

6
WORLD



- Kamala Harris is unfit to rule: Trump; describes her as radical left lunatic

8
NATION



- Myanmar violence, South China Sea tensions are top issues
- Rashtrapati Bhavan's 'Durbar Hall' renamed 'Ganatantra Mandap'
- SC verdict on NEET defeat of Cong's petty politics: Pradhan

Vol .No. XXV

Issue No. 196

RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 26, 2024

PAGES 12

PRICE ₹ 8

APSC civil service exam to have questions in Assamese for 1st time

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 25: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that the combined civil service examination conducted by the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) will have the question papers in Assamese language for the first time.

The mains examination of the civil service is scheduled to begin on Friday. The question papers will have English language along with Assamese.

Sarma has lauded the step and he has praised APSC for this initiative.

Taking to his X handle, the Chief Minister wrote, "The Combined Civil Service Examination (Main) starts tomorrow. For the first time in history, all questions will be in Assamese in addition to English, as per Govt of Assam's instructions.

Kudos to the Assam Public Service Commission for this historic move."

Notably, on July 29, a special Court in Assam will pronounce the punishment for those who were found guilty of the APSC cash-for-job scam.

The court on Monday found thirty-two people guilty, including Rakesh Paul, the former chairman of the Assam Public Service Commission, two of its members, and 29 aspirants who paid thousands of rupees to become agriculture development officers in 2014.

Maximum punishments for the disgraced former APSC chairman and his associates were fervently asked for by the public prosecutors. In its plea, the prosecution asked for the maximum term to be given to the accused, citing factors such as past behavior, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Apex court settles 35-year-old legal conundrum

SC boost for states to tax mining activities

NEW DELHI, July 25: In a setback to the Centre, the Supreme Court on Thursday held that royalty payable on minerals is not a tax and states have the legislative competence to impose taxes on mines and minerals-bearing lands.

The verdict will give a boost to mineral-rich states like Jharkhand and Odisha as they urged the top court to decide on recovery of taxes worth thousands of crores rupees levied by the Centre on mines and minerals, till now.

The states urged the top court to make the verdict operational with retrospective effect to ensure refund of the taxes from the Centre. However, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, vehemently opposed the submissions and sought that the verdict be made effective prospectively.

A nine-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud asked the Centre and the states to



file written submissions on this aspect, and said that it will decide the issue on July 31. By a majority verdict of 8:1, the nine-judge Constitution bench held that royalty payable on minerals is not a tax.

Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, who read out the verdict for himself and seven judges of the bench, held that Parliament does not have the power to tax mineral rights

under Entry 50 of the List II of the Constitution.

Reading the operative part of the majority verdict, the CJI said the 1989 verdict of the apex court's seven-judge Constitution bench, which had held that royalty is tax, is incorrect.

"Royalty is not within the nature of tax as it is a contractual consideration paid by the lessee for the

mining lease. Both royalty and dead rent do not fulfil the characteristics of tax. The judgement in India Cements (1989 verdict) holding royalty to be a tax is overruled," the CJI said.

Royalties are payments that the user party makes to the owner of an intellectual property or real property asset.

Under Entry 49, states have the power to levy taxes on lands and buildings, while Entry 50 allows states to impose taxes on mineral rights subject to any limitations imposed by Parliament by law relating to mineral development.

The CJI said the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDRA), 1957 does not limit the states from imposing taxes on mines and mineral development. "There is no specific provision in the MMDRA Act imposing limitations on the taxing powers of the State. Royalty under MMDRA

is not in the nature of a tax," the bench said, adding "States have legislative competence to tax mines, minerals and mineral bearing land." At the outset, the CJI said the bench has delivered two separate verdicts and Justice B V Nagarathna has given dissenting views.

Reading out her verdict, Justice Nagarathna said the states do not have the legislative competence to levy taxes on mines and minerals bearing lands. The bench decided the hugely contentious issue of whether the royalty payable on minerals is a tax under the MMDRA, and if only the Centre is vested with the power to levy such taxation or states also have the authority to impose levies on mineral bearing land in their territory.

Besides the CJI and Justice Nagarathna, the other members of the bench are justices Hrishikesh Roy, Abhay S Oka, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

HT BRIEFS

IIM-Guwahati

GUWAHATI: The courses at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Guwahati are set to begin in the next academic year, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Wednesday after holding a meeting with education minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Taking to micro-blogging site X, Sarma stated, "It gives me great pleasure to share that Hon'ble Minister has consented to our request of IIM-Guwahati commencing courses from the next academic year."

Educational progress

GUWAHATI: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma held discussions with Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan in New Delhi, securing significant commitments to enhance the educational sector in the state. During the meeting, fruitful discussions took place regarding the transformation of the research, innovation, higher education, and school education field in Assam, along with efforts to link the talented youth of Assam with increased opportunities for education, training, and employment. Taking to micro-blogging site X, Pradhan stated, "NEP remains a guiding principle in making our teaching and learning landscape more vibrant. @EduMinOfIndia will leave no stone unturned in strengthening capacities of academic institutions and teachers, enabling equitable access to 21st century quality education and fulfilling educational priorities of Assam."

Arunachal CM

GUWAHATI: Chief Minister Pema Khandu held a meeting with S Radhakrishnan, the Chief General Manager of State Bank of India (SBI) in Guwahati, at the Secretariat aiming to enhance economic growth and development in Arunachal Pradesh, the chief minister informed on Thursday. The meeting focused on the execution of state government initiatives, with a special emphasis on the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Swavalamban Yojana (DDUSY), designed to promote self-reliant India. Chief Minister Khandu also emphasised the importance of SBI in advancing financial inclusion and bolstering the state's development goals.

Urged central govt to enact MoS clauses to empower KAAC: Tuliram on his Delhi visit



DIPHU, July 25: Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) chief Tuliram Ronghang stated on Thursday that he has been in New Delhi for the past four to five days, pursuing the central government for the enactment of various clauses from Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) 1 and 2 to empower the current KAAC.

Ronghang made these remarks while addressing media personnel at his official residence in Diphu.

He informed that in 2011, the now-disbanded armed group

United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) signed an MoS with the Central government to secure direct funding for development and to enhance KAAC's authority. Additionally, in 2021, six disbanded armed organizations also signed an MoS with the state and central governments to bolster development and improve political, social, and cultural safeguards for scheduled tribes communities under KAAC's jurisdiction.

"We were in New Delhi to urge the central government to include MoS 1 and 2 clauses in the 165th constitutional amendment, thereby enabling direct funding, enhanced development, and better protection for scheduled tribes under KAAC," added the CEM.

"Since the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by ASDC with the Central government in 1995, KAAC has gained oversight of 30 departments. Implementing MoS 1 and 2 could potentially bring an additional 54 departments under KAAC's jurisdiction, encompassing both legislative and executive powers," he elaborated.

Addressing misconceptions about Article 280 of the Constitution of India, the CEM clarified that it pertains to the funding framework of the Central government, not the establishment of Panchayati Raj, as alleged by some opposition leaders.

Asserting KAAC's position, Ronghang stated, "KAAC is arguably the most influential sixth-scheduled Autonomous Council in India." (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Dispute at Assam-Nagaland border prompts high-level meeting

HT Bureau
DIPHU, July 25: A high-level delegation from Karbi Anglong district, led by district commissioner Nirola Phangchopi, ACS, along with key officials including the superintendent of police, secretaries of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), director of survey, KAAC, and others, recently visited the Rongphar crossing on the Assam-Nagaland border.

The visit on July 24 was prompted by complaints from villagers in the border area regarding the proposed construction of a Nagaland Police camp on Assam land, where villagers hold periodic land patts.

During the visit, officials from both Karbi Anglong and Dimapur administrations presented their respective border land maps. While the Dimapur administration referred to Nagaland's land survey, the Karbi Anglong administration presented the Survey of India map.

Disagreement arose when the Dimapur administration did not accept the land demarcation as shown in the Survey of India map. After extensive discussions, both parties



agreed to convene a meeting at the office of the Forest Divisional Officer in Dimapur to further address the issue.

The meeting, attended by officials from Dimapur including deputy commissioner Dr Tinoungshih Chang, NCS, and other administrative officers, welcomed the Karbi Anglong team and stressed the importance of cooperation in resolving the dispute.

Key points discussed during the meeting included recent incidents in the border area, with an agreement reached for both police administrations to exchange reports and maintain ongoing communication to prevent future incidents. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Police strengthened, pending cases drop 4-fold in last 3 years: Himanta

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 25: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday claimed that the state police force has been bolstered and the number of cases pending has witnessed a decline by at least four-fold in the last three years.

Sarma claimed that the number of pending cases in Assam has significantly decreased, from 95,994 in 2021 to 18,286 cases in 2024. As per Sarma, each investigating officer now has fewer cases to handle. 52 cases were filed against each investigating officer in the police department in 2021; by June 2024 that number has come down to just 7.39 cases. The significant decrease in the average cases that each officer handles has been commended by the Chief Minister. "Due to our modernisation efforts, the average number of cases, an Investigating Officer of @assampolice look after has significantly come down, reducing their burden and improving quality of investigation," Sarma



wrote on micro-blogging site X.

This has resulted in a drastic reduction in case pendency, benefiting a large section of society, he said. Over the past three years, the chief minister has implemented various measures aimed at transforming the state police force as a whole. Assam implemented the Body Mass Index (BMI) calculation for all policemen last year in an effort to increase the fitness of the police force. Sarma has previously ordered that any police officer discovered to be drunk will be dismissed from the job immediately. "Police should always act responsibly to ensure that the public is at ease when visiting police stations," he had said.

KAAC implements checkpoints to regulate goods entry

HT Bureau
DIPHU, July 25: The Taxation department of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) has established dedicated checkpoints for the entry of goods at Samding Bey village, Parokhuwa along NH-36, and at Garapani on NH-39.

These checkpoints, operational under the KAAC Market Management Control Act 1954, aim to enforce trading fees and regulate trading licenses, as well as monitor the movement of goods entering and exiting Karbi Anglong.

Mohen Bey, involved in issuing Transit Pass (TP) and challans at the Samding Bey checkpoint, explained, "The checkpoints have been established to impose trading fees, verify trade licenses of traders, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

I will personally invite Kuki-Zo MLAs to attend upcoming assembly session: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, July 25: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Thursday said he will personally send invitations to the 10 Kuki-Zo legislators to attend the upcoming Assembly session.

Talking to reporters here, Singh said, "I will personally extend the invitations, as well as through the Assembly. They (Kuki-Zo MLAs) should join us, and we are ready to cooperate."

Singh's remark comes ahead of the sixth session of the Manipur Legislative Assembly scheduled from July 31 to August 6. The 10 Kuki MLAs, including two ministers, did not attend the last two sessions due to the ongoing ethnic violence in the state.

The fifth session was held from February 28 to March 5 and the fourth session on August 29 last year was adjourned after just 11 minutes, with none of the Kuki-Zo MLAs in attendance. Singh also mentioned about his upcoming trip to Delhi, where he plans to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"My visit to Delhi is for the NITI Aayog meeting. Following this, there will be a chief ministers' conclave where we will discuss various issues. I will address the current situation in the state and seek immediate solu-



tions to the ongoing crisis. I am optimistic that positive outcomes will result," Singh said before departing for the national capital.

Regarding the incident of arson in Jiribam district on Wednesday night, Singh said, "I have conducted investigations and spoken with leaders from both communities. There is no indication (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

New centre in Silchar to submit claims for blocked Aadhaar cards



SILCHAR, July 25: The Assam government has set up a new centre to facilitate submissions for people listed in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) who have not received Aadhaar cards due to biometric discrepancies.

According to an official release on Wednesday, the new centre with four receiving counters will oper-

ate at Dak Bungalow, near the DC Office, to address this issue from July 25.

People included in the NRC but lacking Aadhaar due to biometric issues are encouraged to visit the centre starting at 10 am to submit their claims, the statement added.

Applicants must bring essential documents such as voter ID, PAN

card, ration card, and their NRC application receipt number (ARN), it added.

Biometrics of 27.43 lakh applicants were taken during the claims and objections phase of the NRC exercise before the list was published on August 31, 2019.

Subsequently, the NRC authorities froze this data, preventing the applicants from obtaining Aadhaar cards.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma recently mentioned that approximately nine lakh people had their Aadhaar cards blocked because they applied during the NRC updating process. He highlighted that Aadhaar centres were temporarily converted into NRC hubs during this period, causing timing conflicts which are now under review. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, July 25: The government aims to amplify its efforts to reach every adolescent regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds by fostering partnerships with NGOs and community leaders, Union health secretary Apurva Chandra said Thursday.

India has and will continue to remain steadfast in its commitment to nurturing adolescents' talents, supporting their ambitions and empowering them to build a brighter, inclusive future for all, Chandra said at the launch of the "Economic Case for Investment in the Well-being of Adolescents in India" report, here.

The report builds on the global findings presented in the "Adolescents in a Changing World: The Case for Urgent Investment" which was commissioned by the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH), and re-



leased at the 77th World Health Assembly in Geneva.

The latest report highlights significant improvements in adolescent wellbeing in India over recent decades, showcasing the government's extensive policies and programmes aimed at promoting the

health and well-being of adolescents.

India has the largest population of adolescents in the world (253 million and growing), Chandra said, adding, "Our adolescents are the backbone of our future, embodying the promise of a vibrant and pro-

gressive nation." Highlighting India's unequivocal commitment to the wellbeing of adolescents, he said, "We recognise that ensuring their health, education, and empowerment is vital to achieving our national and international development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."

The government is dedicated to creating an environment where adolescents can thrive, make informed decisions, and contribute meaningfully to society, he said.

He also highlighted that India is the first country to launch the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), a dedicated programme to reach out to the 253 million adolescents -- male and female, rural and urban, married and unmarried, in and out-of-school adolescents (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Markets extend losses for 5th session; metal, bank stocks major drag

MUMBAI, July 25: Equity market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty stayed on the back foot for the fifth straight session on Thursday as investors offloaded metal, banking and finance stocks amid a lacklustre trend in global markets.

Heavy foreign fund outflows after a hike in securities transaction tax and short-term capital gains tax also impacted markets' sentiment negatively, traders said.

However, strong buying in oil & stocks, energy and auto shares helped the indices offset some losses, they added.

After a sharp fall in intra-day trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex managed to recover some of the lost ground to settle 109.08 points or 0.14 per cent lower at 80,039.80, as a sharp rally in Tata Motors and Larsen & Toubro restricted its fall. During the day, it tanked 671 points or 0.83 per cent to 79,477.83.

Shares of Larsen & Toubro ended nearly 3 per cent higher after the company posted a 12 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) in the June quarter.

Tata Motors jumped nearly 6 per cent. The NSE Nifty dipped 7.40 points or 0.03 per cent to 24,406.10. Intra-day, it tumbled 202.70 points or 0.83 per cent to 24,210.80.

In five days, the BSE benchmark has tumbled 1,303.66 points or 1.60 per cent, while the Nifty declined 394.75 points or 1.59 per



cent. "Overnight slump in US equities caused a major slump in domestic markets in early trade due to heavy profit-taking in banking, IT, metals and realty stocks."

"However, markets recouped most of its losses towards the end, with Sensex managing to close above the crucial 80k-mark amid buying in oil & gas and automobile stocks, indicating that investors are willing to bet on good fundamental sectoral stocks despite rising concerns of the stretched valuations of the Indian markets," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

From the Sensex pack, Axis Bank declined over 5 per cent after the company's June quarter earnings failed to cheer investors.

Nestle, Titan, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, ITC, JSW

Steel and State Bank of India were the other laggards.

Sun Pharma, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finance and Power Grid also ended in the positive territory.

"After a volatile session, the Indian market concluded on a flat note, influenced by lower-than-expected earnings growth from major banks. Global indices also reacted pessimistically due to the disappointing results from top US tech companies."

"However, the government's commitment to improving consumption and bridging the gap for energy transition in the budget buoyed sectoral sentiments," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.22 per

cent, and smallcap index dipped 0.14 per cent.

Among the indices, metal lost 1.19 per cent, bankex (1.10 per cent), realty (0.80 per cent), telecommunication (0.65 per cent) and financial services (0.60 per cent). On the other hand, energy, healthcare, industrials, utilities, auto and oil & gas were among the gainers.

"Global stocks tumbled on Thursday after a tech-fuelled sell-off on Wall Street last night. A slew of disappointing results caused traders to panic that the artificial intelligence frenzy that has powered the bull market this year may have been overdone," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities, said.

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

European markets were trading in the negative territory in the mid-session deals. US markets ended significantly lower on Wednesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 5,130.90 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.73 per cent to USD 80.31 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark declined 280.16 points or 0.35 per cent to settle at 80,148.88 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty dropped 65.55 points or 0.27 per cent to 24,413.50. (PTI)

Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at all-time low of 83.72 against US dollar

MUMBAI, July 25: The rupee fell 1 paisa to close at an all-time low of 83.72 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, dragged down by demand for the American currency in the overseas market and significant foreign fund outflows.

Forex traders said the fall in domestic unit came on the heels of a significant downturn in the Indian equity markets, sparked by the government's decision to hike the tax rate on capital gains.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.72 and touched an intra-day high of 83.66 and a low of 83.72 against the dollar during the session.

It finally settled at an all-time low level of 83.72 (provisional) against the American currency, down 1 paisa from its previous

close.

On Wednesday, the rupee depreciated 2 paise to hit its all-time closing low of 83.71 against the US dollar.

The local unit appreciated slightly during the intra-day trade on supposed intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and overall weakness in crude oil prices, said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on weak global markets and fresh FII outflows. However, weak US dollar and declining crude oil prices may support the rupee at lower levels. Intervention by the Reserve Bank may also support the rupee," Choudhary added.

The government's decision to hike the tax rate on capital gains

dampened market sentiment, exerting immense pressure on the rupee and the equity market.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 109.08 points, or 0.14 per cent, to settle at 80,039.80 points, and Nifty dropped 7.40 points, or 0.03 per cent, to 24,406.10 points.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 104.17, lower by 0.21 per cent.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 1.79 per cent to USD 81.25 per barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Wednesday as they offloaded shares worth ₹ 5,130.90 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

APSC civil service

the interest of society, the nature of the offense committed, etc. Special public prosecutor Pallab Katakai appeared for the imposition of a consecutive sentence, citing a number of Supreme Court rulings.

SC boost for states to tax

JB Pardiwala, Manoj Misra, Ujjal Bhuyan, Satish Chandra Sharma and Augustine George Masih. The nine-judge bench of the apex court began hearing the complex matter on February 27 because of two apparently conflicting constitution bench decisions on the issue.

The case has its roots in a dispute between India Cement Ltd and the Tamil Nadu government. India Cement secured a mining lease in Tamil Nadu and was paying royalty to the state government.

The state government then imposed a cess in addition to royalty on India Cement, which moved the Madras High Court against the measure, contending that a cess on royalty meant a tax on royalty which was beyond the remit of the state legislature. The TN government argued the cess was by way of land revenue and on mineral rights, which it was empowered to impose. A 7-judge bench had decided in favour of India Cement in 1989. It had ruled the Centre was the primary authority under the MMDRA.

It held that states can collect royalty under the MMDRA but cannot impose further tax on mining and mineral development. "...royalty is a tax, and as such a cess on royalty being a tax on royalty, is beyond the competence of the State Legislature..." the top court had held.

However, in 2004, a five-judge constitution bench, while hearing another dispute over imposition of cess on land and mining activities between the state of West Bengal and Kesoram Industries Ltd held there was a typographical error in the 1989 verdict and that royalty was not a tax. It said the phrase "royalty is a tax" should instead be read as "cess on royalty is a tax" and that the 1989 judgement held that royalty is not a tax.

Over 80 more petitions were filed in the Supreme Court over the years, and since the India Cement matter was dealt with by a seven-judge bench, the matter was referred to a nine-judge bench to decide whether royalty is a type of tax or there was an error in the India Cement case judgement.

While States' defended their right to impose tax on land and mineral activity during the 8-day long hearing, the Centre, mining companies and public sector undertakings had contested the contentions, saying only Parliament can impose taxes on minerals by virtue of the MMDRA and states are completely denuded of the power to levy any taxes on mines and minerals.

Urged central govt to enact

Ronghang also clarified that one MoS clause aligns with the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, mandating the establishment of Traditional Village Development Councils (TVDCs) in tribal areas with populations of 500 to 1000, and Village Development Committees (VDCs) in non-tribal areas with populations of 3000 to 5000, aimed at fostering development.

Meanwhile, in support of the CEM's assertions, the BJP East Karbi Anglong District Committee (EKADC) convened a press conference at the BJP-EKADC office, where Bijoy Teron, president of Minority Morcha, West Karbi Anglong, emphasised that Article 280 enables TVDCs to receive funds from the Central government. Teron criticised JI Kathar, president of the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), alleging that he abandoned negotiations during the Joint Action Committee for Autonomous State (JACAS) talks with the Central government.

BJP spokesperson Selawar Bey accused Kathar of opposing the 125th constitutional amendment without fully understanding the concept of an Autonomous State. Bey accused Kathar of misrepresenting the Sixth Schedule to the public. BJP-EKADC media incharge Bidyasing Rongpi highlighted that the 125th constitutional amendment aims to strengthen KAAC's authority. He criticised Kirsing Timung, organising secretary of APHLC, for opposing the amendment without understanding its implications.

Another BJP spokesperson, Laichan Englang, quoted Kathar as saying, "If funds are allocated through Article 280, it will reduce the Sixth Scheduled Autonomous Councils to mere Panchayati Raj institutions," which Englang disputed, urging Kathar not to obstruct progress.

Dispute at Assam-Nagaland

The meeting concluded with a decision to officially share border land maps between administrations and to seek a final inspection by Survey of India, Assam Survey, and Nagaland State Survey authorities.

I will personally invite Kuki-Zo

of involvement from either community. Police are actively pursuing the perpetrators. This seems to be the work of people seeking to perpetuate violence." Unidentified people set ablaze an abandoned house at Borobekra in Jiribam district on Wednesday night, police said. The house was abandoned by its owner after violence broke out in the district, they added. (PTI)

KAAC implements checkpoints

and track the types of goods entering and leaving Karbi Anglong. They also serve to prevent the illegal entry of goods." He expressed approval of the initiative, emphasising that these checkpoints will enable the Taxation department to generate significant revenue. Initially launched on a trial basis at Samding Bey village, Parokhuwa and Garampani, similar checkpoints are planned for Lahorijan, Khatkhati, and West Karbi Anglong in subsequent phases.

Regarding operations in the Parokhuwa area, Bey clarified, "The KAAC entry tax gate at Parokhuwa market monitors the daily influx of commercial vehicles into Karbi Anglong. Meanwhile, the Samding Bey village checkpoint focuses on verifying trade licenses and overseeing goods movement."

Bey further highlighted concerns about illegal activities detected through the Samding Bey checkpoint, noting instances where traders failed to renew licenses or lacked proper documentation, resulting in revenue losses for the Taxation department.

He also advocated for the inclusion of stone crushers under trading activities to enhance revenue collection, particularly from those supplying materials for national highway construction.

However, Bey acknowledged public apprehensions about potential price increases due to the new checkpoints, assuring that minimal trade fees imposed on traders would not significantly impact market prices. Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang emphasised the authority of the KAAC under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to independently levy taxes on trades, including animals, underscoring the rationale behind the establishment of these checkpoints for goods entry.

Govt aims to amplify its efforts

-- with special focus on marginalised and under-served groups. The School Health and Wellness Programme under the Ayushman Bharat aims to strengthen health promotion and disease prevention for schoolchildren using trained teachers, Chandra said. The Scheme for Promotion of Menstrual Hygiene is focused on adolescent girls to increase awareness and promote menstrual hygiene, he said.

"By fostering partnerships with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community leaders, and international agencies, we aim to amplify our efforts and reach every adolescent, regardless of their socioeconomic background," he stated. Chandra also informed that India is on the cusp of launching the U-WIN platform which is modelled on the Co-WIN platform.

It will have a transformative impact on not just storing the health records of every child but also in digitising these records as well as in monitoring, identifying and rectifying the challenges that arise, he said.

Ministry of Education additional secretary Anand Rao V Patil highlighted the increased budgetary allocation for school education and modifications being made in curriculum. PMNCH executive director Rajat Khosla noted the world's adolescents population is 1.5 billion, one-fifth of whom reside in India. Commending the government's initiatives towards this significant population group, he pointed out that adolescents face various challenges including violence, early pregnancies etc.

He underscored the economic and social imperatives of investing in adolescents and applauded the Rs 2 lakh-crore budgetary allocation made by the government towards adolescents' wellbeing in the Union Budget 2024-25. "India is a beacon of hope not only to LMIC (Low-or Middle-Income Country) but to other countries across the world. India has shown that empowerment of adolescents can be done," he remarked.

Dr Rodrigo H Ofirin, WHO Representative to India, noted that the government of India is taking various initiatives to reap its demographic dividends.

"The country has achieved important triumphs in various health indicators", he said, adding that investing in adolescents is a smart investment in the future of the nation. "Achieving the SDGs would not be possible without investing in adolescents," he stated. (PTI)

Gold tumbles ₹ 1,000 to 70,650 per 10 grams on sluggish demand, global cues

NEW DELHI, July 25: Gold prices continued to fall for the third day and tumbled ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 70,650 per 10 grams in the local market here on Thursday amid heavy selling by jewellers, triggered by a fall in rates in overseas markets.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal prices had closed at ₹ 71,650 per 10 grams in the previous session on Wednesday.

Continuing its slide for the third day in the national capital, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity declined ₹ 1,000 each to ₹ 70,650 per 10 grams and ₹ 70,300 per 10 grams, respectively.

Silver prices also fell sharply by ₹ 3,500 to ₹ 84,000 per kg. It had ended at ₹ 87,500 per kg in the previous session.

The precious metal has declined ₹ 5,000 per 10 grams in the past three sessions since July 23 when it had fallen ₹ 3,350 to end at ₹ 72,300 per 10 grams -- marking the highest fall this year -- after the government on Tuesday decided to slash customs duties on a range of products, including gold and silver.

The customs duty on gold and silver was cut from 15 per cent to 6 per cent.

Traders said gold prices declined on persistent selling by local jewellers amidst weakening trend in the international markets.

Globally, Comex gold was trading at USD 2,421.80 per ounce, down USD 42.20 per ounce. "Gold and silver prices are trading lower tracking broad selling across global

financial markets, triggered by a sharp appreciation in the Japanese yen on rising bets of a rate hike by the Bank of Japan at its meeting next week, whereas other central banks are looking for rate cuts," Pranav Mer, VP -- Research (Commodity & Currency) at BlinkX and JM Financial, said. Prices now are stuck in a range as we look ahead to US data on GDP and Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index inflation data, Mer added. In addition, silver also quoted lower at USD 28.04 per ounce in New York.

According to Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities, HDFC Securities, gold traded lower in European trading hours on Thursday. Further, technical selling and long liquidation drove gold prices lower, prior to the release of crucial US economic data, Gandhi said. (PTI)



Dhunseri Tea sees positive outlook amidst challenges

KOLKATA, July 25: Dhunseri Tea and Industries Ltd, a leading tea manufacturer based in the city, stated that the outlook for the tea industry is positive due to increasing domestic demand, despite challenges that require government support.

"Increasing manufacturing costs have put pressure on margins, and the industry faces a difficult phase due to unfair competition from the unorganised sector. The industry expects effective incentives from authorities," the company informed shareholders in its latest annual report.

The company reported a loss of ₹ 60.73 crore in FY'24, up from ₹ 11.88 crore in the previous year. The loss was despite the company's tea production for 2023-24 was higher at 20.44 million kg, with 13.09 million kg coming from Indian operations and 7.35 million kg from offshore operations, it said.

The company stated that realisation was lower due to subdued tea prices. The management noted that the tea industry faces challenges such as weather uncertainties, increasing production costs, and unfair competition from the unorganised sector. Nevertheless, with growing demand for tea in the domestic market, Dhunseri Tea expects a positive outlook.

The company currently owns 12 tea estates, along with their respective tea estate factories, all located in Assam. As part of its programme to rationalise operations and improve profitability, the company disposed of Hatibari Tea Factory (formerly known as Bahadur Tea Estate Factory) and Shivani Tea Factory (formerly known as Santi Tea Estate Factory) during 2023-24. (PTI)

Map war intensifies; Google announces new features to woo users in India

NEW DELHI, July 25: Amid rising competition from homegrown challenger Ola Maps, Google on Thursday announced a slew of new features on Google Maps to woo Indian users, including EV charging station information, flyover callouts and AI-driven routing capability to reduce narrow road usage for four-wheeler drivers.

It is "an exciting time in mapping", Google Maps said announcing the new lineup, which comes in the backdrop of a pitched battle with Ola Maps.

Google recently decided to cut the pricing of Google Maps platform for developers by up to 70 per cent from August 1, just weeks after Ola Founder and CEO Bhavish Aggarwal openly nudged Indian developers to shun Google Maps and offered them sweeteners like one-year free access to Ola Maps.

Emphasising its focus on the market, Google Maps on Thursday said India is at the centre of its innovation, and that it "can't wait to build the future of Maps right here". India is the first country to get EV charging stations feature for two-wheelers on Google Maps, and senior company officials said it will look at replicating features like this and others, with tweaks where necessary, for use in other markets, as well.

Replying to a question on the timing of Google Maps' price cuts - coming right after an offensive from Ola - Google Maps senior executives said that while "it's tempting to think that way, but we actually do not focus on competitors".

"We're very focused on making sure we're serving our user base and our partner community, which is our developer partners. And to be honest, we timed it with our IO Connect event in Bengaluru," Miriam Daniel, VP and GM, Google Maps said at a briefing.



Daniel added: "...this is something our partners have been requesting of us for a while, and we've been working on it for quite some time to make sure our infrastructure, our pricing systems are localised and adapted to the needs of our partners in India".

The new offerings range from metro ticket booking on Google Maps in Kochi and Chennai, backed by collaboration with ONDC and Namma Yatri, all the way to improved features for reporting road incidents and traffic mishaps.

"We're excited to continue our journey of innovation, and build the future of Google Maps right here in India," a blogpost by Daniel and Lalitha Ramani, GM, Google Maps, India, read.

Stating that navigating narrow or congested roads in unfamiliar areas can be a challenge for four-wheeler drivers, Google Maps announced it is introducing a new feature for users in India designed to reduce the use of narrow roads when driving four-wheelers.

This means four-wheeler drivers can enjoy a less stressful driving experience, and it also benefits bikers, pedestrians and other commuters who can now use these narrow roads more safely and

confidently, it added.

Google Maps is starting to roll out this feature on Android devices this week in eight cities - Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Coimbatore, Indore, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar and Guwahati, and has promised to bring the feature to iOS and more cities soon.

Another new feature on Google Maps is call-out flyovers along the recommended route. This feature helps users anticipate upcoming flyovers and prepare ahead of time to get onto the flyover.

"Starting this week, you'll see these flyover callouts in 40 cities across India for both four-wheeler and two-wheeler active navigation on Android apps and Android Auto. iOS and CarPlay support will be coming soon," it said.

Both Narrow Roads and Flyover features have been pioneered in India, tailored to the unique navigation needs of users, it said.

To ensure EV drivers have the tools they need to confidently hit the road, it has also announced availability of information about EV charging stations on both Google Maps and Google Search in India.

"To achieve this, we're collaborating with leading EV charging providers in India ElectricPe,

Ather, Kazam, and Statiq to add authoritative information for over 8,000 charging stations, representing a significant portion of available charging stations in India," it said.

This marks the first time Google is launching EV charging station information for two-wheelers on Google Maps, and India is the first country to get this feature.

Last December, the company announced a collaboration with ONDC and Namma Yatri to streamline the public transport experience on Google Maps. This metro booking experience in Google Maps is now going live in Kochi and Chennai, powered by ONDC and Namma Yatri.

The company has simplified how users can report road incidents. "Whether there's ongoing construction or a traffic mishap on the route, users can now report it with just a few taps, making it easy and less distracting, it said, adding that this update is available in India on Google Maps across all platforms - Android, iOS, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay.

Google said it is making it easy to discover helpful lists from local experts and the Google Maps community.

India's digital mapping landscape is under the spotlight, especially after Ola's Aggarwal - who in the past championed the cause of India's digital sovereignty - argued recently that the Western apps to map India have been used for "too long".

The top honcho of Ola also declared that Ola Cabs has fully exited Google Maps and will be using its own in-house Ola Maps, leading to lucrative savings for the company. The Ola founder in May this year announced that Ola will snap ties with Microsoft's Azure cloud and shift workloads to the cloud service of its sister firm Krutrim AI. (PTI)

Two arrested with fake currency

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, July 25: Acting on a tip-off, Rupahihat police arrested two individuals involved in trading fake Indian currency notes. The suspects, Abdul Jalil of Barghuli village and Mahmudul Hussain of Bhakumari village, were apprehended from the Pachim Saloni area late Wednesday night.

Police recovered 13 bundles of ₹ 500 denomination fake currency notes, a currency note-making machine, a printer, and other incriminating items from their possession. The arrested individuals are reportedly members of a larger gang engaged in the illegal trading of counterfeit currency on an interstate level. An investigation is ongoing to identify and apprehend other members of the gang.

The arrested suspects were presented before a local court on Thursday, which remanded them to judicial custody.

ATTWA Thowra Sub-Branch Committee formed

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, July 25: In a press release, Biswanath Nag, secretary of the Assam Tea Tribes Students Association (ATTSA), Demow branch, stated that the Assam Tea Tribes Women Association (ATTWA), Demow regional, is under the Assam Tea Tribes Students Association (ATTSA), Demow branch. Under the patronage of ATTSA, the Thowra sub-branch in Thowra Tea Estate Labour Binudan Kendra, the Assam Tea Tribes Women Association (ATTWA), Thowra Sub-Branch Committee was formed on Thursday.

Biswanath Nag, secretary of ATTSA, Demow branch, presided over the representative meeting. Priya Sahu, joint secretary of ATTWA Central, gave the welcome speech. Pubali Rajgarh, secretary of ATTWA, Demow branch, gave her valuable speech. Priyanka Rajbhoshi was selected as president, and Nomi Sundi was selected as secretary of the 36-member Assam Tea Tribes Women Association (ATTWA), Thowra Sub-Branch Committee.

Governor visits Barpeta district: Reviews development schemes & infrastructure

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 25: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria held a review meeting with the district administration of Barpeta to assess the progress of various central and state government schemes across different departments in the district. During the meeting, he emphasised the importance of frequent reviews and discussions among officials to remove bottlenecks and ensure the successful implementation of these schemes.

Governor Kataria, while taking a briefing on the academic scenario of the district, urged the district administration to take institutional measures to increase school enrollment. He asked concerned functionaries to identify areas that would help improve literacy rates, reduce school dropouts, and enhance the overall academic environment.

Regarding MGNREGA, the Governor praised the administration for its good track record in implementing the scheme but stressed the need for increased female participation.



Kataria expressed satisfaction with the implementation of PMAY-G and reiterated the need for a survey to assess how the scheme has improved lifestyles and contributed to socio-economic empowerment. In the agriculture sector, he emphasised the importance of multi-cropping and encouraged the Agriculture Department to enable farmers to engage in farming activities throughout the year to maximise land use and productivity. On physical infrastructure, the Governor reviewed the progress of various development projects with the Public Works Department.

Regarding the Social Welfare Department, the Governor stressed the need to empower grassroots-level people, especially mothers and children. He also highlighted the importance of strengthening Anganwadi Centres and praised the department's efforts in the POSHAN Abhiyan for addressing malnutrition. The Governor re-

viewed the disbursement of funds under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and called for targeting the female population in the PM-SVANidhi scheme.

Governor Kataria also held an interactive session with beneficiaries of various schemes, including PMMSY, PMAY-G, PMAY-U, AROHAN, Arunodoi, PM-JSY, PM-VISHWAKARMA, PM-SVANidhi, and NFSA, to understand their experiences. He visited three vendors benefiting from PM-SVANidhi and gathered feedback on their experiences with the scheme.

Later, the Governor visited Barpeta Satra, the centre of Neo-Vaishnavism, and offered his prayers. He also inspected the Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Medical College and Hospital in Barpeta, reviewing facilities such as the ICU, dialysis unit, indoor pharmacy, and other aspects of hospital operations. The Governor emphasised the importance of maintaining campus cleanliness to ensure optimal hygiene standards for patients.

Assam flood situation improves, 66,267 still affected in 9 districts



GUWAHATI, July 25: Assam's flood situation improved on Thursday with the water level of the major rivers receding and the number of people affected by the deluge declining to 66,267 in nine districts, an official bulletin said.

There was no loss of human lives reported during the day with the toll due to flood, landslides, storms and lightning remaining at 114, the Assam Disaster Management Authority's (ASDMA) bulletin said.

The number of affected people declined to 66,267 from Wednesday's estimate of 69,671 in 10 districts, it said.

Morigaon, Dhemaji, Hojai, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Nagaon, Golaghat, Goalpara and Jorhat are now on the list of flood-hit districts.

The number of affected revenue circles remains at 21 and the count of villages under floodwater declined to 184 from the previous day's 190.

Nagaon is the most severely affected district with a flood-hit population of 55,711, followed by Golaghat with 4,874 and Dhemaji with 3,850, the bulletin said. Floodwater inundated 4,076.4 hectares of crop area, declining from the previous day's 4,202 hectares.

Currently, 1,953 people are in 24 relief camps, while an additional 2,298 people received assistance through distribution centres, it said.

River Brahmaputra's tributaries Dikhou and Disang are flowing above the danger mark at Sivasagar and Nanglamuraghat respectively.

During the day, floodwater washed away 22 animals, damaged 13 houses, and breached two embankments. Assam has experienced two waves of flood so far this year, affecting all 35 districts.

The first wave took place between May 28 and June 13, while the ongoing second one began on June 16. (PTI)

Political divide in Karbi Anglong over Article 280 & funding mechanism

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 25: There have been differences of opinion within political parties in the hill districts of Karbi Anglong regarding Article 280 of the Indian Constitution and the funding pattern of the Central government to the state governments. The present Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) authority wants direct funding from the central government to KAAC from the 125th constitutional amendment.

All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) is opposed to Article 280 as it does not concern the funding system for the sixth scheduled autonomous council of Karbi Anglong.

The APHLC president, JI Kathar, in a press conference held here at his residence, has explained what Articles 280, 275, 2, and 3 of the Indian Constitution are.

He said, "Articles 2 and 3 speak

about the creation of separate states, while Article 280 says that funds from the finance commission of the central government will be allotted to the state government for panchayati, municipalities, and town committees. There is no word used for 'direct funding'. Article 280 does not speak about direct funding to sixth scheduled areas. While Article 270 says that through India's consolidated funds, money will be allotted by the central government to autonomous states. Here there is mention of an autonomous state and a sixth schedule."

During the Joint Action Committee for Autonomous State (JACAS) talks with the central government, the matter of direct funding was raised, but the central government rejected the demand, Kathar mentioned.

"What we want to say here is that the KAAC is demanding Article 280 provision and not 275 in the 125th constitutional amendment.

Why is the government giving more importance to Article 280, as there is no mention of an autonomous state? The government is giving more priority to Article 280 so that people forget about the autonomous state. After reaching New Delhi, the KAAC delegation forgot the autonomous state issue, giving more stress on Article 280," Kathar alleged. He also said that by accepting Article 280 for funds allocation, the present KAAC will be on par with that of Panchayati Raj.

Kathar said, "The present KAAC is under the sixth scheduled provision, but by accepting Article 280, it will be reduced to the level of Panchayati. In order to raise the standard of KAAC, we are demanding an autonomous state. What we want to appeal to the KAAC authority is to not accept Article 280 of the 125th constitutional amendment but instead to go for an autonomous state."

Two murdered in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 25: In a shocking incident, two members of a family were murdered in Kokrajhar town early Thursday morning.

According to local sources, Mithun Saha alias Manas Saha allegedly killed his wife, Rishika Mallik (36), and his mother-in-law, Kalpana Mallik (57), with a sharp weapon. The incident occurred at their residence in Shanti Nagar, Ward No 3, around 5:30 a.m.

The victims were rushed to Rup Nath Brahma Civil Hospital, Kokrajhar, but were declared dead on arrival due to severe injuries inflicted by the weapon. The accused has fled the scene and remains at large.

Police have launched an investigation into the case. The bodies have been sent for a postmortem examination. Preliminary reports suggest that the murders resulted from a family quarrel that escalated into violence.

BCPL and NDRF conduct joint mock drill on earthquake response

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, July 25: Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL), in collaboration with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), organised a highly effective joint mock drill on earthquake response on Thursday.

The exercise was steered by the district administration, Charaideo, with active participation of mutual aid members including ONGC, Oil India, SDRF, APGCL, and Fire & Emergency Services, Sonari. The aim was to evaluate and enhance preparedness in handling seismic disasters.

The mock drill took place at the BCPL LAKWA plant and simulated a major earthquake hitting the area. The participation of BCPL, NDRF, ONGC, Oil India, SDRF, APGCL, and Fire & Emergency Services, Sonari, in the presence of the District Disaster Management Authority, highlighted the collective commitment to ensuring the safety and security of the company and its surroundings.

During the drill, specialised response teams were deployed to carry out search and rescue operations, medical assistance, and coordination of evacuation efforts.

The exercise focused on assessing the coordination and communication systems between BCPL, NDRF, and mutual aid members, ensuring seamless collaboration in disaster response. It also served as an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of equipment, tools, and techniques utilised by all participating organisations.

Memorial lecture on Sattradhikar Bhadra Krishna Goswami's 6th death anniv

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 25: The annual lecture on the 6th death anniversary of Sattradhikar Bhadra Krishna Goswami was delivered at a program organised at the Guwahati Press Club on Thursday. The lecture on the topic 'Philosophy and Sociology of Srimanta Sankaradeva' was delivered by Professor Dr Nani Gopal Mahanta of Gauhati University.

Sattradhikar Bhadra Krishna Goswami was a social and cultural envoy of Assam renowned for his distinguished contributions to art, culture, and literature. A strong advocate for education, he made significant efforts to acquaint young people with the myriad facets of Sattriya culture. He served as the former Sattradhikar of Jokai Satra and the former president of the Satra Mahasabha, in addition to being a prominent writer and journalist.

Dr Mahanta, the former education advisor to the government of Assam and chairman of Adarsha Vidyalaya Sangathan, Assam, discussed Sankaradeva's philosophy within the context of Vedanta philosophy. He covered concepts such as Brahman, Paramatma, and Bhagawan, and explored the uniqueness of Sankaradeva's philosophy in dualism and non-dualism, as well as his concepts of Nirguna and Saguna, and the philosophy of Brahman and social sustainability.



The welcome address was delivered by Mitali Goswami Trochin, the secretary of the Sattradhikar Bhadra Krishna Goswami Memorial Trust and eldest daughter of Bhadra Krishna Goswami. The traditional lamp-lighting ceremony was initiated by his wife, eminent writer Dibya Rekha Goswami. The program commenced with a Sattriya dance performance by internationally acclaimed dancer Ananya Mahanta.

A special release of a portrait of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva by renowned Russian artist Vladimir Trochin was a highlight of the event. Inspired by the Sattradhikar's enduring love for Sattriya

culture, Trochin had previously created seven art pieces preserved at the Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra. This new portrait was inaugurated by eminent social worker and president of Akhil Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, Assam, Mrinalini Devi. She delivered a heartfelt speech about Sattradhikar Bhadra Krishna Goswami, praised the portrait, and acknowledged Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva's influence on an international level.

Another esteemed guest of honour was Hemanta Bijoy Mahanta, a prominent writer and retired principal commissioner of Income Tax. He highlighted how Sattradhikar Goswami ardently explored the Neo-Vaishnava tradition, which served as a socio-religious and cultural integral of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva's beliefs.

31 Bn SSB Gossaigaon organises civic action program

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, July 25: The 31st Battalion SSB Gossaigaon recently organised a series of comprehensive programs, including a medical civic action program, a veterinary civic action program, and a plantation drive in the Gossaigaon sub-division of Kokrajhar district.

The civic action program aimed to provide essential medical and veterinary services to residents and their livestock, reflecting the unit's commitment to community welfare within its area of responsibility. In the medical civic action program, a total of 36 villagers benefited from free medical check-ups. The group included 14 males, 15 females, and 7 children. Services provided included general health examinations, consultations, and the distribution of essential medicines at no cost. This initiative was vital in addressing the healthcare needs of the rural population, who often have limited access to medical facilities.

The veterinary civic action program extended veterinary services to 113 animals. The care included health check-ups and treatments for various ailments affecting the animals.

As part of its environmental conservation efforts, the battalion also organised a plantation drive. Dr SS Raina, commandant medical of 31 Bn SSB, Gossaigaon, and Dr EC Singh, commandant veterinary of 06 Bn SSB, Ranighuli, along with jawans and villagers, planted a variety of saplings in Jonalgaon. This initiative aimed to promote ecological balance, improve air quality, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the environment.

Cachar admin prepares for 78th Independence Day celebrations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 25: The Cachar district administration is gearing up for the 78th Independence Day with a series of vibrant programs. A preparatory meeting, chaired by district development commissioner Norsing Bey, was held on Thursday in the conference hall of the district commissioner's office. Attendees included district officers from various government departments, and representatives from the police, military, paramilitary forces, civil society, and the chambers of commerce.

DDC Norsing Bey encouraged all district residents to celebrate the national festival with enthusiasm. He reviewed the progress of the Independence Day programs and directed officials to complete all preparations by August 13. After a thorough discussion, it was decided that the Police Parade Ground in Silchar would be the venue for the ceremonial flag hoisting.

A relay of patriotic songs will be played from 5:30 am to 6:30 am by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone on the day.

The national flag will be hoisted at private residences and establishments at 7:00 am and at all government offices and educational institutions at 7:45 am, followed by a community singing of the national anthem.

Floral tributes will be offered to the Father of the Nation at Gandhi Bag at 8:35 am and at Swahid Tarpan at Gandhi Bag at 8:45 am. At 9:00 am, the national flag will be



hoisted by a VVIP at the Police Parade Ground, followed by a combined parade featuring CRPF, police personnel, 6th AP BN, home guards, and NCC scouts and guides.

A cultural program by various ethnic groups will be performed at the Police Parade Ground.

An exhibition football match between the District Bar Association and District Sports Association will also be held at 4:00 pm at DSA Ground, Silchar.

The statues, rotaries, government buildings, and private residences across Silchar will be illuminated at 6:00 pm.

Additional district commissioners Jubaraj Borthakur, Van Lal Limpia Nampui, Kim Langhum, DSP Hemen Das, and other officials also participated in the meeting. This information was stated in a press release issued by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone, Silchar.

Meeting on business development & transportation solutions held

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 25: As part of its initiative to further boost the local economy, NF Railway regularly holds meetings and interactions with traders and business communities. The railway has established Business Development Units (BDUs) across all five divisions and at the zonal headquarters level to increase freight transportation volume. These BDUs frequently engage with trade and industry players to identify new traffic for rail movement. Railways, being a faster and more cost-effective mode of transport compared to roadways, aim to enhance the local economy by opening up larger markets nationwide.

On Wednesday, the divisional railway manager, along with senior officials of the Lumding division, conducted a meeting with traders in Lumding. Thirty-three traders participated, discussing issues such as truck shortages, labour availability, placement of goods-loaded railway rakes, conditions at the goods yard, and concerns regarding penal demurrage and wharfage charges for delayed clearance of goods wagons.

During the meeting, NF Railway officials outlined various activities and facilities available to improve the local economy through rail transport. They emphasised that railways are not only cost-effective but also an eco-friendly transportation mode. Discussions covered the handling of goods traffic, feasibility for transporting automobile traffic, and other commodities, as well as their benefits. Notably, due to the efforts of the Business Development Unit (BDU), 20 wagons of bamboo were recently transported from Dhemaji in Assam to Amlai in Madhya Pradesh for the first time by the Tinsukia division of NF Railway.

Karbi fashion designer showcases traditional weaving at UNESCO World Heritage Exhibition



HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 25: Hillaris Tissopi, a fashion designer and proprietor of M/s Hills Textiles & Design Industry Cooperative Society Ltd., hailing from Baithalangso, West Karbi Anglong, is in Delhi participating in the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee 'India Exhibition' from July 21 to 31 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

Tissopi was invited by the Ministry of Textiles and Development Commissioner (Handloom) and supported by Weavers Service Centre (WSC), Guwahati to showcase and demonstrate Karbi loom weaving (in Karbi called kachivur a therang) at the World Heritage Centre at Delhi Pragati Maidan and National Craft Museum.

On July 21, the 46th session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee's 'India Exhibition' was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Bharat Mandapam,

New Delhi.

It may be mentioned here that Tissopi, a native of Baithalangso (Voithalangso) of West Karbi Anglong, is a multi-art fashion designer. Her deep affection for fabrics, craft, and fashion has led her to pursue handloom & textiles from the Indian Institute of Handloom Technology and fashion designing at the JD Institute. She is dedicated to empowering rural women and young girls, especially through free art and craft training. She works in natural dye, weaving, sewing, and end products.

During the exhibition, she will exhibit traditional clothing items of the Karbi tribe like peni (sarong), pekok (shoulder cloth), piba (child harness), poho (turban), etc., which are manufactured from the traditional loom.

Earlier, Hillaris Tissopi participated in the Textile Fairs India (TFI) – Integrating the textile value chain held from July 18 to 20 at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Hope is but the dream of those who wake.
-Matthew Prior

BJP's North Bengal merger proposal

The West Bengal unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seems adept at making self-damaging moves. The latest in this series is Balurghat MP and Union Minister of State for Education, Sukanta Majumdar, who has sparked controversy by urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to merge North Bengal with the North East. Majumdar, who is also the outgoing state BJP chief, is not the first senior BJP leader to propose splitting West Bengal. In 2021, Alipurduar MP John Barla called for creating a separate state or Union Territory out of West Bengal. More recently, BJP Rajya Sabha MP Ananta Maharaj has advocated for a separate state or Union Territory of Coochbehar, claiming that a verbal commitment has been made and it is only a matter of time before this becomes reality. Barla's proposal was swiftly dismissed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and it appeared to vanish without further discussion. However, Majumdar's recent demand has gained support from Ananta Maharaj, leader of the Greater Coochbehar People's Movement. Yet, the silence from both Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Shah on this proposal suggests a lack of endorsement at the highest levels.

Majumdar's assertion that North Bengal shares many similarities with the North East overlooks the historical trauma associated with the partition for many residents of North Bengal. This move seems to alienate BJP's own supporters, potentially driving them towards the Trinamool Congress (TMC). TMC leaders, including Rajya Sabha member Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, have quickly accused the BJP of promoting secessionism—a grave charge in a state still haunted by the memories of Partition and its aftermath. In the recent 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP's tally of MPs from West Bengal fell from 18 to 12, reflecting a decline in their electoral appeal. This decline cannot be solely attributed to alleged TMC muscle flexing, especially given the presence of central forces during elections. The reality is that BJP leaders were noticeably absent when their activists needed support against alleged attacks by TMC-backed goons post the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2021 Assembly elections. This sudden concern for the people of North Bengal is viewed with suspicion, especially given the BJP's electoral setbacks in the state. Prime Minister Modi had confidently predicted the BJP's best-ever performance in West Bengal, a prediction that did not materialize. As the state BJP chief, Majumdar shares responsibility for this outcome, and his proposal for separate statehood may be seen as an attempt to deflect blame.

The BJP's electoral strategy in North Bengal, which involved playing on fears of Bangladeshi infiltrators, has only deepened the divide. Majumdar's call for merging North Bengal with the North East has reignited painful memories of Partition among residents, further alienating potential voters. The BJP's apparent disregard for the sensitivities of North Bengal's residents reveals a disconnect between party leadership and the electorate. By pushing for such divisive proposals, leaders like Majumdar and Maharaj risk undermining their own party's standing in the state. The TMC's swift condemnation of these proposals as secessionist highlights the political risk the BJP faces. Ultimately, the call for merging North Bengal with the North East may be less about genuine regional alignment and more about distracting from the BJP's electoral missteps. As Majumdar's tenure as state BJP chief comes under scrutiny, this proposal might be a last-ditch effort to shift focus from the party's faltering fortunes in West Bengal.

Kargil to the LAC: Evolution of India's Northern defense strategy and emerging threats

On April 7, 1999, a month prior to the official recognition of Pakistani intrusions into the Kargil sector, the Indian Army's 15 Corps conducted a wargame. During this exercise, a Brigade Commander, assuming the role of Force Commander Northern Area (FCNA) - the adversarial formation across the Line of Control (LoC) in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) - outlined a conflict scenario that strikingly mirrored the real events that would soon unfold.

The wargame was attended by several high-ranking officers, including Lt Gen SK Khanna, who was the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Northern Command at the time; Lt Gen Krishan Pal, then General Officer Commanding of 15 Corps; and Maj Gen VS Budhwar, who served as the General Officer Commanding of the 3 Infantry Division. The role of the 'enemy commander' was played by Maj Gen Mohinder Puri, who was then the General Officer Commanding of the 8 Mountain Division and would later be promoted to Lt Gen.

According to those who were familiar with the wargame, the military leadership at the time was predominantly focused on counter-insurgency operations. This narrow focus hindered a comprehensive evaluation of the situation and resulted in flawed assessments. At the onset of the Kargil conflict, the Corps Commander himself believed that only 35-40 militants were involved and expected them to move further into the Valley.

For years, wargames at different levels had frequently examined the potential for Pakistani intrusions across the LoC. Despite this, Pakistan was able to clandestinely seize key heights overlooking the Srinagar-Leh National Highway. This was widely regarded as an intelligence failure, or by some, a failure to correctly interpret and act on the available information that had surfaced.

As a result, a protracted and costly conflict ensued over three months, fought on the remote and icy

heights spanning a 170-km stretch of the LoC. This conflict, now somewhat eclipsed by the rising Chinese assertiveness along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, remains a significant chapter in military history.

The Kargil sector, situated east of the Zoji La and including the Mushkoh, Drass, Batalik, and Turtuk sub-sectors, had a history of conflict that dated back to 1948. During that period, Indian troops had seized control of certain areas, making the region accustomed to battles and skirmishes.

In 1984, following India's occupation of the Siachen Glacier,

DEGREE OF THOUGHT By: Dipak Kurmi

the Army had established the 28 Infantry Division for deployment in the Kargil sector, in addition to the existing 3 Infantry Division stationed on the eastern flank. However, with the onset of terrorism in the Kashmir valley, the 28 Division was reassigned to counter-insurgency operations west of the Zoji La.

The area previously defended by a full division, which included three brigades, was reduced to just one brigade - the 121 (Independent) Brigade - stationed in Kargil, creating significant vulnerabilities. These weaknesses were taken advantage of by then-Pakistani army chief Pervez Musharraf, who maintained tight control over information regarding his operations within his own ranks. The absence of any broad-scale indications from the Pakistani military establishment regarding an imminent operation further contradicted the intrusion reports emerging from the northern sector.

At the onset of the conflict, operational challenges quickly emerged, including insufficient intelligence and equipment. Field commanders reported issues such as fragmented troop deployments and a mismatched assortment of frontline units. Supplies were delivered through man packs and mule loads, complicating logistics.

Terrain limitations restricted the deployment of artillery in certain areas,

while disconnected sub-sectors and inadequate radio communications further exacerbated the difficulties.

Brigadier Khushal Thakur (ret'd), who led the 18 Grenadiers as a Colonel during the conflict, recounted, "We were relocated from the Valley and thrust into operations. Initially, we were informed that only a few militants occupied the hilltops. However, in the early stages, there was a lack of information and intelligence, and no reconnaissance had been conducted. Meanwhile, the enemy held the high ground and had a distinct advantage.

Our troops were not acclimatized. I lacked proper clothing, and faced significant challenges with casualty evacuation."

Gen VP Malik, the Chief of Army Staff at the time, has publicly acknowledged that the Kargil conflict was conducted under difficult circumstances, marked by significant shortages of ammunition and equipment.

A high-powered committee of four members, led by strategic analyst K. Subrahmanyam (the father of S. Jaishankar, the Minister of External Affairs), was formed to evaluate the conflict. The committee concluded that Pakistan's aggression was entirely unexpected. While the possibility of infiltration by armed irregulars was deemed plausible, the notion of a full-scale intrusion and occupation of territory by Pakistani troops was not anticipated.

The committee identified several deficiencies in the Indian intelligence system and called for major structural reforms within the security establishment. It noted that, although there were no specific signs of an imminent large-scale attack in the Kargil sector - such as major logistical or communication upgrades, a substantial buildup of forces, or forward deployments - there were numerous fragments of intelligence concerning activities within the FCNA region.

Many of these fragments suggested that Kargil was increasingly becoming a

focal point of Pakistani interest, a concern underscored by a notable rise in cross-LoC shelling in 1998.

Twenty-five years later, there has been a dramatic shift in the strategic landscape and threat perception in the northern sector. This period has also seen significant changes within the armed forces, including high-level structural reorganization, enhanced capabilities, and strategic force redeployments.

As with any conflict, the Kargil war revealed numerous lessons, some of which have been acted upon while others remain mired in bureaucratic delays and superficial responses. In the aftermath of the conflict, several key changes were made, including the establishment of the Integrated Defence Staff Headquarters to address inter-service coordination.

The long-awaited position of Chief of Defence Staff was finally instituted in January 2020. Intelligence capabilities were significantly enhanced with the creation of the Defence Intelligence Agency and the National Technical Research Organisation. Additionally, new formations such as the Strategic Forces Command and the Andaman and Nicobar Command, incorporating elements from all three Services, were established to bolster operational readiness.

"A great deal has changed over the past two decades," remarks Lt Gen YK Joshi (ret'd), who commanded a battalion during the conflict and later served as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Northern Command. "The 170-km stretch that was once patrolled by just a brigade with significant gaps is now defended by an entire division. The 8 Mountain Divisions, which was temporarily deployed to Kargil during the conflict, has now been stationed there permanently."

"The region is now securely defended, and I don't foresee a repeat of the Kargil-like situation," he continues. "Additionally, given Pakistan's current internal issues and struggling economy, it lacks the capacity for such operations." He also high-

lights that advancements in technology and force multipliers - such as drones, UAV optical devices, and continuous surveillance equipment - have been integrated. Infrastructure improvements have been made, with all forward posts now accessible via tracks and supported by a robust logistics network.

As the nation observes the conflict's 'Rajit Jayanti,' several unresolved issues remain. Key among them are whether the war could have been conducted differently to achieve similar results with fewer casualties, the need for declassifying documents to enhance transparency, and the necessity for a thorough analysis and discussion of the roles played by senior commanders.

Wars operate on three levels: tactical, involving sub-units and battalions; operational, at the brigades, divisions, and corps level; and strategic, encompassing political leadership and government agencies. "In the Kargil conflict, the commendable efforts and sacrifices of young officers and soldiers have been widely recognized and celebrated," notes a senior serving officer. "However, there has been limited discussion on the contributions and management roles of the Generals and higher defense authorities."

Lt Gen DS Hooda (ret'd), former General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Northern Command, acknowledges that intrusions of the scale seen in 1999 are unlikely to recur. However, he points out that one of the key recommendations made after the conflict was the development of a national security doctrine, which remains unpublished to this day.

He notes, "The crucial integration and coordination between the Services and the Ministry of Defence remains unresolved. The necessary level of co-operation between ministry officials and military officers is still lacking, and the tri-service theatre commands are only partially established." He further points out that the recommendation for a 'one border, one force' approach has not been fully realized. Currently, the Army and

the Indo-Tibetan Border Police are operationally deployed along the Line of Actual Control but report to separate ministries. In contrast, on the Line of Control, the Border Security Force is co-deployed with the Army and operates under its command.

Experts reflect that the Kargil conflict was Pakistan's effort to counterbalance the setback it faced in Siachen and was also part of its broader strategy in Kashmir. Today, along with Siachen, the active Line of Actual Control (LAC) following the 2020 standoff with China remains a significant concern for India. To the immediate north of Siachen lies the Shaksgam Valley, which Pakistan ceded to China and where extensive infrastructure development has been observed. Further east, the Depsang Plains continue to be a volatile region.

The presence of Chinese troops in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) adds to the growing concerns. Any potential collusion between China and Pakistan along the northern borders could have significant repercussions. As Lt Gen Hooda emphasizes, "We must remain vigilant regarding this challenge."

In 2020, troops stationed in the counter-insurgency grid across Jammu and Kashmir, as well as other areas were reassigned to the Line of Actual Control (LAC), while the post-Kargil enhanced posture on the Line of Control (LoC) was maintained. The focus of the Northern Command has since shifted primarily to the LAC.

During the Kargil conflict, China stayed silent, primarily due to its limited infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which has since undergone significant development. Previously, it was assumed that if conflict erupted with China, Pakistan might offer support, whereas if the conflict was with Pakistan, China would likely remain neutral. However, this assumption is now in question, with concerns about the potential for China to become involved. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Nirmala Sitharaman's coalition versus federal, political versus economic budget

By: K Raveendran

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stepped up to her budget rostrum in the Lok Sabha with a resolute demeanour, a symbolic gesture marking the unveiling of what many had anticipated as a transformative federal budget for the fiscal year 2024-25. Yet, what unfolded before the nation on July 23 was not a conventional economic blueprint but rather a delicate coalition budget, meticulously crafted to appease disparate political alliances. In a strategic manoeuvre reflecting the exigencies of governing with a precarious mandate, Sitharaman presented what could be characterised as a political budget; a document attuned more to the exigencies of coalition politics than the traditional imperatives of economic stewardship.

And the most miserable part is that she was not even feeling embarrassed that her gamesmanship would be seen as blatant aberration to the otherwise solemn act of budget making.

Against the backdrop of a minority BJP government shored up by the regional powers of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, the budget's contours bore the indelible fingerprints of compromise and accommodation, where numbers often dictate policy more than principles or prudence. The omission of expected measures to curb inflation underscored the delicate balance required to satisfy regional allies without jeopardizing broader economic stability - a deft tightrope walk that reflected the intricacies of coalition governance in contemporary India.

Central to Sitharaman's address was a purported emphasis on employment generation - a perennial concern exacerbated by the economic aftershocks that BJP's electoral setbacks brought to the fore in the party's post-poll deliberations. Yet, conspicuous by their absence were concrete, target-specific proposals to substantiate this overarching commitment. The absence of a robust roadmap for job creation and a dearth of substantive measures capable of translating lofty rhetoric into tangible outcomes for the millions grappling with underemployment and joblessness were too obvious to be missed.

The budget's pivot towards a political calculus over a purely economic one was underscored by the interplay of fiscal priorities tailored to assuage the exigencies of the regional partners. Nitish Kumar

and Chandrababu Naidu, pivotal to the BJP's tenuous grip on power, loomed large in the budgetary deliberations, their strategic imperatives often trumping the universal demands of economic prudence. The contours of resource allocation bore the imprimatur of these regional satraps, foregrounding the pragmatic exigencies of coalition governance over the idealism of unfettered economic stewardship.

Sitharaman's overtures towards inclusive growth resonated with the imperatives of political expediency, yet brought out the inherent contradictions that bedevilled this purported commitment. The absence of tangible measures to curb inflation - a central bugbear for the common man grappling with escalating costs of essentials - underscored the discordant notes between politics and economics. It laid bare the tension between short-term political imperatives and the demands of sustainable economic stewardship - a dissonance that threatened to undermine the government's broader credibility on matters of fiscal prudence as well as the dictates of constitutional propriety in the formulation of Union budgets.

Nirmala Sitharaman's 2024-25 budget is bound to stir a storm of criticism and disappointment, particularly from states traditionally at odds with the ruling BJP-led coalition. In a departure from the federalist ethos that typically underpins India's budgetary allocations, her fiscal blueprint appeared to dissuade equitable distribution of resources, leaving opposition-ruled states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka conspicuously absent from significant mentions or substantive allocations.

The absence of any meaningful acknowledgment or allocation for states governed by opposition parties underscored a glaring departure from the federalist principles enshrined in India's constitutional framework. Historically, India's budgetary process has sought to balance the fiscal needs and priorities of diverse states, irrespective of political affiliations, in adherence to the principle of cooperative federalism. However, Sitharaman's budgetary strategy appeared to tilt decisively towards placating coalition partners.

For opposition-ruled states, the budget's marginalization translated into more than just fiscal neglect; it symbolized a systemic disenfranchisement and a

disregard for the diverse economic imperatives that characterize the federal structure. States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, known for their robust economic contributions and distinctive developmental challenges, found themselves relegated to the periphery of fiscal discourse, their pressing needs overshadowed by the imperatives of coalition politics.

In Kerala, known for its emphasis on social welfare and human development indices, the budget's neglect resonated deeply. The absence of targeted allocations for critical sectors like healthcare, education, and infrastructure underscored a disconnect between the Centre's fiscal priorities and the pressing realities on the ground. With an economy heavily reliant on sectors like tourism and remittances, Kerala's exclusion from substantive budgetary provisions represented a missed opportunity to bolster resilience and foster sustainable growth in the face of evolving global challenges.

Similarly, Tamil Nadu - with its formidable industrial base and significant contributions to India's GDP - found itself sidelined. The state's developmental aspirations, particularly in sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, and urban infrastructure, were relegated to the margins, overshadowed by the exigencies of political accommodation elsewhere. The lack of targeted investments to catalyse job creation, enhance industrial competitiveness, and bolster agricultural resilience underscored a myopic fiscal approach that prioritized short-term political gains over long-term economic sustainability.

In Karnataka, another state governed by an opposition party, the echoes of discontent were palpable. Despite its status as a key economic hub and technological powerhouse, Karnataka's aspirations for infrastructure development, digital innovation, and sustainable urbanization did not find place in the budgetary discourse.

The repercussions of Sitharaman's budgetary strategy extend beyond mere fiscal allocations; they will reverberate through the corridors of state governance, sparking outcry and apprehension among opposition leaders and policymakers. The perceived neglect of opposition-ruled states threatens to deepen existing fault lines and amplify regional grievances, potentially undermining the collaborative spirit essential for India's developmental trajectory. (IPA Service)

POST BAG

The rise of the Opposition is an auspicious sign for Democracy

Sir/Ma'am

In a democratic country, elections are held through democratic processes, and in these elections, the people decide through voting who will be in power and who will play the role of the opposition. Just as a democratic country cannot function without a government, it is equally essential to have a strong opposition to keep a sharp eye on the government's every move. If the opposition is weak, there is a higher chance that the elected government's actions may become autocratic. The voters elect a government every five years to work in their interest. If the elected government fails to work in the people's interest, it is certain that the voters will not elect the same government for the next five years. However, during the government's five-year term, it is crucial for the opposition to be vigilant and alert to prevent any autocratic actions. The main job of the opposition is to analyze and present every action of the government to the public. It is the responsibility and duty of the opposition to criticize the government for any anti-people actions and to highlight the negative aspects of those actions to the public.

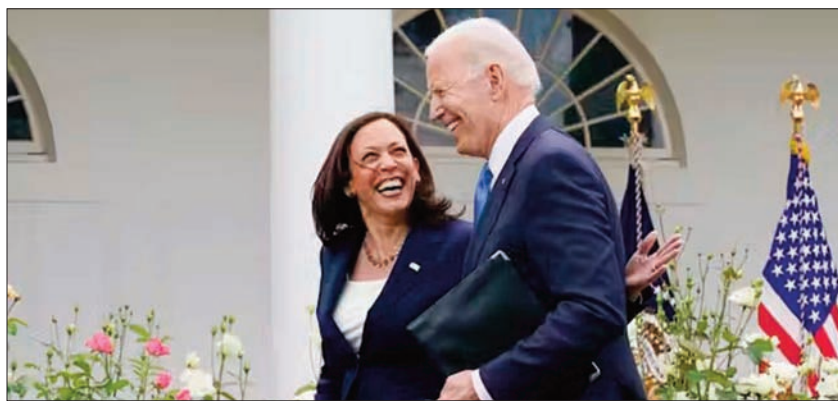
Being in opposition does not mean that one must criticize every action of the government. On issues like national security, integrity, and sovereignty, the ruling party and the opposition must unitedly oppose any forces that threaten the nation. It is a bad sign for the country if the roles of the ruling party and the opposition are different on such issues. While it is necessary for the ruling party and the opposition to have different roles in

politics, it is equally important for them to have a united stance against anti-national forces. Every political party committed to the people's welfare must prioritize addressing the public's sufferings and grievances, whether they are in power or in opposition.

It is natural for the ruling party to claim that every action and scheme they undertake is for the public's benefit. However, some actions are carried out solely for gaining votes in elections, which do not contribute to the overall welfare of the state or country. Highlighting and logically presenting to the public how such actions do not serve the state's or country's interest is the primary job of the opposition. For the past decade, the state of the opposition in the country has been very poor. However, the results of the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections have brought some hope for the opposition. This time, the strength of the opposition has significantly increased. The rise of the opposition will play an important role in strengthening democracy in the country. With the powers granted by the constitution, the opposition will be able to scrutinize the positives and negatives of the government's actions. Just as every conscious citizen keeps an eye on the government's actions, they will also observe how actively the opposition is fulfilling its responsibilities. For democracy to be strong, it is essential for the opposition to be more active in the country's politics.

Deborshi Gautam
Nalbari, Assam
gautamdeborshi@gmail.com

Biden out, Harris in? What this risky move could mean for Democrats – and Trump



By: Emma Shortis

US President Joe Biden's decision to step aside as the Democratic nominee in this year's presidential election certainly had a sense of inevitability about it.

Yet, it is still unprecedented in the modern era for a sitting president to drop out of a presidential race late in the process. We are really in uncharted waters for American politics.

So, how where does the race go from here – and what does it mean for both the Democrats and Donald Trump, the Republican nominee?

Will Democrats now unite behind Kamala Harris?

Biden has endorsed his vice president, Kamala Harris, as the nominee, which I believe he was always going to do.

Not anointing Harris as his successor would have been politically unthinkable for Biden simply because it would have undermined his own decision-making when he chose her to be his running mate before the 2020 election.

His endorsement will also have a big impact on the decision-making of the Democratic Party as a whole. Anybody who challenges Harris now might well be taking on the establishment of the party. And the party would be wary of increasing perceptions of disunity at this point.

So, it certainly seems the Democrats will unite behind her as the candidate.

That said, it's not out of the realm of possibility that she could be challenged by another presidential hopeful. This may well depend on her performance – and the broader reactions to her – in the next couple of days.

Potential rivals will have political ambitions of their own – we can't discount that.

There will also be significant calculations about whether Harris can do the job – if she can win a national election campaign against Trump. Unfortunately, there's a lot of wariness in the US about what it would mean to have a Black woman running against Trump, and how that would be received.

And lastly, there is a lot of very real angst within the Democratic Party – and more broadly – about what a Trump victory would mean for the country.

In many people's views, the best way to avert what Democrats see as a potential catastrophe is to nominate the candidate with the best chance of beating him. Whether or not the party settles on Harris as that person remains to be seen.

What are the potential risks and rewards for the Democrats?

The risks are quite obvious. There's a real wariness about the unprecedented nature of this decision and how it will rattle the party.

One risk is Harris turns out not to be the right candidate and that the presidential race would be difficult for her to win, especially given how badly her first campaign for the presidency went in 2020.

The risks to American politics more broadly are also quite serious, given the level of vitriol and hatred that will be directed at the Democratic Party if a Black woman is the head of the ticket.

But I think it's also entirely possible this is the circuit breaker the Democrats needed. The party had been slipping into a morass of despair after Biden's debate performance against Trump last month and the subsequent assassination attempt against the former president. In a recent poll, two-thirds of Democrats said they believed Biden should withdraw from the race.

Given that both Biden and Trump are so disliked by the American population, Harris (and her running mate) could represent a huge opportunity for the Democrats.

A key strength of Harris is on the critical issue of reproductive rights. She has owned this issue in the campaign so far because Biden has difficulty with abortion politically as a devout Catholic – and we saw how he struggled with the messaging on this issue in the debate.

It's entirely possible it will be a hugely mobilising factor in this year's election, as it was in the 2022 midterm elections.

As such, Harris would have a significant advantage in persuading the Democratic base to turn out to vote on that issue, in addition to other voters.

How would this change the calculations for Trump?

Assuming Harris does become the nominee, Trump's pick of JD Vance as his vice-presidential running mate may turn out to have been a mistake. Like much of the movement that supports Trump, Vance is virulently anti-abortion and committed to further regulations on reproductive rights.

This could be a significant vulnerability for Trump, who doesn't perform as well with women voters compared to men.

And it seems the Trump campaign knows this, which is why it has been campaigning against Harris even before it was clear Biden was going to drop out.

The attacks on Harris from the right have been very brazen in their misogyny and racism.

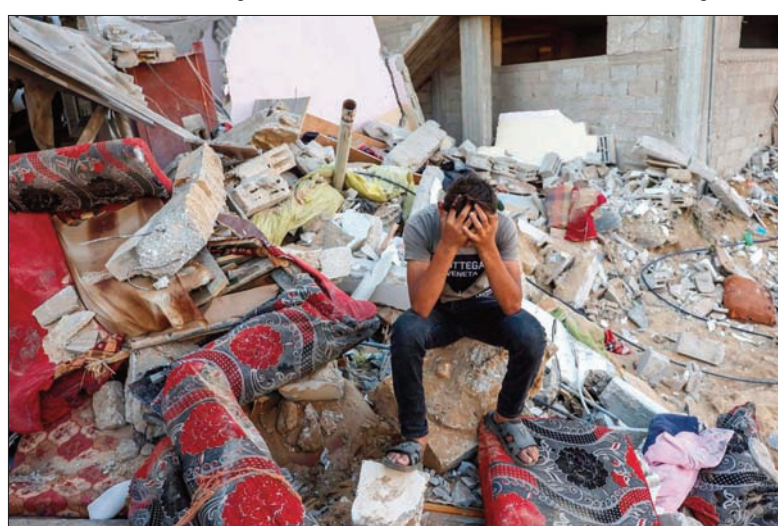
For example, the New York Post published a column earlier this month saying Harris would be the country's first "DEI president", referring to diversity, equity and inclusion. This is a way of dismissing anybody who's not white and not a man as not being worthy of the position they've earned.

Trump rose to national prominence prosecuting the same kind of racist campaign against the presidency of Barack Obama.

I think we can expect there to be a push for the Trump campaign not to go down that road any further. But we've seen in the past how Trump completely ignores that kind of conventional wisdom, and just how much that incites his base.

This remains a dangerous and unpredictable era in American politics. There are no rules for what happens next. (Courtesy: The Quint)

Despite Gaza war crimes, India's ties with key Israeli military firms continue



By: Meher Ali

On April 5, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution urging an arms embargo on Israel and calling on countries to "cease the sale, transfer and diversion of arms, munitions and other military equipment to Israel." India abstained from voting in favour of this resolution.

The resolution came just two weeks after the publication of "Anatomy of a Genocide," a report by Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine, that gave the world evidentiary details on how Israel has committed genocide in Gaza.

This report reaffirms the January preliminary ruling of the International Court of Justice that found that "some of the acts and omissions" committed by Israel during its attacks on Gaza "appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the [Genocide] Convention."

But if you turn to India, it would seem that for both the government and the private sector, it's business as usual with Israel and its military companies.

DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries

Just this March, Israeli state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) launched its very own, wholly-owned company called Aerospace Services India (ASI) in New Delhi at the end of March.

Danny Lauber, its Chief Executive, said that ASI is the only authorised original equipment manufacturer for India's Medium-Range Surface-To-Air Missile (MRSAM) system. It will provide components, maintenance, repair and support.

The MRSAM system was developed jointly by IAI and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), starting in 2017 through a \$1.6 billion contract. At the time, which IAI had said in a press release at the time was Israel's "largest defence contract" in the country's history.

Also this March, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) that tracks international arms transfers, published its 2023 factsheet that listed India as the top arms importer in the world. Not only that, India was Israel's top recipient for arms exports, receiving 37% of its total exports.

Adani Enterprises Limited, Elbit Systems and SK Group

Meanwhile, the export of more than 20 Hermes 900 drones to Israel by Adani-Elbit Advanced Systems was widely reported in February this year.

Adani Enterprises Limited (AEL) entered into a joint venture (JV) with Israel's Elbit Systems in 2016 through its subsidiary Adani Defence and Aerospace Limited to develop drones. Two years later, Adani-Elbit Systems opened its manufacturing unit in Hyderabad, from where these drones were exported to Israel.

Four years later, AEL, through its subsidiary Ordefence Systems, entered into a JV with another Israeli arms company called Israel Weapons Industries (IWI), through buying majority stake in PLR Systems.

IWI manufactures firearms for the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and is a subsidiary of the SK Group, owned by businessman Samy Katsav, once the point person supplying Israeli arms to the Shah of Iran.

"PLR" used to stand for Punj Lloyd Raksha Systems, IWI's initial partner, but was changed to "Precise, Lethal, Reliable" after the Adani acquisition. PLR Systems manufactures small arms such as assault rifles, machine guns and grenade launchers and markets itself as India's "first private sector arms manufacturer."

Bharat Forge, Astra Microwave and Rafael Advanced Defence Systems

The Hermes 900 exports happened alongside Israel's Rafael Advanced Defence Systems promoting its defence and communications systems at the Aero India

Conference this year in Bangalore. Like IAI, Rafael Systems is also owned by the state of Israel.

Rafael entered into a JV with Kalyani Strategic Systems, which is owned by Bharat Forge, back in 2015. This JV established Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems Pvt. Ltd. (KRAS) and it became India's first privately-owned missile manufacturing company.

In August last year, the Indian defence ministry gave KRAS a Rs 287 crore or \$34 million contract to produce missile systems.

What's the harm?: Weapons in Gaza

It has been widely reported that Israeli defence companies test their weapons on Palestinians, before selling these to international customers and the Israeli government. The words they use are "battle-tested" or "combat-proven."

IAI's subsidiary Elta Systems, along with the IDF and Israel's Defence Research & Development Directorate, are testing unmanned D9 bulldozers, called "The Panda", in Gaza, according to Israeli news website Haaretz.

The D9 bulldozers have been "extensively" used against Gaza in the past for "large-scale demolitions," according to Who Profits Research Center that sheds light on the businesses behind Israel's occupation of Palestinian and Syrian lands. But amidst the Gaza war, Israel started "adapting" these bulldozers to become autonomous; this technology was co-developed by IAI's Elta Systems.

One of IAI's most well-known weapons is the Heron TP drone, also known as the killer drone. Two of these, already deployed in Israel but owned by Germany, were loaned by the latter to the former and "instantly put to use against the Palestinians," according to an application submitted by the Republic of Nicaragua to the International Court of Justice against Germany on March 1 of this year.

Nicaragua claims that Germany has contributed to committing genocide in Gaza. The loaned Heron TP drones were cited as one of the weapons used to enable it. The ICJ said on April 30 that it was turning down Nicaragua's request for provisional measures against Germany but reiterated that countries selling arms must be mindful of their obligations under the Genocide Convention.

Alongside this, Elbit's Iron Sting, also called Steel Sting, is a "precision-guided" mortar bomb that can go through concrete walls. It was "presented" at this February's Singapore Air Show. According to the company, it was put through a "pre-operational test" in 2021 during Israel's 11-day attack that it called "Operation Guardian of the Walls" which killed around 256 Palestinians, including 67 children. It is now being tested more widely in the "battlefield" and according to Elbit "customers around the globe are keenly observing [it's] performance."

Investigate is a global database that lists companies that are profiting from and supporting state violence, including against Palestinians. It reported that Elbit has manufactured white phosphorus munitions, as mentioned in its 2012 annual financial report that it submitted to the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

It hasn't mentioned it in subsequent reports. White phosphorus causes severe burns "often down to the skin", according to the Human Rights Watch, which confirmed its use by the Israeli military against civilians in the current war in Gaza. This reporter could not independently verify if the white phosphorus currently being used is manufactured by Elbit Systems.

On April 1, seven aid workers from the nonprofit World Central Kitchen (WCK), who were travelling in a convoy of three vehicles in the central Gaza Strip, were killed in a series of three missile strikes. These were most likely Spike missiles, according to Chris Cobb-Smith, a former British army personnel and UN weapons inspector, quoted by the BBC.

Spike missiles are developed by

Rafael. These were launched at the food aid workers from an Elbit Hermes 450 drone.

All in a day's work: Profits, War and Occupation

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a US-based Quaker nonprofit that has worked in Gaza and runs the Investigate database. It included Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), Elbit Systems, Rafael Advanced Systems and the SK Group in its list of companies that have been profiting from Israel's attacks on Gaza since the beginning of this war on October 7th last year.

Elbit Systems' revenue for the last quarter of 2023 was \$1.6 billion, a 7% increase from the last quarter of 2022. Notably, Elbit earned 12% more in profits in this period from sale of land systems, including sale of ammunition and munitions to Israel, according to its financial report.

Similarly, IAI reported that 2023 was its "highest grossing year since the company's inception." Its sales in the last quarter of 2023, starting October and ending in December, amounted to \$1.4 billion. The company's CEO Boaz Levy said: "Israel Aerospace Industries' financial report for 2023 well reflects a year of significant and varied activities – one in which the country was at war during the last quarter."

For Rafael Advanced Systems, sales increased by 19% to \$1.2 billion in the last quarter compared to 2022.

All three have order backlogs or pending orders worth \$18 billion (IAI), \$17.8 billion (Elbit Systems) and \$14 billion (Rafael). More than 70% of IAI and Elbit Systems' orders were from international customers, while for Rafael, it's more than 50%.

Both Elbit Systems and IAI have been marked for divestment by Investigate.

Divestment means selling off one's investments in a company. In the context of the Gaza war and charges of genocide, it has meant shining a light on businesses that are directly or indirectly involved in the Israeli occupation of Palestine and rights violations against Palestinians.

According to the Investigate database, IAI has been marked because it "supports and maintains illegal settlements" in Occupied Palestine, makes killer drones, surveillance and other weapons systems that cause human rights violations.

Elbit Systems has been marked because its weapons are used in "war crimes" against Palestinians, and its surveillance systems are used along walls and checkpoints in Occupied Palestine.

The representatives of DRDO, Adani Enterprises Limited and Bharat Forge were contacted via email as well as a follow-up call to comment on their Israeli partners profiting from the war on Gaza, amidst calls for ceasefire and charge of genocide against Israel.

They were specifically asked: Why do you continue to do business with IAI/Rafael/Elbit Systems, despite the fact that the United Nations just passed a resolution urging for an arms embargo on Israel?

A spokesperson from Bharat Forge, owned by the multinational Kalyani Group, said: "Kalyani Rafael Advanced Systems is a joint venture formed in August 2015 for engagement on India Specific programmes/requirements only."

The entity does not undertake any export-related activity at all. Kalyani Group as a responsible corporate organisation is fully aligned with the policies laid out by the Government of India and in full compliance of various export control policies."

The spokespersons for AEL and DRDO had not responded at the time this article was published.

The Indian representative at the UN Human Rights Council was asked via email the reason that India abstained from voting on an arms embargo against Israel. He also has not yet responded.

Shir Hever is the military embargo coordinator for the Palestinian Boycott, Divest, Sanctions or BDS movement that organises actions to enforce international law on Israel, inspired by the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. He said, in the context of the International Court of Justice ruling, it's "plausible" that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians: "This is enough to create obligation to third states, such as India, to respect the military embargo. Weapons may not be sold to Israel, bought from Israel or transited to Israel. Whatever atrocities may be committed by the Israeli forces using such weapons, the Indian authorities and defence companies will not be able to argue that they did not know in advance that the risk exists." (Courtesy: The Wire)

Bangladesh protests: By backing Sheikh Hasina, India is undermining its own interests

By: Zia Hassan

The student-led protests that have swept Bangladesh since Sunday, and met violent reprisal, are the strongest indication yet that India should reconsider its long-standing policy towards its eastern neighbour.

India's security-centric approach sees Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the ruling Awami League as stabilising allies against threats like a perceived Pakistan-backed dispensation. But this is increasingly at odds with the democratic aspirations of the Bangladeshi people, particularly its youth.

This position, while rooted in legitimate security concerns, risks undermining Bangladesh's potential for genuine political liberty and diversity. It now threatens India's long-term interests on its eastern border by alienating much of Bangladesh's population at a time when Hasina's political future seems increasingly precarious.

New Delhi's myopic approach not only undermines the democratic aspirations of Bangladeshis but also potentially sows the seeds for instability and anti-India sentiment in a strategically vital neighbour, compromising the very security interests India seeks to protect.

India needs to reevaluate not only its security-centric view but also consider if the hawks have overly influenced Indian foreign policy, promoting a security lens that enables the Awami League and bypasses a nuanced view of Bangladesh.

It is well-known that the conservative Jamaat-e-Islami has never received more than 5% of the vote. It is simplistic to assert that Pakistan can significantly influence Bangladeshi society or its politics through financial means or the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, the Bangladeshi intelligence arm.

So also the claim that the Bangladesh National Party, which includes numerous freedom fighters in its ranks solely caters to anti-Indian and pro-Pakistani sentiment. The Bangladesh National Party seeks to establish a uniquely Bangladeshi identity, a mission that is both overtly promoted and subtly pursued.

Allegations that insurgents in India received support during the rule of the Bangladesh National Party three decades ago have contributed to New Delhi's narrow perspective. However, it is crucial to note that insurgent activities were not exclusive to any single political era: they persisted during the Awami League's regime between 1996 and 2001, partly as a response to India's involvement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This complex history calls for a more balanced assessment of Bangladesh's internal dynamics.

Despite the palpable shift in Bangladesh's political land-

scape, which is undoubtedly evident to Indian diplomatic and intelligence circles, the foreign policy hawks in New Delhi have stubbornly clung to a simplistic narrative.

This reductionist viewpoint is largely a construction of Hasina's regime – a narrative built on years of disinformation, historical distortion, and manipulative rhetoric that has finally been unequivocally rejected by the youth-led uprising.

The tenacious adherence to this outdated perspective by India's foreign policy establishment reflects a dangerous disconnect from the ground realities in Bangladesh. Hasina's long-standing strategy of invoking the spirit of the Liberation struggle of 1971 and exaggerating the influence of external forces like Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence has lost its potency.

The young protesters' bold appropriation of historically charged terms – evident in slogans like "I am razakar [collaborator], I am razakar, who said that, the autocrat" – signals a seismic shift in Bangladesh's political discourse that Indian policymakers can ill afford to ignore.

As the student protests intensify in Bangladesh, Hasina's regime faces a crisis of legitimacy. The government's brutal crackdown, including 174 reported student deaths and



widespread torture by security forces, has turned Hasina into a pariah, waging war against her own people. This violence, coupled with financial instability and growing opposition from the diaspora, signals the beginning of the regime's end game.

The perception that India is Hasina's primary backer has solidified among Bangladeshis, particularly young protesters. Their determination, fueled by the Bangladesh National Party's failure to mount effective political resistance, has created a movement that refuses to back down. This puts India in a precarious position: continuing to support Hasina means running the risk of cementing a long-lasting hostility among Bangladeshis towards India.

No serious analyst is betting based on a timeline but it is clear that Hasina's government cannot sustain its grip on power indefinitely. If India waits to change sides until Hasina's fall becomes inevitable, it could be too late to salvage its reputation among the Bangladeshis.

Instead, a proactive, nuanced approach is imperative. India must pivot from supporting specific political entities to championing democratic processes and institutions. By aligning with the democratic aspirations of Bangladesh's youth and embracing a comprehensive understanding of the political landscape, India can potentially salvage its relationship with its neighbor.

The window for such recalibration is rapidly closing. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Myanmar violence, South China Sea tensions are top issues as Southeast Asian diplomats meet in Laos

VIENTIANE, July 25: Southeast Asian foreign ministers and top diplomats from key partners including the United States and China were gathering in the Laotian capital on Thursday for the start of three days of talks expected to focus on the increasingly violent civil war in Myanmar, tensions in the South China Sea and other regional issues.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi are expected to hold one-on-one talks on the sidelines of the meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Vientiane, which come as both Beijing and Washington are looking to expand their influence in the region.

Lao Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith thanked ASEAN members and partners for their "unwavering collective effort" that has led to its past achievements and emphasized the importance of the bloc's continuous work to promote peace and stability.

"In light of the rapid and complex geopolitical and geoeconomic changes, we need to further enhance ASEAN centrality and unity so as to promote the relevance and resilience of ASEAN, aiming at addressing emerging challenges and seizing opportunity in the future," he said in the opening statement.

For the ASEAN nations — Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos — the violence in Myanmar is at the top of the agenda as the bloc struggles to implement its "five-point consensus" for peace.

The plan calls for the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties. The military leadership in Myanmar has so far ignored the plan and has raised questions about the



ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING AND RELATED MEETINGS
21-27 JULY 2024, VIENTIANE, LAO PDR

bloc's efficiency and credibility to mediate for peace.

Broader talks, including diplomats from elsewhere in the region including Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, are expected to focus on issues including the economy, security, climate and energy.

Regional issues, including Cambodia's decision to build a canal off the Mekong River that Vietnam, which is downstream, worries could have ecological and security implications, as well as massive dam building projects in Laos further upstream could also feature in the meetings.

In Myanmar, the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021 and suppressed widespread nonviolent protests that sought a return to democratic rule, leading to increasing violence and a humanitarian crisis.

In an effort to put pressure on Myanmar, ASEAN has prohibited it from sending any political representatives to top-level meetings, and it has sent bureaucrats instead. Aung Mye Thaw, the permanent secretary of Myanmar's Foreign Ministry, was expected to attend this week's meetings, which run through Saturday.

More than 5,400 people have been killed in the fighting in Myanmar and the military government has arrested more than 27,000 since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. In addition,

there are now more than 3 million displaced people in the country, with the numbers growing daily as fighting intensifies between the military and Myanmar's multiple ethnic militias as well as the so-called people's defense forces of military opponents.

As the needs of civilians grow, discussions on humanitarian assistance to Myanmar will also be a focus of the ASEAN talks, Bolbongse Vangphapha, head of the Thai Foreign Ministry's department for ASEAN, told reporters ahead of the meetings.

Thailand, which shares a long border with Myanmar, has already been heavily involved in providing humanitarian assistance, and Bolbongse said the country is ready to support the next phase of delivery being planned by the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management.

He did not say when or where the aid delivery would be. Thailand initiated its first delivery of aid to Myanmar in March from the northern province of Tak. It was said to be distributed in Kayah state to approximately 20,000 out of millions of people displaced by fighting.

Landlocked Laos is the bloc's poorest nation and one of its smallest, and many have expressed skepticism about how much it can accomplish while the crises mount. But it is also the first ASEAN chair that shares a border with Myanmar. Laos has already sent a special envoy to Myanmar for meetings with the head of the ruling military council and other top officials in an attempt to make progress on the peace plan.

ASEAN also has introduced a mechanism of trilateral informal consultation among its current, past, and future chairs, specifically for ensuring continuity in its response to the situation in Myanmar. The troika met for the first time on Wednesday, attended by Laos, Indonesia and Malaysia. (AP)

Harris will be officially announced as the party's presidential candidate at its Democratic National Convention in August

Kamala Harris is unfit to rule, says Trump; describes her as radical left lunatic



WASHINGTON, July 25: Unleashing a volley of attacks against his new campaign opponent Vice President Kamala Harris, former president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has said she is "unfit to rule" and described her as a "radical left lunatic" whom voters will reject in November.

Trump, 78, launched a scathing attack on Harris as he took the stage for the first time to address an election rally on Wednesday after Harris became the presumptive nominee of the Democratic Party.

Over the weekend, President Joe Biden, 81, announced that he was dropping out of the race and named

Harris as his successor.

Harris, 59, will be officially announced as the party's presidential candidate at its Democratic National Convention in August.

"For three and a half years, Lyin Kamala Harris has been the ultra-liberal driving force behind every single Biden catastrophe. She is a radical left lunatic who will destroy our country if she ever gets the chance to get into office. We're not going to let that happen," Trump said.

Trump, who has previously called Biden "Sleepy Joe," gave Harris the nickname "Lyin Kamala".

"I was supposed to be nice. They say something happened to me when I got shot. I became nice," Trump said,

referring to his brief call for national unity after the July 13 assassination attempt on him.

"And when you're dealing with these people, they're very dangerous people. When you're dealing with them, you can't be too nice. You really can't be. So if you don't mind, I'm not going to be nice. Is that okay?" he asked his supporters amidst huge applause from the audience.

Harris is the most liberal elected politician in American history, he said.

This November, the American people are going to tell her, no thanks, Kamala, Trump said.

"You've done a terrible job. You've been terrible at everything you've done. You're ultra-liberal. We don't want you here. We don't want you anywhere. Kamala, you're fired. Get out of here. You're fired," Trump said.

Trump continued linking Harris to Biden and his policies and argued that both worked to cover up the president's physical decline while in office.

"She was appointed by this horrible president, this horrible guy...what they've done to our country is unthinkable," he alleged.

Trump told his cheering

supporters that Harris lies.

A vote for Harris is a vote for four more years of dishonesty, incompetence, weakness and failure, Trump said.

Trump alleged everything Harris touches turns into a total disaster. He mentioned Harris as many as 45 times in his speech.

"When Kamala Harris was sent to Europe to deter Russia from attacking Ukraine, how did that work out? Russia answered by launching the invasion just five days after she left. Putin laughed at her like she was nothing. She is nothing. She's so bad for us. Everything Kamala touches turns into a total disaster. She's destroyed San Francisco with the policies," Trump said.

Harris has worked as a prosecutor, first as the district attorney in San Francisco and later as the attorney general of California.

"She'll destroy our country if she's elected. So we won't let her be elected. We can't let that happen. Unbelievably, despite all of the damage she's caused, radical, liberal Kamala Harris now wants a promotion to deliver four more years of chaos. We've had the worst four years," he said. (PTT)

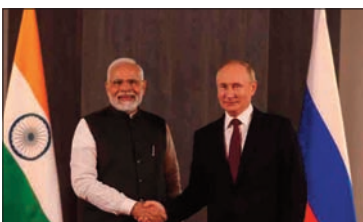
US disappointed about symbolism and timing of PM Modi's Moscow trip, says senior official

WASHINGTON, July 25: The US is disappointed about the symbolism and timing of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Russia visit when President Joe Biden hosted the NATO summit here, a senior State Department official has told lawmakers concerned over the growing India-Russia ties.

Prime Minister Modi paid an official visit to Russia on July 8-9 at the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin for the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit. This was Modi's first trip to Russia since the start of 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.

"I could not agree with you more about our disappointment about the symbolism and the timing of Prime Minister Modi's trip to Moscow. We are having those tough conversations with our Indian friends," Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Donald Lu told American lawmakers at a Congressional hearing here on Tuesday.



"I assure you may be if I could just take a moment to put into context that visit. Prime Minister Modi, two weeks before he went to Moscow, also saw (Ukrainian President Volodymyr) Zelenskyy on the margins of the G7 summit in Italy," he said. The US is looking very carefully at what Modi did when he was in Moscow, he said. "We did not see any new major defence deals. We saw no major discussion of technology cooperation. In addition, you have Modi having said in front of Putin on live television, his feeling that the war in Ukraine could not be won on the battlefield and the pain that he felt watching the death of children in war," Lu said.

"A clear reference to the bombing of

the children's hospital in Kyiv that happened while he was there. I share your concern about this visit, sir, and we are trying very hard to communicate those concerns directly to the Indians. The Indians, who have cancelled billions of dollars in defence purchases over these last two and a half years because the Russians can't deliver anymore. So we're working very hard on that," Lu said.

He was referring to the attack on the Omsk Children's Hospital in Kyiv on July 8 after Russia unleashed a barrage of missiles on cities across Ukraine. At least 42 people were killed including two in the hospital in the strikes.

Lu was responding to a question from Congressman Joe Wilson, a former co-chair of the Caucus of India and Indian Americans on the issue. "I was shocked and saddened to see the embrace by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who I so respect and admire, embrace war criminal Putin in Moscow on the very day that Putin intentionally launched missiles at the largest children's hospital in Kyiv, Ukraine," he said. (PTT)

NORAD says it tracked Chinese and Russian military planes off Alaska

BEIJING, July 25: Two Chinese and two Russian long-range bombers were tracked flying over international waters near Alaska and US and Canadian fighter jets were sent up in response, their joint aerospace command said.

The Chinese and Russian military activity on Wednesday was not seen as a threat, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, known as NORAD, said. "NORAD will continue to monitor competitor activity near North America and meet presence with presence," the command said in a news release. While Russia's military has long been active in the north Pacific, China has emerged as a new actor in recent years as its growing navy and air force expands their presence farther from the country's shores.

Chinese naval ships have showed up in international waters near Alaska, most recently in mid-July when the Coast Guard spotted four ships in the US Exclusive Economic Zone, which extends 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from the shore. (AP)

Pilot miraculously survives Nepal crash after cockpit split from plane: Report

KATHMANDU, July 25: Captain Manish Raj Shakyas, the lone survivor of a deadly plane crash in Nepal that killed 18 other people on board, was saved after the cockpit of the aircraft was sheared off by a freight container seconds before the rest of the aircraft went up in flames, a media report said on Thursday.

The Bombardier CRJ-200 aircraft of Saurya Airlines, carrying 19 people, including two crew members, technical staff of the airline and a child and his mother caught fire shortly after taking off from the Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) here on Wednesday.

The aircraft was bound for the Pokhara International Airport for regular maintenance service.

Of the deceased, 15 died on the spot while three died during treatment at a local hospital, authorities said.

Airport security personnel said when the plane hit the cockpit got stuck in it, while

the rest of the plane fell to the ground reaching another side of the ground.

According to Deputy Inspector General and Chief of TIA Airport Security Office Ram Dutt Joshi, Captain Shakyas, 37, was rescued from inside the container which was on the TIA premises.

"We rescued Captain

Shakyas from inside the container," The Rising Nepal newspaper quoted DIG Joshi as saying.

Doctors have initiated an investigation into the brain scars of Shakyas.

Shakyas is currently receiving treatment at Kathmandu Medical College (KMC).

According to the doctors involved in treatment, although the injuries in different parts of the body and the broken bones at two places of the backbone have not caused serious problems, the doctors

are investigating to find out the cause of the scars on Shakyas's brain.

Neurosurgery Dr. Amit Thapa said that he could provide further information only after the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan of Shakyas's brain scars.

Captain Shakyas's health condition showed improvement on

Thursday as compared to Wednesday. The doctors said he is "free from danger" and can speak.

He can also consume liquid food. According to KMC sources, Captain Shakyas sustained several internal injuries despite not being burnt in the fire. The doctors are preparing for surgery to address his broken bones.

In solemn tribute to the 18 lives lost, the Nepal government has decreed that the national flag will be flown at half-mast on Thursday. (PTT)



Publisher Jimmy Lai will testify in his defence at Hong Kong national security trial, lawyer says



HONG KONG, July 25: A defence lawyer said Thursday that prominent publisher Jimmy Lai will testify in his defence in the landmark national security trial brought under a Beijing-imposed law that has all but wiped out public dissent.

Lai, the 76-year-old founder of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, was arrested in 2020 during a crackdown on the mass pro-democracy

protests that rocked Hong Kong in 2019. He was charged with colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security and conspiring with others to put out seditious publications. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison.

On Wednesday, Lai's lawyer Robert Pang argued his client had no case to answer because the prosecutors' evidence was insufficient. Pang said the prosecution had failed to prove Lai's intent after the introduction of the 2020 law and stressed the importance of freedom of speech. But judges Esther Toh, Susana D'Almada Remedios and Alex Lee ruled against him on Thursday.

"Having considered all the submission, we ruled that the first defendant has a case to answer on all charges," Toh said, without elaborating. Pang later said in court that Lai would testify in his

defence, but when he would do so was not immediately settled. Observers said Lai's high-profile case, which has already stretched over 90 days, is a trial of press freedom and a test for judicial independence in the Asian financial hub.

When Britain handed back Hong Kong to China in 1997, the city was promised to have its Western-style civil liberties kept intact for 50 years. However, the freedoms that once set Hong Kong apart from mainland China, including freedoms of press and assembly, have drastically shrunk since the enactment of the 2020 security law.

Beijing and Hong Kong governments insist that the law brought back stability to the city following the social unrest.

The prosecutors have alleged that Lai had engaged in requesting foreign countries, especially the United States, to

take actions against Beijing "under the guise of fighting for freedom and democracy."

They pointed to Lai's meetings with former U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other senior senators in the United States in July 2019 to discuss a now-withdrawn extradition bill that sparked the massive anti-government protests that year. They alleged Lai had sought support from the U.S. on sanctioning Beijing and Hong Kong's leaders who allegedly cracked down the movement. In 2022, six former Apple Daily executives entered guilty pleas and admitted to the court they conspired with Lai to call for sanctions or other hostile activities against Hong Kong or China. They were convicted and await sentencing behind bars. (AP)

China making inroads into key choke points in Indian Ocean: US Congresswoman

WASHINGTON, July 25: China is making inroads into key choke points along the Indian Ocean, obstructing the free maritime routes, and threatening the national security and economic interests of both the US and its friends and allies in South Asia, an influential American lawmaker has said.

The Indian Ocean is a crucial channel for global trade, an estimated 80 per cent of maritime oil trade and 40 per cent of world trade passes through the Indian Ocean, Congresswoman Young Kim said during a Congressional hearing here.

Young, who is the chairperson of the Subcommittee on Indo-Pacific in the House Foreign Affairs Committee, also said on Tuesday, "We cannot forget the significance of Indo in the Indo-Pacific."

Explaining how the South Asian region faces a dynamic geopolitical landscape that presents challenges for the US policy objectives, she said, South Asia holds "immense significance" for the US foreign policy and national security interests.

Young listed all the recent Chinese development projects in recent years — Chinese ports in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, military installations in Djibouti and infra-



structure investments in the Maldives and drew attention to how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is making inroads into key choke points along the maritime routes and obstructing the right to freely navigate the Indian Ocean waters.

"These threaten the US national security and economic interests and those of our friends and allies in the region," Young said. The resource-rich South China Sea in the Indo-Pacific region is widely seen as a potential flashpoint for global conflict.

China claims most of the South China Sea as its own, while The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims over the maritime area.

Though the US is not a claimant to the

South China Sea, it says the waters are crucial to its national interest of guaranteeing free passage through seas worldwide.

The US Navy regularly conducts freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, saying the US is "defending every nation's right to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows."

It was not the first time that the Subcommittee on Indo-Pacific was dealing with the topic. Last month it held a hearing on the Indo-Pacific budget and the CCP aggression in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

"The Indo-Pacific region's economic, geographical, and military significance makes it an essential arena for US-China competition. ... During this time, we must choose to show up for our allies, or risk ceding our leadership to the CCP," she had said last month.

Recalling that hearing, Young further said, "We cannot forget the significance of Indo in the Indo-Pacific. The CCP has sparked border conflicts along the Line of (Actual) Control with India and its submarines and warships regularly sail in the Indian Ocean." (PTT)

Taiwan sees flooding and landslides from Typhoon Gaemi, which caused 22 deaths in the Philippines

TAIPEI, July 25: Taiwan has seen flooding in low-lying areas, along with landslides and damage to homes and shops after Typhoon Gaemi made landfall on the island.

The storm swept up the western Pacific, leaving 22 people dead in the Philippines from flooding and landslides, and three in Taiwan, with more than 220 reported injured.

Offices and schools in Taiwan were closed for the second consecutive day on Thursday and people were urged to stay home and away from the coastline.

The island is regularly hit by typhoons and has boosted its warning systems, but its topography, high population density and high-tech economy make it difficult to avoid losses when such



storms hit.

The capital, Taipei, was unusually quiet, with light rain falling and occasionally gusting winds. In the Philippines, the death toll rose due to drownings and landslides. At least three people are missing, according to police.

The Philippine coast guard reported that an oil tanker, MT Terra Nova, loaded with about 1.4 million liters (370,000 gallons) of industrial fuel oil sank off Limay town in Bataan province early Thursday and rescuers saved 15 of 16 crew

members.

It's not immediately clear if the sinking was related to the bad weather and rough seas but Transport Secretary Jaime Bautista said coast guard personnel could not immediately reach the area to contain a possible oil spill because of the rough sea conditions. The storm prompted the cancellation of air force drills off Taiwan's east coast.

Gaemi, called Carina in the Philippines, did not make landfall in that archipelago but enhanced its seasonal

monsoon rains. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered authorities to speed up efforts to deliver food and other aid to isolated rural villages. "People there may not have eaten for days," Marcos said in a televised emergency meeting.

In the densely populated region around the Philippine capital, government work and school classes were suspended after rains flooded many areas.

The storm's effects were expected to continue into Friday as it moved in a northwestern direction toward mainland China. In Fujian province on China's east coast, ferry routes were suspended on Wednesday and all train service will be halted on Thursday, China's official Xinhua News Agency said. (AP)

All acts of violence should be condemned: Manipur CM

Singh responded to allegations by Congress that no aid was mentioned for Manipur in the Union Budget



IMPHAL, July 25: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Thursday said all acts of violence should be universally condemned and efforts must be made to prevent them.

Singh made these comments at the launch of a book programme by the department of sericulture and Manipur Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board.

He said, "Peace has gradually returned to the state and we must collectively strive to maintain it. All our demands, including the identification of illegal immigrants and the

implementation of the NRC, should strictly adhere to constitutional and legal frameworks. We must denounce acts of violence and work actively to prevent them."

Singh also responded to allegations by the Congress that no aid was mentioned for Manipur in the Union Budget.

Without directly naming the grand old party, Singh said, "The central government has consistently supported relief efforts since the beginning, regardless of whether the state was mentioned in Parliament or not. Let us

refrain from indulging in petty politics. The Centre has provided assistance for constructing prefabricated homes and daily food provisions. A total of ₹ 145 crore has been allocated for managing relief camps."

He added, "₹ 3 crore was spent on distributing television sets in relief camps, and ₹ 23 crore was distributed in ₹ 1,000 installments to each person residing in relief camps, on at least four occasions. Additionally, ₹ 44 crore was utilised for children's nutrition and personal hygiene, while ₹ 19 crore was allocated as compensatory packages for agricultural and related activities." Singh added, "₹ 25,000 has been disbursed as the first installment to 6,000 families under the special assistance package for violence-affected families, with each family set to receive ₹ 1 lakh."

He addressed criticisms, stating, "Those engaging in petty politics have misrepresented the government's efforts for relief camp residents."

Singh continued, "Even amidst the disastrous hailstorms and floods in recent months, ₹ 80 crore was allocated for flood relief, and ₹ 45 crore was spent on distributing GI sheets to 42,000 people whose homes were damaged by hailstorms." (PTI)

Arunachal's police dept faces acute shortage of manpower: Minister

ITANAGAR, July 25: The Arunachal Pradesh police department has been facing an acute shortage of manpower, the state assembly was informed on Thursday.

Home minister Mama Natung also said that the shortage in manpower was due to creation of new districts and inability of the recruiting agencies to complete the process on time.

Responding to a question from BJP MLA Wanglin Lowangdong during question hour, Natung said that his department could not even fill the sanctioned posts in many districts.

In 2011, the Union home Ministry announced a special package for the Tirap, Changlang and Longding (TCL) region sanctioning 1,949 posts of civil police.

Of those posts, 140 are still pending, the home minister said.

Natung said that in April 2018, the home department had advertised inviting applications for 82 vacant posts for the three eastern districts. However, the advertisement was cancelled due to procedural issues.

"The home department later submitted a requisition against those posts to the Arunachal Pradesh Staff Selection Board (APSSB) for recruitment which is under process. Once the recruitment is completed, the vacant posts will be filled up," he added.

Responding to a supplementary from another BJP member Jikke Tako, Natung said the state cabinet has decided to post adequate police personnel in various districts after the recruitment process is over. (PTI)

Flood, landslides wreak havoc in Arunachal this year: Khandu



ITANAGAR, July 25: Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu on Thursday said that flood and landslides triggered by heavy rain have wreaked havoc in the state as the current monsoon season has been "terrible", unlike previous years.

Responding to a question from BJP MLA Pani Taram during the question hour in the assembly, Khandu said 33 roads and 13 bridges in Kurung Kumey district were severely damaged due to the natural calamities on June 30.

"To ensure that people

trict have been restored.

However, there was major damage in the 11-KV line near the Kurung bridge, which supplies power to Parsi Parlo and a few parts of the Damin circle, and it is yet to be restored.

Work is going on to restore the Kurung bridge, and the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHDCL) has fixed the deadline to launch the bridge by August 30, he said. The chief minister said that the "first two ration sorties to Damin were successfully conducted".

The NHDCL and BRO personnel are working overtime to restore the surface communications to Sarli and its adjoining areas, he said.

Reiterating his government's commitment to help the affected people, the chief minister said the state government has asked the Disaster Management Department to assess the damage thoroughly so that special funds can be allocated. (PTI)

Northeast Indian diaspora announces international summit

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 25: The Northeast India Scientific and Entrepreneurial Diaspora (NEISED) is pleased to announce the successful conclusion of a virtual event held on the other day, that marked significant milestones in its ongoing efforts to bring about scientific and bio-based entrepreneurial growth in Northeast India.

The event witnessed the participation of members from across North America, Europe, South Africa and Australia, along with regional members from diverse professional backgrounds, showcasing the collective commitment to this noble cause.

The event marked the official launch of NEISED's website, a digital platform designed to serve as a hub for collaboration, information sharing, resource mobilisation and a doorway to global opportunities for a thriving ecosystem for bio-based innovation and entrepreneurship.

The website was inaugurated by the education minister of Assam, Ranoo Pegu. During the virtual meet, he stated the importance of realising the golden trope of biodiversity sheltered within the Northeastern states of the country, culminating to the economic progress of the region.

Adding to that, Pegu has highly appreciated the formation of NEISED and emphasised our social responsibility towards a sustainable future, highlighting the necessity of giving back to the ecosystem we were all brought up in. Praising NEISED's voluntary efforts, he noted how the organisation will guide the new generation towards a culture of responsibility and growth.

The other highlight of the virtual meet was the first official announcement of the upcoming 1st International Bio-manufacturing Summit 2025, scheduled to take place on January 10-11, 2025. This summit will bring together global industry leaders, academicians, Government stakeholders, researchers, and students to deliberate on the advancements, challenges, and opportunities in the sphere of Biomanufacturing in Northeast India.

The official launch of NEISED's social media handles on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (Twitter) was also announced.

The content development team of NEISED stated that these platforms will serve as key channels for engagement, updates, and community building, enabling NEISED to reach a wider audience and promote greater interaction among its members.

Strict vigil in Tripura follows Gandatwisa violence



AGARTALA, July 25: In the wake of the recent violence in Tripura's Gandatwisa which left several families homeless, DGP Amitabh Ranjan convened a state-level law and order meeting in Dhalai district and instructed all the SPs to maintain strict vigil throughout the state.

The violence at Gandatwisa on July 12 had left over 80 families homeless due to arson following the death of a tribal youth in a clash between two groups in Dhalai district.

The Tripura Human Rights Commission (THRC) has already issued a notice to the DGP seeking details on actions taken by law enforcement to apprehend those responsible for widespread looting and arson of homes, shops, and markets.

During the meeting held on Wednesday at the SP office in Ambassa, Dhalai's

district headquarters, the DGP conducted a thorough analysis of the Gandatwisa turmoil, a senior officer said. He commended swift police response that brought the situation under control. Emphasising stringent measures against troublemakers, he stressed the need of maintaining peace and tranquility at all costs, advocating judicious deployment of central forces and Tripura State Rifles.

The DGP instructed the SPs to remain alert as far as ethnic and communal issues are concerned and take necessary measures to prevent the situation from aggravating, the officer added.

DGP (Intelligence) Anurag Dhankar further underscored the need for meticulous handling of every situation leading up to the panchayat elections, stressing on enhanced coordination among security personnel. (PTI)

Aaranyak's CSTMs to bolster efforts to deter wildlife crimes in NE

CSMTs are modelled as multi-stakeholder groups- formed by the important units of any particular community



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 25: In tune with its community-centric approach for mounting surveillance at the grassroot to deter wildlife and nature crimes vis-à-vis notified protected areas in particular, premier biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak (www.aaranyak.org) has launched an initiative to form Community Surveillance and Monitoring Teams (CSMT) in different areas of the Northeast region to augment multi-stakeholders efforts for prevention of wildlife crimes.

The resource team from the Legal and Advocacy Division (LAD) of Aaranyak has, after much spade work, succeeded in forming CSMTs which are now operational in the eastern Arunachal Pradesh landscape-around D'Ering Wildlife Sanctuary.

These CSMTs are composed of local community members who shoulder the responsibility of safeguarding their own community from wildlife crimes, and have been formed after several rounds of consultations involving the community members, local NGOs, social leaders and concerned forest officials.

"By involving the community directly in surveillance and monitoring efforts, CSMTs empower locals to protect their natural resources, promote conservation, and deter illegal activities such as poaching and habitat

destruction," said Dr Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, globally acclaimed conservation scientist and the CEO of Aaranyak.

CSMTs are modelled as multi-stakeholder groups- formed by the important units of any particular community. It is a highly flexible model that allows modification and adaptation to the structure of any society where it is intended to be implemented. The initiative is supported by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Resilience Funds-Global Initiative.

In the context of northeast India, the CSMTs will be a mixture of EDCs (eco-development councils), student/youth organisations, local conservation NGOs and Village Councils. Because most of their activities are related to wildlife and the concerned protected area they live around, CSMT will always work in close coordination with the Forest Departments.

Aaranyak has already started preliminary consultations with NGOs and forest officials for establishing CSMTs in western Mizoram around Dampa Tiger Reserve soon. Similar efforts are on in a part of Manipur too.

The idea of CSMTs is based on the VDPs (Village Defence Parties) in Assam. Although it is far from being a legal body like VDPs yet, the CSMT is a beginning for community collaboration to deter wildlife

crimes and illegal wildlife trade in critical areas of northeast India.

"The CSMTs which are and will be located in the fringe villages of any designated wildlife protected area, will monitor the community, the local markets, unspecified guests going in and out of their villages and carry on awareness campaigns and other social activities.

"The CSMT activities aim at keeping a community-based surveillance to deter illegal wildlife crime cases and keeping the community aware. They are expected to be passionate about working towards biodiversity and nature conservation," said Dr Jimmy Borah, Senior Manager of LAD at Aaranyak.

The CSMT activities also include maintaining a strong channel of communications with both the forest and local enforcement officials in order to promptly report any illegalities that they may have observed or been informed about.

CSMTs are entrusted and shall be trained to conduct social surveys to facilitate alternate sources of livelihood for the community and implement eco-tourism activities such as homestays, nature guides, safari tours, adventure guides, etc.

"The main goal of CSMT will always be the deterrence of wildlife crimes in critical areas. Although northeast India has always been the focus of many illegal poaching of high-value wildlife like rhinos and elephants, it has also become a lucrative transit route to smuggle exotics in recent times.

"Hence, it has become imperative for us to not only guard native species, but also protect ourselves from being a corridor for exotic animal trade. CSMTs will work on the ground-level- which will give us a greater opportunity to tackle these crimes on the ground" said Ivy Farheen Hussain, Senior Project Officer in Aaranyak.

Operational CSMTs in the eastern Arunachal Pradesh landscape- around D'Ering Wildlife Sanctuary have been trained to assist their community in eco-tourism and alternate livelihood activities which will also reduce their dependency on the protected forest and wildlife.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE WORKING PLAN OFFICER::: HILL AREAS:::KARBI ANGLONG DIPHU

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed Tender affixing Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Challan amounting Rs. 10/- (Rupees Ten) only are invited from registered Govt. Contractor for the following work and will be received by the office of the undersigned upto 3:00 P.M from 26th July/2024 to 3rd August/2024 and the sealed tender box will be opened on 3rd August/2024 from 4:00 PM onwards. If the office remain closed due to any reason on that day the tender will be received and opened on the next day upto 3:00 P.M (IST). The Tenderer or their authorized agents / representative may be present at the time of opening the tender.

Sl no.	Name of Scheme/Works	Estimated amount (in Lakhs)	Tender amount	Time for completion	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Construction of Vehicle garage at Division Campus.	8,73,931.00	8,73,931.00	30 Days	

The following documents required to be submitted along with tender papers (Technical Bid).

- 2% Earnest Money in case of General and 1 % in case of ST/SC over the value of the work in the form of call deposit from any recognized bank in favour of DFO, Working Plan Division, Hill Areas, Karbi Anglong, Diphu and to submit the same inside the Technical bid envelope.
- Up to Date GST documents clearance certificate from competent authority.
- Caste Certificate.
- Up to Date Professional Tax Clearance certificate from the Authority of KAAC, Diphu.
- Up to Date Trading License if Non-Tribal.
- Up to Date Registration Certificate from Contractor of PWD or others Department.
- Up to date labour license.
- Xerox copy of Pan Card.
- Xerox copy of Bank Pass Book where Account No. Bank Name, IFSC Code No. & Address is recorded.

TERMS AND CONDITION

- Rate of bid should be quoted clearly and distinctly both in figure and words against each Scheme of work in flat percentage basis above/below as per CPWD DSR 2021.
- No construction materials will be supplied by the Department.
- Successful bidder will have to sign a Deed of Agreement under APWD farm -2.
- The undersigned has the right to accept or reject any or all tenders without reasons thereof.
- Earnest Money will be return to successful tendered after completion of works and in respect of un-successful tender Earnest Money will be returned after allotment of works.
- Tender paper will be provided on payment of Rs 250/- (Rupees Two Hundred Fifty) only.
- The Department will not bound to accept the lowest tender rate and reserved right to reject all tender without assigning any reason thereof.
- Tender should be submitted in separate form and envelop i.e all the required documents will have to be submitted in Technical bid envelope with name of works & name of participants written clearly and the Tender paper (wherein bid value will be given) should be submitted in financial bid envelope alongwith name of works and name of participated contractor to be written clearly.

N.B. :- 1) No tender will be accepted failing to furnish the above documents.

Sd/-

Working Plan Officer,
Hill Areas, Karbi Anglong, Diphu

Memo No. B/WPH/18(40)-Tender/2024-25/93-99

Date 24/07/2024

Rashtrapati Bhavan's 'Durbar Hall' renamed 'Ganatantra Mandap', 'Ashok Hall' now 'Ashok Mandap'

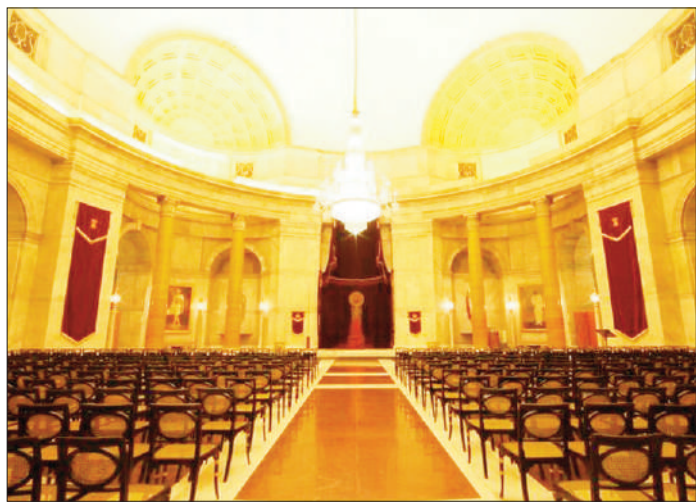
Last year, the famous Mughal Gardens on the Rashtrapati Bhavan premises was rechristened 'Amrit Udyan'

NEW DELHI, July 25: Venues for different ceremonial functions, Rashtrapati Bhavan's iconic 'Durbar Hall' and 'Ashok Hall' were on Thursday renamed 'Ganatantra Mandap' and 'Ashok Mandap', respectively.

Last year, the famous Mughal Gardens on the Rashtrapati Bhavan premises was rechristened 'Amrit Udyan'.

"Rashtrapati Bhavan, the office and the residence of the president of India, is a symbol of the nation, and an invaluable heritage of the people. Continuous efforts are being made to make it more accessible to people. There has been a consistent endeavour to make the ambience of the Rashtrapati Bhavan reflective of the Indian cultural values and ethos," a statement issued by the President's Secretariat said.

Accordingly, President Droupadi Murmu is pleased to rename two of the important halls of Rashtrapati Bhavan -- 'Durbar Hall' and 'Ashok Hall' -- as 'Ganatantra Mandap' and 'Ashok Mandap', respectively, it said. "Renaming 'Ashok Hall' as



'Ashok Mandap' brings uniformity in language and removes the traces of anglicisation while upholding the key values associated with the word 'Ashok', said the statement issued on a day Murmu completed two years of her presidency. 'Durbar Hall', located under the central dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan, is the venue of important ceremonies and celebrations such as the presentation of national

awards. "The term 'Durbar' refers to courts and assemblies of Indian rulers and the British. It lost relevance after India became a Republic, that is, 'Ganatantra'. The concept of 'Ganatantra' is deeply rooted in Indian society since the ancient times, making 'Ganatantra Mandap' an apt name for the venue," the statement said. Its corridor displays the busts of

former Indian presidents, carved by noted sculptors from across the country. Six tall banners in deep red with the national emblem of India in gold also adorn the hall.

Against the wall is placed a fifth century AD statue of Lord Buddha on a crimson velvet background. In front of this statue is placed the president's chair. Earlier, two thrones for the viceroy and the vicereine were placed at this spot.

On renaming the 'Ashok Hall', the president's office said it was originally a ballroom.

"The word 'Ashok' connotes someone who is 'free from all sufferings' or is 'bereft of any sorrow'," it said.

Also, 'Ashoka' refers to Emperor Ashoka, a symbol of unity and peaceful co-existence.

"The national emblem of the Republic of India is the lion capital of Ashok from Sarnath. The word also refers to the Ashoka tree, which has deep significance in Indian religious traditions as well as arts and culture," it added.

The hall is used for presentation of credentials by heads of missions of foreign countries and as a for-

mal place of introductions for the visiting and Indian delegations prior to the commencement of the state banquets hosted by the president. While the floor is wooden and has springs beneath the surface, the ceilings are decorated with oil paintings.

With the glow of six Belgium glass chandeliers, the hall provides a fascinating sight to visitors. A loft was also designed in the state ballroom as a space for the orchestra.

However, it is now used for playing the national anthem during important functions, according to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Remarkable art pieces adorn the hall. These include a long case clock that was made in England and has a marking of British Clock Enfield by Cooke & Kelvey Limited, Calcutta.

The Persian style carpet, measuring 32 metres by 20 metres, was designed especially for the hall, keeping in mind its grandeur. The carpets were said to have engaged five hundred weavers for two years, according to its official description. (PTI)

SC verdict on NEET defeat of Cong's petty politics: Pradhan

NEW DELHI, July 25: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday said the Supreme Court's decision on the NEET-UG matter is not a defeat of students but of the Congress' "irresponsible attitude" and "petty politics".

The Congress, he charged is the "father" of paper leaks and corruption. "The Supreme Court has clearly stated that there has been no systemic breach in the sanctity of the exam. The Congress does not trust the Centre government but does it not trust the Supreme Court too. The SC's decision on the NEET issue is not a defeat of students but a defeat of Congress' irresponsible attitude, fallacy and petty politics," Pradhan wrote on X.

The Education Minister questioned Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge over paper leaks in Rajasthan when his party was in power.

"Is Kharge ji not aware of the paper leaks that happened before the BJP government came to power in Rajasthan? Why did he keep mum on the paper leaks that happened in his government? Congress is father of paper leaks and corruption."

"The people of the country have rejected Congress for the third time in a row. Congress is unable to digest the third consecutive defeat. To make political gains and save its rapidly slipping political ground, Congress has only the support of lies, half-truths and anarchy," Pradhan added.

In a major setback to unsuccessful aspirants of NEET-UG 2024, the Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed the pleas seeking cancellation and retest of the controversy-ridden exam, holding that there was no evidence on record to conclude that it was "vitiated" on account of "systemic breach" of its sanctity. (PTI)

Andhra CM compares Jagan Reddy to Pablo Escobar over alleged ganja menace



AMARAVATI, July 25: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday compared YSRCP chief Y Jagan Mohan Reddy to Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar as he slammed the state of law and order and alleged drug menace in the past five years.

Releasing a white paper on law and order and ganja (marijuana) prevalence, Naidu claimed that he never saw such a situation like how it was when Reddy ruled.

"Only one person can be compared to what happened in Andhra, and it is Pablo Escobar," he said in the Assembly, in an apparent reference to the drug menace.

The CM further said that Escobar was a drug lord who illegally sold drugs worth billions of dollars and also went on to kill leaders and politicians who opposed him.

Calling Escobar a "narco-terrorist", Naidu alleged that a similar situation had emerged in Andhra Pradesh under the YSRCP regime (2019-24) when ganja was allegedly freely available.

The CM alleged that the southern state had emerged as ganja capital between 2019 and 2024 and vowed to crack down on it. (PTI)

President Murmu becomes teacher for a day; interacts with schoolkids on ways to check global warming

NEW DELHI, July 25: President Droupadi Murmu, who completed two years in office on Thursday, took up the role of a teacher and interacted with students on the issue of global warming and ways to check it.

During an interactive session with Class 9 students of Dr Rajendra Prasad Kendriya Vidyalaya in the President's Estate here, she emphasised the need for water conservation and encouraged them to plant more trees in a bid to reduce the impact of climate change.

"I was thinking for the past many days to talk to you as today's kids are very talented. There is so much to learn from them," she said, addressing the class of 53 students.

At the beginning of her interaction, the president asked the students about their ambitions and subjects they liked and expressed her happiness after learning that they aspired to become scientists and doctors, among others.

"Around the world, scientists, people, administrators and rulers conduct symposiums, summits and seminars on a very big prob-



lem. Do you know what it is?" Murmu asked and immediately got answers as "climate change", "global warming" and "environmental pollution".

The president said she was taught in school about six seasons but "we feel only four".

"Out of these four, we feel summer for the maximum time because of global warming. Day by day, the temperature is rising and not only humans but animals, birds and trees all feel its impact," Murmu said.

Because of global warming, parts of the country face drought.

DYFI to hold protests in Kerala against Union Budget 2024-25; calls it anti-youth

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, July 25: DYFI, the youth wing of the ruling CPI(M) in Kerala, on Thursday announced that it would hold protests from July 27 to August 1 against the Union Budget 2024-25 for being "anti-youth" and "against the interests of the state".

Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) State Secretary V K Sanoj said the budget proposals announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday neglected the needs of Kerala and were "anti-youth" for promising only internships, not jobs. On August 1, DYFI will hold a protest outside Raj Bhavan here, he said.

Before that, the Left youth outfit will hold public discussions in 200 places in Kerala against the union budget on July 30 and 31 and will also carry out demonstrations by lighting fire torches in 20,000 places on July 27 and 28, Sanoj said at a press confer-

ence held here.

The budget contains proposals for those who are helping to prop up the government at the Centre, as both Andhra Pradesh and Bihar got whatever they asked for, he commented. "Therefore, it cannot be called a union budget."

He also took a dig at Union Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas and Tourism Suresh Gopi, saying the BJP leader is unaware of what is happening in Kerala. Referring to Kerala's demand for an AIIMS, Sanoj said that Gopi's response on the issue was that the state should first provide the land for it.

"It is unfortunate that a central minister like him (who is from Kerala) is unaware that the state has acquired 150 acres for setting up an AIIMS and has already provided the details of it to the Centre. Having such a minister at the Centre from Kerala is an insult to the state," he said.

Murmu also talked about the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' initiative started by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asked the students to plant a tree on their birthdays.

"I really felt very good interacting with you all. I got the opportunity to learn a lot from you. You are studying in Class 9 and you are so talented. You are very aware about the impact of global warming. I am sure, when you grow up, global warming will definitely be reduced (with all people's effort)," she said while concluding her interaction on the day she completed two years of her presidency.

Born on June 20, 1958, at Uparbeda village in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district, Murmu was sworn in as the country's 15th president on July 25, 2022.

Before taking over the top constitutional office, she was the governor of Jharkhand from 2015 to 2021.

An avid reader with a keen interest in spirituality, Murmu has devoted her life to empowering the downtrodden and the marginalised sections, besides deepening the democratic values. (PTI)

Removal of indexation benefit will lead to huge inflow of black money in real estate: Raghav Chadha

NEW DELHI, July 25: The government's decision to remove indexation benefit on sale of old property will result in huge inflow of black money in real estate and investments in the sector will go down, AAP Rajya Sabha member Raghav Chadha said on Thursday.

Asking the government to roll back the proposal, Chadha, while taking part in the discussion on the Union Budget 2024-25, said people will never be able to buy their "dream homes".

"Restore indexation on long-term capital gains. Throughout the world, to woo investors to invest they are incentivised. In this country, by removing indexation we are disincentivising the investor class," he said, adding that removing indexation is not imposing tax but it is equivalent to "penalising investors".

He said as a result of the step proposed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget 2024-25, individuals selling old properties will incur higher tax outgo.

"If you do not bring back indexation three things will happen in this country. First, investment in real estate will go down and people will never be able to buy their 'dream homes'," Chadha asserted.

He further said there will be undervaluation of property deals, people will buy properties at 'circle rates' and will never disclose the real value of the property.

"Third, there will be a huge inflow of black money if you don't roll back this decision to withdraw indexation," he said.

In the Union Budget 2024-25, the government proposed reducing the long-term capital gains tax on immovable properties to 12.5 per cent from 20 per cent, but removed the indexation benefits to adjust for inflation.

As per the Memorandum to the Union Budget, with rationalisation of rate to 12.5 per cent, indexation available under Section 48 of the Income Tax Act has been proposed to be removed for calculation of any long-term capital gains, which is presently available for property, gold and other unlisted assets.

Chadha also highlighted the high tax burden faced by common people and asked for a comprehensive review of both direct and indirect taxes.

"We impose taxes like the Euro-

peans do, to get services like sub-Saharan countries," he added.

Taking part in the discussion, Debashish Samantaray of the BJD said the central government has given a raw deal to all eastern states like Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal in the Budget.

He charged that in spite of Odisha giving 20 seats to the BJP, there was hardly anything for the state in the Union Budget.

He noted that "regional aspiration should be addressed", and asked the central government to treat all states as equal.

RJD's Sanjay Yadav attacked the government stating the Budget had nothing for the poor and marginalised and only catered to the rich and powerful.

He noted that his party has been demanding special category status for Bihar for a very long time.

Yadav said instead of dividing people on the basis of religion and caste, the government should work towards generating employment in the country.

Medha Vishram Kulkarni of BJP and Rajani Ashokrao Patil of INC also participated in the debate.

C V Shammugham of AIADMK said allocation in the Budget does not significantly address the pressing needs of Tamil Nadu's infrastructure, health care, Social justice and education.

The government has mentioned 76 projects in Tamil Nadu, but most of them are pre-existing ones getting a facelift. Moreover, in the Budget, no help in flood mitigation was provided, despite the state being prone to cyclones. There is no mention of a linkage of Kaveri and Godawari in the Budget, he said.

Samirul Islam of AITC said this Budget is anti-people, anti-poor and anti-Bengal. It only satisfies Bihar and Andhra Pradesh's allies and is to save the government. "The Budget has deprived Bengal," he said. It has also ignored the people, especially the unorganised sector. 83 per cent of India's workforce is employed by unorganised sectors and failed to announce a comprehensive scheme for them and migrant workers, he said.

M Mohamed Abdulla of the DMK said the Budget has provoked a constructive debate and disappointment in Tamil Nadu, a state known for its economic contributions. (PTI)

Lok Sabha adjourned twice amid war of words between treasury, opposition benches

NEW DELHI, July 25: The Lok Sabha was adjourned twice in the post-lunch period on Thursday as a war of words broke out between the treasury and opposition benches, triggered by Congress MP Charanjit Singh Channi's spat with BJP's Ravneet Singh Bittu.

Participating in a debate on the Union Budget, Channi referred to the assassination of Bittu's grandfather, former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh.

This led to a war of words between Channi and Bittu, who recently quit the Congress to join the BJP.

Bittu, the Minister of State for Railways and Food Processing Industries, countered by making certain personal remarks against Channi and former Congress president Sonia Gandhi, triggering an uproar.

Amid the angry exchange of words, Congress member Amrinder Singh Raja Warring tried to enter the Well of the House, but was stopped by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi.

From the treasury benches, Bittu also tried to enter the Well.

BJP member Sandhya Ray, who was in the chair, then adjourned the proceedings for 30 minutes till 2 pm.

When the House reconvened, Defence Minister and Deputy Leader of the Lok Sabha Rajnath Singh urged Speaker Om Birla to remove any unparliamentary references and continue with the debate.

Birla also directed the treasury and the opposition members to maintain the dignity of the House, adding that ministers especially should not break the rules.

Channi then proceeded to conclude his speech.

He mentioned the meeting of Rahul Gandhi with some farmer leaders on Wednesday, adding that they had also sought time to meet the prime minister.

Channi also accused the government of not keeping its promises to the farmers.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal intervened and accused the Congress MP of misleading the House, saying he should authenticate the allegations he was making.

Channi accused the ruling party members of obstructing his speech and alleged that the government was overlooking farmers.

He stressed that the farmers had

several demands, including one for a loan waiver.

As he alleged that National Security Act provisions were invoked against protesting farmers, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said Channi should authenticate the allegations and accused him of misleading the House.

Rijiju also urged the chair to move a privilege motion against Channi. The war of words between the ruling and the opposition benches went on even after Channi concluded his speech.

As Nationalist Congress Party MP Tatkare Sunil Dattatreya started his speech, Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee objected to a minister taking the seat next to the member.

Speaker Birla clarified that seats have not been allotted yet, and the minister was sitting on a seat meant for NDA members.

Banerjee then said he would also sit on a different seat, and sat on the treasury benches' side. He later returned to his seat.

As the ruckus continued, Jagadambika Pal, who was then in chair, adjourned the House till 3 pm.

The House resumed normal functioning after it met at 3 pm.

Speaking outside Parliament later, Bittu accused former Punjab chief minister Channi of indulging in "anti-national" behaviour.

"An ex-CM was behaving like an anti-national, and is misleading the world through the House. What did he do? He said NSA was imposed on farmers, while NSA has been imposed on those who were trying to divide the country and Punjab," Bittu said.

"An ex-CM made remarks that were aimed at dividing the country and Punjab, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was sitting there. When I said on the floor that he should provide evidence, he went on back-foot. The Congress party and INDI alliance have been embarrassed because of him," Bittu said.

In February this year, as farmers camped at the Shambhu border in Punjab, Ambala police had issued a statement saying that it was implementing the process of detaining office bearers of the protesting farmer outfits under section 2(3) of the National Security Act, 1980, to maintain law and order and prevent criminal activities. (PTI)

Annapurna Yojana extended to Ladki Bahin beneficiaries



MUMBAI, July 25: The Maharashtra government has decided to extend the Annapurna scheme, under which three LPG cylinders are provided free per household annually, to the beneficiaries of the Ladki Bahin Yojana, an official said on Thursday.

The Ladki Bahin scheme will see women with a family income of less than ₹ 2.5 lakh per year getting Rs 1,500 as financial aid per month. Both schemes were announced in the budget tabled in the assembly recently.

"The Mukhyamantri Annapurna Yojana will give benefits to 52 lakh families. The scheme has been extended to those covered under Ladki Bahin Yojana. The number of beneficiaries to be covered under both schemes and expenditure that will be incurred are being worked out. The proposal was discussed in the state cabinet on Tuesday," the official informed. (PTI)

CUET-UG: Final answer keys released, result to be declared soon, says NTA

NTA had earlier announced that the third edition of the CUET-UG will be completed in seven days and there will be no normalisation of scores as all exams will be conducted in a single shift

NEW DELHI, July 25: The National Testing Agency (NTA) released the final answer keys of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG on Thursday, paving way for the declaration of the delayed results for the undergraduate admission exam.

The NTA had on July 7 released the provisional answer keys of the CUET-UG 2024. A retest for over 1,000 candidates whose grievances were found genuine by the agency was conducted on July 19.

"The final answer key has been released and the result will be declared soon," a senior official of the agency said.

The delay in the CUET-UG results comes amid a row over alleged irregularities in competitive exams, including in NEET-UG and UGC-NET.

Originally, the CUET results were scheduled to be released on June 30 but the NTA delayed it, grappling with paper leak allegations involving NEET-UG,



UGC-NET and CSIR-UGC-NET. The CUET-UG exam conducted in a hybrid mode for the first time across the country was cancelled in Delhi a night before the scheduled exam day over "logistical reasons". The exam was conducted in the national capital later.

The NTA had earlier announced that the third edition of the CUET-UG will be completed

in seven days and there will be no normalisation of scores as all exams will be conducted in a single shift.

For 15 subjects, the tests were in pen-paper mode and for the other 48 subjects, the exam was held in CBT mode. Over 13.4 lakh candidates registered for the test for admission to undergraduate courses in 261 central, state, deemed and private

universities this year.

In the first edition of the exam in 2022, the test was plagued by technical glitches. Also, as a result of tests for a subject being conducted over multiple shifts, the scores had to be normalised during the announcement of results.

In a major setback to unsuccessful aspirants of NEET-UG 2024, the Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed their pleas seeking the cancellation and re-test of the controversy-ridden exam, holding that there was no evidence on record to conclude that it was "vitiated" on account of "systemic breach" of its sanctity.

The verdict came as a shot in the arm for the embattled NDA government and the NTA, which were facing strong criticism and protests on streets and in Parliament over alleged large-scale malpractices like question paper leak, fraud and impersonation in the prestigious test held on May 5. (PTI)

Heavy rains batter Pune, 4 dead; Army team in Sinhagad Road, says Dy CM Pawar

PUNE, July 25: Heavy rains wreaked havoc in Maharashtra's Pune, where at least four persons died in rain-related incidents on Thursday, while several houses and residential societies in low-lying areas in the city were inundated, following which people are being evacuated, officials said.

During his tour of the district, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said as a precautionary measure, Army teams have been deployed at Ekta Nagar in Sinhagad Road, while NDRF personnel are also in the area.

He also said rescue operations are underway at the site of a landslide in Lavasa in which some bungalows have been affected and three persons are feared trapped.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a 'red alert' for Pune district and asked people to take precautions. Schools and colleges in most parts of the district have declared a holiday in view of the heavy rainfall warning, officials said. Pune city and other parts of the district, including Velha, Mulshi, Bhore talukas and the catchments areas of several

dams, including Khadakwasla, have been witnessing incessant rains since Wednesday night.

In the city, housing societies in the low-lying areas, such as Sinhagad Road, Bavdhan, Baner and Deccan Gymkhana, witnessed flooding and inundation and efforts have been launched by the fire brigade and disaster management cell of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) to evacuate the stranded people, the officials said.

"Currently there is no flooding in Sinhagad Road and all those who needed to be shifted to safety have been moved. Arrangements have been made for meals, clothes and other relief materials for those who have been evacuated," Pawar said. Queried about residents of Sinhagad Road complaining about not being informed about water being released from Khadakwasla Dam, he said the process started early Thursday morning. The water release and heavy rains aggravated the situation but deployment of relief mechanisms was done in advance and people were taken to safety, Pawar asserted.

Pune district collector Suhas

Diwase said that in the wake of heavy rains in the Khadakwasla dam's catchment area, water has been released from the reservoir. "As the catchment areas of Khadakwasla dam has been witnessing incessant rains, water is being released at over 35,000 cusec and it will further increase to 45,000 cusec. Due to the water discharge, several low lying areas along the Mutha river witnessed inundation and flooding," he said.

Later in the afternoon, Pawar said water from Khadakwasla reservoir was being released at 35,000 cusecs but now it has been reduced to 15,000 cusecs.

"I have told officials from the irrigation department that if they want to release the water from Khadakwasla, they can do it before it gets dark. If the water release is increased after it gets dark, those living in the low lying areas along the Mutha river may have to suffer hardships," he said.

"If we can empty the reservoir to some extent and if there are rains during the night, the reservoir will have capacity to store the water. The capacity of the Khadakwasla reservoir is

around 3 TMC. Instructions have also been given to release water through the canals at different dams in Pune district," said Pawar.

Mulshi Dam is almost filling up and officials have been asked to use the water for power generation, the Deputy CM said.

Coordination is underway with the district administration of Kolhapur, Sangli and Satara to monitor the rain situation, while NDRF and SDRF teams are at critical spots as a precautionary measure, Pawar asserted. Four persons lost their lives in rain-related incidents in Pune, officials said.

While three men died of electrocution in Deccan area of the city while trying to move their handcart, on which they used to sell egg dishes, after it got submerged due to heavy rains, one person died and another sustained injuries in a landslide in Tahmini ghat section in Mulshi tehsil, district officials said.

"One person died while another sustained injuries after a landslide on a small eatery in Tahmini ghat in Mulshi tehsil," inspector Manoj Yadav of Paud police station said. (PTI)

Ex-army officer runs 160 km to mark Kargil Vijay Diwas anniversary

MUMBAI, July 25: A former woman army officer has completed a 160-km run from Srinagar to Drass to mark the 25th anniversary of the Kargil Vijay Diwas. Lieutenant Colonel Barsha Rai (Retd) completed the run in four days. "I ran to honour our brave hearts who sacrificed their lives for the nation," she told PTI. Lt Col Rai, whose husband is an army officer in Kashmir, ran from Srinagar to the Kargil War Memorial in Drass section. The run began on July 19 and ended on July 22. She was accompanied in stretches by



the Chinari Warriors marathon team. On completion of the run, they paid tributes to martyrs at the Kargil war memorial. She averaged 40 km per day. After starting from Srinagar, she moved to Wusan on Day 2, running to Sonamarg at an altitude of 9,000 feet.

Day 3 saw her surmount the 11,649 feet high Zojila Pass on the Srinagar-Leh national highway, connecting the Kashmir valley with the Ladakh region, to reach Matayen, before reaching the memorial at Drass on Day 4. "I was in class 7 when the Kargil war started and my father Colonel Keshab Rai, who retired 10 years ago, had then moved out overnight (to the border) along with his entire unit.

"For fauzi families like ours,

what followed were days of uncertainty, loss and despair. This run was not just a personal journey for me, but a tribute to the indomitable spirit of the soldiers who fought valiantly during the Kargil war," she said.

"The physical pain my body endured in this run pale in comparison to the hardships faced by our soldiers during the war. Through this run, my aim was to raise awareness about the sacrifices made by our soldiers," she said. Lt Col Barsha Rai is a fourth-generation army officer. Her great-grandfather was a Military Cross recipient. She was commissioned into the Army Service Corps in March 2010 from the Officers Training Academy in Chennai, where she was awarded the Garhwal Medal (gold medal in academics). (PTI)

18 years on, Railways all set to replace iron trunks of loco pilots, guards with trolley bags

NEW DELHI, July 25: If things go according to plan, loco pilots and guards will no longer have to carry their personal belongings and official equipment in iron trunks and can use trolley bags instead.

In a letter to all its zones, the Railway Board asked them to provide trolley bags to the loco pilots and guards.

"Zonal Railways are requested to start implementing the policy decision of providing trolley bags to loco pilots and guards," the Railway Board said in the letter dated July 19.

According to railway officials, the Board had initiated this move in 2006 with a comprehensive instruction. A year later, it issued another guideline after discussions with trade unions for its implementation on a trial basis.

However, it remained pending for implementation for another 11 years due to stiff opposition from loco pilots and guards. In 2018, the Board once again took a decision to push the scheme in two zones - Northern Railways and South Central Railways - for trial.

After positive feedback from the various trials, the Board issued a final order on February 21, 2022 in which it said, "Trolley bags may be provided to loco pilots and guards in lieu of line box (iron trunk). Zonal Railways may decide to procure & distribute or give allowance in lieu of trolley bags purchased by the crew themselves. The allowance to be limited to ₹ 5,000 for every 3 years." The order, besides directing departments concerned to standardise equipment in trolley bags, also asked to provide soft copies of railway rules and manuals to reduce the weight of the trolley bag.

But the All India Guards Council and other stakeholders concerned challenged this order at various legal fora, including Central Administrative Tribunal's (CAT) Principal Bench at New Delhi, forcing

the railways to put it on hold.

"Whenever a loco pilot (train driver) or a guard (officially called train manager) signs on for train duty, he keeps an iron trunk weighing over 20 kg to the engine/guard cabin as it carries railway norms, various equipment as well as his personal belongings," a railway official said. "To carry the heavy iron trunk, they are provided with a porter who takes the box to their respective cabins," the official added.

The Railway Board emphasised before the CAT several benefits of doing away with the services of porters. For instance, it said that besides monetary savings due to termination of Box Boy contracts; it would also save detention time of trains on account of loading/unloading of heavy boxes to and from the engine or guard's coach.

On the other hand, the guards' union argued that the order was arbitrary and that the Railways was imposing duties of box porters/box boys on train managers.

The other crucial concern of the guards union was that they had to carry detonators composed of potassium chlorate, sulphur, sand, binder and neutralizer issued by Ordnance Factory Board to Indian Railways for specific purposes during train operations. They argued that often they have to leave their cabin and come out of it during train operation at many isolated locations.

"In such a situation, these detonators are safe in the iron trunk which is locked and difficult to carry. However, it is easy to take away the carry bags with detonators from the Guard's cabin," said SP Singh, former general secretary of All India Guards Council.

Finally, on February 8, the CAT refused to grant any relief to the guards' body and said it would not interfere with the railway ministry's order paving the way for the Board to implement its decision. (PTI)

Five Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh's Sukma

SUKMA, July 25: Five Naxalites, collectively carrying a cash reward of ₹ 19 lakh on their heads, surrendered in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh on Thursday, police said.

They turned themselves in before senior police officials here citing that they were disappointed with atrocities committed by senior Naxalites and "inhuman" and "hollow" Maoist ideology, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said.

They said they were also impressed by the state government's Naxal elimination policy and welfare schemes, he said.

Three women are among the surrendered cadres, he said. Of the surrendered cadres, Kawasi Dula (25), Sodhi Budhra (27) and Madkam Gangi (27-year-old woman) who were active as deputy commander, section commander and section 'A' command, respectively, in platoon no. 30 of Maoists carried a reward of ₹ 5 lakh each on their heads, Chavan said. (PTI)

**DISTRICT LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY
CACHAR : SILCHAR**
Court Road, Opp. Dist. & Sessions Judges Court, Silchar-788001
e-mail: disacachar@gmail.com, Contact No. 9435047459

ADVERTISEMENT

Applications are invited in Standard Form (Assam Gazette Part- IX) from intending candidates for filling up the following vacant posts (on contractual basis) in the Office of the Legal Aid Defense Course System (LADCS) under the District Legal Services Authority, Cachar, as per the LADCS Modified Scheme 2022 of NALSA.

Sl. No.	Name of the Post	No. of Vacant Post	Honorarium	Qualification
1	Deputy Chief Legal Aid Defense Counsel	01 (One) No.	Rs. 70,000/- (Fixed Honorarium per month)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice in criminal law for 07 years Excellent understanding of Criminal Law Excellent oral and written communication skills Skills in legal research Thorough understanding of ethical duties of defense counsel Ability to work effectively and efficiently with others Must have handled at least 20 criminal trials in Sessions Courts may be relaxed in exceptional circumstances by Hon'ble Executive Chairman, SLASA, IT knowledge with high proficiency in work.
2	Assistant Legal Aid Defense Counsel	02 (Two) Nos. (For Silchar)	Rs. 40,000/- (Fixed Honorarium per month)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice in criminal law from 0 to 3 years Good oral and written communication skills Thorough understanding of ethical duties of defense counsel Ability to work effectively and efficiently with others Excellent writing and research skills. IT knowledge with high proficiency in work.
		02 (Two) Nos. (For Lakhimpur)	Rs. 30,000/- (Fixed Honorarium per month)	

General terms and conditions:

- The candidate must be an Indian citizen as defined in Article 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.
- The appointment shall be purely temporary and on contractual basis and does not entitle the person for being regularized in Govt. Service.
- The lawyers engaged therein not allowed for taking any private cases or any other retainerhip.
- After expiry of contract period of 01 (one) year, the contractual agreement will automatically stand cease to be terminated.
- The service may be extended after appropriate break in service, subject to the approval of the Hon'ble Executive Chairman, Assam State Legal Services Authority, Guwahati.
- The last date of receipt of application is **07 (Seven) days from date of publication of the advertisement**. The office shall not be liable for any postal delay.
- Duly filled applications in Standard Form of application (Assam Gazette Part IX) along with self attested photocopies of all the relevant testimonials and 02 (two) copies of recent passport size photographs should be addressed to **The Chairman, District Legal Services Authority, Cachar, Court Road, Opp. Dist. & Sessions Judges' Court, Silchar, Assam Pin-788001**.
- The contact numbers and Email id (if any) must be provided in the application.
- The applicants have to submit their application in a sealed envelope in the "DROP BOX" provided for the purpose in front of the premises of the office of **The Chairman, District Legal Services Authority, Cachar, Court Road, Opp. Dist. & Sessions Judge Court, Silchar, Assam Pin-788001**. Applicants may also send their applications through post at the same address. The office shall not be liable for any postal delay.
- Applicant for the post of Deputy Chief Legal Aid Defense Counsel must mention at the top of envelope containing the application "APPLICATION FOR THE POST OF DEPUTY CHIEF LEGAL AID DEFENSE COUNSEL" and Applicant for the post of Assistant Legal Aid Defense Counsel must mention at the top of envelope containing the application "APPLICATION FOR THE POST OF ASSISTANT LEGAL AID DEFENSE COUNSEL".
- The eligible candidates for all the posts shall have to following procedures:-

Sl. No.	Name of Post	Procedure of Selection
1.	Deputy Chief Legal Aid Defense Counsel	Walk-in-Interview
2.	Assistant Legal Aid Defense Counsel	(Viva — Voce)

- The list of eligible lawyers will be uploaded in the official website of Cachar Judiciary (cachar.dcourts.gov.in) with the date of interview and skill test and shall be intimated on their respective mobile phones.
- No separate call letter will be issued from this office.
- All other information relating to recruitment process (including final results) will be published in the official website of Cachar District Judiciary.
- All the applicants are advised to visit the official website frequently.
- Canvassing directly or indirectly shall disqualify a candidate.
- No TA/DA will be admissible to the candidates.

Sd/-
District & Sessions Judge -cum-Chairman,
District Legal Services Authority,
Cachar, Silchar.
Janasanyog /D/2992/24/26-Jul-24

PUBLIC NOTICE

No. SSA/Esstt/Engagement/VSK/622/2023/1282

In pursuant to the advertisement published vide No. SSA/Esstt/Engagement/VSK/622/2023/10920 dated 08.03.2024, it is for general information to all concerned that the written test for the post of Education Executive under VSK is mentioned below :

Sl. No.	Name of the post	Date of written test	Time of test	Venue
1	Education Executive under VSK	02.08.2024	11.00 am	State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha Axom

The list of short-listed candidates is uploaded in the official website of Samagra Shiksha Axom at <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>

The short-listed candidates are requested to attend in the written test before one hour of the scheduled date and time.

The short-listed candidates name may be downloaded their admit card from the official website of Samagra Shiksha Axom at <https://ssa.assam.gov.in> w.e.f. **27.07.2024**.

Sd/-Mission Director
Samagra Shiksha Axom
Kahilpara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog /DF/ 619 / 24/ 26-Jul-24



No. UDB/Tender /01/2022-23/

Date: 25/07/2024

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & twenty five paise) only with a validity period of 180 Days which will subsequence to be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors of Class-II and Class-I (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Road & Building) and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under SOPD & various schemes under BTR for the year 2023-24 & other financial years as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 12.00 Noon on 20/08/2024 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.00 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Tender Amount (In Lakhs)	Cost of Tender Paper	Time of Completion of Work
1	Const. of crematorium ground at Bandwrguri under 15 ASFC for 2022-23 during 2024-25	10,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3 (three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
2	Const. of Earthen canal at No.5 Harisinga Khasibari village (Harisinga VCD) under 15ASFC	15,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3 (three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
3	Const. of Model Community toilet at Golma Baptist Church under 15ASFC	11,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3 (three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
4	Const. of community toilet at Hajwuli Baptist Church under 15ASFC	11,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3 (three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
5	Const. of community toilet at No 2 Amjuli Hatikhuli Catholic Church Baptist Church under 15ASFC	11,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3 (three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
6	Const. of community toilet at Boranjuli Baptist Church Baptist Church under 15ASFC	11,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3 (three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
7	Const. of community toilet at Thema Basti Catholic Church under 15ASFC	11,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3 (three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order
8	Const. of community toilet at No 3 Kundarbil Tasi gaon Lutheran Church under 15ASFC	11,00,000.00	Rs.500.00	3 (three) months from the issue of Formal Work Order

Detailed N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 26/07/2024 to 20/08/2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment.

Sd/-
Block Development Officer
Udalguri Development Block

IPR/BTC/C/2024-25/180

'The Matrix' changed my life: Keanu Reeves



LOS ANGELES, July 25: Hollywood star Keanu Reeves is grateful for starring in The Matrix franchise, which he says changed so many lives. The film, which turned 25 this year, is one of the most celebrated sci-fi movies in cinema and many of its scenes continue to inspire films even today. Reeves, who played the role of Neo, a computer programmer and hacker who comes to know that most of the people are enslaved in a simulated reality, called the Matrix.

In an appearance on The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, Reeves spoke about how much the 1999 film, directed by Lilly and Lana Wachowski, means to him all these years later, according to IndieWire. "The Matrix changed my life, and then over these years, it's changed so many other people's lives in really positive and great ways. As an artist, you hope for that when you get to do a film or tell a story." "So when you say these years, the amount of people that I have met who have said to me and been touched by The Matrix in such a positive way... It's the best." Reeves, 59, reprised his role in The Matrix Reloaded, The Matrix Revolutions and the fourth one The Matrix Resurrections in 2021, which Lana directed solo.

The actor, who has been a part of many Hollywood blockbusters including Speed and most recently the John Wick franchise, has always spoken fondly about the film, which he believes influenced cinema as a whole.

"I think the influences that went into The Matrix brought those influences to other filmmakers in terms of anime, camera angles, action. (It) started training actors and actresses to try and do more physical acting. I think the humor, the style and maybe, well, I don't know about the ambition. It's tough to make such an entertaining kind of science fiction film that's also about philosophy and big ideals," he had told Entertainment Tonight in 2021. (PTI)

Filmmaker Shekhar Kapur appointed IFFI festival director

NEW DELHI, July 25: Veteran filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, known for films such as "Mr India", "Bandit Queen" and "Elizabeth", has been appointed festival director for the International Film Festival of India (IFFI). Kapur will head the festival, held annually in Goa, for the 55th and 56th editions, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry said in a notification. "With the approval of the Competent Authority, it has been decided to appoint Shri Shekhar Kapur as the Festival Director for the 55th and 56th editions of the International Film Festival of India, Goa," the notification read. Kapur said the appointment was an honour. "It's an honour. It's a commitment. It's a responsibility. Thank you for considering me worthy of your trust," he posted on X, tagging the ministry.

Kapur, 78, is an influential name in Indian cinema and one of the earliest directors to establish a name for himself in Hollywood with his film "Elizabeth" and its sequel "Elizabeth: The Golden Age".

He has directed films such as "Masoom", "Mr India" and "Bandit Queen" in India.

Most recently, he directed the British comedy "What's Love Got to Do with It?".

Kapur served as the head of the chairperson of the International competition Jury at the 54th IFFI.

He also served as chairperson of the Pune-based Film and Television Institute of India from 2020-2023. (PTI)



Avinash Tiwary, Triptii Dimri-starrer Laila Majnu to re-release in theatres in Kashmir



MUMBAI, July 25: Actor Avinash Tiwary on Thursday said his debut film "Laila Majnu" is set to re-release next month in theatres in Kashmir on popular demand. Also starring Triptii Dimri in the lead, the 2018 romance drama is written and presented by Imtiaz Ali and directed by his brother Sajid Ali. It is produced by Ali's former wife Preety and Ekta Kapoor.

"Laila Majnu", a modern-day adaptation of the classic folklore, received a lukewarm response at the box office but over the years it garnered a cult status. "Laila Majnu" will be released in theatres in Srinagar on 2nd August," Tiwary said in a statement.

Tiwary and Dimri, who were also seen in the 2020 Netflix film, "Bulbbul", have come a long way in their careers.

Tiwary is known for his performances in films like "The Girl on the Train", and "Madgaon Express", while Dimri, who is basking in the success of her recently released film, "Bad Newz", is regarded for her work in "Qala" and "Animal". (PTI)

Great relief just to be an actor in 'Family Drama': Sindhu Sreenivasa Murthy



BENGALURU, July 25: With just a day to go for her next Kannada release, 'Family Drama', Sindhu Sreenivasa Murthy, whose debut directorial venture 'Achar & Co' became a surprise hit of 2023, said it was a 'great relief' just to be an actor this time round.

"I could be more focused on my performance and, you know, making sure that I am in tune with my co actors. When I was also directing, I had to run like 10 departments in my head at the same time, trying to align everything. So, it definitely felt a lot lighter to just be acting," Murthy told PTI.

'Family Drama', directed by debutante H P Akarsh, said Murthy, is a dark comedy, slated for all-India release on July 26. "I think the audience can expect to have a lot of fun because the film is all about the humour that one finds in unlikely places and in unlikely themes."

At the end of the day, it's a comedy film. It's about seemingly regular and ordinary people setting out to do something so bizarre and all the foolishness that they come up with during that process, resulting in a comedy of errors," said Murthy. Murthy is supported by a crew of mostly newcomers, Abhay, Poor-nachandra Mysore, Ananya Amar, Rekha Kudligi, Aashith, Mahadev Hadapad, Malathesha, Veeresh, Arun Murthy, and Suraj Ravikiran. Murthy said she met the director when she was shooting a documentary for him.

"I was completely sold when I heard the storyline," she added. "All characters are extremely quirky and the female characters are far from the stereotypical ones that are written. The film revolves around a family – mother, son and daughter – all of them scheming to kill someone. Now, how often does that happen in real life, right?" It is not easy to deal with a dark comedy, like finding humour in murder, said Murthy. But since she knew the director, she said she knew if anyone could, it was Akarsh.

"Akarsh was so clear about what he wanted that I thought it would be exciting to work with like-minded people," she said. But make no mistake, Murthy wants to build on the success of 'Achar & Co' in her next directorial venture. "I am, of course, very eager to get back on the floor as director soon," said Murthy. (PTI)

Wamiqa on working with Vishal Bhardwaj: A learning experience like no other

NEW DELHI, July 25: Actor Wamiqa Gabbi says working with filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj on multiple projects, including last year's "Khufiya", has been a learning experience like no other and it will continue to influence the kind of choices she makes in the future.

Gabbi, 30, was supposed to work with Bhardwaj in 2019 for an adaptation of Salman Rushdie's novel "Midnight's Children" but the project got shelved.

The filmmaker then cast her in his spy drama "Khufiya" with Tabu and series "Charlie Chopra and The Mystery of Solang Valley". He also directed her in a segment on "Modern Love: Mumbai" and produced "Fursat". "It's something that I never

thought would happen to me, being Vishal Bhardwaj's sir muse and working with him on four projects. It's been a learning experience like no other," Gabbi told PTI in an interview.

"Because I worked with him for so long, it has really affected my choices, my sense of decision making and I will always be grateful to him," the actor, who also had a major OTT hit in Vikramaditya Motwane's "Jubilee", said.

Gabbi turned showstopper alongside "Heemandi" star Taha Shah Badusha for Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla's collection "ASAL & Mard" at the opening day of the Hyundai India Couture Week 2024 last evening.

The fashion week, which runs from July 24 to 31, also marked

her debut on the ramp.

"I have had opportunities before but I have always declined it, don't know why. It always felt that it's not what I wanted or it has to be something special and here I am walking for Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla and I just feel like out of this world," the actor said about experiencing the fashion runway for the first time.

Describing herself a lover of all things Indian, particularly the jewellery, Gabbi said whatever makes one feel right is "great fashion".

"One thing that I can pair up with everything is Indian jewellery. I love Indian jewellery and Indian touches to my clothes. I love big Indian earrings."

Gabbi made her debut with a

small role in Imtiaz Ali-directed "Jab We Met" in 2007.

Post which she went on to star in several Punjabi films such as "Doorbeen", "Kali Jotta" and "Godha" to name a few.

Last year, the actor had three back-to-back OTT releases that explored her potential and opened the doors for her, also getting much praise for her respective performances.

She will next feature alongside Varun Dhawan in upcoming action-drama "Baby John". Directed by Kalees, the film is produced by Atlee Kumar, Jyoti Deshpande and Murad Khetani.

"I have already completed this shoot and the film is in post-production and the release is on 25th December so can't wait," she said. (PTI)



Olympic soccer preview: Spain women seek gold after lifting a World Cup trophy

PARIS, July 25: Coach Montse Tomé proclaimed that Spain's women's soccer team has "insatiable ambition" heading into the Olympics. That mentality has served the squad well. La Roja is seeking to become the first team to win a gold medal in France after lifting a Women's World Cup trophy.

"We have a group of players who love what they do. We take them to work, work and work," Tomé said. "And in that work, their enjoyment comes out and their talent shines and they can be competitive, because we have footballers who have an insatiable ambition and mentality."

Loaded with talent, including reigning Ballon d'Or winner Ai-

tana Bonmati and two-time former winner Alexia Putellas, Spain won the World Cup despite turmoil surrounding the squad.

Before the tournament even started in Australia and New Zealand, more than a dozen players stepped away from the national team, citing poor treatment of the squad. Then-coach Jorge Vilda was peppered with questions about the mutiny throughout the event.

After the 1-0 victory over England for the title, Spanish federation president Luis Rubiales forcibly kissed forward Jenni Hermoso during the trophy ceremony.

The kiss touched off a

firestorm that led to Rubiales resigning in disgrace. Vilda was dismissed and replaced with Tomé, a former national team player. Now settled, Spain qualified for the team's first Olympics by winning the UEFA Nations League. La Roja opens the tournament Thursday against Japan in Nantes. Group C also includes Brazil and Nigeria, which meet in Bordeaux.

Brazilian legend Marta says she's playing in her final major tournament with the national team. The six-time world player of the year, appearing in her sixth Olympics, has never won a World Cup trophy or a gold medal.

12 teams, multiple venues



The 12 teams competing in the women's tournament play at stadiums across France.

The hosts open Group A play in Lyon on Thursday against

Colombia and teenage sensation Linda Caicedo. Also in Group A are Canada and New Zealand, which meet in Saint-Etienne. The Canadians are the defend-

ing gold medalists.

But the team was swept up in controversy just before the tournament's start when a nonaccredited member of its support staff was detained by French authorities for allegedly operating a drone over New Zealand's training session.

In the fallout, two Canadian staff members were dismissed and coach Bev Priestman said she would step aside for the team's opener. She also apologized to New Zealand.

"I am ultimately responsible for conduct in our program," Priestman said in a statement. "Accordingly, to emphasize our team's commitment to integrity, I have decided to voluntarily

withdraw from coaching the match on Thursday. In the spirit of accountability, I do this with the interests of both teams in mind and to ensure everyone feels that the sportsmanship of this game is upheld."

In Group B, the United States seeks to move on from its disappointing finish at the World Cup. The Americans open against Zambia on Thursday against Nice, while Germany plays Australia in the group's other game in Marseille.

The Australians are without one of the sport's biggest stars, Sam Kerr, who injured her ACL in January. She's one of several high-profile players missing out on the tournament. (AP)

WOMEN'S ASIA CUP SEMI-FINAL

India start firm favourites against Bangladesh

DAMBULLA, July 25: Shafali Verma will be aiming to come out all guns blazing while Smriti Mandhana will be more than motivated to get a big one as India start overwhelming favourites against Bangladesh in the semi-final of the women's Asia Cup here on Friday.

Shafali, with 158 runs, has been the second highest run-scorer in the tournament so far and against Nigar Sultana's team, which has a host of slow bowlers, she will have to give India a good start.

The 'Women In Blue' pummeled the opposition in all three games - winning by seven wickets against Pakistan, 78 runs against UAE and by an 82-run margin against Nepal.

However, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur knows that in Asia Cup, it is only the semi-final and final matter the most and they would not miss the fact that Bangladesh on select days can be a dangerous side. The start will be very important for India and Shafali will want her senior opening partner Mandhana to also fire in unison. The elegant left-hander was in great nick during her 45 against Pakistan, which could have been a bigger one in terms of volume.



With UAE and Nepal being two of the three opponents during the group league stage, the Indian team would certainly face a sterner test against a bunch of decent slow

bowlers in the Bangladesh ranks. Slow left-arm orthodox Nahida Akhter and young leg-spinner Rabeya Khan have both claimed five wickets apiece.

While Nahida with a parsimonious economy rate of 3.25 would like to build the pressure on an experienced batting line-up while leg-break bowler Rabeya is likely

to push for wickets.

The medium pace department comprises veteran Jahanara Alam along with Ritu Moni, who also has chipped in with three wickets.

However, with Harmanpreet, Richa Ghosh and Jemimah Rodrigues coming in the middle-order and all-rounders Deepti Sharma and Puja Vastrakar to complement them, India have a lot of quality in their ranks.

With pitches at the Dambulla Stadium slowing down considerably during the second half, India would like to defend a total on the big day. The semi-final will, however, be an afternoon game.

Off-spinner Deepti has been very consistent with the ball taking eight wickets in three games so far. The economy rate of 4.66 has been equally impressive compared to Radha Yadav, who has been on the slightly expensive side.

The Indian new ball duo of Renuka Singh Thakur and Vastrakar have been on target during the games.

For Bangladesh, they haven't had too many impactful batters and if India can post anything in the range of 140-plus, it could well be enough for a place in the final. (PTI)

Sindhu is underdog but opponents wary of her credentials: Parupalli Kashyap



NEW DELHI, July 25: Former India shuttler Parupalli Kashyap on Thursday dubbed two-time medallist PV Sindhu an "underdog" at the Paris Olympics but said her name still carries a lot of weight and opponents would be wary of her big-match credentials.

Eying an unprecedented third straight Olympic medal, Sindhu has not been at her best since returning from a knee injury in February.

"It's her third Olympics, she won two medals in the last two Olympics and several world championship medals. So I think she feels she has an edge already even though her ranking doesn't say it or her recent form doesn't say it," Kashyap, an Olympics expert at JioCinema & Sports18, told reporters during an interaction. "In major events, I think the opponents also are a little wary of her even though she's not in form. I think she's going as a dark horse and underdog considering the last two years of women's singles."

Since the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, Sindhu won the Singapore Open Super 500 title and Commonwealth Games gold in 2022, but a left ankle injury she suffered in Birmingham took six months to heal.

When she returned to action, she struggled to find her rhythm and endured as many as seven first-round exits. Sindhu did reach the finals of the 2023 Spain Masters but, after a few months, she suffered a knee injury in October last year.

She came back in February this year but satisfactory results were tough to come by, with the highlight being a runner-up finish at Malaysia Masters and a

couple of quarterfinals.

"There are clear four athletes in the women's singles who are out-and-out favourites to make it to the medal rounds but I'm sure they are wary and a little tense about facing Sindhu because she's a big-match player and her game style is also very suited to major events," Kashyap said. "She's an out-and-out attacking player and backs herself with a fitness level as well," added the 2014 Commonwealth Game champion.

A lot is riding on Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty to win India's first-ever badminton gold, and Kashyap termed them one of the favourites for the title.

"I think they are a title contender. And I think the wins in Asian Games, Asian Championships, medals in World Championships, they are one of the title contenders," he said.

"I think Satwik-Chirag, the Chinese pair, and the Korean pair. These three are the favourites to win the gold."

Talking about their opponents, Kashyap said: "Their tough competitors will be the Chinese pair against whom they lost during the Thomas Cup. In the last two encounters, I think the Chinese pair won against Chirag and Satwik. So they are the immediate threat."

"They had a couple of tough matches against the Koreans who won the World Championships but I think they scored a win against them in another tournament."

"So I think the Chinese pair and the Korean pair, these two are the ones who are going to be tough for Chirag and Satwik, but I think they would be feeling the same about them." (PTI)

AOA sends wishes as Lovlina competes for Gold in Boxing at Paris Olympics



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, July 25: The Assam Olympic Association (AOA) organised a special signature campaign here on Thursday, to send best wishes to Khel Ratna Lovlina Borgohain, Assam's ace boxing sensation, as she competes for Gold in the upcoming Summer Olympics in Paris. The event witnessed scores of people signing on a flex wall and sending their best wishes to the ace boxer.

The event was attended by Assam minister Pijush Hazarika; Arjuna Awardee Monalisa Barooah Mehta; general secretary of AOA, Lakhya Konwar; secretary general, BFI, Hemanta Kalita; vice president, AOA Bishnu Ram Nunisa among others dignitaries including sportspersons, support staff.

Speaking on the occasion, minister Pijush Hazarika said, "Today, we have got together here to send our best wishes to this boxing ace who is competing again at the Summer Olympics in Paris. I extend my heartiest wish and best of luck to Lovlina Borgohain, who I am sure will give befitting fight to win the elusive Gold for the country."

The event also witnessed felicitation of Sanjana Baruah from Jorhat who became the first Indian to become a jury member in the shooting segment in the

upcoming Paralympics. Renowned swimmer Elvis Ali Hazarika was also felicitated.

During the programme, an audio-visual presentation by the Assam Olympic Association was shown to the august audience to showcase the journey of India in the Olympics as well as highlighting prospects of the India in the upcoming Summer Olympics in Paris. Another audio-visual presentation on Lovlina Borgohain was also shown which shared her journey on becoming a world class Olympian and sportsperson from Assam.

Speaking on the occasion, Arjuna Monalisa Barooah Mehta, said, "This is a wonderful gesture by the Assam Olympic Association to encourage our athletes as well as other budding sporting talents of the future. Not only it will act as a morale booster to our hardworking athletes but it will also encourage our Grassroot talent to take inspiration from this."

Speaking on the occasion, Lakhya Konwar said, "After a century, Paris is organising Olympics, which makes this apex event of sports, a historic moment. It is our good luck that a girl from Assam, Lovlina Borgohain, is competing in this games as she aims to improve her performance of Bronze in Tokyo Olympics."

Israel's national anthem loudly jeered before Olympic soccer match against Mali

PARIS, July 25: Experienced table tennis player Harmeet Desai believes the Indian men's TT team has "a very good chance" of reaching the optimum level of performance at the Paris Olympics and beat any side on its day, having prepared in earnest for the Games.

The Olympics will begin in the French capital on Friday with a grand opening ceremony in the iconic Seine river.

"On a given day, I think we really have a very good chance of beating any team. We have won against top teams in the world in the past and it is possible this time also if we give our best. "In the Olympics, if all three of us can put on the best show then anything is possible," the 31-

year-old said during an interview with Ultimate Table Tennis.

He played an important role in helping India clinch Commonwealth Games gold medals in 2018 and 2022.

Desai is part of the Indian men's team along with Achanta Sharath Kamal, Manav Thakkar and Sathiyam Gnanasekaran. He will also be competing in the individual events. Desai's confidence stems from the fact that the Indian men's team had defeated the mighty Japan in the quarter-finals to clinch the bronze medal at the 2018 Asian Games. Speaking about the rise of Indian table tennis on the world stage, Desai credited the government's various schemes and the launch of Ultimate Table

Tennis in 2017 for the development of the sport.

"UTT has helped us get more experience and exposure to play with international players and get guidance from foreign coaches. That was not the case before 2017. "So, this kind of experience has helped the players get more self-belief and perform well in the international arena," he said. The Indian table tennis contingent created history earlier this year when both the men's and women's teams qualified for the Olympics for the first time and the preparatory camps, in Bengaluru from June 7-16 and in Saarbrücken, Germany earlier this month, were focused on working out the perfect combinations for the team events. (PTI)

I watch clips of my goals to boost confidence ahead of Olympic debut, says Hockey forward Sukhjeet

NEW DELHI, July 25: Indian hockey forward Sukhjeet Singh is unfazed by the pressure of playing at the highest level and is watching the clips of his international goals to boost his confidence ahead of his Olympic debut at the Paris Games.

"I made my debut in the Indian team in 2022 and scored a goal in my debut match against Spain in the FIH Pro League. The journey so far has been good and I try to do my best in every match," he told PTI Bhasha in an interview before departing for Paris.

Having scored 22 goals in 70 international matches so far, Sukhjeet is prepared physically and mentally to face the pressure of the Olympics.

He is one of the five debutants -- Sanjay, Abhishek, Rajkumar



Pal, and Jarmanpreet Singh -- who have joined the 11 members of Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist team for the Paris Games. "I am not feeling any pressure at all. We have played big tournaments, so we know how to handle pressure. We are confident of playing well against

big teams in the pool as our preparation has been really good," said the 27-year-old.

The team will begin its campaign on July 27 against New Zealand, followed by matches against Argentina (July 29), Ireland (July 30), Belgium (August 1) and Australia (August 2).

India and Australia have clashed on the hockey field a total of 43 times since 2013, according to data from the FIH Data Hub.

Australia have emerged victorious 33 times, while India have won 8 games and 7 matches ended in a draw. Similarly, India has 8 wins, 16 losses and 6 draws in 30 matches against Tokyo Olympic champion Belgium in the last 10 years. Sukhjeet had scored six goals in his debut tournament -- FIH Pro League -- in 2022. After this, he scored three goals in the 2023 World Cup held in India. He was also part of the Indian team that won the gold medal in the Asian Games in Hangzhou.

"I watch my clips of the matches in which I scored goals before big matches. This increases my confidence and I try

to do better in the next match. My previous performance makes me mentally stronger," he said when asked about mental preparations for the Olympics.

"Apart from this, talking to a sports psychologist before the semi-finals or finals in the Asian Games and also during the Asian Champions Trophy has benefited a lot. They tell us how to handle pressure. The tips I get from them are very useful."

"Senior players in our team, Shree Bhai (PR Sreejesh), Manpreet, Harmanpreet have a lot of experience. They tell us about their experiences and motivate us to perform well. If we have any problem, we talk to them."

Sukhjeet was introduced to hockey by his father Ajit Singh when he was six years old. (PTI)

Indians eye double-digit medal haul as Paris Olympics set for grand start

PARIS, July 25: Some would be carrying a huge burden of expectations, some others would look to spring a surprise and a few more would be eyeing the perfect closure to their glittering careers as the 117-strong Indian contingent aims for a better-than-before performance in the Olympic Games, starting here on Friday.

India returned from Tokyo with seven medals, and it is only natural that a double-digit performance is now desired in Paris.

Except for wrestlers, who have waded through a highly controversial build-up, athletes in all disciplines have had no complaints about their preparations.

Whether it was training abroad or getting the best of facilities to sharpen their skills, there was planning in place.

But will the hard work, the strategies and the unbridled support translate into medals?

It will be a Herculean task to match the Tokyo figures of seven medals, given that except for reigning Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra, not many are top contenders in their respective disciplines.

More than half of the 117-member contingent is from three sports – athletics (29), shooting (21) and hockey (19). Of these 69 athletes, 40 are debutants.

In other sports too, there are debutants like tennis player N Sriram Balaji and wrestler Reetika Hooda. They are not exactly inexperienced, but largely, India's campaign will be driven by the athletes, who will be competing on a stage this grand for the first time. Then there are the seasoned ones who would be expected to raise their game suitably.

Two-time medallist shuttler PV Sindhu, tennis player Rohan Bopanna, legendary table tennis player Sharath Kamal and hockey goalkeeper PR Sreejesh are certainly playing their last Olympics.

The hockey team has endured patchy form in the build-up to the Games, the boxers and wrestlers are lacking in real competition time. The shooters too have notched up mixed results heading into the Olympics.

The track and field athletes, especially Avinash Sable, have done well of late, but compared to their global rivals, their per-



formances don't seem enough to put them in the bracket of medal hopefuls.

For instance, steeplechaser Sable has been consistently bettering his own national record. His best stands at 8:09.94 but there are seven international runners who have achieved better timing than that in the run-up to the Games.

Given this, Even making the finals will be considered a huge achievement.

India's hopes for podium finishes largely hinge on Neeraj, despite concerns around his adductor niggle, and the in-form badminton duo of Chirag Shetty and Satwik-sairaj Rankireddy.

The coveted 90m mark has eluded Neeraj from Tokyo to Paris but the ace javelin thrower seems to be doing just enough, and most importantly, consistently, to land global titles.

On big competition days, Neeraj has fared better than his other fancied rivals and if he is fit, the javelin thrower from Panipat will have a chance to become only the third athlete in India's sports history to win back-to-back Olympic medals.

Only Sindhu (2016 Rio and 2012 Tokyo) and wrestler Sushil Kumar (2008 Beijing, 2012 London) have managed to win two consecutive medals.

Rankireddy and Chirag have grown into one of India's most formidable men's dou-

bles teams and they are being seen as certain medal winners.

Talking about Sindhu, she is not in the best of form and has also got a tough draw but if she can come through the initial rounds, the vast experience could help her make the medal round.

HOCKEY: The men's hockey team has been inconsistent. It lost all five games in Australia recently after a mixed run in the Pro League. It was a far cry from the Asian Games in Hangzhou where the team emerged champion.

Penalty Corner conversion and maintaining the tempo throughout a match remain a concern.

And if that's not enough, the Indian team has been clubbed with heavyweights Australia, Belgium, Argentina, New Zealand and Ireland. There is no room for error if the team has to make the top-four from this pool.

SHOOTING: It's been a quiet build-up for the 21-member shooting contingent, the biggest ever, compared to London and Tokyo where stars such as Manu Bhaker and Saurabh Chaudhary had raised medal hopes with their exceptional performances in the run-up to the Games.

Even Divyansh Panwar and Elavenil Valarivan were hailed as future superstars but all of them have flattered to deceive.

There is hardly any spotlight on shooters but still Sift Kaur Samra (50m three position), Sandeep Singh (10m air rifle) and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (men's 50 m rifle) have it in them to end the 12-year wait for a medal.

Gagan Narang, who is now India's Chef de Mission, was the last Indian shooter to climb the podium when he won the 10m air rifle bronze in the 2012 London Games.

WRESTLING: The sport has delivered a medal for India in the last four editions. The hopes of winning four to five medals were raised for the Paris Games but the protest against the Wrestling Federation of India brought the sport to a standstill.

There was no national camp, and no competition for a long time. The qualified wrestlers have trained on their own at the centres of their choice – both in India and abroad.

Fitness status of many is not known, but going into the Games, Anshu Malik, Antim Panghal and Aman Sehrawat are considered India's best bets. Reetika Hooda, the U-23 world champion, will be a dark horse.

OTHERS: The archers and TT players have qualified for the Games on the basis of their rankings. While it is a huge achievement for TT players, the same can't be said about the archers.

They have promised a lot in the past too but have not been able to deliver. The recent episode of their coach being denied the Games accreditation means the campaign has started on a negative note.

Weightlifter Mirabai Chanu, the Tokyo Games silver-medallist, has struggled with injury and form of late and is perhaps not in the best frame of mind. There are question marks if she will be able to repeat her success.

Experienced boxer Nikhat Zareen and Nishant Dev will be watched keenly as their latest results have been encouraging. So far, India have won 35 medals at the Olympics with shooter Abhinav Bindra (2008) and Neeraj Chopra (2021) being the only two individual gold medal winners.

It's time to turn aspirations into achievements. Let the Games begin. (PTI)

Gambhir's 1st headache: Pant or Samson for the T20I series



COLOMBO, July 25: New India head coach Gautam Gambhir will have the onerous task of choosing between Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson during the three-match T20I series against Sri Lanka starting from Saturday.

While most of the key stars of the T20 World Cup winning side sans the retiring duo of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are in the Island nation, the choice between two flamboyant wicketkeeper batters Pant and Samson won't be an easy one.

Worse, even with two slots vacant, one can't fit in both the hard-hitting batters. Pant with 171 runs was the third highest run-getter for India in the T20 World Cup in the Americas but Samson, though was part of the team, didn't get into any game.

A bilateral series against Sri Lanka, of late, has become a low-stakes affair with the two countries often engaged in inconsequential series, some of which India plays to help other international cricket boards stay afloat.

One such series was supposed to be the upcoming one against Sri Lanka but it has assumed greater significance after Gambhir took over as the coach and Hardik Pandya, a sure-shot candidate for captaincy was surpassed by Suryakumar Yadav.

In this backdrop, the presence of Gambhir, a fiercely opinionated former India opener and a successful franchise-level mentor, will certainly have a broader say in the team composition, something that will be built over two years in the run-up to the next T20 World Cup. The choice of a keeper-batter in T20Is hasn't exactly been a straight forward one for India, especially during the time Pant was out of action due to a horrific car accident in December, 2022.

Ishan Kishan was around for some time before he fell out of favour after leaving the tour of South Africa midway. Samson has featured in some games, so has Jitesh Sharma and Dhruv Jurel in the interim. Samson, one of Pant's contemporaries, has so far played 28 T20I games with a couple of fifties and strike rate of 133 plus.

But it will be fair to say that 27 of those matches have come in the period between 2020 to present, having made his debut back in 2015. So in three and half years, 27 matches sporadically isn't a lot of games to build on confidence.

While average is a slightly less important aspect in the shortest format, the Kerala star would himself admit that 21.14 doesn't do justice to his immense potential. On the other hand, Pant from his 74 T20I games has three fifties and a strike-rate of a shade below 127. Samson's average is thus pretty similar to the Delhi Capitals skipper, who scored at 22.70 per game. In terms of sheer numbers there is not much to choose between the two. Both are audacious stroke-makers, Pant's falling pull shots are fascinating while Samson on his day can hit the fastest of bowlers over extra cover for maximums.

It will also purely depend on what the new team management feels. When it came to Rohit Sharma, he has blind faith in Pant's capabilities and Samson despite being in the squad wasn't even up for discussion during the T20 World Cup.

However, in the next tour following the T20 World Cup when most first XI boys were rested, Samson played the last three games in Zimbabwe and was also appointed vice-captain to Shubman Gill.

In terms of keeping, Pant is a far better keeper to spinners like Ravi Bishnoi but in T20Is, keeping skills aren't that important as there are very few balls that would pose trouble for the glovesmen.

Gambhir was Pant's first first-class captain and has seen him as an 18-year-old even before he played for the India U-19s. But he has also been a big advocate of Samson's T20 prowess and vocal about his inclusion during his days as a TV pundit.

It will be a very tough choice and even if Pant is picked for the series, he knows that he would have to not only score quick but also play a few big innings to stack up the numbers and keep Samson at bay. (PTI)

There's a lot of improvement, you will see that on court: Sindhu

PARIS, July 25: From spending time in a hypoxic chamber to sparring with a variety of partners to adapt to different styles, Indian badminton ace PV Sindhu has left no stones unturned to be battle-ready for the Paris Games, where she will be chasing an unprecedented third consecutive Olympic medal.

Sindhu's form has been patchy of late but she says the hat-trick of medals is very much possible because the last eight months spent with mentor Prakash Padukone has instilled confidence in her.

No Indian player has won three Olympic medals on the trot and a podium finish will make Sindhu arguably India's greatest athlete.

"I am aiming for a medal, definitely, yes. Whether it's one or two or three, it doesn't matter. I've won two medals and I don't want to take pressure by thinking that, oh, what is the third one," she said after a training session at Porte de la Chapelle Arena here.

"Every time I play Olympics, it's a new Olympics for me. So every time I go out there, I want to get a medal and hopefully, I will do that hat trick soon."

Sindhu had won silver and bronze in the last two Olympics at Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo respectively.

Before coming to Paris, Sindhu

trained at Sportcampus Saar in Saarbrücken, Germany where the altitude, the weather, and the conditions are similar to the French capital.

There she created a hypoxic chamber (low oxygen) in her room and slept for a couple of days. Hypoxic chambers help prepare an athlete's body to function at higher-altitude places.

"I couldn't go to the high altitude training center. I didn't have much time and obviously, there I couldn't have been playing. So I just thought, it would be good for me instead of going somewhere, getting it here and doing some changes and sleeping that way," she explained.

So, if the conditions demand the maximum from an athlete, with such training they feel ready to negotiate the challenge.

Sindhu said she has improved her strokes and is more consistent during the long rallies.

"Being much more confident in strokes," she replied when asked what difference she finds after training with Padukone.

"In women's singles now, there are a lot of long rallies and long matches, being consistent. I am confident in that now," she said.

"With every opponent, it's a different style and, you need to play the right stroke at the right time.

And that's what Prakash sir also keeps saying. We've been working on that. And that's almost there. There's a lot of improvement. You will see that on court."

The 29-year-old also shared her training regime in Germany, where she sparred with all kinds of players and sometimes competed against two players at the same time.

"Saarbrücken training was really good. I was there for almost a couple of weeks and I got my own sparring partners as well. I got an opportunity to train with different people. One was like a left-hander and one was an attacking player, a rally player."

"And I had a Nigerian guy, who also was sparring with me. And one was a German singles player who was also playing with me for a couple of days."

Sindhu was an underdog in the 2016 Olympics, while she competed at Tokyo Games as an experienced player.

Talking about her journey, Sindhu said: "I've experienced two different kinds of Olympics where, in one, a lot of people shouted and cheered, but there was no pressure. In the second one, there were a lot of responsibilities and pressure, everybody wanted you to get a medal, but there was no crowd. (PTI)

Indian athletes' confidence has reached new high: Gagan Narang

PARIS, July 25: Olympic medallist shooter Gagan Narang said Indian athletes' mindset has changed over the years and their confidence has touched unprecedented levels, encouraging them to set their sights on a gold medal.

The London Games bronze medallist, who is serving as India's Chef-de-Mission at the Paris Olympics, felt the Indian athletes are now not intimidated by their counterparts from other countries.

"There is a huge change in the motivation and the level of thinking our athletes have today. We used to feel scared, under-confident because other countries were better. But slowly that's changed, the mindset (has) changed," Narang told reporters here.

"People started watching sports, playing it, then we had great performances. The confidence is at a new high. Today's athletes don't go just to participate, they go to perform. "Someone in the top 8 or 5 wants to win a medal today and not just any medal but a gold. That's the difference in thinking of the athletes today."

"They don't think anyone is above them. They rate competitors at par and that's a very positive sign for Indian sport," Narang added.

The 41-year-old said there has been an "unprecedented coordination" between the Sports Ministry, Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the national federations.

"The support we have got from the government (this time) we never got before. The support has increased in the past few years, TOPS' players have increased, they have got all the facilities they wanted."

"There is unprecedented coordination between the Ministry and SAI, IOA NSFs. Hopefully, the athletes will be motivated and this will translate into medals," he added. (PTI)

Tough draw for Nagal; Bopanna-Balaji to start against French duo

PARIS, July 25: India's top singles player Sumit Nagal will begin his Paris Olympics campaign against French Moutet Corentin, who he had beaten in April and could run into formidable Australian world number six Alex de Minaur in the second round if he wins the opener.

Nagal, ranked 80th in the world, shares a 2-2 head-to-head record with Moutet, who is

placed 12 places above him in the ATP singles chart. If Nagal can clear the first round, he might face Wimbledon quarterfinalist Di Minaur in the second round.

Di Minaur withdrew from the last-eight Wimbledon clash against Novak Djokovic due to a hip injury. In the men's doubles, Rohan Bopanna and N Sriram Balaji have been drawn

to meet the French team of Fabien Reboul and Edouard Roger-Vasselin. Bopanna has shared the court with Roger-Vasselin in the past on the ATP Tour.

This is Bopanna's last chance to win an Olympic medal. He had finished fourth with Sania Mirza in the mixed doubles event at 2016 Rio Games. (PTI)

Threat of missile attacks, fear for families' safety: How Ukrainians trained for Paris Olympics

PARIS, July 25: The fear of death has been a constant in an average Ukrainian's life ever since the war with Russia broke out in 2022 and that includes the majority of the country's 143-strong athlete contingent here for the Olympics beginning on Friday.

Even in normal circumstances, the pressure to perform on the biggest sporting stage can take a toll on the best in the business.

In the case of Ukrainian athletes, it's hard to imagine how they were able to train for the mega-event with missile attacks and air sirens becoming a part of their lives for the past 29 months.

Electricity almost became non-existent with power grids destroyed by the conflict.

In the eyes of Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the athletes who are in Paris are already "heroes" and that is what he told them in a virtual address on Wednesday.

Teenaged diving sensation Oleksiy Sereda and slalom canoeist Viktoriia Us were part of the call with president Zelenskyy.

Speaking to PTI outside the Athletes' Village, both Sereda and

Viktoriia narrated their struggles for survival besides explaining how they trained for the ultimate sporting test.

"We had lots of troubles for preparation for this Olympics because there are always air alerts back home (for an impending missile strike), you have to go to a safe place and hide."

"That is why all our preparation in Ukraine was super hard. But we are here and (will) try our best to get some medals," said Sereda, who became the youngest European Diving Champion at 13 years of age back in 2019, breaking Tom Daley's record in the continental competition.

Sereda is from Mykolaiv in the south of Ukraine but trained in Kyiv for the Olympics. The constant sounds of air sirens made it almost impossible for him to focus on his craft but he somehow pulled through to make a second straight experience at the Summer Games. The now 18-year-old finished an impressive sixth on his Olympic debut in Tokyo 2020. He has already won as many as four medals in the World Champi-



onships.

Standing next to him outside the Village, slalom canoeist Viktoriia too feels that being in Paris is not just about competing, it is also about demonstrating the Ukrainians' steely resolve in war times.

The 31-year-old from Kyiv will make her third Olympic appear-

ance, having trained in France for the past 12 months.

"For me this Olympics is not just about participation. This is super important for the people of Ukraine and soldiers protecting us. I feel proud to represent them," said Viktoriia.

"Even after such a long time

since the war happened, nobody is safe in Ukraine. Kyiv (capital city) is still under attack from missiles and we need more air defense systems. We will only be safe when the war is over," she said.

Both Sereda and Viktoriia, who shuttles between Ukraine and France, have had a close shave

with death and away on national duty, they fear for the lives of their families back home.

"When the war started, a shell hit my house in Nikolaiv but I was lucky that nobody was home. The bomb caused a hole in the roof but thankfully no one was injured," recalled Sereda.

"The situation is mentally very stressful. When you are training you feel you are scared to dive from 10 metres but at the same time, some bomb can hit the swimming pool. It is stressful. I am really worried about my family especially my father, he is a soldier," he said.

Viktoriia too has gotten used to living under the shadow of war.

"It is stressful mentally, to live in a country at war. I was in Ukraine when a missile struck my house, there was no electricity. We are hoping to win this war and get back to normal life."

"A lot of countries are helping us but we need more support. We need more missile defense systems because all the time, we are under attack," she said.

Russian athletes should not be

here even as neutrals

The International Olympic Committee has barred Russia and ally Belarus from the Summer Games but their athletes would be competing under the neutral flag.

Ukrainians have been told to avoid any contact with athletes from Russia and Belarus at the Games. Viktoriia believes the Russians should not have a part of Olympics in any capacity.

"I did not meet anyone from Russia and I hope I will not meet them. But thankful to IOC that they are not allowed to participate under the national flag. I feel they should not be here even under the neutral flag."

"Olympic is all about peace and we need peace first and then we will see," said Viktoriia.

Her younger compatriot Sereda too left the interaction with a compelling message.

"The world must see that Ukrainians are here and competing and everyone must remember about this horrible situation in Ukraine. We are here to show that Ukraine is read to fight anywhere," he added. (PTI)