

**6** WORLD

**8** NATION

- Israeli strike in central Gaza kill 20 Palestinians
- China launches investigation in response to EU probes
- Bypolls: Sporadic violence reported in Uttarakhand, West Bengal
- BJP MLAs slam oppn for boycotting all-party meet on quota

## HT BRIEFS

## Football coaching

**DIPHU:** Dillai Sports Association (DSA) in collaboration with Jirpo Chingrum FC, Dillai has organised a free football coaching summer camp starting from yesterday at Dillai. Former executive member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and president of DSA, Longki Timung in presence of football secretary, Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA), Horen Engti and founder president, DSA, Joysing Timung inaugurated the football coaching. Inaugurating the coaching camp the KASA football secretary, Engti said consistency, hard work, discipline, and showing respect to the coach and team members are the key elements needed to improve in life. Engti appreciated the DSA and Jirpo Chingrum FC for organising the summer camp, where children out of school for one month will keep them busy in the coaching camp and will also learn the art of playing football. It is also an effort to promote sports culture in the area, he said. Secretary, DSA, Harlongbi Engleng informed that the coaching will start from 3:30 pm every day at the DSA play ground.

## JJM scheme

**DIPHU:** Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) of Chinthong MAC constituency, West Karbi Anglong, Avijit Kro today inaugurated completed Jal Jivan Mission (JJM) scheme, a central government project of pipeline water connectivity to every household at Pampura. The pipe water connectivity is benefiting 50 households. Inaugurating the scheme Kro said, "The JJM scheme here at Pampura water has now reached every household. Before villagers have to climb down the valley to fetch water, but now piped water has reached in front of every household." There are 65 JJM schemes in Chinthong, and several are under completion.

17 lakh affected in 26 districts • 159 wild animals die in Kaziranga National Park

## Flood situation improves marginally

**GUWAHATI, July 10:** The flood situation in Assam improved marginally on Wednesday with water levels of major rivers showing a receding trend, reducing the affected population to 1.7 million across 26 districts, according to an official bulletin.

Vast tracts of land, however, remain inundated with sporadic rainfall reported from several districts.

Seven deaths were reported on Tuesday with two in Cachar and one each in Dhubri, Dhemaji, South Salmara, Nagaon and Sivasagar, according to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA).

The death toll in this year's floods, landslides and storms increased to 92 with 79 people losing their lives to the deluge alone.

An area of 38,870.3 hectares of cropland was still inundated as against 49,014.06 hectares on Monday.

Among the worst-hit districts are Dhubri where 3,54,045 people are affected, Cachar (1,81,545),

Sivasagar (1,36,547), Barpeta (1,16,074) and Goalaghat (1,09,475).

A total of 48,021 affected people have taken shelter in 507 relief camps while relief materials have been distributed to 104,665 others outside these camps.

Dhubri, Cachar, Kamrup, Goalpara, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, South Salmara, Nalbari, Karimganj, Dhemaji, Morigaon, Nagaon, Sivasagar, Goalaghat, Sonitpur, Hailakandi, Biswanath, Barpeta, Darrang, Kamrup (M), Majuli, Jorhat, Kokrajhar, Tinsukia and Chirang are among the affected districts.

Urban flooding was reported from two districts of Kamrup (Metropolitan), Dibrugarh and Karbi Anglong.

Kaziranga National Park has seen its worst floods in recent years, resulting in the death of 159 wild animals due to drowning or during rescue operations, while 133 others have been saved. Infrastructure damage includes 94 roads. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## Prosecuting persons will not resolve issue of child marriages: SC

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** Prosecuting persons involved in child marriages will not resolve the problem which has social dimensions, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday while reserving the verdict on a PIL over the alleged rise in underage weddings in the country.

Unimpressed by the Centre's submissions that state-specific programmes like awareness campaigns and training are being undertaken, the top court said "These programmes, lectures do not really change things on the ground".

NGO 'Society for Enlightenment and Voluntary Action', in 2017, had filed the PIL in the top court alleging that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was not being enforced in "letter and spirit".

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra



heard submissions from the counsel of the petitioner NGO and Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, before reserving the verdict.

"It is not about prosecution only. Prosecuting persons involved in child marriages will not resolve the problem as it has social dimensions," the bench said and asked the counsel for both sides to give suggestions on a way forward to deal with the issue.

"We are not here to criticise anybody. This is a social issue," the CJ said and asked the law officer to apprise as to what the government was doing on it.

At the outset, the additional solicitor general informed the bench about the present status and said states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra and Assam have witnessed more child marriage cases.

She said northeastern states, sans Assam, have hardly any such incidents.

Five states and UTs including Dadra Nagar Haveli, Mizoram and Nagaland have not reported any case of child marriage, she added.

The law officer referred to the data and said there was marked improvement in the last three years.

She said out of 34 states and UTs, 29 have provided the data on child marriages.

There was no data available on convictions in child marriage cases, she said, adding, "That data is not here. We can get it. But please see, there is a lot of improvement. There is a 50 per cent reduction (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CM distributes ₹ 68.44 cr among 349 edu institutions

Nearly 95,000 students get free admission to higher education

**GUWAHATI, July 10:** Nearly 95,000 poor students from underprivileged sections have been offered free admission from Class XI onwards till post-graduation across colleges and universities of Assam, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday.

As part of the 'Pragyan Bharati Scheme', Sarma distributed ₹ 68.44 crore among 349 colleges and varsities for giving free admission for higher secondary, undergraduate and post-graduate courses in arts, science and commerce streams.

"Today, nearly one lakh students secured a pathway towards free education. This scheme aims to foster higher education and promote inclusivity by empowering students from the underprivileged sections," he said at an official function here.

In the first phase of the 2024-25 academic year, 94,838 students from poor and middle-class families across 349 colleges and universities have benefited, with ₹ 68.44 crore disbursed, he said.

While the first phase of the admission fee was paid on Wednesday, the subsequent payments will follow in the coming months after document verification, Sarma said.

"The next round of spot admission and 3rd and 5th semester fee waivers for CUET and non-CUET candidates will be disbursed in September," he said. Education Minister Ranaj Pegu had last week stated (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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## ASDC and allies hold protest against educational issues



## HT Bureau

**DIPHU, July 10:** The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and its allies, including the Karbi Students Association (KSA), Karbi Nimso Chingthar Asong (KNCA), and ASDC Youth Front, held a sit-in demonstration on Wednesday before submitting a memorandum to education minister Ranaj Pegu through district commissioner Madhumita Bhagawati.

They demanded solutions to educational issues plaguing Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts. ASDC general secretary Jotson Bey, KSA president Jemson Timung, ASDC Youth Front president Premson Bey, and KNCA president Maikon Rongpharpi led the sit-in demonstration.

The memorandum highlighted that successive state governments have not allocated sufficient funds to improve the education standards in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi

Anglong districts. Consequently, educational institutions face severe shortages of teachers and classrooms.

It further noted that institutions like Diphu BEd College and others have been excluded from provincialisation schemes for the past twenty-five years, causing significant issues.

The memorandum urged the minister to take immediate steps, including provincialising non-provincialised colleges and ensuring an adequate number of teachers and classrooms.

They emphasised the need to exclude LP and ME schools from amalgamation policies and advocated for local autonomy in educational governance up to the higher secondary level. Additionally, they demanded the establishment of examination centers for NET, NEET, and CUET at Assam University Diphu campus.

bring down the acid created in stomach and is commonly available in pharmacies under many drug names, such as Pan 40.

In the 54 prescriptions, the condition being diagnosed was Herpes Zoster, or shingles -- a viral infection causing painful rashes anywhere on the body.

Tablet pantoprazole 40 milligrams was prescribed along with others, including paracetamol, and ointments, according to the study published in the Indian Journal of Medical Research.

Among these 475 prescriptions, the conditions most commonly diagnosed were found to be upper respiratory tract infections (URTI) and hypertension. In 35 of the URTI (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

18 killed, 19 injured as bus hits milk tanker in UP's Unnao

## Tea workers protest against alleged land sales in Dibrugarh

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIBRUGARH, July 10:** Tea garden workers across Upper Assam, including Dibrugarh under the banner of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS), staged an hour-long protest in various tea gardens on Wednesday over the alleged sale of tea garden lands for commercial purposes.

Former Union DoNER Minister and ACMS president Paban Singh Ghatowar led the protest at Bokpara Tea Estate in Dibrugarh, chanting slogans alongside tea garden workers against the sale of tea garden lands.

Ghatowar stated that the sale of tea garden lands for non-agricultural activities and the uprooting of tea plants would not be tolerated. He emphasised that tea workers rely on these gardens for their sustenance and livelihoods, questioning where they would go if tea plants (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



District Magistrate Gaurang Rathi said it appears that the bus, which was coming from Motihari in Bihar, was speeding and hit the milk tanker from behind.

Eighteen people died and 19 were injured in the accident. A probe has been launched into the matter, he said.

Rathi said 20 passengers who sustained minor injuries were sent to Delhi in another bus, which was carrying 60 people.

Additional Director General of Police, Lucknow, S B Shiradkar told PTI that 14 men, three women and a child were killed in the accident. Bangarmai Circle Officer (CO) Arvind Kumar said due to the collision, both the bus and milk tanker overturned. Drivers of the two vehicles were among the dead.

He said the injured were rushed to a hospital and their condition was stated to be stable.

Glass shards and people's belongings lay scattered on the highway next to the overturned bus and milk tanker. Cranes were used to put the two vehicles back on their wheels and they were later towed away.

The impact of the collision left the front portion of the bus badly mangled with one side ripped open.

"We were sleeping. I don't know what happened," Mohd Shamim, a passenger (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The counting of votes will take place on August 12, state election commissioner (SEC) Saradhindu Chowdhury said.

Addressing a press conference, he said the notification for the three-tier panchayat elections will be issued on Thursday. The last date for filing nominations will be on July 18 and a scrutiny of papers is scheduled on July 19.

The last date for withdrawal of nomination papers will be on July 22, he said.

The northeastern state has 591 (6,111 seats) gram panchayats, 116 (419 seats) panchayat samities and eight (116 seats) zilla parishads.

Chowdhury said the panchayat elections will be held on ballot papers, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Washington, July 10: India will continue to be a strategic partner for the US despite concerns over its ties with Russia, the Biden Administration has said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Russia for two days for the 22nd India-Russia annual summit that has been watched closely by the West amidst the raging Ukraine conflict.

During his talks with Putin on Tuesday, Prime Minister Modi told President Putin that a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield and peace efforts do not succeed amid bombs and bullets.

On Tuesday, spokespersons of the Pentagon and the State Department reacted separately to questions on India's relationship with Russia and Modi's visit to Moscow.

"India and Russia have had a relationship for a very long time. From a US perspective, India is a strategic partner with whom we continue to engage in full and frank dialogue to include their relationship with Russia. As it relates to the NATO summit being this week, of course, like you, the world is focused on that," Pentagon press secretary Major General Pat Ryder told reporters at a news conference.

On the other hand, US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters at his daily news conference that the US has been quite clear about its "concerns about India's relationship with Russia." "We have expressed those privately directly to the Indian (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

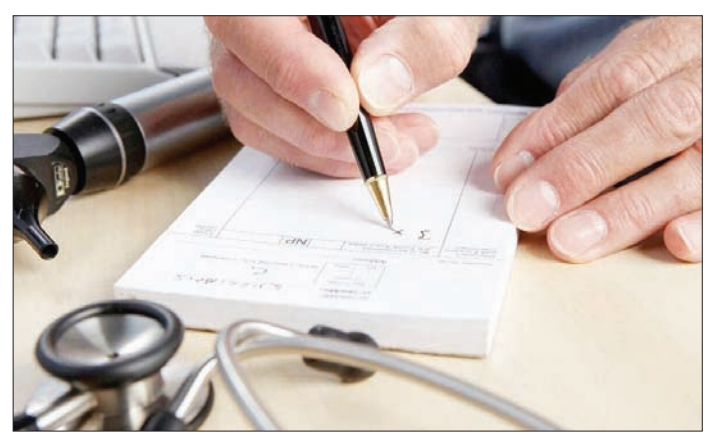
## Pantoprazole is known to help bring down the acid created in stomach

### One in two medical prescriptions issued in India deviated from standard guidelines: Study

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** Nearly one in every two medical prescriptions issued in India deviated from standard guidelines, with approximately a tenth showing "unacceptable deviations", a study, conducted by a team of researchers including those at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here, has found.

The team analysed 4,838 prescriptions issued by physicians between August 2019 and August 2020 for their compliance with standard treatment guidelines.

These prescriptions were issued at 13 Rational Use of Medicines Centres (RUMC), set up by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and located in tertiary care teaching hospitals and medical col-



leges across the country. The researchers found that among the 475 prescriptions they deemed to show unacceptable deviations from the standard guidelines, pantoprazole was prescribed the most often -- in 54 of them. Pantoprazole is known to help

bring down the acid created in stomach and is commonly available in pharmacies under many drug names, such as Pan 40.

In the 54 prescriptions, the condition being diagnosed was Herpes Zoster, or shingles -- a viral infection causing painful rashes anywhere on the body.

Tablet pantoprazole 40 milligrams was prescribed along with others, including paracetamol, and ointments, according to the study published in the Indian Journal of Medical Research.

Among these 475 prescriptions, the conditions most commonly diagnosed were found to be upper respiratory tract infections (URTI) and hypertension. In 35 of the URTI (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Markets sink below record levels; Sensex tanks over 400 pts on widespread profit booking

**MUMBAI, July 10:** Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under heavy selling pressure to sink below record high levels on Wednesday, tracking deep losses in metal, auto and IT stocks amid widespread profit booking after recent gains.

Rising uncertainty over interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve also added to the weak trend in domestic equities, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex opened 129.72 points higher to hit a fresh all-time high of 80,481.36. However, the index soon tumbled 915.88 points or 1.13 per cent to trade at 79,435.76. It finally closed lower by 426.87 points or 0.53 per cent at 79,924.77.

The NSE Nifty also hit its record 24,461.05 in opening deals but pared all gains to decline 291.4 points or 1.19 per cent to 24,141.80 intra-day. It dropped 108.75 points or 0.45 per cent to settle at 24,324.45.

"The Indian market experienced profit booking ahead of the upcoming earnings season. The expectations are muted, given the moderation in sales growth due to a slowdown in the world economy and consolidation in margins driven by high inflation.

"Additionally, the market is under temporary risk towards high budget expectations, which ap-



pears well factored in the last one month's rally," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the Sensex pack, Mahindra & Mahindra tanked over 6 per cent after the company cut the prices of its SUV models to boost demand.

Mahindra & Mahindra said its XUV700's fully-loaded AX7 range now starts at ₹ 19.49 lakh, a price cut of over ₹ 2 lakh.

Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies, State Bank of India, JSW Steel, Tata Motors and Kotak Mahindra Bank were other losers. On the other hand, Asian Paints, NTPC, Power Grid, Adani Ports and Bharti Airtel were the winners. "The intraday

slide in the index has slightly dented sentiment, but resilience in certain pockets limited the damage," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. A total of 2,574 stocks declined, while 1,365 advanced and 82 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.69 per cent, while the midcap index dipped 0.19 per cent.

Among the indices, auto declined 1.65 per cent, metal (1.60 per cent), IT (0.99 per cent), commodities (0.87 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.78 per cent), tech (0.76 per cent) and industrials (0.62 per cent).

In contrast, healthcare, utilities

and power were the winners.

"Markets had been hitting new highs over the past few weeks, and hence, investors resorted to profit-taking because of the stretched valuations of Indian equities.

"While several sectoral stocks have run up sharply ahead of their fundamentals, the upcoming earnings of many of these companies will show if the rise is justified or not. Also, investors would look to churn their portfolios ahead of the Budget and trim their exposure in risky stocks," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower, while Seoul and Tokyo ended higher.

European markets were trading higher in the mid-session deals. US markets ended on a mixed note in the overnight trade on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.24 per cent to USD 84.86 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹314.46 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 391.26 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 80,351.64 on Tuesday. The NSE Nifty went up by 112.65 points or 0.46 per cent to 24,433.20 -- its record closing high. (PTI)

## Tata Steel launches carbon bank



**JAMSHEDPUR, July 10:** Private steel major Tata Steel recently launched a carbon bank, a virtual repository through which carbon dioxide will become a value-creating asset for future usage, a company statement said here on Wednesday.

CO<sub>2</sub> is widely recognized as a harmful substance emitted due to the use of various fossil fuels in industry and transportation. The steel industry, in particular, often relies on coal and other fossil fuels in its production line, resulting in the release of large quantities of CO<sub>2</sub>.

The carbon bank is aimed at measuring and managing carbon dioxide savings generated from various sustainability projects. These savings not only contribute to environmental goals but also hold the potential for generating revenue that can be reinvested into further decarbonization efforts, it said. Rajiv Mangal, Vice President (Safety, Health & Sustainability), Tata Steel, said "In the face of mounting global concerns about sustainability, Tata Steel has taken proactive steps to spearhead carbon abatement initiatives as part of its unwavering commitment to sustainability across environmental, societal, and business domains. The carbon bank is one such tangible commitment to driving sustainability within the organization."

Initially, Tata Steel identifies decarbonization projects that can reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in one or more production processes. The carbon savings from these projects are rigorously monitored by an independent auditor, who verifies the company's CO<sub>2</sub> savings claims following appropriate ISO system, it said adding that upon verification, a carbon savings certificate is issued by the auditor and virtually deposited in the carbon bank. (PTI)

## RBI deputy gov flags concerns over quality of disclosures by some NBFCs

**MUMBAI, July 10:** Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao has flagged concerns over quality of disclosures made by some NBFCs and urged the auditing community to ensure that entities provide appropriate qualitative information to depositors as well as other stakeholders.

"The statutory auditors play a significant role in maintaining stakeholder confidence in audited financial statements and this is particularly important in the case of banking industry where the entire edifice is built on 'trust' and the biggest external stakeholders, i.e., depositors, are fragmented and unorganised," he said.

Rao was addressing the Conference of Statutory Auditors and Chief Financial Officers of Commercial Banks and All India Financial Institutions (AIFIs) here on Tuesday.

He emphasised that the RBI has a strong interest in promoting sound and high quality accounting and disclosure standards for the banking and financial industry as well as in having transparent and comparable financial statements that strengthen market discipline.

The deputy governor said the RBI, for some time now, has been

supplementing rule-based regulations with principle-based regulations to give regulated entities (REs) a degree of flexibility in their business decision making.

"The principle-based approach to regulations is founded on the belief that financial reporting reflects the economic reality of a transaction. However, application of principle-based standards requires significant use of management judgement," Rao said.

He said disclosures are the cornerstone of transparency as these bridge the gap between what management knows and what external users can infer from financial statements.

Striking a balance between comprehensive disclosure and conciseness is a tightrope walk. When disclosures are clear and comprehensive, they foster trust in the market, he said.

Sharing the RBI's experiences in this regard, Rao said the central bank looked at disclosure being made by non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) in the context of ECL (expected credit loss) framework.

"On perusal of the disclosures of the accounting policies of some NBFCs, we observed that much of the disclosures were largely a rep-

etition of the text of respective accounting standards.

"We could not glean any specific insights such as discussion of the assumptions and methods applied in measuring ECL, shared credit risk characteristics to assess expected loss on a collective basis, qualitative criteria in determination of SICR (significant increase in credit risk), etc," the deputy governor said. To address the issue, Rao said the central bank is nudging REs to enhance the quality of their disclosures.

He urged the auditor community to critically evaluate the disclosure practices and ensure that these meet the needs of accounting standards and end-users.

"Auditors also have the responsibility of ensuring that entities provide appropriate qualitative information related to governance and control mechanisms," he said.

Rao further said even as banks navigate an increasingly complex emerging landscape, a harmonised approach by the regulators and auditors can remove the blind spots in risk identification and mitigation.

This, he added, will help achieve the shared goal of financial stability as well as ensure robustness of individual institutions. (PTI)

## Aadhaar-based eKYC of LPG customers underway to weed out bogus users

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** State-owned oil companies are conducting an Aadhaar-based eKYC authentication of LPG customers to weed out bogus ones, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said. This is done to remove bogus customers under whose names cooking gas is booked but these are used by commercial establishments. While households buy what is called domestic LPG for ₹ 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder (about ₹ 56.5 per kg), commercial establishments like hotels and restaurants are mandated to buy a 19-kg commercial cylinder that comes for ₹ 1,646 (₹ 86.3 per kg).

"Oil marketing companies are undertaking eKYC Aadhaar authentication for LPG customers to remove bogus customers against whose name commercial cylinders are often booked by certain gas distributors," Puri said in a post on X. "This process is in place for more than 8 months now."

His post came in response to V D Satheesan, Leader

of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, raising the "unprecedented hardship" caused to common man due to the decision. "It has been learned that the central government has mandated mustering for gas connections in order to ensure that LPG cylinders are held by legitimate customers. Though mustering is imperative to identify legitimate customers, the decision to complete the mustering process at respective gas agencies has caused inconvenience to common LPG holders," he said in a letter to Puri, a copy of which was posted on X. In response, Puri said the LPG delivery personnel while delivering refills to customer verifies credentials.

"Delivery personnel using their mobile phone captures the Aadhaar credentials of the customer through an app. Customer receives an OTP which is used to complete the process. Customers can also approach the distributor showroom at their convenience." (PTI)

discuss and find practical solutions," Virmani noted.

He observed that there is always a way of saying, "We recognise specific problems, and deal with those special problems."

The 14th Finance Commission raised the share of states in taxes collected by the Centre to 42 per cent from 32 per cent but abolished special category states.

The special status category was introduced in 1969 on the recommendation of the Fifth Finance Commission to benefit certain backward states with hilly terrains, strategic international borders, and economic and infrastructural backwardness. With support from N Chandrababu Naidu's TDP and Nitish Kumar's JD(U), which won 16 and 12 seats in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, respectively, and other alliance partners, the NDA has crossed the halfway mark to form the government at the Centre. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Flood situation improves

three bridges, 26 houses, and six embankments. The Brahmaputra River remains above the danger level at Nimatighat, Tezpur, Guwahati, and Dhubri, while other rivers like Burhi Dihing, Dikhou, Disang, Kopili, and Kushiara are also flowing above their danger marks in various places. (PTI)

## Prosecuting persons will not

in cases of child marriages compared to 2005-06." "We have to work towards the wholesome education of young girls and women. That is how one-half of the population will be able to contribute as national builders and get out of this social evil," the law officer said.

The court asked why officers like district magistrates and SDMs are being given the additional charge to act as child marriage prohibition officers. The law officer said that these officers, being in a position of power in districts, are more equipped and empowered to deal with the issue of child marriages.

Earlier, the top court had directed the Ministry of Women and Child Development to file a status report detailing steps taken by it to execute the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. "The Union of India should also engage with the State governments in order to apprise the court on the compliance by states of the provision of Section 16(3) for the appointment of the child marriage prohibition officer. Affidavit shall also clarify whether the officer so appointed or given other multifarious duties," the court had said. (PTI)

## CM distributes ₹ 68.44 cr among

that previously, students with a parental annual income of up to ₹ 2 lakh were eligible for free admission, but the limit was raised to ₹ 4 lakh this year. The colleges now allow ration cards as proof of family earnings instead of income certificates earlier, Pegu had added.

Since the scheme's inception, a total of 22,30,257 students have benefited with a cumulative amount of ₹ 826.36 crore paid till the last academic year, officials said. (PTI)

## 18 killed, 19 injured as bus hits

who sustained head injuries in the accident, told reporters at the hospital.

Another passenger, Dilshad, lost six of the eight family members he was travelling with.

"We were sleeping at the time of the accident and woke up to find ourselves trapped inside the bus. Those who reached the spot were busy recording videos instead of helping," Dilshad said.

He said the bus driver was speeding all night. Later, Dilshad identified six members of his family -- Ashfaq (45), Ruby (40), Gulnaz (12), Suhail (4), Sonu (32) and Soni (28) -- in the post-mortem house.

Four other deceased were identified as bus driver Ekhlaj (49), milk tanker driver Sunil Kumar (35), Deepak Kumar (27) and Shiydawal (28). Police had earlier said 14 bodies had been identified. However, they later said that only 10 had been identified so far. Another injured, Chandni, said there were around 60 passengers in the bus and officials reached the accident spot an hour after the incident. She thanked the local administration for facilitating a video call with her husband.

Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said officials have been instructed to ensure the best treatment for the injured. "The loss of lives in a road accident in Unnao district is extremely sad and heartbreaking. My condolences are with the bereaved families," he said in a post on X. "District administration officials have been instructed to reach the spot and expedite the relief work. I pray to Lord Shri Ram to grant a place to the departed souls at his feet and for the speedy recovery of the injured," the chief minister said.

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the loss of lives in the accident. In a post on X, Murmu said, "The news of the death of many people in a road accident on the Lucknow-Agra Expressway in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh is extremely sad. I express my deepest condolences to the family members of those who have become victims of such sudden death and wish for the speedy recovery of those injured." PM Modi announced an ex gratia of ₹ 2 lakh for the families of the deceased.

"The road accident in Unnao is extremely painful. My condolences to those who have lost their loved ones in this (accident). May God give them strength in this difficult time. Along with this, I wish the injured a speedy recovery," the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) quoted Modi as saying in a post on X.

Modi said the local administration is extending all possible help to the victims under the supervision of the state government.

"The Prime Minister has announced an ex-gratia of ₹ 2 lakh from PMNRF for the next of kin of each deceased in the mishap in Unnao. The injured would be given ₹ 50,000," the PMO said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge expressed grief over the incident and urged the administration to provide all help to those affected. "The news of the death of 18 people in a tragic road accident on the Lucknow-Agra Expressway in Unnao, UP, is extremely saddening. We express our deepest condolences to the bereaved families of the victims," he wrote on X. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav posed a series of questions to the BJP-led state government over the incident.

"Where was the highway police? Was regular patrolling not being done? How long did it take for the highway ambulance service to arrive after the accident and what was its role in relation to the casualties?" he said.

Crores of rupees are collected on the expressway every day. Is this money going somewhere else instead of being spent on management of the expressway, he said. BSP president Mayawati said the news of the Unnao accident was extremely sad and measures must be taken to prevent such incidents in future.

According to an official release, the district administration has issued helpline numbers -- 0515-29707662, 0515-2970767, 10774 (toll-free), 96514327035, 94544174476 and 8081211297. (PTI)

## Tea workers protest against alleged

and gardens were no longer there. Ghatow mentioned that he has raised the issue with the Central government, state government, and tea garden owners. He also called for the reconstruction of dilapidated tea workers' quarters, improved housing facilities, access to drinking water for garden workers, and enhancements to tea garden hospitals with more doctors, nurses, staff, and medicines.

Furthermore, Ghatow advocated for gratuity and provident fund benefits for retired tea garden employees, as well as timely promotions for tea garden staff.

Nabin Chandra Keot, ACMS Dibrugarh secretary and central vice president, stated, "We have staged a protest with our 11-point charter of demands. Our primary demand is an increase in the wages of garden workers. Most of the garden quarters are in deplorable conditions, and the garden management has neglected repairs".

"We urge the government to take necessary steps to address our demands," he added.

## Panchayat elections in Tripura on

and online submission of nomination papers will not be allowed in the election process as there is no such rule. Opposition parties had demanded that online submission of nomination papers for the panchayat election be allowed. "According to the existing rules, nomination papers must be submitted by candidates in person to the returning officers," he mentioned.

The SEC has already held meetings with the police to provide security to conduct free and fair elections, another official said. "Adequate protection will be made to ensure peaceful elections," he said.

On the deployment of forces during the day of the election, the SEC said Tripura State Rifles (TSR) and state police will guard the polling stations due to the non-availability of the required number of central forces.

Although 12,90 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in the three-tier panchayat elections.

The BJP candidates were elected unopposed in over 80 per cent of the seats of the three-tier panchayat in the last rural elections. (PTI)

## India to remain strategic partner

government, and continue to do so. And that has not changed," Miller told reporters at his daily news conference. India has been stoutly defending its "special and privileged strategic partnership" with Russia and maintained the momentum in the ties notwithstanding the Ukraine conflict.

India has not yet condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and has consistently pitched for a resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy. Ryder said: "I do not think anybody will be surprised if (Russian) President (Vladimir) Putin tries to represent this visit in a way that seeks to somehow show that he is not isolated from the rest of the world. And the fact of the matter is President Putin's war of choice has isolated Russia from the rest of the world, and it has come at great cost.

Their war of aggression has come at great cost, and the facts bear that out," he said. "So we will continue to view India as a strategic partner. We will continue to have a robust dialogue with them," Ryder said.

"He (Putin) is not looking so isolated with the head of the world's largest democracy being in Moscow, embracing him right now," a reporter asked. Ryder responded by saying that Prime Minister Modi also met recently with the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy and offered his assurances that India will continue to do everything within its means to support a peaceful solution to the war in Ukraine.

"I think that we trust that India will support efforts to realise an enduring and just peace for Ukraine and will convey to Mr Putin the importance of adhering to the UN charter and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity," he added.

Miller said the US continues to "urge India to support efforts to realise an enduring and just peace in Ukraine, based on the principles of the UN charter based on upholding Ukraine's territorial integrity and its sovereignty. And that will continue to be what we will engage with India about. (PTI)

## One in two medical prescriptions

prescriptions, the drug being prescribed was tablet rabeprazole+domperidone (used to treat gastric conditions like acid reflux), which the researchers said was responsible for the prescription to be qualified as one with "unacceptable deviation". The tablet combination was prescribed along with others, including paracetamol and levocetirizine (treats cold and runny nose).

Tablet rabeprazole+domperidone accounted for the second highest among the prescriptions with unacceptable deviations, after pantoprazole, the authors found. They said the most common potential consequences of irrational drug prescription for patients were high treatment costs and adverse drug reactions.

"Gastroprotective drugs are to be prescribed if the patient has a risk for developing peptic ulcer. Unnecessary prescribing of pantoprazole may lead to potential side-effects such as abdominal bloating, oedema and rash," the authors wrote. The researchers said that most of the physicians followed the disease-specific ICMR guidelines, with about 55 per cent adherence.

Where there were no Indian guidelines or recent updates in the guidelines, physicians used the international guidelines, such as those of the American Association of Family Physician or the American Heart Association, they said. (PTI)

## Need to find out practical solutions of problems facing states: NITI member Arvind Virmani

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** NITI Aayog member Arvind Virmani on Wednesday made a case for finding "practical" solutions to problems faced by states, as many of them like Rajasthan and Odisha have done well without getting the special category status.

Virmani further said in a democracy one has to recognise specific problems and find out pragmatic solutions.

He was responding to a question on the issue of granting special category status (SCS) to Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.

"There have been committees and commissions which have tried to define criteria for special category status (for states). And again, it is a difficult issue," Virmani told PTI.

The economist noted that in the last 30-40 years, "we used to have BIMARU states".

"But Odisha for example devel-



oped a lot, Rajasthan has developed a lot and things change.

"As far as I know, none of those states had special category status. That does not mean it is not important," he said.

Andhra Pradesh has been demanding special category status after its bifurcation in 2014 on the grounds of revenue loss as Hyder-

abad became the capital of Telangana.

Bihar has also been seeking the special status since 2005 when Nitish Kumar was sworn in as its chief minister. The state also suffered revenue loss after the mineral-rich Jharkhand was carved out of it in 2000.

"So in a democracy, we have to

## Vigyata Mundra awarded CCRT scholarship

HT Correspondent

**HOJAI, July 10:** Vigyata Mundra of Guwahati has been awarded the CCRT Scholarship. She has been selected for the Junior Award of Scholarship in 'Sattriya Dance' under the Cultural Talent Search Scholarship Scheme 2024-2025 of the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

She is the granddaughter of Ramawatar and Bimla Mundra, and the daughter of Aditya and Shilpa Mundra. She is a student of class 8 at Delhi Public School, Khanapara in Guwahati. Notably, she has been undergoing training in Sattriya dance at the institution named 'Sanskriti' under the guidance of Jollymoni Saikia, who is the recipient of the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar for the year 2020.

Her family members and well-wishers are happy with her achievement and wished her a bright future in the realm of classical Indian dance.

## Floods persist despite Brahmaputra recession, officials rush to mitigate risks

# Overflowing Kolong river threatens Nagaon



**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, July 10:** The flood situation in Nagaon district on Wednesday remained grim despite a slight receding of water levels in the mighty Brahmaputra and Kapili rivers. According to a report by the District Disaster Man-

agement Authority, Nagaon, over 80,000 people in 184 villages under Kamrup, Raha, Dhing, Samaguri, and Kaliabor revenue circles are affected by flood waters. Although the water level of the Brahmaputra has receded at Kaliabor, its tributary, the Kolong

river, is flowing above its danger level. Due to excessive water hyacinth on the river bed, the overflowing water from the Brahmaputra cannot flow freely through the Kolong river, resulting in spillovers at various riverine areas in the district. This poses a

fresh threat to the people of Nagaon town.

The overflowing water from the Kolong river has submerged a significant area near 'Harhoria Jaan' near Difalu in the town, affecting Teliagaon and Majorati villages. It also breached the Majorati-Solmari connecting PWD road on Wednesday morning. Similarly, due to excessive water hyacinth, the swollen water from the Kolong river has submerged larger areas between Samaguri and Puranigudam, including Samaguri, Moriagaon, Majuli Chapori, Bali, Teliagaon, Pohukata Chapori, etc., as reported.

District commissioner Narendra Kr Shah, along with other officials from the Nagaon district administration, rushed to the breached portion of the Majorati-Solmari road on Wednesday morning. They assessed the situation and directed concerned department officials to expedite the cleaning of water hyacinth on the river bed to prevent any further untoward situations in the town in the coming hours.

## Kokrajhar DC inspires NTPC Bongaigaon's GEM participants



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, July 10:** Pradeep Kumar Dwivedi, IAS, district commissioner of Kokrajhar, engaged in an inspiring interaction with the 40 Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) girls from NTPC Bongaigaon as part of the 'Meet the Role Models' initiative. The event included an educational tour of the DC office, providing the girls with firsthand experience of district administration operations.

During the session, Dwivedi lauded the GEM girls for their impressive presentations, musical talents, and poetic recitations. He encouraged them to pursue their ambitions with dedication and highlighted the significance of setting clear life goals. The girls also had the opportunity to interact with Kabita Deka, ACS, ADC, Kokrajhar, Jitraj Gogoi, ACS, ADC, Kokrajhar, and Rima Trishna Haloi, ACS, assistant commissioner, who shared insights into their roles in maintaining law and order. The officials emphasised the importance of self-belief and offered words of encouragement for

their future endeavours.

Dwivedi also conducted a quiz session, engaging the girls in discussions about career aspirations and civic responsibilities. He awarded small tokens of appreciation to participants, leaving them inspired and grateful for his guidance.

The GEM girls expressed their appreciation for the enriching experience and acknowledged NTPC Bongaigaon's commitment to empowering young women through initiatives like GEM.

Onkar Nath, AGM (HR), Madhurya Singha Lahkar, senior manager (HR-Corporate Communications), Pranami Handique, senior manager (HR), Aduity Thakuri, CSR executive of the station, and faculties of JYT Enterprises were present on the occasion.

The Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) by NTPC Bongaigaon aims to empower young girls through education, skill-building, and mentorship, fostering their holistic development and preparing them for leadership roles in society.

## Sattriya dance and drama workshop concludes

HT Correspondent

**TEZPUR, July 10:** A 10-day workshop on Sattriya dance and drama held at Darrang College concluded on Wednesday with a day-long valedictory function. The workshop, organised by the Performing Arts Centre of Darrang College, was held in collaboration with the Assam State Film Finance & Development Corporation Ltd.

As part of the day-long valedictory programme, participants of the workshop presented a spectacular Sattriya dance performance under the direction of noted Sattriya dancer Prerana Baishya. The participants also enthralled the gathering assembled in Bipin Pal Das Memorial Auditorium of the college with mind-blowing performances of five short plays, including 'Gyanchokshyu', 'Path Suraksha Jeevan Rakshya', 'Daman', 'Surakshya', and 'Deha Thakilehe Beha'.

## National Fish Farmers' Day celebrated in Sivasagar

DC Aditya Vikram Yadav distributes fish seed collecting cycles, highlights role of fish producers

HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, July 10:** Along with the rest of the country, National Fish Farmers' Day 2024 was observed at the District Fishery Development Office, Jaysagar on Wednesday. Aditya Vikram Yadav, DC, Sivasagar, attended the meeting and distributed cycles fitted with fish seed collecting boxes to the beneficiaries. The function was also attended by Jyoti Prabhakar Duwora, district fishery officer, Manoj Kumar Borthakur, senior journalist, Pranjal Kr Das, SDFO, Nazira, Biplov Kar, and a large number of fish producers from Sivasagar and Charaideo districts.

Jyoti Prabhakar Duwora spoke on the importance of the day and urged the farmers to consult the department's resource persons in developing a fishery project. Presiding over the meeting, Manoj Kumar Borthakur said that the fish producers in the country played a key role in making India the third-highest fish-producing country after China and the Philippines. They have been providing vitally important food nutrients in the form of fish to the common people.

Adidul Haque, a successful fish farmer from Nazira, said that total involvement and supervision are necessary for developing a fishery. Manoj Konwar of Kheluwa shared his years of experience and how he developed a three-high plot into an integrated farming project and now a rural resort for tourists. Debendra Deka from Bhatiapar said that adopting a marketing strategy is equally important along with fish production. It is usually overlooked by Assamese farmers. Nripen Saikhai, Partha Pratim Neog, and Paresh Gowala of Chintamonigrah said that a flood-resistant fish farming strategy is needed to counter the loss the fish farmers incur in flood-prone areas. Anil Gam (Aphala), Jayanta Gogoi, and Janardan Mahanta from Nazira spoke about their experiences in the sector and the extensive help the Fishery Department has been providing.

## Gauhati HC senior advocate honours Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma

HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, July 10:** Anil Kumar Bhattacharya, senior advocate of Gauhati High Court, visited Thulungapuri Dotma in Kokrajhar on Wednesday and offered floral tributes to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, former president of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU). He was accompanied by Sabdaram Rabha and Ranjit Mushahary, advocates of Gauhati High Court, and Saito Basumatary, advocate.

Bhattacharya recalled the contributions and dedication of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, who rendered endless services towards the welfare and upliftment of the Bodo and downtrodden communities in Assam. He described Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma as one of the prominent leaders of the Bodos and the entire state of Assam.

"Today, I visited Thulungapuri, Dotma, to pay respects and floral tributes to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma. He was not only a leader of the Bodos but also of the entire Assam. Under his leadership, the movements led by AASU and ABSU gained reputation worldwide. Today, we remember his contributions to society and the welfare of the Bodo community," Bhattacharya said.

Bhattacharya also visited the BTC Secretariat in Bodofa Nwgrw, Kokrajhar, and Bodoland University, Debagaoon, where he met with the registrar and faculties of the university. He expressed satisfaction after touring various educational institutions and the BTC Secretariat in particular.

## Aaranyak's Wildlife Genetics Lab celebrates decade of DNA forensic excellence



HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, July 10:** The Wildlife Genetics Laboratory (WGL) at Aaranyak, the only such facility in North East India, has been providing wildlife DNA forensic analysis services in Assam for ten years with success.

The laboratory has provided its services in over a hundred cases in the state of Assam, besides several cases in other states as well, thereby offering significant assistance in wildlife crime investigation in the region.

During this period, the laboratory has pro-

vided a range of DNA analysis services, including the identification of wildlife species from morphologically indistinguishable biological material, forensic individual matching through DNA fingerprinting of rhinos, elephants, tigers, leopards, and parentage testing of captive elephant calves.

In 2012, the WGL of Aaranyak became the first laboratory in the world to successfully use DNA fingerprinting for individual identification of greater one-horned rhinos in the wild and use this technique for population estimation as well

as forensic investigations.

The laboratory has developed a genetic database of rhinos in the country, which allows the identification of the source of origin of any rhino sample, such as confiscated horns, providing crucial inputs to rhino-related crime investigations.

"Along with providing training and on-ground support for DNA sampling, we plan to keep supporting wildlife forensic DNA investigations in Assam and other north-eastern states," says Udayan Borthakur, a senior scientist at Aaranyak and the founder head of its Wildlife Genetics Division.

"We also express our gratitude to the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change, government of India, Assam government, as well as other state forest departments for enabling us to work in this field," Borthakur added.

It is noteworthy that WGL, which was founded in 2008, was granted permission to collect biological samples from Scheduled I species under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, by the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change in 2009. The laboratory has been working on several major conservation genetic research projects on threatened wildlife species since 2009. The Assam Forest Department approved WGL's services in 2014 for forensic DNA analysis and wildlife genetics inside the state.

## RAISED VOICES



People of Rukmini Gaon staging protest demanding solution for artificial flood at Rukmini Gaon in Guwahati on Wednesday. UB Photos

## Wild tusker killed

**HT Correspondent**  
**JAGIROAD, July 10:** A wild elephant was killed when it was hit by a high-speed train in Tegheria under Jagiroad Police Station on Wednesday morning. The elephant was struck by the speedy Kanchanjunga Express while crossing the railway line. It is learnt that the elephant was coming from the nearby Sonaikuchi Reserve Forest in search of food. Elephants are often found in the area, coming down from the Sonaikuchi Forest in search of food. Meanwhile, Railway Police and Forest Department officials visited the spot and took necessary measures.

Jorhat correspondent wins national award

HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, July 10:** Jitu Kalita, a Jorhat-based correspondent for an Assamese daily, has been selected by the Press Council of India for a National Award for Excellence in Journalism 2023 under the Rural Journalism category for a news piece. The award is scheduled to be presented to him on August 5 in Delhi by Prasar Bharati Board member and eminent journalist Ashok Tandon, in the presence of Ranjana Prakash Desai, chairperson of the Press Council of India, who is a retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India.

## SBI marks 69<sup>th</sup> foundation day across Tezpur

Tezpur MLA felicitates distinguished personalities



HT Correspondent

**TEZPUR, July 10:** The State Bank of India (SBI) celebrated its 69th foundation day with great enthusiasm, in collaboration with all branches in the Tezpur area, including its Dhanuwa Nagar Branch in the heart of Tezpur town here on Wednesday.

The history of SBI dates back to the nation's banking sector, with the Bank of Calcutta established in 1806, followed by the Bank of Bombay in 1840 and the Bank of

Madras in 1843. These three banks were merged into the Imperial Bank of India on January 27, 1921. The Imperial Bank of India was later nationalised as the State Bank of India (SBI) on July 1, 1955. Since its inception, SBI has served millions of customers across the nation and abroad.

During the foundation day programme, Tezpur MLA Prithiraj Rabha, representing SBI, felicitated 30 distinguished personalities for their

contributions across various fields of society. The felicitated individuals included Assamese cine artist Arun Nath, Krishna Das Nath, noted academician Shailaja Kumar Padmapati, president of Baan Theater Bankim Sarma, playwright Aiswaryya Kakoty, radio artist Durgamoyee Borah, Dr Jahana Begum, principal of Darrang College, Dr Polashmani Saikia, social worker Hemanta Lahkar, retired judge of Tezpur Court Aruna Devi, physician Dr Laksheswar Bhuyan, professor Dr Sanjay Deka, environmentalist Haren Morang, Saurav Barkataki, Trishnamani Laskar of Nabaprabhat Orphanage, journalist Pankaj Baruah, Dr Shyama Saikia, and Dr Atul Kalita, among others.

The event was managed by SBI's manager and cultural activist Luit Borah, while the regional manager of SBI, Dipak Kumar Gupta, delivered the welcome address. MLA Prithiraj Rabha addressed the gathering, highlighting SBI's history and its comprehensive service to customers across all sectors since its establishment.

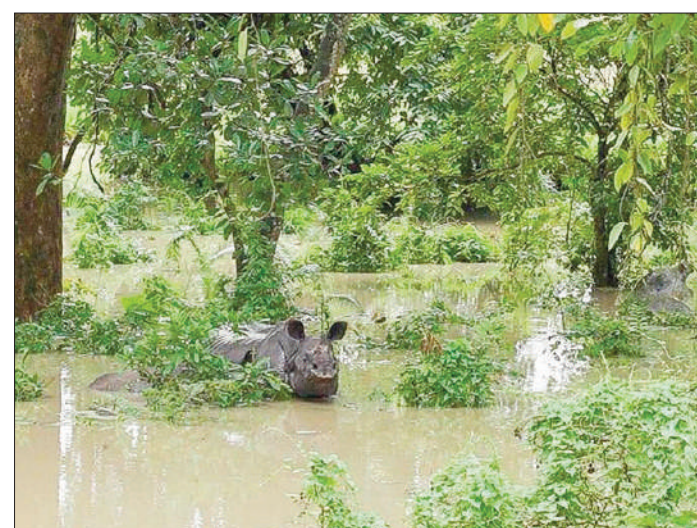
## NFR enhances connectivity

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, July 10:** The new Road Over Bridge (ROB) at Tetelia station yard, constructed by North-east Frontier Railway, was opened for use by the public. This ROB (No 59A) was constructed by Northeast Frontier Railway at a total cost of ₹ 72 crores.

The existing road on Level Crossing Gate No ST-22 passes through the station yard of Tetelia station and is situated on a state PWD road connecting Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. There is high detention of road traffic due to shunting operations, movement of trains in both directions, or stabling of trains connecting Tetelia-Bymnihat section and Star Cement siding line. The newly constructed ROB will replace Level Crossing Gate No ST-22 at Tetelia station yard. The necessity for constructing an ROB in lieu of Level Crossing Gate No ST-22 arose due to road traffic congestion. The gate was very busy, with a TVU of 88,818. Necessary approval for the closure of Level Crossing Gate No ST-22 has been obtained from the district authority, government of Assam, and shall be closed with effect from July 10, 2024. The total length of the newly constructed ROB is 442.58 metres, featuring a bow string arch steel girder of 62 metres in length. The height of the bow string arch steel girder is 16.754 metres, and its weight is 514 MT.

## Four more wild animals die in flooded Kaziranga National Park, toll rises to 163



122 hog deer, three swamp deer, two each of rhino, sambar, elephant and scops owl and one each of Indian hare, Rhesus Macaque, otter, and a jungle cat.

Currently, seven animals are under medical care while 116 others have been released after treatment, the official said.

The KNP is experiencing the worst deluge in recent years with the previous large-scale devastation occurring in 2017 when over 350 wildlife died in the flood waters and in vehicle hits while migrating through animal corridors to the highlands.

The NH-715 is a corridor for the animals to cross to the hills of Karbi Anglong.

Out of the total 233 camps in the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, 51 are still inundated till Tuesday evening as against 62 the previous day, the official said.

Forest Department employees including security personnel stay in camps inside the national park to conduct patrolling for the protection of flora and fauna and till Tuesday, four camps were vacated but now all have returned to their respective camps. (PTI)

the devastating second wave floods that have affected the entire state.

The dead animals include nine rhinos, 146 hog deer, two sambar, a rhesus macaque and an otter.

A total of 22 animals have died during treatment. They are 17 hog deer, three swamp deer, one rhesus macaque and one otter pup.

The forest personnel rescued

**GUWAHATI, July 10:** Four more wild animals died in the worst flood in Kaziranga National Park (KNP) in recent years, taking the death toll to 163 due to drowning and during treatment, an official said on Wednesday.

Altogether 135 animals have also been rescued in the deluge, the KNP official said.

The animal mortality has increased from 159 till Tuesday in

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Love comes unseen; we only see it go.  
-Henry Austin Dobson

## Unrest in West Bengal

Recent months have seen a disturbing rise in mob violence across West Bengal's districts and urban areas. Known for their courtesy and culture, the Bengali bhadralok are grappling with the causes behind this alarming trend. The triggers often seem trivial—rumours of theft or even accusations of stealing a mobile phone. Yet, these incidents escalate rapidly into brutal acts of collective violence. The reasons behind this phenomenon remain elusive. From kangaroo court verdicts that sanction beatings for couples in live-in relationships to the public thrashing of a mother and her son, mob violence is becoming increasingly prevalent. Historically, Bengal has seen its share of political violence, particularly in the late '60s and '70s, continuing into the Left Front regime. However, the recent spike in mob violence is unprecedented. In June alone, four people were killed and ten severely injured in 13 incidents within a fortnight—an alarming statistic that highlights the gravity of the situation. Despite drawing significant attention, these incidents have not deterred further crimes. This is particularly concerning under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee, who prides herself on running a woman-friendly administration. The involvement of ruling party functionaries in some of these violent acts only exacerbates the situation, tarnishing the reputation of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and its leader, popularly known as Didi.

The police administration appears to be struggling, often reacting only after the violence has occurred. The division within the TMC itself, with spokesperson Kunal Ghosh condemning a violent incident while legislator Hamidul Islam justifies it, reflects a lack of coherent strategy to address the issue. Most cases of mob violence have been concentrated in five districts in South Bengal, including Burdwan and Midnapur, but urban areas like Kolkata have not been spared. Perpetrators of these violent acts seem emboldened, operating with apparent impunity. The police's slow response and lack of preventive measures are glaring issues. It is imperative for the government to hold the police accountable and ensure they act promptly to prevent and address such incidents. Over 50 arrests were made in June, but this alone is insufficient. The cruelty exhibited in these acts of mob violence is chilling. Victims have been tied to trees and beaten to death, sometimes requiring police intervention to save them. The deep-seated hatred and ruthlessness in these acts cannot be explained solely by a desire to take the law into one's own hands. Often, the grievances are based on rumors and hearsay, targeting weaker individuals, including women, children, and the disabled.

A strong message must be sent that acting as judge, jury, and executioner is unacceptable. Strict and consistent penalties are essential to deter mob violence. However, punitive measures alone will not suffice. It is crucial to address the underlying social aggression and understand the provocations that turn ordinary citizens into perpetrators of violence. Delving into the root causes in the minds of people is necessary to effect lasting change. The rise of mob violence in West Bengal is a blot on the state's image and a threat to its social fabric. Urgent and decisive action is needed to restore law and order, ensure justice for victims, and prevent future occurrences. The government, police, and society must work together to combat this menace and uphold the values of justice and humanity.

## 'Seculars' against reservation benefits to Hindus in AMU!



By: Er. Rajesh Pathak

In Banaras Hindu University (BHU) poor upper caste Hindus; backward castes and SC/STs could avail the reservation benefits provided in the constitution; but not in Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). AMU hadn't been minority institution once. The land where today it stood was notably offered by Hindu Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh; and, Maharaja Vijaynagar, Maharaja Ptiyala and Nawabs donated money. Due to its all-weather bond of affection with Muslims, Congress govt. changed the Act in 1981 and called that its existence is predominantly for the education of Muslims.

In 2005 the matter went into the High Court which ruled it to be the violation of law. Then Congress took the recourse of the Division bench, where it could get no relief. Now the matter is under the Supreme Court. Hearing is over, and the judgment is kept reserved. And the senior advocates of 'Secular' moorings did not want that the deprived Hindu students could get justice.

In 2019 passed the Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) that offered great relief to Bangal's SC/STs like Namoshudras, Matuas and others who were made to flee Bangladesh in face of Jihad led terror. They notably once stayed back in Bangladesh under the assurance of their Dalit leader and the then Law minister, Jogenranath Mondal, of pre-partitioned unified Pakistan. But before the barbarity of the atrocities unleashed upon his fellow Dalit Hindus because

of their religion the eyes of Jogenranath Mondal opened to see the reality of so called Hindu-Muslim fraternity. And he left Pakistan in utter dejection within 3 years only. As their sole mentor left Pakistan, Hindus came under the grip of panic. This caused stampede among them, and they followed the suit, making exodus and coming to settle in India.

Today in Pilibhit city of Uttar Pradesh alone, 2.50 lakhs Bangladeshi Dalits are there. Congress never cared about their citizenship; and if anybody did that then it was Amit Shah and Narendra Modi. However, then who were seen to sit in Shaheen Bagh with Muslims against CAA? They were the same who are today spreading the rumor of so-called abolition of the provision of reservation in the constitution.

Whereas who have availed the benefits of CAA so far are none other than 70-75 % Dalits. This is what a Dalit MP, Brijlal, told in his speech in Rajyasabha; notably, who is also a retire IPS officer of Indian Police Services.

And what Mayawati thinks about Congress, see that also. When she supported the abolition of Article 370, Congress party set upon criticising her. At this her curt reaction was that Congress has always been against the humanity based principle of Dr. Ambedkar. Therefore he had to resign from the post of first Law Minister of the country. Neither congress ever allowed him to get elected for the Lok Sabha, nor honoured him as Baharat Ratna. (The author can be reached at [rajeshpathakbpl@rediffmail.com](mailto:rajeshpathakbpl@rediffmail.com))

## Divided NATO's three day summit in Washington to focus only on Ukraine

After NATO's catastrophic, illegal invasions of Yugoslavia, Libya and Afghanistan, on July 9, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) begins its three day summit in Washington. The British will not burn down the US Capitol as they did in 1814, and the Germans are still meekly pretending that they don't know who blew up their Nord Stream gas pipelines. So expect smiling photo-ops and an overblown orgy of mutual congratulation.

The details of NATO's agenda for the Washington summit were revealed at a NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Prague at the end of May. NATO will drag its members into the US cold war with China by accusing it of supplying dual-use weapons technology to Russia, and it will unveil new NATO initiatives to spend our taxes on a mysterious "drone wall" in the Baltics and an expensive-sounding "integrated air defence system" across Europe.

But the main feature of the summit will be a superficial show of unity to try to convince the public that NATO and Ukraine can defeat Russia and that negotiating with Russia would be tantamount to surrender.

On the face of it, that should be a hard sell in the US. The one thing that most US citizens agree on about the war in Ukraine is that they support a negotiated peace. When asked in a November 2023 Economist/YouGov poll, "Would

you support or oppose Ukraine and Russia agreeing to a ceasefire now?" 68 per cent said "support," and only 8 per cent said "oppose," while 24 per cent said they were not sure.

However, while NATO leaders hold endless debates over different ways to escalate the war, they have repeatedly rejected negotiations, notably in April 2022, November 2022 and January 2024, even as their failed war plans leave Ukraine in an ever-worsening negotiating position. The endgame of this non-strategy is that Ukraine will only be allowed to negotiate with Russia once it is facing total defeat and has nothing left to negotiate with - exactly the surrender NATO says it wants to avoid.

As other countries have pointed out at the UN general assembly, the US and NATO's rejection of negotiation and diplomacy in favour of a long war they hope will eventually "weaken" Russia is a flagrant violation of the "Pacific Settlement of Disputes" that all UN members are legally committed to under Chapter VI of the UN charter. As it says in Article 33(1):

"The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other

support to Ukraine "on a firmer footing for years to come." The effort will be headquartered at a US military base in Wiesbaden, Germany, and involve almost 700 staff. It has been described as a way to "Trump-proof" NATO backing for Ukraine, in case Trump wins the election and tries to draw down US support.

At the summit, Stoltenberg wants NATO leaders to commit to providing Ukraine with \$43 billion worth of equipment each year, indefinitely. Echoing George Orwell's doublethink that "war is



peaceful means of their own choice."

But NATO's leaders are not coming to Washington to work out how they can comply with their international obligations and negotiate peace in Ukraine. On the contrary, at a June meeting in preparation for the summit, NATO defence ministers approved a plan to put NATO's military

peace," Stoltenberg said: "The paradox is that the longer we plan, and the longer we commit [to war], the sooner Ukraine can have peace."

The summit will also discuss how to bring Ukraine closer to NATO membership, a move that guarantees the war will continue, since Ukrainian neutrality is Russia's principal war aim. As Ian Davis of NATO Watch reported, NATO's rhetoric echoes the

support to Ukraine "on a firmer footing for years to come." The effort will be headquartered at a US military base in Wiesbaden, Germany, and involve almost 700 staff. It has been described as a way to "Trump-proof" NATO backing for Ukraine, in case Trump wins the election and tries to draw down US support.

At the summit, Stoltenberg wants NATO leaders to commit to providing Ukraine with \$43 billion worth of equipment each year, indefinitely. Echoing George Orwell's doublethink that "war is

the same lines he heard throughout 20 years of war in Afghanistan: "The Taliban (now Russia) can't wait us out." But the vague hope that the other side will eventually give up is not a strategy.

There is no evidence that Ukraine will be different from Afghanistan. The US and NATO are making the same assumptions, which will lead to the same result. The underlying assumption is that NATO's greater GDP, extravagant and corrupt military budgets and fetish for expensive weapons technology will somehow, magically, lead

Ukraine to victory over Russia. When the US and NATO finally admitted defeat in Afghanistan, it was the Afghans who had paid in blood for the West's folly, while the US-NATO war machine simply moved on to its next "challenge," learning nothing and making political hay out of object denial.

Less than three years after the rout in Afghanistan, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin recently called NATO "the most powerful and successful alliance in history." It is a promising sign for the future of Ukraine that most Ukrainians are reluctant to throw their lives onto NATO's bonfire.

In an article titled "The New Theory of Ukrainian Victory Is the Same as the Old," the Quincy Institute's Mark Episkopos wrote, "Western planning continues to be strategically backwards. Aiding Kiev has become an ending in itself, divorced from a coherent strategy for bringing the war to a close." Episkopos concluded that "the key to wielding [the West's] influence effectively is to finally abandon a zero-sum framing of victory..."

We would add that this was a trap set by the US and Britain, not just for Ukraine, but for their NATO allies too. By refusing to support Ukraine at the negotiating table in April 2022, and instead demanding this "zero-sum framing of victory" as the condition for NATO's support, the US and Britain escalated what could have

been a very short war into a protracted, potentially nuclear, war between NATO and Russia. Turkish leaders and diplomats complained at how their US and British allies undermined their peacemaking, while France, Italy and Germany squirmed for a month or two but soon surrendered to the war camp.

When NATO leaders meet in Washington, what they should be doing, apart from figuring out how to comply with Article 33(1) of the UN charter, is conducting a clear-eyed review of how this organisation that claims to be a force for peace keeps escalating unwinnable wars and leaving countries in ruins.

The fundamental question is whether NATO can ever be a force for peace or whether it can never be anything but a dangerous, subservient extension of the US war machine.

NATO is an anachronism in today's multipolar world: an aggressive, expansionist military alliance whose inherent institutional myopia and blinkered, self-serving threat assessments condemn us all to endless war and potential nuclear annihilation.

The only way NATO could be a real force for peace would be to declare that, by this time next year, it will take the same steps that its counterpart, the Warsaw Pact, took in 1991, and finally dissolve what Secretary Austin would have been wiser to call "the most dangerous military alliance in history." (IPA Service)

## Could a Labour government forge a new strategic deal with India?

By: Dipak Kurmi

After reprimanding Rahul Gandhi for purportedly criticizing Hindus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi likely found satisfaction in the recent statements by Britain's new Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer. Wasting no time, Sir Keir affirmed that "Hindu-phobia has no place in Britain." Additionally, the accomplished lawyer, who soundly defeated Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, pledged to forge a "new strategic partnership with India."

Rishi Sunak's defeat likely resonated most deeply with his mother-in-law, Sudha Murthy, who resides in India and serves as a member of the Rajya Sabha. Sudha Murthy, known for proudly claiming credit for her husband, Infosys founder N.R. Narayana Murthy's success, also used to highlight how her daughter Akshata "had managed to make her husband Prime Minister of the UK." This turn of events underscores the enduring relevance of the observation made by American politician Dean Acheson in 1962: having lost an empire, Britain still struggles to find its role in the world.

Across Britain, Nigel Farage of the Reform UK party wasn't far off when he remarked on the lack of enthusiasm for the new Prime Minister. Despite the Labour Party's sweeping victory, securing two-thirds of the seats in the House of Commons with slightly more than one-third of the popular vote, the sentiment remains tepid. At 60 years old, and after finally entering Parliament on his eighth attempt, Mr. Farage is determined to challenge Labour's dominance.

Some members might be swayed by his persuasion, especially since the ideological lines that once set parties apart have blurred. This shift began when Tony Blair abandoned Labour's long-standing commitment to mass nationalization, transforming the party into the vote-winning New Labour.

Critics of the shift, both then and likely now, argue that the party's principles have become so indistinct that they could easily align with groups like the Liberal Democrats, Nigel Farage's Reform UK with its mere four MPs, or even Rishi Sunak's Conservatives. The latter, according to Labour-supporting ethnic Indian peer, Ayesha, Baroness Hazarika, have presided over 14 years of "economic, social, and political vandalism."

During this period, governance in Britain has declined under the leadership of five different Prime Ministers. The Conservative Party, comprising around 180,000 members, tends to represent individuals who are generally wealthier and older than the average citizen. There is a widespread belief-potentially unjust-that these members expect government financial policies and top state officials to prioritize their collective interests.

Rishi Sunak's elite background, marked by costly boarding schools and an Oxford education, coupled with his substantial wealth-rumored to surpass that of King Charles III-only bolstered his image as a plutocrat. His assets include a country house worth over £2 million, complete with extensive gardens and a lake. Sunak assumed office after Liz Truss, whose disastrous mini-budget in 2022 led to the resignations of both herself and her finance minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer Kwasi Kwarteng.

It was reported that Boris Johnson, who served as Prime Minister from 2019 to 2022, offered no assistance to Rishi Sunak as he navigated one crisis after another during his time in office. During those months, investment declined, insufficient new jobs were generated, and the once-venerated National Health Service faced numerous complaints of delays and negligence. Additionally, rising inflation and sluggish economic growth were exacerbated by Brexit, which extricated Britain from the European Union. Initially celebrated as a panacea, Brexit now seems to have introduced more problems than it resolved, particularly by deepening the divides between North and South, and between the rich and poor.

While Rishi Sunak crafted several commendable economic revival plans, many of them ultimately failed to materialize. Yet, as Britain's youngest Prime Minister since 1812 at the age of 42, and the first man of color-also a Hindu, taking his oath on the Bhagavad Gita-Rishi Sunak secured his place in history. Despite this distinction, he did not exhibit particular affinity for India, his ancestral homeland. Perhaps constraints prevented him from doing so. Alongside colleagues like Suella Braverman, a staunch hardliner of Goan descent, there were subtle jabs from certain Britons insinuating that his non-English background rendered him unfit to govern England.

Race continues to be a sensitive topic. Recently, Sir Keir Starmer faced considerable criticism for suggesting that people arriving from Bangladesh should be sent back, sparking a significant backlash.

He may have been seeking reconciliation when he specifically chose to embrace Sadiq Khan, London's ethnic Pakistani mayor, as his first gesture upon becoming Prime Minister-elect. Visiting North London's Shree Swaminarayan Mandir in Kingsbury, he paid homage and expressed admiration for Hindu culture, even pledging to govern with a spirit of service ("seva"). These actions could have been seen as efforts to mend relations.

India's relationship with Britain's Labour Party has been complex. Historically, the party was associated with India's independence movement; although Prime Minister Clement Attlee's statements sometimes irked Indian audiences by implying he had granted India independence. However, Indians in influential positions believed Labour had become influenced by Islamic fundamentalists, leading to resentment over its positions on issues like Jammu and Kashmir and the Gujarat religious riots. Labour politicians were also accused of organizing violent protests outside India's high commission in London, prompting the high commissioner to request police protection.

As India increasingly aligns itself with the West, particularly the United States, it becomes crucial to enhance its relationships with Europe, Japan, the European Union, and Britain. Sir Keir Starmer has emphasized a need for CHANGE, highlighting bilateral relations as a key area for improvement. The economic ties, with trade valued at £25 billion and India being the second-largest investor in Britain, creating over 8,600 new jobs, only scratch the surface of the deep and enduring social, cultural, and emotional bonds between the two nations. Despite these ties, India faces significant challenges, particularly from China, whose trade surplus with India continues to grow.

India and Britain have the opportunity to mutually revive stalled discussions on a free trade agreement, demonstrating equal flexibility. The British Prime Minister's proposal for a new strategic partnership with India marks a potential resurgence of the close cooperation seen in their historic relationship. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com))

## Hemant Soren's winning trust motion is testimony for failed 'operation Lotus'

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Chief Minister of Jharkhand Hemant Soren's winning trust motion on July 8 was on expected line, but its significance goes beyond just a formality in the Vidhan Sabha and a foregone conclusion. No vote was cast against the motion amidst BJP's walk-out from the House, signifying a total unity among the INDIA bloc allies on the one hand, and the utter failure of the alleged 'operation lotus' to break up the allies or the parties therein on the other. Additionally, BJP's walk-out is indicative of its waning political strength both in the House and in the state, at a time when Vidhan Sabha elections are scheduled to be held by 2024 year-end.

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha Executive President Hemant Soren after being taken oath again as Chief Minister on July 4 went for a floor test in Jharkhand Vidhan Sabha on Monday, July 8, 2024, and got 45 votes in support, while the majority mark in the 81 seat House is currently only 39, since 5 seats are vacant. There are currently only 76 MLAs in the Vidhan Sabha.

Among the INDIA bloc allies JMM has 27 MLAs in the House while INC has 16, CPI (ML) L 1, NCP 1, and RJD 1. A total of 45 votes cast in favour of Hemant Soren's trust vote. It should be noted that BJP has only 23 MLAs in the House, while its allies AJSU party has 3. Obviously, the BJP was not in a position to face the motion of trust by Hemant Soren in the House. Of the 76 MLAs, 46 are aligned with INDIA bloc, while only 30 are with BJP led NDA.

Pradeep Yadav, who had won as JVM (P) candidate, and now with the ruling coalition, has said that the BJP was trying to continuously destabilize the government by using "Operation Lotus", but failed. "Operation Lotus" is a term denoting the BJP's tactics of breaking up the non-BJP political parties through horse trading or by threat to the individual leader of ED or CBI actions giving them only two option - either support BJP or join BJP.

Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been saying the opposition INDIA bloc is a pack of corrupt politicians for several months now. He had vowed to take action against all corrupt politicians in the country. ED action against Hemant Soren is just part of PM Modi's strategy against the opposition leader. ED

had arrested him on money laundering charges on January 31 in connection of a land scam involving 8.86 acres in Ranchi, while the High Court of Jharkhand had given him bail on June 28 saying that there exist "reasons to believe that Soren is not guilty."

Just before arrest by ED, Hemant Soren had resigned from the post of Chief Minister, and made Champai Soren Chief Minister of the state. During the motion of trust, Pradeep Yadav has also referred to the numerous corruptions during the former BJP government in the state, and to substantiate his allegation he waived the front page of a book by former BJP leader and currently an independent MLA Saryu Roy in which there was mention of alleged corruption during the BJP regime. He also presented a booklet by Babul Marandi, when he was not in the BJP, but now Jharkhand BJP President, which detailed 46 corruption allegations against the BJP.

Just before the trust vote, Hemant Soren said on BJP's staging walk-out that the opposition does not have any agenda, that is shy its leaders are creating ruckus in the assembly. He also thanked Champai Soren for running the government and saving it during his five-month period in jail. He also said that even half of the opposition MLAs will not come back after the upcoming Vidhan Sabha election.

His claim about the BJP's imminent political loss is not off the mark if we look at the Lok Sabha election result 2024. BJP has lost 3 of its 11 seats, chiefly because of its support base shifting to other political parties, especially to a new entrant Jharkhand Bhasa Khatiyas Sangharsh Samiti (JBKSS) led by Jairam Mahto. Mahtos have traditionally BJP voters but young generation has shifted away from the party to JBKSS, which led to the loss. Mahtos who were formerly ST, now again demanding ST status, which BJP leaders have been denying. JBKSS has announced to contest majority of seats in the forthcoming assembly election and hence BJP is in great difficulty.

BJP's ally Nitish Kumar led JD(U) has already decided to contest Jharkhand Vidhan Sabha election without taking BJP into confidence, though they are part of NDA government in Bihar and at the Centre. It is indicative of the fact that everything is not well within the NDA. (IPA Service)

# July: Extremely important period for farmers experiencing mounting issues

By: **Munmun Singha Chowdhury**

Assam's economy is fundamentally based on agriculture. Over 70 percent of the state's population relies on agriculture as farmers, as agricultural laborers, or both for their livelihood.

July is an important month for farmers who rely on agriculture since it marks the start of the monsoon season, which is vital for land cultivation. During this season, farmers focus their efforts on crop production, which is critical to their families' income and survival. This month is critical in ensuring farmers receive a significant income, so raising their level of living.

However, the situation is far from ideal. Farmers usually face several problems that result in despair, worry, and a lower level of living. These concerns not only affect individual farmers but also endanger the livelihoods of a large percentage of the people.

To address these difficulties thoroughly, particularly in Assam, it is

critical to first understand the causes that contribute to them. Ignoring these challenges may jeopardize farmers' future livelihoods.

The difficulties are numerous, including yield volatility induced by irregular monsoons and changes in the climate, limited diversification of crops, unequal land distribution, fractured land holdings, unsecured land tenure, and inadequate conditions of work for agricultural laborers.

Furthermore, inadequate access to necessary supplies, insufficient irrigation, and unproductive marketing channels all contribute to decreased output and farmer revenue. The unpredictable character of monsoons, compounded by climatic change-induced weather patterns, causes yield instability, which impacts both the quantity and quality of crop products.

This unpredictability impedes farmers' ability to prepare adequately. India's existing agricultural techniques prioritize a few basic crops, resulting in an absence of crop diversification and greater susceptibility to diseases, pests, and market swings.

Unequal land distribution and own-

ership maintain social and economic imbalances, with a select few wealthy individuals owning enormous landholdings while the rest lives on scattered and small plots.

Insecure land tenure hinders long-term agricultural investment because farmers with insecure land rights are less likely to practice sustainable agriculture or invest extensively in their land. Agricultural laborers confront low earnings, bad conditions of employment, and an absence of social security. Limited access to superior fertilizers, pesticides, and manures reduces the productivity of soil and health of crops, further lowering agricultural yields. Addressing these difficulties in Indian agriculture necessitates a diverse strategy.

Adapting crop varieties and robust techniques for changing weather patterns, implementing early warning systems for extreme weather events, and encouraging organic farming to increase soil quality and minimize chemical inputs are all critical initiatives. Encouraging crop variety as a risk-mitigation technique will improve overall agricultural circum-

stances. The government must take aggressive steps to increase small and marginalized farmers' access to affordable financing, launch microfinance projects, and raise understanding of mitigation and adaptation to climate change options.

Policies that prioritize the growth of agriculture and provide assistance to marginalized farmers are critical.

Implementing these ideas collectively can help address India's agricultural challenges, promote sustainability, raise production, and improve the living conditions of farmers across the country. Indian agriculture is at a critical juncture, experiencing environmental, economic, and technical problems that jeopardize its viability.

Addressing these concerns is critical to the sector's long-term viability and stability. By implementing new solutions, regulatory reforms, and environmentally friendly procedures, India can revolutionize its agricultural environment and liberate its farmers for the coming generations. *(The author is the Director, Connection Point Academy)*

# How climate change is worsening water scarcity in the Andaman Islands



By: **Bikash Kumar Bhat-tacharya**

As clouds gathered on the horizon one morning in late May, the residents of Kadamtala in India's Andaman Islands were elated. "That was the first signs of rain in months," says Arati Karmakar, a villager. Kadamtala lies 77 kilometres north of the Andaman capital, Port Blair. "It heralded the end of the dry season and the start of a long-awaited respite," he adds.

The dry season in the Andaman archipelago, located in the northeast Indian Ocean, spans from January to May and has been associated with water scarcity for several decades now. However, this year has been particularly bad, with the authorities limiting water supplies to once every seven to eight days, forcing people to store drinking water and, in some cases, resort to using muddy pits for other purposes.

"Ever since I remember we have always faced seasonal water scarcity, but in recent years the situation has worsened," says Karmakar.

## Small islands, big problems

The Andamans, famed for their palm-tree dotted white beaches, consist of 836 islands in the Bay of Bengal, separated from Thailand and Myanmar by the sea that bears their name. Drinking water for the over 400,000 people who live on the 38 inhabited islands is sourced from reservoirs and springs. Water scarcity is a perennial issue, exacerbated during the dry season.

This island water crisis is not unique to the Andamans. Small island states worldwide are facing increasingly stressed freshwater resources. According to a study published in the journal Nature Climate Change, researchers estimated that by 2050, the majority of small island states will experience a decline in groundwater sources if climate change goes unabated.

The Andaman Islands exemplify the severe consequences of unaddressed water problems.

In Bakultala, a village north of Port Blair and near the shore, residents endured a ten-day stretch without water in early May. Narayan Mondal, the gram pradhan [village chief] of Bakultala, tells Dialogue Earth that over 10,000 residents were affected: "The exasperated villagers staged protests on multiple occasions."

## Step hills, inadequate aquifers

The Andaman chain of islands is characterised by rough terrain, with hills enclosing narrow elongated valleys. Flat land is scarce and the coral-fringed coasts are deeply indented, forming tidal creeks. The islands receive roughly 3,000 mm of rainfall annually, mainly from the southwest monsoon, comparable to rainfall levels in some parts of the Amazon.

However, nearly 75-80% of this water is lost to runoff into the sea. Geological features such as steep slopes, low soil permeability and close proximity to the sea lower the freshwater retention capacity of these islands.

A 2020 report by the Central Ground Water Board of India highlights that the South Andaman districts do not have good aquifers. On Little Andaman Island, which is underlain by coralline rocks and limestone, the groundwater that does exist is highly vulnerable to earthquakes. The 2004 earthquake and subsequent tsunami destroyed many dug wells "and water in dams disappeared," according to the report.

A more recent report from the Board, published in 2022, found that the water table is so low in North and Middle Andaman, that salty seawater seeps into freshwater, a process called "salinity ingress". Other islands have it even worse: on small Chowra, with a rocky upland at its southern end, the steep landscape means that whatever rainfall occurs gets discharged into the sea almost as soon as it lands.

Climate change is making things worse.

A Velmurugan, the principal scientist at the Central Island Agricultural Research Institute in Port Blair, says that rainfall distribution has become increasingly erratic on the islands. Preserving rainwater is difficult, making intense bouts of precipitation less useful than regular smaller rains.

"Although the total amount of rainfall remains the same, the num-

ber of rainy days has come down. Prior to 1990 rainfall used to commence from the first week of May, but now it has receded towards the end of May. This is likely an impact of El Niño that suppresses rainfall over India during the monsoon," says Velmurugan.

In 2023, the Andaman authorities claimed that inadequate monsoons, providing less-than-expected rainfall in the previous two years, had resulted in a water crisis. However, this is disputed by locals, who blame their water problems on chronic underinvestment.

Failing water infrastructure compounds the challenge of water shortages across Andaman – a Union Territory where the lieutenant governor, as the head of administration, has huge power.

## Ageing pipelines, public protests

India's Har Ghar Jal scheme, which was supposed to provide piped water to every household by 2024, was expected to increase funding and focus on water infrastructure.

However, TSG. Bhasker, chairman of Andaman Nicobar Territorial Congress campaign committee, says that over the years, administrators have treated the issue of Andaman's local water scarcity as a minor issue. "Local representatives often flag the problem of water shortage, but it hardly gets the attention it deserves," he says.

Some islanders believe the water scarcity they faced in early May was largely due to pipeline problems. "The pipeline that carries water from Panchawati spring to Bakultala was laid over 25 years ago. In recent years, there has been frequent leaks leading to water wastage," Mondal from Bakultala village tells Dialogue Earth. "Such loss of water due to failing infrastructure adds to the woes. The pipeline is in urgent need of repairs."

Harinagar, another village in Middle Andaman, also experienced water shortages due to leaking pipelines. Manojit Halder, Harinagar's gram pradhan, describes the combination of rainfall and infrastructure problems as "a double whammy".

In August, 2023, Kamorta Island witnessed massive public protests after authorities supplied muddy water for several days. SK Gupta, an assistant engineer at the Andaman Public Works Department (APWD), the agency responsible for water distribution, explains that damage to the filter bed of the water treatment plant was the cause. It took several weeks to replace the filter bed. Gupta adds that a lack of funding often hinders pipeline repairs.

## Policy problems, potential solutions

Kuldeep Rai Sharma, a former member of the Indian parliament representing Andaman and Nicobar islands, believes the issue is largely a policy problem. He advocates for a comprehensive water policy and a central agency dedicated to managing the water crisis: "People of Andaman have been demanding the establishment of a jal [water] board for better management and distribution of water."

A 2022 report by the Central Ground Water Board of India on Andaman's aquifers recommended the construction of check dams – small dams designed to slow water flow in channels – and ponds to preserve freshwater.

At present, the Dhanikhari reservoir is the only source of drinking water for Port Blair and its surrounding areas. Dependence on only one water source is risky, given the islands' seismic activity and ongoing climate changes disrupt the monsoon, raising temperatures.

"Therefore, it is imperative to develop more water sources such as reservoirs, ponds, check dams to meet the ever-increasing demand for water," Sharma says. "And solar-based desalination plants could be a good option for smaller islands."

Back in Kadamtala, villagers celebrate the clouds and the promise of rain they bring. In future, they will need more than the whim of an ever-changing weather cycle to ensure a steady water supply.

"If only we could find a way to store rainwater to use it in the dry season, our water woes would be over," says Karmakar. *(Courtesy: Scroll.in)*

# US reports first local plant extinction due to rising sea levels: Study

By: **Rohini Krishnamurthy**

Rising sea levels, a growing threat linked to climate change, may have claimed its first victim in the United States — a unique cactus species. A new study suggests the Key Largo tree cactus, discovered roughly three decades ago in North America, was driven to extinction locally in 2023.

The cactus, known scientifically as *Pilosocereus millspaughii*, once thrived in a single population in Florida Keys, an island chain particularly vulnerable to the effects of sea-level rise and storm surge as much of its land sits less than 5 feet above sea level. Researchers believe rising sea levels inundated its habitat with saltwater, ultimately leading to its demise.

While the species can still be found on a few scattered islands in the Caribbean, including northern Cuba and parts of the Bahamas, the loss of the Key Largo population marks a significant milestone in the fight against climate change and its impact on biodiversity.

Between 1971 and 2022,

the region's average sea level rose by 4.09 millimetres every year, or 0.21 metres total, according to data. Rising sea levels, soil depletion from hurricanes and high tides and mammalian herbivory have all contributed to an increase in saltwater intrusion in the region, the paper stated.

"Unfortunately, the Key Largo tree cactus may be a bellwether for how other low-lying coastal plants will respond to climate change," Jennifer Possley, director of regional conservation at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and lead author of the study, said in a statement.

The paper documents the species' collapse over the years. The cacti reportedly survived Hurricane Georges in 1998 and were not significantly impacted by a series of four hurricanes in 2005.

But things changed in 2015. The researchers counted only 60 live individuals during that annual monitoring event. This was a 50 per cent decline from the previous report in 2013.

Possley thinks this was due to worse storm surges in recent hurricanes. This, she added, could have been re-

lated to sea-level rise or storm intensity, the location of the eye of the storm, and the like.

While some species are known to migrate to higher elevations in response to climate change, this cactus population did not have the option. "They inhabit a small island of upland habitat, surrounded by mangrove forest, which has a wet, mucky substrate, and would not support this cactus' growth. The nearest suitable habitat was too far away for dispersal by fragmentation," Possley told Down To Earth.

Herbivory most likely played a role in it too. Cacti, according to the researchers, store water reserves in their stems in order to survive long periods without rain. This, they added, makes them attractive to animals dealing with water scarcity.

Since the year 2000, 19 named hurricanes have impacted the Florida Keys. In 2019, the region witnessed "king tides", staying flooded for up to three months, the study noted. King tides are unusually high levels of water that can cause local tidal flooding.

The researchers observed

an increase in saltwater flooding from king tides in the area.

"That limits the amount of freshwater available to small mammals and might be related to why the herbivores targeted this cactus, but we can't say for sure," study co-author James Lange, a research botanist at Fairchild, said in a statement.

By 2016, 28 rooted stems remained — a reduction of another 50 per cent from 2015.

By 2021, the team found only six ailing fragments, which were rescued for off-site cultivation. They returned to the site in July 2022 and again in July 2023 to search for any survivors that were missed in the previous rescue operations.

The team found no healthy material in 2022. However, in the following year, they saw a small, rooted fragment that was once in poor condition had re-grown to approximately 35 cm in height.

The team rescued this individual as well. "It was clear that the area will only continue to succumb to sea-level rise," they wrote in the paper. The year 2023 witnessed continued soil erosion in

higher-elevation areas. Mangroves and salt-tolerant vegetation also began to increasingly encroach on the area.

"The collapse of the Key Largo tree cactus was likely caused by the confluence of storm surges, sea-level rise and the 2015 herbivory event," the paper read. Other plant and animal species in the area are also at risk due to sea-level rise, the study warned.

The global sea level has risen by 103 mm since 1993, driven by water from melting ice sheets and glaciers, and the expansion of seawater as it warms, according to data from US agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Florida Keys is not the only region at risk. A 2013 report from the US-based nonprofit, Center for Biological Diversity, found that 17 per cent — one in six — of the nation's threatened and endangered species are at risk from rising sea levels. The top five species were Key deer, Loggerhead Sea turtle, Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel, Western snowy and Hawaiian monk seal. *(Courtesy: Down To Earth)*

# Protecting the vulnerable from monsoon's flood of diseases

By: **Indranil Mukhopadhyay**

While much of India was reeling under intense and prolonged heat, the tiny northeastern state of Sikkim recently faced flash floods that left nine people dead and stranded 1,200 tourists.

As India awaits the onset of the annual monsoon, past experience suggests the accompanying heavy rain not only causes the kind of flooding experienced in Sikkim but also throws up public health challenges.

Unplanned development, massive destruction of forest, construction of roads, dams and infrastructure and unchecked urbanisation have compounded the challenges manifold.

Even normal rainfall poses challenges. Stagnant rainwater becomes a fertile breeding ground for mosquitoes. Consequently, vector-borne diseases such as dengue and malaria affect entire neighbourhoods, leaving municipal health services in severe stress.

Over the last few years, there has been a surge in dengue cases in smaller towns and peri-urban areas, in states where dengue was unknown a decade ago. One study found that between January and October 2022, 110,473 dengue cases were reported in India. When a landmass is faced with an extreme weather event routinely, its people adapt to the ensuing challenges over time.

## The poor most vulnerable

People living in the Brahmaputra flood plains have learned to cope with floods over generations. But their coping mechanisms and strategies remain inadequate when faced with rain fury. A responsive state and its health system need to prepare so the human costs can be minimised.

The Indian experience shows that untimely and inadequate response from health systems has disproportionately impacted the poor and marginalised, who lack resources to cope with health catastrophes and challenges.

This is compounded by poor living conditions, inadequate social and family support systems, lack of information, and lack of political and social capital, inadequate financial resources and adverse work conditions. All these separately or in combination can shape health seeking behaviour and access to health care for vulnerable households in times of crisis.

While dealing with unprecedented or extreme weather events, India needs a multi-pronged approach which can go beyond the reach and scope of the existing health system.

A resilient health system is one which can respond to emergency situations, prepare to deal with impending crises and adapt to changing pub-

lic health needs. Much of the action in preparing a robust health system can happen at the local level around primary, preventive and public health initiatives.

Greater attention can also be paid to disaster and emergency response programmes. While rural and urban local bodies have a critical role, smaller towns and peri-urban areas are at greater risk as public amenities are stretched at best and rickety at worse.

## More investment is needed

A crucial prerequisite for this is greater public investment with immediate focus on urban and peri-urban areas. While the National Urban Health Mission has made modest beginnings in improving primary care systems in urban areas, the limited and varied ability of urban local bodies in generating revenues constrain progress.

In India, public spending on health remains in per capita terms. A National Health Accounts India report says that the per capita current public spending on health was around Rs 1,555 (USD\$18.6) in 2019-20.

Bhutan's spending on health was two-and-a-half times more than India's, while Sri Lanka's was three times more. Many BRICS nations spent 14-15 times more than India.

A paltry sum — 2.69 percent — of the total government budget is spent through local bodies. This translates to Rs 42 per capita — or just 50 US cents — a measly amount given the magnitude of the challenges.

Much of the spending happens in larger municipal corporations and metropolitan cities, while preventive health action remains largely absent in smaller towns and rural bodies.

A special fund from statutory institutions such as the Finance Commission, to be targeted towards building a resilient system for vulnerable areas, is urgently needed. Such attention needs to go beyond big cities to smaller towns.

Lack of public spending leads to systemic bottlenecks, which range from high number of vacancies in medical and programme staff, weak systems for reporting and information management, inefficiencies in procurement and distribution of essential medicines and consumables, underdeveloped referral systems and lack of funds for implementing proper planning and management strategies.

Urban health governance is complex, with multiple agencies and fragmented care provision, alongside an increasing presence and dominance of the private sector. The COVID experience showed that public health emergencies need greater coordination and cooperation in knowledge and data sharing.

A robust health system cannot be built without robust and actionable data.

## Weak health data

India's health system data architecture remains weak and incomplete. Institutions with access to data do not often collaborate or share data in public.

Under-reporting remains rampant. For example, while there were numerous reports in the media of increasing dengue fever in 2023, national and state reports showed a decline.

Government data reported only seven deaths due to dengue in Bihar in 2023. In Patna, the Bihar capital, anecdotal reports indicated more deaths. Protocols clearly spell out that multiple verifications are needed to ascertain dengue or malaria cases and deaths attributable to these diseases.

A moribund health system dealing with epidemic-like conditions often does not have the capacity for due diligence and therefore cases and deaths go unreported.

Besides, there is limited compliance from the private sector and lack of appreciation within policy institutions for building an eco-system for robust data which can feed into local planning and implementation.

Systems such as the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), established to monitor and strengthen disease outbreaks by putting together a decentralised surveillance system for epidemic prone diseases, needs to be universal and comprehensive.

Very little is spent on epidemiological surveillance, risk, and disease control programmes (2.77 percent) — only Rs 43 (US \$0.50) per capita. Only Rs 1,944 crore (US \$238,698.35) was spent on preparation on disaster and emergency response programmes, which constitutes only 0.33 percent of total public spending.

With the complex nature of the health and climate crisis, the current system of vertical disease control programmes, which create parallel systems for different diseases (such as tuberculosis) or set of diseases (vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue etc), need to give way to a comprehensive health system approach in management of public health programmes.

An immediate step towards this could be integration of frontline workers across various disease management programmes to create a cadre of multipurpose frontline public health professionals in urban areas, who would be accountable to communities as well as to the health system.

Such integration will also likely address one of the key challenges in India's public health sphere — shortage of adequately trained workforce in health and allied areas. *(Courtesy: The Wire)*

In 9 months of bombardment, Israel has killed more than 38,200 people and wounded more than 88,000

## Israeli strike in central Gaza kill 20 Palestinians as mediators make new push on cease-fire deal

**DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), July 10:** Israeli airstrikes early on Wednesday killed 20 Palestinians in central Gaza, including six children and three women, some of them inside a purported "safe zone" declared by the Israeli military, hospital authorities said.

This second straight night of deadly strikes in the central town of Deir al-Balah and nearby refugee camps came as U.S., Egyptian and Qatari mediators as well as Israeli officials came together in the Qatari capital, Doha, for talks trying to push through a long-elusive deal for a cease-fire and hostage release.

Israel and Hamas had appeared to narrow the gaps in recent days, but obstacles remain.

Strikes early on Wednesday hit three houses in the Nuseirat refugee camp, killing 12 people including five children, said authorities at al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, where the casualties were taken. An Associated Press reporter counted the bodies.

The camp, like others around Gaza, was originally erected to house Palestinians driven from their homes dur-

ing the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation. It has grown into an urban neighborhood in the decades since.

A fourth strike early on Wednesday killed four men, three women and a child when it hit a home in Deir al-Balah, an area that is located within the "humanitarian safe zone" where Israel has told Palestinians to seek refuge as it conducts offensives in multiple parts of the Gaza Strip.

The overnight bombardment came hours after Israeli warplanes struck the entrance of a school sheltering displaced families outside the southern city of Khan Younis. The toll from the strike rose to 31 people killed, including eight children, and more than 50 wounded, officials at the nearby Nasser Hospital said on Wednesday.

Footage aired by Al-Jazeera television showed kids playing soccer in the school's yard when a sudden boom shook the area, prompting shouts of "a strike, a strike!"

The Israeli army said the airstrike near the school and reports of civilian casualties were under review, and claimed it was targeting a Hamas militant who took part



in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, though it provided no immediate evidence.

The military blames civilian deaths on Hamas because the militants fight in dense, urban areas. But the army rarely comments on what it is targeting in individual strikes, which often kill women and children.

In nine months of bombardment and offensives in Gaza, Israel has killed more than 38,200 people and wounded more than 88,000, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count.

Nearly the entire population has been driven from their homes. Many have been displaced multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into sweltering tent camps.

Israel's onslaught was triggered by Hamas' cross-border

raid on Oct. 7, during which militants killed 1,200 people in southern Israel, most of them civilians, according to Israeli authorities.

The militants took roughly 250 people hostage. About 120 are still in captivity, with about a third said to be dead.

This week, Israeli troops have also been waging a new ground assault in Gaza City in the north of the territory — its latest effort to battle Hamas militants regrouping in areas the army previously said had been largely cleared.

Large parts of Gaza City and urban areas around it have been flattened or left a shattered landscape by previous Israeli assaults, and much of the population fled earlier in the war. But the latest incursions and bombardment prompted a new flight of people.

After Israel on Monday called for an evacuation from eastern and central parts of Gaza City, staff at two hospitals - Al-Ahli and the Patients Friends Association Hospital - rushed to move patients and shut down, the United Nations said.

The Israeli military said Tuesday that it told hospitals and other medical facilities in Gaza City they did not need to evacuate. But hospitals in Gaza have often shut down and moved patients at any sign of possible Israeli military action, fearing raids.

In the past nine months, Israeli troops have attacked at least eight hospitals, causing the deaths of patients and medical workers along with massive destruction to facilities and equipment.

Israel has claimed Hamas uses hospitals for military purposes, though it has provided only limited evidence.

Only 13 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are functioning, and those only partially, according to the United Nations' humanitarian office.

## China launches investigation in response to EU probes of solar, wind power and other products

**BEIJING, July 10:** China announced an investigation on Wednesday into whether the European Union has adopted unfair trade practices in its probes of Chinese companies bidding on projects in the 27-nation bloc. The move is the latest in a brewing trade war between the two economic giants.

The investigation will focus on wind power, photovoltaics, security equipment and electric trains, the Chinese Commerce Ministry said.

The EU has used a new regulation to investigate companies bidding for projects within the European Union. These include a probe into whether Chinese subsidies give wind turbine companies an unfair advantage in the competition for projects in Spain, Greece, France, Romania and Bulgaria.

China accused the European Union of protectionism and "reckless distortion" of the definition of subsidies in response to that investigation. The EU has also investigated Chinese companies bidding for a 455-megawatt solar park in Romania and for the procurement of 20 electric trains in Bulgaria.

The Chinese investigation will be completed before January 10, with a possible extension of three months to April. It was requested by China's Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products.

The EU imposed provisional tariffs on China-made electric vehicles last week over subsidies that it alleges gives an unfair advantage to automakers exporting from China. In response, China has launched an investigation into European pork exports.

Both the EU and the United States are worried that inexpensive Chinese automobiles could overwhelm their domestic producers and lead to factory layoffs. Chinese auto exports have risen about 30 per cent in the first six months of this year. (AP)

## Make no mistake, Russia failing in this war: Biden



**WASHINGTON, July 10:** US President Joe Biden on Tuesday announced a historic donation of air-defence equipment for Ukraine and said Russia is failing in this war.

Welcoming leaders of NATO member countries for the historic summit on the occasion of its 75th anniversary, Biden said the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Italy will provide Ukraine with the equipment for five additional strategic air-defence systems.

In the coming months, the US and its partners intend to provide Ukraine with dozens of additional tactical air-defence systems, he said, adding that the US will make sure that when "we export critical air-defence interceptors, Ukraine goes to the front of the line".

"They will get this assistance before anyone else gets it. All told, Ukraine will receive hundreds of additional interceptors over the next year, helping protect Ukrainian cities against Russian missile and Ukrainian troops facing air attacks on their front lines," Biden said.

"Make no mistake, Russia is failing in this war. More than two years into (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war of choice, his losses are staggering. More than 350,000 Russian troops dead or wounded, nearly one million (10 lakh) Russians, many of them young people, have left Russia because they no longer see a future in Russia," he said.

"Kiev, remember fellas and ladies, was supposed to fall in five days? Remember? Well, it is still standing two and a half years later and will continue to stand. All of the allies knew that before this war, Putin thought NATO would break. Today, NATO is stronger than it has ever been in its history. When this senseless war began, Ukraine was a free country. Today, it is still a free country," the US president said.

Reiterating that Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine continues, he said the Russian president wants nothing less than Ukraine's total subjugation to end that country's democracy, to destroy its culture and to wipe it off the map.

"We know Putin will not stop at Ukraine, but make no mistake, Ukraine can and will stop Putin," Biden said.

He said the war will end with Ukraine remaining a free and independent country. "Russia will not prevail. Ukraine will prevail. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a pivotal moment for Europe, for the transatlantic community and I might add, for the world. Let us remember, the fact that NATO remains the bulwark of global security did not happen by accident," he said.

"NATO is stronger, smarter and more emerged than when you began. And a billion people across Europe or North America, indeed the whole world, will reap the rewards of your labour for years to come in the form of security, opportunity and greater freedom," the president said.

In his remarks, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said there are no cost-free options with an aggressive Russia as a neighbour.

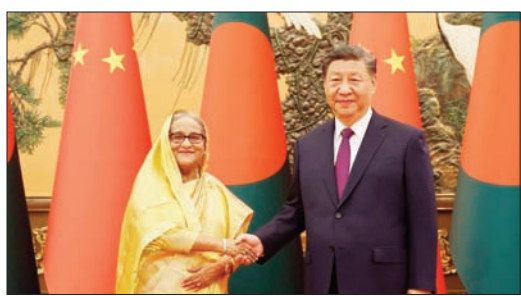
"There are no risk-free options in a war. And remember -- the biggest cost and the greatest risk will be if Russia wins in Ukraine. We cannot let that happen. Not only would it embolden President Putin, it would also embolden other authoritarian leaders in Iran, North Korea and China," he said.

He acknowledged that NATO's enduring success has never been a given, but is rather "the result of deliberate choices and difficult decisions" -- from the alliance's creation to arms control negotiations, and from NATO's enlargement at the end of the Cold War to its support to Ukraine today.

"The time to stand for freedom and democracy is now, the place is Ukraine," he said. Stoltenberg concluded by saying that the alliance will continue to face difficult questions in the future, but that "we are stronger and safer together in NATO".

Biden presented Stoltenberg with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States' highest civilian honour, in recognition of his decade of service at the helm of the alliance. (PTI)

## Bangladesh and China sign 21 agreements, MoU as PM Hasina meets President Xi



**BEIJING, July 10:** Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met President Xi Jinping and her Chinese counterpart Li Qiang here on Wednesday as the two countries signed 21 agreements, MoUs and announced seven more projects to further elevate their strategic cooperative ties.

During the meetings, both countries agreed to elevate their "strategic partnership" to a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership," Bangladesh's state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) reported.

China will help Bangladesh economically in four ways by giving grants, interest-free loans, concessional loans and commercial loans,

the Chinese President said during the bilateral meeting with Hasina, it said.

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, Bangladesh's State Minister at the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications & Information Technology posted a photo of the two leaders' meeting on X and said, "Hon'ble President of China, H E Mr Xi Jinping met and held a bilateral meeting with the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Wednesday."

Foreign Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud briefed the newsmen about the outcome of the meeting and described it as: "A very successful discussion was held between

the two leaders in a very cordial environment."

Giving out details about the Li-Hasina meeting, BSS said the agreements were inked in the presence of Hasina and Li after the delegation-level talks between the two countries.

Earlier, the Bangladesh prime minister was accorded a red carpet reception and greeted by Premier Li as she reached for the bilateral meeting.

The bilateral talks mainly featured the Rohingya issue, business, trade and commerce, investments, and bilateral relations alongside various regional and international matters.

The instruments on cooperation in the economic and banking sector, trade and investment, digital economy, infrastructure development, assistance in disaster management,

construction of 6th and 9th Bangladesh-China friendship bridges, export of agricultural products from Bangladesh and people-to-people connectivity were signed, the BSS report said. (PTI)

## New top US envoy to Taiwan pledges to help the island with self-defense as threats from China loom

**TAIPEI, July 10:** The United States' new top envoy to Taiwan promised on Wednesday that Washington will help the self-ruled island defend itself as China ramps up its military threats.

Raymond Greene, who assumed his new role as director of the American Institute in Taiwan on Monday, met with Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te.

"First of all, and the most important thing, the U.S. will strongly support Taiwan's self-defense capabilities," Greene said. "We both have common and long-term interests in peace and stability over the Taiwan Strait."

Lai said Taiwan will strive to maintain the status quo with Beijing, which claims the island democracy of 23 million people as its own territory, to be reclaimed by force if necessary.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry also said Wednesday it detected 36 Chinese military jets, including J-16 fighters and H-6 bombers, flying south and southeast of the island and headed into the Western Pacific to carry out drills with China's Shandong aircraft carrier.

The U.S., like most countries, does not recognize Taiwan as a country. But it's the island's main partner and is bound by U.S. laws to provide it with the means to defend itself. Less than a month ago, the U.S. State Department approved the sale to Taiwan of missiles and drones for an estimated \$360 million.

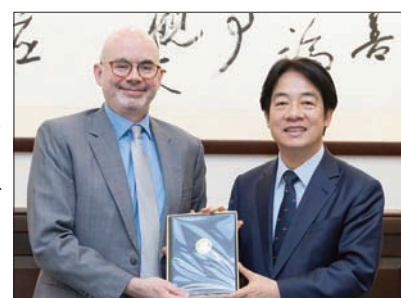
In April, the House of Representatives approved an \$8 billion military aid package for Taiwan.

"Taiwan and the U.S. are solid partners to each other who strive to maintain regional peace and stability," Lai said Wednesday.

The Chinese government didn't immediately comment on the meeting. The American Institute in Taiwan functions as a de facto embassy. Taipei also operates an Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the U.S. and similar de facto embassies in other countries.

China has ramped up its military pressure against the island since Lai took office in May. Beijing sees Lai as a separatist and refuses to speak with him.

In late June, Beijing threatened to hunt down and execute "hardcore" Taiwan independence supporters. In response, Taipei urged its citizens to avoid traveling to China and the semi-autonomous Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Macao. (AP)



## Kenya's president warns of huge consequences after his effort to address an \$80 billion debt fails

**NAIROBI, July 10:** The ballooning debt in East Africa's economic hub of Kenya is expected to grow even more after deadly protests forced the rejection of a finance bill that President William Ruto said was needed to raise revenue. He now warns "it will have huge consequences."

Facing public calls to resign, Ruto has said the government will turn to slashing a \$2.7 billion budget deficit by half and borrowing the rest, without saying from where.

After anger over bloated bureaucracy and luxurious lives of senior officials helped to fuel the protests, Ruto also has promised funding cuts in his own office and said funding would stop for the offices of the first lady, the "second lady" — the wife of the vice president — and the wife of the prime Cabinet secretary.

Almost four dozen state enterprises with overlapping roles will be closed.

Ruto has become deeply unpopular in his two years in office over his quest to introduce taxes meant to enable



Kenya to repay its \$80 billion public debt to lenders including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and China.

The public debt makes up about 70% of Kenya's gross domestic product, the highest in 20 years.

How Ruto's administration will find the money to pay off debt without further angering millions of Kenyans barely getting by, and without slowing down the economy, is the key question. The economy grew 5.6% in 2023.

Economist Mbui Wagacha, a former adviser to previous President Uhuru Kenyatta, said Kenya needs a professional budget and management body like the Office of Management and Budget in the U.S.

Currently, Kenya's treasury makes budget estimates and forwards them to the parliament

finance committee, which creates the finance bills.

"Parliament has abdicated its mandate on the public finances in the Constitution and it's looking after its own interests," Wagacha said in an interview.

He said further borrowing by Kenya could be "disastrous" and proposed a strategy of using diplomacy to attract investment and restructuring the debt in an attempt to get creditors to write off some of it.

Another economist, Ken Gichinga, agreed that government borrowing will slow down Kenya's economy. Businesses still haven't recovered from the effects of the COVID pandemic and the war in Ukraine, he said.

"When the government borrows more, interest rates go up. And when interest rates go up, businesses slow

down, the economy slows down, due to the high cost of repayment," Gichinga said.

Kenya's president has advocated self-sustainability, saying the country should raise more revenue instead borrowing. "If we are a serious state, we must be able to enhance our taxes," he said in May.

But Kenyans have rejected attempts to raise taxes as they struggle with rising prices on basic goods, even storming parliament during the recent protests.

Last week, days after announcing he would not sign the finance bill he once championed, Ruto said he had worked hard "to pull Kenya out of a debt trap" and that huge consequences lie ahead.

Wagacha said economic growth must come before the government increases revenue targets and tax collection.

"You create an expanded economy with employment and with investment, and people have money in their pockets. It's much easier for them to hear about your request for taxes," he said. (AP)

## The search intensifies for dozens buried in an Indonesian landslide that killed at least 23 people

**PALU, July 10:** Search efforts for those trapped in a deadly landslide intensified on Wednesday, with more rescuers deployed to search an unauthorized gold mine on Indonesia's Sulawesi island that saw 23 deaths over the weekend.

More than 100 villagers were digging for grains of gold Sunday in the remote and hilly village of Bone Bolango in Gorontalo province when tons of mud plunged down the surrounding hills and buried their makeshift camps.

The provincial Search and Rescue Office said Wednesday that 81 villagers managed to escape from the landslide, several of them pulled out by rescuers, including 18 with injuries. It said 23 bodies were recovered, including a 4-year-old boy, while 33 others were missing.

More than 1,000 personnel, including army troops, were deployed to increase the strength of search efforts, said Edy Prakoso, the National Search and Rescue Agency's operation director. He said the Indonesian Air Force would send a helicopter as it was the only way to speed up the rescue operation that has been hampered by heavy rains, unstable soil, and rugged terrain.

Informal mining operations are common in Indonesia, providing a tenuous livelihood for thousands laboring in conditions that pose a high risk of serious injury or death. Landslides, flooding and collapses of tunnels are just some of the hazards facing miners.

Much of gold ore processing involves highly toxic mercury and cyanide with workers frequently using little or no protection.

The country's last major mining-related ac-

cident occurred in April 2022, when a landslide crashed onto an illegal gold mine in North Sumatra's Mandailing Natal district, killing 12 women who were looking for gold.

Environmental activists have campaigned for years to shut down such operation across the country, especially on Sulawesi, where the practice has grown in recent years.

"The local government which has allowed illegal gold mining activities in this area to continue has contributed to the deadly disaster," said Muhammad Jamil, who heads legal division of the Mining Advocacy Network, an environment watchdog known as JATAM.

He said that gold mining involves many people who share blame, from those working on the ground all the way up to officials in the local council and even the police.

"This mafia network would have helped shield the miners from law enforcement, even as they tear up protected forests," Jamil said.

"When natural resources such as rivers, forests, land and the sea are damaged, it will be a complete loss to the country's economy," Ferdy Hasiman, a mining and energy researcher from Alpha Research and Datacenter, said the proliferation of the pit mines has long been blamed for environmental damage in upstream areas that has in turn exacerbated flooding and landslides downstream.

"Flash floods and landslides would persist if illegal mining and the deforestation in the practice continue," Hasiman said. "We call on the local and central government to expand their efforts to shut down illegal gold mining across the country." (AP)

## Pakistani court dismisses pre-arrest bail petitions of ex-PM Imran Khan in May 9 riot cases

**LAHORE, July 10:** A Pakistani anti-terrorism court (ATC) has dismissed pre-arrest bail petitions of former prime minister Imran Khan in three cases of May 9 riots which erupted following his arrest in a graft case.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder-chairman was booked on the charges of abetment in attacks on Lahore Corps Commander House known as Jinnah House, Askari Tower, and Shadman police station on May 9, 2023.

Supporters of Khan attacked several important government buildings and army installations following his arrest in an alleged corruption case in May last year.

ATC Lahore Judge Khalid Arshad refused pre-arrest bail to Khan and dismissed his petitions in the three cases, after the prosecution equated the May 9 violence to the United States Capitol Hill attacks by supporters of former US president Donald Trump in 2021.

The prosecution said the police required custody of the former premier to complete the investigation in the three cases.

The 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician is facing over 200 cases and has been in Rawalpindi's Adiala jail since August last year.

Judge Arshad announced the short order at 7 pm, which he reserved on July 6 after hearing the final arguments of the prosecution and the petitioner's counsel, the Dawn newspaper reported on Wednesday.

Due to the absence of Khan's legal team, the judge decided that the court would announce a short order. The judge said the detailed verdict will be released on Wednesday.

The attendance of the incarcerated PTI's founding chairman could not be marked via video link due to "poor internet service" in Adiala jail, Rawalpindi, the report said.

Rejecting allegations of conspiracy and abetment, Barrister Salman Safdar had argued that there was no witness to prove that Khan incited violence and questioned how he could have conspired given his custody on May 9 and release on May 11.

He mentioned that Khan condemned the protests and urged his supporters to refrain from violence after his release. (PTI)

*'Joined SKM as public mood in its favour'*

## Lone SDF MLA Tenzing Norbu Lamtha joins ruling SKM

**GANGTOK, July 10:** Tenzing Norbu Lamtha, the lone Sikkim Democratic Front MLA on Wednesday joined the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha claiming that the public mood stood overwhelmingly in favour of the SKM led by Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang.

"I consulted my constituents who suggested to me to join the SKM as the mood and momentum is in favour of the ruling party," he told reporters.

Hailing the leadership of Tamang, Lamtha said the "SKM government did a tremendous job in the past five years for the development of the state and welfare of the people who handed a landslide



mandate to the ruling party in appreciation of its performance." The first-time MLA from Shyari

constituency claimed that the people have clearly given a message that there was no need for opposi-

tion to the SKM in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly and outside as reflected in the mandate.

Earlier, the chief minister welcomed Lamtha into the SKM family saying: "I am pleased to meet the Hon'ble Member of Legislative Assembly from the 23-Syari Constituency, Shri Tenzing Norbu Lamtha, at my official residence, Mintokgang, today."

"He has officially joined our SKM family," he said in a Facebook post.

Tamang said Lamtha raised several commendable concerns related to the welfare of his constituency which will be considered for the benefit of the entire Syari constituency under a com-

prehensive development plan for the area and its people.

Lamtha had defeated senior SKM leader and Education Minister Kunga Nima Lepcha by 1,314 votes in the assembly polls held recently. The speculation about him joining the SKM was ripe since the results were declared on June 2 with Lamtha hinting that he may switch sides for the sake of development of his constituency.

"I will decide the future course post public consultation," he was quoted as saying when asked about his next move.

The SKM had won 31 seats in the 32-member Sikkim Assembly with the opposition SDF winning only one seat. (PTI)

## We are in touch with PM 24/7: Manipur CM



**IMPHAL, July 10:** Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday said whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits the state or not is a non-issue, since his government is in touch with him round the clock.

Singh's statement came two days after Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi visited Manipur and requested Modi to come to the ethnic strife-affected state to offer some solace to the people.

"It is not a question of the PM visiting the state or not. The coming of the PM depends on the situation," the chief minister told reporters on the sidelines of the extended executive meeting of the

state BJP.

Singh, however, did not clarify what he meant by "the situation". "We are maintaining contact with him 24/7 and working under his guidance. All relief works, security measures, food and medical provisions are being carried out following the Prime Minister's advice and consent," he said.

Ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities in the northeastern state claimed more than 200 lives since May last year.

"Reconciliation efforts between the two communities are going on. We have to solve the issues," Singh said. The recent flood in the state was among the issues discussed in the BJP meeting, he said. (PTI)

## ASF claims 5,321 swine deaths in Mizoram

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, July 10:** The number of swine deaths caused by African Swine Fever in Mizoram reached 5,321 as of July 9, with 299 pigs reported dead and 435 culled. Mamit district is the worst affected with 137 pigs reported dead on July 9, at the tourist town of Reiek.

According to officials from the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department, the total number of pigs that died from January to July 9, 2024 in Mizoram is 5321, while 10,040 pigs have been culled since.

Meanwhile, the highest number of pig fatalities this year was recorded on June 20 with 328 deaths and 306 pigs culled.

The department also mentioned that 159 villages/localities across the state have been infected by the swine flu. Department officials said the resurgence of the ASF outbreak has been continuing since 2021. They added that the flu is prevalent in warm monsoon weather. The Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department stated that 33,417 pigs died due to ASF in 2021, 12,795 in 2022 and 1,039 in 2023.

## Normal life hit due to 'total shutdown' in Kuki-majority areas

**IMPHAL/CHURACHANDPUR, July 10:** Normal life was affected in at least four districts of Manipur due to a 12-hour "total shutdown" called by a major Kuki organisation of the northeastern state to protest against the arrest of five people belonging to the community.

Markets, educational institutions and banks remained closed in Churachandpur, Kangpokpi, Pherzawl and Tengnoupal districts, owing to the 6 am-to-6 pm strike call by the Kuki Inpi, official sources said.

Government offices also recorded thin attendance, they said. Security was heightened in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi to ensure that no untoward incidents occur, the sources said. In Churachandpur and Tengnoupal, protestors demonstrated and chanted slogans at many places, denouncing the arrest. The recent arrest of two persons in Jiribam and three others in Kangpokpi "poses a significant security threat" for them, the Kuki Inpi had said in a statement on Tuesday. Ethnic violence in Manipur since May last year has resulted in the death of over 200 people, while thousands have been rendered homeless. (PTI)

## Sikkim Police forms SIT to find missing former minister

**GANGTOK, July 10:** The Sikkim Police on Wednesday set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to find 80-year-old former minister Ram Chandra Poudyal who went missing on July 7, an officer said.

The octogenarian politician has been reported to be missing after he left home on Sunday morning. He had told his family that he would return by the afternoon on that day.

"A Special Investigation Team has been constituted to investigate the missing person case of Ram Chandra Poudyal (80), a resident of Chota Singtam in Pakyong district," the Superintendent of Police (SP) of the district, Karma Gyamtso Bhutia, said. (PTI)

## NLSA provides ₹ 36.85 lakh victim compensation to 17

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, July 10:** The Nagaland State Legal Services Authority (NLSA) distributed ₹ 36.85 lakh as victim compensation to 17 people for the financial year 2023-2024 under the Nagaland Victim Compensation Scheme, 2012, and National Legal Services Authority Compensation Scheme for Women Victims, Survivors of Sexual Assault and Other Crimes 2018.

The amount was sanctioned through the state home department (relief and rehabilitation) to the 17 applicants from different districts of the state. The victims included 14 minor girls, one minor boy and two males, an official release said on Wednesday.

The claims were recommended by the district legal services authorities and NLSA and forwarded to the state home department for sanctioning the amount.

The applications included cases of rape, sexual assault and loss of life under the POCSO Act, and loss of life in other crimes.

The victim compensation scheme was introduced to give compensation to victims or dependents who had suffered loss or injury as a result of crime and who require rehabilitation.

Applicants can submit applications before the legal services authority of the state and attach them with an FIR, medical reports, and a copy of the judgment or recommendation if the case is disposed off.

After scrutiny, the compensation is awarded based on factors such as the gravity of the offence, loss of livelihood, age (in case of death), monthly income, number of dependents, and if the crime is an isolated incident or part of a series over a period of time.

## Tripura power minister voices concern over surge in gas prices

**AGARTALA, July 10:** Tripura's Power Minister Ratan Lal Nath has voiced concern about the recent surge in gas prices impacting the state's power generation costs, according to an official release on Wednesday.

During the fiscal year 2020-21, Tripura State Electricity Corporation (TSECL) spent an average of ₹ 10.66 crore monthly on gas purchases. This figure has since risen to ₹ 30 crore per month in the 2022-23 fiscal.

"The recent increase in gas prices has significantly raised the cost of power generation in Tripura. I appeal to the Ministry of Power to collaborate with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas to reconsider gas pricing under APM arrangements, which is crucial for maintaining affordable electricity rates," the release quoted Nath as stating.

Nath addressed these concerns at the North Eastern Power Ministers' conference in Guwahati, held in the presence of Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Tuesday. Highlighting the challenge of gas supply shortages from ONGC's Tripura fields, Nath emphasised the impact on the state's predominantly gas-based power generation units.

"This is affecting the state-



owned gas-based power plants and necessitating additional power purchases from the exchange market. The situation has posed financial challenges for the state's power utility body," it said.

Advocating for comprehensive support from the central government to ensure sustainable and affordable electricity services, Nath proposed reinstating the Power System Development Fund to strengthen advancements in the power sector.

He also highlighted Tripura's proactive pursuit of solar power projects under initiatives like PM-DevINE and PM-KUSUM.

These efforts include installations such as micro-grid solar

power plants, solar street lighting systems, and rooftop solar panels on government buildings across the state.

Nath further mentioned significant financial assistance secured, including a ₹ 2,275 crore agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), aimed at bolstering Tripura's power sector. "Initiatives like the Revamped Reformed based Result-linked Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) and PM-JANMAN aim to enhance operational efficiency and provide electricity connections to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) households, notably the Reang community," it quoted the minister as saying. (PTI)

## NSF urges Nagaland govt to implement ILP in Dimapur

**KOHIMA, July 10:** The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has urged the state government to bring Dimapur district under the Inner Line Permit (ILP) regime and take steps to eliminate backdoor appointments in government jobs. The NSF made the appeal through a representation to Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio during their meeting at the latter's office here on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the NSF underscored the ILP's importance in managing illegal immigration and safeguarding Naga identity, culture, and demographics. The NSF lamented that over the past several decades, successive governments have struggled to execute the ILP diligently.

The exclusion of Dimapur district (erstwhile) from the ILP regime, as indicated by the suspension order dated June 2, 2023, has created a perilous haven for illegal immigrants, it said.

The NSF urged the immediate reversal of the ILP suspension order for Dimapur and proposed the establishment of monitoring cells at key entry points to enforce the regulations across all district headquarters.

On the issue of government job appointments, the NSF acknowledged the establishment of the Nagaland Staff Selection Board (NSSB) for merit-based recruitment in Grade-III posts.

However, they voiced concern over alleged backdoor appointments in various departments. "The federation, through RTI campaign, has uncovered numerous discrepancies that suggest a continuation of this practice, undermining the integrity of our administrative system," it said. (PTI)

## Nagaland to provide free travel to PwDs in NST buses

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, July 10:** In a noble gesture, the Nagaland govt has decided to extend free travel facilities in the Nagaland State Transport (NST) passenger buses to the persons with disabilities (PwDs) within the state.

In a notification on Wednesday, the state transport department said for identification of persons with benchmark disabilities (PwBDs) to avail free travel facilities, unique disability identify (UDID) card issued by the department of empowerment of persons with disabilities, ministry of social justice and empowerment of persons with disabilities, Government of India, or valid disability certificate issued by a competent

authorised medical board would be prerequisite. The free travel pass will be issued by the NST general manager's office in Dimapur on payment of ₹ 50 which is renewable after two years against payment of ₹ 20. In case of any damage or loss, new free travel pass will be issued on payment of ₹ 50.

The applicants may submit their applications directly to the NST general manager's office, or through the district NST office.

Companion, if any, of the PwBDs will have to pay full fare against prior reservation on request to occupy a seat next to the PwBDs. However, for a PwBD with 80% or more disabilities or multiple disabilities who require assistance, free travel bus travel fa-

city will be allowed to one associate.

The free travel facility for PwDs is permissible for to and fro journey, including break journey, or the journey from the originating station to the terminating station will be considered as completion of one stretch of journey. The free travel facility will be limited to four seats in a particular bus in open space behind the driver's seat in the first and second row. The seat will be reserved and marked accordingly.

For availing the facility, a request in advance or at least one day ahead of departure of the bus will be preferred subject to availability of seats. This free travel facility will be non-transferable, and any imposter so de-



tected will be liable to prosecution.

Any pass that is misused will be cancelled, the NST department added.

## Fish farming in Manipur

GOI has introduced PMMSY towards the fish sector development

future economy of Manipur.

As the state observed the 24th National Fish Farmers Day today, concerned officials and the department stated about the fish farming situation in Manipur and the measures they have been taking.

Addressing the gathering, M.H. Khan, Special Chief Secretary, Forest, RD & PR, TA & Hills, Government of Manipur, said that fishery is the future of the economy of Manipur. The shortage of fish production faced earlier in the state has been overcome by the efficient, hard working and dedicated fish farmers of the state along with the help of modern technologies, he also said. They are also playing a vital role in sav-

ing the indigenous Sareng (a type of fish in Manipur).

He further expressed how Andhra Pradesh and other South Indian states play a major role in fish production. He mentioned the proposed action plan by the Chief Minister of Manipur in the year 2020 with the help of Central Agricultural University (CAU), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and other experts from the Government of India to meet the demand and supply gap of fish production in Manipur.

Khan further opined how the state is socio-economically dependent on this activity for their livelihood.

The Government of India has in-

troduced the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) towards the fish sector development. Besides this, the Department must converge with departments like Agriculture, Horticulture, Forest and Environment and Climate Change in improving, preserving and production of the indigenous fish varieties.

Further, the officer then urged to introduce more training programs of fish farmers and to take up capacity building programs to the related staff for augmenting their fishery activities.

H Balkrishna Singh, director, fisheries Manipur expressed that, with the contribution and rigorous help from our efficient fish farm-

ers, "we have been able to fulfil the shortcomings successfully within a short period of time".

He further added that the hatchery farms have started functioning in recent times.

The Fishery department along with the fish farmers, have been able to achieve 'Sustainable Right of aquaculture'. Lastly, assuring that the Department of Fisheries is ever ready to help each fish farmer, he appealed to the farmers to give their best.

Six successful fish farmers who are involved in promoting Sareng shared their experiences and were being felicitated along with some officials of the directorate in the function. (NNN)



**IMPHAL, July 10:** The Government of Manipur has been taking

up various measures for further improvement of the production of

fish in the state. The state government feels that fish farming is the

# Bypolls: Sporadic violence reported in Uttarakhand, West Bengal

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** Moderate to brisk polling was recorded in 13 assembly constituencies across seven states where bypolls were underway on Wednesday amid sporadic incidents of violence in Uttarakhand and West Bengal. Voting began at 7 am and will continue till 6 pm.

The electoral exercise, the first since the Lok Sabha polls, will decide the fate of many veterans and some debutantes, including Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's wife Kamlesh Thakur. The bypolls are being held against vacancies created either due to deaths or resignation of incumbent members.

Barring Uttarakhand and West Bengal, polling has been peaceful in the rest of the states so far.

In Uttarakhand's Mangalaur constituency, four party supporters were injured in a clash between workers of different political parties at a polling booth.

Some reports claimed there was firing at the booth too. However, police denied the reports.

Purported videos of the clash on social media showed Congress candidate and former MLA Qazi Nizamuddin taking a man in bloodstained clothes to the hospital. He accused the BJP of throttling democracy by sowing seeds of hatred. Another video showed him em-



bracing an injured party worker at the hospital and crying aloud.

Violence erupted at the booth when some people with half their faces covered entered the booth and started stopping people from casting their votes, sources said.

Several Congress leaders, including former chief minister Harish Rawat, Leader of Opposition in the state assembly Yashpal Arya and Congress MP from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh Imran Masood condemned the violence, saying it had never happened in Uttarakhand before.

While 43.88 per cent of the voters exercised their franchise in Mangalaur till 1 pm, Badrinath reported 33.08 per cent.

The Mangalaur bypoll was necessitated by the death of sitting BSP MLA Sarwat Karim Ansari in October last year while the Badrinath seat fell vacant after sitting Congress MLA Rajendra Bhandari resigned and switched to the BJP in March this year.

In West Bengal, violence was reported in Bagdah and Ranaghat Dakshin as the BJP accused TMC activists of assaulting its booth agents and stopping its candidates from visiting some polling stations.

BJP candidates Manoj Kumar Biswas and Binay Kumar Biswas from Ranaghat Dakshin and Badgah respectively claimed they were not allowed to visit some booths.

The TMC denied the allegations and dubbed them as "baseless".

The BJP has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against these incidents.

A voter turnout of 38.28 per cent was recorded till 1 PM in the bypolls to four assembly constituencies in the state.

Among the constituencies, Ranaghat Dakshin witnessed the highest turnout at 42.19 per cent, followed by Raiganj at 41.38 per cent, Bagdah at 35.66 per cent and Manikatala at 33.37 per cent.

In Himachal Pradesh, a voter turnout of about 48 per cent was recorded till 1 pm in the bypolls in three assembly constituencies.

The Nalagarh assembly constituency recorded the highest polling of 51.59 per cent, followed by Hamirpur (47.05 per cent) and Dehra (46.47 per cent), according to data till 1 pm shared by the state election department.

The seats fell vacant after the three independent legislators Hoshiyar Singh (Dehra), Ashish Sharma (Hamirpur) and K L Thakur (Nalagarh), who had voted in favour of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha polls held on February 27, resigned from the House on March 22.

In Punjab, the bypoll to the Jalandhar West assembly segment saw a voter turnout of 34.40 per cent till 1 pm. At many polling sta-

tions, plants were given to voters who exercised their franchise.

The ruling AAP has fielded Mohinder Bhagat, the son of former minister and former BJP MLA Bhagat Chundi Lal. Bhagat had joined the AAP after quitting the BJP last year.

The Congress has placed its bet on Surinder Kaur, who is the former senior deputy mayor and five-time municipal councillor in Jalandhar. She is a prominent Dalit leader of the Ravidassia community.

The BJP has fielded Angural, who switched sides in March after quitting the AAP. He had won this seat in the 2022 Punjab assembly polls on an AAP ticket.

In Bihar, a voter turnout of 39.36 per cent was recorded till 1 pm in the bypoll to Rupauli Assembly seat.

The bypoll was necessitated following the resignation of sitting MLA Bima Bharti, who won the seat for JD(U) several times in the past, but quit the party to contest the Lok Sabha elections on a RJD ticket. Following her loss in the parliamentary election, she contested in the bypoll as an RJD candidate.

Brisk polling was witnessed in the bypoll to Vikravandi assembly constituency in Tamil Nadu with voters queuing up in large numbers at polling stations to exercise their franchise. (PTI)

# BJP MLAs slam oppn for boycotting all-party meet on quota

Assembly adjourned 3 times



**MUMBAI, July 10:** Uproarious scenes were witnessed in the Maharashtra assembly on Wednesday as BJP members criticised the opposition for boycotting the all-party meeting called by the government on the Maratha reservation issue the previous day.

Amid slogan-shouting by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members and noisy scenes, the House was adjourned three times.

Raising the issue in the Lower House, Ameet Satam (BJP) accused the opposition of playing politics over the quota issue.

He asked the opposition to clarify its stand on the demand that Marathas be given reservation from the OBC (Other Backward Classes) quota.

"The opposition only wants to create a rift between the two communities," he charged.

Ashish Shelar (BJP) claimed the opposition backtracked at the last minute from attending the all-party meeting.

Members of the treasury benches trooped into the well of the House, slamming the opposition. Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadetiwar accused the government of creating a social divide and remembering the opposition when things spiral out of control.

"Social tensions are the sin of the Mahayuti government," he alleged. BJP MLA Sanjay Kute objected, saying all-party meetings were held earlier also to discuss the quota issue and the opposition attended them.

He claimed that Congress and NCP leaders have opposed reservation to Marathas. It is the BJP-led government which gave reservation to Marathas, Kute said. Shelar demanded that the opposition apologise to the Marathas and OBCs. "The opposition has no intention to resolve the issue," he claimed.

Speaker Rahul Narwekar adjourned the House initially for 5 minutes and later for 10 minutes.

When the House reassembled following the second adjourn-

ment, Nitesh Rane (BJP) said the opposition's "real face" has been exposed.

"They should immediately clarify whether they want a separate quota for Marathas or from the OBCs (category)," he said.

Shelar sought to know at whose instance the opposition backtracked at the last minute. "Whose message or phone call was it?" he asked.

When Wadetiwar rose to speak, members of the treasury benches, who were in the well of House, started shouting slogans. The speaker then adjourned the House for 45 minutes.

The Maharashtra government pushed for evolving a consensus on reservation in jobs and education for Marathas at the all-party meeting here on Tuesday evening and asserted that while resolving the emotive issue, the existing quota of other communities will not be disturbed.

The opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress and NCP (SP), boycotted the all-party meet.

It was convened ahead of the assembly polls due in October and days before the end of a deadline set by Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange for the state government to accept the community's demands, including quota under the OBC category.

Last month, OBC quota activists Laxman Hake and Navnath Waghmare went on a hunger strike demanding that the draft notification that gives Kumbi certificates to Marathas to avail quota benefits under the OBC category be scrapped.

Kumbi, an agrarian community, falls in the OBC category, and Jarange, spearheading the agitation over the reservation issue, has been demanding Kumbi certificates for all Marathas, making them eligible for reservation benefits in education and government jobs. (PTI)

# Victim of witch-hunt, falsely implicated in motivated case: Kejriwal to Delhi HC

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has contended before the Delhi High Court that he is a victim of "witch-hunt" by the ED and that cancellation of his bail granted by a trial court in the excise policy-linked money laundering case would tantamount to "grave miscarriage of justice".

Opposing the Enforcement Directorate's plea challenging his bail in the case, the embattled chief minister said discretionary orders of bail cannot be set aside merely on "perceptions and fanciful imagination" of the prosecution. "The order passed by the special judge granting bail was not only well reasoned but prima facie showed a due application of mind in considering as well as faithfully recording and dealing with 'relevant arguments and contentions raised on behalf of both the parties'."

"Therefore, to cancel the order would tantamount to grave miscarriage of justice," Kejriwal said in his reply filed to the ED's petition.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener urged the high court to dismiss ED's petition and to vacate the June 25 interim order by which the trial court's June 20 decision granting him bail was stayed.

On Wednesday, Justice Neena Bansal Krishna, who was scheduled to hear the ED's plea, was informed

by the counsel for the probe agency that they were served with Kejriwal's reply to their petition only late Tuesday night and the agency required some time to file a rejoinder.

While the probe agency's lawyer submitted that the copy of the reply was served to them at 11 pm on Tuesday, Kejriwal's counsel maintained that it was served to the investigating officer (IO) of the case at 1 pm. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, representing Kejriwal, mentioned the matter before the court, saying a specific time be fixed for the hearing as there is extreme urgency in the case.

However, Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for the ED, submitted that the agency was served with the reply copy of Kejriwal only on Tuesday night and they need some time to go through the response and file their rejoinder to it.

He contended that the documents are supposed to be served to the advocate appearing in the case and not the IO. The court said it is not disputed that the ED was served with the reply copy on Tuesday and the agency was entitled to file a rejoinder to it. The court granted time to the ED to file its rejoinder and listed the matter for hearing on July 15.

Kejriwal, in his reply, contended that the arrest was "illegally made to harass and humiliate" a political opponent and there was no material in possession of ED on the basis of which "further incarceration can be justified. "ED has implicated the respondent (Kejriwal) in a false and concocted story, no case is made out against the respondent and the arrest in the instant matter is absolutely illegal," the reply claimed.

It further said, "The respondent is victim of witch-hunt and standard modus operandi adopted by ED to implicate its given targets wherein the ED uses illegal measures of pressurising the other co-accused and inducing them to make incriminating statement in lieu of 'no objection' by ED to the grant of bail of such co-accused".

Countering the ED's contention that it was not given adequate opportunity by the trial court to argue its case, Kejriwal said merely because the court had regulated and controlled the manner of proceedings or asked the ED's counsel to be brief can by no stretch of imagination be construed as curtailment of an opportunity. "All the submissions made by ED are not only untenable in law but also reflect their apathy, insensitivity and overbearing as well as overreaching attitude towards courts of law," the reply said.

The Delhi CM contended that no offence of money laundering was made out against him and his life

and liberty must be protected from "unwarranted and unjustified violation" at the hands of the ED on the basis of a "false, malicious and motivated case".

"There exists no proof or material demonstrating that the AAP received funds or advanced kickbacks from the South group, let alone utilising them in the Goa election campaign. Not a single rupee was traced back to the AAP, and the allegations put forth in this regard are devoid of any tangible evidence, rendering them vague, baseless without any corroboration," the reply said.

It added there was no link established by the ED to claim that ₹ 45 crore was transferred by the South group as advanced kickback which was then allegedly utilised by AAP in Goa elections.

On June 20, Kejriwal was granted bail by a trial court here on a personal bond of ₹ 1 lakh.

The ED moved the high court the next day and contended that the trial court's order was "pervasive", "one-sided" and "wrong-sided" and that the findings were based on irrelevant facts. The high court, on June 21, imposed an interim stay on the trial court's bail order till passing of an order on ED's application for interim relief. It had issued notice and asked Kejriwal to file a reply to ED's petition. (PTI)

# SC verdict on maintenance to divorced Muslim women ended threat to Constitution: BJP

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** The BJP on Wednesday lauded the Supreme Court verdict, which averted that a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to seek maintenance from her husband, saying the judgment has finished off a threat posed to the Constitution by the decision of a past Congress government.

BJP spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi said the Rajiv Gandhi government's decision to enact a law to overrule an apex court judgment granting alimony to divorced Muslim women was one of the biggest threats to the Constitution as it gave primacy to Sharia, Islamic laws.

"Whenever the Congress has been in power, the Constitution was under threat. It (Rajiv Gandhi government's) was a decision which gave primacy to Sharia over the Constitution. The prestige of the Constitution which was crushed during the Congress government has been restored by this order. The verdict has ended one of the big threats posed to the Constitution," he told a press conference while replying to a question.

In what is popularly known as the Shah Bano case, the Supreme Court in 1985 had allowed her plea for alimony from her husband after she was divorced. However, the then Congress government passed a law in Parliament to overrule the verdict following protests from conservative Muslim groups. The Supreme Court has now granted a big relief to Muslim women, Trivedi said, adding that it should be seen beyond a matter of religion as it is an issue of equal rights. There is no secular state where Sharia provisions like halala, triple talaq and Haj subsidy were allowed and the then government by enacting a law had turned India into a partial Islamic state, he claimed.

In a judgment of far-reaching implications, the Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that a Muslim

woman can seek maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the CrPc and said the "religion neutral" provision is applicable to all married women irrespective of their religion.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 will not prevail over the secular law, a bench of justices B V Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih said while stressing that maintenance is not charity but the right of all married women.

At the presser, Trivedi said Russia's highest state award, Order of St Andrew the Apostle, being conferred on Prime Minister Narendra Modi by Russian President Vladimir Putin is a matter of pride and satisfaction.

Lauding Modi's leadership and global standing, he said many countries, including France, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have bestowed their highest honour on him. He addressed the joint sitting of the US Congress twice, the BJP leader noted, adding that the US has reiterated that India is a strategic ally while Russia has honoured him with its highest award. No leader of a country enjoys a position like him, Trivedi said.

Taking a swipe at opposition parties, who have questioned Modi over foreign issues, including the Ukraine war, he said they have the habit of casting doubts on every auspicious occasion. Slamming the Congress, he said the party had passed a resolution at its CWC meeting in support of Palestine after conflict broke out between Israel and militant group Hamas.

"I want to ask the Congress whether any resolution on the Russia-Ukraine issue. On how many international issues, has the CWC (Congress Working Committee) passed any resolution," he said, adding that the opposition party should not engage in petty selfish politics over foreign issues. (PTI)

# 'Chacha-bhatija' duo engaged in corrupt practices in govt recruitment before 2017: UP CM

**LUCKNOW, July 10:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday attacked the Samajwadi Party saying the "chacha-bhatija duo" would engage in corrupt practices in the government recruitment process held before 2017.

Without taking names, Adityanath usually refers to Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle Shivalp Singh Yadav as "chacha-bhatija" (uncle-nephew).

He said in 2022, the Revenue Department urged the Subordinate Services Selection Commission to expedite the appointment process.

"The commission conducted the selection process with utmost honesty and transparency. However, there are always some who try to obstruct every good initiative," he said.

The chief minister distributed appointment letters to 7,720 accountants (lekhpal), selected through a "fair and transparent" recruitment process by the Uttar Pradesh Subordinate Services Selection Commission (UPSSSC) at the Mission Rozgar pro-

gramme held at Lok Bhavan, an official statement issued here said. Adityanath said, "Before 2017 (during the SP rule), all the positions of accountant were vacant due to a recruitment process which was plagued by numerous loopholes. Even before the process began, the 'chacha-bhatija' duo would engage in corrupt practices, distributing entire districts among their family members.

"This is the same Uttar Pradesh whose youths were sidelined if they went anywhere outside. Some districts had such a poor image that people would not even give them a place in hotels and dharamshalas, let alone jobs," he said.

The chief minister said this selection process in his regime was carried out with complete fairness and transparency without any discrimination or recommendations. It is the duty of the recruited candidates to work diligently, without relying on recommendations and to enhance both the ease of doing business in the state and the quality of life of the poor, he added. He further emphasised, "Your

positive cooperation is crucial in attracting investment opportunities. The general public and youth should receive timely support in obtaining caste, residence and income certificates," he emphasised.

The chief minister stressed the importance of timely completion of proceedings related to inheritance, transfers and land measurement.

"You should uphold a positive reputation among the people, ensuring that the name of lekhpal does not evoke fear," remarked CM Yogi.

"Violent incidents often take place over minor land disputes in rural and urban areas. Timely measurement and demarcation can prevent such disputes. "If powerful land mafia attempt to illegally occupy government or poor people's land, we must intervene with anti-land mafia measures and take decisive action," he said.

The CM also emphasised the importance of timely processing of investment proposals and urged the accountants to expedite relief efforts during disasters such as floods. (PTI)

# Waterlogging in Goa tunnel disrupts trains on Konkan Railway route, passengers stranded

**PANAJI, July 10:** Train traffic on the Konkan Railway route was paralysed once again on Wednesday morning due to severe waterlogging inside a tunnel at Pernem in Goa, leading to the cancellation and diversion of several trains and stranding passengers at various stations. Goa has been receiving heavy rains for the last three days. Although it witnessed moderate showers since Wednesday morning, the Met Department has issued a red alert predicting exceptionally heavy rainfall for the day. The train disruption began at 2:35 pm on Tuesday when water began oozing into the Pernem tunnel between the Madure-Pernem section, according to Konkan Railway Corporation (KRCL) Deputy General Manager Baban Ghatge.

Although the waterlogging was initially cleared and traffic resumed at 10:13 pm on Tuesday, the problem reoccurred at 2:59 am on Wednesday with greater intensity. As a result, several trains were ei-



ther cancelled or diverted from the Konkan Railway route. Several trains, including the Vande Bharat express train originating from CSMT Mumbai, were cancelled as the track remained closed for the train traffic. Cancelled trains include Vande Bharat Express originating from Mumbai CSMT; Mandovi Express (Margao to Mumbai); Margao to Sawantwadi passenger train; Margao to Mumbai Tejas Express; Margao to Mumbai Janashatabdi Express; and Sawantwadi-Diva Express.

The diverted trains included the Tirunelveli-Jamnagar Express, Nagarcoil-Gandhidham Express, Er-

nakulum-Hazrat Nizamuddin Express, Ernakulum-Hazrat Nizamuddin Express, and the Thiruvananthapuram Central-Lokmanya Tilak Express, the KRCL stated. The recurring issue has left numerous passengers stranded at various railway stations across Goa, including Margao, Canacona, Karmali, Thivim, and Pernem.

The sudden cancellations led to chaotic scenes, particularly at Margao station in South Goa. A group of 200 travellers from Gujarat, including 60 senior citizens, found themselves stranded when the Goa Samparkranti Express was cancelled just two hours before departure. "There is a group of 200 people with us, of which at least 60 are senior citizens. We were told two hours in advance that the train was cancelled. What should we do now?" questioned Abdul Walekar, a member of the group on tour to Goa. The group, destined for Baroda railway station, requested that KRCL officials

arrange alternative travel. "We don't mind waiting here at the railway station, but some arrangement should be made for our travel back. We have a big group with us. Staying back in Goa means incurring huge expenses," another member of the group added.

He said KRCL officials have assured them of making alternative arrangements.

Meanwhile, KRCL Deputy General Manager Baban Ghatge assured passengers that efforts are underway to restore the track at the Pernem tunnel. However, he could not provide a specific timeline for when the track would be cleared, as water continued to seep into the tunnel.

"We are trying to resolve the issue as soon as possible," Ghatge told PTI. Trains stranded at different railway stations are being diverted while some trains are cancelled including Vande Bharat Express which was supposed to leave from Mumbai, he added. (PTI)

## Cabinet will decide on renaming Ramanagara district as Bengaluru South: CM

**MYSURU (KARNATAKA), July 10:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said the State Cabinet would take a decision on the proposal to rename neighbouring Ramanagara district as 'Bengaluru South.'

The proposal to rename the district, consisting of Ramanagara, Magadi, Kanakapura, Channapatna and Harohalli taluks, has once again gained steam, with a Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar-led delegation on Tuesday meeting Siddaramaiah and submitting a memorandum to raise the pitch. They have also proposed that Ramanagara town, about 50 kms from here, remain as the headquarters of the renamed district.

"Leaders from Ramanagara district had met me under the leadership of D K Shivakumar, stating that people of the region consider themselves to be part of Bengaluru since the beginning, so the district should be renamed as Bengaluru South district. I said it has to be decided at the Cabinet and will place the matter before the Cabinet," Siddaramaiah told reporters here.

Taking a dig at the proposal, JD(S) leader and Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Tuesday reportedly said that he would reverse the plan, if implemented, in the event of him becoming Chief Minister again. Kumaraswamy, a former Chief Minister, also alleged that the motive behind the proposal was to exploit real estate opportunities there.

Ramanagara is the home district of Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress chief. Shivakumar, who first mooted the proposal in October last year, is in-charge Minister for Ramanagara and also the Bengaluru City Development Minister.

Reacting to Kumaraswamy's comments, Siddaramaiah said: "first of all they won't come to power. So he (Kumaraswamy) reversing it is an illusion."

"It is people who give power. Can someone become CM just like that by claiming to become? We (Congress) were in opposition for five years, after that with the blessings of the people we have come to power by winning 136 seats. Have people blessed Kumaraswamy to become CM? Let's see what people decide in the next election," he added.

Kumaraswamy was the Chief Minister of the JD(S)-BJP coalition when Ramanagara district was carved out in August 2007. Kumaraswamy had earlier threatened to go on a fast unto death if the government decides to go-ahead with the proposal to rename the district. Ramanagara district is the political turf of Kumaraswamy as he has represented Ramanagara and Channapatna Assembly segments, and also had been an MP from the region.

The proposal has gained significance ahead of Channapatna Assembly bypolls -- the date for which is yet to be announced -- necessitated following Kumaraswamy's election to Lok Sabha from Mandya. (PTI)

## Kathua ambush: 24 detained as search operation for terrorists continues in dense forests of J&K

**JAMMU, July 10:** At least 24 people have been detained for questioning as the hunt for the terrorists behind the ambush in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, in which five army personnel were killed, entered its third day on Wednesday, officials said.

The search operation by the army and police is underway amid intermittent heavy rain in dense forests across four districts, besides Kathua. It was launched from three different areas -- Kathua, Udhampur and Baderwah, officials said.

Security forces have detained 24 people for questioning in connection with the ambush, they said, as efforts continued to track down and neutralise the terrorists who are believed to be hiding in a forest.

The officials said another search operation is underway in the higher reaches of Doda district where a gunfight took place between terrorists and security forces on Tuesday evening, a day after the ambush in Kathua.

On the search operation linked to the Kathua ambush, the officials said army and police personnel are also deployed in dense forests in different parts of Udhampur, Samba, Rajouri and Poonch districts.

Fresh searches were also launched in the Lala Chack area of Samba, Manjakote area of Rajouri and Surankote of Poonch on Wednesday morning, they said.

On Monday, terrorists ambushed a



patrol party on the Machedi-Kindli-Malhar mountainous road near Badnota village in Lohai Malhar, around 150 km from the Kathua district headquarters, killing the five army personnel and injuring many.

From the Baderwah side, security personnel are moving cautiously because of the area's challenging topography, thick foliage and natural caves, the officials said.

Personnel of the army's special forces "Para" unit have also been deployed to conduct surgical operations in specific areas, they said.

The officials said the search teams are being supported by helicopter and UAV surveillance. In addition, sniffer dogs have been deployed and metal detectors are being used, particularly dense forest areas, of the region.

They said a team of the National Investigation Agency has visited the scene of the ambush and it is assisting police in the probe. On the Doda search operation, officials said police and army personnel are combing the Ghadi Bhagwah forest area, which is around 35 km east of Doda town and borders Kishtwar district.

The operation to hunt down two terrorists, who are believed to have suffered injuries in the Tuesday encounter, resumed early Wednesday. The terrorists are yet to be traced, the officials said.

In the backdrop of the ambush in Badnota in Kathua, residents of Badnota village and its adjoining villages said they were concerned about their safety.

They have demanded that village

defence groups be sanctioned for their self-defence and to effectively tackle of threats posed by terrorists.

"The government should provide weapons and training to us, we are ready to fight shoulder-to-shoulder with our forces against the terrorists," Jagdish Raj, a local, said.

Punkaj, a 20-year-old student, said the ambush has caused fear among the local populace but "the situation changes altogether when you have weapons in your hands".

"We can swiftly move into the forests and help tackle the threat of terrorism," he said, demanding a special recruitment drive for the local youth of the area.

Shahid Ahmad, who claimed to have moved from the higher reaches to Machedi due to terror threat, said Muslims and Hindus of the area want peace and are ready to assist security forces in wiping out terrorism.

"Our eyes filled with tears with the loss of our soldiers. Such an attack had never happened (here) even during the peak of terrorism over two decades ago," he said, adding that the government should provide weapons and training to them to fight the menace.

Ahmad said innocent villagers, who have moved with their flocks of livestock to the upper reaches, are compelled to provide food to terrorists as they threatened at gunpoint.

"We are with our forces in the fight against terrorism," he said. (PTI)

## Muslim women can get maintenance under CrPC's Section 125, secular law will prevail: SC

**NEW DELHI, July 10:**

In a judgment of far-reaching implications, the Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that a Muslim woman can seek maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the CrPC and said the "religion neutral" provision is applicable to all married women irrespective of their religion.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 will not prevail over the secular law, a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih said while stressing that maintenance is not charity but the right of all married women.

"We are hereby dismissing the criminal appeal with the major conclusion that Section 125 would be applicable to all women....," Justice Nagarathna said while pronouncing the verdict.

"The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 will not prevail over the secular and religion neutral provision of Section 125 of CrPC," the bench said.



The two judges gave separate but concurring verdicts.

The erstwhile Code of Criminal Procedure's Section 125, which deals with a wife's legal right to maintenance, covers Muslim women, the bench said.

The apex court dismissed the petition of a Mohammed Abdul Samad, who has challenged a Telangana High Court order refusing to interfere with the maintenance order of the family court.

He contended that a divorced Muslim woman is not entitled for maintenance

under Section 125 of CrPC and has to invoke the provisions of the 1986 Act.

The bench had reserved its verdict on February 19 after hearing senior advocate Wasim Qadri for the petitioner. It had appointed advocate Gaurav Agarwal as amicus curiae in the matter to assist the court.

Qadri had submitted that the 1986 Act is more beneficial to Muslim woman as compared to Section 125 of the CrPC.

On December 13, 2023, the high court did not set aside the direction of the family court for payment

of interim maintenance by Samad to his estranged wife but reduced the amount from Rs 20,000 to Rs 10,000 per month, to be paid from the date of petition.

Samad contended before the high court that they got divorced in accordance with personal laws in 2017 and there was a divorce certificate to that effect, but it was not considered by the Family Court, which ordered for payment of interim maintenance.

Aggrieved by the high court's order, Samad approached the top court. (PTI)

## SC judge Sanjiv Khanna recuses himself from considering review pleas on same-sex marriage

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** Senior-most Supreme Court judge Sanjiv Khanna on Wednesday recused himself from considering pleas seeking review of the apex court's judgement last year declining legal recognition to same-sex marriage, sources said. According to the sources, Justice Khanna has cited personal reasons for his recusal.

The recusal of Justice Khanna would necessitate reconstitution of a fresh five-judge constitution bench by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud for considering the review pleas. The top court on Tuesday had refused to allow open court hearing of pleas seeking review of its last year's judgement.

In a setback to gay rights activists, a five-judge constitution bench headed by Chandrachud on October 17 last year refused to accord legal backing to same-sex marriage, saying there was "no unqualified right" to marriage with the exception of those that are recognised by law.

The apex court, however, had made a strong pitch for the rights of queer people so they don't face discrimination in accessing goods and services that are available to others, safe houses known as 'Garima Greh' in all districts to provide shelter to members of the community facing harassment and violence and dedicated hotline numbers which they could use in case of trouble.

A five-judge bench comprising the CJ and justices Sanjiv Khanna, Hima Kohli, B V Nagarathna and P S Narasimha was scheduled to consider in chambers the pleas seeking review of the judgement.

According to practice, the review pleas are considered in chambers by judges.

In its judgement, the bench had held that transgender people in heterosexual relationships have the freedom and entitlement to marry under the existing statutory provisions. It had said an entitlement to legal recognition of the right to union, akin to marriage or civil

union, or conferring legal status to the relationship can be only done through "enacted law".

The five-judge constitution bench headed by CJ Chandrachud had delivered four separate verdicts on a batch of 21 petitions seeking legal sanction for same-sex marriages.

All five judges were unanimous in refusing to accord legal recognition to same-sex marriage under the Special Marriage Act and observed it was within Parliament's ambit to change the law for validating such union.

While the CJ had written a separate 247-page verdict, Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul (since retired) had penned a 17-page judgement in which he broadly agreed with Justice Chandrachud's views.

Justice S Ravindra Bhat (since retired), who authored an 89-page judgement for himself and Justice Kohli, had disagreed with certain conclusions arrived at by the CJ including on applicability of adoption rules for queer couples.

Justice Narasimha had said in his 13-page verdict that he was in complete agreement with the reasoning given and conclusions arrived at by Justice Bhat.

The judges were unanimous in holding that queerness is a natural phenomenon and not "urban or elite" occurrence.

In his judgement, the CJ had recorded the assurance by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that the Centre will constitute a committee chaired by the cabinet secretary for the purpose of defining and elucidating the scope of entitlements of queer couples who are in a union.

The LGBTQIA++ rights activists, who had won a major legal battle in 2018 in the Supreme Court which decriminalised consensual gay sex, had moved the apex court seeking validation of same-sex marriage and consequential reliefs such as rights to adoption, enrolment as parents in schools, opening of bank accounts and availing succession and insurance benefits. (PTI)

## Panel to identify immigrants illegally staying in J&K

**JAMMU, July 10:** The Jammu and Kashmir administration has formed a seven-member panel to identify foreign nationals who have been illegally overstaying in Jammu and Kashmir for the past 13 years, aiming to facilitate their deportation. The panel has been tasked with gathering biographic and biometric details of illegal migrants and maintaining an updated digital record regularly.

"Sanction is hereby accorded to the re-constitution of the committee to identify foreign nationals illegally overstaying in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir since 2011", Principal Secretary to the Government, Home Department, Chandraker Bharti said in an order.

The administrative secretary of the home department will chair the panel. Other members include the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer (FRRO) of Punjab, the Criminal Investigation Department (Special Branch) of the Jammu and Srinagar headquarters, and all district SSPs and SPs (Foreigners Registration), along with the state coordinator, NIC.

According to the order, the committee is required to prepare a monthly report and submit it to the Union home ministry by the fifth day of each month.

The Home Department has also instructed the panel to coordinate and oversee efforts related to tracing and deporting foreign nationals residing illegally in the Union Territory. Apart from it, the panel will monitor the progress made on these issues and report regularly to the Home Department.

It is also responsible for disseminating information on ongoing cases in various courts, as well as monitoring and updating the status of these cases for relevant stakeholders. The nodal officer will oversee the collection of biographic and biometric data of illegal migrants, compile progress reports, and maintain an up-to-date digital record of those illegally staying in Jammu and Kashmir on a regular basis, the order said. (PTI)

## CISF set for formal induction at Parliament; 29 officers posted

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** The over 3,300 personnel strength CISF contingent meant to provide an armed security cover to the Parliament complex in Delhi is set to be inducted formally with the posting of 29 officers, official sources said Wednesday.

The sources told PTI that the 29 officers will lead this contingent of 3,317 men and women personnel headed by a deputy inspector general (DIG), one senior commandant, two commandants, 7 deputy commandants and 18 assistant commandants.

Two officers among these belong to the fire wing as the force has also deployed its fire-combat unit here, the sources said.

The central force has been independently securing the Parliament after it took over these duties from CRPF and Delhi Police in May.

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) was brought in to guard the sensitive and important facility following a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack on December 13, 2023.

Two persons had jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour, released yellow smoke from canisters and shouted slogans before being overpowered by the MPs. Around the same time that day, two others sprayed coloured smoke from canisters while shouting slogans outside the Parliament premises.

The sources said these officers were already deployed as part of the temporary 'internal security duty pattern' deployment of CISF at the Parliament complex building from May-June but their formal orders were issued on Tuesday.

The force will be formally inducted for the Par-

liament House Complex (PHC) duty before the next Parliament session begins on July 22, a senior Union home ministry official said.

The CISF will provide a counter-terrorist and anti-sabotage cover to the Parliament, its members and staff as it has deployed its personnel to guard various places within the complex like all the flap entry gates of the complex, deployment of canine squads, fire fighting personnel along with fire tenders, manpower at CCTV monitoring control room and communication centre apart from the pass section and watch towers.

Various central armed police forces and Delhi Police will be manning the access roads to the Parliament like it was done during the just concluded session which saw the joint address of both Houses by the President, another official said. (PTI)

## After death of 6 children, now boy from Indore ashram goes missing; management alleges abduction



**INDORE, July 10:** A 16-year-old boy from an Indore-based ashram, where six children died recently, has gone missing, prompting its management to lodge a complaint claiming that the minor was mentally-weak and was kidnapped by an unidentified person, police said on Wednesday.

Six children lost their lives at the Shri Yugpurush Dham Bal Ashram, operated by an NGO in Malharganj area of Indore within a span of a few days starting June 29. The deaths raised concerns over mismanagement, over-admission and a suspected cholera outbreak at the shelter for special children.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Ashish Patel said that after the health of children deteriorated following the outbreak of cholera in Shri Yugpurush Dham Bal Ashram, some children were sent to Akhand Parmanand

Ashram located in Khandwa Naka area of the city on July 6 as a precautionary measure.

"An FIR was registered at Tejaji Nagar police station on the basis of a complaint lodged by the management of Shri Yugpurush Dham Bal Ashram that one of the children, Anand (16), was lured by some unidentified miscreant and kidnapped on July 8," he said.

The ACP said the police did not find the boy in the footage dated July 8 captured by CCTV cameras installed in and around the spot. "We are also examining CCTV footage prior to that date," he added.

According to the ashram management, the missing boy is mentally-weak and he was sent to Indore by the Child Welfare Committee of Harda in January, Patel said.

"All aspects related to the case of the missing minor boy are being investigated," the officials said.

Four children died at the ashram between July 1 and July 2 after suffering from cholera, while one of the children who died at the institute on June 30 was claimed to have died due to brain seizure, officials said.

Another inmate of the ashram died during the intervening night of June 29 and 30, but the ashram management did not inform the administration about the death of the child and his body was handed over to his family members and buried at a local crematorium, he said.

The ashram management claimed that the child died of epilepsy, but this could not be confirmed, officials said.

He said the probe by a high-level committee constituted by the administration also revealed overcrowding of children in the ashram, medical records of children not maintained properly and other irregularities in the maintenance of the institution. (PTI)

## Light rain in parts of Rajasthan

**JAIPUR, July 10:** Parts of Rajasthan received light rains while Dungarpur, Banswara and Rajasamand districts were lashed by heavy rain, an official said on Wednesday. According to Jaipur Meteorological Center, during the last 24 hours ending Wednesday morning, the highest rainfall of 80 mm was recorded at Banswara's Bagidora, followed by 79 mm in Obari, 66 mm in Dungarpur's Ganeshpur, 72 mm in Rajasamand's Delwara and 50 mm in Barmer's Gadra Road in western Rajasthan.

### LOST

I, Anghthik Rongpi son of Shri Lakhon Sing Rongpi and Smti. Senimai Rongpharpi resident of Ing-longcherop, Diphu lost my Registration Certificate of B. Tech Engineering, Jorhat Engineering College, Jorhat while on way from Diphu railway station to Inglongcherop, Diphu on 02/07/2024.

Name : Anghthik Rongpi  
Father's name : Shri Lakhon Sing Rongpi  
Mother's Name : Smti. Senimai Rongpharpi  
Address : Inglongcherop, ward No-5  
PO+PS : Diphu  
District: Karbi Anglong  
State : Assam  
PIN : 782460

## BRO seeks LG's intervention to resume work on border roads in Ladakh

**LEH, July 10:** Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has sought intervention of the Ladakh Lt Governor Brigadier (Retd) B D Mishra to complete several border road projects after the work was suspended on the directions of the wildlife department in the Union territory, an official said on Wednesday.

Chief Engineer, Project Vijayak, Brigadier Vinay Bahl and Chief Engineer, Project Himank, Brigadier Vishal Srivastava raised the issue of the suspended work with the Lt Governor after they called on him here, the official said.

Briefing Mishra about the construction of new roads along with the widening of existing roads in the border areas of Ladakh, the delegation informed him about the clearance taken by them from the wildlife board for the construction and widening of these roads.

Brig Bahl informed about the direction received from the wildlife department of Ladakh to stop the construction and widening of the road.

He apprised the Lt Governor of the issues faced by them in completing the said project within the stipulated timeframe and requested his intervention, the official said.

Brig Srivastava also informed Mishra of the issue faced by them in the construction of new roads in the Changthang area, the official said. (PTI)

## Number of children in non-institutional care increased fourfold between 2021-22 and 2023-24: Govt

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** The number of children in non-institutional care, including those in foster care, has increased fourfold between 2021-22 and 2023-24, according to government data.

In the financial year 2021-22, 29,331 children were covered by non-institutional care. This number increased to 62,675 in 2022-23 and to 1,21,861 in 2023-24, it stated. In a recent letter to states and Union Territories (UTs), the women and child development (WCD) ministry said this rise may be because of the government's initiatives in strengthening family-based care to all children in difficult circumstances.

The ministry, however, acknowledged that despite the increase in approvals and fund releases for non-institutional care during 2023-24, the expenditure has been slow in most states until the quarter ending June 2024. It has asked all states and UTs to review and expedite expenditure. District-level officials have been instructed to ensure Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) enabled Aadhaar-based release of funds under the non-institutional care component, the ministry said.

Highlighting the rise in number of chil-



dren in non-institutional care and its efforts under the Vatsalya Mission, the ministry said the mission provides a monthly grant of Rs 4,000 per child for sponsorship, foster care, and "after care".

Guidelines stipulate that every district must have a Sponsorship and Foster Care Approval Committee (SFCAC) under the district magistrate to implement and mon-

itor these programmes. Eligible cases are referred to Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) for the final order for sponsorship or foster care -- facilities for those leaving institutional care after turning 18.

The WCD ministry has also shared the new foster care guidelines with states and UTs. In its letter, the ministry has requested personal attention and appropriate

direction from state and UT authorities to ensure faster implementation of these initiatives for the welfare of Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) and Children in Conflict with Law (CCL).

Child rights activist Sanjay Gupta said the grant can be realised only if there is better convergence among various departments in states. He noted that in many states, District Child Protection Units are still in the initial stages, overloaded, and multitasking.

"CWCs lack proper orientation, training, and infrastructure; beneficiaries lack basic legal documents like Aadhaar cards or bank accounts; state child protection societies are less active; and there is a lack of awareness among common people about the Vatsalya Mission scheme," said Gupta, Director of Childhood Enhancement through Training and Action (Chetna).

"We request the ministry to undertake a rapid state-wise assessment of the status of statutory compliance needed for the disposal of grants under the Vatsalya Mission and the reasons why grants have not been released in time," added Gupta. (PTI)

### ELECTRICAL WORK AT LUMDING DIVISION

E-Tender Notice No. Sr. DEE/LMG/15 of 2024-25; dated: 08-07-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **SN.1; Tender No: EL/LM/24-25/13; Name of work: Repair and provision of additional/enhancement of water treatment facilities in Lumding-Furkating Section i.e. for Diphu, Daldai, Dhanisri, Rangapahar, Chongajain, Bhilgaon, Janguri & Oating under the jurisdiction of Sr. DEE/IV/Lumding (Electrical Portion)** Tender Value: ₹14,00,000/-; Earnest Money: ₹28,000/-; E-tender will be closed at 11:00 hrs. on 30-07-2024 and Opened at 11:30 hrs. on 30-07-2024. **SN.2; Tender No: EL/LM/24-25/06-RT; Name of work: Upgradation of Sr. DSC Office Lumding (Electrical Portion)** Tender Value: ₹5,40,885.89/-; Earnest Money: ₹10,800.00/-; E-tender will be closed at 11:00 hrs. on 30-07-2024 and Opened at 11:30 hrs. on 30-07-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 11:00 hrs. on 30-07-2024 on website [www.irops.gov.in](http://www.irops.gov.in)

Sr. DEE/G&OP, Lumding  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
"Serving Customers with a smile"

# 'Laapataa Ladies', 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani' lead in nominations for IFFM 2024



**NEW DELHI, July 10:** Kiran Rao's "Laapataa Ladies", "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani", directed by Karan Johar, Vidhu Vinod Chopra's "12th Fail", and "Kaathal - The Core" by Jeo Baby have emerged as the top nominees at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM) Awards 2023, the organisers said on Wednesday.

The 15th edition of IFFM is set to commence on August 15, coinciding with Independence Day, and conclude on August 25.

The winners will be announced on September 16 at the annual gala night, set to be hosted at the Palais Theatre in Melbourne.

Besides "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani" and "12th Fail", nominees in the best film category are "Amar Singh Chamkila", "Chandu Champion", "Dunki", "Jawan", "Ma-

haraja", and "Premalu". The best film - critics choice segment is populated by titles such as "Laapataa Ladies", "Kaathal - The Core", "Dear Jassi", "Girls Will Be Girls", "Kabuliwala", "Rapture", "Sapta Sagaradaache Eello", and "Thadavu".

In the best actor category, Shah Rukh Khan has secured a double nomination for "Dunki" and "Jawan".

Diljit Dosanjh ("Amar Singh Chamkila"), Fahadh Faasil ("Aavesham"), Kartik Aaryan ("Chandu Champion"), Mammootty ("Kaathal - The Core"), Mithun Chakraborty ("Kabuliwala"), Ranveer Singh ("Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani"), Sparsh Shrivastava ("Laapataa Ladies"), Vicky Kaushal ("Sam Bahadur"), and Vikrant Massey ("12th Fail") are also vying for the top prize.

Debutantes Nitanshi Goel and Pratibha Ranta of "Laapataa Ladies" and Alizeh Agnihotri ("Farrey") have earned a nomination in the best actress category, alongside Alia Bhatt ("Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani"), Beena R Chandran ("Thadavu"), Jyothika ("Kaathal - The Core"), Parvathy Thiruvothu ("Ullozhukku"), Preeti Panigrahi ("Girls will be Girls"), Sanya Malhotra ("Mrs"), and Swathi Reddy ("Month of Madhu").

The best director race has contenders in "Amar Singh Chamkila" director Imtiaz Ali, "Chandu Champion" director Kabir Khan, "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani" director Karan Johar, "Maharaja" director Nithilan Saminathan, "Bramayugam" director Rahul Sadasivan, "Dunki" director Rajkumar Hirani, and "12th Fail" director Vidhu Vinod Chopra.

Nominees in the best director - critics choice category are Christo

Tomy ("Ullozhukku"), Diwa Shah ("Bahadur - The Brave"), Dominic Sangma ("Rimdogittanga"), Hemant Rao ("Sapta Sagaradaache Eello - Side A"), Kiran Rao ("Laapataa Ladies"), Saurav Rai ("Guras"), Shuchi Talati ("Girls will be Girls") and Sumanth Bhat ("Mithya").

Web series "Made in Heaven 2", "Panchayat" season 3, "Kohrra", and "Poacher" lead the nominations list in the OTT segment.

Besides these four web series, "Dhootha", "Heeramandi", and "The Railway Men" are also part of the best OTT show nominations list.

Arjun Mathur ("Made in Heaven 2"), Babil Khan ("The Railway Men"), Gulshan Devaiah ("Guns & Gulaabs"), Jitendra Kumar ("Panchayat Season 3"), Naveen Chandra ("Inspector Rishi"), R. Madhavan ("The Railway Men"), Roshan Mathew ("Poacher") and Suvinder Vicky ("Kohrra")

will compete for the best actor OTT trophy. In the best actress OTT segment, the contenders are Harleen Sethi for "Kohrra", Karishma Tanna for "Scoop", Neena Gupta for "Panchayat Season 3", Nimisha Sajayan for "Poacher", Parvathy Thiruvothu for "Dhootha", Shriya Pilgaonkar for "The Broken News 2", and Sobhita Dhulipala for "Made in Heaven 2".

The nominees for best documentary include "Farming the Revolution", "Flickering Lights, Headhunting to Beatboxing", "Indira's Emergency", "Insides and Outsides", and "Trolley Times".

The best film - subcontinent category comprises the likes of "Barir Naam Shahana" (Bangladesh), "Paradise" (Sri Lanka), "The Monk and the Gun" (Bhutan), "The Red Suitcase" (Nepal), and "Wakhri" (Pakistan).

IFFM is presented by the Victorian government.

## Pooja Hegde wraps shooting of 'Deva'

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** Actor Pooja Hegde has completed filming for her upcoming movie "Deva".

Also starring Shahid Kapoor, the action thriller film is scheduled to be released in theatres on October 11.

Rosshan Andrews, known for Malayalam blockbusters such as "Salute" and "Kayamkulam Kochunni", has directed "Deva".

Siddharth Roy Kapur's Roy Kapur Films shared the news of the film wrap on Instagram. The banner is producing the movie in collaboration with Zee Studios.

"And #ThatsAWrap on #DEVA! A thrilling action-packed adventure coming your way real soon!" the post read.

According to the makers, "Deva" follows a brilliant yet rebellious police officer investigating a high-profile case. As he delves deeper into the case, he uncovers a web of deceit and betrayal, leading him down a thrilling and dangerous path.

Apart from "Deva", Pooja will also star with Suriya in his 44th film and in Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment's "Sanki". (PTI)



## BOLLYWOOD HALF-YEARLY BO REPORT

# 'KALKI 2898 AD' HINDI VERSION ONLY BRIGHT SPOT IN DULL SEASON

**MUMBAI, July 10:** The success of the Hindi version of "Kalki 2898 AD" is the lone bright spot for the Hindi film industry in a 2024 punctuated with big budget box office failures "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan", "Maidan" and "Yodha", say trade experts and industry insiders.

According to the six-month report card of the industry, the business of the Hindi cinema exhibition sector is down by 20-30 per cent. Small films and original ideas made their presence felt with films such as "Laapataa Ladies" (₹ 20 crore) and "Munhya" (₹ 98 crore) but not enough.

"Had it not been for 'Kalki 2898 AD', I would've said the first six months of 2024 are quite bad. Although 'Kalki' is not a Bollywood film, it has brought a new lease of life with its Hindi dubbed version. 'Kalki' came just to improve our report card; otherwise, it would've been full of red marks," trade analyst Komal Nahta told PTI.

The Hindi dubbed version of the dystopian epic, starring Amitabh Bachchan, Prabhas, Kamal Haasan and Deepika Padukone, is expected to do numbers north of ₹ 300 crore, he said. In total, the pan-India film, also in Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam, has grossed over ₹ 900 crore.

In Nahta's view, "Kalki 2898 AD" is primarily a Telugu production but its Hindi dubbed version has done fantastic business. The other films released during the year did dismal business. Ajay Devgn's sports drama "Maidaan", which reportedly cost ₹ 235 crore, earned ₹ 63 crore gross in India, while "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan", which was reportedly made on a budget of over ₹ 350 crore, grossed over ₹ 110 crore in India. Siddharth Malhotra's "Yodha", another big budget actioner that cost ₹ 55 crore, earned over ₹ 42 crore, way less than what was expected of them.

Devgn's supernatural horror "Shaiteen" did relatively better with earnings of ₹ 147 crore. Similarly, Rajkummar Rao's "Srikanth" earned ₹ 47 crore.

There were other minor hits.

"Fighter", an action movie starring Hrithik Roshan, Deepika Padukone and Anil Kapoor and made on a reported budget of ₹ 250 crore, was barely declared a hit by earning a global gross of over ₹ 300 crore.

Similarly, Shahid Kapoor-Kriti Sanon's "Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya", made on a reported budget of ₹ 75 crore, earned ₹ 139 crore in global gross. Yami Gautam's "Article 370", made on a budget of ₹ 20 crore, turned out to be a major hit by grossing ₹ 105 crore. "Crew", fronted by Tabu, Kareena Kapoor, and Kriti Sanon, made over ₹ 96 crore in India, and Kartik Aaryan-fronted "Chandu Champion" ₹ 73 crore, according to Saenilk, a trade tracking website.

"Business is down by at least 20 to 25 per cent as compared to last year. The exhibitors are bleeding," Nahta said. Mumbai-based exhibitor Manoj Desai and Jaipur distributor Raj Bansal pegged the numbers at 50-60 per cent lower than 2023.

According to the

media analytics and consulting firm Ormax Media, the box office collection of Hindi films from January to May 2023 was ₹ 1,443 crore. This year was significantly less with earnings from January to May 2024 at ₹ 1,251 crore. The agency is yet to compile data for June 2024.

Desai described the period as the worst for the exhibition industry, so different from last year that saw money spinners "Pathaan" and "Gadar 2". "The year 2024 has been very bad for us. We don't know what to do now since we don't have any other alternate business. Last year was filled with many blockbusters like "Pathaan", "Jawan", "Gadar 2", "Animal" and many more. But in 2024, all the films released so far have not worked in a big way," Desai, who serves as an executive director of Gaiety Galaxy cinema in suburban Mumbai, told PTI.

"Producers and distributors earn money irrespective of the fate of the film. It's exhibitors like us who have been suffering. Business is down by 50 to 60 per cent across all theatres. We have the lowest ticket rates in our theatres but we are finding it difficult (to run it), while those who charge exorbitant ticket rates like Rs. 500 to Rs 1,500. I don't know how they are surviving," he said. Jaipur-based Bansal agreed.

"Last year, there were at least five ₹ 500 crore films with "Pathaan", "Jawan", "Gadar", "Tiger 3", and "Animal". The business is down by more than 50 per cent when compared to 2023."

Chennai-based trade analyst Ramesh Bala told PTI that Hindi-language films still struggle to make a mark in the South.

The films that attained some success in the South were Atlee's "Jawan" and Sandeep Reddy Vanga's "Animal", directed by filmmakers who belong to the region.

"There's an audience for Hindi movies in metros like Hyderabad, Chennai, and Bengaluru and they usually like watching action movies or Hindi films that have south connection and out-of-the-box films. There hasn't been anything exceptional coming out from Hindi cinema this year," Bala said.

Audiences are not watching Hindi movies in theatres as frequently as they did before and experts believe high ticket price and poor content are to be blamed.

Nahta said the Hindi film industry should reevaluate its strategies and prioritize content-driven storytelling.

"My observation is that till you don't give something compelling to the audience, they are not going to come to cinemas.

Post-Covid that change has come as a lot of people have shifted to watching films at home. (PTI)

## Scarlett Johansson gives update on 'Just Cause': It's coming along

**LOS ANGELES, July 10:** Hollywood star Scarlett Johansson says the work on the upcoming Amazon thriller series Just Cause is in progress and its script is being developed.

The project was announced by Amazon in 2022 but got delayed due to the writer's strike.

"It's coming along... It's being written," the 39-year-old actor told Deadline during the premiere of her upcoming film "Fly Me To The Moon".

"There was a little bit of a pause during the strike so some of the development, it was like everyone - we were in a holding pattern, but we're now writing away." The original thriller mystery, which featured Johansson as the young daughter of protagonist Paul Armstrong, played by Sean Connery, released in 1995. It was based on John Katzenbach's 1992 novel.

Johansson is now starring and executive producing the show. The gender of the main protagonist, a Miami newspaper editorial writer Matt Cowart, has been changed. Now, Johansson will play the female lead Madison 'Madi'

Cowart, a struggling reporter from a Florida newspaper sent to cover an inmate on death row.

The original film, directed by Arne Glimcher, and also starring Laurence Fishburne, Ed Harris, Blair Underwood and Kate Capshaw, had changed the title character from a journalist to a professor, who is called by his former student, an African American, to save him from the gallows. The student has been convicted of the rape and murder of a young white woman. Just Cause was only the second film for Johansson, who made her debut with North in 1994 as a child artist.

Filmmaker Cord Jefferson and writer John Wells are co-writing the first episode of the new version of Just Cause and both will also serve as the executive producers. It is produced under John Wells Productions.

Meanwhile, Johansson's film Fly Me To The Moon is slated to release on July 12. Directed by Greg Berlanti, the film is distributed by Columbia Pictures.

The actor plays Kelly Jones in the romantic comedy also stars Channing Tatum and Woody Harrelson. The project has been described as a "sharp, stylish comedy-drama set against the high-stakes backdrop of NASA's historic Apollo 11 moon landing", by the makers. (PTI)



# GAMBHIR IS YET TO INK SALARY DEAL, FIRST BIG 'TEST' WOULD BE 'DOWN UNDER'

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** The financial nitty-gritties of Gautam Gambhir's appointment as India's head coach are yet to be worked out but that's the "last of his concerns" right now as he is focussed on getting a support staff of choice to prepare for the enormous challenges that await him during the three-year stint.

On Tuesday, BCCI secretary Jay Shah officially announced Gambhir's appointment, which was on cards for a long time. However, it is learnt that his salary is yet to be finalised although it is expected to be in the same bracket as that of his predecessors Rahul Dravid and Ravi Shastri.

"For Gautam, it was important

that he took charge and salary and other stuff can be worked out as it's not going anywhere. It is similar to the case of Ravi Shastri in 2014 when he was first made Director of Cricket over head coach Duncan Fletcher," a BCCI source told PTL.

"The day Ravi joined, he didn't even have a contract and things worked out. In case of Gautam also, some finer details are being worked out. The salary will be in the same range of Rahul Dravid," he added.

It is understood that Gambhir will be given his own team to work with, who will also closely co-ordinate with the NCA (National Cricket Academy)

coaches, who look after the pathways teams (India A and U-19) as well as the targeted players. "I look forward to working closely with the BCCI, Head of Cricket - Mr VVS Laxman, the support staff, and, most importantly, the players, as we work towards achieving success in the upcoming tournaments," Gambhir had said.

Laxman is currently in Zimbabwe with the young T20 team, but it is expected that once he is back, the NCA head, along with the new head coach and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar, the two captains Rohit Sharma and Hardik Pandya will have a discussion on the road ahead.

There is a lot of interest sur-

rounding who will be Gambhir's job. A few other reports have indicated R Vinay Kumar's name, believed to be Gambhir's choice.

However, it is understood that the BCCI has rejected the proposal even though there's no confirmation of such a development from BCCI secretary Jay Shah, the man who matters in BCCI.

As far as the fielding coach's role is concerned, Jonty Rhodes' name seems to have cropped up again but if one looks at the trend of the past two coaching cycles, BCCI has always preferred one of its home-grown talents in the set-up.

For instance, R Sridhar was a core member of Shastri's team

and worked through the ranks in the NCA and the India U-19 set-up. Ditto for T Dilip, who worked extensively under Dravid at NCA and also went for India A assignments.

There is a school of thought that perhaps Munish Bali, who has been around the set-up for some time now and knows most of the youngsters coming through the system, can be given a try as well.

The T20I and ODI squad for the Sri Lanka series will be announced in the next few days but the IPL-winning former KKR mentor's priority for the next year would be the two traditional formats -- ODIs and Tests.

Gambhir's first big test would

certainly be Australia, where India under Ravi Shastri's tutelage had won back-to-back Test series in 2018-19 and 2020-21.

After 33 years (since 1991-92), India and Australia will be engaged in a five-Test series with the opening Test starting on one of the bounciest tracks -- the Optus Stadium in Perth.

While Gambhir had spent enormous amount of time strategising for Delhi as its captain between 2013-17 in the Ranji Trophy, his standing as a red-ball coach will hinge a lot on a series, which will also prove to be decisive as far as India's qualification for the World Test Championship is concerned. (PTI)

## 3<sup>rd</sup> T20: India take series lead over Zimbabwe with all-round show

**HARARE, July 10:** Shubman Gill and Ruturaj Gaikwad produced high-quality knocks before the bowlers did their part as India outplayed Zimbabwe by 23 runs in the third T20 here on Wednesday.

Gill (66 off 49), Yashasvi Jaiswal (36 off 27) and Gaikwad (49 off 28) propelled India to 182 for four against Zimbabwe after the visitors opted to bat on a fresh pitch.

Zimbabwe were never really in the run chase despite an entertaining effort from number four Dion Myers (65 not out 49), ending at 159 for six in their stipulated 20 overs.

Washington Sundar, who is likely to play a bigger role in India's T20 set-up after the retirement of Ravindra Jadeja, struck thrice while Avesh Khan took a couple of wickets.

The fourth T20 of the five-match series will be staged here on Saturday, July 13. After a loss in the series opener, India have restored normal service with back-to-back victories.

After Avesh Khan bounced out opener Wessly Madhevere in the second over, the wickets kept falling for the home team. However, Zimbabwe did well to steady the ship after losing their first five wickets for 39 runs.



The 77-run stand off 57 balls between Myers and Clive Madande (37 off 26) put much needed life into the game.

Earlier, Gill-led India made some interesting selection calls. They duly inducted World Cup winners Jaiswal, Sanju Samson

(12 not out off 7) and Shivam Dube into the playing eleven, leaving out the likes of Riyan Parag in the middle order.

Sanju came to bat at number five with four specialist openers Jaiswal, Gill, Abhishek Sharma (10 off 9) and Gaikwad occupy-

ing the top four positions respectively.

Jaiswal, who did not get a game in India's triumphant campaign in the T20 World Cup, was happy to be back in the middle and went for his shots from the get go.

The southpaw collected couple of fours and a six over deep-midwicket in the opening over bowled by off-spinner Brian Bennett to set the tone.

Gill began with a gorgeous on drive off left-arm pacer Richard Ngarava before pulling him for a six over fine-leg.

Zimbabwe were poor in the field to say the least, conceding extra runs and grassing regulation catches throughout the innings.

Pacer Blessing Muzarabani (2/25) once again got the extra bounce from length and was the pick of the bowlers.

After racing to 49 for no loss in four overs, India could not maintain that tempo reaching 55 in the powerplay with both openers in the centre.

Zimbabwe skipper Sikandar Raza, who impressed again with the ball, got the breakthrough for his team as Jaiswal's reverse sweep went straight into the hands of the fielder at backward point. Last game's centurion Abhishek did not last long and was holed out in the deep off Raza.

Gaikwad, finding himself at an unusual batting position, was able to milk the spinners in the middle overs and ended with four boundaries and three sixes. (PTI)

## President Murmu asks stakeholders to work together for upliftment of Indian football

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** President Draupadi Murmu on Wednesday asked the stakeholders of Indian football to work together for the upliftment of the game in the country as she flagged off the trophy tour of the century-old Durand Cup tournament here.

The 133<sup>rd</sup> edition of Asia's oldest and world's fifth oldest tournament begins on July 27 and will be played in four cities -- Kolkata, Kokrajhar in Assam, Shillong in Meghalaya and Jamshedpur in Jharkhand.

"Football is the most popular sport in the world. Professional footballers entertain people. Currently, Euro 2024 is going on and

aegis of the All India Football Federation.

After the inaugural edition in Shimla, the tournament moved to New Delhi in 1940, where it was held till 2016.

In 2019, the tournament moved to the eastern part of the country, with Kolkata becoming the home base.

What makes the Durand Cup unique is that the winning team gets three trophies, two rolling (Durand Cup and Shimla Trophy) and one for permanent keep (President's Cup).

The Shimla Trophy was donated by the city's residents in 1904 to show their passion and support for the tournament. The



it is being followed world over, it's everywhere in the news," President Murmu said in her address at a function at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"All the stakeholders in the country should work together for the upliftment of the game in India."

She reminded the gathering of the contribution of Durand Cup - named after its founder Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, the foreign secretary of India from 1884 to 1894 -- in the country's football tradition.

"It is India's oldest football tournament and it's more than 135 years old," the president said of the tournament which was first held in Shimla in 1888.

"India's first president Rajendra Prasad presented the Durand Cup winners the President's Cup in 1950," she added.

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj Pandey and Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi were also present when President Murmu unveiled the trophies.

The Durand Cup is organised by the Indian Army on behalf of the three Services, and under the

Shimla Trophy began to be awarded in rolling from 1965.

Indian football legend Sunil Chhetri reminisced how he was "discovered" and came to national limelight after playing in the Durand Cup in 2002 for Delhi club City FC.

Twenty-four teams will feature in the July 27 to August 31 tournament and they will be divided into six groups. Eight teams -- group toppers and two best second-placed sides -- will qualify to the knockout stage.

Services teams of Bangladesh and Bhutan are also taking part in the tournament.

The final will be held at the iconic Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan in Kolkata.

Indian Super League side Mohun Bagan Super Giant are the defending champions, having beaten Kolkata rivals East Bengal 1-0 in the final in the 2023 edition of the tournament.

Indian football has been in a state of turmoil for the past few weeks after the team failed to qualify for the third round of FIFA World Cup qualifiers, leading to the sacking of coach Igor Stimac. (PTI)

## Messi says he will keep on playing for Argentina beyond Copa America final

**EAST RUTHERFORD (NEW JERSEY), July 10:** Lionel Messi plans to keep playing for Argentina beyond Sunday's Copa America final.

"As I've said before, I intend to continue," he said Tuesday night after Argentina's 2-0 win over Canada. "I intend to keep living day by day without thinking about what will come in the future or whether I'll continue or not. It's something I just live each day. I'm 37 years and only God knows when the end will be."

Messi scored his 109<sup>th</sup> international goal, his first in this year's tournament. It was his 14<sup>th</sup> in Copa America play, three shy of the record.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner spoke outside the locker room at MetLife Stadium, where he announced his retirement after missing a penalty kick in the shootout loss to Chile in the 2016 Copa America final.

He reversed his decision seven weeks later and has scored 54 goals in 73 international appearances since, raising his matches for Argentina to 186 as he helped win the 2021 Copa America and 2022 World Cup.

Teammate Ángel Di María does intend to retire after Sunday's game against Uruguay or Colombia at Miami Gardens, Florida. The 36-year-old Di María made his international debut in 2008 and has 31 goals in 144 appearances,

"It's my last battle. There's nothing left to say that I haven't said a lot of times before," Di María explained. "It's my last game. I have to say thank you to all Argentinians and to this generation that has allowed me to lift so many trophies."

Di María joined with Messi to lead Argentina to its third World Cup and 15<sup>th</sup> Copa America title.

"We've enjoyed him so much," Messi said. "He's always given his all and the best of himself and that he will retire in a final is something he simply deserves."

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni held out hope Di María will reverse his decision.

"We don't want to start crying right now. We don't want to feel melancholy," Scaloni said. "We have to let him play and then we'll see if we can convince him or not to stay with us."

South American World Cup qualifying resumes in September, with each national team scheduled to play 12 more matches. The 2026 World Cup final will be at MetLife, that July 19.

"We will never be the ones to close the door," Scaloni said. "He can be with our team for as long as he wants to be. And if he wants to retire but still come and hang around, it would be great. And if he wants to come with me to somewhere else, I will take him everywhere so he can decide whatever he wants to do." (AP)

## Suryakumar retains second spot in T20I batting rankings

**DUBAI, July 10:** Star batter Suryakumar Yadav stayed put on second position in the latest ICC Men's T20I batting rankings, which also features Ruturaj Gaikwad, who made significant progress following his exploits in the ongoing away series against Zimbabwe.

Suryakumar is placed second with 821 rating points behind Australia's Travis Head, who has 844 rating points.

Phil Salt of England is paced third with 797 points, ahead of Pakistan skipper Babar Azam (755), Mohammad Rizwan (746) and Jos Buttler (716).

Gaikwad has gained 13 places to climb to the seventh spot in the rankings on the back of a stellar 77 not out off 47 balls in a comprehensive 100-run win for India in the second T20I against Zim-

babwe. With most of India's ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024-winning squad rested for the Zimbabwe tour, the five-game series has allowed India's back-up play-wers to showcase their talent, and with the retirement of stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja, the upcoming players can make a good case for a regular place in the side.

Apart from Gaikwad, Rinku Singh and Abhishek Sharma also made solid gains among the India batters. Rinku, who was among the reserves for the T20 World Cup, jumped four places to reach the 39<sup>th</sup> spot on the back of an attacking 48 not out from 22 balls in the second T20I.

And after a duck in the first game, all-rounder Abhishek smashed a stunning 100 from just 47 balls in the second game. With

this spectacular knock, he entered the rankings for the first time at 75<sup>th</sup> spot. Zimbabwe's Brian Bennett gained 25 places to finish at the 96<sup>th</sup> position courtesy of his two attacking cameos, making 22 off 15 and 26 off nine in the two matches. In the bowlers' T20I chart, left-arm spinner Axar Patel dropped two places to be the lone Indian in top-10 at the ninth position with 644 rating points.

Fellow left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav also dropped three places to the 11<sup>th</sup> spot, while T20 World Cup's player-of-the-tournament Jasprit Bumrah also slid two rungs to 14<sup>th</sup> position. Besides, there were some movements in the top 10 positions of the bowling rankings, with Adam Zampa (7<sup>th</sup>), Fazalhaq Farooqi (8<sup>th</sup>), and Maheesh Theekshana (10<sup>th</sup>) gaining positions. (PTI)

## Sunil Gavaskar turns 75: The man who gave 'Sunny Days' to Indian cricket

**NEW DELHI, July 10:** It is difficult to be consistently relevant in an ever-evolving world. Unless, of course, one happens to be Sunil Gavaskar, who is celebrating the completion of 75 eventful summers in his life on Wednesday.

It's tough for today's young cricket fans, who have grown up watching IPL big hits, to truly understand the significance of Gavaskar, as often they have a shrunken image of him -- a former-cricketer-turned-commentator -- in their mind.

Now, there are too many of them. Or, perhaps, it's the recency bias. However, Gavaskar, who tackled some of the meanest pace bowlers to have walked on earth, remains a colossus in the minds of

his contemporaries, who fondly recall the greatness of the right-hand great.

"Gavaskar made his debut two years after my retirement. But we have already been told by (late) Ajit Wadekar about a talented Bombay boy who could make a lot of runs for India. Didn't he make a lot of runs," said former India batter Chandu Borde.

So, how did Gavaskar tame those fearsome quicks from the West Indies, right from his first series in 1971?

"It's his concentration and a water-tight technique. I have not seen a better stance than that of him, and he watched the ball so closely. Of course, he could play most of the shots but used them

wisely. He was a very practical batsman, knew what to do when," said Borde.

Gavaskar scored 774 runs in that series, helping India conquer the West Indies 1-0. 'Lord Relator' immortalised that triumph with a Calypso dedicated to the master batsman.

"It was Gavaskar. He was real master. Just like a wall. We couldn't out Gavaskar at all, not at all," he wrote, and to this day it remains a goosebump-in-

ducing number.

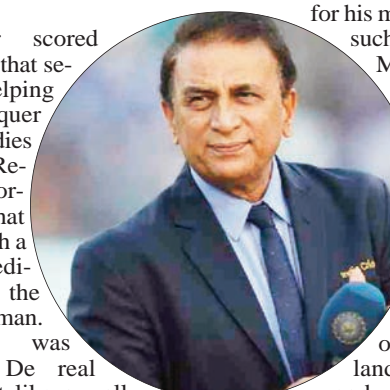
Gavaskar is often remembered for his mastery over pacers such as Andy Roberts, Michael Holding, Malcolm Marshall, and Imran Khan, but another less talked about aspect of his batting was the way he nullified spinners.

Gavaskar, who once rated England's Derek Underwood as the toughest spinner he faced, outfoxed some of the wily twerkers of his generation like Abdul Qadir, Tauseef

Ahmed from Pakistan and England's John Emburey. "Sunny had brilliant footwork, and could use soft hands (against spin). Since he used to watch the ball very closely, he could play spinners late and he never really got into awkward positions against them," recalled former India middle-order batter Mohinder Amarnath, himself a slayer of pacers in the 80s. But occasionally, he wore the enforcer's garb too.

He creamed Marshall for a six to equal the then world record of 29 Test hundreds held by the legendary Sir Donald Bradman.

In fact, Gavaskar's 103, his lone ODI century, against New Zealand during the 1987 World Cup, came off 88 balls. (PTI)





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