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Shah moots pond solution to tame Brahmaputra

Review meeting calls for use of ISRO data for flood, water management

NEW DELHI, June 23: Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday said at least 50 large ponds should be created in the northeast to help tackle floods and develop agriculture, irrigation and tourism.

Chairing a review meeting on preparedness for flood management during the monsoon, Shah also emphasised on optimum use of satellite imagery provided by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for flood and water management.

He also took stock of the preparations to deal with Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF).

Shah said efforts should be made to upgrade the forecast system of water level of rivers for better flood management.

He said at least 50 large ponds should be created in the northeast so that the water of the Brahmaputra can be diverted and stored in these ponds, according to an official statement.

This will help develop agriculture, irrigation and tourism in those areas at a low cost and also help



tackle floods, eventually benefiting the local economy, he added.

Recurring flooding of the Brahmaputra is a major issue for Assam and the northeastern region as it claims scores of lives and inundates thousands of hectares of land every year.

Many people were killed, hundreds rendered homeless and communication lines and road networks snapped in Sikkim and

Uttarakhand in the last few years following flash floods created due to the glacial lake outburst, which has become another major concern for the government during monsoon. The home minister said the natural drainage system should be an integral part of the designs of road construction to deal with their inundation in case of floods.

Shah said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

India's disaster management is moving forward with a 'zero casualty approach'.

He instructed the departments concerned to conduct a detailed study of the recent floods in Sikkim and Manipur and submit a report to the Union home ministry. The home minister said flood monitoring centres of the Central Water Commission (CWC) should be in accordance with the requirements and of international standards. Shah emphasised on the need to integrate weather, rainfall and flood warning related apps developed by various departments.

He also reviewed long-term measures to formulate a comprehensive and far-reaching policy to mitigate the menace of floods in the country, the statement said.

During the meeting, the home minister also reviewed the action taken on the decisions made during last year's meeting. Along with this, new technologies being adopted by all the agencies and the expansion of their network for flood management were also discussed. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC celebrates 73rd foundation day with grandeur

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 23: The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) on Sunday celebrated its 73rd foundation day with grandeur at Sertalin Auditorium, KYF Complex, Taralango.

The event included the presentation of awards and recognition to distinguished personalities and achievers.

On the occasion, the chief executive member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang announced the launch of 'Team Karbi Anglong,' scheduled to commence visiting rural villages from July onwards. The initiative aims to address local issues directly by engaging with village headmen and evaluating the implementation status of government schemes.

"Team Karbi Anglong comprises stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, committed to the betterment of Karbi Anglong. Our goal is to ensure that every village benefits from government initiatives," Ronghang addressed during the open session.

Ronghang also clarified provisions under the 6th Schedule of the



Constitution of India, emphasising the autonomy of KAAC in preparing separate electoral rolls despite the requirement for amendment and government notification.

"Though separate electoral rolls can be prepared by KAAC, the implementing authority is not with the KAAC. As per article 163 (1) of the Constitution of India, the Council of Ministers will aid and advise the Governor. It will go for amendment and government notification then

only it can be implemented," he added.

Regarding recent developments on social media platforms, Ronghang highlighted the enactment of the Criminal Major Act, aimed at combating misinformation and false propaganda.

"Under this Act, those spreading false statements against individuals or communities will face stringent penalties, including imprisonment," he warned. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Two held

GUWAHATI: Two persons were arrested with drugs, cumulatively worth ₹ 8.5 crore, in two operations in Assam's Karimganj district, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday. The two anti-narcotic operations were conducted based on intelligence inputs, he said in a post on X. One person was held with 806 kg of ganja, valued at ₹ 5 crore, in one operation, Sarma said. The second person was apprehended with 10,000 Yaba tablets worth ₹ 3.5 crore, he said. Yaba, which means crazy medicine in Thai, is a combination of methamphetamine and caffeine.

Project review

GUWAHATI: Himanta Biswa Sarma assessed four significant projects totaling ₹ 263 crore during a recent review session, with three projects situated in Guwahati. During the meeting, Sarma examined the progress of four key initiatives in Guwahati: the Guwahati District Library, Rabindra Bhawan, ITA Machkhowa, and the state-of-the-art stadium in Kokrajhar. "Today, HCM Dr. @himantabiswa reviewed four major projects: Guwahati District Library, Rabindra Bhawan, ITA Machkhowa, and the State-of-the-Art Stadium in Kokrajhar," stated a post from the chief minister's office on the microblogging site X.

School upgradation

GUWAHATI: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Sunday the upgradation of 500 schools in the state, each with an investment of ₹ 8 crore. "I reviewed the infrastructural development of schools in Assam. In the first phase, we are upgrading 500 schools across the state with an investment of ₹ 8 crore per school, the highest ever allocation for school infrastructure development in Assam," said CM Sarma. Sarma further stated that he has been engaging with stakeholders to ensure that the state's plans to revolutionize the education sector are progressing well. "In pursuit of educational excellence! Over the last few days, I have engaged with stakeholders to ensure that our plans to revolutionize the education sector are on the right track, which will benefit lakhs of students in the state," Sarma tweeted.

Manipur CM meets Himanta in Assam over Jiribam-Cachar security

IMPHAL, June 23: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh is in Guwahati to discuss security issues along the Jiribam-Cachar inter-state boundary with his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma, an official said on Sunday.

Following incidents of ethnic violence in Manipur's Jiribam in the first week of June, many people from the state have taken refuge in adjoining Cachar district in southern Assam.

To discuss the security situation along the inter-state boundary, Singh, along with senior minister L Susindro Singh, left for Guwahati on Saturday evening, the official said.

The two CMs are also likely to



discuss coordination among police forces to effectively deal with militants active along the inter-state boundary, he said. Singh is likely to return to Manipur on Sunday, another official said.

Sarma had on Saturday asked officials concerned to ensure there is no spillover of Manipur's ethnic violence into Assam and that all hu-

manitarian aid is provided to the people seeking refuge from the neighbouring state.

Tight vigil is being maintained along the Assam-Manipur inter-state boundary and patrolling and area domination is being conducted, a police officer said.

Jiribam, which has a diverse ethnic composition of Meiteis, Muslims, Nagas, Kukis and non-Manipuris, had so far remained unaffected by the ethnic strife that has been raging in Manipur since May last year.

The ethnic conflict between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and hills-based Kukis has led to the deaths of over 200 people, and rendered thousands of people homeless. (PTI)

BJP hits out at INDIA bloc parties over silence on TN hooch tragedy

NEW DELHI, June 23: The BJP on Sunday attacked the INDIA bloc on the hooch tragedy in DMK-ruled Tamil Nadu, saying it hopes the alliance leaders who have not spoken on the issue will at least show repentance by gathering near the Mahatma Gandhi statue in the Parliament complex and observing a moment of silence for the lives lost.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, the party's national spokesperson Sambit Patra also slammed Tamil Nadu chief minister M K Stalin and asked him to clarify if he was "complicit" in the incident which took place in the state's Kallakurichi district.

"More than 56 people have died... many are still critical. More than 40 of those who died consuming spurious liquor are Dalits. This is state-sponsored murder and I am surprised that the Congress' Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Sonia Gandhi, leaders of the DMK and those of other constituents of the 'INDI Alliance' are silent on it," Patra said.

It seems they are silent on this issue as it does not serve their politics, the BJP leader charged.

"When the Parliament session starts tomorrow, I hope INDI AL-

liance leaders will go to Mahatma Gandhi's statue to observe silence, wearing black bands on their arms, and repent for the death of people in the hooch tragedy," Patra said.

"Mahatma Gandhi was against illicit liquor. Gandhiji's statue is waiting for you, his principles are waiting for you," he added. Hitting out at chief minister Stalin, Patra accused his government and leaders of the DMK of being complicit in the hooch tragedy.

"In his first statement, the district collector had initially denied that people died after consuming spurious liquor. He was asked to do so because the Assembly session was scheduled to start the very next day," the BJP leader added, and cited some media reports.

Due to the district collector's denial, those who had stock of the spurious liquor continued consuming it and more than a dozen people died the next day, he added.

"Of course, (Tamil Nadu) government is complicit in this. Look at the behaviour of the chief minister. I am astonished that a tragedy of such a magnitude has struck the state yet the chief minister is absent. Till the time I came to hold this press conference, he had not visited the bereaved family members of those who died," Patra said. (PTI)

CBI files FIR over alleged irregularities in NEET-UG; Gujarat hands over probe to agency

NEW DELHI, June 23: The CBI filed an FIR on Sunday in connection with alleged irregularities in the medical entrance exam NEET-UG held on May 5 on a reference from the Union education ministry, amid nationwide protests and litigation by students for a probe into paper leak claims.

Officials said the ministry alleged in a complaint, now part of the FIR, to the agency that "certain isolated incidents" occurred in a few states during the conduct of the examination.

Giving top priority to the case, the CBI has sent special teams to Godhra and Patna, where cases of question paper leaks have been registered by police, they said.

The Gujarat government, meanwhile, issued a notification on Sunday, handing over the probe to the CBI. Additional Chief Secretary A K Rakesh issued the notification handing over the case registered at the Godhra Taluka police station on May 8 under IPC sections related to criminal conspiracy, cheating and criminal breach of trust among others.

The central agency plans to take over the investigation of the cases registered by the police in Gujarat and Bihar, the officials said.

The CBI action came a day after the ministry announced it would hand over the probe into the alleged

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 23: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal asserted on Sunday that the abrogation of Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled the long-standing aspiration of Syama Prasad Mookerjee.

Sonowal made these remarks while paying homage to Syama Prasad Mookerjee, revered as a stalwart of the nation, at an event held at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan. The event was organised by the BJP's Nagaon district to mark Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Punya Tithi.

Addressing the gathering, Sonowal highlighted Mookerjee's

nationalist principles, his significant role as the founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, and his vision for a unified nation under one flag, one constitution, and one leader.

"Dr. Mookerjee advocated strongly for the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. Inspired by his ideals and under the steadfast leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this historic step towards national unity has been realized," Sonowal emphasised.

He further praised Mookerjee's lifelong dedication to the unity and integrity of India, stating that his legacy will continue to inspire future generations in their commitment to nation-building. Sonowal was joined (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Magisterial probe ordered into Laokhowa wildlife sanctuary shooting

GUWAHATI, June 23: A magisterial inquiry has been ordered into the death of two persons in firing by forest guards at Laokhowa wildlife sanctuary in Assam's Nagaon district, an official order said.

The two were shot dead by forest officials near Rowmari Beel in the early hours on Saturday.

An order issued by the district commissioner entrusted Sudeep Nath, additional district magistrate, Nagaon, to conduct a "detail inquiry into the matter as per NHRC guidelines to find out the actual facts and circumstance leading to death of the aforesaid persons". Nath has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Wanted dacoit injured in police firing in Assam

GUWAHATI, June 23: A dacoit was injured in police firing when he allegedly attempted to flee from custody in Assam's Kamrup district, a police officer said on Sunday. The criminal, along with three others, was apprehended by Boko police on Friday while trying to rob an ATM, the officer added.

"The accused, Kenaram Basumtary, is a wanted criminal wanted in several cases. We had taken him to Guwahati on a search operation on Saturday, based on information provided by him," the officer said.

While returning, Basumtary allegedly tried to attack the personnel accompanying him and flee, leading police to fire at him.

He sustained a leg injury and was admitted to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital, where he is reported to be stable, the officer said. Basumtary's name had emerged in another police firing incident in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

18 Indian fishermen arrested for alleged illegal fishing in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, June 23: As many as 18 Indian fishermen were arrested for alleged illegal fishing in the island nation's waters by the Sri Lankan Navy and three fishing vessels were seized, a media report said on Sunday. The fishermen were arrested from the North Sea near Delft Islands during a search operation conducted Saturday night, news portal The News First reported.

Navy spokesperson Capt Gayan Wickramasuriya said the arrested fishermen would be taken to Kankeasanturai fishing harbour for further legal proceedings.

Last week, four Indian fishermen were arrested and their trawler seized by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly poaching in the island nation's waters.

Before the latest incident, more than 180 Indian

fishermen had been arrested and 25 of their trawlers seized in 2024 for alleged illegal fishing in the Sri Lankan waters, Sri Lankan officials said.

The numbers are almost 75 per cent of the approximate 240-245 held similarly in 2023.

Most of these incidents happen in the Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka's northern tip, a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries.

The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with the Sri Lankan Navy personnel sometimes even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats for illegally entering Sri Lanka's territorial waters. (PTI)

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 23: A large number of devotees thronged the Ambubachi Mela at the Kamakhya Temple atop the Nilachal Hills on the second day on Sunday.

The entire atmosphere reverberated with a kind of divine energy of Goddess Kamakhya, with devotees. Ambubachi Mela marks the annual menstruation of the Mother Goddess, during which temple doors remain closed and people refrain from worshipping the deities. The festival is a celebration of the power of every woman to create a life. Several foreign nationals were among those who attended one of the biggest melas in India, this year. Guwahati, was simmering on 33 degrees on the day with 76 per cent humidity. Devotees who oth-



erwise had a notion that isolated rains drench the city during the four days of the Mela could be seen hoping for a heavy shower.

"I am attracted to the Shakti

worship that is associated with the Mela. For several years I have been visiting the Kamakhya Temple to feel the divine energy residing here", Jairam Sharma, from

Kathmandu told The Hills Times.

Sharma expected rain. But he later came to know Guwahati has already received a fair share of rains till June 20. He said that many families from his area visit the Mela annually. He feels that the rains are synonymous with Ambubachi and will not betray him this year.

"The downpour also lowers the temperature of the hill due to the immense crowd of devotees visiting the shrine during the festival," he said.

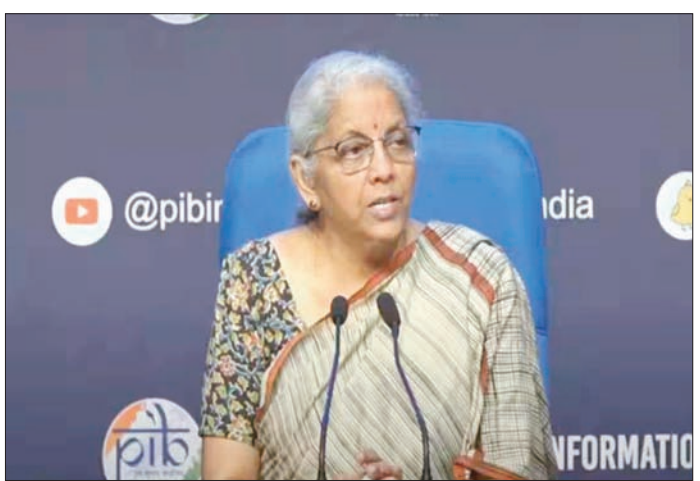
Backpackers from Milan, Italy Allan and Crystalline are first timers this year. They believed India to be a centre of spiritualism in the world. After hiking the Nilachal hill as part of their itinerary on a rainy (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GST Council to reconstitute 3 GoMs as new ministers from 11 states join

NEW DELHI, June 23: The GST Council will have to reconstitute three Group of Ministers (GoM) under it as new ministers from 11 states joined the body on Saturday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that in the 53rd GST Council meeting on Saturday, there were 11 new ministers from Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Telangana and Tripura. The 52nd GST Council meeting was held on October 7, 2023.

With new ministers joining the council, the reconstitution of three GoMs on analysis of revenue from GST, boosting the real estate sector under GST, and GST system reforms are on the cards.



While the GoM on GST rate rationalisation has already been reconstituted in February, making Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary its convener, the reconstitution of the other three is

yet to be notified. In the GoM on analysis of revenue from GST, the new finance minister from Odisha has to be inducted. The BJP won the assembly polls in Odisha and formed the government earlier this month. The name of the new finance minister from Haryana has also to be included in the panel.

The GoM on boosting the real estate sector, headed by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, has to be reconstituted as the finance minister from Bihar has changed.

The panel on GST on system reforms, under the convensorship of Pawar, has to be reconstituted with five new ministers from Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. (PTI)

SBI plans to open 400 new branches across country in FY25: Chairman Khara

NEW DELHI, June 23: As part of the network expansion plan, State Bank of India (SBI) is planning to open 400 branches across the country in the current financial year. The country's biggest lender opened 137 branches last fiscal. Of the total, 59 new rural branches were launched.

"Somebody asked me if 89 per cent of digital and 98 per cent transactions were happening outside the branch, whether the branch is required anymore. My answer is yes. It is still required because there are newer areas which are emerging," SBI Chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara told PTI in an interview.

There are certain services like most of the advisory and wealth services that can be offered only from the branch, he said. "We will be identifying locations where the opportunity exists, and in those locations, we plan to open branches. Almost 400 branches we plan to add this year," he said.

SBI has a network of 22,542 branches across the country as of March 2024. Asked about the monetisation of subsidiaries, Khara said that SBI would wait for them to further scale up their operations before listing them. Scaling up their operation will increase valuation and ensure better returns for the parent SBI. When it comes to subsidiaries, their monetisation would be through the capital market, the chairman said.

"The subsidiaries which would be eligible for this kind of route will be essentially our SBI General and may be at some stage SBI Payment Services, but as of now, we don't have any such plan," he added.

"Maybe, we would like to scale them up a little more, and then we will think in terms of going to the capital market for monetising our holding in these companies. But not in the current financial year," Khara said.

During the year ended March 2024, the bank infused additional capital of ₹ 489.67 crore in SBI General Insurance Company Ltd. The company has also allotted ESOP to employees. Consequently, the bank's stake has decreased from 69.95 per cent to 69.11 per cent.

SBI General Insurance reported a 30.4 per cent rise in net profit to ₹ 240 crore for the financial year ended March 2024. The non-life subsidiary of State Bank of India had recorded a net profit of ₹ 184 crore in the previous financial year.

SBI Payment Services Pvt Ltd, which is in the merchant acquiring business, is 74 per cent owned by SBI, while the remaining stake is with Hitachi Payment Services. (PTI)

Commerce min engaging with different departments on India, Korea FTA upgrade talks: Official

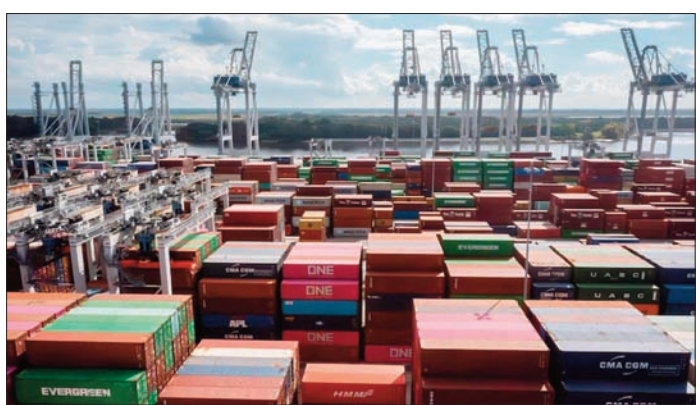
NEW DELHI, June 23: With talks to upgrade the existing free trade agreement (FTA) moving forward between India and Korea, the department of commerce is engaging with different ministries, including heavy industries, steel, and chemicals, to prepare the offer list, an official said.

Preparation of the list is part of the negotiations, which are underway, for the upgrade of the existing FTA between the two countries, dubbed as comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA). The agreement was operationalised in January 2010. So far, 10 rounds of talks have been concluded. The official said both sides have exchanged the request list and "are working on the offer list" and for that the commerce ministry is holding discussions with different ministries, including steel, heavy industries, textiles, chemicals and petrochemicals.

India has sought greater market access for certain products such as steel, rice, and shrimp from South Korea with a view to boost exports of these goods, the official added.

India has flagged issues over Korean firms not buying Indian steel. The exercise assumes significance as both sides have shared the hope that the CEPA upgrade negotiations would play an important role in strengthening and deepening economic cooperation between both countries.

In such agreements, two or more countries either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods added between and ease norms to



promote trade in services and boost investments.

Both sides review the agreement at a mutually agreed time period.

In general, such review or upgrade exercises include implementation issues, rules of origin, verification process and release of consignments; customs procedures; further liberalisation of trade in goods; and sharing and exchange of trade data.

India has also raised concerns on the growing trade deficit between the two countries. India's exports to Korea dipped to USD 6.41 billion in 2023-24 from USD 6.65 billion in 2022-23 and USD 8 billion in 2021-22.

The imports stood at USD 21.13 billion in the last fiscal as against USD 21.22 billion in 2022-23 and USD 17.5 billion in 2021-22.

According to economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), India's trade deficit with South Korea increased at a much higher rate compared to its trade deficit with the world.

It said India's trade with South Korea has shown significant changes in the periods before and after the implementation of the CEPA. The average exports from India to South Korea before the CEPA (2007-09) were valued at USD 3.4 billion, while the average imports stood at USD 7.3 billion, leading to an average trade deficit of USD 4 billion.

Post-CEPA (2022-24), the average exports increased to USD 7.1 billion, and imports surged to USD 19.9 billion, resulting in a much larger average trade deficit of USD 12.8 billion, the GTRI report said, adding this indicates an increase in the trade deficit by USD 7.2 billion from the pre-CEPA period to the post-CEPA period, marking a 220 per cent increase.

Besides, it said Indian exporters are facing various non-tariff barriers in South Korea, including stringent standards, regulations, and certification requirements and these barriers make it difficult for Indian goods to penetrate the

South Korean market.

"There are challenges related to gaining better market access for Indian agricultural products like shrimp, rice, steel, pharmaceuticals, and services in South Korea. Indian businesses seek more favourable terms to compete effectively in these sectors," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

There are concerns regarding the rules of origin provisions under the CEPA, which determine the eligibility of products for preferential tariffs, he said, adding that India aims to ensure that these rules are not overly restrictive and that they facilitate trade rather than hinder it.

According to the GTRI, India is looking for greater liberalisation in the services sector, including healthcare and information technology (IT), and easier access for Indian professionals and service providers in the South Korean market. There is a need for mutual recognition of standards, qualifications, and certifications to facilitate smoother trade and investment flows between the two countries, it said. It added that while India has granted significant tariff concessions under the CEPA, there is a push for South Korea to reciprocate with more meaningful concessions, especially in sectors where Indian products have competitive advantages.

"Addressing these issues is crucial for India to achieve a more equitable and mutually beneficial trade relationship with South Korea under the CEPA framework," Srivastava said. (PTI)

Bank of Baroda aims to double tech team headcount to 3,000 by end of FY26

NEW DELHI, June 23: State-owned Bank of Baroda is aiming to double its in-house technology team headcount to 3,000 in the next two years, a top official

has said. The new additions to the current team strength of 1,500 employees will be done both through the regular hiring processes and lateral hires of specialist talent, Debadata Chand, its managing director and chief executive officer told PTI recently.

"In the next two years, we will double the number of people in our IT team," Chand said after the announcement of its March quarter earnings.

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India has taken stringent action on banks for shortfalls in technology architecture which impacted the ability to execute transactions. Apart from the 1,500 in-house workers, there are also contractual employees engaged by the bank in the IT function, Chand said.

The bank is wanting to hire contemporary talent as part of the efforts to significantly up its strength of IT professionals, he said. The lateral talent will be across

any grade, depending on the requirement and a candidate's experience, he said.

He also said that a generative artificial intelligence-based platform will soon be going live for customers wherein a slew of services could be availed in an interactive way.

Chand said that the bank has been spending aggressively on the technology front, including around ₹ 2,000 crore investments on infrastructure alone, and will up the spends as the area comes under increased focus going ahead.

In FY24, the bank had a budget of ₹ 743 crore on technology and the IT spend stood at ₹ 453 crore, as per management commentary.

The bank is targeting to open 60 new branches during the fiscal year 2024-25.

In FY25, the bank will be targeting a credit growth of 12-14 per cent, backing it up with a deposit growth of 10-12 per cent and aspires to keep the NIMs at 3.15 per cent, Chand said. (PTI)



Contd. from Page 1...

Shah moots pond solution

Shah appealed to all states and Union Territories to timely implement the advisories issued by National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) for flood management. He directed the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the CWC to complete the process of recalibrating all the equipment used in flood forecast at the earliest. He also directed to ensure that floodgates of all major dams are in good condition.

The home minister said the non-perennial rivers are prone to more soil erosion and siltation, resulting in floods. He instructed the NDMA and the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to take appropriate precautionary measures to prevent incidents of forest fire. For this, the home minister stressed on the need to regularly remove dry leaves and conduct mock drills with local residents and forest personnel. Along with this, he also asked to analyse the incidents of repeated forest fires at the same place.

Shah asked the NDMA to prepare a detailed manual to deal with incidents of forest fires. He directed that the IMD's alerts regarding lightning strikes should be disseminated to the public on time through SMS, TV, FM radio and other media. He emphasised on the need to integrate weather, rainfall and flood warning related apps developed by various departments so that their benefits could reach the targeted population.

Shah directed that since the community is the first responder at the time of any disaster, there should be co-ordination and integration in the community awareness programmes being run by various agencies so that they can have the maximum impact. During the meeting, IMD, CWC, NDMA and the National Disaster Response Force made detailed presentations.

The departments concerned also provided information on the action taken on the home minister's instructions given during last year's review meeting. They also apprised him about the preparedness for the current monsoon season and the future action plan. Every year, large swathes of Bihar, Assam and other eastern states are inundated due to a rise in the water level of various rivers due to monsoon rains. Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and a few other states also encounter landslides and other rain-related issues during the monsoon. Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Jammu and Kashmir have also witnessed flooding in recent years. Union Jal Shakti Minister CR Paatil, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai and top officials attended the meeting. (PTI)

KAAC celebrates 73rd

Ronghang further expressed optimism about ongoing development projects in Karbi Anglong, underscoring the return of peace and stability in the region. Looking ahead, Ronghang announced plans for an extended three-day celebration of Karbi Anglong Day in November, featuring cultural exchanges with 6th Scheduled autonomous councils from across Northeast India. In a tribute to outstanding contributions, KAAC awarded the Semson Sing Ingti Award in education to Longsing Bey of Rongchek, Amri, West Karbi Anglong. The Khorsing Terang (Langkung Habe) Award in politics was bestowed upon Lawrence Teron of Rongthang, and the Sarsing Teron (Langkung Habe) Award in politics was posthumously awarded to late Khorsing Bey, former CEM of KAAC, received by his wife, Bina Ronghang. Special recognition was given to MLA Bidyasing Englung for his distinguished political career and to individuals and organisations excelling in arts, culture, culinary hospitality, and sports. The event also honored filmmaker Dhoriram Tisso and actress Malin Tisso, who received a cash award and citation for her achievement in the NERI International Film Festival.

Additionally, 721 participants who set a world record for the longest line of people walking on Kangdonggang (bamboo stilts) were felicitated for their rare achievement. The event was attended by chairman Raju Tisso, deputy chairman Ajit Kumar Dey, Karbi traditional king Longsing Ronghang, executive members (EMs), members of autonomous Council (MACs), MLAs, and principal secretary Mukul Kumar Saikia.

Abrogation of Article 370

at the event by Assam minister Nandita Garlosa, local MLA Rupak Sharma, and other BJP officials including Bikul Deka, Subhash Dutta, and Syed Mominul Awal. In addition to the event, Sonowal visited the Nagaon Zilla Sahitya Sabha building where he engaged with Sabha officials, urging them to empower younger generations in advancing Assamese language and literature.

Magisterial probe ordered

been asked to complete the probe and submit the report within 10 days. "All concerned will render necessary assistance to the enquiry officer for the purpose and provide his access to all records related to the incident," it said. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had on Saturday directed the chief secretary to initiate an inquiry into the incident. Police had earlier said the deceased, who were brothers, entered the wildlife sanctuary for "illegal fishing" at Romwari Beel. They purportedly attempted to flee when forest guards spotted them, leading the latter to fire. (PTI)

CBI files FIR over alleged

They said the agency registered a fresh case against unidentified persons under IPC sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 420 (cheating) among others. "Certain cases of alleged irregularities, cheating, impersonation and malpractice have been reported in NEET-UG which was conducted on May 5," a senior education ministry official said on Saturday. "For transparency in the conduct of the examination process, it was decided after a review that the matter be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for a comprehensive investigation," the official had said. The allegations of irregularities sparked protests in several cities, litigation and a political slugfest, with the opposition accusing the government of toying with the future of students. Ten aspirants have approached the Supreme Court, seeking directions to the CBI and the ED to investigate the alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG. The petition has also sought a direction to the Bihar Police to expedite the investigation in the case and file a report before the apex court. In a separate matter, the Supreme Court sought responses from the Center, the NTA and others on various petitions, including those seeking cancellation of the NEET-UG 2024 exam and a court-monitored investigation. The Supreme Court also halted proceedings on similar petitions in various high courts. The examination was conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) on May 5 at 4,750 centres in 571 cities, including 14 cities abroad. Over 23 lakh candidates took the test.

As many as 67 students scored a perfect 720, unprecedented in the NTA's history, with six from a centre in Haryana's Faridabad figuring in the list, raising suspicions about irregularities. There was also a controversy over grace marks awarded to students to make up for the loss of time at six centres. The Centre later told the apex court that the grace marks were being scrapped and these 1,563 students would be given an option of a retest. The NEET-UG examination is conducted by the NTA for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses in government and private institutions across the country. Facing flak over alleged discrepancies in competitive exams, the Centre on Saturday shunted out NTA Director General Subodh Singh and set up a seven-member panel headed by former ISRO chief K Radhakrishnan to review the agency's functioning and recommend exam reforms. It postponed the NEET-PG entrance, the fourth entrance exam to be impacted in recent days. (PTI)

Wanted dacoit injured in

February last year in Udalguri district in which one person was killed. Initially, police claimed that the deceased was Basumatary, but a CID probe later found that it was a case of "mistaken identity". The probe concluded that the deceased was not dacoit Basumatary, but a person identified as Dimbeswar Muchahary. While Muchahary's family asserted he was a "small-time farmer", police claimed he was a "hardened criminal". Basumatary, a former NDFB militant, was wanted in several cases of armed robberies in Assam as well as neighbouring Meghalaya and had been arrested with arms on previous occasions, police had claimed earlier. (PTI)

Devotees feel divine Shakti

fine day, they want to take part in the Mela to conclude their journey. "India's traditional practices that are so deep rooted in the minds, hearts and soul of people, have always attracted my attention. Coming to Nilachal Hill was part of my journey that has left a mark in my life. The divine energy is in the air," Allan said. He and his partner Crystalline have been staying in a lodge nearby. They haven't been overcharged all the while during their current stay in the city, Allan felt. "We paying the standard fare and charges everywhere," Crystalline said. For America's Ivan, his visit to the Ambubachi Mela is a journey of faith and his interest in the Shakti cult led him to visit Assam. He is on a research on Shakti worship. Clicking pictures with his phone he said he wanted to capture the babas and sadhus, who travelled from faraway places to worship Goddess Shakti. It is believed that some Sadhus who are rarely seen, appear atop Nilachal Hill during the Ambubachi Mela.

The district administration has left no stones unturned to ensure hustle free visit for devotees. Safai karmacharis (cleaners) swung into action whenever required and at quick intervals.

The administration earlier notified the vendors to set up stalls at designated places only. State tourism minister had said that VIP passes would not be issued on June 26 and 27. Following the Pravrutti of the Ambubachi Mela on Saturday morning, the temple's main door will remain closed for three days. The Nivritti is scheduled to take place on June 26, after which the temple's main door will reopen on the morning of the same day. Altogether, 2.5 lakh people visited the temple during the Mela last year, the head priest said.

Union minister underscores state's rich sports talent & ongoing national initiatives for sports development

Sarbananda Sonowal joins International Olympic Day run in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 23: Union minister of Port, Shipping, and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, participated in the Olympic Day run organised on the occasion of International Olympic Day at Nagaon on Sunday. The event was centrally organised by the Assam Olympic Association in collaboration with the Nagaon Sports Association at Nagaon Nurul Amin Stadium.

During the Olympic Day run, Sonowal was accompanied by local MLA Rupak Sarma, state Power minister Nandita Gorlosa, general secretary of Assam Olympic Association Karsh Konwar, DC Narendra Kr Shah, sports secretary of the state government K J Hillali, sports treasurer of Assam Olympic Association cum secretary of Nagaon Sports Association Tapan Kumar Das, Bishnu Ram Nuniisa along with other dignitaries from the district administration and participants.

Addressing the local media, Sonowal highlighted the abundant sports talent in the state, particularly in tea estates and remote villages of both Brahmaputra and Barak Valley. He referenced the initiatives undertaken by PM Narendra Modi for the upliftment of the sports sector across the country through 'Khelo India' and urged active participation in this initiative.

Recalling his previous statements about



Guwahati becoming the sports capital of the country, Sonowal emphasised the efforts of the BJP-led alliance government at both the central and state levels to elevate Guwahati to a standard suitable for national and international sports. He noted that these efforts had significantly boosted the recognition and development of hidden sports talents at national and international levels.

Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal arrived at Nagaon Circuit House on Saturday evening to participate in a series of programs following his appointment as Union minister of Port,

Shipping, and Waterways for the second time in the Modi-led NDA government.

After participating in the International Olympic Day event at Nagaon Nurul Amin Stadium, Sonowal attended a program at Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha Bhavan, where he was felicitated by numerous local organisations. He also visited the Nagaon District BJP office at Morikolung and inspected the ongoing beautification works along the banks of Morikolung. It is noteworthy that the beautification project at Morikolung was sanctioned during his tenure as chief minister of the state.

Morigaon DC suspends PDS sub-wholesale license of M/S Nagabandha GPSS

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, June 23: The Morigaon district commissioner has suspended the M/S Nagabandha GPSS's PDS sub-wholesale license no (sub-wholesale) 10/96 following an enquiry report submitted by the assistant director of FPD & CA, Morigaon. The report reveals that the president and the secretary of Nagabandha GPSS were allegedly found with an excess and illegal stock of 41.32 quintals of PMGKAY rice in the GPSS godown on March 31, 2024.

This rice was illegally accumulated for diversion into the black market for monetary gain, depriving poor beneficiaries of receiving their rice in the correct weight. The enquiry report also states that the

stock register of PMGKAY rice was not correctly maintained on March 31, 2024. Consequently, the district commissioner found that the GPSS contravened terms and conditions no 3(a)(i), (ii), (iii) of the PDS sub-wholesale license issued to them.

The FP shop dealers of M/S Nagabandha GPSS were suspended following a complaint petition on March 21, 2024, alleging that the GPSS authority had been curtailing the quantity of PMGKAY rice issued to FP shop dealers every month. In the interest of the beneficiaries, the district commissioner has tagged the FP Shops of M/S Nagabandha GPSS with M/S Bhurabandha GPSS, which will lift and distribute PMGKAY, MDM, and SNP rice allotted to M/S Nagabandha GPSS until further notice.

NTPC Bongaigaon and BTC forge stronger ties

Leaders discuss mutual initiatives for community development & environmental conservation

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 23: Akhilesh Singh, head of project (HOP) and business unit head at NTPC Bongaigaon, recently held a productive meeting with Pramod Boro, chief executive member of BTC, highlighting collaborative efforts in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and environmental conservation.

Pramod Boro commended NTPC for its diligent efforts in these critical areas and praised the company's commitment to providing uninterrupted power supply to the nation. He recognised the positive impact of NTPC's initiatives on both the community and the environment.

During the discussion, Akhilesh Singh briefed Boro on various ongoing and upcoming initiatives of NTPC. He expressed gratitude to the BTC administration for their steadfast support in areas such as digital literacy, skill development, sanitation, empowerment, and healthcare. These initiatives aim to uplift local communities and contribute to regional development and welfare.

The meeting was attended by senior officials from NTPC Bongaigaon, including Onkar Nath, AGM (HR), Roshan Dungkung, DGM (HR), and Aditya Thakuri, CSR executive, alongside officials from BTC administration. Their presence underscored NTPC's commitment to enhancing community engagement and promoting sustainable practices.

NTPC remains steadfast in its mission to achieve sustainable growth and foster community development, ensuring that its operations not only benefit the nation but also enrich the lives of local communities.

Hojai to host inter-school football competition in July

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, June 23: Under the aegis of the Sports and Youth Welfare Department, government of Assam, an inter-school football competition will be organised in the first week of July in Hojai district. These competitions will be held in three categories: the Piliik Chowdhury Memorial for boys under 15, the Dewkon Memorial for boys under 17, and the Nripendra Narayan Singha Memorial inter-district school football competition for girls under 17. As per the information provided by Janasanyog, Hojai on Saturday, district sports officer Deepraj Sonowal has informed that only school students under the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA) can participate in these competitions. Students interested in participating are required to apply through the headmaster (principal) of their respective school to the office of the Hojai district sports officer by June 29. For more information about these competitions, one can contact 9101167454 or 9706799932.

Sivasagar Kabi Chakra AGM addresses plagiarism issue in Assamese poetry



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, June 23: The annual general meeting of Sivasagar Kabi Chakra was held in Oikya Auditorium on Sunday. Addressing the open session presided over by Mukul Nath, critic and writer Ashim Kumar Hazarika said that a modern poet is essentially a part of the socio-cultural milieu and hence a poet's creation is a reflection of the conflicting trends of thoughts in society. If a poem is not understood even by the critics for its pithy loads of bombastic alliterations in the name of new experimentations, it is useless for writing poems. Plagiarism is still a major problem in Assamese poetry, he cited, giving an example of a poem written on the Manipur situation.

Awards, he said, are not the sole parameter to judge a poet.

Dr Manik Saikia released the collection of poems Niribili Swar brought out on the occasion. It is inspiring that a section of today's youth has taken to writing poems. It indicates that they are serious about the finer feelings of the heart which get reflected in actions in society. In today's explosion of knowledge, very few care about the deeper levels of genuine human feelings. Ram Swaradeati created a series of Badh Kabayas, which was a genuinely new experimentation in those days.

Earlier, Ashrumoni Dutta Ghosh and Prasanta Borgohain were selected as the president and the secretary of the new committee of the Sivasagar Kabi Chakra in the delegates' meeting.

Syed Parvij Hussain in his speech said that we are more inclined towards the western world for inspiration, which can no longer quench our thirst. Ujjal Paogam, a noted poet, said that notable poets of the past, including Navakanta Baruah, did not inspire a group of young poets through any forum or organisation as they were individualistic in their attitude.

Dipali Bhattacharjya Barua, Punjan Baruah, Subon Sing Gam, Brajen Phukan, Haren Gogoi, Meghali Hazarika, Bhoirab Munda, Haren Nath, Satyajit Nath, Jamalluddin Ahmed, Muktab Ahmed, Janam Khanikar, Pranjal Pujari, Pranjal Abir Das, Niru Chetia, and Bandana Kousik Bordoloi. Jantumoni Saikia and Chandralekha Hazarika sang songs.

Morigaon announces football tour

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, June 23: The Morigaon District Inter-School Football Tournament for students under 15 (Boys) and under 17 (both Boys and Girls) will be held on July 3 and July 4, 2024, in Morigaon. The district sports officer (DSO), Morigaon, has requested school authorities to contact the District Sports Office (DSO) by June 30, 2024. It should be noted that students currently enrolled in schools are eligible to participate in the tournament. For further details, please contact 9101647005 or 9399937012.



OBITUARY
Mohan Dutta, a leading citizen of Salaguri and former vice president of the Sivasagar District Congress Committee, passed away at the age of 74 due to cardiac arrest in a Dibrugarh hospital on Saturday. He is survived by his wife, one son, three daughters, and several grandchildren. His death is mourned by the Sivasagar Congress Party, Salaguri HS School, and a host of other organisations.

NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati launches healthcare project

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 23: NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati has undertaken a significant initiative to strengthen healthcare services in Mon district of Nagaland by launching a project worth 98.6 lakhs under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework. The project involves providing two Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances and two mortuary vans, aimed at improving emergency medical response and healthcare facilities in the region.

The Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) for this project was recently signed in an online ceremony. Ajit Kumar Verma, IAS, representing Mon district administration, and Onkar Nath, head of Human Resources from NTPC Bongaigaon, signed as the respective signatories. The event was attended by Akhilesh Singh, head of project, Bongaigaon, Dr Deepayan Paul, chief medical officer at NTPC Bongaigaon, Paresch Mathur, AGM (TS), and Rakesh



Kumar, AGM (EEMG), underscoring NTPC's commitment to the holistic development of Northeast India.

Akhilesh Singh highlighted NTPC's dedication to sustainable development and its role as a responsible corporate citizen contributing positively to the communities it serves. Dr Deepayan Paul emphasised the critical role of the ALS ambulances and mortuary vans in ensuring prompt medical assistance and dignified handling of mortal remains, thereby enhancing healthcare in-

rastructure in Mon district. Ajit Kumar Verma expressed appreciation to NTPC for their generous contribution, acknowledging the positive impact this initiative will have on healthcare accessibility in Mon district. He stressed the importance of strategic partnerships in addressing community needs and promoting sustainable development.

This initiative reflects NTPC's ongoing commitment to supporting healthcare infrastructure and overall community welfare in Northeast India.

Magisterial probe launched into fatal shooting at Lawkhowa Wildlife Sanctuary

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 23: District Magistrate cum district commissioner Narendra Kr Shah has issued a notification declaring a magisterial probe into the firing incident that occurred at Saraihati forest beat under Gorajan range in Lawkhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, resulting in the death of two suspected poachers on Friday night.

It is stated in the notification that Additional District Magistrate Sudeep Nath will conduct a detailed inquiry into the entire incident in accordance with NHRC guidelines to ascertain the actual facts and circumstances surround-

ing the deaths of the two individuals. According to the notification, the inquiry officer has been instructed to complete the probe within 10 days and submit a detailed report along with copies of all relevant documents to the District Magistrate.

Reports indicate that the two victims, brothers identified as Jalil Uddin and Samir Uddin from Juria Ding Bori Chapori area, were shot dead during a firing incident involving forest protection personnel last Friday night. Authorities from Nagaon Wildlife Division allege that the deceased individuals had purportedly entered the

wildlife sanctuary with intentions to poach wildlife during nighttime. Upon encountering forest personnel, they allegedly attempted to flee after attacking the officers. In self-defence, one of the forest personnel fired at them, resulting in the deaths of the two brothers from Juria Ding Bori Chapori village.

Contrary to these claims by forest officials, local residents in the area assert that the deceased brothers, accompanied by others, had gone to Roumari beel for fishing, and that the forest patrolling team fired at them indiscriminately instead of exploring alternative measures, as per sources.

NFR introduces unreserved special trains for Ambubachi Mela pilgrims



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 23: To manage the expected heavy influx of pilgrims during the ongoing Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple, NF Railway has decided to operate a pair of unreserved special trains between Guwahati and Dalkhola stations. This special arrangement aims to help clear the extra rush of devotees and visitors attending the Ambubachi Mela.

The special train, numbered 05674 (Guwahati - Dalkhola), will depart from Guwahati at 23:55

hours on June 23, 24, and 26, 2024, reaching Dalkhola at 09:15 hours the next day. In the return direction, train number 05673 (Dalkhola - Guwahati) will depart from Dalkhola at 09:45 hours on June 24, 25, and 27, 2024, arriving at Guwahati at 19:30 hours on the same day.

The special train will consist of 20 coaches, including sleeper class and general sitting coaches, to ensure the comfort and convenience of passengers. It will pass through various important stations including Kamakhya, Dudhna, Goalpara

town, Abhayapuri, Chapar, Bilasipara, Gauripur, Golakganj, Tufanganj, New Coochbehar, Mathabhanga, New Changrabandha, Jalpaiguri Road, New Jalpaiguri, Kishanganj, and others.

This initiative by NFR is aimed at providing relief to passengers planning to visit Kamakhya Temple during the Ambubachi Mela. The special train will facilitate the return journey of pilgrims from different locations to their destinations, ensuring a smoother travel experience during this summer pilgrimage.

Awareness meeting against rising substance abuse menace

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, June 23: An awareness meeting was organised on Sunday at Margherita Namdang Tea Estate playground. It is noteworthy that in the tea gardens area under Margherita subdivision of Tinsukia district, the sale of drugs, liquor, poppy, opium, hooch, gutkha items has rampantly increased, polluting and spoiling the environment. If action is not taken soon, the upcoming younger generation will be pushed to the brink of destruction.

The awareness meeting was organised by the Village Defence Party (VDP) Namdang Committee. Present at the meeting were its president Sanjay Karmakar, secretary Bipin Gwala, Margherita Thana Committee president Robin Raja, Ledo Valley Lions Club president Bhupendra Singh Virdi, Margherita Cooperative Society president Rajendra Rai, Margherita Sub Divisional medical officer Dr Sashindra Barman, Assam Tea Tribes Student Association (ATTA) joint publicity secretary of Central Committee Pranjal Baraik, All Adivasi Student Association of Assam (AASAA) Margherita Regional Committee president Sanjay Barla, vice president Sebastian Turuwar, general secretary Samuel Topno, former Margherita ATTA leader Nuwel Patra, noted social worker of Margherita Bijay Tanti, and more than 500 tea tribes/Adivasi community people from Namdang Tea Estate.

The awareness meeting was presided over by Margherita Thana Committee president Robin Raja, and noted social worker of Margherita Ajay Tanti outlined the aims and objectives of the meeting in his speech.

Bijay Tanti, in his address, highlighted the



growing menace of drug abuse and other intoxicants in the tea garden areas under Margherita subdivision, drawing attention to the addiction problems among the upcoming youth of the tea tribes community, which threatens to paralyse the upcoming generation.

Dr Sashindra Barman, Margherita sub divisional medical officer, emphasised that while individuals arrested in drug abuse or peddling cases may obtain bail after some days, breaking free from the vicious cycle of addiction is extremely challenging once entered. He stressed the need for awareness about the harmful effects of drug consumption, stating that real change can only occur when consciousness about these issues is raised, rather than just holding meetings.

Local residents of Namdang Tea Estate ex-

pressed concern during the awareness programme that drugs, illicit liquor, opium, poppy, hooch, and now gambling have become prevalent issues, leading many youths aged 16 to 28 to ruin themselves.

A local resident of Namdang Tea Estate pointed out that Namdang Tea Estate, Margherita Tea Estate, Dirok Tea Estate, Dehing Tea Estate, Ledo Tea Estate, Segunbari Tea Estate, and other leaf factories have turned into hotspots for drug abuse and other intoxicants, yet effective measures to curb these activities have not been implemented.

Leaders from ATTA and AASAA appealed to the people of the tea garden areas to remain vigilant and to promptly inform Margherita Police Station and Margherita VDP personnel in case of any problems.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

In love, the one who runs away is the winner.
-Henri Matisse

Tensions in Bay of Bengal

Recent provocations by Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal have dangerously escalated tensions with Bangladesh, posing significant threats to regional stability and security. Reports indicate Myanmar's aggressive actions against Bangladeshi vessels in the Teknaf and St Martin's sea lanes, involving illegal incursions and attacks, have caused fear and disruption among local communities dependent on maritime activities. Eyewitnesses like Syed Alam, a speedboat owner, recount harrowing incidents where Myanmar trawlers and gunboats fired upon vessels near the border. The presence of Myanmar army ships in these areas suggests direct involvement of junta soldiers, exacerbating fears of a sudden invasion. The lack of adequate patrolling by the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and Coast Guard only heightens local insecurity. Compounding this maritime crisis is the ongoing Rohingya refugee situation. Since August 2017, over 1.2 million mostly Muslim Rohingyas have fled to Bangladesh, escaping violence between Myanmar forces and the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). This militant group, involved in transnational crimes, poses a significant security threat. Reports suggest Myanmar's secret services are recruiting and training some Rohingyas, possibly to use them in potential conflicts with Bangladesh, adding a dangerous dimension to an already volatile situation.

The infiltration of international terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Lashkar-e-Taiba into Rohingya camps in Bangladesh has raised alarms. These groups are reportedly recruiting individuals for jihadist activities, significantly threatening regional and global security. The camps have also become hotspots for drug peddling, arms trafficking, and human trafficking, further destabilizing the region. Recent reports indicate around 45,000 Rohingyas are waiting on the Naf River to infiltrate Bangladesh, while others attempt to enter India through sea routes. Indian intelligence agencies have warned of Pakistani ISI's involvement in training Rohingyas, using groups like Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). This training aims to create instability in India, adding another layer of complexity to regional security dynamics. The tensions between Myanmar and Bangladesh over maritime boundaries are not new. In March 2012, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) confirmed Saint Martin's Island as part of Bangladesh, entitled to a territorial sea, continental shelf, and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). However, Myanmar's recent actions show a blatant disregard for international law.

Domestically, the situation is further complicated by political factions in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami criticize the government's handling of maritime boundary issues, arguing that the focus on maritime claims has left Saint Martin's Island vulnerable. Pro-Caliphate and anti-democracy groups like Hefazat-e-Islam are reportedly funding and supporting Rohingya militants to destabilize Bangladesh and India. Bangladesh must urgently increase BGB and Coast Guard patrols in vulnerable areas like Saint Martin's Island. Enhanced surveillance and intelligence-sharing with neighboring countries, especially India, are crucial to track and counter militants and traffickers. While addressing immediate security threats, Bangladesh must also find a long-term solution to the Rohingya refugee crisis, which has created significant economic, social, and security challenges. The international community must support Bangladesh's efforts to maintain regional stability. The humanitarian approach that initially guided the decision to shelter Rohingyas must now be balanced with pragmatic national interests. The current situation in the Bay of Bengal demands a multifaceted response combining diplomatic finesse with robust security measures to ensure regional stability and security.

Blithe disregard of morality!



By: Er. Rajesh Pathak

Last days after taking the oath as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh (AP) Chandrababu Naidu paid visit to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam. Without the consideration of so-called 'Secular sensitivities' he straight away sharply said that the days of anti-Hinduism activities so far being run in the premise are over.

Very shrewdly former CM Jagan had handed over the administrative functions of Devasthanam trust to mostly Non-Hindus affiliated with him and his family.

Naidu says nothing beyond facts when he says that premise has degenerated into the den of Marijuana, Wine and Non-vegetarian foods!

To better understand the things it is required to get to know that the father of late CM of AP, Rajshekhar Reddy (YSR), had adopted Christianity. Later when YSR's daughter Sharmila wanted to wed with Brahmin youth, Anil Kumar, living in America, she could report to have done that only when he had embraced Christianity.

And thus one more 'Crypto Christian' (The Christian with Hindu name) came into being as a 'Brother Anil' to preach Christianity.

Pushing the country into demographic imbalance through different conversion activities is widely under way. As Jagan Reddy took over the CM post after father's demise, through the state's administrative intervention in the 'Changai Utsav' conducted by 'Brother Anil' people in drove began to join to get treated out of the ailments by the 'grace' of Christ. Hindu organization stood in protest against such events driving the people away from Hinduism through deception. Nothing much could happen though.

Brother Anil was not alone, however. One more was there who had his luck shine with the ascendancy of Jagan as CM. And his name was Subba Rao, the brother of Jagan's staunch Christian mother. He was appointed as chief of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam.

Then exactly that began to happen as mentioned by Naidu. Standing against Sanatan Dharma with having the protection of top families of prominent political parties of the country are mostly non-Hindus. But people at large get confused with their Hindu names!

Who could forget KR Narayan? He had been proudly mentioned as first 'Dalit' President of India because of the name, whereas his grave lies in Christian cemetery!

New military axis: Russia joins hands with Iran, North Korea, and China

Russia is now working more closely with Iran, North Korea, and China, sharing sensitive technology that could pose a threat to the United States and its allies even after the Ukraine war ends, say American defense and intelligence officials. The rapid growth and strength of security ties between U.S. adversaries have surprised even American intelligence analysts. According to reports from WSJ, Russia and its Axis allies have put aside past disagreements to challenge what they see as a US-dominated global system.

In a sign of their growing military relationship, Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un announced on June 19, in Pyongyang, that they had agreed to help each other if either country was attacked. Their relationship is an alliance between the two authoritarian nations. Russia started increasing its cooperation with North Korea, Iran, and China after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Early losses on the battlefield and Western sanctions forced Russia to seek new sources of weapons. These partnerships have evolved into joint production deals, technology sharing, and providing workers. The agreements are boosting Moscow's long-term capabilities and could also benefit Tehran, Pyongyang, and Beijing.

For decades, the former Soviet Union exported billions of dollars in weapons to the developing world. Now the relationship is partially reversed, as Moscow scours the globe for material to sustain its Ukraine war, now in

its 28th month. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Tuesday, alongside Secretary of State Antony Blinken, that Russia's war in Ukraine is supported by China, North Korea, and Iran. According to the Wall Street Journal, he mentioned that these countries want the US and NATO to fail. If Russia wins in Ukraine, it could make the West more vulnerable and the world more dangerous.

Iran has helped set up a factory in Russia's Tatarstan region to produce deadly armed drones. US officials believe this factory is now running and can make thousands of Iranian-designed Shahed-136 drones each year. They also expect it to start producing other types of drones. A US defense official stated that Russia will still have this capability after the war. What started as a simple deal has now turned into a sharing of knowledge.

Iran can see how well its drones, which Russia is using against Ukraine, perform in actual combat. The worry is that Iran might bring all the lessons learned from this back to the Middle East. A senior Biden administration official said that China and Russia are also collaborating to produce nonlethal drones within Russia. The thing is, it's deniable because it is just sharing technology and the production of commercially available drones.

On June 19, when Putin and Kim announced their closer military ties, they didn't specify whether the new agreement means they will fight for each



other in a war or if it simply promises other types of support. The United States and South Korea believe Russia might give North Korea space technology and other advanced systems in exchange for artillery shells and short-range ballistic missiles. They believe North Korea has already supplied these weapons to support Russia's war on Ukraine. It is believed that North Korea is also sending workers to Russia to help run weapons production lines. In return, Russia has been giving North Korea large amounts of fuel oil. The worry is that Russia's support could include military help in the future. Current and former U.S. officials said that the growing security ties between Russia, North Korea, Iran, and China do not yet form a formal military alliance like NATO in the West. Instead, these ties involve separate bilateral agreements between Russia and each of the three other countries. Sue Mi Terry, a former CIA and White House official, recently said that for Russia, North Korea, and even China, such cooperation is more a convenient arrangement based on shared interests and

goals right now, rather than a deep alliance.

However, the beginnings of a new alliance are forming, showing signs of wider strategic and diplomatic cooperation.

According to Western officials and customs data, China has been leading efforts to strengthen trade ties with countries sanctioned by the US, such as Russia, Iran, and Venezuela, as a way to protect them against Washington's financial actions. Last month, US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told lawmakers that China and Russia are conducting military exercises for the first time that seem to focus on Taiwan, the self-governing island that Beijing claims as its territory.

In March, Moscow used its veto in the U.N. Security Council to stop the United Nations from continuing to monitor international sanctions on North Korea. This move was to avoid scrutiny of the weapons pipeline between Pyongyang and Moscow. According to a US defense official, the weapons pipeline from Tehran is proving to be the most helpful to Moscow, making Iran Russia's main weapons supplier. Besides helping build the drone factory

in Tatarstan, Iran has sent hundreds of drones and other weapons to Russia. The two countries are in advanced talks for Iran to sell short-range ballistic missiles to Russia.

Iran has, however, denied supplying weapons to Russia. But Behnam Ben Taleblu, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington, said that in many areas where Iran was once the student, it is now becoming the master. For the first time in history, Iran is more than just a junior partner to Russia.

Current and former U.S. officials said that China has done everything except supply weapons to Russia. Washington has warned that providing weapons would lead to American economic sanctions. US officials said that help from Beijing allowed Russia's defense production to recover faster than American intelligence agencies expected after Moscow's early setbacks in Ukraine and Western sanctions aimed at restricting its access to weapons.

Officials said that China has sent large amounts of dual-use equipment to Russia, including machine tools, microelectronics for the defense industry, optics for tanks and armored vehicles, and turbo engines for cruise missiles. China is helping Russia enhance its satellite and other space-based capabilities for use in Ukraine. "They are very careful, but they are coming very close to crossing the line," a defense official said. "They have been doing everything they can to support the Russians, mindful of the consequences." (IPA Service)

Finance ministry's decision to impose a fine on Binance is a step in right direction

By: Arun Kumar Shrivastav

In a decision that could set a precedent in the Indian financial sector, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) under the Ministry of Finance has fined global crypto exchange Binance a hefty Rs 18.82 crore (approximately \$2.2 million) for not adhering to anti-money laundering laws while catering to Indian customers. In January, the websites of nine offshore crypto exchanges including Binance were blocked for not being registered in India and complying with Indian laws. The penalty announced on Thursday paves the way for Binance to resume its operations in India.

Binance had a similar incident in Canada in May when The Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC) imposed a penalty of \$4.4 million for not adhering to Canada's anti-money laundering (AML) and anti-terrorist financing (ATF) regulations. The penalty was imposed for two violations: failing to register with FINTRAC as a foreign money services business (MSB) and failing to report large virtual currency transactions of CAD 10,000 or more. Binance already

shut its Canada operations in June 2023.

In Nigeria, two Binance executives Tigran Gambaryan and Nadeem Anjarwalla have been charged with money laundering and tax evasion. Both were invited to Nigeria for discussions after the government blocked the website amid an economic crisis.

After failed negotiations, they were detained and charged with a slew of financial crimes. Tigran Gambaryan is compliance chief at Binance is a US citizen and a former US federal agent. Nadeem Anjarwalla is a low professional reportedly with dual citizenships of the UK and Kenya.

During a Ramadan prayer, Nadeem Anjarwalla escaped from the Nigerian authorities and has remained elusive to date despite a red alert issued by Interpol. Tigran Gambaryan is still in

Nigerian custody and has reportedly fallen ill.

The former Binance CEO and co-founder Changpeng Zhao "CZ" is currently serving a 4-month prison sentence in the US for Binance US violating anti-money laundering laws. With \$43 billion of personal fortune, CZ is the richest person in prison in history. In a keenly watched court proceeding, Binance agreed to pay a staggering \$4.3 billion settlement. Before the US authorities made CZ accept accountability for his platform's failure to adhere to anti-money laundering and terror financing laws, he was the most powerful crypto tycoon. The failure of Binance to follow anti-money laundering laws in different jurisdictions is not deliberate as recurring instances of the failures and penalties would suggest. Crypto exchanges work in an au-



tomated manner through software programs. The anti-money laundering and other compliance measures need to be incorporated into the software system. The success of Binance lies in its ability to help faceless millions send and receive payments in real-time without any fuss. Binance was able to process withdrawals up to \$10 billion in 24 hours without anyone human being involved. Why CZ and other Binance executives remain committed to their product offerings was this success. It was able to make millions of unbanked people work and get paid as a global workforce. It promised the biggest reform in the banking industry which is still moving at a snail's pace and falling way short of meeting the challenge of providing a quick and efficient international banking experience in the globalized world.

However, the cryptocurrency today has more reasons to cheer about. The approval of bitcoin spot ETF in the US has been extremely successful. Several traditional finance companies like BlackRock are offering investment opportunities in bitcoin spot ETF. It is one of the key supports for the rebound of Bitcoin

and the overall cryptocurrency market. Bitcoin spot ETFs are available in the US, Canada, Australia, Germany, Brazil, Bermuda, Jersey, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Guernsey.

Thailand is the latest country to join the Bitcoin ETF trend, with Thai regulators approving One Bitcoin ETF Fund of Funds Unhedged early this month. However, currently it's available only to wealthy and institutional investors, and not to retail investors. Hong Kong and the UK have also issued similar products as spot Bitcoin ETFs.

The decision of India's FIU to impose a penalty on Binance for not adhering to AML laws is the right decision. It allows Binance to pay the penalty and resume its operations. This time, they should be more careful to avoid being on the wrong side of the law. The FIU's decision to impose a hefty fine on Binance sounds similar to US the Department of Justice's \$4.3 billion settlement with Binance. The FIU and the Indian regulators should be more forthcoming when it comes to punishing wrongdoing in the corporate and business world. In this light, the FIU's decision should be a precedent to follow. (IPA Service)

POST BAG

Separate time zone for Northeast

Sir/Ma'am

Northeast welcomes the Sun every day almost 2-3 hours earlier than other parts of the country but northeasterners have to accept the same time as the rest of India which does not make any sense. It is a waste of prime daylight hours which could have been put to right use if Northeast India had its own time zone. The people of Northeast have been asking for a time zone but no government has done anything in this regard.

A separate time zone for the Northeast would save close to 3 billion units of electricity in a year which means the Northeast would become a self-sufficient

region in power generation.

The saved-up power can also bring revenue as it can be sold to states like Jharkhand, Haryana, and Andhra Pradesh which are going through a supply shortage. There should be a time difference of 4 minutes for every degree of longitude change and as the longitude difference between Gujarat and Arunachal Pradesh is 30 degrees, the time in Arunachal Pradesh should be 120 minutes ahead of the Indian Standard Time. I hope the Indian government will mull over this.

Noopur Baruah,
Tezpur, Assam
barooahnoopur@gmail.com

Personal attacks and derogatory remarks against female candidates in electoral campaigns are unacceptable

Sir/Ma'am

In the context of general elections or state legislative elections, every political party uses all means to attract voters. Since winning the support of the general public is crucial for any party to win elections, efforts to attract voters, either towards the party or the candidate, are common.

Various forums, committees, and other methods are utilized by political parties to exert pressure on opponents or candidates to gain electoral advantage. It's noteworthy that every word and action has its limits and boundaries.

Crossing these boundaries and limits to make any gains is unacceptable. Recently, it has been observed that certain political figures have made derogatory

comments, even against female candidates, during political campaigns. Such actions are truly regrettable. In a healthy political environment and democratic society, personal attacks or derogatory comments against any candidate, especially female political leaders, should not be tolerated under any circumstances. Issues like women's safety and the reservation of seats for women are often raised and addressed.

Such actions undermine the integrity of the democratic process and show a lack of respect for the candidates and the electorate. Any form of harassment or discrimination against female candidates should not be tolerated, and political parties should take measures to prevent and address such behavior. Women have the right to participate in politics on an equal footing with men, and their contributions should be valued and respected.

However, it is the responsibility of all political leaders to ensure that such matters are dealt with appropriately. The preparation of laws and regulations to address these issues falls within the purview of all political parties.

Furthermore, it's imperative to establish strict regulations to prevent any political leader from making derogatory remarks against female political leaders. Such actions not only harm the individual targeted but also raise questions in the minds of the general public about the sincerity of these leaders in working for women's empowerment and safety.

If political leaders fail to take a stand against derogatory comments targeting female political leaders, it raises doubts about their commitment to serving all members of society. A healthy political system is essential for the establishment of a healthy democracy. In this regard, not only the Election Commission but also all political parties have significant responsibilities.

It's not just about winning elections; slogans like "self-interest in winning votes" should not be the guiding principle. Respect for all, regardless of gender, should be the foundation of political discourse. Any leader who fails to uphold this principle and engages in derogatory remarks against female leaders jeopardizes not only their own credibility but also the integrity of the entire political process.

It's high time for all political parties to establish strong disciplinary measures to ensure that no leader, regardless of their position, can make derogatory comments against female political leaders or any other individual. If political leaders want to attract the younger generation towards politics, promoting ethical and value-based politics is crucial. If political leaders fail to attract the youth towards politics by promoting ethical values and principles, then political standards and values will continue to deteriorate.

Deborshi Gautam
Nalbari, Assam
gautamdeborshi@gmail.com

An uncommon neurological birth imperfection - Arnold Chiari Malformation

By: Dr SK Rajan

Regardless of the cause, congenital disorders or commonly known as birth defects usually result in disabilities which may affect physically, intellectually or cause developmental delays. While such complications may hamper the quality of life of the child for life-long, timely intervention may help in curbing down the symptomatic complications and improve the functional outcomes.

Chiari Malformation is one such defect which is majorly a congenital defect which may or may not present its symptoms until early teenage. It is a structural defect in the cerebellum part (which is responsible for controlling body balance), where the brain tissues extend into the spinal canal abnormally. This defect usually triggers its progression from the fetal development stage.

While majority of the cases of Chiari malformation occurs during fetal development, only in few cases the condition may be acquired at later stages of life when excessive amounts of cerebrospinal fluid may drain out due to some reason (injury/infection etc).

Attributing to a plethora of reasons including genetic mutation, improper diet during pregnancy by the mother due to lack of essential nutrients, trauma during pregnancy, in-

fection or exposure to any toxic substance etc, the bony space at the base of the skull remains abnormally small. This in turn exerts pressure on the cerebellum blocking the flow of the CFS which surrounds and helps in protecting the brain and spinal cord.

Prevalence and identification

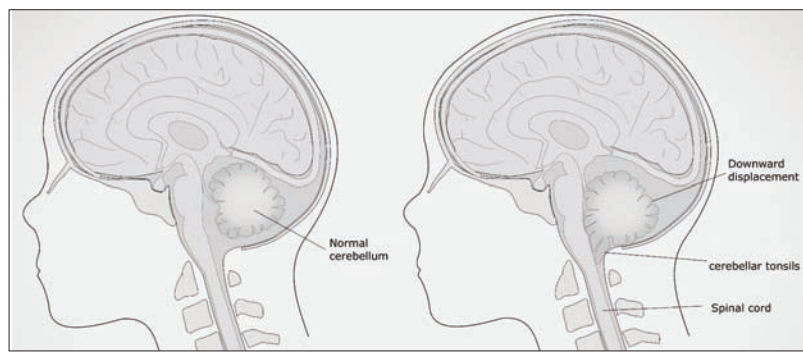
This condition is considered to be one of the rare birth defects, and various reports suggest that its prevalence is only one in a thousand births in the last decade.

But with advancement in technology and diagnostic imaging techniques, the condition may have been under-reported.

In most of the congenital cases, the new born do not have any visible symptoms or the symptoms become prominent around their adolescence, which make the exact estimation of this defect extremely difficult. For sporadic reasons, this defect is known to affect female more than male.

This complication can be classified into four categories –

1. Type 1 – the prevalence of this type of malformation is the most common among children, where only the lower part of the cerebellum (excluding the brainstem) extends into the opening at the base of the skull, which usually has opening only for the spinal cord. This is the only type which can be acquired.



2. Type 2 – this type is usually a consequence in children born with spina bifida (split spine defect). Also known as the classic Chiari Malformation, in these both, the cerebellum and the brain stem extend into the opening.

3. Type 3 – this, despite being a rare case, is the most serious form, as it involves herniation and protrusion of the cerebellum and the brain stem into the opening which has a great potential to cause severe neurological defects.

4. Type 4 – Being the rarest of all the other types, this type of malformation involves an incomplete/ underdeveloped cerebellum and is sometimes associated with exposed parts of the skull.

While birth defect in the spine (spina bifida) is a common reason, yet other conditions associated with the Chiari Malformation can be ex-

cessive build-up of the cerebrospinal fluid (hydrocephalus), cyst development in the central canal of the spinal cord (syringomyelia), disorder in the spine which is progressive that leads to the attachment of spinal cord to the bony spine, or other spinal curvature deformities like scoliosis.

What are the symptoms?

Depending upon the type and severity of the malformation, the symptoms may vary from person to person. While some may be present with no symptoms until late adulthood, others may have persistent symptoms in the early childhood itself.

The most common symptoms include –

- Complications with body balancing and coordination
- Poor vision
- Mild to severe episodes of

headaches

• Weakness in the muscles and numbness

In mild cases of type 1, people suffering from this condition do not even know until the malformation is diagnosed accidentally. But in its severe form the patient may undergo severe pain in the lower back of the head connecting to the neck. This intensifying pain triggers with any activity that exerts pressure in the brain such as sneezing or coughing.

Unlike type 1, congenital patients with type 2 develop excess CSF accumulation which causes debilitating pain during bending, coughing or sneezing, constipated bowel movement, or strenuous physical activities.

Is it treatable? – Yes!

Upon suspicion of the malformation, the treating doctors require physical examining to confirm the condition which involves inspecting the proper functioning of the spinal cord and cerebellum.

If the person has proper and normal body balance, motor skills, sensation, reflexes, this condition may be ruled out for further diagnostics. On the contrary, other diagnostics like CT scan and MRI may be used to identify the condition with precision.

If the symptoms are not persistent and do not hinder with the quality of life, then treatment may not be nec-

essary. While in severe cases where medication provided to subside pain, do not provide relief and interfere with daily activities, the patient may require a surgical procedure.

While surgery remains the last resort to correct the functional outcomes or curb down the progression of the damage rate to the nervous system, the surgery aims to relieve the pressure on the brain and spine, and re-establish the normal fluid circulation.

Various surgical interventions include –

Decompression surgery of the brain stem opening - this procedure requires to surgically remove a minor portion from the bottom of the skull or spinal column to rectify the irregular structure, and creates additional space for the proper circulation of the CSF.

Spinal Laminectomy – In this procedure, a part of the arched bone roof of the spinal canal is removed to increase the canal size and reduce the pressure on the nerve roots and spinal cord.

While additional procedure may be required to correct the condition associated with hydrocephalus, but in most cases surgery results in a significant drop in the symptoms and a prolonged time of remission. *(The author is the Head, Spine Surgery, Agrim Institute of Neurosciences, Artemis Hospital, Gurugram)*

When is it best to exercise in order to maintain healthy blood sugar levels?

By: Erika Watts

Having overweight or obesity can contribute to many health issues, including developing insulin resistance or type 2 diabetes. Once someone develops diabetes, they have to carefully monitor their blood sugar levels throughout the day to make sure their levels are not too high or too low.

Researchers from the University of Granada, in Spain recently studied the role of the timing of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity on glucose metabolism.

Prior studies have shown that physical activity can improve blood glucose (sugar) levels, and the researchers wanted to find out if the time of day the bulk of the activity takes place makes a difference to this effect.

They found an association between being most active later in the day and having more stable blood sugar levels over a 24-hour period.

Physical activity helps keep blood sugar in check

According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 40% of people aged 18 to 44 in the United States have insulin resistance. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that of the 38 million cases of diabetes in the U.S., around 35 million are due to type 2 diabetes.

Doctors may prescribe medications such as metformin to control type 2 diabetes, and they may also recommend diet and exercise to help control blood sugar levels.

With the exercise component in mind, the researchers who conducted the current study wanted to expand on existing research.

"It has been well established that moderate-to-vigorous physical activity enhances glucose homeostasis in adults with overweight/obesity who are at higher risk of developing insulin resistance," note the authors.

The researchers conducted a study using data from the EXTREME trial to see whether the timing of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity impacts blood sugar stability.

They observed a group of 186 adults, evenly split between men and women, with an average age of 46.8 years. The average body mass index (BMI) for the group was 32.9, which the CDC categorizes as indicative of obesity.

The participants wore a device to track physical activity, and a continuous glucose-monitoring device to track glucose levels, for 14 days.

After reviewing the participant data, the researchers categorized each day on the following factors:

- **inactive** — no moderate-to-vigorous physical activity
- **morning** — at least 50% of (moderate-to-vigorous) activity occurred between 06:00 and 12:00
- **afternoon** — at least 50% of activity occurred between 12:00 and 18:00
- **evening** — at least 50% of activity occurred between 18:00 and 00:00
- **mixed** — participants did not have a time period where at least 50% of their moderate-to-vigorous physical activity occurred.

The scientists simultaneously monitored each participant's glucose levels and mapped the readings to the physical activity data.

Evening exercise best for blood sugar control?

The study participants undertook an average of 24 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day. The researchers first noted that their findings reinforced the established link between moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and stabilized glucose metabolism.

The 24-hour average glucose reading for the participants was approximately 1 milligram per deciliter (mg/dL) lower on somewhat active days, and around 1.5 mg/dL lower on very active days compared with inactive days.

When looking at whether the timing of moderate-

to-vigorous physical activity impacted glucose levels, the scientists found an association between completing activity in the evening and lower blood glucose levels.

The 24-hour average glucose reading for the participants who completed their moderate-to-vigorous physical activity during the evening was 1.28 mg/dL lower compared with the reading for inactive participants.

Those who completed most of their moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in the morning or whose activity was spread out across the day did not show statistically different glucose levels compared with the inactive participants.

For the afternoon group, the participants experienced a reduction of 0.98 mg/dL.

"The present study shows that the timing of lifestyle moderate-to-vigorous physical activity is significant and that accumulating most moderate-to-vigorous physical activity during the evening is associated with lower glucose levels in adults with overweight/obesity and metabolic impairments," write the authors.

Furthermore, the researchers found that this association in participants with impaired glucose regulation was even "stronger."

Another promising finding was that the results were consistent in both women and men.

While further studies are needed to explore this, this association may help give people with type 2 diabetes or insulin resistance an idea of how to maximize the benefits of their physical activity.

Any activity helpful for blood sugar control
Robert McLaughlin, MD, a board-certified orthopedic surgeon based in Boston, not involved in this research, spoke with Medical News Today about its findings.

"This study provides valuable insight into the timing of exercise and its impacts on glucose regulation, shedding light on an often overlooked aspect," McLaughlin said.

He noted that the results were "surprising, yet intriguing," adding that:

"While we generally understand the benefits of exercise for glucose metabolism, the idea that timing can enhance these effects adds a new dimension to exercise prescription. This could lead to more effective management strategies for metabolic disorders." However, McLaughlin was quick to warn people not to drop exercise during other times of the day.

"It's essential for the audience to understand that these results should not discourage morning exercise, which still offers significant health benefits," emphasized McLaughlin. "The key takeaway is that if you have the flexibility, incorporating evening workouts could provide additional metabolic advantages, particularly for those managing insulin resistance or diabetes."

The goal is regular moderate-to-vigorous exercise

Shiara Ortiz-Pujols, MD, MPH, who works in obesity medicine in the Department of Surgery at Staten Island University Hospital in New York, also spoke with MNT about the study. Like McLaughlin, she was not involved in this research.

"The study further supported that any physical activity that can be accumulated throughout the day is beneficial, with a more significant impact on glucose regulation if done in the evening hours," said Ortiz-Pujols. She also emphasized the importance of getting in some physical activity whenever possible.

"Although exercising in the evening may be better to [regulate glucose metabolism] in adults with overweight/obesity, schedules may not always permit this for everyone," Ortiz-Pujols noted.

"The primary goal is to engage in regular moderate-to-vigorous physical activity," commented Ortiz-Pujols. "Once we have a regular routine of doing this, then we can aim to exercise in the evening to further optimize glucose regulation." *(Courtesy: Medical News Today)*



New advances in treating stage IV cancer

By: Dr Raghav Kesri

Stage IV cancer, also known as metastatic cancer, is the most advanced form of the disease. It is characterized by the spread of cancer cells from the primary site to distant parts of the body. Historically, a diagnosis of stage IV cancer was often seen as a terminal condition with limited treatment options.

However, recent advancements in medical science have brought new hope to patients and their families. While a complete cure for stage IV cancer remains challenging, treatments such as immunotherapy, targeted therapy, and chemotherapy have shown promising results in controlling the disease and significantly improving patient outcomes.

Immunotherapy is one of the most cutting-edge developments in cancer treatment. This approach harnesses the body's immune system to recognize

and attack cancer cells more effectively. Immunotherapy treatments, such as checkpoint inhibitors, have been particularly successful in certain types of cancers, including melanoma, lung cancer, and kidney cancer.

These drugs work by blocking proteins that prevent the immune system from attacking cancer cells, thereby boosting the body's natural defences. The success of immunotherapy has led to a rapid expansion of research in this field, with ongoing studies exploring its potential in other cancer types.

Targeted Therapy
Targeted therapy represents another major breakthrough in the fight against stage IV cancer. Unlike traditional chemotherapy, which attacks all rapidly dividing cells, targeted therapy focuses on specific molecules and signalling pathways that drive cancer growth.

By directly targeting these pathways, the treatment can halt the proliferation of cancer cells while

minimizing damage to normal cells. The precision treatments are tailored to the genetic profile of the patient's tumor, making them more effective and reducing the likelihood of severe side effects.

Chemotherapy

While newer therapies have garnered much attention, chemotherapy remains a critical component in the management of stage IV cancer. Advances in chemotherapy protocols have led to better combinations and dosing schedules that maximize efficacy while reducing side effects. Chemotherapy can shrink tumours, alleviate symptoms, and, in combination with other treatments, help achieve remission.

A Multifaceted Approach to Treatment

The future of stage IV cancer treatment lies in a multifaceted approach that combines these innovative therapies. Clinical trials are increasingly exploring combinations of immunotherapy, targeted therapy, and

chemotherapy to enhance their effectiveness.

For patients with stage IV cancer, these advancements mean that there are more options than ever before. While the road to a complete cure is still long, the ability to control the disease and improve quality of life is a significant step forward. Continued research and clinical trials are essential to furthering our understanding and expanding the arsenal of treatments available to fight this complex disease.

Stage IV cancer remains a serious diagnosis, but the landscape of treatment is rapidly changing. Immunotherapy, targeted therapy, and chemotherapy offer new hope and improved outcomes for many patients. As research progresses, the prospect of managing, and even curing, stage IV cancer becomes increasingly attainable. *(The author is the Senior Consultant Oncology, Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida)*

Advanced treatment modules assisting in minimally invasive spine surgeries

By: Dr Satnam Singh Chhabra

With the advent of winters, which requires extra efforts to avoid the worsening spiral of immobility and increasing pain, patients especially with spinal complications are at an added risk. Slipped disc is a common problem, which affects approximately 1% of the population at any given time. It usually affects people between the ages of 30 to 50 years. But these days, it is not bound to any age group or gender. It commonly occurs in people whose occupation involves frequent bending and lifting.

However slipped disc is not the only cause of backache/leg pain. These aches can often result from diseases like spinal tumour, infection, T.B., cancer spreading to spine, osteoporosis, arthritis, spinal stenosis, fractures, congenital diseases etc.

Disc is cushion like material between the numerous small bones of the spine column called vertebrae. This gelatinous material is enclosed in a fibrous capsule. Any tear in this capsule predisposes to prolapse of the disc. Prolapse of the disc causes compression of the nerve that lies very close to it. This problem is more common in lower portion of spine called lumbar spine.

The slipped disc typically causes low back pain, which travels to buttock and further down to back of thigh and calf muscles. This leg pain is also called as Sciatica because it radiates along distribution of sciatic nerve. This pain increases on sneezing or straining, walking etc. Pain may be accompanied by numbness or weakness in leg muscles and in severe situations bladder and bowel disturbances.

Human spine is made up of 33 bones calls vertebrae and between each two bones is a soft rubber like disc, which is jelly like in the centre and acts as a shock absorber for the spine and also gives flexibility to the spine. In the centre of the spine runs a canal, which contains the spinal cord.

Spinal cord is a big nerve coming from the brain and its branches go into hand and legs. These nerves get com-



pressed, when the disk slips back into the spinal canal and the problem of backache and leg pain starts. Besides slip disc other lesions can also press the nerves and cause similar symptoms like tumours, infections, deformities etc. hence a proper diagnosis is essential for the treatment.

What are the diagnostic methods?

In recent years, MRI scanning is becoming available more easily and is the preferred diagnostic test for spinal problems. MRI scan can clearly show the site and amount of disc prolapse and the nerve compression. Majority of patients respond to the non-surgical treatment.

Non-surgical treatment is given in the form of bed rest, medicines to reduce pain and swelling. Physiotherapy is gradually started. Surgery is required in 10-20% of patients whose pain persists after conservative treatment or who have paralysis or bladder and bowel dysfunction from beginning.

Latest medical advancements

But thanks to the latest advancements in medical technologies, serious health diseases have now become curable. Determined for the same, Dr Satnam Singh Chhabra has successfully taken spinal surgeries to an altogether new level. With the latest introduction of the new device to provide relief to patients suffering from savior slipped disc and compressed nerves, much relief and better treatment is available for patients with such problems now. Gaining pop-

ularity under the same banner, this Device has been submitted for patent rights by the name of Satnam Device for Endoscopic Surgery.

The device is now being used by numerous hospitals in India, providing a sigh of relief to patients suffering from the agonizing pain. Nowadays, surgery for slipped disc is performed through a tiny (about 1.5 cms) incision in the back with the help of an endoscope. The surgery grants patients the relief to go back home within 12-24 hrs of getting operated.

Additionally, such patients can also easily walk and use the toilet the very same day, besides getting fit to resume office in a few days time.

Generally the idea of undergoing a spinal surgery often puts people on tenterhooks given the risk of paralysis or fear of getting bed-ridden and depending on others. Such is the mindset of patients that they'd rather suffer the pain than get operated. However with modern surgical techniques on the go, such complications are extremely rare."

Satnam Device for Endoscopic Surgery is a special tube which is placed into the back of patient through a minor cut in the skin. Surgery is performed through this tube under endoscopic view on LED monitor. The device gives enormous magnification and clarity of vision which in turn minimizes the risk to normal nerves. *(The author is the HOD, Neurosurgery at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital)*

Iran-backed fighters offer to join Hezbollah in fight against Israel

BEIRUT, June 23: Thousands of fighters from Iran-backed groups in the Middle East are ready to come to Lebanon to join with the militant Hezbollah group in its battle with Israel if the simmering conflict escalates into a full-blown war, officials with Iran-backed factions and analysts say.

Almost daily exchanges of fire have occurred along Lebanon's frontier with northern Israel since fighters from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip staged a bloody assault on southern Israel in early October that set off a war in Gaza.

The situation to the north worsened this month after an Israeli airstrike killed a senior Hezbollah military commander in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah retaliated by firing hundreds of rockets and explosive drones into northern Israel.

Israeli officials have threatened a military offensive in Lebanon if there is no negotiated end to push Hezbollah away from the border.

Over the past decade, Iran-backed fighters from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan fought together in Syria's 13-year conflict, helping tip the balance in favour of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Officials from Iran-backed groups say they could also join together against Israel.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said in a speech Wednesday that militant leaders from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and other countries have previously offered to send tens of thousands of fighters to help Hezbollah, but he said the group already has more than 100,000 fighters.



"We told them, thank you, but we are overwhelmed by the numbers we have," Nasrallah said. Nasrallah said the battle in its current form is using only a portion of Hezbollah's manpower, an apparent reference to the specialised fighters who fire missiles and drones.

But that could change in the event of an all-out war. Nasrallah hinted at that possibility in a speech in 2017 in which he said fighters from Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan "will be partners" of such a war.

Officials from Lebanese and Iraqi groups backed by Iran say Iran-backed fighters from around the region will join in if war erupts on the Lebanon-Israel border. Thousands of such fighters are already deployed in Syria and could easily slip through the porous and unmarked border.

Some of the groups have already staged attacks on Israel and its allies since the Israel-Hamas

war started October 7. The groups from the so-called "axis of resistance" say they are using a "unity of arenas strategy" and they will only stop fighting when Israel ends its offensive in Gaza against their ally, Hamas.

"We will be (fighting) shoulder to shoulder with Hezbollah" if an all-out war breaks out, one official with an Iran-backed group in Iraq told The Associated Press in Baghdad, insisting on speaking anonymously to discuss military matters. He refused to give further details.

The official, along with another from Iraq, said some advisers from Iraq are already in Lebanon. An official with a Lebanese Iran-backed group, also insisting on anonymity, said fighters from Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, Afghanistan's Fatimiyoun, Pakistan's Zeinabiyoun and the Iran-backed rebel group in Yemen known as Houthis could come to Lebanon to take part in a war.

Qassim Qassir, an expert on Hezbollah, agreed the current fighting is mostly based on high technology such as firing missiles and does not need a large number of fighters. But if a war broke out and lasted for a long period, Hezbollah might need support from outside Lebanon, he said.

"Hinting to this matter could be (a message) that these are cards that could be used," he said.

Israel is also aware of the possible influx of foreign fighters. Eran Etzion, former head of policy planning for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said at a panel discussion hosted by the Washington-based Middle East Institute on Thursday that he sees "a high probability" of a "multi-front war."

He said there could be intervention by the Houthis and Iraqi militias and a "massive flow of jihadists from (places) including Afghanistan, Pakistan" into Lebanon and into Syrian areas bordering Israel.

Daniel Hagari, Israel's military spokesman, said in a televised statement this past week that since Hezbollah started its attacks on Israel on October 8, it has fired more than 5,000 rockets, anti-tank missiles and drones toward Israel.

"Hezbollah's increasing aggression is bringing us to the brink of what could be a wider escalation, one that could have devastating consequences for Lebanon and the entire region," Hagari said. "Israel will continue fighting against Iran's axis of evil on all fronts." Hezbollah officials have said

they don't want an all-out war with Israel but if it happens they are ready.

"We have taken a decision that any expansion, no matter how limited it is, will be faced with an expansion that deters such a move and inflicts heavy Israeli losses," Hezbollah's deputy leader, Naim Kassem, said in a speech this past week.

The UN special coordinator for Lebanon, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and the commander of the UN peacekeeping force deployed along Lebanon's southern border, Lt. Gen. Aroldo Lázaro, said in a joint statement that "the danger of miscalculation leading to a sudden and wider conflict is very real."

The last large-scale conflict between Israel and Hezbollah occurred in the summer of 2006, when the two fought a 34-day war that killed about 1,200 people in Lebanon and 140 in Israel.

Since the latest run of clashes began, more than 400 people have been killed in Lebanon, the vast majority of them fighters but including 70 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, 16 soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed. Tens of thousands have been displaced on both sides of the border.

Qassir, the analyst, said that if foreign fighters did join in, it would help them that they fought together in Syria in the past.

"There is a common military language between the forces of axis of resistance and this is very important in fighting a joint battle," he said. (AP)

Imran Khan's party-backed SIC not entitled to reserved seats: Pak election commission

ISLAMABAD, June 23: Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party-backed Sunni Ittehad Council is not eligible for reserved seats as the party does not allow non-Muslims to be a part of it, Pakistan's election commission has said in a response submitted to the Supreme Court, according to media reports.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Saturday filed a reply before the Supreme Court to the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) plea against the rejection of its claim on reserved seats for women and minorities in the national and provincial assemblies after the general election.

The ECP said that reserved seats cannot be allocated to the SIC, which is backed by 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), as the party failed to submit the list of nominees for the reserved seats by the deadline of December 24, Geo News reported.

The top polls body added that as per the SIC constitution, a non-Muslim person cannot be a part of the party, which is unconstitutional.

"According to the constitution of the SIC, a non-Muslim cannot become a member of the party. The provision against the inclusion of non-Muslims in the constitution of SIC is unconstitutional. The SIC is not entitled to reserved seats for women and minorities," the election watchdog said.

It added that the independent candidates joined the SIC after the elections, after which the ECP gave the majority 4-1 verdict of not allocating the reserved seats to the party, and later the Peshawar High Court (PHC) upheld the ruling.

"SIC is not eligible for the reserved seats. There is nothing wrong with the ECP and the PHC's decision of not

giving reserved seats to SIC. The decision is in line with the laws and Constitution," the ECP said, according to the report.

There are 70 reserved seats in the National Assembly and another 156 in the four provincial assemblies, and the SIC was not given any seat as it had not contested the election.

The party gained strength when independently elected candidates backed by the PTI party joined it after the elections.

The PTI-backed independent candidates took the lead in the February 8 elections after they won the 92 National Assembly seats followed by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) (79) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) (54).

The reserved seats were allocated to all political parties according to their strength in the assemblies except the PTI-backed SIC.

The SIC filed a plea which was rejected by the ECP and the PHC, and subsequently, the party challenged it in the Supreme Court.

A full bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez will hear the case of reserved seats on Monday, the report said.

Earlier, on May 6, in a major relief to the PTI, the apex court suspended the PHC's decision about rejecting the SIC plea.

Following the ruling, the ECP on May 14 suspended the victory notifications of 77 candidates declared successful on the reserved seats.

The final ruling by the top court in the case would decide the fate of those 77 reserved seats. Though it may not change the current power structure, the changes in the overall number game in the assemblies may impact the law-making in the country. (PTI)

Philippines says it won't back down, but won't start a war, after clash with Chinese Coast Guard

MANILA, June 23: The president of the Philippines said Sunday his country would not yield to "any foreign power" after Chinese forces injured Filipino navy personnel and damaged at least two military boats with machetes, axes and hammers in a clash in the disputed South China Sea, but added the Philippines would never instigate a war.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. flew with his top generals and defence chief to the western island province of Palawan, which faces the South China Sea, to meet and award medals to navy personnel who came under assault by the Chinese coast guard Monday as they attempted to deliver food and other supplies to an outpost on the holy contested Second Thomas Shoal.

Videos and pictures of the chaotic face-off made public by the military showed Chinese coast guard personnel hitting a Philippine navy boat with a wooden bar and seizing a bag while blaring sirens and using blinding strobe lights.

The Chinese government said that its coast guard had to take action after Filipino forces defied warnings not to stray into what China calls its own offshore territory, a claim long rejected by rival claimant governments and international arbitrators.

The violent confrontation sparked condemnation and alarm from the US, the European Union, Japan, Australia and other Western and Asian nations, while China and the Philippines blamed each other for instigating it. Marcos's key advisers said Friday that his administration has no plan to invoke the country's mutual defence treaty with the United States.

"We are not in the business to in-

stigate wars," Marcos told Filipino forces. "In defending the nation, we stay true to our Filipino nature that we would like to settle all these issues peacefully."

In Monday's face-off at the shoal, Marcos said "we made a conscious and deliberate choice to remain in the path of peace." The Filipino navy special operations group personnel who came under attack used only their bare hands to push back the Chinese, some of whom pointed knives at them, said Philippine military chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr.

"We stand firm. Our calm and peaceful disposition should not be mistaken for acquiescence," Marcos said. "History itself can tell that we have never, never in the history of the Philippines yielded to any foreign power." Chinese officials in Manila and Beijing did not immediately comment on Marcos's remarks.

Marcos praised about 80 officers and personnel involved in Monday's supply mission, including one who lost his right thumb during the high seas confrontation, saying they "exercised the greatest restraint amidst intense provocation." He issued an appeal: "Continue to fulfil your duty of defending the nation with integrity and respect as you have done so far."

The territorial disputes, which involve China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, have long been seen as a flashpoint that could pit the US against China if high seas confrontations escalate into armed conflict. Washington has repeatedly warned that it is obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces are attacked, including in the South China Sea. (AP)

US aircraft carrier arrives in South Korea as a show of force against nuclear-armed North Korea

SEOUL, June 23: A nuclear-powered U.S. aircraft carrier arrived Saturday in South Korea for a three-week exercise involving Japan as they step up military training to cope with North Korean threats, which have escalated following a security pact with Russia. The arrival of the USS Theodore Roosevelt strike group in Busan came a day after South Korea summoned the Russian ambassador to protest a major deal between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un this week.

The agreement pledges mutual defense assistance in the event of war. South Korea says the deal poses a threat to its security and warned that it could consider sending arms to Ukraine to help fight off the Russian invasion as a response — a move that would surely ruin its relations with Moscow.

Following a meeting between their defense chiefs in Singapore earlier in June, the United States, South Korea and Japan announced the Free-

dom Edge drills.

The Roosevelt strike group will participate in the exercise that is expected to start within June. South Korea's military didn't immediately confirm specific details of the training.

Rear Admiral Christopher Alexander, commander of Carrier Strike Group Nine, said the exercise is aimed at sharpening tactical proficiency of ships and improving interoperability between the countries' navies "to ensure we are ready to respond to any crisis and contingency."

South Korea's navy said in a statement that the arrival of the carrier demonstrates the strong defence posture of the allies and "stern willingness to respond to advancing North Korean threats." The carrier's visit comes seven months after another U.S. aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, came to South Korea in a show of strength against the North.

Following completion of the exercise, the Roo-

sevelt strike group will leave for the Middle East to "continue promoting regional stability, deter aggression, and protect the free flow of commerce in the region," Pentagon spokesperson Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said in a statement.

The Roosevelt strike group also participated in a three-way exercise with South Korea and Japanese naval forces in April in the disputed East China Sea, where worries about China's territorial claims are rising.

In the face of growing North Korean threats, the United States, South Korea and Japan have expanded their combined training and boosted the visibility of strategic U.S. military assets in the region, seeking to intimidate the North. The United States and South Korea have also been updating their nuclear deterrence strategies, with Seoul seeking stronger assurances that Washington would swiftly and decisively use its nuclear capabilities to defend its ally from a North Korean nuclear attack. (AP)

Ukraine sends over 30 drones into Russia

KYIV, June 23: Russian authorities said more than 30 drones were shot down over the country's western regions overnight into Sunday, just hours after a Russian bomb attack on Ukraine's second largest city of Kharkiv killed three people and left dozens in hospitals.

One of the four aerial bombs hit a five-story residential building on Saturday afternoon, officials said. Regional Gov. Oleh Synehubov said 41 people were still being treated for injuries.

In a video address following the attack, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Ukraine's partners to bolster its air defences. "Modern air defence systems for Ukraine — such as Patriots, accelerated training of our

pilots for F-16s, and most importantly, sufficient range for our weapons — are truly necessary," he said. Two people were wounded by falling debris when two Russian missiles were shot down over the Kyiv region overnight, Ukraine's air force commander Mykola Oleschuk said.

In Russia, air defence forces shot down 33 Ukrainian drones over the country's western Bryansk, Smolensk, Lipetsk and Tula regions, the Russian Ministry of Defence said. No casualties or damage were reported.

Regional Gov. Vadym Filashkin of Ukraine's partly occupied Donetsk region said that Russian attacks on Saturday killed two people and wounded four. (AP)

Sri Lankan prez reiterates support for separate state of Palestine

COLOMBO, June 23: President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Sunday reiterated Sri Lanka's unwavering support for a separate Palestinian state to be established "within five years." The president also said that despite the country's current bankrupt economy, generous public contributions collected a million dollars in response to his government's Gaza Children's Fund that was donated.

Wickremesinghe made these remarks during participation at a special service held at a Grand Mummah Mosque at the Muslim-dominated Kattankudy in the eastern province for the affected people of Gaza.

Hamas militants attacked Israel on October 7 last year, killed around 1,200 people and took some 250 oth-

ers as hostages. Since then, Israel has regularly bombed the Gaza Strip killing over 37,000 Palestinians. "Sri Lanka's stance on the Gaza clashes would never change, action must be taken to set up an independent Palestine state within five years and murdering of civilians must stop," he said.

"People should not be made to pay for the problems with Hamas. We all should assist in finding a solution to the Palestine problem — the state of Palestine must be set up before five years. It will not be productive to waste time talking about it, as we have done now for 40-50 years. Israel's security concerns must be addressed separately," Wickremesinghe added. (PTI)

With its new pact with North Korea, Russia raises the stakes with the West over Ukraine

SEOUL, June 23: Behind the smiles, the balloons and the red-carpet pageantry of President Vladimir Putin's visit to North Korea last week, a strong signal came through: In the spiralling confrontation with the US and its allies over Ukraine, the Russian leader is willing to challenge Western interests like never before.

The pact that he signed with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un envisions mutual military assistance between Moscow and Pyongyang if either is attacked. Putin also announced for the first time that Russia could provide weapons to the isolated country, a move that could destabilise the Korean Peninsula and reverberate far beyond.

He described the potential arms shipments as a response to NATO allies providing Ukraine with longer-range weapons to attack Russia. He bluntly declared that Moscow has nothing to lose and is prepared to go "to the end" to achieve its goals in Ukraine.

Putin's moves added to concerns in Washington and Seoul about what they see as an alliance in which North Korea provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its war in Ukraine in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that would enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile programme.

The new agreement with Pyongyang marked the strongest link between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War. (AP)

Pakistan govt approves deployment of Frontier Constabulary in PoK

ISLAMABAD, June 23: Pakistan's federal government on Sunday approved the deployment of the paramilitary force Frontier Constabulary in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) which was rocked by protests last month, during which several people were killed. As many as six platoons of the paramilitary force will be deployed in the region for three months, Geo News reported.

The decision to deploy the Frontier Constabulary comes a day after Pakistan announced to launch a major new operation against terrorism with a renewed commitment. The protests, against inflation and high electricity prices, were led by the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) and had traders at the forefront in most parts of the region.

"The development came after the 'prime minister' of the disputed region Chaudhry Anwarul Haq met with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi," Geo News reported.

During the meeting, the two leaders reportedly discussed the law and order situation, the prevailing political landscape, as well as the disputed region's budget for the next fiscal year.

As many as six platoons of the Frontier Constabulary will be deployed in the region for three months and would provide fool-proof security for Neelum-Jhelum, Mangla and Gulpur hydro-power projects, apart from assisting the police. (AP)

Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars on crowd control and safety measures for those attending the annual five-day pilgrimage, but the sheer number of participants makes ensuring their safety difficult

Hundreds died during this year's Haj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia amid intense heat: Officials

MECCA (SAUDI ARABIA), June 23: Hundreds of people died during this year's Haj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia as the faithful faced intense high temperatures at Islamic holy sites in the desert kingdom, officials said Wednesday as people tried to claim their loved ones' bodies.

Saudi Arabia has not commented on the death toll amid the heat during the pilgrimage, required of every able Muslim once in their life, nor offered any causes for those who died. However, hundreds of people had lined up at the Emergency Complex in Al-Muaiseem neighborhood in Mecca, trying to get information about their missing family members.

One local circulating online suggested at least 550 people died during the five-day Haj.

A medic who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss information not released publicly by the government said that the names listed appeared genuine. That medic and another official who also spoke on condition of anonymity for the same reason said they believed at least 600 bodies were at the facility.

Deaths are not uncommon at the Haj, which has seen at times over 2 million people travel to Saudi Arabia. There have also been stampedes and epidemics through the pilgrimage's history.

Each year, the Haj draws hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from low-income nations, "many of whom have had little, if any, pre-Haj health care," according to an article in the April edition of the Journal of Infection and Public Health. Communicable illnesses



can spread among the gathered masses, many of whom save their entire lives for the pilgrimage and can be elderly with preexisting health conditions, it said.

However, the number of dead this year suggests something caused the fatalities to swell. Already, several countries have said some of their pilgrims died because of the heat that swept across the holy sites at Mecca, including Jordan and Tunisia.

Khalid Bashir Bazaz, an Indian pilgrim, speaking near the Grand Mosque on Wednesday, said he "saw a lot of people collapsing to the ground unconscious" during this year's Haj.

Temperatures on Tuesday reached 47 degrees Cel-

sus (117 degrees Fahrenheit) in Mecca and the sacred sites in and around the city, according to the Saudi National Center for Meteorology.

Some people fainted while trying to perform the symbolic stoning of the devil.

Many Egyptians said they lost track of their loved ones in the heat and the crowds. More than 1.83 million Muslims performed the Hajj in 2024, including more than 1.6 million from 22 countries, and around 2,22,000 Saudi citizens and residents, according to the Saudi Hajj authorities.

On Wednesday at the medical complex in Mecca, an Egyptian man broke down when he heard his mother was among the dead. He cried for some time before grabbing his cellphone and calling their travel agent.

"He left her to die," he shouted, referring to the agent. The crowd tried to calm him down.

Security appeared tight at the complex, with an official reading out names of the dead and the nationalities, which included people from Algeria, Egypt and India.

Those who said they were kin of the dead were allowed inside to identify the deceased.

The AP could not independently confirm the causes of death for the people whose bodies were held at the complex. Saudi officials did not respond to questions seeking more information.

The kingdom's ruling Al Saud family maintains a major influence in the Muslim world through its oil wealth and management of Islam's holiest sites. Like

Cloudburst in Itanagar triggers landslides, flood-like situation

ITANAGAR, June 23: A cloudburst on Sunday morning triggered multiple landslides and caused flooding in Itanagar, officials said.

Despite heavy rains in Arunachal Pradesh over recent weeks, the weather had improved in the past two days with no forecast of rain, they added.

The cloudburst occurred around 10:30 am, leading to landslides in various parts of Itanagar and adjacent areas. The NH-415, crucial for the state capital's connectivity, experienced flood-like conditions, stranding numerous vehicles, an official from the Disaster Management Department said.

Heavy rains inundated homes near Energy Park and Bank Tinali areas. The district administration advised people against approaching rivers or landslide-prone zones, encouraging them to relocate to safer areas due to ongoing heavy rainfall.

Dani Salu, secretary of the State's Disaster Management Department, told PTI that several



roads within Itanagar suffered damage. Portions of the NH-415 were submerged, severely disrupting traffic.

No casualties have been reported so far, though the extent of property damage will only be assessed after field evaluations by departmental officials, he added.

Salu urged residents to remain vigilant during the monsoon period.

Rescue and relief operations were underway with the involvement of district administration officials, led by Deputy Commissioner Shweta Nagarkoti Mehta, Itanagar Municipal Corporation commissioner, State Disaster Response Force, and police personnel. Seven relief camps were set up by the district administration to assist affected people, officials said. (PTI)

Mizoram seeks ₹ 237.6 cr assistance to address cyclone caused damage

AIZWAL, June 23: The Mizoram government has requested monetary assistance amounting to ₹ 237.6 crore from the Centre for rehabilitation of people and repair

financial assistance from the Centre.

The recent landslides, rain, and other calamities resulting from the cyclone killed 34 people and caused significant damage to public and private property, Sapdanga added.



the damages caused by landslides and rain that hit the state in the last week of May as a result of Cyclone Remal, state Disaster Management and Rehabilitation Minister K. Sapdanga said on Sunday.

Sapdanga said Chief Minister Lalduhoma, who is currently in Delhi, on Thursday submitted a memorandum to Union Home Minister Amit Shah and detailed the extent of the damage caused by Cyclone Remal and sought fi-

widespread than initially predicted. The minister expressed gratitude to the inter-ministerial team for visiting Mizoram to conduct spot verification of the damages caused by the cyclone.

He briefed the central team on the disastrous effects of the cyclone on the state's roads, water supply, electricity, and other critical infrastructure, as well as the damage to ongoing projects. The meeting was chaired by chief secretary Renu Sharma. (PTI)

Cabinet minister Ashok Singhal felicitates brilliant students in Dhekiajuli

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 23: State housing and urban development minister, Ashok Singhal felicitated students for their excellent performance in both HSLC and HS examinations from different institutions during a special felicitation programme at Trimurti Bhawan in Dhekiajuli town in Sonitpur district on Sunday.

During the programme, 710 students who had passed the HSLC examination and 346 students who had passed the HS final examination were felicitated with a citation, a book and a plant-sapling.

Taking part as the chief guest of the event the cabinet minister congratulated the students and said that the students are the future of the society. He urged the students to establish themselves as good citizens and contribute towards establishing the nation as well as the state in the world stage.

Advising the students to lead themselves with the 'nation first' concept, Singhal said, "The students should be aware of the proper use of

their knowledge, social media etc and conduct themselves in a responsible and disciplined manner."

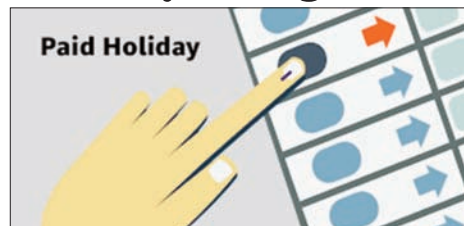
The minister also mentioned how many students get deluded once they complete their school education and start attending college. Many go astray due to several reasons.

"Every principle of nature operates with a fixed discipline and we the human beings are also influenced by it. If we follow it properly we will never be derailed from the track of discipline of our life," he said.

He also said that in the age of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has also become a challenge for us. Saying it's time to compete with self, but not with friends he advised the students to build themselves as valuable human resource using modern science and technology in a proper way.

In the programme noted academician and social worker Sachin Baishya and Biren Saikia along with the headmasters and principals of different schools and colleges were present.

June 26 declared paid holiday in Nagaland



KOHIMA, June 23: In view of the forthcoming municipal and town council elections in Nagaland, the state labour department has empowered under Section 10 (2), 11(3) of the Nagaland Shop and Establishment Act, 1986, and under Section 80(1) of the Factories Act, 1948, has declared June 26 as paid holiday for all the workers engaged in commercial and industrial establishments in the state in order to help them to exercise their right to franchise.

Hence, all the employers and occupiers of the commercial and industrial establishments in the state are directed to pay wage at a rate equal to the daily average of his/her total full time earning for the day for which paid leave is declared.

No deduction what so ever, would be made from the wage of any worker falling under the specified category, it added. (NNN)

RPF of NFR recovers contraband goods worth more than ₹ 16.21 crore

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 23: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has apprehended 15 persons and recovered contraband goods worth more than ₹ 1.22 crore during the period from June 1 to 15.

The accused were apprehended for alleged involvement in transportation of contraband/smuggled goods during this period. Moreover, RPF of NFR has been regularly conducting drives to control the menace of touts.

In recently conducted checks and drives over the zone from June 1 to 15, RPF apprehended five touts and recovered railway tickets worth above ₹ 90 thousand from them.

During January to May, RPF of NFR recovered contraband and smuggled goods worth more than ₹ 16.21 crore and ap-



prehended 217 persons for involvement in smuggling of contraband goods.

Moreover, 119 touts were also apprehended by RPF of NFR and recovered railway tickets worth more than ₹ 21.98 lakh during this period. All the apprehended persons were prosecuted under the relevant section of the Railways Act.

In a recent incident on June 13, RPF and Government Railway Police (GRP) of Guwahati conducted checking in the DN (Donyi Polo Express) at the Guwahati Railway Station.

During checking, they apprehended two persons and recovered 89 gms Brown Sugar worth ₹ 17.80 Lakhs from the train. Later, the accused along

with the recovered brown sugar were handed over to OC/GRP/Guwahati for necessary legal action.

Moreover, on June 9 the RPF team of Kishanganj and CIB team of New Jalpaiguri jointly conducted a raid and search operation at PRS counter of the Alubari Road Railway Station. During the raid, the team recovered 21 PRS Tickets, worth around ₹ 55,223 and apprehended one tout in this connection. A case was registered under section 143 of the Railways Act for further course of action.

It may be mentioned here that RPF of NFR are constantly on vigil towards activities related to smuggling and transportation of contraband items at railway stations and trains and unauthorized and illegal procurement of railway tickets.

Tripura govt schools with below 50 students to be merged with nearby institutes

State has 800 junior and senior basic schools with student enrolment of less than 50

AGARTALA, June 23: The Tripura government has initiated an exercise to identify schools with student strength of less than 50 and may merge them with nearby educational institutes, which have better enrolment, an official said on Sunday.

The exercise, which has been taken up following the Centre's directive last month, is expected to be completed by the end of June, he said.

"As part of a plan to boost the learning system, the district education officers were asked to identify the government schools having a student strength of below 50 for merger with institutes having reasonably better enrolment," Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Education department, Kaliprasad Chakma told PTI.



The move is aimed at improving the student-teacher ratio, he said.

"After completion of the exercise, the government will consider all aspects and may merge these schools with one situated preferably within 1

km or 1.5 km radius", he said.

According to Chakma, preliminary reports indicate that the state has 800 junior and senior basic schools with a student enrolment of less than 50.

In total, there are around 2,500 junior and senior basic schools in the state. After the completion of the ongoing exercise, the department will seek the opinion of school management committees (SMCs) and local bodies and then submit a report to the government to make a necessary decision for the merger, he said.

"The objective of the move is to reorganise the student-teacher ratio at the primary level government schools. It has been found that three teachers are posted in a junior basic school which has only 13 students, while many schools are facing shortages of teaching staff. The problem of such distribution of teachers may be addressed by the exercise", he said.

Responding to the move, the state's youth Congress

leader Md. Shajahan Islam alleged that the BJP-led double-engine government has been "forcing the poor students to get admission to private-run schools."

"The BJP government has failed to improve the education system in its six-year rule. We came to know that the education department has initiated a process to close down 160 schools in West Tripura district alone, citing less-enrolment. Where will the poor students go? The youth Congress strongly protest the move", he said.

CPI (M)-backed Tribal Students' Union general secretary Sujit Tripura claimed that the government has been trying to shut down many schools in rural and tribal areas to deprive the tribal students of education. (PTI)

Rio directs advocate general to take steps for release of detained Naga youths

45 Naga youths reportedly falsely implicated in call centre scam in Mohali

KOHIMA, June 23: Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio has directed the state's advocate general to personally intervene in the case involving 45 Naga youths, who were allegedly falsely implicated in a call centre scam in Punjab's Mohali.

The youths were among 155 people arrested in May during a Punjab Police operation that busted two fake call centres in Mohali.

A government statement on Saturday said Rio discussed the detention of the state's youths with Nagaland Advocate General K N Balgopal in New Delhi.

Rio asked Balgopal to take urgent steps for the re-

lease of the "innocent" Naga youths.

The CM has also tasked the Resident Commissioner of Nagaland House in New Delhi to maintain contact with families of the detained youths and provide necessary assistance.

Meanwhile, S Spongmeren Jamir, the state's newly elected Lok Sabha MP, expressed concern over the situation and urged officials concerned to address the plight of the detained persons from Nagaland.

The Punjab Police had earlier said employees of the fraudulent call centres were held for allegedly scamming people in the US. (PTI)



Mass protests held in Manipur condemning deployment of central forces



IMPHAL, June 23: Mass protests were carried out at various places in the valley districts of Manipur on Sunday against heavy security deployment and arrest of village volunteers, who were guarding the settlement areas in the fringe of the valley districts.

Days after Union Home minister Amit Shah convened a high level meeting to review the security situation in the strife-torn Manipur, the central security forces have been deployed at various places across the valley districts in the last few days.

During a protest carried out at Thangmeiband area of Imphal West district, the protesters demanded removal of the Central forces in the general areas while alleging that their presence caused anxiety and fear among the residents.

They also asked the reasons for deploying the central security forces in the general areas "instead of using them to flush out the armed miscreants who attacked the settlement areas in the fringes".

The protesters further sought concrete steps to end the violence on the part of the state and central governments.

A leader of meira paibi (Ima Khunthoknganbi Meira Thangmeiband Meisnam Leikai) alleged that people of all sections in the state are suffering due to the protracted violence and ineffective governance.

Another mass rally was carried out in Lilong Chajing area of Imphal West district. The people protested against fresh deployment of the central security forces in the general areas and also arrest of village volunteers.

The rally, which began from the Regional College Lilong Chajing and proceeded along NH-2 towards Imphal with participants wanting to submit a memorandum to the chief minister was however, prevented from proceeding further from the main gate of Manipur University.

The protest was organized by Imagi Meira, AMKIL, along with other Meira Paibi organizations from across the valley districts.

A mass rally was also carried out in Moirang of Bishnupur district on Sunday calling for a concrete step to resolve the crisis instead of militarisation.

Manipur Chanura Lamjing Lup (MACHALL) organized the rally that chanted "We will determine our own future."

A sit-in-protest staged in the Heirok area of Thoubal district also protested against the deployment of the central security forces in the general areas of the district.

The protest organized by Ningol Club and Heirok Apunba Meira Paibi also decried the arrest of village volunteers by the police. (NNN)

Tripura CM gifts queen pineapples to Bangladesh PM



AGARTALA, June 23: As a goodwill gesture, Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Sunday sent 500 kilograms of queen pineapples to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina through the Akhura Integrated Check Post (ICP).

"At the initiative of chief minister Manik Saha, we have sent 500 kg of queen pineapples to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 100 packets. Each packet contains six pineapples weighing 750 grams each. This is the best pineapple variety in the world," assistant director of horticulture department, Dipak Baidya, told reporters at Akhaura ICP near Agartala.

Asserting that the bond between India and Bangladesh is old and deep-rooted, Baidya said the 'token gift' will further enhance the relationship. Last year too, the chief minister had sent pineapples to the Bangladesh PM, and Hasina reciprocated by sending mangoes to Saha. (PTI)

Left, Cong to go for 'local level' adjustments in Tripura panchayat polls



AGARTALA, June 23: Tripura CPI(M) leader Jitendra Chaudhury on Sunday said the Left parties will pursue "local level" adjustments with the Congress and like-minded parties to take on the BJP in the three-tier panchayat elections likely to be held in August.

In last year's Assembly elections and the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls, the CPI(M) had formed an electoral understanding with the Congress, but failed to defeat the saffron party and its allies.

"Discussions are ongoing at the local level — blocks and districts — to ensure that all

democratic forces can contest the elections in all seats. The party with a strong base in a particular area will contest the elections in those panchayats," Chaudhury, the CPI(M) state secretary, told reporters.

Earlier, Tripura Pradesh Congress president Asish Kumar Saha also supported this approach, stating there will be local-level adjustments between the Congress and Left parties in the panchayat elections.

Chaudhury said a delegation of Left parties will soon meet the state election commission to demand free, fair, and peaceful panchayat elections.

The Congress has already called for the facilitation of online nomination submissions in the rural polls, as opposition parties could not submit their papers in 90 per cent of panchayats in the last election.

Criticising the BJP-led government's alleged anti-people policies, the opposition leader said the CPI(M) will launch a statewide agitation at the district and subdivision levels to raise awareness.

"People living in rural areas are leading miserable lives. The government has shut down many schools when more educational institutions are needed. All these issues will be highlighted in the agitation to be held on June 26 in Agartala," he said. (PTI)

Keen contest on cards in bypolls to 10 Assembly seats in UP

LUCKNOW, June 23: With the INDIA bloc making significant gains against the BJP in Uttar Pradesh in Lok Sabha polls, the by-elections in 10 assembly seats that have fallen vacant are likely to witness a keen contest, with the ruling party under pressure to regain its hold.

The date for the by-elections has not been announced yet by the Election Commission. However, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress have announced that they will contest together under the INDIA bloc. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has also begun its preparations, according to their leaders.

The seats fell vacant after nine assembly members including Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav were elected to Lok Sabha, while SP MLA from Sisamau MLA Irfan Solanki of Kanpur was disqualified after he was sentenced to jail in a criminal case.

UP Assembly Special Secretary Brajbhushan Dubey told PTI that information about the vacancy on 10 seats has been sent to the Election Commission.

"As per the procedure, by-elections can be held on these seats within six months," he said.

Five of these seats were won by the Samajwadi Party in 2022 while one seat was bagged by the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), which was then in alliance with the SP. Three seats were won by the BJP and one seat went into the account of BJP's ally Nishad Party.

While the by-election results will



be numerically inconsequential for the BJP in the state assembly, where it has a comfortable majority, they will impact the morale of both sides as any further losses to the BJP will help the opposition SP and Congress to further cement their gains.

While the SP and the Congress have expressed confidence that they will continue their winning streak, the BJP is also preparing to do "something special" in the by-elections to increase its "credibility", according to leaders.

BJP's state media in-charge Manish Dixit told PTI that the "NDA will contest the assembly by-elections with full strength. There is no pressure anywhere, rather the NDA will fight the assembly by-elections with full strength. BJP workers are always ready for public service and elections."

"The party will fight the elections will all its might and the result will be a special achievement," he said.

On the question of giving seats to alliance partners, he said, "The party leadership will decide this but at the

level of organisation and government, we have started preparing for the elections with full enthusiasm."

When Samajwadi Party (SP) chief spokesperson and national secretary Rajendra Chaudhary was asked about it, he said, "Preparations for by-elections have been started on all the vacant seats and in alliance with the Congress party, we will fight the elections with full strength and win."

"The committee formed for management in the Lok Sabha elections is preparing for these 10 seats and national president Akhilesh Yadav will form a new committee for this after the Parliament session," he said.

Meanwhile, UP Congress Committee President Ajay Rai said that the "INDIA alliance will fight unitedly in the upcoming by-elections and soon the leaders of the alliance will meet and discuss the seats and election strategy."

A leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party said that its chief Mayawati has called a meeting of prominent leaders of all states in Lucknow on Sunday, in which the strategy for the

by-elections can also be discussed.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the INDIA bloc won 43 seats out of 80 in the state, with 37 seats going to the SP and six seats to Congress.

On the other hand, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party won 33 seats while its ally Rashtriya Lok Dal won two and Apna Dal (S) got one seat. The BSP did not open its account in this election.

The BJP and its allies won 73 Lok Sabha seats in 2014 and 64 seats in 2019.

In the 2022 assembly elections, the BJP won a total of 273 seats with its allies.

According to the website of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly, in the 403-member House, the BJP has 249, its ally Apna Dal (S) has 13, Rashtriya Lok Dal has eight, Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party has six and Nirbal Indian Shoshit Hamara Aam Dal (NISHAD) has five members.

The main opposition SP has 103 members and Congress has two members. Apart from this, there are two members of the Jansatta Dal (Loktantrik) and one member of the Bahujan Samaj Party.

In the by-elections to four assembly constituencies held along with the Lok Sabha elections, two seats each were won by the SP and the BJP, but these MLAs have not taken oath yet.

The MLAs from the NDA who were elected to Lok Sabha are -- Rashtriya Lok Dal's Chandan Chauhan, BJP's Atul Garg, Anoop Valmiki and Praveen Patel, Nirbal Indian Shoshit Hamara Aam Dal's (NISHAD) Vinod Kumar Bin. (PTI)

LS session begins today

Row over appointment of Mahtab as pro-tem speaker set to cast its shadow



NEW DELHI, June 23: The first session of the 18th Lok Sabha beginning Monday will see oath-taking by newly elected members followed by election of the Lok Sabha Speaker on June 26 and President Droupadi Murmu's address to joint sitting of both the Houses on June 27.

The row over appointment of BJP leader and seven-term member Bhartruhari Mahtab as the pro-tem speaker is likely to cast shadow over the session. The move has drawn flak from the opposition, which alleged that the claim of Congress member K Suresh to the post was overlooked by the government.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju asserted that Mahtab has had seven uninterrupted terms as Lok Sabha member, making him eligible for the post, while Suresh lost elections in 1998 and 2004 which makes his current term

as the fourth straight one in the lower house. Earlier, he was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1989, 1991, 1996 and 1999.

On Monday, President Droupadi Murmu will administer the oath to Mahtab as the pro-tem Speaker of the Lok Sabha at the Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Mahtab will then reach Parliament House and call the Lok Sabha to order at 11 am.

The proceedings will begin with members observing a moment of silence on the occasion of the first sitting of the 18th Lok Sabha. This will be followed by Lok Sabha Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh placing on the table of the House the list of the members elected to the lower house.

Mahtab will then call upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Leader of the Lok Sabha, to take oath as member of the House. The pro-tem speaker will then

administer oath to the panel of chairpersons appointed by the President to assist him in carrying out the proceedings of the House till the election of the Speaker on June 26.

The President has appointed Kodikunni Suresh (Congress), T R Bалу (DMK), Radha Mohan Singh and Faggan Singh Kulaste (both BJP) and Sudip Bandyopadhyay (TMC) to assist Mahtab in administering the oath/affirmation to the newly elected members of the Lok Sabha.

After the panel of chairpersons, the pro-tem speaker will administer the oath/affirmation as Lok Sabha members to the Council of Ministers. The members from states, in alphabetical order, will take oath or make affirmation over the next two days.

The election to the post of Lok Sabha Speaker will take place on Wednesday and the prime minister will introduce his council of ministers to the House soon after.

The President is scheduled to address the joint sitting of both houses of Parliament on June 27. The debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address will begin on June 28. The prime minister is expected to respond to the debate on July 2 or 3.

Both the Houses are expected to go into a brief recess and re-assemble on July 22 for the presentation of the Union Budget. (PTI)

Gates of barrage shut by Haryana: Atishi

NEW DELHI, June 23: Delhi is not getting its share of water as Haryana has shut all the gates of the Hathnikund barrage, Water Minister Atishi alleged on Sunday and asserted she will continue her indefinite hunger strike over the issue.

The closure of the gates of the barrage on the Yamuna river, she said, has led to the water shortage in the national capital.

Her hunger strike seeking release of its share of water for Delhi, which is under the grip of a severe shortage amid a searing heat wave, entered its third day on Sunday.

AAP has said doctors advised Atishi to end her fast.

The minister claimed the Haryana government asked how it would release water for Delhi when it did not have adequate supply.

"But yesterday (Saturday), when many journalists went to the Hathnikund barrage, from where water is released for Delhi, everyone took photos and made videos in which it is clearly visible that there is water in the barrage. But the gates from which the water is released for Delhi are closed," Atishi claimed.

"I request the Haryana government with folded hands to open the gates of the Hathnikund barrage. Release the water of the people of Delhi. Delhiites should get the water they are entitled to. Until the Haryana government gives the water they (people of Delhi) are entitled to, until the gates of the Hathnikund barrage are opened, this hunger strike will continue," she added.

In a video message from her 'Jal Satyagrah' on Saturday, Atishi had said 28 lakh people of Delhi were facing water scarcity and she would not eat anything till Haryana releases more water for the city. (PTI)

Omar should have contested from Srinagar, would have been asset in Parliament: Karan Singh

SRINAGAR, June 23: Veteran Congress leader Karan Singh on Sunday said Omar Abdullah made a "mistake" by contesting the Lok Sabha polls from Baramulla instead of Srinagar -- a bastion of the National Conference that was won by its candidate Aga Ruhullah Mehdi.

Omar Abdullah would have been an asset in Parliament had he won, Singh, 93, said as he termed as "dramatic" Engineer Rashid's win from the Baramulla seat by more than two lakh votes despite he being in jail under provisions of the UAPA and contesting the polls as an Independent.

Karan Singh, the son of the last Dogra ruler of Kashmir Maharaja Hari Singh, said he was not sure if Sheikh Abdul Rashid, popularly known as 'Engineer Rashid', would be released from jail but his win has sent a message that the people are not happy with the BJP.

"Omar made the same mistake that I did by moving from Udhampur (Lok Sabha seat) to Jammu. He moved from Srinagar to Baramulla. He should not have done that. He should have fought from Srinagar," he said during an interview with PTI



on Saturday. "We needed him in Parliament. It would have been useful if Omar would have been in Parliament. He would have been an asset," Singh said.

The Congress leader had won from the Udhampur Lok Sabha seat on a ticket from his party in 1967, 1971, 1977 and 1980. He lost the parliamentary elections when he moved to Jammu to fight as an Independent in 1984.

On Awami Ittehad Party leader Rashid, Singh said, "He made his

foray into politics very dramatically. I do not know whether he will be released but the fact that he won from jail is sending a message that people are not entirely happy with the existing party (the BJP at the Centre). Is it not?"

Singh, who was the "Sadri-Riyasat" of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir from 1952 to 1965, also called for the restoration of statehood and conducting assembly elections in J-K.

In 2019, the Centre had abrogated Article 370, which granted special

status to the state of J-K, and bifurcated it into Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

"Today's Jammu and Kashmir is totally different from that of the Maharaja's. We had a very special position which has disappeared now. Not only that but now as a Union Territory, we are even junior to (states like) Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, which is really not acceptable," Singh said.

"I would say one of the first things that is needed now is the restoration of statehood and elections. To elect for the Union Territory is like electing for a glorified municipal council. The Union Territory does not have any power," he said.

Praising the Congress for its performance in the Lok Sabha polls, he said the INDIA bloc is taking shape and the Uttar Pradesh results are a testament of that.

In the 2024 polls, the Congress increased its tally of seats from 52 to 99. In Uttar Pradesh, it won six seats and its INDIA bloc ally Samajwadi Party (SP) 37 of the 80 seats in the state, replacing the BJP to 33. The BJP had won 62, the SP five and Congress one in the 2019 polls. (PTI)

seven-member panel headed by former ISRO chief K Radhakrishnan to review the agency's functioning and recommend exam reforms.

It also postponed the NEET-PG entrance, the fourth entrance exam to be impacted in recent days.

Kharge said the NEET-PG Exam has been postponed and in all four examinations have been either cancelled or postponed in the past 10 days.

"Paper Leaks, Corruption, Irregularities and Education Mafia has infiltrated our Education system," he alleged.

"This belated whitewashing exercise is of no consequence as countless youth continue to suffer," Kharge said.

Slamming the postponement of the NEET PG exam, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi charged that PM Narendra Modi is "helpless" before the paper leak racket and "education mafia".

"Now NEET PG has been postponed. This is another unfortunate example of the ruined education system under Narendra Modi's rule. In BJP rule, students are not forced to study to

save their careers, but are forced to fight with the government to save their future. Now it is clear, after silently watching the spectacle every time, Modi is helpless before the paper leak racket and Education Mafia," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

"Narendra Modi's incompetent government is the biggest threat to the future of students and we must save the future of the country from it," he added.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also attacked the Modi government over the alleged irregularities in national competitive exams, including the NEET-UG, alleging that it has handed over the entire education system to the "mafia" and the "corrupt".

In a post on X, she the NEET-UG question paper was "leaked" while the NEET-PG, UGC-NET and CSIR-NET exams were "cancelled".

Earlier, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "No day is complete without news of cancellation of an exam because of the total incompetence of the non-biological PM and the people around him". (PTI)

Buck stops at top echelons of Modi govt in NEET 'scam': Cong

NEW DELHI, June 23: The Congress on Sunday hit out at the Modi government over the bureaucratic reshuffle in the National Testing Agency after alleged irregularities in NEET-UG, saying the buck stops at the doorstep of the top echelons of the regime.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that the National Testing Agency (NTA) was projected to be an autonomous body, but in reality was made to serve the "devious interests" of the BJP/RSS.

"In the NEET Scam, the buck stops at the doorstep of the top echelons of the Modi Government. Shuffling the bureaucrats is no solution to the endemic problem in the Education system rotted by the BJP," he said in a post on X.

For students to get justice, Modi government must be held accountable, he said.

The Centre on Saturday had shunted out NTA's Director General Subodh Singh and handed over the probe into the irregularities in medical entrance exam NEET-UG to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

The Education Ministry has also set up a

sexually abused him at his farmhouse in Ghannikada on June 16.

Based on the complaint, the Holaraspur police registered a case against the JD(S) MLC under IPC sections 377 (unnatural offences), 342 (wrongful confinement) and 506 (criminal intimidation) late on Saturday evening.

However, Suraj Revanna (37), the grandson of former prime minister H D Deve Gowda and the nephew of Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy, has categorically refuted the charge. Suraj had also alleged the man had filed a false complaint against him in a bid to extort Rs 5 crore from him.

On Friday, police registered a case of extortion against the JD(S) worker on a complaint by Suraj Revanna's close aide Shivakumar.

JD(S) MLC Suraj Revanna arrested for alleged sexual abuse of party worker

HASSAN (KARNATAKA), June 23: JD(S) MLC Suraj Revanna -- the brother of former MP Prajwal Revanna who is facing allegations of sexually abusing several women -- was arrested on Sunday on charges of "unnatural offences" against him, police sources said.

He was booked on Saturday for allegedly sexually abusing a party worker a few days ago and has been booked under different sections of the IPC, including "unnatural offences."

Suraj was questioned at CEN police station here overnight, before he was arrested, the sources said.

A 27 year-old man had complained to the police that Suraj Revanna, the eldest son of Holaraspur MLA H D Revanna,

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Jagan govt allotted 42 acres land for YSRCP offices in 26 districts for ₹ 1,000 lease: Nara Lokesh



AMARAVATI, June 23: Andhra Pradesh Information Technology and Electronics Minister Nara Lokesh on Sunday alleged that the former YSRCP government led by Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy had allocated 42 acres of land in 26 districts for building party offices at a nominal cost of Rs 1,000 lease for 33 years. The minister posted the information on social media platform X along with several pictures of alleged YSRCP offices under construction.

"You (Jagan) allocated 42 acres of land in 26 districts for YSRCP (offices) at a meagre cost of Rs 1,000 lease for 33 years," Lokesh said in a post on X, attaching more than a dozen pictures of the alleged YSRCP offices under construction in various parts of the state. This development comes soon after it became public knowledge that a palatial mansion was allegedly built at a cost of Rs 500-crore in Rushikonda, Visakhapatnam for Jagan Reddy, and that an under-construction YSRCP central party office in Tadepalli was recently demolished.

The sea-view mansion, built with Italian marble, 200 chandeliers, 12 bedrooms, multi-hued illumination and other luxuries was allegedly meant to be the residence of the former CM.

However, the recent transition of the state government from the YSRCP to the TDP brought the mansion into the national spotlight.

According to Lokesh, the 42 acres of land, said to be worth about Rs 600 crore could have easily funded land at the rate of one cent each for 4,200 poor people. Drawing a similar parallel, the TDP general secretary noted that the money spent on the Rushikonda mansion could have funded house construction for 25,000 people.

The TDP on Sunday circulated 19 images of buildings under various stages of construction across the state, alleging that they were YSRCP offices.

"With the demolition of the illegal structures constructed by the YSRCP in Tadepalli, several sensational facts have come to light. The senior officers are now studying the details of how the YSRCP has grabbed lands in prime localities at all 26 district headquarters, worth hundreds of crores (of rupees), in the name of building party offices," a TDP statement said. According to the ruling party, the market value of land in these locations and the estimated expenditure on buildings could total up to Rs 2,000 crore.

Meanwhile, the YSRCP in a post on X also alleged that the erstwhile TDP government between 2014 and 2019 had allocated government lands worth "thousands of crores of rupees" to the ruling party at a paltry lease cost. (PTI)

Syama Prasad Mookerjee's life was dedicated to India's unity: Adityanath on his death anniversary

LUCKNOW, June 23: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday paid tributes to Bharatiya Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee on his death anniversary and said that his life was dedicated to the unity and integrity of India.

Addressing people gathered for a ceremony on Mookerjee, Adityanath said freedom fighter Syama Prasad Mookerjee sacrificed his life in 1953 for "one country, one head of state, one constitution and one flag."

"The country became independent in 1947 and in 1950 India implemented its constitution. But the implementation of the constitution, the then Congress-led government made a malicious attempt to seriously harm the national integrity by adding Article 370 to the constitution of the country."

"Keeping in mind the intention of the then government, Dr Mookerjee who was a minister in the central government at the time, left his post and started a massive movement to remove Article 370 from Kashmir for the prestige and integrity of the country," he said.

The chief minister said he had to sacrifice his life for Kashmir Satyagraha, which he had started Bharatiya Jana Sangh workers.

Crediting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the abrogation of Article 370, Adityanath said, "By abolishing Article 370 in Kashmir, the BJP government has kept its promise of 'one country, one head of state, one constitution and one flag'."

He said, "This is a tribute to all those martyrs who sacrificed their lives for Kashmir, the integrity of the country and for the protection of its borders."

Earlier, in a post on X, Adityanath said, "Humble tribute to the great patriot, founder president of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, excellent educationist, guide of nationalists, revered Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee on his martyrdom day! His entire life and sacrifice, dedicated to the unity and integrity of India, is a great inspiration for the people of the country."

UP cabinet ministers and other prominent leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) also paid floral tributes to Mookerjee's statue here.

BJP leaders, including Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, Water Power Minister Swatantra Dev Singh, former Deputy Chief Minister and Rajya Sabha member Dinesh Sharma and former minister Mahendra Singh paid their tribute to Mookerjee. (PTI)

7-member panel headed by former ISRO chief K Radhakrishnan to review NTA's functioning and recommend exam reforms

Academics urge Centre to uphold exam integrity, say quick fixes won't do

NEW DELHI, June 23: As the row over irregularities in competitive exams continues to rage, several academics on Sunday urged the Centre to preserve the integrity of exams and stressed that overnight solutions are not possible in such complex cases.

Facing flak over alleged discrepancies in competitive exams, the Centre on Saturday shunted out National Testing Agency (NTA) director general Subodh Singh and handed over the probe into irregularities in medical entrance exam NEET-UG to the CBI.

The Union education ministry also set up a seven-member panel headed by former ISRO chief K Radhakrishnan to review the agency's functioning and recommend exam reforms.

It postponed the NEET-PG entrance, the fourth entrance exam to be impacted in recent days.

The academics said that removal of National Testing Agency chief and ordering CBI probe into the NEET irregularities will build trust among students.

"Since this is an issue which impacts lakhs of students, a thorough investigation into the irregularities is required for an informed decision."

Cow slaughter: NSA invoked against two accused in MP's Morena

MORENA (MP), June 23: The stringent National Security Act (NSA) has been invoked against two persons arrested after the recovery of cow meat from a village in Madhya Pradesh's Morena district, police said on Sunday.

Following a complaint of cow slaughter, the police on Friday night seized beef and cow skin from a house at the Bengali colony in Noorabad village of the district, an official said. A villager, Anipal Gurjar, complained that he saw some people slaughtering a cow and when he opposed it, he was attacked by them on Friday evening, Sub Divisional Officer of Police Adarsh Shukla said. Gurjar, who managed to escape from the attackers, lodged a police complaint, he said. The police later seized two sacks of bones and beef, besides the cow skin, from the house of the accused, he said. Four persons, including two women, were arrested on Friday, the official said, adding a minor was also detained.

Additional superintendent of police, Arvind Thakur said two of the arrested accused, identified as Asgar and Retua, were booked under the NSA on Saturday and sent to jail. After the incident, workers of several right wing organisations staged protests and blocked roads on Saturday.

The police have registered a case against nine persons under the MP Anti-Cow Slaughtering Act, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and Indian Penal Code provisions for rioting, assaulting and intimidation, Shukla said. The offence of cow slaughter attracts imprisonment of up to seven years in the state. The official said more than six other persons allegedly involved in the case were absconding and search for them was on in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Thakur said those involved in the case were not natives of Morena district and settled here after coming for labour work. It was a matter of investigation as several persons settled on a sports ground here after coming from Bihar and West Bengal, he said. (PTI)



"Overnight solutions are not possible in such complex cases. The government has already formed high level committee. Lets wait for all the inputs to come. We need to have patience," Govind Rangarajan, Director, Indian Institute of Science (IISc)-Bangalore, said.

Anil Sahasrabudhe, Chairman of National Education Technology Forum, said the decision to hand over all NTA cases to CBI has restored confidence in the students.

"The announcement of high-powered committee with Dr Rad-

hakrishnan as chairman and six other eminent academic is timely corrective action to build the trust amongst students.

"The Radhakrishnan committee shall pave the way for robust transparent zero error process of end to end examination system fixing accountability of every functionary and desired checks and balances creating confidence among students," he said.

Mohandas Pai, Chairman of Manipal Global Education Services, said there should not be retest for the 24 lakh candidates who ap-

peared for NEET.

"It will be unfair to put everybody through the process. Retest should be at the only those centers where things have gone wrong. Government is taking steps to ensure integrity of examination," he said.

University Grants Commission Chairman M Jagadeh Kumar welcomed the setting up a panel on exam reforms.

"The Committee's emphasis on recommending reforms in the examination process, enhancing data security protocols, and improving the NTA's structure and functioning will strengthen our national entrance examination system. Protecting student's interests and their future is our top priority," he said.

The Centre is under fire over alleged irregularities in competitive exams NEET and NET.

While the medical entrance exam question paper was allegedly leaked according to an investigation by the Bihar Police, UGC-NET was cancelled a day after it was conducted following inputs that the integrity of the exam was compromised.

The former is also being probed by the CBI. (PTI)

ISRO chairman, Italian space agency chief to attend India Space Congress

NEW DELHI, June 23: Policymakers, administrators of space agencies from different countries, and entrepreneurs would gather here for the three-day India Space Congress that will begin from Wednesday. ISRO Chairman S Somanath, India's space regulator IN-SPACe head Pawan Kumar Goenka, space administrators from Italy and Australia, and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti are among the dignitaries scheduled to attend the event.

The India Space Congress (ISC), organised by the Satcom Industry Association-India (SIA-India) will have the theme 'Bridging Boundaries and Transforming Tomorrow' and will seek to elevate India's space capabilities through international collaborations.

The event offers exclusive networking opportunities, platforms for startups, and academic insights. It also seeks to foster innovation and progress in space exploration, uniting government, industry, and startups towards a future of boundless possibilities, a statement from the organisers said.

Australian High Commissioner to India Philip Green OAM, Italian Space Agency President Teodoro Valente, and Director (Space Programs), Australian Space Agency, Arvind Ramana are among those attending the ISC.

Major reforms such as the Space Policy 2023, liberalized FDI Policy 2024, the new Telecom Act, the unveiling of norms, guidelines and procedures by the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) for implementation of the space policy underscore the importance of partnerships in leveraging collective strengths and resources for mutual benefit, the statement said.

"These strategic alliances underscore India's commitment to global cooperation in the space industry," said Subba Rao Pavuluri, President at SIA-India.

"For the first time in the ISC series, the agenda places major emphasis on global collaborations, featuring around 35 thematic sessions focusing on international partnerships," said Anil Prakash, Director General, SIA-India. (PTI)

BSF foils bid by B'deshis to smuggle cattle across Bengal border

KOLKATA, June 23: Border Security Force (BSF) personnel on Sunday foiled a bid by some Bangladeshis to smuggle cattle across the international border in West Bengal, a statement said. Jawans of the 146th battalion at Madhubana border outpost in Berhampore sector noticed suspicious movement of 5-6 persons who were trying to cross the unfenced stretch of the international border into India along with two bovine animals early on Sunday.

Upon being challenged, they threatened the jawans by brandishing sharp weapons.

When one of the jawans fired a stun grenade at them, they surrounded him and attacked him with sharp weapons. In self-defence, the jawan fired two rounds, following which the miscreants fled towards Bangladesh, taking advantage of the dark and tall crops in the fields, the statement said.

The jawans later seized two medium-sized bulls and two sharp weapons from the spot.

The possibility of any of the miscreants getting injured in the firing cannot be ruled out, it said.

A similar incident occurred a day back when jawans of the 70th battalion at Lodhia border outpost in Malda spotted the movement of 14-15 Bangladeshis carrying spears and swords. As the smugglers crossed the border and entered India, the jawans fired a stun grenade to disperse them.

However, the intruders attacked the jawans with sharp weapons, following which the BSF personnel fired two rounds in self-defence, the statement said. (PTI)

Water crisis: Delhi L-G assures AAP delegation of his commitment to resolving issue

NEW DELHI, June 23: Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena assured an AAP delegation that met him here on Sunday over the water crisis in the city that he will try to resolve the issue. During the meeting, the 10-member delegation highlighted that Delhi has been receiving 113 million gallons per day (MGD) less water than what it is entitled to, a statement said.

The delegation noted that Delhi's population increased from 1.1 crore in 1994 to three crore now while the amount of water it has been receiving remained the same and stressed for urgent action over the matter, it said. The L-G assured the delegation of his commitment to resolving the issue and making every effort to ensure Delhi receives its fair share of water from Haryana, it said.

The delegation comprised 10 prominent AAP members, including Rajya Sabha MPs Sanjay Singh and N D Gupta, General Secretary Pankaj Gupta, Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, and MLAs Dilip Pandey, Somnath Bharti, Rajesh Gupta and Rituraj Jha. Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said, "We told the L-G that Delhi is getting the same amount of water today as was allocated for it in 1994. Whereas in the 30 years since 1994, Delhi's population has increased three times."

"We told him that ₹ 500 crore was spent on plugging leakages in canals while 12,000 kilo-

metres of pipeline was laid in Delhi. The Delhi government has made a lot of efforts at its level. During this, LG has also given some suggestions on which an agreement to work together was reached," he said. Delhi Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said a delegation of AAP leaders met the L-G and held a positive discussion. "We told the L-G that there is a shortage

of about 113 MGD in the water coming from Haryana right now. Due to this, lakhs of people in Delhi are facing problems. "Since LG is the representative of the central government, we have requested him to talk to the Haryana government and get Delhi its full share of water. On this, he has assured us that he will talk to the Haryana government and try to get Delhi its full share of water," he said. The minister said they also told the L-G that it is likely to rain in a week.

"Rain has started in Himachal Pradesh. So much water will come in the next week that Haryana will not be able to stop it even if it wants to. So now it is just a matter of a week. We have requested LG sir to get water from Haryana for Delhi for a week," he said.

Delhi is dependent on Uttar Pradesh and Haryana for drinking water. The AAP has claimed that Haryana has reduced the water supply to the national capital from 613 MGD to 513 MGD. (PTI)

Under-construction bridge collapses in Bihar's Motihari

MOTIHARI, June 23: An under-construction small bridge collapsed in East Champaran district on Sunday in third such incident in Bihar in less than a week, officials said.

No casualty was reported in the incident that happened in Ghorasahan block in Motihari, they said.

The 16-metre-long bridge was being built over a canal by the state's Rural Works Department (RWD) to connect Amwa village to other areas of the block. It was being built at a cost of Rs 1.5 crore, they added.

"The exact cause of the incident is not yet known. It is a serious matter and a departmental inquiry has been ordered. Strict action will be taken against those who have been found guilty," Additional Chief Secretary of RWD Dipak Kumar Singh told PTI.

"Senior officers of the district administration have reached the spot. A detailed report is awaited," he said.

District Magistrate Saurabh Jorwal said the exact cause of the incident was being ascertained.

"There are reports that a section of locals initially objected to the construction of certain pillars of the bridge. Police are also looking into this matter," he told PTI.



On Saturday, a small bridge collapsed in Siwan district. It was built over a canal, connecting the villages of Daraunda and Maharajan blocks.

Prior to that, on Tuesday, a newly constructed bridge, about 180 metres long, had collapsed in the Araria district.

The state has been witness to several mishaps involving bridges, large and small, constructed over rivers and other water bodies. Though such incidents have not resulted in casualties, these have led to questions being raised on the quality of public works. (PTI)

Two CoBRA personnel killed in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district

SUKMA, June 23: Two personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force's jungle warfare unit CoBRA were killed after Naxalites blew up a truck with an improvised explosive device (IED) in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Sunday, police said.

The Naxal blast took place around 3 pm near Timmapuram village between Silger and Tekalgudem camps of security forces, over 400 km from the state capital Raipur, a senior police official said.

An advance party of the 201st unit of Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) had launched patrolling from Silger camp under Jagargunda police station limits as a part of its Road Opening Party duty towards Tekalgudem, he said.

The security personnel were in a truck and on motorcycles, he said. Naxalites triggered an IED blast targeting the truck that claimed the lives of constable Shaileendra (29) and the vehicle driver Vishnu R (35), he said.

After being alerted about the blast, more forces were rushed to the spot and the bodies were being evacuated from the forest, he said. A search operation is underway in the area, he added. (PTI)

Hoarding crash: Ad firm paid ₹ 46 lakh to company of IPS officer's wife

MUMBAI, June 23: BJP leader Kirit Somaiya on Sunday alleged that ad firm director Bhavesh Bhide had paid ₹ 46 lakh as bribe to a company of the wife of then GRP commissioner, who gave permission to install a hoarding which collapsed here last month.

Somaiya in a series of post on X also claimed that ₹ 5 crore was paid by the Ego Media Pvt Ltd (where Bhide was the director) to various railway police and Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) officials for "two dozen illegal hoardings" in Ghatkopar and Dadar areas of Mumbai.

The former BJP MP said he has written a letter to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, requesting him to suspend then Government Railway Police Commissioner Quaiser Khalid for "Ghatkopar Hoardings Scam BRIBE".

A giant hoarding collapsed in Mumbai's Ghatkopar area on May 13 during gusty winds and unseasonal rains, killing 17 persons and injured more than 70 others, according to police.

The land in question was in possession of the Government Railway Police and permission to erect the hoarding near a petrol pump was given to M/s Ego Media Pvt Ltd for 10 years with the approval of then-GRP Commissioner Quaiser Khalid, a senior official earlier said.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) had been formed to conduct a probe into the hoarding collapse incident.

"Ghatkopar Hoardings Tragedy. Proof & Bank Entries of? 46 lacs Bribes detected by Police SIT. Bhavesh Bhide paid? 46 lacs to Kaiser Khalid (Railway Police Commissioner) via Mohammad Arshad Khan. Mohammad Arshad Khan deposited this? 46 lacs in Mahapatra Garments Pvt Ltd," Somaiya claimed in a post on X on Sunday.

He said the Mahapara Garments Pvt Ltd was incorporated/formed on June 20, 2022 by Sumnana Quaiser Khalid, the wife of Quaiser Khalid, and Mohd Arshad K Khan.

"Bhavesh Bhide of EGO Media Pvt Ltd transferred? 46 lacs to this company during the year 2022/23," Somaiya alleged

Till now, five persons have been arrested in connection with the Ghatkopar hoarding tragedy, he said. "Expecting action against Railway Police & BMC Officials," the BJP leader added. (PTI)

Man killed as speeding car hits motorbike in Pune

PUNE, June 23: A 19-year-old man was killed after a car allegedly driven by the nephew of an NCP MLA hit his motorbike on a highway in Maharashtra's Pune district. The accused, Mayur Mohite, was arrested after the incident on Saturday, police said, adding the car was speeding on the wrong side of the road. Khed NCP MLA Dilip Mohite Patil termed the incident as unfortunate and said he will not support any wrongdoing.

The accident took place at around 9.30 pm on Saturday at Mauje Eklahare village on the Pune-Nashik highway in Ambegaon taluka, the police on Sunday said, adding the victim was identified as Om Bhalerao.

"The accused was driving a Fortuner car on Pune-Nashik road. He was driving the car on the wrong side of the road while travelling to Manchar village when the vehicle had a head-on collision with the motorbike. The two-wheeler rider was seriously injured in the accident and lost his life," a senior police official said.

"Both the vehicles were badly damaged in the incident. The car driver has been arrested and a case has also been registered against him. We are conducting further probe into the incident," he added.

A case has been registered against the accused by the Manchar police under various Indian Penal Code sections, including 304 A (causing death of a person by a rash or negligent act not amounting to culpable homicide) and provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, the police said. Though a preliminary probe indicated the accused was not under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, the police said his blood samples have been collected and reports are awaited.

Legislator Dilip Mohite Patil told reporters, "The incident is unfortunate. I will not support any wrongdoing but I want to say that my nephew never consumes alcohol. The police will probe the matter. He is in police custody and his blood samples have been collected."

On May 19, two IT professionals were killed in Pune's Kalyani Nagar after their motorcycle was hit by a speeding Porsche car allegedly driven by a 17-year-old in an inebriated condition. The juvenile's father, a realtor, his mother and some other persons were later arrested. The boy is currently lodged at a juvenile observation home in Pune. (PTI)

ISRO completes its Reusable Launch Vehicle technology demonstrations through LEX trio

Mission led by Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), a collaborative effort involving multiple ISRO centres

BENGALURU, June 23: Space agency ISRO on Sunday said it has achieved a third consecutive success in the Reusable Launch Vehicle Landing Experiment by demonstrating the autonomous landing capability of the launch vehicle under more challenging conditions.

This mission simulated the approach and landing interface and high-speed landing conditions for a vehicle returning from space, reaffirming the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) expertise in acquiring the most critical technologies required for the development of a Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV), the space agency said.

The third and final test in the series of Landing Experiment (LEX-03) was conducted at 07:10 IST at the Aeronautical Test Range (ATR)

in Chitradurga, Karnataka.

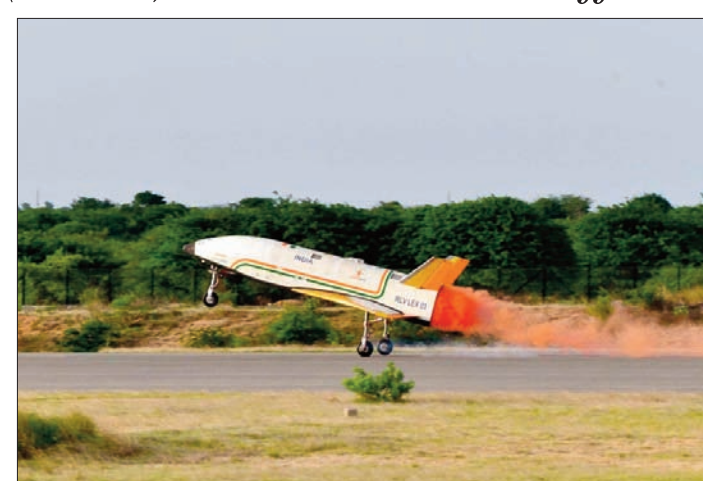
Following the success of the RLV LEX-01 and LEX-02 missions, ISRO in a release said, RLV LEX-03 re-demonstrated the autonomous landing capability of the RLV under more challenging release conditions (cross range of 500 m against 150 m for LEX-02) and more severe wind conditions.

The winged vehicle, named 'Pushpak', was released from an Indian Air Force Chinook Helicopter at an altitude of 4.5 km "from a release point 4.5 km away from the runway. Pushpak autonomously executed cross-range correction manoeuvres, approached the runway and performed a precise horizontal landing at the runway centreline," it said. Due to this vehicle's low lift-to-drag ratio aerodynamic configuration, the landing velocity exceeded 320 kmph, com-

pared to 260 kmph for a commercial aircraft and 280 kmph for a typical fighter aircraft, it added.

ISRO said, after touchdown, the vehicle velocity was reduced to nearly 100 kmph using its brake parachute, after which the landing gear brakes were employed for deceleration and stop on the runway. During this ground roll phase, Pushpak utilises its rudder and nose wheel steering system to autonomously maintain a stable and precise ground roll along the runway, it said.

According to the space agency, this mission simulated the approach and landing interface and high-speed landing conditions for a vehicle returning from space, reaffirming ISRO's expertise in acquiring the most critical technologies required for the development of a Reusable Launch Vehicle



(RLV). Through this mission, the advanced guidance algorithm catering to longitudinal and lateral plane error corrections, which is essential for the future Orbital Re-

entry Mission has been validated, the space agency noted. The RLV-LEX uses multi-sensor fusion including sensors like Inertial sensor, Radar altimeter,

Regional Centre for Military Airworthiness under Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification, National Aerospace Laboratories, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, Indian aerospace industrial partners, Indian Oil Corporation of India and Airport Authority of India.

S Somanath, Chairman, ISRO/Secretary, Department of Space, congratulated the team for their efforts in maintaining the success streak in such complex missions. Dr S Unnikrishnan Nair, Director of VSSC, emphasised that this consistent success boosts ISRO's confidence in the critical technologies essential for future orbital re-entry missions.

J Muthupandian is the Mission Director and B Karthik is the Vehicle Director for this successful mission. (PTI)

BENGALURU, June 23:

For someone who entered the film industry because he heard that 'food is free' on film sets, director Arun Amuktha has come a long way.

His second film, 'Vid-yarthi Vidyarthiniyare', featuring rapper-turned-actor Chandan Shetty and newcomers Manoj, Amar, Manasvi and Bhavana, is all set for a July 19 release.

"My first film, 'Loosegalu' (2013) was so eccentric that nobody understood what I was trying to say. Now, when I am being given another chance almost a decade later, I am playing it safe. 'Vid-yarthi...' is what I would describe as a teen cult, but into which I channeled so much 'Indian emotions' that it has now turned into a family entertainer," Amuktha told PTI.

He has released two songs from the film so far - 'Big Boys' and 'Student Party', both composed by Vijeth Krishna with lyrics by Chethan Kumar. He said both the songs - especially 'Student Party', which has an ear-worm chorus - have been received well among the youth.

He said he is still holding

on to many more trump cards musically - a song composed by Vasu Dixit, Bengaluru's very own rock band Swarathma's lead vocalist, who is known for his pulsating energy, and a song written and sung by Kannada rapper Chirayu, a name to reckon with in the city's underground rap scene.

"I am actually gambling on the youth this time round. You see, every year, there are about 250 to 300 Kannada films, and they are mostly about hero build-up, comedy or action. In the last 10 years, there might have been 10 to 15 films that target the other big segment of the audience - the youth. So, I decided to make that my space," said Amuktha.

Coming as he is from a small village - Chikkmalali in Shivamogga, which, according to him, still has no proper roads or electricity and has about 300 people in total - Amuktha said for him, films are all about entertainment.

"I can watch any kind of films, in any language, as long as they are entertaining. I cannot stand serious films. So, I guess my films will always aim for mass appeal too," he added.

'Vid-yarthi Vidyarthiniyare' is a teen cult film packed with Indian emotions: Director Amuktha

Unlike many who aspire to be a director to make path-breaking films, Amuktha said he wanted to be a director only because he thought it was a cool job.

Twenty years ago, when he moved to Bengaluru, Amuktha said he did what he could to survive - an odd job here and an odd job there - and ended up finally in a film set. For the next five years, he said he watched people make a beeline to the director for any decision and told himself that is a job worth aspiring for.

At the event organised to release the song 'Student Party' on June 15, the lyricist Chethan Kumar, who had directed Puneeth Rajkumar's 'James' - which was released in 2022, posthumously after Puneeth's death on October 29, 2021 - recalled how he, music director Vijeth Krishna and Amuktha shared a room when they were all struggling to make ends meet in Ben-



galuru.

"So, yes, we stand with one another when we can. While making this film particularly, it often felt like those good old days when we used to discuss films and what not in our room," said Chethan Kumar.

Amuktha is also extremely aware that it is very tough to get people to theatre now, given that they have access to good content on their mobiles.

"Personally, I don't mind failures. I believe that it is possible to better yourself, become a better human being, only when faced with failures," he said.

But, he said, only if films do well, will production houses start supporting more innovative content.

As far as he is concerned, the way to innovative content, said Amuktha, is through larger than life and lavish films that would bring people to theatres and thus establish his standing as a director.

"I feel people are open to experiments if the content is good. But somehow execution is falling short of expectations, mostly because producers are not willing to take risks. So, one is forced to make films with trite content. But I also feel, as they say, there's light at the end of the tunnel. One must keep going," he said.

If given a free hand, Amuktha said he would love to explore a film without a hero or a heroine.

"I think this will be my last Kannada film. My next will be a Malayalam film. It is worth overcoming language and other difficulties and getting into the Malayalam film industry because the Kerala government is so supportive that the industry is enjoying a beautiful ecosystem. It sustains everyone - the audience and the artistes," he signed off. (PTI)



Sonakshi, Zaheer wed at private ceremony: Love has guided us through challenges and triumphs

MUMBAI, June 23: "We are now man and wife," longtime actor couple Sonakshi Sinha and Zaheer Iqbal said on Sunday after their low-key ceremony in the presence of family and close friends.

Sonakshi, 37, and Zaheer, 35, wed in a civil marriage at the "Heeramandi" star's sea-facing Bandra West apartment with the blessings of their families and "both of our gods".

The newlyweds shared their news of their wedding in a joint Instagram post.

"On this very day, seven years back (23.06.2017) in each other's eyes, we saw love in its purest form and dedicated to hold on to it.

"Today that love has guided us through all the challenges and triumphs... leading up to this moment... where with the blessings of both of our families and both of our gods... we are now man and wife. Here's to love, hope

and all things beautiful with each other, from now until forever," the couple captioned their wedding pictures.

Both the bride and groom twinned in ivory: Sonakshi wore a saree, whereas Zaheer was dressed in a kurta-pyjama.

Sonakshi's "Heeramandi" co-star Aditi Rao Hydari attended the ceremony along with her fiancé, actor Siddharth as well as actor-friend Huma Qureshi.

The newlyweds will later host a reception for friends and industry colleagues at a fine-dining restaurant in Worli.

Sweets were distributed to the media stationed outside the reception venue.

"Thank you for showering us with so much love, happiness and kindness on the most important day of our lives! Your support and wishes mean the world to us," read a message from Sonakshi and Zaheer.

Though there was no official

confirmation from the couple, the rumours of their wedding started doing social media rounds earlier this month.

While Sonakshi was last seen in the Netflix series "Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar", in which she played the dual role of Rehaana and Fareedan, Zaheer had a special appearance in the action film "Ruslaan".

Sonakshi and Zaheer first collaborated for the music video of the song "Blockbuster", which was released in September 2022. Months later, they co-starred in the comedy drama "Double XL".

The duo didn't publicly confirm their relationship, but were often spotted attending events and social gatherings together. From attending each other's birthday parties, award wins to going scuba diving on holiday, Sonakshi and Zaheer often gave a glimpse into their lives to fans and followers on social media. (PTI)

'Harry Potter' series not something I want to do, says Matthew Lewis

LOS ANGELES, June 23: Actor Matthew Lewis, who played Neville Longbottom in all eight "Harry Potter" films, says he's not planning to be part of the Max series reboot of the franchise.

The 34-year-old, however, said it would be "interesting" to see his character's evolution as an adult. In the movies, based on the popular books by JK Rowling, the actor portrayed the teenage version of Neville.

"It's not something I'm looking at or want to do but would not turn my nose up at. I'd be very interested to see if it was Neville as an adult - a whole different vibe. That could be interesting. I would certainly look at that and consider it," Lewis told People magazine.

As an actor, Lewis said he is always on the lookout for something new.

"The reason I got into this job in the first place was because I have a very short attention span. I am very, very poor at maintaining anything for any length of time. I've had many, many hobbies and passions over the years. Not a single one I still do. I fall madly in love with things and then almost immediately forget about them," he said.

"I've been a nurse, I've been a police officer, I've been a soldier, I've been a wizard, I've been all these different things. I never know what's up next, and I love that," he added. (PTI)



'Munjya' crosses ₹ 80 crore mark at box office



MUMBAI, June 23: Horror comedy "Munjya" has earned ₹ 80.11 crore at the box office, the makers announced on Sunday. Directed by Aditya Sarpotdar, the Hindi film stars Sharvari Wagh, Abhay Verma and Mona Singh in the lead. It released on June 7.

Production banner Maddock Films shared the update on its official X page. "Another weekend of #Munjya making waves at the Box Office," the banner captioned the post, stating the total domestic collection of the film stands at ₹ 80.11 crore in 16 days of its release.

The latest offering in Maddock Films' horror comedy universe, "Munjya" follows the story of the eponymous mythical creature which has its roots in Marathi folklore. It stars Suhas Joshi, Ajay Purkar and Bhagyashree Limaye.

"Stree 2", the next film in the horror comedy universe, is set to be released in theatres on August 15. It is the sequel of 2018's "Stree", which marked the beginning of the popular franchise. (PTI)

ICW 2024 to take place from July 24-31

NEW DELHI, June 23: The India Couture Week will be returning with its 17th edition scheduled to be held here from July 24 to 31, the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) announced on Saturday.

The upcoming edition will see India's foremost designers come together to unveil their exclusive collections over the course of eight days, a press release said.

The lineup of 14 Indian couturiers for the 2024 edition include Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla, Amit Aggarwal, Dolly J, Falguni Shane Peacock, Gaurav Gupta, Jayanti Reddy, JJ Valaya, Kunal Rawal, Rahul Mishra, Rimzim Dadu, Roseroom, Siddhartha Tytler, Suneet Varma, and Tarun Tahiliani.

"This event is a testament to the rich heritage and extraordinary craftsmanship of Indian fashion"

"Through this edition of Couture Week, we aim to not only celebrate the visionary artistry of our designers but also spotlight the timeless beauty and cultural significance of handcrafted couture.

"We look forward to showcasing collections that will inspire and set new trends in the fashion industry," said Sunil Sethi, Chairman of FDCI.

The fashion event, set to take place at the Taj Palace hotel, is presented by Hyundai India in association with Reliance Brands.

Tarun Garg, COO at Hyundai Motor India Limited, said the company is thrilled to continue its association with the Indian Couture Week for the second year in a row.

"Aligned with our parent company, Hyundai Motor Company's vision of 'Progress for Humanity', we aim to create newer and unique experiences for our customers in India. This partnership with ICW is a testament to our commitment of supporting artisans and the diverse cultural heritage of India. (PTI)

MEXICO BEAT JAMAICA 1-0 IN COPA AMERICA OPENER ON GERARDO ARTEAGA'S 69TH-MINUTE GOAL

HOUSTON, June 23: Gerardo Arteaga scored from the edge of the penalty area in the 69th minute and Mexico beat Jamaica 1-0 on Saturday night in its Copa America opener.

Competing as a guest in South America's championship for the 11th time, Mexico dominated the match and scored on its 17th shot.

Joel Latibeaudiere's weak headed clearance went to Luis Romo, who controlled the ball off a thigh and passed to Arteaga. His left-foot shot beat goalkeeper Jahmali Waite and went inside the far post for his second goal in 25 international appearances.

"The idea was to empower some players who were called before but didn't have the minutes to shine," Mexico coach Jaime Lozano said through an interpreter. "Today was Arteaga's turn, but we have a set of other players who are adding minutes at the top level. That's what we had in mind when we made the roster."

Michail Antonio appeared to put Jamaica ahead with a short-range header in the 50th minute but the goal was disallowed for offside following a video review.

"A fraction offside," Jamaica coach Heimir Hallgrímsson said. "I've seen it

again, and it was correct." Mexico captain Edson Álvarez left in the 30th minute following a left hamstring injury and was replaced by Romo.

"Regarding Edson, we are going to wait," Lozano said. "He's going to see what he has and take some images. We don't want to risk it. He felt something in his leg."

Lozano said it was going to be a couple days before they would know the severity of the injury.

"I think it has been our motto for this summer – together and unity," Lozano said. "It's not easy to overcome your captain being re-

moved from the field, but I felt they responded fast. We suffered a bit more than we needed to suffer."

Lozano said the turf did not play a factor in the game.

Venezuela beat Ecuador 2-1 in the other Group B match. Mexico plays Venezuela at Inglewood, California, on Wednesday, when Jamaica faces Ecuador at Las Vegas. The group finishes on June 30, when Mexico plays Ecuador at Glendale, Arizona, and Jamaica faces Venezuela at Austin, Texas.

El Tri reached the semifinals in 1997, 1999 and 2007. The Reggae Boyz are 0-7 in the tournament following

group-stage elimination in 2015 and 2016.

"We fought until the end," Hallgrímsson said. "I'm proud of the players. We gave them a tough match, and in the end, I was hoping, and I thought we deserved to score one, get something out of this game. ... Overall, quite happy with how the game played out. Of course, unhappy with losing."

Before a crowd of 53,763 at NRG Stadium, Mexico wore red, green and black jerseys patterned after folk art.

El Tri has not lost to Jamaica since a 2017 CONCACAF Gold Cup semifinal. (AP)



Mandhana's graceful 90 leads India to 6-wicket win over SA, ODI series sweep

BENGALURU, June 23: Smriti Mandhana waltzed to a characteristically elegant 90 to form the crux of India's six-wicket win in the third and final women's ODI against South Africa, marking their 3-0 series clean sweep here on Sunday.

Mandhana, whose innings came off 83 balls (11x4), had efficient support casts in Shafali Verma (25), Priya Punia (28) and Harmanpreet Kaur (42, 48b, 2x4) as India went past the target of 216 without exerting themselves much.

The hosts made 220 for four in 40.4 overs, after South Africa were restricted to an underwhelming 215 for eight despite skipper Laura Wolvaardt's solid 61 (57b, 7x4).

Though she failed to make a third hundred on the bounce, the knock underlined the way Mandhana dominated this ODI series, scoring 343 runs at an average of 114.33.

The 27-year-old was once again composed in the middle, and played some typically graceful shots around the Chinnaswamy stadium.

The pitch was smoothened out during the chase and the SA bowling was anything but threatening, giving the Indian vice-captain ample time to pur-



sue her game without an iota of pressure.

On view were those trademark shots that make her batting a sight for the sore eyes – swivel pulls, cover drives, straight drives and those late taps that touch the rope after

teasing the third man fielder. However, Mandhana's batting partners too deserved a pat on their backs for producing little yet polished knocks.

Shafali helped her make 61 runs in 11.5 overs for the opening wicket, while Priya, who is

playing an ODI for the first time since 2019, assisted her in amassing 62 runs in 66 balls for the second wicket.

Skipper Harmanpreet was fluent during the unbeaten third wicket stand that was worth 54 runs. But the vociferous, highly-

partisan crowd that touched 15000 could not see a popular Mandhana century, as her attempt to sweep left-arm spinner Nonku Mlabha ended in the hands of Ayabonga Khaka.

Earlier, the Indian bowlers showed an unbending will to restrict South Africa to 215 for eight after the visitors raced to 102 without loss in 19.5 overs.

Wolvaardt and Tazmin Brits (38, 66b, 2x4, 1x6) negated Indian bowlers during their first-wicket alliance as SA looked set for a big total that could have given them a chance to register a consolation win.

Both Wolvaardt and Brits were comfortable against the Indian bowlers even though there was a hint of varied bounce, which was evident when pacer Pooja Vastrakar beat the defence of Sune Luus (13) with a delivery that stayed close to her ankle. However, the SA openers found a way to tackle that, as they hardly opted for aerial shots and collected their runs more pragmatically with singles, twos and the occasional power shots.

Brits' six off left-arm spinner Radha Yadav over mid-wicket following a little shimmy down the track was the lone moment of explosion. (PTI)

De Bruyne crowns Belgium's 2-0 win over Romania to get Euro 2024 campaign on track

COLOGNE (GERMANY), June 23: In front of Belgium's royal family, King Kev sealed the win. Belgium shook off the shock of losing to Slovakia in its opening game of the European Championship by beating Romania 2-0 on Saturday.

Kevin De Bruyne's second-half goal completed the win after Youri Tielemans scored in the second minute at Cologne Stadium.

Watching on were Belgium's King Philippe and Queen Mathilde.

"We knew what we needed to do. We needed to win otherwise we were going home," De Bruyne said. "I will do everything I can to keep the lads on track."

This was just what Belgium needed after the Slovakia stunner, which raised the prospect of another early exit from a major tournament after being eliminated at the group stage of the 2022 World Cup.

Tielemans gave the No. 3-ranked team in the world a flying start with a goal from the edge of the area. De Bruyne converted direct from Belgium goalkeeper Koen Casteels' long kick in the 80th. The result means all four teams in Group E have three points and there is all to play for in the final round of games on Wednesday, when Belgium plays Ukraine and Romania takes on Slovakia.

"I'm very relieved we won the game. It was very important to get the three points," Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco said.

While Belgium won, there was more frustration for Romelu Lukaku, who had a

third goal ruled out by VAR at these Euros.

Still, he was at the center of his team's great start when laying the ball off for Tielemans to drive in low from the edge of the box.

Belgium has been criticized for failing to live up to expectations in the past, and its opening defeat would not have helped the confidence among the squad going into Saturday's game.

Tielemans' goal seemed to lift the pressure, and Belgium ruled the rest of the half with 67% of possession.

Lukaku thought he scored after the break, but VAR said he strayed offside before firing past Romania keeper Florin Nita.

The longer the game went on without Belgium scoring a second, the more the tension rose.

Dennis Man could have evened the score when running through on goal, but was denied by Casteels. The keeper then turned provider with a long punt upfield, which De Bruyne raced on to and fired home.

Tedesco thought his team took too long to seal the win.

"Scoring four or five goals tonight was possible," he said. "It is important to create chances, but you have to kill the game earlier for sure."

Under former Belgium coach Roberto Martinez, Portugal advanced to the knockout phase after a 3-0 win against Turkey in Group F.

Georgia picked up its first ever point at a major tournament after a drawing the Czech Republic 1-1 and still has hopes of advancing. (AP)

'Momentous occasion for sports': PT Usha on launch of Bharat Centre of Olympic Research and Education

GANDHINAGAR, June 23: The Bharat Centre of Olympic Research and Education was inaugurated on June 23 at the Rashtriya Raksha University in Gujarat's Gandhinagar district.

Speaking at the inauguration event, Indian Olympic Association president and legendary sprinter PT Usha said the centre will serve as a hub of knowledge, innovation and performance in the Indian sports ecosystem.

The launch of such a centre is a momentous occasion marking a significant step forward in the commitment to excellence in sports and at the Olympics, she said at the event held in the RRU campus in Lavad.

The centre will serve as a repository of knowledge, housing invaluable data and insights



in Olympics, training methodologies, sports science and athlete development, Usha said.

"By working together, sharing knowledge and embracing innovative practices, we can create a robust sports culture that nurtures talent from the

grassroots to the elite level. Let us continue to support and inspire our athletes, providing them with resources and encouragement they need to achieve greatness," said Usha, who is also a Rajya Sabha MP.

"It will serve as a beacon of hope and aspiration for the athletes who dream of representing India in the global arena. As someone who has dedicated a significant part of my life to athletics, I understand the importance of rigorous research and continuous learning," Usha said.

It was the unwavering support of her mentors, advancement in sports science and the relentless pursuit of excellence that helped overcome obstacles in her career and achieve her dream, Usha asserted. (PTI)

You got to match aggression with aggression: Kuldeep on instant success in Caribbean

GROS ISLET, June 23: Kuldeep Yadav believes in fighting fire with fire in the T20 format and it is that aggressive approach that is helping the Indian wrist spinner get instant success in the Caribbean leg of T20 World Cup.

Kuldeep, India's best spinner across formats over the past 12 months, was benched in the league stage of the tournament in USA due to the surfaces in New York. The wily operator was expected to play a major role on the spin-friendly tracks in the Caribbean and he is doing exactly that in the Super 8s. Kuldeep has already taken five wickets in the two games he has been part of, including a three-wicket haul against Bangladesh on Saturday.

A big part of Kuldeep's success across formats is down to his approach. He is never afraid to toss

the ball from length even when the opposition batters are going hammer and tongs. The Bangladesh batters were unable to pick him from his hands and the India spinner ended being all over the opposition.

He dismissed opener Tanzid Hasan with a googly before trapping Towhid Hridoy in front with a straighter ball. Shakib Al Hasan was his third victim.

Explaining his mindset, Kuldeep said he doesn't compromise on his length.

"For any spinner around the globe, the length matters a lot. And especially in this format, you have to read what the batter is trying to do, be more aggressive, the approach should be like very-very aggressive. So that is actually helping me during IPL and it's actually helping me in T20 World



Cup," said Kuldeep on Saturday.

He will face his toughest test yet against Australia here on Monday.

Asked how he sticks to his game plan even when the batters are looking for boundaries, Kuldeep said: "When the other

Afghanistan shock Australia by 21 runs in Super 8s match of T20 World Cup

KINGSTOWN, June 23: Afghanistan pulled off an upset of epic proportions with a shock 21-run win over mighty Australia in T20 World Cup with Gulbadin Naib's four-wicket haul upending Pat Cummins' hat-trick to produce one of most memorable days in Afghan cricket.

Using the slower balls smartly on a difficult batting wicket, Afghanistan defended their total of 148 for six for their first-ever win over Australia in international cricket.

Australia were all out for 127 in 19.2 overs in the Super Eight contest and they are now staring at early elimination from the World Cup. Australia now must win their match against India on Monday and also hope that Afghanistan lose to Bangladesh in their next match.

Afghanistan openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz (60) and Ibrahim Zadran (51) forged a 118-run partnership setting up base for a challenging total but Pat Cummins registered his second successive hat-trick spread across two overs to restrict Afghanistan to a manageable total.

Australia were reduced to 32 for 3 in the powerplay but Glenn Maxwell slammed a 41-ball 59 to somewhat resurrect the chase. However Naib's timely strikes proved crucial in toppling the 2021 champions.

Afghanistan exacted revenge for their defeat in Mumbai during the ODI World Cup. Maxwell had snatched victory from Afghans at that time and on Saturday too he threatened to deny them but Naib's brilliance ensured them the win.

Afghanistan players jumped in joy and were joined by their support staff members to celebrate the win. The result has opened up the Group 1 as both Australia and Afghanistan now have one win each with one match to go, while India sit atop the table with two wins from as many games.

Defending 149 on a spin-friendly wicket, Afghanistan had the perfect start as Naveen-ul-Haq picked up two early wickets with the new ball to peg Australia back.

First Naveen cleaned up Travis

Head for a duck with a fuller delivery and then he deceived the skipper Mitch Marsh with a slower delivery as he holed out to Nabi.

Maxwell eased the pressure with two fours off Azmatullah but Nabi removed David Warner (3), who went for a slog sweep only to find Noor Ahmad as Australia scored the lowest Powerplay score of 33 for 3 this World Cup.

Maxwell, who had tormented Afghanistan during the ODI World Cup last year, continued to find the boundaries as he clattered spinner Nangeyalya Kharote for a four and a six.

Naib then struck twice to give Afghanistan hope as he surprised Marcus Stoinis with a bouncer. The batter top-edged it to find Gurbaz. He next trapped Tim David as Australia slipped to 85 for 5 in the 13th over.

Maxwell slammed a six off Rashid Khan and Naib in 12th and 13th overs to keep Australia's chase on track.

Naib returned to pick his most prized cap, dismissing the dangerous Maxwell in the 15th over and then Rashid removed Matthew Wade as their chase fell apart.

Naib next knocked off the stumps of Cummins, while Naveen claimed his third victim by removing Ashton Agar. Azmatullah ended the proceedings by dismissing Josh Hazlewood.

Earlier, Gurbaz and Ibrahim notched up their third century stand of this T20 World Cup with a 118-run partnership.

The duo capitalised on their chances as Australia had to wait till the 16th over for their first breakthrough.

Gurbaz slammed four maximums and as many fours in his 49-ball stay, while Zadran hit six boundaries during his 48-ball knock. Stoinis got rid of Gurbaz with an off-cutter, while in the next over, Adam Zampa cleaned up Azmatullah Omarzai with a slider. Looking for big hits, Afghanistan lost wickets there after with Cummins dismissing Rashid Khan, Karim Janat and Gulbadin Naib to become the first player to pick up two hat-tricks in T20 World Cups. (PTI)

But it was more like an Australian sort of wicket. But here I played, I made my T20 ODI debut here back in 2017. I knew the conditions very well, just the length and trying to vary my pace. So it is nice for spinners to come here and bowl. (PTI)

Near perfect India could play party poopers to under pressure Australia

GROS ISLET (SAINT LUCIA), June 23: India will be out to derail Australia's T20 World Cup campaign when they take on their shocked and under-pressure opponents in their final Super 8 game here on Monday.

A third straight win for India will not only make them the group toppers and send them to the semifinals, it will also substantially threaten Australia's chances of progressing through to the semi-finals following the unexpected loss to Afghanistan in Saint Vincent on Saturday night.

Following the reverse against Afghanistan, Australia don't have the destiny in their own hands and will be keenly tracking Rashid Khan's team final game against Bangladesh on Monday night.

India, who have had to endure heart-breaking defeats at the hands of Australia in major ICC events, would like to see a pre-mature exit of their strong rivals.

On fine-tuning their game ahead of

the knockouts, India don't need to do much having ticked all boxes in their back-to-back wins against Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Both Rohit and Virat Kohli played innings of substance against Afghanistan, while Shivam Dube, who had not been able to perform his role, answered his critics with a crucial knock.

Number three Rishabh Pant has been getting dismissed off reverse hit often and it is something he would like to correct.

The biggest positive for India in this tournament has been the all-round effort of Hardik Pandya, who has now come to the party with the bat to complement his incisive spells.

Kuldeep Yadav has taken little time to come up with match-winning contributions and he would be relied on for wickets in the middle overs.

With the team playing three Super 8 games with as many days of travel in between, the management will be tempted to rotate players but is unlikely to do so.



India, who arrived in Saint Lucia on Saturday night, chose not to train ahead of the Australia game considering the hectic travel involved.

It will only be the second day game at

the Darren Sammy Cricket Stadium. The day nighters have produced high-scores here but in the previous game at the venue, England were not able to chase 164 in a day game against South

Africa.

It has been the best batting strip of the competition but sun beating down on the pitch through the day is likely to aid the slower bowlers.

Australia, on the other hand, have plenty to worry about going into the game. It was a flop batting show against Afghanistan and unusually Mitchell Marsh's team had a forgettable night in the field as well.

Having logged only 88 runs in six games at a strike rate of 111, Marsh needs to lead from the front against India.

With the ball, offie Glenn Maxwell needs to check his economy rate of 8.58 runs per over.

In terms of match ups, it will be interesting to see how Kohli fares against leg-spinner Adam Zampa, who has had the better of the Indian superstar on multiple occasions.

Australia played the extra spinner in Ashton Agar instead of Mitchell Starc against Afghanistan but that could

change against India.

"It was an off-night for us in the field, and we own that. We'll be back next game. It wasn't an easy wicket but both teams played on this surface. (India next...) First and foremost it becomes clear for us. We need to win and no better team to do it against (India)," said the skipper in a very matter of fact way after the Afghanistan game.

Squads:

India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj.

Australia: David Warner, Travis Head, Mitchell Marsh (captain), Glenn Maxwell, Marcus Stoinis, Tim David, Matthew Wade (wk), Pat Cummins, Ashton Agar, Adam Zampa, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc, Josh Inglis, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis. (PTI)

NADA suspends Bajrang again, serves him notice of charge

NEW DELHI, June 23: The National Anti-Doping Agency on Sunday suspended Bajrang Punia for a second time, three weeks after ADDP had revoked his suspension on the grounds that NADA had not issued a 'notice of charge' to the wrestler.

NADA had on April 23 suspended Tokyo Games bronze medalist wrestler for refusal to give his urine sample for dope test during the selection trials held in Sonapat on March 10. World Governing body UWW had also suspended him.

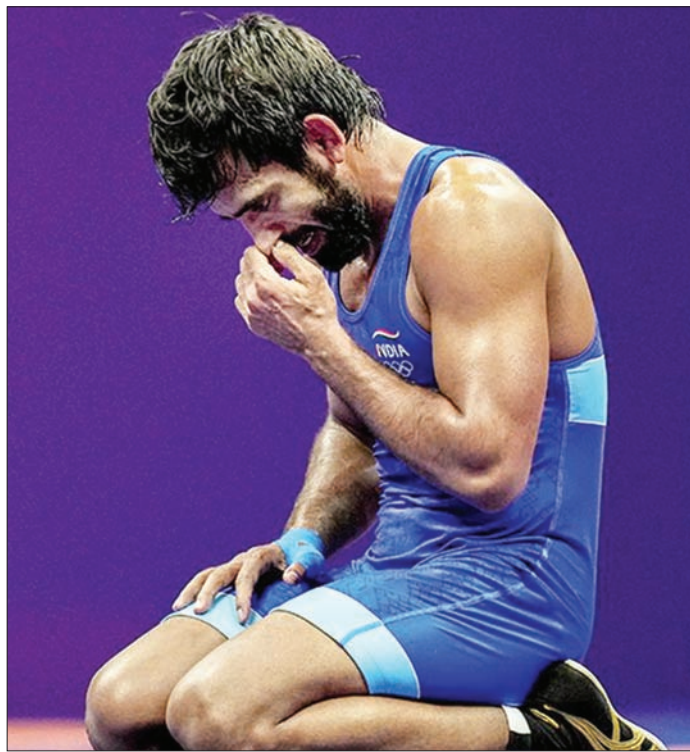
Bajrang had appealed against the provisional suspension and NADA's Anti-Disciplinary Doping panel (ADDP) had revoked it on May 31 till NADA issues the notice of charge.

Swinging to action, NADA on Sunday served the notice to the wrestler.

"This serves as a formal notice that you are being charged with the violation of Article 2.3 of the National Anti-Doping Rules, 2021 and now you are provisionally suspended," said NADA's communication to Bajrang.

Bajrang has time till July 11 to request for a hearing or accept the charge.

The elite wrestler has maintained that he never refused to



give sample but only demanded to know NADA's response to his email where he sought answer why expired kits were sent to take his samples in December 2023.

NADA also explained the rea-

son for its action.

"Chaperone/DCO had duly approached you and informed you that you were required to provide a urine sample for dope analysis purposes.

"Even after several requests

made by the DCO, you had refused to provide your urine sample on the ground that you would not provide the sample unless NADA replies to your email regarding the issue of expired kits, which were used by the concerned DCO who had come to collect the sample of the athlete for the dope test about two months ago. Following your refusal to submit to sample collection, the DCO of NADA had also explained to you in detail, about its consequences and outcomes under the NADR, 2021.

"Despite all the efforts made by the DCO, you had refused to submit for the sample collection."

NADA made it clear that of Anti-Doping Rule Violation (ADRV) is upheld. It will seek "disqualification of results in the event during which the ADRV occurred, commission of the ADRV with all resulting consequences including forfeiture of any medals, points and prizes."

The NADA may, at their discretion, also elect to recover from Bajrang the financial costs associated with the ADRV and or impose a fine as provided in the NADR, 2021. (PTI)

KINGSTOWN (ST VINCENT), June 23: Glenn Maxwell's breathtaking double hundred denied a distraught Rashid Khan forty winks during November last year but the Afghanistan skipper can now be happily awake after settling scores with Australia for that mind-numbing defeat in Mumbai.

Afghanistan kept their semifinal hopes alive with a well-earned 21-run win against Australia, and it will certainly heal the scars of that Mumbai night.

The Aussies recovered miraculously from 91 to 7 to chase down 292 with Maxwell striking a tornado-like unbeaten 201.

"I think I can sleep better now. But that was a night which didn't let me sleep. The game kept coming into my mind," Rashid said at the post-match media conference, recollecting that epic fight-back by a hamstring Maxwell, who hit 21 fours and 10 sixes.

"Definitely, I didn't sleep the whole night (on November 7, 2023) and I feel like tonight because of the happiness, I won't be able to sleep. That's how happy the whole team is," said a visibly happy Rashid.

The spinner then tried to provide an elaborate perspective to what the victory meant for a war-ravaged Afghanistan, where their cricket team's biggest win is an escape from daily hassles.

"It's a massive win for us as a team, as a nation. It's not just like a bilateral game. It's a World Cup game, and definitely in a World Cup, you're beating the best side. It's a great achievement. And you're (Australia) the winners of the 2021 World Cup.

"So, beating a team like that, I think it always gives you so much energy and doesn't let you sleep as well," he said.

Having beaten New Zealand at the group league stage, Afghanistan's win also kept Group 1 in Super 8s alive.

If India beat Australia on Monday, then all Rashid and his men



would need is a simple win over Bangladesh to make it to their maiden semifinal at a global event.

Rashid wasn't off the mark when he said cricket was the only source of happiness for people in Afghanistan, which is now ruled by the Taliban.

"And I mentioned earlier, cricket is the only source of happiness back home. That's the only source left in Afghanistan where people could celebrate. And if we keep that source away from us as well, I don't know where Afghanistan will remain.

"I feel like we are so lucky to be here giving this happiness to people back home. We hardly see these kind of events back home where they could celebrate and enjoy those moments. That's something which really satisfies me," Rashid, one of the prominent global ambassadors of his country, said.

The only issue Rashid sidestepped was Australia's continuous refusal to host Afghanistan for a bilateral series because of its government's policy of not engaging in any sporting ties with a nation that doesn't allow its women to take part in sports.

"Wish we could do something, and wish that was a kind of solu-

tion for it, we would have been happy, but I don't know what's the solution for that.

"...Some things, government, and political things, I don't know much about these things and I don't like it as well. So, I have no answer for this, but my only thing always in my mind is I love to play against the big teams."

A regular member of the Adelaide Strikers in Australia's Big Bash League, Rashid chose to remain politically correct, speaking about the love showered on him whenever he plays Down Under.

"Whenever I go to Australia in Big Bash, I think I have got so much love and support from the fans there. They have given me so much love. Even in the 2022 World Cup, when we were playing in Adelaide against Australia, I got more support than them.

"Every city I go to, huge amount of support is there and people love giving me so much love, especially during the tough days in 2019 when my dad passed away.

"So, that was the hardest moment for me. The amount of love and support I got from everyone in the team, and also from the fans, I call them a family," he concluded. (PTI)

Recurve archers win two bronze; India finish with four medals in World Cup Stage 3

ANTALYA (TURKEY), June 23: Dhiraj Bommadevara secured two bronze --- one individual and another in recurve mixed team event with Bhajan Kaur, as India ended their campaign with four medals in the Archery World Cup Stage 3, here on Sunday.

India could have added another but Ankita Bhakat, eyeing a maiden World Cup medal, narrowly lost her semifinal to eventual gold medalist and top-seed Yang Xiaolei of China. She eventually ended up losing her bronze medal match as well.

The third-seeded mixed team of Dhiraj and Bhajan produced an excellent performance to

rally past Mexico and clinch a bronze.

Trailing 0-2 after conceding the opening set, the third-seeded mixed team of Dhiraj and Bhajan produced a flawless round to bring it level and seal a stunning 5-3 (35-38, 40-39, 38-37, 38-38) win over their Mexican opponents Alejandra Valencia and Matias Grande in the bronze playoff. Dhiraj, who qualified as No 3 seed, then went on to add another in the individual section when he defeated ninth-seeded Marco Nespoli of Italy 7-3 (28-27, 29-28, 27-28, 28-28, 30-29).

It was also his second World Cup bronze, having won his maiden medal at the Stage 1

of the event at this same place last year.

Dhiraj earlier lost in the semifinal against world No 3 former Olympic team medalist Kim Woojin of South Korea.

The Army man managed to hold the South Korean heavyweight twice before going down 2-6 (29-29, 27-30, 29-29, 27-29) in a high intensity last-four clash.

Ankita, who came all the way after her lowly 45th finish in the rankings, fought hard from being 0-2 down to make it 2-2 but could not capitalise crunch moments to lose the next two sets narrowly to cap a 2-6 (26-30, 28-27, 26-27, 27-28) defeat against Yang. (PTI)

Australia perform best under pressure, we'll be up and about against India: Marsh

KINGSTOWN, June 23: Captain Mitchell Marsh feels Australia tend to perform best with their backs against the wall, adding that the former champions will bounce back strongly from the loss to Afghanistan and bring their A Game against India on Monday.

Australia were handed a 21-run defeat by Afghanistan in their Super Eights fixture here, jeopardising their chances of qualifying for the semifinals.

Marsh and Co. now will have to win their final Super Eights match against India and maintain a healthy net run rate to reach the last four stage.

"It's a big game, it will be against India obviously and it's a must-win game. I think if you look back at the short history of this team, I know for a fact that it brings out the best in our guys. So, the boys will certainly be up and about for it," Marsh said at the post-match press conference.

"Yeah, I think that's really clear for us. It's all about trusting ourselves. We've got a good bunch of people and I believe our best is up there with the best. So, we need to bring that in a couple of days' time and move forward pretty quickly," he added.

The loss broke Australia's eight-



match winning streak in T20Is with Marsh calling it an "off" day.

"First things first, recover. We have a lot of belief in our group. We are a very good cricket team. Yes, tonight we had an off night but I guess there's also a positive in the fact that in 36 hours we go again."

It was the Afghans first-ever win over Australia in international cricket. Afghanistan had lost all six of their previous meetings, including four ODIs.

They had come close to defeating Australia during the ODI World Cup last year but a spectacular performance by Glenn Maxwell had denied

them that joy.

"I mean first things first. I thought Afghanistan were really good and they outplayed us and they deserved to win that game.

"There's a lot of things you can look at, the reality is there're small margins here. When the scores are low, we had an off-one in the field. But yeah, got to give credit where credit is due and Afghanistan was pretty good."

Marsh acknowledged that Afghanistan have developed into a dangerous side in world cricket. Rashid Khan and his men had defeated Australia's trans-Tasman ri-

vals New Zealand in the group stage earlier.

"Obviously, they're a good side. And they're not an Associate nation, they're a very good cricket team who play against the best all the time and they have improved a hell of a lot over the last few years.

"We know certainly in these conditions that they are a big danger team. Like I said before, they outplayed us tonight and credit to them."

Australia were guilty of dropping as many as five catches against Afghanistan. The men from Down Under had looked off-colour in the group game against Scotland as well.

"Look I think we don't want too many off nights in the field but I also believe that at our best we're an unbelievable fielding side. So, it's easy to look at tonight and yes it was disappointing but ultimately, we have 36 hours to turn it around and I still believe that our best is very good in the field."

"We certainly pride ourselves on our fielding. Can't question the boys putting in the work. I think it's no different to any other skill set.

"We put in the work, we didn't execute in the field tonight and ultimately it played a part in us losing the game." (PTI)

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