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- World leaders meet in Switzerland to discuss a Ukraine peace roadmap
- NEET Row: Sibal demands probe by SC-appointed officials
- Held discussions with stakeholders: LS speaker

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Historic moment in green energy promotion: CM Himanta

Assam secretariat emerges as India's first eco-friendly state govt headquarters

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: Assam Secretariat on Sunday became the first-ever civil secretariat in the country with the inauguration of a 2.5 MW solar power project on its campus.

The said solar power project was inaugurated by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at a ceremony held at the Assam Secretariat complex.

"Adding another chapter to the State's endeavours at promoting green energy, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday inaugurated the Janata Bhawan Solar Project, a 2.5-Mw power generation capacity grid connected rooftop and ground-mounted solar PV system, at a ceremony held at the Assam Secretariat Complex. The launch of the solar power project today has led to the Assam Secretariat Complex becoming the first-ever civil secretariat in the country that relies entirely on solar



generated electricity for daily consumption," said an official statement. As per the statement, this project would yield an average of 3 lakh units of electricity monthly and the investment amount of ₹ 12.56 crore is projected to be recovered within a period of 4 years with monthly savings standing at approximately ₹ 30 lakh.

With a lifespan of 25 years, this solar plant will cut down 3060 metric tonnes of carbon emissions annually and 76,500 metric tonnes of carbon emissions during its lifetime, the statement added.

Speaking at the event, Sarma referred to the launch of the project as a historic moment in the State's march towards embracing of green energy.

"The state government had been

paying around ₹ 30 lakh to Assam Power Distribution Company Limited on a monthly basis for traditionally-produced electricity consumption. Transition to green energy will help the government utilise its resources for the welfare of the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of the society," the statement quoted him as saying.

The chief minister further stressed upon the need for every government office to adopt solar power in a gradual and phased manner. In the initial phase, he called upon medical colleges and universities to make a transition to solar energy.

Speaking about the state government's initiatives aimed at promotion of green energy, Sarma referred to the 25-Mw Solar Power Project at Namrup, the foundation stone for which was laid recently. He also spoke about the solar projects at (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Terror in J-K has shrunk from highly organised acts to mere proxy war: Shah

NEW DELHI, June 16: The fight against terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is in its decisive phase and recent incidents show that terrorism has been forced to shrink from highly organised acts of violence to a mere proxy war, Union home minister Amit Shah said on Sunday.

During a high-level meeting at the North Block here to review the security situation in the Union Territory in the wake of recent terrorist attacks there, he also directed security agencies to implement area domination and zero-terror plans in the Jammu division like they did in Kashmir to achieve success.

The government is determined to root out terrorism, Shah asserted. The meeting with top security officials was convened to review the situation in the wake of the attacks in the Union Territory's Jammu region, officials said. Home Minister Shah directed the security agencies to work on a mission mode and ensure quick response in a coordinated manner.

He also stressed on seamless coordination among security agencies, identifying vulnerable areas and addressing security concerns in these areas.

Reiterating the government's zero-tolerance policy against terrorism under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said the government will leave no stone unturned to root out terrorism from Jammu and Kashmir.

The efforts of the government of India have yielded great positive results in the Kashmir Valley with significant reduction in terror-related incidents, he said.

Shah noted that the improvement in the law and order situation is reflected in the record flow of tourists in the Kashmir Valley. The home minister appreciated the se-



curity agencies and the Jammu and Kashmir administration for the successful conduct of the Lok Sabha elections, which witnessed record voter turnout in the Union Territory. He directed the agencies to replicate in the Jammu division the successes achieved in the Kashmir Valley through the area domination plan and the zero-terror plan, the officials said.

The fight against terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is in its decisive phase and the recent incidents show that terrorism has been forced to shrink from highly organised acts of violence to a mere proxy war, the minister said. In a subsequent meeting, Shah also reviewed the preparations for the annual Amarnath pilgrimage, which is scheduled to begin on June 29. The officials said the home minister was given a thorough briefing on the prevailing situation in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong slams govt over statues' relocation within Parliament

HT Bureau

NEW DELHI, June 16: The Congress on Sunday claimed that the decision to relocate statues within the Parliament premises was taken by the ruling regime "unilaterally" and its sole objective was to not have the statues of Mahatma Gandhi and BR Ambedkar that have been traditional sites of democratic protests right next to where the Parliament actually meets.

The opposition party's attack came ahead of vice president and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar inaugurating the 'Prerna Sthal', which will house all statues of the freedom fighters and other leaders that were earlier placed at different places in the Parliament complex.

While the Congress has criticised the decision to remove the statues from their existing place, the Lok Sabha secretariat has said their placements at different places made it difficult for the visitors to see them properly.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said that according to the Lok Sabha website, Parliament's Committee on Portraits and Statues last met on December 18, 2018 and it was not even re-constituted during the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024) which also functioned (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Feasibility study for India land connectivity nearing final stages'

COLOMBO, June 16: Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Sunday that the feasibility study on a proposal to establish land connectivity with India is in its final stages.

Wickremesinghe, who was travelling in the northeastern district of Mannar to inspect the development work in the region, said that the preliminary work of the feasibility study was over and the final phase would be completed soon.

This proposal and the prospect of a power grid connection between the two nations are likely to be discussed during the visit of external affairs minister S Jaishankar to Lanka this week.

Wickremesinghe said a commercial venture to sell the excess renewable energy to India would also be discussed during the minister's visit.

On Saturday, the Lankan foreign ministry here announced that Jaishankar would arrive in Colombo on June 20.

However, there was no official announcement on Jaishankar's visit from India's Ministry of External Affairs.

If confirmed, this could be Jaishankar's first official stand-alone visit abroad after he was appointed India's external affairs minister in the new government early this month. Officials here confirmed that all Indian projects in Sri Lanka, including the Adani group's wind power project (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IMD issues red alert in 4 districts

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a red alert for four districts in Assam, forecasting heavy to very heavy rainfall over the next 4-5 days, according to an IMD bulletin released on Sunday.

The districts of Chirang, Baksa, Barpeta, and Bongaigaon are expected to experience very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall until June 18, with Nalbari predicted to receive heavy rainfall.

"Heavy to very heavy rainfall with isolated extremely heavy falls is likely to continue over Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, and Meghalaya during the next 4-5 days," the IMD bulletin stated.

The Southwest monsoon, crucial for the onset of rain in the region, has already established itself in the north-eastern states. Earlier, the IMD had predicted the arrival of the southwest monsoon in Northeast India by June 5.

The bulletin further noted that a cyclonic circulation is positioned over northeast Assam, with another cyclonic circulation over Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. Additionally, an east-west trough extends from north-west Bihar to Meghalaya in the lower tropospheric lev-



els. Strong southwesterly to southerly winds prevail from the Bay of Bengal towards the northeastern states in the lower tropospheric levels.

"Under these influences, widespread light to moderate rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning, and gusty winds (30-40 kmph) is expected over Arunachal Pradesh, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta criticises media over traffic enforcement criticism

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma criticised the media on Sunday for their response to the police's stringent enforcement of traffic advisories, emphasising the need for such measures to curb road accidents in the state.

Speaking during an interaction with reporters, Sarma expressed dismay over media criticism directed at police officials when they impose fines for violations such as over-speeding and lack of helmets among riders.

"Whenever the police get tough on traffic violations, certain sections of the media start criticising these actions, alleging that it is solely for

revenue generation due to the state's economic situation," Sarma remarked. He underscored the importance of strict enforcement to reduce road accidents, advocating for measures such as installing speed restriction meters at critical junctions to deter reckless driving.

"While demanding a reduction in road accidents, the media also opposes police actions aimed at achieving this goal," Sarma pointed out, criticising the inconsistency in media coverage.

Addressing concerns over the Garchuk area flyover in Guwahati, Sarma reassured the public, stating that thorough inspections by officials found no structural defects. "I personally (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Coal minister Kishan Reddy meets CM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: Union Coal and Mines minister G Kishan Reddy on Sunday met Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma here to discuss harnessing the state's mineral potential.

"Had a detailed deliberation on the roadmap to harness the rich potential of various minerals in the state and their optimum utilisation towards growth with sustainable practices," Reddy said.

The two ministers have decided to appoint a high-level committee to take this preliminary discussion forward to extract the minerals in Assam, he posted on X.

"Today, Hon'ble Union Minister for Coal and Mines, Shri G Kishan Reddy, met with HCM Dr. @himantabiswa (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



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I-T relief for those in lowest slab may be considered in Budget: CII

NEW DELHI, June 16: Income tax relief for the people in the lowest slab may need to be considered in the upcoming full Budget for 2024-25 considering the high levels of inflation, according to newly-elected CII President Sanjiv Puri.

In an interview with PTI, he also suggested creation of an institutional platform for consensus building between the Centre and states to successfully carry out all reforms, including those related to land, labour, power and agriculture.

The industry body also said it does not see compulsions of coalition politics hampering the reforms in the third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In stead, it believes that the performance of Indian economy and the success of policies in the previous two stints would set the base to accelerate the process.

"Broadly, I would say at this point of time it is public capex, adherence to fiscal glidepath, roadmap for investment in the social infrastructure, green fund and greater investment in the rural sector. These are the broad principles," he said, when asked about CII's expectations from the upcoming full Budget for 2024-25.



The wholesale inflation rose for the third consecutive month in May at 2.61 per cent on account of rise in prices of food articles, especially vegetables, and manufactured items.

The wholesale price index (WPI) based inflation was 1.26 per cent in the previous month. It was (-) 3.61 per cent in May 2023.

Earlier this month, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may consider "further policy actions" only if it is confident of headline inflation staying put at 4 per cent.

Das said it is the central bank's core objective to align the inflation

rate with the 4 per cent target, and added that no action on rates will be possible till the RBI is confident of it remaining at or below 4 per cent. As per CII's estimate, Puri said inflation is "probably going to be around 4.5 per cent this year" on the back of an expected good monsoon, which has in the past led to moderation of food inflation.

On the tax side, he added, "What we are suggesting is that the process of simplification should continue. There are certain suggestions relating to capital gains, which are different for different instruments. Can it be rationalised?"

Puri further said there are some operational difficulties in TDS (tax deducted at source) and multiplicity of rates and CII would prefer simplification of these.

"...over a period of time as far as customs is concerned, we should move to a three-tier structure, primary at the lowest level, intermediates in between and then the finished goods and all over a period of time should be moderate rates with some exclusions, as deemed appropriate," he added.

Under the old regime, Income tax exemption limit is applicable on income up to ₹ 2.5 lakh for individuals whereas under the new regime, the exemption limit is on income up to ₹ 3 lakh.

The CII president also expressed optimism that the reform process should strengthen going forward.

Puri said he was hopeful that food prices may moderate on the back of a good monsoon going forward, sharing that CII estimates inflation to be around 4.5 per cent in the near future, and expects the Reserve Bank to cut the key interest rate somewhere in the second half of the current financial year starting from October.

"We think that in the second half of the year, we should see some easing of interest rates," the CII president said. (PTI)

Karnataka fuel price hike Rates still lower than neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra

NEW DELHI, June 16: The Congress-ruled Karnataka government's move to raise local tax on auto fuels pushed petrol prices above ₹ 100 a litre and diesel to ₹ 89, but rates are lower than neighbouring Andhra Pradesh which has the costliest fuel in the country, oil industry data showed.

The Karnataka government on June 15 hiked local VAT (value added tax) from 25.92 per cent to 29.84 per cent on petrol and from 14.3 per cent to 18.4 per cent on diesel. This led to petrol price now costing ₹ 102.86 per litre in Bengaluru and diesel coming for ₹ 88.94 a litre.

But the rates in Karnataka are still lower than neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

TDP-BJP combine ruled Andhra Pradesh has the costliest petrol at ₹ 109.87 a litre, followed by Left Democratic Front (LDF)-ruled Kerala, where a litre of petrol comes for ₹ 107.54. Congress-run Telangana is close behind with petrol costing ₹ 107.39 a litre.

BJP-ruled states are not far behind -- petrol costs ₹ 106.45 a litre in Bhopal, ₹ 105.16 in Patna (BJP in coalition with JD-U), ₹ 104.86 in Jaipur and ₹ 104.19 in Mumbai. Mamata Banerjee's TMC-ruled West Bengal has petrol priced at ₹ 103.93 a litre.

Other states with over ₹ 100-a-litre petrol are Odisha (₹ 101.04 a litre in Bhubaneswar), Tamil Nadu (₹ 100.73 in Chennai), and Chhattisgarh (₹ 100.37 in Raipur), industry pricing data showed.

Diesel prices have almost a similar story with Amravati in Andhra Pradesh selling the fuel at ₹ 97.6 a litre, followed by ₹ 96.41 a litre in Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram, ₹ 95.63 in Hyderabad and ₹ 93.31 in Raipur.

The fuel is in the range of ₹ 92-93 a litre in BJP-ruled states of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Bihar. It is also in that range in Odisha and Jharkhand.

On Sunday, Oil minister Hardeep Singh Puri com-

pared fuel prices in Karnataka with those in BJP-ruled UP and Gujarat to target the Congress.

"After not fulfilling the promises of transferring ₹ 8500/month to a woman of each family, Congress ruled Karnataka government has saddled the people of Karnataka with the burden of paying Rs 3/litre more for petrol and diesel in the state," he said in a post on X.

"After this decision, people of Karnataka would be forced to pay higher amounts for food items, clothing, medicines and all items of basic necessities as fuel prices directly impact prices of all goods. Such a decision just after elections have been concluded, exposes the hypocrisy of the Congress which talks about mehngai but levies approximately ₹ 8litre-₹ 12litre additional VAT in comparison with BJP ruled states," the minister wrote.

With this hike, petrol in Karnataka is now ₹ 8.21/litre more expensive than both BJP-run governments in UP and Gujarat, he said. He however did not cite rates in neighbouring BJP-ruled states.

"The price gap is even more staggering if Karnataka is compared with BJP-governed Arunachal Pradesh where the party has come back to power strongly. The petrol prices in Karnataka are over ₹ 12/litre higher than in Arunachal. The price gap for diesel is ₹ 8.59/litre between the two states with Arunachal being much less expensive," he said.

Puri said during the last three years of global energy turmoil, the NDA government deftly diversified India's crude oil purchases to ensure that petrol prices actually decreased by about 14 per cent and diesel prices fell by nearly 11 per cent during November 2021 -May 2024 period. "During the same period, US saw petrol prices soar 29 per cent, while neighbours Pakistan and Sri Lanka faced severe financial stress due to spike in global crude prices," he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Historic moment in green

Bharchalla in Sonitpur district, Khudigaon in Dhubri district and the 1,000-Mw project in Karbi Anglong. These and other projects, on completion, shall drastically reduce the state's dependence on energy procured from outside the State, he added.

"These and other initiatives have led to the Assam Power Generation Company Limited earning a profit of ₹ 60 crore this year," the chief minister stated.

Sarma appealed to the members of the general public to apply for the "PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Scheme" so that the electricity consumption expenses of the households can be brought down. It has been observed that installation of solar panels results in 85% decrease in households' electricity consumption expenses, he added.

The chief minister further added that from July 1, the provision of free electricity supply to the official quarters of the chief minister, other ministers, senior officials and government officials shall be one away with and they will be asked to pay for the electricity consumption. Power Minister Nandita Gorlosa, chief secretary Ravi Kota, principal secretary to chief minister K K Dwivedi, managing director of APDCL Rakesh Kumar, along with a host of officials was present.

Terror in J-K has shrunk

Jammu and Kashmir where security forces are expected to intensify counter-terrorism operations in the coming days. The operations against terrorists will be carried out in line with the prime minister's directive, they said. Shah presided over the high-level meeting, three days after Prime Minister Modi held a similar meeting where he directed officials to deploy the "full spectrum of counter-terror capabilities" after a spate of terror incidents, including an attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in Reasi district of the Jammu region.

National Security adviser Ajit Doval, Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Manoj Sinha, Army chief general Manoj Pande, Army chief-designate Lt. general Upendra Dwivedi, Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla, Director of Intelligence Bureau Tapan Deka, CRPF director general Anish Dayal Singh, BSF director general Nitin Agarwal, Jammu and Kashmir director general of Police R R Swain and other top security officials attended the meeting.

In a meeting on Friday last, Shah was briefed about the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, the deployment of forces along the International Border and the Line of Control, infiltration attempts, the status of ongoing anti-terror operations and the strength of terrorists operating in the Union Territory, sources said.

Terrorists struck at four places in Reasi, Kathua and Doda districts of Jammu and Kashmir within four days last week, killing nine pilgrims and a CRPF jawan and leaving seven security personnel and several others injured.

Two suspected Pakistani terrorists were also killed in an encounter with security forces in Kathua district.

On June 9, terrorists opened fire on a 53-seater bus carrying pilgrims when it was en route to the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra from the Shiv Khori temple. The bus, ferrying pilgrims from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi, plunged into a deep gorge following the gunfire, killing nine people and injuring 41 others.

On June 11, terrorists fired at a joint checkpoint of the Rashtriya Rifles and police at Chattergalla in Bhadervah while a search party in the Gandoh area of Doda district was attacked on June 12, resulting in injuries to seven security personnel, including a policeman. Prime Minister Modi spoke to the home minister on June 13, and discussed the deployment of security forces and counter-terror operations.

Modi also spoke to the Jammu and Kashmir lieutenant governor as well and took stock of the situation in the Union Territory.

Sinha briefed him on the efforts being undertaken by the local administration. In the meeting, the prime minister was given a full overview of the security-related situation in the region and was apprised of the counter-terror efforts being undertaken.

The attacks took place ahead of the annual pilgrimage to the shrine of Amarnath, located at a height of 3,880 metres in the south Kashmir Himalayas, which will begin on June 29 and will continue till August 19. The Amarnath pilgrims travel through two routes -- Baltal and Pahalgam -- in Jammu and Kashmir. Sources said last year over 4.28 lakh people visited the shrine and the figure could go up to five lakh this time. (PTI)

Himanta criticizes media over

directed officials to inspect the flyover, and they have confirmed its safety. There is no cause for concern," Sarma affirmed.

Coal minister Kishan Reddy

to discuss various issues," the Chief Minister's Office said in a post on X. Reddy met Sarma at the latter's residence in Guwahati. Sarma congratulated Reddy on his recent appointment and thanked him for his impactful tenure as the Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Minister during the last BJP government at the Centre, it added. (PTI)

IMD issues red alert

Assam & Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram & Tripura, and Sub-Himalayan West Bengal & Sikkim during the next 5 days," the bulletin added. The IMD further warned, "Isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall is very likely over Sub-Himalayan West Bengal & Sikkim, Assam & Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram & Tripura during the next 5 days, with isolated extremely heavy rainfall also likely over Assam & Meghalaya from June 16-20; Arunachal Pradesh on June 17-18; and Sub-Himalayan West Bengal & Sikkim from June 16-18. Isolated exceptionally heavy rainfall is also likely over Assam & Meghalaya on June 18."

Cong slams govt over statues'

for the first time without the Constitutional post of deputy speaker. "Today, a major reconfiguration of statues in the Parliament complex is being inaugurated. Clearly it is a decision taken by the ruling regime unilaterally," he said. "Its sole objective is NOT to have statues of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Ambedkar--traditional sites of peaceful, legitimate and democratic protests--right next to where Parliament actually meets," Ramesh said in a post on X.

The Mahatma Gandhi statue has thus been displaced not just once but actually twice, he said. Ramesh added that the Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations will not have the same scale and significance in the Parliament complex, given that his statue no longer occupies a distinctive place. The Lok Sabha secretariat has said the 'Prema Sthal' has been constructed so that the dignitaries and other visitors coming to the Parliament House Complex could conveniently see and pay tributes at these statues in one place.

"An action plan has been made to make the life stories and messages of these great Indians available to the visitors through new technology," it said. The Congress has claimed that the idea behind relocating the statues of Mahatma Gandhi, B R Ambedkar and Chhatrapati Shivaji among others is to ensure that they are not in a prominent place where the MPs could conduct peaceful and democratic protests. (PTI)

'Feasibility study for India land

in Mannar and the creation of an industrial zone in the eastern port district of Trincomalee, would be discussed during the visit. Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda has been quoted as saying in the local media that Sri Lanka would raise the contentious issue of illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters by Indian fishing, including bottom trawling. The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries. Fishermen from both countries are arrested frequently for inadvertently trespassing into each other's waters. (PTI)

SBI to monetise subsidiaries after scaling up their biz: Chairman Khara

NEW DELHI, June 16: SBI Chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara has said the lender would wait for its subsidiaries like SBI General Insurance and SBI Payment to further scale up their operations before monetising them.

Scaling up of their operation will increase valuation and ensure better returns for the parent State Bank of India (SBI). When it comes to subsidiaries, their monetisation would be through the capital market, he told PTI in an interview. "The subsidiaries, which would be eligible for this kind of route, would be essentially our SBI General and may be at some stage, SBI Payment Services, but as of now, we don't have any such plan," he said. "Maybe, we would like to scale them up a little more, and then we will think in terms of going to the capital market for monetising our holding in these companies. But not in the current financial year," he added.

During the year ended on March 31, 2024, the bank infused additional capital of ₹ 489.67 crore in SBI General Insurance Company Ltd. The company has also allotted ESOP to employees and consequently, the bank's stake has decreased from 69.95 per cent to 69.11 per cent.

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



had recorded a net profit of ₹ 184 crore in the previous financial year. SBI Payment Services Pvt Ltd, which is in the Merchant Acquiring Business, is 74 per cent owned by SBI, and the rest with Hitachi Payment Services.

SBI Payments is one of the largest acquirers in the country, with more than 3.310 million Merchant Payment Acceptance Touch Points as of March 31, 2024, including 1.367 million POS machines, deployed across geographies.

However, the company's net profit declined to ₹ 144.36 crore for the year ended March 2024 against ₹ 159.34 crore in the previous year. Khara also said there is a growing demand for credit from the corporate sector, and loans worth ₹ 5 trillion are in the pipeline. Unlike the past few years, when corporates had sufficient cash surplus on their bal-

ance sheet, they have started looking for credit to fund working capital requirements and capacity expansion, he said.

"Now, we have come to a stage where they (corporates) have started approaching banks for augmenting their capacity or for working capital purposes. Of course, this I can say with confidence because when we look at our un-availed term loan percentage, it has come down from 25 per cent to 18 per cent, and when we see the working capital utilisation, even that has improved," he said.

So, he said, all these are confirming that private sector opportunities are going to be there and SBI is in a position to create value for the sector. At the same time, he said, "When we look at our pipeline for the new proposals, that is also quite healthy, somewhere around ₹ 5 trillion or so". (PTI)

IIFL Finance Q4 results: Consolidated net profit falls 6% to ₹ 431 cr

NEW DELHI, June 16: IIFL Finance on Sunday reported a 6 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to ₹ 431 crore for the March quarter as the RBI barred the financial services firm from undertaking gold loan business.

The company had earned a net profit of ₹ 458 crore in the same quarter a year ago.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on March 4 barred IIFL Finance Ltd from disbursing gold loans, with immediate effect following multiple supervisory concerns, including serious deviations in assaying and certifying the purity of the yellow metal.

Its consolidated total income during January-March 2024 rose to ₹ 2,922 crore as compared with ₹ 2,276 crore in the year-ago period, IIFL Finance said in a regulatory filing. Interest income of IIFL Finance offers a range of loans and mortgages increased to ₹ 2,720 crore during the quarter, as against ₹ 2,058 crore in the year-ago period. During the quarter, the gross non-performing assets (NPAs) increased to 2.3 per cent as against 1.8 per cent at the end of March 2023. At the same time, the net NPAs also rose to 1.2 per cent from 1.1 per cent at the end of fourth quarter of previous year. Total CRAR stood at 19.7 per cent as on March 31, 2024, as against minimum regulatory requirement of 15 per cent, it said. (PTI)

Mutual funds industry adds 8.1 mn new investor accounts in Apr-May FY

NEW DELHI, June 16: The mutual fund industry has added over 8.1 million investors' accounts in the first two months of the current fiscal (FY25), mainly due to consistent marketing efforts, celebrity endorsements and dedicated work of the distribution network.

Additionally, changing perceptions about fixed deposits, which no longer offer competitive returns compared to mutual funds, and the rise in income levels and accessibility to financial markets have also contributed to the rise in new investors, Trivish D, COO of stock trading platform Tradetjini, told PTI. Going ahead, the outlook for mutual fund folios remains strong, supported by the ongoing bull run in the stock market, solid risk management practices, continuous investor education, and consistent marketing efforts, he added.

Moreover, the industry will continue to see decent growth as savers increasingly look for alternative avenues to create wealth for their long-term goals, experts said.

"As India's per capita income grows, investors will look to save money in asset classes, which have the potential to beat inflation and create wealth. As the penetration of mutual funds increases, this will translate into a higher folio base at the industry level," Abhishek Tiwari, CBO, PGIM India Mutual Fund, told PTI.

According to the latest data with the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), mutual fund folios of the industry stood at 186 million in May-end, a surge of 4.6 per cent from 177.8 million registered at the end of March.

This suggests an addition of over 8.1 million folios.



In May, the industry saw an addition of 4.5 million folios compared to 3.611 million folios added in April. In 2023, the average monthly addition of folios was 2.23 million, making the latest figure more than double this average.

This impressive growth was fuelled by consistent marketing efforts, celebrity endorsements, dedicated work of the distribution network, robust returns given by equities and ease of investing, experts said.

Folios are numbers designated to individual investor accounts. An investor can have multiple folios.

Interestingly, the majority of the new investors are taking the route of digital channels to enter into the mutual fund space. Over the last few years, the surge in mutual fund folios has been led by Gen-Y and Gen-Z investors.

Millennials, also known as Gen Y, are typically defined as those born between 1981 and 1996. Generation Z, or GenZ, are those born between 1997 and 2012.

Overall, the total number of unique PAN and PAN-exempt

KYC reference numbers stood at 45.9 million as of May 2024.

"Investors tend to hold multiple folios, and thus we should look at increasing the total unique number of unique investors in the industry. We believe the growth will come from increasing foot soldiers of distributors and advisers in hinterlands, increased adoption of technology and smartphones and an overall increase in awareness about mutual funds," he added.

Of the total 8.1 million folios, equity-oriented mutual fund schemes experienced an addition of 6.125 million units during the period under review. This has taken the number of such folios to a new high of 128.9 million, representing 69 per cent of the total.

Investors flocked to equity funds due to the rally seen in the last few years.

Within the open-ended equity funds category, the highest increase in folios was witnessed in the sectoral/thematic funds category. This category added 2.319 million folios in the first two months of this fiscal. This was fol-

CEM Boro visits Mintokgang to discuss cultural cooperation & sustainable development between BTR and Sikkim

CEM Pramod Boro extends congratulations to Sikkim CM Tamang on re-election

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 16: Pramod Boro, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Bodoland Territorial Region, visited the chief minister of Sikkim, Prem Singh Tamang (Golay), at his official residence, Mintokgang in Sikkim on Saturday evening.

CEM Boro met with the leader of Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) party and chief minister Tamang, who has taken oath for a second consecutive term after securing the largest majority in the recently concluded assembly elections in Sikkim.

During the meeting, CEM Boro conveyed his best wishes and congratulations to Tamang for his successful second term and congratulated the SKM party on forming the government in Sikkim. Both leaders discussed strengthening communication, enhancing cultural cooperation be-



tween Sikkim and Bodoland Territorial Region, and fostering sustainable development and welfare initiatives. Boro expressed his immense pleasure at meeting chief minister Prem Singh Tamang-Golay at his official residence, Mintokgang. He conveyed his best

able progress in Sikkim. He eagerly anticipated witnessing even more positive developments under chief minister Tamang-Golay's leadership. In response, chief minister Prem Singh Tamang (Golay) appreciated Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region, for his visit to Sikkim.

"The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTR), Pramod Boro, visited me at my official residence, Mintokgang. During our meeting, CEM Boro extended his heartfelt congratulations and kind wishes to our Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) party on successfully forming the government," Tamang said. "I deeply appreciate his generous words of support and I am thankful for his kind visit. His encouragement is greatly valued as we embark on this new journey in the days to come," he added.

NF Railway introduces bi-weekly special train

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: For the convenience of the passengers, NF Railway has decided to operate a bi-weekly special train between Guwahati and New Jalpaiguri through the Chapar, Bilasipara, Gauripur, Golakganj, Tufanganj route. The special train bearing no 05698/05697 (Guwahati - New Jalpaiguri - Guwahati) will operate from June 18, 2024 till January 1, 2025 in both directions. With the operation of this special train, people of the vast areas of West Assam and North Bengal will get easy access to Guwahati and New Jalpaiguri.

Special train no 05698 (Guwahati - New Jalpaiguri) will depart from Guwahati at 23:55 hours from June 18 till December 31, 2024 on every Tuesday and Thursday to reach New Jalpaiguri at 08:15 hours the next day. In the return direction, train no 05697 (New Jalpaiguri - Guwahati) will depart from New Jalpaiguri at 11:15 hours from June 19, 2024 till January 1, 2025 on every Wednesday and Friday to reach Guwahati at 19:30 hours the same day.

The special train will consist of AC 2-tier, AC 3-tier, sleeper class, and general seating coaches for the convenience of passengers from all segments. During its journey both ways, the special train will have stoppages at Kamakhya, Dudhnoi, Goalpara Town, Abhayapuri, Chapar, Bilasipara, Gauripur, Golakganj, Tufanganj, New Coochbehar, Mathabhanga, New Changrabandha, Jalpaiguri Road, and Rani Nagar Jalpaiguri stations.

The details of stoppages and timings of this train are available on the IRCTC website and are also being notified in various newspapers and social media platforms of NF Railway. Passengers are requested to verify the details before undertaking their journey.

Maheshwari community celebrates 'Mahesh Navami' in Hojai

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, June 16: The Maheshwari community in Hojai celebrated 'Mahesh Navami' with religious fervour at their homes and temples on Saturday. Notably, Mahesh Navami is observed on the Navami Tithi (ninth day) of Jyeshtha, Shukla Paksha (the waxing or brighter phase of the Lunar cycle). It is believed to be the day of origin of the Maheshwari community, which hails Mahesh (Lord of the Lords) as the supreme power. Talking to this correspondent, Shiv-sankar Bora and Ramesh Mundra said, "We Maheshwari celebrated the day by offering prayers and pujas to Lord Mahesh (Shiva) and his consort, Devi Parvati." They informed that other than pujas and customary rituals, in other parts of the country the community also organises cultural events and rallies to spread oneness, service, sacrifice, and truth. "It gives us immense pleasure when people from all walks of life wish us on this auspicious day," they added. They also informed that Kailash Kabra, provincial president of the Purvottar Pradeshia Marwari Samellan, also greeted the community on this occasion.

Services, organised a seminar aimed at educating and raising awareness among investors in Assam and North East. The seminar featured sessions titled 'Nivesh ki Baat, Siddhartha Khemka ke Saath' and 'Option Jaaniye, Chandan Taparia ke Saath', where both speakers provided insights to the investors. The event was well-attended by a large number of investors from Guwahati, who appreciated the initiative by Pushpgeet Financial Services, the regional partner of Motilal Oswal Mumbai. B L Agarwalla, Sanjay Agarwal, and Manish Agarwalla, co-owners of Pushpgeet Financial Services, were also present at the seminar.

Siddhartha Khemka, senior group vice president and head of research at Motilal Oswal, highlighted India's unique economic prospects, emphasising factors such as solid macroeconomic indicators, healthy corporate earnings, stable interest rates, moderate inflation, and ongoing policy initiatives. He mentioned that with the elections concluded, the focus is likely to shift towards fundamental bottom-up stock selection. Khemka outlined key factors currently influencing investor sentiment, including the Union Budget, monsoon progress, and movements in interest rates. He noted that Nifty is currently trading at a forward P/E of approximately 20x, slightly above its 10-year average. He recommended investment themes in sectors such as financials, consumption, discretionary, autos, industrials, real estate, and telecom.

Chandan Taparia, senior vice president and analyst-derivatives at Motilal Oswal, discussed the rapid growth of the options market and its opportunities for traders. He emphasised the importance of proper trading strategies, risk management, and discipline in capitalising on the potential of options trading. Taparia mentioned the increasing popularity of algo trading in Indian derivatives markets, particularly in option strategies aimed at mitigating risk and achieving substantial returns.

Throughout the session, investors and traders engaged with experts during the 'Aap Ke Sawal Expert Ke Jawab' segment, where queries were addressed comprehensively. The interaction provided valuable insights into investment strategies and market dynamics, reinforcing the commitment of Pushpgeet Financial Services and Motilal Oswal to investor education and empowerment.

Couple injured in attack by armed land mafia in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 16: A couple was grievously injured in a sudden attack by a gang of land mafia at their rented house near the Nagaon Uttar Haibargaon area under Haibargaon Outpost on Saturday night. The injured couple, identified as Nagen Saikia and his wife Anima Saikia, was immediately admitted to a local hospital in critical condition, sources added.

Sources claimed that police

from Haibargaon Outpost immediately arrested one woman, identified as Khaleda Begum, and another person in connection with the barbaric attack right after the incident. However, police operations against the other attackers are ongoing till the time of filing this report.

It was learned from the sources that a large gang of land mafia, well equipped with arms and led by Khaleda Begum, invaded the

rented house of Nagen Saikia and attacked Saikia and his wife, leaving both with grievous injuries. Additionally, the attackers vandalised their rented house, destroying their CCTV cameras, monitoring system, and other furniture.

Upon being informed, when Haibargaon Police rushed to the spot, the attackers had already fled after looting valuable items and gold ornaments, sources added.

Assam Natya Sanmilan to commemorate Bishnu Rabha Divas

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 16: Assam Natya Sanmilan, a premier dramatic organisation of the state, has announced the central organisation of the upcoming Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha Divas on June 20 at Miri Gaon, Bongalmora, according to a press release issued by the organisation on Sunday. The central program is being conducted under the auspices of Pub Dikrong Bishnu Rabha Natya Sanmilan in collaboration with Lakhimpur District Natya Sanmilan, Bishnu Jyoti Rangamancha, and in association with Bongalmora Janjati HSS. The day-long program will

commence with a plantation drive, followed by flag hoisting, floral tributes, and a series of competitions. The open session is scheduled for 1:00 pm, chaired by Kumar Dipak Das, president of Assam Natya Sanmilan. Dhiren Saikia, retired principal of Bongalmora Janjati HSS, will be present as the appointed speaker. The event will also be attended by Hiranya Hazarika, executive president, Mrigen Bora, vice president, Anup Borthakur, Dr Basanta Khanikar, Jayanta Hazarika, Niranjan Kakaty, and Dilip Kr Bora, among others. The open session will be inaugurated by Haren Saikia, president of Swarnapeeth Mandal Committee.

Police capture cannabis dealer in Sootea

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 16: Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of Sootea police, led by Shyamal Jyoti Saikia, officer-in-charge of Sootea PS, and Nabaji Das Baghri, dy SP (HQ), Biswanath, successfully apprehended a cannabis dealer identified as Bibek Nath on Sunday. The team recovered approximately 8 kgs of cannabis from his possession. According to the officer-in-charge, the police received information about the cannabis dealer and intercepted him at Khanaguri, Bibek Nath, who arrived from the Udalguri side, was apprehended with the cannabis intended for sale in the Sootea and Biswanath area. Bibek Nath is originally from Kharthebari, Barpeta.

Biswanath District Kabi Sanmilan holds 3rd annual meeting

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 16: The 3rd annual meeting of Biswanath District Kabi Sanmilan was conducted on Sunday at the conference hall of Binapani Natya Mandir with Shailen Bora, vice president, presiding over the session. Bedadeep Upadhyaya, joint secretary of the central committee, attended the meeting as an observer. Prior to the open session, a delegates' meeting was convened to constitute the new Biswanath District Committee of Kabi Sanmilan. The committee was formed with Hiteswar Saikia, Kanaklata Neog, Dhanada Kalita, and Shailen Bora as advisors. Anjana Bhagawati was appointed as the president, Dilip Bora as the working president, Champa Bora as the vice president, Khagen Chandra Bora as the general secretary, and Prem Boishnav and Labanu Saikia as joint secretaries, along with eleven executive members.

Pushpgeet Financial Services hosts seminar in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: India's leading investment and financial company, Motilal Financial Services Ltd., in collaboration with regional partner Pushpgeet Financial

BEST WISHES & CONGRATULATIONS



We are showering our best wishes and congratulations to our Daughter/ Grand daughter/ Niece/Elder sister/ Relative/ Neighbour Miss Gargi Saharia for passing the HSSLC Examination held in 2024 with distinction. May God bless her. Parents Jagat Saharia (Grand Father) Sarat Saharia (Uncle) Mridula Saharia (Aunt) Kritartha & Nirban (Brothers) Jyotish Chandra Goswami (Relative) & Neighbours, Tezpur, Assam

OFFICE OF THE
DIPHU MUNICIPAL BOARD
DIPHU KARBI ANGLONG
e-mail: dtodiphu branch 1 @gmail.com

NO.DMB/W/SBM/ 2018-19/277/ Pt-V/ 835 Dated Diphu the 14/06/2024

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed offers are hereby invited from the intending financially sound bidder against the work for Construction of 2 nos General public toilet at Diphu town as noted below:-

GROUP NO	WARD NO	NAME OF WORKS	ESTIMATED AMOUNTS	EARNEST MONEY	
				1%	2%
1	5	Construction of public toilet at lorulango market	Rs. 9,00,000.00	9,000.00	18,000.00
2	1	Construction of public toilet at Sericulture campus	Rs. 9,00,000.00	9,000.00	18,000.00

1. The tender will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00 PM on 25.06.2024 and the same will be opened on 3.00 PM 25.06.2024
2. The Tender should bear a Municipal Board fee stamp of Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only (Nonrefundable) to be affixed with the offer without which no offer will be considered for acceptance.
3. The offer should be placed in a sealed cover.
4. EARNEST MONEY which will contain earnest money of the project based upon the Following:

Amount of earnest money 1% for ST/SC/OBC/MOBC
-2% of the estimated cost for non-Tribal Registered Contractors
as state above in the form of NSC/KVP/Demand Draft

or their authorized representatives. The time allowed for completion is two months from the date of issuing of the formal works order.

4. The Complete bidding documents containing the offer forms general forms general and specially conditions of contract etc. can be held on application.
5. The undersigned reserve the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason thereof and does not bind him to accept the lowest rate.
6. The selected bidder will have to sign the formal offer in F-2 form within 7 (Seven) days from the date of issue of selection order failing which an amount equivalent to 2% of the offer value of the work shall stand forfeited.
7. Canvassing in connection with offer is strictly prohibited and the offers submitted by the contractors who resort to such canvassing will be liable to rejection.
8. on acceptance of the offer the name of accredited representative (s) of the contractor who should be responsible for taking instruction from the offer of the Diphu municipal Board, Diphu
9. All right shall be quoted on the proper form furnished with the offer documents. Special care should be taken to write the rate in figure as well in words and the amounts in figures only, in such a way that interpolation is not possible.
10. The Contractor must produce the Registration or GST including Clearance Certificate Professional Tax Clearance Certificate Trading License for Non Tribal Contractors including the Tender papers.
11. No Engineer of Gazetted rank or other Officer employed in Engineering or Administrative duties in an Engineering Department of the state/central government is allowed to work as a contractor for a period of two years after his retirement from Government Service without the previous permission of the Government. This contract is liable to be cancelled if either the contractor or any of his employees in found at any time to be such a person who had not obtained the permission of the Government as aforesaid before submission of offer or engagement in the Contractor services.
12. The Offer for work shall remain open for acceptance for a period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days from the date of opening the offers. If any bidders withdraws his offer before the said period or makes any modification in the items and conditions of the offer which are not acceptable to the department then the government shall without prejudice to any other right or remedy be at liberty to forfeit an amount equivalent 1 to 2 % of the value of the contract either from the registration fees of the contractor or any other dues payable to him by the Department.
13. The offer for the work shall not be witnessed by a contractor or contractors who himself/themselves has/ have bidder or who may offer for the same work. Failure to observe this condition should render offers of the contractors offering as well as witnessing the offer liable to summary rejection.
14. The offer shall be for the composite work mentioned in this notice- inviting offer.
 - a) Before offering the intending bidder shall inspect the site to fully acquaint himself about the condition in regard to accessibility of site and locality nature and extent of ground working conditions including stacking of materials installation of T & P etc. conditions affecting accommodation and movement of labour etc. required for the satisfactory execution of the work/ contact. No claim whatsoever on such account shall be entertained by the Department under any circumstances.
 - b) The intending bidder should also inspect the quarry and satisfy himself about the quality and availability of the various materials shall not consider after acceptance of the contract to pay any extra charges for lead or any other persons in case the contractor is found later on to have misjudged quality and availability of materials in the quarry.
15. The contractor's responsibility for the contact shall commence from the date of issue orders of acceptance of offer.
16. Unsealed offers shall be summarily rejected.
17. The contractor should read the specifications and study the other terms and conditions carefully before submitting the offer.
18. If it is found that the offer is not submitted in the per manner or conditions too many correction or assured rates or amount it would be offence for the department to take suitable action against the contractor.
19. The bidder shall sign a declaration under the official secret act for maintaining secrecy of the offer documents drawings or any other records connected with the work given to them.
20. The bidder must have at least 3 year work experience under the KAAC area.
21. Payment is subject to availability of found under the concerned head.
22. All machineries and materials will have to be arranged by the contractor himself

Executive Officer
Diphu Municipal Board,
Diphu, Karbi Anglong

QUOTE OF THE DAY

I have a Father's Day every day.
-Dennis Banks

Modi's rhetoric shifts

The recent introspection within the BJP, led by the RSS, highlights a critical issue: the arrogance of its leaders. This self-assessment points to a significant disconnect between the party and the grassroots, which has contributed to their setbacks in the Lok Sabha elections. The leaders' overconfidence and dismissive attitudes have alienated voters, creating a need for the BJP to recalibrate its approach towards governance and public engagement. Emphasizing humility and responsiveness is now paramount for rebuilding trust and support. The failure to secure a clear majority in the elections tested Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political acumen. Initially, Modi appeared to recognize the need for a shift. Moving away from his typical rhetoric of personal guarantees, he emphasized the collective strength of the NDA. This change suggested a willingness to accommodate diverse voices and a recognition of the necessity for coalition politics in India's pluralistic democracy. This newfound humility sparked speculation about a potential softening of Modi's governance style.

Modi's embrace of coalition-building was not merely an ideological pivot but a pragmatic response to parliamentary arithmetic. With support from key allies like Chandrababu Naidu and Nitish Kumar, Modi's position seemed secure. However, as alliances solidified, Modi's initial semblance of humility gave way to his familiar self-assurance, verging on arrogance. His body language, once hinting at compromise, began to echo past triumphs, suggesting a return to his old ways. The prospect of Modi reverting to his earlier style carries significant implications. A resurgence of his authoritative approach could exacerbate existing political fault lines and deepen polarization. Modi's reluctance to embrace genuine change appears systemic, mirrored in the demeanour of his close ally, Amit Shah. During Chandrababu Naidu's ministry swearing-in ceremony, Shah publicly rebuked Tamil Nadu BJP leader Tamilisai Soundarajan, a move that drew considerable attention. The incident was notable not just for the rebuke but for Shah's body language, which starkly contrasted with the humility he displayed during the election results announcement. His pointed finger suggested a disdain for the Dravida land and a sense of racial superiority, which has not gone unnoticed by the people of Tamil Nadu. Shah's public scolding of Tamilisai, seemingly indifferent to optics, signals a return to a more assertive and authoritative stance. This could be seen as Shah reasserting his authority within the party or as a reflection of the changing political landscape post-election.

The shift from humility to sternness in Shah's demeanour may indicate a recalibration of political strategies in response to evolving challenges. The timing of Shah's rebuke, during a high-profile event, amplifies its significance. It underscores his assertiveness and raises questions about internal dynamics within the BJP and its state units. The public nature of the incident suggests a message to party members and allies regarding discipline and loyalty. Given Tamil Nadu's importance for the BJP's expansion plans, handling intra-party conflicts in such a setting has far-reaching implications. While Modi's language has adapted to the electoral setback, his and Shah's body language suggests a reversion to their old, authoritative styles. This shift risks alienating voters further and could deepen political divides. The BJP leadership must genuinely embrace humility and responsiveness to navigate the challenges ahead and rebuild trust with the electorate. The pendulum of political fortunes is ever-swinging, and only time will tell if the BJP can truly learn from its setbacks and adapt accordingly.

Overview on Land restoration, desertification and drought resilience

By: Mowsam Hazarika

Land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience are interconnected concepts that address environmental degradation, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions. Here's an overview of each concept and their interrelationships:

Land Restoration

Land restoration involves activities aimed at returning degraded land to a healthy state, improving its productivity and ecological functionality. Restoration techniques include:

- Reforestation and Afforestation:** Planting trees to restore forests and create new forested areas.

- Soil Conservation Practices:** Techniques like terracing, contour plowing, and the use of cover crops to prevent soil erosion.

- Wetland Restoration:** Re-establishing wetlands to improve water filtration and habitat for wildlife.

- Agroforestry:** Integrating trees and shrubs into agricultural landscapes to enhance biodiversity and soil health.

Desertification

Desertification is the process by which fertile land becomes desert, typically as a result of drought, deforestation, or inappropriate agriculture. Key factors include:

- Climate Change:** Altered weather patterns can reduce precipitation and increase temperatures, accelerating desertification.

- Unsustainable Land Use:** Overgrazing, deforestation, and poor agricultural practices deplete soil nutrients and structure.

- Water Mismanagement:** Overuse and mismanagement of water resources can exacerbate soil degradation.

Drought Resilience

Drought resilience refers to the ability of an ecosystem or community to withstand and recover from periods of low water availability. Strategies to enhance drought resilience include:

- Water Conservation Practices:** Efficient irrigation systems, rainwater harvesting, and the use of drought-resistant crop varieties.

- Soil Moisture Management:** Techniques like mulching and the use of organic matter to retain soil

moisture.

- Diversification of Livelihoods:** Encouraging diverse agricultural practices to reduce dependency on water-intensive crops.

Interconnections

- Land Restoration and Desertification:** Effective land restoration can combat desertification by improving soil health, increasing vegetation cover, and restoring natural water cycles. Techniques like reforestation and sustainable agriculture can halt and reverse the spread of deserts.

- Land Restoration and Drought Resilience:** Restored land is more resilient to drought as healthy soils retain more moisture and support diverse plant life, which in turn maintains local climate conditions.

- Desertification and Drought Resilience:** Reducing desertification through sustainable land management increases resilience to drought by maintaining the land's productivity and water retention capacity.

Case Studies and Examples

- The Great Green Wall Initiative:** A project across the Sahel region in Africa aiming to combat desertification through a mosaic of green and productive landscapes.

- China's Loess Plateau:** Restoration efforts have transformed a heavily degraded area into productive farmland, improving local climate resilience.

- Australia's Water-Sensitive Urban Design:** Incorporating green infrastructure to manage urban water sustainably, enhancing resilience to both drought and flooding.

Combating desertification and enhancing drought resilience through land restoration requires a holistic approach, integrating ecological, social, and economic strategies. Sustainable land management practices not only restore ecosystems but also support livelihoods and create more resilient communities in the face of climate change. *(The author is People's Science Activist of Assam and a Former Director, Assam Seed and Organic Certification Agency & Former Joint Director of Agriculture (Pulse), Department of Agriculture. He can be reached at mowsam2000@yahoo.co.in)*

Sharp increase in tainted leaders - a matter of concern

The 18th Lok Sabha has been elected in the country. The world's largest democracy and record number of voters are to be proud of, but there are also disturbing trends in this democracy. The news is that out of the 543 members of Lok Sabha elected recently, no less than 46 percent have criminal records, which is three percent more than the last time. In Indian politics, people with criminal image or facing criminal charges are the potential threat to the government and the nation both, in every conceivable way, which is a matter of worry for every citizen.

Will the democratic purity and sanctity of the country be protected in this situation? Will these tainted people not criminalize our system over time? The latest report by the Association of Democratic Reforms, an advisory body that analyses issues related to the criminals in Indian politics, shows that while 233 (43%) of the MPs elected in 2019 had accepted criminal cases registered against them, 251 MPs elected for the 18th Lok Sabha have accepted criminal cases registered against them, which is 46% of the total number.

Today, a big question is how to make Indian politics crime-free. It is not without reason that the increasing interference by criminals in Indian politics has created such a problem that instead of appearing in court, an MP who is accused of kidnapping reaches Rashtrapati Bhawan to take oath as a minister. Leaders like Arvind Kejriwal say in the general elections that the people should vote for Aam Aadmi Party in large numbers, so that he can be saved from going to jail.

Here the most important question is how will we establish a good governance and honest system by giving responsible positions to such characterless and criminal elements? How will he live up to the trust of the general public? How will the doors be closed for the tainted persons to reach the Parliament?

In fact, on the alert initiative by the Supreme Court, all political parties have started publishing the criminal records of Lok Sabha and Assembly candidates since the year 2020. Certainly, the purpose of this order was to free the country's politics from the crooks tainted with criminal image. But in reality this did not happen, because the priority of all political parties was to gamble on the winning candidates, even if they had a criminal record.

The big question is who will present the ideal in politics then? What happened to those people who always presented the ideal picture by making every sacrifice possible? They became exemplars for millions, became ideals - whether it was the freedom struggle, security of the country, security of religion, protection of their word or the question of protection of their culture and identity, they sacrificed everything to fulfil their duty and promise. Heroes like Maharana Pratap, Bhagat Singh, Durgadas, Chhatrasal, Shivaji made big sacrifices by abandoning all comforts of life. Guru Govind Singh got both his sons bricked into the wall and Panna Dhay sacrificed her son for her devotion to her master. Temples should be built for such people.

If their temples are not built, people bow their heads in reverence, as soon as their names are mentioned. But the way our national life and thinking have been distorted today, our politics has become selfish and narrow-minded, our behaviour has become false, we have worn more masks than faces, it has destroyed all our values. With the rise of criminals in politics, citizens



zens of the nation are worried and confused about the future of the country. The time has come when some top people will have to make Herculean efforts to

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

Lalit Garg

protect the country's culture, glorious heritage. A new standard will have to be set before the directionless leadership class. If a person is accused in any murder, kidnapping, murder or any other serious crime, then the attempt to protect him by calling him a political person, or the evil attempt to take political advantage will have to be stopped. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always given priority to corruption and crime free politics, but in the battle to win elections, he has also been seen giving shelter to criminal politicians.

All political parties have given tickets to tainted candidates. This highlights the huge difference between the words and actions of political parties. The question is - what will be our future if such tainted people who formulate policies for the country continue to be the makers of our destiny? Will people with criminal backgrounds not affect our law and order after being elected as public representatives? What will be the future of our society and system? Why don't the leaders who talk about all the ideals and question the actions of the leaders of other parties take honest initiative to free

politics from the dominance of criminals? Why don't all political parties agree for purity and sanctity in Indian democracy? Certainly, if no serious initiative is taken in this direction in time, then this percentage of tainted people will continue to increase in the coming years. Along with this, the big crisis is that the dominance of leaders who have become millionaires by hook or crook is increasing in the lower house of the country. This time, there are 504 millionaires among the MPs elected to the Parliament. In such a situation, can it be expected that a common man who lives off his hard-earned money can ever think of becoming an MP? Tainted and criminal politicians are becoming a big irony and anomaly of democracy.

It is not just about the Lok Sabha, there is such a contradiction and anomaly in the governments of various states that a leader with a criminal image becomes the Law Minister, an illiterate or less educated representative is made the Education Minister. The same happens with other important ministries. What kind of helplessness is this of political parties? Often the reality of the claim of making politics crime-free comes to the fore when the opportunity comes to form a coalition government in a state or at the Centre. It is a matter of happiness that such helplessness has been controlled to a great extent in the cabinet of the coal-

ition government formed at the Centre. Only one demand is heard from those who protect the nation on the borders that after death our dead body should be sent to our home. When we read such things, our head salutes those soldiers; it seems that the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice has not died yet. But when will such an ideal be present in politics? The light of the lamp of character and morality in politics has become dim; oil will have to be poured. Whether it is the CBI raids and prison bars on the houses of ministers in the Delhi government or the coronation of criminal elements in the formation of the Bihar Council of Ministers, these are serious issues on which there should be an intense debate in politics, there should be a meaningful effort to purify politics, this should be the priorities of new India - strong India.

Everyone is running and shouting for their identity and self-interest. Some try to establish their independent identity with money, some with their beauty, some with their scholarship, some with their behaviour. The condition of politics is even worse that here leaders resort to crime, corruption and immorality to rule the hearts of the people. There are attempts to divide the people on the basis of caste, regional, and communalism. But how much illusion do we nurture? Identity is not built without character. Everything else is temporary. Character is a sadhana, austerity. Just as the belly of ego is big, it needs something or the other every day. Similarly, political character needs daily protection and all this can be achieved only with strong morale, clean image, honesty and freedom from crime. In politics, only a leader with character and morality is respectable and acceptable. *(The author is a journalist & columnist. He can be reached at lalitgarg11@gmail.com)*

plainly. He has also expressed his opinion on the unrest in Manipur. "Manipur has been seeking peace for a year. This should be discussed as a priority. The state had been peaceful for the past 10 years. It seemed that the old 'gun culture' had ended. The fire ignited or instigated by the sudden tension there, is still burning. Who will pay attention to this? It is our duty to prioritize and pay attention to it," he said. Undeniably, Manipur has been burning for almost a year. Violence and massacres continue there. The situation hasn't come under control. Just when it seems that peace is about to be restored in Manipur, bad news comes from there. The situation in Manipur has troubled the entire country. Obviously, the whole country connects with Mohan Bhagwat's opinion on Manipur. Now the country's desire is that peace be restored in Manipur and the warmth that existed in the relationship between the Sangh and the BJP should return. *(The author is a senior editor, columnist & former Raja Sabha MP)*

How strong is the BJP without the RSS

By: R.K. Sinha

Mohan Bhagwat, the chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) expresses his frank opinion on specific issues or occasions. Yes, when he speaks, the whole nation listens intently. His statements are interpreted from various angles. Recently, after the Lok Sabha elections, Mohan Bhagwat caused a stir by indirectly blaming some BJP leaders of being 'arrogant'.

Addressing a Sangh event in Nagpur, Maharashtra, Mohan Bhagwat said, "A true servant maintains decorum while working. They don't have an ego like 'I did this'. Only such a person deserves to be called a servant." What does he intend to convey by discussing ego? One opinion is that some BJP leaders, after coming to power, have not remained humble. They have become arrogant. They have distanced themselves from the concerns of the common people. They have alienated themselves from public service. Due to this, the people did not give BJP the expected success in the recent

Lok Sabha elections. A top official of an organization allied to the BJP was telling me a few months ago, he met an Union Minister for some important work. The minister knew that he had dedicated his entire life as an RSS worker. Despite all this, the Union Minister did not give him much importance. The smug minister forgot that the BJP gets its strength from the RSS and its allied organizations. There is no doubt that BJP leaders who are not familiar with the importance and ideology of the RSS need to change their thinking. The BJP has no existence without the Sangh.

In his speeches, Mohan Bhagwat has consistently praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During the 'Pran Pratishtha' (consecration) of the Ram temple, Mohan Bhagwat said, "Before coming to consecration festival, Prime Minister Modi observed a strict fast. He followed a much stricter regimen than what was asked. I have known him for a long time and I know, he is an ascetic."

The Sangh is the parent organization of the BJP, so it's nat-

ural that it will have an impact on the BJP. Additionally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been an active Sangh campaigner. However, for some time now, there has been a muted discussion about whether the BJP always operates under the influence of the Sangh? If not, to what extent does the Sangh have control over the BJP?

You will remember that during the Lok Sabha election campaign, BJP President Jitendra Nathada said that the BJP is a political organization and the RSS is a cultural and social organization that does its own work. He also said that the BJP's structure has become strong and now it runs on its own. Nathada made this statement in an interview to a noted daily newspaper when asked if the presence of the Sangh within the party had changed compared to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee's era. Whether Nathada should have said all this about the relationship between the Sangh and the BJP or not, but somewhere there are signs that some ideological differences arose between the Sangh and some BJP leaders during the Lok Sabha elections.

However, I cannot say anything concretely about this, whether the BJP ignored the suggestions given by the Sangh regarding the selection of some candidates for the elections in Uttar Pradesh after the party's defeat there. The Sangh and the BJP have been working together for a long time in many elections.

Yes, it is true that a lot of leaders from other parties have joined the BJP. They may not have a lot of allegiance to the Sangh's thinking. But no one can deny that the BJP still needs the support of the Sangh. The BJP must follow Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay's ideology. He was far from ego. He was a serious philosopher and deep thinker, as well as a dedicated organizer and leader who established the highest level of personal integrity and dignity in public life. I worked with him in Bihar in the 1960 to 1968, till his last days. I was a teenager then though politically very active and aware. There was no trace of arrogance in his personality. BJP leaders must always follow his ideas and lifestyle. Mohan Bhagwat speaks

POST BAG

Revive APOL

Sir/Ma'am

Assam used to be a textile producing giant ruling the early 90s with APOL fabrics which slowly became a household name in India because of its fine quality. Leading apparel brands like Goenka used to manufacture their products in APOL's facility. Assam Polyester Limited which is more famously known in its shortened form APOL slowly occupied a large share of the market in the 90s but post liberalisation in 1995 the company stuttered in front of big conglomerates due to lack of working capital and with time it ceased production in 2003.

It has been more than two decades APOL's employees are demanding its revival as more than 1500 of them became jobless. Now as Pabitra Margherita takes the oath of office of Ministry of Textiles we can hope that he will do his bit to revive APOL and put a smile on those 1500 families.

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Role and contribution of laboratory technicians in the health department

Sir/Ma'am

The role and contribution of laboratory technicians in the health department are often underestimated in society. While people generally perceive the health department as comprising only doctors and nurses, the reality is far more complex. Many health workers are involved in various capacities within this extensive sector, a fact that is often overlooked by the general public.

The responsibilities and contributions of other health workers in the health department are not always recognized by society. Laboratory technicians, in particular, play a crucial role that often goes unnoticed. When we visit a hospital for medical treatment, our focus is usually solely on getting better, with little awareness of the multitude of health workers involved behind the scenes. In reality, it is not just doctors and nurses who are integral to ensuring the health and well-being of patients.

Laboratory technicians play a vital role in diagnosing and treating illnesses. They provide crucial support by conducting various tests and offering advice on appropriate treatment options. Before any patient undergoes medical treatment, it is essential to conduct thorough tests to ensure an accurate diagnosis. Laboratory technicians are responsible for collecting samples and performing tests to detect the presence of pathogens or other indicators of illness. Their work is instrumental in confirming whether a patient is infected with a particular disease or not.

In cases where medical intervention is necessary, it is essential to ensure that patients receive the appropriate treatment without the risk of further complications. Before any surgical procedure, laboratory technicians conduct specific tests to determine whether the patient is at risk of contracting infections or other complications due to the disease. This helps to mitigate the risk of postoperative complications and ensures the safety of the patient.

The role of laboratory technicians extends beyond the confines of the laboratory. They are responsible for collecting samples and performing tests, often directly interacting with patients. This direct contact increases the likelihood of transmitting infections to technicians. Therefore, it is essential for laboratory technicians to take necessary precautions to protect themselves and others from potential infections.

In addition to conducting tests and analyzing results, laboratory technicians also play a crucial role in maintaining the safety and cleanliness of the laboratory environment. They adhere to strict protocols to prevent contamination and ensure accurate test results. Their meticulous attention to detail and dedication to their work contribute significantly to the overall success of the health department.

During times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of laboratory technicians becomes even more apparent. They are at the forefront of efforts to control the spread of the virus by conducting tests and providing accurate data to health authorities. Their tireless dedication and commitment to their work are commendable, and they deserve recognition for their invaluable contributions to public health.

In conclusion, laboratory technicians are indispensable members of the health department, playing a vital role in diagnosing and treating illnesses, ensuring patient safety, and maintaining the integrity of laboratory operations. Their contributions are often overlooked but are essential for the effective functioning of the health care system.

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Managing acute gastroenteritis amidst the heatwave

By: Dr Vineet Kumar Gupta

Acute gastroenteritis, commonly referred to as stomach flu, is an inflammation of the stomach and intestines typically caused by viral, bacterial, or parasitic infections. It is characterized by sudden onset of symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea, stomach cramps, and fever. While it can affect individuals of all ages, certain groups, including young children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems, are particularly vulnerable to severe dehydration and complications arising from this condition.

The primary mode of transmission for gastroenteritis is through the ingestion of contaminated food or water, direct contact with an infected person, or touching contaminated surfaces. Viruses, especially norovirus and rotavirus, are the leading causes of gastroenteritis globally. Bacterial pathogens such as *E. coli* and *Salmonella*, as well as parasites like *Giardia*, also contribute to outbreaks.

Symptoms and diagnosis

The symptoms of acute gastroenteritis can range from mild to severe and typically appear within one to three days after exposure to the causative agent. Common symptoms include watery diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea, abdominal pain, and cramps. Fever, headache, and muscle aches may also be present. The illness usually resolves within a few days to a week; however, severe cases may require medical attention to prevent dehydration and other complications.

Diagnosis of gastroenteritis is primarily based on the patient's clinical history and symptoms. In severe cases, laboratory tests, including stool cultures and blood tests, may be conducted to identify the specific pathogen and guide appropriate treatment.

Treatment and prevention

Treatment for acute gastroenteritis focuses on managing symptoms and preventing dehydration. This includes ensuring adequate fluid intake with oral rehydration solutions, maintaining a balanced diet,

and avoiding foods that may irritate the stomach. In severe cases, hospitalization and intravenous fluids may be necessary. Antibiotics are typically reserved for bacterial infections and are not effective against viruses.

Preventive measures are crucial in controlling the spread of gastroenteritis. These include practicing good hand hygiene, ensuring safe drinking water, properly cooking and storing food, and avoiding contact with infected individuals. Vaccination is available for certain pathogens, such as rotavirus, which can significantly reduce the incidence of severe gastroenteritis in children.

Impact of heatwaves on gastroenteritis

The ongoing heatwave has exacerbated the incidence of acute gastroenteritis, highlighting the intricate relationship between climate conditions and infectious diseases. High temperatures can affect food and water safety, leading to an increased risk of contamination and outbreaks. During a heatwave, the risk of foodborne illnesses rises as bacteria multiply more rapidly in warm conditions. Improper food storage, inadequate refrigeration, and unsafe food handling practices can lead to bacterial proliferation in food, causing gastroenteritis. Additionally, high temperatures can compromise the quality of drinking water, particularly in areas with inadequate sanitation infrastructure. Contaminated water sources become breeding grounds for pathogens, increasing the likelihood of waterborne gastroenteritis.

Acute gastroenteritis is a common but potentially serious condition that requires prompt recognition and management to prevent complications. The ongoing heatwave has heightened the risk of gastroenteritis outbreaks due to increased food and water contamination. Public health efforts should focus on promoting safe food and water practices, especially during extreme weather events, to mitigate the impact of gastroenteritis and safeguard the community health. (The author is the Director and HOD, Gastroenterology, Yatharth Hospital, Greater Noida)

Cardiovascular disease will remain global top killer in 2050, Alzheimer's disease among 5 leading causes of death: Study

By: Rohini Krishnamurthy

Cardiovascular disease, the top killer in 2022 globally, will continue to retain its position as the leading cause of death three decades later as well, a new study published in *The Lancet* warned. Ischemic heart disease - also called coronary heart disease - is caused by narrowed heart arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle, leading to a heart attack.

In India, things look slightly different. By 2050, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), a common lung disease causing restricted airflow and breathing problems, is predicted to take the top spot among leading causes of fatality in the country, the data showed. Ischemic heart disease was placed second.

In 2022, ischemic heart disease secured the top spot, followed by COPD, the data showed.

The top five killers in 2050 are COPD, ischemic heart disease, stroke, diarrhoeal disease and lower respiratory infections. The same conditions were responsible for the highest number of fatalities in 2022 as well.

The paper, however, predicted that tuberculosis - the sixth-largest killer in 2022 - would drop to the 12th position in 2050. Falls, road injuries, and self-harm remained

the top leading causes of death in 2022 and 2050 in India.

COVID-19, which occupied the 12th position in 2022, was moved to the 133rd leading cause of death in 2050.

By 2050, the burden of diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, chronic kidney disease, and urinary diseases is likely to go up.

Another trend emerging in India is the decrease in infectious, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases over the next three decades. In 2022, five conditions - diarrhoea, lower respiratory infections, tuberculosis, neonatal disorders, and COVID-19 - belonging to this category stayed in the top 15. By mid-century, only three - diarrhoea, lower respiratory infections and tuberculosis - remained.

Global scenario

The top five killers in 2050 globally were ischemic heart disease, stroke, COPD, Alzheimer's disease and chronic kidney disease.

In 2022, the top three killers remained the same. But lower respiratory diseases and COVID-19 were ranked the fourth and fifth leading cause of death that year. Diarrhoeal disease will move to 13th position in 2050, compared to 15 in 2022.

Like India, the world is likely to see a higher burden of non-com-

municable diseases (NCD), which are not caused due to infections. In 2050, 11 of the top 15 causes of death are expected to be due to NCDs, two from communicable or infectious diseases, and two from injuries.

In contrast, 2022 saw nine of the top 15 causes of death due to NCDs, three from communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases, and one from injury.

COVID-19 moved from the fifth spot in 2022 to the 133rd position in 2050, the estimates showed. The researchers acknowledged that data on COVID-19 cases and deaths in 2022-23 are still very limited due to reporting lags and that there is uncertainty around the longer-term direct and indirect effects of the pandemic.

"In the absence of data that could indicate future trends in the COVID-19 burden, we assumed that COVID-19 deaths will decline linearly to zero between 2023 and 2030," the researchers wrote in their study.

The study also highlighted that the annual probability of another pandemic of a magnitude similar to that of the COVID-19 pandemic is 2-3 per cent. This, they explained, equates to an 18-26 per cent chance of it occurring within a decade and 79-90 per cent likelihood within 2100. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Viagra may help prevent dementia by boosting brain blood flow

By: Tim Newman

According to a recent study published in *Circulation Research*, sildenafil - more commonly known as Viagra - may reduce the risk of vascular dementia.

After participants took the drug for three weeks, the scientists measured positive changes in the behavior of blood vessels in the brain.

The study, called the Ox-HARP trial, lays the foundation for future clinical trials.

Viagra's expanding scope
Viagra, first designed to treat angina, rose to fame in the late 1990s as an effective treatment for erectile dysfunction.

Because it is a relatively safe drug and affects a number of organs, such as the heart, liver, kidney, and brain, it is a good candidate for drug repurposing.

For instance, scientists have already investigated whether sildenafil might help treat conditions including chronic pain, cancer, depression, kidney disease, and more.

The latest study asks whether Viagra might help reduce the risk of developing vascular dementia.

What is vascular dementia?

Vascular dementia is a form of dementia caused by impaired blood flow or damaged blood vessels in the brain. It often occurs after a stroke. As the second most common form of dementia after Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia accounts for 15-20% of dementia cases in North America and Europe.

Medical News Today spoke with José Morales, MD, a vascular neurologist and neurointerventional surgeon at Pacific Neuroscience Institute in Santa Monica, CA. Morales, who was not involved in the new study, told Medical News Today that "there are treatments available that can help manage the symptoms and slow the progression of the disease."

However, "There is no cure," so identifying risk factors and ways to reduce those risks is important. Cerebral small vessel disease (CSVD) is one such risk factor. CSVD is an umbrella term for a number of conditions that affect small blood vessels in the brain.

MNT reached out to one of the study's authors, Alastair Webb, MSc, a consultant neurologist at Imperial College London in the United Kingdom. He provided an outline of CSVD:

"Small vessel disease is chronic damage to the small blood vessels deep inside the brain, resulting in them becoming narrow, blocked, and leaky. This damage occurs to some extent in most people as they get older, but it is much more severe in some, often due to having high blood pressure for a long time."



The resulting damage may further reduce blood flow to the deep part of the brain resulting in strokes and dementia," he explained.

How Viagra may affect blood vessels in the brain

In the recent study, the scientists recruited 75 people with neurological signs of CSVD.

Every participant received 3-week regimens of sildenafil, placebo, and cilostazol - a treatment for vascular disease. Each course of drugs was separated by a "washout" period of at least 1 week.

Testing all three drugs on all participants is called a crossover trial. These studies are powerful because each participant acts as their own control. They also require fewer participants to achieve statistically meaningful results.

The researchers focused on the following measures:

• **Cerebral pulsatility:** Webb described this as "stronger pulsations of blood flow to the brain with each heart beat."

• **Cerebrovascular reactivity:** This is "reduced responsiveness of blood vessels in the brain," according to Webb.

• **Cerebrovascular resistance:** how much resistance there is to blood flow within vessels.

• **Cerebral blood flow:** Blood supply to the brain.

MNT asked Webb why they decided to investigate sildenafil:

"It causes blood vessels to open up, to increase blood flow and the responsiveness of blood vessels," he said. "As such, it had the right type of action to improve the blood flow problems seen in our patients, but it was unclear whether it worked in the brain in the same way."

Fewer side effects than

drugs for poor circulation

The researchers found that sildenafil did not improve cerebral pulsatility compared with placebo. Although Webb "had reason to believe that it would reduce pulsations," the team was not overly surprised that it did not work in this way.

Importantly, though, sildenafil did improve cerebrovascular reactivity and resistance, and cerebral blood flow compared with placebo.

Compared with cilostazol, Viagra performed similarly but produced fewer side effects, such as diarrhea.

The authors conclude:

"Overall, the improved cerebrovascular dynamics with sildenafil provide a new potential treatment to prevent progression of [cerebral small vessel disease] that needs testing in clinical trials."

Although it is still early days, this is a step toward understanding how to reduce the risk of vascular dementia.

Why use Viagra to reduce dementia risk?

MNT spoke with Rakesh C. Kukreja, PhD, professor of internal medicine at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine in Richmond, who was not involved in the study. On why Viagra might help reduce vascular dementia risk, Kukreja said:

"Sildenafil is a potent inhibitor of the enzyme phosphodiesterase 5 (PDE5), which breaks down the powerful vasodilator molecule cyclic guanosine monophosphate (cGMP)."

"By preventing the breakdown of cGMP, sildenafil promotes the relaxation of blood vessels and improves blood flow. Therefore, the enhanced cerebral blood flow and reduced vascular resistance from sildenafil treatment might influence the risk of dementia," he said.

It is worth mentioning that this study's results line up with earlier research.

For instance, a study using a rodent model of vascular dementia found that Viagra improved cognitive ability and memory. Other rodent

studies produced similar findings.

Also, studies in a human population concluded that Viagra usage was linked with a reduced risk of developing Alzheimer's. Similarly, Kukreja outlined another study involving "insurance claim data for 7.23 million individuals."

In this study, he explained, "sildenafil was associated with a 69% reduction in the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease."

Tackling lifestyle risk factors for dementia

While further research is needed into Viagra and vascular dementia, there are lifestyle factors that can make a difference to an individual's risk.

MNT spoke with Dr. Tim Beal, head of knowledge at the Alzheimer's Society who was not involved in the study. He outlined some lifestyle risk factors for vascular dementia:

"We know that what's good for the heart is good for the brain, so a healthy diet and lifestyle, including not smoking or drinking too much alcohol, can help to lower your risk of dementia and other conditions like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers."

For individuals who already have dementia, he told MNT that "there is growing evidence to suggest that regular exercise, looking after your health, and keeping mentally and socially active can help to reduce the progression of dementia symptoms."

Too soon to use Viagra to prevent dementia

The results of this study suggest that sildenafil may help reduce the risk of vascular dementia in people with CSVD. However, it only measured changes to aspects of cerebral blood flow over a relatively short period of time.

To get a clearer picture of whether Viagra and similar drugs truly can reduce risk, scientists will need to follow people for years to assess whether their risk is reduced.

Webb plans to continue this line of investigation:

"It is very important to follow up on this work. We need to do some further studies to work out the best dose of the drug, and the best drug from this group of drugs to take on further," he told MNT.

"We are aiming to test it in a much larger trial to understand if it not only improves blood flow to the brain but also to test whether this reduces the risk of stroke and dementia," he added. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Will Rajasthan be able to be free from TB by 2025?

By: Amarpal Singh Verma

Many diseases are still a challenge in the whole world. Many countries are trying to eradicate these diseases but due to various reasons, it is becoming difficult to control them. Tuberculosis, which is said to be the oldest disease in human history, is also one of these diseases. Rajasthan, the largest state of India, is facing the challenge of TB disease. Although treatment for TB is available, still a lot of hard work has to be done to eradicate TB in the state as compared to all other infectious diseases.

Like the whole country, the roots of TB are very old and deep in Rajasthan too. 26 per cent of the world's TB patients are in India and six per cent of them are in Rajasthan, due to which TB eradication has remained a challenge for a long time. The government has taken extensive steps for this, but even today there is a lack of necessary awareness about this deadly disease, lack of knowledge about the ways to avoid infection and misconceptions, negligence and blind faith prevalent in the community regarding proper treatment of patients are obstacles in TB eradication.

The World Health Organization set the goal of eliminating TB by the year 2030, and India went even further by setting the goal of eliminating TB by 2025. Under the central government's goal, work was

started on a large scale in Rajasthan, but instead of decreasing, new cases of TB are increasing continuously here. According to the data, one lakh 2032 patients were found in the state in the year 2015, which increased to one lakh 6756 in the year 2016.

Similarly, one lakh 5953 patients were found in the year 2017, which increased to one lakh 79 thousand 168 in the year 2018. One lakh 75 thousand 218 patients were found in the year 2019, which increased to one lakh 37 thousand 343 in the year 2020. Similarly, in the year 2021, one lakh 49 thousand 225 patients were found in the state, whose number has increased to one lakh 69 thousand 522 in the year 2023. Most of the cases in the state are of lung TB, but MDR TB also remains a big crisis for health. This is a type of TB on which medicines have no effect.

Every year about one and a half thousand patients of MDR TB are coming up in the state. Out of every one lakh people in the state, 209.3 people are suffering from TB. The rural and poor and deprived class people of the state are facing the maximum outbreak of TB. Although no district of the state is untouched by TB, but the maximum number of patients are coming up in Jaipur, Ajmer, Alwar, Banswara, Bharatpur, Bhilwara, Bikaner, Dungarpur, Hanumangarh, Sriganganagar, Jodhpur, Karauli, Kota, Nagaur, Tonk, Udaipur and Sikar districts. TB disease has be-



come a challenge in tribal-dominated Banswara, Dungarpur districts because most migration takes place from there. Due to migration, the identified patients are not getting treatment.

According to a study by Geetanjali Medical College, Udaipur, an increase in the prevalence of TB has been observed among silicosis patients in the mining area near Udaipur in the southern part of the state. The outbreak of TB has increased in many villages around the Suratgarh Thermal Power Station in Sriganganagar district. Reports of increase in TB cases have also come in the media in many other industrial and mining areas of the state.

However, the success rate of TB treatment has increased in Rajasthan. According to the India TB Report 2023, the success rate in the state is 84.7 per cent, but still three percent of people suffering from TB die every year. In the year 2021, 4852 people have lost their

lives due to TB. These deaths are happening due to delay in starting treatment. TB patients leaving treatment midway, many registered patients not being traced after some time and treatment failing are also the reasons for the increase of TB.

According to the latest report, 2.7 percent people in Rajasthan leave treatment midway and disappear, due to which it is not possible to follow up their disease. While the disease of such people is increasing due to lack of treatment, they are also becoming the reason for spreading infection. This is very worrying because one TB patient can infect fifteen people. Apart from this, the treatment of 0.6 percent people in the state is proving ineffective.

The government in the state is sending five hundred rupees to the account of every patient under the Nikshay Poshan Yojana. The government is spending crores of rupees every year on expensive medicines and

tests, but every year a large number of new patients are found and deaths due to TB show the seriousness of the situation. In such a situation, the question arises whether the target of making Rajasthan TB free by 2025 can be achieved?

Dr. SP Singh, a former Indian Administrative Service officer who has served in the Medical and Health Department of Rajasthan for 27 years, says that the efforts to eliminate TB have certainly gained momentum due to the activeness of WHO, the government and various agencies, but it is still not possible to eliminate TB by 2025. Even though this is due to increasing the scope of investigation, the way TB patients are increasing year after year in Rajasthan, it is certain that it will take time to eliminate TB. Until the number of patients does not decrease, TB cannot be expected to end. If all efforts are made in a coordinated manner, it will take three to five more years to eliminate TB.

Dr. Singh, who was selected as a consultant in the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program (RNTCP) of the World Health Organization in the year 2001, says that lack of necessary resources, poor health infrastructure in rural areas, poverty, lack of nutrition, blind faith are such reasons which are not allowing us to achieve victory over TB. The last chapter of TB can be written only with additional efforts. On the other hand, the state government claims that exten-

sive work is being done to make the state TB free.

'TB Free Gram Panchayat Abhiyan' is being run to make villages TB free and to identify and treat patients up to the Gram Panchayat level. In Rajasthan, last year, the second phase of 'TB Free Gram Panchayat Abhiyan' was started in 7 thousand Gram Panchayats to make the Gram Panchayats of the state TB free. This year this campaign will be run in 9328 Panchayats.

Next year this campaign will run in all the remaining Panchayats. In the year 2022, eight districts have been honored by giving Sub National Certificate of TB Elimination Award for remarkable work towards TB elimination. 29 Gram Panchayats of the state have been declared TB free. Last year, Rajasthan has reached fourth place in the country in terms of identifying TB patients, giving better treatment and providing them financial assistance. The state has done remarkable work in 9 indexes like examination of infected patients, expenditure on medicines and tests etc. and TB Preventive Therapy (TPT) in small children up to the age of six years, but the target of making the state TB free by the year 2025 still seems to be far away.

Acting State Nodal Officer (TB) Dr. Indrajit Singh says that we are making the facility of molecular test available to CHCs in the state. Due to this, correct investigation is being done and the risk of untimely

death is being averted. We are rapidly increasing these tests in the state. He tells that more TB cases are being reported in the state because there has been progress in registering the information of TB patients in the state. Active TB cases are being detected by connecting private health providers to the campaign on a large scale.

On the question of Rajasthan becoming TB free by the year 2025, Dr. Singh said that we are trying to ensure that no one dies of TB in the state, take care of potential patients and provide smooth treatment. This will make the dream of TB free Rajasthan come true. As per the need, the government can extend the target of TB free by the year 2025 by one or two years.

Dr. SP Singh says that there is a need to work on a large scale to eliminate TB. On the one hand, while working as a mass movement for TB free Rajasthan will have to be done, on the other hand, coordinated and effective efforts will have to be made to ensure success in identifying people who come in contact with TB infected and implementing measures for prevention of the disease, otherwise not only will the efforts to eradicate TB in Rajasthan be affected, but the fulfillment of the dream of making India TB free will also be questioned. (The author is an Independent journalist from Rajasthan. He has written this article under Reach Media Fellowship. He can be reached at verma-marpalsingh@gmail.com)

US military targets Houthi radar sites in Yemen after a merchant sailor goes missing

'U.S. strikes destroyed seven radars within Houthi-controlled territory'

DUBAI, June 16: The US military unleashed a wave of attacks targeting radar sites operated by Yemen's Houthi rebels after one merchant sailor went missing and the vessel he was on caught fire in the latest Houthi strike on shipping in the crucial Red Sea corridor, authorities said Saturday.

The attacks come as the US Navy faces the most intense combat it has seen since World War II in trying to counter the Houthi campaign — attacks the rebels say are meant to halt the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. However, the Iranian-backed rebel assaults often see the Houthi target ships and sailors who have nothing to do with the war while traffic remains halved through a corridor vital for cargo and energy shipments between Asia, Europe and the Midwest.

U.S. strikes destroyed seven radars within Houthi-controlled territory, the military's Central Command said. It did not elaborate on how the sites were destroyed and did not immediately respond to questions from The Associated Press.

"These radars allow the Houthis to target maritime vessels and endanger commercial shipping," Central Command said in a statement.

The U.S. separately destroyed two bomb-laden drone boats in the Red Sea, as well as a drone launched by the Houthis over the waterway, it said.

The Houthis, who have held Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since



2014, did not acknowledge the strikes, nor any military losses. That's been typical since the U.S. began launching airstrikes targeting the rebels.

The Central Command said one commercial sailor from the Liberian-flagged, Greek-owned bulk cargo carrier Tutor remained missing after an attack Wednesday by the Houthis that used a bomb-carrying drone boat to strike the vessel.

"The crew abandoned ship and were rescued by USS Philippine Sea and partner forces," Central Command said. The "Tutor remains in the Red Sea and is slowly taking on water."

The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said Saturday afternoon that the Tutor was "still on fire and sinking."

The missing sailor is Filipino, according to the state-run Philippine News Agency, which cited Migrant Workers Secretary Hans Leo Caccad. He said most of the Tutor's 22 mariners were from the Philippines.

"We're trying to account for the particular seafarer in the ship and are praying that we could find him," he said Friday night.

Also on Saturday, Central Command said the vessel M/V Anna Meta rescued crew members from the cargo carrier M/V Verbena, which was struck Thursday in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Yemen in two separate missile attacks by the Houthis.

The crew abandoned ship after being unable to bring fires on the vessel under control. One mariner was severely wounded. CENTCOM said the Verbena is

a Palauan-flagged, Ukrainian-owned and Polish-operated bulk cargo carrier that had docked in Malaysia and was on its way to Italy carrying wood.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, killed three sailors, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the U.S. Maritime Administration. A U.S.-led airstrike campaign has targeted the Houthis since January, with a series of strikes May 30 killing at least 16 people and wounding 42 others, the rebels say.

The war in the Gaza Strip has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians there, according to Gaza health officials, while hundreds of others have been killed in Israeli operations in the West Bank. It began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking around 250 hostages.

"The Houthis claim to be acting on behalf of Palestinians in Gaza and yet they are targeting and threatening the lives of third-country nationals who have nothing to do with the conflict in Gaza," Central Command said. "The ongoing threat to international commerce caused by the Houthis in fact makes it harder to deliver badly needed assistance to the people of Yemen as well as Gaza."

The attacks continued early Sunday as two explosions struck in close proximity to another ship in the Red Sea, though the ship and crew were safe, the British military said. (AP)

World leaders meet in Switzerland to discuss a Ukraine peace roadmap; Russia notably absent

OBBURGEN (SWITZERLAND), June 16: Dozens of world leaders converged on a Swiss resort Saturday to discuss how to bring peace to war-ravaged Ukraine, though any hopes of a real breakthrough were muted by the absence of Russia.

More than two years into the war, the combatants remain as far apart as they've ever been, with Kyiv sticking to its demands that Russia leave all Ukrainian territory it has seized and Moscow pressing on with its grinding offensive that has already taken large swaths of eastern and southern Ukraine.

Despite Russia's absence from the conference at the Bürgenstock resort overlooking Lake Lucerne, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy suggested that one measure of the two-day event's success was "bringing back to the world the idea that joint efforts can stop war and establish a just peace." Attendees faced a tricky balancing act, with many chastising Russia for breaking international law while hedging their positions to leave the door open for Moscow to join future peace talks that might bring about an end to the conflict one day.

"Here, there are representatives from Latin America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia, the Pacific, North America and religious leaders," Zelenskyy said. "Now, there is no Russia here. Why? Because if Russia was interested in peace, there would be no war."

"We must decide together what a just peace means for the world and how it can be achieved in a truly lasting way," he said. "At the first peace summit, we must determine how to achieve a just peace, so that at the second, we can already settle on a real end to the war." About half of the roughly 100 delegations were led by heads of state and government. Analysts said turnout would be a key indicator about how much pull Ukraine and its staunch Western backers have with the broader international community.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday sought to cast a shadow over the Swiss-Ukrainian initiative for the conference. Some countries such as India, Turkey and Saudi Arabia that have retained ties, at times lucrative, with Moscow — unlike Western powers that have sanctioned Russia over the war — were also on hand.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, told the conference that credible peace talks will need Russia's participation and require "difficult compromise."

Turkey's foreign minister,

Hakan Fidan, acknowledged the mistrust between Russia and Ukraine, saying "each side regards the other party's steps (in floating proposals) as an extension of broader war effort."

"Excellencies, I must also note that this summit could have been more results-oriented if the other party to the conflict — Russia — was present in the room," he added.

Entering the venue, President Gitanas Nausėda of Lithuania, a NATO member country that has been one of the most stalwart supporters of fellow former Soviet republic Ukraine, said Russian troops must leave Ukraine, and that Moscow must be held accountable for crimes there and pay reparations for the war damage.

"Right now it seems unrealistic, but I think we have to stay united, and if international society will push the Russian Federation, everything is possible," he told The Associated Press. "I think the situation is very clear: Ukraine has to seek territorial integrity."

U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, representing the United States while President Joe Biden attended a fundraiser in California, reiterated America's full backing for Ukraine and announced \$1.5 billion in new U.S. assistance for an array of projects such as energy infrastructure and civilian security.

China, which backs Russia, joined scores of countries that sat out the event. Beijing has said any peace process would require the participation of Russia and Ukraine, and has floated its own ideas for peace.

In a separate initiative last month, China and Brazil agreed to six "common understandings" toward a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, asking other countries to play a role in promoting peace talks to be held "at a proper time" with both Russia and Ukraine involved.

The standoff over Ukraine is steeped in security for Europe — it is the continent's deadliest conflict since World War II — and big-power geopolitics.

U.S. intelligence officials say China has increased sales of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology to Russia that Moscow is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry to fuel its war effort.

"What is clear is that China is not here, and I presume they're not here because Putin asked them not to come and they obliged Putin," said Biden's top foreign policy advisor, Jake Sullivan. "And I think that says something about where China stands with respect to Russia's war in Ukraine. I think coun-

tries should take notice of that."

Harris and Sullivan both acknowledged that not all participants were on the same page about an eventual peace settlement.

Russian troops who control nearly a quarter of Ukraine have made territorial gains in recent months. When talk of the Swiss-hosted peace summit began last summer, Ukrainian forces had recently regained large tracts of territory, notably near the southern city of Kherson and the northern city of Kharkiv.

The conference centers on three agenda items — seen as the least controversial bits of a 10-point peace "formula" laid out by Zelenskyy: Nuclear safety, including at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia power plant; possible prisoner of war exchanges; and global food security. The war has disrupted shipments of food and fertilizer through the Black Sea.

Zelenskyy's plan also called for the withdrawal of Russian troops from occupied Ukrainian territory, the cessation of hostilities and the restoration of Ukraine's original borders with Russia, including Russia's withdrawal from occupied Crimea. With Ukrainian mostly on the defensive these days, those appear to be increasingly distant hopes.

Putin wants any peace deal to be built around a draft agreement negotiated in the early phases of the war that included provisions for Ukraine's neutral status and limits on its armed forces, while delaying talks about Russian-occupied areas. Ukraine's push to join NATO over the years has rankled Moscow.

He wants Ukraine to drop its bid to join NATO and pull its forces out of regions that Russia illegally annexed in 2022.

"The situation on the battlefield has changed dramatically," said Alexander Gabuev, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, noting that although Russia "can't achieve its maximalist objectives quickly through military means," it is gaining momentum on the battlefield.

As world leaders discussed a pathway to peace in Switzerland, the war ground on in Ukraine, where shelling killed at least three civilians and wounded 15 others on Friday and overnight into Saturday, regional officials said.

Meanwhile, Vyacheslav Gladkov, the governor of Russia's southern Belgorod region, blamed Ukraine in a social media post for shelling that struck a five-story apartment building in the town of Shebekino on Friday, killing five people. There was no immediate comment from Kyiv. (AP)

PM Sharif vows to end Pakistan's dependency on foreign aid and IMF bailouts

ISLAMABAD, June 16: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has pledged to end Pakistan's dependency on foreign aid and IMF bailouts and surpass neighboring nations in economic activity, as he outlined a series of bold reforms to reduce the cash-strapped government's expenses and revive the economy.

Sharif addressed the nation on Saturday and expressed hope that the next deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a bailout package would be the last in Pakistan's history.

The Pakistan government is currently in talks with the IMF for a loan estimated to be between USD 6 billion to USD 8 billion, as it strives to avert a default in a slow-paced economy. Sharif emphasized that every penny would be spent on the progress of the nation and its people.

He expressed commitment to reduce expenses and, within five years, provide education and skills to the youth.

"Inshallah, this will be the last IMF programme in Pakistan's history. We will stand on our feet and surpass our neighbouring countries in economic activity," he said in the televised address. Sharif was addressing the nation after his government completed 100 days of rule.

Sharif had taken oath on March 4 after stitching together a coalition with five other parties and foiling the chances of jailing former prime minister Imran Khan to stage a political comeback. Sharif said that there were countries in the world that sought assistance from the IMF once

and never needed it again.

"We have approached the IMF 24 to 25 times. I assure you today if we adhere to our programme and targets, the next IMF agreement will be the last in Pakistan's history," he said.

"I informed foreign nations that I am here for trade relations, not to ask for loans. I believe this is how Pakistan will break the debt cycle," he added. Sharif highlighted the importance of tough decisions for the sake of the nation.

He vowed to abolish all institutions, ministries, and other departments burdening the national exchequer and have nothing to do with public service, asserting this move alone would save taxpayers' billions and foster prosperity.

"It is the prime obligation of the government to end all the extravagant expenses and shut down institutions that are not serving the public in any way," he said.

"One such department is the Public Works Department (PWD). It is known as the 'most notorious' one in terms of corruption," the Prime Minister added.

Declaring that the government will save on expenses wherever possible and will not establish more industries or be involved in running them, Sharif said, "Instead, we will work with the private sector."

He warned that the road ahead is not only "long and difficult" but also "demands sacrifices" from both government personnel and the salaried class but his "government is committed to making a change." (PTI)

Singapore rushes to clean-up oil slick after boat hits stationary fuel supply ship

KUALA LUMPUR (MALAYSIA), June 16: An oil spill caused by a dredger boat hitting a stationary cargo tanker has blackened part of Singapore's southern coastline, including the popular resort island of Sentosa, and sparked concerns it may threaten marine wildlife as a clean-up operation was underway Sunday.

The Netherlands-flagged dredger Vox Maxima struck the Singaporean fuel supply ship Marine Honor on Friday. It damaged the cargo tank on Marine Honor, which leaked oil into the sea.

Singapore's Maritime and Port Authority said in a statement late Saturday the oil leak from the vessel had been contained, and that the oil that escaped from the damaged tanker had been treated with dispersants. But due to the tidal current, it said the treated oil had landed along shorelines including at Sentosa and other southern islands, a nature reserve and a public beach park. Sentosa, which attracts millions of visitors annually, houses one of Singapore's two casinos, golf courses and Southeast Asia's only Universal Studios theme park.

Part of the beachfront at the public park and at the nature reserve have been closed to facilitate clean-up efforts, it said. The Sentosa beach will remain open to the public but sea activities and swimming are prohibited.

On Sunday, workers in orange suit were seen scooping up sand in a clean-up operation at an empty beach in Sentosa. Black water washed up on the oil-stained shore.

Authorities have deployed 18 crafts for the clean-up efforts and laid close to 1,500 meters of container booms, temporary floating barriers to trap the oil spill.

"More will be laid over the next few days to prevent further spread of oil onto the shore, and facilitate the recovery of the trapped oil off the affected shorelines and lagoons to prevent them from going back to sea," the statement said.

Conservationists and biologists are monitoring the full extent of the damage on marine and wildlife.

Local conservation group Marine Stewards reportedly said there were photos of dead fish, octopus and kingfishers covered in oil slick.

Group founder Sue Yel told Singapore Straits Times that oil spills smother and suffocate fish, birds and marine animals that have to go to the surface for air, such as turtles and dolphins. (AP)

This year's Hajj came against the backdrop of the devastating Israel-Hamas war, which has pushed the Middle East to the brink of a regional conflict

Pilgrims commence the final rites of Hajj as Muslims celebrate Eid al-Adha

MINA (SAUDI ARABIA), June 16: Masses of pilgrims on Sunday embarked on a symbolic stoning of the devil in Saudi Arabia under the soaring summer heat. The ritual marks the final days of the Hajj, or Islamic pilgrimage, and the start of the Eid al-Adha celebrations for Muslims around the world.

The stoning is among the final rites of the Hajj, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. It came a day after more than 1.8 million pilgrims congregated at a sacred hill, known as Mount Ararat, outside the holy city of Mecca, which Muslim pilgrims visit to perform the annual five-day rituals of Hajj.

The pilgrims left Mount Arafat on Saturday evening to spend their night in a nearby site known as Muzdalifa, where they collected pebbles to use in the symbolic stoning of pillars representing the devil.

The pillars are in another sacred place in Mecca, called Mina, where Muslims believe Ibrahim's faith was tested when God commanded him to sacrifice his only son Ismail. Ibrahim was prepared to submit to the command, but then God stayed his hand, sparing his son. In the Christian and Jewish versions of the story, Abraham is ordered to kill his other son, Isaac.

On Sunday morning, crowds headed on foot to the stoning areas. Some were seen pushing disabled pilgrims on wheelchairs on a multi-lane road leading to the complex housing the large pillars. Most pilgrims were seen sweltering and carrying umbrellas to protect them against the burning summer sun.

An Associated Press reporter saw many pilgrims, especially among the elderly, collapsing on the road to the pillars because of the burning heat. Security forces and medics were deployed to help, carrying those who fainted on gurneys out of the heat to ambulances or field hospitals. As the temperature spiked by midday, more people required medical help.

Despite the suffocating heat, many pilgrims expressed joy at being able to complete their pilgrimage.



"Thank God, (the process) was joyful and good," said Abdel-Moaty Abu Ghoneima, an Egyptian pilgrim. "No one wants more than this."

Many pilgrims will spend up to three days in Mina, each casting seven pebbles at three pillars in a ritual to symbolize the casting away of evil and sin.

While in Mina, they will visit Mecca to perform their "tawaf," or circumambulation, which is circling the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque counterclockwise seven times. Then another circumambulation, the Farewell Tawaf, will mark the end of Hajj as pilgrims prepare to leave the holy city.

The rites coincide with the four-day Eid al-Adha, which means "Feast of Sacrifice," when Muslims with financial means com-

mentate Ibrahim's test of faith through slaughtering livestock and animals and distributing the meat to the poor.

Most countries marked Eid al-Adha on Sunday, others, like Indonesia, will celebrate it Monday.

Once the Hajj is over, men are expected to shave their heads and remove the shroud-like white garments worn during the pilgrimage, and women to snip a lock of hair in a sign of renewal and rebirth.

Most of the pilgrims then leave Mecca for the city of Medina, about 340 kilometers away, to pray in Prophet Muhammad's tomb, the Sacred Chamber. The tomb is part of the prophet's mosque, one of the three holiest sites in Islam, along with the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

All Muslims are required to make the Hajj once in their lives if they are physically and financially able to do so. Many wealthy Muslims make the pilgrimage more than once. The rituals largely commemorate the accounts of Prophet Ibrahim and his son Prophet Ismail, Ismail's mother Hajar and Prophet Muhammad, according to the Quran, Islam's holy book.

More than 1.83 million Muslims performed Hajj in 2024, Saudi Hajj and Umrah Minister Tawfiq bin Fawzan al-Rabiah said in a briefing, slightly less than last year's figures when 1.84 million made the rituals.

Most of the Hajj rituals are held outdoors with little if any shade. It is set for the second week of Dhu al-Hijjah, the last month in the Islamic lunar calendar, so its time of the year varies. And this year the pilgrimage fell in the burning summer of Saudi Arabia. The heat soared to 47 C (116.6 F) at Mount Arafat on Saturday.

This year's Hajj came against the backdrop of the devastating Israel-Hamas war, which has pushed the Middle East to the brink of a regional conflict.

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip weren't able to travel to Mecca

for Hajj this year because of the closure of the Rafah crossing in May when Israel extended its ground offensive to the city on the border with Egypt. And they will not be able to celebrate the Eid al-Adha as they used to do in previous years.

Dozens of Palestinians gathered Sunday morning near a destroyed mosque in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis to perform the Eid prayers. They were surrounded by debris and rubble of collapsed houses. In the nearby town of Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, Muslims held their prayers in a school-turned shelter. Some, including women and children, went to cemeteries to visit the graves of loved ones.

"Today, after the ninth month, more than 37 thousand martyrs, more than 87 thousand wounded, and hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed," Abdulhalim Abu Samra, a displaced Palestinian, told the AP after wrapping up the prayers in Khan Younis. "Our people live in difficult circumstances."

Also in the occupied West Bank, Palestinians convened for the Eid prayers in Ramallah, the seat of the Western-backed Palestinian Authority. "We suffer greatly and live through difficult moments with (what's happening to) our brothers in Gaza," said Mahmoud Mohana, a mosque imam.

In Lebanon where the militant Hezbollah group traded nearly daily attacks with Israel, a steady stream of visitors made their way into the Palestine Martyrs Cemetery near the Shatila Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut early Sunday morning, bearing flowers and jugs of water for the graves of their loved ones, an annual tradition on the first day of Eid.

The cemetery is the burial site of many Palestinian Liberation Organization leaders and militants who died fighting Israeli forces in Lebanon in the 1970s and 80s. More recently, top Hamas official Salah al-Aroui and two other Hamas members killed with him, in an apparent Israeli airstrike in Beirut's southern suburbs in January, were buried there. (AP)

Tripura has great prospects in gymnastics, 2 arrested, heroin seized in Karbi Anglong

Nandi lauds state govt for providing good facilities at Netaji Subhash Regional Coaching Centre for development of gymnastics

AGARTALA, June 16: Bishweshwar Nandi, a recipient of the prestigious Dronacharya award for outstanding contribution to gymnastics, is pinning hopes on Tripura's gymnasts to shine on the global stage.



Nandi is also the coach of top gymnast Dipa Karmakar, who had finished fourth in the vault final at the 2016 Rio Olympics. "Tripura has great prospects in gymnastics... Six to seven girls are showing potential to perform well not even at the national level but also on the global stage. Gymnastics is a highly competitive, injury prone and technical game. Proper guidance from the coach is very important," Nandi told PTI.

Uttar Pradesh and a few southern states are also performing well. Dipa, hailing from Tripura, recently became the first Indian to win a gold medal at the Asian Senior Championships, after she clinched the yellow metal in the women's vault event in Tashkent. "As I said, providing proper guidance to budding gymnasts is the most important duty of coaches in order to make them perform well at global tournaments," he said. Talking to PTI, Dipa, 30, said there are no events lined up for her this year, as no gymnast from India could qualify for the Paris Olympics. "There are no major events in 2024 and 2025 except the Olympics. Currently, I am trying to keep myself fit under the guidance of coach Bishweshwar Nandi," she said. (PTI)

Two arrested for fuel theft in Tripura

AGARTALA, June 16: Two persons, including an ONGC employee, have been arrested from West Tripura district for their alleged involvement in a fuel theft case, police said on Sunday. The arrested persons - the "stock holder" of ONGC fuel station, Badharghat, and a driver recruited through an agency - are currently in judicial custody, they said. The duo was held after ONGC authorities lodged an FIR, alleging that around 620 litres of diesel were stolen from a fuel station inside its premises in Badharghat. Based on the complaint, a police team visited the ONGC complex and arrested the two accused, Officer-in-Charge (OC), Amtali Police Station, Ranjit Debnath, told PTI. (PTI)

Father's Day celebrated

BOKAJAN, June 16: Father's Day was celebrated at the Lakhijan Baptist Church in Bokajan with a special service dedicated to fathers. President of Lakhijan Baptist Church, Nimarli Asong, Birtna Derapi led the celebration by reading the Bible. The women members of the church presented gifts to the fathers. A song dedicated to fathers was presented on the occasion. Then, Bible reading was taken up by Christina Katharpi from Corinth 16:13. After the Bible reading Rev. Aaron Teron, Pastor of Lakhijan Baptist Church gave the Bible message.

Rise in bison population in Tripura's Trishna sanctuary

AGARTALA, June 16: The population of bison in Trishna sanctuary in Tripura's South district has risen following the fencing of the sanctuary and conservation of biodiversity, an official said. Bison is an endangered species and is locally known as gaba. Wildlife Warden of the sanctuary, Bimal Das said in the last three months four calves of the bison were seen in the sanctuary. Das said the Forest department has undertaken several initiatives for the conservation of the endangered species including fencing the entire sanctuary with barbed wire so that the wild animals cannot go out of the forest area and the poachers cannot enter the sanctuary. "The entire sanctuary area is located right on the India-Bangladesh international border and animals used to migrate from the sanctuary to the neighbouring country before setting up of barbed wire

fencing. The poachers are very active in Bangladesh and they earlier used to enter the sanctuary for poaching of bison. Now due to fencing, they cannot enter," Das told this reporter. He said the construction of barbed wire fencing in the sanctuary, nurturing of the core area, which includes setting up of grazing land, and installation of six watch towers and lightning conductors have helped increase the bison population. He said beefing up the strength of the forest protection force has also helped to save the animals from poachers. He also said one of the main reasons for the increase in the population of bison is the planting of a special kind of grass in the core area of bison habitation. "We have planted one species of bamboo, Oxtenantha nigricollata, locally known as Kailai, which is a favourite food for bison. We are also spreading

rock salt in the grassy area, which the bison likes very much," he said. The wildlife warden said 137 bison were spotted in last year's animal census in the sanctuary spread over more than 164 sq km area. "The census report of this year was yet to be published. So, we cannot say the exact figure, but it is presumed that it would cross 140 this year," he said. Even many tourists have spotted that the calves were grazing with their mothers in the afternoon, he added. The wildlife warden said some patches of the sanctuary still remained unfenced and one bison went out of the sanctuary about a fortnight ago, but that was brought back to the sanctuary by forest officials. The sanctuary has several perennial water rivulets, water bodies, grasslands and patches of virgin forests which are rich in rare vegetation. (PTI)

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, June 16: The police have arrested two youths and seized 84.65 grams of heroin at Kaliram Basti in Khatkhati in Karbi Anglong. Based on secret information the police led by the officer-in-charge of Khatkhati Police Station, Roman Bordoloi, seized heroin from two youths on a motorcycle in the evening on Saturday. The police conducted a checking at Kaliram Basti near the RCC bridge on the newly constructed four lane highway during which the duo

were intercepted. On being searched, a polythene bag containing 7 plastic cases containing suspected heroin was found. The narcotic was seized in the presence of witnesses. The accused were identified as the courier-cum-peddler Kamtinang (35) and Lung Oumang Tuboi (29). While Kamtinang is the son of Lt. Lenna Maolah and a resident of Phaijijang village in the Dimapur district of Nagaland, Tuboi is the son of Paolam Tuboi and hails from the Moloum village in Chümoukedima district of Nagaland.

Freight loading over NFR increases by 16.83%

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has registered 1,034 million tonnes of loading of various commodities in May this year, which is an increase of 16.83 per cent in comparison with the same period last year. The NFR has been working dedicatedly round the clock to serve its customer and ensure essential commodities reach end users in time. Hence, NFR is constantly progressing in freight loading. During May, loading of few

commodities have registered significant growth in comparison to the corresponding period of the previous year. During the month, food grain loading has increased by 57.7 per cent and cement loading by 122.2 per cent. While POL loading increased by 69.4 per cent, container loading increased by 33.3 per cent as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. Loading of miscellaneous commodities like timber and ballast also registered an increase by 66.7 per cent and 38.8 per cent re-

spectively, when compared to the corresponding period of last financial year. In the last two months of the current financial year May, loading of cement increased by 14 per cent, food grain by 41.5 per cent, fertilizer by 29.2 per cent, POL by 56.3 per cent and container by 33.3 per cent. Eventually, the increase in freight loading year after year signifies the growing economic activities of the region. Progress in freight loading has generated a remarkable amount of goods revenue.

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

No. KAAC/Art & Culture/Repairing/Nothengpi/2022/48 Dated Diphu, the 15th June 2024

TENDER NOTICE

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

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

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

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

Terms & Conditions:

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

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

SBFC

Registered Office: Unit No.-103, 1st Floor, C&B Square, Sangam Complex, CTS No.95A, 127, Andheri Kurla Road, Village Chakala, Andheri (E), Mumbai-400059 | Telephone: +912267875300 | Fax: +91 2267875334 | www.SBFC.com | Corporate Identity Number: U67190MH2008PTC178270

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Limited on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited, 1st Floor, Ramkrishna Shopping Complex, Babu Para, Barpeta Road, Ward No - 7, Pin - 781315, Assam. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers who have failed to pay their dues. Our notices of auction have been duly issued to these borrowers. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Overdue Loan Accounts of our various Customers mentioned below with branch name. Branch Barpeta Road: AP00469019, AP00539103, AP00540140, AP00540727, AP00556949, AP00557554, AP00559376, AP00566806, AP00568912, AP00576684, AP00577231, AP00577520, AP00585094, AP00585287, AP00587281, AP00588644, AP00588930, AP00594564, AP00606304, AP00613348, AP00613582, AP00613707

Bongaigaon Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited, North Bongaigaon, B.O.C. Gate, Chapaguri Road, Indian Bank Branch Building, 2nd Floor, Bongaigaon, Ward No -10, Pin - 783300, State - Assam -Bangaigaon Branch: AP00546809, AP00547364, AP00584599, AP00586247, AP00588991, AP00595085

This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Limited on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited, Dibrugarh Branch, C/o. Hanuman Drugs, 2nd Floor, H.S. Road, Dibrugarh, PIN-786001, Assam. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers who have failed to pay their dues. Our notices of auction have been duly issued to these borrowers. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Overdue Loan Accounts of our various Customers mentioned below with branch name. Branch Dibrugarh: AP00346780, AP00352693, AP00356836, AP00380309, AP00422486, AP00430409, AP00437459, AP00446618, AP00482779, AP00516502, AP00524720, AP00530350, AP00530664, AP00546256, AP00548353, AP00557760, AP00559371, AP00567016, AP00575577, AP00577360, AP00593946, AP00583962, AP00595509, AP00595558, AP00597217, AP00605342, AP00613591, AP00614916

Guwahati Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: Opp: Jalukbari Jame Masjid, Above MRF Tyre showroom Jalukbari, Guwahati, Assam Pin: 781014. Branch - Guwahati: AP00293324, AP00317800, AP00324307, AP00332929, AP00338490, AP00339817, AP00400433, AP00423756, AP00425525, AP00430555, AP00432495, AP00432553, AP00437005, AP00438296, AP00447501, AP00449726, AP00478945, AP00485897, AP00502511, AP00528853, AP00532864, AP005447208, AP00548938, AP00568549, AP00575907, AP00584648, AP00585202, AP00587457, AP00588318, AP00595042, AP00596004, AP00596494, AP00597473, AP00606305, AP00606356, AP00613162, AP00614034, AP00614039, AP00615869

Jorhat Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: 1st Floor, Old Sahara branch building, Rupahi Ali Road, Near Punjab National Bank, Jorhat - 785001, Assam. Branch - Jorhat: AP00191148, AP00192248, AP00195286, AP00200360, AP00212137, AP00278516, AP00318871, AP00333055, AP00333892, AP00340194, AP00367748, AP00469002, AP00511129, AP00511617, AP00514214, AP00523776, AP00529449, AP00529794, AP00532019, AP00548735, AP00549244, AP00551023, AP00566471, AP00568304, AP00577178, AP00587524, AP00605279, AP00607940, AP00614618, AP00614687, AP00615366

Nagaon Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: First Floor, Behind Nataraj Hotel, Haibargaon, Nagaon. Pin: 782002. Branch - Nagaon: AP00291234, AP00300840, AP00309196, AP00311234, AP00311349, AP00317743, AP00334297, AP00335158, AP00335217, AP00335397, AP00357183, AP00358743, AP00368567, AP00372213, AP00374679, AP00383703, AP00398585, AP00399587, AP00420996, AP00422627, AP00430391, AP00446792, AP00448659, AP00449039, AP004467367, AP004467426, AP00470052, AP00470246, AP00476825, AP00493141, AP00504172, AP00510446, AP00516098, AP00522292, AP00530509, AP00538505, AP00539053, AP00547834, AP00560094, AP00565898, AP00567987, AP00571743, AP00575723, AP00576137, AP00582071, AP00583990, AP00585107, AP00585543, AP00585752, AP00588359, AP00588359, AP00593495, AP00594375, AP00595894, AP00595892, AP00604148, AP00604982, AP00605044, AP00605928, AP00607155, AP00613610

Rangia Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: 1st floor NT road, ward no-5, Canara Bank campus, rangia,, Assam pin-781354 Branch - Rangia : AP00339335, AP00351096, AP00352618, AP00357332, AP00371480, AP00373161, AP00397971, AP00414394, AP00428051, AP00429976, AP00432711, AP00460331, AP00475741, AP00478055, AP00485726, AP00486732, AP00503250, AP00519850, AP00520409, AP00548879, AP005549661, AP00550001, AP00558864, AP00558983, AP00559621, AP00575460, AP00580619, AP00584369, AP00584724, AP00586538, AP00587993, AP00594809, AP00596083, AP00596832, AP00596947, AP00597837, AP00606156, AP00613352, AP00615365

Silchar Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC finance limited Branch Address: Hospital Road, Ambicappatty Point, 1st Floor, Above Foods & Flavours, Silchar-788004. Branch - Silchar: AP00339718, AP00387609, AP00397952, AP00407303, AP00407425, AP00414533, AP00429993, AP00431420, AP00431957, AP00433163, AP00434401, AP00437869, AP00446942, AP00446562, AP00511132, AP00511828, AP00513236, AP00518701, AP00518971, AP00519344, AP00522055, AP00522312, AP00523794, AP00526990, AP00529575, AP00530654, AP00532358, AP00532359, AP00549251, AP00556278, AP00556754, AP00558155, AP00565621, AP00565785, AP00567677, AP00575970, AP00582201, AP00584962, AP00584966, AP00587291, AP00587559, AP00596371, AP00597033, AP00598189, AP00599622, AP00604544, AP00606602, AP00607209, AP00607312, AP006080507

Sivasagar Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: GNG Road, Opp Mahadevi Medical Stores, Dist: Sivasagar (Assam) Pin: 785640. Branch - Sivasagar: AP00205336, AP00248430, AP00302245, AP00320064, AP00327906, AP00347297, AP00352844, AP00358738, AP00368745, AP00398991, AP00431751, AP00432882, AP00461631, AP00467308, AP00469089, AP00476312, AP00477563, AP00485283, AP00494258, AP00494995, AP00501530, AP00502555, AP00512587, AP00527942, AP00529663, AP00529881, AP00532756, AP00534268, AP00539096, AP00541200, AP00546774, AP00549205, AP00551055, AP00555927, AP00556112, AP00556386, AP00557570, AP00559774, AP00560736, AP00566504, AP00566463, AP00576264, AP00587222, AP00595419, AP00595934, AP00596692, AP00597510, AP00604999, AP00605014, AP00605566, AP00606077, AP00607854

Tezpur Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC finance limited Branch Address: D.B.Mart, Opp. Spring Valley Hotel, N.C. Road, Tezpur, Sontpur, Assam, Pin: 784001. Branch - Tezpur : AP00362048, AP00392494, AP00477435, AP00480115, AP00486040, AP00486835, AP00488459, AP00488561, AP00556245, AP00556707, AP00558817, AP00584546, AP00587201, AP00588373, AP00593520, AP00594505, AP00596643, AP00615235

Tinsukia Branch Auction will be conducted on 25.06.2024 at 10:30 am at SBFC Finance Limited. Branch Address: 2nd Floor, Janki Complex, Chirwapatty Road, Opp: HDFC Bank, P.O.-Tinsukia, Pin-786125, Assam. Branch - Tinsukia: AP00187818, AP00189324, AP00191124, AP00199085, AP00199522, AP00201687, AP00245200, AP00246058, AP00277925, AP00280759, AP00293361, AP00315182, AP00319029, AP00319389, AP00330071, AP00331661, AP00333627, AP00336050, AP00340908, AP00344634, AP00356701, AP00370284, AP00392276, AP00395628, AP00396719, AP00441027, AP00458659, AP00478899, AP00480658, AP00480880, AP00485848, AP00487190, AP00496117, AP00502500, AP00512730, AP00513124, AP00519038, AP00529464, AP00531212, AP00532034, AP00540591, AP00542522, AP00545608, AP00545707, A P00550197, AP00556073, AP00556252, AP00557852, AP00558599, AP00559026, AP00559265, AP00566057, AP00566419, AP00575087, AP00575087, AP00577744, AP00586193, AP00587438, AP00588592, AP00594154, AP00596256, AP00597702, AP00605241, AP00606281, AP00607361, AP00613869

For more details, please contact SBFC Finance Limited Contact Number(s): 1800-102-8012 (SBFC Finance Limited reserves the right to alter the number of accounts to be auctioned &/ post-pone / cancel the auction without any prior notice.)

Held discussions with stakeholders: LS speaker on relocation of statues in Parl complex

'Relocation of statues, were done as part of a landscaping and beautification exercise'



NEW DELHI, June 16: Statues of freedom fighters and national icons spread across the Parliament complex have been relocated to a new enclosure on its premises, Prerna Sthal, following discussions with different stakeholders, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said on Sunday.

The relocation of the statues, he said, were done as part of a landscaping and beautification exercise.

Addressing reporters here, Birla also asserted that discussions were held from time to time with different stakeholders on the relocation of statues as such decisions were within the purview of the Office of the Lok Sabha Speaker.

"None of the statues have been removed, they have been relocated. There is no need to indulge in politics on this," the outgoing speaker said when asked about the opposition criticism on the relocation of the statues.

"From time to time, I have been discussing these issues with different stakeholders. People were of the view that having these statues at one place will help disseminate information about their lives and achievements in a better way," Birla said.

The statues of Mahatma Gandhi and B R Ambedkar, earlier located at prominent places on the Parliament premises, were places where opposition leaders gathered to protest against the government.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had said the whole idea of this relocation and giving it a grandiose name was to ensure that the statues of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Ambedkar were not in a prominent place right in front of Parliament House where MPs could hold peaceful and democratic protests as and when required.

Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar is inaugurating the Prerna Sthal on Sunday where all members of Parliament have been invited.

Birla said the Prerna Sthal -- lo-

cated on the lawns between the old Parliament building and the Parliament library building -- will be open to visitors all through the year and hold commemoration days to honour the contribution of the leaders to nation building.

The outer lawns of the Parliament complex have statues of national icons such as B R Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Maharana Pratap, Hemu Kalani, Mahatma Basaveshwara, Kittur Rani Channamma, Motilal Nehru, Maharaj Ranjit Singh, Durga Malla, Birsu Munda, Rajarshi Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, and Chaudhary Devi Lal.

"An action plan has been made to make the life stories and messages of these great Indians available to visitors through new technology," the Lok Sabha speaker said.

Birla said during the construction work of the new Parliament building, the statues of Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru and Chaudhary Devi Lal were moved to other places within the complex.

Lawns and gardens have been laid around the statues at the Prerna Sthal to allow visitors to easily pay their tributes to them and also take inspiration from their lives by accessing information using QR codes, Birla said. Asked about the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) taking over security of the entire Parliament complex, Birla said it was done so that accountability could be fixed on one agency.

Earlier, the Parliament Security Service, the Delhi Police and the Central Reserve Police Force were responsible for the security of the Parliament complex and there was certain overlap in responsibilities, he said.

The Lok Sabha speaker said CISF personnel were being trained on dealing with parliamentarians as the system of Parliament security was different from guarding other premises. (PTI)

NEET Row: Sibal demands probe by SC-appointed officials

NEW DELHI, June 16: Amid the raging row over medical entrance exam NEET, former HRD minister Kapil Sibal on Sunday demanded a probe by Supreme Court-appointed officials into allegations of irregularities and called on the government to have a thorough consultation with all states as to how this examination is to be held in future.

In an interview with PTI, the Rajya Sabha MP also hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the issue, saying if the testing system in any examination becomes corrupt then it is "not really neat for the PM to remain silent".

Sibal urged all political parties to raise the matter strongly in the upcoming session of Parliament but was not optimistic about it being taken up for discussion, predicting that the government will not allow it citing that the matter is sub-judice.

"The present National Testing Agency (NTA) has really bungled and corruption has been brought to light on media platforms, such as providing solutions for question papers for something like becoming a doctor," Sibal, who was the Human Resource Development (now the portfolio is Education) minister from May 29, 2009 to October 29, 2012, said.

"Some of these incidents in Gujarat have perplexed me and are a matter of great national concern. I think NTA should answer some of these very serious questions," he said.

Sibal said what is even more



surprising and disappointing is that whenever something like this happens and there is corruption under the aegis of the present government, the "andh bhakts" start blaming the UPA for it and that is most unfortunate because they don't seem to be fully educated before making statements of this nature.

He pointed out that the NEET regulation was introduced in 2010 by the Medical Council of India (MCI) through its board of directors. The MCI was under the ministry of health and not under the ministry of education.

"So, I as the minister of HRD had nothing to do with this. The medical council of India board of governors introduced a regulation, saying there should be a national eligibility test for students getting admitted to MBBS course. The regulation was challenged by writ

petitioners and it was struck down by the Supreme Court on July 18, 2013, saying the MCI has no legislative competence to introduce NEET which is an all India eligibility entrance test," he said.

"So, after this was struck down, on April 11, 2014, a review petition was filed. The review was allowed and the order of 2013 was withdrawn," he said.

"The BJP government came to power and on April 28, 2016, a writ petition was filed in Supreme Court, saying since the order striking down the NEET regulation has been withdrawn, why isn't the regulation issued by MCI under board of governors, not being implemented," Sibal said.

Thereafter, on August 4, 2016, the then BJP government introduced section 10D and the Indian Medical Council Act was amended, he noted.

Meghwal hopeful about UCC implementation

KOLKATA, June 16: Union Law and Justice Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Sunday expressed hope about implementation of the Uniform Civil Code, contending that some states have started to bring it into force.

Meghwal made the remark while speaking at the sidelines of a conference on "India's Progressive Path in the Administration of Criminal Justice System" here.

"In BJP manifesto, we have mentioned about the UCC. There are states like Goa and Uttarakhand that have started implementing them. The coalition which has been formed in the Centre is a very strong government and there is nothing to worry about," Meghwal said here on Sunday.

Last week, soon after Meghwal, an MP from the Bikaner constituency, said that the UCC is still on the BJP's agenda, the JDU, said that any such move must come through consensus. JD(U) leader KC Tyagi said that while the party is not against UCC, it wants that such a move should come through a consensus.

The Union Law minister criticised the incidents of

alleged post-poll violence in West Bengal and said that the central government is alert about them.

He said that such post-poll violence is not healthy for a democratic country like India.

"Election is a significant part of the democracy. There should not be any violence after the completion of any election. It (Post-poll violence in Bengal) is in our knowledge and the (central) government is also alert (about it). The rule of law is there in the country. This is not good for democracy," Meghwal said.

The BJP on Saturday formed a four-member committee to look into the alleged political violence in West Bengal, as the party accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of remaining a mute spectator.

A BJP statement said, "Mamata Banerjee remains a mute spectator, while criminals of her party, attack and intimidate opposition workers and voters with impunity. Even the Calcutta High Court has taken note of these excesses and extended deployment of CAPF till June 21 and has listed the matter for hearing on June 18." (PTI)



Suresh Gopi clarifies 'mother of India' reference

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 16: A day after his reference to former prime minister Indira Gandhi as "mother of India" received widespread attention, Union Minister Suresh Gopi on Sunday clarified that he called the late leader the mother of the Congress party in the country and his remarks were misinterpreted by the media. The actor-turned-politician said he was a person talking from the heart and he firmly believed that there was nothing wrong in what he said about Indira Gandhi.

While addressing the media here, the BJP leader asked the reporters whether they don't understand the "contextual meaning of language".

"What did I say? As far as the Congress is concerned...whether anyone likes it or not... K Karunakaran is the father of the Congress party in Kerala. In India, its mother is Indira Gandhi. I said this from my heart," Suresh Gopi said. The minister of state for petroleum and tourism, however, continued to lavish praises on Indira Gandhi on Sunday as well. (PTI)

"On August 8, 2019, the National Medical Council Act was passed replacing the Indian Medical Council Act of 1956. It contained another section 14 which provided for the NEET examination. On October 29, 2020, the Supreme Court upheld this legislation," he said.

"The legislation was introduced by the present government...This had nothing to do with UPA," he added.

Sibal also hit out at Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for his remarks rejecting allegations of paper leak or rigging in the exam.

"Let him go on social media and see how this is happening in Gujarat itself. The state of Gujarat is one of the progressive states, even in respect of corruption it seems to be somewhat progressive," he said, taking a swipe at the BJP.

Sibal alleged there is rampant corruption in the manner in which examinations are being held not just in one state but throughout the country.

"If 67 students have maxed and some of them belong to same centre I think the minister should be worried about it instead of saying there is nothing wrong. In this government, there would not be any minister who will admit that something wrong has been done," he said.

The Rajya Sabha MP said the complexity of this country is such that any kind of uniformity tends to favour a certain class of people.

"As you know Tamil Nadu has been opposed to the NEET exam.

There is something to be said for that because the examination is based on CBSE courses and therefore it favours schools which have a CBSE examination. There are lots of local boards also in the country," he said.

Talking about the way forward, Sibal said any kind of aberration in the NEET exam which is very competitive requires a thorough inquiry.

Sibal said a CBI inquiry will protect the administration and so an inquiry is needed through an independent agency or independent officers selected by the Supreme Court and not by the government in power.

"I think this government centralises everything, every decision is taken on basis of whims and fancies of authorities in Delhi. With India having a 140 crore population and such a complex social order, I think the Centre must consult each state and come up with a consensus as to how admissions for medicine are going to take place," he said. Sibal said he would raise the issue in Parliament if given a chance.

"I do urge all political parties to raise this issue (in Parliament) because it impacts the lives of young people of the country," he said.

The examination was held on May 5 across 4,750 centres and around 24 lakh candidates appeared for it. There have been allegations of question paper leaks in states like Bihar and other irregularities in the prestigious exam. (PTI)

CM Siddaramaiah defends hike in petrol and diesel prices



BENGALURU, June 16: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday defended the hike in petrol and diesel prices saying that it will ensure funding essential public services and development projects.

With the opposition BJP and its ally JD(S) coming down heavily on the Congress government for increasing the petrol and diesel prices by ₹ 3 and ₹ 3.5 per litre respectively, Siddaramaiah said even after the hike, taxes on fuel remains low compared to most southern states.

"The Government of Karnataka has increased VAT on petrol to 29.84 per cent and on diesel to 18.44 per cent. Even after this hike, our state's taxes on fuel remain lower than most South Indian states and similar economy-sized states like Maharashtra," the Chief Minister said in a statement.

According to him, the VAT on petrol is 25 per cent plus ₹ 5.12 additional tax, and on diesel in Maharashtra it is 21 per cent. Karnataka's revised rates are still more affordable, he pointed out.

"Karnataka's VAT adjustment ensures we can fund essential public services and development projects. The state remains committed to balanced and responsible governance," Siddaramaiah emphasised.

Stating that despite the VAT hike, diesel prices in Karnataka are still lower than in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the Chief Minister said, "We remain committed to

keeping fuel prices reasonable for our citizens."

He also took a dig at the opposition BJP, which has decided to stage statewide protests on Monday.

"The then double engine BJP government collaborated to divert Karnataka's resources to other states. The state BJP govt kept reducing VAT on petrol and diesel while the Central govt increased its own taxes," the Chief Minister charged. He alleged that this manipulation by the previous BJP government in the state led to reduced revenue for Karnataka, "while the Central government collected more for its coffers, cheating Kannadigas."

Siddaramaiah said that the Central Excise duty on petrol was ₹ 9.48 per litre and ₹ 3.56 on diesel before the BJP came to power in 2014. However, during the tenure of the BJP government, the Central Excise Duty on petrol and diesel was steeply increased, reaching a record high of ₹ 32.98 and ₹ 31.83, respectively, in May 2020.

Subsequently, the Excise duty on petrol and diesel was cut by ₹ 13 a litre and ₹ 16 litre, respectively, between November 2021 and May 2022, he added.

"Despite the reductions, the current Central excise duty on petrol is ₹ 19.9 and on diesel is ₹ 15.8. We urge the Union Government to reduce these taxes for the benefit of the people," the Chief Minister said. (PTI)

'Black box': Rahul, Akhilesh question credibility of EVMs

NEW DELHI, June 16: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said EVMs in India are a "black box" which nobody is allowed to scrutinise, and asserted that "serious concerns" are being raised about transparency in the country's electoral process. Congress' ally and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav also questioned credibility of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and demanded that all future elections should be conducted through ballot papers.

"Democracy ends up becoming a sham and prone to fraud when institutions lack accountability," Gandhi said in a post on X and tagged a media report which claimed that a relative of Shiv Sena's candidate, who won the polls from Mumbai's



North-West seat by 48 votes, had a phone that unlocks an EVM.

The former Congress president also tagged a post by Tesla CEO Elon Musk in which he talked about eliminating EVMs.

"We should eliminate electronic

voting machines. The risk of being hacked by humans or AI, while small, is still too high," Musk had said in his post.

In a post on X in Hindi, SP chief Yadav said, "Technology is meant to solve problems, if it becomes the

cause of problems then its use should be stopped."

Targeting the BJP over the issue, Yadav said, "Today, when fears of EVM tampering are being expressed in many elections of the world and the world's renowned technology experts are openly writing about the danger of EVM tampering, then what is the reason behind the insistence on using EVM, BJP should clarify this."

Yadav also tagged the Musk's post and reiterated his party's demand that all future elections be conducted using ballot papers.

The opposition parties have been raising concerns over EVMs for some time now and had demanded a 100 per cent count of the VVPAT slips which was not allowed. (PTI)

No one ready for unprecedented heat endured this summer: Sunita Narain

NEW DELHI, June 16: India is grappling with unprecedented heat this summer and no one is prepared for the level of warming being experienced, leading environmentalist Sunita Narain has said, emphasizing the need for a heat index and a complete overhaul of the way modern cities are designed.

In an interaction with PTI editors here, Narain, the Director General of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), said the brutal heat scorching swathes of India is a result of naturally occurring El Nino phenomenon -- an unusual warming of the ocean surface in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean -- and climate change.

"Nobody is prepared. Let's be very clear, 2023 was globally the hottest year on record. We have broken every record in the last 45 days with an unbroken (streak of) temperatures above 40 degrees. This is climate change. It is compounded this year by the waning of the (2023-24) El Nino. This means we really need to get our act together. We need to ensure that vulnerable communities are less affected," she said.

Narain stressed the need to de-



velop a heat index, which measures how the temperature feels to the human body when relative humidity is combined with air temperature.

"We need a heat index similar to the air quality index we have on our phones. AQI tells you the level of air pollution and its impact on your health. This linkage is essential to know what actions need to be taken. Remember, heat is not only about temperature, it is also about humidity," she said.

The India Meteorological Department began issuing an experimental

heat index for different parts of the country in April last year.

The IMD officials said India will soon come up with its system now, a multi-parameter product called 'heat hazard score', which along with temperature and humidity will also integrate other parameters such as wind and duration.

Narain noted that heatwaves are turning modern glass buildings into furnaces, overheating the occupants and emphasized the need for new architectural science to address this heat.

"Your biggest challenge today is how to rebuild the cities. Look at Gurugram - it's all glass facades. Those glass buildings are the worst thing you could have for a heating climate," she said.

India experienced multiple intense and prolonged heatwaves in April and May, testing the limits of human endurance and the country's disaster preparedness, as many states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha, reported heatwave-related deaths.

According to the IMD data, 14 of the 36 sub-divisions in the country recorded over 15 heatwave days (when the maximum temperature is at least 40 degrees Celsius and 4.5 degrees above normal) from March 1 to June 9.

Studies show that rapid urbanization has exacerbated warming in the urban areas, with outdoor workers and low-income households bearing the brunt of the impact.

Low-income households have limited capacity to adapt to extreme heat because of poor access to water and electricity. The design and construction of informal houses often mean there is poor ventilation and little shelter from extreme heat. (PTI)

After AIADMK announces Vikravandi bypoll boycott, DMDK follows suit



CHENNAI, June 16: The Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam, which fought the recent Lok Sabha polls in alliance with the main opposition AIADMK, announced on Sunday that it will boycott the July 10 bypoll to the Vikravandi assembly constituency.

The DMDK's decision came following the announcement by the AIADMK on June 15 that it was giving the bypoll a miss, alleging that the ruling DMK would unleash "violence" and not allow people to vote "independently". The DMDK, founded by late actor-politician Vijayakanth, said it does not have "faith" in this bypoll. In a statement, DMDK General Secretary

Premalatha Vijayakanth said her party had so far contested all the general elections and bypolls but it would now "boycott" the Vikravandi bypoll.

"The reason is: Elections should be conducted honestly in a democratic manner," she said, adding that in the present-day context, elections are, however, held in the "wrong" fashion.

Hinting at abuse of power, without explicitly naming Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK, Premalatha said, "We do not want the hard work of our cadres to go to waste; we are not inclined to waste our time and money since we have no faith in this bypoll."

There is a "big question mark" on the democratic nature of elections under the present rulers, she alleged, adding that people and the party workers are aware of it. Meanwhile, S Ramadoss, founder of the Pattali Makkal Katchi, a constituent of the BJP-led NDA in Tamil Nadu, announced that his party's vice-president C Anbumani, will contest in the Vikravandi bypoll. The DMK had already announced that its functionary Anniyar Siva will contest in the bypoll. Tamil nationalist Naam Tamilar Katchi has also announced its candidate, Abinaya, a homoeopathy doctor. (PTI)

No need to teach about riots, demolition in schools, says NCERT chief after textbook revisions

NEW DELHI, June 16: Rejecting accusations of saffronisation of school curriculum, NCERT's director has said that references to Gujarat riots and Babri masjid demolition were modified in school textbooks because teaching about riots "can create violent and depressed citizens."

In an interaction with PTI editors at the agency's headquarters here on Saturday, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) director Dinesh Prasad Saklani said the tweaks in textbooks are part of annual revision and should not be a subject of hue and cry.

Asked about references to Gujarat riots or Babri masjid demolition being tweaked in NCERT textbooks, Saklani said, "Why should we teach about riots in school textbooks? We want to create positive citizens not violent and depressed individuals".

"Should we teach our students in a manner that they become offensive, create hatred in society or become victim of hatred? Is that education's purpose? Should we teach about riots to such young children ... when they grow up, they can learn about it but why school textbooks. Let them understand what happened and why it happened when they grow up. The hue and cry about the changes is irrelevant," he said.

The comments by Saklani come at a time when new textbooks have hit the market with several dele-



tions and changes. The revised Class 12 political science textbook, does not mention the Babri masjid, but refers to it as a "three-domed structure". It has pruned the Ayodhya section from four to two pages and deleted details from the earlier version.

It instead focuses on the Supreme Court judgement that paved the way for the construction of a Ram temple at the site where the disputed structure once stood before it was torn down by Hindu activists in December 1992. The Supreme Court verdict was widely accepted in the country. The consecration of the Ram idol in the temple was performed on January 22 this year by the prime minister.

"We want to create positive citizens and that's what is the purpose of our textbooks. We cannot have everything in them. The purpose of our education is not to create vio-

lent citizens ... depressed citizens. Hatred and violence are not subjects of teaching, they should not be focus of our textbooks," added Saklani.

He hinted that the same hue and cry is not made about 1984 riots not being in textbooks.

The latest deletions in the textbooks include: BJP's "rath yatra" from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya; the role of kar sevaks; communal violence in the wake of the demolition of the Babri masjid; President's rule in BJP-ruled states; and the BJP's expression of "regret over the happenings at Ayodhya".

"If Supreme Court has given a verdict in favour of Ram temple, Babri masjid or Ram jannabhoori, should it not be included in our textbooks, what is the problem in that? We have included the new updates. If we have constructed

new Parliament, should our students not know about it. It is our duty to include the ancient developments and recent developments," he said.

Asked about allegations of saffronisation of curriculum and ultimately textbooks, Saklani said, "If something has become irrelevant ... it will have to be changed. Why shouldn't it be changed. I don't see any saffronisation here. We teach history so students know about facts, not for making it a battleground".

"If we are telling about Indian Knowledge System, how can it be saffronisation? If we are telling about iron pillar in Mehrauli and saying Indians were way ahead of any metallurgical scientist, are we saying wrong? How can it be saffronisation?"

Saklani, 61, who was head of the ancient history department at the HNB Garhwal University before taking charge as NCERT director in 2022, has faced criticism over the changes in textbooks, especially pertaining to historical facts.

"What is wrong about changes in textbooks? Updating textbooks is a global practice, it is in interest of education. Revising textbooks is an annual exercise. Whatever is changed is decided by subject and pedagogy experts. I do not dictate or interfere in the process ... there is no imposition from top.

"There are no attempts to saffronise curriculum, everything is

based on facts and evidence," he said.

The NCERT is revising the curriculum of the school textbooks in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

From the assertion that recent studies of ancient DNA obtained from archaeological sources at Rakhigarhi, an Indus Valley site in Haryana, rule out Aryan immigration to a call for more research into whether the Harappans and the Vedic people were the same, several crucial topics have either been dropped or tweaked in textbooks.

A two-page table detailing achievements of Mughal emperors such as Humayun, Shah Jahan, Akbar, Jahangir and Aurangzeb have also been removed.

This is the fourth round of revision and updating of NCERT textbooks since 2014.

Referring to the changes to the section on Ayodhya, the NCERT had said in April -- "Content is updated as per latest development in politics. Text on Ayodhya issue has been thoroughly revised because of the latest changes brought by the Supreme Court's Constitutional bench verdict and its widespread welcoming reception".

Saklani said, some changes have happened because the subjects were irrelevant, some to update new information while several topics were removed earlier to minimise burden on students cause by the COVID-19 pandemic and reduce duplication of content. (PTI)

Rajkot civic staffers forged documents day after game zone fire to destroy evidence: Police



RAJKOT, June 16: The civic employees arrested for a game zone fire in Rajkot allegedly conspired to forge documents by making backdated entries a day after the incident in a bid to destroy evidence and evade arrest, the police probe has suggested.

The fire at the TRP game zone in Gujarat's Rajkot city on May 25 claimed 27 lives.

The police have so far arrested six employees of the Rajkot Municipal Corporation (RMC) in connection with the incident.

A probe has indicated the arrested RMC employees "conspired to approve the impact plan of the TRP zone where the incident took place" by making backdated entries a day after the fire and destroy evidence, the investigation officer said in an application before Additional Judicial Magistrate B P Thakar on Friday.

The civic officials were involved in making forged entries in the inward register on May 26, a day after the incident, pertaining to the impact plan of the TRP game zone. The entry was shown as having been made on May 4, 2024, the police said.

The accused also drafted a query letter dated May 9, 2024 related to the entry dated May 4, said the application. A new register with fake details was created by the accused and the old register was destroyed, the police said.

The accused persons presented false information recorded in the fake register kept in their possession. They also tampered with the inward register at the RMC's west zone office, the police said.

The register was forged to show the game zone management had applied for regularisation of the facility and that the RMC raised queries for the same, the police told the court.

These acts constitute offences under the given sections related to forgery, destruction of evidence and criminal conspiracy, they said.

The court on Friday allowed the police to invoke Indian Penal Code sections 465, 466, 471, 474, 120 (b), 201 and 114, pertaining to forgery, destruction of evidence, criminal conspiracy and abettor present when offence is committed, against the six arrested RMC employees.

The police had earlier arrested RMC's Town Planning Officer M D Sagathia, assistant TPOs Mukesh Makwana and Gautam Joshi, and former station officer of Kalavard Road fire station Rohit Vigora in connection with the incident.

On Saturday, they arrested RMC's assistant town planning officer Rajesh Makwana and assistant engineer Jaideep Chaudhary for their alleged involvement in forging a register by making backdated entries and destruction of evidence, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Crime, Parthrajsinh Gohil said on Sunday.

A co-owner of the game zone, Ashoksinh Jadeja, surrendered before the police on Thursday evening.

Jadeja is one of the six owners of the TRP game zone. Five of them have been so far arrested while one died in the May 25 fire.

A manager of the game zone has also been arrested in the case.

The CCTV camera footage showed the fire started after sparks fell on the thermocol (polystyrene) sheets during welding work on the ground floor.

Though workers present there tried to douse the blaze with fire extinguishers, it spread quickly and eventually engulfed the game zone.

According to police, the game zone was being operated without a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the RMC's fire department.

After the Rajkot incident, several game zones and other recreation hubs were sealed across the state and FIRs were also filed against their owners for running such facilities without requisite permissions. (PTI)

Andamans govt sets sights on underwater Guinness World Records

PORT BAIR, June 16: The tourism department of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is gearing up to take a shot at the underwater Guinness World Records in a bid to showcase the archipelago as a top diving destination, officials said.

Lt Governor Admiral (Retired) D K Joshi has initiated discussions with officials concerned and other stakeholders to materialise the plan, they said. "This place is surrounded with beautiful beaches, tropical rainforest and mountains and I think it's a perfect destination to trigger the adrenaline rush," said Vishwendra, Secretary, Directorate of Information, Publicity and Tourism Office (IP&T), Port Blair. "The objective of this exercise is to put Andaman and Nicobar Islands on the global diving destination list and promote tourism. In addition to the waterfront and beach activities, endeavour will be made to popularise the diving terrain and highlight the unparalleled opportunities for diving and adventure tourism in this Indian Ocean rim," he said. The IP&T is studying all the previous Guinness World Records in this domain to finalise the categories before applying, the official said. The applicant will be the local administration, which will be supported by the Andaman Nicobar Command, Andaman Chamber of Commerce, certifying agencies like the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), Scuba Schools International (SSI) and National Institute of Watersports (NIWS), among others, he said. (PTI)

Health ministry issues interdepartmental referral guidelines for hospitals

NEW DELHI, June 16: Citing significant inconsistencies and lack of accountability in the referral process, the Union Health Ministry has for the first time issued interdepartmental referral guidelines for hospitals to facilitate better communication and cooperation. The 'Guidelines for Inter-Departmental Referral (within hospitals)' stress that referrals should be initiated promptly as and when patients require specialised care, diagnostic evaluations or consultations beyond scope of admitting department. The referral for a consultant's opinion should only be written by consultants and not post graduate residents should not close referrals on their own without discussing with their consultants, the guidelines released on June 7 stated.

Consultant on call should review the referral record attended to by his team the previous day, a step which will help improve patient care and enhance learning of residents.

The referral process is a crucial com-

ponent of high-quality patient care in any medical institution, Director General of Health Services, Union Health Ministry, Dr Atul Goel said in the document. Problems such as poor coordination and communication, unclear procedures, non-standardised formats, and inadequate training for healthcare professionals are common and they ultimately can potentially harm a patient, Dr Goel said.

The roles of various professional levels are often undefined, resulting in gaps in patient care, he stated highlighting many patients who visit hospitals have multiple co-morbidities and need a multi-disciplinary approach. The document said a robust and efficient referral mechanism should be an essential part of training of residents as well. After residency as they enter a healthcare setup to practice, this training will be very useful for them. However, problems can arise in any inter-departmental referral process, including -delays in processing/attending of referrals, break-

down in communication, and variations in referral practices across departments, it said.

To address these challenges, hospitals must implement standardised referral protocols, streamline referral work flows, and provide education and training to healthcare providers and staff involved in the referral process. "Currently, with no clear guidelines in place, it has been observed that there exist heterogeneous referral mechanisms. Every department and individual have their own way of sending and attending referrals. The documentation is also variable and inconsistent.

"There are delays in attending to referrals which can affect patient care adversely. Mostly junior residents (first or second-year post-graduates) see referrals where higher order inputs may actually be required. There are conflicts between departments regarding referrals which are mostly rooted in lack of communication," the document stated. (PTI)

Railway Board sets up committee, holds meeting to ascertain why drivers violate speed restrictions

NEW DELHI, June 16: The Railway Board has set up a committee to find out the reasons for the violation of speed restrictions by train drivers at various points between originating and destination stations which is detrimental to safe train operations. According to sources, the Board came into action after recent incidents in which two train drivers violated the speed restriction of 20 kmph at a river bridge, which was under maintenance and drove their trains at 120 kmph speed.

In the first incident, the loco pilot and assistant loco pilot of the Gatiman Express, India's first semi-high-speed train which runs at 160 kmph speed between Hazrat Nizamuddin in Delhi and Virangana Lakshmi Jhansi Junction in Uttar Pradesh, violated the advisory speed restriction between Jajau and Mania railway station near Agra Cantt.

Just a couple of days after the Gatiman incident, the drivers of another train Malwa Express, which runs between Katra (Jammu) and Indore (Madhya Pradesh), too committed a similar violation at the same spot and steered the train at 120 kmph.

Soon after these incidents, the Railway Board on June 3 issued a circular to all zones and informed, "Railway Board has constituted a committee to review the caution orders being issued to Loco Pilots and Train Managers (guards)."

"The committee desires to interact with Loco Pilots through video conference to understand the issues related to caution orders at the field level," the circular added, asking all zones to nominate loco pilots from each division to attend a meeting on June 5.

"Over 180 loco pilots and loco inspectors took part in the meeting and came out with various suggestions to ensure that speed restrictions are followed in letter and spirit," said a loco pilot, who was part of the virtual meeting.

The Railways imposes speed restrictions for the safe operation of the trains for various reasons such as track condition, ongoing track repair work, old railway bridges and station yard remodelling etc.

The Railway officials said that before boarding the engine, the loco pilots and their assistants obtain a complete route chart along with advisories

and cautionary speed limits from the concerned operating department and they are supposed to maintain the speed accordingly.

During operation, the assistant driver calls out loudly these advisories and cautions and the driver repeats it to confirm.

"In the meeting, various suggestions came. For instance, a section of drivers suggested that a train guard should remind a driver on a walkie-talkie 3 km before the starting point of the speed restriction. This practice is being followed by the guards of Kota division and a request was made to make it applicable across the board in Railways," said another loco pilot, who attended the meeting.

"Some drivers wanted the caution order to be given on bold letters with bigger font size on A4 size white paper. They also said that drivers should be issued different colour highlighters to mark the restrictions for their convenience," he added.

The participants also said that it was also discussed in the meeting whether permanent speed restriction (PSR) should also be made a part of the caution order. (PTI)

Uttarakhand accident: Victim at AIIMS succumbs to injuries, toll rises to 15

DEHRADUN, June 16: A person injured in the tempo traveller accident in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur succumbed to his injuries, taking the toll to 15, while the condition of four of the 11 injured is still critical, officials said on Sunday.

A person who was brought to AIIMS, Rishikesh by air ambulance after the accident on Saturday died late at night, trauma surgeon Ruby Kataria said.

A tempo traveller carrying tourists skidded off the Badrinath national highway, rolled 200 metres down a gorge and fell into Alaknanda river, killing or injuring all 26 people present in it. Ten people died on the spot near Raitoli village, about four kilometres from Rudrapur district headquarters.

Kataria said the patient was brought to the hospital in a "brain dead" condition after which he was put on life support but he could not be saved. The doctor said that the remaining four injured at the hospital are also in critical condition and it will take a lot of time to shift them to the ward.

Seven persons seriously injured in the accident were taken to AIIMS, Rishikesh through a heli-ambulance. Two of them died before reaching the hospital.

At Rudrapur district hospital, five accident victims admitted to Rudrapur District Hospital were

discharged on Sunday. The other two victims will be discharged on Monday, officials said.

A team led by Pauri's divisional transport officer probing the accident went to the accident site and will submit its detailed investigation report by Monday.

Uttarakhand Joint Transport Commissioner Sanat Singh said that prima facie the accident is believed to have happened because the driver was tired or drowsy due to overnight travel but the investigation team that has technical experts will determine the real reason.

Accidents in such mountainous parts happen due to narrow and bad roads but the road at the Rudrapur accident site was in good condition and around six metres wide, he said.

Jagmohan Rawat, president of Gopinath Taxi-Sumo Vehicle Association in Rudrapur, said that accidents happen in these parts as drivers from other states do not have the experience of driving in the mountains. He said that the tempo traveller in this case was booked from Delhi-NCR and the tourists were visiting Chopta.

Rawat also questioned why there were 26 people in the vehicle, more than the prescribed capacity of 20, and said the accident happened after passing through half a dozen check posts within the state's border. (PTI)

Fallen hero: Col Manpreet Singh remembered fondly; Son still sends voice messages

ANANTNAG (KASHMIR), June 16: In a heart-wrenching tale of love and loss, seven-year-old Kabir remains unaware of the harsh reality that his father will never return and the young boy relentlessly sends voice messages to Colonel Manpreet Singh's number, pleading with him to come back.

"Papa bus ek baar aa jao, phir mission pe chale jana (Papa, please come back once, and then you can resume your duties)."

Some of these heartfelt messages are whispered in secrecy to avoid his mother's watchful gaze, as Kabir implores his father to make a video call.

Colonel Singh's final act of valour came during a joint operation on September 13 last year, when he along with other soldiers engaged in a fierce gun battle with terrorists in the forests surrounding Gadool village. Despite their courage, Colonel Singh, Major Aashish Dhochak, J-K Police Deputy Superintendent Humanyun Bhat and Sepoy Pardeep Singh made the ultimate sacrifice, leaving a void in the hearts of those who knew and admired them.

A revered commanding officer of the 19 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) unit, Colonel Singh is remembered as a hero in the worst terrorism-hit areas of Larkipora, Zaldora and Kokernag in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district.



Many locals remember him as a symbol of bravery, leadership and selfless sacrifice in these areas that are mainly the Area of Responsibility, or AOR in army parlance, of the 19 RR. His legacy lives on in the hearts of people.

The absence of Colonel Singh weighs heavy on his family mem-

bers, particularly his wife Jagmeet who vividly recalls the time when he planted two Chinara trees and affectionately named them after their children -- Kabir and Vani.

"He had said that we will return after 10 years to see these trees again. But now..." said Jagmeet, her trailing off voice encapsulating the uncertainty and sorrow that has befallen the family.

Jagmeet shared with PTI over phone from Mohali in Punjab how deeply passionate Colonel Singh was about improving the

lives of people in Kashmir and also spoke about the difficulties in making her own children understand that he won't return.

"Often Mann (Colonel Manpreet) would get calls in the dead of night and he would promptly ensure that help was provided to them," she said, adding that the help could be to resolve a personal dispute or for hospitalisation, it could be for anything.

She said her martyred husband was invited by locals for marriages, to celebrate the birth of a child and Eid. "It was like one big family," Jagmeet said.

Remembering her last conversation with him, which lasted 32 seconds, Jagmeet said, "Operation mein hoon (I am in operation) were his last words before I did not hear from him ever."

Colonel Singh's dedication to the community extended beyond his military duties.

He was instrumental in rehabilitation efforts, particularly in helping those addicted to drugs find a path to recovery. Colonel Singh's impact on empowering women and fostering a sense of community through sports and education is fondly remembered by those who knew him.

Rubbiya Sayeed, a well-known women cricketer from Anantnag, recalled Colonel Singh's impact on the community. "He believed that sports played an important role in building a society...There were many drug addicts whom he sent for rehabilitation," she said.

Sayeed said Colonel Singh's focus on empowering women to be self-reliant and economically independent showcased his commitment to building a better society through sports and education.

"He actually was a healing touch to the people and the 19 RR headquarters had become the most people-friendly place where the focus was on building the youth and reasoning out with them about their better future," she said in a choked voice.

Local residents spoke of Colonel Singh's kindness and support, highlighting his gentlemanly demeanour and positive influence on the youth.

"I have never seen a gentleman officer like him. He used to treat me like his brother," Rayees said and recalled how his son would play with Kabir. "Probably, he was one of our last resort whenever we were in some problem," he said. (PTI)

Nia Sharma on her absence from TV: It was a conscious decision

MUMBAI, June 16: Actor Nia Sharma, popular for TV shows such as "Ek Hazaaron Mein Meri Behna Hai" and "Jamai Raja", says she decided to stay away from the small screen as she was "sceptical" about its future at a time when every other show was going off air in a few months.

As someone who has been part of long-running soap operas, including "Ishq Mein Marjawan", the actor said she wanted to wait for the right opportunity which came in the form of her latest outing "Suhagan Chudail", which airs on Colors TV.

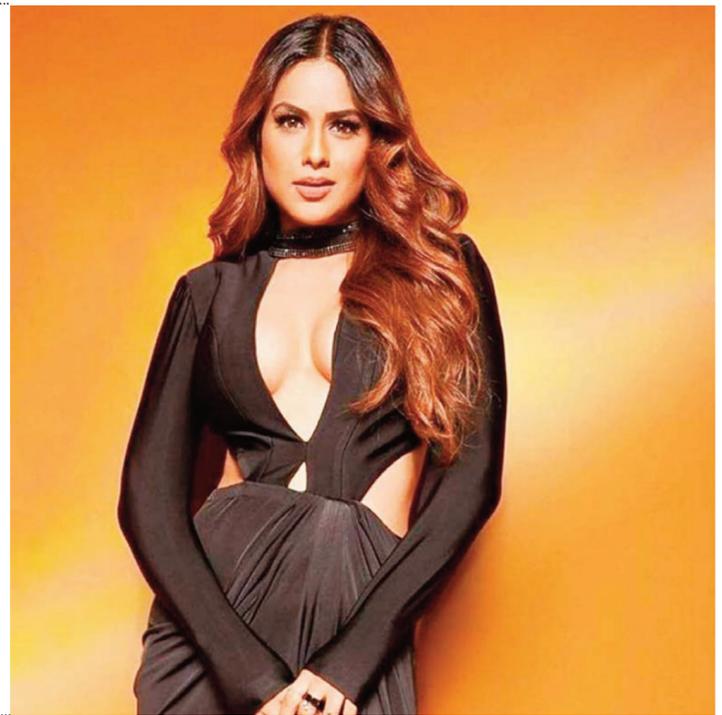
Her previous show appearance was in the Ekta Kapoor-produced "Naagin 4", which ended in 2020. In the last four years, she has starred in reality shows such as "Khatron Ke Khiladi: Made in India", emerging as winner, and "Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa 10". "It was a conscious decision as the idea was that TV overall in the last few years has really drained in terms of TRP. Every show was shutting in three to four months. The kind of shows I've done, they had longevity, they were running for years and years. I always believed that a project shouldn't be like, 'It came and it went off air and no one was aware about it'.

"I'm sceptical of those kinds of things, and that's why I was consciously not taking up a TV project because everyone was experimenting. Nobody was sure and even the roles that I got , I

did not resonate with them. All the shows that were being offered to me went off in three months. So, I was kind of okay. 'Thankfully, I did not take it up'," Sharma told PTI in an interview here. The Indian TV space has long been beset by problems such as long working hours, delay in remuneration, harassment and toxic environment on sets. According to Sharma, the situation is less likely to improve because the focus of the industry is to churn out content regularly.

"We always know of certain things that television faces, it's the working conditions, which will always be there because it's daily soaps. They're churning out content on a daily basis, they're not here to set examples about how a TV show set should be... We all are aware of these conditions," she added.

After cementing her position in showbiz, the Delhi-born actor said she has started "demanding" the treatment she believes she deserves. "... Like, I do have a lavish vanity for myself, the money is great. The show has come on my own terms and conditions. Going forward in life, the kind of experience that you have, you're treated as per that. They are not going to lay a bed of roses for you on television. Let's face it, it's 'take it or leave it'. I'm not trying to defend the situation here, but this is how it is," she added. (PTI)



Jon Bon Jovi is 'getting back' to performing on stage after undergoing vocal cord surgery

LOS ANGELES, June 16: Rock legend Jon Bon Jovi says he is getting back to live performances "step by step" following his vocal cord surgery which was conducted over two years ago.

In the recently released docu-series "Thank You, Goodnight: The Bon Jovi Story", the 62-year-old singer-songwriter had revealed that his vocal problems began in 2015 but got worse in 2022 following which he had to seek professional intervention.

Speaking with the People magazine at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame's latest exhibit centered around his band Bon Jovi, the musician said he was in high spirits after taking to the stage in Nashville, Tennessee over the weekend.

"We performed last night in Nashville, and everything was very good. So step by step, I'm getting back to it," said Bon Jovi, known for songs such as "Livin' on a Prayer", "It's My Life" and "You Give Love A Bad Name". He credited singer Shania Twain, who had similar voice problems, for encouraging him to go forward with the procedure. "She's been my spirit sister in this. She's the only other one I've known that's ever had this surgery, with this doctor, and the only reason I found that out is because she reported it in the press. 'Not only did she reassure me that it would be OK, but I think she also pulled my leg a little bit because she told me I'd be out there a lot sooner than I have been. She says, 'Well, I told you that because I knew that you might back out otherwise.' And so, I couldn't wait to get the operation," the Grammy winner recalled. Bon Jovi, who has released his new album "Forever", said he is closely working with vocal coaches to further his improvement. (PTI)



Director RS Prasanna announces wrap on Aamir Khan-starrer 'Sitaare Zameen Par'

MUMBAI, June 16: Director RS Prasanna has announced that the filming on "Sitaare Zameen Par", starring Aamir Khan, is finished.

On Saturday, Prasanna of "Shubh Mangal Saavdhan" fame shared the update on his Instagram Story which featured a picture of cake with the film's title with the caption "It's a wrap". In a separate Instagram Story, the filmmaker praised Khan for being a "terrific leader" and "protector". "From watching Lagaan on screen and picking up my jaw from the floor. To standing next to, learning from, admiring and working with THE Aamir Sir. God has been extremely kind and generous. So so much to learn from sir on so many fronts. "But above all... How to be an amazing human being... Full of love, passion, absolute humility... Un-

ending curiosity and learning zeal... A terrific leader, an extraordinary creative culture builder... Constantly empowering those around him... Extremely trusting... And a protector," Prasanna wrote in his post. Sitaare Zameen Par, also produced by Khan's banner Aamir Khan Productions, also features Genelia Deshmukh.

"What an absolute delight of a human. You are a treasure my friend," the director wrote alongside his photo with Deshmukh on his Instagram Story.

Sitaare Zameen Par will also mark Khan's return to the silver screen after 2022's Laal Singh Chaddha. Recently, Khan co-produced Laapataa Ladies with its director and his former wife Kiran Rao. His next production is Rajkumar Santoshi's Lahore 1947, starring Sunny Deol and Preity Zinta. (PTI)

Joe Alwyn looks back on Taylor Swift romance: We had decided to keep our relationship private

LONDON, June 16:

Actor Joe Alwyn has opened up about his romance with singer and former partner Taylor Swift after over a year of parting ways, saying they had mutually decided to keep some details of their relationship "private".

The former couple split after six and a half years of dating. Swift is currently in a public relationship with American footballer Travis Kelce.

Alwyn said he is in a good place both professionally and personally. According to an insider, the actor has also moved on and was "dating and happy".

"As everyone knows, we together — both of us, mutually — decided to keep the more private details of our relationship private. It was never something to commodify and I see no reason to change that now.

"And, look, this is also a little over a year ago now and I feel fortunate to be in a really great place in my life, professionally and personally. I feel really good," Alwyn told The Sunday Times in an interview.

Asked if he had listened to Swift's latest album "The Tortured Poets Department", allegedly inspired by their time together, Alwyn said coming to terms with a long and "fully committed" relationship was tough to navigate.

"I would hope that anyone and everyone can empathise and understand the difficulties that come with the end of a long, loving, fully committed relationship of over six and a half years.

"That is a hard thing to navigate. In thinking on what I was going to say, I would think and hope that anyone and everyone can empathise. ... This isn't a direct answer to your question, but just thinking about what I want to talk about," he added.

The "Kinds of Kindness" actor said he has made peace with the "gap between what is known and what is said" about one's personal life in the media.

"What is unusual and abnormal in this situation is that, one week later, it's suddenly in the public domain and the outside world is able to weigh in. (PTI)

Badshah apologises to fans after Dallas concert stopped midway: You guys deserve better

NEW DELHI, June 16: Rapper Badshah on Saturday apologised to his fans after he had to cut short his concert in Dallas, US, due to a "discrepancy" between local promoters and the production company.

The rapper is currently on a tour to the US and Canada in support of his third studio album, "Ek Tha Raja". Titled The Paagal Tour 2024, the tour started in May and will conclude in August.

Badshah posted a statement on his Instagram page and said he is "heartbroken" after he had to stop his performance midway at Curtis Culwell Center in Dallas.

"Dallas, I'm literally so heartbroken and bummed about what happened today. You guys are incredible and deserve better.

"I was really looking forward to performing in your city but due to a discrepancy between the local promoters and the production company I was forced to cut short the set and stop the show midway," he said.

The 38-year-old musician said promoters need to be better equipped, especially for large-format shows, as it takes a considerable amount of energy and effort to put together a tour.

"This isn't fair to the fans who spend their hard-earned money

to purchase that ticket, and it definitely isn't fair to the whole crew who pours their hearts into putting on these tours. We rehearse for weeks, plan for months and travel tirelessly to bring you the best possible experience.

"The music industry is all about respect - respect for the fans as much as it is about respect for the artists and the support crew," he added.

Badshah said his management team "tried everything in their control" to salvage the situation and ensure a smooth run.

"We sincerely apologise for the inconvenience, disappointment and irritation caused due to this sheer lack of management from the promoter's end. We will make sure things are better managed in future with a more competent promoter team that prioritises a quality experience and understands that music and touring is a serious business.

"I promise to return, and it's going to be bigger, better, and bolder! Thanks for always being there and having my back," he concluded his statement.

As part of the Paagal Tour, Badshah has so far performed in cities like Washington DC and Houston. (PTI)



For Test cricket to thrive, India has leadership role to play: CWI CEO Johnny Grave

BRIDGETOWN, June 16: Test cricket remains in danger and powerhouse India has a "leadership role to play" in ensuring the five-day game not just survives but thrives in smaller regions like the West Indies, its CEO Johnny Grave told PTI.

Grave, who joined Cricket West Indies (CWI) back in 2017, lauded the BCCI's unwavering commitment to Test cricket despite a gruelling calendar but said more needs to be done at the ICC level to protect the red-ball game outside the big three comprising India, England and Australia.

Only the big three out of the nine competing ICC full members will play a five-match series

in the 2023-2025 World Test Championship cycle. Three full members -- Ireland, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe -- have never been part of the championship introduced in 2019.

Grave, currently busy with co-hosting of the T20 World Cup, spoke his mind on future of the game and the role he expects the BCCI to play.

"India have a leadership role to play. They're now the number one board when it comes to power, influence, and resources. To date, they've been fantastic in how they've continued to play all three formats of the game, their commitment to Test cricket. I don't think it has ever been as strong as it is now," said

Grave.

With the ICC being a members' body, the BCCI's stance on any subject carries huge significance. Are they doing enough in the leadership role?

"I think they are. They're becoming increasingly influential in the key decisions that the ICC makes. The BCCI were hugely supportive in one of the biggest things the ICC have achieved in the last 12 months, which is getting cricket back into the Olympics.

"The fact that India came on board and supported that bid was absolutely, in my opinion, crucial for the result that the ICC got, which was the acceptance of cricket into the LA Games.

"And we're already seeing from the associate world in particular, that being an Olympic sport has a very big impact on them positively in terms of how they can get money from government, get money from the Olympic associations to drive the game at all levels," he said referring to the sport's return to the Summer Games after 128 years. India have toured the West Indies thrice in the last five years, providing a massive financial boost to the CWI, which depends on media rights money from Indian and English broadcasters to keep the game afloat in the Caribbean.

As of the now, series in the WTC cycle are staged like bilat-

eral rubbers with the home board pocketing all broadcast revenues and the visiting teams having to pay for their own travel. Grave wants the ICC to centralise at least the travel costs as the West Indies have to spend the most in crisscrossing the world. "We have to have a league mentality that we're all in it together as the Test playing nations. And I think the World Test Championship is a start to that. I think it's gaining some momentum. I think it can be improved.

"Centralise flights and accommodation within the World Test Championship and take on those costs as the costs of the league rather than placing all that burden on the participating teams as

we're so negatively disadvantaged by that," said the CWI CEO. In Grave's words, the CWI has not been in a better place financially after multiple tours from India and England in the post-COVID era. The T20 World Cup, which is the first ICC men's event held in the Caribbean since 2010, will also add to the coffers of CWI which generates an annual revenue of USD 50 million.

The six chosen venues needed urgent renovation for being World Cup ready and that has been done at a cost of USD 50 million approximately, with half of them spent on the Kensington Oval in Barbados, where the final will be staged.

"It's been 14 years since we hosted our last men's event. And it's hugely important (that we get to host world events).

"... (building infrastructure) It's a huge part of hosting a World Cup because the legacy of that means that the six grounds that are hosting or playing hosts for this World Cup will have facilities that we, Cricket West Indies and our home boards, can benefit from for hopefully the next decade," he said. The West Indies are co-hosting the T20 showpiece with USA and going forward, more world events will be jointly hosted and not just by the big three, as it has been the case in the last 10 years. (PTI)

Ton-up Smriti, spinners hand India massive win over South Africa in 1st ODI

BENGALURU, June 16: Smriti Mandhana's resolute hundred and a disciplined bowling effort, led by spinners Deepti Sharma and Asha Shobana, piloted India to a huge 143-run win over South Africa in the first women's ODI here on Sunday.

India now lead the three-match series 1-0, and the second game will be played here on June 19.

Mandhana's sixth ODI century (117, 127 balls, 12x4s, 1x6) formed the fulcrum of India's competitive 265 for eight on a sluggish Chinnaswamy pitch.

Then the Indian bowlers worked their magic around the South African batters to bowl out the visitors for 122 as debutante leg-spinner Asha (4/21) led the show with a frugal spell and was well-supported by offie Deepti (2/10). Pacer Renuka Singh (1/30) gave India the perfect start, dismissing the in-form South Africa skipper Laura Wolvaardt in the first over itself.

Wolvaardt had no answer for an excellent nip-backer from Renuka that clipped the top of her off-stump.

The Indians soon fetched the wickets of Tazmine Brits and Anneke Bosch as the tourists slumped to 33 for three.

The experienced Marizane Kapp (24, 39 balls), who ham-



pered Renuka for successive four and six, tried to revive the innings with Sune Luus who fought well with a 33.

But their fourth wicket alliance of 39 runs consumed 68 balls as the asking rate climbed over

seven which never really came down thereafter.

Asha ended that struggle when the leg-spinner had Kapp caught at covers by Harmanpreet Kaur.

At five down for 74, South Africa were always facing the

climb up the hill.

Earlier, India's script for victory was written by Mandhana, who thrilled the home crowd with a well-paced hundred.

Mandhana stitched two significant partnerships with the feisty

Deepti (37, 48 balls, 3x4s) and Pooja Vastrakar (31 not out) to take India out of trouble after the hosts found themselves at 99 for five at one stage.

Mandhana and Deepti added 81 runs (92 balls) for the sixth wicket and Pooja, who had to leave the field later with a knee niggle while fielding, assisted the Indian vice-captain to make 58 runs (54 balls) for the seventh wicket.

Mandhana has a lot of flair in her batting.

But here she was forced to eschew that because of the team situation and the sluggish nature of the pitch to which India top-order batters like Shafali Verma (7), Harmanpreet (10) and Jemimah Rodrigues (17) failed to adapt, leading to their soft dismissals.

Mandhana was on 33 when India's fifth batter fell, and she had to preserve her wicket to take India forward.

Largely making her runs through those nips and tucks, Mandhana was also happy to free her hands when width was offered.

The left-hander's swivel pull off debutant pacer Anne Derksen and a little shimmy down the track to deposit offie Nondumiso Shangase over mid-on had streaks of her elegance. (PTI)

Australia crush Scotland by 5 wickets; England enter Super Eight of T20 WC

GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA), June 16: Australia did their arch-rivals England a massive favour with a five-wicket win over a gritty Scotland as the Richie Berrington-led side crashed out of the T20 World Cup Super Eight stage race here.

With England hammering Namibia earlier in the day in a rain-truncated game, all that Jos Buttler's side needed was Australia's win over Scotland to a get a lifeline.

Australia scored 186/5 while chasing 181 in 19.4 overs after Scotland fought right until the end to keep their hopes alive.

After putting on a formidable total on board, Scotland had even reduced an edgy Australia to 60/3 at one stage but their most successful batters in this World Cup — Travis Head (68) and Marcus Stoinis (59) — delivered again.

"We spoke about sticking to our plans. Scotland are a good team, they have improved a lot and we certainly wanted to respect them," Australia skipper Mitchell Marsh said after the win. "We just wanted to stay consistent and if we fail, we fail our way. Whenever our team is challenged, it brings the best out of us. Today we were challenged and it was a good experience and a good game of cricket. We start fresh now," he added.

With Australia's chase appearing to be falling apart, the in-form Head and Stoinis joined forces to bring them back in the game.

On a wicket where batters could swing their willows without fretting much over the pace or movement off the surface, the two seasoned campaigners put the Scottish resolve to a stern test with a sturdy 80-run association for the third wicket off only 44 balls. Head smacked four sixes and five fours to top score with 68 off a mere 49 balls but Stoinis was more aggressive, cracking nine fours and two sixes to make a quickfire 59 from a mere 29 balls.

But before that, there were some nervous moments for the

former champions when David Warner (1) was removed from the equation early, skipper Mitchell Marsh failed to impose himself, and Glenn Maxwell's torrid run with the bat continued.

Maxwell was done in by one from Mark Watt that straightened enough to beat his bat and crash into the top of the off-stump, extending the all-rounder's struggles further with the bat, even though he claimed two wickets in the first half.

"I think the guys can hold their head high. We played some really good cricket throughout the tournament. It was a great learning for us. Obviously, we are a bit disappointed given the position we were in. We came here to qualify but couldn't do that," Scotland captain Berrington said.

Earlier, Scotland put their best foot forward in terms of setting a formidable total against the heavyweights, finishing at 180 for five after being asked to bat first. Australia had expectedly rested some of their frontline pacers and their absence was felt with the others not producing as much impact and control as their first-choice bowling attack can.

Brandon McMullen was the star with the bat for the Scots as he took on the Australian bowling, hitting six sixes and two fours to race to 60 from a mere 34 balls and set up a strong platform for his side following an early blow.

Aston Agar had cleaned up opener Michael Jones for two in the first over but the pair of McMullen and George Munsey produced an excellent recovery for Scotland, putting on 89 runs for the second wicket in a mere 48 balls. If McMullen was more belligerent of the two, Munsey played his part well with a 23-ball 35, which was studded with three sixes and a couple of fours.

After the pair was separated, Scotland skipper Richie Berrington took charge of taking his side forward as he forged multiple crucial stands with the following batters to take them to 180. (PTI)

Ankita, Bhajan progress in Final Olympic Qualifier after Deepika's shock loss

ANTALYA, June 16: Indian archer Deepika Kumari suffered an embarrassing opening round defeat to little known Yaylagul Ramazanova of Azerbaijan, while Ankita Bhakat and Bhajan Kaur progressed to the pre-quarterfinals in the Final Olympic Qualifier, here on Sunday.

Ankita and Bhajan are thus one win away from sealing an individual women's quota. The individual quotas are allotted to the top-eight nations. Each country gets one individual quota.

So far, India have a solitary quota -- in men's individual section through Dhiraj Bommadevara from the Asian qualifying leg. Ankita defeated Shelley Hilton 6-4 (24-26, 25-25, 28-20, 25-25, 27-25) and Mikaella Moshe 7-3 (28-25, 25-27, 27-

27, 28-25, 26-25), both from Israel, to make the last-16.

Third seeded Bhajan, who got a bye into the third round of 32, overcame Urantungalag Bishindee of Mongolia 6-2 (29-27, 28-26, 26-29, 27-24).

Deepika, who qualified as second seed, won the opening two sets to lead 4-0, but her shooting went horribly wrong in the next two sets where she scored 23 and 24 points respectively, landing five of her six arrows in the outer rings.

She shot thrice in the eight-point red ring, once in the seven-point red ring and while another hit the outer six-point ring as Yaylagul gleefully brought it level before 4-4. The Azerbaijan archer then won the fifth set with a solid display and seal

a splendid win 6-4 (26-28, 25-27, 23-26, 24-25, 27-29).

There was no equipment malfunction but she had poor release after failing to anchor her bow properly. It could be pressure or something else," a team official told PTI.

Indian men's and women's teams have failed to seal the quotas from the Final Olympic Qualifier. The men's team had qualified as top seed but lost to Mexico in the quarterfinals. The women's team, who got fifth seed in rankings round, exited in the pre-quarters.

But they still can still Paris Games berths if they maintain their World Rankings till the cutoff date of June 24.

The top two nations from among the

countries who have not got team quotas will make the cut for the Paris Olympics on June 24 after the third stage of the World Cup here beginning on Tuesday.

India will have to put up a good show to maintain their rankings.

The men's team is currently No. 2 with 243 points behind South Korea who have already qualified.

Chinese Taipei and Italy, who are behind India in the rankings, have already qualified. India's nearest competitors are China (204 points) and Japan (190).

The women's team is currently No. 8 behind South Korea, China, Germany, France, Mexico, USA and Chinese Taipei -- all these seven nations have already got team quotas. (PTI)

ICC's Big American Dream: Too many loose ends, over-dependence on Indian market

NEW DELHI, June 16: Under-prepared drop-in tracks, poor ground conditions, over-dependence on Indian TV audience, not factoring in weather and steep ticket prices were only some of the problems that didn't make America the most viable commercial destination for a global event like T20 World Cup, in first attempt.

However the only takeaway is United States' national team's stupendous show to beat Pakistan and give India a run for their money before entering the Super Eights on its debut at the world stage. There are only few things that money can't buy and the performances by Saurabh Netravalkar and Monank Patel were indeed priceless, something that would give the pin-striped suits of ICC sitting in Dubai, a chance to heave a sigh of relief despite lot of things that didn't go right during the course of two-and-a-half weeks. For any team sport to do well and get popularity in a particular geographical region, it is imperative that there is some sense of nationalism associ-

ated with it and the H1B visa holders and Green Card acquiring Indians have given them that opportunity.

Cricket in America has been ICC's pet project for a long time and having T20 included in the 2028 Olympics programme for the Los Angeles edition is a big leap in that direction.

However the global body would be the first to admit that the teething problems associated with the logistics and organisational part did paint a sorry picture. Let us take the example of the Nassau County Cricket ground in the Long Island, which is more than an hour's drive from the CBD (Central Business District) of the New York City.

It was a makeshift facility and by the time this article reaches the readers, the 37,000 seater portable stands would have been dismantled and no one knows what kind of cricket matches would be played at that ground henceforth. The drop-in pitch will be plucked out for sure.



The mouth-watering proposition of India vs USA in New York state (not City) however needed a bit more than just hype and not testing the tracks was a juvenile mistake. The pitch was pilloried for its uneven bounce during India's opening match against Ireland when balls were flying from length after hitting the cracks.

The groundsmen then rolled the track to cover the cracks and so much that the pitch became slow and teams found it difficult to

chase down any target which was in the range of 115-120. The low scores made the matches enticing but also took away the fun element from the whole process of coming to watch a T20 match where they would want to see more sixes being hit. A total of 56 maximums were hit in 8 games and at an average of seven per game, which isn't the best advertisement for promotion of the game in an unchartered territory where the viewership is dependant on Indian

diaspora. In one IPL match alone this season, 42 sixes were hit, which is the other end of the spectrum. As far as the native Americans, who have grown up on liberal dose of New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox are concerned, you would need more action than scores like 95, 113, 119 to bring the footfalls at the turnstiles. "Obviously, if you have to showcase it to the world and sell it, I don't think it's a great selling product, but for cricket, it's tight competition. It brings the other teams and the higher teams very close to each other," said South African batter Heinrich Klaasen after a match. "I think all the batters are keen to get out of this place, to be fair. The bowlers would love to stay here," he said.

Coming back to the timing, if one wants regular series, matches need to be held in the evening unless it's just catering to the broadcasters' demand of 8 pm IST timing which means that on weekdays, you will not have big crowds in future. (PTI)

Italy recovers to beat Albania 2-1 at Euro 2024 after conceding goal after 23 seconds

DORTMUND (GERMANY), June 16: By conceding a goal after just 23 seconds, Italy made the worst possible start to its European Championship title defence.

Thankfully for the Azzurri, it soon got much better.

Italy recovered from letting in the quickest goal in the tournament's 64-year history to beat Albania 2-1 in Dortmund on Saturday in an atmospheric Adriatic derby that immediately threatened an upset.

Nedim Bajrami thrilled a heavily pro-Albanian crowd at Westfalenstadion by pouncing on a throw-in by Italy left back Federico Dimarco that failed to reach teammate Alessandro Bastoni, before taking a touch and smashing a rising shot inside the near post. Within 16 minutes, the Italians were ahead as Bastoni headed in Lorenzo Pellegrini's cross to the back post in the 11th then Nicolo Barella struck home a swerving first-time shot from the edge of the area.

Barella was one of five survivors from the team that started for Italy in the penalty-shootout

win over England in the 2021 European Championship final.

The pressure was on Italy's new-look side under Luciano Spalletti to win its opener given the other teams in Group B are three-time champion Spain and Croatia, a World Cup semifinalist in 2022. Spain beat Croatia 3-0 earlier Saturday.

Bajrami's goal gave the Azzurri a jolt and created some history — it was much quicker than the previous fastest in the tournament's lifespan, which was 67 seconds by Russia's Dmitri Kirichenko in 2004.

Yet they controlled the game after that, dominating possession to a backdrop of jeers and boos from a sea of red in the crowd.

It's now just one loss in 12 matches under Spalletti, who took over last August — three months after leaving Napoli following its Italian league triumph — and was tasked with restoring national pride after Italy failed to qualify for the World Cup for a second straight time. Italy is clearly more at home in the European Championship as it goes for a record-tying third title. (AP)

No concerns about Kohli's form, couple of dismissals won't change anything: Rathour

LAUDERHILL (FLORIDA), June 16: Virat Kohli's string of single digit scores in the ongoing T20 World Cup is hardly a concern as he has been in superb touch during nets and is looking hungrier than ever ahead of the Super Eight, India's batting coach Vikram Rathour said.

Kohli, who was the highest run-scorer in the IPL, went through a dry run so far scoring 1, 4 and 0 against Ireland, Pakistan and USA respectively.

The moment the question popped up at the post-match media conference after the game against Canada got washed out on Saturday, Rathour was ready with the answer.

"I love it when every time I come there is a question about Virat Kohli, whether he is doing well or not. No concern at all, no concern at all," Rathour said.

"He (Kohli) has been batting superbly from the tournament that he came from (IPL). Couple of dismissals here, doesn't change anything, he is batting really well."

Rathour is confident that India's

No. 1 batter would come good when it matters the most.

"Actually, it's good that he is a little hungrier, he is really keen to do well and really switched on. It's a good space to be as a batsman, I think.

"Looking forward to some good games and we've watched some good innings from him."

The batting coach sidestepped the query about whether playing four all-rounders, including Shivam Dube and Axar Patel, is cast in stone or not.

"Again, we need to be a flexible team. We need to look at the conditions that are in front of us and be ready to deal with those. So as a team, we are going to be really flexible, I think.

"We'll react to what (conditions) we get on the day. We have enough sources in our team to deal with any kind of conditions," he said.

Some game time in Florida ahead of Super Eights would have surely helped, he said.

"But if the game had happened that would have really helped us. We were really looking forward to



playing a game, to play a good game of cricket. There's always a concern when you play a game in conditions like this that some injury can happen.

"You're already in Super 8 and that's the last thing (injury) you want to happen before you enter the serious part of the tournament."

Rathour admitted that the chocha-bloc schedule of Super Eight with hardly any time between the games isn't an ideal situation.

"Again, not ideal. It would have been great if we could have played a game today. But now this is what it is. So, we look forward to having a couple of good practice days in Barbados and getting into the game. So again, now the matches will happen simultaneously after one day.

"So, as a team I think we are ready. We are used to this kind of schedule. We have done it in the past and I am sure we will do it re-

ally well this time as well."

Rathour also felt that ICC should tell fans why the whole ground here wasn't covered.

"This question should be asked to the ICC people. I won't be able to answer that. I don't know the reason why it was not covered and why it didn't have enough covers to cover the whole ground.

"If they would have covered it, definitely that would have helped. But now it's not there and this is what we've got."

The batting coach didn't want to read too much into the New York drop-in strip which was hardly ideal for batting.

"It's good. You should be able to play on all types of wickets. We have the skills to play in all types of conditions and do well. So, we have got the difficult wickets.

"Hopefully, we will get good wickets in the tournament.

"And if we get turning wickets, we have 4 spin options, we have enough fast bowlers as well. So, whichever conditions come, I think we are really equipped to deal with that," he added. (PTI)

B'desh look to seal Super Eight spot in clash against Nepal; New Zealand take on PNG



KINGSTOWN (ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES), June 16: Bangladesh will look to iron out their flaws and seal the second Super Eight spot from Group D when they take on a tricky Nepal in the T20 World Cup here on Monday.

With four points, Bangladesh are all set to progress further in the tournament from the last group in the competition but a spirited Nepal will pose a strong threat.

Even though they have not yet won a game and are out of race for the next round, Nepal's confidence will be sky high after they nearly pulled off a win against South Africa and will be keen on fulfilling their dream of beating a Test-playing nation before signing off.

The equation for Bangladesh, however, could change if they lose to Nepal by a big margin and the Netherlands manage to do the same against a struggling Sri Lanka — an unlikely scenario indeed but this tournament has thrown its share of surprises.

Teams (from):

Bangladesh: Najmul Hossain Shanto (c), Taskin Ahmed, Litton Das, Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Shakib Al Hasan, Tawhid Hridoy, Mahmud Ullah Riyad, Jaker Ali Anik, Tanvir Islam, Shak Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib. Travelling reserves: Afif Hossain, Hasan Mahmud.

Nepal: Rohit Paudel (c), Aasif Sheikh, Anil Kumar Sah, Kushal Bhurtel, Kushal Malla, Dipendra Singh Airee, Lalit Rajbanshi, Karan KC, Gulshan Jha, Sompal Kami, Pratis GC, Sundeeb Jora, Abinash Bohara, Sagar Dhakal and Kamal Singh Airee.

Match starts at 5:00AM IST.

Sri Lanka look to sign off on a high Gros Islet (St Lucia): Wary of the Dutch firepower and current form, the 2014 champions Sri Lanka, who are placed fifth in Group D, will take on the third-placed Netherlands.

Already out of reckoning for the Super Eight round, Sri Lanka's pride will be at stake given they have had a tournament to forget, marred with multiple issues on and off the field.

For the Scott Edwards-led Netherlands team, there will be a great deal of motivation to bring out their best and hope for a big win as well as luck to favour them.

Netherlands have notched wins in two out of three games in this tournament yet they find themselves nearly eliminated in a tight Group D, from which South Africa have already sailed through.

Teams (from):

Sri Lanka: Wanindu Hasaranga (c), Charith Asalanka, Kusal Mendis (wk), Pathum Nissanka, Kamindu Mendis, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Angelo Mathews, Dasun Shanaka, Dhananjaya De Silva, Maheesh Theekshana, Dunieth Wellalage, Dushmantha Chameera, Nuwan Thushara, Matheesha Pathirana, Dilshan Madushanka.

Netherlands: Scott Edwards (c&wk), Aryan Dutt, Bas de Leede, Daniel Doram, Fred Klaassen, Logan van Beek, Max O'Dowd, Michael Levitt, Paul van Meekeren, Sybrand Engelbrecht, Teja Nidamanuru, Tim Pringle, Vikram Singh, Viv Kingma, Wesley Barresi.

Match starts at 6:00AM IST.

New Zealand eye consolatory win over PNG Tarouba (Trinidad and Tobago): A consolatory win over a lowly Papua New Guinea would be the best that the New Zealand can walk away with in this T20 World Cup, with curtains coming down on their campaign prematurely.

For a team as consistent as New Zealand in ICC tournaments, the Kiwis have paid a heavy price for being sluggish at the start as a couple of defeats upfront led to their surprisingly early exit.

The game will, however, carry a massive significance for the Kiwi group as Trent Boult has confirmed this is his last T20 World Cup for the country and the Kane Williamson-led side will be motivated to give their best against PNG, who have lost each of their three matches so far.

Teams (from):

New Zealand: Kane Williamson (c), Finn Allen, Trent Boult, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway (wk), Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee.

Papua New Guinea: Assadollah Vala (c), Alei Nao, Chad Soper, CJ Amini, Hila Vare, Hiri Hiri, Jack Gardner, John Kariko, Kabua Vagi Morea, Kipling Doriga (wk), Lega Siaka, Norman Vanua, Sema Kamea, Sese Bau, Tony Ura.

Match starts at 8:00PM IST. (PTI)

Lovlina loses to Li Qian, clinches silver in Grand Prix



NEW DELHI, June 16: Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist boxer Lovlina Borgohain lost to China's Li Qian to settle for a silver medal in the women's 75kg contest at the Grand Prix Usti nad Labem in the Czech Republic. The Paris Olympic-bound Borgohain lost by a 2-3 split verdict in her final bout against the reigning Asian Games champion late Saturday night.

Qian, who is a two-time Olympic medalist and has a three World Championships medals, including a gold under her belt, had defeated Borgohain in the summit clash of the Asian Games last year.

Lovlina said this will hold her in good stead going into the Paris Olympics.

"Participating in this competition has been a very good experience for me. I won a silver this tournament before the Olympics was very important for me as far as my preparation is concerned. This will be beneficial to him. I thank the Boxing Federation of India, TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme) and Government of India," Lovlina said in a video, which was

posted by Mansukh Mandaviya. Mandaviya lauded Lovlina for her performance.

"Congratulations to @LovlinaBorgohain for winning the Silver Medal at Grand Prix 2024. She displayed great skills. Her success in the boxing ring is an inspiration for upcoming athletes. Best wishes for future endeavours," the sports minister tweeted. The tournament, being hosted under the aegis of World Boxing, featured four boxers in the women's 75kg category -- Borgohain, Cindy Ngamba of the Refugee Boxing Team, Qian and England's Chantal Reid -- and is being held in a round robin format. Borgohain managed only one win in the tournament, losing two of her three bouts. The Assam boxer had registered a hard-fought split decision win in her opening bout over England's Chantal Reid before losing to Ngamba and Qian. The 26-year-old, who is the lone Indian competing in the tournament, is preparing for a second Olympic medal. She is one of six Indian boxers who have qualified for the Paris Olympics. (PTI)

Supersub Wout Weghorst scores late again in Netherlands' 2-1 win over Poland at Euro 2024

HAMBURG, GERMANY, June 16: Netherlands forward Wout Weghorst loves to make a big impression off the bench and he did it again Sunday late in a 2-1 win over Poland at the European Championship.

The imposing striker struck with a low left-foot shot in the 83rd minute with his first touch after coming on to replace Memphis Depay who had wasted several shooting chances. Weghorst might not look the most elegant player, but his reputation for being effective was earned at the 2022 World Cup with two late goals against Argentina to force extra time in a memorable quarter-final against the eventual champion.

This time, Weghorst's goal was worth a win that puts some pressure on Group D favorite France, which already beat the Dutch twice in qualifying last year and plays Austria on Monday. "I said it this morning to my girlfriend: 'Scores level, 0-0, 1-1, 20 minutes to go.' It was a bit later. But you feel it and visualize it for yourself," Weghorst told Dutch broadcaster NOS. Poland was forced to cope without its injured star Robert Lewandowski but soon found a goal from his replacement who matured in Major League Soccer.

Adam Buksa used all his 1.91 meter (6-foot-



3) height — a bit shorter than Weghorst at 1.97 meters — when circled by four Dutch defenders at a 16th-minute corner to guide a header into the net. Buksa had 2 1/2 prolific years with New England Revolution until returning in 2022 to join French club Lens. Cody Gakpo leveled in the 29th with a shot that was deflected and deceived goalkeeper Wojciech Szczęsny. It was fair reward for a vibrant first half for the Dutch.

Gakpo is a fast starter at major tournaments. He scored in all three group-stage games at the World Cup that led the Netherlands to a clash with Argentina. That day in Doha, Weghorst also replaced Depay when he came on in the 78th.

Weghorst then had a testy exchange with Li-

onel Messi in a post-game interview area that became a viral meme after the Argentina great barked at the former Manchester United forward to stop staring at him. A reliable option for the Dutch, Weghorst now has four goals in five national-team games this year and he scored three more in the Euro 2024 qualifying group — compared to the seven goals he scored for his German club Hoffenheim this season.

The Netherlands win was preserved by goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen with key late saves from substitute Karol Swiderski and, with the last touch of the game, a long-range shot by Nicola Zalewski.

Lewandowski sat out the game to rest a leg muscle injury and is targeting Poland's second game, against Austria on Friday. The Dutch will play France on Friday, also getting a full day's more rest than its next opponent.

About 50,000 Dutch fans made the short trip to Hamburg and there was a shooting incident involving police before the game in the downtown St. Pauli district near where many had gathered. It did not seem related to the soccer.

Police said they shot and injured a man who was threatening them with an ax and a Molotov cocktail. (AP)

If Rohit or Kohli plays defining knocks on big days, group league scores won't matter: Manjrekar

NEW DELHI, June 16: Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are in this Indian set-up because of their ability to play defining knocks when it matters the most and Sanjay Manjrekar wouldn't mind a few underwhelming group league scores from the two megastars if they can make a difference in the semi-final or final of the ongoing T20 World Cup.

While Kohli has failed to reach double digits in all three completed games, skipper Rohit was in good nick during his fifty against Ireland but didn't score many against Pakistan and USA in the subsequent matches.

"Ideally, if you have gone for people like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, then you have gone for experience. You want to take your experienced players in World Cup to deliver when it really matters," Manjrekar told PTI in an exclusive interview.

The former India player added, "So, I don't mind if certain players are out of form. Coming into the knockouts, if they play a defining innings in a semi-final or the final to win the title, that's the kind of expectation you must have from your senior players.

"If a youngster comes to the fore, that's a bonus like it happened in 1992

with Pakistan, with Inzamam ul Haq. It's the seniors who have to make the major contribution and that is why I guess selectors go for experience in T20 World Cup or World Cups generally."

Manjrekar, who has played 37 Tests and 74 ODIs, is one of the most respected cricket analysts and when asked about the legendary duo's future in T20Is post World Cup, he felt that it could be answered by the players themselves or the national chairman of selectors.

"I think it's a question best asked to chairman of selectors what their plans are and the two individuals can tell what their plans are and how the selection committee is going to be thinking and I think there's fair bit left in the tournament before they start thinking on those lines," the Mumbaier said.

Dube in Windies? Let's wait and watch

Shivam Dube, the toast of Chennai Super Kings' IPL campaign, hasn't exactly looked at ease on the tough New York strip and seems to be struggling when the ball isn't coming onto the bat.

Since he is a designated power-hitter, the jury is still out on his utility on the Caribbean tracks, where hitting through the line might not be the best option.



"We will have to wait and see. You are right because the hitting that you saw from Shivam Dube was on some of the flattest pitches in the world and also a long league (IPL) where a lot doesn't hinge on one game. So the pressures of World Cup are different.

"So, we need to wait and see if Shivam Dube can replicate what he did in the IPL against the spinners. You are

right as it isn't going to be as easy to hit the spinners as it was on Indian pitches, and so we need to see if Dube can upgrade his power-hitting skills against spinners on these tracks," Manjrekar assessed.

Rishabh at No. 3 is a brilliant move Manjrekar didn't envisage Rishabh Pant getting promoted to No. 3 but it has turned out to be a master-stroke as the

flamboyant left-hander was easily India's best batter on view during the group league stage.

"They (team management) want more and more impact players, at every position down the order and Rishabh Pant, I didn't expect him to be batting at No. 3, and what a brilliant move it has turned out to be, starting from that warm-up game against Bangladesh, when Samson and Rohit Sharma took some time to get used to the surface," he opined.

"Pant has showed his class. He has been India's best batter in this tournament so far, and on a difficult pitch, and that is Rishabh Pant's class. That they gave him the No. 3 slot also ensured that India don't have six right-handers like they had in that 50-over World Cup and the only left-hander India had was Jadeja at No. 7."

If pitches offer turn in WI, India might opt for finger spinners

Kuldeep Yadav, India's best spinner in last 18 months, has been on the bench as they opted for four all-rounders (two seam bowling and two spin bowling) during the USA leg of the tour.

The pitches in West Indies are supposed to be conducive for spinners but if it's a rank turner, India might just go

with their two finger spinners rather than any of the two wrist spinners, reckoned Manjrekar.

"The thing about pitches in the West Indies is that if India comes across a real turning pitch, then they might just be happy having finger spinners (Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel) because if you see in India, when we have rank turners, you always see that you have Ashwin and Jadeja, so that might suffice.

"Kuldeep Yadav's great strength is that if there isn't much in the pitch, he will extract more from the pitch than any other spinner, plus the kind of artistry that he has, plus all those kind of bowlers' value hasn't been seen because there is so much in the pitches, all you needed are bowlers who can bowl accurately."

The interview was facilitated by Disney+ Hotstar, which also streams an exclusive first-of-its-kind LIVE cricket show, 'Caught & Bold' featuring Harbhajan Singh, S. Sreesanth, Piyush Chawla, Ambati Rayudu, Sanjay Manjrekar and a host of other former cricketers from around the world.

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 is streaming LIVE and FREE on mobile on Disney+ Hotstar. (PTI)