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- 14 Indian nationals trapped in cybercrime scam in Cambodia rescued
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# Over 100 Assam students return from Bangladesh

**GUWAHATI, July 21:** Nearly 120 students hailing from Assam have returned from Bangladesh, which has been rocked by violent protests, over the last few days, a senior official said on Sunday.

Additional chief secretary (Home) Ajay Tewari told PTI that the Assam students have so far entered India through Integrated Check Posts at Sutarkandi in Karimganj district and Dawki in Meghalaya.

"In the Northeast, students and other people are entering through the ICs in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. Till Saturday night, 76 students who hail from Assam entered from Dawki while another 41 students from Sutarkandi," he said.

He also said that students from



Barak Valley are mostly coming through Sutarkandi, while those belonging to the Brahmaputra Valley have entered through Dawki. More students are expected to come in the next few days and the

Most of the students belonging to Tripura have returned through Akhaura post in that state," he added.

Asked how many Assamese students were there in Bangladesh, Tewari said that the number is not available with the state government but it is with the Ministry of External Affairs.

"They have not given us the estimated number of Assamese students stuck in Bangladesh or I don't know if they have that breakup. We are monitoring anyone coming through the Sutarkandi post and facilitating their safe return to their respective homes," he said. Karimganj district commissioner Midul Yadav on Saturday said that (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Opposition raises NEET paper leak at all-party meet

**NEW DELHI, July 21:** Opposition parties drew the battle lines on the eve of Parliament's Budget session on Sunday as they asked the government at an all-party meeting to allow discussion on a host of contentious issues such as the Uttar Pradesh government's order to eateries on the Kanwar Yatra route and exam paper leaks, including of the prestigious NEET.

The government, which breaking from the recent practice invited a number of smaller parties for the meeting to signal its political outreach, conveyed its willingness to discuss all issues but Parliamentary Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju stressed that it should be in accordance with the rules.

He called for cooperation from all parties for running Parliament smoothly, saying it is a collective responsibility.

Representatives from the JD(U), a BJP ally, the BJD and the YSR



Congress Party demanded special category status for Bihar, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, respectively, at the meeting of 44 parties, including some having only one MP. During the meeting, which was chaired by defence minister Rajnath Singh, opposition RJD echoed the demand for Bihar. Congress leader K Suresh told

# BSF on high alert amid Bangladesh unrest: Official

**AGARTALA, July 21:** The Border Security Force (BSF) is on high alert to deal with any situation that may arise due to the prevailing unrest in neighbouring Bangladesh, a top official said on Sunday.

Anti-quota agitations in the neighbouring country have left more than 100 dead, prompting the government to enforce a curfew to tackle the volatile situation.

"The prevailing law and order situation in Bangladesh is a security concern for the BSF too as we are entrusted with guarding the international border. We are fully seized of the situation and have beefed up security so that criminal elements from across the border do not take advantage of the current situation," BSF Tripura Frontier inspector general Patel Piyush Purushottam Das said at a



press conference.

He said a large number of troops and all senior commanders have been sent to the border to ensure a high level of operational preparedness.

"The BSF is fully committed to securing the borders of our country and is fully prepared to deal with any exigency," he said.

Das said that one of the prime concerns at present is the safe return of Indian students studying in Bangladesh.

"The number of Indian students in Bangladesh is believed to be close to 8,000 and most of them are enrolled in medical colleges. Most of the students are studying in medical colleges in Comilla, Brahmanbaria and Dhaka and many have chosen to enter India through Tripura," he said. Altogether 314 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Supreme Court to hear pleas related to NEET-UG 2024 today

**NEW DELHI, July 21:** The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a batch of petitions related to the controversy-ridden medical entrance exam, NEET-UG 2024, which was held on May 5.

The National Testing Agency (NTA) had on Saturday released city- and centre-wise results of the medical entrance exam, which is riddled with accusations of paper leak and inordinate inflation of marks.

According to the cause list of July 22 uploaded on the apex court's website, a bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra would hear more than 40 pleas, including those filed by the NTA seeking transfer of cases pending against it in various high courts on the NEET-UG row to the Supreme Court to avoid multiplicity of litigations.

An analysis of data released by NTA indicated that the candidates



who allegedly benefitted from the paper leak and other irregularities did not do well. Some centres, however, showed high concentration of well-performing students, it revealed.

The voluminous data of over 32 lakh candidates from 4,750 centres was not released in a cumulative format but in a drop-down menu for each centre. The data was released on the direction of the Supreme Court which is hearing

# Assam flood situation improves, 1.30 lakh still affected

**GUWAHATI, July 21:** The flood situation in Assam improved on Sunday with the number of people reeling under the deluge decreasing to 1.30 lakh in 10 districts, officials said.

Two major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, continued to flow above the danger level.

A central team, comprising top officials from various ministries, visited the state to assess the damage caused by two waves of floods this year.

Over 1.30 lakh people in 23 revenue circles and 423 villages across 10 districts remain affected in the state, the officials said.

The affected districts are Kamrup, Morigaon, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Golaghat, Nagaon, Dhemaji, Goalpara, Kamrup Metropolitan and Cachar.

Nagaon is the worst-hit district with more than 72,000 people still reeling under the deluge.

Till Friday, the number of

flood-hit people was 2.07 lakh in 10 districts.

The toll in this year's flood, landslide, lightning and storm stands at 113.

More than 9,000 people are taking shelter in 46 camps, while another 18 relief distribution centres are serving over 21,000 citizens, the officials said.

The Brahmaputra river was flowing above the danger level in Dhubri and the Disang in Naglamuraghat.

Damage to embankments, houses, roads and other infrastructure across various districts has also been reported.

The eight-member inter-ministerial central team to assess damage due to the flood wrapped up their three-day visit on Saturday.

The team, led by Ministry of Home Affairs joint secretary Mihir Kumar, visited several flood-affected areas and held discussions with senior state government (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Ashok Singhal visits flood-affected Barchala area

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, July 21:** Assam cabinet minister Ashok Singhal visited several flood-affected areas in the Chitalmari region of Barchala LAC, Sonitpur District on Sunday to assess the situation.

Accompanied by fellow Cabinet Minister Pijush Hazarika, Singhal engaged in discussions with local residents and flood-affected individuals, alongside a team of engineers from the Water Resources Department.

They discussed urgent measures, including the construction of embankments to mitigate the impact of recurrent floods in the area.

Singhal also visited the residence of Baloram Das, a resident of the flood-affected area who tragically lost (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Jawans plant saplings during a plantation drive at SSB camp in Rangiya on Sunday. UB Photos

# 13 Indians, lured into cyber-scramming centres in Laos, rescued

**NEW DELHI, July 21:** Thirteen Indians, who were lured into certain cyber-scramming centres in Laos, have been rescued and sent back home, the Indian embassy in the Southeast Asian country said on Sunday.

"In our continued work to ensure safety & well-being of Indians as top priority, Embassy successfully rescues 13 Indians from cyberscamming centres in Laos & ensures their safe return to India," the mission posted on 'X'.

"So far, Embassy has rescued 518 Indians. We thank Lao authorities for their cooperation," it said.

On May 7, the embassy came out with an advisory cautioning Indians against fake job offers.

"Instances have come to our notice recently wherein Indian nationals are being lured for employment through Thailand," it had said.

"These fake jobs are for posts such as of 'Digital Sales and Marketing Executives' or 'Customer Support Service' by dubious companies involved in call-centre scams and crypto-currency fraud in Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos," the embassy said in the advisory.



It said agents in places such as Dubai, Bangkok, Singapore and India associated with these firms are recruiting Indians by taking simple interviews and tests.

"Victims are illegally taken across the border into Laos from Thailand and held captive to work in Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos under harsh and restrictive conditions," it said.

"At times, they are held hostages by criminal syndicates indulging in illegal (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Two held with 47.42 grams of heroin in KA

**HT Bureau**  
**BOKAJAN, July 21:** In a significant crackdown on narcotics trafficking, Khatkhathi police on Sunday seized a total of 47.42 grams of heroin in two separate operations in Karbi Anglong.

The arrests were made during routine checks along NH 39, underscoring the persistent efforts to curb drug smuggling in the region.

The first seizure occurred around 2 pm when police intercepted a motorcycle bearing registration AS 12 AA 3075 at Khatkhathi. Upon thorough inspection, officers discovered four containers of chewing tobacco concealing 26.52 grams of heroin.

Guljar Hussain (26), hailing from Morigaon Lahorighat, was promptly arrested in connection with the incident.

In a subsequent operation at Lahorjan around 3:30 pm, Khatkhathi police (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Sharad Pawar is 'Sargana of Corruption': Amit Shah

**PUNE, July 21:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday termed NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar as the "sargana" (ringleader) who institutionalised corruption in the country and accused Rahul Gandhi of being "arrogant" despite Congress losing elections on three occasions.

Addressing the BJP's state convention in Pune, Shah dubbed Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray "the head of the Aurangzeb fan club" who was sitting with people who sought pardon for 1993 Mumbai serial blasts convict Yakub Memon.

He said Rahul Gandhi's arrogance will be crushed after BJP wins upcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Jharkhand.

"If there is the biggest 'sargana' of corruption in Indian politics, it is Sharad Pawar. There is no confusion in my mind about this. I am saying it openly that Pawar has institutionalised corruption in the country," Shah said as he accused the veteran politician of doing nothing for the country's welfare and Maharashtra when he was in power.

Taking a swipe, Shah said the BJP allotted reservation to Marathas when it helmed Maharashtra (under Devendra Fadnavis) whereas whenever Sharad Pawar's government comes to power, the Maratha quota disappears.

He said the Mahayuti government must come to power to ensure the reservation for Marathas stays.

This is Shah's first visit to Maharashtra after the BJP suffered severe drubbing in the recent (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# 'We are witnessing a dynamic shift in how tobacco cessation is approached'

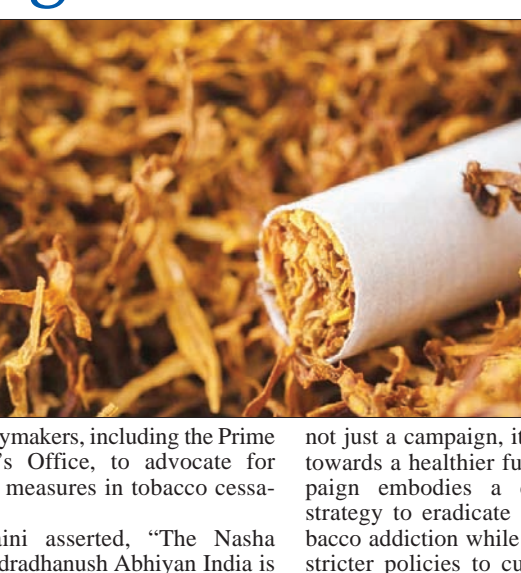
## Doctor-led campaign to make India addiction-free garners over 1,000 signatures

**NEW DELHI, July 21:** Over 1,000 doctors, public health experts, and undergraduate and postgraduate medical students have signed to support the initiative "Nasha Mukti Indradhanush Abhiyan India" for a tobacco-free future.

Launched by the Asian Coalition for Health Empowerment (ACHE) in collaboration with Doctors Against Addiction (DaAD), this signature campaign garners support from medical professionals and the public, paving the way for a healthier, addiction-free India.

Over the past eight months, the campaign has seen a remarkable response. Dr Narender Saini, former general secretary of the Indian Medical Association, said.

These signatures are being compiled and shared with health organizations



and policymakers, including the Prime Minister's Office, to advocate for stringent measures in tobacco cessation.

Dr Saini asserted, "The Nasha Mukti Indradhanush Abhiyan India is not just a campaign, it's a movement towards a healthier future. The campaign embodies a comprehensive strategy to eradicate the grip of tobacco addiction while advocating for stricter policies to curb its use and other harmful substances."

"We are witnessing a dynamic shift in how tobacco cessation is approached. The collective efforts of our dedicated healthcare professionals and the broader community in dispelling myths and fostering awareness are crucial steps toward a healthier society," he said.

The campaign's focus extends beyond tobacco, targeting addictions like drugs, alcohol, and even smartphone overuse, he elaborated.

It aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal-3 (SDG-3), which emphasises ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages, embodying a preventive and curative approach to tackling the crisis. Dr Pawan Gupta, senior consultant, Pulmonary Medicine, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)











# Will offer shelter to anyone in distress who comes knocking on our door: Mamata on B'desh situation



**KOLKATA, July 21:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said that in the wake of the escalating violence in Bangladesh, she would keep the doors of her state open for people in distress from the neighbouring country and offer them shelter.

over matters concerning the current situation in Bangladesh. "We should exercise restraint and not walk into any provocation or excitement on the issue," she stated. The Trinamool Congress supremo also expressed her solidarity with the people who have remained at the receiving end of the ongoing violence in the neighbouring country. "We are sad to see blood getting spilt and my heart goes out to those students who were killed," she said. President of the BJP's Bengal unit and junior union minister Sukanta Majumdar, however, opined that such matters, involving the country's foreign policies, should first be consulted with the Centre before any public statement is made. "It's true that we are all concerned about the current situation in Bangladesh over which Delhi is keeping a close watch. Our chief minister should not be voicing her opinions on matters involving our country's foreign policies without first consulting the Centre," he said. Violence escalated in the Bangladesh capital Dhaka and elsewhere over student protests demanding reforms of the quota system for government jobs. The protesters are demanding an end to a quota system that reserves up to 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971 against Pakistan. (PTI)

## Govt clears consideration of private member's bill on free internet

**NEW DELHI, July 21:** The government has cleared the consideration of a private member's bill that seeks to grant every citizen the right to free internet access while ensuring equal access to people from backward and remote regions of the country. "No citizen shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from accessing internet facilities," the bill has proposed. While the bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by CPI(M) member V Sivadasan in December 2023, according to a bulletin issued by the Upper House of Parliament, Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has communicated to the Rajya Sabha secretary-general that the president has recommended the consideration of the bill to the House. Private members' bills involving expenditure from the exchequer require the president's permission through the ministry concerned on whether such bills can be considered by the House. (PTI)

## Mamata slams NDA allies for sacrificing ministerial berths, claims Central govt won't last long

**KOLKATA, July 21:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday asserted that the BJP-led government at the Centre would not "last long and would collapse soon", claiming it was formed through "intimidation and threats". Addressing the mega 'Martyrs' Day' rally of the TMC, Banerjee, without naming anyone, also criticised the BJP's allies in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre for "sacrificing" ministerial positions allegedly for financial gain. The TMC leader praised Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, who was present at the event, for his party's performance in the Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh. "The government at the Centre won't last long. This is not a stable government and will collapse soon," she said. Describing the NDA allies as "cowards and greedy individuals who yielded to financial inducements," Banerjee questioned, "Has anyone ever heard of money being offered instead of ministries? They are cowards, shameless, and greedy. They sacrificed their own identities." While commending Akhilesh Yadav, Banerjee remarked, "The 'Khel' (game) you played in UP should have forced the BJP government (in UP) to resign, but the shameless government continues in power by misusing agencies and other means. You cannot intimidate us by misusing agencies..." The TMC supremo claimed that only Bengal can preserve the existence of India and there can be no India without Bengal. Echoing Yadav's claim that the BJP-led NDA government would not endure, Banerjee predicted it would soon "collapse". She asserted, "The BJP no longer holds a majority. Given how the current Central government came to power—by misusing central investigation agencies and the Election Commission of India—it won't be able to sustain itself for long." Banerjee accused the BJP, Congress, and CPI(M) of having a "tacit understanding" in West Bengal, alleging that their sole aim is to obstruct development efforts in the state. "I am prepared to offer 10 lakh state government jobs. However, whenever I attempt

## Spike in terror attacks won't be justification to delay assembly polls in J&K: Omar Abdullah

**SAMBA/JAMMU, July 21:** National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah on Sunday said the spike in terrorist attacks in the recent past would be no justification to delay assembly elections, which were held even in 1996 when militancy was at its peak in Jammu and Kashmir. "Some people are saying the situation has deteriorated and hence, there should be no elections. What happened to you? Are we so weak or the situation worsened so much that there are no chances of holding elections? We held elections in 1996 and you have to agree that there is a difference of heaven and earth between the situation at that time and today," he said. "Those who do not want to hold elections (in J&K) should tell that we are bowing before the gun-toting forces and are accepting defeat, besides ignoring the sacrifices of our forces. You tell our enemies that we will lay down without fighting," he said. "If you want to bow before such forces then don't go for the (assembly) elections. We have no objection be-

cause this election is taking place on the orders of the Supreme Court which has set a deadline of September 30. "You say in the Supreme Court the situation is not conducive for holding assembly polls and we are bowing before the forces who over the past (three) years martyred our 55 brave hearts. If you want to ignore and waste their sacrifices, we will bear the decision silently as there is nothing else we can do," Abdullah told reporters on the sidelines of a public rally at Gurha Slathia in the Samba district. He said there are such forces across the neighbouring country which do not want friendly ties between the two countries. "We know they won't desist from their activities but somehow we were also found off-guard," he said, criticising Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha for delaying the joint high-level meeting held in Jammu on Saturday to chalk out a strategy to tackle growing terror incidents. Omar said the meeting should have been called a long time after the first terror incident. "Why he waited for so

long? It was only after we started raising the concern, the meeting was convened," he said. Earlier, addressing a gathering, Omar said, "We have to face these forces bravely but this is not expected under their rule." "When they took over from us in January 2015, the situation was altogether different as we had cleared all areas of Jammu region of the scourge of terrorism. Despite their claims post (August) 2019 (when J&K's special status was revoked and the erstwhile state was bifurcated into two Union Territories), there is no place which is not facing the looming threat of terror attacks," he said. "Not only they failed to ensure the development of J&K, but our security has also been compromised, which is evident from the attacks, resulting in loss of precious lives of our brave personnel. They are least bothered about all these," he said. Omar said from Kathua to Reasi and Rajouri to Doda, there hardly passes any day when there is no news of a terror attack on the forces. (PTI)

# Private Members' Bills barring former judges from joining politics, deepfake ban listed in RS

Deepfake involves morphing someone's face or other features of their body digitally to make it appear like someone else

**NEW DELHI, July 21:** Private Members' Bills listed in Rajya Sabha for the upcoming Monsoon Session include one that seeks prohibition on holders of constitutional posts, like judges, joining a political party post retirement, a few bills on artificial intelligence and deepfake, as well as one on amending the citizenship law. In all, 23 Private Members' Bills have been listed for introduction in the upcoming session in the Upper House. The Constitution (amendment) Bill, 2024 (amendment of articles 124, 148, 319 and 324 and insertion of new articles 220A and 309A), listed by Rashtriya Janata Dal MP AD Singh, seeks to bar those retiring from Constitutional posts, like judges and former election commissioners from joining political parties post retirement, a source said. The Bill comes against the backdrop of recent controversies such as one involving Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who resigned from his judicial position on March 5, and within two days, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party. In July, former Madhya Pradesh High Court judge Rohit Arya



joined the BJP, three months after his retirement. Another Bill listed by Singh seeks amendment in the The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita to include marital rape as a crime. Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP V Sivadasan has listed two Bills -- one seeking universal basic income and another enactment of Right to Old Age Care. Trinamool Congress MP Mausam Noor has also listed two bills, one on protecting rights of employees from Artificial Intelligence, and another seeking crimi-

nalisation of 'deepfake'. Deepfake involves morphing someone's face or other features of their body digitally to make it appear like someone else, typically for malicious purposes. During the recently concluded Lok Sabha polls, concerns were expressed over the use of deepfake videos to spread misinformation. Union Home Minister Amit Shah was one of its victims. P Sandosh Kumar of Communist Party of India has listed a bill to create an Artificial Intelligence Technology Regulatory Authority.

Kumar has also listed The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2024 to amend the law to provide citizenship to "persecuted minorities" from neighbouring countries, and not to provide citizenship on the basis of religion, as prescribed in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019. The law which led to protests in several parts of the country, including Delhi, provides for accelerated eligibility for Indian citizenship to persecuted minorities who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, and who entered India on or before December 31, 2014. The Act does not mention Muslims. A private member's bill is a bill introduced by a legislator who is not a part of government. Only 14 such bills have been passed by both Houses since 1952. According to a booklet published by Rajya Sabha secretariat, the importance of Private Members' Bills lies in the fact that they enable legislators to draw attention to issues which might not be represented in Government Bills or to highlight the issues and gaps in the existing legal framework requiring legislative intervention. (PTI)

## India's air pollution crisis result of policy failure: Cong slams govt



**NEW DELHI, July 21:** Accusing the Modi government of "poor policy-making" in dealing with air pollution, the Congress on Sunday demanded that the forthcoming Union Budget must provide a path forward to resourcing and equipping India's local bodies, state governments, and the Centre in tackling this "grave public health crisis". "Not only they failed to ensure the development of J&K, but our security has also been compromised, which is evident from the attacks, resulting in loss of precious lives of our brave personnel. They are least bothered about all these," he said. Omar said from Kathua to Reasi and Rajouri to Doda, there hardly passes any day when there is no news of a terror attack on the forces. (PTI)

sequences of air pollution - in both morbidity and mortality - have become all too evident," he said. It is now time for a revisit and a total revamp of both the Air Pollution (Control and Prevention) Act and the NAAQS, Ramesh said. "Our cities need at least 10-20 times more funding -- NCAP must be made a Rs 25,000 crore programme NCAP must adopt measurement of PM 2.5 levels as the yardstick for performance NCAP must reorient its focus to key sources of emissions - burning of solid fuels, vehicular emissions, and industrial emissions," he said. NCAP must adopt a regional/airshed approach for air quality control - municipal and state authorities must have the governance architecture and resources required to collaborate across jurisdictions, Ramesh said. "The NCAP must be given legal backing, an enforcement mechanism, and serious data monitoring capacity for every Indian city, beyond the current focus only on 'non-attainment' cities, he argued. "Air pollution norms for coal power plants must be enforced immediately. All power plants must install a Fluoride Gas Desulfurizer (FGD) by the end of 2024," he said. Ramesh demanded that the National Green Tribunal's independence must be restored, and the "anti-people environmental law amendments" made in the last 10 years must be rolled back. "The forthcoming Union Budget must provide a path forward to resourcing and equipping India's local bodies, state governments, and Union government in tackling this grave public health crisis," he said. Tagging his statement, Ramesh said on X, "India's air pollution crisis is a result of policy failure." (PTI)

## All-party meet: Cong demands discussion on NEET, UP eateries row

**NEW DELHI, July 21:** The Congress on Sunday asserted that an all-party meeting that issues such as the NEET 'scam', Uttar Pradesh government's order to eateries and internal security situation in Jammu and Manipur, be taken up for discussion during the Budget session of Parliament. Congress general secretary, in-charge communications, Jairam Ramesh said that in the all-party meeting of floor leaders chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Congress' deputy leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi presented a host of issues on behalf of the party that should be taken up in the Parliament session beginning Monday. Gogoi called for discussion on governance issues relating to "NEET/NET scams, UPSC controversies, worsening railway safety and Agniveer", Ramesh said. He said the party also flagged that the internal security situation in Jammu and Manipur should be taken up for discussion during the session. According to Ramesh, Gogoi also asserted at the meeting that challenges on the borders with China and environmental concerns arising out of floods and natural disasters, deforestation and pollution, be discussed during the session. The Congress also raised the is-



sues relating to Centre-state relations and the economy, which it stated must be debated upon. In an apparent reference to the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments' controversial directive to eateries on the Kanwar Yatra route to display the owners' names, the party also flagged the issue of "deliberate attempts at polarisation in states like UP by passing unconstitutional orders", Ramesh, who was also present at the meeting, said in a post on X. Earlier, as the meeting got underway, Ramesh posted on X that in the all-party meeting, the JD(U) leader demanded special category status for Bihar. "The YSRCP leader demanded special category status for Andhra Pradesh. Strangely, the TDP leader kept quiet on the matter," Ramesh said. In another post, he said, "How the political climate has changed! In the

all-party meeting of floor leaders the BJD leader reminded the Defence Minister and BJP President JP Nadda that the BJP's manifesto for the 2014 assembly elections in Odisha had promised special category status to the state." Ramesh also posted on X that there was a universal demand that the Central Hall should once again be opened up for MPs to mingle with each other and improve communications across the parties. "The historic Central Hall has sadly fallen into disuse after the opening of the new building of Parliament," Ramesh said. "In the all-party meeting of floor leaders chaired by the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, the universal demand was for the constitution of the 24 Department-Related Standing Committees and giving them their due importance. There was also a universal demand for reviving the Consultative Committees where MPs can interact with the Ministers concerned," Ramesh said in another post on X. Later, Congress leader K Suresh told reporters that his party was joined by other INDIA bloc members in seeking the Lok Sabha deputy speaker's position for the opposition according to convention. (PTI)

## Noida spent only 6 pc of NCAP funds for air pollution control: Govt data

Noida in Uttar Pradesh has utilised only ₹ 1.43 crore of the ₹ 21.95 crore allocated to it for combatting air pollution

**NEW DELHI, July 21:** Noida, one of India's most polluted cities, has used only around 6 per cent of the ₹ 21.95 crore it received under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) since 2019, according to government data. Data released by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) showed that 19 out of the 131 cities covered under the NCAP have utilised less than 50 per cent of the funds allocated, and four have used below 25 per cent of the funds received as of May 3. Launched in 2019, the NCAP is India's first national effort to set clean air targets, aiming for a 20-30 per cent reduction in PM10 pollution by 2024, with 2017 as the base year. The revised target aims for a 40 per cent reduction by 2026, using 2019-20 as the base year. A total of 46 cities and urban agglomerations spent less than 75 per cent of the money received under the programme, either directly from the environment ministry or through the 15th Finance Commission.



Noida in Uttar Pradesh has utilised only ₹ 1.43 crore of the ₹ 21.95 crore allocated to it for combatting air pollution. Bengaluru spent only ₹ 68.37 crore of the ₹ 535.1 crore received, Nagpur used ₹ 17.71 crore of ₹ 132.6 crore, and Visakhapatnam spent ₹ 26.17 crore of the ₹ 129.25 crore it got. Other cities with low fund utilisation include Pune (26.44 per

cent), Gulbarga (27.2 per cent), Vasai-Virar (28.01 per cent), Nashik (28.21 per cent), Kolhapur (28.37 per cent), Vijayawada (29.16 per cent), Angul (29.95 per cent), Jamshedpur (35.78 per cent), Delhi (37.33 per cent), Anantapur (38.39 per cent), Faridabad (38.89 per cent), Durg Bhilai Nagar (42.31 per cent), Varanasi (46.25 per cent), Ranchi (48.73 per cent), and Jalandhar (48.81 per cent).

A report released by the independent think tank Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) on Friday said only ₹ 6,806 crore (64 per cent) of the total ₹ 10,566 crore allocated to the 131 cities since the programme's inception has been utilised as of May 3. Nearly two-thirds of the funds allocated to 131 cities under the NCAP have been used for dust management, while only 0.61 per cent of the total funds have been used to tackle industrial pollution, 12.63 per cent for vehicular pollution, and 14.51 per cent for biomass burning. Among the cities covered by the programme, 82 receive direct funding from the MoEFCC, while 42 cities and seven urban agglomerations with population over a million receive funding from the 15th Finance Commission. The 82 cities utilised ₹ 831.42 crore of the total ₹ 1,616.47 crore allocated, while the 49 cities receiving funding under the 15th Finance Commission spent ₹ 5,974.73 crore of the total ₹ 8,951 crore allocated. (PTI)

