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## Pradhan assures formation of probe panel

NEET row rages further after UGC-NET cancellation ● Students stage protests ● Oppn attacks govt

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** The outcry against alleged irregularities in the medical entrance exam NEET grew louder on Thursday with several student groups staging protests and opposition attacking the government saying the paper leaks are an expansion of the Vyapam scam and the future of candidates who appeared in these exams is being destroyed.

The cancellation of UGC-NET, amid the raging row over NEET, led to questions being raised over National Testing Agency's (NTA) capability to conduct exams of larger magnitude.

The Ministry of Education said it is waiting for a report of Bihar Police's Economic Offences Unit on alleged irregularities in conduct of NEET in Patna and will take further action on the basis of that. The ministry also summoned NTA DG Subodh Kumar Singh to dis-



cuss the issue further.

The ministry on Wednesday cancelled UGC-NET conducted by the NTA following inputs that the integrity of the examination may have been compromised.

Meanwhile, under fire for the irregularities in NEET and the can-

cancellation of the UGC-NET exam, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has said that a high-level committee will be formed and that the interest of the students is the first priority of the government.

Over 30 lakh candidates appeared for the exams, both of

which were conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), and the minister's comments came on a day when students held protests in various parts of the country, including outside Pradhan's home in Delhi.

Addressing a press conference on Thursday, Pradhan said, "I want to assure everyone that the government is committed to ensuring the interests of students."

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi held a press conference and launched a scathing attack on the government over the alleged irregularities in NEET and cancellation of UGC-NET and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "psychologically collapsed" post-elections and will struggle to run a government like this. He said the main reason for paper leaks is that educational institutions have been captured by the BJP and its parent

organisation RSS and paper leaks will not stop unless that is reversed. "It was being said Prime Minister Modi stopped the Ukraine-Russia War and Israel-Gaza war, but he is either not able to stop exam paper leaks or doesn't want to," Gandhi said.

He claimed that during his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, thousands complained about paper leaks.

"There has been an expansion of the idea of Vyapam to rest of the country," he said of the recent controversy while referring to the Vyapam examination and recruitment scam in Madhya Pradesh.

"Nothing should be done in an arbitrary manner, rules that apply to one paper should apply to another," Gandhi said. More than two dozen students from different universities and members of various students' groups were detained on Thursday. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## EC receives applications for EVM verification on 8 LS seats in 6 states



**NEW DELHI, June 20:** The Election Commission has received eight applications from aggrieved candidates, including those from the BJP and the Congress, for verification of tampering or modification in micro-controller chips embedded in the EVMs post declaration of Lok Sabha election results on June 4.

Terming the suspicion of manipulation of the electronic voting machines "unfounded", the Supreme Court had on April 26 rejected the demand for reverting to the old paper ballot system.

But at the same time, the top court had opened a window for the aggrieved unsuccessful candidates securing second and third places in the poll results and allowed them to seek verification of micro-controller chips embedded in five per cent EVMs per assembly constituency on a written request upon the payment of a fee to the poll panel.

BJP's Ahmednagar (Maharashtra) candidate Sujay Vikhe-Patil has sought verification of the machines from 40 polling stations.

Vikhe-Patil had lost to Nitesh Lanke of NCP (Sharad Pawar) faction. A YSRCP and a DMDK candidate too have applied for the verification, according to data shared by the poll panel.

According to the EC, eight par-

liamentary seats spread across six states are involved. The total number of polling stations for which verification has been sought is 92.

Candidates who come second or third and seek verification of the EVMs will have to pay ₹ 47,200 per EVM set, according to the standard operating procedure issued by the EC on June 1.

According to the EC's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), the cost submitted by manufacturers BEL and ECIL to carry out EVM "check and verification" is ₹ 40,000 (plus 18 per cent GST) per set of EVM.

"In addition to the cost incurred by the manufacturers, there are also administrative costs like cost of labour to shift the units, CCTV coverage, electricity charges, videography costs and various other operational costs at the district election officer level," the document said.

It, however, said to make the verification process "more accessible" and inclusive in compliance to the referred mandate of the Supreme Court, it is decided that instead of going purely by the actual economic costs incurred, the administrative expenditure on EVM verification will be treated as "election expenditure and borne by the central or state government, as the case (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Terrorists killed in Baramulla were Pakistani and linked to LeT: Army

**SRINAGAR, June 20:** The Army on Thursday said the two terrorists killed in an encounter with security forces in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir were Pakistani and associated with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

"The killed terrorists have been identified as Usman and Umar, both of Pakistan origin and associated with LeT," Commander 7 Sector Rashtriya Rifles, Brigadier Deepak Mohan, told reporters in Rafiabad.

Two terrorists were killed and two security personnel injured in the encounter that broke out on Wednesday in Baramulla district of north Kashmir.

The forces launched a cordon-and-search operation in the Watergam area of Baramulla in the morning on information about the presence of terrorists there, which

then turned into an encounter when the terrorists opened fire at the security personnel.

The Brigadier said Usman has been active in the Kashmir Valley since 2020.

Significant quantities of weapons and ammunition have been recovered after the operation, the army officer said.

He said over the past few weeks there has been constant information on the movement of a terrorist group in the Sopore-Rafiabad area of Baramulla District.

On Wednesday, specific intelligence was received through JKP that two terrorists were holed up in a house in the Hadipura village of the Rafiabad area. Consequently,

the Indian Army, JKP and CRPF launched a joint operation, swiftly cordoning off the area, Brigadier Mohan said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam Skill University to be fully functional in 2025: Himanta



**HT Bureau GUWAHATI/MANGALDAI, June 20:** Assam Skill University will commence classes at its permanent location in Mangaldai from the upcoming year, announced chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday.

"I met with the vice chancellor and other officials today to review the progress of the Skill University.

They assured me that regular classes could commence from the permanent setup by 2025," Sarma stated while addressing the media during a visit to the construction site of the over ₹ 1000 crore project in Mangaldai's Gerimari.

The university is designed to accommodate up to 10,000 students simultaneously, with nine distinct trade schools planned to cater to

the demands of modern and future technologies.

Additionally, the chief minister announced that classes will commence next month at a temporary location in Guwahati. These classes will focus on soft skills such as data science, artificial intelligence, and road construction technology in the interim facility.

On the other hand, Sarma also said that the site for the upcoming Darrang medical college to be finalised by the district administration within a week and the state government will start further processes to begin the building work for the medical college.

Notably, during the Mangaldai visit, Sarma visited two sites for the proposed medical college.

"I have visited two places here. One is just beside the upcoming skill university campus and another at the sericulture campus adjacent to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Shiksha Setu App working smoothly with no glitches: Ranoj Pegu



**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, June 20:** Education Minister Ranoj Pegu on Thursday asserted that there is no discrepancy in the Shiksha Setu mobile application that is used to capture daily attendance of teachers and students in the government schools across the state.

The statement of the minister came after it was reported that in Abhayapuri Lower Primary school in the Kamrup district, one teacher identified as Harjyoti Das, who passed away on June 11 in an accident, was showing him present in the Shiksha Setu app for the

last few days.

A section of teachers voiced displeasure and claimed that the app has bugs. However, Pegu debunked these claims and said, "The Shiksha Setu app is working perfectly fine and there is no glitch in it. The Samagra Shiksha Authority has checked the case of Harjyoti Das properly and it was found that the application at the school was not updated and it captured the cache memory."

The education minister asserted that in the Shiksha Setu portal, the teacher was showing absence and the school was instructed to update their app on the tablet.

"The app was updated and nobody can give attendance through the Shiksha Setu application through video or any other mode. But some schools have not updated the app on their tablets and they will be given instruction to do so," he added.

Shiksha Setu application has been a bone of contention between the teacher community and the education minister. The teachers have alleged that this app has many glitches and sometimes giving attendance through it becomes an uphill task.

Recently, the education department has also issued an order that any teacher who is found to be late by 15 minutes in the Shiksha Setu app for the two times in a month, a half day casual leave will be deducted.

## Those involved in recent terror attacks will be punished: PM

**SRINAGAR, June 20:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said preparations for the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir have begun and the Union territory will get back its statehood too.

Addressing an event after laying foundation stone and inaugurating 84 developmental projects worth ₹ 1,500 crore in Srinagar, Modi also said the central government has taken the recent terror attacks in the Union territory very seriously and the enemies of Jammu and Kashmir will be given a befitting reply.

He also praised the youths of Jammu and Kashmir for the high turnout in the recently-concluded Lok Sabha polls and said they have ensured victory of democracy.

Modi said the wall of the Article 370, which was scrapped in August 2019, collapsed and fruits of Indian Constitution ensured in Jammu and



Kashmir. "Today the Indian Constitution has truly been implemented in Jammu and Kashmir," he said. The prime minister said today the forces inimical to peace and development are making last ditch efforts to stop the progress of Jammu and Kashmir. "The Centre has taken the recent terror attacks

very seriously. The home minister held a meeting and reviewed the entire mechanism. I want to assure that we will leave no stone unturned to punish the enemies of Jammu and Kashmir," he said. Modi assured the people that permanent peace will be established in Jammu and Kashmir. (PTI)

## Delhi court grants bail to Kejriwal

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** In a huge relief to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, a court here on Thursday granted him bail in a money laundering case stemming from the alleged excise scam. Special Judge Niyay Bindu also declined the Enforcement Directorate's prayer to keep in abeyance the bail order for 48 hours to allow the central agency to appeal against it in a superior court. The judge ordered Kejriwal's release on a personal bond of ₹ 1 lakh. The court, however, imposed certain conditions on the AAP leader before granting him the relief, including that he will not try to hamper the investigation or influence the witnesses. The judge also directed Kejriwal to appear before the court whenever required and to cooperate with the investigation. The judge had reserved the order earlier during the day after hearing the ED, which sought to link Kejriwal to the alleged proceeds of crime and co-accused, and the defence that claimed the prosecution has no evidence to nail the AAP leader. (PTI)

## Climate change also impacts major life decisions for 69 per cent of people globally

77 pc of Indians want stronger climate action: UNDP-Oxford survey

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** Amid a crippling heatwave affecting large parts of India, a new survey released on Thursday showed 77 per cent of Indians demand stronger climate action, and 33 per cent have recently experienced extreme weather events.

The Peoples' Climate Vote 2024 survey, conducted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the University of Oxford and GeoPoll, collected responses from over 75,000 people across 77 countries, representing 87 per cent of the global population.

The survey reveals robust support for stronger climate measures among the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters.

Majorities in these countries favour increased climate action, including 66 per cent in the US and



Russia, 67 per cent in Germany, 73 per cent in China, 77 per cent in South Africa and India, 85 per cent in Brazil, 88 per cent in Iran, and up to 93 per cent in Italy.

Women in five major emitting countries -- Australia, Canada, France, Germany, and the US -- show even higher support for

stronger climate commitments compared to men.

Globally, 72 per cent of respondents support a rapid transition away from fossil fuels, even among the top producers of oil, coal, or gas. Only 7 per cent globally believe their country should not transition at all.

At the United Nations COP28 climate change conference in December last year, world leaders reached a historic agreement to transition away from planet-warming fossil fuels.

The survey shows climate anxiety is widespread, with 56 per cent of people thinking about climate change regularly, and 53 per cent more worried about it than last year. This concern is notably higher in the least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Climate change also impacts major life decisions for 69 per cent of people globally, particularly in LDCs. Cassie Flynn, Global Director of Climate Change, UNDP, said, "As world leaders decide on the next round of pledges under the Paris Agreement by 2025, these results are (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India, Australia, France pledge to work for rules-based Indo-Pacific

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** India, Australia and France have vowed to jointly work towards a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific amid China's growing muscle-flexing in the region.

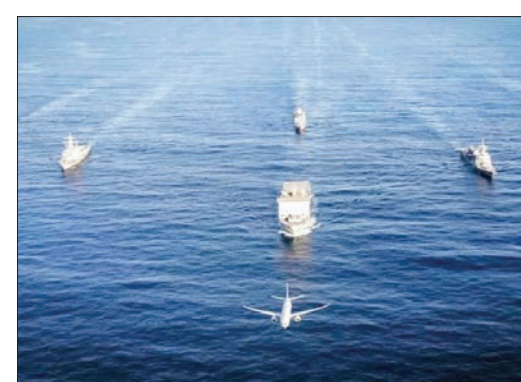
The overall situation in the Indo-Pacific came up for detailed deliberations at the third 'India-France-Australia trilateral focal points' meeting that took place in Delhi on Wednesday.

"The three sides reviewed the progress made under the three pillars of trilateral cooperation: maritime safety and security, marine and environmental cooperation, and multilateral engagement," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

It said the meeting identified new proposals for furthering the trilateral cooperation, including under the framework of the Indo Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) mechanisms.

"India, Australia and France reaffirmed their commitment to advancing their shared values and working together towards a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific," the MEA said in a statement.

The IPOI is an open, inclusive, non-treaty based, global initiative that was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 14th East Asia Summit in



November 2019 to promote collaborative efforts among like-minded nations to better manage, conserve and secure the Indo-Pacific maritime domain.

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is an inter-governmental organisation aimed at strengthening regional cooperation.

The Indian side at the trilateral was led by Piyush Srivastava, joint secretary (Europe West) and Paramita Tripathi, joint secretary (Oceania and Indo-Pacific) at the MEA. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# India Inc urges FM to reduce tax burden

## Earmark more for capex in upcoming Budget

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** India Inc on Thursday asked finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman to reduce tax burden on common man, continue capital expenditure, and announce steps to contain food inflation in the upcoming Union Budget.

During pre-Budget consultation with Sitharaman, the industry leaders and associations also urged the government to focus more on infrastructure development with a view to maintaining the economic growth momentum.

The industry leaders also laid stress on boosting the MSME (Micro, small, and medium enterprises) sector, considered a backbone of the Indian economy and main employment generator.

President of industry body CII Sanjay Puri put forth eight points for consideration for the finance minister. These include relief in income tax at the lower end of income slabs, streamlining of employment inked incentive



schemes like Production Linked Incentive (PLI), and promoting ease of doing business. CII also made recommendations for agriculture and rural development.

Recommendations of Ficci centred around capex drive, innovation and tax simplification.

During the meeting, Subhrakant Panda, former Ficci president,

made a case for supporting growth momentum by energising demand, laying thrust on infrastructure development, taking further measures to rein in food inflation, supporting MSMEs and prioritising innovation and research and development in the country.

"The Union Budget, being the first major public policy announce-

ment of the government, is expected to set the tone for the next five years in terms of policy direction," Panda noted.

Sanjay Kirloskar (CMD of Kirloskar Brothers), Arathi Krishna (MD of Sundram Fasteners), Vinod Aggarwal (President at SIAM), Neeraj Akhouri (President at Cement Mfrs Association), Sanjay Aggarwal (President at PHD Chamber), Samir Somaiya (President at IMC Chamber), Shafeli Misra (Vice President at Biocon), and Yash Pal Sachar (Vice President at Ashok Leyland) also made several key recommendations to the minister for consideration in the Budget.

The full Budget 2024-25 is expected to be presented in Parliament next month. Vivek Jalan, chairman of National Fiscal Affairs and Taxation Committee of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, suggested easing of licensing requirements for imports of electronics. (PTI)

## Blue Dart starts drone deliveries

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, June 20:** Blue Dart, South Asia's leading courier and integrated express package distribution company has successfully launched drone deliveries in collaboration with Skye Air, a leader in drone technology.

This move marks a significant advancement towards cleaner and more efficient delivery solutions. Building on their pioneering VLOS trials in Vikarabad, Hyderabad, in September 2021, and BVLOS trials under the Telangana Government's 'Medicine from the Sky' initiative, Blue Dart continues to lead in utilizing drone technology for logistics.

Initially focusing on the growing e-commerce sector, this innovative approach is set to revolutionize last-mile delivery by offering same-day delivery for shipments, significantly reducing delivery time and environmental impact. This milestone achievement notably coincided with World Environment Day, emphasizing Blue Dart's commitment to sustainable logistics practices.

On this initiative, Balfour Manuel, managing director, Blue Dart, says, "The logistics sector in India is experiencing an exhilarating phase. The nation's robust economic growth, coupled with the aspirations of its consumers and growth in Tier 2 & Tier 3 cities, has significantly boosted purchasing power. This surge in demand emphasizes the need for innovative solutions that drive growth while ensuring efficiency and sustainability. As we witness the marvel of drone technology, we eagerly anticipate extending this service further, with plans to cover additional pin codes in subsequent stages with our partners."

With a rich legacy spanning over four decades, Blue Dart has set the standard for reliability, resilience, and responsiveness in the express logistics industry. The successful initiation of drone delivery operations further solidifies Blue Dart's position as an industry leader, reaffirming its commitment to continuous innovation and top-notch service.

## Sensex, Nifty scale fresh record high levels

**MUMBAI, June 20:** Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty soared to new lifetime highs on Thursday, fuelled by intense buying in market heavyweights Reliance, ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank amid a recent surge in foreign capital inflows.

Besides, stable global crude prices extended support to capital markets amid investors looking for fresh triggers, traders said.

Rallying for the sixth straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 141.34 points or 0.18 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 77,478.93. During the day, it surged 305.5 points or 0.39 per cent to 77,643.09. As many as 2,282 stocks advanced while 1,571 declined and 128 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The BSE benchmark has jumped 1,022.34 points or 1.33 per cent in the last six days.

The NSE Nifty rose 51 points or 0.22 per cent to settle at its fresh closing high of 23,567. Intraday, it soared 108 points or 0.45 per cent to 23,624.

"FIIs have been net buyers in Indian equities for the last three days and have bought ₹ 12,600 crore, which includes a few large block deals. On the domestic front, the market is consolidating with a positive bias amid strong FII flows and healthy macros.

Also, an expectation of a growth-focused budget is aiding sentiments and is likely to lead to sector-specific action," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Among the 30 Sensex companies, JSW Steel, Tata Steel, Axis Bank, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Asian Paints were among the biggest gainers.

In contrast, Mahindra & Mahindra, Sun Pharma, NTPC, Wipro, State Bank of India and Power Grid were among the laggards.

"Markets were a bit volatile in early trade but settled in positive territory to move in a range-bound manner thereafter, as investors resorted to stock-specific selection after witnessing record-breaking spree over the past few ses-

sions. Also, US indices were closed on Wednesday, and hence, domestic investors were cautiously optimistic," Prashanth Tapse, senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1 per cent, and the midcap index rallied 0.55 per cent.

Among the indices, realty jumped 1.97 per cent, commodities climbed 1.88 per cent, metal rallied 1.87 per cent, energy surged 0.90 per cent and industrials (0.50 per cent).

Telecommunication, utilities, auto, power and tech were the laggards.

"Global shares held around record highs on Thursday, helped by investor confidence in the chance of a drop in US interest rates this year, while the pound held steady ahead of a Bank of England meeting later in the day.

"European stocks strengthened after the Swiss National Bank delivered a second interest rate cut of 25 bps to 1.25 per cent," Deepak Jasani, head of retail research at HDFC Securities, said.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the green, while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. US markets were closed on Wednesday in observance of Juneteenth.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 7,908.36 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

"...the decline in US bond yields has facilitated robust FII inflows in recent days," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.16 per cent to USD 85.21 a barrel.

"In the near term, market attention is expected to centre around the upcoming Union Budget and the progress of monsoon," Nair said. Rising for the fifth straight session on Wednesday, the BSE benchmark climbed 36.45 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 77,337.59. However, the Nifty ended at 23,516, down 41.90 points or 0.18 per cent. Intraday, it rose 106.1 points or 0.45 per cent to 23,664. (PTI)

## North Indian tea output may be hit by 60 million kgs till June

**KOLKATA, June 20:** The North Indian tea industry is facing a production shortfall of 60 million kgs till June of the current crop year over the corresponding period last year due to adverse weather conditions, according to an estimate by a tea body. The loss of the first and second flush crops, which produce the highest quality teas of the year, will undoubtedly impact the producers' revenue and may push tea prices higher, officials say.

The states of Assam and West Bengal, which comprise the North Indian tea industry, are experiencing a precarious situation. Excessive heat coupled with a rain deficit in May, followed by excess rainfall and a lack of sunshine, has severely impacted production. Tea Association of India (TAI) president Sandeep Singhania estimated that the combined crop loss is estimated to be 60 million kgs by June compared to the previous year's output.

"As reported by the member tea estates of the association, the tea estates of Assam and West Bengal are estimated to be behind by around 20 per cent and 40 per cent respectively during May 2024 compared to last year," he said. Data released by the Tea Board of India indicates a drop in production of around 8 per cent in Assam and around 13 per cent in West Bengal up to April 2024 compared to the same period last year. TAI said IMD data showed significantly less rainfall between 50 and 80 per cent in the major tea-growing districts of West Bengal and between 10 and 30 per cent in Assam compared to the normal rainfall for the period. Detailing further about the adverse weather conditions, the TAI noted that the tea-growing districts of Assam and West Bengal received the southwest monsoon a week earlier and during the first half of June, the tea-growing districts of West Bengal and Assam experienced significantly higher rainfall.

According to data from the India Meteorological Department, West Bengal received 15-66 per cent more rain than usual, while Assam saw an increase of 3-20 per cent compared to the average for the month, Singhania said.

Excessive rainfall coupled with practically no sunshine during the day has hampered crop production in both states, affecting the first and second-flush teas, which fetch the best prices in any tea crop year, the official said. (PTI)

## KEI Wires and Cables launches Conflame Green+

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, June 20:** KEI Wires and Cables, a leading name in the electrical industry, is proud to announce the launch of its groundbreaking house wire, Next Gen living eco friendly solution "Conflame Green+," at a prestigious business partners meet in Assam. This event marks a significant milestone in KEI's ongoing journey toward sustainability and consumer safety in the electrical solutions domain.

The business partners' meet was graced by the presence of distinguished leadership including Anil Gupta, chairman and managing director of KEI, Akshit Divish Gupta, director, Manoj Kakkar, executive director, and Ravi Sharma, vice president of Sales and Marketing. Their participation underscored the importance of this launch and KEI's commitment to fostering strong relationships with its business partners. KEI Conflame Green+ represents a revolutionary step forward in eco-friendly electrical solutions. Designed to meet the growing demand for sustainable products, especially among the younger generation, this innovative house wire offers unparalleled safety and environmental benefits. It not only protects lives but also reduces costs, making it an ideal choice for environmentally conscious consumers.

The event in Assam highlighted KEI's position as a leading brand in the northeastern region of India. By bringing together business partners and industry leaders, KEI emphasized the importance of collaboration and innovation in driving the industry forward. The launch of Conflame Green+ marks a significant stride in KEI's commitment to environmental responsibility and consumer safety. As part of the Next-Gen Living initiative, this product is poised to make a substantial impact on the electrical industry, setting a new benchmark for eco-friendly solutions.

## Prices of wheat and wheat flour have increased by up to ₹2 per kg from a year ago

## Govt weighs interventions to stabilise rising wheat prices

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** The government on Thursday said it will undertake suitable policy interventions to ensure stability in wheat prices for consumers in the country. After a meeting of the committee of ministers chaired by home affairs and cooperation minister Amit Shah, the government said it has directed officials to keep a close watch on wheat prices.

Prices of wheat and wheat flour have increased by up to ₹2 per kg from a year ago, according to the official data.

As of June 20, the average retail price of wheat stood at ₹ 30.99 per kg, up from ₹ 28.95 a year ago, while wheat flour price rose to ₹ 36.13 per kilogram as against ₹ 34.29 per kg last year, the data



showed.

The ministers discussed the position of wheat stocks and prices in detail during the meeting.

In a statement, the Food and Consumer Affairs Ministry said, "The Union Minister directed that a close watch may be kept on the prices of wheat and suitable policy interventions to be undertaken to

ensure price stability for the consumers of the country."

It assured that the government has procured slightly more wheat for the central pool than the previous year.

"After meeting the requirement for PDS and other welfare schemes, which is approximately 18.4 million tonnes, sufficient stock of wheat is available to undertake market interventions, as and when required," the ministry statement said.

As of June 18, the government had procured 26.6 million tonnes of wheat for the central pool in the 2024-25 rabi marketing year which started on April 1, marginally higher than 26.2 million tonnes in the previous year. (PTI)

## Once completed, Vadhan Port alone can push Maharashtra economy by 1 pc: Official

**MUMBAI, June 20:** The upcoming ₹ 76,200-crore greenfield, Vadhan Port in Maharashtra, which received the Union Cabinet's approval on Wednesday, has the potential to increase the state's economy by 1 per cent once completed, a top official has said.

To be developed in two phases by Vadhan Port Project Ltd (VPPL), the all-weather greenfield deep draft major port at Vadhan in Palghar district will comprise nine container terminals, each 1,000 metres long, four multipurpose berths, including the coastal berth, four liquid cargo berths, a Ro-Ro berth, and a coast guard berth. VPPL is a special purpose vehicle (SPV) formed by Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) and Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB) with 74 per cent and 26 per cent stake, respectively.

"Once this (the project) is completed, it will increase the GDP of Maharashtra by 1 per cent. It has that potential," JNPA Chairman Unmesh Sharad Wagh said at a media briefing here.

Wagh said the upcoming port will also be the starting point for the 'International North' South Transport Corridor (INSTC),

which is a multi-modal transportation route linking the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran and onward to northern Europe via St Petersburg in Russia, as well as for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC).

He also said the strategic placement of the Vadhan port will facilitate the call of container traffic. "The port will bridge international and Indian coasts that will accelerate the economies of scale and mitigate the logistics cost. Moreover, the port will also address the EXIM needs of industries in Vapi, Indore, Karnataka and Maharashtra," he said.

Stating that the work on the project is expected to start after the monsoon next year, Wagh said the first phase of the port will be completed by 2029.

According to Wagh, the Vadhan Port, which is to be built on "Land Lord Model" will not require any land as the developers will create a land of 1,448 hectares inside the sea (reclaimed land), besides construction of 10.14 km of breakwater container/cargo storage areas. He said the investment proposal approved by the Union cabi-

net is to the tune of ₹ 76,220 crore, adding that the central government will not give any financial assistance for this project and it "will be borne by the Maharashtra government and the JNPA".

"We have to put in around ₹ 13,000 crore. We have that money already in our bank," Wagh said, adding that two public sector financial institutions are keen to fund the project.

Foreign financial institutions have also shown interest in funding the project, he said.

The ₹ 76,220-crore project cost includes core infrastructure, terminals and other commercial infrastructure in PPP mode.

The cabinet also approved the establishing road connectivity between the Port and National Highways by MoRTH and rail linkage to existing rail network and the upcoming Dedicated Rail Freight Corridor by MoR.

The proposed deep draft all-weather major port at Vadhan will augment the national container handling capacity by 23.2 million TEUs and will facilitate the calling of mega size container vessels capable of carrying 24,000 TEUs, as per the JNPA. (PTI)

## Blade-like object in-flight meal: FSSAI issues improvement notice to TajSATS

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India on Thursday issued an improvement notice to flight catering company TajSATS after a passenger found a blade-like object in a meal served onboard an Air India flight from Bengaluru to San Francisco.

The incident occurred on June 9, and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) conducted an inspection at TajSATS Bengaluru from where the food item was supplied.

"We have issued an improvement notice to TajSATS, following a detailed inspection at TajSATS Bengaluru," FSSAI CEO Kamala Vardhana Rao told PTI. Under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, an improvement notice can be issued to a food business operator if it has failed to comply with any regulations and is required to take measures within a reasonable period.

The company has been asked to comply with the

improvement notice within 15 days, he said.

Air India and its catering partner TajSATS are owned by the Tata Group.

The airline on Monday had "deeply apologised" for the incident, saying that it came from the vegetable processing machine used at the facilities of its catering partner TajSATS.

The food safety authority found that the blade was from an automatic vegetable cutter that accidentally got displaced and stuck inside the vegetable piece.

To prevent similar incidents, Rao said TajSATS has been instructed to take corrective actions, including the installation of x-ray machines, and manual vegetable chopping, besides strengthening of inspection and maintenance processes. In the recent past, the FSSAI issued an improvement notice to Indigo.

FSSAI held several meetings with airlines and food suppliers, asking them to comply with the food safety norms, he added. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Pradhan assures formation

while they were protesting against the cancellation of the UGC-NET examination and irregularities in the NEET.

The students were detained from outside the Ministry of Education as well as the Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's residence here in central Delhi.

Bihar deputy chief minister Vijay Kumar Sinha claimed the arrested prime accused in the NEET "paper leak" is linked to officials associated with RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, and demanded an investigation into it.

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan urged the Centre to take immediate steps to resolve the crisis in the NTA, saying its "repeated incompetence" in conducting exams such as NEET and the UGC-NET cannot be accepted.

Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale said the examination process in the country has crashed and the lives of students are being destroyed. He accused the NTA of being complicit.

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MP Manoj Jha said the NEET exam should also be cancelled.

"You had to scrap NEET and you must scrap NEET now as there is ample proof that this examination was compromised. And it is time to acknowledge that the NTA is a fraud," he said. (Agencies)

## EC receives applications

may be". "Accordingly, the administrative charges will be waived for the applicants -- the same shall not be charged to the applicants," it noted. The charges for EVM verification to be paid by the applicant candidate for the current financial year 2024-25 -- till March 31, 2025, it said. An EVM set has at least one Ballot Unit, one Control Unit and a VVPAT machine.

Separately, YSRCP and BJD candidates from Andhra Pradesh and Odisha respectively have also applied for EVM check following the announcement of assembly results on June 4. Assembly polls in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh were held along with the Lok Sabha elections. In the verification exercise for assembly poll results, total assembly constituencies involved are three where verification has been sought in 26 polling stations.

According to the SOP, the concerned state chief electoral officer (CEO) was required to communicate to the manufacturers the consolidated list of applicants within 30 days of the date of declaration of results -- by July 4. The CEOs have already conveyed the same to the manufacturers 15 days ahead of the schedule, the EC said. The technical SOP enumerating the methodology and steps for checking and verification of burnt memory/micro-controller of the EVM units will be issued by the EC in due course. (PTI)

## Terrorists killed in Baramulla

Following standard procedures, civilians were safely evacuated from adjacent houses and the area was secured. The target house was thoroughly cordoned off and on the search being commenced, terrorists opened fire on the security forces. In the ensuing firefight, two terrorists were neutralized, he said. The army officer said the elimination of these terrorists marks another major success for the security forces.

Over the past few months, we have maintained a high operational tempo, resulting in some major achievements. The success is also attributed to the complete cooperation of the Kashmiri people. Security forces will continue to make sustained efforts to maintain peace and stability in Kashmir, he added. (PTI)

## Assam Skill University to be

the national highway. The sericulture campus is now dysfunctional and it has 108 bighas of land. I think it is a suitable place to build a medical college," he added.

According to Sarma, the district commissioner will convene with MLAs, MP and other stakeholders to finalise the site of the upcoming medical college. "Once the district administration completes the land selection process, further steps will be taken by the state government," he said.

Moreover, Sarma also mentioned that in Nalbari and Kokrajhar, the general people urged to maintain the district hospital which has created some issues with the smooth functioning of the medical colleges there.

"This time, we will hold a public meeting and the people will be informed that there will not be any provision of district hospital at the medical college," the chief minister stated. Sarma also took stock of the under-construction Mangaldai Bypass and the site for the upcoming Darrang Medical College & Hospital. Arriving at Mangaldai, the chief minister straightaway visited the construction site of the 15-Km bypass on NH15 and took stock of the progress and quality of the construction activities.

However, Sarma expressed concern at the slow progress of the project and was seen directing concerned authorities to take all measures necessary to ensure its expeditious completion.

## 77 pc of Indians want stronger

undeniable evidence that people everywhere support bold climate action."

"The next two years stand as one of the best chances we have as the international community to ensure that warming stays under 1.5 degrees Celsius. We stand ready to support policymakers in stepping up their efforts as they develop their climate action plans through our Climate Promise initiative," she said. Countries are required to submit their third round of NDCs 9 to 12 months before the UN climate talks in Brazil next year.

NDCs are national climate plans to achieve the goals set out in the 2015 Paris Agreement, including limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius and preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to the 1850-1900 average. (PTI)

## India, Australia, France

The French side was headed by Benoît Guidée, Director (Asia and Oceania) in French foreign ministry. The Australian delegation was led by Sarah Storey, a first assistant secretary at Australian foreign ministry's South and Central Asia Division. (PTI)



# Commemorations honour the legacy of the iconic cultural figure

## State pays tribute to Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha on 55<sup>th</sup> death anniversary

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, June 20:** State minister for Power, Cooperation, etc., Nandita Gorlosa paid tribute to the legendary cultural icon Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha at a program held at Cultural Institute Hall, Haflong, on Thursday. The program was organised by the district administration and was attended by dignitaries such as Mohet Hojai, chairman of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC); Donphainon Thaosen and Probita Johori, executive members of NCHAC; Rupali Langthasa, NCHAC MAC; Simanta Kr Das, district commissioner; Madhumita Daolagup, ex-principal of Haflong Government College; and Gayetri Naiding, inspector of schools.

During her speech, minister Nandita Gorlosa spoke about the great legendary icon Bishnu Prasad Rabha, emphasising that he was not just an artist but also a spirited freedom fighter. She encouraged students and the public to understand the greatness of his personality and other icons of Assam. She stated, "Bishnu Prasad Rabha's name as an artist, musician, dancer, lyricist, orator, and litterateur has resonated in the minds of every person not just in Assam but across the nation." She further urged students to study about the life of Bishnu Rabha.

District commissioner Simanta Kr Das welcomed all the guests and spoke briefly about Kalaguru and his significant contributions to society. He highlighted that Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha was a multifaceted genius whose immense contributions to Assamese culture, literature, music, dance, and social reformation continue to inspire even today.

Chairman of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), Mohet Hojai, also spoke about Rabha's contributions and expressed his thoughts on the multi-talented and versatile personality of Kalaguru.

Several participants from Assam Sanskritik Mahasangam (ASM) performed Rabha Sangeet during the program.

The Central Rabha Divas celebration, which took place in Tezpur, including the state central program, was broadcasted live throughout Assam, including in Haflong. The chief minister's live speech was attended by people across the state.

Similarly, members of New Art Players (NAP), a leading socio-cultural organisation of the state, observed Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha Divas on Thursday evening at its auditorium in a dignified manner.

At the outset, general secretary Rathindra N Bhattacharya welcomed the gathering, and president Ajoy Kumar Datta paid homage to the legendary figure. Ramen Barua, an eminent music director and senior member of NAP, lit the ceremonial lamp in front of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha's photograph and offered floral tributes in remembrance. Other members and guests also paid their respects with floral tributes. The ceremony included the felicitation of children from the NAP family for their outstanding achievements in various examinations held this year.

In honour of the cultural icon of Assam, NAP presented 'Mukti Hawk Nirjator' - a musical program conceptualised and directed by Anupam Choudhury, a renowned music director and senior member of NAP. The program featured performances by established and upcoming artists including Aboni Bora, Mallika Barua, Kritanjali Goswami, Rubul Kalita, Spandan Chakraborty, Anupama Sarma, Sunayana Goswami, Humayun Choudhury, Semima Khatun, Nibedana Katoky, B Palki, Eva Choudhury, Niroda Chakraborty, Kalyan Kalita, and instrumentalists Bhabajyoti Das, Pradip Das, and Bimal Bharali. The audience was captivated by the performances of songs, recitations, and dances. Melody Patgiri served as the anchor for the musical program. The event concluded with the rendition of the state anthem.

**Our Hojai correspondent adds:** Along with the rest of Assam, Hojai also observed the 55th death anniversary of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha under the aegis of Hojai district administration at Sankardev Nagar in Hojai. Hojai Unit of Sanskritik Mahasabha, and Assam Sahitya Sabha at Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaruah Bhawan in Newmarket in Hojai, and various other organisations on Thursday. At the district headquarters, district commissioner Lachit Kumar Das began the commemoration session by lighting a lamp and paying floral tributes in front of the portrait of the cultural icon.



Addressing the gathering, the DC spoke about the unmatched contribution of cultural icon Rabha. He highlighted the importance of the day and recalled the contributions of the cult, stating that Kalaguru was himself an institution, a versatile genius as well as an expert in politics, sports, architecture, acting, dancing, and writing. He said it is our responsibility to emulate his contribution.

During the program, guest artists performed Rabha Sangeet and highlighted the lifelong contributions of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha through music. Administrative officers and employees, including students of various schools, eminent personalities, and the additional commissioner, marked their attendance.

On the other hand, at Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbaruah Bhawan in Hojai, under the aegis of Hojai Sanskritik Mahasabha and Hojai Sahitya Sabha, homage was paid to the literary and cultural genius Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha. At the beginning of the program, the members of both organisations paid tribute to Kalaguru by garlanding his bust and lighting a lamp. Various competitions like painting, poetry recitation, and dance competition were also organised, where students from various schools partici-

pated with enthusiasm. Simultaneously, tribute was paid to Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha under the aegis of Sanskritik Mahasabha at Lanka within Hojai district.

**Our Nagaon correspondent adds:** Along with the rest of the state, various organisations, educational institutions, cultural organisations, and NGOs observed the death anniversary of Bishnu Prasad Rabha as Rabha Divas with day-long programs in Nagaon on Thursday.

The district unit of Gana Natya Sangha, Sadou Asom Gramya Puthibharal Sangstha, Gram Vikas Parishad, Asom Jatiyabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad, Asom Silpi Karon, and others garlanded the portrait of Bishnu Prasad Rabha and paid tribute to the great Assamese soul, Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha. Additionally, the organisations and institutions commemorated his life and contributions to the Assamese nation through his songs, music, and writings.

In addition to the commemoration program, the organisations and cultural institutions conducted drawing competitions, Bishnu Prasad Rabha song competitions, and poem recitation competitions among school and college students.

The Nagaon district unit of Gana Natya Sangha, in association with Jonaki Kobi Sammilan and Sahitya Alochona Chakra, organised a commemoration program at the Nagaon Press Club auditorium. Dipti Kr Baruah, district president of Gana Natya Sangha, chaired the program. Noted Assamese poet and physician Dr Prayag Kr Saikia, Dwijendra Nath Hazarika, president of Nagaon Zila Kobi Sammilan, academican Mridupaban Bora, Rupak Mazumder, president of Jonaki Kobi Sammilan, Gauri Ballav Goswami, Dr Binapani Neog, poet Ashokram Bhattacharya, and senior scribe Kanak Hazarika attended the program as special guests.

Dr Prayag Kr Saikia spoke on the life and contributions of Bishnu Prasad Rabha, highlighting Rabha's ideology and philosophy of life.

**Our Biswanath Chariali correspondent adds:** Like other parts of the state, Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha Divas was observed in Biswanath Chariali under the aegis of the Biswanath district administration with pomp and gaiety on Thursday. The central programme of the Biswanath district administration was held at the conference hall of Biswanath Commerce College. The programme began with the offering of floral tributes and the illumination of a ceremonial lamp by Dhrubajyoti Das, ADC, Biswanath, who delivered a welcome address. This was followed by a chorus performed by the students of Chariali Adarsha Vidyapeeth.

Dr Neha Yadav, district commissioner of Biswanath, placed a garland on the portrait of the legendary icon and presented a life sketch highlighting his contributions in the fields of art, culture, and literature. Anjan Bora, CRCC, conducted the proceedings of the meeting, which was attended by Pushpankar Patir, Bichitra Das, assistant commissioners, along with officials from the district administration and other dignitaries.

**Our Kokrajhar correspondent adds:** Along with the rest of the state, Rabha Divas was observed with fitting programs scheduled at various locations across the entire Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) districts on Thursday, commemorating the contributions and dedication of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad

Rabha, who significantly contributed to the welfare and upliftment of greater Assam in his time.

In Chirang, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) Central Committee, in association with the Chirang district committee of ABSU, observed Rabha Divas at the Kajalgaon ABSU office complex. The program commenced with floral tributes to Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha. Khwrvndao Wary, vice president of ABSU, delivered the welcome address, extending greetings to the invited guests and participants. The event was chaired by Dipen Boro, president of ABSU. Dr Anil Kumar Boro from Gauhati University graced the occasion as the chief guest.

Notably, 15 prominent personalities representing various communities, including Bodo and Rabha, were warmly welcomed and felicitated by the student union as a symbol of integration among citizens.

ABSU president Dipen Boro emphasised that Rabha Divas was centrally observed in Chirang district to honour the contributions and sacrifices of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha, who dedicated himself to the welfare and development of the common masses. He reiterated that ABSU and the general public would always remember Rabha's philosophy and ideology of sacrifice and contribution. Rabha, he noted, was a great leader who consistently worked for the wellbeing of grassroots communities.

In Kokrajhar, the district committee of ABSU, in collaboration with the North Kokrajhar Anchalik Committee ABSU, observed Rabha Divas at the North Kokrajhar Anchalik Committee ABSU office in Debargaon. ABSU leaders, members, and local citizens paid homage to Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha on his death anniversary.

Pramod Boro, chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, also paid tribute to Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha, recalling his contributions and sacrifices for the welfare and integration of the common masses. He highlighted Rabha's dedication to the upliftment of marginalised communities and emphasised that Rabha's vision for social upliftment with dignity and integrity would continue to inspire citizens in the future.

## BTC chief unveils 100 day action plan for accelerated development

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, June 20:** In a decisive move towards accelerated development, BTC chief Pramod Boro finalized a comprehensive 100-day action plan for all departments on Thursday, which will take effect immediately. This milestone decision was made during a daylong meeting held with all heads of departments at the BTC Secretariat in Kokrajhar.

Chief of BTC Pramod Boro called upon all council heads of departments (CHDs) to execute their duties with utmost sincerity and dedication to effectively serve the people residing in the five districts under the BTC jurisdiction. He underscored the BTC's commitment to fostering rapid and inclusive development across the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). He further said, "Our government of BTR remains unwaveringly committed towards enhancing the delivery of services to the citizens and continually improving the standards of good governance in BTR."

The meeting elaborately discussed various action plans designed to drive significant advancements across multiple sectors. Key areas of focus include



implementing systems to improve data management and transparency, initiatives to protect and promote the rich cultural heritage of the region, encouraging community involvement in local governance, and training and development programs for enhancing the skills and efficiency of the workforce. Additionally, the action plan emphasises establishing collaborations with external organisations for resource and knowledge sharing, upgrading facilities, and organising visits to other regions

for knowledge exchange and learning best practices.

Promoting civic engagement and awareness among residents, developing and implementing new policies to address emerging needs, and launching initiatives aimed at protecting and conserving the environment were also key topics of discussion. Strategies to gather financial and other resources for development projects, enhance infrastructure that supports economic activities and livelihoods, adopt digital tools to streamline government processes and services, and strengthen communication channels with external stakeholders and the public were also highlighted.

It is noteworthy that on Wednesday, the BTC Legislative Assembly passed the annual budget of BTC for the financial year 2024-25. This newly approved budget will support the implementation of development schemes in both the revenue and capital sectors to ensure the overall development of the BTR.

"The 100-day action plan signifies a pivotal step in the BTC's ongoing efforts to uplift the BTR and ensure a prosperous future for its citizens," Boro said.

## State agriculture officials review schemes in Morigaon

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, June 20:** A high-level delegation of the Directorate of Agriculture, Assam, comprising the commissioner of Agricultural Production, visited Morigaon district on Thursday and reviewed various schemes implemented by the district agriculture department. The delegation, led by state nodal officer, National Agriculture Development Scheme (Horticulture) Bhaskar Kalita, first held a review meeting with the departmental officers and employees at the office of the district agriculture officer. The meeting discussed various schemes implemented by the district agriculture department, such as

Rashtriya Vikas Yojana, PS MSC. The meeting reviewed the successful implementation of various schemes. The meeting also reviewed the works undertaken in the district under various schemes implemented by the Agriculture Department and asked the officers and employees to act as links between the district office, district administration, and state headquarters for smooth and effective implementation of schemes under central and state governments.

The delegation offered advice and urged the officers to identify specific problems and challenges encountered during the implementation process and arrange solutions through liaison with the state headquarters. They advocated that

the Department of Agriculture should provide better and more effective services to the farming community, identify progressive farmers, and provide appropriate recognition to innovations made by farmers.

The meeting was attended by assistant nodal officer from the Directorate of Agriculture Jeevan Krishna Biswas, assistant director of Agriculture from the District Agriculture Office Surya Kumar Amchi, sub-divisional agriculture officers Mehdi Arif Hussain, Gautam Nath, agricultural development officers, planning officer Dr Poonam Saikia, and media expert Gautam Kumar Nath. Officers and employees from APART and ATMA were also present.

## Teacher's indecent proposal sparks outrage in Gossaigaon

**HT Correspondent**

**GOSSAIGAON, June 20:** A brazen act by science teacher Uttam Saha of Tulsibil Higher Secondary School under Gossaigaon sub-division in Kokrajhar district has shocked the surrounding area. The science teacher's indecent proposal and obscene text messages to a female student through WhatsApp have gone viral, creating a chaotic atmosphere in the area.

As per the information available, Uttam Saha, a science teacher working in a reputed educational institution in the sub-division, sent

vulgar and obscene messages multiple times through WhatsApp and attempted to create an illicit relationship with the student. However, he failed, and his poor mentality was exposed.

Following the incident, the conscious citizens of the area condemned the shameless acts of the hypocritical teacher Uttam Saha. He also threatened the student with dire consequences if she did not delete all the obscene texts he had sent.

The conscious citizens of the area also made serious allegations that in the past, science teacher Uttam Saha had committed similar

brazen acts with many others, but due to the reputation of the institution, the matter was kept hidden.

Later, Tulsibil Police, based on an FIR, detained Uttam Saha and started an investigation into the shameless act.

On the other hand, student organisations like AAMSU and NEMSU have demanded appropriate punishment for the teacher while criticising the incident in the strongest terms. Meanwhile, it has also come to light that a vicious circle is said to be making efforts to settle the matter.

## Noted dramatist Shailen Kumar Nath passes away

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, June 20:** Shailen Kumar Nath, a noted dramatist, director, critic, novelist, and journalist who was a well-known figure in the cultural arena, passed away at his residence in Bahona Dhuwapukhuri on Thursday due to an illness. He was 75 years old.

Nath is survived by his wife, a son Anibesan Baruah who serves as the Jorhat correspondent for Dainik Asom newspaper, a daughter-in-law, and a large number of relatives. He had written and directed numerous dramas, and also penned scripts for several video films.

His play 'Natak Natak Lage' was broadcasted by the Guwahati All India Radio Centre. Nath also served as an assistant director in several documentary movies, including working under eminent film director Chandra Narayan Barua.

Nath was the editor of the Assamese weekly 'Saptahik Bartaman' and was actively involved with various socio-cultural organisations. His demise has been mourned by many organisations and individuals, including Jorhat Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi.

## NFR announces resumption of Garib Rath Express services

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, June 20:** NF Railway has decided to resume the services of two pairs of Garib Rath Express from the month of July, 2024. These trains will run between Agartala-Kolkata and Guwahati-Kolkata at designated days of run from its respective destinations.

Train no 12502 (Agartala-Kolkata) Garib Rath Express will run every Wednesday w.e.f from July 3, 2024. The train will depart from Agartala at 7:35 hrs to reach Kolkata at 14:30 hrs next day. Similarly, Train no 12501 (Kolkata-Agartala) Garib Rath Express will run every Sunday w.e.f from July 7, 2024 and will depart from Kolkata at 21:40 hrs to reach Agartala at 05:15 hrs on Tuesday. These trains will run via stations like Dharmanagar, New Haflong, Guwahati, Goalpara Town,



New Bongaigaon, New Alipurduar, New Jalpaiguri, Malda Town, Katwa Jn. and Bandel Jn. to reach its respective destinations.

Train no 12518 (Guwahati-Kolkata) Garib Rath Express will run every Saturday w.e.f from July 6, 2024. The train will depart from Guwahati at 21:00 hrs to reach Kolkata at 14:30 hrs next day. Similarly, Train no 12517 (Kolkata-Guwahati) Garib Rath Express will run every Thursday w.e.f from

## GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER (PHE) KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL:: DIPHU

### NOTIFICATION

The Assam Citizen Centric Service Delivery (ACCSD) Project, Right to Public Service (RTPS) Web portal has been launched. So the Contractor of **Class III** who is registered with Public Health Engineering Department is immediately requested to apply for online registration of Contractors License through "Sewa Setu" Portal. **The Contractors under PRE Divisions under KAAC Zone are hereby requested to apply online and upload the relevant documents at the Sewa Setu Portal (sewasetu.assam.gov.in) for re-registration of earlier offline paper based contractors registration issued to them. The process is to be completed within 30th June, 2024 positively or else registration will be treated as invalid after 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2024.**

Sd/-

Additional Chief Engineer, PHE  
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu

Memo. No. Addl. CPHE/DIP/Estt-50/2023-24/503-09 Dtd. 9/06/2024



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*It is a wise father that knows his own child.*  
-William Shakespeare

## Priyanka's entry into poll fray

With the entry of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra into the political fray, the Congress party is strategically reinforcing its dynasty, positioning its members across key regions. The latest move suggests a north-south divide of responsibilities within the Gandhi family. While Rahul Gandhi focuses on northern constituencies, Priyanka is expected to fortify the Congress's presence in the south, specifically in Wayanad, Kerala. Wayanad, known for its significant Muslim electorate, seems an ideal battleground for Priyanka. Her charismatic presence could invigorate the base in ways Rahul Gandhi has not. Despite Rahul's initial success, his waning presence and reduced winning margin in the 2024 elections have caused some discontent. Priyanka's entry, with her dynamic and engaging personality, is seen as a fresh impetus for the Congress in Kerala. The Congress party, with Sonia Gandhi in the Upper House, now boasts four influential members of the Gandhi family actively shaping the political landscape. This concentration of political power in the Gandhi family inevitably draws criticism. Prime Minister Modi's frequent attacks on 'parivarvaad' (family rule) resonate with a section of the electorate weary of dynastic politics. Nonetheless, the Congress seems undeterred, banking on the historical allure of the Gandhi name.

However, Priyanka's challenge in Wayanad is multifaceted. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) is strategizing to reclaim the seat, with CPI's Annie Raja, who contested against Rahul Gandhi, expressing unresolved grievances. The BJP, too, is vocal about the Congress's perceived entitlement over Wayanad. Their arguments reflect a broader discontent: why should a Kerala constituency become a Gandhi bastion? The demography of Wayanad, with its substantial Muslim population, traditionally favors the Congress. Yet, local sentiment can shift, especially if Priyanka's presence is perceived as a novelty without substance. Her ability to connect with the local electorate and maintain a consistent presence will be crucial. The political dynamics in Kerala demand more than just star value; they require a commitment to regional issues and continuous engagement. The Left Front's determination to mount a massive campaign indicates a tough road ahead for Priyanka. The CPI, analyzing its previous electoral setbacks, is keen on a robust comeback. The BJP, meanwhile, questions the Congress's assumption that a Gandhi family member is a guaranteed victor in Wayanad. This skepticism is not unfounded, given the diverse and politically aware electorate of Kerala. The history of the Gandhi family in Indian politics, from Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministerial tenure to the current generation, has always been under scrutiny. Rajiv Gandhi's vacations in Lakshadweep were seen as a casual entitlement, but converting a constituency into a family stronghold is perceived as an overreach by many. This perception could play a pivotal role in how Priyanka's candidature is received.

Moreover, the Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's foray into Wayanad is more than just a personal political journey; it symbolizes the Congress's broader strategy to reclaim its lost ground. Her success will depend not only on her ability to draw votes but also on her engagement with the constituency's unique socio-political fabric. The upcoming elections will test her resilience and the electorate's patience with the Congress's dynastic politics. While Priyanka's entry brings renewed energy to the Congress, it also reignites the debate on dynastic politics. The people of Wayanad will decide if her appeal transcends novelty and if the Congress's gamble pays off.

## Yoga for self and society



By: Ranjan K Baruah

Yoga is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practices or disciplines which originated in ancient India. There is a wide variety of schools of yoga, practices and nowadays it is practiced around the world. The word 'yoga' derived from Sanskrit and means to join or to unite, symbolizing the union of body and consciousness.

The philosophy behind the ancient Indian practice of yoga has influenced various aspects of how society in India functions, whether it be in relation to areas such as health and medicine or education and the arts. Based on unifying the mind with the body and soul to allow for greater mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing, the values of yoga form a major part of the community's ethos.

We know that yoga consists of a series of poses, meditation, controlled breathing, word chanting and other techniques designed to help individuals build self-realization, ease any suffering they may be experiencing and allow for a state of liberation. It is practised by the young and old without discriminating against gender, class or religion and has also become popular in other parts of the world.

We have seen that in the past or ancient days yogas were common in the ashrams but nowadays, yoga ashrams or hermitages provide enthusiasts with additional opportunities to learn about the traditional practice, as well as schools, universities, community centres and social media.

This year marks the 10th International Day of Yoga with the theme "Yoga for Self and Society." Yoga, a transformative practice, represents the harmony of mind and body, the balance between thought and action, and the unity of restraint and fulfilment. Recognizing its universal appeal, on 11

December 2014, the United Nations proclaimed 21st June as the International Day of Yoga by resolution 69/131. The day aims to raise awareness worldwide of the many benefits of practicing yoga.

The draft resolution establishing the International Day of Yoga was proposed by India and endorsed by a record 175 member states.

The proposal was first introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address during the opening of the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly, in which he said: "Yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action ... a holistic approach which is valuable to our health and our well-being."

The Secretary-General of the UN in his message said that "the International Day of Yoga recognizes the ancient practice's unmatched power to deliver healing, inner peace and physical, spiritual and mental wellbeing." "With roots in India but now embraced worldwide by people of all faiths and cultures, yoga unites people with its values of balance, mindfulness and peace with people and planet alike", he added in his message. "On this important day, let us all be inspired by yoga's timeless values and its call for a more peaceful and harmonious future," he further added.

This year's theme says how yoga is important for an individual and also for the society. It reminds us that we must practice the same when we get time or we can do it regularly which will ensure happiness amongst us and also in our society. We can actively take part in the promotion of yoga for a healthy society. (With direct inputs from UN publication and feedback can be sent to bkranjian@gmail.com)

# Yoga and music: A symphony of mind, body, and soulful melodies

The 21st of June holds a revered place, a celestial confluence where ancient wisdom intertwines with the universal tongue of melody. It is a day when the timeless science of yoga, a physical scripture etched upon the canvas of the body, finds harmonic resonance with the boundless realm of music, an ethereal language that transcends borders and cultures. On this auspicious occasion, the "International Yoga Day" and "World Music Day" become sacred rites, inviting humanity to embark on a transformative odyssey. Yoga, with its roots anchored in the fertile soil of Indian heritage, unfurls like a lotus, guiding souls towards inner equilibrium. Meanwhile, music, an ever-present companion to the human experience, weaves its enchanting tapestry, stirring the deepest recesses of the heart and soul. In this symphonic embrace, the physical, mental, and emotional realms converge, unveiling a holistic pathway to wellbeing and blissful transcendence.

Yoga has been around for ages, like literally thousands of years! It all started in India way back when, and the early yogis were getting their stretch on while philosophizing about life, the universe, and everything. The old Sanskrit texts like the Rigveda, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita gave us some of the earliest glimpses into this whole yoga thing. They were all about finding that inner peace and harmony between your mind, body, and soul. But it was Patanjali who really laid it all out there with his 'Yoga Sutras' around 400 CE. Dude basically gave us the yoga playbook with his eight limbs covering the physical postures, breathing techniques, meditation, and ethical principles.

From there, yoga just kept evolving and changing with the times. Different yogis put their own spin on things, and we ended up with all these different styles - Hatha, Ashtanga, Kundalini, you name it! So yeah, yoga has been on this crazy journey for millennia, constantly being reshaped and reinvented by the cultures and people along the way. But at its core, it's always been about that journey towards self-discovery and enlightenment. Totally far out, right?

Yoga, once rooted in ancient Indian traditions, has blossomed into a global phenomenon, transcending cultural boundaries and capturing the hearts and minds of individuals worldwide. Its multifaceted benefits, validated by scientific research, have propelled it to the forefront of holistic wellness practices. Numerous prestigious journals have shed light on yoga's remarkable impact on various aspects of human health. The 'European Journal of Preventive Cardiology' has unveiled yoga's potential to bolster cardiovascular well-being by favorably influencing blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and body mass index. Concurrently, the 'Journal of Psychiatric Practice' has highlighted yoga's complementary role in the treatment of major depressive disorder, seamlessly integrating physical postures, meditation techniques, mindfulness, and breath control to cultivate inner tranquility and enhance cognitive function.

Furthermore, the 'International Journal of Yoga' has illuminated yoga's capacity to nurture emotional regulation and foster positive emotions. Practices such as guided meditation and pranayama have proven exceptionally effective in cultivating emotional stability and resilience, equipping individuals with the tools to navigate life's vicissitudes with grace and fortitude. As yoga continues to gain global recognition, it stands as a testament to the enduring wisdom of ancient traditions, harmoniously intertwined with modern scientific inquiry, offering a holistic pathway to physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga's popularity has surged beyond mere physical exercise, transcending into a holistic approach to health and wellness embraced by millions globally. In the United States, yoga participation skyrocketed over the past decade, with a substantial portion of the population engaging in regular practice. Concurrently, across Europe, yoga has been assimilated into public health initiatives and educational curricula, underscoring its value in fostering comprehensive well-being.

The annual International Yoga Day has evolved into a unifying global phenomenon, thanks to the visionary proposal put forth by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. With an overwhelming 177 nations co-sponsoring the resolution, the day underscores yoga's holistic benefits for physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Under Modi's dynamic leadership, this occasion has attained remarkable worldwide recognition, highlighting yoga's enduring relevance in the modern era.

Coinciding with World Music Day, which celebrates the healing and unifying power of music in all its diverse forms, International Yoga Day fosters global awareness and encourages the practice of yoga, promoting unity and peace across cultures and national borders. On this day, a myriad of events unfold worldwide, including mass yoga sessions, workshops, and educational initiatives, showcasing yoga's universal appeal and its ability to transcend boundaries and bring people together.

A melodic celebration that transcends borders, "World Music Day," also known as 'Fête de la Musique,' harmonizes with the summer solstice on June 21st, coinciding with International Yoga Day. Tracing its origins to France in the early 1980s, one theory posits that this global event was born from a desire to honor the universal language of music. On this day, musicians of all skill levels and genres are encouraged to take their talents to public spaces, creating a symphony of diverse musical expressions that resonate

freely through the streets and parks. The power of music to unite, heal, and uplift the human spirit is profound, making this celebration a cultural cornerstone that reminds us of the melodies that bind us together, transcending boundaries and fostering a sense of global harmony. Music's therapeutic benefits are well-documented. Studies show it can decrease stress levels, lessen pain perception, and boost cognitive performance. When incorporated into yoga practice, music creates a calming environment conducive to focus and deep relaxation. The combined effects of yoga and music offer a holistic approach to improving mental and emotional wellbeing.

The profound words of Sadhguru, the renowned yogi and mystic, unveil the profound essence of yoga, transcending mere physical contortions. His utterance, "Yoga is not just about bending and twisting, it's a process of creating a situation where your body and mind are in tune with nature and music," resonates with the harmonious fusion of yoga and music witnessed during the annual Shivaratri celebrations organized by the Isha Foundation. This seamless blend of meditation, yogic practices, and the euphonious melodies elevates the practice to a sublime level, facilitating the flow of positive energy and fostering a meditative state conducive to inner tranquility.

The ancient practice of yoga, as eloquently described by the pioneering guru B.K.S. Iyengar, is a holistic science that encompasses the entirety of human evolution - from physical well-being to the ultimate realization of the self. In this pursuit of comprehensive growth, the integration of music into yoga practices serves as a powerful catalyst, fostering mental clarity and emotional equilibrium.

According to a report from The Times of India dated June 21, 2022, Dr. Pratiksha Gadkari, a physiotherapist, underscored the myriad benefits of yoga in enhancing joint flexibility and expanding the range of motion. She emphasized its vital role in cultivating balance through posture and movement, while simultaneously highlighting the calming influence of music on the mind. Dr. Gadkari proposed that initiating exercise routines with soothing musical accompaniment can invigorate energy levels and promote a refreshing start to the day,



### DEGREE OF THOUGHT Dipak Kurmi

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# Yoga: A powerful medium for women empowerment and world peace

By: Lalit Garg

The 10th celebration of International Yoga Day will be celebrated in India as well as in most of the countries around the world on 21st June 2024 with a new theme - 'Yoga for women empowerment'. This year the theme of Yoga Day is based on women to promote the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being of women by using yoga as a tool. This will ensure that women are healthy, confident and play a leading role in society. Yoga is being made a medium to connect human beings.

In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had proposed to celebrate Yoga Day in the United Nations meeting, after which it was announced on 11 December 2014 to celebrate 21 June every year as International Yoga Day. Due to India's efforts regarding the importance of yoga, countries around the world started celebrating Yoga Day at the world level. Through Indian Yoga and Meditation, India is succeeding in achieving 'Vishwa Guru' status and a unique identity in the world. That is why International Yoga Day has been accepted by the whole world.

The vision and efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created an unusual atmosphere for the international acceptance of Yoga Day. Today every sphere of life is surrounded by problems due to pandemic, Great War, terrorism, rising inflation, poverty, unemployment, due to which every person and family is feeling extreme stress/pressure in their daily life. Everyone is living a life of doubt, conflict and mental turmoil. There is a crisis of life in front of man.

Mental balance is getting disturbed. Mental balance means to establish harmony in different situations and to achieve this; the powerful and effective medium is yoga. Yoga is such a technique, a science that heals our body, mind, thoughts and soul. It removes our stress and frustration. When we do yoga, focus on the breath, do pranayama and exercise, all this inspires our body and mind to be happy and cheerful from within. Yoga is a powerful way to get rid of the hustle and bustle of life.

Yoga is the process of purifying and enlightening the consciousness of man, it is an undertaking to elevate man, it is a means to establish balance in life and it is the science of oneness with God and the universe. Realization of self is the task of life, the goal. This realization can neither be attained by discourse, nor can it be attained by intellect, nor by listening a lot, for that it is necessary to have self-realization and this realization happens only to the one whose conscience is pure and selfless.



The pure conscience is the mirror in which the vision of the soul, the manifestation of nature and the vision of the self are seen. In a pure conscience, the intellect remains heavenly and clean, the mind as pure as the Ganges, the mind as steady as the light of a motionless lamp without wind, and the entire consciousness flowing like rivers to meet the ocean.

Just as one's face is visible in the mirror only when the mirror is clear and stable, similarly the Supreme power of self is visible only through a pure conscience. Yoga is such an effective form of exercise, through which balance is created not only in the parts of the body but also in the mind, and soul. This is the reason that apart from physical ailments, mental problems can also be overcome by yoga.

The importance of yoga, which is found in our Vedas or even earlier literature, today the same yoga is gaining its fame all over the world and due to the corona crisis, the usefulness of yoga has increased more than before. Seeing its benefits, everyone seems to be adopting it in their rushing life and life crisis caused by epidemics, war, violence, economic instability and terrorism. Slowly, but people are understanding that by doing yoga, not only the biggest diseases can be driven away but also happiness can be brought in their life, life can be balanced, Work-efficiencies can be increased, peace and harmony can be established.

Yoga is the only way for physical, mental and spiritual peace of health. But in the occult age, the history of yoga is hidden in the infinite depths of time. By the way, some people also believe that the science of yoga is older than the Vedas. In the excavations done by the Archaeological Department of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, many such sculptures have been found in which Shiva and Parvati are shown performing various yogasanas. Swami Vivekananda, who promoted Indian Yoga to the world, says - "A pure heart is the best mirror for the reflection of truth. That's why all spiritual practice is for purifying the heart. When it becomes pure, all the truths are reflected in it at that very moment. Unholy imagination is as bad as unholy acts."

Modern materialistic and convenient life is pushing man towards disturbance, imbalance, tension, fatigue and irritability, due to which the disorder is increasing. Yoga is such a powerful medicine that keeps the mind cool and the body fit to keep such heterogeneous and discrepant life healthy and energetic. The pace of life can be given a musical pace through yoga. Yoga is the oldest identity of our Indian culture. The awakening of Yoga-consciousness leads to purification of the mind. Its process is to see the soul through the soul. Observing the tendencies and states of mind by the free consciousness of attachment and aversion. Right philosophy is a powerful undertaking to transform the Self. The secretions of the glandular system are balanced by the experiments of self-realization. Due to this the feelings remain pure, thoughts become healthy.

The word yoga is derived from the age of culture, which means the union of the soul with the universal consciousness. Yoga has

been practiced for more than ten thousand years. According to the Vedic Samhitas, it is mentioned in the Vedas about the ascetics since ancient times. Sculptures depicting yoga and meditation were also found in the Indus Valley Civilization. In Hinduism, Yoga civilization was adopted by sages, monks and yogis from the very beginning, but not much time has passed since this method has spread among the common people.

However, knowing the glory and importance of yoga, it is being adopted extensively for a healthy lifestyle, mainly because of its positive effects in busy, stressful and unhealthy routines.

Yoga is necessary for us to stay healthy. Through yoga, you can benefit from many diseases like asthma, diabetes, blood pressure, and arthritis. Yoga removes stress and gets good sleep, appetite is good, not only this, digestion is also improved. Body fat can be reduced only through yoga. When man takes shelter of yoga to solve his physical, mental and spiritual problems and get their solution, then he connects with yoga, makes relationships, and tries to bring it into life. But when one starts knowing something about it, knowing it steps in the process of action, and then it reaches the limit of use. By making the role of this experiment an integral part of life, we can give a new shape to humanity.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is deeply interested in Yoga, has implemented it with a great resolution. Surely his yoga-revolution will become the medium of development, happiness and peace in the life of world humanity. Yoga not only teaches how to live a beautiful and orderly life, but also teaches the art of improving personality, communal harmony, good governance and balanced life. Those who do politics in the name of yoga are doing great harm to humanity.

Because Yoga is not associated with any religion, sect, caste or language. Yoga means to unite, so it talks about love, non-violence, compassion and taking everyone along. Yoga is an investigation into the process of life. It came into existence before all religions and it opened up infinite possibilities before human beings. This science related to inner and spiritual development, human welfare is a great gift for the whole world. (The author is a journalist & columnist who can be reached at lalitgarg11@gmail.com)



# Agnipath scheme must be dumped

By: Lt General Harwant Singh

When the Agnipath scheme was first introduced, there were widespread protests across the country. Later candidates came forward for recruitment as 'Agniveers', essentially due to large scale unemployment in the country. However, given the terms and conditions of their service, "the scheme has not been able to draw the right material". Such are the inputs from various sources. The underlying compulsion for introducing such a scheme and whose brainchild this scheme is, has not been revealed. There are many assumptions to that end.

One is that "the Pension Bill of Defence Forces is an excessive and disproportionately large part of the Defence Budget". The strength of the Armed Forces (Army, Navy and Air Force) is around 15 lakhs, while that of the civilians in the Ministry of Defence (MoD, DRDO, OFB, MES, Mil Estate etc) is 3.75 lakhs.

The pension bill of Armed Forces personnel is much less, in proportion, than that of civil employees in the MoD. Pay and Pension Bill, as part of Defence Budget, appears large because the allocation for Defence is less than 2 percent of GDP. In the case of China's GDP is five times more than India's and its Defence allocation is 3 percent of it. The other point, which has apparently led to the adoption of Agnipath scheme is to have a 'young defence force'. At present a soldier retires at the age of 35/37 years, which from all angles, is young enough to perform well, his tasks during war.

The fact is that these soldiers had performed excellently during the 1965, 1971 wars, and finally at Kargil, where they charged up steep slopes at heights of 18,000 to 20,000 feet, in many cases without proper acclimatisation. They proved beyond doubt that they are physically fit to measure up to the demands of their profession.

In any case during such operations they follow their company and battalion commanders, who are generally in the 30 to 38 years age group. At the same time, a young recruit is no substitute for a seasoned soldier.

During the 1965 War, Pakistan had state of the art tank fleet (Pattons) which was larger than the Indian Army's tank fleet. Indian tanks were of Second World War vintage. However, Indian tank crews were seasoned 'tank-men,' who have had years of training on the Field Firing Ranges. They were highly proficient in the field of tank gunnery. These experienced Indian Army tank crews were able to decimate Pakistan's far superior tank fleet. Hundreds of destroyed Patton tanks littered the

battlefields of Khemkaran, in Punjab Sector and Jammu in Jammu and Kashmir.

Before bringing in a change in an existing system, particularly any drastic recasting of it, the first and foremost point is that some drawbacks or failing should have surfaced in such a system. Or an exceptionally better system should have emerged. Considering the past performance of Indian soldiers, no change was called for. Before adopting the new Agnipath scheme, it should have been thoroughly examined, analysed, evaluated and widely discussed. However a whimsical attempt at change can result in failures and failure in war can be a total disaster.

Soldiering is unlike any other profession. It calls for total dedication, commitment to a cause, acceptance of extreme hardships and ever willingness to sacrifice one's life. Camaraderie, and regimental spirit are essential requirements in a soldier and to build these requires time, good leadership and right motivation and appropriate environments. Under the changed recruitment system, the Agniveers are to serve for a period of four years (including one year of training) after which only 25 percent would be re-enrolled. The remaining 75 percent will be given one time monetary grant of ₹ 11.25 lakhs and discharged.

Those 25 percent retained would serve for another 15 years only. The first four years would not be counted towards total service. Obviously those four years are wasted. Not including these four years will, on re-enrolment, impact their pay and subsequent pension. If at some future date courts were to order the inclusion of these four years, the total service would be 19 years, which would be one year short of earning 50 % of pay as pension. See how we shortchange our soldiers?

Many Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly draw not one but six to seven pensions. They draw pension even if they are MP/MLA for short period.

Why should any country balk from paying a soldier his meagre pension, more so when he is retired at age 35-37 years? One needs to look at another aspect of the Agnipath concept. Even if one is to overlook the existing deficiency of two lakh personnel in the army, on an average around 60,000 retire every year and therefore, that is the number to be recruited each year.

However, last year only 50,000 Agniveers were recruited. Therefore, this year the vacancies would be 70,000 (against those retiring: 60,000 plus 10,000 vacancies leftover from last year). After four years, when 75 percent of these Agniveers from the first batch will be discharged, the vacan-

cies will be 60,000 + 42,500. That works out to 1,02,500.

During the next 12 years these figures will keep increasing. Therefore the facilities for training such a large number of recruits will have to be created and all that will cost a substantial amount in terms of facilities and training staff. At the other end technical services, such as Navy and Air force and technical arms in the Army, consider this four years service too short for a tradesman to measure up to his job. After 12 years of introduction of this system there would be four to 4.5 lakh Agniveers in their first four years of service. In the event of a war, how will such a large number of Agniveers impact the Army's performance?

Out of these 75 percent will subsequently be due for discharge. Some of them would be looking forward to receiving ₹ 11.25 lakhs on discharge and therefore averse to putting their life on the line and the other merged in cutthroat competition, so as to be amongst those 25 percent who will be retained.

What sort of camaraderie and team spirit is likely to prevail amongst them? In the event of operations this will have its own impact on their performance and consequent outcome.

Given the state of unemployment in the country, finding an alternate or second career will be a problem for those Agniveers discharged after four years. The present promise of reservation for ex-servicemen in various government departments is only on paper. The actual absorption of servicemen against existing promises of 10 percent and more is less than 1 percent. This is so because there is much to be gained in direct recruitment in these organisations.

More recently one Director General of a Central Police Organisation (CPO) stated that why should they take those rejected by the army. The efficacy and consequently wisdom of bringing in this new system of enrolment of Agniveers will come to light in the next war, as and when it occurs. What ever was the underlying idea of this proposal, it should have been best tried out with the CPOs.

If funds for the pension of ex-servicemen alone has been the reason for bringing in this new system, then it is better to enhance the retirement age of soldiers to 42 years. This step alone will substantially lower the pension bill of other ranks. In any case there is a compelling reason to increase the age of retirement of a soldier. The results of recent elections, to some extent, revealed the anger of our country folks on the adoption of the Agnipath scheme. We ought to be alive to the pitfalls in it and therefore, jettison it sooner than later. (Courtesy: The Citizen)

# How small businesses are caught in the crossfire in the battle of AI giants

By: Bhavik Sarkhedi

The air was thick with tension as the tech world watched an unprecedented battle unfold. On one side stood OpenAI's ChatGPT 4.0, a formidable force in the artificial intelligence arena. On the other, Google's Gemini is an advanced yet seemingly struggling contender in this high-stakes competition.

The echoes of this clash reverberated far beyond the corridors of Silicon Valley, reaching into the everyday lives of small businesses and startups. As these tech titans tussle for dominance, the collateral damage is already becoming apparent, with smaller players bearing the brunt of this seismic shift.

The story begins with the rapid rise of ChatGPT 4.0. OpenAI has consistently pushed the envelope, and this latest iteration of their AI is no exception. Launched on 14 March 2023, GPT-4 quickly made waves with its enhanced capabilities, including improved accuracy in logic and reasoning tasks and its ability to process both text and images.

Within two months, ChatGPT reached 100 million active users, setting a record for the fastest user growth in history. Capable of generating text that feels very human-like, ChatGPT 4.0 has become an indispensable tool for a variety of applications. From customer service to content creation, businesses have eagerly adopted this technology to streamline operations and cut costs. Its intuitive interface and impressive capabilities have set a new standard, one that Google's Gemini is desperately trying to match.

Google, a giant that has long ruled the search and AI landscape, finds itself in unfamiliar territory. The launch of Google Gemini was meant to be a bold response to ChatGPT's growing influence. However, the reception has been lukewarm at best. Yes, people are moving towards OpenAI's marvel.

Critics argue that Gemini is more of a reactionary product, a mix of borrowed ideas rather than a groundbreaking innovation. This narrative is similar to the early 2000s when Yahoo, once a giant in the search engine world, faltered under the pressure of a rapidly evolving internet and the rise of Google. At its peak in 2000, Yahoo was valued at over \$125 billion, but by 2017, it sold its core internet operations to Verizon for just \$4.48 billion.

The implications of this struggle extend far beyond corporate boardrooms. Small businesses, often the first to adopt and innovate with new technologies, are caught in the crossfire. These enterprises, spanning industries from translation services to digital design, find themselves at a precarious juncture.

As giants like OpenAI and Google pour resources into outpacing each other, the tools that small businesses rely on become either prohibitively expensive or obsolete. Why? They are not funded; most of them are bootstrapped.

It's like the quote, "When banks compete, the customers win." If you are an aspiring entrepreneur and you want to start a tech business, you would think of numerous reasons to not start a new business today. Who knows? The core competition of your business will be a tech giant's side feature tomorrow.

Take, for instance, a small translation service company. Earlier, they might have had people to do translation, allowing human translators to focus on more complex, nuanced work. With the advent of ChatGPT 4.0, these tasks can now be handled with unprecedented accuracy and speed. Now, such tasks are done with a click. What about the whole translation business? Of course, we admit and know that those businesses won't be wiped out completely but surely there will be layoffs and fewer and fewer requirements.

Google's Gemini, while a potential alternative, does not yet offer the same level of sophistication, leaving these businesses in a technological limbo. What if it does in the next few months?

The design industry faces a similar predicament. Freelance graphic designers and small agencies have embraced AI-driven tools to enhance productivity and creativity. Tools like DALL-E are upgrading so fast that the small designing companies which relied on basic to mediocre designing with minimal efforts are in trouble. This arms race results in frequent updates and changes, often without adequate support or documentation, leaving small businesses scrambling to keep up. The constant need to adapt is challenging.

Video production and content creation, too, are not spared. The allure of AI in automating tedious editing processes and generating compelling narratives is undeniable. ChatGPT's 20% subscription gives you access to the web, grammar check, high-quality blog creation and whatnot. Small content creators, who once thrived on the accessibility and simplicity of more gigs, now face a steep learning curve.

The broader economic landscape worsens these challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has already stretched small businesses to their limits. Just as they begin to recover, they are hit with another wave of disruption.

Amid this chaos among the tech giants, there is a growing sense of disillusionment in small and medium-sized technology businesses. These tools can code. Literally. In the blink of an eye.

The narrative of technological progress being a universally positive force is being questioned. The technology that once promised to be a great equaliser is increasingly becoming a barrier, reinforcing existing inequalities. And the bad news is that these tools and technologies are upgrading every second, leaving small businesses with limited cash flow and working capital to either downsize or shut down the whole business. For many small businesses, the AI revolution is not a story of empowerment but of survival. But for freelancers and independent content creators, it tells different stories.

Pawan Chhabra from Delhi sees AI enhancing content editing with polished drafts but believes it can't replace compelling content creation. It aids in research, outlining, and editing. Swapnil Deep Kaur in Chandigarh notes a surge in AI-generated content for overseas education consultancies. Initially embraced for cost-cutting, companies faced penalties from Google for AI-generated content, resulting in more rejections than new cases.

Lavinia D'Souza, a travel blogger in London, struggles with AI's impact on SEO writing and blogging, citing increased plagiarism and decreased website traffic. Jennifer Willis in Portland lost a major client to AI, affecting her income. She's sceptical about AI's growing role in writing despite her 30 years of experience. Amanda Horiuchi in Tokyo finds AI beneficial for generating high-quality content, giving her a competitive edge with US clients while emphasising the importance of additional skills beyond writing.

As we watch this battle unfold, one cannot help but wonder if Google will find a way to reclaim its footing or if it will succumb to the relentless advance of OpenAI.

More importantly, what will be the fate of the small businesses caught in the crossfire? Will they adapt and thrive in this new world, or will they be pushed to the brink of extinction, their voices drowned out in the noise of technological progress? Only time will tell, but one thing is clear: the AI revolution is here, and its ripple effects are just beginning to be felt. (Courtesy: The Quint)

# India's foreign policy under Modi 3.0

By: Kumar Chellappan

In less than a week of assuming office as the Prime Minister for the world, Modi, is back where he excels. He was in Italy this week, meeting the leaders from the powerful group of nations also known as the G7. On the sidelines were several bilateral meetings with leaders of African, Arab nations, besides several clear messages to the primarily American and European groups leaders.

This was PM Modi's first trip abroad, after assuming office for a third time (a remarkable feat in itself), where nearly 670 million voters, patiently waited in queues, under an extremely harsh summer sun, over a period of nearly two months, to choose the leader of the largest democracy. PM Modi and his party, despite, setting really ambitious expectations, could not manage a majority by itself and is now dependent on a bunch of pre-poll alliance political parties, to lead the National Democratic Alliance Government. This assumes significance at a

time when several parts of Europe, not to mention US are going their own set of democratic churns. The US goes to poll end of the year and voices on either side of the aisle, are getting harsher and louder.

Similarly the elections to the European Parliament, has thrown a resurgence of far right parties, which is likely to have an impact on the geo-political dynamics for a long time. What Modi may be comforted by, is the fact that he may not need to look around for carefully worded diplomatic statements, while explaining the State of Indian democracy to the western nations. In the past few years, several questions have been raised across the western nations and in US regarding the health of the Indian democracy, its report card on minority rights, religious freedom, existence of press etc.

The near majority verdict, by the Indian electorate, with ample scope of checks and balances to keep the party with highest seats under leash, a robust opposition presence in the parliament would be clear talk point for PM and his set of diplomats to set out a gold

standard for democracy, when engaging with several nations. This becomes even more robust, given India's unblemished record of being a largely democratic nation, with a huge diverse population, in a neighbourhood, where there are several non democratic regimes, not to forget the second largest economy in the world China.

Modi, with his nearly three decades of experience as head of the State and nation, is not new to diplomacy and in several interviews, leading up to the general elections, has articulated his target of enhancing India's global image. The grand spectacle around G20 (not to forget back room diplomatic negotiations to arrive at a joint Statement), several high level State visits, a bunch of rescue operations carried out for citizens and neighbours from war torn areas, supply of emergency medicines during Covid, are all pointers towards the focus the Prime Minister's Office attaches on global reputational management. PM's first visit in his third term to meet the G7 leaders, is a reassurance of continuity, as well as scoping out newer engage-

ment roadmaps with existing and potential new allies.

Modi's visit to Italy comes at a time when the Ukraine war is unrelenting and despite severe reluctance, there seems to be chinks in the united European approach towards the aggressor Russia. Many of them, would have, similar concerns regarding Israel's war on terror, which has refused to die down in months. It may be recalled that both Israel and Russia are close allies of India and India has so far walked a tightrope when commenting both of these volatile situations.

The dynamics of the past relationship, while building deeper relations with recent allies such as US are likely to be a sensitive diplomatic trope. It is no wonder, that PM Modi has picked up S Jaishankar, a seasoned diplomat as the External Affairs minister for a second term, to retain the continuity and foreign policy focus achieved during his last term. The evolving geo-political landscape and India's role in global affairs would continue to be tested and chiselled in days to come. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

# How does an expanded BRICS benefit India?

By: Aneesh Parnerkar

The 15th BRICS Summit, convened in Johannesburg, South Africa, marked a pivotal moment for the grouping's future. With the inclusion of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the BRICS+ officially came into existence on 1 January 2024. Notably, more than 40 countries from the Global South had expressed their willingness to join, with at least 22 submitting formal applications. However, the acceptance of only the aforementioned five warrants closer examination to understand its implications for the grouping and how it benefits New Delhi's foreign policy objectives.

**What led to the BRICS expansion?**

In recent years, New Delhi has strived to use multilateral institutions to strengthen its global standing. Be it pioneering the inclusion of the African Union during its G20 Presidency or accepting strategically chosen partner nations from West Asia and Africa into BRICS, this growing aspiration is evident in all its actions. New Delhi views BRICS for what it is today: a geo-economic framework of emerging economies that swiftly captured the zeitgeist when they came together 15 years ago, but one that has made only modest progress in achieving its goal of renovating and reforming the global financial architecture.

For example, over the last decade, the BRICS' New Development Bank (NDB) has ap-

proved loans worth only US\$ 33 billion, less than one-third of what the World Bank commits in a year. Even in terms of currency, many members wish to decouple their economies from the US dollar due to the apprehension associated with the Federal Reserve's policy changes. Many seek alternatives to park their foreign exchange assets following Russia's exclusion from the SWIFT payment system. However, neither China nor India possess a fully convertible currency, limiting the appeal of the RMB and the INR, respectively.

Nevertheless, today, more so than ever before, BRICS is being leveraged by New Delhi as another important mechanism to promote a more multipolar world and advocate for reforms in the global governance framework. If successful, this could mean the expansion of the United Nations Security Council's permanent members and an alternative model of NDB-led development finance emerging from the Global South. Therefore, while BRICS may have lost some relevance as a geo-economic framework, it is evolving under the geopolitical ambitions of its member nations, positioning itself to play a more influential role in shaping emerging norms, policies, and institutions.

**The new BRICS members**

The Johannesburg BRICS summit garnered international interest rarely seen since the grouping's formation in 2009, with speculation over the admission of new members. Heads of state and business leaders from almost all 54 African countries participated



in the Summit, anticipating Africa-centric positive outcomes. This anticipation was met with invitations extended to two additional African countries, Egypt and Ethiopia, along with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, to join BRICS as full members.

India's strategic partnerships with the new members underscore the benefits of their inclusion. Both Egypt and Ethiopia have seen a revival of ties with New Delhi under the Modi government. For instance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Cairo in June 2023, followed by visits from the external affairs minister, defence minister, and military chiefs, was the first of its kind since 1997. India was Egypt's 5th largest trading partner between April and December 2022, with bilateral trade figures reaching US\$ 5.17 billion. Moreover, the admission of Egypt was still unsurprising, as it is the largest economy in North Africa today and had already joined the NDB in February 2023.

However, the backing and inclusion of Ethiopia into the BRICS demonstrate New Delhi's astute strategic thinking. Amidst the scramble for power in Djibouti and Eritrea (unprecedentedly, in terms of overseas military bases) between the United States (US), France, Japan, China, and Russia, among others, New Delhi has been quietly establishing a partnership with Ethiopia in the increasingly important Horn of Africa region. With its inclusion, India now has partners in both North and East Africa.

Interestingly, Ethiopia is also the largest recipient of India's Lines of Credit in Africa, engineering the development of energy transmission projects, the sugar industry, and railways. India and Ethiopia are also in the final stages of clinching a defence cooperation agreement, which will see New Delhi help the African nation with military training and credit lines to shore up defences. Furthermore, Ethiopia confirmed the discovery

of over two billion barrels of oil in January 2023. Thus, untapped natural resources, geostrategic location, and deepening ties highlight the importance and significance of these two countries for New Delhi.

The admission of both Saudi Arabia and Iran into BRICS is also a pivotal achievement but one that can prove to be a significant hurdle, given the regional rivalry and consensus criteria in place for all BRICS policies. However, New Delhi has taken a broader view and pushed for the inclusion of the two nations. Since the last few years, India-Saudi Arabia relations have become robust, with the Kingdom becoming New Delhi's fourth largest trading partner and a key collaborator in counterterrorism and anti-money laundering efforts.

During FY 2022-23, India's imports from Saudi Arabia reached US\$ 42.03 billion and exports to Saudi Arabia were worth US\$ 10.72 billion, registering an increase of 22.48 percent over the previous year. The Kingdom alone accounts for 18 percent of India's energy imports, reflecting its significance for New Delhi's energy and economic security calculus.

India and Iran have also maintained cordial ties amidst the flux regional environment. On 13 May 2024, India signed a 10-year deal with Iran to operate and develop the strategically important port of Chabahar, investing around US\$ 120 million in the port and US\$ 250 million in credit to reinforce India's connectivity to Central Asia,

Afghanistan, and the greater Eurasian region.

By 2030, India will have the potential to export more than US\$ 1 trillion, which will require new robust linkages of connectivity with Greater Eurasia for sustained economic growth and prosperity. The Chabahar Port and its development will thus boost trade between India and Central Asia with a bilateral trade potential of more than US\$ 200 billion. While it may have been Beijing which brokered a timely détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia, New Delhi's backing to have the two nations on board shows its confidence in its respective relationships and materialisation of its recent shift to a multi-alignment foreign policy.

The inclusion of the UAE is also not coincidental. It signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with India in February 2022, ensuring free, open, and non-discriminatory trade between the two countries. It also guarantees greater access for UAE's exports to the Indian market by reducing or removing tariffs on more than 80 percent of the products traded. Furthermore, the UAE has long maintained a 'one-foot in both camps' approach, skilfully balancing its relationships with both Western and Eastern nations.

Thus, making the country an attractive partner for New Delhi to have on the BRICS table. It further solidifies the robust bilateral trade and economic relationship between the two countries and brings a level-headed partner to the BRICS table to avoid devolving into an anti-West bloc.

**Conclusion**

The expansion of BRICS marks a significant milestone in the grouping's evolution from a geo-economic framework to a geopolitical force. By admitting Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, BRICS has solidified its position as a counterweight to Western-dominated global institutions. This move not only strengthens the collective bargaining power of the Global South but also aligns with India's strategic interests in promoting a multipolar world order.

It also underscores its Vishwa Bandhu approach to foreign policy and positions BRICS as a platform for balanced dialogue rather than an anti-Western bloc. However, the expanded BRICS faces significant challenges. Reconciling its members' diverse interests and priorities will be a formidable task, particularly in areas such as energy transition, environmental concerns, and the admission of new members.

The success of BRICS depends on its ability to translate its geo-economic and geopolitical potential into tangible outcomes. For India, the expanded BRICS presents both opportunities and challenges. While it offers a platform to assert its global leadership aspirations, New Delhi must be ready to navigate the complex geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics within the grouping. The careful selection of new members and the skilfully crafted consensus criteria for admission demonstrate New Delhi's foresight in global affairs. (Courtesy: ORF)



Kyiv's drones target more enemy oil depots

# Russia hammers Ukraine's power grid again

**KYIV, June 20:** Russia resumed its aerial pounding of Ukraine's power grid and Kyiv's forces again targeted Russian oil facilities with cross-border drone strikes, seeking to curb each other's ability to fight in a war that is now in its third year, officials said on Thursday.

With no major changes reported along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, where a recent push by the Kremlin's forces in eastern and northeastern Ukraine has made only incremental gains, both sides in the war have taken aim at distant infrastructure targets.

In its seventh major attack on Ukrainian power plants since Moscow intensified energy infrastructure attacks three months ago, Russia fired nine missiles and 27 Shahed drones at energy facilities and critical infrastructure in central and eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian air force said. Air defences intercepted all the drones and five cruise missiles, it said.

The attack hit power structures



in the Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv and Vinnytsia regions of Ukraine, causing "extensive damage", according to national power company Ukrenergo. Seven workers were injured, it said.

Ukrenergo announced extended blackouts across the country despite electricity imports and help with emergency supplies from European countries.

Private energy company DTEK

said one of its power plants was hit in the overnight attack but did not specify its location. Three company employees were injured and the plant's equipment was severely damaged, DTEK said on social media.

Among the most damaging recent strikes on Ukraine's energy supply were an April barrage that damaged Kyiv's largest thermal power plant and a massive attack

on May 8 that targeted power generation and transmission facilities in several regions.

Rolling blackouts have affected Ukrainian households and industry.

The Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement that the strikes aimed at Ukrainian energy facilities that are needed to produce weapons and military equipment. Ukraine, which is heavily dependent on Western military aid, is developing a small but fast-growing defence industry.

In Russia, meanwhile, authorities in two regions reported fires at oil storage depots after drone attacks, two days after a Ukrainian strike started a huge blaze at another refinery.

Ukraine has in recent months stepped up aerial assaults on Russian oil, targeting refineries and oil terminals in an effort to disrupt the Kremlin's war machine.

The overnight drone attacks were carried out by Ukraine's Security Service, known by its acronym SBU, a Kyiv security of-

ficial told The Associated Press.

The attacks triggered fires at the facilities, which processed and stored crude oil and its derivatives used to supply the Russian army, the official said.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release the information.

The head of Russia's Adygea region, Murat Kumpilov, said a Ukrainian drone attack sparked a fire at an oil depot in the town of Enem that was later extinguished.

The governor of the Tambov region, Maxim Yegorov, said an oil reservoir went ablaze at an oil depot there.

Krasnodar region Gov. Veniamin Kondratyev said a drone hit a private house in the town of Slavyansk, killing a woman.

Russia's Defence Ministry said air defences downed 15 Ukrainian drones over three regions but didn't mention any damage. The ministry said it has shot down more than 26,000 Ukrainian drones since the start of the war. (AP)

## Putin signs deals with Vietnam in bid to shore up ties in Asia

**HANOI, June 20:** Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a series of deals with his Vietnamese counterpart To Lam on Thursday, during a state visit that comes as Moscow is seeking to bolster ties in Asia to offset growing international isolation over its military actions in Ukraine.

The two signed agreements to further cooperation on education, science and technology, oil and gas exploration and health. They also agreed to work on a roadmap for a nuclear science and technology centre in Vietnam.

Following the talks, Putin said that the two countries share an interest in "developing a reliable security architecture" in the Asia-Pacific Region based on not using force and peacefully settling disputes with no room for "closed military-political blocs".

This was echoed by Vietnam's new President To Lam, who said they seek to further "further cooperate in defense and security to cope with non-traditional security challenges" while implementing energy projects and expanding investments. He also congratulated Putin on his re-election and praised Russia's "domestic political stability".

The agreements between Russia and Vietnam were not as substantial as an agreement Putin signed with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un the previous day, pledging mutual aid in the event of invasion said Nigel Gould-Davies, a senior fellow for Russia and Eurasia with the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, and a former British ambassador to Belarus.

Putin arrived in Hanoi early Thursday morning from North Korea, where he and North Korean



leader Kim Jong Un signed an agreement that pledges mutual aid in the event of war. The strategic pact that could mark the strongest connection between Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War comes as both face escalating standoffs with the West.

Putin also met Vietnam's most powerful politician, Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, as well as Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, according to the official Vietnam News Agency. He is also scheduled to meet parliamentary chief Tran Thanh Man.

Putin drove to Vietnam's Presidential Palace on Thursday afternoon, where he was greeted by school children waving Russian and Vietnamese flags. There, he shook hands with and embraced Lam before a bilateral meeting and a joint briefing to the media.

Russia is keen to maintain "close and effective cooperation" in energy, industry, technology, education, security and trade, Russian Ambassador to Vietnam Gennady S. Bezdetko said on Wednesday, according to Vietnamese official media.

The trip has resulted in a sharp rebuke from the US Embassy in the country.

Much has changed since Putin's last visit to Vietnam in 2017. Russia now faces a raft of US-led sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine. In 2023, the International Criminal Court in Hague issued an arrest warrant for Putin for war crimes. The Kremlin rejected it as "null and void", stressing that Moscow doesn't recognize the court's jurisdiction.

Putin's recent visits to China and now North Korea and Vietnam are attempts to "break the international isolation", said Nguyen Khac Giang, an analyst at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute.

The US and its allies have expressed growing concerns over a possible arms arrangement in which Pyongyang provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its use in Ukraine, in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile programme.

Both countries deny accusations of weapons transfers, which would violate multiple UN Security Council sanctions that Russia previously endorsed.

Meanwhile, Russia is important to Vietnam for two reasons, Giang said: It is the biggest supplier of military equipment to the Southeast Asian nation, and Russian oil exploration technologies help maintain its sovereignty claims in the contested South China Sea.

"Russia is signalling that it is not isolated in Asia despite the Ukraine war, and Vietnam is reinforcing a key traditional relationship even as it also diversifies ties with newer partners," said Prashanth Parameswaran, a fellow with the Wilson Centre's Asia Programme. (AP)

## China in jitters over US-Dalai Lama meet

China says Dalai Lama must correct his political propositions for talks; asks US to respect its sensitivities over Tibet



**BELJING, June 20:** China on Thursday asked the Dalai Lama to thoroughly reflect and completely correct his political propositions for it to hold talks with him and asked the US to respect its sensitivity and importance to Tibet-related issues as Washington is set to pass a tough Tibet policy law.

On the central government's contact and talks with the 14th Dalai Lama China's policy is consistent and clear, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing.

The key is that the 14th Dalai Lama must thoroughly reflect on and completely correct his political propositions, he said, without elaborating.

China watched warily the high-powered US Congressional delegation's visit to Dharamsala and its meeting with the 88-year-old Dalai Lama besides the strong remarks made by its leading members US House Foreign Affairs Committee chair Michael McCaul and former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi questioning China's policy towards Tibet and their call to Beijing to hold talks with the Dalai Lama.

Their visit came as US President Joe Biden was set to sign the Tibet policy bill adopted by both the US Senate and the House of Representatives. The bill awaits Biden's signature to make it into law.

The bill seeks to counter China's narrative about its control over Tibet and promote dialogue between the Chinese government and the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, who is based in India since he fled the Himalayan region in 1959.

On Tuesday, Beijing urged Biden not to sign the Tibet policy bill, warning of "resolute measures".

On the US delegation's visit to Dharamsala and its talks with the Dalai Lama, Lin said, "We urge the US to clearly see the sensitivity and importance of Xizang-related issues and earnestly respect China's core interests on its comments on Xizang, refrain from any forms with the Dalai group and stop sending out to the world wrong signals."

He also criticised the reported remarks by the Tibet government-in-exile that it is going to use the new Tibet legislation passed by the US Senate and Congress to try to force China to come to the negotiating table and urge other countries to put pressure on Beijing to hold talks with it.

"The so-called Tibet government-in-exile is an out-and-out separatist political group and an illegal organisation in total violation of China's constitution and laws. It is not recog-

nised by any country," Lin said.

After the US Congressional talks with the Dalai Lama, McCaul said on Wednesday that the Tibetans have the right to self-determination and should be allowed to practise their religion freely.

At a felicitation ceremony held after the seven US Congress members met the Tibetan leader, McCaul said the delegation had defied a warning from the Chinese Communist Party.

"The Tibetan people possess a distant religion, culture and historic identity and they should have a say in their own future. You should be able to freely practise your religion and that is why we are here today in defiance of the CCP (Communist Party of China) warning," he said.

"Our delegation received a letter from the CCP warning us not to come here. They repeated their false claim that Tibet is part of China since the 13th century but we did not let the CCP intimidate us and we are here today," he said at the event organised by the Dharamsala-based Central Tibetan Administration (CTA).

He added that the Dalai Lama, the people of Tibet and the US know that Tibet is not part of China.

The US delegation included Marianne Miller, Gregory Meeks, Nicole Malliotakis, Jim McGovern and Ami Bera.

At his residence, the Dalai Lama told them that he wanted the people of the world to be happy and peaceful.

Referring to the Tibet policy bill, McCaul said at the later event that the timing of the visit could not be better. The bill also required aggressively challenging the CCP propaganda on Tibet, he added.

"I presented the Dalai Lama with a wind chime, which will remind him of our support," he said.

"Like many of you, I wish that this meeting was happening in your homeland of Tibet, but 65 years ago you were forced to flee after the Chinese Communist Party annexed Tibet and slaughtered tens of thousands of Tibetan people," he said.

The delegation leader claimed that the CCP was determined to eliminate Tibetan culture and forcibly bring the Tibetan people under its control.

Thanks to the kindness of the Indian people, the Tibetans who fled their homeland are able to live freely in this country and practise their religion without fear of persecution.

"It is still my hope that one day His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his people will return to Tibet in peace," McCaul said. (PTI)

## South Korea to consider supplying arms to Ukraine

**SEOUL, June 20:** South Korea's presidential office on Thursday condemned an agreement reached by Russia and North Korea that vowed mutual defence assistance in the event of war and said it will reconsider its policy of limiting its support to Ukraine to non-lethal supplies.

The comments by a senior presidential official came hours after North Korea's state media released the details of the agreement reached between its leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin during their summit on Wednesday in Pyongyang. The North's official Korean Central News Agency said the deal requires both countries to use all available means to provide immediate military assistance in the event of war.

The office of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol issued a statement condemning the agreement, calling it a threat to the South's security and a violation of UN Security Council resolutions, and warned that it would have negative consequences on Seoul's relations with Moscow.

The presidential official, who spoke on condition of anonymity during a background briefing, according to office rules, said Seoul in response will reconsider the issue of providing arms to Ukraine to help the country fight off Russia's invasion.

South Korea, a growing arms exporter with a well-equipped military backed by the United States, has provided humanitarian aid and other support to Ukraine while joining US-led economic sanctions against Moscow. But it has not directly provided arms to Ukraine, citing a long-standing policy of not supplying weapons to countries actively engaged in conflict.

Both Kim and Putin described their deal as a major upgrade of bilateral relations, covering security, trade, investment, cultural and humanitarian ties. Outside observers said it could mark the strongest connection be-

tween Moscow and Pyongyang since the end of the Cold War.

KCNA said Article 4 of the agreement states that if one of the countries gets invaded and is pushed into a state of war, the other must deploy "all means at its disposal without delay" to provide "military and other assistance". But it also says that such actions must be in accordance with the laws of both countries and Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which recognises a UN member state's right to self-defence.

"It's absurd that two parties with a history of launching wars of invasion — the Korean War and the war in Ukraine — are now vowing mutual military cooperation on the premise of a preemptive attack by the international community that will never happen," Yoon's office said.

"In particular, Russia's decision to support North Korea and cause harm to our security, despite its status as a permanent member of the Security Council that has endorsed the sanctions resolution against North Korea, will inevitably have a negative impact on (South Korea-Russia) relations."

The summit between Kim and Putin came as the US and its allies expressed growing concern over a possible arms arrangement in which Pyongyang provides Moscow with badly needed munitions for its war in Ukraine, in exchange for economic assistance and technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by Kim's nuclear weapons and missile programme.

Following their summit, Kim said the two countries had a "fiery friendship", and that the deal was their "strongest-ever treaty", putting the relationship at the level of an alliance. He vowed full support for Russia's war in Ukraine. Putin called it a "breakthrough document" reflecting shared desires to move relations to a higher level. (AP)

## Swedish court acquits former Syrian army general accused of role in war crimes

**COPENHAGEN, June 20:** A Swedish court on Thursday acquitted a former Syrian army general accused of playing a role in war crimes in his home country more than a decade ago.

Brig. Gen. Mohammed Hamo, who now lives in Sweden, was charged in February with aiding and abetting crimes against international law. Prosecutors said that as head of the Ordinance Department of the Syrian Army's 11th Division, he was responsible for providing the weapons that were used to commit war crimes in 2012.

The prosecutor alleged that Hamo had participated in the division's indiscriminate attacks on military and civilian targets in and around the Syrian cities of Homs and Hamam.

The Stockholm District Court said it was "clear that the Syrian army's warfare in the conflict included indiscriminate attacks in violation of international law" there. However, Judge Katarina Fabian said the evidence that the prosecutor relied on was not sufficient to convict Hamo.

Swedish news agency TT said that Hamo was the highest-ranking military officer ever to stand trial in a European court for international human rights violations in Syria. Syria has been ravaged by civil war



for over 13 years.

Little is known about the 65-year-old Hamo. In June 2012, he was transferred to northern Syria, and the following month he decided to leave the army and fled to Turkey. There, he joined a group that was fighting against the Syrian regime.

He travelled to Sweden in 2015, where he sought asylum. He was granted asylum, but Sweden's Migration Board informed the government that Hamo was previously "a senior officer within the framework of an army that was systematically considered to have committed violations of human rights."

Hamo was living in central Sweden when he was arrested on December 7, 2021. A court at the time released him two days later, saying there wasn't enough evidence to keep him incarcerated. He has since been free.

The unrest in Syria between Assad's regime and opposition groups began in March 2011, and later exploded into a civil war that has killed nearly half a mil-

lion people and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million.

Chief prosecutor Karolina Wieslander was not immediately available for comment. A lawyer for the eight plaintiffs who backed the case against Hamo told Swedish broadcaster SVT that they need to read the verdict before deciding whether to appeal.

The plaintiffs included a man whose brother was killed in attacks on Homs, as well as a British and a French journalist — Edith Bouvier and Paul Conroy — who were injured in an attack on a media centre in Baba Amr in February 2012. Veteran war correspondent Marie Colvin was killed in the same attack.

Aida Samani of the Stockholm-based Civil Rights Defenders, a politically independent human rights organisation which had been present during the trial but was not a part of it, said the news was disappointing for the victims and the thousands of others affected by the attacks.

She added that it was believed the first time that a court of law recognised the attacks in the said period as war crimes.

Hamo maintained his innocence throughout the trial at the Stockholm District Court, which took place from April 15 to May 21. (AP)

## Australia boosting aid to Papua New Guinea for landslide recovery and security

**NEWCASTLE (AUSTRALIA), June 20:** Australia will provide a further 2 million Australian dollars (USD 1.3 million) to support reconstruction efforts in Papua New Guinea after last month's deadly landslide, the government said Thursday.

The South Pacific island nation off Australia's northern coast is still struggling with the aftermath of the disaster in Enga province in its mountainous interior, which the United Nations estimated killed 670 villagers and immediately displaced 1,650 survivors. Papua New Guinea's government has told the United Nations it thinks more than 2,000 people were buried when the mountainside tumbled onto the settlement of Yambali as people slept.

"Road access is critical for essential services as well as food and fuel supply chains," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement that coincided with a visit to the site of the landslide with Papua New Guinea's Defence Minister Billy Joseph and Enga Gov. Peter Ipatas.

"The additional support of 2 million Australian dollars announced today is in response to PNG's request to restore connectivity of the Highlands Highway — the transport artery of the region," Wong added.

Wong said the aid would also support local health care services and the provision of more than 1,000 learning packs for children. Australia's initial assistance of USD 2.5 million provided emergency supplies, support for humanitarian partners and disaster responders and technical experts in the days after the landslide on May 24.

Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles and Wong, with other senior government officials are in Papua New Guinea for a ministerial forum, the most significant such bilateral gathering for Australia among South Pacific island nations.

PNG has a population of nearly 10 million people and is the most populous Pacific island nation.

During the visit, they unveiled a comprehensive aid package aimed at bolstering Papua New Guinea's internal security and advancing law and justice priorities under a bilateral security agreement established last year as part of Australia's attempts to ward off growing Chinese influence in the region.

Key components of the package involve supporting a weapons management program and enhancing PNG's legal framework to combat financial crime.

"A safe and secure Papua New Guinea is good for Papua New Guinea, it's good for Australia and it's good for the region," Wong said Thursday on Channel Nine's Today show. (AP)

## US lawmakers, corporate leaders pledge to strengthen India-US relationship



**WASHINGTON, June 20:** Days after Narendra Modi took oath as the Prime Minister of India for a third consecutive term, powerful US lawmakers, corporate leaders and senior White House officials pledged to further strengthen the relationship between New Delhi and Washington. At the annual Leadership Summit of the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) here, they also applauded the development in India in the last decade.

Henry R Kravis, co-founder and co-executive chairman of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts and Co., said, "India is a terrific country to do business in. There are a lot of opportunities there with 860 million on the Internet and a lot of innovative entrepreneurs."

The USISPF honoured Kravis with its 2024 Global Leadership Award for his unwavering commitment to enhancing the US-India relationship.

Under Kravis' leadership, KKR has emerged as one of the largest investors in India and has invested over

USD 11 billion over the past two decades across sectors, creating thousands of jobs and contributing to the growth of the Indian economy.

"India has long been a key market for KKR due to its impressive growth, dynamic population, and innovative entrepreneurs and business community," he said.

USISPF chairman John Chambers spoke about collaboration and the future of technology.

"AI will be the most fundamental change in the future. AI will disrupt every business and every country. This is the chance for our countries to come together," he said.

Chambers later sat down in conversation with Republican Senators, Steve Daines and Dan Sullivan.

Senator Daines said, "We are working with the Indian government to reduce tariffs. India is the number one consumer of pulse crops, and Montana is the number one producer. So, there is a natural relationship." Sullivan said, "The story of India

is untold. We need to get the story out there. From my visits to India, I can see the tremendous innovation there. The vision for the world's oldest and world's largest democracy to do much more strategically together." Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer spoke with Mastercard executive vice president Tucker Foote.

Domestic Policy Advisor to President Biden Neera Tanden spoke with former US envoy to India and USISPF Board Member Tim Roemer.

In a fireside chat, Tanden highlighted the importance of the people-to-people connection and the role of the diaspora in shaping the contours of the US-India strategic partnership. "I started my career at the Clinton White House. Back then, there were only a handful of Indian-Americans in the Executive Office of the President. Today, I feel fortunate to be one of the many Indian-Americans advising the President," she said.

"The values that we share between the United States and India in entrepreneurship, innovation and education and the convergence of these values is what allows so many Indians who come to the US and innovate and become leaders in their chosen fields," she said.

India's Deputy Ambassador to the US Sripriya Ranganathan said, "We need to have our companies working closely on the very areas that we have prioritised. That will determine our success in the coming century. In fields like defence, space, communications, and biotech, our companies must see each other as partners of first choice." (PTI)



## Nagaland civic polls: 2.76 lakh voters to decide fate of 523 candidates



**KOHIMA, June 20:** Around 2.76 lakh voters will decide the electoral fate of 523 candidates in the ensuing elections to urban local bodies in the state, a senior poll official said on Thursday.

On June 26, elections will be held in three municipal councils and 36 town councils in the state after a gap of 20 years.

Addressing a press conference here, State Election Commissioner (SEC) T John Longkumer said that in all, 670 nominations were received, out of which four were rejected after scrutiny, 79 withdrawn and 64 candidates were elected unopposed.

No candidate is contesting in the town councils in eastern Nagaland, he said. Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation, the apex body of seven Naga tribes in the region, called for abstaining from participating in the civic polls to press for its statehood demand for Frontier Nagaland Territory. People of the region also did not participate in the Lok Sabha polls.

A total of 2,76,229 voters, including 1,40,167 women and 1,36,062 men, are eligible to exercise their franchise, he said.

The state has a total of 418 wards spread across the civic bodies, with 142 wards reserved for women.

The parties contesting the elections are Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), BJP, Congress, Naga Peoples' Front (NPF), Rising Peoples' Party, RPI (Athawale), JD(U) and LJP.

Voting will commence at 7.30 am and conclude at 4 pm under tight security arrangements made by Nagaland Police, he said.

On allegations of a Congress candidate in Dimapur being forced to withdraw nomination by a sitting BJP MLA, Longkumer said the commission has received a formal complaint and has written to the deputy commissioner and returning officer of Dimapur on the matter. He appealed to everyone to participate in the elections peacefully and ensure free and fair polls.

On the use of ballot papers, SEC secretary L Jamithung Lotha said the EC did not give permission to use EVMs for the civic polls.

Longkumer said that Nagaland had a shortage of ballot boxes but Arunachal Pradesh helped mitigate it.

State police nodal officer Limasunep Jamir said altogether, elections will be held in 278 wards in 10 districts. There will be a total of 530 polling stations, of which 229 have been categorised as hyper-sensitive and 209 as sensitive.

He said that 108 companies of state security forces, including 41 companies of District Executive Force (DEFs), 29 companies of Nagaland Armed Police and 38 of Indian Reserve Battalion, totalling to 8,100 personnel would be deployed.

"We will take all measures within the law to ensure that no one vitiates the peaceful atmosphere in the state," he asserted, while expressing confidence that the ULB polls will be peaceful. SEC secretary Wonchio Odyuo said that all preparations have been made and training of polling personnel completed. (PTI)

## Coffee table book tells stories of community and govt partnership

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, June 20:** A coffee table book *Engaging Communities: Empowering Lives*, with stories representing the strength of the community and the partnership between the government and community was launched in Kohima.

Published by the project director, Nagaland Health Project, directorate of health and family welfare, Dr Imkongtensu Longchar, the book is a combination of the best practices and innovations from different parts of Nagaland.

It says when different stakeholders work together and own the process, projects can achieve the desired result.

Launching the book, commissioner and secretary, health and family welfare department, V Kezo said the purpose of the project is to improve the quality of the healthcare system which was implemented in Nagaland through numerous local initiatives and innovations with cross-sectorial coordination and intervention with other stakeholders.

The community's capacity for governance, planning and institutional development was enhanced and the mainstreaming of gender inclusion was reconstituted through the project, Kezo said. He added that these days the Nagas have become very health conscious because of the awareness, leading to improvement in health services and increase in their utilisation at target locations across the state. Marion Jane Cros and Bathula Amith Nagaraj, both senior health specialists, health, nutrition and population, World Bank Group, also attended the coffee table book launch programme.

## USTM featured in Nature Index for research output

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, June 20:** University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) has been featured in the Nature Index, securing 109th position for the first time ever. This accomplishment is attributed to the significant contributions of the Department of Chemistry at USTM, particularly by Dr Mohit L. Deb, assistant professor of Chemistry whose work has been published in 'Chemical Communications', a Nature Indexed Journal.

The Nature Index is a prestigious metric that tracks research output through publications in 82 top-tier natural science journals, chosen based on the reputation of an independent group of researchers. Nature Index considers only 145 primary research articles published within natural science and health science journals and is crucial for universities and departments as it quantifies high-quality research output, enhances institutional reputation, attracts top talent, secures funding, and facilitates strategic planning through benchmarking against global peers.

In this context, Dr Sarifuddin Gazi, head of the department of Chemistry at USTM, said, "Nature Index will help USTM by benchmarking research quality, identifying collaboration opportunities, attracting funding, and enhancing its scientific reputation. Achieving a position in the Nature Index is a testament to our department's dedication to cutting-edge research and scientific excellence". He stated that this milestone reflects the hard work and passion of the faculty members, researchers, and students of the University. "Let's continue to push boundaries, collaborate globally, and strive for even greater heights in advancing the field of chemistry. Together, we are making a significant impact on the scientific community and beyond. Congratulations to everyone involved", he added.

Dr Gazi said that the Department of Chemistry is dedicated to both basic and applied research across various areas of chemical sciences. The faculty members are focused on exploring fields such as catalysis, hydrogen production, solar energy harvesting, solar thermal fuels, biodegradable polymers for packaging and other applications, inorganic porous materials, liquid crystals and functional materials, inorganic complexes and their applications, nanomaterials, organic synthesis, and sensing, among others.

## KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL ART & CULTURE DEPARTMENT KAAC SECRETARIAT :: DIPHU

No. KAAC/Art & Culture/Repairing/Nothengpi/2022/48

Dated Diphu, the 15th June 2024

### TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender affixing non-refundable KAAC court fee stamp (receipt) Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only eventually to be drawn up in form ae hereby invited from KAAC Registered/reputed firms and will be received from 15-06-2024 to 19-06-2024 by the undersigned up to 4 P.M. as per the Annual Action Plan (AAP) for the financial year 2024-2025 under Art & Culture Dept., KAAC, Diphu for the scheme/works mentioned below and will be opened on the same date, place and hours in presence of the tenderers on their authority agent if any.

If any day of the opening of tender happens to be any holiday/non-working day, the tender will be re-opened in the next day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject any reason thereof and will not be bound to accept the lowest tender quoted.

Sl. No.	Name of Schemes/Works	Estimated Amount	Tender Amount	Earnest Money	Time allowed for the work completion
1	Repairing/Renovation of Electrical works at Nothengpi: Karbi Heritage Museum, Taralangso	Rs. 12.41 Lacs	Rs. 12.41 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
2	Construction of Kitchen hall at Howraghat KCS office complex	Rs. 21.52 Lacs	Rs. 21.52 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
3	Construction of RCC Ringwell at Traditional Music School, KPH, Taralangso, Diphu	Rs. 5.00Lacs	Rs. 5.00Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
4	Construction of Lighting Ramp at Singmirjeng Achatai, KPH, Taralangso, Diphu	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
5	Construction of 5 nos. Of Zonal Camps at KPH, Taralangso	Rs. 130.00 Lacs	Rs. 130.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
6	Construction of drainage system of Artist village at KPH, Taralangso	Rs. 20.65 Lacs	Rs. 20.65 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
7	Construction of 3 nos. Waiting Shed at KPH, Taralangso	Rs. 45.00 Lacs	Rs. 45.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
8	Construction of KTMS Building, Hangjanglangso	Rs. 36.42 Lacs	Rs. 36.42 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
9	Construction of Extension of Rooms for Karbi Traditional Music School at KPH Taralangso	Rs. 21.64 Lacs	Rs. 21.64 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
10	Installation of permanent hoarding board of Kajir Ronghangpi at different places in Karbi Anglong	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
11	Renovation of KLA Office, Borjan	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
12	Renovation of KLA Office, Hangjanglangso	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
13	Renovation of KLA Office, Deopani	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	Rs. 10.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
14	Staircase with railing and water pipe connection at Nothengpi: Karbi Heritage Meseum, KPH, Taralangso	Rs. 5.00 Lacs	Rs. 5.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
15	Renovation of Zonal Camps at KPH, Taralangso	Rs. 15.00 Lacs	Rs. 15.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
16	Earth cutting & Retaining wall at Bonglong Terang Memorial Park, Rongplimlam, Borjan	Rs. 15.00 Lacs	Rs. 15.00 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
17	Const. of Tradition sports gallery (Hambi Aklam) at KPH, Diphu	Rs. 32.39 Lacs	Rs. 32.39 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
18	Const. of Chikimo Memorial & Retaining Wall with boundary wall at KCS, Diphu	Rs. 16.17 Lacs	Rs. 16.17 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
19	Earth cutting & filling at Zonal Camps, KPH, Taralangso, Diphu	Rs. 17.87 Lacs	Rs. 17.87 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days
20	Boundary wall & boulder pitching at Muscum, KPH, Taralangso	Rs. 17.90 Lacs	Rs. 17.90 Lacs	ST/SC/OBC = 1% General = 2%	30 Days

Details N.I.T./Tender documents may be obtained from the Deputy Director, Art & Culture KAAC, Diphu during working hours and office hours.

### Terms & Conditions:

**N.B.**

- The rate to be quoted as %(percent) above/below/as per schedule rate for building/sanitary/works for all division under as per CPWD DSR 2021
- Earnest Money should be deposited in favour of Deputy Director, Art & Culture Dept., KAAC, Diphu in the form of call deposit/Bank Draft & should attached with the tender without which no tender will be accepted.
- The work must be carried on as directed by the EE (Works), KAAC/KAAC authority.
- The contractor shall re-construct, if the works executed fails due to inferior quality works. The KAAC authority will take legal action, if contractor refuse to re-construct the same.
- The following documents should be enclosed with the tender:-
  - Professional Tax Clearance Certificate,
  - Sale Tax Clearance Certificate/GST registration,
  - Council Registration,
  - Call Deposit,
  - Cast Certificate,
  - Bank Details and Account number.
- The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest quoted rate.
- Payment shall made subject to availability of fund.

Sd/-  
Deputy Director, Art & Culture Dept.,  
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council  
**D I P H U**



# PM arrives in Srinagar, will lead Yoga Day event

Srinagar city has been declared as 'Temporary Red Zone' for the operation of drones and quadcopters

**SRINAGAR, June 20:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday embarked on a two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir where he will inaugurate or kick start projects worth ₹ 1,500 crore and participate in the International Yoga Day.

"Leaving for Srinagar, where I will be taking part in two programmes. Later this evening, I will be at the 'Empowering Youth, Transforming J&K' programme, which focuses on youth-led development."

"Key projects worth over ₹ 1500 crore will be inaugurated or their foundation stones would be laid. These works cover infrastructure, water supply, education and more. Tomorrow morning, I will take part in the Yoga Day programme in Srinagar," the prime minister posted on X before leaving for Srinagar.

This is Prime Minister Modi's first visit to Jammu and Kashmir after taking charge at the Centre for the third term.

He will inaugurate and lay the foundation stones of multiple development projects in J&K worth over ₹ 1,500 crore. He will also launch competitiveness Improvement in Agriculture and Allied Sectors Project (JKICP) worth ₹ 1,800 crore.

"On 21st June, around 6.30 am,



the prime minister will participate in the 10th International Day of Yoga event at SKICC in Srinagar. The prime minister will address the gathering on the occasion and take part in the CYP Yoga session thereafter," an official handout from the Press Information Bureau said.

Stringent multi-layer security arrangements have been put in place for the prime minister's two-day visit to Kashmir. More than 7,000 participants will join him in performing yoga on Friday on the banks of picturesque Dal Lake, officials said.

The participants have been trained over the past three days in the yoga 'Asanas' to be performed by the prime minister, the officials said.

Security forces personnel have been deployed in strength across the Srinagar city to ensure that the prime minister's visit passes off peacefully, they said.

The roads leading to SKICC have been sealed, they said.

The sanitisation operation at the SKICC was concluded on Tuesday and the background security check of all officials of the SKICC, security personnel and others on duty, and the sportspersons who will attend has been conducted, they said.

As part of the security measures, the Srinagar Police declared the city a 'Temporary Red Zone' for the operation of drones and quadcopters.

"Srinagar city has been declared as 'Temporary Red Zone' for the operation of drones and quadcopters as per provisions of Rule 24(2) of Drone Rules, 2021 with immediate effect," the Srinagar Police said on X on June 18.

All unauthorised drone operations in the "red zone" are liable to being penalised according to provisions of the drone rules, the police said.

Ahead of the main function on Friday, a series of yoga events have been held over the past three days at many places in the city and elsewhere in the valley, the officials said.

A yoga event was held near the iconic clock tower at the Lal Chowk city centre here while a mega yoga camp was held at Polo Ground on Wednesday, they said.

Another event was also held at the SKICC here, the officials said, adding similar events were held at many places in the Valley to mark the celebrations for the 10th IYD. (PTI)

## Congress to decide on LoP in Lok Sabha: Sharad Pawar

**PUNE, June 20:** NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Thursday said the Congress will decide on the appointment of the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha as it has maximum seats among the INDIA bloc parties in the Lower House of Parliament.

Asked if efforts will be made to have the Lok Sabha's deputy speaker from the opposition, Pawar claimed this "rule" was not followed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his last government.

"A discussion will take place on that point, but I do not think any fruitful outcome will be there from it," he said. Pawar was speaking to reporters at Baramati in Maharashtra's Pune district. The BJP won 240 seats in the

recently held polls to the 543-member Lok Sabha and formed government with its partners in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Among the opposition INDIA bloc constituents, the Congress bagged the highest 99 seats.

Asked about the appointment of the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha, Pawar said, "Earlier, we had agreed that the position would go to the party with the highest seats."

He further added, "Today, the Congress has the maximum seats (among opposition parties) in the Lok Sabha, so they will decide who should hold the position." (PTI)

## Jarange creating confusion: OBC quota activist

**JALNA, June 20:** The two activists whose indefinite fast over the OBC quota entered the eighth day on Thursday have alleged that Maratha youths are ending their lives due to confusion created by campaigner Manoj Jarange.

They also accused Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde of ignoring their protest. Laxman Hake and Navnath Waghmare have been agitating at Wadigodri village in Jalna district demanding that OBC reservation not be diluted.

They are opposed to Jarange's demand over implementation of the draft notification that recognises Kunbis as "sage soyare" (blood relatives) of Maratha community members. Kunbi, an agrarian group,

falls under the OBC category, and Jarange has been demanding that Kunbi certificates be issued to all Marathas, thus making them eligible for quota in government jobs and education.

Hake said the Maratha community might be economically disadvantaged but they are not socially backward. "The reservation criteria pertain to those who are socially backward," said Hake, suggesting that Marathas should pursue schemes for their economic development with the government.

"Jarange is creating confusion and because of that Maratha youths are committing suicide over reservation. Jarange is comparing Marathas to OBC communities," Hake said.

The OBC activists have been demanding the scrapping of the "sage soyare" draft notification. Hake also alleged that Chief Minister Eknath Shinde was ignoring their protest. "The chief minister has shut his eyes and ears to our protest," he said.

He said Guardian Minister Atul Save, Rajya Sabha member Bhagwat Karad, and newly elected Aurangabad MP Sandipan Bhumre had met them on Monday not as government representatives but in their personal capacity.

Even Jalna Collector Dr Shrikrishna Panchal, who visited them on Wednesday night, was silent about the government's attention to their protest. (PTI)

## 114 heatwave deaths reported, nearly 41,000 cases of suspected heatstroke

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** The unrelenting heatwave sweeping large parts of the country has claimed at least 114 lives and left more than 40,984 people grappling with suspected heatstroke between March 1 and June 18 this year, Health Ministry sources said on Thursday.

Uttar Pradesh is the worst-affected having reported 37 deaths followed by Bihar, Rajasthan and Odisha, according to the data compiled under the National Heat-Related Illness and Death Surveillance by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

"The data may not be final submission from states. So the numbers are expected to be higher than this," an official source said.

Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Thursday asked officials to visit Central government hospitals to see if separate arrangements have been made for heatwave affected patients regularly.

According to the data, on June 19, there have been four deaths due to heatstroke.

Swathes of northern and eastern India have been in the grip of a heatwave, increasing heatstroke casualties and prompting the Centre to issue advisory to hospitals to set up special units to cater to such patients.

Nadda on Wednesday directed that special heatwave units be set up in all Central government hospitals to cater to those falling ill due to heat.

The health minister also asked officials to ensure all hospitals are prepared for providing the best healthcare to the affected as he reviewed the situation across the country and preparedness of hospitals to deal with it.

Under the directions of Nadda, an advisory for state health department on 'Heat Wave Season 2024' has been issued by the health ministry.

"The country may observe above normal seasonal maximum temperatures in line with the observed trend of summertime temperatures. To reduce health impacts of extreme heat, health departments must ensure preparedness and timely response," the ministry said.

The advisory asked state nodal officers under the National Programme for Climate Change and Human Health (NPCCCH) to start submitting the daily data on heatstroke cases and deaths and total deaths from March 1 besides reporting under Heat-Related Illness and Death Surveillance.

It called for maintenance of digital line list of heatstroke cases and deaths (suspected/confirmed) at health facility/hospital level in given formats and undertaking.

They have been asked to ensure dissemination of National Action Plan on Heat Related Illnesses (HRI) to all districts and strengthening of health systems preparedness for HRI.

It stressed on dissemination of early warning of heatwaves issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and said forecast for the next four days should be disseminated to health facilities and vulnerable populations.

The advisory also directed for health facility preparedness for prevention and management of severe HRI and procurement and supply of adequate quantities of ORS (oral rehydration solution) packs, essential medicines, IV fluids, ice-packs, and equipment to support management of volume depletion and electrolyte imbalance, etc.

It also called for ensuring availability of sufficient drinking water at all health facilities, general cooling appliances in waiting and patient treatment area and their functioning, and stressed that cases with suspected heatstroke should be rapidly assessed and actively cooled using standard treatment protocols.

"Coordinate with power distribution company/corporation for uninterrupted electricity supply to hospitals for constant functioning of cooling appliances. Adopt measures to reduce indoor heat and energy conservation in health facilities like cool roof/green roof, window shading, rainwater harvesting, solarization etc. Provide shade outside the health facilities in heat-prone regions," the advisory added. (PTI)

## When will full statehood be restored, elections be held in J&K: Cong on PM's visit

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Jammu and Kashmir, the Congress on Thursday asked the timelines for restoration of full statehood to the Union Territory and holding of assembly elections there.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramsh also asked why the BJP was scared of holding elections in Jammu and Kashmir and why has the law and order situation deteriorated under the prime minister's watch.

"As the 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri makes his maiden visit to Jammu and Kashmir since the Lok Sabha elections, six questions he should answer: When will full statehood return to Jammu and Kashmir," Ramesh asked in a post on X.

He said since 2018, the people of J&K have been denied any avenue to express their grievances and the region has become a "bureaucratic fiefdom controlled by the BJP-RSS cabal".

"While claiming to have ended special status for J&K, the 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri has in fact created an extra-special situation of a new and unique political system: one where the state has been downgraded to a UT, elections have been suspended, and all norms of constitutional morality violated," he asked.

The Congress leader recalled that in his speech in Parliament on December 11, 2023, Home Minister Amit Shah said full statehood to J&K would be restored at an "appropriate time", but five years after being stripped of their statehood, the people of J&K still lack clarity on what the timeline for this return of statehood is.

"Can the 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri give a straight answer to this key question: when will full statehood return to Jammu and Kashmir," he asked. The last Vidhan Sabha elections were held in 2014 and four seats in the Rajya Sabha remain vacant because of the delay in holding assembly polls, he said.

"The blame for this suspension of democracy lies entirely with the Centre. As the Chief Election Commissioner clarified in March 2024, the Pradhan Mantri's Government failed to reconcile its own J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 with its own Delimitation Exercise, 2022 – preventing the ECI from initiating the electoral process.

"This weaponized incompetence appears to be deliberate: unable to win power through legitimate electoral means, the BJP has used this opportunity to control the levers of power for selfish gains," he alleged.

Ramesh said it is only the Supreme Court-imposed deadline of September 2024 that has forced the Centre to conduct the polls now.

"Can the 'one-third' PM explain this long delay

in holding the elections? Why has he clung so desperately to power in a state where the people never chose to be led by him," Ramesh asked.

Asking why the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir has deteriorated, he said, "The one-third Pradhan Mantri claims to have curbed terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir at all his public meetings. The mood on the ground in J&K, however, is one of anxiety. "Since January 1st 2023, 35 of our brave security personnel and eight innocent civilians have lost their lives in the Pir Panjal Range (comprising the Rajouri-Poonch area) alone, in an area where there were no major incidents of terrorism between 2007 and 2014," he said.

The Congress Rajya Sabha MP claimed that infiltration from Pakistan is rising along the international border, and a palpable sense of insecurity prevails across J&K. "but 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri, who has been busy accepting congratulatory messages, including from Pakistani PM, has been conspicuously silent even amidst this surge in terrorism. Why has his Government failed to salvage the security situation in J&K? What is his vision to restore normalcy?"

Questioning why the Government has failed to support Kashmiri Pandits, Ramesh alleged the BJP has "exploited" the misery of the Kashmiri Pandits in every election campaign.

"However, ten years after coming to power, the Pradhan Mantri and the Home Minister have done absolutely nothing for the community and have not even held a meeting with the community's representatives... Does the Pradhan Mantri view the community only as a talking point? Why has he neglected their interests over the last decade," he asked.

Posing several questions, Ramesh also asked that if the Union Government's actions are popular, why do the BJP and its proxies keep getting rejected by the people of J&K. He also inquired about the investment which Jammu and Kashmir has actually garnered since 2019.

"When the BJP abrogated Article 370 to much fanfare in 2019, they repeatedly argued that the actions were popular among the people of Jammu and Kashmir. However, the Pradhan Mantri refused to visit the J&K after 2019, until the Lok Sabha polls in 2024.

"The BJP refused to contest the Lok Sabha elections in the Kashmir Valley, instead implicitly supporting candidates put up by its proxies. However, all three proxies fared poorly, scoring a zero in the Lok Sabha and securing a lead only in one Vidhan Sabha segment. If the Union Government's actions are popular, why do the BJP and its proxies keep getting rejected by the people of J&K," he asked. (PTI)

### GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

#### OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (PHE)

#### ULUKUNCHI DIVISION, ULUKUNCHI

#### KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL, DIPHU

No. EE/PHE/UCHI/NIT-01/2024-25/ 453

Dated: 20/06/2024

NIT NO-I for 2024-25

#### Notice Inviting Tender

Separate sealed tenders for separate works in plain paper affixing non-refundable KAAC cash receipt worth Rs.10.00 (Rupees Ten) only eventually to be drawn in PWD F-2 form are hereby invited from registered contractors/ Firms of PHE Department under Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council for the works mentioned in Annexure A as per approved A/A of SOPD 2024-25 accorded by the authority of KAAC vide No. KAAC/PHE-3/AA/2019-20/2021-22/13 A dt. 13/06/2024. Detailed tender papers, terms and conditions etc. may be obtained from the office of the undersigned on all works days from 10.00 A. M. to 3.00 from 26/06/2024 till 12.00 noon of 02/07/2024 and received on 02/07/2024 till 3.00 P.M. and will be opened in the same date i.e. 02/07/2024 at 3.30 PM in presence of the intending tenderers or their authorized agents who likes to remain present. In case the last date and time for receipt and opening of tender happens to be holiday, the tenders so invited will be received and opened on the same time of the next working day.

The AA accorded under the Head of Account "2225-02-190-2419-670-32-99" for the financial year 2024-25 of Grant No. 76

The tender paper will be available in the office of the undersigned on payment of Rs. 100.00 per group either in cash or demand draft pledged in favour of "Executive Engineer, PHE, Ulukunchi Division, Ulukunchi".

**Name of the works: -As per Annexure- "A"**

#### TERMS AND CONDITION.

1. Tenderer should quote their rate distinctly both in figure and in words on percentage basis at per/ below/above on the estimated rates.
2. The Tenderer should furnish their full name and address distinctly in the tender papers.
3. Class I, II, III contractors are only invited as intending tenderer.
4. Earnest money in the form of NSC/KVP/Fixed deposit duly pledged in favour of the "Executive Engineer (PHE), Ulukunchi Division, Ulukunchi," should invariably be enclosed with the tender papers.
5. GST, Professional Tax, Income Tax Clearance Certificate should be enclosed with the tender papers.
6. The work must be completed within stipulated time as stated in Annexure A.
7. The work should be started after signing necessary agreement and in consultation with A.E.E. in charge.
8. Payment will be made subject to availability of fund.
9. No advance payment will be made for the work.
10. Non-tribal tenderer must produce up to date KAAC trading license along with tender documents.
11. All other terms and condition will be followed as per APWD, F-2 form of tender.
12. The undersigned reserved the right to accept/reject any or all tender in part or in full without assigning any reason thereof and does not bind himself to accept the lowest quoted tender rate.

Sd/-

Executive Engineer (PHE)  
Ulukunchi Division, Ulukunchi

Memo No. EE/PHE/UCHI/NIT-01/2024-25/ 454 – 67

Dated: 20/06/2024



# 34 people die in Tamil Nadu after consuming illicit arrack

Four persons linked to the sale of the poisonous arrack have been arrested so far, Stalin said and declared ₹ 10 lakh assistance to each of the families of the deceased

**KALLAKURICHI/CHENNAI, June 20:** The entire Karunapuram locality in Kallakurichi on Thursday echoed with the wails of the family members of the victims of illicit arrack that claimed the lives of at least 34 persons. About 100 others are undergoing treatment.

Following the tragedy in the state's northern district, the opposition lashed out at the DMK while the ruling party said it should not be assumed such issues happened only during its regime.

Chief minister M K Stalin said: "The Kallakurichi incident must not have happened and it has caused deep anguish to me." The deaths were due to consumption of 'methanol mixed arrack,' he said, adding he has directed authorities to ensure special care to those being treated in hospitals.

Stalin, who held a meeting to review the situation, announced setting up of a one-man commission to be led by retired Madras High Court Judge B Gokuldas to make recommendations to the government on measures to be taken to prevent recurrence of such incidents and also look into the reasons for the deaths.

Four persons linked to the sale of the poisonous arrack have been arrested so far, Stalin said and declared ₹ 10 lakh assistance to each of the families of the deceased. Also, he announced ₹ 50,000 assistance to those who are being treated in hospitals. The state Home Secretary and Director General of Police will submit a report on the hooch tragedy following inspection, he added.

He assured tough action against those who provided methanol for making the spurious concoction that became poisonous.

The entire Karunapuram, which has witnessed the deaths, including that of two women and one transgender, wore a gloomy look.

Heart-wrenching scenes, including that of a sobbing young girl, anxious rel-



atives awaiting a medical update on their near and dear ones and women wailing in the streets were witnessed in this nondescript locality.

Leader of Opposition (LoP), Edappadi K Palaniswami visited the affected people, including three children who have apparently lost both their parents.

According to locals, a contributing factor for the increase in death toll is the 'initial denial' of district authorities including police for several hours on Wednesday that the deaths, which were less than five at that time, were not due to 'illicit arrack.' In the meanwhile, several others consumed illicit arrack and some of them had got stored in their houses.

Meanwhile, #Resign Stalin trended on social media platform 'X' and several users targeted the 'Dravidian model' tagline of the DMK regime by posting messages using the hashtag #Sarayam model (arrack model).

State BJP president K Annamalai announced a state-wide protest on June 22 against the 'incompetence' of the DMK government in curbing the production

and sale of illicit liquor.

While the CBCID officials began their probe in Kallakurichi, Stalin said he had directed them to probe the source of methanol and its complete destruction at the local level. Authorities had already seized about 200 litres of illicit arrack and an analysis disclosed the presence of deadly methanol.

Health Minister Ma Subramanian and PWD Minister EV Velu are in Kallakurichi to render help to the affected people. District Collector MS Prasanth said 116 people were admitted in various government-run facilities and out of them 34 died.

Palaniswami alleged the point of sale of illicit arrack 'is the central place of Kallakurichi, close to the police station and court.' The AIADMK chief claimed "36 persons have died."

Speaking to reporters Kallakurichi, he said there is a 'big gang' behind the sale of illicit arrack which also has the involvement of 'powerful persons' who belong to the ruling DMK. "Otherwise, could the sale of illicit arrack happen in the central locality of the town and near

the police station?" he asked.

Expressing anguish and recalling similar past incidents, he said his party legislator M Senthil Kumar (Kallakurichi Assembly constituency) had days ago complained about the menace of illicit arrack to local police. However, no action was taken.

On March 29, 2023, Senthil Kumar had submitted a call attention motion with Assembly officials. However, it was not taken up, he alleged. Had this been debated and action taken, such deaths could have been averted. "Illicit liquor is flowing like a river in Tamil Nadu."

Referring to three children who lost both their parents, he said his party will bear their educational expenditure and provide ₹ 5,000 assistance to them for 10 years. The financial assistance to the families of the deceased should be increased by the government from ₹ 10 lakh to ₹ 25 lakh and a government job should be provided to eligible persons in the affected families, he demanded.

Palaniswami visited the Kallakurichi government medical college hospital where several of the affected people are being treated and also the families of victims, consoled them and conveyed his condolences.

Senior Minister Velu said it should not be assumed as if 'illicit arrack sale' has happened only under the DMK rule and such incidents have been occurring during all the regimes. "Every government (be it DMK or AIADMK governments) has taken tough action, this government has been taking stern action continuously," he told reporters.

Ruling DMK's allies—CPI and MDMK demanded tough legal action against those involved in the episode.

The Kallakurichi incident comes a year after the death of 21 persons, who died in nearby Villupuram and Chengalpattu districts after consuming spurious liquor. (PTI)

## NEET aspirants say little faith in NTA

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** Many medical aspirants are clamouring for a retest of the NEET-UG 2024 which has been plagued with charges of irregularities, paper leaks and steep rise in merit list, with the Centre's decision to cancel grace marks for 1,563 students doing little to assuage their concerns.

Student bodies and youth wings of many political parties have been holding protests countrywide to flag their concerns over the alleged irregularities in the prestigious exam that saw 67 students score a perfect 720, unprecedented in the National Testing Agency's (NTA) history.

With reports of paper leak and other discrepancies continuing to pour in, many students say they have lost faith in the conduct of the exam.

While many demand a thorough inquiry in the allegations of the paper leak, considerable others think the re-test option given to 1,563 students is a mere "eyewash".

"The inflation in marks is too much to be offset by a selective retest of 1,563 students. I think revaluation of marks of each student will be a good thing, otherwise a universal retest, but then the government must give us one to

two months to prepare," Aheli Ghosh Hazra, a National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) aspirant from West Bengal, told PTI.

On the conduct of NEET this year, she said, "You cannot fix a sick tree by just taking a sick leaf out of it. The whole tree must be uprooted. We have no clue to what extent the rigging took place." Another aspirant from Madhya Pradesh said things look "fairly unjust" from his point of view.

"They just want to get it over with. They also want to hide the paper leak scam," Animesh, a NEET aspirant from Madhya Pradesh, said.

"Things are not very clear... I think the matter should be probed by a third party which is not biased towards the NTA," he added.

Animesh demanded a retest for all candidates.

"Only those with scores above 650 would have an issue with a retest. There must be a retest, but they must give some more time to students. Everyone is out of momentum. Everyone is bogged down by media reports. Logistically, it won't be feasible for the NTA too to conduct retest in a short time," he said. (PTI)

## IIT Bombay imposes fine on 8 students for performing play that allegedly mocked Lord Ram

**MUMBAI, June 20:** The Indian Institute of India (IIT) Bombay has imposed a fine of up to ₹ 1.2 lakh on eight students, who performed a play that allegedly mocked Lord Ram and portrayed the 'Ramayana' in a bad light, a fellow student said on Thursday.

The students had presented the play named 'Raahovan' on March 31 this year, as part of the Performing Arts Festival (PAF).

"The play that was presented mocked Lord Ram and portrayed the Ramayana in a vulgar and derogatory manner," said a Masters student at the institute.

The student, who declined to be named, is one of those who lodged a complaint against the play with the administration.

Another student affiliated to the Ambedkar Periyar Phule Study Circle (APPSC) at the IIT Bombay also confirmed that

students were fined for presenting the play.

The APPSC is a left-leaning student's body.

"Following the complaint, each of the eight students was fined in the range of ₹ 40,000 to ₹ 1,20,000," the student said.

A notice issued by the IIT Bombay registrar's office dated June 4 said the fine has to be paid by the students by July 30.

The IIT Bombay has declined to comment on the issue.

"We welcome disciplinary action taken by the @iitbombay administration against those involved in the play 'Raahovan,' which depicted the Ramayana in a derogatory manner. These students abused their academic freedom to mock Lord Ram, Mata Sita, and Lord Laxman," said @IITBforBharat on social media site X on June 19.

The @IITBforBharat is an account on X which calls itself

a group of volunteers aimed at having a common space for Indic civilisational values.

The group on April 8 demanded an action against students involved in the play dubbing it as an act of Hindu-phobia.

"We urge the @iitbombay administration to establish guidelines to ensure that no religion is ridiculed under the guise of freedom of expression on the campus in any form. Also, An apology letter regarding this action and the objectionable PAF event is expected from the @iitbombay administration to the @iitbombay community."

"According to the sources, two different punishments were executed, one for the students who are passing this July and another for the regular students," @IITBforBharat said. (PTI)

## WB accident: Initial probe blames lapses by goods train crew, Jalpaiguri division's operating dept

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** The initial probe into the June 17 Kanchanjunga Express accident has suggested there were lapses by the operating department of the New Jalpaiguri Rail Division and the crew of the goods train that hit the passenger train.

At least 10 people were killed, including the passenger train's guard and the pilot of the goods train after it rammed into the stationary Sealdah-bound Kanchanjunga Express in West Bengal's Darjeeling district on Monday.

The collision occurred near Rangapani station, 30 km from New Jalpaiguri station, causing four rear compartments of Kanchanjunga Express to derail due to the impact by the goods train's locomotive at 8.55 am, the official said.

Soon after the accident, Railway Board chairperson Jaya Varma Sinha said the collision took place because the goods train disregarded the signal. The Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) has started a probe into the cause of the accident.

The railways also set up a probe team of six senior officials who have filed their preliminary report which has been seen by PTI.

While five officials have blamed the goods train driver for violating signals as well as the speed restriction, one has given a dissenting note suggesting that the operating department of the New Jalpaiguri Rail Division failed to take adequate measures to safeguard the route between Ranipatra (RNI) and Chatter Hat Junction (CAT).

The majority view is that the rear-end dashing of the Kanchanjunga Express by the goods train may have occurred due to the failure of the goods train crew (driver, assistant driver and guard) to obey the rule of "passing the automatic signal at danger position"

and also "keeping the excessive speed of the train".

In his dissent note, one official, the chief loco inspector (CLI) of the NJP division, said the automatic and semi-automatic signals had not been working since 5:50 am on June 17, 2024.

In such a situation, the whole section (route between RNI and CAT) should have been converted into an Absolute Block System (a system to allow only one train at a time between RNI and CAT), the official further said referring to the railway rules.

Giving details on what happened before the accident, the probe report said that the Kanchanjunga Express departed from Ranipatra station at 8.27 am on June 17 with two authority letters "T/A 912 and T369 (3B).

"T/A 912 allowed the driver to cross all red signals and it didn't mention any speed. On the other hand, T369 (3B) mentioned that the driver would cross the two signals immediately after leaving the RNI station at 15 kmph speed," a railway source from New Jalpaiguri told PTI.

According to the probe report, the same two authority letters were also issued to the goods train which departed from Ranipatra station at 8.42 am.

The report also suggests that the Kanchanjunga Express was waiting at one of the defective signals when the goods train hit it from behind.

The probe officials said that five coaches of the passenger train and eleven wagons of the goods train were affected in the accident. They said that they found two dead bodies stuck in the general coach of the passenger train and they were taken out after cutting the coach portion. (PTI)

## Five Syro-Malabar bishops express disapproval of circular warning priests over Holy Mass dispute

**KOCHI, June 20:** Five bishops of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church have expressed disapproval of a recent circular issued by their church head, which warned that priests in the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese who protest against the changes made to Holy Mass customs would be excommunicated.

The bishops have alleged that the circular "smacks of the middle-age culture of the Church."

The circular dated June 9, 2024, jointly by Syro-Malabar Church head Raphael Thattil - who is also the major archbishop of the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese - and its Apostolic Administrator Bosco Puthur, was issued as a warning to priests who disagree with the synod's suggested manner of celebrating Holy Mass.

The bishops who raised their voice in protest include Ephrem Nariculam, Jose Chittoorambil CMI, Jose Puthenveetil, Kuriakose Bhanikulangara and Sebastian Adayanthrath. They serve as bishops of various dioceses under the Syro-Malabar Church.

"Excommunication is an unheard-of term after the II Vatican Council. The Oriental Code of Canon Law (CCEO) does not envisage automatic excommunication ('latae sententiae')," the five bishops said in a dissent note, copies



of which are in the possession of the media and were confirmed by church sources on Thursday.

The dissent note came days after the Syro-Malabar Church issued an ultimatum to the priests who do not comply with its directive to hold uniform Holy Mass in the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese starting from 3 July this year.

Protests were held at various Catholic churches under the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese here on Sunday by a section of the laity against the ultimatum issued by the Syro-Malabar Church.

The bishops said it was a matter of worry that such a serious circular was issued without seeking the opinion of the synod at its scheduled online meeting.

"We, as members of the synod, had the responsibility given by the Holy Father (the Pope) to look at this issue collectively and come up with a viable solution," they said, asking how such a serious de-

cision that should have been taken by the synod was already prepared in advance of the synod meeting.

"How was the circular planned to be discussed in the synod leaked from our Chancery?," the bishops asked. "It is rumoured that in the past too such things have happened."

The bishops clarified that they were in no way justifying the resistance to celebrating Holy Mass in a uniform manner across all the churches of the Syro-Malabar Catholic church, but argued for a benevolent approach on the matter.

The bishops said they feel that in light of the recent circular, the whole archdiocese is going to be in turmoil and that is going to affect each and every one in the archdiocese, including their own family members.

Interestingly, all five dissenting bishops hail from places that fall under the Ernakulam-Angamaly archdiocese.

"As members of the synod and as bishops knowing well the ground realities in Ernakulam-Angamaly, we earnestly appeal to your high authority to reconsider the matter, and not to create a division in the Church. We respectfully request you to record this dissent note with our names and share this with the members of the synod," the bishops said in the note.

The Syro-Malabar Church has not officially responded to the recent developments.

In the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese, some priests and members of the church community disagree with the Syro-Malabar Church's August 2021 decision on uniform Holy Mass.

This decision mandated a standardised way of conducting Holy Mass, where priests are required to face the congregation only at the beginning and end of the service, turning towards the altar for the rest of the Mass (known as the 50:50 formula).

While most dioceses under the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church have adopted this approach, many priests in the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese, along with their parishioners, continue to oppose it.

They argue that it breaks from tradition, where the priest traditionally faces the congregation throughout the entire Mass. (PTI)

### GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

#### OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT, HANDLOOM AND TEXTILES, HAMREN, WEST KARBI ANGLONG

No. SHTH(A) 02/2024-25/3

Dated 19/06/2024

### T E N D E R

In pursuance of Administrative Approval Letter No. KAAC/H&T-15/AA&FS/Pt-1/2016-17/441 Dated 14/06/2024, sealed tender affixing non-refundable KAAC Money Receipt worth Rs. 10/- (Rupees ten) only are hereby invited from intending Govt./KAAC Registered Contractor for the following Construction work for implementation of SOPD Schemes for the financial year 2024-25. The tender will be received up to 2.00 pm of 29/06/2024 and will be opened there after on the same day, date and time. In case, if the opening day of the tender fall on holiday then tender will be opened on next working day in same time.

Sl No	Name of Work	Quantity	Rate in Lakh	Estimated Amount in Lakh	Earnest Money	Time allowed of completion
1	Construction of common toilet & renovation including internal electrification of HTC Hamren	1 Units	7.00	7.00	1% for ST/SC/OBC 2% for General	90 (Ninety) Days
2	Construction of Weaver Work-Shed at Bithung-Rengthama MAC Constituency	4 Unit	5.00	20.00		
3	Construction of Weaver Work-Shed at Hamren MACC	1 Unit	5.00	5.00		
4	Construction of RCC Ring well at Weaver Extension Service Unit (WESU), Baithalangso	1 Unit	1.50	1.50		
5	Internal electrification work at WESU, H&T Satgaon	1 Unit	1.50	1.50		
6	Repairing of Handloom Training Centre, Bhoksong	1 Unit	3.00	3.00		
7	Construction of Boundary wall at HTC, Bhoksong	1 Unit	2.00	2.00		

#### Terms and Condition

- The undersigned reserved the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.
- The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest tendered rate.
- The rate should be quoted in figures and words.
- Taxes as per rules in force will be deducted from the bill at the time of payment.
- No any interest on principal amount may be claimed by the contractors for delay payment in future

The following valid documents should be enclosed with the tender

- Photocopy of Professional Tax Clearance Certificate.
- Photocopy of CST Registration and Clearance Certificate.
- Photocopy at Govt./KAAC Registration Certificate.
- Original copy of Call deposit/Hank draft of any Govt. recognized Bank in favour of Superintendent, H&T Hamren
- Photocopy of Caste Certificate.
- Photocopy of PAN Card
- Photocopy of Account Number(Passbook front page)

Sd/-

Superintendent,  
Handloom and Textiles, Hamren  
West Karbi Anglong

Memo No. SHTH(A) 02/2024-25/3

Dated 19/06/2024



# When Kamal Haasan told Amitabh Bachchan he wants to play a bad guy in a movie

**MUMBAI, June 20:** South star Kamal Haasan, who plays the antagonist in "Kalki 2898 AD", on Wednesday said he was craving to play a bad man onscreen and is glad he got the opportunity through the upcoming movie.

Set in a post-apocalyptic world, the film features top movie stars like Amitabh Bachchan as the immortal Ashwatthama and Prabhas as Bhairava, an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu.

Haasan plays the role of Supreme Yashin in "Kalki 2898 AD", directed by Nag Ashwin. The film also stars Deepika Padukone as Sumathi.

"I was (telling) backstage to Amit ji (Bachchan) about how I always wanted to play a bad man because the bad man gets to do all the good things. Where the heroes are singing romantic songs and waiting for the heroine, he (bad guy) can just go ahead and do what he wants.

"I thought I'm going to play the bad man so it's going to be fun. But then, he (Ashwin) wanted it to be different. I'm almost like a sage in the film with a bad idea," Haasan told reporters here at a promotional event of the film.

Speaking about his menacing look bald in the film, Haasan said the idea was to do something that hasn't been explored before.

"We had a lot to talk about (the look), and also not look like something else that I had done already or somebody else has done already. I thought I've a fantastic idea and I had not seen any images of the film, so I thought I would dress myself up in such a way that people would turn around and look at me.

"I was like, 'I'll do research', and I got to know that, 'Amit ji is doing it (the film)'. Then I thought, I'll come with armour, I was told, 'Prabhas has got that'. I didn't want to be pregnant in the film (referring to Padukone's character Sumathi), otherwise I would've tried that as well. With a good director, even that would've been possible," the 69-year-old actor said.

He further said the team went to Los Angeles to get the right look for his character.

"We travelled to LA, we failed a couple of times before we arrived at the acceptable look. So, it's a collaboration. I hope the audience will react the same way we did when we saw the first look," he added.

Haasan recalled being stunned when he was first approached for "Kalki 2898 AD".

Calling Ashwin as an ordinary man with an extraordinary idea, just like his mentor the late leg-

endary filmmaker K Balachander, the actor said the director knew how to present his vision.

"I'm used to these kind of ordinary looking people (referring to Ashwin) who do extraordinary things. My boss, my mentor (K Balachander) was one such man. He looked like a government official. If he entered any house, you'll think there's been an income tax raid.

"But I've seen what he was capable of from the kind of films he did. I think 'Ek Duuje Ke Liye' was his 60th or 70th film. So, I was not surprised. I don't underestimate these ordinary looking guys. They have a depth that doesn't show unless you talk to them. I had the opportunity of talking to him, he is a man of a few words," he added. At the event, Bachchan presented the first movie ticket of "Kalki 2898 AD" to Haasan.

He fondly recalled watching Bachchan's 1975 blockbuster "Sholay" weeks after it had been released in cinema halls.

"I wish this had happened four to five decades ago as I waited for three weeks to watch 'Sholay'... I never thought I'd get a first day-first show ticket from Mr Amitabh Bachchan. I was a film technician and now I'm an actor. But, not much has changed," he said. (PTI)



## Sunny Deol to star in Gopichand Malineni's action film



**NEW DELHI, June 20:** Superstar Sunny Deol is set to join hands with filmmaker Gopichand Malineni for "the biggest action film of the country", the makers said on Thursday. The upcoming movie will be produced by Mythri Movie Makers and People Media Factory. Deol shared the project announcement on his X page.

"Make way for the biggest action film of the country - #SDGM. Starring Action Superstar @iamsunnydeol. Directed by @megopichand Produced by @MythriOfficial & @peoplemediafactory MASS FEAST LOADING! Shoot begins soon. @MusicThaman @RishiPunjabi5 @artkolla," he wrote. Malineni, known for Telugu action films such as "Don Seenu", "Bodyguard", "Balupu", and "Veera Simha Reddy", also shared the update on the microblogging site. "Excited to announce my next project with the Action Superstar @iamsunnydeol sir!"

"Thrilled to be teaming up with @MusicThaman Bawa @RishiPunjabi5 sir, @NavinNooli brother and @artkolla for #SDGM. This venture is being produced by the amazing teams at @MythriOfficial & @peoplemediafactory. We need all your support and blessings," the director posted. Deol, who was last seen in the 2022 blockbuster hit "Gadar 2", will next be seen in Rajkumar Santoshi's "Lahore 1947". Malineni also has another film with frequent collaborator and Telugu star Ravi Teja in the pipeline. (PTI)

## Jameel Khan on his journey and why 'Gullak' speaks to middle class Indians: It evokes nostalgia

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** "Gullak" star Jameel Khan still remembers his father's words when they argued over a white lie the elder Khan had told when he was young. And they were: "You won't be able to make it in business."

What he did not know at the time was that his father's words would turn out to be prophetic and he would go on to chart a different course in Mumbai, far away from the family's thriving carpet business in Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh.

Interestingly, he found fame while playing Santosh Mishra, a middle class patriarch in popular SonyLIV series "Gullak", which the actor says reflects the upbringing he and many in India have received.

"There are many people of my age, who come from lower middle class and have made a mark for themselves, for whom the show evokes a sense of nostalgia... It's a show written with a lot of love, served with a lot of love," Khan told PTI in an interview.

"We are in season four and it is on par with the previous seasons, if not higher. That's the love of the audience, they have related so wonderfully with the show," the actor said about the TVF-produced show that revolves around the daily life of the Mishra family, living in a nondescript Uttar Pradesh city.

Khan was born in an upper middle-class business family from Bhadohi, home to the largest hand-knotted carpet weaving industry hub in South Asia. Much like everyone else in the town, his father was also in the same business, specialising in Persian designs. He describes it as a "simple but happy and privileged background".

Recalling the argument with his father, the actor said, "We had a carpet business and we used to live right above the workshop. One day, a worker came and told my father that some sahab was asking for him... My father asked the worker to say that he wasn't at home. As soon as he left, I asked him 'Why did you lie?'"

His father brushed off the incident as a business matter but the actor stuck to his guns. "No, you lied!" he had said.

"My father then explained why he had to do so for the sake of business. But I was still not convinced. He then said with a laugh that

"Tumse jo hai na,

business nahin ho payega life mein' ('You won't be able to do business in life'). For me, it was either black or white."

Khan, who did his schooling from Nainital's Sherwood College and completed his graduation from Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and masters from University of Mumbai, said whatever he has achieved in life is because of his parents and their upbringing, which gave him a strong sense of morality. The shift to Mumbai came as a culture shock for the actor. "Raising one's voice is something that's frowned upon in our house. No abusive language or 'tu-tadak' (informal) at all. Then, I came to Bombay, which is culturally a very different place. So, (I would be shocked) when people would refer to me using words like 'tu' or 'tum'... But I understood that's how the language is here. I speak to my children using 'aap'... I feel everybody deserves respect whether they are younger or junior to you," he said.

For many viewers who love "Gullak", he is Santosh Mishra, the affable, honest father stuck in a dead-end government job. But the 49-year-old's career is filled with several milestones, whether it's his feature debut with Sanjay Leela Bhansali's "Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam" in 1999, "Baby" or his small but memorable role in "Gangs of Wasseypur", directed by Anurag Kashyap.

Khan credits his love for theatre for leading him to Mumbai, where he found a window into the entertainment world through veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah's theatre group Motley.

"I did many plays with them, two of my favourites are 'Manto Ismat Haazir Hain' and 'Katha Collage', which changed my life. People got to know about Jameel Khan, the actor, through this play and from there I was cast in films, advertisements and for voiceovers." (PTI)



## We grew up watching your films: Prabhas to Amitabh Bachchan

**MUMBAI, June 20:** South star Prabhas says he has been a fan of Amitabh Bachchan, his co-star on "Kalki 2898 AD", since childhood and remembers one of his uncles sporting a hairstyle that the megastar made popular in the 70s.

The actor thanked producer Aswini Dutt and director Nag Ashwin for giving him the opportunity to work with "greatest legends" like Bachchan and Kamal Haasan on the futuristic drama that also stars Deepika Padukone in the lead role.

"It's like a dream," the "Baahubali" star said, recalling how he wanted to touch Bachchan's feet in their first meeting.

"First time, when I went to meet Amitabh sir, I was going to touch his feet and he said, 'Don't do it, if you do it, I'll also do it'. I was like, 'Sir please, I can't even think,' Prabhas said at a promotional event of "Kalki 2898 AD" here last night, which was hosted by his actor friend Rana Daggubati.

According to Prabhas, Bachchan, 81, was the first actor to have achieved mass popularity across India.

"We grew up watching you (his films). One of my uncles had your hairstyle (like Bachchan). He is the first actor who reached every part of the country -- North, South, in Telugu, Tamil, everywhere. We saw men with the Amitabh Bachchan hairstyle (everywhere around us), any tall person was referred to as Amitabh Bachchan," he said.

Prabhas shared that as a kid he and his cousins would often mimic Haasan, another actor whose popularity has endured over the decades.

"When Kamal sir's 'Sagara Sangamam' came, I had asked my mother to get the (same) dress, my cousin would tuck a cloth on his tummy and act like him (Haasan), and I'm working with them, it's unbelievable."

Prabhas said he always wanted to work with Deepika.

"There are some actors who can reach so wide on an international level (like her) she is beautiful, gorgeous, a superstar, and a great actor. It's beautiful to work with her," he said about his co-star. Padukone, who is expecting her first child, said Prabhas took good care of everyone on the sets. "I'm like this because of all the food that he has fed me. Every day, at one point it was like the food was not only coming from his home it was like a full catering service. The highlight of the day almost became 'what is Prabhas feeding everyone. Those who know him well, know that he feeds from the heart,'" she said.

In "Kalki 2898 AD", Padukone plays the role of an expectant mother called Sumathi.

The actor said she was amazed by the passion of the director for the movie when she narrated the script during the COVID-19 pandemic.

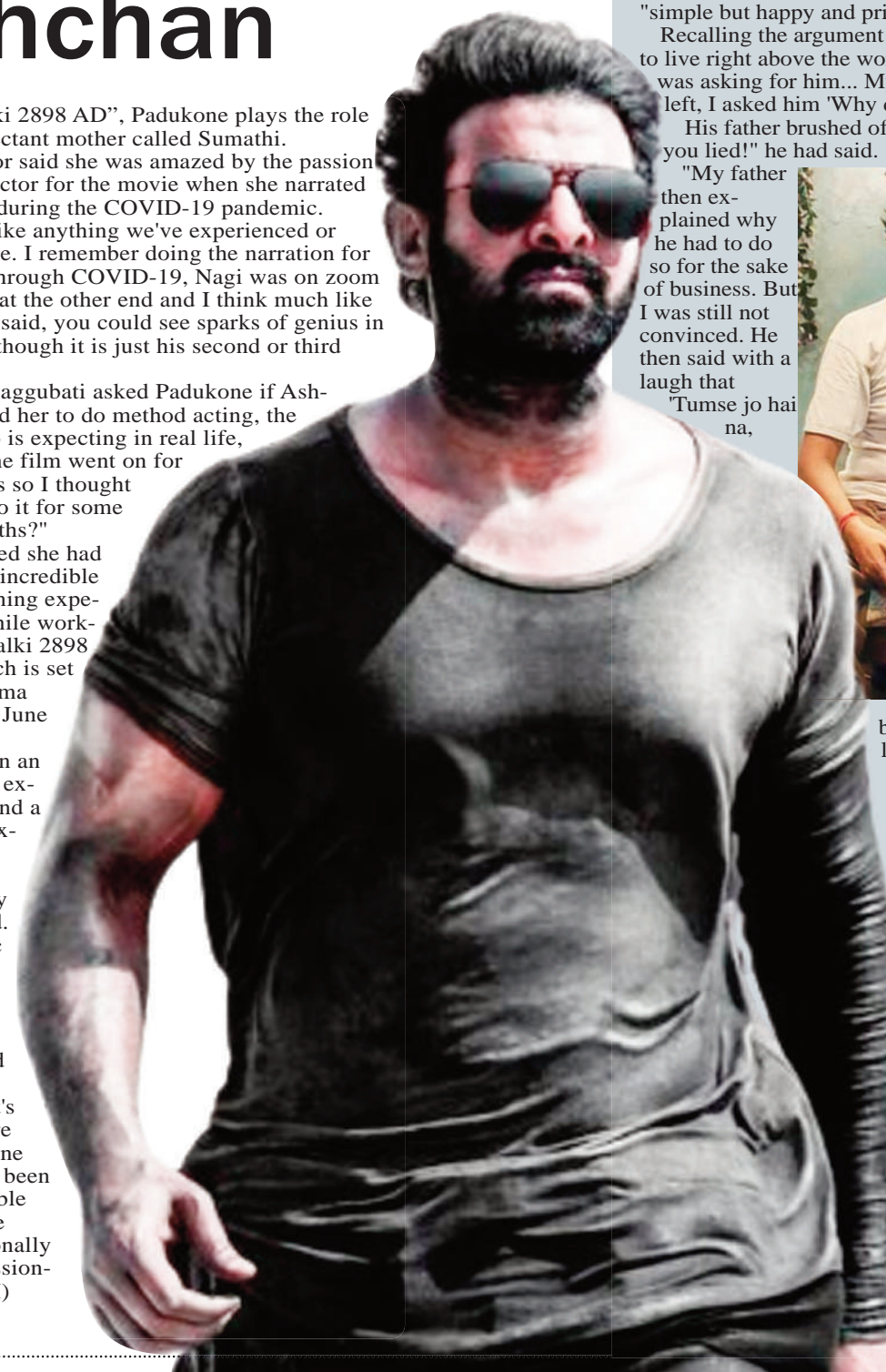
"It's unlike anything we've experienced or seen before. I remember doing the narration for this film through COVID-19, Nagi was on zoom and I was at the other end and I think much like Kamal sir said, you could see sparks of genius in him even though it is just his second or third movie."

When Daggubati asked Padukone if Ashwin pushed her to do method acting, the actor, who is expecting in real life, joked, "The film went on for three years so I thought why not do it for some more months?"

She added she had the most "incredible and a learning experience" while working on "Kalki 2898 AD", which is set to hit cinema houses on June 27.

"It's been an incredible experience and a learning experience."

It was a completely new world. The magic that is in Nagi's head, we all actors discovered along the way and it's finally here for everyone to see. It's been an incredible experience both personally and professionally." (PTI)





# Former India pacer David Johnson dies after falling from fourth-floor apartment; Police probe on

**BENGALURU, June 20:** Former India pacer David Johnson died on Thursday after falling from the balcony of his fourth-floor apartment here and an investigation is in progress to figure out if it was a case of suicide, the police has said.

Johnson, who played two Tests for India, was 52 and is survived by his wife and two children.

"It is believed that 52-year-old David Jude Johnson fell from his apartment in Kanaka Sri Layout in Kothanur. A UDR (unnatural death report) has been filed at the Kothanur police station," a statement from the state police read.

"The body is taken for post-mortem to the Ambedkar Medical College Hospital at

Shampura main road," it added.

Johnson, who was admitted to the St Philomena's Hospital last week after complaining of acute stomach pain, was battling health issues for a while now.

"None of his family members have raised any suspicion. It was a 'self-fall' and there is no eyewitness to the incident. Neither, there was a suicide note," the police said, adding a probe was nonetheless being conducted.

A senior police official later also informed that Johnson had been visiting a de-addiction centre in the city.

Earlier, a Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) official said Johnson was brought dead to a nearby hospital by the

members of his family and friends.

"We were informed that he had fallen from the fourth floor of his apartment building. He was taken to a hospital but the doctors declared him brought dead," the KSCA official told PTI.

Johnson, who was known for his pace from a slightly slinging action, took 125 First-Class wickets and 41 List A scalps from 33 matches.

His finest effort in the domestic circuit was a 10 for 152 against Kerala in the Ranji Trophy, and it brought him into national reckoning.

In his prime, Johnson, who played two Tests and 39 First-Class matches, was the member



of a formidable Karnataka bowling unit that also featured Anil Kumble, Javagal Srinath, Venkatesh Prasad and Dadda Ganesh.

"It is shocking news as we had played together from our tennis cricket days for a club called Jai Karnataka," Ganesh, also a former India pacer and Johnson's long-time friend, told PTI.

He fondly recalled their time together on the field.

"Later we played together for the state and the country. That Karnataka bowling attack was the Indian bowling attack for a long time.

"In fact, six members from the state, including Rahul Dravid, were in the India squad at the

same time. I doubt any other state has managed that feat," said Ganesh.

Legendary leg-spinner Anil Kumble condoled his one-time teammate's death.

"Saddened to hear of the passing of my cricketing colleague David Johnson. Heartfelt condolences to his family. Gone too soon 'Benny'," Kumble wrote on X.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah too extended his condolences to the bereaved family.

"Deepest condolences to family and friends of our former Indian fast bowler David Johnson. His contributions to the game will always be remembered," Shah wrote on X. (PTI)

## Shaqiri scores stunning goal in Switzerland's 1-1 draw with Scotland at Euro 2024

**COLOGNE (GERMANY), June 20:** "Shaq" did it again. At the age of 32 and having left top-flight European soccer behind to play in MLS, Xherdan Shaqiri is back on the international stage and back scoring again.

His stunning first-half strike secured a 1-1 draw for Switzerland against Scotland at Euro 2024 on Wednesday.

It is the sixth-straight major international tournament in which Shaqiri has scored, dating to the World Cup in 2014.

That's three World Cups in a row and now three European Championships for the Chicago Fire forward. According to UEFA he is the first player to achieve that feat.

"He proved tonight that he lives and breathes for moments like these," Switzerland coach Murat Yakin said.

Shaqiri rolled back the years with a first-time curling effort from about 20 meters out at Cologne Stadium.

Scotland led from the 13th minute when Scott McTominay's shot took a wicked deflection off Fabian Schar to beat Switzerland goalkeeper Yann Sommer.

But Shaqiri pounced on Anthony Ralston's loose pass in the 26th to even the match with a left-footed shot into the top corner and past Scotland keeper Angus Gunn.

"If that chance falls to any other player in the Swiss team,



it's not a goal," Scotland manager Steve Clarke said. "You knew when it was rolling towards Shaqiri it was destined for the back of the net. He's a top, top player, so you don't give top, top players that kind of chance."

Shaqiri's career has seen him play for some of Europe's most iconic teams, including Bayern Munich, Inter Milan and Liverpool. He joined the Fire two years ago, but in that time has continued to produce for his

country on the biggest stage.

"Shaq always gives everything in training," Switzerland defender Manuel Akanji said. "I don't know how many other players are able to score that goal."

The draw leaves Switzerland on four points, second in Group A behind Germany and likely to advance to the round of 16.

Germany became the first nation to advance after a 2-0 win over Hungary earlier in the day. Scotland's hopes of making the

knockout round depend on its final game against Hungary on Sunday and results elsewhere. No team has failed to advance from the group stage with four points.

Both teams had chances to win the game.

The Swiss should have taken the lead just before the hour mark when Dan Ndoye turned Kieran Tierney on the edge of the box. With just goalkeeper Angus Gunn to beat, Ndoye fired wide

of goal.

Grant Hanley then headed against the post from a Scotland free kick and Switzerland's Zeki Amdouni headed wide at the far post late on.

Scotland has never advanced beyond the group stage of a World Cup or Euros on 11 previous attempts.

But repeated disappointment doesn't seem to dampen optimism among its fans, who filled Cologne's square before the game.

Swiss supporters were out in numbers, too, creating a raucous atmosphere in the stadium.

It was certainly a more enjoyable evening for Scotland's fans than the opening game of the Euros — a 5-1 loss to Germany.

"It was what we expected. It was a good reaction to a disappointing night. We're still alive in the tournament," Clarke said.

Goals from Jamal Musiala and Ilkay Gundogan made it two wins from two for host Germany after victory against Hungary and ensured there would be no repeat of its group stage exit from the 2022 World Cup.

Albania substitute Klaus Gjasula scored in the fifth minute of stoppage time to hold World Cup semifinalist Croatia to a 2-2 draw in Group B. Gjasula's own goal, just four minutes after entering the game in the second half, had looked like handing Croatia the win until his late strike. (AP)

## Diksha confident as she aims to defend her title in Czech Republic



**BEROUN (CZECH REPUBLIC), June 20:** Diksha Dagar will return to defend her title on the Ladies European Tour (LET) at the Tipsport Czech Ladies Open following a stunning last season where she had nine Top-10 finishes, which placed her third on the 2023 Order of Merit.

The two-time winner on the Tour had secured a three-shot victory at Royal Beroun Golf Club to win her second title last year and would be among five Indians who would try their luck in the event over the weekend.

The other Indians in the field are rookie Pranavi Urs, experienced Tvesa Malik and Vani Kapoor, and Ridhima Dilawari.

Diksha is coming into the tournament on the back of a Top-10 finish last week.

"It's always amazing to be back here as the defending champion because it is a very rare opportunity to defend your title and it's a new challenge for me," said Diksha.

"I would love to win again. If I can do that, it will be a mark off my bucket list. I remember on the second day, I played seven-under. I remember every shot and every hole because it was very precious to me.

"It is always a special moment having your parent on your bag, especially your family," said Diksha, whose father Narinder Dagar is her caddy.

"He will be my caddy and he also knows about the course well, it's going to be so exciting for us."

It's been a good start to the 2024 season for Diksha, who has had four Top-10 finishes to

date on the LET and sits 10th in the Order of Merit. Her best has been a third-place finish at the Joburg Open and she was sixth last week in the Ladies Italian Open.

The 23-year-old believes she is in good form and is hoping to carry some positive vibes.

"This golf course is in the same condition as last year. The greens are smaller. I love smaller greens on the golf course. The greens are a bit different to last week in Italy, I have to read carefully because it will be more challenging.

"I feel I am keeping up my game and going in a very good momentum. I'm super excited playing this tournament.

"I played in the Pro-Am and putted really well, made lots of birdies. I feel there are going to be some positive vibes coming in and I'm sure I can do well and finish in the top 10 again."

Having been successful on this golf course previously, Dagar is hopeful that her third LET title is just around the corner.

"I always enjoy here. Before winning in the Czech last year, I was playing well. I was in the leading group in Germany and also Belgium.

"I was hoping that I was very close to winning and finally it happened, after a long gap of five years. This year is the same, I finished in the top-10 last week, so I feel I am getting closer to the win."

The 2023 championship gets her title defence underway at 1.14 pm (local time) on June 21 alongside Czech Republic's Klara Davison Spilkova and Spain's Nuria Izturiz. (PTI)

## Estonia's Sahil Chauhan calls Rohit Sharma his inspiration after world record T20 ton

**MUMBAI, June 20:** India-born Estonia batter Sahil Chauhan has called Rohit Sharma his inspiration after smacking the fastest ever T20 century, which came off a mere 27 balls, against Cyprus.

The 32-year-old Chauhan clattered 18 sixes and six fours to make a whirlwind 41-ball 144 not out on Monday.

He broke the record for the fastest century in all T20 cricket, held by Chris Gayle who had made a 30-ball ton in the Indian Premier League, as well as Namibia's Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton's record of fastest T20 Interna-

tional century (off 33 balls). "I've been a big Rohit Sharma fan since I watched him play, he's a brilliant player who doesn't take any pressure," Chauhan was quoted as saying by FanCode. "Regardless of the situation, he always plays his game. I have learned a lot from him. His hook shots are my favourite," said Chauhan, who hails from Manakpur Devil village in Haryana. Recalling his journey from a village in Haryana to Estonia and discovering cricket in the European country, Chauhan admitted he was pleasantly surprised to get an opportunity. "My

uncle was the reason I moved to Estonia. He has a small restaurant business and that is where I work," he said. "I started playing here in 2019. I was really bored so I started searching on Google for cricket in Estonia (and) I found a team's contact information and called them. I asked, 'Are you playing cricket?' They replied, 'yes, we play cricket'." "I said, 'Are you serious about this?' and they responded, 'yes'. That's how I started playing the game here," he added. Chauhan said he has played cricket right from his childhood. "I used to play a lot of

cricket in my village back in India. I started right from the age of 6-7, playing gully cricket and never really stopped," he said.

Chasing 192, Estonia had slipped to 40 for three in the fifth over when Chauhan walked out to bat at No.5 and helped his side wrap up the win with six wickets and seven overs to spare. "I was just thinking about the innings and the target we had to chase. I just played to the merit of the ball, and that's it. The ball was coming nicely to the bat, and I was just playing my shots," he recalled about his knock. (PTI)



terms of injuries, (for) every fast bowler, there is always risk of being injured. But at the same time you can't go out there thinking that way.

"You've got to go out there and do the job to the best of your ability and whatever happens, happens. The only way he should change is if he, may be, sustains a serious injury or has to re-model his action or something," said the 60-year-old who played 98 Tests

for the West Indies taking 405 wickets.

Ambrose, who troubled the world's best batters with the extra bounce he created because of his 6'7" frame, also doesn't believe that the stress on Bumrah's back is only because of his action.

"I've never been through it (stress fracture). So it would be unfair for me to even try to say what to do. I will leave that for the medical expert. I don't think Bum-

rah's stress comes totally from his action.

"You can look at Ian Bishop, he had a perfect action and he also had stress fracture," reasoned the cricketer from Antigua.

The international calendar is busier than ever before with T20 leagues around the world taking a lot of space. Ambrose acknowledged that the game has changed drastically and too much cricket is having an adverse impact.

"The game has become a bit more commercialised. Too much cricket is being played as well. Players are leaving from one series to the next, there is franchise cricket as well. Guys could get burnt out.

"It's still exciting, there are wonderful players around but too much cricket is being played and that to me would be a bit of a concern," said Ambrose.

The fearsome pacer from Antigua played plenty of limited overs cricket but for him Test cricket is the only format that produces legends. (PTI)

**BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS), June 20:** Curtly Ambrose is a huge fan of Jasprit Bumrah and despite the Indian spearhead's struggles with stress fractures in the past, the Caribbean legend would not want to change anything in his unorthodox action as he feels every fast bowler takes the field with a risk of getting injured.

Bumrah, arguably the best all-format pacer in the game right now, has had his fair share of back problems and underwent a surgery in March last year. After a long rehab, Bumrah made a comeback ahead of the ODI World Cup in India in November and he has not looked back since then.

The 30-year-old can get wickets in a T20 at any stage of the game and in the longest format, he has the ability to strike with both the new and the old ball, more so when it is reversing.

In a telephonic interview with PTI, Ambrose said Bumrah should not change a thing unless he sustains a serious injury.

"What I can tell you something about Jasprit Bumrah, I'm a big fan. Right from ever since I saw him the first time. He's so unconventional but highly effective. And that's what I like about him. When you look at traditional fast bowlers, you wouldn't look at Bumrah, he's so unorthodox.

"He has done a great job for India and still doing a great job in all formats. I met him a couple of years ago when India played in Antigua. He's someone I've always enjoyed watching because he's so different," said Ambrose who is involved with promoting the ongoing T20 World Cup here.

Bumrah's open-chested action does put pressure on his back but Ambrose believes every fast bowler has to deal with risks like that.

"From my little experience, there are no two bowlers who are exactly alike. Bowlers may have similarities but they are never exactly alike and we all have our different styles everyone is different. "In terms of his longevity, in

## Hall of Famer Waisale Serevi named head coach of Indian men's, women's rugby 7s teams

**NEW DELHI, June 20:** World Rugby Hall of Famer Waisale Serevi, who is widely considered the greatest rugby sevens player of all time, has been appointed head coach of the Indian men's and women's teams. The Fijian also enjoyed a long career in fifteen-a-side rugby at both club and national levels.

Renowned globally as the 'King of Sevens', he was also an advisor on behalf of World Rugby to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), for the inclusion of Rugby Sevens in the Olympics. "The core impetus for all of us at Rugby India is to do better today than we did yesterday. To go one step further every day in our quest to compete with the world's best," said Rahul Bose,

President, Rugby India.

"...it is a privilege for us to welcome Waisale Serevi as the Head Coach of the Indian National Sevens teams. We wish him the best and are excited to see him mold the future of Indian Rugby," he added.

A five-time winner at the prestigious Hong Kong Sevens, Serevi steered Fiji to their maiden world series title in his first year as player-coach in 2005-06. His most recent stints in coaching were with the Rhinos Rugby USA, Jamaica Sevens team, and Russia Sevens team. "It is an honour and privilege for me to be part of the Rugby family in India, I am grateful and I thank god for the opportunity." (PTI)



# T20 WC: England batters look to tame strong South African bowling

**GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA), June 20:** If their authoritative win against the West Indies is a sign, England batters seemed to have found their cloak of invincibility at the right time and they will eye an encore against a formidable South African bowling unit in a Group-2 match of the T20 World Cup Super 8s here on Friday.

England were at their menacing best against the Windies, while handing them a crushing eight-wicket defeat here that has also fired them to the top of the group through a better Net Run Rate -- +1.34 against SA's +0.90.

That the winner here will have their one foot in the semifinals of this ICC showpiece will come as an additional motivation.

South Africa, on the other hand, suffered a scare from the USA before they squeezed out an 18-run win in their Super Eight opener.

English opener Phil Salt showed why he is the No. 2 T20I batter in the world when he steered a tricky 181-run chase, mixing caution and aggression en route an unbeaten 87.

Salt would once again look to give England an explosive start along with his skipper Jos Buttler, who will be eyeing some runs under his belt.

Buttler, who scored a 42 in their loss to Australia in the group stage, has not been able to convert his



starts with just 91 runs from four innings.

The return to form of Jonny Bairstow, who struck a crucial 48 not out against the West Indies, will also be a big boost for England.

Bairstow had scored just 46 runs with two single digit dismissals in this tournament.

But he used all his experience for the big match against the West Indies when he seized the momentum with his counter-attacking ap-

proach.

The challenge for the likes of Kagiso Rabada and Keshav Maharaj will be to prevent the England batters from running away with the match.

The South African duo showed exceptional control and discipline in the middle and death overs to seal a fine win against the USA, who failed to chase 28 runs from the last two overs.

The biggest positive for South Africa is Quinton de Kock redis-

covering his form. Following his poor outings with the bat -- 20, 0, 18 and 10 -- so far, De Kock smashed a 40-ball 74 against the USA.

England will also have a better idea of the conditions having already played against the West Indies here.

"We've still got a couple more games to win. Different venue, different surfaces. Never know what you're going to get out there," De Kock had said after the match

against the US.

While Salt and Bairstow dominated with the bat, the English bowlers also showed how to bowl on a placid track, while bowling 52 dot balls that prevented the West Indies from posting a second successive 200-plus total.

Adil Rashid was phenomenal with an economy of 5.25, while Jofra Archer also contained the Windies batters with 12 dot balls.

It denied Windies at least 20 runs, and English duo will look to tighten the noose against the likes of De Kock and Heinrich Klaasen.

"We bowled well to restrict a powerful batting line-up. Now, it's important to put this to bed and focus (on the next match)," said Buttler.

**Teams:**

**England:** Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley and Mark Wood.

**South Africa:** Aiden Markram (c), Ottiel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi and Tristan Stubbs.

Match starts: 8pm IST. (PTI)

# T20 WC: Australia need all-round effort against tricky Bangladesh



**NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA), June 20:** It's a mismatch on paper but title-favourites Australia would be wary of slipping on the proverbial banana peel that Bangladesh can be when the two teams clash in their Super Eight, Group 1, match of the T20 World Cup here on Friday.

Australia, champions of the 2021 edition of the tournament, will be mindful of the dangers of taking Bangladesh lightly.

The supremely confident team from Down Under was humbled 1-4 by the South Asians in a T20 International series in 2021, and any laxity can be severely punished in conditions here that have close resemblance to the sub-continent.

From an Australian perspective, it might bring increased onus on leg-spinner Adam Zampa and part-timers such as Glenn Maxwell and Travis Head.

Keeping in mind the inherent slowness of the pitch here, the Aussies might also mull retaining left-arm spinner Ashton Agar, who is a handy bat too, from their last group match against Scotland.

But irrespective of the conditions or nature of the pitch, Australia's real strength lies in its pacers -- Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood -- who are persistently nagging.

Cummins and Hazlewood are set to return for this match after sitting out of the Scotland game.

The Aussies have also received a boost as captain Mitchell Marsh has declared himself fit to bowl in the Super Eight stage.

"I'll be available to bowl. With the line-up that we've got, I don't really necessarily see a need for me to bowl."

"But I think it's really important in this format to have options and we're blessed with plenty of those," said Marsh in the pre-match press conference.

Not just in bowling, Australia carry heavy guns through their batting line-up as well.

Their top-six consisting of Head,

David Warner, Marsh, Maxwell, Marcus Stoinis and Tim David can be a threat to any bowling line-up in the world.

All of them have chipped in with runs at various stages of this ICC showpiece, and now they will eye a collective firing.

Bangladesh will hope that their assortment of clever and experienced T20 bowlers like Mustafizur Rahman, Shakib Al Hasan, Mahmudullah and Taskin Ahmed can deliver against the Australian batters.

However, Bangladesh's real problem lies in a rickety batting line-up.

The batters are as experienced as any of their counterparts in the T20 format, but in this tournament, they have not really joined the party.

They stuttered through the group stage matches, and the highest total they could post was 159 for five against Netherlands.

Their other totals were 125/8, 109/7 (both while chasing against Sri Lanka and South Africa respectively), and 106 while batting first against Nepal.

So, there is a need for them to find their rhythm against a storied opponent.

**Teams:**

**Australia:** Mitchell Marsh (c), Ashton Agar, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa. Travelling Reserves: Jake Fraser-McGurk, Matt Short.

**Bangladesh:** Najmul Hossain Shanto (c), Taskin Ahmed, Litton Das, Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Shakib Al Hasan, Tawhid Hridoy, Mahmud Ullah Riyad, Jaker Ali Anik, Tanvir Islam, Shak Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib. Travelling reserves: Afif Hossain, Hasan Mahmud.

Match starts at 6 AM IST. (PTI)

## Indian rower Balraj Panwar to leave for Paris 20 days in advance to 'acclimatise well'

**KOLKATA, June 20:** Competing in the high-endurance men's singles sculls rowing event at the Olympics can be tough, but Balraj Panwar, India's only qualifier for the Paris Games, hopes to make it count by training there for 20 days.

Panwar will be among the first batch of athletes to reach Paris to acclimatise themselves to the conditions.

"We are going there 20 days in advance and I'm sure it won't feel 'strange'. It will help us acclimatise to the weather and be ready," Panwar said in a virtual media interaction organised jointly by SAI, IOA and the Rowing Federation of India.

Indian doubles sculls rower Salman Khan will be his training partner and will set the pace for him during training at a club in France before the actual competition.

"You are alone in the waters in men's singles sculls and there is a lot of mental as well as physical training needed. With Salman in training, I hope to get myself ready fully before the big event." (PTI)

## Hockey India names 27 core probables for pre-Olympic camp; striker Dilpreet misses out

**BENGALURU, June 20:** Hockey India on Thursday decided to keep faith in its proven performers while announcing a 27-strong list of men's team core probables for a pre-Olympic national camp which will be conducted from June 21 to July 8 at the SAI centre here.

India are placed in a tough Pool B in the Olympics along side Belgium, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia and Ireland. The Tokyo Games bronze-winners will start their Olympic campaign against New Zealand on July 27.

The Indian team is returning to the national camp after a successful outing in the FIH Hockey Pro League, where it currently occupies the fourth spot after earning 24 points from 16 matches.

The core group includes goalkeepers Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh, Suraj Karkera and defenders Harmanpreet Singh, Jarnanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay and Amir Ali.



The mid-fielders called up include Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Sumit, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Vishnukant Singh, Akashdeep Singh and Mohammed Raheel Mouseen.

Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Gurjant Singh, Bobby Singh Dhami and Arajjeet Singh Hundal are the for-

wards who have been included.

Striker Dilpreet Singh is a notable absentee from the core list. Indian men's hockey team chief coach Craig Fulton feels the Pro League outing against top teams of the world was a great experience for his side.

"We are looking to start an important block of training in this camp, and we need to make sure that we are in the best form ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympics. The

players have learned a lot from their matches in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24," he said.

"It has helped us in realising where we need to improve. We have a lot of time to work on those areas. We have a strong mix of players who are capable of winning anything," the South African added.

**Goalkeepers:** Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh, Suraj Karkera

**Defenders:** Harmanpreet Singh, Jarnanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay, Amir Ali

**Midfielders:** Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Sumit, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Vishnukant Singh, Akashdeep Singh, Mohammed Raheel Mouseen

**Forwards:** Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Gurjant Singh, Bobby Singh Dhami, Arajjeet Singh Hundal. (PTI)

## My priority is playing for NZ, even though SA20 is exciting: Kane Williamson



**WELLINGTON, June 20:** Kane Williamson said the intention to play in next year's SA20 was the catalyst behind him declining the New Zealand central contract, but reaffirmed his commitment to play for his country in all three formats outside of the T20 league.

The SA20 is scheduled between January 9 and February 8, 2025, which clashes with the dates of the Super Smash in New Zealand.

As per NZ rules, a player has

to play in Super Smash if they are not on an international assignment to be eligible for a central contract.

"I want to play as long as I can. There's a number of great competitions during that time, but SA20 looks really exciting. Unfortunately, it meant turning down a central contract," Williamson told reporters upon his arrival in New Zealand from the T20 World Cup, where his side failed to enter the

Super Eight stage.

Consequently, Williamson had also stepped down from the Kiwis' captaincy in white-ball formats but the elegant right-hander insisted that his international career was far from over.

"My priority still is, absolutely, playing for New Zealand. Think I might miss maybe a handful of games over a three-week period," he added.

It meant that Williamson would

miss the ODI and T20I series against Sri Lanka in January next year.

But he will be available for the one-off Test against Afghanistan in September, besides the WTC matches against India and Sri Lanka away and the three-match series against England at home.

"It's simply the contract, the rules that currently exist meant I wasn't able to have one but in terms of playing for New Zealand I'm not missing almost any cricket really, so that was important to me," he said.

Williamson said he was eagerly waiting to see how the leadership role of New Zealand evolves in white ball formats.

"I've really, really enjoyed my time captaining and it's been a privilege and an honour to do that for a number of years."

"I'm excited with what's next for the team in terms of the leadership as well and looking forward to being part of that," he added.

The 33-year-old also did not attach any time-frame to his career, saying he was taking it one year at a time.

"In terms of a timeframe, it's difficult to say. I want to keep being fit, doing as well as I can, keep trying to improve. All major events and key series are things that whet the appetite and are an exciting prospect."

"But being part of this team is so dear to me and I want to remain in that community as long as I can, and as long as I'm offering value," he said. (PTI)

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