the same to the nearest relative. It provides for the appointment of special "sub-registrars" in the event of disaster or epidemic for speedy registration of deaths and issue of certificates, to collect Aadhaar numbers of parents and informants, if available, in case of birth registration.

It will also ensure addressing the grievances of the general public aggrieved by any action or order of the registrar or district registrar and enhance the penalties provided in the Act. Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai had said in Lok Sabha that the original Act had not been amended since its inception and to keep pace with the societal change and technological advancements during the period of its operation and to make it more citizen-friendly, there is a need to amend the Act. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Modi fires fresh salvo

have to thwart their attempt," he further said. The Prime Minister's attack on the Opposition bloc followed DMK leader and Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin's controversial statement that Sanatan Dharma is against social justice and should be eradicated. A Raja, another DMK leader, likened Sanatan Dharma to diseases. The heads of the people of the country are high and their chests are filled with pride due to the success of the G-20, he said.

"The credit does not go to Modi. The credit goes to 140 crore people....Every child in the villages was aware of the G-20. It has bolstered their self-confidence. It was the team spirit that made it successful," Modi added.

Targeting the Congress without naming it, he said those who ruled Madhya Pradesh for a long time did nothing, but only indulged in corruption and crime. "Criminals held sway in the state earlier. But after we (BJP) were given the chance (to rule), the lawlessness and corruption have disappeared," Modi said. With the change in the atmosphere, industrialists are investing in the state, he added. Madhya Pradesh, once one of the most lagged states, is now going to scale newer heights, Modi said.

The country has come out of a mindset of slavery and the new India is marching ahead with pride, he said. His government will provide 75 lakh new gas connections to women in the country so that every household has cooking gas, the prime minister said. "Projects of ₹ 50,000 crore are being set up in Madhya Pradesh, which will give an impetus to the state's development," he said.

Underlining the importance of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', the prime minister underlined the need to reduce imports and pointed out that India is dependent on foreign countries for petrol, diesel and other petrochemical products.

The petrochemical complex at Bina Refinery will be a step forward in the direction of making the country self-reliant, he said. "The petrochemical complex....will spur growth in the entire region and take development to new heights," Modi said, adding that not only it will give rise to new industries, but also benefit small farmers and entrepreneurs and create thousands of opportunities for the youth.

His government has eliminated middlemen in government schemes, he said, citing the example of the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi under which eligible farmers get ₹ 28,000 directly in their bank accounts. The government has spent more than ₹ 2,60,000 crore on this scheme, he noted.

It has also made efforts to reduce the input costs of farmers and provide cheap fertilizers, spending more than ₹ 10 lakh crore in nine years, Modi said.

A bag of urea which costs farmers in the United States up to ₹ 3,000 is available for less than ₹ 300 for Indian farmers, he said. "Who knows the importance of irrigation better than Bundelkhand," the PM said as he highlighted irrigation projects carried out in the region by the "double-engine government." The Ken-Betwa river link will benefit the region, Modi said. Tap (piped) water was supplied to some ten crore new families in the country in just four years, while 65 lakh families received piped water for the first time in Madhya Pradesh alone, he said.

"In Bundelkhand, work is also being done on a large scale on creating water sources under the Atal Ground-Water Scheme," Modi said.

The 500th birth anniversary of Rani Durgavati, a tribal ruler who attained martyrdom while fighting the Mughals, will be celebrated in a grand manner on October 5, he said. Governor Mangubhai Patel, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri were present at the function. Starting with his visit to the state on September 17 last year when he released translocated Namibian cheetahs in the Kuno National Park, this was Modi's eighth visit to Madhya Pradesh in the last one year.

The Congress meanwhile, hit back at the Prime Minister after he dubbed the INDIA bloc parties as "ghamandia", accusing him of using a government function to abuse the opposition. "The PM is back to doing what he does best—insult. He repeated his abuse of INDIA parties as so-called Ghamandia parties," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said on X.

"Look, who's talking! The man who uses the occasion of a government function to abuse the Opposition. Stooping to his level, one could easily say he heads the GA-NDA coalition—Gautam Adani's NDA," the Congress leader alleged.

The Congress has been attacking the BJP over the Adani issue and accusing the Prime Minister of not initiating a probe against the Adani Group after allegations of irregularities and stock price manipulation cropped up in the wake of a US research report, a charge denied by the Adani group. (PTI)

15 people arrested for

The arrests were made from Hailakandi town, Panchgram, Katlicherra, Algapur, Lala, Ramnathpur and Balaipur areas of the district, Baruah said. The arrested persons were produced in a court on Thursday and remanded to police custody for interrogation. The state government began a massive crackdown on child marriage in February this year, arresting over 3,000 people, which included men who had married minors, family members and qazis, who had forced minor girls to enter matrimony illegally. Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on September 10 announced that the state would launch the second round of its crackdown against child marriage within the next few days, during which he said another 3,000 people would be arrested. (PTI)

Revamped administrative structure

and education will shortly notify the new sub-divisions as per the reworked boundaries. The CM said construction of new buildings for the headquarters of the sub-districts will commence immediately in places where there is consensus on the location and Rs 5 crore each has already been sanctioned for the purpose. "In sub-districts where there is dispute on the location of the headquarters, the office of the ADC will function from the DC's office for the time being," he added. Sarma also said the ADC will be the signing authority as the 'principal circle officer' in land-related documents under his or her jurisdiction. He said sub-districts have not been formed in the Sixth Schedule areas at present, but discussions are on how to take it forward. In case of Bajali, which was initially announced as a new district but notified as a sub-district, Sarma said 'some difficulties' are there and work is on to declare it a full-fledged district within 15-20 days. (PTI)

Indian-origin leaders shine

Priyanka Radhakrishnan is the first person of Indian origin to become a Minister in New Zealand. Born in Chennai to Malayali parents, she is currently the Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector. Christine Carla Kangeloo, the president-elect of Trinidad and Tobago, was born into an Indo-Trinidadian family.

Pritam Singh, an Indian-origin lawyer, and author, has been serving as Leader of the Opposition in Singapore since 2020. Devanand "Dave" Sharma became the first person of Indian origin to become a Member of the Australian Parliament in 2019. Mohamed Irfan Ali, the President of Guyana, was born into a Muslim Indo-Guyanese family in Leonora. Pravind Jugnauth has been serving as the prime minister of Mauritius since January 2017. He was born into a Hindu Yaduvanshi family in 1961. His great-grandfather migrated to Mauritius from the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in the 1870s. Prithviraj Singh Roopun, the president of Mauritius since 2019, was born in an Indian Arya Samaj Hindu family.

Chandrikapersad "Chan" Santokhi has been the president of Suriname since 2020. Santokhi was born in 1959 into an Indo-Surinamese Hindu family in Lelydorp. Wavel Ramkalawan has been serving as the president of Seychelles since October 2020. His grandfather was from Bihar.

According to the 2021 Indianopora government leaders List, more than 200 leaders of Indian heritage have ascended to the highest echelons of public service in 15 countries across the globe, with over 60 of them holding Cabinet positions.

With more than 32 million people of Indian origin (PIOs) globally, according to India's Union ministry of external affairs, Indians are the largest community population in the world. (PTI)

No decision yet on simultaneous polls: Reddy

HYDERABAD, Sept 14: Telangana BJP president G K Reddy on Thursday said Assembly polls in the state would be held as per schedule as no decision has been taken yet on holding simultaneous elections. The union minister said the central government has not taken any decision so far as the high-level committee headed by former President Ramnath Kovind to examine simultaneous polls to Lok Sabha, state Assemblies and Panchayats has not submitted its recommendations. It will take time for the report to come, he said. Reddy was responding to a query about the reported comments of state finance minister T Rao that people are with BRS even if the BJP decides to hold simultaneous elections. The union minister sought to know how the country would develop if a lot of time (by governments and others) is spent on elections. "There are many prominent persons in it (committee). Debate needs to take place. That's our wish. But, Telangana elections will happen at the right time.... Telangana polls and simultaneous elections (one nation, one election) are not related," he told reporters here. "We will take part in elections as per the schedule without being concerned about simultaneous elections. We will dislodge this corrupt and family-based party (ruling BRS)," he said. (PTI)

National Institute of Virology sends mobile BSL-3 lab to Kozhikode for early detection of Nipah virus

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: The ICMR's National Institute of Virology in Pune on Thursday sent its mobile BSL-3 laboratory to Kozhikode in Kerala to test samples for Nipah virus in the district itself after five cases, including two deaths, were reported there.

A team of experts from the Department of Animal Husbandry has also been deployed to assist the state in the surveillance of animals, official sources told PTI. Apparently, samples will be collected from bats to check for the presence of the Nipah virus.

The brain-damaging virus has killed two people and infected three others in Kozhikode district so far. On Wednesday, a 24-year-old health worker became Kerala's fifth confirmed Nipah case since its recent outbreak.

"The ICMR's mBSL-3, which is the first biosafety level-3 containment mobile laboratory of South Asia, has been stationed at Kozhikode. It will help in early testing and detection of the infection at the district itself," an official source said.

So far, the samples were being sent to the National Institute of Virology in Pune.

The mobile laboratory was set



up in February last year to investigate newly emerging and reemerging viral infections that are highly infectious and of lethal potential to human beings.

Union minister of state for health Bharati Pravin Pawar visited the ICMR's National Institute of Virology in Pune and held a review meeting in view of the Nipah virus cases reported in Kozhikode.

A five-member central team comprising experts from the National Centre for Disease Control, RML Hospital and NIMHANS has been stationed in Kerala to take stock of the situation and assist the state government in the management of the Nipah virus infection.

The Kerala government on Thursday said there was no need to be apprehensive about the Nipah outbreak in Kozhikode district but caution needs to be exercised by people as they go about their daily activities.

The Kerala government on Thursday said the monoclonal antibody required for treatment of those infected by the Nipah virus has arrived in the state. State health minister Veena George said a meeting was held between the Principal Secretary of the Health Department and the Union Health Ministry earlier in the day and now the monoclonal antibody has arrived. (PTI)

Story of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will echo with people across globe: Shyam Benegal

MUMBAI, Sept 14: Filmmaker Shyam Benegal on Thursday said he is honoured to narrate the story of Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through his film "Mujib - The Making of a Nation".

A Bangladesh-India co-production, "Mujib - The Making of a Nation" was screened at 48th annual Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) on Wednesday evening.

The upcoming biographical drama narrates the life story of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first president of Bangladesh and later its prime minister who was assassinated with most of his family in 1975. Benegal, 88, who was unable to attend the screening, said he was happy to present "Mujib - The Making of a Nation" at the prestigious festival.

"Delighted to be unveiling the film at this prestigious festival. I'm sure the story of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his journey to create the Nation of Bangladesh will echo with the people and communities across the globe. It has been an honour to be able to tell this inspiring story of the making of a nation," the veteran filmmaker said in a statement.

"Mujib - The Making of a Nation" is a collaboration between India's National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) and the Bangladesh Film Development Corporation (BFDC).

Dr Hasan Mahmud, minister of



Information & Broadcasting of Bangladesh, said he was brimming with emotions at the screening of the film inspired by the life of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, popularly known as 'Bangabandhu', under whose leadership Bangladesh attained freedom in 1971.

"I'm grateful to the team from both countries for being able to portray his journey, his unfathomable love and supreme sacrifice for the country and its people. Mr Shyam Benegal is missed immensely as he's not present for the screening," Mahmud said.

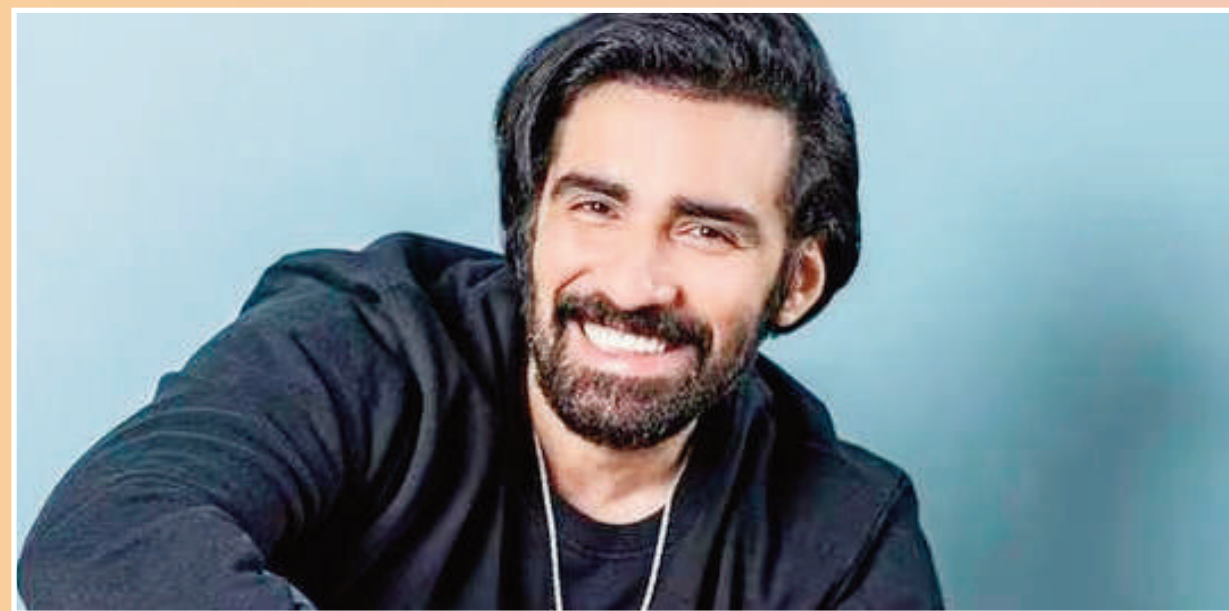
Bangladeshi actor Arifin Shuvo plays the title role in the film, which also stars Nusrat Imrose and Nusrat Faria in the roles of his wife

Renu and Sheikh Hasina, their daughter and the current Prime Minister of Bangladesh, respectively.

Shuvo, who attended the TIFF screening of "Mujib - The Making of a Nation", said it was a great experience to view the film alongside the festival crowd.

"The research, the detailing to look like Mujib is seen on screen. I may not be able to put it in words what a feeling it is to see the film with an audience. It is an honour to play Bangabandhu in this magnificent biopic and to be here to see the response myself. May Mujib continue to touch our hearts and inspire the world the way he always did," he said. (PTI)

ACTOR AVINASH TIWARY ASPIRES TO BE A VERSATILE PERFORMER



MUMBAI, Sept 14: Actor Avinash Tiwary says as an aspiring actor, he wants to have a "range and versatility" which is why he has attempted an array of genre whether it's an intense love story like "Laila Majnu" or his upcoming crime thriller show "Kaala". The actor, who also gained prominence with his role in Anvita Dutt's "Bulbbul", is currently promoting back-to-back OTT productions. "Bambai Meri Jaan" debuted on Prime Video on Thursday, while "Kaala" is set to be released on Disney+ Hotstar on Friday.

"As an aspiring actor, I want to have a range and versatility... These are the things that you went with (to start in the industry). The idea is to just create variety, do good stuff. Hopefully, it reaches out to the world. There's slightly more of an aspiration to reach out to a wider

audience, to the world now because we've the distribution system," Tiwary told PTI in an interview.

The actor said director Bejoy Nambiar first approached him for "Kaala" in 2021 but he couldn't commit at the time.

"I was busy doing something else when he wanted to shoot. Then he came back again saying, 'Are you still open for this?', I said, 'It's been 13 years since I've been trying to work with you and now finally we come together with an idea that's so fresh, like reverse hawala."

"I was glad that he thought of me to headline this. I felt honoured. It made me feel nice about myself as an actor."

Tiwary said he didn't do any research for "Kaala" and instead relied on the script and the director's vision to portray the part of Intelli-

gence Bureau (IB) officer Ritwik Mukherjee.

"This is one of my most spontaneous performances because it was (about) going by the moment. I felt we were building this while making it. For me, it was a different kind of process. I would like to believe there are moments of honesty there," he added.

Following the two OTT shows, Tiwary will appear in the comedy film, "Madgaon Express", which marks the directorial debut of actor Kunal Kemmu.

"It ('Madgaon Express') is a fun story if it lands properly. I haven't seen the film, but I keep saying this to Kunal, 'if it lands 80 percent of his narration, then we have a winner.' There's also another film but I shall wait for the official announcement," the actor said. (PTI)

VETERAN ACTOR RIO KAPADIA DIES AT 66



MUMBAI, Sept 14: Veteran actor Rio Kapadia, best known for films such as "Dil Chahta Hai", "Chak De! India", and "Happy New Year", passed away after a battle with cancer this afternoon, his friend Faisal

Malik said. He was 66. "He passed away in the afternoon at around 12:30 pm. He was suffering from cancer," Malik told PTI. Kapadia largely played supporting roles in films and TV shows such as "Khuda

Haafiz", "The Big Bull", "Agent Vinod", "Kutumb" and "Sapne Suhane Ladakpan Ke", among others. He was most recently seen in season two of "Made in Heaven", in which he played the father of

Mrunal Thakur's character in the second episode. The last rites of the actor will be held tomorrow at a crematorium in Goregaon, suburban Mumbai. Kapadia is survived by his wife and two children. (PTI)

NFDC ScreenWriters' Lab 2023 unveils 8 writers and scripts from across India

MUMBAI, Sept 14: "Killa" director Avinash Arun's next feature project "Boomerang", National Award-winning cinematographer Savita Singh's "Ballad of the Circus" and Rohan K Mehta's "Absent" are among the eight scripts that have been selected for NFDC Screenwriters' Lab.

The initiative by National Film Development Corporation of India (NFDC) aims to develop, nurture, and promote original voices from all over India, and this time, the stories that the Lab has selected ranges from themes of magic realism, fantasy, horror/thriller, women's empowerment, cross-border politics, LGBTQ+ issues, and mental illness, a release from NFDC said.

In its 16th edition, the NFDC Screenwriters' Lab has selected scripts in multiple languages, including Hindi, Marathi, English, Urdu, Malayalam, Bengali, Odia, and Tibetan.



"We, at NFDC, strongly feel that a well-written script forms the foundation of a compelling story, engaging characters, and meaningful dialogue, all of which are essential elements of a successful film," Prithul Kumar, Managing Director of NFDC, said in a statement.

"We are at the forefront of not only training our writers to better develop

their unique stories, but also pitch them successfully to domestic and international producers and investors at Film Bazaar, while keeping industry trends and practices in mind," he added.

The selected scripts also include -- Sanju Kadu's "Kosla (The Cocoon)", Neha Negi's "Chhawani (Cantt)", Vatsala Patel's "Daant (Bite)", Biswa Ranjan Pradhan's "Pra-

mana Patra" and Diwa Shah's "Chab (Refuge)".

The three-part intensive workshop is an annual programme that offers emerging and established screenwriters an opportunity to fully develop their screenplays under the guidance of acclaimed script experts from India and around the world, according to the release.

Mentors this year include founder of NFDC Screenwriters' Lab Marten Rabarts (New Zealand), Claire Dobbins (Australia), Bikas Mishra (Mumbai), and Ketki Pandit (Pune). Some of the award-winning projects to emerge out of the NFDC Screenwriters' Lab include -- "Lunchbox" (Ritesh Batra), "Lipstick Under My Burkha" (Alankrita Shrivastava), Dum Laga Ke Haisha" (Sharat Katariya), "Titli" (Kanu Behl), "A Death In The Gunj" (Konkona Sen Sharma) and "Bombay Rose" (Gitanjali Rao). (PTI)

HINDI DIWAS

LITERATURE FINDING ITS WAY IN STORIES

MUMBAI, Sept 14: Hindi stories and poems have started gaining popularity in mainstream storytelling in Bollywood and streaming shows, believe actors Vijay Varma and Pankaj Tripathi on the occasion of Hindi Diwas on Thursday.

Hindi poet Badri Narayan's 'Prem Patra' was a scene-stealer of sorts when it played during a crucial moment in the Prime Video series "Dahaad" in which Varma played a Hindi teacher who moonlights as a serial killer.

In the same show, poem 'Machli', by Danyanti Bali, is painted on one of the doors of the van driven by Varma's character.

One of his other shows "KaalKoot" featured Tigman-

shu Dhulia as Varma's professor-poet father. The actor once again got to recite a Hindi poem. "In one year, I've had two projects, where my character recites poetry. I believe things are changing. I felt very good that I got to play a Hindi literature teacher in 'Dahaad'. When my character had to recite a Hindi poem, I prepared for it. "I felt it is a poem about 'prem ras' but in the show, the poetry recitation comes at a time when something horrible is happening. So, I recited it in a different way, and that connected well," the 37-year-old actor added.

Tripathi noted that new age screenwriters in the film business have an awareness about Hindi literature and are

shrewdly figuring out how to incorporate it into their narratives. "The young writers are very well read, be it Amar Kaushik, Sumit Arora and a few others. All the young writers have read literature," the actor told PTI.

In fact, Arora was behind the 'Prem Patra' moment in "Dahaad", the series by Reema Kagti and Zoya Akhtar. He also introduced Wasim Barelvi's lines to promote one of the songs from Shah Rukh Khan-starrer "Jawan".

In a recent interview with PTI, Arora had cited well-known writers such as Harishankar Parsai, Sharad Joshi, Ravindranatha Tyagi, Shrilal Shukla and Manohar Shyam Joshi as his childhood influ-

ences. "I studied in a Hindi medium school. I didn't know how to speak in English. My mother gave me the habit of reading from an early age. I used to read stories from (magazines) 'Nandan', then I graduated to literary magazines like 'Hans', 'Gyanodaya', and others. "By the age of 17 and 18, I had columns published in Hindi newspapers. Satire was my forte," Arora, a Hindi literature graduate, said.

Tripathi, an ardent lover of rich Indian literature, recently opened a library in his village as a tribute to his late father. The National Award winner believes actors should give importance to literary texts.

"We benefit from it (Hindi literature) in storytelling. Like,

when we read literature, we will be introduced to so many different things from across the world. The aim of literature is to evoke compassion, sympathy, and different human emotions in a reader.

"As an actor, it is important to read literature for your growth. Writers and directors have to read it, but I believe even for actors, it is important to read and understand poetry and literature. I do it," he said.

Varma, who played a cop in the JioCinema series "KaalKoot", believes poetry is the finest method to generate emotions.

"In 'Kaal Koot', my father was a professor and a poet, so I had the opportunity to read his poems in the show. There's a

poem, which is a love letter from his late father for his mother, it is a very personal thing. I believe there's a lot of impact in poetry, like you can evoke so many emotions. I believe there should be scope for many more poems (in pop-culture)," he added.

According to Varma, Hindi literature played a huge role when he was starting out as a theatre artist in Hyderabad.

"I started my career with theatre, there our teachers would emphasise more on literature, it was rather believed that 'If you are not good at literature, then you can't become a good actor.'" In many parts of the country, speaking English is seen as a status symbol and actor Richa Chudha said she

finds it strange that people don't like to talk in Hindi.

"It is important to know English or any language, like French, German, or Spanish, but I don't understand why people in Mumbai don't talk much in Hindi. Like, there are people in Mumbai, who often say that, 'We talk to our maid and driver in Hindi, and with our kids in English.' I feel very angry about it. If you speak in Hindi that doesn't mean you don't know English," the 36-year-old actor told PTI.

"Jo bhi samaj apni bhasha, apni pehchan ko chodega woh kahi na kahi directionless ho jayega (Any society that abandons its language and identity is bound to be directionless)," she added. (PTI)

THE MANIPURI ATHLETE HAD FIRST ATTEMPTED IT AT THE NATIONAL C'SHIPS IN FEB 2020

Clock ticking as 90kg snatch lift continues to elude Mirabai Chanu

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: Mirabai Chanu has been a frontrunner in the women's 49kg category for years but with an increasing number of weightlifters breaching the elusive 90kg mark, the pressure is mounting on the Tokyo Olympics medallist to nail the coveted lift.

As many as seven athletes, including five in this current Olympic cycle, have lifted 90kg or more in the snatch section.

Chanu herself has been working to cross the mark since 2019. However, the much-anticipated 90kg snatch lift has eluded her in her two attempts in the past four years. The Manipuri athlete had first attempted it at the National Championships in February 2020 and then again at last year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. Chanu's personal best in the section remains an underwhelming 88kg and the gulf between her competitors is increasing every tournament.

The Chinese duo of Tokyo Olympics gold medallist Hou Zhihui and two-time world champion Jiang Huihua has been consistently lifting in excess of 90kg at tournaments.



The return of Thai weightlifters after severing a two-year suspension has made the field more competitive with both Thanyathorn Sukcharoen and Surodchana Khambao lifting 90kg at the Asian Championships in May this year. European champion Mihaela Valentina Cambei (92kg) of Romania and North Korea's Ri Song Gum (91kg) are the other athletes to have snatched more

than 90kg.

The Asian Games, starting in Hangzhou, China on September 23, will be the perfect opportunity for the star Indian lifter to successfully hoist 90kg or more.

"We are aiming to cross the 90kg mark (in snatch) at the Asian Games. It's been a while since we have been trying to get over that line," India head coach Vijay Sharma told PTI.

Chanu is at par with her oppo-

nents in the clean and jerk section, although her world record lift of 119kg in the section was broken by Huihua, who lifted 120kg at the World Championships this month. But her snatch performances have been found wanting and often brought down her total weight. The former world champion has prioritised the Asian Games this year as a medal in the continental event is the only silverware

missing from her decorated trophy cabinet.

With two athletes each from weightlifting powerhouses like China and Thailand competing at the Asiad, Chanu will have to elevate her game to stand on the podium in Hangzhou.

Chanu had confessed that the 90kg lift had become somewhat of a mental block last year, ahead of the CWG.

"To reach 96kg, it will take some time and it will be a little difficult for me. But I can reach 93-94kg," she said.

Additionally, crossing the 90kg mark will also be a huge confidence booster for the 29-year-old ahead of next year's Paris Olympics. But lifting close to twice your body weight is easier said than done, especially for Chanu, who struggles with a shoulder imbalance issue that affects her snatch.

Zhihui holds the snatch world record -- 96kg -- in the lightest women's Olympic category, which is 8kg more than Chanu's personal best.

"We have to keep in mind Mira's body as well. She is aging, and the chances of injuries increase with age. So we have to be careful with the workload," Sharma said. (PTI)

It's good to have four fit fast bowlers going into World Cup: Mhambrey



COLOMBO, Sept 14: India bowling coach Paras Mhambrey on Thursday said the return of Jasprit Bumrah has beefed up their pace unit and it is pleasing to have four fully-fit fast bowlers going into next month's World Cup. During the recent tour to Ireland, Bumrah wore India colours after a long injury layoff, and impressed with his intensity during the ongoing Asia Cup as well.

"We have been following Bumrah's progress from the NCA, and we are very happy with the report that we have got."

"Now, we have four quality bowlers, and it is always great to have those options. The problem of plenty is always good," Mhambrey said ahead of India's final Super 4 match against Bangladesh on Friday.

However, India's first-choice pace attack is now centred around Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj and Hardik Pandya, forcing the management to bench Mohammed Shami.

"It's not very easy to drop someone like Shami. The experience that he has and the performance that he has done for the country is phenomenal. It's never easy to have that kind of a conversation (dropping a player)," he said.

Mhambrey said while it was a difficult choice, the player concerned has been conveyed clearly about the team decision. "But we are clear in the way we have gone

about the conversation with the players and they have shown confidence in us."

"Players know any decision that we take and they know that it is for the benefit of the team," said Mhambrey.

The former India pacer was also delighted to see the strides Pandya has taken as a bowler in recent times.

"I am very happy with the way Hardik has shaped up, something that we have worked on for a long time. We have been managing his workload, making sure that he is fit and able to achieve what we expect out of him."

"Once he hits 140 kmph he is a different bowler. From the team perspective it's a wicket-taking option that we have," added Mhambrey. Mhambrey also said the Indian team has undertaken the process of developing the bowling skills of some batsmen, so that they have more options to choose from when needed.

Tilak Varma features prominently in that scheme.

"I have been working with Tilak since his U-19 days. We were in South Africa and we realised he has bowling skills. We are working on it consistently."

"If the captain gets confidence that he can bowl one over and deliver, this one over can turn into two overs. But it depends on circumstances where we need that extra bowler," he said. (PTI)

16-yr-old Lamine Yamal seeks 1st goal with Barca vs Betis

BARCELONA, SPAIN, Sept 15: Two years after Lionel Messi left Barcelona, the Spanish club hopes it has found its next star after the emergence of 16-year-old Lamine Yamal.

Yamal returns to Barcelona after an impressive debut for Spain over the past week, when the sleek forward became the youngest player to score in a European Championship qualifier. He also became the youngest player to score for Spain's national team. "Lamine has this spark, that brilliance that very few

players have," Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said about the teenager. "We must be prudent, and give him time and be patient. He can achieve many important things in soccer as long as he is humble and keeps his feet on the ground, which is very important at his age." Yamal had already set another milestone when he became the youngest starter for Barcelona in a win over Cadiz. He has yet to score for his club, but came very close in a 4-3 win at Villarreal. In that game two weeks ago, he assisted on a goal by Gavi,

hit the woodwork, and helped produce a winner for Robert Lewandowski, who finished off the rebound after a shot by Yamal.

Not bad for a player who had yet to turn 3 years old when Barcelona coach Xavi Hernández helped Spain win the 2010 World Cup.

Yamal, who was born near Barcelona to a mother from Equatorial Guinea and a father from Morocco, caught the eye of Xavi when he was playing for Barcelona's youth sides last season. His senior team debut in

April made Yamal the youngest player to appear for Barcelona at 15 years, 9 months, 16 days.

His breakout this season has coincided with Barcelona loaning out Ansu Fati, who was considered the club's brightest young star before he sustained a serious leg injury.

Yamal now looks set to be a regular starter in a young Barcelona lineup that also includes 19-year-olds Gavi and Alejandro Balde and 20-year-old Pedri González.

Barcelona hosts Real Betis in

the Spanish league on Saturday trailing leader Real Madrid by two points. The surprising Girona is level on points with Barcelona before it visits Granada on Monday.

Jude Bellingham will be aiming to keep up his superb start since joining Madrid when it hosts Real Sociedad on Sunday.

The 20-year-old midfielder has scored five goals in four games -- and has yet to go scoreless -- to keep Madrid perfect through four rounds. He added another goal for England this week in a 3-1 win over Scotland in a friendly. (AP)

Our hearts and souls are with people back home: Morocco captain Tahiri

LUCKNOW, Sept 14: The devastation back home, caused by a deadly earthquake that killed close to 3000 people, has jolted the Moroccan players ahead of their Davis Cup tie against India but visiting skipper Mehdi Tahiri said his team is determined to do well against a strong home side.

The 6.8 magnitude earthquake in the High Atlas Mountains on Friday left 2901 people dead and more than 5000 injured apart from causing massive destruction.

The same day the Morocco Davis Cup team was on its way to India for the World Group II tie.

With moist eyes and a soft voice, skipper Tahiri expressed helplessness when he addressed the media on the eve of the draw.

"Our hearts and souls are with the people back home. It's very difficult for us to be away in this tough situation. A lot of people have lost their families. We wanted to help people, but unfortunately, we are here," said Tahiri.

"But we have to take it in our stride. We are away, we can't do much. Our prayers are with them," he said.

Morocco will be the underdog side in this tie with India possessing better singles players in their line up but Tahiri said they do not feel threatened by the home team.

Sumit Nagal, at 156, will be the highest ranked singles player in the two-day tie while Morocco have their best player Elliot Benchetrit, ranked 465 in the world. Benchetrit, though, has the exposure of playing at the highest level, having played in three Grand Slam events in his career.

Their next best is Yassine Dlimi, placed as low as 557. Adam Moundir is further behind at 779 and the remaining two players -- Walid Ahouda and Younes Lalami Laaroussi -- do not figure even in top-1000. "Davis Cup is not played on rankings," countered Tahiri. "We have come all the way here to compete. We may be the

underdogs, but matches are not won on paper by rankings, it's won on courts. We will fight hard," he said.

India skipper Rohit Rajpal said he won't take Morocco lightly. "Yes we are a stronger side but extremely humid conditions are a big challenge here. We were getting drenched even when we were just standing and not playing. That's why we have changed the timing of the matches."

"We are not doing those crazy training sessions, we have to save enough (energy) for the matches," he said.

Rajpal admitted that India needs to produce better singles players as the country has slipped to World Group II for the first time since the new format was launched in 2019.

"Not enough singles players have come. I feel Somdev and Yuki were the last. Also, we have run into some very tough teams. A captain is as good as his players," he said. (PTI)

LUCKNOW, Sept 14: Sweating profusely Rohan Bopanna says, "If I am sweating and changing my T-shirt during a training session, something is seriously wrong."

If Thursday's training session is an indication of what lies ahead for the Indian Davis Cup team in the World Group II tie against Morocco, it will not be an exaggeration to say that more than the rivals it's going to be the treacherous conditions that will test the fitness of the home players. The severe humidity has turned the Mini Stadium into a 'mini cauldron'.

Bopanna's teammates know well that he does not sweat much, not even in hot and humid conditions of Chennai.

To drive home his point, the 43-year-old told PTI, "For the first time in 20 years, Bopanna is sweating. That means it's humid. I played five sets against Brazil in a singles match for four hours in one shirt, but here in half-an-

hour (I am changing), it's not right." Bopanna is playing his last Davis Cup tie for India.

Yuki Bhambhani and Saketh Myneni swiftly looked for a shade after playing a few points and Ramkumar Ramanathan asked the team physio, Yash Pandey, to quickly hand him a gatorade drink.

"I want to stay hydrated," he tells Pandey.

The temperature is only 33 degrees, but it feels like 43. It had rained a few days back in the city, causing such conditions. Though the sun is not harsh, humidity is making it extremely hard for the players. The heat coming off the court is also making the conditions worse.

In such tough weather conditions, a player loses about 2-3 litres of water every hour, along with essential electrolytes like sodium, chloride, potassium and magnesium.

"If the equal amount of water and electrolytes are not replen-

ished, then within 30 minutes the performance will start dropping and eventually they cramp," explained Pandey, who is trying to ensure that the players stay fit and hydrated.

"As physiotherapists, our job is to make sure that the players perform at their peak and prevent any injuries. We are carrying electrolytes and salt tablets to maintain the water and electrolyte balance, using ice towels and ice packs to bring the body temperature down during practice," he said.

Debeshish Das, the other physio attached to the team, said: "Doing ice bath, set at around 10-12 degrees is required for recovery along with pool recovery work."

Considering the weather, the captains agreed to reschedule the match-timings, delaying it by two hours.

On Saturday, the matches will begin at 2 pm instead of 12 noon and on Sunday the matches will

begin at 1 pm instead of 11 am.

While a two-hour delay is not expected to make much difference, India coach Zeeshan Ali says the decision still makes sense.

"The change in timing will definitely help the players who will be playing the second singles because what could have been a 2 pm start will now be a 4 pm start. The conditions are tough for both teams. It will come down to the fitness aspect. It will be a combination of fitness and tennis we are going to witness in the next two days," Zeeshan said.

Zeeshan said the players are professional, and adapting to different weather conditions should not be an issue.

"Whoever handles the heat better on the day will make the difference (in outcome)," the coach said.

Yuki said the conditions are certainly tough, but not the worst. (PTI)

ESPORTS TO BREAKDANCING, HANGZHOU WILL SET THE TREND FOR FUTURE OF SPORT

NEW DELHI, Sept 14: Two sports disciplines including esports, which is becoming a rage among youngsters across the globe, will make their debut at the Asian Games as Hangzhou prepares to host the quadrennial extravaganza later this month.

Originally scheduled to take place last year, the continental showpiece will commence on September 23 with esports along with breakdancing making an entry into the curriculum as the Games expand to 40 sports (61 disciplines) spread over venues across six districts.

The decision to include esports and breakdancing in the Asian Games programme came as late as December 2020, while chess and cricket will return to the continental showpiece after the 2010 Guangzhou and 2014 Incheon Games respectively.

ESPORTS: It was added as a demonstration event during the 2018 Asian Games and, following

the buzz it created in Jakarta, the decision to include it as a full-fledged medal event in the Hangzhou edition was taken.

Esports mimics the experience of watching professional sporting event, except that instead of watching a physical event, spectators watch video gamers compete against each other.

Competition in seven video games -- Dota 2, FIFA Online 4, League of Legends, Arena of Valor, Dream Three Kingdoms, PUBG Mobile and Street Fighter 5 -- will take place at the China Hangzhou Esports Centre.

India is sending a strong all-male 15-member contingent that includes stalwarts such as Charanjot Singh, Krish Gupta and Ketan Goyal, among others. India's best chances of a medal are in FIFA Online 4, where they are ranked 13th in the world and third in Asia behind Singapore and Saudi Arabia.

Squad: FIFA Online 4: Charan-

jot Singh and Karman Singh Tikka; Street Fighter V: Mayank Prajapati and Ayan Biswas; Sanindhya Malik, Mihir Ranjan, Aditya Selvaraj, Aakash Shandilya and Akshaj Shenoy and Samarth Arvind Trivedi; DOTA 2: Darshan Bata, Krish Gupta, Abhishek Yadav, Ketan Goyal and Shubham Goli.

BREAKDANCING: The sport, also known as 'breaking', will give exponents from Asia the much-needed exposure ahead of next year's Paris Olympic Games, where it will debut as a medal sport. While critics have mixed opinion whether it is a sport or a dance form, the fact that it is now part of both the Asian Games and Olympic Games curriculum means the Olympic Council of Asia and the International Olympic Committee have recognised it as a discipline that straddles the line between sport and art form. "Breaking" blends artistry and dance with acrobatic moves



and was announced as part of the Paris programme in late 2020. There will be two events contested at Hangzhou Asian Games -- men's and women's breaking.

India will go unrepresented in the competition as the sports ministry did not clear a four-member

contingent for not fulfilling the selection criterion.

CHESS: The game of 64 squares will be making a much-anticipated comeback into the Asian Games after 13 years. Its inclusion after missing out from the 2014 Incheon and 2018

Jakarta Asian Games couldn't have come at better time for India given that its band of young players, including the likes of R Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi, have hogged limelight of late. Chess was contested at the 2006 Doha Asian Games where India topped the medals tally with two gold in women's individual rapid (Koneru Humpy) and mixed team standard (Krishnan Sasikiran, Pentala Harikrishna and Koneru Humpy). India had a far-from-convincing outing at the 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games with the county managing two bronze.

But following the sparkling performance by the men's trio at the FIDE World Cup recently, and an incredibly strong contingent announced by the All India Chess Federation, the Indians can look forward to recreating the Doha magic.

There will be four events in the discipline at Hangzhou: men's in-

dividual rapid, women's individual rapid, men's team rapid and women's team rapid.

China and India will be the two strongest contenders. The current world champion, China's Ding Liren, will be one of the favourites for the top podium place, alongside Vidit Gujrathi, Gukesh, Erigaisi FIDE World Cup silver medallist Praggnanandhaa. Squad: Men: D Gukesh, Vidit Gujrathi, Arjun Erigaisi, Pentala Harikrishna, Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa. Women: Koneru Humpy, Harika Dronavalli, Vaishali Rameshbabu, Vantika Agrawal, Savitha Shri B.

CRICKET: The sport is returning to the Asian Games after being left out in 2018 Jakarta. Cricket was part of two editions of the continental games -- 2010 Guangzhou and 2014 Incheon -- but the BCCI did not field its teams citing prior commitments. (PTI)

India's workload management plans in focus against Bangladesh; Shami may get a look-in

COLOMBO, Sept 14: Having already sealed a place in the final, India will be tempted to test their fringe players when they face an already knocked out Bangladesh in a Super Four match of the Asia Cup here on Friday.

The Rohit Sharma-led outfit will think deep whether to give as much game time as possible to its first-choice team or give an opportunity to some of the fringe players ahead of the World Cup at home next month. The question of workload management is pertinent particularly in the case of bowlers.

Jasprit Bumrah has bowled just 12 overs so far in the Asia Cup — five against Pakistan and seven against Sri Lanka. He did not play against Nepal.

So, it could boil down to Bumrah's choice whether he wants to have a crack at batsmen in one more match or take a step back and return for the summit clash on September 17. On the other hand, Mohammed Siraj has bowled 19.2 overs and Hardik Pandya 18 overs in this tournament.

It might not appear heavy numbers but the humidity in Colombo has been energy-sapping, so the team management might just give a break to one of them.

In that context, it would not be a major surprise if Shami replaces Siraj against Bangladesh. It will also help the senior pacer to register some valuable real-match time under his belt before the quadrennial big bash, starting October 5.

It is important because Shami



has now been used as a back-up seamer behind Bumrah, Siraj and Pandya.

But the dwindling bowling graph of Axar Patel will concern the thinktank as he has been marked as a cover for Ravindra Jadeja.

The left-arm spinner has neither been able to take wickets and contain the run-flow, an area where Jadeja excels.

Axar has played seven ODIs this year, and managed to take only three wickets and his economy is hovering around six. He will need a significant lift in his game, and

immediately too!

KL Rahul's return to full fitness has straightened a lot of creases for the team management. He has batted with fluency and kept wickets with agility here.

After the match against Sri Lanka, Rahul had spoken at length about the role clarity given to him by the team management, that he would be India's premier wicket-keeper-cum-middle-order batsman. So, it can be assumed that Rahul is all set to continue his duty against Bangladesh as well.

But Shreyas Iyer's fitness will be keenly watched as he missed

the Super 4 matches against Pakistan and Sri Lanka with back spasm.

However, Shreyas batted and bowled at nets on Thursday without any visible discomfort, and that should come as a pleasing development for the team.

But if the management wants to give some extra time for the Mumbaier to recuperate, they can weigh their options between Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav.

While Kishan has been impressive in ODIs so far, Suryakumar's numbers were quite disappointing in the format.

Despite that, Suryakumar has been viewed as an important cog in India's white ball establishment, and the thinktank would want to give another chance for him to push his case.

When it comes to the Bangladesh camp, they will not have the services of wicketkeeper batsman Mushfiqur Rahim for this match.

Rahim had flown back home after their Super 4 match against Sri Lanka, which they lost by 21 runs.

In the absence of Rahim, Litton Das is expected to keep wickets.

However, their captain Shakib al Hasan has rejoined the team after returning home to spend some time with his family.

Teams: India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Shubman Gill, Suryakumar Yadav, Tilak Varma, Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya (vice-captain), Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Kuldeep Yadav, Prasidh Krishna.

Bangladesh: Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Anamul Haque Bijoy, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Towhid Hridoy, Afif Hossain Dhrubo, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Nasum Ahmed, Shak Mahedi Hasan, Naim Sheikh, Shamim Hossain, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Tossin Hasan Sakib.

Match starts at 3 PM IST. (PTI)

Uncertainty over coach Stimac accompanying team Chhetri only notable face in 18-member Indian football squad for Asian Games



NEW DELHI, Sept 14: Veteran striker Sunil Chhetri was the only notable face in the 18-member Indian squad for the Hangzhou Asian Games as All India Football Federation (AIFF) finally managed to stitch a second-rung team, but there is still a big question mark on head coach Igor Stimac accompanying the team.

Most of the clubs had shown unwillingness to release the 22 players named in the Indian squad as the Asian Games' football competition schedule clashes with the ISL, which starts on September 21.

This could be seen as a massive loss of face for AIFF president and BJP leader Kalyan Chaudhary, who had actually made hectic parleys with the ministry to send the team despite not meeting the government criteria to compete in the quadrennial extravaganza.

After prolonged parleys, the AIFF was able to announce an under-strength team made up of nine players from the original 22, including Chhetri, while the remaining were made up of inexperienced players from the clubs.

But there are doubts whether Stimac will travel to Hangzhou at the helm of such an under-strength team. He had earlier said that the Asian Games was a priority.

Initially, the AIFF said through a press release that the team will comprise 17 players but later added Mohun Bagan's Deepak Tangri in the squad.

It could be a rare instance of India sending an under-strength football team in a major competition. The only saving grace was the inclusion of the current Indian football poster boy Chhetri, who recently became a father.

The two other senior footballers — defender Sandesh Jhingan of FC Goa and goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu of Bengaluru FC — were not released by their clubs.

Azfar Noorani of Mumbai Kenkre FC, which played in the 2022-23 I-League but were relegated to second division, was also named in the team.

The national federation, which was able to stitch together the team just three days before its departure for China, still thanked the Indian Super League clubs and the FSDI "for coordinating with it for the release of players".

The Indian team is scheduled to begin its Asian Games campaign with a match against China on September 19, followed by games against Bangladesh (September

21) and Myanmar (September 24).

The top two teams from the six groups will make it to the pre-quarterfinals, with four best-ranked third-placed sides also qualifying.

The football team did not meet the qualifying criteria to be part of the Asian Games contingent but got clearance from the sports ministry on the prospect of the best side being picked, with Chhetri, Jhingan and number one goalkeeper Gurpreet in the squad.

But the ISL clubs had other plans as they refused to release their players as doing so would mean missing three to four matches. They are, however, not bound to release the players as the Asian Games did not fall in the FIFA international match window.

A hapless AIFF was even hoping that the ISL clubs would release any 22 players from the registered 50 for the Asian Games to allow the senior men's team to participate in the continental showpiece.

The under-strength team has just two goalkeepers, instead of three in a normal 22-member squad, and it could be problematic if there are injuries during the tournament.

The team will also have to pick 10 outfield players from 16 and any further injury can lead to limiting the number of substitutions and most of the players will have to be on the field for long time.

Bengaluru FC, which had six players in the original 22, refused to release Gurpreet but agreed to Chhetri and Rohit Danu to be with the national team. In the absence of Gurpreet, the Indian goal will be manned by either Gurmeet Singh or Dheeraj Singh Moirangthem.

FC Goa also refused to let go of Jhingan while East Bengal, which had two players in the earlier squad, did not have any in the final team. Mohun Bagan have two players in Sumit Rathi and Tangri while Gurkirat Singh is the lone player from Mumbai City FC. Many of final team players have not played too many matches for their respective ISL clubs and have not been regular first XI players.

The Indian Squad: Gurmeet Singh, Dheeraj Singh Moirangthem, Sumit Rathi, Naren Gahlot, Deepak Tangri, Amarjit Singh Kiyam, Samuel James, Rahul KP, Abdul Raheem Anjukandan, Ayush Dev Chhetri, Bryce Miranda, Azfar Noorani, Rahim Ali, Vincy Baretto, Sunil Chhetri, Rohit Danu, Gurkirat Singh, Aniket Jadhav. (PTI)

CA's mandatory neck guard rule could force Smith and Warner to fall in line



MELBOURNE, Sept 14: Veteran batters Steven Smith and David Warner could be forced to wear neck guards as Cricket Australia has made it mandatory for international and domestic players to do so from October 1.

Under the new playing conditions for 2023-24, every Australian player on international and domestic cricket will be required to wear neck protectors fixed or fitted to the rear of helmets when facing fast or medium pace bowling in all CA-sanctioned competitions, according to cricket.com.au.

The regulation update came a week after all-rounder Cameron Green was struck by a Kagiso Rabada bouncer on the neck guard fixed to his helmet and substituted out of the first ODI against South Africa with concussion at Bloemfontein on September 7.

The move will impact several Australian players, including David Warner and Steve Smith, who have resisted using the neck guards since their introduction in 2015. Usman Khawaja also do not currently wear the protectors when batting. CA will make wearing neck protection at international training and matches mandatory via a change to its clothing and equipment regulations, the report said. The rule does not apply to facing spinners or for wicketkeepers and close-in fielders. CA had recommended the use of neck protectors since their introduction in 2015 following the tragic death of Phillip Hughes but several veteran players have been reluctant to take them up.

Smith had earlier said the neck guards made him "feel claustrophobic". He was not wearing a neck guard when struck by a Jofra Archer delivery at Lord's in the 2019 Ashes.

Warner said in 2016 that he does "not and will not wear" one because it "digs into" his neck and is an "uncomfortable distraction".

Australia international players will now be required to wear neck guards during both home and away matches. Although international umpires won't enforce the regulation like in domestic cricket, players could face sanctions under CA's code of conduct for a breach of clothing and equipment regulations, the report said. Among other changes, CA has removed the COVID-19 substitute rule from its playing conditions in line with the ICC doing the same. (PTI)

Jaydev Unadkat, Jayant Yadav record five-fors in maiden County outings

LONDON, Sept 14: India seamer Jaydev Unadkat and spinner Jayant Yadav made impressive debuts in the English County circuit, taking five-wicket hauls for Sussex and Middlesex respectively.

Unadkat, who could be back in contention for selection in the Indian Test side later this year for the tour of South Africa, took an overall nine wickets for Sussex against Leicestershire to help them win by just 15

runs in a Division Two match.

The left-arm seamer took 3 for 23 in the first innings and returned with figures of 32.4-94-6 in the second essay to help Sussex not only record a narrow win but also revive their hopes of promotion into Division One.

India batter Cheteshwar Pujara, who is also Sussex's captain, scored 26 and 23 in the game and also took a spectacular catch to dis-

miss Leicestershire opener Rishi Patel. Yadav, playing in a Division One game for Middlesex against Lancashire, toiled for his five-wicket haul as he returned with figures of 33-4-131-5 in a drawn game at Manchester.

Meanwhile, also making his County debut this season, leg spinner Yuzvendra Chahal took an overall five wickets — 3/63 and 2/43 — for Kent against Nottinghamshire in a Division One game at Canterbury. (PTI)



Players of Tezpur FC and Morning star Club, Difu play a football match of the Rajen Borthakur Memorial Tezpur Challenge Football Tournament, 2023 organised by Tezpur District Sports Association at Tezpur Polo playground on Thursday. UB Photos

Pak unleash 'slinger' Zaman: From tape ball cricket to ODI cauldron

COLOMBO, Sept 14: The endless chain of fast bowlers that Pakistan has produced over the years has been the envy point of other cricketing nations. Zaman Khan is the latest to join that illustrious line.

But there is a slight difference to Zaman. Perhaps, he is the first slinger fast bowler a La Iasith Malinga to play for Pakistan in international cricket.

Zaman was drafted into Pakistan's Asia Cup squad on Wednesday after Naseem Shah was ruled out due to a shoulder injury.

Now, the cricketing world might be engaged in a frantic Google search to know more about Zaman, but the 21-year-old had to waddle through layers of difficulties to even start playing cricket.

The ever-endearing rags to riches story, if you may. As it happens with many other Pakistan pacers, Zaman too cut his teeth in tape ball cricket in Mirpur, a small village in PoK.

Coming from a family of daily wage workers, Zaman was drawn to cricket from a very young age and found backing from his household to pursue his dream.

"My father and brothers are labourers. I started playing cricket after watching other boys in my street playing that sport. I used to skip classes at Madrasa to play cricket.

"One of my relatives told me to take part in an under-16 trial in my village after seeing how fast I was bowling. Fortunately, I got selected and my journey started," Zaman said in a video posted by PCB.

Zaman took the next step when he was picked in the Pakistan under-19 team to tour Australia, an experience he termed as an eye-opener.

The pacer's first big stage experience came when he was picked by Lahore Qalandars for Pakistan



Super League (PSL) 2022.

It was cathartic for him to rub shoulders with top stars of his country such as Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf.

Zaman made a mighty impression in his first PSL season, taking 18 wickets from 13 matches to finish third on the wicket-takers' chart behind Afridi (20

and leg-spinner Shadab Khan (19).

His effort had played a big role in Lahore winning their maiden PSL title that year.

"When we saw him in the Kashmir T20 league, we wanted to draft him into the side. He was quick and had wonderful yorker, and we thought that he could be a good fit into our team," said Waqas Ahmed, the

bowling coach of Qalandars.

His observation was not far from truth as Zaman made his presence felt in PSL 2023 as well, grabbing 15 wickets from 13 matches.

It helped the Qalandars to retain their title, the first team in the PSL to do so.

"He was a bit raw when he came to us. He has that roundarm action. He was quick alright but he tended to stray the ball down the leg side or way outside the off-stump.

"We worked on the accuracy factor at nets and he is a hardworking boy and a quick learner," said Ahmed.

"Since he has this ability to bowl fast full-length deliveries, we always wanted to use him at the death," Ahmed added.

Zaman's skill was visible when he defended 12 runs in the last over of the PSL 2023 final against Multan Sultans on March 18.

Six days later Zaman made his Pakistan debut in a T20I against Afghanistan at Sharjah. When Pakistan needed a replacement for Naseem, team director Mickey Arthur, a man who has a keen eye for talent, immediately wanted Zaman in the squad.

Zaman was handed his ODI debut too against Sri Lanka here. But more than that, it will be a golden opportunity for him to learn the nuances of his craft from an accomplished performer like Morne Morkel, Pakistan's bowling coach.

"I am super excited to work with a talent like Zaman. I followed him a little bit on TV during the PSL, but it is important for him to find his feet in a big game (against Sri Lanka), a must win for us.

"He is a fine talent. I want to connect with him, build that relationship, and develop him because he is a match winner," said Morkel. (PTI)