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State govt staffers to intensify stir against NPS

GUWAHATI, July 29: Assam government employees under the National Pension System (NPS) on Monday vowed to intensify their agitation to demand the reintroduction of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS).

The All Assam Government NPS Employees' Association (AAGNPSEA), in a release, said that the state and central dispensations are adamant on continuing the new system despite demands for the restoration of old pensions at all levels.

"The central executive committee of the AAGNPSEA decided to intensify the struggle to restore old pensions against the government's emotionless decision. It is a fact that only the OPS can provide retirement protection," it said.

"Instead of protecting the working class, the Centre has exacerbated the problem by proposing a

cut of another 4 per cent from employees to benefit the big capitalists in the budget presented in Parliament," it said.

Therefore, the association has decided to restart its strong agitational programmes demanding the OPS, the release stated.

The AAGNPSEA also requested chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma not to implement the central decision of additional 4 per cent deduction from NPS employees of the state government.

"Our sole objective is to protect the retirees. We will continue our struggle until the government takes a decision. We will move forward on the streets as well as in literature and culture so that people from all walks of life come forward in this struggle," it said.

AAGNPSEA president Achyutananda Hazarika had earlier stated that most (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

APSC cash-for-jobs case: Basanta Kumar Doley and Samedur Rahman awarded 10 years of imprisonment

Kingpin Rakesh Paul gets 14-year jail term

GUWAHATI, July 29: Former Assam Public Service Commission chairman Rakesh Paul was on Monday sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment by a special court in connection with a cash-for-jobs case related to recruitment of agricultural development officers in the state.

Two other former APSC members – Basanta Kumar Doley and Samedur Rahman – were awarded 10 years of imprisonment, while 29 others will serve jail sentence of four years, Special Judge Dipankar Thakuria said in his order.

Paul and the two former members were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment of seven years in connection with a case of cheating, another seven years for forgery, and 10 years for cases registered under various sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

In the case of Paul, the sentence will run consecutively, but with the CrPC stating that a person convicted in such a case can be in



prison for a maximum of 14 years, he will serve the sentence for 14 years.

In the case of Doley and Rahman, the sentence will run concurrently and they will be in jail for 10 years. The case saw 32 out of 44 accused individuals convicted.

Among those found guilty are Paul, Doley, Rahman, and Binata Rynjha, the lat-

ter now serving as an approver in the case. Additionally, the court convicted 36 candidates, one APSC employee, and three middlemen involved in the scam.

Conversely, the court had acquitted 11 individuals who were previously implicated in the scandal. The ADO recruitment scam is part of the larger APSC cash-for-job scandal, in which candidates allegedly bribed officials to secure government positions they were not qualified for.

Paul, a central figure in the scam, orchestrated fraudulent activities related to the ADO recruitment process.

An aspirant, who had failed to qualify for the test, had registered a complaint and a case was filed, alleging that marks of another candidate had been increased in lieu of financial transactions.

First exposed in 2015-16, the APSC scandal involved widespread allegations of candidates manipulating (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Orientation program
TEZPUR: The Department of Business Administration, Tezpur University, organised an orientation program titled "Deeksharambh" on Monday to welcome the newly admitted students in the Department for the academic year 2024-25. The event was held in the council hall of the University, attended by newly admitted students, faculty members, and distinguished former alumni of the Department. Noted alumni, Dr Rouhin Deb, chief economist, chief minister's secretariat, govt of Assam and Dr Miftahul Barbaruah, director at Vet Helpline India Pvt Ltd, were present on the occasion.

School infrastructure
GUWAHATI: The Central government has given the green light for a budget of Rs 455 crores to enhance the infrastructure of 65 secondary schools in Assam, the chief minister's office announced on Monday. Taking to micro-blogging site X, the chief minister's office stated, "₹455 crore approved for infrastructure development of schools in Assam." The government has planned to construct new school buildings as part of the NESIDS-OTRI (Other Than Road Infrastructure) scheme.

Ration cards
GUWAHATI: In a significant development for migrant workers from Assam, those registered on the e-Shram portal between 2021 and 2023 are now eligible to apply for new ration cards or add members to their existing ration cards, the chief minister's office announced on Sunday. The state government has set a deadline for submissions to remain open until August 3, 2024. Taking to micro-blogging site X, the chief minister's office stated, "Registered migrants workers from Assam in the e-Shram portal from 2021-2023, will now have a chance to apply for a Ration Card or add members to their ration cards by applying before August 3, 2024."

CM Himanta asks DCs to transform districts into 'fulcrum of administration'

GUWAHATI, July 29: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday called upon the district commissioners (DCs) to transform their respective districts into the "fulcrum of administration" to ensure convenient disbursement of benefits.

In his opening remarks on the first day of a two-day district commissioners' conference here, Sarma urged the DCs to lay more emphasis on areas and sectors that their respective districts can contribute to the growth of the state.

He said that the newly created sub-districts in the state, a vital state government policy to decentralise administration, will start

functioning from October 2 and on the same day, the foundation stone for their permanent offices will be laid.

A core team will be constituted at the state level to support DCs to delegate work to the sub-districts, he said.

Sarma directed the DCs to visit and supervise the construction of government buildings in their respective jurisdictions.

The CM also directed the officers to expedite work on health, education and anganwadi centres as they hold immense potential for development.

He also asked the DCs to distribute flood rehabilitation grants by August 12. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Mizoram, Assam to resume border talks after over a year

The 2 states held the last round of talks in Nov '22 in Guwahati

AIZAWL, July 29: Mizoram and Assam will resume border talks in August, twenty months after the two northeastern neighbours held discussions to find an amicable solution to the inter-state boundary dispute.

Mizoram home minister K Sapdanga on Monday said the next round of border talks will be held in Aizawl on August 9.

The two states held the last round of talks in November 2022 in Guwahati.

"The Assam home secretary last week communicated to our home secretary about their intention to come to Aizawl on August 9 for talks. We conveyed our consent to the Assam government after consulting Chief Minister Lalduhoma," Sapdanga told PTI.

The Mizoram delegation would be headed by Sap-

danga, while the Assam team would be led by its Border Protection and Development minister Atul Bora.

Sapdanga expressed optimism that the talks will yield positive results to bring an amicable solution to the border dispute which remained unresolved for decades.

Although Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had in February this year agreed to send Bora to Mizoram in March, no further steps could be taken due to the Lok Sabha elections, according to Sapdanga.

He said there was no violation of the status quo from both sides since the violent clash in July 2021 when police forces of the two states exchanged fire at the inter-state boundary, leading to the death of six policemen and a civilian from Assam. Three Mizoram districts - Aizawl, Kolasib and Mamit - share a 164.6 km (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Assam's unemployment rate falls to 6.1%: CM

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 29: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said that Assam's unemployment rate has gradually declined to 6.1% for the fiscal year 2023-24, down from 8% in 2022-23.

He said that the one of their major election promises and governance focus was on reducing unemployment and giving the youth of the state ample growth opportunities.

Sarma further stated that the unemployment rate will speed up more in the upcoming years, with proactive and efficient government strategies in line for implementation. "After 3 years, the statistics speak for itself; unemployment is down to 6.1% and will further dip in the coming days when the results of our policy interventions will start to show up. We are always (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

INDIA bloc will break govt's 'chakravayuh', ensure MSP legal guarantee, caste census: Rahul

NEW DELHI, July 29: Using the 'chakravayuh' metaphor as a leitmotif, leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Monday claimed that an atmosphere of fear prevails all around with a group of six trapping the entire country in a 'chakravayuh' he promised would be broken by the INDIA bloc.

Participating in the debate in the Lok Sabha on Budget 2024-25, Gandhi said the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) will ensure that a legal guarantee for MSP as well as a caste census is passed by the House.

In a speech that invoked the Mahabharat and led to an uproar in the House, prompting speaker Om Birla to intervene frequently, the former Congress chief alleged that the sole aim of the Union Budget is to strengthen the framework of big businesses, political monopoly that



destroys the democratic structure, and the deep state or the agencies.

"There is an atmosphere of fear and that fear has pervaded every aspect of our country. In the BJP only one man is allowed to dream to be the prime minister. If the defence minister wants to be PM, there is a big problem, there is fear. This fear has been spread throughout the country...why is it that my friends in the BJP are terrified, ministers are

terrified, farmers, workers are terrified?" the Congress leader asked.

Thousands of years ago in Haryana's Kurukshetra, six people killed a youth, Abhimanyu, in a 'chakravayuh', he said, adding that a 'chakravayuh' has violence and fear.

Gandhi's reference was to the Mahabharat legend according to which Abhimanyu was killed in a 'chakravayuh'. 'Chakravayuh' refers to a multi-layered military formation aimed at trapping a warrior by opponents placed strategically in an alignment resembling a lotus-shaped labyrinth.

He said the 'chakravayuh' is also called a 'padmavyuh' for its resemblance to a lotus (BJP's election symbol) formation.

"In the 21st century, another 'chakravayuh' has been prepared. It is in the form of lotus and the prime minister (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India will have more contacts with Ukraine & Russia: EAM Jaishankar

TOKYO, July 29: India will have more contacts with Ukraine and Russia going forward as such engagements by countries talking to both sides are important to resolve their conflict, external affairs minister S Jaishankar said on Monday, days after it emerged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi may visit Kyiv next month.

Jaishankar said India's position has been that a solution to the conflict will not emerge from the battlefield, and cautioned that it could be "fatalistic" to allow the situation to take its course and wait for events in some other parts of the world to provide some help to end the crisis.

"We do believe that we should be more active there," he said during an interactive session at Japan National Press Club. Jaishankar is on a three-day visit to Japan.

"I can reasonably expect that there will be more contacts between us and Ukraine and between us and Russia as well," he said, replying to a question on reports of Modi's likely visit to Kyiv next month.

Declining to give a specific answer, the external affairs minister added: "We, like any government, make our positions known at the right time through the right channels."

Jaishankar said more needs to be done to find a way to end the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

"Our feeling today is that more needs to be done (and) that we should not resign ourselves to the continuation of the current state of conflict and say 'let this take its own course and let us wait for events in other parts of the world to provide some kind of solution'," he said. "That to our mind would be fatalistic," he noted.

Jaishankar said considering the gravity of the situation, it is important for countries, who are in touch with both Russia and Ukraine as not many are actually talking to the two sides.

The external affairs minister also referred to Modi's meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Italy last month. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



'As of now, 42 properties have been inscribed on the World Heritage List' Nearly 60 properties from India on Tentative List for inclusion on World Heritage List: Govt

NEW DELHI, July 29: There are nearly 60 properties in India which find a place in the Tentative List for further inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List, according to information shared by the government in Parliament on Monday.

A Tentative List is an inventory of those properties which each State Party intends to consider for nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The 46th session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) is being held in New Delhi from July 21 to July 31.

India is hosting the key event of UNESCO for the first time.

The mound-burial system of the Ahom dynasty in Assam -- 'Moidams' -- was on July 26 inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, making it the first cultural property from the Northeast to get the coveted tag.

'Moidams' was submitted as India's nomination for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List for the year 2023-24. The site was put in the Tentative List of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2014.

In a written response to a query in Lok Sabha, Union Culture minister Gajendra



Singh Shekhawat said, "There are 57 properties in the Tentative List for further inclusion in the World Heritage List. However, as per the Operational Guidelines 2023, only one property can be submitted for the World Heritage inscription process each year. As of now, 42 properties have been inscribed on the World Heritage List." The updated list for India, after the

inclusion of centuries-old 'Moidams', is now 43 sites on the World Heritage List and 56 properties on the Tentative List, according to the website of UNESCO, which adds that out of the 195 States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, 189 have submitted a Tentative List.

Shekhawat was also asked whether the government has formulated any scheme for the protection of cultural heritage in compliance with the guidelines of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

"No, sir, there is no such scheme formulated for the protection of cultural heritage in compliance with the guidelines of UNESCO. However, India has ratified the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention. All the World Heritage properties, along with other sites and monuments under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, are protected and conserved by funds provided by the Government of India based on their requirements and Annual Conservation Plan (ACP)," the Union minister replied.

In response to another query, he said the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) takes up conservation and maintenance work of protected monuments and sites throughout the country, including 286 in the state of Maharashtra.

"Conservation and maintenance of monuments and archaeological sites is a continuous process and is taken up as per the need of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HC reserves order on CM Arvind Kejriwal's bail plea in CBI case

NEW DELHI, July 29: The Delhi High Court on Monday reserved its order on the bail plea by chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in the corruption case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam.

The verdict was reserved by Justice Neena Bansal Krishna after hearing the counsel appearing for the AAP leader as well as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

The CBI opposed Kejriwal's bail plea in the case, saying he was the "sutradhaar" of the excise scam and if released, he could influence the witnesses.

"The investigation could not have been concluded without his arrest. Within a month we filed the charge sheet," said CBI's counsel advocate D P Singh.

Earlier in the day, the CBI filed its final charge sheet in the trial court against the chief minister and five others, including AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Kejriwal, contended that the arrest was an "insurance arrest" to ensure that he does not come out of jail. He emphasised that there was no direct evidence against the AAP chief and the investigating agency apprehended him based on presumptions and hypothesis.

Kejriwal was arrested by the CBI on June 26 from Tihar Jail while he was

EXCISE SCAM



lodged in judicial custody in a connected money laundering case filed by the ED.

The court's verdict on his petition challenging the arrest by CBI is awaited.

The chief minister, who was arrested by the trial court in the money laundering case on June 20. However, the trial court's order was stayed by the high court.

On July 12, the Supreme Court granted interim bail to Kejriwal in the money laundering case. The excise policy was scrapped in 2022 after the Delhi lieutenant governor ordered a CBI probe into alleged irregularities and corruption involving the formulation and execution of the policy. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

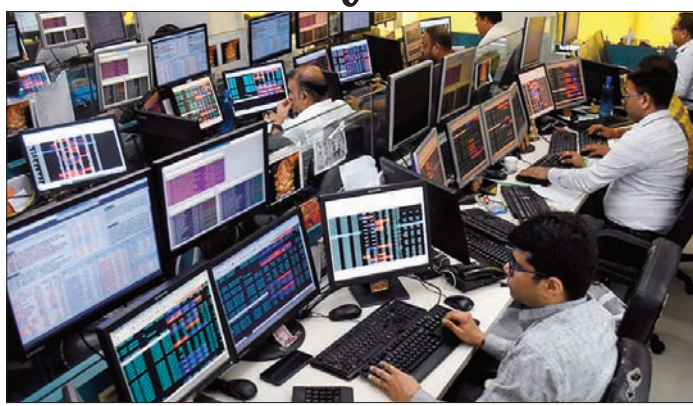
Sensex, Nifty retreat from record highs to close flat ahead of key US Fed rate decision

MUMBAI, July 29: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty hit intraday record high levels before closing almost flat on Monday due to profit-taking in FMCG and IT shares by cautious investors ahead of the key US Fed interest rate decision later this week.

The 30-share BSE Sensex closed higher by 23.12 points or 0.03 per cent at 81,355.84 -- its all-time closing high -- with 16 of its components advancing and 14 ending lower.

The index opened higher and jumped 575.71 points or 0.70 per cent to hit a new intra-day record peak of 81,908.43 in late morning deals following a decline in US bond yields. However, investors preferred to book profits at record high levels amid high volatility dragging the index lower to close flat. The NSE Nifty ended marginally up 1.25 points or 0.01 per cent at an all-time closing high of 24,836.10. During the day, it surged 164.9 points or 0.66 per cent to hit a fresh lifetime peak of 24,999.75.

From the Sensex pack, Larsen & Toubro rose the most by 2.77 per cent after it announced bagging new large orders worth ₹ 2,500 crore to ₹ 5,000 crore.



UltraTech Cement, which announced the acquisition of 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements from promoters and their associates for ₹ 3,954 crore, closed up 1.42 per cent. India Cements closed lower by 0.65 per cent.

Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries and Sun Pharma were among the biggest gainers.

On the other hand, Titan Ltd fell the most 2.38 per cent. Bharti Airtel (2.22 per cent), ITC (1.33 per cent), Kotak Mahindra Bank (1.04 per cent) and HDFC Bank (0.68 per cent) were among the major losers, dragging the key indices

from record highs. IT shares Tech Mahindra, TCS, Infosys, and HCL Tech fell up to 1 per cent ahead of the US Fed meeting on interest rates.

"Nifty ended almost flat after a volatile session. Asian stocks started the week with gains ahead of central bank policy meetings in the US, the UK and Japan," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.17 per cent and the midcap index climbed 0.80 per cent. The BSE smallcap index hit its all-time high level during the day. Among the indices, capital goods surged 2.73 per cent,

industrials rallied 2.33 per cent, realty (1.51 per cent), oil & gas (1.17 per cent), energy (0.96 per cent) and power (0.76 per cent).

IT, telecommunication, utilities and tech were the laggards.

"An ease in the US personal consumption expenditure to 2.5% and the subsequent drop in the US 10-year yield have fuelled optimism that the Fed might cut rates in September, leading to a global rally. However, profit-booking was triggered in the domestic market given trading in the overbought territory and closed flat," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Mixed global cues and the underperformance of major banks are causing an intermediate pause in the index, Ajit Mishra SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong settled in the positive territory. European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets rallied on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 2,546.38 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.31 per cent to USD 80.88 a barrel. (PTI)

RBI plans 5-episode web series to showcase 90-year journey

NEW DELHI, July 29: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is planning a five-episode web series to provide an in-depth presentation about its functions and its 90-year journey. The web series is proposed to be for nearly three hours, with each episode having a duration of 25-30 minutes, according to an official document. The RBI, which was set up in 1935, completed 90 years in April this year.

"The bank is desirous of creating a web series of five episodes of approximately 25-30 minutes each, which can be aired on national TV channels and/or OTT platforms, commemorating 90 years journey of RBI," it said in the document inviting bids through e-

tendering for 'Production and distribution of Web Series Commemorating 90 years of RBI'.

The five-episode series will serve as a valuable resource for enhancing public understanding of the central bank's vital role in the economy, fostering greater engagement, and building trust and confidence in its operations and policies, it said. For the web series, the RBI has invited proposals from interested production houses, TV channels, and OTT platforms. The primary objective of this project is to create a comprehensive and engaging series that provides an in-depth exploration of the RBI functions and operations over its 90-year journey. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

State govt staffers to

of the people who retired under the NPS are getting pensions in the range of ₹ 500 to a maximum of ₹ 3,000 a month. He had also claimed that Assam has around five lakh government employees, of whom around 3.5 lakh are under the NPS. (PTI)

Kingpin Rakesh Paul gets

exams through bribery to obtain government jobs. This verdict marks a pivotal moment in the ongoing legal proceedings surrounding the APSC scam, which has unveiled deep-seated irregularities and corruption within the Assam Public Service Commission examinations. (Agencies)

CM Himanta asks DCs to

Sarma also directed the officers to frequently hold meetings with the guardian ministers of the respective districts, preferably every fortnight. The DCs were also directed to keep government functions simple with only vegetarian food to be served in all government functions or during visits of the chief minister or ministers.

Sarma said that in case of the chief minister's visit to the districts, the motorcade should not consist of more than 10 vehicles, including those of the DC and the superintendent of police. The chief minister also congratulated all the DCs on the successful conduct of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Sarma will review the progress of all ongoing welfare projects with the ministers, senior officials and the DCs during the two-day conference which will conclude on Tuesday. (PTI)

Mizoram, Assam to resume

border with Assam's Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts. The dispute mainly stemmed from two colonial demarcations - 1875 and 1933. Mizoram claims that 509 square miles area of the inner line reserved forest, notified in 1875 under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) 1873, falls within its territory. Assam, on the other hand, regarded the map prepared by the Survey of India in 1933 as its constitutional boundary.

Vast areas within the inner line reserved forest now fall under Assam. Similarly, a certain extent of the area, as per the 1933 demarcation line, is now on the Mizoram side. There is no ground demarcation of boundaries between the two states.

The two states have held several rounds of talks, including three ministerial-level meetings since August 2021 and agreed to maintain peace along the boundary and resolve the dispute through dialogue. (PTI)

Assam's unemployment rate

committed to the youth of Assam!" Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X. The chief minister also listed down a few key factors behind the slump in the rates like providing more government jobs to youths, empowering Self-Help groups, and pushing startup culture.

Notably, in the recently published reports by NITI AAYOG on the SDG India Index, Assam ranked 23 out of 28 states in the country, moving up to the "front runner" category from the "aspirant" category in 2018.

INDIA bloc will break govt's

(Narendra Modi) wears the symbol on his chest. What was done with Abhinmanyu is being done with India, with its youth, women, farmers and small and medium businesses," he said. Today also, there are six people at the centre of the 'chakravayuh', including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah. Gandhi took the name of four more people but Speaker Om Birla disallowed it citing that they were not members of the House and hence cannot be named.

"The 'chakravayuh' that has captured India has three forces behind it: first is the idea of monopoly capital-- that two people should be allowed to own the entire Indian wealth... The second element is the institutions, agencies, CBI, ED, Income Tax department of this nation; and the third is the political executive," Gandhi said.

These three together are at the heart of the 'chakravayuh', and they have devastated this country, he said. "My expectation was that this budget would weaken the power of this 'chakravayuh'. It would help the farmers of the country, the youth, labourers, and small businesses of the country. But what I have seen is that the sole aim of this budget is to strengthen this framework of monopoly business, the framework of political monopoly that destroys the democratic structure, and the framework of the deep state or the agencies," he said.

The first thing this 'chakravayuh' did was to attack the small and medium businesses that used to give jobs to crores, he said, adding that this was done through demonetisation and tax terrorism. "The finance minister talked about the internship programme in the budget. This is a joke, because you said that the internship programme will be in the top 500 companies of the country...99 per cent of the youth have nothing to do with this programme," he said. "This means that first you broke their leg and then you are applying a bandage," Gandhi said, slamming the government. The truth is that the government created a maze of unemployment and paper leak, he alleged.

"Paper leak is the biggest issue for the youth today, but it was not discussed in the budget. On the contrary, you have reduced the budget for education. You created a 'chakravayuh' of unemployment and paper leak," Gandhi said. "You call yourself nationalists but when you have to help jawans, you do not give money for pensions. You trapped the youth in the 'chakravayuh' of Agniveer," he said.

Gandhi said the middle class of the country probably supported the prime minister before this budget. "When during the Covid pandemic the prime minister asked the middle class to bang plates and switch on mobile lights and they did. But in this budget, you have stabbed the same middle class in the back with one knife and in the chest with another. The cancellation of indexation and increase in capital gains tax were examples of that," he said.

However, he added, that there is a hidden advantage for the INDIA bloc as "the middle class is going to leave you and come to this side". "You create 'chakravayuh' and we break them," he said and asserted that the best way to break 'chakravayuh' was through the caste census. Gandhi also displayed a photo of the halwa ceremony that precedes the printing of the budget, saying there was no Dalit, adivasi or backward class person in the photo.

Gandhi said 20 officers worked on preparing the country's budget and of them only one was from the minority community and one from the OBC category. "The 'padmavyuh' people think that the youth and backward class people are Abhinmanyu, but they should know that they are not Abhinmanyu but are Arjun and will break the 'chakravayuh'," he said, in a reference to the Mahabharat legend of Arjun breaking the 'chakravayuh'.

"INDIA bloc has taken the first step and we have destroyed the confidence of the PM. He is not coming for our speeches. I tell you in advance he will not come for my speeches. The 'padmavyuh' people do not know that India's nature is not of violence and 'chakravayuh'," Gandhi said. Referring to Lord Shiva's wedding procession, Gandhi said anyone can join it and in all religions people are welcomed in religious places but in the government's 'chakravayuh' there are only six people.

"The fight is between 'Shiva ki baraat' and 'chakravayuh'. We break chakravayuh -- Independence, constitution, green revolution, MGNREGS are all examples of it," he said.

"Chakravayuh' cannot defeat 'Shiva's baraat'. You call yourself Hindu, you do not understand Hinduism," he said, slamming the BJP. Later, in a post on X, Gandhi said, "Today a 21st century lotus-shaped Chakravayuh is trapping India and is controlled by six figures: Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, Adani, Ambani, Ajit Doval, and Mohan Bhagwat." (PTI)

India will have more contacts

"A few weeks later, we were in Moscow for our annual summit. So he (Modi) had a chance to discuss with President (Vladimir) Putin at very great length. And I myself have kept in touch with my (Ukrainian) counterpart Dmytro Kuleba," the external affairs minister said.

Jaishankar said India believes it is important for everybody to do whatever they can to see if in some way something improves and something moves out of the battlefield into the conference table.

"We believe that there must be a return to dialogue and diplomacy," he said. "From the very beginning, we had the view that the use of force does not resolve problems between countries. In the last two-and-a-half years, this conflict has deepened, it has cost lives, it has done economic damage; it has had global consequences," he said.

"I mean look at parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, it has actually impacted other societies. It has created food shortages, it has raised energy costs, it has created a fertilizer supply problem, it has contributed to global inflation and in some cases, it has even directly triggered economic crises in countries," he said. "It is very serious as it is. Its implications in a globalised world are even more serious. We recognised that," Jaishankar said. (PTI)

Nearly 60 properties from India

monuments and availability of resources," the minister said. Shekhawat, in his response, also shared details of expenditure incurred on conservation, preservation and environmental development of protected monuments during the last three years and till July 15 of the current financial year.

The figures stand as follows -- ₹269.57 crore (2021-22), ₹ 391.93 crore (2022-23), and ₹ 443.53 crore (2023-24), while it was ₹ 73.36 crore (2024-25) till July 15 of the current financial year. (PTI)

HC reserves order on CM

According to the CBI and the ED, irregularities were committed while modifying the excise policy and undue favours extended to licence holders. (PTI)

Digitalisation in finance paving way for next-generation banking: RBI Guv



MUMBAI, July 29: Digitalisation in finance is paving the way for next-generation banking and improving access to financial services at affordable cost, said Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday.

In the foreword of the Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) for 2023-24, the Governor also said the flagship Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has revolutionised the retail payment experience for end-users, making transactions faster and more convenient.

In the digital currency arena, the Reserve Bank is at the forefront with pilot runs of the e-rupee, the central bank digital currency (CBDC). The digital lending ecosystem is becoming vibrant with initiatives such as Open Credit Enablement Network, Open Network for Digital Commerce and the Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit.

He said fintechs are collaborating with banks and non-banking financial companies

(NBFCs) as lending service providers. They are also operating platforms to facilitate digital credit. Big Techs are backing payment apps and lending products as third-party service providers. "Digitalisation in finance is paving the way for next-generation banking; improving access to financial services at affordable costs; and enhancing the impact of direct benefit transfers by effective targeting of beneficiaries in a cost-efficient manner," Das said.

He noted that loans in the retail segment are being enabled by online payments and innovative credit assessment models with instant disbursements. Also, e-commerce is being boosted through embedded finance.

"All these innovations are making financial markets more efficient and integrated," the Governor said. At the same time, Das said digitalisation also presents challenges related to cybersecurity, data privacy, data bias, vendor and third-party risks, and customer protection. "Increased inter-connectedness may lead to systemic risks. Additionally, emerging technologies can introduce complex products and business models with risks that users may not fully understand, including the proliferation of fraudulent apps and mis-selling through dark patterns," he said.

Das further said digitalisation may induce human resource challenges in the financial sector, necessitating strategic investments in upskilling and reskilling. (PTI)

Govt sells subsidised tomatoes at ₹60/kg in Delhi-NCR

NEW DELHI, July 29: Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Monday launched sales of tomatoes at a subsidised rate of ₹ 60 per kg in Delhi-NCR as part of the government's efforts to stabilise prices and provide relief to the common man. The National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Ltd (NCCF) vans will provide tomatoes at a subsidised rate. The tomatoes will be sold in Delhi along with Noida and Gurugram, according to an official statement. The Centre undertook the market intervention initiative to stabilise rising tomato prices in the retail market. While addressing the media during the flagging-off ceremony, Joshi said the Department of Consumer Affairs has decided to launch this initiative to check the surge of tomato prices in major cities, especially Delhi.

"From today onwards subsidised tomatoes will be sold for ₹ 60 per kg," he said. Vegetable vendors are selling tomatoes at ₹ 70-100 per kg in the national capital, depending on the quality and locations. Joshi said the Centre has set up a Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) to stabilise rising food prices and protect consumers' interests. "Whenever a situation arises price of essential commodities increases, and we utilise the PSF to procure the commodities. These essential commodities are directly procured from farmers that reduce intermediary costs and ensure availability to consumers," he said. In this case, the minister said the PSF was not utilised as tomatoes were directly procured from mandis. He further added that this initiative will ease tomato prices, stabilise the market and provide tomatoes at a subsidised rate to consumers. (PTI)

Indian economy likely to record over 7 pc growth: NCAER

NEW DELHI, July 29: The Indian economy could grow higher than 7 per cent and possibly closer to 7.5 per cent in the current fiscal on the back of normal monsoon and receded electoral uncertainty, economic think tank NCAER has said.

In its July 2024 issue of Monthly Economic Review (MER), NCAER said real GDP grew by 8.2 per cent in FY2023-24, driven by stable consumption demand and steadily improving investment demand.

"Based on the momentum in the high-frequency indicators, normalised monsoon, a relatively benign global outlook and receded electoral uncertainty, both in India and in the rest of the world, growth will likely turn out to be higher than 7 per cent, and possibly closer to 7.5 per cent," NCAER director general Poonam Gupta said.

Gupta said the Union Budget 2024-25 lived up to the expectations of unwavering commitment to fiscal consolidation, prudence, and quality.

The Budget has kept the fiscal deficit target at 4.9 per cent of GDP and capital expenditure at 2.4 per cent of GDP during 2024-25. (PTI)

LG unveils stylish microwave ovens with Scan-to-Cook technology

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: LG Electronics, a leading name in consumer durables in India, has introduced its 2024 range of microwave ovens, showcasing the latest in cutting-edge technology and stylish designs. This new lineup, which emphasizes convenience, health, and taste, is set to transform the kitchen experience for Indian consumers.

The new collection includes nine models: seven from the Scan-to-Cook series and two from the premium Objet series. While the 28L model from the Objet series is already available, the 32L model is slated for an upcoming launch. All models in this range feature ThinQ connectivity, enabling seamless operation and integration into modern home environments.

The Objet series, characterized by its sophisticated beige color and matte finish, is designed to blend effortlessly into con-

temporary kitchens. The Scan-to-Cook series, on the other hand, offers a variety of stunning designs including floral, wave, regal, and glossy black finishes. These models are not only visually appealing but also come with innovative features aimed at making cooking more convenient and healthier.

Youngmin Hwang, Director of Home Appliances & Air Conditioner at LG Electronics India, commented on the launch: "At LG, we strive to blend style, technology, and sustainability in our products. The new Wi-Fi enabled LG Scan-to-Cook Microwave Ovens and Objet series epitomize this commitment by combining advanced cooking innovations with elegant designs. These models simplify cooking, promote healthier lifestyles, and enhance the aesthetic appeal of kitchens. We are thrilled to offer these versatile and stylish appliances that meet the diverse needs and preferences of our Indian customers."

India's digital economy poised to constitute 1/5th of GDP by 2026: RBI report

MUMBAI, July 29: India's digital economy is poised to constitute a fifth of GDP by 2026 from one-tenth at present, according to a Reserve Bank report released on Monday.

In the foreword of 'Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) for the year 2023-24', Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das emphasised that digitalisation in finance is paving the way for next-generation banking and improving access to financial services at affordable cost. India is at the forefront of the digital revolution, the report said.

The country has embraced not just financial technology (FinTech) by speeding up digital payments but has also celebrated India Stack comprising biometric identification, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), mobile connectivity, digital lockers and consent-based data sharing.

The digital revolution is galvanising banking infrastructure and public finance management systems covering both direct benefit transfers and tax collections, the report said.

Vibrant e-markets are springing



up and expanding their reach.

"It is estimated that the digital economy currently accounts for a tenth of India's GDP; going by growth rates observed over the past decade, it is poised to constitute a fifth of GDP by 2026," the report said. Several enabling forces have come together to energise this revolution. Although internet penetration in India was at 55 per cent in 2023, the internet user base has grown by 199 million in the recent three years.

India's cost per gigabyte (GB) of data consumed is the lowest globally at an average of ₹ 13.32 (USD 0.16) per GB. India also has one of the highest mobile data consumption in the world, with an average per-user per-month consumption of 24.1 GB in 2023.

In the foreword of the report, the RBI Governor also said the flagship UPI has revolutionised the retail payment experience for end-users, making transactions faster and more convenient.

DDMA Dima Hasao hosts workshop on CFS in disaster relief camps



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) of Dima Hasao conducted a one-day district-level workshop at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's Office in Haflong. The workshop targeted district-level officers and field functionaries, focusing on the creation and management of Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS) in relief camps during disasters.

The primary objective of the workshop was to equip partici-

pants with the essential knowledge and skills to effectively establish and manage child-friendly spaces. These spaces are designed to meet the comprehensive needs of children during emergencies, ensuring educational continuity, health and hygiene, psychosocial support, and safety.

The workshop featured professionals from Dima Hasao district who had received advanced training at Dispur, conducted by the Assam State Disaster Management Authority. The resource persons

included Pravin Kumar Sharma, district project engineer i/c, SSA; Himansu Dev Goswami, DPO (TT&P), SSA; Dimple Johori, supervisor, Social Welfare Department; Lalhmangai, supervisor, Social Welfare Department; Annie Lalchhingpui Choral, gender specialist, Social Welfare Department; Kidnapping Bathai, gender specialist, Social Welfare Department.

The workshop was attended by 80 participants from various departments, including Panchayat & Rural Development (P&RD), Revenue, Social Welfare, Education, Public Health Engineering (PHE), field officers, and volunteers.

This collaborative effort highlights the importance of inter-departmental coordination in disaster management, particularly in safeguarding and supporting children during emergencies.

The DDMA of Dima Hasao remains committed to enhancing the district's disaster preparedness and response capabilities, with a special focus on the well-being and protection of children in critical situations.

Guv Kataria honours heads of top NAAC accredited institutions

Education minister praises state's top position in NAAC rankings

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: Governor Gulab Chand Kataria felicitated the heads of Gauhati University, Cotton University, Borooh College, and Bhola Nath College of Dhubri for their outstanding performance in academic pursuits, which has earned them commendations from the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The felicitation program was held on Monday at Raj Bhavan in the presence of Education minister Dr Ranaj Pegu and senior officials of the Education Department.

Speaking on the occasion, the Governor congratulated the heads of the educational institutions and their teams of teaching and non-teaching staff for their dedicated services, which enabled their respective institutions to earn commendations. He stated that universities should not merely confer degrees but also identify and nurture inherent talents among stu-



dents. He also emphasised the need for creating a supportive environment for research and innovation in academic institutions.

In recognising the achievements of Gauhati University, Cotton University, Borooh College, and Bhola Nath College, the Governor remarked that their notable accomplishments would inspire other institutions to strive for excellence. He stressed that their achievements

motivate institutions to advance further in their pursuit of knowledge and innovation.

Education minister Dr Ranaj Pegu mentioned that Assam currently boasts the highest number of NAAC-accredited higher education institutions. He emphasised the importance of all higher education institutions obtaining NAAC accreditation to ensure quality education across the state. He also

highlighted that the government has been generously funding the creation of infrastructure for these institutions and supports each institution comprehensively in providing both manpower and infrastructural backing.

It may be mentioned that Gauhati University was felicitated for achieving 'A+' grade with a CGPA of 3.32 by NAAC and for securing the 44th position in the academic category in the Nature Index 2024. The university also became the first state university in India to achieve ISO 9001:2015 certification. Cotton University secured the 51st position in the Nature Index 2024. Bhola Nath College, Dhubri, was recognised for being conferred autonomous status by UGC and for being accredited with an A+ grade by NAAC. Borooh College, Guwahati, was also conferred autonomous status by UGC and received an A++ accreditation by NAAC.

Guv administers oath

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: Governor cum chancellor Gulab Chand Kataria administered the oath of office to Prof Nani Gopal Mahanta as the vice chancellor of Gauhati University, Prof Dhanapati Deka as the vice chancellor of Bhattarai University, and Prof Manabendra Dutta Choudhury as the vice chancellor of Rabindranath Tagore University at a function held in the Conference Hall of Raj Bhavan on Monday.

Earlier, secretary to the Governor Kabita Deka sought the permission of the Governor to start the proceedings of the ceremony.

The ceremony was attended by minister of Education Dr Ranaj Pegu, advisor chancellor's Secretariat Prof MK Choudhury, secretary of Higher Education Narayan Konwar, director of IIT-G Prof Devendra Jalihal, and senior officers of the state government.

New road inaugurated in Lalpool

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, July 29: The newly constructed pavel road from NH-15 to Gandapukhuri village in Lalpool Gaon Panchayat, under Bechimari development block, was inaugurated by Majibur Rehman, legislator, Dalgaoon LAC. The road, built under the MNREGA scheme at a cost of approximately Rs 41 lakh, was completed in just five months.

During the inauguration, MLA Rehman emphasised his commitment to infrastructure development under the slogan 'Samasti Ka Har Sadak Pakka'. He highlighted that, since taking office, funds from various schemes have been utilised to construct numerous pavel roads across his panchayats. He also mentioned that several more pavel block roads are currently under construction and will be inaugurated soon.

Rehman noted that the construction pace of roads like Bechimari-Daipam and Khetachar Kopati under the PMGSY scheme has been slow due to contractor negligence, a matter that has been reported to the concerned department. He added that he has submitted proposals for various schemes aimed at overall development, which are pending government approval and expected to be approved soon.

APNA Manch provides relief to Kanwar Yatris at Rengbeng

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, July 29: Amidst scorching heat, a dedicated team from APNA Manch, Hojai distributed drinking water to Shiva devotees and security personnel at Rengbeng near NH 27 in Sarupather, Nagaon district, on Sunday evening. "With the blessings of Lord Shiva, we have distributed drinking water among the Kanwar Yatris and the security personnel deployed for the smooth functioning of Sawan Mela here at Rengbeng," said Shivsankar Bora, senior member of APNA Manch. He added that their team is continuously working for the welfare of society by organising various programs such as cleanliness drives, plantation drives, competitions for school and college students, the felicitation of meritorious students, and celebrations like Hindi Diwas.

The drinking water service was conducted in memory of the late Ramesh Beriwal. Notably, during the month of Sawan, the Rengbeng



area holds special significance for Shiva devotees. Thousands of devotees gather here to take holy baths in the nearby stream and offer puja at various Shiva temples. After performing these rituals, they begin the Kanwar Yatra from Rengbeng to their chosen Shiva temple, carrying sacred water. They walk through the night to reach their final destination to

offer puja to Lord Shiva. People from surrounding areas, including Lanka, Lumding, Doboka, Nagaon, Jagiroad, Haibargaon, Morigaon, Kampur, and Kaki, visit this revered place during Sawan. The Sawan Mela is organised on a large scale here, requiring the district administration to deploy hundreds of security personnel to ensure its smooth functioning.

NFR enhances track safety with major maintenance upgrades

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), in its ongoing effort to enhance track safety and provide a safer and more comfortable travel experience to rail passengers, has made significant progress in track maintenance works. During the financial year 2024-25, NFR has achieved several milestones related to track safety, surpassing the targets set by the Railway Board.

In June 2024, the complete track renewal of 26.38 kilometres was completed, making a cumulative progress of 69.65 kilometres from April to June 2024. This represents a 59.77 percent increase compared to the same period last year. Thorough sleeper renewal of 23.69 track kilometres (TKM) was completed in June, with a cumulative progress of 71.75 TKM from April to June 2024, a 135.63 percent increase over the previous year. Thorough turnout renewals of 23 equivalent sets were completed in June, with a cumulative progress of 48.50 equivalent sets from April to June 2024, a 117.98 percent increase compared to the previous year.

Thick web switches (TWS) totaling 17 were installed in June 2024, bringing the cumulative total to 49 from April to June 2024, a 2350 percent increase over the same period last year. Additionally, deep screening of 28.34 TKM of plain track was completed in June, with a cumulative progress of 145.41 TKM from April to June 2024, a 156 percent increase from the previous year.

Moreover, 1132.20 kilometres of track were tested by the USFD (Ultrasonic Flaw Detection) machine in June 2024, making a cumulative total of 5221.60 kilometres from April to June 2024. The USFD technique is employed to detect flaws such as cracks and to facilitate the timely removal of defective rails for safety. It is noteworthy that NFR regularly undertakes various track renewal works to maintain railway tracks in proper condition, ensuring a safe and secure train journey with enhanced passenger comfort. These activities include the replacement of worn tracks, turnouts, damaged sleepers, and deep screening with ballasting of tracks.

Biswanath organises workshop on CFS

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, July 29: The district level capacity building workshop on managing Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS) during emergencies was organised by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA). Biswanath, on Monday at the SIPRD, Biswanath. The workshop saw participation from the DSWO, Biswanath; joint DHS, Biswanath; all CDPOs; BEEOs; district and block coordinators of Poshan Abhijana; DPM; BPM (NHM); and field officers of Disaster Management, as stated in a press release. The program was inaugurated by Hridoy Kumar Das, ACS, CEO of DDMA. The objectives and specific deliverables were explained by Bhargab Baruah, DPO of DDMA. The workshop covered subjects such as understanding humanitarian crises, introduction to child-friendly spaces and their guidelines, psychosocial response, age-appropriate learning continuity, CFS kits, and the roles of different departments in managing CFS. The CFS kit, which will be distributed to the model relief camps, was displayed, and the uses of the items were also explained.

Guwahati branch of Indian Academy of Paediatrics celebrates 'ORS Week'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: The Guwahati branch of the Indian Academy of Paediatrics celebrated 'ORS Week' on Monday at the department of Paediatrics, IHR Goenka Nursing Home, Bharalumukh, in Guwahati. The event, held on Monday, saw participation from doctors, paramedical staff, nurses, parents, and guardians of patients.

Dr Nirmal Jain, a senior child specialist at the hospital and secretary of the Guwahati unit, and Dr Ranjit Agarwal addressed the gathering on the significance of ORS Day and the theme of ORS Week. They emphasised the role of ORS (Oral Rehydration Solution) and zinc in managing diarrhoea and demonstrated the correct preparation of ORS. They advised using a small packet of ORS in 200 ml of water and a large packet in 1 litre of water, with both solutions to be consumed within 24 hours.

Dr Ranjit Agarwal, secretary of the IAP Guwahati City Branch, emphasised sanitation practices and the correct composition of ORS to be used during diarrhoea. ORS Week is being celebrated across various hospitals and clinics in Guwahati by doctors of the IAP Guwahati City Branch.



The doctors also discussed home monitoring for children and highlighted danger signs that indicate the need for medical attention. They advised lactating mothers to continue breastfeeding and maintain a normal diet along with ORS.

Dr Jain urged the public to avoid sugary drinks available in the market and to opt for ORS recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). The event concluded with a question-and-answer session, allowing attendees to seek further information.

CPI leader Ranganath Gogoi remembered

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, July 29: The smriti charan sabha (commemorative meeting) for comrade Ranganath Gogoi was held on Monday, coinciding with his Adyashraddha, at the Betbari Bokabeel residence of the recently deceased CPI leader. Comrades Janardan Baruah and Pradip Konwar lit the ceremonial lamp before his portrait.

The meeting was presided over by Prof (ret) Jiten Borpatragohain, who reminisced about his association with the late comrade and highlighted how Ranganath Gogoi collaborated with revolutionary leaders such as Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Khagen Barbaruah, Sten Baruah, Maliram Bezbaruah, CPI leader Bhadra Krishna Goswami, former minister Pro-mo Gogoi, and Khagen Gogoi in the early years, strengthening the party's grassroots support.

CPI state secretary Kanak Gogoi, social worker Pulbar Dihingia, and CPI leaders Janardan Barua, Nitai Choudhury, Aparna Gogoi, Indreswar Baruah, Moni Buragohain, and Anjali Baruah Phukan, in their speeches, remembered Gogoi's selfless service to the people and the party.

Global Tiger Day observed in Sootea

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, July 29: Global Tiger Day 2024 was observed by the Wildlife Division, Biswanath, in collaboration with local NGOs Upatyaka, WWF, and ARO at Dr Zakir Hussain ME School in Adabheti on Monday. An awareness meeting was held in the conference hall of the school, where Soidur Rahman, managing director of the NGO Upatyaka, addressed the attendees. Rahman spoke on the significance of Global Tiger Day and made a heartfelt appeal for collective efforts in tiger conservation, emphasising that tigers are on the verge of extinction.

The meeting was attended by Khagesh Pegu, DFO of Biswanath Wildlife Division; Jatindra Mohan Das, crime investigating range officer of Biswanath Wildlife Division; Debajit Saikia, range officer of Nagsankar Forest Range; Pranjal Gogoi, range officer of Gamera Range; Nayan Jyoti Gogoi, forest officer of Biswanath Central Forest; Tridip Sarma, officials from WWF; Tilak Pradhan of ARO; and Babul Hazarika, among others.

Bol Bom devotees gather at Sivasagar Siva-Doul



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, July 29: On the second Monday of the Hindu calendar month of Sawan, a large number of Bol Bom (Kanwar Yatra) devotees flocked to the three-century-old Ahom-era Sivasagar Siva-Doul. They came to offer prayers after travelling from distant places and waiting overnight in long queues despite the scorching heat and intermittent rains. Thanks to the systematic provisions made by the Temple Development Committee, the devotees had no trouble accessing the inner sanctum. Water was poured into the auspicious crater through a temporary PVC pipe installed in the temple's sanctum sanctorum. To minimise air pollution, devotees were allowed to light earthen lamps under two sheds on either side of the temple access point.

Additionally, the district administration took measures to maintain a peaceful atmosphere by restricting high-decibel sound systems, which helped create a more spiritual ambience around the temple.

NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati concludes four-week Girl Empowerment Mission

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 29: NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati successfully concluded its four-week-long Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) recently at its premises. The event was graced by Pradeep Kumar Dwivedi, district commissioner of Kokrajhar, who served as the chief guest. Dwivedi highlighted GEM as a shining portrayal of NTPC's steadfast dedication to fostering positive change, uplifting spirits, and empowering girls within local communities. He commended the impressive talent displayed by the girls, who captivated the entire gathering through a vibrant cultural program.

Pushpraj Singh, superintendent of police, Kokrajhar, emphasised NTPC's commitment to community development and empowerment, which has opened new avenues for progress in the region. He discussed how NTPC can explore new opportunities to support various underprivileged girls.

Akhilesh Singh, business unit head of NTPC Bongaigaon, who was also present as the guest of ho-

nour, spoke about the four-week stay of the girls and how NTPC Bongaigaon empowered them through various creative endeavours. He highlighted the focus on outbound training as a crucial aspect of the program, aimed at exposing the girls to diverse experiences and enhancing their personal growth. Singh expressed gratitude towards the parents, teachers, and district administration for their unwavering support since the inception of the program.

Earlier, Asutosh Biswas, GM (operation), delivered the welcome address, discussing the objective of the program and how NTPC Bongaigaon has helped the girls realise their dreams. Prabhath Ram, AGM (HR), ER-II, emphasised the holistic development of the girls through the program. He underlined that the impact of GEM transcends mere numbers and statistics; its true measure lies in the profound stories of transformed lives, hopeful smiles, and rekindled dreams. As part of the program, NTPC Bongaigaon, in a first-time initiative, distributed cy-



cles to the girls.

Sangeeta Singh, president of Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, NTPC Bongaigaon, commended NTPC Bongaigaon for their meticulous attention to detail in arranging the girls' stay and spoke on how the ladies' club actively participated in the process. Onkar Nath, AGM (HR), NTPC Bongaigaon, extended a vote of thanks to all de-

partments for the smooth coordination of the event.

The two-hour-long program showcased impressive performances by the girls, including a skit on the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, fusion dance, Bardwi Shikla dance (a cultural dance of Bodoland), Bihu performance, group songs, and a display of yoga. The event concluded with a

colourful dance celebrating women empowerment. Various craft items made by the GEM children were also displayed on the occasion.

The ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including Induri S Reddy, GM (O&M), Asutosh Biswas, GM (operation), GM Thangzom, commandant, CISF, Onkar Nath, AGM (HR), MS Kandari, assistant commandant, CISF, NTPC Bongaigaon, the coordinator of the program from GYT, members and office bearers of Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, union and association representatives, and GEM faculties.

On the following day, during the de-registration process, Akhilesh Singh, head of project, and Sangeeta Singh, president of Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, presented certificates and framed photographs to the girls, symbolising their successful completion of the program. The program was also graced by Sanjay Kumar Dey, chief factory inspector.

NTPC Bongaigaon GEM, which commenced on July 2, 2024, saw

the participation of 40 students from the vicinity of the power station. NTPC Bongaigaon was the final station to complete GEM for the year 2024. The four-week residential workshop provided the girls with essential academic inputs in subjects like Hindi, English, maths, science, and vernacular languages, along with opportunities to learn extracurricular activities such as life skills, yoga, dance, computers, crafts, and sports.

The program also included demonstrations on fire safety by CISF personnel and health-related sessions conducted by doctors. The girls were exposed to various outbound training sessions at the BTC Secretariat, District Commissioner's Office, Superintendent of Police's Office, Sports Authority of India, and Bodoland Silk Park.

Notably, this initiative, launched by NTPC in 2018, has empowered more than 18,000 girls across various NTPC stations, and NTPC Bongaigaon proudly hosted the program for the third time this year.

Carcass of adult tusker found at Kondali

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, July 29: Locals spotted the carcass of a wild tusker at Silphata village near Kondali, on the Nagaon-Karbi Anglong district border, on Monday. Upon receiving information from locals, forest officials from the Kathiatoli forest range rushed to the spot and discovered that the left thigh of the tusker was swollen, possibly due to severe injuries from a suspected fight with other wild elephants, sources added.

Officials from the Kathiatoli forest range stated that the exact cause of the tusker's death would be confirmed only after the autopsy report is received.

Meanwhile, the body of the wild elephant was buried after the post-mortem was conducted in the afternoon. It is pertinent to mention that the tusker had been roaming in the area for over a week after being separated from its herd, sources further added.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Prepare for the worst; expect the best; and take what comes.
-Hannah Arendt

Nicholas Maduro wins Venezuelan presidency

In a highly contested election, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has emerged victorious, securing another six-year term. According to the National Electoral Council, Maduro received 51.2% of the votes, while his opponent, Edmundo González, garnered 44.2%. With approximately 80% of the vote counted, Maduro achieved over five million votes, compared to González's 4.4 million. Maduro first assumed the presidency in 2013 following the death of Hugo Chávez, the long-time leader of the socialist coalition who governed Venezuela from 1999 until his death. Having previously won the 2018 presidential election, Maduro now prepares for another term amid mounting tensions and challenges from the opposition. Following the electoral council's announcement, President Maduro addressed his supporters, vowing to defend the people, the constitution, and the nation's laws. He dedicated his victory to his mentor, Chávez, exclaiming, "Long live Chávez. Chávez is alive!"

The outcome of the election has been celebrated by Maduro's allies, including Cuban leader Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, who praised the "historic victory" as a triumph of "the dignity and courage of the Venezuelan people." Bolivia's left-wing leader, Luis Arce, also hailed the result, noting the symbolic significance of the election date, which coincided with what would have been Chávez's 70th birthday. "What a great way to remember Comandante Hugo Chávez," Arce tweeted. However, the election results have sparked controversy and rejection from several quarters. Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado, who supported González's campaign after being barred from running herself, claimed the opposition had won in every state. Machado, an ardent supporter of Donald Trump, accused Maduro of stealing the election, echoing Trump's rhetoric. International reactions have been mixed. While some Latin American nations have withheld immediate recognition of the results, waiting for detailed outcomes, Chile's President Gabriel Boric declared that Chile would not recognize any unverified result. Peru's foreign minister also rejected the results outright.

From the United States, Vice President Kamala Harris expressed solidarity with the Venezuelan people, tweeting, "The United States stands with the people of Venezuela who expressed their voice in today's historic presidential election. The will of the Venezuelan people must be respected." Secretary of State Antony Blinken voiced serious concerns over the accuracy of the election results, emphasizing the need for fair and transparent vote counting. In his post-election speech, Maduro urged his supporters to remain vigilant against opposition efforts to challenge the results. He highlighted the presence of international observers who commended the election's fair and peaceful conduct. Elvis Amoroso, head of the National Electoral Council, called on Venezuelans to respect the results, announcing an investigation into alleged "acts of terrorism" during the vote. Amoroso urged adherence to the constitution and the mandate expressed at the polling stations. Venezuela, officially known as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, is a northern South American country bordered by the Caribbean Sea to the north and the North Atlantic Ocean to the east. It shares borders with Colombia, Brazil, and Guyana and has overlapping maritime borders with several Caribbean nations. With an area of 912,000 km², Venezuela is slightly more than 2.5 times the size of Germany and has a population of 31.1 million, with 6 million residing in the capital, Caracas. As Venezuela continues to grapple with its political and economic challenges, the latest election results have only deepened the nation's divisions, setting the stage for continued turmoil and uncertainty.

CM Yogi Adityanath may be the sacrificial goat to protect Modi

By: Sushil Kuttu

Who benefits from blaming Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the BJP's poor Lok Sabha polls performance in Uttar Pradesh? As things have moved, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya is the dark horse though Union Home Minister Amit Shah is also talked about as somebody who gains from a downgraded Yogi. OBC heavyweight Keshav Prasad Maurya has long held a grudge that Yogi Adityanath walked away with the Chief Minister's post after he, Keshav Prasad Maurya, won the state for the BJP in 2017. The saffron-clad Yogi came out of the blue and became Chief Minister, when Maurya was the head of the UP unit of the BJP.

Since then, Keshav Prasad Maurya was waiting for the right time, which came after the recent Lok Sabha elections with the BJP unable to match its 2019 performance. There have been allegations that the "disconnect between the BJP cadre and the Yogi-led government" led to the 2024 UP debacle. The dismal performance, compared to that of the Samajwadi Party, exposed the soft underbelly of the ruling party in the state and at the Centre. It has also been alleged that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has been resorting to startling measures to regain his primacy and popularity among Hindu voters.

The way the BJP top-brass is behaving, the BJP's sub-par showing in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections has dealt Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath a bigger jolt than to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had kept up the refrain "Modi ki guarantee" and "abki baar 400 paar" throughout the BJP's campaign in Uttar Pradesh and other states. And now the hammer has fallen not on Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah but on the ascetic who holds the state in his fist, undoubtedly the most powerful politician in Uttar Pradesh. There is a widespread view that in terms of popularity, the Yogi beats Modi hands down.

Does that make Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath rivals? What role does Union Home Minister Amit Shah have in the UP turmoil? Apparently, Shah has a soft corner for Keshav Prasad Maurya and Maurya is in the eye of the cyclone now skimming over Yogi

Adityanath's clean-shaven head. Throughout the current turmoil, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah have been lackadaisical and seemingly uninterested, unmindful of what befell Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath even as this attitude compelled Yogi Adityanath to go on the offensive.

The Yogi's strategy revolves around meetings with current and former MLAs, MPs and MLCs and making himself more popular with the BJP's Hindu votebank, which was in two minds when voting for or not voting for the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections. The Yogi's meetings with MLAs and MPs haven't cleared the air. The next assembly elections are in 2027 and what could happen now is a change of guard, which could mean only one thing – Yogi Adityanath making way to Keshav Prasad Maurya, who is being told of the many innovative ways he could become Chief Minister.

Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav's "Monsoon Offer" to Keshav Prasad Maurya, asking him to "Sau Lao Sarkar Banao" is right up Maurya's alley. But the Deputy Chief Minister is staying put with the BJP; perhaps, with the assurance that the strategy to oust him with the least resistance. Meanwhile, a "future roadmap" can be held at bay. In the 2022 assembly elections, Yogi Adityanath had proved himself by winning 255 of the 403 assembly seats against Akhilesh Yadav's tally of 111 and the Congress' two. Then, there was no move to replace him as there was no Lok Sabha elections in 2022. Things turned to "turmoil" in 2024 only because there were Lok Sabha elections and Prime Minister Narendra Modi was asking for votes in his name, but failed to get "abki baar 400 paar". There wouldn't have been the Uttar Pradesh turmoil if Narendra Modi hadn't lost face along with tonnes of votes. The critical eye had to shift from Modi to Yogi, a scapegoat had to be found to save the GOAT (Greatest Of All Time)! (IPA Service)

Will Hasina save Bangladesh from anarchy?

Never before in the history of Bangladesh (since 1972), in any student uprising, anti-government movement or people's revolt so much blood has been spilt in street violence. The panic-stricken government of Sheikh Hasina, the longest-serving woman prime minister of Bangladesh in the world suddenly imposed shoot-on-sight orders during curfew hours, the blanket blackout of internet and mobilised army to quell the rioters on 18 July evening. Rumours of declaring an Emergency Rule were also heard.

Hasina, who won a fourth consecutive term after January elections that were apparently not free or fair, had previously imposed and then withdrawn the quota. Educational institutions have been closed indefinitely. Broadband internet has been partially opened after a week. There is no deadline for when mobile internet will be restored. Several messaging apps, including Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube and many international news media remain blocked.

The students at Dhaka University and four other universities in the outskirts of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Sylhet since 1 July began their protest for reforms of job quota in government jobs.

Earlier a judgement of the High Court challenged the government's decision to cancel all categories of job quota sparked the students to take to the streets.

On 21 July, the Supreme Court, hearing an appeal from the government, ruled to reduce the quota in government jobs, allocating 5 per cent for descendants of independence war veterans and 2 per cent for other categories of third-gender (Hijra) and physically chal-

lenged persons. Possibly the political historian will be able to explain whether anywhere in the world, such a huge price the people had to pay for a higher court verdict.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina squarely blamed the anarchy on the shoulders of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI). BNP has not only boycotted the January 2024 election but also announced to resist the electioneering. JeI did not have any say, as Bangladesh Supreme Court upheld the High Court's verdict scraping its legitimacy in participating in any elections.

"Bangladesh has been troubled for a long time due to unfettered security force abuses against anyone who opposes the Sheikh Hasina government, and we are witnessing that same playbook again, this time to attack unarmed student protesters," said Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

The government instead of mentioning the death tolls is more concentrated in describing the anarchy, mayhem, vandalism and arson of state properties listed as Key Points Installations (KPIs). Like the two stations of the newly built Metro Rail, the elevated expressway was pride mega project of Hasina.

The Shetu Bhaban, which houses the Bangladesh Bridge Authority, the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) head office, state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) and several other government buildings also took the full brunt of the severity of the frenzied mob. Hasina asked the members of the public and law enforce-

ment agencies to hunt for the perpetrators who have destroyed her pride projects. Her call will surely encourage a witch-hunt of alleged suspects to settle individual scores against their rivals.

Nearly a thousand students, journalists, passersby, and bystanders were wounded. Scores of children who were not in the street protest were killed or critically wounded. Harrowing tales of children are appearing on the front page of leading newspapers in Bangladesh.

More than 200 people, including students and innocent, were shot and killed. According to the independent newspaper Prothom Alo, 5,000 people were arrested and slammed in hundreds of cases of arson, terrorism and attack on law enforcement officers. The majority of the detained persons are innocent.

Independent media rights researcher and journalist Pullack Ghatak said at least four journalists were shot and killed by police during the clashes.

While 187 journalists in print media, news portals and television were mercilessly assaulted by police, student protesters and rioters. Once the full fact-finding is concluded the number of wounded journalists from all over the country would climb to 300, Ghatak said.

A huge number of casualties was the result of excessive force by law enforcement officers and troops with lethal weapons. The riot police violated the rules of engagement with the agitating public. Firearms are not an appropriate tool for the policing of assemblies; they must only be used when strictly necessary to confront an imminent threat of death or serious injury, says

Amnesty International.

There was a severe absence of crowd control engagement by the police, anti-crime force Rapid Action Battalion, paramilitary Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) and armed paramilitary auxiliary force Ansar Battalion confronted the defiant students and violent protesters.

The situation went out of the hands of the law enforcement officers when the "Helmet Bahini", a 'gladiator' wing recruited from the Chattra (student) League and Juba (youth) League of the ruling Awami League went berserk.

The 'Helmet Bahini' wearing motorbike helmets and armed with metal bars, batons, hockey sticks, unauthorised firearms, mostly handguns, shotguns, and crude home-made bombs were mobilised in scores of hotspots in the capital Dhaka, port city Chattogram (former Chittagong) clashed with students and protesters. Amnesty International claims video and photographic analysis confirms police unlawfully used lethal and less-lethal weapons against protesters.

Amnesty International and its Crisis Evidence Lab have verified videos and photographic evidence of three incidents of unlawful use of lethal and less lethal weapons by law enforcement agencies while policing the protests.

Amnesty International urges the Government of Bangladesh and its agencies to respect the right to protest, end this violent crackdown and immediately lift all communications restrictions.

An independent and impartial investigation into all human rights violations committed by security forces, including the high death toll of protesters, must be urgently conducted.

Amnesty urged that "An independent and impartial investiga-

tion into all human rights violations committed by security forces, including the high death toll of protesters must urgently be conducted and all those found responsible must be held fully accountable. Victims of unlawful police use of force, including those who have been injured and family members of those who have been killed must also receive full reparations from the state." Meanwhile, the United Nations Human Rights chief Volker Türk on the student protests called on the Bangladesh government to urgently disclose full details about the crackdown on protests amid growing accounts of horrific violence.

Türk also urged the government to ensure all law enforcement operations abide by international human rights norms and standards, according to a press release published on the UN Human Rights Office of The High Commissioner's website. An Awami League intellectual and a popular talkshow star Shubash Singha Roy confidently said this anarchy has proved that Bangladesh needs Sheikh Hasina and has once again proved that she can handle crisis efficiently.

"Now is the time for influential governments to press Sheikh Hasina to stop her forces from brutalising students and other protesters," said Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. (The author is an award-winning independent journalist based in Bangladesh. A media rights defender with the Reporters Without Borders (@RSF_inter). He is also a recipient of Ashoka Fellowship and Hellman-Hammett Award. He could be reached at salemamad@hotmail.com; Twitter (X): @salemsamad)

Champions of Olympic Movement in India

By: Vivek Shukla

When the nation was rejoicing the bronze medal performance of Manu Bhaker last Sunday, the Brother's House in the capital was also celebrating the victory of Manu Bhaker. Those who live there were all the more happy that Jaspal Rana, the coach of Manu is related to them. Actually, Rana was an alumnus of St. Stephen's college was established by Delhi Brotherhood Society more than 140 years ago. Indeed, it is a champion of Olympic movement in India along with top cop late Ashwani Kumar.

Well, the thinking cop Ashwini Kumar, who also served as the second Director General of BSF, had monitored the security aspects of Olympic Games after the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. Ashwini Kumar was heading the security team of Montreal (1976), Moscow (1980), Los Angeles (1984), Barcelona (1992), Atlanta (1996) and Sydney (2000) games. Until the 1972 Munich Olympics, everything was going according to plan until tragedy struck the Munich Olympics when Palestinian terrorists invaded the Olympic Village and killed two members of the Israeli team. Nine other Israelis were held hostage as the terrorists bargained for the release of 200 Palestinian prisoners in Israel. That gory tragedy brought the Games to a halt.

Post Munich, there was a demand from various quarters to organise both summer and winter Olympic Games without any untoward incident. That was the time when

the International Olympic Conference (IOC) requested him to look after the security aspects of the games.

IOC knew that Ashwini Kumar knows policing more than most of the people. Hockey buff and Imperial Police (IP) officer (now Indian Police Service), Ashwini Kumar once told me "In subsequent Olympics after Munich, increased security measures in the Olympic Villages and competition venues protected athletes. It is also true that increased security also diminished the festive and open atmosphere that is at the heart of Olympics. But then you have no choice after the Munich massacre and as the number of terror outfits are swelling thick and fast across the world." And if we talk about Delhi Brotherhood Society (DBA), it has been doing great service in developing sports culture in India through its St. Stephen's College in Delhi and now St. Stephen's Cambridge school in Sonapat in Haryana. Their college has produced a host of great Olympic players.

According to Brother Solomon George of the Delhi Brotherhood Society (DBS), which established St. Stephen's College, "We have always been committed to community service and encouraging emerging athletes. This college has produced hordes of players who have represented India in Olympic Games. If it has been producing accomplished players, credit must be given to all those who work both as Christian priests and social workers. They are all associated with DBS."

Why the prolonged quiet on the UPSC Chairman's resignation?

By: Dipak Kurmi

The news of UPSC Chairman Dr. Manoj Soni's resignation gained traction following a controversy over a fake certificate used by an IAS probationer. However, whispers both in the public sphere and within bureaucratic circles suggest that Dr. Soni actually submitted his resignation about a month prior to the scandal coming to light.

If this is accurate, it implies that Dr. Soni's resignation wasn't directly tied to the controversy surrounding Pujja Khedkar's fake certificate. So what's the real story? Given that Dr. Soni hails from Gujarat and has been closely associated with both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, there must be more to the situation than meets the eye.

According to insiders, Dr. Soni, known for his strong spiritual inclinations, is eager to shift his focus to social work and spiritual pursuits. While he holds personal beliefs like anyone else, he's also recognized for his depth of character. Sources suggest that Dr. Soni is known for his principled stand, even if it means challenging influential figures.

It's curious that this significant development was kept under wraps for so long. Perhaps the administration's tight control over information played a role, or the media's focus on government formation and Parliament sessions might have overshadowed it. There's also the possibility that the timing of Dr. Soni's resignation, aligning with the Budget Session where Rahul Gandhi was poised to address it, is more than just a coincidence.

Regardless of the reason for his resignation, this entire affair is rapidly evolving into a major scandal. New revelations about Dr. Soni's departure are emerging, potentially serving as a catalyst for much-needed reforms and thorough scrutiny within the system.

Vinay Kwatra is set to offer the continuity that

India requires in Washington, DC

Vinay Mohan Kwatra, who recently completed his tenure as India's Foreign Secretary, has been appointed as the Indian Ambassador to the United States. This position has been open since January, following Taranjit Sandhu's retirement. Kwatra's appointment comes at a crucial moment, ensuring that Indo-US relations continue on a stable course.

Observers believe Kwatra is exceptionally suited for the role due to his extensive expertise in international relations and a distinguished diplomatic career. His experience spans key postings in China, the US, France, and even within Prime Minister Modi's office. This diverse background positions him well to navigate the intricacies of global politics and enhance the partnership between the two democracies.

As the US elections approach, Kwatra's role takes on heightened importance. His mission will be to maintain stability and consistency in the India-US relationship, irrespective of potential changes in the US administration. A key focus for him will be to engage with influential officials who are likely to influence India-related policies in the forthcoming administration.

Rumi's words, "In silence there is eloquence," aptly describe Kwatra, a diplomat whose influence is profound yet understated. His arrival in Washington, DC, is poised to be a pivotal moment in the evolving Indo-US relationship.

Kerala's audacious decision: A new 'foreign secretary' sparks debate

In an unexpected development, the Kerala government has appointed senior IAS officer K. Vasuki, currently serving as the Secretary of Labour and Skills, to the newly designated role of "Foreign Secretary," officially titled Secretary in Charge of External Cooperation. This decision has attracted considerable attention and has been met with some criticism.

Given that foreign affairs usually fall under the Union government's purview, the BJP has promptly labeled this appointment as a "blatant overreach" by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's administration. The Congress has also weighed in, calling the move "fairly unusual."

As per the government order, Vasuki will take charge of all external cooperation matters, collaborating closely with the General Administration (Political) Department until new arrangements are established. Furthermore, the Resident Commissioner of Kerala House in New Delhi will assist him in coordinating with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and Indian diplomatic missions overseas.

Under the new government order, Vasuki will manage all aspects of external cooperation, collaborating closely with the General Administration (Political) Department until alternative arrangements are put in place. Moreover, the Resident Commissioner of Kerala House in New Delhi will assist him in coordinating with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and Indian diplomatic missions overseas.

Critics have raised concerns about the legitimacy of Vasuki's new role, arguing that it intrudes upon the Ministry of External Affairs' jurisdiction. Some have even labeled the appointment as unconstitutional, with suggestions that Chief Minister Vijayan might be trying to establish a quasi-autonomous entity within Kerala. Nonetheless, some observers acknowledge that while the move is unusual, it could be seen as a reasonable step for state governments to manage issues related to their residents living abroad.

Amidst the controversy, the Kerala government appears determined to move forward with this unconventional choice. Whether this decision will enhance the state's external relations or merely escalate the political debate remains to be seen. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipld@gmail.com)

What's with the glorification of forced marriages in the Indian media?

By: Ayesha

Ever noticed how Shivaay in Ishqbaaz blackmails Anika into marrying him? Or how does Katha in Satyaprem Ki Katha marry for her father's honor? Consider Kumkum Bhagya, where Pragya is emotionally manipulated into marrying Abhi for the sake of family honor. In Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam, Nandini is pressured to marry Vanraj despite being in love with someone else.

These are not just stories, they're powerful scenes that draw us in with their drama and emotion. Yet, they paint a troubling picture of forced marriages, where individuals are married without their free will or against their consent.

Forced marriages, driven by deep-seated cultural, economic, and patriarchal pressures, are a significant issue in India. In many narratives, they are depicted as a duty, overshadowing personal desires and rights. Women, especially, are often shown sacrificing their happiness for the sake of family honor. This act of self-sacrifice is glorified, suggesting that familial obligations are more important than individual freedom.

Romanticization and Idealization

Indian cinema and television have a knack for romanticizing forced marriages, turning them into picturesque and emotionally stirring stories. This romanticization often involves several key elements:

Grand Celebrations: Forced marriages are often depicted with grandiose wedding ceremonies, filled with music, dance, and vibrant colors. These visually appealing sequences overshadow the lack of consent, making the event appear joyous and desirable. For example, in Tashan-e-Ishq and Mubarakan the bride and groom were not even willing participants the bride was in love with someone else but both were forced to marry, and the celebration was grand and extravagant.

Emotional Manipulation: Characters in these stories are frequently shown being emotionally coerced into marriage. This manipulation is

portrayed as yielding to family pressure, often depicted as an act of love and duty rather than a personal compromise. For example, in Akaash Vani, the heroine is emotionally manipulated by her father, who reminds her of the years they have nurtured her and begs her to marry for the sake of family honor. Similarly, in Saath Nibhaana Saathiya, the hero's mother forces him to marry an uneducated girl despite knowing he loves someone else.

Happy Endings: Stories like Bawal and Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon often depict the hero treating the heroine in the worst possible ways—degrading her, physically torturing, or insulting her—only for the couple to find happiness and love after the forced marriage. This trope reinforces the idea that such unions can lead to positive outcomes despite

the initial lack of consent, sending a dangerous message that personal choice is secondary to family arrangements.

Downplaying Personal Choice and Consent

In any relationship, choice and consent are crucial, but in movies and TV shows, the depiction of forced marriages often involves downplaying their significance.

Sacrifice and Duty: Characters, particularly women, are shown sacrificing their personal desires for the sake of family honor. This sacrifice is glorified as noble and virtuous, implying that fulfilling familial obligations is more important than pursuing personal happiness. For example, in TV serials like Swaragni and Udaariyaan, it is often seen that one sister sacrifices her love because the boy's marriage is fixed with another sister, illustrating how the duty to family often takes precedence.

Parental Authority: Parents and

elders are portrayed as the ultimate authority figures whose decisions must be respected. The narrative often suggests that parents know best and their choices should be accepted without question, undermining the individual's right to make their own decisions. In Dhadkan, for instance, Anjali is pressured by her father to marry against her wishes, highlighting the pervasive influence of parental authority in these narratives.

Normalization of Pressure: The societal and familial pressure to marry is normalized through repeated depictions across various media. Characters who resist such pressure are often shown to face severe consequences. For example, in Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam, the heroine is pressured and locked away for denying an arranged marriage, reinforcing the idea that compliance is the only viable option.

Glorification of forced marriages

This glorification is rooted in values that prioritize tradition, honor, and stability over personal choice and autonomy.

Familial Approval: The narrative places immense value on gaining family approval for marriage, often at the expense of personal choice. This reinforces the idea that familial acceptance is more important than individual desires. In Yeh Rishta Kya Khehata Hai and Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge the hero and heroine ultimately conform to their family's wishes despite their own love story, underscoring the supremacy of family approval.

Stability and Success: Movies and TV shows often present forced marriages as more stable and successful compared to love marriages. This portrayal suggests that marriages arranged or forced by families

are more likely to lead to long-term happiness and fulfillment. In Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi, the couple initially comes together through a forced arrangement but eventually finds happiness, suggesting that such marriages can lead to positive outcomes.

Critique and the need for change

While these depictions may reflect certain cultural realities, it is crucial to critique and challenge them to promote a more progressive and empowering narrative. Addressing these portrayals involves:

• **Highlighting the Importance of Consent:** Media should emphasize the significance of consent in marriage, portraying relationships built on mutual respect and choice.

• **Empowering Characters:** Portraying strong, independent characters who prioritize their personal aspirations and challenge traditional norms can inspire real-life change.

• **Diverse Narratives:** Introducing diverse narratives that reflect different ways of forming relationships can help normalize varied forms of partnerships beyond forced marriages.

• **Critical Examination of Tradition:** Media should critically examine and question traditional practices that undermine individual autonomy, promoting a more nuanced understanding of cultural norms.

The portrayal of forced marriages in Indian movies and TV serials not only reflects cultural norms but also significantly shapes societal attitudes. By romanticizing and idealizing these unions, the media perpetuates the notion that personal choice and consent can be sacrificed in favor of familial expectations. This narrative influence extends beyond entertainment, subtly reinforcing traditional patriarchal values and diminishing the importance of individual autonomy.

As viewers, we must critically examine the messages embedded in these narratives. Do these portrayals truly reflect our evolving understanding of relationships and personal freedom? Or do they perpetuate outdated norms that constrain individual agency? (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)



Why do some people lose more weight through exercise than others?

By: Corrie Pele

Everyone knows that regular physical activity is important to maintaining a healthy weight. However, some people lose more weight than others through exercise.

Why is that?

Researchers from Kobe University in Japan say people who lose weight slower with regular physical activity may be lacking variants of the protein PGC-1α, which helps regulate the body's metabolism and response to short-term exercise.

Scientists believe this finding may open the doors for an entirely new class of weight loss medication. The study was recently published in the journal Molecular Metabolism.

Focusing on the PGC-1α protein

For this study, researchers used both mouse and human models to look deeper into how the protein PGC-1α impacts exercise and its effects on the body. "PGC-1α is a protein that falls under the category of 'transcription coactivators,' which have the function of inducing gene expression," Wataru Ogawa, MD, PhD, professor and chair in the Division of Diabetes and Endocrinology in the Department of Internal Medicine at Kobe University Graduate School of Medicine in Japan and lead author of this study explained to Medical News Today. "PGC-1α enhances the expression of genes related to mitochondria, genes involved in fatty acid oxidation, and genes involved in thermogenesis, promoting efficient energy consumption in muscles."

"When you exercise, the expression of PGC-1α in skeletal muscle increases, which in turn induces the expression of genes that promote efficient energy consumption," Ogawa continued. "This is considered to be the mechanism by which energy is efficiently expended in muscles during exercise."

Lacking additional versions of protein negates exercise benefits

Through previous research, scientists have identified there is not only the normal "a" version of the PGC-1α protein, but also "b" and "c" versions that are a bit different.

"These new PGC-1α versions, called 'b' and 'c,' have almost the same function as the conventional 'a' version, but they are produced in muscles more than tenfold more during exercise, while the 'a' version does not show such an increase," Ogawa explains.

Using both a mouse model and human test subjects, Ogawa and his team found that not having "b" and "c" versions of PGC-1α protein meant short-term activity had no impact on the body, causing less fat burn during and after a workout.

However, when human test subjects had both "b" and "c" versions of the protein, they consumed more oxygen and had a smaller percentage of body fat than those who did not. This was seen in humans who were both healthy and with type 2 diabetes. "Mice lacking only PGC-1α b/c not only exhibited reduced energy expenditure during exercise but also gained weight even when housed under normal conditions," Ogawa said.

"The amount of food the mice consumed was not different from that of the control mice. We were surprised to find this strong phenotype; these mice became obese. While there are many model mice that become obese due to increased food intake, there

are few model mice that gain weight due to reduced energy expenditure."

"Additionally, there are mouse models that gain weight when fed a high-fat diet or other special diets, but a mouse model that gains weight simply by eating a normal diet is rare," he added. "Our observations clearly support the hypothesis that 'the efficiency of energy expenditure in muscles determines the tendency to gain weight.'"

Possibility of an entirely new class of weight loss medication

With the current interest in weight loss drugs such as glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists, how might these findings be used to either change or develop weight loss medications in the future?

"Recently, powerful anti-obesity drugs have been developed and are starting to be widely used around the world. These medications [GLP-1 agonists] work by suppressing appetite. In other words, they help people lose weight by reducing their food intake.

A drug that increases the expression of PGC-1α b/c, unlike such appetite-suppressing medications, would promote weight loss regardless of diet. This represents an entirely new class of medication." - Wataru Ogawa, MD, PhD.

"As the saying goes, 'exercise is medicine' and exercise contributes to the cure and improvement of various conditions," he continued. "In the treatment of diabetes, which is my expertise, exercise therapy is the most fundamental and effective treatment. If the mechanisms of weight loss through exercise become clear, it could lead to the development of better exercise therapies and, more importantly, drugs that mimic the effects of exercise."

For the next steps in this research, Ogawa said they are conducting research on why the increase in PGC-1α b/c varies among individuals, and we are beginning to uncover some of the reasons.

"The phenomenon of DNA methylation seems to explain this variability," he added. "Additionally, we have identified a substance that can increase PGC-1α b/c levels. Such a substance could potentially lead to the development of new anti-obesity drugs."

Diet more important than exercise

After reviewing this study, Mir Ali, MD, a board certified bariatric surgeon and medical director of MemorialCare Surgical Weight Loss Center at Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, CA told MNT he found it to be very interesting.

"Obviously, we've known for a long time that genetics plays a big component in some of the weight gain and weight loss, so it was interesting to see that this shows a genetic component to exercise as well," Ali said.

Although exercise does contribute to how well or quickly someone loses weight, Ali said he tells his patients the biggest factor in losing weight is their diet. "Even if somebody exercises a lot but they're choosing the wrong diet, they still are not going to see a lot of weight loss results," he continued.

"Exercise is an important adjunct to weight loss, also of course cardiovascular health and there's a lot of other benefits to exercise. But for somebody trying to lose weight, the biggest thing is the actual diet that they're eating." (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Why does spicy food make you feel hot? And why doesn't drinking water make it better?

By: Daniel Eldridge

Spicy foods taste spicy because they contain a family of compounds called capsaicoids. Capsaicin is the major culprit. It's found in chillies, jalapeños, cayenne pepper, and is even the active ingredient in pepper spray.

Capsaicin doesn't actually physically heat up your mouth. The burning sensation comes from receptors in the mouth reacting to capsaicin and sending a signal to the brain that something is very hot.

That's why the "hot" chilli sensation feels so real—we even respond by sweating. To alleviate the heat, you need to remove the capsaicin from your mouth. So why doesn't drinking water help make that spicy feeling go away? And what would work better instead?

Water-loving and water-hating molecules

To help us choose what might wash the capsaicin away most effectively, it's helpful to know that capsaicin is a hydrophobic molecule. That means it hates being in contact with water and will not easily mix with it.

Look what happens when you try to mix hydrophobic sand with water.

On the other hand, hydrophilic molecules love water and are very happy to mix with it.

You've likely seen this before. You can easily dissolve hydrophilic sugar in water, but it's hard to wash away hydrophobic oils from your pan using tap water alone.

If you try to wash hydrophobic capsaicin away

with water, it won't be very effective, because hydrophilic and hydrophobic substances don't mix.

Going for iced water will be even less effective, as hydrophobic capsaicin is even less soluble in water at lower temperatures. You may get a temporary sense of relief while the cold liquid is in your mouth, but as soon as you swallow it, you'll be back where you started.

Instead, a good choice would be to consume something that is also hydrophobic. This is because of an old-but-true adage in chemistry that "like dissolves like".

The idea is that generally, hydrophobic substances will not dissolve in something hydrophilic—like water—but will dissolve in something that is also hydrophobic, as this video shows:

My mouth is on fire

A swig of oil would likely be effective, but is perhaps not so palatable.

Milk makes for an ideal choice for two reasons. The first is that milk contains hydrophobic fats, which the capsaicin will more easily dissolve in, allowing it to be washed away.

The second is that dairy products contain a protein called casein. Casein is an emulsifier, a substance that helps oils and water mix, as in this video:

Casein plays a large role in keeping the fat mixed throughout your glass of milk, and it also has a strong affinity for capsaicin. It will readily wrap up and encapsulate capsaicin molecules and

assist in carrying them away from the receptor. This relieves the burning sensation.

What else can I try?

What about raita? This dish, commonly served with Indian curries, is made primarily from yoghurt. So aside from being its own culinary experience, raita is rich in fats, and therefore contains plenty of hydrophobic material. It also contains casein, which will again help lock up and remove the capsaicin.

Ice cream would also work, as it contains both casein and large amounts of hydrophobic substances.

Some studies have also shown that consuming drinks with large amounts of sugar can relieve spiciness.

What about reaching for that ice cold beer?

This is commonly suggested as a suitable approach to stop the burning. At first glance, this may seem a good idea because capsaicin is highly soluble in alcohol.

However, most beers only contain between 4–6% alcohol. The bulk of the liquid in beer is water, which is hydrophilic and cannot wash away capsaicin. The small amount of alcohol in your beer would make it slightly more effective, but not to any great degree.

Your curry and beer may taste great together, but that's likely the only benefit.

In truth, an alcoholic beverage is not going to help much unless you go for something with a much, much higher alcohol content, which comes with its own problems. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Babr: Lions symbolised its kings; but tigers had their own unique place in Persia, Persianate Central Asia & the Caucasus

By: Rajat Ghai

Many in the Indian Subcontinent are familiar with the 'Shir-o-Khurshid' or 'Lion-and-Sun' symbol. It symbolised kingship in ancient, pre-Islamic Persia and later on, in Islamic Iran as well. The lion has had a huge influence on the Middle East, with it appearing in cultures throughout the region - Canaanite, Babylonian, Assyrian, Israelite, Islamic and of course, Persian. But the other big cat, the tiger, is not behind, at least in the case of Persia.

Let us take a very popular (albeit a controversial one in our times) name: Babur or Babar. It is the name of the founder of the Mughal dynasty that ruled large parts of South Asia from 1526-1857. His full name is Zahiruddin Muhammad 'Babur'. What is the meaning of Babur, you may ask? 'Tiger' is the answer.

Babur, who claimed descent from two of Asia's biggest conquerors - Genghis Khan and Tamerlane or Timur - spoke a Turkic language known as Chagatai. The word 'Babur' appears in the language, a loanword from, you guessed it - Persian.

Incidentally, the Mughal standard was the 'Shir-o-Khurshid'.

Why, might one ask? The answer is that the Mughals followed the 'Turko-Persian' tradition. "Turko-Persian Islamicate culture... is an ecumenical mix of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic elements that melded in the ninth and tenth centuries in eastern Iran — that is, in Khurasan and Transoxiana. From there it was carried by conquering peoples to neighboring areas, so that it eventually became the predominant culture of the ruling and elite classes of West, Central and South Asia," writes Robert L. Canfield in *Turko-Persia in historical perspective*.

But how did a word for tiger appear in Persian? Persia and the Greater Middle East were home to the Asiatic lion. The answer is that the tiger too was found in Persia. It was called the Caspian or Hyrcanian tiger (*Panthera tigris virgata*). It is now extinct.

'Lord of Hyrcania'

'Hyrcania' was a region of ancient Persia well-known in the ancient world. It lay immediately south of the Caspian Sea, the world's largest inland body of water.

The region can be described

as Persia/Iran's very own 'cloud forest'.

The remarkable Hyrcanian Forests exist because of the mass of water vapours that evaporate from the Caspian Sea. When these confront the Alborz massif, it acts as a climatic wall, producing dense clouds and discharges of rain or snow; this, in turn, creates a very dense forest on the northern slope of the Alborz mountains, while the southern slopes end in the Kavir desert, one of the driest deserts in the world.

Today, the Hyrcanian forests stretch from Azerbaijan in the west to the vicinity of Gorgan in the northeast of Iran. Three Iranian provinces - Gilan, Mazandaran and Golestan (where Gorgan is) - are home to these unique forests. 'Gorgan' is derived from an ancient Persian term meaning 'Wolf Land', which became known to the Greeks as 'Hyrcania'.

Indeed, these forests are still home large predators like the Persian leopard, brown bear and wolf, in addition to herbivores like red deer and roe deer.

There was one more predator here once. Again, over to Mohammad Tohidifar et al:

In 1958, just 58 years ago,

Iran lost its most magnificent carnivore, the Caspian Tiger *Panthera tigris virgata*, when the last known individual was shot at Sharlogh (in the present Golestan N.P.). This remarkable animal once lived throughout the Hyrcanian region.

But Hyrcania was just one of the haunts of the Caspian.

Central Asia and the Caucasus

The Caspian Tiger occurred in eastern Turkey, the southern Caucasus, northern Iran, Iraq, and in isolated pockets throughout Central Asia until northwestern China... The Ily-Balkash Basin was one of the four core areas of the tiger's distribution in Central Asia, together with the South-Caspian region, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river systems. The tiger lived in reed beds and flood plain forests along rivers and around lakes and adjacent dry lands with appropriate cover...

Incidentally, Central Asia - Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan - as well as the Muslim-dominated areas of the southern Caucasus Mountains - Azerbaijan - follow the Turkic-Persian tradition.

Impact on culture

The Caspian tiger made its mark on Persia and the cultures it came in contact with, both in the pre-Islamic as well as post-Islamic periods.

The tiger reached the amphitheatres of Rome, where it was used in fights with other animals, as well as humans.

...menageries and zoological parks developed under Greek and Egyptian influences, but, once tigers reached Rome, their principal role became to take part in practices such as the venatio, the staged hunt in the amphitheater; the ludi (games), in which animals were forced to fight against one another or against bestiarii (beast hunters) or venatores (hunters); and the damnatio ad bestias, which was the public execution by wild animals of a person convicted of a capital crime.

The tiger also appears in the Shahnameh, the national epic poem of Iran.

Many epic heroes also wore leopard skin garment (Palangineh) during the war, and Rostam is at the forefront of these heroes. It has been previously mentioned that Rostam's war garment was sometimes called Babr-e Bayan (armor made of tiger skin) and some-

times Palangineh. The Hyrcanian tiger famously appears in the works of William Shakespeare like Macbeth, Hamlet and Henry VI.

Irish playwright Conor Harratty notes that: "Hyrcania was a beloved reference in ancient Roman texts as a place of real wildness. When Dido wants to accuse Aeneas of heartless savagery in Virgil's Aeneid, she suggests that he was nursed by Hyrcanian tigers. One assumes that Shakespeare learned the reference from a source like this."

Can it come back?

Why did the Caspian die out across its range? Reasons include habitat loss and hunting. "However, its lowland forest habitats have been completely destroyed and opened-up for agriculture and urbanization..." Tohidifar et al note about the tiger's extinction in Hyrcania. Central Asia and the Caucasus mostly came under Tsarist Russian rule by the 19th century. When the Soviet Union took over these regions, it completed what its predecessor had set out to do: Hunt the tiger to extinction.

"The main reason for the disappearance of the tiger in Cen-

tral Asia was habitat destruction and extermination by military and professional hunters," Jungius notes.

Today, efforts are on to bring back the tiger to these regions. It won't be the Caspian, but its relative the Amur or Siberian.

"Studies of ancient mitochondrial DNA have suggested a close relationship between the Caspian tiger and the extant Amur tiger *Panthera tigris altaica*: perhaps some Central Asian tigers returned eastward across southern Siberia, establishing the Russian Far East's Amur tiger population," Luc Hermann notes in *Chronological distribution of the tiger Panthera tigris and the Asiatic lion Panthera leo persica in their common range in Asia*.

"Wild tigers could be back in Kazakhstan by 2026"

While WWF-Russia is spearheading an effort to bring Amur tigers to Kazakhstan in Central Asia, will it really be the same as having the Caspian back, one might ask?

Science can send humans to the moon. But it cannot bring back a species. Even if it does, humans playing God can never be the same as the original. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Maduro secured 51% of the vote, overcoming the main opposition candidate, Edmundo González, who garnered 44%

Maduro is declared winner in Venezuela's presidential election as opposition claims irregularities

CARACAS (VENEZUELA), July 29: Nicolás Maduro was declared the winner in Venezuela's presidential election on Sunday, even as his opponents were preparing to dispute the results, setting up a high-stakes showdown that will determine whether the South American nation transitions away from one party rule.

Shortly after midnight, the National Electoral Council said Maduro secured 51% of the vote, overcoming the main opposition candidate, Edmundo González, who garnered 44%.

But the electoral authority, which is controlled by Maduro loyalists, didn't immediately release the tallies from each of the 30,000 polling booths nationwide, hampering the opposition's ability to challenge the results after claiming it had data for only 30% of the ballot boxes.

Foreign leaders held off recognizing the results as the electoral council promised to release official tallies in the "coming hours."

"The Maduro regime should understand that the results it published are difficult to believe," said Gabriel Boric, the leftist leader of Chile. "We won't recognize any result that is not verifiable."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. has "serious concerns that the result announced does not reflect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people," speaking in Tokyo.

The delay in announcing results — six hours after polls were supposed to close — indicated a deep debate inside the government about how to proceed after Maduro's opponents came out early in the evening all but claiming victory.

When Maduro finally came out to celebrate the results, he accused unidentified foreign enemies for trying to hack the voting system.

"This is not the first time that they have tried to violate the peace of the republic," he said to a few hundred supporters at the presiden-



tial palace. He provided no evidence to back the claim but promised "justice" for those who try to stir violence in Venezuela. Opposition representatives said tallies they collected from campaign representatives at the polling stations showed González trouncing Maduro. Meanwhile, the head of the electoral council said it would release the official voting acts in the coming hours.

Maduro celebrated the result with a few hundreds supporters at the presidential palace. He ca

Maduro, in seeking a third term, faced his toughest challenge yet from the unlikely of opponents in González: a retired diplomat who was unknown to voters before being tapped in April as a last-minute stand-in for opposition powerhouse María Corina Machado.

Earlier, opposition leaders celebrating, online and outside a few voting centers, what they assured was a landslide victory for González. "I'm so happy," said Merling Fernández, a 31-year-old bank employee, as a representative for the opposition campaign walked out of one voting center in a working class neighborhood of Caracas to announce results showing González more than doubled Maduro's vote count. Dozens standing nearby erupted in an impromptu rendition of the national anthem.

"This is the path toward a new Venezuela," added Fernández,

After she was blocked from joining the presidential race, she chose a college professor as her substitute on the ballot, but the National Electoral Council also barred her from registering. That's when González, a political newcomer, was chosen.

Sunday's ballot also featured eight other candidates challenging Maduro, but only González threatened Maduro's rule.

After voting, Maduro said he would recognize the election result and urged all other candidates to publicly declare that they would do the same.

"No one is going to create chaos in Venezuela," Maduro said. "I recognize and will recognize the electoral referee, the official announcements and I will make sure they are recognized."

Venezuela sits atop the world's largest proven oil reserves, and once boasted Latin America's most advanced economy. But it entered into a free fall after Maduro took the helm. Plummeting oil prices, widespread shortages and hyperinflation that soared past 130,000% led first to social unrest and then mass emigration.

Economic sanctions from the U.S. seeking to force Maduro from power after his 2018 reelection — which the U.S. and dozens of other countries condemned as illegitimate — only deepened the crisis.

Maduro's pitch to voters this election was one of economic security, which he tried to sell with stories of entrepreneurship and references to a stable currency exchange and lower inflation rates. The International Monetary Fund forecasts the economy will grow 4% this year — one of the fastest in Latin America — after having shrunk 71% from 2012 to 2020.

But most Venezuelans have not seen any improvement in their quality of life. Many earn under \$200 a month, which means families struggle to afford essential items. Some work second and third jobs. (AP)

Bangladesh intensifies security vigil amid call for fresh protests

DHAKA, July 29: The Bangladesh Army and paramilitary troops on Monday patrolled the streets of the capital Dhaka while police in riot gear enforced a strict vigil as a faction of the protesting students overnight called a new round of protests after six of their coordinators announced the withdrawal of the demonstrations.

"We have mobilised forces to prevent fresh violence," a police official said.

Witnesses and live TV footage showed the security forces guarding major points in the capital with military and police armoured personnel carriers patrolling the streets alongside the paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh.

A group of students called for new street protests on Monday after six of their leaders in an appearance before the media overnight announced the withdrawal of the street demonstrations as their demand for reforms in the quota system was met by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government following a Supreme Court order.

The protests subsided after the apex Appellate Division of unitary Bangladesh's Supreme Court on July 21 ordered a massive quota reform, keeping only seven per cent of reserve posts instead of the existing 56 per cent.

The government subsequently issued a Gazette notification in line with the order saying 93 per cent of jobs would be open to candidates on merit.

"Our main demand for logical reforms to the government job quota system has been met," student coordinator Nahid Islam on Sunday said in a video message, calling for educational institutions to re-open.

However, other students, calling for new protest, claimed their leaders were forced to announce while in police custody. Meanwhile, the government ignored an ultimatum to release their leaders and apologise for those killed in deadly unrest.

A nationwide curfew gripped Bangladesh last week, and the government called in the army to quell protests

against job quotas that killed more than 200 persons across the country.

The protests, which started in universities and colleges earlier this month, quickly turned into a more widespread agitation against Hasina and her government.

The unrest has left several thousand people, including policemen, wounded and major government installations damaged.

The mass circulation 'Prothom Alo' newspaper, however, cited 210 deaths, 113 of them being children. Most others were juveniles and youths.

The newspaper said at least 9,000 people were arrested nationwide since the beginning of the unrest.

The government leaders said the peaceful and issue-specific students' movement was not involved in violence and attributed the anarchy to the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) party and their student activists backed by the main Opposition outside parliament Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of ex-premier Khaleda Zia.

The BNP had boycotted the January 7 elections.

The unrest significantly impacted Bangladesh's economy with the Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) estimating the economic impact to be around USD 10 billion and rising.

President of the country's apex business chambers, Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI), Mahbul Alam, said the major export-earning garment industries alone incurred losses of Bangladesh Taka 6,400,000 (USD 5,45,167).

Bangladeshi authorities said they restored internet services in the country after a 10-day disconnection of both mobile internet and the key social media platform as the situation returned to normal following the disbandment of the protests.

However, the resumption of mobile internet on Sunday failed to relieve tens of thousands of F-commerce sellers, who rely on Facebook to sell their goods and services, were yet to resume. (PTI)



No country should dominate others: says Quad in clear message to China

TOKYO, July 29: In a loud and clear message to China, the Quad on Monday reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, vowing to work towards a region where no country dominates others and each state is free from coercion in all its forms.

At a meeting here, the foreign ministers of the Quad countries called for upholding the free and open rules-based international order and respecting the principle of freedom, human rights, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations.

Without directly naming China, the four foreign ministers expressed serious concern over the situation in the East and South China Seas and reiterated the Quad's strong opposition to any "unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion."

The meeting was attended by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Australia's Penny Wong.

"All countries have a role in contributing to regional peace, stability, and prosperity while seeking a region in which no country dominates and no country is dominated, competition is managed responsibly, and each country is free from coercion in all its forms and can exercise its agency to determine its own future," the ministers said in the statement.

The Quad also vowed to work towards a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific, a region that has seen increasing Chinese military muscle-flexing in the last few years.

"We reaffirm the Quad's steadfast commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, which is inclusive and resilient, and are united in our commitment to upholding the free



and open rules-based international order, with its strong support for the principle of freedom, human rights, the rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and peaceful settlement of disputes," the ministers said.

The ministers also referred to increasing Chinese manoeuvres in the South China Sea, especially the "dangerous use" of coast guard and maritime militia vessels.

"We continue to express our serious concern about the militarisation of disputed features, and coercive and intimidating manoeuvres in the South China Sea," the joint statement said.

"We also express our serious concern about the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels, the increasing use of various kinds of dangerous manoeuvres, and efforts to disrupt other countries' offshore resource exploitation activities," it said.

The ministers emphasised the importance of adherence to international law, particularly as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to address challenges to the global maritime rules-based order, including in the South and East China Seas.

The ministers also "unequivocally" condemned terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms including cross-border terrorism.

"We deplore the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs),

drones, tunnels and information and communication technologies by terrorists and terrorist entities," they said.

"We strongly reiterate our condemnation of terrorist attacks, including the 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot attacks and call for bringing the perpetrators of these attacks to justice without delay," they added.

The Quad urged all countries to take immediate, sustained and irreversible action to prevent territory under their control from being used for terrorist purposes.

"We are committed to working together to promote accountability for the perpetrators of terrorist attacks and support domestic investigations including through domestic designations of UN Security Council resolutions as they pertain to sanctions," the ministers said.

"We reiterate the call for concerted action against all UN-listed terrorist groups including Al-Qa'ida, ISIS/Daesh, Lashkar-e-Taayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and their proxy groups," they said.

The ministers said the Quad is committed to international cooperation and working together with our international and regional partners in a comprehensive and sustained manner to strengthen their capacity to prevent, detect and respond to threats posed by terrorism and violent extremism. (PTI)

Sri Lanka's Justice Minister resigns to contest presidential election

COLOMBO, July 29: Sri Lanka's Justice Minister Wijeyedasa Rajapakse on Monday said that he has resigned from his position to contest the presidential election on September 21.

Rajapakse, 65, became the second member of the cabinet to declare himself a candidate after President Ranil Wickremesinghe announced his intention to contest the election last Friday. "I have resigned from my ministry to contest the election. I will be doing so under a new front which will be announced soon," he said.

"Upon myself and the President announcing our intentions to contest the elections, issues arose. The main issue was two people from the Cabinet of Ministers contesting for the presidency, even though we were contesting from two different parties. The President sought my opinion on this and I have decided to step down from my ministerial portfolios to contest for the Presidential Election," he told the media.

Last week, Rajapakse announced his candidacy for the presidential election. At the time, speaking to the media, he said under his leadership, measures will be taken to resolve issues in several sectors, with a focus on development.

He further expressed confidence that the National Election Commission will act independently and as per the Constitution concerning the upcoming elections. Rajapakse is having the backing of former president Maithripala Sirisena who leads a faction of the Freedom Party which is deeply mired in a legal wrangle.

Sirisena was served with a court writ restraining his functioning as the leader of the SLFP. Sirisena later anointed Rajapakse, the leader of the SLFP, which was disputed in court by a rival SLFP faction led by another cabinet minister Nimal Siripala de Silva. The rival group claims Rajapakse remains a member of the SLFP and his purported SLFP membership is invalid. Rajapakse, however, claimed that 90 per cent of members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) support his candidacy.

President Wickremesinghe has announced his intention to contest as an independent. Sri Lanka will hold the presidential poll on September 21, a contest which is likely to determine the future of economic reforms in the cash-strapped country.

This will be the first election to be held in Sri Lanka after it plunged into economic bankruptcy in 2022.

Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka, Sri Lanka's former Army chief and the architect of the military offensive that led to the annihilation of the LTTE, on Thursday formally declared his candidacy for the election.

The main opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) leader Sajith Premadasa and Marxist JVP leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake are also vying for the post. (PTI)

Pak court extends remand of Imran Khan's party's central information secretary by 2 days

ISLAMABAD, July 29: A Pakistani court has extended the physical remand of a close aide of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party for two more days and sent a female social media activist, allegedly linked to the political organisation, to judicial remand.

The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) presented Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Central Information Secretary Raof Hasan before District and Sessions Judge Murid Abbas on Sunday after the expiry of his three-day remand granted last week, the Dawn newspaper reported on Monday.

The FIA prosecutor informed the judge that the case record, including transcripts of videos, has been submitted to court. The forensic analysis of the videos has to be carried out, the pros-

ecutor said and sought eight days' physical remand of Hasan. Following the arguments, the judge extended Hasan's physical remand for two more days, the report said.

During the last hearing on Thursday, the FIA presented a report to the court claiming that Hasan received "instructions through messages, audio notes, graphics and videos" from abroad daily. It alleged that the PTI member oversees the party's social media teams that run trends on social media platforms "to incite violence, create law and order situation and fan cyberterrorism".

The FIA also presented Syeda Arooba Kanwal, a social media activist who was allegedly linked with the PTI in court. The FIA prosecutor claimed that Kanwal was operating the party's account on social media platform X, which she

refused to surrender to the investigators, and sought her physical remand for investigation.

The defendant's lawyer, Ali Bukhari, said Kanwal was an employee and handled PTI's social media account. He claimed the entire case has been based on data retrieved from a cell phone, which is already in FIA's custody. The advocate requested the court to discharge all the accused. However, the judge sent Kanwal to jail on judicial remand. The Pakistan government last week formed a joint investigation committee to identify those involved in creating disorder in the country through "malicious social media campaigns". No party or person has been named against whom the possible investigation would be directed. However, analysts say, the step may be targeted at the PTI party. (PTI)

6 UK lawmakers are running to lead the Conservative Party after its crushing election defeat

LONDON, July 29: Six British lawmakers have announced they are running to lead the defeated Conservative Party, ahead of a Monday deadline, in a contest that will decide whether the opposition party tacks to the right or steers toward the political center ground.

Contenders include former Foreign Secretary James Cleverly and lawmaker Tom Tugendhat from the party's centrist grouping. Former Home Secretary Priti Patel and ex-Business Secretary Kemi Badenoch have support from the right of the party. Former immigration minister Robert Jenrick and veteran lawmaker Mel Stride also have secured the required support of 10 Conservative lawmakers before the deadline of 2:30 p.m. (9:30 a.m. EDT, 1330GMT) on Monday.

Badenoch, who came third in the party's last leadership election in 2022, was the early favorite with bookmakers. The Nigeria-raised lawmaker used language reminiscent of Conservative icon Margaret Thatcher, saying the party should lead "a renewal for capitalism" built around a smaller state and seek to persuade voters "why conservatism should matter."

In the wake of the party's devastating election defeat this month, which saw it lose votes to parties on both right and left, Conservatives are split between moderates who want to try to win back centrist voters and hard-liners who want tougher migration and law and order policies to regain political territory lost to the Reform U.K. party led by anti-immigration firebrand Nigel Farage.

Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman, a standard-bearer for the party's right, said Sunday she would not run. Braverman has urged the party to reach out

to Reform and welcome Farage into Conservative ranks.

Writing in the Daily Telegraph, she said Conservative colleagues were unwilling to listen to her, and had branded her "mad, bad and dangerous."

The Conservatives were kicked out by voters in a July 4 election that brought a Labour landslide, ending 14 years in power under five prime ministers. The Conservatives were reduced to 121 seats in the 650-seat House of Commons, their worst-ever result.

The Tories' turbulent years in office brought a series of economic shocks: years of spending cuts, Britain's exit from the European Union, a global pandemic and

Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It also brought self-inflicted wounds including the scandal-tarred tenure of Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the economic turmoil

unleashed by his successor Liz Truss.

The contest to replace former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will last more than three months. Sunak will remain acting leader until his successor is announced on Nov. 2. Conservative lawmakers will narrow the field down through a series of votes to four contenders, who will make pitches to members at the party's annual conference in early October. Lawmakers will then choose two final candidates, who will be put to an online vote of Conservative members across the country.

The party's last contested leadership selection, in mid-2022, saw members choose Truss over Sunak. Truss resigned after just 49 days in office when her tax-cutting plans rocked the financial markets and battered the value of the pound. (AP)



AFTER 8 MONTHS HALT Two-way traffic to resume on Umiam bridge today



SHILLONG, July 29: Meghalaya government has approved resumption of two-way traffic on the Umiam bridge starting Tuesday, following completion of repairs.

The Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) had initiated efforts to address structural concerns regarding the dam last December.

This included replacing bridge bearings, adjusting expansion joints, and incrementally raising the bridge structure by 5-10 mm to enhance stability.

Over the past eight months, traffic between Guwahati and Shillong was disrupted as only one-way traffic was permitted across the dam bridge, leading to extensive snarls on both sides.

"After extensive discussions by the high-powered committee on the repair and reopening of the bridge, we have decided to allow two-way traffic from Tuesday morning, restricted to vehicles carrying loads under 4 metric tons," Power Minister AT Mondal told PTI on Monday.

The committee meeting included district authorities, consultants from IIT-Guwahati, and Public Works Department officials. Mondal highlighted that the repairs included retrofitting the bridge and addressing issues above the spillway, totalling expenditures of ₹ 19.9 crore. He assured that ongoing minor tasks, such as repairing cracks in the upstream phase of the bridge, will not disrupt vehicle movement. (PTI)

NSCN-IM asks UNLF cadres to 'keep a tight rein'



AIZWAL, July 29: Three persons, including a woman, have been arrested and altogether 985 gm of heroin has been seized from their possession in separate incidents in Aizawl, Mizoram excise and narcotics department said in a statement.

A 35-year-old woman, identified as Lalbuatsaihi, was arrested in Durtlang locality on the northern outskirts of Aizawl on Wednesday and 131 gm of heroin seized from her possession, it said.

In Hunthar area, a 23-year-old man, identified as Lalmuansanga, was arrested and 775 gm of heroin seized from his possession, while 79 gm of heroin was seized from 43-year-old Lalsangliana in Chhingha Veng locality of the capital city.

They were booked under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act 1985. (PTI)

Nagaland schools observe Education Week

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, July 29: Schools all over Nagaland celebrated Skilling and Digital Initiatives Day on Day 5 of Shiksha Saptah (Education Week) to commemorate four years of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Various activities around skill-based learning and digital initiatives in both government and private schools marked the day.

The event aimed to raise awareness among students about various skilling options and encourage them to explore career paths beyond traditional academics and the various digital tools which can be incorporated to make the learning experience wholesome for students with a holistic approach.

An official event took place at Thinuovicha Memorial Government Higher Secondary School in Kohima district, showcasing a range of practical activities undertaken by students. These activities included raised-bed preparation and made soilless nurseries in seedling tray, which involved students learning about soil management and planting techniques, electrical wiring, where they gained hands-on experience in basic electrical installations, king chilli pickle preparation, offering insights into food preservation methods and paper bag-making, focusing on sustainable practices.

This event highlighted the students' engagement in vocational skills and practical learning, re-

'Can't issue clearance unless identification is cleared by country concerned' Rohingya infiltration serious issue in Tripura: MEA

AGARTALA, July 29: Infiltration, especially by Rohingya community people, from across the Bangladesh border has become a "very serious" issue, a Ministry of external affairs (MEA) official said here on Monday.

As many as 29 Bangladesh nationals with no valid travel documents were arrested in two places in Tripura since Saturday.

"Infiltration, especially Rohingya infiltration, has become a very serious issue. The presence of Rohingyas has been found in Hyderabad, Haryana and Kashmir. This is a threat to the security," MEA joint secretary Ankan Banerjee told the media.

"The infiltration issue is being discussed at the highest level. We want to push the illegal immigrants back but the MEA can't give clearance until the host country establishes their identification of nationality", he said.

When his attention was drawn



to a number of juvenile infiltrators being held up either in detention centres or jails due to the absence of a green signal from the MEA, Banerjee clarified in most cases, the infiltrators do not give correct information and the host country doesn't want them to return.

"The MEA is just an interven-

ing agency which can't issue clearance unless nationality identification is cleared by the country concerned," he said.

Banerjee also said that the MEA has been trying to expedite connectivity with the northeast and Kolkata through Bangladesh. "It is happening... We can't

force anyone. We have a very favourable government in Dhaka since 2009. This (connectivity) is a political issue. There was a massive protest in Bangladesh recently. I am sure all the pending issues will be addressed amicably by the highest leadership of both countries," he said.

Violence gripped Bangladesh recently and the government called in the army to quell protests against job quotas. The government in the neighbouring country on Monday officially acknowledged that 150 people were killed during the students' unrest.

Banerjee was in the Tripura capital to attend the 'Videsh Sampark Programme', an event organised by the MEA to bring the Centre and the states on a common platform for mutual benefits.

Tripura home secretary PK Chakravarty and DGP (Intelligence) Anrag Dhankar attended the programme. (PTI)

New Governor of Meghalaya to be sworn in today



SHILLONG, July 29: The new Governor of Meghalaya will be sworn on July 30 at Raj Bhavan here. Chief Justice of the Meghalaya High Court, S Vaidyanathan will administer the oath of office.

Two-time Mysuru MP and former minister CH Vijayashankar has been appointed as the Governor of Meghalaya. He is one of the six Governors appointed by President Droupadi Murmu, who also reshuffled three others late on Saturday. He will replace incumbent Governor Phagu Chauhan.

Lakshman Prasad Acharya has been made the Governor of Assam with the additional charge of Manipur while Gulab Chand Kataria has replaced Banwarilal Purohit as the governor of Punjab.

Acharya has replaced Kataria, who has also been appointed the administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh, according to a communique issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan. (NNN)

Methamphetamine tablets worth ₹ 61.9 cr seized in Mizoram

AIZAWL, July 29: Methamphetamine tablets worth ₹ 61.9 crore has been seized in Mizoram's Champhai district, Assam Rifles said in a statement.

Acting on a tip-off, Assam Rifles personnel conducted a raid in Zokhawthar village near the India-Myanmar border and seized 20.6 kg of Methamphetamine tablets on Sunday, it said.

The seized tablets were handed over to the state police for further legal proceedings, it added. (PTI)

Had no idea regarding appointment: New Telangana Governor

AGARTALA, July 29: Tripura's former deputy CM Jishnu Dev Varma said he had no idea regarding his appointment as the new governor of Telangana before he received calls from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the state's CM Revanth Reddy.

Dev Varma, who lost the assembly election last year from Charilam in Sepahijala district, said he was the first person from Tripura to be appointed the governor of a state.

"I was not aware of my appointment as the new governor of Telangana before PM Modi first called me on Saturday night. He told me that I have to work outside Tripura and I said that I was ready to perform whatever responsibility is given to me," the BJP leader told reporters on Sunday.

"Soon after, I received another call from Telangana CM Revanth Reddy who told me 'welcome to Telangana', and it was at that time I realised that I was going to Telangana as its new governor," he added.

Dev Varma said he would reach Telangana on July 31 and take oath as its governor on the same day.

"Earlier, I had discharged my duty as the deputy CM, which was a political post. Now, I am going to perform constitutional duties. I will work in coordination with the chief minister to ensure that Constitution functions appropriately," he said.

Dev Varma, a member of the state's former royal family, said his appointment to the post was a testament to the PM's care for Tripura.

"PM Modi visits Tripura even if there is no election. When I was the deputy CM holding portfolios such as



Finance, Rural Development and Power, the PM helped me. This is the first time that someone from Tripura is going to take oath as the governor of a state," he said. "Tripura is the state where I was born and brought up. I started my political career in this small state. Even if I have to leave for Telangana, I will try my best to help my state by exchanging views, sharing ideas and experience," he said. Dev Varma, who joined the BJP from the Congress in 1993, was appointed the new governor of Telangana on Saturday night. (PTI)

ANSAM condemns alleged harassment of student

SENAPATI, July 29: The All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM) strongly condemned the July 26 incident which occurred at Ocean Lounge, Khuman Lampak in Imphal around 9 pm. According to the ANSAM, one student identified as Leishithem Mangkung of Loushing village was "physically harassed by the armed gang with a gun at her work place and six others were mercilessly attacked with a gun and beaten severely injuring one among the six identified as Sochihan Hungyo of Kashung village and who has been hospitalized due to critical bullet wound on his head".

The Naga student body termed it as a "barbaric act of violence" against the innocent civilians. The ANSAM also said the "continual ill-famed activities of the armed gangs who are lawlessly operating in the capital city of Manipur, repeatedly and will-fully perpetrated towards the peace loving Nagas in the state of Manipur without sparing women and innocent students is antithetical in today's democratic society and highly condemnable by all concerned social organizations". (NNN)

Taxpayer interactive outreach programme

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, July 29: In a bid to make people financially literate, the office of the principal chief commissioner of income tax, North East Region (NER), Guwahati, on Monday held an interactive outreach programme at the conference hall of Mokokchung deputy commissioner.

Representatives from various NGOs, business community and entrepreneurs of Mokokchung district attended the programme.

Addressing the gathering, principal chief commissioner of income tax (NER), Chaitali Panmei, said even if the Section 10(26) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 provides for tax exemption to tribal of north east India, there is lot to learn about so that the people of the region becomes financially literate.

"Today, we are sowing the seed in Mokokchung but in few years' time the people will realise the impact and the importance of the interactive outreach programme held today and how it benefits the



people in their endeavour," she said.

In his address, Mokokchung deputy commissioner Thsuvisue Phoji said when it comes to income tax, almost all the people in the region, particularly in Mokokchung district are illiterate.

He said the programme is an eye opener and added that what

was learnt today would surely enlighten and benefit the people of the district in days to come.

Welcoming the officials of the income tax department led by its principal chief commissioner to the district, Phoji expressed his gratitude to the department for taking all the trouble in organising such a programme in the district.

Solution for displaced street vendors

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, on Monday, wrote a letter to the Mayor of Agartala Municipal Council, Dipak Majumdar, seeking immediate intervention for the indigenous vegetable sellers who were evicted from the Abhoynagar Bridge Area in Agartala. Pradyot who is also chairman of the Tipra Motha wrote, "I am writing to bring to your kind attention the pressing issue faced by local Indigenous Vegetable Sellers and Street Vendors of the Abhoynagar Bridge Area under the Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC). These sellers, who have been doing business in the area for over seven (7) years now, have become an integral part of the local market, but are now facing significant hardships. For the last six months, they have encountered threats and obstacles from various individuals and groups and their longstanding arrangement was recently disrupted, with their stalls being dismantled and directives issued to relocate elsewhere".

USTM & Assam State Zoo celebrates Tiger Day

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: The department of Zoology, University of Science & Technology Meghalaya (USTM) and Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden, Guwahati on Monday jointly celebrated International Tiger Day in the Assam state zoo premises to spread awareness and educate people about the apex predators of the system with the threats and issues they are facing.

The programme was attended by Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury, retd commissioner and secretary to the Government of Assam, Dr B K Das, pro vice-chancellor, USTM, Bhupen Talukdar deputy conservator of forests Govt of Assam, the students and faculty of the Department, students of PM Shri KV Khanapara and Zoo authorities and staff.

The inaugural address was given by Anwaruddin Choudhury with his prior and rich expertise on the present status and future of tigers in Assam. This was followed by a talk delivered by Bhupen Talukdar who highlighted the different species and trademark behaviour of tigers in their natural environment.

The expert opinions were followed by



the address from B K Das who conveyed the social responsibility of USTM towards conserving the habits and habitats of fauna in and around the region. He also spoke on the productivity and outcome of the programme and how it would benefit society.

An awareness rally was held with all the invited students of Kendriya Vidyalaya Khanapara and of the Department of Zoology, USTM with slogans

on placards to showcase the importance and issues of rhinos and wildlife in general. Drawing and quiz competitions were also organized by the department on zoo premises for the school students and the general public for which certificates and prizes were distributed at the spot. A wonderful street play was enacted by the students of the Department of Zoology which stressed the threats & conservation of tigers.

Asked why no Meitei Mayek script on signboards: ANBA

IMPHAL, July 29: The All Naga Business Association, Imphal (ANBA), said recently that it received numerous reports from Naga shopkeepers operating in Imphal stating that some executive members of the Meitei Erol Eyeek Loinasillo Apunba Lup (MEELAL) have approached them, demanding to know why the Meitei Mayek script is not mentioned or written on their signboards. Furthermore, MEELAL executive members have been summoning these shopkeepers to their office for not including the Meitei Mayek script on their

signboards, the ANBA alleged. "India recognizes many official local languages and scripts from various states, as included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. However, neither the State Government nor the Central Government, nor any civil society organizations have imposed any language or script as compulsory. Such actions by MEELAL are arbitrary, unconstitutional, and amount to mental harassment, which is against the law of the land," it added. (NNN)

PUBLIC NOTICE

No. SSA/Esst/Engagement/DPE&FAO/274/2024/1326

In pursuant to the advertisement published vide No. SSA-17044/1/2022-Establishment-SSA/1/462198/2024, it is for general information to all concerned that the interview for the post of District Project Engineer under Samagra Shiksha Axom scheduled to be held at 9.30 am onwards on 30.07.2024 is hereby postponed & rescheduled and will be held on 06.08.2024 at 9.30 am.



Sd/-Officer on Special Duty
Samagra Shiksha Axom
Kahilpara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog /DF/673/24/30-Jul-24

CBI files final charge sheet in excise policy case against Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, July 29: Concluding its probe in the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, the CBI on Monday filed its final charge sheet in the case against Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and five others, including AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak, officials said.

The federal probe agency had earlier filed a main charge sheet and four supplementaries in the case in which former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, Telangana MLC K Kavitha and 15 others have also been charged.

It said the charge sheet filed on Monday is the final one in the case.

The CBI has named Kejriwal, AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak, non-executive director of Aurobindo Pharma P Sarath Chandra Reddy, director of Buddy Retail Pvt Ltd Amit Arora, alleged hawala operator Vinod Chauhan and businessman Ashish Mathur as accused.

The probe agency has alleged that liquor businessman Magunta Sreenivasulu Reddy (now a TDP MP) met Kejriwal on March 16, 2021, at his office in the Delhi Secretariat.



Reddy allegedly requested Kejriwal to provide support in his liquor business in the national capital by tweaking the Excise Policy 2021-22 which was then in the making, the CBI said in its charge sheet against K Kavitha.

Kejriwal assured support to Reddy and asked him to contact the accused K Kavitha as she was working with

his team on the Excise Policy of Delhi, the CBI has alleged.

The Delhi chief minister, in turn, allegedly told Reddy to provide funds to his Aam Aadmi Party, the probe agency has alleged.

The CBI also claimed that kickbacks of around ₹90-100 crore were paid in advance to some politicians of the ruling AAP in Delhi and other

public servants by some persons in the liquor business from South India through co-accused Vijay Nair, Abhishek Boimpally and Dinesh Arora to tweak the 2021-22 Excise Policy.

The agency had alleged that these kickbacks are found to have been returned to them subsequently out of the profit margins of wholesalers holding L-1 licenses through different modes, like issuance of excess credit notes, bank transfers, and outstanding amounts left in accounts of the companies controlled, by some conspirators from the South lobby.

The CBI had alleged that a cartel was formed between three stakeholders of the said policy -- liquor manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers -- by violating provisions and against the spirit of the policy.

All the conspirators allegedly played active roles in achieving the illegal objectives of the said criminal conspiracy. It resulted in huge losses to the exchequer and undue pecuniary benefits to the public servants and other accused involved in the conspiracy, the CBI has alleged. (PTI)

No politics over IAS aspirants' death, states must supervise coaching centres' functioning: Pradhan

Government is ready for any kind of discussion on the education system



NEW DELHI, July 29: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Monday said there are clear guidelines for running coaching centres and it is the duty of the state governments to supervise their functioning.

Taking part in a short debate in the Rajya Sabha over the death of three students due to flooding of the basement of a UPSC coaching centre in Delhi's Old Rajinder Nagar following heavy rains on July 27, he termed the incident unfortunate and said there should be no politics over it.

Nothing would compensate for the loss the bereaved families have suffered, Pradhan said.

"We must fix responsibility so that such incidents do not recur," he said, adding, "There should be no politics... Negligence has happened and someone has to take responsibility so that a solution can be found."

Stressing that education is in the concurrent list and is the responsibility of the Centre as well as the state, Pradhan said the coaching centres have responsibilities too.

The Government of India sent advisories related to coaching centres to the states and Union Territories in 2017, 2019, 2020 and 2024, the Union education minister said.

The advisories suggest "registration of coaching centre and minimum standards for that, what kind of safeguards it should take for students and continuous monitoring, including levying penalty if someone goes against it"

Some states such as Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Manipur have their own regulations.

"Considering this, the government in January 2024 sent an advisory to states. That is already in public. Had the state governments followed it, this unfortunate incident would not have happened," Pradhan said while asserting that it is the states' duty to implement it.

It would not be appropriate for the state governments to move away

from their responsibilities, he said in the Rajya Sabha.

Pradhan said that the government is ready for any kind of discussion on the education system. "We don't have anything to hide," he asserted.

Some people think they are experts in constitutional matters, he said, adding the Supreme Court has already given its order on NEET and the government is ready to discuss the issue in detail in the Upper House.

Slamming the UPA government for not implementing the Public Examination Malpractices Bill, 2010, Pradhan said the present government has brought the law into force.

Cited incidents of paper leaks across states, the Union education minister told the House that "we all need to move forward" and the "coaching centres have to follow the rules."

"There is clarity on the law governing the coaching centres. States will have to follow it, they will have to take responsibility," Pradhan said.

He also sought constructive suggestions from the members regarding the issues. "This government is transparent and focused on taking the country to greater heights," he added.

Cutting across party lines, the members demanded strict action against erring government officials and even representatives for allowing illegal coaching centres to flourish.

Describing the coaching industry as "mafia", CPI member Sandosh Kumar P noted that there is a mismatch in the quality of education being imparted in schools, colleges and coaching centres.

This mismatch is leading to the mushrooming of coaching centres, he claimed and sought a white paper on the state of coaching centres across the country.

Harish Beeran of the IUML sought setting up a regulator to oversee the functioning of coaching centres.

While BJP MP Ram Chander Jangra sought concrete measures so that incidents like the Old Rajinder Nagar one did not recur anywhere in the country, the AAP's Swati Malwal blamed rampant corruption for the spread of coaching centres and sought strict police action against government officials and public representatives of the area.

M Thambidurai of the AIADMK sought a ban on coaching centres while Priyanka Chaturvedi of Shiv Sena (UBT) demanded a serious discussion on the matter.

Asserting that the country doesn't need a parallel education system, NCP MP Fauzia Khan said it is a matter of introspection that coaching classes have become an alternative to schools and colleges.

Mahua Maji of the JMM said private and public schools need to have the same standard of education while Samajwadi party MP Jaya Bachchan asked political parties to rise above petty politics over such matters.

Ramji of BSP batted for tough actions by the Centre and state governments to prevent the recurrence of such incidents and YSRCP MP V Vijay Sai Reddy said coaching centres would not be required if the education standard was better in the country.

There is a need to ban coaching centres or bring in a regulator for maintaining the standard of education, he said while demanding that accountability be fixed in the coaching centre flooding incident in Delhi that killed three students and strict action be taken against erring officials.

Manoj Jha of the RJD described the death of the IAS aspirants as "murder" and alleged that the coaching institutes have become so powerful that they now claim the ability to rig any exam.

"This is become a country of accidents. This issue has become BJP versus AAP. Even death is dividing us," he said.

Surender Singh Nagar of BJP said people responsible for the death of students at the coaching centre should be punished and sought to know why no action has been taken by the Delhi government against erring officials.

Senior police officials said the coaching centre's basement got flooded mainly because the civic authority failed to clear the roadside drain before the onset of Monsoon and there was no provision for draining out water at the basement where a library was running illegally.

The IAS aspirants who died in the incident have been identified as Shreya Yadav (25) of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, Tanya Soni (25) from Telangana and Nevin Delvin (24) from Ernakulam in Kerala. (PTI)

Tiger, and not lion, is the king of jungle, says MP CM Yadav

BHOPAL, July 29: Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Monday contended that the tiger, and not the lion, is the king of jungle in true sense as it is stronger, more courageous and agile than the latter.

Addressing a function to mark International Tiger Day, he maintained that lions are "lazy to earn and eat" and hence do not deserve the coveted title associated with them. "Usually, people consider the lion as the king of the jungle but they do injustice. The lion is not the king of the jungle, it is the tiger. If you look at the nature of the lion, it takes care of family but is lazy in earning (killing prey). It is not able to earn on its own," Yadav said.

Yadav noted the lion eats after someone from its family has killed the prey. "After someone else from its family hunts, the lion comes to eat prey first. I am against this culture. We should have 'parakram' and 'purusharth' (courage and endeavour), which is exhibited by the tiger by hunting and eating its own prey," Yadav argued.

The Chief Minister said general perception is that the lion will go after a deer baby or old ones in a herd, while the tiger will hunt the healthiest one among them due to its muscularity.

"I ask (people) in jest why they (lions) behave in such a way. They reply they are able to catch the baby or old (deer) easily. I say they are not catching (the deer) for sports but for food. People like eating 'thali' (platter) with healthy food. Isn't it? Tigers see who is the healthiest one though it needs hard work," he said.

Yadav pointed out that Madhya Pradesh, besides being a "tiger state" (it is home to highest number of big cats the country), also enjoys a distinct place in Asia's wildlife map as it houses cheetahs, too.

He said more than 25 lakh tourists visit Madhya Pradesh's seven tiger reserves every year.

Yadav said cheetahs and tigers roam freely in Sheopur, which houses the Kuno National Park (KNP), and since it is a border district, these animals also venture into neighbouring Rajasthan. (PTI)

CM Siddaramaiah accuses Nirmala Sitharaman of 'lying'

BJP trying to taint Karnataka as 'corrupt state': CM

MYSURU, July 29: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday accused Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman of "lying" as he targeted her and the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre for meeting out "injustice" to the State in the recent Union Budget. He alleged that the BJP was trying to taint the Congress-ruled Karnataka as a "corrupt state."

The Chief Minister also said that he and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar will be travelling to New Delhi as they have been called by the Congress high command to "discuss the party and the government" but did not elaborate.

"Pre-budget meeting was called, we had said there that you (Centre) have said that you will give Rs 5,300 crore for the Upper Bhadra project. Is it there in the Budget? It is not given. The fifteenth finance commission in its report has recommended Rs 5,495 crore as special grants, is it there? It was said that Rs 3,000 crore will be given for the peripheral ring road (in Bengaluru). It was promised to give Rs 3,000 crore for development of water bodies, is it there (in the budget)?" Siddaramaiah asked.

Speaking to reporters here, he said: "None of these are in the budget, is it not injustice? (grants) have been given to Andhra and Bihar, what is given to Karnataka? Union Ministers H D Kumaraswamy and Nirmala Sitharaman could have at least said that they will make efforts to ensure Karnataka gets (its due)."

The chief minister was responding to a question on Sitharaman on Sunday dismissing his allegation that Karnataka did not get its due share in the budget this year. She had claimed there was a lot of mis-information being spread about fund allocation. Sitharaman had also alleged that because of the "worsening law and order situation (in Karnataka), industries are scared and they want to get out.

Siddaramaiah said: "Has any new industry come to his (Kumaraswamy's) Mandya constituency? Has any industrial corridor come to the state? No Mokedatu (project), no industry, the grants we had sought had not come, we had sought for AIIMS in Raichur, IIT for Hassan or Mysuru -- has it happened? What has she (Sitharaman) given to say that no injustice has happened," he added. Initiating the discussion on the Motion of Thanks on President's Address, Thakur said the Lok Sabha elections have kept those against the Constitution in the Opposition benches for the third time. While congratulating Gandhi on becoming the Leader of Opposition, Thakur said the Congress leader now has power with responsibility and "absentee landlordism will not work". For the last many years, Gandhi was enjoying power without responsibility, Thakur said and asserted that it

was an "agnipariksha" for the Congress leader now.

"Whenever Nirmala Sitharaman has come (to Karnataka), she has lied," Siddaramaiah said. "She has lied in the past too, even now she is lying. She claims to have given funds/grants for the state, do you know Karnataka is the state that has faced most injustice in the fifteenth financial commission, despite her representing the state as the Rajya Sabha member."

She has alleged industries are going to other states from Karnataka, Siddaramaiah said and asked: "do you know that there is a 31 per cent drop in FDI coming to the country, it is because of whom? It is because of policies and programmes; who makes policies and programmes? It is Mrs Nirmala Sitharaman, who is the finance Minister of the country."

Maharashtra is number one in tax collection, Karnataka is number two -- "what is that contribution we have not given?" the Chief Minister said. Noting that he had boycotted the NITI Aayog meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week in protest against the injustice meted out to the state in the Union Budget, Siddaramaiah said: "not just me, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and several other non-BJP Chief Ministers have also not attended, except West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee -- she too had walked out of the meeting, as she was not given time to speak." (PTI)

Owaisi expresses discontent over govt's treatment of Muslims

NEW DELHI, July 29: Lok Sabha MP Asaduddin Owaisi on Monday expressed dissatisfaction with the government's treatment of the Muslim community, highlighting the alleged lack of focus on Muslims in Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget speech. During a discussion in the Lok Sabha on the Union Budget, Owaisi criticised the government's approach to inclusion and equity and accused it of treating Muslims as "untouchables".

"During the budget speech, the finance minister mentioned four communities, but I want to ask, are there no poor, young people, farmers, or women among the 17 crore Muslims in this country?" Owaisi said. "Muslims are the poorest in this beloved

nation with Muslim women facing the highest rate of deprivation," the president of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen said.

Sharing data to back his claims, Owaisi said only 29 per cent of Muslims aged between 15 and 24 years have access to education, compared to 44 per cent of Scheduled Castes, 51 per cent of Hindu OBCs, and 59 per cent of Hindu upper castes.

"In higher education, Muslim enrolment is just 5 per cent," he noted, citing Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data from 2018-19 to 2022-23. The Hyderabad MP also highlighted the "economic struggles" of Muslims, saying while 58.4 per cent of

them are self-employed, the community has the lowest representation in regular wage employment at 15 per cent, and the highest in casual labour at 26 per cent. "Muslim youth are not getting jobs or educational opportunities," Owaisi stressed.

"The government considers Muslims untouchables, denying them political representation and a share in the country's progress," he said. Owaisi condemned the government for reducing the Ministry of Minority Affairs' budget from ₹5,000 crore to ₹3,000 crore. He said the marginal increase for the ministry in this year's budget was a sign of the government's bad faith and false commitments. (PTI)

Ready to discuss Mokedatu project implementation with TN, says Karnataka CM

MYSURU, July 29: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said his government was ready to discuss with Tamil Nadu regarding implementation of Mokedatu project across river Cauvery, but the neighbouring state was not coming forward despite it not "causing any problem to them".

If the Centre gives necessary permissions, the State is ready to implement the project, he told reporters here. Siddaramaiah along with Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, several Ministers and officials today offered 'bagina' (traditional thanksgiving) to river Cauvery at Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) dam in Srirangapatna taluk in Mandya district. It is customary to offer a 'bagina' to the rivers in the state, when the dams are filled to their maximum capacity.

"We are ready to discuss. Despite Mokedatu not causing any problem to them (Tamil Nadu), they are not ready to discuss. If the central government gives permission we are ready to construct the Mokedatu reservoir," Siddaramaiah said.

He was responding to a question on whether he will hold discussions with Tamil Nadu or the Centre for a "concrete programme" as a lot of water is flowing into the sea, with Mettur dam in Tamil Nadu expected to fill up in a couple of days.

Later speaking at an event, Siddaramaiah said: "Mokedatu is our right, the reservoir will be constructed in the state...Tamil Nadu is unnecessarily creating a dispute"

During the normal year when there are good rains and KRS and other dams in the Cauvery river basin region are filled, 177.25 tmcft of water has to be released by the state, he said.

"In 2022-23, about 665 tmc water has flown (to TN), there is possibility for more water to flow this year too; already more 83 tmc water has flown," he said, adding, the Supreme Court has prescribed the quantum of water to be released every month during a normal year, "but during deficit or distress year, we will not be able to give that much water."

Noting that surplus water that flows to Tamil Nadu flows into sea as Mettur dam is also filled, the Chief Minister said the surplus water can be stored by a balancing reservoir at Mokedatu.

"It will benefit Tamil Nadu more than us. Despite that for the sake of politics they keep raising up issues. So far the central government has not given clearance for the project," he said, as he hit out at the opposition BJP and JD(S) and



Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy for not getting clearance for the Mokedatu project. The Mokedatu project will help us store 65 tmc water, also generate power and provide drinking water for Bengaluru, Siddaramaiah said, adding, the stored water can be used to provide water to Tamil Nadu during the distress years. Shivakumar, who is also the Water Resources Minister, had recently made a passionate appeal to the Tamil Nadu government to cooperate with the implementation of the Mokedatu project, stating that it would be more beneficial to the neighbouring State.

Mokedatu is a multi-purpose (drinking water and power) project proposed by Karnataka, which involves building a balancing reservoir near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district (now renamed as Bengaluru South district).

Tamil Nadu has been opposing the project, raising apprehensions that the state would be affected if the project takes shape.

The project, once completed, is aimed at ensuring drinking water to Bengaluru and neighbouring areas (4.75 tmcft); it also can generate 400 MW power, and the estimated cost of the project is Rs 9,000 crore (2019 rates), according to Karnataka officials. A separate Project Division and two Sub-Divisions have already been set up to implement the ambitious 'Mokedatu Balancing Reservoir and drinking water project of Cauvery river' valley, Siddaramaiah had said, presenting the state budget in February.

"A survey to identify land that will be submerged under this project and the counting process of trees have already been initiated," he had also said, adding, "action will be taken on priority to commence the work early after obtaining remaining necessary clearances from the competent authorities." (PTI)

India lost 528 elephants due to 'unnatural causes' in 5 years, most from electrocution: Govt

NEW DELHI, July 29: India lost 528 elephants in the last five years due to unnatural causes, including poaching, poisoning, electrocution, and train accidents, the government informed Parliament on Monday.

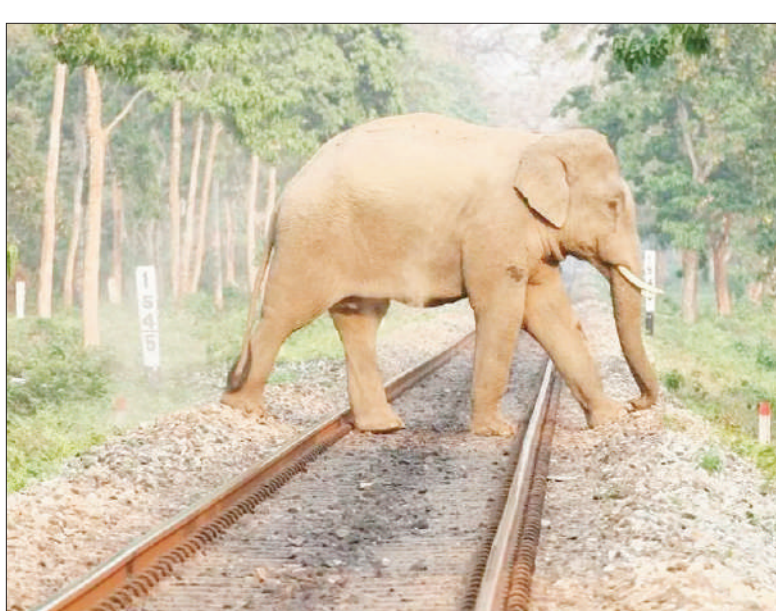
In response to a question by BJP MPs Jayanta Kumar Roy and Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo, Union Minister of State for Environment Kirti Vardhan Singh told the Lok Sabha that 392 elephants died from electrocution and 73 were killed in train accidents during this period.

Fifty elephants were killed by poachers and 13 succumbed to poisoning, he said.

According to the government data tabled in the Lok Sabha, 71 elephants died due to electrocution in Odisha, 55 in Assam, 52 in Karnataka, 49 in Tamil Nadu, 32 in Chhattisgarh, 30 in Jharkhand, and 29 in Kerala.

Assam and Odisha recorded 22 and 16 elephant deaths in train accidents. Poachers killed 17 pachyderms in Odisha, 14 in Meghalaya, and 10 in Tamil Nadu.

Ten elephants were poisoned in Assam, two in Chhattisgarh, and one in



West Bengal. According to the last elephant census conducted in 2017, India has 29,964 elephants, which is around 60 per cent of their global population.

Data presented in Parliament last week revealed that human-elephant conflict resulted in 2,853 human deaths in India over the last five years, with the number of fatalities reaching a five-year high of

628 in 2023.

"Elephants caused" 587 human deaths in 2019, 471 in 2020, 557 in 2021, 610 in 2022, and 628 in 2023.

The data revealed that Odisha recorded 624 such deaths during this period, Jharkhand 474, West Bengal 436, Assam 383, Chhattisgarh 303, Tamil Nadu 256, Karnataka 160, and Kerala 124.

The minister said the management of wildlife habitats is primarily the responsibility of state governments and Union Territory administrations.

He said the central government provides financial and technical support under the centrally sponsored scheme 'Project Tiger & Elephant' for the protection of animals, their habitats and corridors, addressing human-animal conflict, and for the welfare of captive elephants.

In February 2021, the ministry issued an advisory on dealing with human-wildlife conflict, recommending coordinated inter-departmental action, identification of conflict hotspots, adherence to standard operating procedures, and establishment of rapid response teams. (PTI)

Education ministry notifies guidelines for bagless days for classes 6-8

NEW DELHI, July 29: The Union education ministry on Monday notified guidelines for implementation of bagless days for classes 6-8 and making learning in schools more joyful, experiential and stress-free.

The guidelines, developed by PSS Central Institute of Vocational Education, a unit of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), were released on the fourth anniversary of the new National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. The NEP, 2020, had recommended that all students in classes 6-8 participate in a 10-day bagless period.

"The idea behind 10 bagless days is to make them an integral part of the teaching learning process rather than an add-on to the existing scheme of studies of education from classes 6-8. It will not only reduce the boundaries between the bookish knowledge and application of knowledge but also expose children to the skill requirements in the work areas, thus helping them to decide the future career path," the guidelines stated.

"Every student will take a fun course during classes 6-8 that gives a survey and hands-on experience of a sampling of important vocational craft such as carpentry, electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, etc, as decided by states and local communities and as mapped by local skilling needs," they added.

The ministry said all students would participate in the 10-day bagless period sometime during classes 6-8 during which they would interact with local vocational experts such as carpenters, gardeners, potters, etc.

"Ten bagless days activities can be accommodated in any number of slots in an annual calendar. But it is advisable to keep two or three slots. While developing an annual work plan, all subject teachers may be involved. If necessary, indoor and outdoor activities may be clubbed in a day," the guidelines stated.

Visit and survey of vegetable markets; charity visits; survey and report writing on pet care; doodling, kite making and flying; organising a book fair; sitting under a banyan tree; and visiting a biogas plant and solar energy park are among the recommended activities in the NCERT guidelines.



lines.

Among other initiatives launched on the NEP anniversary were dedicated TV channels to facilitate learning of various Indian languages; a Tamil channel; primers for early graders in 25 Indian languages; career guidance guidelines; National Mission for Mentoring and National Professional Standards for Teachers in braille and audiobooks; school innovation marathon by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and a book on graduation attributes and professional competencies.

Four books and lecture notes aimed at promoting Indian knowledge systems among students and teachers were also launched.

"The four-year journey of NEP, 2020, has been about bringing in transformative change in the country's education system for nurturing a

new generation of learners. NEP, 2020, stands as a symbol of hope for transforming the learning landscape, harnessing the country's demographic dividend, empowering the population and driving socio-economic development," Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said in a message.

"Implementation of NEP has made learning more vibrant and guided in making the country's education more futuristic, rooted, global and outcome-oriented," he added.

The Akhil Bharatiya Siksha Samagam has been conceptualised as an event to celebrate the adoption of NEP, 2020, to reinvigorate the commitment of various stakeholders for its effective implementation and to realise the collective strength for achievement of shared goals through collaborative efforts. (PTI)

Odisha to set up world's first black tiger safari by end of this year: PCCF

BHUBANESWAR/BARIPADA, July 29: Odisha is poised to unveil the world's first melanistic (black) tiger safari near Similipal Tiger Reserve in Mayurbhanj district by the end of this year, a top forest official said on Monday.

The state government's proposal for the safari has received "in-principle" approval from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), with the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) already granting its endorsement, Susanta Nanda, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, said.

Initially, melanistic tigers currently housed at Nandan Kanan Zoo in Bhubaneswar will be relocated to the proposed safari, spanning 200 hectares adjacent to NH-18.

Official sources said the safari will be established over an area of 200 hectare. Approximately 100 hectares will be dedicated to the display area, while the remainder will accommodate veterinary facilities, a rescue centre, staff infrastructure, and visitor amenities. Located 15 km from Similipal Tiger Reserve, the site mirrors its natural landscape.

Similipal Tiger Reserve is globally renowned as the sole habitat where wild melanistic tigers are found.

This initiative aims to bolster wildlife tourism in Odisha, offering a unique opportunity for conservationists, researchers, enthusiasts, and the public to observe this rare species up close.

In January, former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had unveiled



plans for the melanistic tiger safari near Similipal. Nanda emphasised the significance of protecting Odisha's forests as crucial corridors for tiger populations migrating from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

In a post on X, Nanda said, "Tigers are roaring back in Similipal Tiger Reserve- the one & the only place in the world to host the famed wild melanistic tigers. Let's protect our gem. Odisha forests were & is a sink to source populations from MP & Maharashtra. Let's protect the corridors for them to populate."

According to the first All Odisha Tiger Estimation (AOTE) 2023-24, the population of Royal Bengal Tigers has increased to 30 in the past two years in the state.

The All India Tiger Estimation (AITE) 2022 report, however, had put the number at 17 and these were largely confined to Similipal.

A total of 27 adult tigers were camera-trapped in Odisha during the AOTE exercise. These big cats

comprise 14 females and 13 males. Proof of another three adult tigers was also found in the tiger reserve, the officials said.

In Baripada, the district headquarters of Mayurbhanj, International Tiger Day 2024 was commemorated with a 5-km mini-marathon organised by Similipal North Wildlife Division, Jashipur. The event began with a floral tribute to Late Khairi, the Princess Tigress of Similipal, and drew 105 participants from various schools and colleges under the theme "Run for Similipal."

The marathon route stretched from Khairi Niwas to Guili Siva temple, concluding at the Deputy Director's office of Similipal North Wildlife Division.

Following the marathon, a brief meeting was held to enhance awareness among participants and the public about community engagement in wildlife, forest conservation, and environmental preservation, according to an official release. (PTI)

HMIL holds placement drive for 403 students across nine states

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 29: Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) announced employment opportunities for 403 students from ITIs and polytechnic institutes across nine Indian states, at its dealer network. HMIL offers a special skill development program and further helps students get meaningful employment opportunities in its wide network. The recent recruitment drive was conducted across Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Telangana, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

"Committed to Hyundai's global vision of 'Progress for Humanity', HMIL aims to enrich lives and empower dreams of India's youth and build a better Bharat. Through this initiative, HMIL helps create an ecosystem for students ensuring industry-ready skill development, exposure to latest technologies, on-the-job training, and employment opportunity at the completion of the course", a statement said. As part of the program, Hyundai Motor India Foundation (HMIF), the CSR arm of HMIL has invested in improving the tie-up facilities by fulfilling various needs of the institutes to ensure that students receive the necessary resources, quality education and the much-needed exposure to latest technology.

Tarun Garg, director and COO, said, "HMIL is committed to India and we take pride in supporting Government of India's 'Skill India' initiative. The recent program ensures that students are trained in the latest technologies and are ready to contribute from day one of their job. HMIL plans to train more youth across the country, so as to help them earn a respectable livelihood."

HMIL has a tie-up with 76 government ITIs and polytechnic institutes, and has been providing study material on latest advancements in the automotive industry and automobile technology, alongside on-the-job training to students, with the aim to upskill and enhance their skillsets.

'Child brides in schools common, we can do little,' teachers in Rajasthan village

KOTA (RAJASTHAN), July 29: There was little disbelief among students of a government school here when two of their mates came bearing the signs of a newlywed bride. Teachers suspected the obvious, but chose to overlook.

Rani and Pinki (name changed), aged 15 and 16, were married at their home with full fanfare in Hanuman ji Ka Jhoda village on July 15, two days before the annual wedding season would expire.

The two sisters, belonging to an Other Backward Caste, study in class 9 and 10 in a government school in Hindoli area of Bundi district.

Years after the rule of law was enshrined in our polity, child marriages continue to take place in villages of Rajasthan.

For instance, it is not uncommon here to witness the husband or some member of the in-laws' family dropping the little bride on a motorbike to school.

"Being the elder aunt (tai) of the girls, I did the 'kanyadaan' of Rani, one of the two child-brides," Rukamani Bai (name changed), who works as a househelp in Bundi city, told PTI.

Rukamani Bai had taken four days' leave from work to attend the weddings of her two nieces and shopped for gifts worth around Rs 10,000 for them. One of the teachers of a government school on condition of anonymity said they do notice some girl suddenly one day coming wearing sindoor and colourful bangles, but they can do little about it.

"Sometimes girls in the class are heard whispering about their mate's wedding. The bride usually either shies away or avoids the question by turning her face to the other side," he said.

The teacher said complaining to authorities yields little once the marriage has already happened, and one always risks inviting the locals' wrath who may respond by taking the girl out of school. (PTI)

'Jalabhishek' in Shiva temples on second Monday of Shravan

VARANASI/AYODHYA/PRAYAGRAJ, July 29: A large number of devotees performed 'Jalabhishek' -- a ritual where they offer water to the deity -- in Shiva temples across Uttar Pradesh on the second Monday of the holy month of Shravan.

Devotees offered prayers at Varanasi's Kashi Vishwanath temple, Siddhanath temple in Ayodhya and Shiva temple in Prayagraj.

"Shravan is a very sacred month during which devotees come and perform 'Jalabhishek' etc," Nishant Mishra, a devotee said in Varanasi.

People gathered in large numbers at the Siddhapeeth Nageshwar Nath temple in the holy city of Ayodhya, starting in the early hours of the day, to offer water to Lord Shiva.

They appreciated the arrangements made by the administration to manage the crowd.

"There is a huge crowd but the management is really

good. It looked as if it would be difficult to offer prayers, but they made very good arrangements to manage the crowd," said a devotee.

In Prayagraj, devotees were seen offering water to Lord Shiva in temples throughout the city.

Barricades were installed, and police forces deployed at the Mankameshwar Mahadev temple to ensure security.

"People come from far away to visit Shri Mankameshwar Mandir. Today is the second Monday of Shravan, so there is a long queue. Everyone's wishes get fulfilled here, especially of those who come with a true heart. Bholenath is present here," Anju Jaiswal, a devotee said.

The Dudheshwar temple in Ghaziabad also witnessed a large influx of devotees to offer prayers and seek Lord Shiva's blessings. The holy month of Shravan commenced on July 22, with Shravan Shivratni expected to be celebrated on August 2. (PTI)

Classroom construction irregularities 24 Delhi PWD engineers served show cause notices

NEW DELHI, July 29: Twenty-four public works department engineers have been served show cause notices by the vigilance directorate over alleged violations and irregularities related to construction of Delhi government school classrooms, officials said on Monday.

Notices were served to each of the engineers by the Directorate of Vigilance (DoV) on July 26 and they were given 14 days to submit their replies, the officials said.

In 2016, the public works department (PWD) had highlighted that due to building byelaws and scarcity of space for offset of services, around 119 classrooms could not be constructed in various schools.

"This, prima facie, reflects that a detailed study was not conducted by the PWD while submitting preliminary estimates as to whether land was available for construction, the soil had load-bearing capacity and whether appropriate approval from local authori-

ties had been taken," read the notices.

In the notices, it was stated that a survey conducted by the PWD, before preparing the list of schools where additional classrooms were to be constructed, was an "eyewash" and tenders were floated "without assessing the actual requirements of works" to be undertaken.

The DoV notices also claimed that the cost of construction increased by more than Rs 326 crore in the name of incorporating "richer specifications", without the approval of the council of ministers and without calling for fresh tenders.

The complaints of irregularities were also examined by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), and in its report, it said 1,214 toilet blocks were constructed against the requirement of 160, causing an extra expenditure of Rs 37 crore, according to the notices.

The DoV also claimed that the PWD minister's office had initially advised the department's nodal officer to keep

the construction cost within Rs 1,200 per square feet, but records show it reached Rs 2,292, much above the cost-ceiling.

The engineers who have been served the notices include the then engineer-in-chief, who also held the post of secretary in the PWD, a chief engineer, a superintending engineer, a chief project manager and 20 executive engineers, officials said.

In April 2015, the then education secretary proposed construction of additional classrooms in Delhi government schools, in view of high student-classroom ratio.

In May of the same year, the education secretary wrote to his counterpart in the PWD to carry out a survey and prepare an estimate.

The DoV said that instead of submitting a single consolidated estimate, the PWD submitted 16 preliminary estimates, thereby splitting the project of Rs 1033.73 crore that was further split into 63 tenders. (PTI)

Penguin to publish English translation of Kampan's Ramayana



NEW DELHI, July 29: Penguin Random House India (PRHI) on Monday announced the publication of the first complete multi-volume English translation of "Kamba Ramayana", a Tamil version of the epic Ramayana by 12th-century poet Kampan.

The monumental project, undertaken by six scholars and translators of the Tamil language, is expected to be released between 2028-30.

Widely considered as the Tamil literary tradition's greatest poet, Kampan's Ramayana is celebrated for its innovative use of language, the psychological depth of its characters, and its profound engagement with

themes of power, truth, and divinity.

The six books of Kampan's Ramayana, consisting of 42,000 lines of verse, will be divided into seven volumes along with an introductory volume -- "Volume 1: Bala"; "Volume 2: Ayodhya"; "Volume 3: Aranya"; "Volume 4: Kiskindha"; "Volume 5: Sundara"; and "Volume 6 and 7: Yuddha Part 1 and 2".

The team of noted scholars and translators include Shiv Subramaniam from Emory University, professor David Shulman from Hebrew University, professor Whitney Cox from University of Chicago, independent scholar Jennifer

Clare, professor Archana Venkatesan from UC Davis and Aniruddhan Vasudevan from Princeton University.

"The 12th-century poet, Kampan, created a Tamil Ramayana in 10,000 verses, each of them a miracle. His work encompasses and gives voice to an entire civilisation, its landscapes, its people, its primary values, profound emotions, and visions of the world.

"We are thrilled that Penguin will be publishing an English translation of the entire text in individual volumes by a close-knit team of six translator-scholars. This will be the first complete, fully annotated, literary translation of Kampan into a Western language," professors Venkatesan and Shulman, who also serve as the volume editors and the authors of the introductory volume, said in a statement.

The influence of Kampan's Ramayana extends far beyond Tamil Nadu, and impacts literary traditions in Kerala, parts of the Indian peninsula, and even Southeast Asia.

According to the publisher, despite its vast influence, a "reliable and complete English translation of the text has been long overdue", largely due to its immense size. (PTI)

Court dismisses bail plea of 'kingpin' in 2022 JKSSB SI exam paper leak case

JAMMU, July 29: A special court here on Monday rejected the bail application of the alleged 'kingpin' in 2022 JKSSB sub-inspector recruitment exam paper leak case, saying "money laundering is a serious threat not only to financial system of the country but also to the global economy at large".

The alleged mastermind Yatin Yadav (43), a resident of Haryana's Rewari area, was arrested by the Directorate of Enforcement, Jammu under criminal sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on July 24 and is presently under judicial custody.

The Jammu and Kashmir Service Selection Board (JKSSB) sub-inspector recruitment exam was held on March 27, 2022 but the selected list of 1,200 candidates along with 1,300 junior engineers and 1,000 finance account assistants was cancelled by the Jammu and Kashmir administration in July following allegations of paper leak and malpractice.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which was handed over the case, had already filed a chargesheet against 33 accused, including Yadav, on November 12, 2022. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) case stems from the CBI FIR.

Hearing the bail plea of the accused, Bala Jyoti, Special Judge, Anti-corruption (CBI cases), Jammu,

said the court is of the firm opinion that the application being devoid of any legal force and premature is not maintainable at this stage as the investigation is incomplete and at its infancy, besides many important witnesses are yet to be examined by the ED. Special Public Prosecutor Ashwani Khajuria representing the ED vehemently opposed the bail plea and said the applicant has indulged in serious offences of money laundering whereby he is the kingpin of the 'gang' indulging in the paper leakage of the government competitive exams against the monetary payments.

"Moreover, in the ongoing investigation under the PMLA, Yadav's monetary, transactions have surfaced relating to smuggling out the paper, arranging the stay of the candidates in 'Karnal', adjustment of the payments received between himself and Anil Kumar (another key accused) and receipt of payments in the bank account of M/s New Global Fundation Corporation, proprietor Yadav etc are being further investigated," Khajuria said.

"Besides, the investigation under PMLA is separate and independent and therefore, the proceedings before the trial Court in the CBI case has no effect on the PMLA investigation conducted by the respondent," he argued.

"Having heard and after consideration of material on record in its entirety and to the nature of the allegations and gravity of the accusation and also stage of investigation, to my mind investigating agency must be given sufficient time in conducting analysed and effective investigation," the judge said.

"This apprehension of ED finds force upon the submission made by the counsel that the applicant may influence the witnesses and give slip to law hence in light of supra, the present application deserves to be dismissed," he added.

"It is apt to note that the evil of money laundering is a curse and has its diverse effect on the society and its citizens, moreover money laundering is a serious threat not only to financial system of our country but also to global economy at large which is required to be dealt sternly," the court said.

It said therefore, in light of supra, given the grave and serious allegations against the petitioner, apart from ongoing investigation, this court is not inclined to grant privilege of bail to the applicant.

However, the applicant's case can be considered on its own merit without being prejudiced by this order at a later stage if there is a change in circumstances, it added. (PTI)

WB to consider lifting ban on potato shipment after price stability in local market

KOLKATA, July 29: Shipment of potatoes to other states will be considered after retail prices in West Bengal stabilise at Rs 30 per kg, an official in Kolkata said on Monday. West Bengal, one of the largest producers of potatoes in the country, has restricted shipment of the commodity to other states because of a steep rise in prices in the local market. Neighbouring states such as Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar depend on West Bengal for potatoes. "We have been able to control prices, but our aim is to achieve Rs 30 per kg at the retail level before allowing shipment to neighbouring states," an official of West Bengal's Agriculture Marketing Department said. The situation is being closely monitored, and the next steps would be decided after a thorough review, he said. At present, the Jyoti variety of potatoes is retailing at Rs 36 per kg in Kolkata, while the cold storage price stands at Rs 26 per kg.

The state-run Sufal Bangla outlets are selling potatoes at Rs 29 per kg. The Progressive Potato Traders' Association said it did not receive any official communication regarding price targets or restarting outward shipments.

"There is no communication or directive that shipments to neighbouring states will be allowed once retail prices stabilise at Rs 30 per kg," said Lulu Mukherjee, the secretary of the association.

He said that while dispatches from Hooghly and Burdwan cold storages remained high, those from Medinipur and Bankura, which focus more on shipment to other states, were comparatively less due to the ban. Traders argued that the varieties shipped to other states differ from those consumed locally, warning that a prolonged ban could lead to a surplus, negatively impacting farmers. (PTI)

Genres need not be about gender, Janhvi a superstar: 'Ulajh' director Sudhanshu Saria



MUMBAI, July 29: Sudhanshu Saria says it was exciting to tell a spy story through a female protagonist as it opened up new possibilities in "Ulajh", his upcoming thriller fronted by Janhvi Kapoor.

Set in the intriguing world of Indian Foreign Services (IFS), "Ulajh" follows the journey of a young IFS officer, played by Kapoor, who gets embroiled in a dangerous personal conspiracy after getting appointed for a career-defining post.

The patriotic thriller is written by Parveez Shaikh and Saria while Atika Chauhan has penned the dialogues.

"I never look at stories from a gender lens, I don't think genres need to be about gender. For me, Parveez's choice to make the protagonist a woman was exciting and that opened up possibilities in a fresh way," the filmmaker told PTI.

Spy thrillers are one of the most popular genres in Hindi cinema and Saria is happy that they get to be one of the firsts to come up with a spy thriller, led by a star like Janhvi.

"I know there's a wave of spy thrillers that will come now. There's a Yash Raj Films one with Alia (Bhatt) and Sharvati (Wagh) in it, but I'm excited that we get to lead that charge. For me, Janhvi is as much a superstar as any of those before who have done these big massy spy thrillers," the director said.

Known for "Sanaa" and streaming show "Big Girls

Don't Cry" Saria said he started working on the movie three years ago when Jungle Productions approached him to direct the movie.

"I was really surprised that they thought of me," said the "Loev" fame director, adding he was awestruck by the twists and turns in the movie.

"I saw a real possibility in the script of reinventing the genre. This was three years back, I always think of what our audience is going to be looking for in 2025-2026 or 2024, when you are sitting in 2021... It ticked all the boxes for me. So, for me it was a very easy yes." The film boasts of an ensemble including Roshan Mathew, Gulshan Devaiah, Adil Hussain, Rajesh Tailang, Meiyang Chang, Rajendra Gupta, and Jitendra Joshi.

The casting process for "Ulajh" was a significant undertaking, taking approximately eight months to assemble the talented ensemble, Saria said, adding he was delighted to be working with such accomplished actors.

"It made directing such a joy. Every day I would go on the set, I would look at the call sheet and be like, 'Which exciting actor combo pair am I going to work with?'. For me, it is always about serving the audience. I work for the audience, and the idea of keeping them excited and serving up actor after actor, and putting them in the same film, I was very greedy about it."

The film is slated to release in theatres on August 2. (PTI)

I GO BACK IN TIME TO FIND BEAUTY: DESIGNER JJ VALAYA



NEW DELHI, July 29: Celebrated designer J J Valaya says it's his duty to preserve the beauty of the bygone era and present it in a new avatar as an "excavator of the past".

Valaya showcased modernity, royalty and elegance in his latest collection "Muraqqa", which he presented on the fourth day of the Hyundai FDCI India Couture Week here.

The new clothing line by his label The House of Valaya drew inspiration from three cities of historical importance: Istanbul in Turkey, Iran's Isfahan and Delhi. "I think it's my duty... As an excavator of the past. I go back in time to find all the beauty and bring it forward, make it relevant for today and then present it in an all new manner. Otherwise, it will be lost," Valaya told PTI on the sidelines of the ongoing fashion gala.

Through the festive collection of "Muraqqa", which was ruled by custom woven silks and lush velvets, the Delhi-based designer stayed true to his USP: luxury. "Everything that is rich and luxurious. We are a luxury brand. This is the festive season, this is a festive couture. So, it's all about rich velvets, silk and everything that you can think of which is truly luxury," he said.

The colour palette ranged from green, beige, brown to maroon and even had shades of golden and black. The menswear featured evening jackets, sherwanis, Nehru jackets, and bandhgala jackets, whereas the women's range comprised lehengas, sarees, anarkalis, and suits.

Some of the male models wore turbans to complement their attire and nose rings completed the looks of the female models. Bold applique designs, polka dots, and geometrical figures with embroidery were also spotted in the ensembles.

For Valaya, one of the most popular Indian couturiers in the international fashion circuit known for maximalism, fashion is style.

"There is something I always say. Fads and gimmicks are not fashion. Something that is timeless and endures... which stands the test of time. I would identify that as fashion. Fashion equals style."

In his latest collection, the Istanbul theme draws from Ottoman intricacies and art deco lines, while Isfahan reinterprets Persian carpets and miniature paintings with a contemporary twist. Delhi celebrates Mughal inlays intertwined with flora and fauna motifs.

He picked "beautiful nuances" from the three cities and put them into the new modern collection.

Valaya summed up the collection as a blend of "royalty, spirit and art".

From the initial idea to its final form, the ace couturier detailed his process about bringing designs to life.

"You have that thought and then you research. I believe a lot in research. In fact, I spend weeks and weeks collecting the data. I even try to travel to those places and then put together mood boards.

"Then we have a brainstorming session then the first sketch is made followed by the first traces then the development of the print, weaving of textiles, etc. Everything comes together in one cohesive spirit to create those beautiful collections," he added.

Asked who he considers the most stylish personality, the designer said while it was tough to single out one, American fashion icon Iris Apfel, who died in March at the age of 102, was someone with a great sense of style.

"If we go back in time, not very far back, Iris Apfel. She was an American diva, she passed away after over 100 years of living... The way she put it all together was just fantastic."

Valaya is already working on his next collection. (PTI)

Priyanka Chopra Jonas posts photo with baby koala named after her

NEW DELHI, July 29: Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas says she was pleasantly surprised to find out that an eight-month-old koala joey at an Australian homestead has been named after her.

The actor, who is touring Australia during her time away from the sets of "The Bluff", shared a series of pictures and videos with the koala on Instagram. "An 8 month old koala joey named after me!! So sweet.. thank you @paradisecountrycyc for the lovely surprise and for introducing us to the most amazing wildlife," she captioned the post.

In one of the videos, the tour guide at the Gold Coast-based homestead can be seen revealing that the koala joey's name is Priyanka inspired by the actor.

A surprised Priyanka says, "Stop it!" and expresses gratitude towards the official. In her post, she also thanked the farmhouse management for "magical Sunday afternoon".

"Meerkats, koalas, kangaroos, Tasmanian devils and Dingo's! Thank you for all the work you're doing for wildlife conservation in Australia as well." Priyanka is in Australia to shoot for the Hollywood movie "The Bluff", in which she plays the role of a former female pirate and serves as a producer on the project. Set in the 19th century Caribbean, the Prime Video film follows a former female pirate who must protect her family when the mysterious sins of her past catch up to her. It hails from the Russo Brothers' banner AGBO Studios and Amazon MGM Studios. (PTI)



Film shooting stops in Kolkata studios as directors call for cease work

KOLKATA, July 29: Amid the ongoing impasse over technicians' body refusal to work under a particular director for a project, no shooting took place on Monday in any film studio in the city and surrounding areas as directors of Bengali film industry decided to go for an indefinite cease work from July 29 in solidarity with the young filmmaker.

"There has been no shooting in all the 11 studios of any sort since this morning," a spokesperson of the Directors' Guild said.

The technicians' body is also slated to meet later on Monday on their boycott. While producers also came forward in support of directors' demand.

Directors Association of Eastern India in a statement on Sunday night said, "In reference to the

wishes and sentiments of majority of directors, the association has decided to go for indefinite cease work on shooting floors from Monday (July 29) till the problem faced by directors are addressed in an amicable and proper manner.

Amid the ongoing impasse over technicians' body refusal to work under a particular director for a project, no shooting took place on Monday in any film studio in the city and surrounding areas as directors of Bengali film industry decided to go for an indefinite cease work from July 29 in solidarity with the young filmmaker.

"This was extremely humiliating for directors and actors present at the shooting floor. As demanded by many directors after this development we suggest until the technicians under the federation agree to

take part in the shoot accepting Raheel Mukherjee as director, till then we will be forced to go for non-cooperation," the statement said. The directors further asserted federation cannot impose its will in an arbitrary manner without seeking any acceptable solution.

"The way technicians of the federation have been forced to non-cooperate with Raheel Mukherjee is ominous for the entertainment industry and insulting for every single director, the statement said.

Arindam Sil said, "The cease-work will be only applicable for Bengali film, serial and web series shoots. Voicing apprehension that the boycott of the director by technicians and protests by other directors may snowball into a major crisis affecting shoots of films, serials, web series in Bengali film in-

dustry, West Bengal Motion Pictures Artists Forum president and veteran actor Ranjit Mallick and secretary Santilal Mukherjee on Sunday requested all sides to sit for talks immediately and thrash out the differences.

"Any disruption of shooting will affect actors, directors, technicians, producers - every stakeholder in the industry - which will do no good... We therefore call upon every side to sit for talks for the interest of industry and iron out differences. If required the artist's forum can mediate to resolve the issue. Let's not allow the situation to snowball into a major crisis that will only affect everyone in the industry as well as the audiences," the forum earlier said.

The forum is the apex body of actors in the entertainment industry

in Bengal.

On July 27, despite the clean chit given to filmmaker Raheel Mukherjee by the Directors' Guild allowing him to work as creative producer in an upcoming film, no technician turned up at a Kolkata studio on the first day of shooting.

Federation of Cine Technicians and Workers of Eastern India (FCTWEI) president Swarup Biswas said Mukherjee was being debarred from directing films for three months for violating norms by visiting Bangladesh for shooting another movie without intimation to the federation and taking the help of technicians in Dhaka.

Biswas told reporters that while it had been amicably decided earlier that Raheel Mukherjee would be the creative producer of the film to be shot from July 27, the call

sheet given to them for the shoot still referred to Raheel Mukherjee as the director and he was seen taking every initiative during the shoot.

"This was seen as violating the spirit of our agreement and we technicians don't want to work under the instruction of Mukherjee who had not taken any technician from Kolkata to complete 10 days of shooting of an OTT film 'Lohu' in Bangladesh earlier this year.

"Mukherjee himself had admitted his mistake at the first meeting with the federation and guild earlier in July but now retracting," Biswas said.

The untitled film produced by SVF mired in uncertainty starred Prosenjit Chatterjee, Anirban Bhat-tacharya and Priyanka Sarkar. (PTI)

10M AIR PISTOL MIXED TEAM EVENT

Manu-Sarabjot duo enters bronze medal round

CHATEAUX (FRANCE), July 29: A confident Manu Bhaker placed herself in contention for a second Olympic medal as she combined with Sarabjot Singh to make the bronze playoff of the 10m air pistol mixed team event but Arjun Babuta buckled under pressure to finish fourth in men's 10m air rifle competition here on Monday.

In the women's 10m air rifle final, Ramita Jindal ended seventh. Babuta shot a total of 208.4 in the air rifle individual final. A last shot of 9.5, in response to Croatian Miran Maricic's 10.7, put paid to his hopes of finishing on the podium.

Earlier, the 22-year-old Bhaker, who came into the mixed team qualifications after winning a historic bronze medal in the 10m women's air pistol event on Sunday, and Sarabjot finished with a total of 580 to make the medal round to be held on Tuesday.

The Indians will face Korea's Oh Ye Jin and Lee Wonho, who shot 579, in the bronze-medal match.

The other Indian pair of Rhythm Sangwan and Arjun Singh Cheema finished 10th with a score of 576 and failed to make it to the medal rounds.

Turkiye, after equalling Quali-



fication Olympic Record with 582, and Serbia (581), who finished second, respectively, will contest the gold-medal match.

Bhaker was sensational with her 98s in the first two series, but a 95 in the third set pulled the team down a bit. However, the pair did enough to make the medal round in the end.

Sarabjot, who missed out on gaining a spot in the finals of the men's 10m air pistol event by a

whisker, shot 97 in the second and third, after a 95 in the first.

The 25-year-old Babuta, who was the last Indian shooter to take aim on Monday, started the 10m air rifle final with a 10.7 and followed that with a 10.2.

A third shot of 10.5 saw him take the fourth spot while a 10.4 in his fourth attempt lifted him to the third spot. He finished the first series with a solid 10.6.

He started the second series with

a 10.7, followed that with a 10.5 and shot a near-perfect 10.8 in the second shot of the first elimination series.

That effort propelled him into the second place while reducing the deficit between him and world record holder Chinese Sheng Lihao to 0.1 point.

However, he could not sustain the form and missed out on the medal.

Babuta, who took up rifle shoot-

ing at the insistence of Olympic champion Abhinav Bindra's coach JS Dhillon, will need time to recover from this heartbreak after having come so close to making his Games debut memorable with a podium finish.

Lihao claimed the top honours in this event with an Olympic record of 252.2. Sweden's Victor Lindgren took the silver medal with a score of 251.4, followed by Maricic (230) at the third spot.

Young Indian shooter Ramita's score was 145.3 when she bowed of the high-quality eight-women final. She was placed seventh after 10 shots (104.0), when the elimination began.

In danger of being eliminated, a 10.5 pushed Ramita to sixth place even as Norway's Hegg Jeanette Duestad made an exit. But the Indian could not save herself after that.

She was placed fourth at one point but failed to maintain the momentum.

In the qualifications on Sunday, she performed exceedingly well to make the final in the fifth place.

Ramita, the Hangzhou Asian Games bronze-medallist in the event, beat World Championship medallist Mehuli Ghosh and Tilotama Sen at the domestic trials to make it to Paris Games. (PTI)

Lakshya's win over Cordon bears no count

'Deleted' after his opponent's withdrawal



PARIS, July 29: Star Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen's victory over Kevin Cordon in the opening men's singles Group L match won't be counted as his Guatemalan opponent pulled out of the Paris Olympics due to a left elbow injury.

"Guatemalan men's singles player Kevin Cordon has withdrawn from the Paris 2024 Olympic Games Badminton Competition due to a left elbow injury," Badminton World Federation (BWF) said in an update.

"His remaining Group L matches against Indonesia's Jonatan Christie (Court 2, 2pm local time, 29 July 2024) and Julien Carraggi of Belgium (Court 3, 'Not Before' 9.20am local time, 31 July 2024) will not be played. Matches on these courts in each respective session have been rescheduled.

"As per BWF General Competition Regulations for group stage play, the results of all matches played, or yet to be played, involving Cordon in Group L are now considered deleted," the sport's global governing body added.

The withdrawal of Cordon, a Tokyo Olympics semifinalist, means Group L will now be considered a three-player affair, involving Christie and Carraggi of Belgium besides Sen.

The 22-year-old Indian will be the only player in the group to have played three matches as the other two will need to compete in

two matches to make it to the knockout stage.

Sen will face Carraggi on Monday and take on Christie in his final group match on Wednesday.

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's men's doubles Group C clash on Monday has been cancelled following the withdrawal of German player Mark Lamsfuss due to injury.

The Indian pair was scheduled to meet the German duo of Lamsfuss and Marvin Seidel on Monday.

"German men's doubles player Mark Lamsfuss has withdrawn from the Olympic Games Paris 2024 badminton competition due to a knee injury," the BWF informed.

"Lamsfuss' and teammate Marvin Seidel's remaining Group C matches against India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy/Chirag Shetty (Court 3, 8.30am local time, 29 July 2024) and Lucas Corvee/Ronan Labar of France (Court 1, 'Not Before' 2.50pm local time, 30 July 2024) will not be played," it added.

Satwik and Chairag had opened their campaign with a 21-17 21-14 win over the French combination of Lucas Corvee and Ronan Labar on Saturday.

They will take on Indonesia's Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Rian Ardianto in their final game on Tuesday.

Due to the withdrawal of the German pair, the Indonesian win over Lamsfuss and Seidel on Saturday has been deleted. (PTI)

India's tennis campaign ends at Paris Olympics in single day

PARIS, July 29: India's tennis campaign at the Paris Olympics lasted just one day as Sumit Nagal and the men's doubles pair of Rohan Bopanna and N Sriram Balaji bowed out after losing their respective opening matches to French challengers, here Sunday.

Nagal was first to take court, but his strong baseline game didn't seem to be enough against mercurial Corentin Moutet, who earned a stylish three-set win.

In his second appearance at the Olympic Games, Nagal bounced back after losing the first set but fell 2-6 6-4 5-7 in two hours and 28 minutes at a packed court seven at the Roland Garros.

In the Tokyo Games, Nagal had lost in the second round to Russian Daniil Medvedev but could not make the most of a manageable opener today. He was up 2-0 in the decider with an early break but allowed Moutet to claw his way back and win.

Later in the day, Bopanna and Balaji went down fighting 5-7 2-6 against Edouard Roger-Vasselin and Gael Monfils, who replaced injured Fabien Reboul in the home team at the last minute.

India have won only one Olympic medal in tennis, when Leander Paes bagged a bronze in the 1996 Atlanta Games.

Monfils' big-hitting helped the home team that was egged on by the partisan crowd.

It was probably the last time Bopanna represented India in a multi-sport event. The 44-year-old has already announced his retirement from Davis Cup.

The doubles match featured several fiery baseline exchanges between Bopanna and both the French players.

The French play of engaging Bopanna in long rallies from the back took Balaji out of the picture on many points, and it largely denied the debutant opportunity of a quick finish at the net.

The Indians dropped serve first when Bopanna went down 0-40 in game six following a long rally



that ended with Indian team's unforced error.

Bopanna and Balaji though got the break back in the next game on Roger-Vasselin's serve. Down by a breakpoint, Monfils could not put away a volley.

The match was back on serve. Eventually, Balaji came out to serve at 5-6 to stay in the set. Feeling the nerves, he struggled to put first serves in and committed a double fault to get to 15-30. A long rally ensued, which ended in home team's favour. At second set point, Bopanna netted a backhand volley.

Balaji could not hold serve in the second set, as Bopanna too struggled to cope with the powerful strokes of the French players.

The match ended with Indian team's unforced error.

It has always been a battle of attrition between Nagal and Moutet with three of their last four outings being three-set affairs and it was no different today.

Nagal had got the better of Moutet in their last meeting in Grand Prix of Hassan in the Moroccan city of Marrakech in April this year.

Nagal didn't seem to have a plan B but Moutet had a few tricks in his bag to unsettle his rival. He served underarm a number of times and used the drop shots, the forehand slice and the backhand slice very effectively.

The chants of Coco-Coco, Aaale-Aaale and Moutet-Moutet

certainly gave the home player the energy required in such a slugfest.

Nagal had a nervy start with a boisterous crowd behind Moutet. A drop volley error at 30-all put him down by a breakpoint. Another unforced error cost him the opening game.

The French player began with an underarm serve, much to the amusement of the home fans. He, however, ended up serving a double fault. It was an easy hold for the southpaw even as Nagal also bounced back with a hold at love.

Nagal said he was expecting underarm serves from him but obviously didn't appreciate that.

Moutet struggled a bit with his first serve but fed Nagal a lot of high balls and attacked his backhand more to build on the break.

Nagal had his chances to get the break back in game four but squandered four breakpoints.

He was down by another breakpoint in game five but saved and held when Moutet just missed the line with his return. The crowd favourite again amused the gathered supporters at court seven as he crossed over the court to check the spot if the ball landed inside the line.

It was crucial for Nagal to hold serve after falling behind 2-4 but he erred on overhead volley at breakpoint.

Moutet pocketed the opening set when Nagal's forehand return soared over the baseline.

The second set was not a one-

way traffic with Nagal finding his rhythm. The free points were not given. The set remained in serve till game five.

After playing two deuce points, Moutet again served underarm, and this time he got the point as Nagal netted the return. Nagal was furious but the crowd loved the moment.

Nagal finally had his first break of the match when Moutet's dropped shot crashed into the net.

Before that on the second breakpoint, when he netted the return, Nagal had banged his racket on the court, letting go of the frustration.

However, he gathered himself with the crucial break. The crowd stood and began singing the national anthem to egg on their favourite.

Nagal though, consolidated the lead with a hold and levelled the match by breaking his rival in game eight when Moutet netted a volley return.

The French player yet again resorted to giving high balls and drop shots to Nagal to break the momentum, and almost succeeded, but Nagal too stuck to his guns, avoiding an early break.

He then broke Moutet when he double faulted while facing his fourth breakpoint.

Leading 2-0 in the decider, Nagal had a perfect opportunity to run away with the match but found himself down 0-40. He saved the first breakpoint but a drive volley error from him meant that the set was back on serve.

Serving at 5-5, Nagal began by netting a forehand, and Moutet found a stunning forehand slice passing-winner on the run.

Another forehand error put Nagal down by three break points. He lost fourth point in a row when he could not pick up a half volley. It was not difficult from there for Moutet to close the match.

He will play either Australian world number six Alex de Minaur or Germany's Jan-Lenard Struff next. (PTI)

Want to win them all: Gauff on her olympic debut

PARIS, July 29: Coco Gauff is 2-0 so far at the Paris Olympics after adding a 6-3, 6-0 singles victory over Australia's Ajla Tomljanovic on Sunday to a win a day earlier in doubles alongside Jessica Pegula. Gauff also entered in mixed doubles with Taylor Fritz, which means there could be a lot of matches left to play at the 20-year-old American's Summer Games debut. At least she hopes so.

"People in the (athletes) village are asking: Oh, how many do you need to win?" said Gauff, who is making her Olympic debut after testing positive for COVID-19 right before she was supposed to fly to the Tokyo Games three years ago. "I'm like, I don't know. I'm in three events, and I want to win all of them."

For the record: It would take 15 victories — six in singles, five in women's doubles and four in mixed doubles — to collect a trio of tennis gold medals. No one has managed to do that since tennis returned to the Olympics in 1988. (AP)



Advocate General of Assam and Joint Secretary, BCCI, Devajit Saikia; Secretary, ACA Tridip Konwar and Vice President, AOA, Bishnu Ram Nunisa meets parents of cricketer Riyan Parag at 91 Yards Club Office, ACA Stadium, Barsapara on Monday. (HT Photo)

'Players will fight tooth and nail'

Dravid confident of cricket featuring in next Olympics

Haley Batten wins Olympic silver medal

ELANCOURT (FRANCE), July 29: Haley Batten was fined by the Olympic mountain bike judges for breaking a rule on the final lap of her race Sunday, though she will no doubt gladly pay the modest penalty after her silver medal marked the best finish ever by an American rider.

Batten was jockeying for second place with Sweden's Jenny Rissveds, well behind eventual champion Pauline Ferrand-Prevot, when she went through a lane dedicated for taking on food and drink or stopping for mechanical problems. But after the judges reviewed the footage, they decided Batten had done neither and broke one of the rules of the race.

She was fined 500 Swiss francs, or about \$565, for "failure to respect the instructions of the race organization or commissaires," though the judges apparently decided that the infraction was not serious enough to warrant a disqualification.

It hardly put a damper on a banner day for Batten, who finished ninth three years ago at the Tokyo Games.

"I knew before Tokyo that this was the race I was focusing on," she said. "I've known for a long time that I could be good here and Tokyo was — I wanted to be on the podium there, but I wasn't quite ready to be honest. I prepared much better to be the best I've ever been. For me, preparation has been in the details, studying and building every single year."

The 25-year-old from Park City, Utah, has been at the forefront of a new wave of American mountain bike talent. That includes her 25-year-old teammate Savilia Blunk, who finished 12th on Sunday, and 26-year-old Christopher Blevins and 22-year-old Riley Amos, who will be competing in the men's race on Monday.

The fact that Batten was in the mix at Elancourt Hill, where the Olympic mountain bike race took place just outside of Paris, was not a complete surprise. She proved she's among the world's elite when she won this year's World Cup race in Araxá, Brazil.

But Batten also had to overcome a concussion that forced her to miss last year's world championships in Scotland, and more recently, a minor Achilles injury during the World Cup short-track event at Crans-Montana in the Swiss Alps. (AP)

PARIS, July 29: An ardent supporter of cricket's inclusion in the Olympics, former India head coach and batting legend Rahul Dravid says the "serious dressing room conversations" that he has heard indicate that players are going to "fight tooth and nail" to be there at the world's biggest sporting event.

Dravid was in the French capital on Sunday to attend a panel discussion on 'Cricket at the Olympics: Dawn of a New Era', celebrating the sport's inclusion in the 2028 Los Angeles Games, at the recently inaugurated India House.

"I've already heard a few conversations in the dressing room. People are talking about the 2026 T20 World Cup, there is an ODI World Cup in 2027, and you hear people saying there is the Olympics in 2028," Dravid, who also caught up on some tennis action at the Games before coming for the event, said during the discussion.

"People are going to want to win that gold medal, stand on the podium, and be a part of the



Games Village, a great sporting event, and interact with so many athletes.

"As you get closer, I have no doubt that teams will be preparing and checking out facilities. They will take this seriously, and players will fight tooth and nail to be out there," he added.

The Test great had ICC CEO Geoff Allardice for company during the discussion at India House

fantastic cricket tournament, hopefully Indian men and women winning the gold which would be nice.

"Unfortunately, I won't be able to play, but I will make every effort to be in LA in some capacity or another. If not anything else, I will try to get a media job," joked Dravid, who ended his tenure as India head coach after the recent T20 World Cup triumph in the West Indies.

The men's and women's cricket competitions will run concurrently at the LA Olympics.

As far as Allardice is concerned, he said cricket will be one of the "star attractions" in LA four years from now.

"It's quite surreal to be here in Paris, seeing the energy around sport and how it's getting together. Cricket is starting to dawn on the global sporting community.

"I think cricket will be one of the star attractions in Los Angeles...when you see global stars of big sports around the world competing in one city at a time -- watching Rafael Nadal at tennis

this afternoon -- and then if you are in LA, you can watch the best tennis players, best golfers, and the best cricketers.

"We are going to be very, very strong come 2028," he said.

Dravid also shared his thoughts on the growth of women's cricket, saying it is progressing well and increasing participation by young players is making the sport more inclusive and attractive.

"Women's cricket is already going forward. I don't think it needs anything else. It's fantastic to have it going on concurrently. Even when you talk to people at the grassroots level, to coaches, one of the things they constantly tell you is the level of participation from young girls.

"Every year in every academy, the percentage is growing exponentially, sometimes even more than the boys. Cricket is becoming a lot more inclusive and attractive. This could potentially be a career. You would not have said that five or six years ago. That's what we want to see." (PTI)

DUO STARING AT EARLY EXIT Ponnappa-Crasto lose to world no 4 Matsuyama and Shida



PARIS, July 29: India's Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto were staring at an early exit after suffering their second consecutive group stage defeat in the women's doubles badminton competition at the Paris Olympic here on Monday.

The Indians went down 11-21 12-21 to the world number four Japanese duo of Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida in the 48-minute Group C match. They had lost their opener against South Korea's Kim So Yeong and Kong Hee Yong.

Ponnappa and Crasto, world number 19, are currently placed third in their group behind the Japanese and the South Koreans. The two top ranked pairs from each group qualify for the quarter-finals. "A bit disappointed because this was the only shot we had for a chance to get to the quarters. Not the way we wanted to play but they were very strong. I wish we had given them a better fight. We had one more match and hope we can win that," Ponnappa said after the game.

from the onset, racing to a 4-0 lead after Crasto netted a long rally.

The seasoned Ponnappa produced a smash to earn India's first point and Crasto followed suit with a body smash to make it 2-7.

But it was mostly a one-way traffic from there as the Japanese kept inflating their lead to take the game.

The Indians were put under pressure from the start in the second game as the Japanese raced to a 7-1 lead.

To make matters worse for the Indians, Crasto injured her finger and required medical attention. Crasto and Ponnappa then fetched three back-to-back points but the Japanese squashed the Indians' momentum.

Matsuyama and Shida's quick court coverage, coordination, and effective combination of power and placement proved too much for the Indian pair and in the end the Japanese had nine match points.

Ponnappa and Crasto will take on Australia's Setyana Mapasa and Angela Yu in their final group game.

"There's a lot to take away. It builds my confidence as we are playing at such a high level and giving fight to each an every pair. It takes a lot of courage and confidence to play here in front of so many people. It's not over for us yet, hopefully we will be able to pull through," Crasto said. (PTI)

Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli to train ahead of ODIs against Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, July 29: India skipper Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and a few other players will start their from Monday ahead of the three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka starting August 2.

While the Indian T20I team under Suryakumar Yadav will play the third and final match on Tuesday in Pallekele, Rohit, Kohli and a few others like rookie Harshit Rana will train in Colombo after reaching the island nation's capital on Sunday.

Rohit, Kohli and Kuldeep Yadav will hit the ground running nearly a month after they helped India win the T20 World Cup in the Americas for the second time.

The ODIs against Sri Lanka will also mark the return of Shreyas Iyer into the national side. It was in late 2023 that Iyer last played a limited-overs match for India, against South Africa in December.

The squad also features Delhi all-rounder Rana, who was a member of the IPL-winning Kolkata Knight Riders' team earlier this year.

These players will train under India assistant coach Abhishek Nayar in Colombo.

Each of the three ODIs will be played at the R Premadasa Stadium here. While the first match is on August 2, the second and third ODIs are on August 4 and 7 respectively. (PTI)

DURAND CUP Bodoland FC to face NEUFC today



HT Bureau GUWAHATI, July 29: The Bodoland FC will face North East United FC in the inaugural match of Durand Cup in Kokrajhar on Tuesday. The inaugural programme will start from 2 pm onwards on Tuesday.

Lalhinglova Hmar, Sports Minister of Mizoram will grace the occasion as chief guest.

Dasho Lotay Tshiring, former Prime Minister of Bhutan will be present as special guest.

The programme will also be

graced by Shri Pramod Boro, CEM of Bodoland Territorial Council and senior officials of Indian Army.

The BTR Government will host the 133rd edition of the Durand Cup from July 30 to August 21 at the SAI Stadium in Kokrajhar.

"In a bid to upgrade and develop sports infrastructure across the region, the BTR Government has left no stones unturned and is currently focusing on construction of Bir Chilagang Memorial Mini

Stadiums at six locations: Ramfalbil (Kokrajhar), Runikhata (Chirang), Barghuli (Tamulpur), Kokilabari (Baksa), Dwarkuchi (Tamulpur), and Rowta (Udalguri) as these are the epicentres of sports talents. A state-of-the-art sports stadium in Kokrajhar and a Sports Academy in Udalguri are also underway. Additionally, seven mini stadiums and two district stadiums are under construction as part of the NIDA (NABARD Infrastructure Development Assistance) program," a PR stated.

Enormous stakes for Olympic men's basketball teams

VILLENEUVE-D'ASCQ (FRANCE), July 29: No team has reached the quarterfinals yet in the men's basketball tournament at the Paris Olympics. No team has been eliminated, either.

That said, Tuesday and Wednesday sure seem like make-or-break days for some nations — and medal chances might evaporate very quickly for those which stumble again.

With all 12 teams having been in action on either Saturday or Sunday, everyone in the men's tournament at Pierre Mauroy Stadium gets Monday off. For some, that provides a chance to regroup and practice. For others, like the U.S. — which rolled past Serbia in its opener, led by Kevin Durant's brilliant return from a calf issue — it brings a day to relax, recover and go to Team USA fans.

"It's huge," U.S. coach Steve Kerr said Monday. "And it's also important for us to allow our players to enjoy the Olympic experience, for them to be able to go and watch some of the other sports, be with their families. It's a huge part of this. That's what today is about, and then we'll lock back in tomorrow."

Group play takes a 12-team Olympic field and trims it down to eight, with the top two teams in each of the three groups automatically advancing to the quarterfinals in Paris next week and the two best third-place teams also moving on.

Translation: teams that go 3-0 in group are definitely in, teams that go 2-1 in group are almost certainly safe barring some wild tiebreaker scenario, teams that go 1-2 in group will need some help but could still move on (two such teams did advance at the Tokyo Games three years ago), and teams that go 0-3 in group are going home early.

A look at where things stand after one round of group play:

Group A: Australia, Canada in lead — Standings: Australia 1-0, Canada 1-0, Greece 0-1, Spain 0-1.

Tuesday schedule: Spain vs. Greece, Canada vs. Australia.

Outlook: The Canada-Australia winner — a battle of bronze medalists, Australia from



the Tokyo Olympics three years ago and Canada from last year's World Cup — can go ahead and start planning for next week's knockout round. Expect the Greece-Spain game to have a Game 7-type feel to it, since the loser will fall to 0-2 and will face a must-win scenario Friday just to have any chance of advancing.

After this: Friday has Australia vs. Greece and Canada vs. Spain.

Quotable: "It's a tough one. But I think at the end of the day, that just helps you prepare for what's coming after. When you survive a group like this, it just makes you better." — Canada coach Jordi Fernandez, on being in the so-called group of death' at these Olympics.

Group B: Germany, France on top for now — Standings: Germany 1-0, France 1-0, Brazil 0-1, Japan 0-1.

Tuesday schedule: Japan vs. France, Brazil vs. Germany.

Outlook: If France and Germany both win Tuesday, they're in the quarterfinals and their game on Friday will be for the top spot coming out of the group. Victor Wembanyama had a monster Olympic debut, and Germany proved its World Cup title last year was no fluke in its opener here. Watch the point differentials — Brazil lost by 12 in its opener to France and Japan lost by 20 to Germany in its first game. The worse those numbers get, the lesser the chance of winning any potential wild-card tiebreakers to decide those two best third-place teams.

After this: Friday has Japan vs. Brazil and France vs. Ger-

many. **Quotable:** "These games are always tricky. Japan just lost so they're going to give everything." — France's Evan Fournier, on the level of desperation he expects from Japan on Tuesday.

Group C: U.S., South Sudan to play for 1st place — Standings: U.S. 1-0, South Sudan 1-0, Puerto Rico 0-1, Serbia 0-1.

Wednesday schedule: Puerto Rico vs. Serbia, U.S. vs. South Sudan.

Outlook: The U.S.-South Sudan matchup is one that everyone will be watching, especially after the upstart team from Africa nearly knocked off the Americans in London earlier this month in a 101-100 game that nobody saw coming. The winner of that game will lock up a trip to the quarterfinals. Serbia-Puerto Rico isn't an elimination game, but the winner has a much better shot of advancing to next week and the loser will be doing a whole lot of hoping.

After this: Saturday has Puerto Rico vs. U.S., Serbia vs. South Sudan.

Quotable: "That was a friendly. They're going to be ready for us. ... USA is a big challenge, and we'll prepare these next couple of days for USA and get in the gym and get right." — South Sudan coach Rohit Ivey, discussing the one-point loss in an exhibition at London and now getting ready to face the Americans in the Olympics.

Next week's schedule: The quarterfinals are Aug. 6, the semifinals are Aug. 8 and the gold- and bronze-medal games are on Aug. 10, all in Paris. (AP)

KA players in Assam team for Dr BC Roy Trophy

HT Bureau DIPHU, July 29: Litdong Dera player from West Karbi Anglong and Sterwin Hanse, Pawan Rai, Rosan Dung Dung, Sasang Hengna and Kamsenlal Vaephei from Karbi Anglong namely are part of Assam squad in Junior Boys' National Football Championship.

The championship which is also known as Dr BC Roy Trophy 2024-25 has been taking place at Nurul Amin Stadium, Nagaon, Assam, from July 28 to August 11.

Nowgong Sports Association organises the tournament in association with Assam Football Association.

The inaugural match was played between Assam and Andhra Pradesh on July 28, where the host state won by 5-0. Sterwin Hanse of Deithor, Karbi Anglong is the team captain.

States like Manipur, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Assam, Tripura, Gujarat, Lakshadweep, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Andaman & Nicobar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Pondicherry, Telangana, Bihar and Uttarakhand have been participating in the tournament.



Meanwhile, three girl players from Karbi Anglong will represent the Assam team for the Junior Girls Football Championship 2024-25 at Belgaum, Karnataka. The players are Serbirika Terangpi, Rengmir Intipti and Shivani Engtipi.

Triathlon cancels Olympic swim training for 2nd straight day

PARIS, July 29: The water quality in the Seine River remained a concern Monday as officials called off the swimming portion of an Olympic triathlon training session for a second straight day.

Event organizers overseeing the event at the Paris Games are optimistic that triathletes will be able to swim in the city's famed waterway when the competition starts on Tuesday. The sport's governing body World Triathlon and its medical team, along with city officials, are banking on sunny weather and higher temperatures over the course of the next 36 hours to improve the water quality and bring it below the necessary limits to stage the swim portion of a race that also includes biking and running.

World Triathlon made the decision to cancel the swim workout early Monday following a meeting over water quality. The representatives for Paris 2024 and triathlon's international federation said tests conducted in the Seine on Sunday showed water quality levels leading into the training session that "did not provide sufficient guarantees to allow the event to be held." The delegation said this was due to the recent rain that impacted Friday's opening ceremony.

Swimming in the Seine has been banned for over a century in big part because of the poor water quality. Organizers have invested 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) to prepare the river ahead of the Olympics. In addition to the swimming part of the triathlon Tuesday and Wednesday, the Seine will be used for the marathon swimming competitions on Aug. 8 and 9.

Daily water quality tests in early June indicated unsafe levels of E. coli bacteria, followed by recent improvements. Some of the measures put in place to improve the water quality include the construction of a giant basin to capture excess rainwater and keep wastewater from flowing into the river, renovating sewer infrastructure and upgrading wastewater treatment plants. (AP)

Manu Bhaker is a Khelo India's product: Sports Minister 'Chosen ones make the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) pool'

NEW DELHI, July 29: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday said Manu Bhaker, who became the first Indian woman shooter to win an Olympic medal in the ongoing Paris Games, is a product of the sporting ecosystem created by the government's flagship Khelo India programme.

Bhaker showed tremendous fighting spirit on Sunday to end a 12-year medal drought for shooting at the quadrennial showpiece and put India on Paris Games medal table with her 10m air pistol bronze.

"When she met PM Modi (before the Games), she told him that 'the initiative of Khelo India has helped many athletes like myself in shaping our careers' and today, through Khelo India, many athletes are participating in many events," Mandaviya told PTI in an interaction here.

Bhaker, who has a plethora of international medals in her cabinet including gold from the world championships, has also been a gold-medallist at the Khelo India Games.



"Khelo India has two important flanks, through the KIRTI Project, we are doing talent identification among students who are studying in colleges and giving them an ecosystem, training, hostel facilities and

coaches, they get trained abroad," he said. "Manu Bhaker was given the opportunity to train in Germany and Switzerland through the TOPS scheme so that she could perform her best," he added.

The minister defended the decision to

send personal coaches with athletes to Paris, saying it was a conscious decision of the government to provide every possible support to them.

"Previously our contingent's support staff and coaches had limited facilities to travel with the players, this time we ensured that our athletes were aided by 140 people and their support staff, including their coaches.

"We have made the arrangement of India House in Paris so that we can operate a central information system from there along with a central support system," Mandaviya said.

The Indian contingent also has a medical board, headed by renowned surgeon Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, in Paris.

"It's natural when our players do well, it helps boost the morale of the country too and I am fully confident that our players will do the nation proud," Mandaviya said.

Asked how important will be India's Paris performance when India's ambitious bid to host the 2036 Olympics is evaluated, Mandaviya said: "In 2036, India has prepared to bid for it (Olympics) and is willing to meet the expectations of the administration to get the rights." (PTI)