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PRICE ₹ 8

Direct benefit transfer to over 2 lakh girl students Assam cabinet greenlights Nijut Moina scheme

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 12: In a bid to increase enrolment of girl students, the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday announced financial assistance to them under the Mukhya Mantri Nijut Moina scheme.

The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting chaired under the chairmanship of Sarma. Sarma informed that under the scheme the girl students would get monthly stipend through direct benefit transfers, adding, "The scheme would be effective in preventing child marriage".

"The Assam government has announced today a unique scheme to fight against early marriage of girl students. It is also a scheme to in-



spire them to continue with their education upto the post graduate level," Sarma added.

Sarma further said that the girl students enrolled in higher second-

ary, degree first year and PG first year of government and venture schools, colleges, and universities irrespective of their economic status are eligible for this scheme.

"However, students enrolled in private institutions will not be eligible for the scheme," he said. Under the scheme students enrolled in class 11 would receive ₹ 1000 per month over a period of 10 months totalling ₹ 10,000. Students enrolled in graduation 1st year (BA/Bsc/Bcom) would receive Rs 1250 per month over a period of 10 months totalling ₹ 12,500.

For students enrolled in post graduation 1st year (Bed/MA/MSc/M.com) would get ₹ 2500 per month for a period of 10 months, totalling ₹ 25,000. The chief minister said that the total outlay of the scheme would be ₹ 1500 crore benefiting over 2 lakh girl students of the state. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Several Indians among 49 killed in Kuwait apartment blaze

DUBAI/KUWAIT CITY, June 12: A massive fire engulfed a multi-storey building in Kuwait housing foreign workers, mostly Indians, early on Wednesday, killing at least 49 people and injuring more than 50 others, according to officials.

Most deaths were due to smoke inhalation while residents were sleeping, and a significant number of occupants were evacuated, they added.

The fire started in a kitchen in the six-storey building in the Mangaf area in Kuwait's southern Ahmadi Governorate, officials said, adding that the building reportedly had nearly 200 people living in it, who are workers of the same company.

In a statement, the Interior Ministry said that the death toll from the tragic fire has reached 49, the Kuwait Times newspaper reported.

The ministry said that criminal evidence department personnel are currently working on identifying the



victims on site and revealing the cause of the fire and added that strict measures will be taken against building owners who violate the law. "Unfortunately, we received a report of a fire at... exactly 6:00 am (0830 IST) in the Mangaf area,"

major general Eid Al-Owaihian, head of the interior ministry's General Department of Criminal Evidence, said. The majority of the deceased were Indian nationals from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and north Indian states. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

First session of 18th Lok Sabha from June 24

Budget likely in late July

NEW DELHI, June 12: The first session of the 18th Lok Sabha will begin on June 24 during which new members of the Lower House will take oath and the Speaker will be elected. Parliamentary Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju said on Wednesday.

President Droupadi Murmu will address a joint sitting of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha on June 27 and is likely to outline the new government's roadmap for the next five years. The session will conclude on July 3. The first three days of the first session will see the newly elected leaders taking oath and electing the Speaker of the House. Both Houses of Parliament are expected to reconvene in the third week of July for the presentation of the Union Budget.

Nirmala Sitharaman is set to become the first finance minister to present seven consecutive Union Budgets, surpassing the record of

Morarji Desai, who had presented six budgets in a row.

"First session of 18th Lok Sabha is being summoned from 24/6/24 to 3/7/24 for oath/affirmation of newly elected members, election of Speaker, President's address and discussion thereon," Rijiju said in a post on X. He said the 264th Session of Rajya Sabha will also commence on June 27 and conclude on July 3. Prime Minister Modi is expected to introduce his council of ministers to Parliament after the President's address on June 27.

The debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address is expected to see an aggressive opposition, whose strength has increased in the 543-member House, trying to corner the NDA government on various issues. The prime minister will respond to the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address in both the Houses of Parliament. (PTI)

First meeting maps out plan for eviction drive in KA

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 12: The High Power Committee (HPC) constituted by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) to oversee an eviction drive in the Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) lands of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong held its inaugural meeting to discuss the eviction process.

Chaired by chief executive member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang, the meeting took place at the conference hall of the new KAAC Secretariat building. Attendees included HPC members and representatives from various stakeholder groups, such as social organisations, political parties, and intellectuals.

During the two-hour session starting from 11 am, discussions focused on the diligent handling of the matter and the solicitation of support from the State government, given that the police department falls under its jurisdiction.

Following the meeting, CEM



Ronghang informed the media that the eviction drive was initiated by the KAAC in compliance with a Supreme Court order to reclaim government land from encroachers.

"A resolution has been adopted in today's meeting, stipulating that before proceeding to the next phase, the HPC will obtain a copy of the notification order issued for declar-

ing PGR/VGR land in 1936, prior to independence, as a supporting document," Ronghang stated.

Regarding the total area of PGR/VGR land, the CEM disclosed that the Dongkamukam Revenue Circle in West Karbi Anglong and Phuloni Revenue Circle encompass 14,000 encroachers. The next meeting is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Dialogue, diplomacy best option to resolve Ukraine conflict: India ahead

NEW DELHI, June 12: India on Wednesday reiterated that the best option to resolve the Ukraine conflict is dialogue and diplomacy as Prime Minister Narendra Modi travels to Italy to attend the annual summit of G7 grouping that is set to focus on dealing with global geopolitical tur-

moil. Modi, accompanied by a high-level delegation, will travel to Italy on Thursday to attend an outreach session on the summit on June 14. It will be his first trip abroad after assuming charge as prime minister for the third term.

The G7 summit, to be held in the luxury resort of Borgo Egnazia in Italy's Apulia region from June 13 to 15, is expected to be dominated by the raging war in Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza. "We have always maintained

that dialogue and diplomacy is the best option," foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra said at a media briefing when asked what would be India's approach to resolve the Ukraine conflict.

He also recalled Modi's statement in September 2022 that "today's era is not of war".

Kwatra talked about the consequences of the war including its derivative impact on food, fuel and fertiliser availability, challenges to global supply chains and disruptions in the global economy. "We have always been in the forefront to talk about not just the conflict, the need for dialogue and diplomacy but also the way the conflict is impacting on the priorities and interests of the developing countries," he said. "We have always (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Oppn's victory has 'crippled' NDA govt: Rahul

MALAPPURAM/WAYANAD (KERALA), June 12: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said that the BJP-NDA government at the Centre was a "crippled" one as the opposition dealt a fatal blow to the saffron party in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Gandhi also said that the people of the country have sent a clear message to the BJP and Narendra Modi and therefore, the prime minister will now have to change his attitude.

"The truth is, what we have today is a crippled government (at the Centre). It has been beaten so badly by the INDIA bloc that it cannot walk straight. It is certainly not a government which is capable of leading the country," he said at a public meeting at Kalpetta in Wayanad district of the state.

It was his first appearance in the state after winning the Wayanad LS seat by a huge margin for the second consecutive time.

Gandhi further said that the INDIA bloc has "completely destroyed the idea of Narendra Modi".

"Today the Narendra Modi you see is completely different from the one you saw before the election," he said.

He spoke along similar lines at Edavanna in Malappuram district, earlier in the day, where he said, "You will see that the government that has been formed in Delhi is a crippled government. The opposition has dealt a fatal blow to the BJP. You will see that even Narendra Modi's attitude will have to change."

He also said that there was "fundamental misunderstanding" on the part of the PM and Union home minister Amit Shah.

"They (PM and Shah) thought that just because they have political power, they have ED, CBI and the Income Tax department, they can dictate to people what is going to happen. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



A farmer busy in a Paddy field in Dhakuakhana on Wednesday. UB Photos

63 cases of unfair means in NEET-UG; no paper leak: NTA

NEW DELHI, June 12: Sixty-three cases of students using unfair means were reported in NEET-UG out of whom 23 have been debarred for varying periods, NTA officials said Wednesday, but reiterated the sanctity of the medical entrance exam hasn't been compromised and there has been no paper leak.

The result of the remaining 40 candidates who were found using unfair means have been withheld, NTA DG Subodh Kumar Singh told PTI.

"A committee was constituted consisting of three eminent experts in field of examination and academics to put forward different types of cases reported such as impersonation, cheating and tampering with OMR sheet," NTA DG Subodh Kumar Singh told PTI.

"On recommendations of the panel, 12 candidates were debarred from taking the exam for three years, nine candidates debarred for two years and two candidate for one year each. The result of remaining candidates has been withheld. The panel had given recommendations for each case," Singh added. The total number of cases of usage of unfair means was 63, he said.

The agency is under criticism amid allegations of irregularities and inflation of marks in the crucial medical entrance exam. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The authors find disparities in disability admissions and medical costs

Heatwaves affect people with disabilities more, Lancet study finds

NEW DELHI, June 12: People with disabilities are hit harder by heatwaves, compared to those without, according to a new research that found increased hospitalisations from being exposed to extreme heat.

Researchers from Pusan National University, South Korea, examined how exposure to heat impacted emergency admissions during warm seasons in the country - June to September. They looked at people with four types of disabilities - physical, brain lesion disorders, vision, and hearing impairments.

The study, published in The Lancet Planetary Health journal, found that this section of society was at twice the risk of hospitalisation compared to the general population, especially due to mental and respiratory diseases.

The researchers found a fourfold in-



crease in emergency admissions and seven times higher medical costs in people with disabilities.

Further, among those with disabilities, people having brain lesion disorders and severe physical disabilities,

along with women and those older than 65 years, were found to be more vulnerable to extreme heat.

The authors said the findings reveal disparities in admissions and medical expenses for individuals with disabili-

ties and those without.

The study highlights the need for informed public health policies to support and address the specific needs of this group, they said.

"As far as we know, there are still a limited number of guidelines against climate change in the context of people with disabilities. Our study sheds light on the importance of considering the population with disabilities while developing guidelines against climate change," said lead researcher Whanhee Lee from Pusan National University.

For instance, public health policies could include practical actions addressing various disabilities, along with healthcare training to consider the diverse medical conditions of people with disabilities and the impacts of climate change on their health, the authors said. Such plans (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Nifty hits fresh all-time high; Sensex climbs 150 points

MUMBAI, June 12: Benchmark equity indices ended higher on Wednesday, with the Nifty hitting its fresh record closing level, mainly due to buying in power, capital goods and industrial stocks amid a largely positive trend in global equities.

Besides, a heavy rush on select index-heavyweight counters like HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries boosted investors' sentiment, traders said.

In a highly volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 149.98 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 76,606.57. During the day, it jumped 593.94 points or 0.77 per cent to 77,050.53. The BSE benchmark is just 28.51 points away from breaching its previous lifetime peak of 77,079.04.

The NSE Nifty went up by 177.1 points or 0.76 per cent to hit its new all-time intra-day high of 23,441.95. It ended at a new closing peak of 23,322.95, up 58.10 points or 0.25 per cent.

"After opening on a positive note, the market continued to move up for the better part of the session. Intraday weakness in between has been used as a buying opportunity," Nagaraj Shetti, Senior Technical Research Analyst at



HDFC Securities, said. Power Grid was the biggest gainer on the Sensex chart, rising 2.54 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Steel, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finserv and HCL Technologies.

In contrast, Mahindra & Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Infosys and Titan were among the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.07 per cent and smallcap index climbed 1.06 per cent.

Among the sectoral indices, industrials, power, capital goods, en-

ergy, commodities, healthcare, and metal were among the biggest gainers.

On the other hand, realty and FMCG were the laggards.

"Ahead of US inflation data and FOMC meeting, global markets largely remained positive. The consensus indicates expectations of stable US inflation, but the trajectory of potential rate cuts holds significant importance for future direction, as rate cut expectations have tempered to 2 from 3 earlier."

"The domestic market is trading at new high on expectations of the final budget with a focus on

growth, which was amplified by the RBI's upgrade in GDP growth forecast," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. In Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the positive territory, while Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly with gains during the mid-session deals. US markets ended mostly higher on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.16 per cent to USD 82.87 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 111.04 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark Sensex declined 33.49 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 76,456.59 on Tuesday. In a volatile trade, the Nifty ended marginally up by 5.65 points or 0.02 per cent at 23,264.85.

"For the third consecutive day, markets remained within a narrow range and ended with slight gains...After three days of consolidation, markets are expected to react to the outcome of the US Fed meeting in early trade on Thursday, which could set the tone for the day," said Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd. (PTI)

Xiaomi Introduces 6L Air Fryer

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 12: Alongside the launch of the 14 CIVI, Xiaomi has unveiled the Xiaomi Air Fryer 6L, the newest addition to its home appliance lineup, tailored specifically for the Indian market. This latest offering is designed to cater to the evolving needs of larger families, promoting healthier lifestyles without sacrificing convenience or taste.

The Xiaomi Air Fryer 6L features an innovative adjustable capacity design, allowing users to adapt the cooking space to their needs. The fryer can switch between a generous 6L capacity and a more compact 3L, making it versatile enough for both single servings and family feasts.

Equipped with advanced 360-degree hot air circulation technology, the Xiaomi Smart Air Fryer 6L ensures effortless and healthy cooking. Its powerful 1500W motor and a 9-blade fan guarantee rapid and even heat distribution, resulting in perfectly cooked food every time. The inclusion of NTC temperature control technology allows for precise temperature regulation, enhancing efficiency and cooking results.

The Xiaomi Air Fryer 6L will be available starting June 21 at an introductory price of ₹ 5,999, inclusive of a ₹1,000 discount through an ICICI Bank offer. It will be sold across Mi.com, Amazon.in, Flipkart, and Xiaomi retail partners.

India's industrial output grows 5 pc in April

NEW DELHI, June 12: India's industrial production grew 5 per cent in April this year mainly due to good show by mining and power sectors, according to official data released on Wednesday.

The factory output measured in terms of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) witnessed a growth of 4.6 per cent in April 2023.

India's Index of Industrial Production grew by 5 per cent in April 2024, an official statement said.

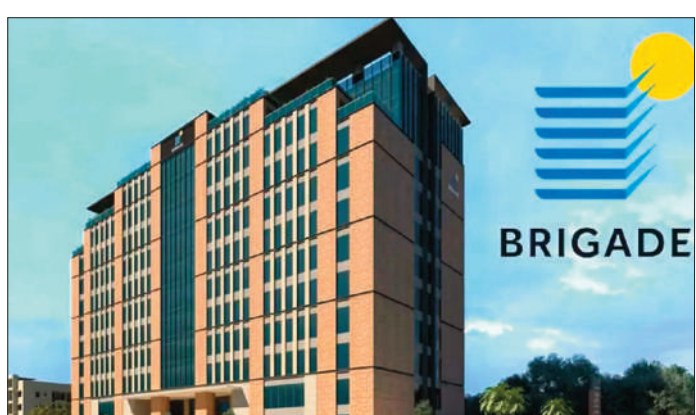
The data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) showed that the manufacturing sector's output grew 3.9 per cent in April 2024 against 5.5 per cent in the year-ago month. (PTI)

Brigade Enterprises to invest ₹ 8,000 cr in Chennai by 2030 to build homes, offices, malls, hotels

BENGALURU, June 12: Realty firm Brigade Enterprises Ltd on Wednesday announced an investment of ₹ 8,000 crore in Chennai property market for development of housing, commercial and hotel projects.

In a regulatory filing, Brigade informed that "the company has planned an investment of over ₹ 8,000 crores by 2030 in Chennai to expand its business in the city, with a strong pipeline of projects across the spectrum of residential, office, retail and hospitality for over 15 million square feet." The Gross Development Value (GDV) of the residential projects alone is estimated to be over ₹ 13,000 crore.

Brigade also announced the launch of a new project, 'Brigade Icon Residences', which is part of a mixed-use development located in the heart of Chennai's historic Mount Road. The GDV will be



over ₹ 1,800 crore.

In Chennai, Brigade Group has already completed over 5 million square feet across residential, office, hospitality and retail real estate. Its flagship project, World Trade Center Chennai, is over 90 per cent leased.

and about 1 million square feet of commercial development in Chennai.

Pavitra Shankar, Managing Director, Brigade Enterprises Ltd, said, "Chennai will be the second largest market after our hometown Bengaluru. Our aim is to double our growth in the city by expanding all four verticals of residential, commercial, retail and hospitality."

She noted that all segments are witnessing strong demand.

"We have already signed MoUs with the state government for four projects as part of their Global Investors Meet, approvals for which are in process," Shankar said.

Established in 1986, Brigade Group is one of India's leading property developers. It has a presence in Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mysuru, Kochi, Gift City-Gujarat, Thiruvananthapuram, Mangaluru and Chikkamangaluru. (PTI)

Force Motors unveils fully revamped Gurkha

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 12: Force Motors, India's largest Van manufacturer that has introduced iconic brands like the Tempo, Trax, Traveller, and Urbania on Wednesday unveiled the 3-door and the 5-door variants of their fully revamped Force Gurkha in Assam and North East. These vehicles were launched during an event in Guwahati's Khanapara.

The said vehicles are now powered by a 2.6 litre turbocharged inter-cooled diesel engine delivering 140PS and peak torque of 320Nm over a wide band from 1400 to 2600rpm.

"The ex-showroom pan India price of the 3-door variant (4-seater) is ₹ 16,75,000/- and ₹ 18,00,000/- for the 5-door (7-seater) variant (exclusive of TCS). Accessories, Road tax, registration and insurance charges will be payable extra as applicable," said an official statement.

The improved power and torque output of the new Force Gurkha enables it to cruise on the expressways at triple-digit figures and also enables it to easily extricate itself from tricky situations off the road better than any other vehicle in this class. The Force Gurkha is a testament to Force Motor's commitment towards providing an unparalleled driving experience by combining the legacy of robust engineering and manufacturing excellence.

India's diverse geography offers innumerable adventures to explore and experience, from snow-



capped peaks to deserts, scenic coastlines, tropical rainforests, wildlife sanctuaries, and ancient architectural heritage sites. The Force Gurkha is a unique vehicle that is equally comfortable doing daily commutes, highway drives, and overlanding across the country. The All-new Force Gurkha's capability has received a serious boost with a class-leading ground clearance of 233mm, 35-degree gradeability, and 700mm water-wading capability with the unique factory-fitted air intake snorkel.

The new independent front suspension has been fine-tuned in line with the increased power to offer excellent ride quality both on highways and off the road.

The stylish dual-tone 18-inch alloy wheels has lead to a taller and imposing road presence.

The Force Gurkha also comes with fully locking mechanical differentials on both axles and Electronic shift-on-the-fly for

effortless shifts into 4WD when the terrain gets rough. The All-new Force Gurkha retains the iconic and much loved Mercedes Gelandewagen inspired design synonymous with its rugged character and extreme potential.

The All-new Gurkha is the most spacious vehicle in its class offering commanding driving position, panoramic all-round visibility, and the most comfortable seating for all occupants.

It also features a new digital instrumentation cluster and a 9-inch touchscreen infotainment system to keep you entertained during those adventurous outings. The convenience features include electronically adjustable ORVMs, a start-stop function for improved efficiency, and high-intensity Force Pro-edge LED headlamps, etc. Keeping the occupants safe is the all-metal body that is frontal crash-compliant, along with the dual airbags, ABS, and EBD.

Ather Energy unveils Rizta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 12: Ather Energy, a prominent name in India's electric scooter market, has launched the Rizta, its first scooter designed specifically for families. The Rizta stands out as a practical choice for those seeking a versatile and comfortable electric scooter, boasting ample storage, a spacious seat, and numerous features that enhance the riding experience.

The Ather Rizta sports a contemporary design and is available in a range of vibrant colors. Tailored to meet the needs of Indian families, the Rizta features a large seat and extensive underseat storage. It offers one of the longest seats in its segment, comfortably

accommodating two adults and a bag.

The 34-liter boot space is also among the largest in its category, capable of holding both a full-face and a half-face helmet, with additional room for other items. Additionally, the storage compartment includes a charging slot for mobile devices and other electronics. A smaller storage space, the "joey pocket," is ideal for wallets, keys, and other small items.

The Rizta comes in two variants: the Rizta S and Rizta Z. The Rizta S and Rizta Z with a 2.9 kWh battery offer an IDC range of 123 km, while the Rizta Z with a 3.7 kWh battery extends the range to 159 km per charge.

The scooter features a top speed of 80 km/h and two riding modes, Zip and SmartEco. Its linear throttle response makes it accessible for riders of all skill levels and capable of handling steep slopes.

Bookings for the Rizta are now open, with deliveries beginning in June 2024. The Rizta S with a 2.9 kWh battery is priced at ₹1,09,999. The Rizta Z models are available at ₹1,24,999 for the 2.9 kWh variant and ₹1,44,999 for the 3.7 kWh variant (ex-showroom Bengaluru). The Rizta S comes in three monotone colors, while the Rizta Z is available in seven colors, including three monotone and four dual-tone options, perfect for daily commutes and short-distance travel.

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Assam cabinet greenlights

"However, for the current academic session benefits can be availed for 9 months. From second year onwards, no application needs to be submitted. A certificate from the head of the institution certifying her continuity in the institution will be sufficient for availing the benefits," Sarma stated.

The chief minister also said that the preparation of the scheme through form distribution will begin in July for colleges and in September for universities. Explaining further about the scheme, Sarma said that daughters of MPs/MLAs and ministers would not be able to get benefits from this scheme.

"Married girl students except PG and Bed students, girl students who receive scooters under Pragyan Bharati Scheme and girl students enrolled in private institutions will not be benefited under the scheme," he said.

The scheme benefits will be disbursed to all beneficiaries from October 11 via direct benefit transfer.

The chief minister further said that the cabinet has also decided that from this academic year both boys and girls who score more than 75 per cent marks will receive ₹ 10,000 as a one-time financial grant under the Anundoram Borooah Scheme. "From next academic year, scooters will be distributed to both boy and girl students who secure more than 75 per cent marks," he said. Sarma added that to enhance the quality of infrastructure in state-run educational institutions, the cabinet has accorded approval to upgrade 126 schools, with an allocation of ₹ 8 crore to each school.

Several Indians among

Their ages ranged between 20 and 50 years, he was quoted as saying by English language daily Arab Times. The building is rented by the NBTC group. Sources said that five firefighters sustained injuries during the rescue operation.

"In connection with the tragic fire accident involving Indian workers today, the Embassy has put in place an emergency helpline number: +965-65505246. All concerned are requested to connect over this helpline for updates. Embassy remains committed to render all possible assistance," the Indian Embassy in Kuwait said in a post on X. Indians constitute 21 per cent (1 million) of the total population of Kuwait and 30 per cent of its workforce (approximately 9 lakhs).

"The fire mishap in Kuwait City is saddening. My thoughts are with all those who have lost their near and dear ones. I pray that the injured recover at the earliest. The Indian Embassy in Kuwait is closely monitoring the situation and working with the authorities there to assist the affected," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on X.

At the direction of Prime Minister Modi, minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh is rushing to Kuwait to oversee assistance to Indians injured in the fire and to ensure early repatriation of mortal remains of those killed.

"Deeply shocked by the news of the fire incident in Kuwait City. There are reportedly over 40 deaths and over 50 have been hospitalized. Our Ambassador has gone to the camp. We are awaiting further information," External Affairs minister S Jaishankar said in a post on X.

"Deepest condolences to the families of those who tragically lost their lives. Wish early and full recovery to those who have been injured. Our Embassy will render the fullest assistance to all concerned in this regard," he added.

Indian Ambassador Adarsh Swaika visited the fire incident site and later hospitals where over 50 Indian workers injured in today's fire incident have been admitted. "Amb @AdarshSwaika1 visited the tragic fire-incident site in Mangaf to ascertain the situation. Embassy is in constant touch with relevant Kuwaiti law enforcement, fire service and health authorities for necessary action and emergency medical health care," the Indian mission said.

He visited the Al-Adan hospital where over 30 Indian workers injured in fire have been admitted. He met several patients and assured them of full assistance from the Embassy. Almost all are reported to be stable by hospital authorities, the mission said.

Ambassador Swaika also visited Farwaniya Hospital, where 6 injured workers, expected to be mostly Indians, were admitted. Hospital authorities confirmed that 4 of them have been released, one has been shifted to Jahra Hospital and one in the ward is reportedly stable, the Indian mission said in another post on X.

He visited Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital, where 11 injured workers have been admitted. Ten of them are expected to be released today and one in hospital is reportedly stable. He met with patients still in hospital and assured them of the Embassy's full support.

"Amb @AdarshSwaika1 visited Jahra Hospital, where 6 workers, understood to be Indians, injured in today's fire incident, have been admitted. They are reportedly stable. Another 6 are expected to be shifted to Jahra hospital today from the Mangaf site," the Indian mission wrote on X.

The Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber al-Sabah on Wednesday ordered authorities to probe the massive fire and vowed to hold accountable those responsible for the tragedy.

Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmed Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah condoled the deaths and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured.

Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf Al-Sabah, serving as the first deputy Prime Minister, minister of Interior, and minister of Defence, has ordered police to arrest the owner of the Mangaf building where the fatal blaze occurred Wednesday, the building's janitor, as well as the owner of the company responsible for the workers pending the end of the criminal evidence personnel's examination of the scene, the Kuwait Times reported. (PTI)

First meeting maps out

scheduled for July 12. Among the attendees were MP Amarsing Tisso, former MPs Dr Jayanta Rongpi and Horensing Bey, former CEM of KAAC Jotson Bey, former state minister Holiram Terang, former MLA Dhoromung Teron, MLAs Bidyasing Englung, Darsing Ronghang, and Rupsing Teron, executive member (EM) Surji Rongphar, Elwin Teron, and principal secretary of KAAC, Mukul Kumar Saikia.

Dialogue, diplomacy best

been at forefront to offer assistance wherever we can to alleviate challenges faced by the Global South because of the conflict, humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and also to the Global South affected by conflict," he said.

The foreign secretary said India will continue to share its perspective with world leaders on the sidelines of the summit and continue to emphasise and underline the importance of dialogue and diplomacy to address the situation.

Kwatra said Modi will participate in the Outreach session along with the other countries on June 14. The session will be focused on issues relating to artificial intelligence, energy, Africa and the Mediterranean.

The foreign secretary said the prime minister's participation in the G7 summit would also provide a timely opportunity to follow up on outcomes of the G20 summit held under India's presidency last year and deliberate on issues which are significant for the Global South.

He said India's regular participation at G7 summit points to increasing recognition to New Delhi's efforts to address global challenges. Kwatra said Modi is expected to hold a bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister of Italy Giorgia Meloni. "In the meeting, the two prime ministers are expected to review the entire gamut of bilateral ties and give directions for next steps," he said.

Modi is also likely to have bilateral meetings with some other leaders. Asked whether the prime minister will hold any bilateral meeting with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Kwatra did not give a direct reply and said Modi's schedule is in the works. Modi had attended the previous G7 summit in Hiroshima in May last year. On the sidelines of the summit, he talks with Zelenskyy and a number of other leaders. (PTI)

Oppn's victory has 'Crippled' NDA

"The people of Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and all other states showed the PM that you cannot dictate to us what we want. The people of India told them that the Constitution is our voice. Do not touch the Constitution," he said.

He further said that the truth was that the PM barely escaped defeat in Varanasi and the BJP was defeated in Ayodhya.

"So, even the people of Ayodhya sent a message to the BJP that we do not appreciate hatred and violence," the Congress leader said at Edavanna. Later, at Kalpetta, Gandhi said that during the entire LS poll campaign period, the media, ED, CBI and the entire Central administration were against the INDIA bloc.

"The Election Commission designed the election to suit the PM's needs. The plan was a big drama where at the end, the PM's election will be held in Varanasi.

"The PM also violated the model code of conduct by meditating at Kanyakumari towards the end of the elections when all other candidates were forbidden from campaigning. But, he had the full media coverage. After all this, he barely escaped (defeat) in Varanasi," he said. At Kalpetta and Edavanna, Gandhi said that the fight in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls was for protecting the Constitution of India and in that fight, hatred has been defeated by love and affection and arrogance by humility.

Gandhi, during his speech at both places, held up a copy of the Constitution and claimed that the BJP leaders, prior to the elections, would say that they will change and replace it. But immediately after the LS polls results, Prime Minister Modi was seen bowing before the Constitution, he said. He also alleged that in the last 10 years, the BJP has been attacking the Constitution. Pointing to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, he said on one side there were millions of Indians who wanted to preserve their different traditions, languages, cultures and histories, and added that they will define their future.

On the other side were the PM and Shah who said they will decide what languages should be spoken and what traditions should be followed, he claimed. "The single biggest message that the people of India gave was that we have multiple traditions, states, religions and histories and every single one of them was going to be respected," Gandhi said. (PTI)

63 cases of unfair means

The matter has also reached the top court which said on Tuesday the sanctity of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG), 2024 has been affected and sought responses from the Centre and the National Testing Agency (NTA) on another plea seeking holding of the examination afresh on grounds of alleged question paper leak and other malpractices.

Amid fire from protesting students and opposition parties, the Education Ministry had last week set up a four-member panel to review the grace marks awarded to 1,563 students to compensate them for loss of time due to delay in starting examination at certain centres.

"The panel is yet to submit its report. Depending upon the panel's recommendations, either a retest will be conducted for nearly 1,600 students or an alternate mechanism may be devised to ensure no candidate faces any disadvantage," he said. Asked about allegations of marks inflation due to which 67 candidates have bagged top rank, Singh said, out of 67 candidates who got 720 out of 720 marks, 44 candidates received marks on account of revision of answer key of physics and 6 on account of loss of time. "Only two candidates who got grace marks have received 718 and 719 marks," he clarified. (PTI)

Heatwaves affect people

will also align with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for equal healthcare access and climate action, they said.

For the study, the researchers looked at the health records of nearly 60,000 beneficiaries with disabilities and over 10 lakh beneficiaries without, from the Korean National Health Insurance Service-National Sample Cohort database. (PTI)

Officials, law enforcement & community leaders rally for rehabilitation and prevention efforts

World Day Against Child Labour observed



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, June 12: Sivasagar district commissioner Aditya Vikram Yadav formally signed the board to remind all stakeholders of their commitment to ending child labour and to inaugurate the month-long Saksharta Abhiyan in the district on the occasion of World Day Against Child Labour, observed worldwide on Wednesday. Dr Bikash Ranjan Konwar, child protection officer, spoke about the importance of the day to the gathering of officials from the District Child Welfare Department, Department of Labour, Legal Aid Cell, subdivisional health officials, child helpline, district sports officer, social welfare officer, district employment office, district skill development officer, and other concerned officials. The district commissioner reviewed the work done by the concerned departments regarding child care and child protection.

Our Jagiroad correspondent adds: The District Legal Services Authority and the District Child Protection Officer's Office organised a meeting on the occasion of World Anti-Child Labour Day at the District Commissioner's Office, Morigaon on Wednesday. The meeting, chaired by district

commissioner Devashish Sharma, discussed the issue of rescuing child labourers and taking appropriate measures for their rehabilitation. It delved into controlling crimes against child labor and the justice system in detail. The district commissioner directed the concerned departments to conduct a series of raids in various factories, business establishments, hotels, and garages in the district to rescue child laborers. He also instructed them to take necessary steps for the rehabilitation of the rescued children. The meeting was attended by SP Hemant Kumar Das, who urged inspector of schools Apurba Thakuria to place a suggestion and complaint box in front of each school, allowing children to submit their issues and complaints without fear or hesitation. At the end of the meeting, everyone took an oath against child labor.

Additional district commissioner Sulakhana Barpatragohain, District Legal Services Authority secretary Kumari Aarti, district child protection officer Mridusmita Barua, heads of the police department and various departments, and representatives of child line were present at the meeting.

BPF leaders defect to UPPL

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 12: In a development concerning the ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), two prominent leaders from the Opposition BPF party joined the UPPL party in Kokrajhar on Wednesday amidst the presence of UPPL president and CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, and MCLA Mantu Boro. Swgmsar Boro, president of Koklabari Youth BPF, and Rubul Rabha, organising secretary of the central Rabha cell of the BPF party, have joined



the UPPL party in the presence of senior party leaders. The new members from different political parties and social organisations are joining the UPPL party and rendering services for the welfare and development of society. UPPL president and CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, welcomed the newly joined members and extended a warm welcome with felicitation. He said that the BPF party has now become irrelevant amongst citizens in today's juncture. "Inspired by our philosophy of 'peace, equality, justice & progress', Swgmsar Boro (president, Koklabari Block Youth BPF) and Rubul Rabha, (organising secretary, Central Rabha Cell BPF), joined our UPPL family today. I extend my heartiest welcome to them both. Together, we shall continue to strive against the forces of violence, corruption & misgovernance, and work for a peaceful, progressive & prosperous BTR," Boro added.

Farmers protest FCI's rejection of paddy procurement

HT Correspondent

DALGAON, June 12: The farmers of Dalgaon and the entire region staged a protest against the Kharupetia FCI for refusing to procure their paddy. The farmers alleged that the paddy they cultivated has not been sold because local merchants are not allowed to procure it, and neither is FCI. As the situation worsened, Drang DC Munindra Bath Ngtay visited FCI along with respective officials to check the quantity of the paddy. He told reporters that the paddy is highly moistured and hence FCI is not procuring it. However, he assured the farmers that he would work to minimise the issue and talk to local merchants.

Training program enhances local women's expertise in tea production

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 12: A two-day training and orientation program on handmade tea preparation was organised by the region's premier biodiversity conservation organisation, Aaranyak, in Kohora, Karbi Anglong, Assam, from June 9-10.

The training, held at the Community Resource Centre (CRC) in Chandrising Rongpi village of Kohora, was attended by a total of 15 women from six villages in the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong Landscape (KKL), as well as 12 interested students from the local Chandrasing Rongpi Memorial High School (CRMHS).

The program focused on the processing of handmade tea and provided orientation to the local women's groups under Alternative Sustainable Livelihood (ASL) initiatives by Aaranyak in the landscape.

Minna Tokbipi, a local entrepreneur from Englepathar village, was invited as the trainer. She provided hands-on training and orientation on handmade tea processing, which included two types of tea: green tea and Orthodox tea. She meticulously trained participants on the steps involved, starting



from plucking the tender tea leaves to boiling them, hand-withering them, and drying them in the sun. Participants were taught every step of the process to ensure the high-

ABSU commemorates 37th Bodoland Martyrs Day

Observance across districts pays tribute to martyr Sujit Narzary and Bodoland movement legacy

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 12: The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) observed the 37th Bodoland Mungkhlong San (Bodoland Martyrs Day) across the districts of the state with a befitting program scheduled on the death day of martyr Sujit Narzary, the first martyr of the Bodoland movement.

The Bodoland movement, initiated in 1987 under the leadership of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, former president of ABSU, sought separate Bodoland statehood within the Indian constitution. This movement led to the signing of three Bodo peace accords till date, including the BAC accord (Bodoland Autonomous Council) in 1993, BTC accord (Bodoland Territorial Council) in 2003, and BTR (Bodoland Territorial Region) accord in 2020, aimed at paving the way for good governance and all-round development of the region.

Martyr Sujit Narzary became the first martyr on June 12, 1987, during the Bodoland movement. Since then, ABSU has been observing the day as Bodoland Martyrs Day every year to commemorate his sacrifice.

In Kokrajhar, the central committee of ABSU, in association with the Kokrajhar district committee of ABSU, observed Bodoland Martyrs Day at Raimona Friends Club playground, Jomduar, under Gossaigaon subdivision. The observation began on Tuesday with a two-day program, which included discussions on the uplift and welfare of the students' union



and the community welfare of the Bodo community.

Thousands of delegates and observers from different district committees and anchalik committees participated in the event. ABSU president Dipen Boro hoisted the students' union flag at half-mast followed by homage to martyr Sujit Narzary and other martyrs of the Bodoland movement.

Leaders from different students' unions, social organisations, including the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region and UPPL president, Pramod

Boro, Assam Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary, MLAs Lawrence Islay and Jiran Basumatary, UN Academy director Krishna Gopal Basumatary, former ABSU president Dipak Kumar Basumatary, former ABSU leaders, UPPL leaders, and Tribal Sangha leaders were present and paid homage to martyr Sujit Narzary.

CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, recalled the contributions and sacrifices of the martyrs of the Bodoland movement, emphasising that the day marks the Bodoland martyrs, whose sacrifices have brought the region to its present juncture. "We always remember the contribution and dedication of the martyrs, and accordingly, the Bodo people are coming forward to render welfare services towards the Bodo and other down-trodden communities in the state," Boro added.

Earlier in the day, the CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro, offered floral tributes to Sujit Narzary at the martyr's tomb at the Bhatipara village under South Kokrajhar Anchalik Committee in Kokrajhar. ABSU president Dipen Boro said that the students' union organised a special session on the occasion of Bodoland Martyrs Day observation at Jomduar in Gos-

saigaon subdivision, discussing at length the welfare and developmental aspects of the Bodo community. He reiterated that ABSU would continue to remember the contributions of Bodoland martyrs in the days to come, emphasising that both the Bodo community and other down-trodden communities remember the sacrifice and contributions of Bodoland martyrs who laid down their lives for the cause of Bodoland statehood.

He assured that the martyrs' family members would be given due respect and honour in the days to come. He urged the younger generations to come forward in bringing about healthy welfare and development among society.

The district committees of Chirang, Baksa, and Udalguri also observed Bodoland Martyrs Day with various programs to mark the death day of martyr Sujit Narzary on Wednesday.

Hojai conducts mass vaccination drive for livestock health

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, June 12: A mass vaccination program for the prevention of lumpy skin disease (LSD) and brucella disease in cattle and PPR (Peste Des Petits Ruminants) disease in goats was held at Dhanuhar Basti under Pub Dhaniram Pathar Gram Panchayat of Hojai by RAIC, Hojai, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department in collaboration with the Family Strengthening Program of SOS Children's Village Hojai on Wednesday. The program was led by Dr Roshni Rai, VO, RAIC, Hojai, with her team members consisting of veterinary field assistants Mashud Ahmed Borbhuyan and Javke Teron.

The vaccination program started early in the morning at 7 am and continued until 11 am. During the camp, the health check-up of the animals was conducted, and details like pregnancy status and age of the animals were verified by the team before vaccinating them. Free deworming medicines, mineral mixtures, and other feed supplements were also distributed to the animal owners for their livestock. A total of 135 cattle and 103 goats were vaccinated, and ear tagging was done for cattle and goats for registration in the government platform to receive further services under the department.

The village-level Pashu Sakhi, MAITRI under Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department, and all animators of Dhanuhar Basti under the Family Strengthening Program, including Chittaranjan Mohanty, assistant village director, and Niranjana Das, senior CW FS, SOS CV Hojai, were present for the smooth management of the program. The community members were very happy to receive free vaccination for their cattle and goats in their village, along with health check-ups for their animals.

Restrictions on providing food and beverages during Ambubachi

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 12: The Kamrup(M) district administration has stated that organisations and institutions will not be allowed to provide food and drinking water at their discretion during Ambubachi Mela.

The Ambubachi Mela is held every year at Kamakhya pith atop Nilachal hill. The mela is slated to be held from June 22.

Additional district commissioner Biswajit Saikia chaired a meeting with representatives of various institutions and organisations involved in the Ambubachi Mela to be held at the Shaktipeeth Maa Kamakhya Dham in the city from June 22.

The Additional District Commissioner said that the institutions concerned can only make such arrangements at designated places with the permission of the district administration. In addition,



officers and employees of the food and civil supplies department will be present at each designated place. The city's Bashaisha temple authorities have also urged concerned institutions and organisations from this year to ensure free food and water. Devotees take refuge at the temple during Ambubachi mela.

There is a tradition of providing free food and drinking water to the

devotees who visit the Ambubachi Mela held at the Shaktipeeth Maa Kamakhya Temple on the slopes of the Nilachal Hills every year. Meanwhile, Additional District Commissioner Biswajit Saikia said the district administration would welcome any organization or individual interested in providing disposable chappal to the devotees walking during the upcoming Ambubachi Mela.

Nurse's mysterious death shocks Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 12: The body of Purabi Bora, a nurse at DBM Nursing Home who stayed at a hostel of the nursing home, was found under mysterious circumstances inside her room at the hostel.

The deceased nurse, hailing from the Puranigudam area, went for a morning walk with her colleagues this morning, and subsequently, her body was found in her room at the hostel, sources added.

Upon being informed, local police from Nagaon Police Station rushed to the spot and recovered the body of the unmarried nurse. The police then sent the mortal remains to Nagaon BP Civil Hospital for an autopsy to determine the cause of her mysterious death. During the preliminary investigation, police found syringes and other containers of injected materials near the body. Colleagues of the nurse suspect it might be a case of suicide related to a tragic love affair, sources added. Meanwhile, the police have registered an unnatural death (U/D) case in this regard.

Motorcycle expedition marks 25 years of Kargil victory

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, June 12: A pan-India motorcycle expedition named 'Delta 5 Motorcycle Expedition' was flagged off on the eastern route by Major General Vikrant Deshpande, General Officer Commanding, DAO Division, from the Dinjan Military Station in Dibrugarh on Tuesday to celebrate the Rajat Jayanti of the Army's historic victory in the Kargil War. The expedition aims to highlight the Army's stellar role in the war and to honor the bravehearts who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty.

The Delta 5 Motorcycle Expedition was flagged off simultaneously from three locations - Dinjan Military Station, Dhanuskodi, and Dwarka - and will converge in Delhi before culminating at Drass. The Delta 5 expedition on the eastern route will cover a distance of 4,000 km and pass through eight states and union territories. All the motorcyclists participating in the expedition from Dinjan are from the Artillery regiment. The expedition will felicitate Kargil veer naris and war veterans en route, as a token of appreciation for their selfless sacrifice to the nation.

Kokrajhar incident highlights urgent need for child protection measures

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 12: A 60-year-old man identified as Shashikanta Roy, of the same village, raped a minor girl. The rapist has been arrested and is presently undergoing jail sentences.

Meanwhile, Bodo short film actor and digital creator, Dilip Narzary (34) has been arrested in a POSCO case.

Narzary has been arrested in connection with Gossaigaon PS case No 89/24 u/s 376(3)/34 IPC R/W Sec 6 of POSCO Act and produced before the Kokrajhar Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court. He was sent to 3 days of police custody for further investigation. Three more others including actors Anil Kumar Narzary, Subarna Basumatary, and Dviden Wary are reportedly absconding.

According to sources, the four individuals had allegedly molested the minor.

Silchar prepares against flash floods

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, June 12: In a bid to clean drains and sewerage channels to mitigate the problem of flash floods in Silchar, the district administration has sought the co-operation of local citizens in Rangirkhal, Singirkhal, and Longaikhal, specifically those who have built constructions, RCC slabs, or temporary structures over the connected drains, to clear the built structures by June 30.

A notice was issued in this regard by district commissioner Rohan Kumar Jha on Wednesday. The notice states that during field visits to Rangirkhal, Singirkhal, and Longaikhal, it has been observed that some inhabitants of these localities have constructed RCC slab structures, temporary bamboo structures, and extensions over the connected drains without providing for manholes, thus obstructing the clearing and cleaning of drains. It has also been observed that due to siltation, there is a blockage of the natural flow of water through the drains, triggering artificial floods and persistent water logging during rainy days in those areas. Consequently, there is an immediate need to take necessary steps to keep the natural drainage system free from any blockage to ensure the smooth and natural flow of stormwater during rainy days and avoid artificial floods or water logging in different parts of Silchar town, the notice by DC Jha stated.

Further, the DC, who is also the chairperson of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), directed the citizens to clear the built structures by June 30. The constructed structures will be razed if the order is not followed by that date, the notice stated.

Intoxicating items banned near Tezpur University

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 12: District Magistrate Deba Kumar Mishra issues an order prohibiting the selling and storage of intoxicating items, including gutkha, cigarettes, and liquor, within a radius of 100 meters of Tezpur University campus in compliance with Section 6(b) of the COTPA Act, 2003. This order comes into force with immediate effect and shall remain in force until further notice. Moreover, any violation of the order will be punishable as per the law. The order has been issued in view of the letter received from the Registrar of Tezpur University alleging illegal sale of liquor and substances in front of the University.

Sitajakhala Dugdha Utpadak Samabai Samity marks 67th registration day

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, June 12: The Sitajakhala Dugdha Utpadak Samabai Samity celebrated its 67th registration day with a day-long program on Tuesday. The program began with the unfurling of its flag at 10 am, followed by tributes to the founder members who established the society in 1925. Addressing the farmers' meet held on the occasion at the multipurpose auditorium, the Water Resource minister and MLA of Jagiroad expressed satisfaction and gratefulness towards the great personalities whose systematic dedication and sacrifice have brought the society close to its 100th year.

The minister, while giving away the Nandalal Upadhyaya Memorial State Farmers Award for 2023 and 2024 to the Uttar Anchalik General Pagladia Dong Bandh Committee of Baska district and Lofa Gaon Unnayan Samity of Sadakhkhowa Village in Lakhimpur district, expressed hope that the award will inspire upcoming youths to engage in the prosperous agricultural sector of the state. The session was chaired by Narayan Kumar Radu Kakoti, the working president of the Reception Committee and former chairman of the Tiwa Autonomous Council, Morigaon, Assam. Dr Laxmi Narayan Sharma, a renowned scientist of the locality, was graciously felicitated during the session. A souvenir titled 'Sitajakhala' was released by Dr Hiranya Bhattacharyya, associate director of Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, and the 'tour book' of the society was released by Morigaon district commissioner Devasish Sharma. The meeting was also attended by Jagiroad College principal Dr Bhaben Chandra Neog, Reception Committee president Asom Saurav Guru Nadiram Deuri, Reception Committee secretary and social worker Jursing Bordoloi, Gova Raja Deep Singh Deoraja, Tiwa Autonomous Council CEO Jiban Chandra Konwar, Jagiroad Development Authority chairman Dibyajit Neog, and Society president Ranjib Sharma, among others.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Each day is the scholar of yesterday.
-Publius Syrus

Water diplomacy in South Asia

In a recent development that has stirred the diplomatic waters between India and Bangladesh, a high-ranking Indian official made a discreet visit to Dhaka amidst the Lok Sabha elections. The purpose of this visit was to discuss potential collaboration on water management projects, particularly focusing on the Teesta River, which has been a contentious issue between the two nations for years. The timing of this visit, during India's intense electoral season, raises eyebrows and underscores the urgency that New Delhi attaches to this issue. The Indian official's discussions with senior Bangladeshi administrators revolved around constructing a reservoir in the Himalayan region. This proposed reservoir aims to harness the excess monsoon waters of the Teesta, providing a strategic solution to the perennial water-sharing dispute. The proposal also extended India's assistance and participation in any water management schemes that Bangladesh might pursue. This offer marks a significant shift in India's approach, reflecting a willingness to engage more actively in resolving the Teesta issue. Notably, the Indian official did not rule out potential collaboration with China if necessary, hinting at a pragmatic approach to regional water management.

The Teesta River, flowing through the Indian state of West Bengal and into Bangladesh, has long been a source of friction. India's previous indifference to Bangladesh's concerns over water sharing has strained bilateral relations. The current proposal suggests a new urgency from New Delhi, driven by geopolitical considerations as much as environmental and economic ones. A major factor influencing this shift appears to be the potential involvement of China in the region. The prospect of China establishing a significant presence in North Bengal through water projects has likely prompted Indian defense strategists to rethink their stance. The strategic implications of Chinese involvement in a region close to the sensitive Siliguri Corridor – India's narrow land link to its northeastern states – cannot be overstated. This corridor is a critical vulnerability in India's strategic landscape, making any Chinese foothold in the vicinity a matter of serious concern. Beyond the Teesta, the broader issue of water sharing between India and Bangladesh also includes the Ganga River. The existing Ganga water-sharing treaty has been a point of contention. While India feels that the treaty leaves insufficient water for its use, exacerbating siltation issues at the Calcutta port, Bangladesh argues that the Farakka Barrage has led to ecological imbalances, drying up previously irrigated areas.

Despite these challenges, there is cautious optimism that a new, mutually acceptable formula can be worked out. Both nations recognize the critical importance of water management in sustaining their agricultural economies and maintaining regional stability. The recent high-level visit indicates that India is now more attuned to the strategic and ecological imperatives of water sharing. It also reflects an acknowledgment of Bangladesh's legitimate concerns and a willingness to find cooperative solutions. The inclusion of potential Chinese participation adds a layer of complexity but also highlights the importance of regional collaboration in addressing water security. The debate over water sharing in South Asia is far from over. However, the proactive steps taken by India suggest a more engaged and responsive approach. As climate change exacerbates water scarcity and geopolitical tensions, such collaborative efforts will be crucial. The evolving dynamics of water diplomacy in South Asia will require sustained dialogue, mutual respect, and innovative solutions to ensure a secure and prosperous future for both nations.

A critical examination of the intersection of celebrity, politics, and ideology

The recent incident involving actress-turned-MP Kangana Ranaut and CISF constable Kulwinder Kaur at Chandigarh airport has ignited a multifaceted debate about the interplay of personal beliefs, professional responsibilities, and societal reactions. This incident, which led to Kaur's suspension and legal action against her, is emblematic of deeper issues within the Indian political and social fabric.

Kulwinder Kaur's assault on Kangana Ranaut was reportedly motivated by the latter's criticism of the farmers' protest. Kaur's actions, leading to her suspension and an FIR under sections 321 and 341 of the Indian Penal Code, have drawn widespread condemnation. This case highlights not just a breach of protocol by a government employee but also raises questions about the susceptibility of government personnel to radical ideologies.

The troubling trend of government employees engaging in actions contrary to their professional duties is not new. Instances of employees supporting extremist activities, particularly in sensitive regions like Kashmir, are well-documented. In 2023 alone, several government officials in Kashmir were dismissed for their involvement in terrorist activities. This erosion of trust in public institutions due to the actions of a few has far-reaching implications, undermining security and public confidence.

The recent electoral victories of separatist candidates such as Sarabjit Singh Khalsa, Amritpal Singh, and Engineer Sheikh Abdul Rashid, backed significantly by postal ballots cast by government employees, further illustrate the deep-seated ideological divides. This phenomenon underscores the urgent need for a thorough review of the political leanings of those in public service, as their actions and votes have significant consequences for national security and unity.

Adding fuel to this already

volatile situation, music director Vishal Dadlani's public offer of employment to Kulwinder Kaur has sparked outrage. Dadlani, known for his provocative statements, has faced backlash for what many perceive as an endorsement of violence against dissenting voices. This incident has brought to the fore the dangerous precedent of justifying and rewarding violent behavior based on personal or political grievances.

Public figures wield significant influence, and their actions and statements can have profound societal impacts. Dadlani's past encouragement of violent acts and his support for Kaur highlight a worrying trend of normalizing violence as a means of settling scores. This not only threatens the rule of law but also endangers public figures and politicians, especially women, by making them targets of ideological retribution.

Rewarding acts of violence, as exemplified by Dadlani's job offer, could lead to an increase in such incidents. This sets a perilous precedent where individuals might feel justified in taking the law into their own hands, expecting societal or professional rewards. The normalization of such behavior could embolden vigilantes and extremist groups, exacerbating the already tense socio-political climate in India.

The incident at Chandigarh airport and the subsequent reactions highlight the urgent need for a reassessment of the role of personal ideology in public service. It also underscores the responsibility of public figures to promote peace and respect for the law.

As India navigates these complex issues, it is crucial to reinforce the principles of non-violence, accountability, and adherence to democratic norms to ensure the stability and integrity of the nation's political and social institutions. (The author can be reached at shashankadas007@gmail.com)



Challenges and opportunities before Modi government

The results of the 18th Lok Sabha elections shown up with different scenarios, even if the Bharatiya Janata Party did not get the absolute majority, even if the India Alliance stood as a challenge, still Narendra Modi, becoming the Prime Minister of India for the third time, is moving ahead with more strength, determination and will to build a new and strong India than in the first two terms. BJP may have suffered a loss in terms of seats, but it emerged as the largest party for the third consecutive time. The party has surprised everyone with its excellent performance in Odisha and Telangana. In Odisha, not only in the Lok Sabha, the party also broke the 24-year-old dominance of the Biju Janata Dal in the Assembly.

In the 60-member assembly elections of Arunachal Pradesh, BJP has succeeded in forming the government on the strength of 54 percent votes and a massive majority of 46 seats. At the same time, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh remain the strongholds of BJP, while Modi is still the biggest and dominant leader in the country's politics. He will continue to give the nation new wings of development with his surprising and unique decisions. BJP should review and ponder over the reasons for getting fewer seats and accept the reasons for its defeat with ease and generosity and should remove the mistakes that led to fewer seats.

The role of the Election Commission in conducting this election in a planned and effective manner was commendable. Even though the India Alliance had tarnished the country and democratic processes by questioning the impartiality of EVMs and the Election Commission, the elec-

tion results have not only shattered such misleading statements and myths, but have also restored the vibrant, pluralistic, secular and healthy democratic image of India. The left-jihadi-communalist political group that blindly opposes Prime Minister Modi has left no stone unturned in its nonsense blabbering and anti-national conspiracy.

Despite this, the election results have been satisfactory in many ways for the constituent parties of the India Alliance. This election has become the harbinger of new life for the Congress. Anyway, for an ideal democracy, it is necessary to have a strong opposition; this is what gives beauty to democracy. Indian voters have given the message to the India Alliance to play the opposition role effectively.

This time the election results have also raised many questions in front of many political parties. The courts decide who will stay in jail. But Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had handed over the right to the voters to stay in or out of jail, the result of which was that AAP's account was not even opened in Delhi ruled by him, while his party failed to repeat the miracle of Assembly Elections-2022 in Punjab and won only 3 out of 13 seats.

Who is Sharad Pawar's political heir and whose is the real Shiv Sena? Are Maya and Mamta still powerful? This election started with many such questions. Some of these have been answered and some are still pending. The kinds of results that have come have also raised doubts whether economic reforms will continue in the country? Will the country continue to move on the path of

development? What will happen to policy stability? Perhaps due to this doubt, there was a huge fall in the stock market.

But these questions were answered to a large extent in the speech given by Narendra Modi at the first BJP headquarters and in the meeting with the alliance parties, due to which the stock market also gained momentum and enthusiasm was generated among the workers of BJP and the alliance parties.

The country is once again entering the era of coalition governments. Now it is a reality that in view of the current mandate, forming a coalition government has become a compulsion for the BJP. Certainly, there is a big difference between running a government with allies with an

absolute majority and running a government with allies in minority. The question is whether the BJP, which has taken big decisions in the interest of the country in two terms with an absolute majority, will be able to feel comfortable in ruling under the pressure of coalition partners? But there is no doubt that the government under the leadership of Modi will move forward with strength and will give shape to its resolutions and plans. A coalition government is going to be formed for the first time at the central level in the country after 2009. In the past, Narasimha Rao and Atal Bihari Vajpayee have also run coalition governments efficiently and have also taken forward the reforms. Manmohan Singh has also run a coalition government for ten years, but it cannot be ignored how he had to bow down to undue pressure from allies many times. Atal Bihari Vajpayee also

struggled with the challenges of a coalition government. But Modi's circumstances are different. He is a master of politics and Amit Shah is a player of political manipulation.

Considering this, it is believed that the BJP and the NDA government led by it will be able to do their work successfully. Not only the government, but the major issues of the BJP will also be implemented. Whenever the BJP faces situations of undue political pressure, the government will find a meaningful way out. Anyway, the BJP is not far from the majority figure, so it is expected that it will be much easier for it to run the government with other allies including Telugu Desam Party, Janata Dal-U, Shiv Sena. Even after this, Prime Minister Modi will be running a coalition government for the first time.

Although he is aware of the ways of running such a government due to working under the coalition government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, running such a government will be a new experience for him. But he is aware of the efficient running of the activities of the organization while holding many posts in the BJP organization. Facing pressures from within the country and abroad, he has made India a power.

When the world is facing an economic crisis, India's economy is moving towards becoming the third economy of the world. His running of the coalition government will certainly give a new dimension to his leadership ability and political skill of taking everyone along. He has a political vision and skill to solve the country's problems amidst challenges. Coalition governments have some positive aspects as well as some negative aspects.

The leader of coalition governments has to work in coordination with the constituent parties. The problem arises when the constituent parties start making unreasonable demands or try to bargain or start doing politics of pressure to fulfill their narrow interests. To deal with these situations, the Modi government is already making efforts to include other independent MPs and other political parties in its fold. The allies should worry about the political and economic interests of their states instead of unreasonable demands and pressure, but while doing so, they should not lose sight of national interests. They should also ensure that the coalition government runs smoothly.

Certainly, Modi government is facing challenging situations, just like 'Pandavas' faced complex situations in Mahabharata war. Today, there is appeasement instead of Drona, corruption instead of Kripacharya, terrorism instead of Ashwatthama, ambition and immorality instead of Duryodhan, internal and global conspiracy instead of Shakuni, all kinds of disruptive forces instead of nationalism - linguistic, regional, casteism, communalism, selfishness etc. and fundamentalism instead of Karma. Along with this, there are extremely complex problems of inflation, unemployment, discontent etc. and now India is trapped in them. Still, the light in the form of Narendra Modi will become more powerful in his new innings and break all these 'Chakravayuh' of India. Playing the most successful innings of his political life, he will once again show the negative and anti-national forces their place.

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Europe's centre is holding - by integrating the far Right

By: David Broder

Would Giorgia Meloni prefer to partner with the "mainstream pro-European" Emmanuel Macron, or else the "far-right outsider" Marine Le Pen? Ahead of this weekend's elections to the European Union's parliament, much punditry on the EU's future speculated on the next moves by the Italian prime minister - deemed a potential "king-maker" in Brussels coalition-building or else a partner in a new nationalist international. Rival far-right candidates accused Meloni of sucking up to the French president (and to the EU's top official, Ursula von der Leyen); some more proudly Europeanist commentators hoped Macron and Meloni could "join forces to save Europe." But now, with Macron calling snap elections that could easily vault Le Pen's party into the national government, perhaps Meloni won't have to choose one over the other after all.

International media veneration of Meloni as a pragmatic actor in EU politics generally relies on a near-indifference to specific policies, so long as the overall European project holds together. Her party is by this point committed to changing the EU from within, and also relatively stable at home. It scored 29 percent in Sunday's vote, beating its 2022 general election score and outclassing its often-disruptive coalition partners in the Lega (8 percent).

The results also confirm that Italian prominence in EU politics reflects the weakness of the bloc's usually central French-German pairing and the tailing-off of its post-pandemic economic relaunch. In France, Macron's list scored 15 percent, versus 31.5 percent for Le Pen's Rassemblement National. In Germany, scandals over Nazi-indulgent views in the Alternative für Deutschland (which rose to 16 percent) did not stop it defeating the ruling Social Democrats (14 percent), whose coalition partners (Greens on 12 percent, Free Democrats on 5 percent) also scored abysmally.

In general, the far right increased its numbers, though the language of insurgent outsiders ill befits what is now an established part of the EU political landscape. In fact, looking at the election as a whole, the change was pretty incremental. Overall seat totals suggest that in the new 720-member parliament, which has grown by fifteen seats since 2019, the center-right European People's Party gained about nine seats, the Social Democrats lost two, the Left lost one, Greens and Liberals lost about twenty each, and the various strains of the far right added on about thirty or so, mainly in France and Germany.

In Italy the far right came first, but this wasn't new: the fourteen seats gained by Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia were all at the expense of the Lega. The center left performed well, while Macron's extreme centrists like Matteo Renzi lost out. In Spain, Meloni's ally Vox gained two seats, but the mainstream parties' vote also held up; in Poland, Law and Justice lost out, to the benefit of both the softer right and the harshly nationalist/right-wing-libertarian Konfederacja.

Still, if these comments put the far right's advance in relative terms, the events in France look like the most important, for now at least. Macron's government had, already since June 2022, lacked an absolute majority in parliament. Now reaching the nadir of its support, he seeks

yet another duel with Le Pen, often his chosen political adversary in forming his own "anti-populist" coalition.

Yet, critics have also seen this as a double act in a different sense. Before his initial election seven years ago, graffiti across Paris proclaimed "Macron 2017=Le Pen 2022," expressing the left-wing belief that - far from a "barrier against populism" - Macron and his neoliberal-hawk policies would feed social grievance and thus help the Rassemblement National to eventually triumph. We'd already seen him at work as economy minister in François Hollande's disastrous center-left government, and he promised that he would turn France into a "start-up nation." His language of entrepreneurial dynamism expressed contempt for "slackers" but also working people who expected to hang on to a stable job and then get a good retirement at the end of it.

In this sense, Macron's attacks on the French social model have been unsurprising, as has the police authoritarianism against protesters like the gilets jaunes or opponents of his pension "reforms." This surely explains part of the far right's rise. Le Pen's party denounces Macron's anti-social measures but also the protests against them - and benefits from the despair and cynicism that results from their defeat.

But there is more to it than this. Macron ministers' efforts to capture part of Le Pen's agenda - damning "Islamist-leftists" and welfare-scrongler immigrants, or accusing the far-right leader of going "soft on Islam" - have surely gone further than was expected of a nominally liberal government in promoting the far right's talking points and easing its path to the mainstream.

The snap elections that Macron called last night could well produce a so-called cohabitation, an often-conflict-ridden situation where France's president and the prime minister belong to different political camps. But in policy terms - including an immigration bill passed in December thanks to Le Pen's votes - such coexistence has been long in the works. If the far right does surge, we would likely see a push-

me-pull-you between a weakened head of state and a Rassemblement National seeking to dominate the domestic agenda.

In France, establishment center-right admirers of Meloni have often contrasted her positively with Le Pen. These include the likes of businessman Alain Minc, who claims that while the Italian premier has "entered the circle of reason" and "fallen into line" with the nostrums of support for NATO and respect for EU-monitored budget balancing, the French far-right leader remains less easily contained.

Surely, some in the Rassemblement National, notably lead European candidate Jordan Bardella, have responded to this by seeking to place the party on a more respectable and Atlanticist course; the party is in any case today far from the kind of anti-euro sentiment that it promoted in the mid-2010s in the era of adviser Florian Philippot, and has over the last decade recruited a handful of candidates from the historically more mainstream Gaullist right. Civil servants and business leaders are surely hoping to prepare a "soft landing" as Le Pen's party approaches power, and the election called by Macron - perhaps bringing the Rassemblement National into government well before the 2027 presidential election - could help grease the wheels.

It seems as if Le Pen's party has the wind in its sails. Ever less anathematized, it draws on an increasing share of the wider right-wing vote, as it also expands into more middle-class parts of the electorate, especially in small-town France. Its victory in the June 30/July 7 snap election is hardly certain: there are also counterforces on the Left, and the two-round electoral system continues to put up barriers to Le Pen winning outright majorities. But in France as across Europe, there is no firm cordon sanitaire between the bourgeois right and the parties that were until a few years ago labelled a threat to democracy itself. In calling this election Macron is, quite obviously, not afraid of letting Le Pen win.

Lacking a clear project for the EU other than a return to austerity, unable to chart an independent course in foreign policy,

and frightened by the possibility of a Trump victory in November, Europe's establishment is finding ways to integrate bits of the far right, first with Meloni, seemingly next with the Rassemblement National. This process has moments of conflict - as will any cohabitation between Macron and a far-right prime minister, or some "independent" chosen by Le Pen. But the "pro-EU liberals vs. national populists" framing is clearly ever hollower.

Asked in a pre-election TV debate why his party used to want a referendum on leaving the EU but has now abandoned this objective, the Rassemblement National's Bardella said "you don't quit the negotiating table when you're about to win." The same could be said of the far right also in other countries, and the general decline of "euro-exit" type forces in the 2024 EU election.

Whatever their many differences, these parties can also find their own ways of talking about Europe, compatible with the EU institutions. In a campaign ad, the Sweden Democrats praised the different parts of European culture seen as under threat from immigration. It was an homage to a continent of cars, cold beers, and short skirts, all imperiled by the gang wars and pro-Palestine protests brought by Muslims. The video, from a party that once favoured quitting the EU, was a love letter to Europeanness - and ended proclaiming "My Europe Builds Walls." This is the continent as a way of life, a civilization under threat, perhaps a bit like what EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell called a "garden" that needs protecting from the "jungle" of the outside world.

Meloni's experience in government has shown that the far right can indeed find its place within this "garden," indeed as one of its ardent defenders. In recent years there was much hand-wringing about national populists who threatened to break up the EU, whether by design or through ill-costed spending plans. But after this campaign, it looks increasingly like these forces will accommodate themselves to it - and that the establishment will find out that they have ways of working together. (IPA Service)

POST BAG

4th pillar of Democracy needs a fix Welcome move

Sir/Ma'am

The fourth pillar of democracy in India is seeing a new low as India's rank in the World Press Freedom Index has dropped from 150 in 2022 to 161 in 2023. It is a big blow to the mouthpiece of the people. Almost all the newspapers and news channels are seen singing songs of praise for the ruling government which is embarrassing for any sensible person. Almost every newspaper and channel in India is seen running after the ruling government's acceptance but they have forgotten that they are the mouthpiece of 1.4 billion people.

Neglecting the aspirations and wishes of 1.4 billion people will cost them dear in the future. It is time that they mend their ways and stay true to the people even if it means going against the government. They need not fear anyone because they are backed by 1.4 billion people who have the power to change the government according to their will and they have released a trailer of that in 2024 General Elections.

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Sir/Ma'am

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana to accommodate an additional 3 crore rural and urban houses signifies a substantial commitment by the government to address the housing shortage across India comprehensively. By extending assistance to eligible households, the initiative aims to ensure that more families have access to safe and affordable housing with basic amenities.

This move not only contributes to improving the quality of life for millions but also stimulates economic growth by generating employment opportunities in the construction sector and related industries. Furthermore, it underscores the government's dedication to fulfilling its promise of providing housing for all and promoting inclusive development nationwide.

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The invaluable role of urban trees

By: Dipak Kurmi

Trees offer numerous advantages to urban environments, contributing to ecological balance, community well-being, and economic prosperity. Their ability to absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen purifies air quality. Shade provided by tree canopies mitigates urban heat island effects, reducing energy demands for cooling. Trees act as natural sound barriers, decreasing noise pollution. Their presence enhances property values and commercial appeal. Furthermore, trees foster psychological benefits by providing green spaces for recreation and relaxation. Planting and maintaining robust urban forests is crucial for creating sustainable, livable cities that serve current and future generations.

Urban forestry offers a multitude of environmental benefits that enhance the quality of life in metropolitan areas. The process of transpiration and the provision of shade by trees contribute to the mitigation of elevated ambient temperatures in cities. Furthermore, trees possess the remarkable ability to improve air and water quality through the absorption of pollutants, the interception of particulate matter, the release of oxygen, and the reduction of ground-level ozone concentrations, while simultaneously mitigating soil erosion.

Trees play a crucial role in urban stormwater management, a critical issue exacerbated by the prevalence of impervious surfaces such as roads and buildings in urbanized areas. These impermeable surfaces significantly contribute to increased stormwater runoff. By intercepting a portion of the precipitation through their foliage and enhancing the soil's capacity for water absorption, trees alleviate the strain on municipal stormwater drainage systems, thereby promoting more sustainable and resilient urban environments.

The escalating threat of global climate change, driven by a surge in atmospheric greenhouse gases, manifests in ominous long-term meteorological shifts – soaring temperatures, rising sea levels, and intensifying extreme weather events. Our nation has been a testament to this alarming trend, witnessing a steady rise in average temperatures and sea levels over the past few decades, a pattern that climate models project will persist well into the foreseeable future.

Amidst this daunting challenge, trees emerge as indispensable allies in our battle against climate change. Through the remarkable process of carbon sequestration, these botanical marvels absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it within their woody structures. This natural carbon capture and storage mechanism renders trees an essential asset in our multifaceted efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change on our beloved country.

Urbanization has a deleterious impact on indigenous flora and fauna, often resulting in a significant decline in biodiversity within metropolitan areas. However, the strategic incorporation of arboreal elements can serve as a mitigating factor, counteracting the detrimental effects of urban development on native species. Avian populations, in particular, rely on the shelter and sanctuary provided by trees for nesting and evading predators. Furthermore, the floral components and foliage of certain tree species offer sustenance to various indigenous avian and lepidopteran species. Additionally, the expansive branches of trees provide a suitable habitat for native climbing plants, ferns, and orchids. Moreover, the implementation of dense tree plantings along transportation arteries facilitates the creation of verdant corridors, enabling more seamless passage for native wildlife between fragmented forestry enclaves while simultaneously enhancing the likelihood of encountering these species within residential vicinities.

The presence of trees in our communities offers a multitude of benefits that extend beyond their natural beauty. These towering sentinels of nature serve as catalysts for social cohesion, providing cool, inviting havens within urban landscapes. By creating refreshing microclimates in public parks, trees entice residents to gather and engage in recreational pursuits, fostering a sense of community and reducing social isolation. Moreover, the verdant embrace of trees holds the power to uplift our overall well-being. Scientific studies have revealed that exposure to nature's greenery enhances cognitive functioning and attention spans in school-aged children.

For those confined to office environments, the mere glimpse of a verdant vista through a window offers restorative respites, contributing to increased pro-

ductivity and job satisfaction. Trees, in their quiet elegance, weave a tapestry of physical, mental, and social benefits, enriching the fabric of our communities.

Trees provide numerous health benefits. The biophilia hypothesis suggests humans are naturally drawn to nature and living systems. Substantial research confirms urban trees and green spaces benefit physical and mental health. Tree-lined parks and streets encourage outdoor exercise like walking and cycling, lowering risks of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. Greater exposure to greenery correlates with reduced depression, stress, childhood ADHD rates, and improved overall wellbeing. Hospital patients recover faster when exposed to trees and gardens. Therapeutic gardens featuring trees aid elderly and dementia patients by providing shade, sensory stimulation through colors/textures/scents, and emotional comfort. Urban tree cover demonstrably promotes public health.

Trees contribute significantly to economic growth. Studies show businesses located in areas with more trees enjoy higher foot traffic and retail sales. Developers leverage the appeal of greenery to market properties, sometimes increasing their value. By providing shade and lowering temperatures, trees help reduce air conditioning usage and associated costs for businesses. Furthermore, trees offer ecosystem services like stormwater management, avoiding expensive infrastructure investments. Singapore's tropical, tree-lined streets have become an iconic global identity, solidifying its reputation as a City in a Garden that values closeness to nature.

Undoubtedly, trees thriving in urban environments face a multitude of challenges that their counterparts in natural habitats do not encounter. The relentless onslaught of environmental stressors, such as extreme temperature fluctuations, moisture imbalances, and air pollutants, takes a significant toll on these resilient beings. Furthermore, the soil in which they are rooted often lacks the essential nutrients required for optimal growth and vitality. The perils do not end there. Construction activities and vehicular traffic pose a constant threat, potentially inflicting damage upon their delicate root systems, trunks, and branches.

Ongoing development proj-

ects further exacerbate the situation by encroaching upon their already limited growing space. Moreover, the bustling trade activity that characterizes urban centers heightens the risk of introducing foreign plant diseases, posing yet another formidable challenge to the well-being of these arboreal inhabitants. In light of these adversities, it becomes imperative to establish and nurture urban trees with a meticulous and purposeful approach, far surpassing the demands of their wild counterparts. To safeguard the overall health and safety of the urban forest, a comprehensive regime of professional inspection, maintenance, and judicious replacement must be diligently implemented. Only through such proactive measures can we ensure the enduring vitality of these invaluable green assets amidst the concrete jungle.

Proper tree selection and planting techniques are crucial for establishing a thriving urban forest. Choose tree species carefully, considering factors like sunlight exposure, water availability, growth space, and proximity to infrastructure at the planting site. With patience and dedication to following best practices, newly planted trees can mature into towering green assets that enhance the urban landscape for years to come.

Select quality saplings with straight, sturdy trunks and balanced shoot-root systems. Ensure they're free from damage, pests, and diseases. Prepare the planting hole carefully, using well-textured, nutrient-rich soil. Avoid compacted, extremely acidic/alkaline, saline, nutrient-poor, or contaminated urban soils, as these can stunt growth or kill the sapling. After planting, apply mulch around the base to conserve moisture and promote nutrition. Install sturdy poles to support the sapling and a PVC guard to protect against mechanical damage from lawn mowers or vehicles. Water regularly. These steps will help the sapling establish itself and thrive.

Fertilize urban trees regularly to provide essential nutrients. Forest soils are richer, so city trees need supplemental fertilization to stay healthy. Apply fertilizers containing high levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Use liquid fertilizers or slow-release granular formulations. Spread fertilizer around the tree base or place in holes dug near the roots. Also mulch annually around the base with organic materials like com-

posted wood chips, leaves, or grass clippings. Mulching improves soil quality and tree nutrition.

Towering silently, trees may lack the ability to speak, but their physical presence and subtle movements whisper volumes about their well-being. These verdant sentinels of nature have their own doctors – professional arborists, skilled in the art of reading a tree's every nuance. With meticulous precision, these tree physicians examine their patients from root to crown, scrutinizing their overall shape, the sturdy trunk, the sprawling branches, and the verdant canopy above. Trained eyes can discern the telltale signs of decay or distress, the symptoms that betray a tree's faltering health.

Like diagnosticians, arborists employ the Visual Tree Assessment (VTA) technique, a standardized protocol revered by the International Society of Arboriculture. This systematic evaluation guides them through a comprehensive inspection, unveiling any observable indicators of instability or illness that might otherwise go unnoticed. Armed with their expertise, these arboreal healers can then prescribe remedies, offering hope for rejuvenation and a return to vibrant splendor for the ailing trees under their care.

After conducting a Visual Tree Assessment (VTA), an arborist may choose to employ advanced tools to further investigate a tree's internal condition. One option is a resistograph, which drills into the wood at a constant speed. Higher resistograph readings indicate dense wood, while lower readings suggest decay or cavities. Alternatively, an arborist can use a sonic tomograph, which relies on the principle that sound travels faster through solid wood than decayed wood. By placing sensors around the tree trunk and transmitting sound from different points, the sonic tomograph can detect hollow or decayed portions within the tree.

Trees in urban areas require regular pruning for several key reasons. Young trees need pruning to guide their growth into an ideal structural form. Roadside trees must have branches trimmed back when they obstruct pedestrians or vehicles. Pruning also helps maintain an attractive, well-groomed appearance for trees. Mature trees require pruning to remove dead or diseased limbs, lighten heavy branches that pose risks, and reduce the wind resistance of the

overall canopy. After assessing a tree, an arborist may recommend specific pruning techniques like crown thinning or reduction to promote the tree's health and safety. Proper pruning is essential for sustaining aesthetically pleasing and vigorous urban trees.

Venerable trees, those towering sentinels that have witnessed the passage of time, deserve special care and consideration. When the mighty trunks and branches of these revered elders show signs of structural vulnerability, arborists spring into action, employing ingenious support systems to extend their majestic existence. Cables and braces are meticulously woven, limiting the sway of trunks and limbs, while intricate prop structures rise from the ground, steadfastly embracing the ancient giants. This intervention, a labor of love, is reserved for those trees deemed invaluable treasures, their worth measured not merely in years but in the stories they hold within their rings.

Yet, the threats to these noble guardians extend beyond the physical realm. The searing wrath of lightning poses a formidable danger, and thus, arborists cloak the tallest among them in protective raiment. Copper cables, channeling nature's fury into the earth's embrace, safeguard the hallowed Heritage Trees of Singapore, shielding them from the celestial bolts that might otherwise rend their hallowed forms. In this symbiosis of human ingenuity and natural grandeur, we bear witness to the reverence bestowed upon these living monuments, ensuring their enduring presence for generations to come.

The urban landscape is a dynamic tapestry, where the trees that grace our city streets and parks are in a constant state of flux. Like all living beings, these arboreal sentinels are subject to the inexorable march of time, beset by an array of adversities that challenge their resilience. Pests, diseases, and environmental stressors such as drought or the fury of storms wage an incessant battle against their vitality. Yet, in the urban realm, these stalwart guardians face additional trials – the insidious tentacles of pollution, the impoverished soils that lack the nourishment they crave, and the constant disruption of their roots, as development encroaches upon their sanctuaries. Even those that have weathered the vicissitudes of time are not

immune to the perils that lurk within the urban jungle.

As they attain the grandeur of maturity, their sheer size can become a liability, compromising their structural integrity in the confines of their urban abodes. Furthermore, certain species, such as the Albizia (Falcata moulucana) and the African Tulip (Spathodea campanulata), possess an inherent fragility – their wood brittle, their roots shallow, rendering them vulnerable to the ravages of storms, particularly as they reach the zenith of their life cycle.

In urban areas, trees posing safety risks must be proactively removed and replaced, unlike natural forests where deteriorating trees can be left to weaken naturally. When a tree is retired, it is typically replaced with one or more saplings, instantly increasing the diversity of tree species and mimicking the biodiversity and structure of a natural forest. Over time, these saplings will mature, taking the place of the previously removed trees. Just as a natural forest is an ever-changing landscape, with new seedlings constantly emerging to replace old canopy trees, the urban forest is in a continuous state of regeneration. Adhering to best practices, tree care professionals can ensure the sustainable management and safeguarding of our urban forests for future generations of Singaporeans.

Urban trees face numerous challenges, from harsh environmental conditions to space constraints and infrastructure conflicts. However, their immense value to cities makes protecting and cultivating vibrant urban forests essential. With proper planting techniques, regular maintenance like pruning and fertilization, and proactive monitoring for risks or declines, arborists can help urban trees thrive. When safety issues develop, timely tree removal and replacement with new plantings allows for continuous forest regeneration.

By embracing sound urban forestry practices, cities can reap the economic, environmental, health, and community benefits provided by a flourishing tree canopy for generations to come. Each tree planted represents an investment in a greener, more sustainable urban future. With vision and stewardship, the concrete jungle can truly blossom into reforested cities welcoming nature back into the built environment. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)

Creating climate resilient food systems

By: Shoba Suri

The future of global food systems is more crucial now than ever. Climate change has significantly impacted agricultural and aquatic food production worldwide, causing changes in soil quality, precipitation patterns, pest regimes, seasonal growth cycles, land degradation, and biodiversity loss. The connections between climate change and food security are becoming increasingly evident, especially in developing countries where nutritional deficiencies are prevalent, and rain-fed, farm-centered agriculture dominates. Given the rising frequency and intensity of climate-related events such as droughts, floods, and heat waves, it is crucial to urgently transform our food systems to improve their climate resilience. This necessitates strategies and practices vital for creating resilient food systems, thereby ensuring sustainability and food security for future generations.

Transforming food system under climate change

The figure above indicates the essential elements required for the transformation of the food system under climate change. A key strategy for developing climate-resilient food systems is the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. This approach involves techniques such as crop rotation, polycultures, and cover crops, which improve soil health and decrease susceptibility to pests and diseases.

Agroecology incorporates ecological principles into farming practices, fostering biodiversity, and ecosystem services. Conservation agriculture emphasises maintaining a continuous soil cover, reducing soil disturbance,

and diversifying plant species. According to a study, conservation agriculture enhances soil structure, improves water retention, and boosts resilience to climate extremes. Organic farming, which avoids synthetic inputs and focuses on natural processes, also supports soil fertility and ecosystem health, making it a sustainable choice for climate resilience.

Another crucial strategy to enhance resilience is diversifying crops and livestock. Climate change can alter pest and disease patterns, making monocultures especially susceptible. Diversified farming systems, which include a variety of crops and livestock breeds, help mitigate these risks. Evidence suggests that crop diversification lowers the risk of total crop failure and can boost overall farm productivity. Also incorporating climate-resilient crop varieties and livestock breeds is crucial. These varieties and breeds are better adapted to withstand extreme weather conditions like heat, drought, and floods. A study from Sub-Saharan Africa highlights that diversified farming systems help maintain productivity under varying climate conditions, ensuring a stable food supply.

Efficient water management is crucial for climate resilience, and adopting efficient irrigation methods like drip irrigation, which delivers water directly to plant roots, minimising waste. Additionally, rainwater harvesting is an effective practice, capturing and storing rainwater for use during dry periods.

Utilising climate-smart technologies is crucial for modernising agricultural practices and enhancing resilience. Precision agriculture, remote sensing, and

data analytics enable farmers to make informed decisions, optimise resource use, and boost productivity. Mobile applications and digital tools provide real-time weather forecasts, pest alerts, and best practice recommendations, aiding farmers in adapting to changing conditions. Precision agriculture employs GPS and sensors to monitor crop health, soil conditions, and weather patterns, allowing farmers to apply inputs like water, fertilisers, and pesticides more efficiently, reducing waste and improving yields. Remote sensing technologies, such as satellite imagery, facilitate the monitoring of large areas, early identification of stress signals, and mitigation of potential losses.

Climate resilience in food systems also involves enhancing social and economic resilience among farming communities and vulnerable populations. This includes providing access to climate information and early warning systems, improving market access and value chains, and implementing social safety nets and insurance schemes for farmers. Empowering local communities and fostering inclusive economic development are crucial elements of building climate resilience.

In addition to traditional adaptation strategies, innovation plays a vital role in transforming food systems for climate resilience. Research and development in areas such as climate-resilient crop varieties, biofortification, sustainable aquaculture, and alternative protein sources are critical for addressing food security challenges in a changing climate. Advances in digital agriculture, blockchain technology, and data analytics also offer new opportunities

for improving resilience and transparency in food supply chains.

Effective policy and governance frameworks are essential for driving the transformation of food systems towards climate resilience. Integrating climate change considerations into agricultural policies, promoting sustainable land use planning, incentivising climate-smart practices through subsidies and incentives, and fostering international cooperation and knowledge exchange can be adopted. Collaboration between governments, civil society, the private sector, and research institutions is key to implementing holistic and inclusive strategies.

Despite the progress made in addressing climate resilience in food systems, several challenges remain. This includes limited access to finance and technology for smallholder farmers, the lack of awareness and capacity among stakeholders, competing land-use priorities, and policy gaps at the national and global levels. However, these challenges also present opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and investment in sustainable agriculture and food systems.

Although making our food systems climate resilient is complex, it is an imperative task in the face of climate change. It requires a combination of adaptive agricultural practices, technological innovation, social and economic empowerment, biodiversity conservation, and effective governance. By addressing these challenges and seizing opportunities, we can build resilient food systems that ensure food security, protect natural resources and promote sustainable development for future generations. (Courtesy: ORF)

Like humans, elephants have specific names for each other

By: Himanshu Nitnaware

Some other species of the animal kingdom such as dolphins and parrots call one another by imitating the signature sound of the receiver. But that is not the mechanism adopted by elephants, researchers wrote in a new paper. Rather, they use specific vocalisations for addressing each other, they noted. The pachyderms also displayed evidence of recognising and reacting to these calls.

The findings of the study were published in the journal Nature Ecology and Evolution.

Researchers from Colorado State University, Save the Elephants and Elephant Voices recorded rumbles and as well as contact and greeting calls recorded between 1986 and 2022 of two African elephant herds from Samburu in northern Kenya and Buffalo Springs National Reserves in Amboseli National Park in southern Kenya.

They used artificial intelligence to find evidence of a name-like component in elephant calls – a common elephant low frequency but harmonically rich sound that is unique and distinguishable.

They shortlisted 469 distinct calls that included 101 elephants calling to address 117 receiving individuals. They noticed that such calls were made when the caller was out of sight for more than 50 metres from one or more social herd and an effort to re-establish contact.

Greeting rumbles or calls were made when one individual approached the other within touring distance, according to the researchers. They also noticed caregiving calls between an adult and a calf.

"Inventing or learning sounds to address one another suggests the capacity for some degree of symbolic thought," the researchers added.

They also observed that elephants responded actively to playback of calls addressed to them against the playback of calls from the same caller addressed to a different receiver. This means that the calls had receiver-specific information embedded in them, prominent to elephants or conspecifics.

Like humans, elephants maintain lifelong differentiated social bonds within the community. Vocal contact calls enabled them to reconnect with elephants where the caller and receiver were separated, the researchers wrote.

In case of close-distance calls such as greeting and caregiving rumbles, vocal labels may help strengthen social bonds, similar to the way in which humans experience a positive affective response and increased willingness to cooperate when someone remembers their name, they noted.

Explaining the behaviour further, the researchers said the surprising finding for them was how caregiving rumbles were more than just greeting rumbles.

They said that labels possibly are included in caregiving rumbles to enable calves to learn them, which others use to address them or because hearing the spe-

cific label was more comforting for calves.

"Calls made by adult females were also more likely to be correctly classified than calls made by juveniles. This suggests that adult females may use vocal labels more than calves, possibly because the behaviour takes years to develop," the researchers stated in the report.

They found that elephant rumbles are highly complex with multiple encoded messages but not limited to caller identity, age, sex, emotional state and behavioural context.

It suggested that vocal labels contributed to a small fraction of the total variation in calls, even though the information above was encoded in voice characteristics. On the contrary, human language includes sequential encoding information to convey complex messages.

"Elephants may rely more on simultaneous encoding, packing more information into a single vocalisation than humans typically do," it said.

The researchers also made an elephant listen to recorded sounds with specific frequencies of their friend or family members, to which it responded positively.

Lead author Michael Pardo and postdoctoral associate, K Lisa Yang Center for Conservation Bioacoustics Cornell Lab of Ornithology, said, "We don't know if their names function exactly like human names, but I think we have found pretty strong evidence that they do have something like a name."

In an email conversation, he added, "Unfortunately, we were not able to definitively isolate the names for specific individuals, as the names are likely only one component among many in the calls, and we don't yet know how to tease apart all the different messages encoded in a single call."

"But when we played back calls that we thought were names, the elephants responded more strongly to what we believed to be their own name compared to what we believed to be someone else's name," he said.

The study noted that the findings prove that after humans, elephants are now known to have made use of arbitrary labels like names.

Arbitrary communication is when a sound represents an idea but is non-imitating in nature. It enables communication ability and considers higher levels of cognitive skill.

"The use of learned arbitrary labels is part of what gives human language its uniquely broad range of expression. Our results suggesting possible use of arbitrary vocal labels in elephants provide an opportunity to investigate the selection pressures that may have led to the evolution of this rare ability in two divergent lineages," the authors noted.

They said that these findings now raise further curiosity on the complexity of elephant social cognition, given their potential relevance of symbolic communication related to their social decision making. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Attacks come when Blinken is visiting the region to push a US backed cease-fire proposal for Gaza

Hezbollah fires scores of rockets at northern Israel as Gaza cease-fire talks hang in the balance

BEIRUT, June 12: Lebanon's Hezbollah fired a massive barrage of rockets into northern Israel on Wednesday to avenge the killing of a top commander, further escalating regional tensions as the fate of an internationally-backed plan for a cease-fire in Gaza hung in the balance.

The retaliatory attack came as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in the region to push a cease-fire proposal with global support that has not been fully embraced by Israel or Hamas. The militant group submitted its first official response late Tuesday, requesting "amendments" to the deal.

Hezbollah, an Iran-backed ally of Hamas, has traded fire with Israel nearly every day since the 8-month-long Israel-Hamas war began and says it will only stop if there is a truce in Gaza. That has raised fears of an even more devastating regional conflagration.

Air raid sirens sounded across northern Israel, and the military said that about 160 projectiles were fired from southern Lebanon, making it one of the largest attacks since the fighting began. There were no immediate reports of casualties as some were intercepted while others ignited brush fires.

Hezbollah said it fired missiles and rockets at two military bases in

retaliation for the killing of Taleb Sami Abdullah, 55. Known within Hezbollah as Hajj Abu Taleb, he is the most senior commander killed since the fighting began eight months ago. The Israeli strike destroyed a house where Abdullah and three other officials were meeting, about 10 kilometres from the border, late Tuesday.

Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon have killed over 400 people, most of them Hezbollah members, but the dead also include more than 70 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, 15 soldiers and 10 civilians have been killed since the war in Gaza began.

Other groups allied with Iran, including powerful militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis rebels in Yemen, have also attacked Israeli, US and other targets since the start of the war, often drawing Western retaliation. In April, Israel and Iran traded fire directly for the first time.

US President Joe Biden's administration has said the best way to calm regional tensions is for Hamas to accept a proposal for a phased cease-fire that it says would end of the war in Gaza and bring about the release of the remaining hostages abducted in Hamas' October 7 attack that ignited the war. The UN Security Council voted overwhelmingly in favour of the



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Hamas has expressed support for the broad outline of the deal but wariness over whether Israel would implement its terms, particularly provisions for an eventual permanent end to fighting and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

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Hamas said Tuesday that it gave mediators its reply to the proposal, which appeared to be short of outright acceptance but kept negotiations alive. Qatar and Egypt, which have been key mediators alongside the United States, said mediators were studying it.

Hamas spokesman Jihad Taha said the response included "amendments that confirm the cease-fire, withdrawal, reconstruction and (prisoner) exchange." Taha did not elaborate. (AP)

Elon Musk drops lawsuit against ChatGPT-maker OpenAI

SAN FRANCISCO, June 12: Elon Musk has dropped his lawsuit against OpenAI just ahead of a scheduled on Wednesday hearing on the case. Musk in February sued the San Francisco artificial intelligence company and its CEO Sam Altman over what he said was a betrayal of the ChatGPT maker's founding aims of benefiting humanity rather than pursuing profits.

In the lawsuit filed in February at San Francisco Superior Court, billionaire Musk said that when he bankrolled OpenAI's creation, he secured an agreement with Altman and Greg Brockman, the president, to keep the AI company as a nonprofit that would develop technology for the benefit of the public and keep its code open instead of walling it off for private gain.

However, by embracing a close relationship with Microsoft, OpenAI and its top executives set that pact "afire" and are "perverting" the company's mission, Musk alleged in the lawsuit. Most legal experts said Musk's claims — centred around allegations of breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty and unfair business practices — were unlikely to succeed in court. Musk's lawyer filed a notice Tuesday seeking to dismiss the entire case. No explanation was given for why it was being dropped. (AP)

NATO chief: Hungary has agreed not to veto alliance's assistance to Ukraine

BRUSSELS, June 12: Hungary has agreed not to block NATO from giving support to Ukraine but it will not provide any personnel or funds to help the war-ravaged country, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday.

At a summit in Washington next month, U.S. President Joe Biden and his NATO counterparts are expected to agree on a new system for providing more predictable and long-term security assistance and military training to Ukraine's beleaguered armed forces.

"Hungary will not participate in these NATO efforts and I accept this position," Stoltenberg told reporters in Budapest, after talks with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Stoltenberg said that he and Orbán had "agreed modalities for Hungary's non-participation in NATO's support for Ukraine." NATO's top civilian official did not elaborate on how that would work.

"No Hungarian personnel will take part in these activities and no Hungarian funds will be used to support them," Stoltenberg said.

"At the same time, the prime minister has assured me that Hungary will not oppose these efforts,



enabling other allies to move forward, and he has confirmed that Hungary will continue to meet its NATO commitments in full," Stoltenberg added.

Hungary's stridently nationalist government has increasingly become a thorn in the side of NATO — and the European Union — by undermining their efforts to help Ukraine. All other allies agree that Russia's war on Ukraine poses an existential threat to European security.

Orbán, seen as one of the friendliest European leaders toward Russian President Vladimir Putin, styles himself as a peacemaker, and has labelled his EU and NATO partners assisting Ukraine as being "pro-war." He has also advocated for former U.S. President Donald Trump's victory in the November election.

Since Russia's full-fledged invasion in February 2022, Ukraine's Western backers have routinely met as part of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, run by the Pentagon, to drum up weapons and ammunition for Kyiv.

Stoltenberg has spearheaded an effort to have NATO coordinate that process. As an organization, the military alliance does not send weapons to Ukraine and has no plans to do so but many of its members give help on a bilateral basis.

NATO allies provide more than 90% of the military support that Ukraine receives.

Plans are afoot for NATO's leaders to commit on July 9-11 to maintain the level of military support they have provided Ukraine since the invasion began. The world's biggest security organization estimates the amounts to around \$40 billion worth of equipment each year.

At their summit in Lithuania last year, Biden and his counterparts promised that they would "be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the alliance when allies agree and conditions are met." The consensus among members now is that it should not happen while war rages on. (AP)

Baltimore port reopens 11 weeks after Scott Key Bridge collapse

WASHINGTON, June 12: The Baltimore port, one of America's largest shipping hubs, formally reopened on Wednesday, 11 weeks after the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed when it was struck by a massive cargo ship mostly manned by Indians.

The 2.6-km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River collapsed on March 26 after the 984-foot ship "Dali" crashed into it. The crew onboard the crippled ship included 20 Indians and one Sri Lankan.

"I made clear that my Administration would move heaven and earth to reopen the Port of Baltimore — one of our nation's largest shipping hubs. Today, thanks to the tireless work by the men and women in the Unified Command, the full navigation channel is now open to all vessel traffic, allowing a full return of commerce to the Port of Baltimore," US President Joe Biden said in a statement.

Disruptions from the March 26 bridge collapse have cost the Baltimore region's economy about USD 1.2 billion, said Anirban Basu, an economist with Sage Policy Group, a Baltimore-based consulting firm, told The Washington Post. (PTI)

French President Macron urges moderate politicians to regroup to defeat far right in elections

PARIS, June 12: French President Emmanuel Macron called on Wednesday for moderate politicians from the left and the right to regroup to defeat the far right in general elections.

Macron, a pro-business centrist, said he wants "men and women of goodwill who were able to say no" to extremists to join together to be able to build a joint project for the country.

Macron is addressing French voters for the first time since he called for a snap national election following a crushing defeat of his party by the far right in the European parliamentary vote.

His address is to mainly explain his shocking decision to dissolve the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament, that has triggered

an early legislative election to take place three weeks after the far-right National Rally party of Marine Le Pen triumphed at the election

for the European Union Parliament. Macron said he decided to call an early vote because he could not ignore the new political reality after his pro-European party was handed a chastening defeat and garnered less than half the support of the National Rally with its star leader, Jordan Bardella.

Macron, who has three years left of his second presidential term, hopes voters will band together to contain the far right in national elections in a way they didn't in European ones.

"Things are simple today: we have unnatural alliances at both extremes, who quite agree on nothing except the jobs to be shared, and who will not be able to implement any pro-

gram," Macron said during an opening address at a press conference in Paris.

Sunday's decision to dissolve parliament and send to the polls voters who just expressed their discontent with Macron's politics was a risky move that could result in the French far-right leading a government for the first time since World War II.

Potential alliances and France's two-round voting system in national elections make the outcome of the vote highly uncertain.

Opposition parties on the left and right have been scrambling to form alliances and field candidates in the early legislative balloting that will take place on June 30 and July 7.

While sharp differences between parties remain on either side of the political spectrum, prominent figures calling for a united front appear to have one thing in common: They don't want to cooperate with Macron.

Despite their divisions, left-wing parties agreed late Monday to form an alliance that includes the Greens, the Socialists, the Communists and the far-left France Unbowed of Jean-Luc Melançon.

National Rally leader Marine Le Pen is working to consolidate power on the right in efforts to translate the European triumph into a national win and come closer to claiming power. The far-right party, with a history of racism and xenophobia, is expected to win the most French seats in the European Parliament, potentially as many as 30 of France's 81. (AP)

Malawi announces state funeral and 21 days of mourning for vice president killed in a plane crash

BLANTYRE, June 12: The Malawi government said on Wednesday that Vice President Saulos Chilima will be honored with a state funeral after he died in a plane crash along with eight other people.

President Lazarus Chakwera had already announced 21 days of national mourning on Tuesday, when the wreckage of the small military plane carrying Chilima and a former first lady was discovered in a mountainous area in the country's north. Flags will fly at half-staff across the southern African nation during the period of mourning.

Chakwera has appointed a ministerial committee to oversee preparations for Chilima's state funeral, the government said in a statement. No date was announced.

Chakwera previously said that there were 10 people on the plane but the government now says that a total of nine were on board when it crashed.

Everyone was killed on impact when the twin propeller aircraft went down in a hilly, forested area in bad weather, the president said.

The victims included former first lady Shanil Dzimbiri, the ex-wife of former Malawian President Bakili Muluzi. Six passengers and three military crew members were killed.

The plane was carrying Chilima and members of his staff on a short flight from the capital, Lilongwe, to the northern city of Mzuzu to attend a funeral of a former government minister when it went missing Monday morning.

The president said that air traffic controllers had told the plane not to land in Mzuzu because of bad weather and poor visibility and to return to Lilongwe. Air traffic controllers then lost contact with the plane and it disappeared from radar.

Hundreds of soldiers, police officers and forest rangers searched for more than 24 hours before the wreckage was discovered in a forest plantation south of Mzuzu. The remains of the victims were brought back to Lilongwe on a Zambian Air Force helicopter on Tuesday night, when officials and mourners including Chakwera and Chilima's wife, Mary, gathered at an airport.

The bodies of Chilima and the others were transported from the airport in ambulances as soldiers lined the tarmac and saluted. (AP)

Jailed Imran Khan changes his mind, gives green signal for talks with Pakistan govt

ISLAMABAD, June 12: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan in an apparent U-turn has given a green signal for talks with the government to ease the ongoing political tension, days after refusing to have a dialogue with the toothless ruling coalition.

The change of heart came after the Supreme Court during a hearing of a case on changes to the country's graft laws observed that Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party should initiate talks with the government and resolve its issues in parliament through dialogue.

Speaking to journalists outside the Adiala Jail where Khan is incarcerated, PTI leader Gohar Ali Khan on Tuesday said that Khan has given the go-ahead for the talks with the government. He said the party would initially take its allies into confidence but could also take a solo flight on the issue.

"We told the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder that dialogue is necessary, as the distance is widening. He agreed with us (on this)," Gohar told the media outside the Adiala jail in

Rawalpindi. According to Gohar, Khan, 71, wanted the avenues of dialogue to be opened.

"The PTI founder has said many times that 'I am ready to forgive what happened to me'," Gohar was quoted as saying by Geo TV.

The cricketer-turned-politician has been lodged at the high-security Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi since his arrest 10 months ago for his involvement in multiple cases, some of which have resulted in conviction. When asked if the negotiations will take place a la the behest of the Supreme Court's advice, Gohar said: "The option given by the apex court is also under consideration."

However, he emphasised that it is PTI's "own decision" to negotiate.

"The PTI founder did not write any letter to the SC for negotiation. PTI will also respond to its negotiation option."

Gohar said that the party would begin its negotiations after talking to Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party chief Mahmood Khan Achakzai. He said there is an alliance with Achakzai and

other parties, and that his party will take them into confidence.

"Negotiations can also be held at the alliance level. PTI can also initiate itself," said the party's chief, reiterating that there is no option but negotiation.

"We have never refused to negotiate. The ice is breaking. We want things to improve," said Gohar, insisting that his party's negotiation offer should not be interpreted as a deal.

However, he made it clear that the negotiations should not be considered as a deal or weakness of the party. His comment comes days after Khan decided to step back from his rigid stance, ordering his party leaders to establish contacts both inside and outside the Parliament to ease the ongoing political tension, sources told Geo News.

The sources said that the party's leadership was directed to hold talks with various political parties outside the Parliament, while its lawmakers were also asked to enhance its relations with parties in the ruling coalition government. (PTI)

More than 1.5 million foreign Muslims arrive in Mecca for annual Hajj pilgrimage

MECCA, June 12: Muslim pilgrims have been streaming into Saudi Arabia's holy city of Mecca ahead of the start of the Hajj later this week, as the annual pilgrimage returns to its monumental scale.

Saudi officials say more than 1.5 million foreign pilgrims have arrived in the country by Tuesday, the vast majority by air, from across the world. More are expected, and hundreds of thousands of Saudis and others living in Saudi Arabia will also join them when the pilgrimage officially begins on Friday.

Saudi officials have said they expect the number of pilgrims this year to exceed 2023, when more than 1.8 million people performed Hajj, approaching pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, more than 2.4 million Muslims made the pilgrimage. Saudi authorities control the flow of pilgrims through quotas, allowing each country one pilgrim for every thousand Muslim citizens.

The pilgrims included 4,200 Palestinians from the occupied West Bank who arrived



in Mecca earlier this month, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were not able to travel to Saudi Arabia for Hajj this year, because of the 8-month war between Israel and Hamas.

"We are praying for Palestine to be free and (for Palestinians) to liberate their land and to be like other nations, to live in peace and not always to have war," said Ibrahim al-Hadhari, an Algerian pilgrim, as he was standing in the Grand Mosque court waiting for evening prayers. On Tuesday, pil-

grims thronged the Grand Mosque in Mecca, performing a ritual circuit walking seven times around the Kaaba, the cube-shaped structure inside the mosque that is considered Islam's holiest site. They wore ihrams, two unstitched sheets of white cloth that resemble a shroud.

Many were seen carrying umbrellas against the sun, in temperatures reaching 42 degrees Celsius (107 Fahrenheit) during the day on Tuesday.

"I was relieved when I arrived at the Al-Masjid Al-Haram and saw the Kaaba," said Rabeia al-Raghi, a Moroccan woman who came to Mecca for Hajj along with her husband and their daughter. "I am very happy."

Mohammad Abdel-Baset, an Iraqi pilgrim, said he was overjoyed to perform Hajj. "We congratulate the great crowd and thank God for gathering us from all regions, globally and not from the Arab world only, from all the global Muslim regions (who) came to the Grand Mosque," said Abdel-Baset, a lawyer from Baghdad.

At night, the vast marble court around the Kaaba was packed with the faithful, walking nearly shoulder to shoulder and often jostling with barricades set up by security forces to direct the giant flows of people in and around the Grand Mosque.

Pilgrims do the circumambulation, known as "Tawaf" in Arabic, upon arriving in Mecca. The large crowds circling the Kaaba will last into the Hajj's first day.

On Friday, pilgrims will move to the Mountain of Arafat for a daylong vigil, then to Muzdalifah, a rocky plain area a few miles away. In Muzdalifah, pilgrims collect pebbles to be used in the symbolic stoning of pillars representing the devil back in Mina. One of the world's largest religious gatherings, the Hajj is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. All Muslims are required to undertake it at least once in their lives if they are physically and financially able to do so.

Those in the Hajj view the pilgrimage as an opportunity to strengthen their faith, wipe out old sins and start new. (AP)

Pradyot Debarma emphasises on community empowerment by providing leadership opportunities to women, youths

Keep pressure on Centre for implementation of Tiprasa accord: Tipra Motha chief

AGARTALA, June 12: Tipra Motha chief Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debarma on Wednesday exhorted party's leaders and workers to maintain pressure on the Centre for proper implementation of the Tiprasa accord.

In March, Tipra Motha had entered into an agreement with the Centre and the state government in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to address the issues faced by Tripura's indigenous people.

"Signing accord is not everything, but what is important is its proper implementation. Maharani Kanchan Prabha Devi signed a merger agreement with the Centre in 1949, Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawil inked TNV (Tripura National Volunteers) accord in 1988 and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) had also entered into an agreement", he said in a Facebook post.



"Everybody was happy after Tipra Motha signed an agreement with the Centre to solve the problems of indigenous people. Signing an accord is not important. Party leaders, workers and people must keep pressure for proper implementation of the accord. Amidst

hot and humid conditions, people are denied of drinking water and power service gets snapped after a mild shower. Under such a situation, we can't call it 'Ram Rajya'", he said.

He highlighted the significance of community welfare over political gains, urging party leaders to prioritise people's interests over personal ambitions for posts.

Debarma also acknowledged past mistakes and urged for a focus on community empowerment, particularly by providing leadership opportunities to women and youth. He emphasised that true leadership lies in serving the community's needs rather than pursuing individual ambitions.

"If we fail to do this, nothing will be achieved for Tiprasa (indigenous) people. There were mistakes in the past that's why the people did not get anything", he said. (PTI)

Tripura: Tipra Motha minister unhappy with portfolios, to take it up with Shah

Animesh Debarma, former leader of opposition, took charge as MoS after Tipra Motha joined BJP-led govt in state in March

AGARTALA, June 12: Tipra Motha leader Animesh Debarma, who became a minister in the BJP-led government in Tripura ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, said he was unhappy with the portfolios allotted to him and was looking to take up the issue with Union home minister Amit Shah.

Speaking to reporters, Debarma said he has already raised the issue with chief minister Manik Saha.

"I am not happy with the departments allocated to me. The Forest Department is okay, but Printing & Stationery and Science & Technology excluding TRENDA... I am not happy. I met the CM a few days back and urged him to allocate some important departments so that I could help the rural people. There is nothing to hide," he said on Tuesday.

Debarma said he would soon visit Delhi to meet Shah and congratulate him for assuming the charge of the Union ministry of home affairs again, and take up the issue with him.

"I have been in politics for the last 22 years. Many MLAs get many things even after completing only five years in politics. There is no point if I don't get (important portfolios). I am not against the government but I have to perform," he said.

"If one looks at my experience, I was elected MLA many years ago and then worked in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTADC) as an executive member, and also performed my duties as



leader of the opposition in the assembly. I urge the CM to provide important departments to me and I will work efficiently," he said. After Tipra Motha joined the state government in March, Animesh Debarma, who was the leader of the opposition and Brishaketu Debarma were made ministers. Debarma was made MoS of the industries and commerce department. (PTI)

Pema Khandu to become Arunachal CM for third term

ITANAGAR, June 12: Pema Khandu will become the chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh for the third term in a row, after he was unanimously elected as the BJP Legislature Party Leader at a meeting here on Wednesday, senior leader Tarun Chugh said.

Chugh and Ravi Sankar Prasad attended the meeting as BJP's central observers. Union minister Kiren Rijju, who hails from the northeastern state, was also present there.

Later in the evening, Khandu accompanied by Chugh and several legislators called Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik at Raj Bhawan here and staked claim to form the government.

The governor invited Khandu and his ministers for swearing in.

"State BJP president Byuram Wahge proposed the name of Khandu as the chief minister which was supported by all the 46 party's MLAs," Chugh told reporters at Raj Bhawan.

Appreciating Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party's President J P Nadda, Khandu thanked the people of the state for reposing faith in the BJP and voting it to power for the third consecutive term. Khandu also appreciated the party leadership and the workers for their hard work to ensure victory of the party candidates in the April 19 assembly elections including the two Lok Sabha MPs.

"I assured the people of the state that the new government as 'Team Arunachal' will keep all the commitments enlisted in the election manifesto and will ensure that developmental activities will be initiated in all the districts," Khandu said. (PTI)

Railway Board sanctions Final Location Survey for international connectivity



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 12: Indian Railways has recently sanctioned the Final Location Survey (FLS) for 14 new railway connectivity-routes connecting neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and also alternate routes towards Northeast.

The total length of the Final Location Survey sanctioned is 1275.50 km. The total length of the survey for new railway lines connecting Bangladesh is 861 km and with Nepal is 202.5 km. The proposed alternateroutes towards Northeast will be of 212 km length.

The sanctioned routes for FLS of Rail connectivity between India and Bangladesh are Balurghat - Hili -Parbatipur - Kaunia - Lalmanirhat - Mogalhat - Gitaldaha section. This will be of 32 km, out of which 14 km will be new railway line and 18 km will be gauge conversion. Proposed Balurghat - Gitaldaha - Bamanhat - Sonahat - Golakganj - Dhubri section will be of 56 km length, out of which 38

km will be new railway line and 18 km will be gauge conversion. Balurghat - Hili -Gaibandha - Mahendraganj - Tura - Mendipathar section will consist of 250 km new railway line construction. Proposed Mangurjan - Pirganj - Thakurgaon - Panchgarh - Haldirbari route will consist of 60 km new railway line construction.

Proposed Dalkhola - Pirganj - Thakurgaon - Panchgarh - Haldirbari section will be of 80 km new railway line. Proposed Radhikapur - Biroi - Parbatipur -Kaunia - Gitaldaha section will be of 32 km length, out of which 14 km will be new railway line and 18 km will be gauge conversion. Proposed Belonia - Feni - Chottogram route will be of 131 km length, out of which 38 km will be new railway line and 93 km will be gauge conversion. Gede - Darsana - Ishwardi - Tongi - Bhairab Bazar - Akhaura - Agartala route will consist of 100 km gauge conversion. Proposed Petrapole - Benapole Nabharon - Jessore - Rupdia -

The sanctioned route for Final Location Survey of Rail connectivity between India and Nepal is between Biratnagar - New Mal Jn section which will require construction of 190 km new railway line. The proposed Galgalia - Bhadrapur - Kajali Bazar section will require construction 12.5 km new railway line. The above newly proposed railway lines will further strengthen connectivity through the chicken-neck portion.

The central government is committed to developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all itsneighbourhood under the 'Neighbourhood First' policy. This policy will prioritise enhanced rail/road connectivity, infrastructure development and fostering greater people-to-people contacts. It will also develop better communication between neighbouring nations, which will lead to significant increase in trade and tourism.

SKM's Mingma Norbu Sherpa new speaker of Sikkim assembly



GANGTOK, June 12: SKM MLA Mingma Norbu Sherpa was unanimously elected the speaker of the Sikkim assembly on Wednesday.

Raj Kumari Thapa was unanimously elected the deputy speaker of the House.

Pro-tem speaker Sanjeet Kharel put forward the proposal for voting by the members who unanimously elected Sharma as the speaker of the House.

A two-term MLA from Darangin, Sharma was a minister in the last Prem Singh Tamang government.

After taking charge, the new speaker read out a proposal about Raj Kumari Thapa's candidature for the post of deputy speaker.

Thapa, 44, was also elected unanimously by the House. She is a two-term MLA from Rangang-Yangang.

Earlier, pro-tem speaker Kharel administered oath to all 31 members of the House, beginning with chief minister Prem Singh Tamang who has been elected from two constituencies -- Rhenock and Soreng-Chakung. (PTI)

Poll panel issues revised list of observers for Nagaland civic body elections

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 12: The State Election Commission on Wednesday issued a revised list of 30 election observers for various municipal and town council elections in Nagaland.

Among them, three new observers were appointed for municipal councils in Dimapur, Kohima and Mokokchung and 27 new observers for an equal number of town councils in the state.

On April 29, the commission had notified the election programme for conduct of elections to three municipal councils and 36 town councils in the state, scheduled for June 26. It had appointed election observers along with their assigned municipalities on May 31.

It said no nomination had been received in certain town councils in the districts of Mon, Longleng, Noklak, Tuensang, and Kiphire during the period for filing nominations as specified in the election programme, rendering the subsequent election activities, including the conduct of polls, post the period of filing nominations infructuous in such municipalities.

The commission said in partial modification of its notification dated May 31 and consequent upon the municipalities having received no nomination, the revised list of election observers deployed/redeployed to the civic bodies has been issued in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 31(1) and (3) of the Nagaland Municipal Act 2023.

The commission asked all the election observers concerned to take necessary action in this regard.

Meanwhile, 669 candidates filed nominations for elections to the urban local bodies till the last of filing of nomination papers, which concluded on Tuesday. Of the 669 candidates who filed nominations, 238 are women, according to an update from the State Election Commission.

The state has 418 municipal and town council wards, with 142 wards reserved for women.

Despite a directive from the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation for abstention from all state and central elections, including the civil polls in eastern Nagaland, 61 candidates filed nominations in various councils across the region comprising the six districts of Mon, Tuensang, Longleng, Kiphire, Shamator and Noklak.

CANCELLATION NOTICE

No. SSA/Esstt/Engagement/SMO/PE/264/2024/774

The advertisement vide No. SSA/Esstt/Engagement/SMO/151/2023/10422 dated 17.02.2024 for the post of Project Engineer under Samagra Shiksha, Assam is hereby cancelled.



Sd/- Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog /DF/278/ 24/13-Jun-24

Manipur BJP MLA raises concerns on security lapses, demands action

IMPHAL, June 12: In the wake of the ambush on Manipur CM N. Biren Singh's advance security convoy in Kangpokpi district on Monday and the recent surge of violence in Jiribam district, a BJP MLA has raised concerns about security breaches and demanded an inquiry into police officers who received advance intelligence reports regarding the situation in Jiribam earlier this year.

In a post on X on Wednesday, BJP MLA Rajkumar Imo Singh said, "The state government has to initiate an inquiry regarding the lackadaisical attitude of the officers who were given advance intelligence report by the state government regarding the situation in Jiribam earlier this year. These officers should be held accountable for the loss of lives and property of all those affected and, pending such inquiry they should be suspended and strict action should be taken against them as per procedures prescribed by law."

"Along with their associate officers, they should also be held accountable for the ambush on the state police team heading as the advance cavalcade for the chief minister, which is also related to the Jiribam incident," he added.

On June 9, the chief minister's office had instructed the police department to submit an action-taken report by June 11 on the security measures taken up in Jiribam district as the CMO had previously gave inputs about the movement of 200 armed Kuki Zo militants from Churachandpur towards Jiribam district.

In January, the CMO had informed that militants were seen in Phaitol and Old and New Kaiphundai in Tamenglong district, bordering Jiribam, and instructed the DGP to "take all necessary security measures and respond to threats posed by these groups." (PTI)

Nagaland Gov felicitates HSLC, HSSLC toppers

Gov advises students to think out of the box to boost their creativity and accept new challenges

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 12: Nagaland Governor La Ganesan felicitated toppers, rank holders and other achievers of the HSLC and HSSLC examinations, 2024 at a felicitation programme at Raj Bhawan in Kohima on Wednesday.

Speaking at the programme, Ganesan acknowledged the achievements of the diligent students who have made their families, school, and society proud with their hard work, dedication, and perseverance. He said the event was not just to celebrate the achievements of the students, but also to give due credit to the teachers, families and friends for the unconditional and unwavering support that they had bestowed throughout the journey of the students.

He wished to see the students present to be good leaders of today and tomorrow and be self-



sufficient. Ganesan exhorted the students to think out of the box to boost their creativity and take up new challenges in this extremely challenging world. He added that they are fortunate to have good facilities and infrastructures and have been provided with quality education by trained and experienced teachers.

He concluded by quoting Nelson Mandela "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world". The Governor also announced that cash awards for the students will be enhanced from next year.

Adviser to school education and SCERT, Kekhriehoulie Yhome congratulated the successful students and urged them to work harder to achieve greater heights. He thanked the office of the Governor for initiating and organising the programme to encourage the students of the state.

Yhome urged the students to appreciate all the good things in life and strive towards excellence.

NOTICE INVITING APPLICATION

It is to inform that the office of the undersigned is inviting application from the interested individuals in fisheries sector of West Karbi Anglong for implementation of "PRADHAN MANTRI MATSHYA SAMPADA YOJNA" (PMMSY) — Cage Culture 2020-21. The selected beneficiaries will get Govt. assistance of 60% (ST/Women) of the unit cost and the remaining 40% will have to be borne by the beneficiary as beneficiary's share. The District Level Selection Committee (DLSC) will approve the beneficiary base on feasibility and availability of the scheme. Application to be submitted at the O/o the Sub Divisional Fisheries Development Officer, Hamren, West Karbi Anglong on or before 24th June 2024 till 5 P.M.

Sl. No.	Component	Category	Unit Cost (Rs in lakh)	West Karbi Anglong		Remarks
				No. of Unit	Project Site	
1.	Cage Culture	ST	3.00/Nos.	15 Nos.	Maimaru Beel, Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong	Preference will be given to the applicants residing near the project site within the radius of 2 kilometers.
		Women	3.00/Nos.	10 Nos.		
		Women	3.00/Nos.	30 Nos.	Tongwok Beel, Karbi Rongsopi-2, West Karbi Anglong	

Following documents are to be enclosed along with the application:

1. Photo copy of PAN card, Voter ID, Front page copy of bank passbook, Passport size Photograph (3 Copies), Caste certificate, ADHAAR card and Mobile number are mandatory.

Sd/-
District Fisheries Development Officer
Karbi Anglong, Diphu

In dilemma on whether to retain Wayanad or Rae Bareilly LS seat, says Rahul Gandhi

Gandhi said that whatever decision he will take, both constituencies will be happy with it

MALAPPURAM (KERALA), June 12: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who won from Wayanad and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seats in the 2024 general elections, said on Wednesday that he was in a dilemma as to which constituency he should relinquish.

Gandhi said that whatever decision he will take, both constituencies will be happy with it.

He thanked the people of Wayanad for electing him for a second term in Lok Sabha and said, "I look forward to seeing you soon."

"I have a dilemma before me, whether I should be the MP of Wayanad or of Rae Bareilly. What I will commit to you is that both Wayanad and Rae Bareilly will be happy with my decision," the Congress leader said while speaking at a public meeting here.

It is his first appearance in the state after winning the Wayanad LS seat by a huge margin for the second consecutive time.

Gandhi, while speaking at the event, took a dig at Narendra Modi by saying that he does not receive any directions from God on what has to be done the way the PM does.



The Congress leader said that during the election campaign, Modi had claimed he was not biological and was put on earth by God who takes all the decisions for him.

Mocking at Modi, Gandhi said, "He (Modi) has a strange God. He makes him (Modi) take all the decisions in favour of Adani and Ambani. Unfortunately, unlike him, I am not guided by God. I am a human being."

He alleged that God directs the PM to hand over the country's

major airports and power plants to Adani and then "to do the Agniveer" to help the industrialist in the defence sector.

I, unfortunately, do not have this luxury as I am a human being and God does not order me. For me, it is much simpler. My God are the poor people of India. My gods are the people of Wayanad.

"So, for me, it is easy. I just talk to the people, and they tell me what I should do," he said.

During his speech, he also said

that the fight in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls was for protecting the Constitution of India and in that fight, hatred has been defeated by love and affection, and arrogance by humility.

Pointing out that on one side there are millions of Indians who want to preserve their different traditions, languages, cultures and histories, Gandhi said that they will define their future.

On the other side are the PM and Union Home Minister Amit Shah who said they will decide what languages should be spoken and what traditions should be followed, he claimed.

The Lok Sabha MP said that there was "fundamental misunderstanding" on the part of the PM and Shah.

"They (PM and Shah) thought that just because they have political power, they have ED, CBI and the Income Tax department, they can dictate to people what is going to happen."

"The people of Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and all other states showed the PM that you cannot dictate to us what we want. The people of India told them that the Constitution is

our voice. Do not touch the Constitution."

He further said that the truth was that the PM barely escaped defeat in Varanasi and the BJP was defeated in Ayodhya.

"So, even the people of Ayodhya sent a message to the BJP that we do not appreciate hatred and violence. The single biggest message that the people of India gave was that we have multiple traditions, states, religions and histories and every single one of them was going to be respected," Gandhi said.

Therefore, PM Modi will now have to change his attitude because the people of India have sent him a clear message, the Congress leader said.

He termed the government formed at the Centre as a "crippled one" and said the opposition has dealt a fatal blow to the BJP.

"From our perspective, our role of opposition will continue. We proposed an alternative vision for people of India - a pro poor compassionate vision - and we will fight for that. We are committed to making India a fairer society, a more productive society," he said. (PTI)

Chandrababu Naidu sworn in as Andhra Pradesh CM, Pawan Kalyan takes oath as Minister

AMARAVATI, June 12: TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh for the fourth term on Wednesday at a ceremony that was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, senior BJP leaders and Union Ministers.

Janasena chief and actor Pawan Kalyan, Nara Lokesh, son of Naidu, among others, took oath as Ministers. Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer administered the oath to Naidu and others. PM Modi hugged and patted Chandrababu Naidu on his assuming office.

Later, the PM held the hands of Telugu megastar Chiranjeevi and Pawan Kalyan and fondly spoke to them and also had a brief conversation with former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister O Panneerselvam, Tamil superstar Rajinikanth and his wife Latha on the dais.

Naidu retained his Kuppam con-

stituency while Pawan Kalyan and Lokesh won from Pithapuram and Mangalagiri assembly segments in the recently held polls.

Union Ministers Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari and J P Nadda, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde were present.

Former vice president M Venkaiah Naidu, Ex Chief Justice of India N V Ramana and Superstars Rajinikanth and Chiranjeevi also took part. The Pawan Kalyan-led party has got three and BJP one berth in the 25-member present cabinet.

As per the strength of Andhra Pradesh assembly (175), the cabinet can have 26 ministers, including the CM.

Besides Naidu and Lokesh, TDP legislators K Atchannaaidu, P Narayana, Kolla Ravindra, Nimmala Rama Naidu, Anitha Vangalapati, Anam Ramanarayana Reddy, Koruslu Parthasarathy, NMD Farooq,

Payyavula Keshav, A Styra Prasad, Dola Sree Bala Veeranjaneya Swamy, Gottiapati Ravi Kumar, Gummidi Sandhya Rani, BC Janardhan Reddy, TG Bharath, S Savitha, Vasamsetty Subhash, Kondapalli Srinivas and Mandipalli Ram Prasad Reddy also took oath.

From Janasena party, Nandendla Manohar and Kandula Durgesh while BJP legislator Satya Kumar Yadav took oath as ministers along with Pawan Kalyan.

In separate meetings on Tuesday, the Telugu Desam Legislature Party and NDA partners elected Naidu as their leader.

The NDA comprising TDP, BJP and Janasena won a landslide victory in the recently concluded simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the southern state with a huge majority of 164 out of the total 175 Assembly and 21 out of the total 25 Lok Sabha seats. (PTI)

President Murmu rejects mercy plea of Pak terrorist convicted in Red Fort attack case



NEW DELHI, June 12: The mercy petition of Pakistani terrorist Mohammed Arif alias Ashfaq convicted in the nearly 24-year-old Red Fort attack case has been rejected by President Droupadi Murmu, officials said on Wednesday.

This is the second mercy plea rejected by the President after assuming office on July 25, 2022.

The Supreme Court had dismissed a review petition by Arif on November 3, 2022, affirming the death penalty awarded to him in the case. However, a death row convict can still knock on the doors of the top court seeking commutation of his sentence on the ground of prolonged delay under Article 32 of the Constitution, feel experts.

The mercy petition from Arif, received on May 15, was turned down on May 27, the officials said, quoting the President's secretariat order of May 29.

The Supreme Court, while upholding the death sentence, noted that there were no mitigating circumstances in Arif's favour and emphasised that the attack on the Red Fort posed a direct threat to country's unity, integrity, and sovereignty. The attack, which took place on December 22, 2000, saw intruders opening fire at the 7 Rajputana Rifles unit stationed within the Red Fort premises, resulting in the deaths of three Army personnel.

Arif, a Pakistani national and a member of banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), was arrested by Delhi Police four days after the attack.

"Appellant-accused Mohd. Arif alias Ashfaq was a Pakistani national and had entered the Indian territory illegally," the top court's order of 2022 had said.

Arif was found guilty of conspiring with other militants to carry out the attack, with the trial court sentencing him to death in October 2005. The Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court upheld the decision in subsequent appeals.

The trial court had said that the conspiracy to attack the Red Fort was hatched at the house of two conspirators in Srinagar, where Arif had illegally entered in 1999 along with three other LeT militants.

The three militants -- Abu Shaad, Abu Bilal and Abu Haider -- who had also entered the monument, were killed in separate encounters.

Despite multiple legal challenges, including review and curative petitions, Arif's plea for mercy was rejected, highlighting the severity of the crime and the threat it posed to national security.

The Delhi High Court had confirmed the trial court's decision in September 2007. Arif then approached the Supreme Court challenging the high court's verdict. The top court had in August 2011 also sided with the order of awarding the death sentence awarded to him.

Later, his review petition came up before a two-judge bench of the apex court which dismissed it in August 2012. A curative petition was also rejected in January 2014.

Thereafter, Arif had filed a petition submitting that review petitions in matters arising out of award of death sentence be heard by a bench of three judges and in open court.

A constitution bench of the apex court had in its September 2014 judgement concluded that in all cases in which death sentence was awarded by the high court, such matters be listed before a bench of three judges. Before the September 2014 verdict, the review and curative petitions of death row convicts were not heard in open courts but were decided in chamber proceedings by circulation.

In January 2016, a constitution bench had directed that Arif shall be entitled to seek re-opening of the dismissal of the review petitions for an open court hearing within one month. The apex court had rejected the review petition in its verdict delivered on November 3, 2022. (PTI)

J&K BJP chief slams Farooq Abdullah for advocating dialogue with Pakistan

JAMMU, June 12: Jammu and Kashmir BJP president Ravinder Raina on Wednesday criticized National Conference president Farooq Abdullah for advocating dialogue with Pakistan and asked "what type of talks will be held with an enemy nation which has destroyed Jammu and Kashmir through its sponsored terrorism". He said the BJP would respond to Pakistan only in the same language which it understands. "Abdullah should stop advocating for Pakistan which had bled Jammu and Kashmir and brought destruction to the region by training, arming and pushing terrorists into this side to kill innocent citizens. Instead of condemning Pakistan, showing it the mirror and exposing its black face to the world, he is advocating dialogue which is highly regrettable," Raina said. Earlier in the day, Abdullah told reporters in Srinagar that terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir will not end unless talks are held with Pakistan. "I have always said that terrorism is not going to end unless there is an understanding between the two nations (India and Pakistan). Terrorism will continue and we will have to face it. The tragedy is that innocent people are getting killed... and that is unfortunate," Abdullah said. The National Conference leader said that "more innocent people would lose their lives unless we wake up and find a solution to this". "We are the ones facing tragedies. Innocent people of the state are facing tragedies and a reflection of this happens in the rest of the country. I hope they realise that the time has come to end this," he added. The BJP leader said that Abdullah should tell the people whether Pakistan is behind the bloodshed which is happening in Jammu and Kashmir or not. "Pakistan Army is conducting training for the terrorists and providing them weapons before pushing them into Jammu and Kashmir," Raina said, adding having sympathy for Pakistan is not good and instead Abdullah should boost the morale of the Indian Army, police and paramilitary forces and salute their sacrifices for safeguarding the region by fighting terrorism. (PTI)

Will PM Modi visit Manipur after Bhagwat's remarks, asks Uddhav Thackeray

MUMBAI, June 12: Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday asked whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Manipur after RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's remarks on the situation in the north-eastern state.

Addressing a press conference here, the former Maharashtra chief minister also sought to know what was the difference on the ground after the abrogation of Article 370, which provided special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

Manipur plunged into violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities in May last year. Since then, nearly 200 persons have been killed, while thousands have been displaced following large scale arson that has gutted homes and government buildings.

Fresh violence has been reported from Jiribam in Manipur over the past few days.

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Bhagwat on Monday expressed concern over peace eluding Manipur even after one year and said the situation in the strife-torn north eastern state must be considered with priority.

"Mohan Bhagwat has said that Manipur is burning. He has at least said this after a year. Will the prime minister and home minister not go there?" Thackeray asked.

Referring to the situation in Manipur and Jammu and Kashmir, he said if Modi can't handle it, then he has no right to be the prime minister for the third term.

Thackeray claimed Jammu and Kashmir is on the boil.

"Lives are being lost. Who is responsible for the terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir?" the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader asked.

"I am concerned about the future of the country and not about the future of the NDA government," he said.

Officials on Wednesday said a CRPF jawan was killed and six security personnel were injured in two overnight encounters with terrorists in Kathua and Doda districts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Earlier, nine persons were killed and 33 injured as terrorists struck a bus carrying pilgrims from Uttar Pradesh in Jammu and Kashmir's

Reasi district on Sunday evening, opening fire on the vehicle which fell into a gorge.

Thackeray also said there were no differences in the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi, comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress and the NCP (SP) led by Sharad Pawar, over candidates for the upcoming state legislative council polls for four constituencies.

"There is no difference," he asserted. It is a fact there was a "loose connection" in the dialogue (among the MVA partners), Thackeray said, adding that he was not here after the Lok Sabha polls.

During this time, all parties declared their candidates and nominations had to be filed within the stipulated time, he said.

The deadline for filing nominations was June 7. Voting will be held on June 26 and results will be declared on July 1.

The biennial elections to four legislative council seats - Mumbai Graduates, Konkan Graduates, Mumbai Teachers and Nashik Teachers - became necessary as terms of the sitting members are expiring in July.

The Congress on Tuesday expressed displeasure over Thackeray "unilaterally" announcing Shiv Sena (UBT) candidates for the legislative council polls in the Konkan Graduates and Nashik Teachers' constituencies, demanding their withdrawal from the race.

Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole claimed he had attempted to contact Thackeray when the candidates were announced, but the Shiv Sena (UBT) chief was abroad.

According to Patole, the Congress had finalised the candidature of Sandeep Gulve for the Nashik Teachers' constituency and informed Thackeray, but the latter inducted Gulve into the Shiv Sena (UBT) of 1999," it said.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) has nominated MLC Anil Parab and J M Abhyankar for the Mumbai Graduates and Mumbai Teachers constituencies, respectively. Parab is a former state transport minister, and Abhyankar heads the Shiv Sena (UBT) teachers' cell. (PTI)

BJP tribal leader Mohan Majhi sworn in as Odisha CM

BHUBANESWAR, June 12: Four-time MLA and tribal leader Mohan Charan Majhi was on Wednesday sworn in as the first BJP chief minister of Odisha at a ceremony here attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several Union ministers and chief ministers.

Senior BJP leader and Patnagarh MLA KV Singh Deo and debutant from Nimapara assembly segment Pravatī Parida took oath as deputy chief ministers.

Governor Rabghubar Das administered the oath of secrecy and office to them at Janata Maidan.

This is the first time that a BJP government has been formed in the eastern state.

Apart from Modi, BJP chief JP Nadda, Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Bhupendra Yadav, Dharmendra Pradhan, Jai Oram, Ashwini Vaishnav and others attended the ceremony.

Several chief ministers of BJP-ruled states including Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand were also present. Odisha's outgoing chief minister Naveen Patnaik also attended the ceremony.

BJP for the first time got a clear mandate in Odisha, ending the 24-year-old stint of the BJD.

The saffron party stormed to power in Odisha by securing 78 seats in the 147-member Assembly while Patnaik-led BJD got 51 seats, Congress (14), CPI(M) won in one seat while Independents got three. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, June 12: Three teams of eight motorcyclists each from three corners of the country have embarked on a journey as part of pan-India motorcycle expedition that began on Wednesday to commemorate the 25th anniversary of India's victory over Pakistan in the Kargil conflict.

The expedition serves to showcase significant contribution of the brave soldiers and honour their legacy, the defence ministry said in a statement.

"As a tribute to the valour and sacrifices of heroes of the Kargil war, the Indian Army has commenced a pan-India motorcycle expedition today, a journey commemorating the 25th anniversary of India's victory over Pakistan in the Kargil war of 1999," it said.

Three teams of eight motorcyclists each have embarked on this journey from three corners of the country -- Dinjan in the east, Dwarka in the west, and Dhanuskodi in the south. These riders will traverse diverse terrains and challenging routes, symbolising the unity and resilience of the armed forces, the statement said.

On their way, the riders will reach out to

Will PM Modi continue to deprive Odisha of its fair share: Cong

NEW DELHI, June 12: The Congress on Wednesday accused the Centre of steadily reducing Odisha's central funding in recent years and asked whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi will continue to deprive the state of its fair share.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh posed questions to the prime minister ahead of the swearing-in ceremony of Mohan Charan Majhi as the CM.

"The previous government of the 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri had steadily reduced Odisha's Central funding in recent years. According to CAG reports, central transfers as percentage of revenue receipts have been consistently decreasing from 57 per cent in 2017-18 to 38 per cent in 2021-22," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Similarly, the CAG noted that the state's share of Union taxes, as a percentage of revenue receipts of the state, has been continuously decreasing from 2018-19 to 2021-22, he said.

Ramesh also pointed out that grants under recommendation of the Fifteenth Finance Commission have also decreased recently.

"Will the 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri continue to deprive Odisha of its fair share?" the Congress general secretary asked.

He said the Sitalapali rail wagon factory has been in cold storage ever since it was sanctioned by the UPA government in 2013.

The previous government undertook zero

work on this project and then finally dropped it in 2018, he alleged.

"When the current Railway Minister, a Rajya Sabha Member from Odisha, took office, he promised to take the project up again. In September 2021, an official of the East Coast Railway said that the project would be implemented on a PPP model. Till date, however, there has been no progress in this much-awaited project," Ramesh said.

The Congress leader further said that two other projects, the Gopalpur-Rayagada Railway Line and the Rairakhole-Gopalpur Railway Line, have also suffered the same fate.

Will these projects see the light of day before the current government collapses, he asked.

Noting that 293 people were killed and over a 1,000 injured in the horrific collision of three trains in Balasore last year, Ramesh said that while three railway officials were eventually held responsible, one can hardly absolve the Central government of their role in this mishap.

"In the last ten years, the railways have struggled with high staff vacancies across the country. In November 2022, the Railway Workers' Union had even organised a sit-in demanding new recruitment so that staff would not be forced to work overtime and would receive the rest they required," he said.

The Railway Ministry itself admitted in a RTI that there were 2.74 lakh vacancies, includ-

ing 1.7 lakh vacancies in the safety category, he said.

"This hasn't changed despite a track record of accidents: a similar accident had occurred in May 2022 due to improper wiring and a cable fault, but the Railway Ministry did not implement any corrective measures. The government clearly has blood on their hands," Ramesh alleged.

However, even after such disasters, staff vacancies continue to remain rampant and the Railway Minister was re-appointed to his position, he said.

Are Odia lives so cheap and disposable to the PM, Ramesh asked.

"During the elections, the BJP's now MP Sambit Patra stated that even 'Lord Jagannath is a devotee of Modi'. This statement is deeply insulting to crores of Lord Jagannath's devotees across the world. After the incident, Patra rendered a half-hearted apology, making the excuse that his statement was just a 'slip of tongue'," Ramesh recalled.

"However, this is not an isolated instance but part of a larger pattern - the 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri himself has claimed that he was not biologically born but sent to Earth by the Creator himself. Can he tell us where he claims to fit in the pantheon of Indian Gods? Does he truly believe Lord Jagannath to be his devotee?" he said. (PTI)

Pan-India motorcycle expedition kicks off to mark 25th anniversary of victory in Kargil war



the Kargil war heroes, veterans and 'veer nari' who are residing at various places en route, it said.

They will also pay homage at war memorials en route, raise awareness and encourage the youth to join the Indian Army.

The eastern route encompasses movement from Dinjan to Delhi, via Jorhat, Guwahati, Binaguri, Katihar, Danapur, Gorakhpur, Lucknow and Agra covering 2,489 km approximately, it said.

The western route encompasses movement from Dwarka to Delhi via Dhran-gadhra, Ahmedabad, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Ajmer, Jaipur and Alwar covering nearly 1,565 km approximately.

The southern route encompasses movement from Dhanuskodi to Delhi via Madurai, Coimbatore, Bengaluru, Anantapur, Hyderabad, Nagpur, Bhopal Gwalior and Alwar covering nearly 2,963 km.

The teams will converge in Delhi on June 26 and proceed ahead along two different routes to Dras. One through Ambala, Amritsar, Jammu, Udampur and Srinagar covering 1,085 km while the other via Chandimandir, Manali, Sarchu, Nyoma, Tangtse and Leh covering 1,509 km.

"The expedition will be finally culminating at Gun Hill in Dras, a place etched in history for its strategic importance during the Kargil war. This final leg of the expedition will not only retrace the paths of bravery but will also serve as a reminder of the relentless spirit and dedication of our soldiers," it added.

Flag-off and flag-in ceremonies at all prominent places will be conducted in the presence of eminent dignitaries to include senior military officials, veterans, 'veer nari' and distinguished guests, who will felicitate and encourage the riders and the cause they represent.

The Kargil war veterans and 'veer nari' will also be felicitated recognising their sacrifices and unwavering support during the war.

The expedition is being led by the Regiment of Artillery, which played a pivotal role to ensure success in Operation Vijay. Artillery's precision, firepower and strategic support were vital in turning the tide in favour of the Indian armed forces.

As the riders travel through the length and breadth of the country, they will carry with them the stories of courage, sacrifice and patriotism. This expedition is not just a tribute, but a symbol of enduring spirit of the Indian Army, it said.

'Operation Vijay' was the name given to India's limited war against Pakistan after the neighbouring country infiltrated in 1999.

On July 26, 1999, the Indian Army announced the successful culmination of 'Operation Vijay', declaring victory after a nearly three-month-long battle at the icy heights of Kargil, including super-high-altitude locations such as Tololing and Tiger Hill. (PTI)

Maharashtra gov't's slum policy strange as it encourages encroachments; its inspection required: Bombay HC

MUMBAI, June 12: The Bombay High Court has termed as "strange" the Maharashtra government's slum policy under which encroachers are given free tenement, and lamented that an international city like Mumbai is known for its slums.

In a judgment passed on Tuesday, a division bench of Justices Girish Kulkarni and Jitendra Jain said the state's policy has resulted in large pockets of land being siphoned off from the "state pool".

It also called for a "thorough inspection of such government policies, keeping in view the plight of the future generation who would suffer the ill-effects of the state of affairs".

The court said once slums on a private land are recognised under the Slum Act, strangely the encroachment on a private land gets converted into a legitimate right of a free tenement to the encroacher under the slum policy of the state government, which, in our opinion, is as good as a premium on the illegality of the encroacher in encroaching on either private or public land.

The court said government authorities need to be conscious of the ground reality that it is a herculean task to remove encroachers from

both private and public land.

The court said it is reminded of "woeful realities" wherein major public lands in Mumbai have vanished from the public pool and are subjected to private development by developers under the garb of slum redevelopment.

If the official machinery was to act as per law, today we would not have been confronted with the situation of an international city like Mumbai being also known for its slums on private and public lands," the HC said.

The bench quashed a notice of October 2021 issued by the CEO of the SRA to the Mount Mary Church trust seeking to acquire some portion of land owned by it in suburban Bandra for a slum redevelopment project.

"In our opinion, the acquisition in the present case is totally unwarranted. The decision of the SRA, as



for its slums on private and public lands," the HC said.

The court was hearing a petition filed by Bishop John Rodrigues, sole trustee and rector of Basilica of Our Lady of the Mount Mount Mary Road in Bandra challenging the SRA notice seeking to acquire 1596 sq metres land for the slum redevelopment project.

As per the plea, the trust owns the 9,371 sq metres, situated at Ban-

drum Mumbai, out of which 35 slum structures occupy the 1,596 sq metres land.

The court in its order said the right of the slum-dwellers is only to a permanent alternate accommodation under the statutory scheme and the state policies.

"The slum-dwellers cannot have an approach that they become owners of the land and assert rights to defeat the rights of the real owners of the land. In our opinion, neither such rights of any ownership of the land to the slum dwellers are recognised by the Slum Act nor can such rights be so inferred," it said.

"Unfortunately, it is the state policy which in fact has encouraged encroachments on all categories of lands and resulted in large government lands being siphoned off from the 'state pool' and equally private lands being completely lost to its owners," the court said.

Such a position is wholly unacceptable when the rights of every individual/person are conferred by the Constitution and the laws, it added.

The bench said a thorough inspection is required on such government policies, keeping in view the plight of the future generation who would suffer the ill-effects of the

state of affairs, as they exist today, continues.

"It is high time to ponder on the future rights on such aspects. We are conscious of the needs of the large cities which require a large amount of migrant work force and recognition of the residential needs of such a workforce. However, this could not mean that valuable lands, either public or private, can be taken away merely because such lands for a long period are permitted to be encroached, throwing to the winds, the elementary adherence of principles of law on the right to property," it said.

The bench said the SRA and other authorities need to be conscious of the ground realities that it is an herculean task in Mumbai to remove any encroachment on private and public land.

It is equally difficult for a private owner of the land to safeguard its land and prevent encroachment, HC said.

"This is the sad story, as encroachment does not happen by such encroachers simply squatting on the land, but are invariably backed by slumlords, criminals, social workers, politicians (as the squatters would be vote banks)," it said. (PTI)

Jailed gangster raises pro-Pak slogans inside court premises, roughed up



BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA), June 12: Jailed gangster Jayesh Pujari allegedly raised pro-Pakistan slogans on the premises of a court here, where he was brought on Wednesday in connection with the hearing in a pending case against him, police said.

Following this, he was allegedly roughed up by people and advocates who assembled there, they said.

"We don't have a conclusive answer as to why he shouted those slogans. We are investigating," a senior police official said.

Pujari had a hearing scheduled today in connection with a 2018 case registered against him and so was brought to the court from Central Prison, Hindalga, where he is lodged, police said.

The case was registered after he allegedly threatened one of the then Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Alok Kumar, the police official told PTI, adding, he is also a convict in a double murder case.

On Wednesday, when he was being produced in the court, he allegedly shouted 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogans inside the court premises, he said.

Police personnel present there immediately secured him and brought him to the police station.

Asked if he was assaulted over the raising of pro-Pakistan slogans, the official said: "We are investigating, we still need to find out what happened. There is footage which shows he was allegedly assaulted but whether he was actually assaulted or not, we are still checking but he is fine and did not sustain any visible injury marks."

"A case is being registered against Pujari with respect to today's incident under sections 295 A (Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) and section 505 (2) (Statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes) of the Indian Penal Code at market police station of Belagavi city and subsequently, he will be sent to judicial custody," he added.

Pujari had made threatening calls to the office of Union Minister Nitin Gadkari demanding ransom last year, police said. (PTI)

Mental health institute receives bomb threat over email; turns out to be hoax

CHANDIGARH, June 12: A mental health institute here received a bomb threat over email on Wednesday, but later it turned out to be a hoax, police said.

After the email was received in the morning, patients and employees were moved to safety and a search operation was initiated, police said.

An official of the institute claimed the same email was sent to a number of hospitals in Delhi and south India.

A Chandigarh police official said they cordoned off the area and thoroughly searched the premises of the mental health institute but nothing was found.

"We did not find anything," Deputy Superintendent of Chandigarh Police (South) Dalvir Singh said.

Besides police personnel, the bomb disposal squad, dog squad and fire department officials were also deputed at the site after police were informed about the email.

Dr Aparajita, the deputy medical superintendent of the Mental Health Institute at Sector 32, Chandigarh, told reporters earlier in the day that the hospital received the bomb threat over email in the morning.

There were about 100 people, including patients, doctors and other employees at the hospital at that time, she said.

"We received an email. In addition to our centre, the email was sent to many psychiatry hospitals in the country. It stated that there is a bomb in the hospital," the doctor said.

Replying to a question, Dr Aparajita said, "We forwarded the email to the police. The sender's name... did not appear to be known. It was sent from a personal email id."

Asked which other hospitals were mentioned in the email, she said, "It had names of some hospitals in Delhi, some in south India and CIP (Central Institute of Psychiatry), Ranchi."

"In the email, it was written that there is a bomb in the hospital and everyone will die," the deputy medical superintendent said. (PTI)

BSF busts Maoist dump in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, June 12: The Border Security Force (BSF) discovered explosives, including IED, and a few more items in a Maoist hideout in the jungles of Malkangiri district in Odisha.

The haul was seized on Tuesday by the troops of the 2nd battalion of the force from under a rock cavity formed along the foothills of the Tulsi Dongri reserve forest.

An Improvised Explosive Device weighing about 1.5 kg and packed in a steel tiffin, explosive powder weighing about 300 gm, a solar plate and wire, iron-cutter and some other items were recovered by the troops during a patrol, official sources said.

The troops destroyed the IED and a potential threat to security forces and locals was neutralised, they said.

The BSF is deployed in Odisha for anti-Naxal operations in the state and along its borders with Chhattisgarh. (PTI)

J&K: Terrorist, CRPF jawan killed in Kathua 6 security personnel injured in Doda encounter

JAMMU, June 12: A terrorist holed up in a border village in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district was killed by security forces on Wednesday in a more than 15-hour operation during which his partner was also shot dead and a CRPF jawan lost his life, officials said.

According to them, two senior officers escaped unhurt even as their vehicles were hit by bullets during the operation that began on Tuesday night after two terrorists were spotted in Saida Sukhal village.

In Doda district, five troopers of Rashtriya Rifles and a special police officer (SPO) were injured when terrorists attacked a joint checkpoint in the upper reaches of Chattergalla on the Bhaderwah-Pathankot road late on Tuesday night. Traffic on the highway has been suspended as an operation is underway to track down the terrorists.

The two incidents come just days after terrorists attacked a bus carrying pilgrims from the Shiv Khori temple to Katra, causing it to veer off the road and fall into a deep gorge. Nine people died and 41 were injured in the Sunday evening attack.

Police have announced a Rs 20 lakh reward for information on the whereabouts of the terrorists involved in the attack on the bus and have also released the sketch of one of the terrorists.

Authorities have claimed that attempts by Pakistan to disturb the peaceful atmosphere in Jammu and Kashmir were the reason for the spurt in terror activities in the Jammu region.

In Kathua's Saida Sukhal village near the International Border -- around 60 kms from here -- the second holed-up terrorist was killed on Wednesday noon in an intense gunfight after being cornered by the joint security parties of the police, Army and CRPF, officials said.

The terrorist tried to break the cordon by firing indiscriminately at the security forces around 3 am. Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan Kabir Dass, a resident of Madhya Pradesh, was critically injured in the firing and later succumbed to injuries in a hospital, they said.

During the operation, official vehicles of Deputy Inspector General of Police, Jammu-Samba-Kathua range, Sunil Gupta and Senior Superintendent of Police, Kathua, Anayat Ali Choudhary were hit by several bullets but the officers escaped unhurt.

Talking to reporters after the encounter ended, Additional Director General of Police (Jammu zone) Anand Jain, who supervised the operation, said both the terrorists have been killed and a large quantity of weapons, improvised explosive devices and grenades

recovered from them.

"A search is still on as there is a possibility of some more terrorists hiding in the area. The terrorists had freshly infiltrated (from across the border) and a joint operation was launched immediately after getting information about their presence in the village," he said.

He lauded the bravery of the slain CRPF jawan and said, "We salute his sacrifice."

Earlier, the ADGP said, "Two terrorists entered the village around 8 pm on Tuesday and asked for water from a household. The people got frightened and as soon as they informed us, a police team rushed to the village."

"One of the terrorists tried to hurl a grenade at the police team and was killed in the exchange of fire," he said.

Officials said both the slain terrorists are believed to be Pakistanis. An M4 carbine, an AK assault rifle and over Rs 1 lakh in cash besides Pakistan-made food items and medicines were seized from the encounter site, they said, adding the identity and group affiliation of the terrorists were being ascertained.

A civilian was also injured in the terrorist firing and was hospitalised on Tuesday night, the officials said.

In Doda, terrorists fired on a joint check-

post of the 4 Rashtriya Rifles and police at Chattergalla area late on Tuesday night, leading to a fierce gunfight which continued for several hours, officials said.

They said five Rashtriya Rifles personnel and an SPO were injured and they were taken to hospital. Additional security personnel have been rushed to the area to intensify the operation against the terrorists, they said.

According to the officials, traffic movement has been completely suspended on the busy Bhadarwah-Pathankot interstate highway in view of the ongoing search and cordon operation in Chattergalla, Guldandi, Sarthal, Shankh Pader and Kailash mountain range.

Without naming Pakistan, ADGP Anand Jain said the "hostile" neighbour is always making attempts to disturb peace in the Jammu region.

Meanwhile, a search and cordon operation has been launched in the Kadal area of the Nowshera sector in Rajouri district following suspicious movement of two persons.

Security forces have been put on high alert following intelligence reports about possible attempts by terrorists to carry out an attack, especially in Poonch and Rajouri districts which has been seeing a spurt in terror activities over the past two years, officials said. (PTI)

Nine lakh tulips to be planted across Delhi ahead of flowering season



NEW DELHI, June 12: Delhi will be adorned with over nine lakh tulips during the flowering season, Raj Niwas officials said on Wednesday.

Nine lakh tulips will be planted this year, almost double the number of tulips planted in Delhi in the winters of 2023 (five lakh) and almost six times the number planted in 2022 (1.5 lakh tulips), they added.

"The increase in plantation of Tulips and other flowers across the city is in line with Delhi Lt Gov-

ernor VK Saxena's aim and the emphasis given on turning the National Capital into a 'City of Flowers'.

"In a meeting chaired by Saxena yesterday, a blueprint was prepared for sourcing and plantation of Tulips in the upcoming flowering season. The meeting was attended by the horticulture departments of various civic and government agencies," the official said.

In the meeting, LG was informed that the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) would procure 3.25 lakh Tulips while the DDA (Delhi Development Authority) will procure four lakh tulips this year, he said.

Other civic and greening agencies will purchase Tulips from NDMC and DDA, as per their requirements. Nearly 2.5 lakh Tulip bulbs would also be received from the CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bio-resource Technology in Palampur and other Centres where NDMC had sent the harvested tulip bulbs from Delhi for further regeneration, he added.

In the meeting, the LG also directed the DDA and

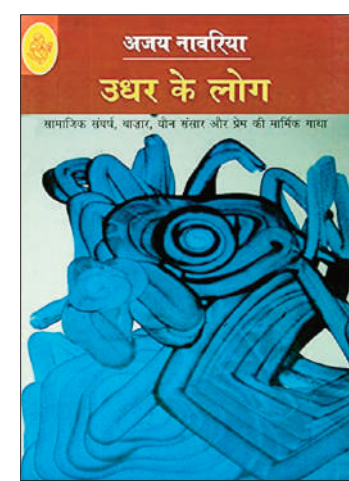
NDMC to sell potted tulips at reasonable prices, through its nurseries in different parts of the city like New Delhi, East, North and Outer Delhi areas.

This year, the entire NDMC area including its 52 roundabouts, prominent places like the diplomatic area of Shanti Path, Talkatora Garden, Windsor Place, Central Park (Connaught Place), Mandi House, Akbar Road, Chanakyaपुरी, Lodhi Garden and Nehru Park, RML round about etc. would be adorned with multi-hued Tulips. Tulips will also be planted at the Parliament House well in advance so that they are in full bloom during the sessions.

DDA will plant the tulips in various parks, and recreational spaces on the Yamuna riverbed like Asita, Baansera and Yamuna Yatika, and other city forests that are frequented by people.

Last year, tulips in the shades of yellow, white, orange, purple, blue, pink and red, were planted in 65 locations. However, the target this year is to cover nearly 200 prominent locations across Delhi, with tulips, he said. (PTI)

Novel discusses struggles of emerging middle class among Dalits in urban India



NEW DELHI, June 12: Ajay Navaria, who teaches Hindi at Jamia Millia Islamia, wanted to highlight how different castes behave and interact with each other and also wrote about the struggles of the emerging middle class among Dalits in urban India and thus his novel "Udhar ke Log" was born.

"Worlds within Worlds", the English translation of the Hindi work, deals with a plethora of topics ranging from conversations and debates regarding current caste politics to deconstructing of wedding rituals.

In the novel, translated into English by Nita Kumar and published by Niyogi Books under its Thornbird imprint, the various characters portray the multiplicity, and offer myriad ways and means, to understand caste and power in everyday life across socio-economic and cultural landscapes.

Navaria says caste is "not only the social reality of India but sadly, it is also the economic, political and cultural reality" of the nation.

In this way, the concept of caste deeply affects the lives of the Indian people and their human sensibilities like love, friendship, spirit of cooperation, compassion, anger and generosity, he says.

"While writing this novel, this was the basic thought that compelled me. I wanted to highlight the way different castes behave and interact with

CWC and IIT Roorkee forge partnership for water resources and urban flood management

NEW DELHI, June 12: The Central Water Commission (CWC) and IIT Roorkee have inked two pacts aimed at tackling pressing issues in water resources management and urban flooding.

The agreements signed by Kushvinder Vohra, Chairman of CWC, and Professor Kamal Kishore Pant, Director of IIT Roorkee, mark a collaborative effort to develop innovative solutions for efficient water management and urban flood resilience, a statement said.

The first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) focuses on enhancing water resources management. Key initiatives include assessing irrigation efficiency, conducting comprehensive water accounting studies and mapping cropped areas under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana.

The partnership will also establish a certificate programme for water auditors and evaluate the impact of climate change on water resources.

These efforts aim to improve water management practices and boost agricultural productivity,



aligning with government objectives.

The second MoU addresses urban flooding, with a focus on forecasting, numerical flood inundation and hazard mapping and urban flood risk management.

By leveraging data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning, the collaboration aims to produce precise flood susceptibility maps and robust resilience mechanisms. This initiative supports government strategies to enhance urban infrastructure and

disaster preparedness.

"The expertise of IIT Roorkee in water resources management, combined with the practical insights of the CWC, will drive innovation in irrigation efficiency, water accounting and urban flood forecasting. This partnership is poised to foster a culture of innovation that promotes efficient water resources management," Professor Ashish Pandey, Bharat Singh Chair Professor for Water Resources, said.

Vohra emphasized the impor-

ASSOCIATE SIGNALING WORK AT LUMDING DIVISION
E-tender No. SNT-24-LMG-2024-25
Dated: 10-06-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Name of work:** Associate Signaling work in connection with replacement of existing 1 in 12 with 1 in 16 turnout at Mahur, Manderdisa, Dibalong, Maibang, Dasotahaja & Langling station in Hill section of Lumding division.
Tender value: ₹2,00,07,976.21. **Bid Security:** ₹2,50,000/- **Date and time of closing of Tender:** 15:00 hrs. on 02-07-2024 & opening at 15:30 hrs. on 02-07-2024. For details please visit www.irpe.gov.in
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Everywhere I go, people call me Pradhan ji: Raghubir Yadav on 'Panchayat' success

NEW DELHI, June 12: Almost four decades after his first film, more since his debut on stage and numerous small screen appearances later, veteran actor Raghubir Yadav says Panchayat has taken his success to the next level with people recognising him as "Pradhan ji" wherever he goes.

"As if what I have

Yadav, one of the most prominent faces of the parallel cinema and theatre movement whose career arc spans decades and mediums, told PTI.

The adulation after Panchayat, which revolves around the everyday struggles of people in an Uttar Pradesh village and is currently in its third season, also worries him. The OTT show has reintroduced him to audiences as the beloved and a little befuddled Pradhan ji, always looking to improve the lives of his village.

"Everywhere I go, people call me Pradhan ji. Right now, I am shooting in Varanasi and people are wondering what is Pradhan ji doing

done in the past is forgotten. I am Pradhan ji,"



amongst us," he said in the phone interview from Varanasi.

The 66-year-old acknowledges the enormous success of the OTT show but is also wary of making too much of it in case it affects his performance.

"I will take it in only after there are no more seasons left. Right now, I just worry about the quality of the show. I don't want to be too happy or sad," he said. "The characters shown in the series were the kind of people I grew up with or met them during my Parsi theatre days. There was a simplicity and ease to life that is still inherent in our villages. That's what the series has managed to translate without much artifice," Yadav said.

He grew up in one such village in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district. Ranjhi didn't even have a school but was steeped in melody. He would sing film songs in local functions and perform bhajans in the temple built by his maternal grandfather. And that's how he started dreaming of a career in music.

"Sometimes your wishes pave the way for you. I joined a Parsi theatre company run by (actor) Annu Kapoor's father and worked there for six years. I would get Rs 2.50 daily and I count it among my best days. I would often go hungry but it

taught me so much. Thodi takleef na ho to maza nahi aata," he said.

From the Parsi theatre in Madhya Pradesh, Yadav went on to study in Delhi's National School of Drama where he stayed for 13 years as part of the repertory company, honing his talents as an actor and also singer.

"Since childhood, I don't get too happy or sad about things. What people call a struggle, I believe is just motivation to work hard," he said. Recalling his student years in NSD, where Panchayat co-star Neena Gupta was his junior, Yadav recalled that Ebrahim Alkazi, then director of the drama school, asked him to choose his specialisation and he responded by saying he wanted to learn everything.

"And that's how I came into stagecraft. All the students warned me that you will have to labour a lot but I went ahead with it. It has helped me a lot in acting. I never need any cues or the mark. I know where to stand, when to stop and how much distance there should be between co-actors while performing." "I have a small workshop at home and when I am not doing anything, I craft little things like flutes and stuff. I also sometimes pick up the broom and clean the house or get into the kitchen. I find it therapeutic," he

added.

Gupta, who plays his on-screen wife Manju Devi in "Panchayat", recently posted a picture of their youth which was circulated widely. Yadav said it feels surreal that their life has brought them to this moment. "We did many plays together and while working on the show we realised we have travelled such a long distance and still are like family to each other. That's how we behave when we are working on the show. This is a picture from when she was in NSD and I was in the repertory. That photo made us realise the journey we have had. That experience now reflects on our faces," he said.

Acting, said the Mumbai-based artiste who first came to notice with Massey Sahib and the Doordarshan serial Mungeri Lal Ke Haseen Sapne, is a constant process of learning. "The field of arts and culture is like an ocean. You can never have enough. If I am honest, I feel one lifetime is too short for it. There is so much to do for everyone. I feel I should learn the best I can and maybe I can excel in my next life because one life is not enough," he said. From playing Mungerilal, the day-dreaming protagonist of "Mungerilal..." to Pradhanji in Panchayat, it has been an interesting journey. The film debut came with Pradi

Krishen's Massey Sahib. And it has been quality over quantity for him ever since.

Yadav has also featured in acclaimed films such as Salaam Bombay!, Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda, Dharavi, Maya Memsaab, Bandit Queen and Saaz. Then there were commercial outings, including Dil Se..., Lagaan, Dilli 6, Peepli Live or Piku, Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar and the latest Kathal.

His television outings have been equally impressive whether it was Mungerilal Ke Haseen Sapne or the Chacha Chowdhary of the beloved comic book adaptation. That's not counting his theatre years and the music work that he has done over the years. Not all the film roles were to his liking. It was challenging to say no to movies that were of inferior quality but came with attractive pay cheques, he said. However, he always felt he should stay true to his craft, he said. "I always feel that I shouldn't be doing something that does not feel right. You may earn money in the short term but what will you do after that. I come from theatre and understand the joy that comes from playing varied characters. In the other kind of work, you are playing the same character with different outfits after a point," he said. (PTI)

Diljit Dosanjh to appear on Jimmy Fallon 'The Tonight Show'

NEW DELHI, June 12: Actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh is set to make an appearance on American talk show The Tonight Show, presented by Jimmy Fallon.

Fallon will host Dosanjh, a popular name in Punjabi cinema and music industry, on the June 17 episode of the long-running show which airs weeknights on the US broadcaster NBC.

Dosanjh, who is currently on the North American leg of his 'Dil-Lumnati Tour', shared about his appearance on his Instagram page on Tuesday. "PANJABI AAGYE OYEE. This Week's Guest. @jimmyfallon @fallontonight @nbc," the singer captioned a series of pictures, setting the post to his popular Punjabi song "GOAT".

"BHANGRA HUN MAINSTREAM PENA PROPER HOLLYWOOD (Now Bhangra will go mainstream in Hollywood)," he added.

Dosanjh, who was last seen in Amar Singh Chamkila, is looking forward to the release of his Punjabi movie Jatt and Juliet 3. (PTI)

BTS member Jin discharged from military, band reassembles to celebrate his homecoming

NEW DELHI, June 12: Singer Jin of the internationally renowned K-pop group BTS has officially been discharged from his mandatory military service, as confirmed by the band's managing agency on Wednesday.

The news was met with joy as the six other BTS members—RM, Suga, j-hope, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook—were granted a day off from their own military duties to celebrate Jin's homecoming. The reunion was marked with festivities that included a cake, cookies, and balloons spelling 'JIN IS BACK'.

In South Korea, all able-bodied men aged 18-28 must serve roughly two years in the military. BTS members were able to defer this duty until they reached the age of

30. Jin, born Kim Seok-jin, began his service on December 13, 2022, making him the first of the group to enlist.

Big Hit Music, BTS's management agency, shared the announcement and celebratory images on Instagram, echoing the excitement of the band's global fanbase, known as ARMY. Jin's discharge came just a day before BTS's 11th debut anniversary, adding to the jubilation. The fan group is eagerly anticipating FESTA 2024, a two-week event commemorating the band's debut, and a special meet-and-greet with Jin to be livestreamed on Weverse.

BTS aims to reunite fully by around 2025, following the completion of all members' military service commitments. (PTI)



Indian film shoots 'very nice' success story, says Bulgarian tourism chief

SOFIA (BULGARIA), June 12: Several Indian film production houses have chosen Bulgaria as a destination for their foreign shoots in recent years, something the country's senior tourism official describes as a "very, very nice success story", which they would like to build on further in their quest to boost tourism from India to the European country.

Georgi Alipiev, Director of International Cooperation in the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, believes the country's pitch as an "all-seasons destination" and move towards fully aligning with the European Union's (EU) common Schengen free travel area will attract even more film production teams, with tourists from India follow-

ing in their footsteps. From Shah Rukh Khan's 'Dilwale' to Ajay Devgn's 'Shivaay' and the epic 'Bahubali', several big banner films have chosen locations in and around the Bulgarian capital of Sofia.

"We have a very, very nice success story with the filming of Bollywood movies and this is because of the fact that we can offer the best quality of shooting; the professionals in Bulgaria can assist their colleagues from India," Alipiev told PTI.

According to the Indian Embassy in Bulgaria, former Indian President Ram Nath Kovind requested his Bulgarian counterpart, Rumén Radev, during his State Visit to Sofia in 2018 to drop in on the sets of the fantasy adventure

'Brahmastra: Part One - Shiva'. The following year the adventure-based television reality show 'Khatron Ke Khiladi' was shot in Sofia.

"I think films are the best channel through which we can advertise Bulgaria to the Indian market. We are the 16th largest European country out of 55 nations, so our territory is not small. This is a strong fact. They can enjoy many, many interesting landmarks, many interesting sites. The capital Sofia itself has huge cultural value as a real cradle of Christianity for Europe and for the world," he said.

Alipiev went on to highlight many other spectacular sites in the capital city, which also offers around 30 mineral water springs and is among the top

three spa destinations of Europe.

"Our other important cities include Plovdiv, the oldest inhabited city in Europe which has many interesting Roman and ancient monuments from other cultures and periods. I will recommend Varna as well, this is our largest city on the Black Sea coast giving the chance for visitors to enjoy the oldest processed gold treasury in the world - 6,000 years old," he said, adding that smaller cities with attractions such as the "Valley of Roses" also offer very scenic spots.

"Tourism is booming in Bulgaria. We have already reached our pre-pandemic levels... And, we expect to join Schengen fully very, very soon. This is a very important priority for

our country. It will influence our tourism industry massively because there is not going to be any queues on the borders, which is a very, very big advantage," he said.

Alipiev also pointed to Bulgaria's ambition to join the common Euro currency zone with the EU, one of the other factors to have a wide-ranging impact on international travel and tourism from countries such as India.

"India is one of the most important and prospective partners of the European Union because we know that India is, more or less, the largest democracy in the world. We share common democratic values with India and this is the fundament of our bilateral relations," he added. (PTI)

Ajinkya Rahane, Dhawal Kulkarni, MCA officials pay last respects to president Amol Kale

MUMBAI, June 12: India and Mumbai players Ajinkya Rahane and Dhawal Kulkarni and several others from the cricketering fraternity on Wednesday paid their last respects to Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA) president Amol Kale, who passed away in New York.

Kale's mortal remains were brought back to India on Wednesday afternoon after he died on the intervening night between June 9 and 10 due to a cardiac arrest.

The 47-year-old was in New York to watch India's match against Pakistan in the ongoing T20 World Cup along with a few other officials of the MCA as well as of the BCCI.

"Deeply saddened to hear about the sudden demise of MCA President Amol Kale. His dedication to Mumbai cricket was exemplary. Deepest condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time," BCCI secretary Jay Shah, who also watched the India-Pakistan game, wrote on his X account.

The secretary Ajinkya Naik, other association officials and former India player and MCA's women's cricket advisor Diana Edulji were also present at the MCA Lounge at the Wankhede Stadium, where Kale's mortal remains were brought in for about an hour.

Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis,

BJP leader and BCCI treasurer Ashish Shelar, Shivsena (UBT) leader Sachin Ahir, NCP (Sharad Pawar) leader and MCA apex council member Jitendra Awhad were also among those who paid the last respects to Kale. "Took antim darshan and offered my humble tributes to my friend, Mumbai Cricket Association President Amol Kale at Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai," Fadnavis wrote on X. Kale became MCA president after defeating former India player Sandip Patil in the elections in October 2022.

During his tenure, the iconic Wankhede Stadium witnessed legendary Sachin Tendulkar's statue being unveiled during the



ODI World Cup last year.

"Shocked to hear about the untimely demise of MCA President Shri Amol Kale. Condolences to his family and close ones as they find the strength to overcome this sudden loss," Tendulkar wrote on X on Tuesday. Before Tendulkar's statue was unveiled, special seats were marked and decorated where MS Dhoni's six to win the 2011 World Cup final had landed.

After Mumbai won the record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy earlier this year, MCA had announced that it would match BCCI's fee for all players in red-ball cricket for the 2024-25 season. (PTI)

Injustice was done, our dream killed by irregular goal: Stimac

DOHA, June 12: India football coach Igor Stimac said "injustice was done and his team's dream was killed" by the blatantly "irregular" goal that allowed Qatar to claw back and clinch the must-win World Cup qualifying match here.

India suffered a 1-2 defeat at the home of the two-time Asian champions to bow out of contention from the third round of qualification for the 2026 World Cup. The visitors were leading 1-0 before Qatar scored the contentious equaliser by dragging the ball back after it had crossed the line to go out of play.

"Qatar were lucky tonight, especially because they came back from 0-1 with an irregular goal. I can confirm that now because I have seen the replay. The whole ball was out of play and the goal was given," Stimac didn't mince words as he spoke about what went wrong in the game.

"It shouldn't be happening in today's football because that goal changed everything in this game. It could've happened to Qatar today and I would say the same. I'm not looking for an excuse. I feel sad that when you have 23 boys working really hard and living the dream, to achieve something, and that



dream is killed because we didn't stop such things from happening," the Croat added.

The loss, however, cannot hide the fact that India have been consistently poor in their campaign, the lowest point being a home loss to

Afghanistan. But on Tuesday, which was India's first game after the talismanic Sunil Chhetri's retirement, Stimac said his players gave their everything and he had no complaints. "They were fantastic. All Indian fans can be proud of

their team today. We controlled the game for a major part, with a high press against a good Qatari team. You could say that the chances India had were better than Qatar's," he said.

Apart from the baffling Qatari equaliser, Stimac also high-

lighted a few Indian shortcomings. "We should have scored thrice in the first half to kill the game definitely," he said.

"But there is something which is missing in Indian football, and that's clinical reactions inside the box," he pointed out.

Qatar's equaliser by Yousef Aymen in the 73rd minute took the wind out of India's sails, totally turning the momentum in the hosts' favour, who completed the comeback in the 85th minute with a brilliant Ahmed Al-Rawi long-ranger that Gurpreet Singh Sandhu couldn't have done much about.

A victory would have given India a place in the third round of the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers for the first time, alongside direct qualification for the 2027 AFC Asian Cup.

Now, India's bid to make the continental tournament for the third successive time will take them to the Asian Cup Qualifiers Third Round, which is scheduled to begin in March 2025.

"It's kind of an injustice to my boys tonight because we were very close to winning this game and qualifying for the third round, but it didn't happen. Congratulations to the Qatari team," Stimac said. (PTI)

China keeps its World Cup hopes alive despite a 1-0 loss to South Korea



SEOUL, June 12: China kept its 2026 World Cup hopes alive by the narrowest of margins despite a 1-0 loss to South Korea on Tuesday in Asian qualifying.

China advanced to the third qualification round because Thailand, needing to beat Singapore by three goals, only won 3-1.

South Korea finished the second round of continental qualifying atop Group C and remains on course for an 11th straight World Cup appearance.

Six of the 18 Asian teams in the next stage will secure automatic spots at the World Cup. Two more teams will earn direct entry to the World Cup from a fourth stage in Asian qualifying and another will go into inter-continental playoffs for a spot at the global tournament.

In front of 65,000 fans at Seoul World Cup Stadium, Lee Kang-in scored in the 61st minute. A cross from Tottenham star Son Heung-min found its way to the Paris Saint-Germain midfielder, who scored on a low shot from near the penalty spot.

"We were able to keep China from creating any dangerous chances," Son said. "There's no such thing as a perfect match, but we stayed patient and capitalized on our chance to win. Obviously, we could have won by a bigger margin, but overall, everyone did a great job."

China needed a draw or better to ensure second place in the group but was forced to wait and hope that Singapore could avoid a three-goal loss in Bangkok.

China's only appearance at a men's World Cup so far was in 2002, when the tournament was co-hosted by South Korea and

Japan.

At the Rajmangala Stadium, Suphanat Mueanta put Thailand ahead in the first half, and Ikhsan Fandi equalized just before the hour.

Thailand made it 3-1 on goals from Poramet Arjvirai and Jaronsak Wonggorn but couldn't find the key fourth goal.

"I feel disappointed that we didn't make it to the next round," Suphanat said. "I have to apologize to the football fans and all Thai people ... there were so many opportunities."

There was also heartbreak for the India squad. India needed to beat Qatar A leader Qatari to be sure of progressing but lost 2-1 in Doha after scoring the first goal. Kuwait scored in the 81st minute to Afghanistan 1-0 and take second spot with seven points from six games.

Earlier, in a contest between teams already confirmed as first and second in Group I, Australia beat the Palestinian team 5-0 in Perth to make it six wins out of six and a 22-0 goal difference. Socceroos forward Kusini Yengi scored twice, including the contentious penalty in the opening minutes that upset the Palestinian team, and 18-year-old Nestory Irankunda capped it with a late penalty.

A crowd of 18,261 fans attended the match in the Western Australia capital, with Palestinian supporters more vocal than the Socceroos fans.

Indonesia progressed with a 2-0 win over the Philippines in Group F. North Korea took advantage of Syria's 5-0 loss to Japan, which did not concede a goal in the six games, to take second place in Group B with a 4-1 win over Myanmar. (AP)

There's nothing I can tell you now: Stimac on future



DOHA, June 12: Under-pressure India football coach Igor Stimac was non-committal about his future with the team after it crashed out of the 2026 World Cup qualification race following a controversial 1-2 loss to Asian champions Qatar here.

Qatar scored from a ball that had clearly gone out of play to equalise before adding a second to send India out of contention from the third round of World Cup qualification.

A few weeks ago, Stimac had promised to leave if he failed in his "mission" to take India into the third round. On Tuesday, a crestfallen Stimac was not so sure and said he would need a few more days to figure things out. "That's something we need to discuss internally in the next few weeks where our futures stand. There is nothing I can tell you now," the 56-year-old, who took over in 2019, said.

"What I can tell you is that it was obvious tonight that India has a good future in football. Many people will say that Qatar played with a reserve team, but our team is not that older than the Qatari team today," he added. Last October, Stimac and his support staff got an extension that keeps them in charge

of the senior and the under-23 men's football teams till June 2026. If the team had made the third round of World Cup Qualifiers, Stimac's contract would have been automatically renewed till 2028. Despite the heartbreak here, what can't be ignored is India's underwhelming campaign, which included a home loss to lower-ranked Afghanistan.

Stimac was quizzed about it and he said the team can easily make it to the World Cup if Indian-origin players competing in European leagues are allowed into the national fold.

"If we were allowed to use them, then India would qualify for the World Cup regularly. We have 1.5 billion people, but we have a league with only 13 clubs with no relegation so competitiveness is missing there. In half the season, you have five or six clubs who don't fight for anything anymore," he said. "For the players to come to a certain level of competitiveness, they need to play under pressure during the season and need to feel the intensity of games in each game without relaxation so that they can come to the international level and provide the same," Stimac explained. (PTI)

Pitches likes the ones in New York even the field: Aaron Johnson

NEW YORK, June 12: The Nassau County ground's pitch has been subjected to severe criticism in the ongoing T20 World Cup but Canada opener Aaron Johnson is not complaining as he believes such surfaces bring smaller teams into the game. Johnson played the best innings of his T20 career, a 44-ball 52, against Pakistan on Tuesday but his team could not cross the line against an under-pressure opponent.

The 107-target that Pakistan overcame was the highest chase at the makeshift venue.

"I wouldn't say it's the best surface. It's a tricky surface but when T20 cricket started 120-130 was good total on wickets. (Now) because you have flat

belters, people are getting 200. I think if you have a surface like this, it evens the playing field and we fancy our chance against any opponent, not only Pakistan," said Johnson in the post-match media interaction.

Johnson gave a brisk start to Canada with his belligerent strokeplay on the off-side against one of the best pace attacks in the world.

"I think it's my best innings so far in international cricket. And growing up, you know that Pakistan, one thing they have is quality fast bowling attack, right?"

"And to be able to get a decent total on the board for my team, that's up there with the top, probably top two best in-

nings for me," said Johnson, who was born in Jamaica.

Canada play their final league game against India on June 15 and Johnson could not be more excited for the match in Florida though his team's qualification to the next stage seems unlikely.

"Again, as I say, it's a ball. The ball is very round. The moment you walk on the field, anyone can win. Yes, you have to have respect for these guys. They have been doing it for years. There are some of them, like someone like Babar (Azam) today, he's a legend. I'm pretty sure he will be a legend of the game, right? Hopefully we will get to play against Kohli, Rohit, all of these guys, the list goes on and on. (PTI)

Address injustice, says AIFF seeking probe into Qatar's controversial goal in WC qualifier

NEW DELHI, June 12: The All India Football Federation has sought an investigation into the controversial goal awarded to Qatar in their crucial World Cup qualifying match in Doha, AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey said on Wednesday while urging the concerned authorities to "address the injustice". The AIFF chief said India have asked for a thorough investigation into the goal that was allowed by South Korean referee Kim Woo-Sung despite the ball clearly going out of play during the must-win match that the visitors lost 1-2 at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Tuesday.

"Victory and defeat are part and parcel of the game, we have learned to accept gracefully, although one of the two goals



scored against India yesterday night left a few questions unanswered," Chaubey said in a statement.

The goal sparked widespread outrage as it deprived the Indians of what would have been their maiden entry into the third round of the FIFA World Cup

Qualifiers for the 2026 edition.

"We have written to FIFA Head of Referees, AFC Head of Referees, and the match commissioner, regarding the grave supervision error that practically cost us a place in the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers Round 3.

"Given its severity, We call upon concerned officials for a thorough investigation. We have urged them to explore the possibilities of sporting compensation to address the injustice and we trust that FIFA and AFC will take necessary steps," he added.

Iran's Hamed Momeni was the match commissioner for the game. The role requires him to supervise the organisation of the match and ensure that FIFA regulations are adhered to during the game.

In the 73rd minute, Abdullah Alahrak's free-kick saw Yousef Ayem attempt a header, which was saved by India skipper and goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu. But as the custodian lay on the ground seeing the ball roll over the line, Hashmi

Hussein kicked it into play with Aymen slotting it into the net.

Since the ball had visibly rolled out of play, the game should have stopped and then resumed with a corner-kick in this case as Sandhu was the last player to come in contact with the ball before it went out.

But, to the frustration of the Indian players, the referee awarded the goal to Qatar and despite the visiting team protesting vehemently, the on-field official upheld his decision. According to FIFA rules, "the ball is out of play if it is wholly passed over the goal line or touchline on the ground or in the air."

India coach Igor Stimac later expressed his dismay by stating that the "irregular" goal killed his team's dream. (PTI)

NZ face WI in virtual knockout, rain threatens to derail England again

TAROUBA, June 12: Staring at early elimination, New Zealand will look to dish out a much-improved show in a do-or-die clash against tournament co-hosts West Indies in the T20 World Cup here.

New Zealand suffered a batting collapse to be bowled out for 75 in 15.2 overs in a stunning 84-run loss to Afghanistan in their tournament-opener at the Providence Stadium.

This loss dropped their run rate to -4.2, the lowest among the four teams in Group D, placing them at the bottom of the standings.

Now, they find themselves on the brink of a rare group stage exit -- an unexpected predicament for a team known for its remarkable consistency in World Cups, having reached the semi-finals in all six recent editions: the ODI World Cups of 2015, 2019, and 2023, and the T20 World Cups of 2016, 2021, and 2022.

Only two of their batters managed to score double digits and the Kane Williamson-led side will have to buck up as a batting unit to pose any challenge to the local favourites.

It's not just the batting, their fielding also put them down as they dropped easy chances, missed stumping and run-out as the Afghanistan opening duo of Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran set it up with a solid 103-run opening stand.

West Indies on the other hand face no such issues as a Super Eight berth will be up for grabs if they manage to secure a third win on the trot.

Having started off with a scrappy win over Papua New Guinea, WI have started to come on their own and coasted to a 134-run victory after bowling out Uganda for 39 in their previous match.

Teams (from)

West Indies Squad: Rovman Powell (c),



Brandon King, Johnson Charles, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Sherfane Rutherford, Andre Russell, Romario Shepherd, Roston Chase, Akeal Hosein, Alzarri Joseph, Gudakesh Motie, Obed McCoy, Shamar Joseph, Shimron Hetmyer and Shai Hope.

New Zealand Squad: Kane Williamson (c), Finn Allen, Devon Conway (wk), Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Mark Chapman, Michael Bracewell, Mitchell Santner, Matt Henry, Lockie Ferguson, Trent Boult, Tim Southee, Ish Sodhi, James Neesham and Rachin Ravindra.

Match starts: 6am IST. Bangladesh, Netherlands hope to stay alive

Bangladesh and the Netherlands will look to keep their Super Eight hopes alive when they lock horns in a crucial Group D fixture

at Kingstown. In the group of death, South Africa have already made the cut and the fight is among the Bangladesh, Netherlands, Nepal and Sri Lanka -- in that order -- to book the second slot.

Having started off with a two-wicket win over Sri Lanka, a nervy Bangladesh let it slip against South Africa to go down by four runs in their last match.

Netherlands too are coming on the back of a reversal against South Africa and will hope to bounce back.

Teams:

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 and Tanzim Hasan Sakib.

Netherlands: Scott Edwards (c), Aryan Dutt, Bas de Leede, Kyle Klein, Logan van Beek, Max O'Dowd, Michael Levitt, Paul van Meekeren, Ryan Klein, Saqib Zulfiqar, Sybrand Engelbrecht, Teja Nidamanuru, ??Tim Pringle, Vikram Singh, Viv Kingma and Wesley Barresi.

Match starts: 8pm IST

Rain forecast has once again threatened to derail defending champions England who also are on the verge of an early exit and will face Oman in first of their two must wins matches at North Sound.

England, who have just one point from two matches after a washout against Scotland, will face Namibia in their final group league clash at the same venue. There has been a rain forecast and Jos Buttler's men will have a watch on the sky.

Wins in both the matches may not be enough for England as Scotland (5 points from three matches) are ahead of the race.

Scotland may get to seven points by virtue of a win over Australia and England's Super Eight hopes may eventually rest on the hands of their arch-rivals.

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.

Oman: Aqib Ilyas (c), Zeeshan Maqsood, Kashyap Prajapati, Pratik Athavale, Ayaan Khan, Shoaib Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Naseem Khushi, Mehran Khan, Bilal Khan, Rafiullah, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Shaheel Ahmad and Khalid Kail.

Match starts: 12.30 am IST (Friday). (PTI)

Hazlewood questions T20 WC format, says strange that net-run rate will count for nothing in Super 8



NORTH SOUND, June 12: Australian pacer Josh Hazlewood finds it a bit strange that their superior net-run rate after three comprehensive wins will have a count for nothing in the Super 8 stage of the T20 World Cup.

Considering it is the biggest-ever T20 showpiece with the involvement of 20 teams, the ICC created four groups of five teams, out of which two from each pool make the Super 8 stage of the tournament.

Thereafter, two groups of four will be formed to determine the semifinalists of the competition.

The format is different from the previous edition, when all the top teams began their competition in the Super 12 stage where two groups of six teams were created and top two from each pool made the semifinals.

Australia qualified for the Super 8 stage on Tuesday with a nine-wicket hammering of Namibia, taking their run rate to +3.580.

"Yeah, it's a little bit strange that it doesn't really, it doesn't go through the tournament. This is probably the first T20 World Cup I've played that's set up this way, or first World Cup in general that's set up this way, so it's a little bit different," said Hazlewood.

wood in the post match media interaction.

"Yeah, the work that you do in the round games and if you go through undefeated and have a good net run rate, doesn't really account for much once you're in the Super Eights. So, yeah, it's a strange run, but that's how it is," added the premier pacer.

He was one of the stars of Tuesday's win alongside spinner Adam Zampa who took four wickets to take his tournament tally to eight.

Asked if Zampa is one of the more underrated Australian cricketers around, Hazlewood showered due praise on the leg-spinner.

"Yeah, we certainly do within the team, for sure. We know his importance. We've seen it time and time again in whether it be one day cricket or T20 cricket, often in big tournaments and in big games as well."

"100 T20 wickets, first one there, played the most T20 for Australia as a bowler. So, he's ticking a lot of boxes and continues to. I think the big thing is he continues to improve all the time. He's always working on something and nailing down his lengths or whatever it is so yeah - he's a key part of our team," Hazlewood added. (PTI)

Demow Tang Soo Do Academy organises training camp

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, June 12: The Demow Tang Soo Do Academy organised a one-day Training Camp on Shivkalin Mardani Khel (Ashtedu Akhada) and Hand to Hand Fighting Sport in Demow Multi-Purpose Building on Wednesday where the students participated. Students from Demow, Palangi, Dhemechi, Khamun, Sivasagar, Desang and Doba Field Joysagar took part. Debojit Gogoi, National Referee as well as Northeast Chief Instructor of Shivkalin Mardani Khel (Ashtedu Akhada) and Hand to Hand Fighting Sport, the National Referees namely- Dipankar Chetia, Manash Pratim Konwar, Debojit Dowari, Sasanka Gogoi, Montu Chetia trained the Students in the one-day Training Camp. For the first time in Demow, the Training Camp on Shivkalin Mardani Khel (Ashtedu Akhada) and Hand to Hand Fighting Sport was organised and a total of 70 students participated, informed Dipankar Chetia, Chief Instructor of Demow Tang Soo Academy on Wednesday.

No one will hand us anything, we have to take it. Gurpreet

DOHA, June 12: Livid after the controversy-marred 1-2 defeat to Qatar in a do-or-die World Cup qualifying match, Indian football captain Gurpreet Singh Sandhu called for a more aggressive approach by his teammates, saying that the "unfortunate result" has showed that "you don't just need the hook but the crook as well."

Following Lallianzuala Chhangte's 37th minute goal, India led till the last 15 minutes of the regulation time and were on course for a stunning win over the Asian champions.

But the hosts scored an outrageous equaliser after the ball had gone over the line. It was a stunning oversight by the South Korean match officials that left the Indians in disbelief.

"We had the belief, we had the chance to make amends even after everything. The boys gave everything on that pitch last night to make it happen but yet it didn't," Gurpreet said in a post on his X handle.

"Yesterday's unfortunate result and the incident of the equaliser is a lesson that where we want to go, you don't just need the hook but the crook as well. No one will hand us anything, we have to take it!" he added without elaborating the context of his remarks.

Gurpreet took over the captaincy after the talismanic Sunil Chhetri's retirement in their last match against Kuwait, a goalless draw at the Salt Lake Stadium on Thursday.

Gurpreet went on to thank the fans for their unwavering support, promising that the team would continue to strive to make them proud. (PTI)

Distinguished football coach TK Chathunni dies

NEW DELHI, June 12: Former Kerala footballer TK Chathunni, who made a name for himself as a renowned coach, died on Wednesday at the age of 75 in Kochi following a brief illness, the All India Football Federation said.

He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

He was a top-rated defender during the 1960s and 1970s and also played for India during the Merdeka Tournament 1973 in Kuala Lumpur.

Having featured in six international matches for India, he also played for clubs like EME Centre (Secundrabad), Vasco Club (Goa) and Orkay Mills (Mumbai), besides also featuring for Services in the National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy.

But it was in coaching where he



made a name for himself, having credited for unearthing talents like former greats IM Vijayan, Bruno Coutinho and Jo Paul Anchery among others.

As a coach, he helped Mohun Bagan win their maiden national

league title, then NFL, during the 1997-98 season. He also holds the distinction of coaching highest number of clubs in the country including that of FC Kochin, Salgaocar FC, Dempo Sports Club and Churchill Brothers. He coached Kerala Santosh Trophy team, Kerala Police among others.

Describing Chathunni as a top class coach, AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey said: "Chathunni was a dependable defender and later a top-class coach. I extend my sincerest condolences to his family at this time of sorrow."

AIFF acting secretary general M Satyanarayan stated: "TK Chathunni was a reputed footballer of his time and continued to inspire footballers of later generations with his coaching. His death has created a void in Indian football." (PTI)

Panghal wants to train in Shillaru ahead of Paris Games rather than going overseas

NEW DELHI, June 12: Olympic-bound world championships silver medalist boxer Amit Panghal wants to train at SAI's high-altitude training centre in Shillaru for the Paris Games rather than preparing abroad. The boxer from Rohtak desired to train at SAI's Netaji Subhash High Altitude Training Centre in Shillaru, Himachal Pradesh, which he said will help him strengthen his endurance, one of the areas that Panghal has been focussing on.

"I am planning for high-altitude training in Shillaru. If that happens it will be great for me," Panghal said in a press conference facilitated by SAI in collaboration with IOA and BFI. "I am focussing on endurance. After cutting weight I feel fatigued in the third round. So, I am

working to increase it," he added. Panghal made a remarkable comeback to the national team by winning the 51kg quota in the final qualifying tournament in the first and last chance he got earlier this month.

The 28-year-old former World No. 1 also wanted to train in India due to dietary constraints.

"I have an issue with the diet outside. I don't get anything to eat. And my weight is also less. Last time (ahead of the Tokyo Olympics) that was a huge problem," he added. Ahead of the Tokyo Games, the Indian boxing contingent had trained in Italy. Not only had Panghal had a bitter experience with the food there, he had also sparred with Colombia's Yuberjen Martinez, who ended up defeating the Indian in the Olympics. (PTI)

Paine urges Australia to 'manipulate' Scotland game, eliminate England

MELBOURNE, June 12: Former Australia Test captain Tim Paine wants Mitchell Marsh and Co. to "manipulate" their final group game against Scotland to ensure that England are knocked out of the T20 World Cup.

Defending champions England find themselves in a precarious spot after a washed out game and a heavy defeat against Australia, who have qualified for the Super Eights.

"Absolutely they should (manipulate the result) and I'm not even joking. I've spoken to people about this in the last few days. I'm dead serious," Paine said on Sen Radio.

As things stand in Group B, England are fourth with just a point and -1.800 Net Run Rate. They have two more games left. Even if they win both their games they can't overtake Scotland, who are second with five points and a healthy +2.164 NRR.

In order to progress to the Super Eights, Jos Buttler and Co. not only have to win both their remaining games by heavy margins but also hope familiar foes and table leaders Australia had Scotland a huge defeat to dent the Scots' NRR.

Paine clarified that he doesn't want Australia to lose the match but rather make it close enough for England to be eliminated.

"I'm not sure what the net run rate looks like, you don't have to lose the game, I think they can just let Scotland get close enough."

"Again, let's not get too far ahead of ourselves, Scotland could have a day out



But say Scotland batted first and got to 140 and we chased it off 19.5 overs to make sure they don't suffer a big net run rate loss.

"I think England have to win both of their games by about 50 runs to even get up towards Scotland's net run rate. So, it's certainly plausible that you can win the game (but still ensure England don't progress)," he added.

The former wicketkeeper batter sees this as a "smart, calculated" move that may help Australia later in the tournament.

"That's not just because it's England. You got to go into these tournaments trying to win a World Cup. Who could certainly pose a threat in the latter rounds? That is England."

Despite the bad start, Paine feels England have the capability to turn things

around and defend their title.

"There's no doubt they are still one of the best teams in the world, they got off to a horrible start and now it's in our hands."

"If you could knock out one of the most highly fancied teams in the tournament and do it in a way that's you're not deliberately losing a game, I'm all for it."

"You're manipulating the net run rates a

little bit... you can say whatever you want to say, but to me, it is smart, calculated, tournament play.

"We're there to win a World Cup. I wouldn't want to play England in the semi-final. They've got six or seven guys that could take a game away from you, much like Australia do."

"If you can have a side like that not go through to the next phase, it makes the World Cup easier for you to win." he added.

Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood also acknowledged the potential benefit in hindering England's progress and said it would serve "best interest" for all teams.

"Yeah, I think so. In this tournament you potentially come up against England at some stage again," Hazlewood said in the media interaction after their big nine-wicket win over Namibia in North Sound.

"They're probably one of the top few teams on their day and we've had some real struggles against them in T20 cricket so if we can get them out of the tournament that's in our best interest as well as probably everyone else."

Hazlewood however suggested that the team's approach will remain unchanged, leaving decisions about game 'manipulation' to others.

"But yeah, it'll be interesting to see. We've never really been in this position before as a team I don't think, so whether we have discussions or not, we'll just try and play it again the way we did tonight. Yeah, that'll be up to people, not me." (PTI)