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- Israeli forces push deeper into Gaza City as Hamas warns
- Pope begs for new peace efforts after latest attacks in Ukraine, Gaza



- Assembly bypolls: Polling in 13 seats today
- Rahul does Oscar-level acting on protecting Constitution: BRS



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DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2024

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18,80,783 people in 91 revenue circles still reeling under water ● Urban areas of KA under water

## State witnesses improvement in flood scene

GUWAHATI, July 9: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said that the Brahmaputra and its tributaries were flowing below the danger levels in most places, even as the overall flood situation in the state improved marginally with the number of people reeling under the deluge in 27 districts decreasing to around 18.80 lakh.

An Assam State Disaster Management (ASDMA) release on Tuesday said 18,80,783 people in 91 revenue circles and 3,154 villages in 27 districts of the state were reeling under the deluge.

Sarma, in a post on X, said, "Good News - The water level of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries is below the danger level in most places." In a few places, it is still flowing above the danger level but showing a falling trend, he added.

Flooding has been reported from urban areas of Karbi Anglong and Dibrugarh districts, it added.

The toll in this year's flood, landslide and storm rose to 85 with six more deaths reported on Monday.



Altogether 48,124 displaced people are taking shelter in 245 relief camps.

The release said NDRF teams have been deployed at Cachar, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Dibrugarh and Jorhat for rescue and relief

operations. SDRF, Fire and Emergency Services personnel, police forces and AAPDA Mitra volunteers of ASDMA have been helping the district administrations in flood and storm-affected areas, it added.

## Khattar calls for collective efforts to boost NE power sector growth

GUWAHATI, July 9: Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Tuesday emphasized on collective efforts for a sustainable future along with advancing the growth of power sector in the north-eastern region.

Chairing a meeting of Power ministers of the region in Guwahati, the minister stressed on collective efforts.

"Chaired the all-important Power Minister's Conference (North-Eastern Region) in Guwahati today. During the session, highlighted the significance of collective efforts towards a more promising & sustainable future along with advancing the growth of the power sector in the North-Eastern region," Khattar wrote in a post on X.

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, also in a post on the

micro-blogging site, wrote: "I had an extremely fruitful discussion with Hon'ble Union Minister Shri @mlkhattar ji during his first visit to Assam after assuming charge."

He said the state has sought "assistance to help rationalise gas prices to meet Assam's increased demand for power. The state's peak power demand has already crossed over 2500 MW." Sarma informed the Union Power minister about the increased demand for PMAY (U) homes, as the state has already delivered over 60 per cent of the sanctioned 1.7 lakh homes.

"Shared our plans to achieve saturation in urban drinking water supply, building the Guwahati River Front and develop a new satellite township on G20 principles near Guwahati. We also deliberated on the possibility (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### HT BRIEFS

#### One drown

BOKAJAN: Ashikul Islam (18) drowned in Lahorijan River in Karbi Anglong while bathing along with his friends on Monday afternoon. The youth was a resident of Lahorijan Notun Bosti. His friends noticing he was missing searched for him but to no avail. Khatkhati Police Station was informed about the incident and called in SDRF from Dimapur. SDRF searched for the missing youth but as night fell they started the search this morning. The deceased's body was found at 11 this morning. The body has been sent to Diphu Medical College and Hospital for a post-mortem report.

#### Memorial award

DIPHU: Pabitra Bora, compiler and journalist from Diphu town in Karbi Anglong district is nominated by Karbi Anglong District Sahitya Sabha for Joysing Hanse Memorial Award. Previously the award was given to Biren Singh, Basanta Das, Dr. Phukan Chandra Phangcho, Yajnoram Gogoi and Lunse Timung. He was a teacher and later became a journalist.

#### Lightning strike

KHERONI: Lightning strike kills a woman identified as Indravati Devi in Rangia Village, Jenkha, West Karbi Anglong. The deceased woman was cutting fodder for livestock when the incident took place. The lightning strike burnt the woman's clothes and various parts of her body. The incident caused a stir in the area.

#### BJP Mandal

HOWRAGHAT: Bishnu Terang, 48, former president of Howraghat Town BJP Mandal Youth Morcha died from a heart attack at a private hospital in Guwahati this morning. He was a resident of Bakong Tiso village, Howraghat in Karbi Anglong district. He was admitted to the hospital for treatment several days earlier and died while undergoing treatment.

## PM hails Russia as India's 'all-weather friend'; lauds Putin's leadership

MOSCOW, July 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday made a wholehearted endorsement of India's ties with Russia, describing the old ally as India's "all-weather friend" and lauding President Vladimir Putin for strengthening the bilateral relations over the past two decades of his leadership.

Addressing the Indian diaspora, he said the India-Russia relationship is built on the strong pillar of mutual trust and respect, ascertaining that their ties were tested time and again only to emerge stronger every time.

Modi's high praise of Russia as an ally and Putin's leadership came amid ongoing efforts by the Western world to isolate the Russian leader over the war in Ukraine.

Prime Minister Modi also made a veiled criticism of the "influence-oriented global order" which endured for decades.

"But, what the world needs right now is confluence not influence and no one can deliver this message better than India which has a strong tradition of worshipping confluences," he said.

He said India is being seen as a strong pillar in the "emerging multipolar world order".

"When it speaks of peace, dialogue and diplomacy, then the whole world listens." Modi has often stressed the need for dialogue



and diplomacy to end the war between Russia and Ukraine. Commenting on India's ties with Russia, he said he has been for decades an admirer of the unique partnership between the two countries.

"On hearing the word Russia, the first word that comes to the mind of every Indian is India's 'sukh-dukh ka saathi' (all-weather friend) and a trusted ally," he said.

"No matter how low the temperature dips below zero degrees during Russian winter, India-Russia friendship has always remained in 'plus' and been full of warmth. This relationship is built (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Area accounts office of Defence Accounts opened in Jorhat

### HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 9: An Area Accounts Office under the Controller General of Defence Accounts (CGDA) was inaugurated in Assam's Jorhat town on Tuesday, a defence release said here.

The step is also for ensuring that the needs of the defence forces are met with the highest standards of professionalism and dedication, it said. Controller General of Defence Accounts (CGDA) Devika Raghuvanshi, inaugurating the newly established

office, highlighted the historic legacy of the Defence Accounts Department, one of the oldest departments under the Central Government.

She emphasised the department's pioneering role in implementing systemic changes to adapt to technological advancements and meet the evolving demands of the services.

Raghuvanshi reaffirmed the department's commitment to delivering efficient, accurate and prompt accounting, payment, audit and financial

advisory services to the defence forces. She underscored the importance of client satisfaction and elucidated upon the Department's dedication to overcoming the challenges inherent in this critical responsibility.

Highlighting the logistical challenges faced by units and formations under HQ Spear Corps Dimapur and HQ 41 Sub Area, Jorhat, in sending bills, vouchers and other auditable documents to the main office in Guwahati or the Area (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

LUCKNOW, July 9: The Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday suspended the local SDM, a circle officer and four others based on the SIT report on the Hathras stampede that did not rule out a "big conspiracy" behind the incident.

The SIT report also flagged lapses on the part of the local administration that led to the incident that claimed 121 lives on July 2.

The report held the organisers responsible for the stampede, claiming they did not make arrangements to manage the crowd and also fixed the responsibility of administration, according to official sources.

It said the local police and administration did not take the event seriously and failed to provide proper information to senior officers.

The stampede at the 'satsang' of self-styled godman Surajpal alias Narayan Sakar Hari alias Bhole Baba claimed 121 lives. "In its preliminary investigation, the SIT has held the event organisers primarily responsible for the stampede on the basis of eyewitnesses and other evidence. The SIT did not rule out any big conspiracy behind the incident and has stated the need for a thorough investigation," officials said.

The lawyer of the 'godman' on July 6

claimed "some poisonous substance" sprayed by "some unidentified men" triggered the stampede.

The investigation committee also found the event organisers and the tehsil-level police and administration guilty. It said the local SDM, circle officer, tehsildar (revenue official), inspector, and outpost in charge were guilty of negligence in discharging their duties.

"The Sub-District Magistrate of Sikandrara granted permission for the event without inspecting the venue and did not even inform the senior officials," the report said, adding the official did not take the event seriously. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'It is humanly not possible to cover all the glacial lakes'

## Govt to launch survey to assess vulnerability of glacial lakes after monsoon

NEW DELHI, July 9: Four states and a Union territory in the Himalayas will commence ground surveys to determine the vulnerability of glacial lakes after the monsoon season, officials said on Tuesday.

A glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in Sikkim in October 2023 has prompted this initiative, they said. Monitoring systems will also be established to provide crucial information about GLOFs, the officials said.

"Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir are setting up survey teams and identifying routes to the glacial lakes. The teams will include officials and experts from agencies, such as the National Remote Sensing Centre, the Indian Army and the Geological Survey of India," an official from the National Disaster



Management Authority told PTI. The survey, set to launch after the monsoon season, will target select glacial lakes based on their risk profiles. "It is humanly not possible to cover all the glacial lakes," the official said.

Most of these lakes are situated at altitudes of 5,000 metres or higher. The survey teams will comprise experts in hydrology, topography and other relevant fields who are equipped to endure harsh weather and difficult terrain.

The glacial lake outburst in Sikkim resulted in at least 60 fatalities and extensive damage in the Mangan, Gangtok, Pakyong and Namchi districts. It also destroyed the Chungthang dam (Teesta III dam), a crucial

part of a major hydropower project. Glacial lakes are formed by the melting of glaciers and accumulation of meltwater in depressions on or near the glacier's surface. GLOFs occur when these lakes suddenly burst open due to factors, such as excessive water accumulation or triggers like earthquakes. These floods can cause significant destruction and pose serious risks to people and the environment downstream. The officials said that the current understanding of glacial lakes is primarily based on remote sensing, which is insufficient to determine their vulnerability comprehensively. Conducting ground surveys is essential but challenging due to the remote, high-altitude locations of these lakes.

According to an April report by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), 676 of the 2,431 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)





### Connect with Community, Control Dengue

## Anti Dengue Month

### July 2024


#### LOOK OUT FOR SYMPTOMS OF DENGUE

 High Fever	 Joint Pain
 Headache	 Redness of the Eyes
 Pain Behind Eyes	 Rash on Skin
 Muscular Pain	 Bleeding from Gums

#### STEPS TO PREVENT DENGUE

- Make sure there is no water stagnating in and around your house, in open containers, discarded coconut shells, unused flower pots etc.
- Always use a mosquito net while sleeping, even during the day. Dengue mosquitoes bite during the day.
- Protect yourself from mosquito bites by wearing long sleeved clothes and trousers. Use age appropriate repellents like electric mats, coils etc.
- If you feel any dengue-like symptoms, consult a doctor immediately, Do not take medicines without a doctor's consultation.

Prevent incubation of mosquitoes inside and outside your home. Save yourself from Dengue

						
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Treatment of Dengue is available in all Government Hospitals. Laboratory facilities for testing Dengue is available free of cost in all District Hospitals and Medical Colleges.

Call 104 for Health related queries | Call 108 for Ambulance Service | For any help, contact ASHA/ANM

(NHM/D/2024-25/151)



# Sensex, Nifty hit all-time closing high levels on gains in auto, FMCG shares

**MUMBAI, July 9:** Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday, hitting their fresh record closing levels on the back of gains in auto and FMCG shares and foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 391.26 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 80,351.64. During the day, it jumped 436.79 points or 0.54 per cent to hit a new lifetime high of 80,397.17.

The NSE Nifty went up by 112.65 points or 0.46 per cent to 24,433.20 -- its record closing high. During the day, it surged 123.05 points or 0.50 per cent to hit a new record peak of 24,443.60.

"Both domestic and global factors continue to drive the market momentum. Currently, consumption sectors like FMCG and auto are leading the gains, buoyed by progress in the monsoon and kharif sowing," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Among Sensex shares, Maruti Suzuki India jumped over 6 per cent amid reports that the UP government waived registration taxes



on hybrid cars as part of its initiative to promote environmentally friendly vehicles in the state.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan, Sun Pharma, ITC, Nestle and Tata Motors were the other big gainers.

Reliance Industries, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finance and JSW Steel were among the laggards. Investors are eagerly awaiting the first-quarter earnings results, which will guide market direction, Nair said, adding, "Ad-

ditionally, continuous positive FII inflow contributes to the prevailing positive sentiment."

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.36 per cent and smallcap index went up by 0.22 per cent.

Among the indices, auto jumped 2.17 per cent. Consumer durables (2.01 per cent), realty (1.23 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.21 per cent), healthcare (1 per cent) and utilities (0.76 per cent)

also closed higher.

Telecommunication, capital goods and tech were the laggards.

A total of 2,010 stocks advanced while 1,924 declined and 92 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Also, 320 stocks hit their upper circuit limit while 242 firms hit the lower circuit levels.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms on Tuesday hit a fresh lifetime high of ₹451.27 lakh crore.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled higher while Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading mostly lower. US markets ended mostly higher on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 60.98 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.51 per cent to USD 85.31 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark declined 36.22 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 79,960.38 on Monday. The NSE Nifty dipped 3.30 points or 0.01 per cent to 24,320.55. (PTI)

## MylTreturn unveils India's First Mobile App for tax filing

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** MylTreturn has launched a pioneering mobile app designed to revolutionize the way Indians file their income tax returns. This first-of-its-kind app allows users to file taxes directly from their smartphones, eliminating the need for physical documents and streamlining the entire process for greater efficiency.

Saakar Yadav, Founder of Skorydov, expressed his

enthusiasm for the new app, stating, "We are thrilled to introduce this game-changing app to India. At MylTreturn, our mission has always been to make tax filing easy, secure, and efficient. This app is a testament to that mission, providing a unique solution that simplifies the entire process while ensuring the safety of users' data and maximizing possible refunds. We believe this app will fundamentally change how Indians approach their tax filing in the coming days."

## Rupee gains 1 paisa to 83.49 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, July 9:** The rupee inched up one paisa at 83.49 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday as gains from strong domestic equities and sliding global crude prices were negated by a surging greenback overseas. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee started slightly up at 83.49 and hit an intra-day high of 83.47 and a low of 83.51 against the American currency during the session. It finally settled at 83.49 against the dollar, registering a gain of one paisa over the previous close. On Monday, the rupee settled at 83.50 against the US dollar.

"Indian rupee gained today on optimism as Nifty touched fresh all-time highs and fresh FII inflows. A decline in crude oil prices also supported the rupee. However, a positive US dollar capped sharp gains. The US dollar gained on weak Euro amid political uncertainty in France," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.06 per cent to 104.72. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.66 per cent to USD 85.18 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 391.26 points or 0.49 per cent to close at 80,351.64. The broader NSE Nifty gained 112.65 points, or 0.46 per cent, to 24,433.20. (PTI)

## Bandhan Bank launches products to facilitate international trade

**KOLKATA, July 9:** Private lender Bandhan Bank on Tuesday said it has launched an array of products to facilitate international trade. The bank said in a statement that the products have been designed to streamline various aspects of global trade by catering both to importers and exporters.

The lender launched products like letters of credit (LCs), remittances, bank guarantees, export-import collection bill and bill/invoice discounting among others. The new products will empower SMEs and corporates to expand their businesses globally, while retail customers can make remittances to other countries. (PTI)

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Khattar calls for

of establishing a Centre of Excellence for Urban Planning in the State," the CM posted. In another post on X, the chief minister's office (CMO) said that Sarma discussed various issues and apprised the Union Minister of the state's initiatives to revamp power sector and urban infrastructure.

"HCM also conveyed that, inspired by Hon'ble PM Shri @narendramodi, the state is intensifying efforts to ensure affordable green energy through enabling policy support," the CMO added. (PTI)

## PM hails Russia as India's

on the strong foundation of mutual trust and mutual respect," Modi said. He said he had a special appreciation for "his friend" Putin for steering the India-Russia friendship to greater heights over the last two decades. As prime minister, he said it was his sixth visit to Russia and the two leaders have met 17 times during this period. "All these meetings have added to our mutual trust and respect," he said, praising Putin for helping the evacuation of Indian students during the war. He expressed gratitude to the Russian leader and Russian citizens for this. To the applause from the audience, he announced that India will open two new consulates in Russia to boost travel and trade between the two countries.

Recalling the celebrated Hindi song 'Sar pe la topi Rusi, phir bhi dil hai Hindustani' picturised on Raj Kapoor, he said it may be an old number but its sentiments remain evergreen. He also mentioned Mithun Chakraborty, another Indian actor who earned a big following in Russia, as he spoke about the deep cultural ties between the two countries.

Modi said India was undergoing a transformation and the pace of development over the past 10 years has taken the world by surprise. Even the world now acknowledges what he used to say during his poll campaign that the 21st century belongs to India, he added. The fast pace of India's development will write a "new chapter" in the world's progress, he said.

He said India was changing as it believes in the strength of its 140 crore citizens who are now dreaming of turning their resolve of 'Viksit Bharat' into reality. "Today's India is brimming with self-confidence, unlike the situation before 2014 when the country was sunk in despair, and this is our biggest capital," Modi said.

In this context, he mentioned India's win in the T20 World Cup and added that India's teams in different sports were giving a historic performance. "The youth India of today does not concede defeat till the last ball and the last moment," he said, adding that the country is sending a strong team for the Paris Olympics and its athletes will show their mettle. "When people like you bless us, even the biggest goals can be achieved. You all know that today's India achieves whatever goal it sets its mind to," he said.

He said it was in his DNA to challenge all the challenges and India will write a new chapter of global growth in coming years.

Modi said it was exactly a month ago that he took oath as prime minister for the third consecutive term when he had made the resolve to work at thrice the strength and speed to fulfil the aspirations of the country.

"Our government envisions making India the world's third-largest economy, build three crore homes for the poor and turn three crore poor women in villages to 'lakhpati didi'," the prime minister said amid chants of 'Modi, Modi' and 'Modi hai toh mumkin hai'. He said India was the country which sent Chandrayaan to a place on the moon where no country has gone before and has given the world the most reliable model for digital transactions.

"India's development of the past 10 years was just a trailer, we will see much faster growth in the next 10 years," Modi asserted. The Indian diaspora takes pride in the country's achievements, he added. (PTI)

## Cannot rule out 'big conspiracy'

The SIT recommended action against the concerned officials posted in Sikandarapur, including the SDM, circle officer, SHO Sikandarapur police station, tehsildar, and police outpost in charge of Kachora and Pora.

"The organisers took permission to organise the programme by hiding facts. The conditions applicable for permission were not followed. The organisers did not make adequate and smooth arrangements by inviting an unexpected crowd. Nor were the conditions of permission given by the local administration for the program followed," the SIT report said. People associated with the organising committee have been found guilty of creating chaos, it said, adding that they engaged volunteers without proper police verification.

"The organising committee misbehaved with the police. An attempt was made to stop the local police from inspecting the event venue," it said. The Satsangarta or preacher (bhola baba) was allowed to meet the crowd without any security arrangements, it said.

Given the huge crowd, no barricading or passage arrangements were made and when the accident occurred, the members of the organising committee fled from the spot, it added. The SIT comprised additional director general of police (Agra Zone) Anupam Kulshrestha and Aligarh divisional commissioner Chaitra V. It was formed immediately after the stampede. The SIT inspected the incident site on July 2, 3 and 5.

During the investigation, statements of 125 people, including administrative and police officials, the general public and eyewitnesses, were recorded. Apart from this, copies of news published in connection with the incident, on-site videography, photographs, and video clippings were taken into cognisance. A separate judicial commission headed by retired Allahabad High Court judge Brijesh Kumar Shrivastava, and retired IPS Hemant Rao is also probing the Hathras stampede case.

Earlier, government agencies, including police, had blamed the organisers for the mismanagement at the event, noting that the size of the crowd exceeded to over 2.50 lakh from the permitted 80,000. So far, nine people, including key accused Devprakash Madhukar, have been arrested in connection with the stampede. Madhukar was the main organiser and fundraiser of the July 2 'satsang' of self-styled godman Surajpal alias Narayan Sakar Hari alias Bhole Baba at Phulrai village. The godman was not mentioned as accused in the FIR lodged at the local Sikandarapur police station on July 2. (PTI)

## Area accounts office

Accounts Office in Shillong, the CGDA emphasised the necessity of establishing an additional Area Accounts Office in the Upper Assam region to better serve these units.

Ambarish Barman, Controller of Defence Accounts, Guwahati, in his speech, maintained that the capabilities brought about by this office will significantly contribute to the operational readiness and financial soundness of the concerned units and formations.

Praising the endeavours of the Defence Accounts Department, the GoC 41 Sub-Area, Major General Deepak Sharma, said that the establishment of the AAO Jorhat will not only provide substantial support to the troops stationed in forward areas but also foster deeper understanding, cooperation and adept management of financial resources, thereby significantly enhancing operational efficiency.

Spars Verma, assistant controller, tracing the journey of the establishment of the new office, stressed on decentralisation of audit and payment services. In his presentation, he highlighted the strategic importance that the government places on this region and the efforts that the defence accounts department is taking to overcome the challenges posed by the region, the release added. (PTI)

## Govt to launch survey

glacial lakes larger than 10 hectares in the Himalayas have notably expanded since 1984. Of these, 130 lakes are in India, with 65, 7, and 58 located in the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra river basins, respectively. The report noted that 601 lakes have more than doubled in size, 10 have grown between 1.5 to 2 times, and 65 lakes have expanded by 1.5 times. An elevation-based analysis reveals that 314 lakes are located between 4,000 and 5,000 metres, and 296 lakes are above 5,000 metres in elevation.

The Ghepang Ghat glacial lake in the Indus River Basin, situated at an elevation of 4,068 metres in Himachal Pradesh, has seen a 178 per cent increase in size from 36.49 to 101.30 hectares between 1989 and 2022.

The Himalayas, often referred to as the Third Pole due to their extensive glaciers and snow cover, are highly sensitive to climate change. Research worldwide has consistently shown unprecedented rates of glacier retreat and thinning due to human-caused climate change, leading to the formation of new lakes and the enlargement of existing ones in the Himalayan region. (PTI)

## India added 4.7 cr jobs in FY24: RBI data



**MUMBAI, July 9:** India added nearly 4.7 crore jobs during 2023-24, taking the total number of employed people to 64.33 crore spread over 27 sectors covering the entire economy, according to Reserve Bank data.

The number of employed people was 59.67 crore at the end of March 2023, said the RBI's update on 'Measuring Productivity at the Industry Level-The India KLEMS [Capital (K), Labour (L), Energy (E), Material (M) and Services (S)] Database'. Using the Tornqvist Aggregation formula, the RBI said the annual growth in employment during 2023-24 was 6 per cent compared to 3.2 per cent in the year-ago period.

In the last five years, the India KLEMS database revealed that total employment increased from 53.44 crore in 2019-20 to 64.33 crore during the previous fiscal.

The data for financial 2022-23 is a provisional estimate of productivity for the total economy.

The 'agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing' employed 25.3 crore individuals, up from 24.82 crore in 2021-22, the fiscal 2022-23 data suggested.

Construction, trade, and transport and storage were among the leading employment provider segments in 2022-23.

The RBI said the document describes the procedures, methodologies and approaches used in the construction of India KLEMS database version 2024.

"The production and publication of India KLEMS database are meant to support empirical research in the area of economic growth and its sources," the RBI said. Most importantly, the database is meant to support the conduct of policies aimed at supporting the acceleration of productivity growth in the Indian economy, it added. (PTI)

## Kesoram committed to Cygnet after cement demerger, aims turnaround with Japanese Futamura

**KOLKATA, July 9:** B K Birla group firm Kesoram Industries on Tuesday said it remains committed to its loss-making subsidiary, Cygnet Industries Ltd, and will seriously engage in dialogue with its Japanese technical partner, Futamura, as a strategic investor after the demerger of its cement business is completed, a company official said.

He was speaking to reporters on Tuesday on the sidelines of the Kesoram's 105th AGM, bustling as usual with shareholders and schoolgirls from Ashok Hall Group attending the meeting, but missing Manjushree Khaitan. She died on May 16.

The AGM was chaired by Satish Narain Jajoo, who was elected chairman after the demise of the Birla scion last month.

"There is no plan to hive off Cygnet. We are currently focused on the demerger process of the cement business, which is ex-



pected by December this year. We continue to believe that Cygnet, which has innovative packaging products in its kitty, can turn around," Kesoram Industries' whole-time director and CEO, P. Radhakrishnan said.

Cement contributed 90 per cent of Kesoram's revenue. Kesoram Industries has sold its cement business to UltraTech Cement for ₹

7,600 crore and has received all approvals except the NCLT nod, for which the company is awaiting. Kesoram CFO Rohit Shah said that currently, some research and development is being carried out to suit the requirements of Futamura. Currently, Cygnet's flagship biodegradable cellulose transparent paper is targeted for retail use, while the Japanese partner wants it

tailored for industrial packaging to consider the plant as part of its global supply chain ecosystem.

Radhakrishnan said Cygnet requires a fund infusion between ₹ 45-60 crore, which would help attain a scale that could take the turnover to ₹ 1,000 crore over the next few years.

Cygnet is the only company in Southeast Asia that manufactures non-toxic, biodegradable cellulose transparent paper, also known as cellophane paper, used to wrap food and protect it.

Cygnet is also in the business of viscose rayon filament yarn and chemical manufacturing verticals and has around 1,500 employees.

In 2023-24, Cygnet's revenue stood at ₹ 246.40 crore, and it posted a loss of ₹ 67.61 crore.

Meanwhile, Kesoram's net loss in 2023-24 nearly doubled to ₹ 384 crore compared to the ₹ 194 crore loss posted in the previous year. (PTI)



CM Himanta Biswa Sarma has various plans to mitigate problems in Silchar, says Margherita

## Pabitra Margherita unveils super sucker electric vehicles



**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, July 9: Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles, government of India, Pabitra Margherita, who is on a 3-day visit to Barak Valley, unveiled super sucker electric vehicles at the Silchar Municipal Board's office on Tuesday. Equipped with mini super sucker machines, these electric vehicles, the first of their kind in Assam, will be used to clean drains in different areas of Silchar town.

A ceremonial programme was organised at the municipal board's office, where Margherita, in his speech, said that chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has made various plans to mitigate existing

problems in Silchar town. A master drainage system will be implemented to resolve the perennial problem of flash floods, and the town's expansion will be done in a scientific manner in the coming days, Margherita said.

He termed Silchar an important commercial hub in Assam and mentioned that the government is planning various works for the overall development of the town. Resolving the age-old problem of waterlogging is the state government's topmost priority, he added.

On Monday, minister Margherita visited various relief camps, took stock of the situation, and interacted with the inmates. He also held a review meeting at the

conference hall of Cachar district commissioner's office with various departments, besides surveying the post-flood damage and situation. The minister reviewed the damage caused by the flood in Cachar and the accounting of the government grants given to the victims. He also instructed officials of the water resources department to implement various river dams and sluice gates in the district to deal with the flood situation.

Minister Margherita assured the provision of more sophisticated means to clear out drains to solve the problem of waterlogging in Silchar. He discussed at length with the officials of the concerned departments, including district

commissioner Rohan Kumar Jha. He appreciated the Cachar district administration for flood relief activities and emphasised that special steps should be taken to clean the Silchar canals in the winter season and initiatives should be taken to make the public aware of littering.

On this day, officials from the Department of Education, along with APDCL officials from other line departments, highlighted the problems created in the post-flood situation. The minister assured that these problems would be addressed. The APDCL officials also informed about the commissioning of various sub-stations after the flood.

Minister Margherita, while talking to the officials of the education department, said primary schools and those with classes from primary to higher secondary will receive financial assistance if affected by the flood. He also learned details about the health camps after the flood, diseases, and illnesses from the district health department. He asked the veterinary department to get the medicines required for cattle health camps from the district disaster management authority if necessary.

Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty, Udharpur MLA Mihir Kanti Shome, Lakhimpur MLA Kaushik Rai, and others were also present at the meeting.

This information was stated in a press release issued by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone, Silchar.

## Geo-mega tube technology deployed to restore breached embankment

**HT Correspondent**  
DIBRUGARH, July 9: Advanced geo-mega tube technology has been employed for the restoration works of a breached embankment in Tengakhat from Monday.

These large bags, filled with sand or slurry, are being used for the first time in dam protection work during floods. Geotextile tubes, or geo tubes, are engineered tube-like sacks made from high-strength woven or non-woven geotextile fabric, typically composed of polypropylene or polyester materials that can withstand the forces of wind, waves, and storms. They are placed in a trench along the shoreline or riverbank and then covered with more sand or soil to create a natural-looking barrier by blending in with the surrounding

landscape. The Water Resources Department, Dibrugarh, began the restoration work of the embankment with a prayer ceremony on Monday, following chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's announcement for immediate restoration work in the Tengakhat area of Dibrugarh.

On July 2, the Tengakhat embankment was breached due to the rising waters of the Buridehing River, submerging more than 25 villages in the Tengakhat revenue circle. On July 5, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited the breached embankment at Tengakhat and announced that restoration work would begin shortly. Consequently, the Water Resources Department has started the restoration work on a war footing

from Monday.

Talking to media persons, Samiran Deka, additional chief engineer of the Water Resources Department's Upper Assam Zone, said that the restoration work at Tengakhat is being carried out using advanced geo-mega tube technology. "If the weather remains favourable, the work is expected to be completed within 20 days," Deka said.

Dibrugarh district was affected in the second wave of floods, with most areas coming under water and the streets of Dibrugarh town remaining waterlogged for nine consecutive days. The water has started to recede, but in some areas, people are taking shelter in temporary relief camps near NH-37 in Moran.

## MP vows to table plea for constitutional inclusion of flood issues

**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, July 9: While addressing a press conference at Nagaon Rajiv Bhavan on Tuesday afternoon, MP Pradyut Bordoloi said that he will table the centuries-long burning issues of flood and erosion of the state in parliament soon and will demand to bring the grievous issue under the 7th Schedule of the constitution.

He said that he also wanted the revival of the Kolong river, but it must be in a scientific mode so that it could not be a curse again for the people of greater Nagaon in the future. Bordoloi also claimed that he will table a plea for the constitution of a commission for the Brahmaputra river valley, covering the neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh. Besides, he will go ahead in parliament for the constitution of the Riverine Erosion and Embankment Management Authority in the next parliamentary session in Delhi.

Referring to recent remarks by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on the construction of river embankments in the state, MP Bordoloi said that Congress had constructed not only the river embankments but also the nation.

When the embankments were constructed by Congress, the current chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was in the Congress party and hence he should take responsibility for those embankments in the state, MP Bordoloi asserted. MP Bordoloi was accompanied by the district Congress president, Prasanta Kr Saikia, at the press conference on Tuesday.

## OBITUARY



**B**abesh Das (Bapon), originally from Silpukhuri and residing in Kahilipara, Guwahati, passed away on Monday, at 5:30 pm due to a massive heart attack. He was 69 years old. A socially active and popular figure, he leaves behind his wife and numerous relatives. His last rites were performed at the Navagraha cremation ground on the same day, attended by family, relatives, and well-wishers. His demise is widely mourned.

## Little done in eight years by BJP's 'double-engine' govts for flood problem in Assam: Gaurav Gogoi



**JORHAT, July 9:** As floods continue to wreak havoc in Assam, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Tuesday said the BJP's "double-engine" governments in the Centre and the state did very little during the past eight years to find a solution to the perennial problem.

Gogoi also asked the Union Jal Shakti minister to visit the state to assess the situation as the problem needed a long-term solution and significant financial investment.

"Flood and erosion response need a long-term solution and significant financial investment. Unfortunately, very little has been done over the last eight years by the 'double-engine' BJP government at the state and central levels," Gogoi said in a post on X.

"The Central Water Commission has ignored Assam for a long time. I request the minister of Jal Shakti to visit the state during these difficult times," he added. The BJP came to power in Assam in 2016.

Gogoi said relentless rain caused widespread devastation in Assam and 78 people had lost their lives so far.

"Homes are submerged, forcing evacuation and displacement of families. The loss of crops and livestock further threatens food security and livelihoods," he said. Over the last few days, Gogoi said he visited several areas in and around Jorhat, his parliamentary constituency, to take stock of the situation. "The situation on the ground continues to be grim. The vast scale of this disaster requires urgent action and support," he said. As many as 27 districts are affected by the floods in Assam. Several major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, continue to flow above the danger level at different places while there is a forecast of further rain in isolated places. (PTI)

## RPF of NFR apprehends touts and thieves

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, July 9: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of NF Railway continues its efforts to curb the activities of touts and thefts from passengers. During checks and drives conducted from June 16 to 30, 2024, the RPF apprehended 3 touts and recovered railway tickets valued at over ₹ 95,000. Additionally, 17 individuals involved in the theft of passenger belongings were apprehended during this period.

The operations involved coordinated raids with the Government Railway Police (GRP) and local police stations wherever necessary. A total of 34 tickets worth ₹ 95,219.55 were recovered during these drives and raids. All apprehended persons have been prosecuted under the relevant sections of the Railways Act.

In a specific incident on June 27, 2024, the RPF team of Rangia conducted a raid at 'NH Enterprise' in Kharupetia town, recovering 18 e-tickets worth approximately ₹ 59,192.10 and ap-



prehending one tout. A case has been registered under Section 143 of the Railways Act at Rangapara North for further legal action.

Earlier, on June 16, 2024, the RPF team of Katihar, in collaboration with the CPDS team of Katihar, conducted checks on train no 15909 at Katihar Railway Station, apprehending three individuals and recovering three stolen mobile phones worth approximately ₹ 45,000. The apprehended persons and recovered

items were handed over to the respective GRP for further legal proceedings.

Apart from monitoring unauthorised ticket sales, the RPF of NF Railway remains committed to providing assistance and security to rail users. The railway authorities urge all passengers to ensure they have proper tickets to avoid complications during travel. For any issues during train journeys, passengers can dial 139 (Toll-free).

## 2 arrested with drugs in Karbi Anglong

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** Two persons were arrested with drugs in Karbi Anglong district on Tuesday, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. The drugs were being brought from a neighbouring state, he said.

"In an anti-narcotics operation carried out by @karbianglongpol at wee hours, a vehicle was intercepted based on actionable intelligence and upon thorough checking, 685.65gms heroin and 3.118kg YABA

tablets (over 29,400 tabs) were recovered," he posted on X.

YABA tablets are illegal in India as they contain methamphetamine, a Schedule II substance under the Controlled Substances Act.

The items were being transported from a neighbouring state and two people were apprehended, Sarma said. (PTI)

## State govt to fill 35,000 vacancies by April next year: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** The state government will fill 35,000 vacancies by April next year, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

These include vacancies in the police force, grade 3 and grade 4 of the state government as well as teachers, he said.

"We are all set to fill 35,000 government vacancies by April '25 in a transparent manner," Sarma said on X.

He said recruitment examinations for grade 3 and grade 4 will be conducted in three stages – preliminary, mains and viva-voce from September. Police hiring will start in October, and teacher recruitment will be notified shortly, the chief minister said.

Physical test for over 6,400 posts of the Assam Police will commence from October 3 onwards.

Prelims for 7,500 grade-3 posts will be held on September 15, 22 and 29, while for 4,500 grade-4 posts on October 20 and 27, he said.

Sarma added that recruitment for over 13,000 posts of teachers in elementary and secondary education will be notified shortly. (PTI)

## Man stabbed to death

**HOJAI, July 9:** Sensation prevailed in Hojai due to a murder incident. As per information, the incident took place at the Theplaguri Village in Hojai on Monday night. Reportedly, a person named Bharat Chengyung killed Santosh Daudung Langtha with a sharp knife. Santosh, along with Deben Daolaguphu, had come to meet Jyotika Kemparai at her house in Theplaguri on Monday night. Accused Bharat stabbed Santosh to death and also attacked Jyotika Kemparai. The injured woman is currently undergoing treatment at Hojai FRU. Locals suspect that this incident happened due to an illicit love affair.

As soon as Hojai police got the information, they reached the spot, took the deceased's body into custody, and sent it to the hospital for post-mortem. Later on, the absconding accused Bharat Chengyung surrendered at Lanka Police Station on Tuesday. Accordingly, Hojai police took him into their custody and brought him to Hojai Police Station. Now, Hojai police is investigating the matter thoroughly.

Celebrations kick off with flag hoisting, tributes to past faculty & inaugural events

## Sibsagar Girls' College commences diamond jubilee celebrations

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, July 9:** Diamond jubilee celebrations of the state's premier women's educational institution, Sibsagar Girls' College, began on Monday with a day-long program. It was also the foundation day of the college. The spectacular flag hoisting program by an equal number of distinguished citizens of the state was initiated by Dr Jogesh Bora, president of the Governing Body, and Dr Pratim Sharma, principal of the college. It was followed by 'smriti tarpan' to the teachers and employees of the institution who are no longer alive, offered by youth leader Manos Handique and social worker Dilip Changmai. The wall magazine, brought out on the occasion, was released by Dr Saumerjyoti Mahanta, principal of Sibsagar Commerce College. Runumala Bhuyan and Kalikanta Bhuyan Memorial College Entrance Gate was inaugurated by a member of the donor family, Akashi Sarmah, former principal Sonaram Baruah released the college souvenir 'Prabahini' while Dr Heman Phukan released the annual newsletter 'Meraki'.

Dr Karabi Deka Hazarika, an alumna of the college and a professor in the Assamese department at Dibrugarh Univer-



sity, attended the open meeting as the chief guest. Dr Hazarika said that she is truly proud of her achievements made possible by the inspiring environment of the college when she was a student in the seventies. She urged fellow women to rise above the mundane level to rediscover the giant strength and creativity within. The meeting was presided over by Dr Jogesh Bora. The college students sang the cho-

rus at the beginning. The program ended with the lighting of earthen lamps in the evening. Lakhikanta Mahanta, Stradhikar Ujanial Satra, lit the ceremonial lamp to formally begin the meeting, which was attended by Dr Prakash Kotoky, Khagendranath Bhuyan, Dr PP Chetia, Anu Sharma, Asna Chetia, Monica Saikia, Makhan Bora, and a host of other distinguished citizens.

**অসম পাবলিক সার্ভিস কমিশন**  
ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION  
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022

No. 76PSC/CON/Exam-23/2023-2024

**NOTIFICATION**

The Assam Public Service Commission hereby declares today, the 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2024, the result of the Screening Test (OMR based and Conventional Type) for the post of **Cultural Development Officer under Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Assam under Cultural Affairs Department (Adv. No. 25/2023 Dtd. 09/05/2023)** conducted by the Commission on 07/01/2024. Candidates bearing the following Roll Numbers will have to appear in the Computer Practical Test to be conducted by the Commission. The date of Computer Practical Test will be notified shortly.

Roll Numbers of candidates to be appeared in the Computer Practical Test are stated below (horizontally):

10004	10010	10031	10039	10052	10065	10067	10070	10072	10081
10083	10108	10112	10124	10148	10163	10195	10225	10233	10252
10253	10300	10311	10334	10343	10356	10381	10415	10429	10435
10468	10512	10519	10636	10648	10658	10668	10682	10683	10691
10731	10771	10792	10802	10810	10812	10831	10836	10840	10844
10858	10860	10866	10888	10911	10912	10927	10946	10952	10955
10959	10964	11005	11043	11057	11058	11067	11075	11119	11128
11133	11141	11143	11144	11158	11160	11171	11176	11201	11202
11216	11237	11247	11253	11265	11267	11272	11273	11325	11370
11371	11376	11379	11383	11391	11437	11467	11470	11486	11499
11517	11521	11524	11525	11542	11547	11554	11557	11558	11568
11573	11578	11589	11591	11606	11608	11621	11628	11636	11673
11691	11705	11723	11725	11729	11739	11741	11749	11761	11764
11765	11766	11771	11772	11773	11778				

**N.B.:** The Commission will not be responsible for any typing/printing mistakes.

Sd/-  
Principal Controller of Examinations,  
Assam Public Service Commission,  
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022

Janasanyog /D/2291/24/10-Jul-24



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

People only see what they are prepared to see.  
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

## PM in Russia, turmoil at home

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently spent two days in Russia, engaging in high-profile discussions with President Vladimir Putin. Amidst speculation that Modi has been asked by the United States to mediate a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, the Indian Prime Minister's focus appears to be directed towards international diplomacy. This stance, however, comes under scrutiny as terror attacks and military casualties continue unabated in Jammu and Kashmir. The conflict in Jammu and Kashmir remains relentless, with the killing of five Indian Army soldiers on July 8 highlighting the grim reality. These incidents, often met with standard statements of condolence, seldom elicit a direct response from the Prime Minister, who frequently tweets on other matters such as sports or celebrities. This lack of acknowledgment extends to other key figures like Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, although promises of retribution are routinely made. The contrast between Modi's international engagements and the domestic security situation is stark. While he talks peace in Moscow, the persistent violence in Jammu and Kashmir undermines claims that the abrogation of Article 370 has diminished cross-border terrorism. The recent attack claimed by the "Kashmir Tigers," linked to the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad, exemplifies the continuing threat and raises questions about the effectiveness of India's counter-terrorism strategies.

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, once celebrated for his undercover exploits in Lahore, now faces criticism. The ongoing violence suggests that the intelligence apparatus under his watch is struggling to prevent such attacks. Despite Doval's reputation, the frequent killings of soldiers have cast doubt on his effectiveness and the broader intelligence framework. The government's rhetoric of avenging attacks has not translated into concrete action. Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane's statement following the recent killings promised a "strong message" to the enemy. However, such promises have become a routine response, with little visible impact on the ground. The terrorists' ability to strike and vanish underscores a significant gap in India's security and counter-terrorism operations. Prime Minister Modi's focus on international diplomacy, particularly his involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, may seem incongruous with the pressing security challenges at home. Critics argue that while Modi seeks to position himself as a global peacemaker, the unresolved violence in Jammu and Kashmir, and issues in regions like Manipur, reflect a disconnect between his international ambitions and domestic responsibilities.

The promise of a "recapture of PoK" (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) remains a high priority, ostensibly aimed at rectifying what Modi perceives as past territorial losses under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. However, this narrative does little to address the immediate and ongoing threat posed by terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. As the 2024 elections approach, the effectiveness of Modi's leadership in addressing internal security concerns will be a critical issue. The perception that international engagements take precedence over domestic security challenges may influence voter sentiment. The repeated loss of soldiers' lives demands more than rhetoric—it calls for tangible action and accountability from those in power. While Prime Minister Modi's efforts to broker peace on the global stage are commendable, the unresolved violence in Jammu and Kashmir poses a significant challenge to his administration. The government must balance its international ambitions with a robust response to domestic security threats to ensure the safety and stability of the nation.

# Tragedy and faith: The stampede at 'Bhole Baba's' congregation in Hathras

Amidst the aftermath of a tragic stampede during a religious congregation near Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, led by 'Bhole Baba'-formerly Suraj Pal, a retired police constable—the community grapples with profound loss and unanswered questions. As families mourn their loved ones and political leaders tread cautiously, the incident has sparked debates about faith, accountability, and the complexities of religious influence in contemporary India. This article explores the human stories, the investigation's developments, and the societal reflections surrounding this poignant event.

Vinod, gripped by grief and listlessness, struggles to find words. His mother, Jaywanti Devi, a devoted follower of 'Bhole Baba'-former Uttar Pradesh Police constable Suraj Pal—had taken his wife Rajkumari and their eight-year-old daughter Bhoomi to the satsang (congregation) in Sikandra Rao town near Hathras on that fateful morning of July 2. They never returned. His anger is palpable whenever he manages to speak.

Sitting outside his modest two-room house in Sokhana village near Hathras, the daily-wage laborer expresses his limited knowledge of the self-proclaimed godman, saying, "Whoever he is, he should feel ashamed of himself." His emotions then overflow, questioning, "I don't know if this Baba is a divine incarnation, but couldn't he have returned to check on his followers after the stampede? Does he grasp the essence of humanity? Couldn't he have ensured the well-being of his devotees? Basic humanity should suffice for that. Yet, he claims to possess divine powers."

Harimohan, a resident of Hathras town, mourns the loss of his aunt in the tragic stampede. "Only our Chachi used to attend his congregations. We know nothing about this Baba," he explains. "She would argue with us if we tried to reason with her or discourage her from attending such satsangs."

A common theme emerges among the families of the vic-



DEGREE OF THOUGHT  
Dipak Kurmi

times: many of the men interviewed express complete unfamiliarity with the godman's activities and the sway he held over the women in their households.

Suraj Pal, also known as Baba Narayan Hari and Saakar Vishwa Hari Bhole Baba, departed from the police force over two decades ago to pursue a career as a religious preacher. His followers span across various socio-economic backgrounds, from the disadvantaged to the affluent, with a significant presence among the Dalit community. Pinpointing the exact reasons behind the popularity of 'Bhole Baba' proves challenging. For women from the most impoverished backgrounds, these congregations offer a fleeting escape from the harsh realities of life—poverty, isolation, or domestic abuse. Whether driven by ignorance or unwavering faith, their vulnerability is evident. Take Mukesh Kumar, devastated by the loss of his daughter Lata in the stampede. Despite their grief, both he and his inconsolable elder daughter maintain unwavering faith in 'Bhole Baba'. They attribute the tragedy solely to crowd mismanagement, refusing to hold the Baba accountable for his absence afterward, giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Numerous accounts circulate regarding the events leading to the stampede on the afternoon of July 2nd. One commonly recounted narrative suggests the tragedy unfolded amidst a surge

of people vying to catch a glimpse of the self-proclaimed godman and touch the soil ('charan dhool') where he had walked earlier that day.

On July 3rd, the Uttar Pradesh government established a three-member judicial commission, led by a retired high court judge, to investigate the tragedy and explore the potential for conspiracy surrounding the stampede. Police reported that the crowd at the venue exceeded the permitted limit threefold, with a majority of the 121 deceased followers being women.

The influence of 'Bhole Baba' extends beyond congregational gatherings. Mukesh attests to this, sharing, "My wife had a cancerous growth that healed after she applied 'charan dhool'. That's the power of belief in Baba." Similar sentiments are echoed by Vijay Kumar Gautam, a farmer from Bahadur Nagar in Etah, Suraj Pal's ancestral village. He vividly recalls how a family member experienced healing after using 'charan dhool'. "Faith in Baba is something you must experience; it's beyond words," Vijay emphasizes.

On Saturday, Suraj Pal, also known as 'Bhole Baba', expressed his distress over the stampede incident in a message and urged the affected families to trust the judicial process. Notably, he has not been named in the FIR. The night before, Dev Prakash Madhukar, the chief organizer ('mukhya sevadar') of the congregation, surrendered in

Delhi, becoming the main accused in the case.

Suraj Pal, formerly part of the intelligence unit of Uttar Pradesh Police in Agra, is now revered by his steadfast followers as a godman who preached values of humanity, kindness, and equality for all. According to his admirers, he shunned self-promotion—there are no advertisements of him in newspapers or on television, and he maintained distance from political affiliations. Yet, visitors to his ancestral village, Bahadur Nagar, are drawn back repeatedly, attests Vijay Kumar Gautam.

Just outside his ancestral village, stands a sprawling ashram where 'Bhole Baba' was born into a farming family of six siblings. The family once owned vast tracts of land. The ashram, guarded by men in pinkish-khaki uniforms and adorned with imposing gates, is said to have been constructed by Baba personally. According to a volunteer at the ashram, Baba last visited the village around 10 to 12 years ago.

On the road leading to the village, one can observe passersby paying their respects by bowing before the gates of the ashram.

According to Rajendra Prasad, a resident of Bahadur Nagar, Suraj Pal's brother and sister still reside in the village. When asked about his beliefs in 'Bhole Baba's' teachings and their alignment with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideals—whose image prominently adorns Prasad's home—he remarks, "Suraj Pal emphasizes unity and humanity, whereas Baba Saheb dedicated himself to uplifting the impoverished, a cause the godman does not champion."

Villagers unanimously agree that his congregations have consistently been well-organized and peaceful. They speculate that the July 2 incident may have been the result of some form of conspiracy.

"Initially, his congregations caused us inconvenience with the crowds, but we adapted our daily routines around them," shares Jagjivan Ram, a farmer. "However, as the crowds grew, he began hosting them outside the village at larger venues."

Meanwhile, Aligarh-based journalist Akram Shah notes, "Despite organizing numerous large gatherings before, such an incident had never occurred previously. This could be a conspiracy orchestrated by those envious of his influence within the community he serves."

Jatavs, a sizable community in western Uttar Pradesh, particularly in the Aligarh, Hathras, and Etah regions, make up the majority of Suraj Pal's followers, reflecting his own roots within the community.

One possible reason for the cautious response from the political class is the significant support base Suraj Pal holds within the Jatav community in western Uttar Pradesh, including areas like Aligarh, Hathras, and Etah. Leaders such as Akhilesh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi have refrained from publicly mentioning him by name, instead focusing on addressing organizational shortcomings related to the incident.

Last Friday, Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, visited the families of the victims. Prior to meeting with the bereaved families in Hathras, he made a brief stop in Aligarh. During his visits, he emphasized the urgent need for maximum compensation to be provided without delay.

On the other hand, Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati called for stringent action against Suraj Pal, cautioning that "the poor, Dalits, and the oppressed should not compound their suffering by falling prey to the superstitions and hypocrisy of such babas."

Meanwhile, the police have arrested seven individuals linked to the incident, including chief organizer Madhukar, Anandi Devi, mother of one of the arrested persons named Mukesh Kumar, expressed concern, stating, "The police took him into custody despite his lack of involvement with the Baba's team and his absence at the event." Many questions still linger without answers. **(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)**

## India needs \$150-200 billion in annual FDI inflows for next 10 years

By: Nantoo Banerjee

It may look odd that India aspiring to be an industrial powerhouse and a major global economy received a total foreign direct investment (FDI) of only US\$28 billion, last year, compared to tiny Singapore receiving \$160 billion and Hong Kong \$113 billion. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), FDI inflows to India plummeted by 43 percent against a global decline of two percent to \$1.3 trillion amid economic slowdown and rising geopolitical tensions. India would need at least \$150-200 billion annually for the next 10 years to become a truly strong economy. The coming annual budget by the new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government must try sincerely to remove all obstacles to large FDI flows to the country.

Despite being the world's most populous country, India's GDP at current prices in 2023-24 has been estimated at only worth \$3.52 trillion. In contrast, neighbouring China's GDP in 2023 was Yuan 126.06 trillion, equivalent to US\$17.89 trillion. India's current economic growth trend shows a major departure from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's earlier target of hitting a \$5-trillion GDP mark at the end of the current financial year. India needs a double-digit annual economic growth for several years to deal with its poverty and unemployment.

The country requires large investments to pump up production in almost all sectors of its economy. A handful of domestic industrial investors with surplus funds simply cannot meet such requirements. The massive economic rise of China has been made possible by large FDI inflows to the country, year after year. In 2021, FDI inflows to China reached the peak of \$344 billion. On the other hand, investments by Chinese multinational companies (MNCs) to other countries came of age in 2023. Outbound Greenfield FDI from China was over \$140 billion, setting up a new record. This is after a decline of outbound Chinese mergers and acquisitions as western governments stepped up scrutiny of proposed Chinese M&A deals. China is expanding into new markets in strategic sectors such as clean energy and electric vehicles.

Latest reports suggest that India's fast expanding Adani group, a major recipient of the government's production linked incentive (PLI) scheme, selected as many as eight Chinese companies to help its ambitious solar manufacturing project. China-linked MG Motors in Gujarat is driving electric vehicles production and sales in India.

Incidentally, the United States, the world's largest economy, continues to be a top receiver of FDI, which totalled \$341 billion in 2023. The FDI inflows to the US reached record highs in 2015 and 2016, at \$484 billion and \$480 billion, respectively. Lately, the FDI inflows have considerably shrunk in the US. Among the top-20 host economies, the largest absolute drops in FDI inflows were registered in France, Australia, China, the US and India.

The data released by the India government's Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade

(DPIIT) listed that FDI fell to a five-year low in 2023-24 due to external factors such as high interest rates in advanced economies and the limited absorptive capacity in various sectors in the country.

Ironically, the only sector which seems to be booming in India is the stock trade. Stock gamblers have been campaigning for lower interest rates despite high consumer inflation to see further spurt in listed scrip prices. It is a matter of great concern that the Reserve Bank and the government may fall for such campaigns.

While foreign direct investment in equity and debt in the primary market remains somewhat minuscule compared to other major economies, foreign portfolio investment (FPI) continues to play hide and seek to turn India's stock market highly vibrant as also volatile, making it a punters' paradise. Most of the foreign punters started pulling out of the market early this year fearing the possibility of an unstable government at the Centre after the Lok Sabha (lower house) election.

However, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance's return to power started bringing these overseas portfolio investors back. After two months of net outflows before the Lok Sabha election, they turned buyers last month. In June, they infused around ₹ 26,500 crore in buying stocks and nearly ₹ 15,000 crore in debt instruments. Last week, the country's stock market benchmarks – the 30-share Sensex and Nifty-50 – witnessed massive gains setting new records.

Few are concerned about the poor state of FDI inflows in India. Till now, very few OECD countries, barring the US, the UK and Germany, are direct investors in India. Investments are largely routed through countries such as Mauritius and Singapore. Mauritius accounted for 25 percent of the total FDI inflows in India between April 2000 and March 2024, followed closely by Singapore (24 percent) and the US (10 percent).

During the last fiscal, FDI equity inflows in India dropped from all major investing countries, including Mauritius, Singapore, the US, the UK, the UAE, Cayman Islands, Germany and Cyprus. It is believed that a lot of FDI investors are actually Indian entities abroad routing investments through shell companies in small countries.

It is time that the government takes measures to make FDI equity inflows highly attractive and open as it did for foreign investments in the semiconductor sector, last year. The country's forthcoming national budget for 2024-25 should hinder all hindrances to FDI equity inflows in India. The big nations are ready to come to India to invest in the country and reap benefits for both India and their foreign investors. However, some invisible domestic interests seemed to be standing in the way ever since the UNCTAD investor surveys pointed to a strong interest in India as a FDI destination. Years ago, an A.T. Kearney survey had also placed India as "the second most attractive destination for FDI." Unfortunately, this is yet to be translated into action through the required government actions and focus on policy reforms, removing the infrastructure and regulatory barriers. **(IPA Service)**

## The future of Indo-Iran ties

By: Asad Mirza

Reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian has won Iran's runoff presidential election, beating hardliner Saeed Jalili by promising to reach out to the West and ease enforcement on the country's mandatory headscarf law after years of sanctions and protests squeezing the Islamic Republic.

Pezeshkian promised no radical changes to Iran's Shia theocracy in his campaign and long has held the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as the final arbiter of all matters of state. But an Iranian government still largely held by hardliners will challenge even Pezeshkian's modest aims.

The late president, Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash in May 2024, was seen as a protégé of Khamenei and a potential successor as supreme leader. While Khamenei remains the final decision-maker on matters of state, whichever man ends up winning the presidency could bend the country's foreign policy towards either confrontation or collaboration with the West, on which the whole edifice of Iranian diplomacy rests.

Though, in most countries presidents are usually the final authority in their capacity as heads of state or government – or both – that's not the case in Iran. It is the Supreme Leader, who is the final authority in Iran and sets the domestic and foreign policies of the country and makes all key decisions. Thus, one may wonder if the presidential elections are a mere ruse and the president's office a mere token. However, the reality is quite complicated.

In reality, the president is not a mere decorated mechanical bureaucrat. A president and his minister still have a crucial executive role and the manner in which they implement the policies and enforce the decisions plays a major role in the outcomes these policies and decisions produce.

As a result, while rules like the mandatory wearing of hijab for females in public will not be revoked, the implementation under Pezeshkian is expected to be much more humane and incidents like the custodial killing of Mahsa Amini, which triggered months long protests across Iran, are expected to be checked. And it is this background that we'll have to see future of the Indo-Iran ties under President Pezeshkian.

Quite interestingly, Four polling stations were set up in India – Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad – to facilitate the over 3000 Iranian population to come out and vote in the elections.

At a practical level bilateral ties be-

tween the two countries have remained cordial and even trade has seen an upswing. India-Iran bilateral trade during the FY 2022-23 was \$2.33 billion, registering a growth of 21.76% YOY. During the period, India's export to Iran was \$1.66 billion (a growth of 14.34%) and India's import from Iran was \$ 672.12 million (a growth of 45.05%).

### Indian Support to Iran

The strong ties are further demonstrated by the manner in which the Indian government used its good offices recently to get Iran a membership berth at BRICS and the manner in which it is going full steam ahead with developing the Chabahar Port in Iran.

There is enormous appreciation among Iranian intellectuals, diplomats and politicians regarding PM Modi's stellar support for their country's membership of the BRICS grouping. Modi played a key role to navigate Iran's membership purposively at the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg last August.

Allegedly, the defining moment was a phone call from the Iranian President late Ebrahim Raisi to Modi in the week before the summit meeting.

However, the ground for the last-minute flurry of diplomatic activity was prepared in the preceding weeks by the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval when he attended the meeting of BRICS national security advisors in Johannesburg in late July 2023, just weeks prior to the summit to review security and economic cooperation.

Further, Tehran visualises that in the downstream of Chabahar Port, Indian trade and industry can and should enter the hinterland in a big way via trade, investments and project exports. The Iranian side feels that Chabahar has the potential to elevate India's partnership with Iran to an altogether higher strategic level.

### Chabahar Project

On May 13, 2024, India signed a 10-year agreement with Iran to develop and operate the Shahid Beheshti terminal of Iran's strategic Chabahar port. The new agreement follows a previously promised Iranian investment in 2016 of a potential \$500 million. It comes after multiple failures to fully implement a previous deal concluded in May 2016 to develop two

terminals and five berths at Chabahar port to transport goods and gas from Central Asia to India and handle other international cargo.

PM Modi travelled to Iran in 2016 to conclude the original Chabahar Agreement, also signing an international transport and transit corridor deal Tehran drafted to expand port infrastructure. But US-led sanctions on Tehran forced New Delhi to call for a temporary halt. India eventually managed to negotiate an agreement with the United States to allow Indian investments in the port.

In 2018, Washington agreed to issue sanctions exemptions to enable India to use Chabahar to trade with land-locked Afghanistan for humanitarian purposes. But progress in developing Chabahar continued to be delayed by sanctions.

By March 2023, Tehran called on India to use Chabahar port for mutually beneficial trade, including Indian imports of Iranian oil, which New Delhi suspended after the United States declined to extend sanctions waivers.

The latest agreement in May, signed by Indian Ports Global Ltd and Iran's Port and Maritime Organisation, is narrowly focused on expanding the Shahid Beheshti terminal, with a \$120 million investment from Indian Ports Global and a credit window of \$250 million, thereby enabling New Delhi to avoid financially overcommitting to the project. Though, following the signing of the agreement, the United States suggested India could face sanctions for business deals with Iran and India has not yet responded to these threats.

As far as the future of Indo-Iran ties is expected, a positive indication of that was recently given by the Iranian Ambassador to India, Iraj Elahi, in a newspaper interview, said that there would be no change in the foreign policy between Iran and India, irrespective of who comes to power. There is unlikely to be any change in the foreign policy, which is led by the Supreme Leader and different bodies of high-ranking politicians, adding that a large segment of Iranians feel that even if they were to reconnect with the West, sanctions would be imposed again on some pretext or the other. **(The author is a Delhi-based senior political and international affairs commentator)**





# Progress and challenges: Women in the IFS towards gender parity

By: Jyoti Saikia

The Indian Foreign Service (IFS) saw a significant rise in the presence of women, increasing by 6.6 percent to reach 37.8 percent from 2014 to 2022. Notably, between 2018 and 2020, the percentage of female recruits in the IFS surpassed 40 percent. Observers point out that the IFS generally has a higher proportion of women compared to other services like the IAS and IPS.

Despite this undeniable progress, achieving gender parity in the diplomatic corps remains an ongoing challenge. Historically, women in the IFS have faced numerous obstacles, including exclusion from challenging postings and the requirement for government approval to marry—restrictions not imposed on their male colleagues.

Trailblazers like C.B. Muthamma battled these discriminatory practices, notably in 1979, paving the way for significant improvements by the 1980s.

Although there have been advancements, the IFS remains a relatively small service, which contrasts with India's self-perception as an emerging global power. Experts in foreign af-

fairs have long advocated for tripling the number of recruits to bridge the gender gap and bolster India's international presence. Historically, increasing recruitment has resulted in a higher proportion of women entering the service. This trend was evident in 2015 when 17 women were inducted into the IFS.

Presently, women lead only eight of India's diplomatic missions, with none stationed in major capitals. This marks a significant decrease from 2008, when over 25 missions, including several key locations, were headed by women. Additionally, in the ministry of external affairs (MEA), just one of the seven top-level positions is currently held by a woman.

For true gender parity in the IFS, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar must tackle the structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's advancement and leadership opportunities. Creating a more inclusive and representative diplomatic corps will ensure that the values and strengths of a modern India are more accurately reflected on the global stage.

The NDA government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is moving swiftly. As the new Union



Ministers acclimate to their roles, the Centre is promptly appointing private secretaries to support them. In the initial wave of appointments, private secretaries were named for Union ministers such as Nitin Gadkari, Manohar Lal Khattar, Giriraj Singh, and Hardeep Singh Puri.

The selected private secretaries, Shinde Deepak Arjun, Rassel Dwivedi, Raman Kumar, and B. Vijay Datta, come from the IAS batches of 2010, 2011, and 2012. Notably, these appointments were made with minimal input from the ministers themselves, particularly in the case of Gadkari.

In the following round of appoint-

ments, six more officers were designated as private secretaries to Union ministers. Among them, Anirudha Sravan Pulipaka from the Karnataka cadre was appointed as the private secretary to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

What's fueling this urgency? The drive stems from a 100-day action plan for ministries and departments, developed by bureaucrats and Niti Aayog officials at Modi's behest, even before the elections were announced. Initiatives requiring legislative approval or funding will be highlighted in the upcoming Budget, scheduled for next month. The government is evidently on a mission to

start strong, and these rapid appointments are just the beginning.

In a surprising and somewhat ironic gesture towards "ease of doing business," officials in Gujarat are now accepting bribes on an installment plan to lessen the financial strain on those paying them. Yes, it's true.

These accommodating bureaucrats seem to have borrowed a concept from the banking sector, enabling citizens to pay bribes in manageable installments.

No longer do people need to gather large sums for bribes in one go. If you find yourself needing to pay a bribe but can't manage the full amount upfront, worry not! Now, you can spread the payment over several months. For instance, earlier this year, someone implicated in a state GST fraudulent billing case was asked for a bribe amounting to ₹ 21 lakh.

Luckily, an installment plan was offered: ₹ 2 lakh per month for nine months. Similarly, a cybercrime unit officer allegedly demanded ₹ 10 lakh but agreed to accept payment in four installments instead.

According to sources familiar with the matter, the practice is becoming

more widespread. In Surat, a deputy sarpanch and a taluka panchayat member requested ₹ 85,000 from a villager for leveling his farm. Understanding the villager's financial situation, they generously proposed an EMI arrangement: an initial payment of ₹ 35,000 followed by three subsequent installments for the remaining amount.

In a startling turn of events, two police officers absconded with ₹ 4 lakh, the initial installment of a ₹ 10 lakh bribe they had demanded from a Sabarkantha district resident. Evidently, they were not willing to wait for the remainder!

Senior police officials acknowledge that this trend is becoming more prevalent, with at least 10 such incidents reported this year alone. This phenomenon is shedding light on previously undisclosed aspects of the renowned Gujarat model. It may even serve as inspiration for other states to consider adopting similar practices.

Remember to acknowledge Gujarat for pioneering this approach, where citizens need not deplete their savings all at once—instead, they can expect a monthly deduction. *(The writer can be reached at jyoysaikia1990@gmail.com)*

## How India's emerging legal framework impacts women's rights and agency

By: Natasha Singh

From July 1, the three new laws—Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Act—have replaced the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, and Evidence Act, respectively.

This decision has sparked a range of reactions across the country, with citizens filing petitions and experts calling for further parliamentary deliberation. Despite these concerns, the government remains confident about implementing the new laws, with the Ministry of Home Affairs instructing states to identify and address potential issues during the rollout. As we transition to this new criminal justice system, it is crucial to examine how India's emerging legal framework impacts women's rights and agency.

At the state level, Uttarakhand became the second state in India to implement a Uniform Civil Code after Goa, and Assam is following suit by repealing the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorce Registration Act of 1935. Uttarakhand's code includes a provision for registering live-in relationships with a state-appointed registrar. This is significant, as live-in relationships are already protected under laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. The registrar will maintain public records and have the authority to inquire into these relationships.

Notably, the code requires informing parents if either partner is under 21, despite the marriage age requirement being 18 for girls, which raises questions about the autonomy of young women. While these developments may seem like mere legal conflicts that can be clarified through subsequent judg-

ments, they were passed using the regular legislative processes with the help of our elected representatives.

Politics, as a form of power, manifests in different ways and significantly influences both public and private lives. In India, the regulation of private spaces often serves as a double-edged sword for women. For instance, when the state regulates private issues such as marriage, relationships, abortion, and contraception, it blurs the line between public and private, asserting control over intimate spaces.

Similarly, issues like domestic violence and marital rape highlight how state intervention in personal matters can profoundly affect women's lives. This interplay between public policy and private autonomy often results in one being prioritised over the other, raising important questions about the balance of power and the protection of individual rights.

At the central level, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, which replaced the Indian Penal Code 1860, reaffirms the earlier exception of 'marital rape', stating that "sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his wife, the wife not being under eighteen years of age, is not rape." This is concerning when, according to the NFHS-5 survey, among married women aged 18-49, 83% report experiencing sexual violence by their current husband, and 13% report a former husband as a perpetrator.

While the Supreme Court has yet to deliver a judgment on this issue,

the government's latest position on this matter was that criminalising marital rape would 'harm the institution of marriage.' For women, this means their bodily autonomy is at risk to preserve the larger societal institution.

Although they may have the legal independence to choose their marriage partner (barring the societal hurdles of religion, caste, and class), their protection post-marriage remains conditional on the state's interpretation of marriage and its societal significance.

Further, the same law also removes protection from sexual violence against trans persons, which was mentioned in the earlier versions of the law under Section 377 of the IPC. Further, the same law also retains its earlier provision on self-managed abortions for women. By legal interpretation, voluntary miscarriage stands for criminal abortion, punishable by law. This means that if a woman causes herself to miscarry for reasons other than her health or in good faith (not defined under law), she will be liable for a fine and a jail term of up to three years.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021 stands as an exception to this law, allowing for the abortion of a pregnancy. But even this abortion is conditional and can only be performed on the advice of a doctor for select categories of women dealing with physical, sexual, mental, or humanitarian distress.

In special circumstances beyond the gestational limit of 24 weeks, it

depends on the approval of the Medical Board only if there is a substantial foetal abnormality. So while access to abortion exists under the legal regime of the country, there is still a long road ahead before it is recognised as a right for a person with the capacity to become pregnant to unconditionally decide whether a pregnancy is to be continued or not.

In all these examples, we see an incongruous image of what constitutes 'personal' to women and their agency in making decisions according to the state's understanding. While they may not have the autonomy to choose a partner or make sexual and reproductive decisions, the state exercises control in societal institutions such as marriage to reinforce perceptions of morality. Thus, privacy in law for women becomes a slippery slope.

When linked with individual dignity, bodily integrity, and sexual autonomy, privacy serves as a tool for women to assert their rights. However, when the notion of privacy conflicts with societal structures, it can potentially undermine women's rights, given the gendered power dynamics within families.

While it may be essential to have common laws on some civil matters and to standardise certain laws for greater 'integration' of civil suits, the question remains: how do we strike the balance between regulation and the infringement of agency? This is crucial considering that key decisions affecting women and girls' lives occur in both the private and public spheres and often entail negotiation and compromise. As the new criminal laws take effect, ongoing discussions and clarifications are necessary to ensure that women's autonomy is not compromised in the pursuit of societal norms. *(Courtesy: The Wire)*

## Does Laapata Ladies give us our first 'female saviour'?

By: Sachi Bhanap

The tale of an abla naari is a sad one. Dependent on the men in her life for the smallest of things and systematically wronged and taken advantage of, she has no choice but to stay put in her situation, until her male saviour arrives to rescue her.

And it is true—there may be and are women like this. Forced by their circumstances and having to bend under heavily patriarchal notions, they remain weak and defenceless, having to wait for a lifeboat in the shape of a man no matter how small the crisis may be. But Laapata Ladies takes that notion and flips it over so effectively that it seems as natural as it should be.

Yes, many a 'abla naari' live in our society. She may be your mother, sister, aunt, friend or even you. But does she have to stay that way? Does she not have any power to take basic control of her life?

No. What she lacks is not capability, but opportunity and space.

Every woman is not abla, but rather able—able to think and act for herself with agency and confidence, without having to rely on a knight in shining armour.

**Mistaken identity, unexpected freedom**

In Laapata Ladies, all it takes for the two main female characters (Phool and Jaya/Pushpa Rani) to set forward on the

path of empowerment is the chance to handle things by themselves, instead of being led everywhere, hand held and g h u n g h a t - d r a w n .

Both are different women with different worldviews and desires from their life. But their initial predicament is the same—new brides travelling to their new families with their bag and baggage and the jhanjhat of a ghunghat. Initially, they are lost because of an earnest mistake thanks to the ghunghat that masks not just their identity to others but also their own sight of the world (Kiran Rao aptly uses this metaphor to its fullest extent throughout the movie).

However, from there they go in slightly different directions—Jaya is grateful to have escaped her husband (who showed clear potential to be abusive) and grabs the doorknob to her freedom, making systematic plans to continue her education. Her self-assuredness, confidence in her abilities and shrewdness are awakened after she had smothered them for a forced marriage to Pradeep, and she now walks about with purpose, even enjoying herself and the company of others around her.

On the other hand, Phool takes some more time. Naive and untouched by the ways of the world, she was simply taught to be a 'dutiful' daughter. She now makes hard peace with the fact that she is well and truly lost with no hope of reuniting with Deepak unless he comes searching for her. Then she gets adopted by a gruff but kind Manju Maai who opens up her world view and gives her a sense of independence. Eventually, she realises that instead of waiting for Deepak to find her, she can simply go and find him!

What I love about Phool's character is that she stays true to her desire to reunite with Deepak (who would not want to if it was Deepak?) and live a traditional family life but also imbibes an important nuance of independence—it is not about rejection of others' help or existence, rather being able to depend on yourself despite others being there.

But either way, the tale of an 'abla naari' is no longer that of Jaya or Phool. They are now free and competent enough to 'rescue' themselves and take their life in their own hands.

**First female saviour?**

The entire movie was a heartwarming ode to women empowerment but what struck me the most in this simple but optimistic dramedy was that this is the first time I've seen a woman 'saving' a woman. Whether it was Manju Maai bluntly but not unkindly schooling Phool on her lack of agency or Jaya not just saving herself, but ingeniously helping in the quest for Phool—it was a woman who put on the shining armour for other women.

What makes her so different from a classic 'male saviour' is that she does not presuppose that the other woman is weak, incapable of rescuing herself—the 'saviour' doesn't do the actual rescuing, she facilitates it. The classic 'male saviour', never once thinks that the woman is capable, rather suddenly gains the ease of a superhero who fights 20 goons before breakfast and whisks the lady away from danger.

Instead, the 'female saviours' of Laapata Ladies become a more realistic 'friend in need', whose role is simply to nudge something innate in the woman that will urge her to save herself.

Not just that, but the 'male saviour' also tends to make the story all about himself—the suffering woman is just there so that he may become the hero, as Kartik Aaryan in Satyaprem Ki Katha so thick-headedly articulates, "Hero heroine ko nahi bachaayega toh hero kaise banega".

The story of Laapata Ladies never suddenly

becomes about Manju Mai (though her life would make a movie that would be a good slap on the face of a certain director who loves to propagate abuse as love), neither does it glorify Shyam Manohar's act of holding up the law (which is basically his job) and make it about how he rescued a damsel in distress.

The story could have also easily been about Deepak and how he is such a good man and so he not only rescues his own wife but also saves Jaya from the brutal Pradeep and 'gives' her the freedom to pursue her education. Haven't we all too often seen movies that do this? However far-fetched it may sound in the setting of Laapata Ladies, it is a trope that has been consistently used throughout the ages. Indeed, the fact that this seems far-fetched in the story, is Laapata Ladies' biggest achievement.

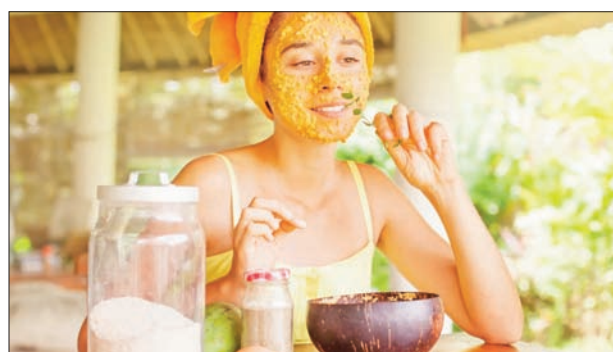
Suddenly, refreshingly, we don't see the women going—'bachao, bachao', neither do we see a man 'saving' the woman but drawing focus away from the narratives of the very women he is supposed to be empowering.

Instead, empowered women empower other women to take control of their lives and choices. Deepak and Shyam Manohar definitely help in certain processes but the story's focus remains on the trajectory of Phool and Jaya.

The journey from an 'abla naari' to 'able naari' is theirs and solely theirs.

Are we finally dismantling the 'abla naari' trope and giving way to the 'able naari' one? Are we finally seeing the 'female saviour'?

The heartwarming optimism of Laapata Ladies is infectious and so I truly hope we find ourselves answering the above questions with a resounding 'yes' in the coming years. *(Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)*



By: Shahnaz Husain

Every year, summers take a toll on the skin. The burning sun and hot winds tend to damage the natural skin glow and make it dull, rough and dark. An increase in temperatures during the summer months, combined with humidity and heat end up with excessive sebum around the T-zone, itchy rashes, sunburn, and premature signs of ageing.

Our skin suffers from roughness, summer tans and clogs pores because of dust, pollution and heatwaves. This can lead to blackheads, itchiness and loss of your beautiful skin tone.

Because of all this, our skin needs special care in summer. Most people spend a lot of money on chemical products or face treatments, assuming this will do the trick. But let me tell you, ultimately they are using chemicals only.

Most people spend a lot of money on chemical products or face treatments, assuming this will do the trick. But let me tell you, ultimately they are using chemicals only.

This is where the skincare home remedies come in handy that helps glow your skin naturally that prove to be the best alternative to the chemical-based products.

It's a good idea to keep one day in the week to give yourself a home facial. It helps to keep the skin in a good condition and also to counteract the effects of pollution and dirt, which are present in the air in most cities. It helps to refresh the skin and rejuvenate it after a week of stress, strain and fatigue. First take a headband or scarf, place it just above the forehead, along the hairline and tie it at the back just above the neck. This is to protect the hair.

Start by cleansing the skin thoroughly. Choose the cleanser according to skin

type—gel/cream cleanser for normal to dry skin; cleansing milk or lotion for normal to oily and combination skins.

Apply it on the face. Take cotton wool pads, wet them and squeeze out the water. Using these, wipe your skin with upwards and outwards strokes. On the forehead, use strokes from just above the bridge of the nose, going on either side towards the temples, following a gentle arc. Pay special attention to the corners of the nostrils and don't forget the neck area. Wash the face with plenty of water.

While the face is still damp, apply a facial scrub for deep pore cleansing. This is particularly good for oily skins and blackheads. However, if you have spots, pimples, acne, rashes or any eruptions, avoid using a scrub. Facial scrubs are easily available nowadays. You can also use home ingredients, like almond meal, oats, or rice flour. Add a little rose water or yogurt and apply on the skin. Rub the skin gently with it and wash the face with plain water.

If you have a normal to dry skin, nourishing should come next. Apply the nourishing cream, wet your hands with water and massage the cream into the skin, using outwards and upwards strokes. Use extremely gentle strokes for the area around the eyes, using only

your ring finger. The motion should be outwards and care should be taken to see that the skin is not pulled or stretched. For the neck, use strokes from the chin downwards.

Continue the massage for three to four minutes and wipe your skin with damp cotton wool or a clean, moist face towel. Avoid applying cream if the skin is oily, but nourish the neck area. Next, apply a face mask. Mix together two teaspoons choker (wheat bran) one teaspoon each ground almonds, rose water, curd and honey into a paste. This is suitable for all skin types.

Apply this on the face, leaving out lips and area around the eyes. Take two cotton wool pads and soak them in rosewater, for eye pads. While the mask dries, lie down, close your eyes and put the eye pads on the eyelids. Allow your body to relax. This kind of relaxation is a beauty treatment in itself. After 20 to 30 minutes, wash off the face mask with water. Next, soak cotton wool pads with chilled rosewater and wipe the skin with it. Stroke the skin too, with the rose water pads and pat your skin briskly with it. This helps to tone the skin, close the pores and add a healthy glow.

Precaution while doing a facial:

1. Don't wash your face that night. Your skin needs a

chance to relax. Your facial will have left it quite clean, so there's no need to wash your face before bedtime.

2. Do not apply makeup immediately after treating your skin to a facial. Give your skin moderate time to breathe.

3. Give facial every week using skin-friendly organic products to improve your skin texture. The synthetic products may damage your skin.

4. Make advance preparations and keep all ingredients ready before starting your facial to complete all steps efficiently.

5. Keep yourself tension free in a quiet and calm atmosphere to achieve the best results.

6. Stay out of the sun. The new skin cells exposed by your facial are sensitive. Give them a few days out of the sun and, if you have to go out, use a high SPF sunscreen. Use umbrella while going out of home to avoid direct sun light

7. Avoid any gradients which does not suit your skin type and in case if you feel discomfort with any ingredients then rinse it off immediately and cleanse your face.

8. Drink plenty of water/soup or juices to keep your skin refreshed and hydrated. *(The author is international fame beauty expert and is called herbal queen of India)*



## Kyiv mourns as rescuers sift piles of rubble at a children's hospital hit by a Russian missile

**KYIV, July 9:** Rescue operations stretched into a second day at a major Kyiv children's hospital struck by a Russian missile, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Tuesday, as officials raised the countrywide casualty toll to 42 dead and almost 200 injured in the previous day's intense daytime barrage that smashed into multiple cities.

Zelenskyy said on the social platform X that 64 people were hospitalized in the capital, as well as 28 in Kryvyi Rih and six in Dnipro - both cities in central Ukraine. It was Russia's heaviest bombardment of Kyiv in almost four months and one of the deadliest of the war, hitting seven of the city's 10 districts. The strike on the Okhmatdyt children's hospital, which interrupted open-heart surgery and forced young cancer patients to take their treatments outdoors, drew an international outcry.

The 10-story hospital, which is Ukraine's largest medical facility for children, was caring for some 670 patients at the time of the attack, Okhmatdyt's Director General, Volodymyr Zhovniir, said Tuesday. The missile hit a two-story wing of the hospital.

"The building where we conducted dialysis for children with kidney failure or acute intoxication is ruined entirely," he told reporters, estimating the overall damage to the hospital at \$2.5 million. Danielle Bell, the head of a U.N. team tracking human rights violations in Ukraine, said at least two people were killed at the hospital and some 50 people were injured, including seven children.

The casualty figure would have been much higher if patients hadn't been taken to a bunker when air raid sirens first sounded, she added. Authorities were working to restore the hospital's power and water supply, Zhovniir said.

Kyiv city administrators de-

clared Tuesday an official day of mourning. Entertainment events were prohibited and flags were lowered in the capital.

Russia denied responsibility for the hospital strike, insisting it doesn't attack civilian targets in Ukraine despite abundant evidence to the contrary, including Associated Press reporting.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday repeated that position, pointing to a Russian Defense Ministry statement that blamed a Ukrainian air defense missile for partially destroying the hospital.

Bell, the head of the U.N. team, dismissed that argument. She said an assessment of video footage and

findings on site indicated the hospital "took a direct hit, rather than receiving damage due to an intercepted weapons system." The hospital likely was struck by a

Russian Kh-101 cruise missile, Bell said. Ukrainian officials said the same. The bodies of three more people were found Tuesday under the rubble of a residential building in the Shevchenkivskiy district of Kyiv, officials said, bringing the death toll in the single building to 10. The Russian onslaught Monday came on the eve of a NATO summit in Washington where alliance countries are expected to pledge new military and economic support for Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, was hosting India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Moscow. New Delhi's importance as a key trading partner has grown since the Kremlin sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

Zelenskyy was deeply critical of Modi's visit, saying on X late Monday: "It is a huge disappointment and a devastating blow to peace efforts to see the leader of the world's most bloody criminal in Moscow on such a day." (AP)

## Newly elected French lawmakers enter into talks to see who can form the next government

**PARIS, July 9:** Newly elected lawmakers arrived on Tuesday at the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament, for talks seeking to cobble together a government majority after a chaotic election result left the legislature split among left, center and far-right parties.

President Emmanuel Macron on Monday asked his Prime Minister Gabriel Attal to continue handling day-to-day affairs, less than three weeks before the start of the Paris Olympics. Macron leaves on Wednesday for a NATO summit in Washington.

Sunday's election left no faction even close to the majority needed to form a government, raising the risk of paralysis for the European Union's second-largest economy. While a fractured parliament is not uncommon in Europe, the situation is unprecedented in France's modern history.

Leaders of the leftist coalition, the New Popular Front, which won the most seats, say they should form a new government. The three main parties in the coalition — the hard-left France Unbowed, the Socialists and the Greens — began negotiations to find a candidate for prime minister.

Their talks are complicated by internal divisions. Some are pushing for a hard-left figure while others, closer to the center-left, prefer a more consensual personality. France's prime minister is accountable to parliament and can be ousted through a no-confidence vote.

Members of France Unbowed and the Greens arrived on Tuesday morning at the National Assembly. The Socialist lawmakers, who include former President Francois Hollande, were to gather in the afternoon.

The top negotiator for the Socialist party, Johanna Rolland, said that the future prime minister won't be Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the divisive hard-left founder of France Unbowed who has angered many moderates.

Speaking on France 2 television Tuesday, she suggested the leftist coalition could possibly work with center-left members of Macron's alliance. "We will be open," she said.

According to official results, all three main blocs fell far short of the 289 seats needed to control the 577-seat National Assembly, the most powerful of France's two legislative chambers.

The results showed just over 180 seats for the New Popular Front leftist coalition, which placed first to beat Macron's centrist alliance, with more than 160 seats. The far-right National Rally part of Marine Le Pen and its allies were restricted to third place, although their more than 140 seats were still way ahead of the party's previous best showing of 89 seats in 2022. Macron has three years remaining on his presidential term. (AP)

## Hurricane Beryl kills 4, plunges 3 million into darkness in Texas

**HOUSTON, July 9:** At least four people were killed, and nearly three million homes and businesses were left without power as powerful tropical storm Beryl, which brought damaging winds and floods, slammed into Texas early on Monday. Beryl brought Schools, businesses, offices, and financial institutions to a halt soon after it made landfall near Matagorda as a category 1 hurricane, the National Hurricane Centre said on Monday evening.

Flooding, rains and tornadoes were possible across portions of eastern Texas, Western Louisiana and Arkansas, the centre said. Two people were killed after trees fell on homes, and a civilian employee of the Houston Police Department was killed when he was trapped in flood waters.

One more person was reported dead in a fire incident. Officials asked residents to stay home on Monday night as floodwaters from Beryl began to recede, and crews started surveying the damage. "Don't let the clear skies fool you," Mayor John Whitmire said at a news conference.

"There were no immediate reports of widespread structural damages," he said. "We still have dangerous circumstances."

Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo offered a similar message: "We're not out of the woods



yet... Let's just wait until tomorrow. Doing a damage assessment on your own property is one thing, but driving around unnecessarily — we really ask that you avoid it."

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who is leading the state while Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is out of the country, said it will be a "multiple-day process to get power restored" to the about 2.7 million customers across Texas experiencing outages.

Patrick said CenterPoint officials told him they were sending in 11,500 people to help with restoration efforts. The workers are coming both from out of state and from unaffected counties in Texas, Patrick said during a late Monday afternoon storm briefing in Austin.

High water, tree damage and other debris are expected to make roadways unsafe for the next

Most of the population of 2.3 million has been displaced, often multiple times

## Israeli forces push deeper into Gaza City as Hamas warns that escalation threatens cease-fire talks

**DEIR-AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), July 9:** Israeli forces advanced deeper into the Gaza Strip's largest city in pursuit of militants who had regrouped there, sending thousands of Palestinians fleeing on Monday from an area ravaged in the early weeks of the nine-month-long war.

Hamas warned that the latest raids and displacement in Gaza City could lead to the collapse of long-running negotiations over a cease-fire and hostage release, after the two sides had appeared to have narrowed the gaps in recent days.

Israeli troops were again battling militants in areas that the army said had been largely cleared months ago in northern Gaza. The military ordered evacuations ahead of the raids, but Palestinians said nowhere feels safe. Most of the population of 2.3 million has been displaced, often multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into sweltering tent camps.

Israel ordered the evacuation of northern Gaza in the first weeks of the war and has prevented most people from returning. But hundreds of thousands of Palestinians remain, living in shelters or the shells of homes.

"We fled in the darkness amid

heavy strikes," said Sayeda Abdel-Baki, a mother of three who had sheltered with relatives in the Daraj neighbourhood. "This is my fifth displacement." Residents reported artillery and tank fire, as well as airstrikes. Gaza's Health Ministry, with limited access to the north, did not immediately report casualties.

Israel issued additional evacuation orders for areas in other neighbourhoods of central Gaza City. The military said it had intelligence showing that militants from Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group were in the area, and called on residents to head south to the city of Deir al-Balah. Israel accuses Hamas and other militants of hiding among civilians. In Shijaiyah, a Gaza City neighbourhood that has seen weeks of fighting, the military said troops raided and destroyed schools and a clinic that had been converted into militant compounds.

The war has decimated large swaths of urban landscape and sparked a humanitarian catastrophe. Israel and Hamas seem to be the closest they have been in months to agreeing to a cease-fire deal that would pause the fighting in exchange for the release of dozens of hostages captured by Hamas in the October 7 attack that



triggered the war.

CIA Director William Burns returned to the region Monday for talks in Cairo, according to Egypt's state-run Qahera TV, which is close to the security services. An Israeli delegation was also heading to the Egyptian capital, Israeli media reported. But obstacles remain, even after Hamas agreed to relent on its key demand that Israel commit to ending the war as part of any agreement. A key part of that shift, officials told The Associated Press, is the level of destruction caused by Israel's rolling offensive.

Hamas still wants mediators to guarantee that negotiations conclude with a permanent cease-fire, according to two officials with knowledge of the talks. The current draft says the mediators — the

United States, Qatar and Egypt — "will do their best" to ensure that negotiations lead to an agreement to wind down the war.

Israel has rejected any deal that would force it to end the war with Hamas intact — a condition Netanyahu reiterated on Sunday.

Hamas on Monday said it is "offering flexibility and positivity" to facilitate a deal, while accusing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of "putting more obstacles in the way of negotiations".

Meanwhile, Hamas' top political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, warned mediators of "catastrophic consequences" if Israel continued its operations in Gaza City, saying Netanyahu and the army would bear "full responsibility" for the collapse of the talks, the group said

## A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels targets a ship in the Gulf of Aden

**DUBAI, July 9:** A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted a ship in the Gulf of Aden on Tuesday, the latest assault by the group on the crucial maritime trade route.

The captain of the ship reported an explosion in close proximity to the vessel off the coast of Nishtun, Yemen, close to the country's border with Oman, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre said.

The ship, whose name and flag were not released, and all crew are safe, the UKMTO said in a warning to mariners.

The explosion took place in the farthest

reaches of the waterway earlier targeted by the rebels, the centre said.

It did not elaborate on what caused the explosion, though the Houthis have been known to use drones and missiles as well as bomb-carrying drone boats.

The Houthis did not immediately comment.

However, it can take hours or even days before they acknowledge carrying out an attack. The last reported Houthi attack in the region took place June 28.

The rebels have targeted more than 60 vessels by firing missiles and drones in their campaign that has killed a total of four sailors.

They seized one vessel and sank two since November.

US-led airstrikes have targeted the Houthis since January, with a series of strikes on May 30 killing at least 16 people and wounding 42 others, the rebels say.

The Houthis maintain that their attacks target ships linked to Israel, the United States or Britain as part of rebel support for the militant group Hamas in its war against Israel in the Gaza Strip.

However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the Israel-Hamas war - including some bound for Iran. (AP)

## To counter China, NATO and its Asian partners are moving closer under US leadership

**WASHINGTON, July 9:** In the third year of the war in Ukraine, NATO is set to deepen relations with its four Indo-Pacific partners, which, although not part of the military alliance, are gaining prominence as Russia and China forge closer ties to counter the United States and the two Koreas support opposing sides of the conflict in Europe.

The leaders of New Zealand, Japan and South Korea for the third year in a row will attend the NATO summit, which starts on Tuesday in Washington, DC, while Australia will send its deputy prime minister. China will be following the summit closely, worried by the alliance's growing interest beyond Europe and the Western Hemisphere.

"Increasingly, partners in Europe see challenges halfway around the world in Asia as being relevant to them, just as partners in Asia see challenges halfway around the world in Europe as being relevant to them," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said last week at the Brookings Institution.

America's top diplomat said the US has been working to break down barriers between European alliances, Asian coalitions and other partners worldwide. "That's part of the new landscape, the new geometry that we've put in place,"

Countries with shared security concerns are strengthening ties as competition escalates between the United States and China. Washington is trying to curb Beijing's ambition to challenge the US-led world order, which the Chinese government dismisses as a Cold War mentality aimed at containing China's inevitable rise.



On Monday, Beijing responded angrily to unconfirmed reports that NATO and its four Indo-Pacific partners are expected to release a document laying out their relationship and ability to respond jointly to threats from cyberattacks and disinformation.

Lin Jian, a spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry, accused NATO of "breaching its boundary, expanding its mandate, reaching beyond its defence zone and stoking confrontation".

The war in Ukraine, which has pitted the West against Russia and its friends, has bolstered the argument for closer cooperation between the US, Europe and their Asian allies. "Ukraine of today may be East Asia of tomorrow," Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told the US Congress in April. The US and South Korea accused Pyongyang of supplying Russia with ammunition, while Russian President Vladimir Putin visited North Korea last month and signed a pact with leader Kim Jong Un that envisions mutual military assistance.

South Korea and Japan, meanwhile, are sending military supplies and aid to Ukraine. The US also says China is providing Russia with machine tools, microelectron-

ics and other technology that allow it to make weapons to use against South Korea.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol will bring to Washington "a strong message regarding the military cooperation between Russia and North Korea and discuss ways to enhance cooperation among NATO allies and Indo-Pacific partners", his principal deputy national security adviser, Kim Tae-hyo, told reporters on Friday.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said discussions would "focus on our collective efforts to support the rules-based system".

The partnership does not make NATO a direct player in the Indo-Pacific but allows it to coordinate with the four partners on issues of mutual concern, said Mira Galic, senior policy analyst on China and East Asia at the US Institute of Peace. For example, she wrote in an analysis, they can share information and align on actions such as sanctions and aid delivery but do not intervene in military crises outside of their own regions.

The NATO summit will allow the United States and its European and Indo-Pacific allies to push back against China, Russia, North Korea and Iran, according to Luis Simon,

director of the Centre for Security Diplomacy and Strategy at Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

"The fact that the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific alliances are structured around a clear anchor — US military power — makes them more cohesive and gives them a strategic edge as compared to the sort of interlocking partnerships that bind China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea," Simon wrote in a commentary last week on War On the Rocks, a defence and foreign affairs website.

Beijing is worried by NATO's pivot to the east, said Zhu Feng, dean of the School of International Studies at Nanjing University in eastern China. Beijing has insisted that NATO not interfere in security affairs in the Indo-Pacific and that it should change its view of China as a strategic adversary.

"NATO should consider China as a positive force for the regional peace and stability and for global security," Zhu said. "We also hope the Ukraine war can end as soon as possible ... and we have rejected a return to the triangular relation with Russia and North Korea."

"In today's volatile and fragile world, Europe, the US and China should strengthen global and regional cooperation," Zhu said.

NATO and China had little conflict until tensions grew between Beijing and Washington in 2019, the same year the NATO summit in London raised China as a "challenge" that "we need to address together as an alliance".

Two years later, NATO upgraded China to a "systemic challenge" and said Beijing was "cooperating militarily with Russia". (AP)

in a subsequent statement.

The two officials said there's also an impasse around whether Hamas can choose the high-profile prisoners held by Israel that it wants released in exchange for hostages. Some prisoners were convicted of killing Israelis, and Israel does not want Hamas to determine who is released. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the sensitive talks with the media.

Inside Gaza, residents saw no end to their suffering. Maha Mahfouz fled her home with her two children and many neighbours in Gaza City's Zaytoun neighbourhood. She said their area was not included in the latest evacuation orders but "we are panicked because the bombing and gunfire are very close to us".

Fadel Naem, the director of the Al-Ahli hospital, said patients fled the facility even though there was no evacuation order for the surrounding area. He said those in critical condition had been evacuated to other hospitals in northern Gaza.

Marwan al-Sultan, director of the Indonesian Hospital, said it received 80 patients and wounded people from Al-Ahli who were packed into "every corner". (AP)

## Pope begs for new peace efforts after latest attacks in Ukraine, Gaza



**VATICAN CITY, July 9:** Pope Francis appealed for concrete new measures to end the wars in Ukraine and Gaza on Tuesday after attacks targeted a children's hospital in Kyiv and a school in Gaza.

The Vatican press office issued a statement on Tuesday expressing Francis' pain over the new attacks and his "profound upset" at the spiraling of violence.

"While he expresses closeness to the innocent victims and injured, he hopes and prays that concrete paths can be identified to put an end to these ongoing conflicts," the statement said.

Francis has frequently asked for prayers for the "martyred" people of Ukraine but tends to keep his appeals generic. He has also tended to take a balanced line toward the war in Gaza, frequently mentioning Israel and the hostages still held by Hamas alongside the suffering of Palestinians.

A Russian missile struck the Okhmatdyt children's hospital Monday, drawing international outcry.

Russia denied responsibility, insisting it doesn't attack civilian targets in Ukraine despite abundant evidence to the contrary, including Associated Press reporting.

In Gaza, an Israeli strike last week on a school sheltering displaced Palestinians killed more than 30 people, according to local health officials. The Israeli military said that Hamas militants were operating from within the school. (AP)

## Interim UK Opposition Leader Rishi Sunak names shadow Cabinet

**LONDON, July 9:** Rishi Sunak, the interim UK Opposition Leader until his Conservative Party finalises the process to choose his successor, has named a shadow Cabinet who will take their place in the House of Commons as the new members of Parliament begin being sworn in on Tuesday.

The 44-year-old British Indian leader had to contend with some high-profile resignations and missing Tory MPs who lost their seats in the party's worst electoral defeat in last week's general election, which the Labour Party won with a landslide.

David Cameron, a former prime minister who was parachuted into the House of Lords by Sunak to become his foreign secretary last year, has resigned and the portfolio will now be shadowed by his former deputy Andrew Mitchell.

"It's been a huge honour to serve as foreign secretary, but clearly the Conservative Party in Opposition will need to shadow the new foreign secretary from the Commons," said Cameron in a social media post.

"As a committed Conservative I will continue to support the party and help where I can as we rebuild from the very disappointing election result," he said.

Richard Holden resigned as party chairman after what he said was a "very tough set of results" and has been replaced by former economic secretary to

the UK Treasury Richard Fuller as interim chairman.

James Cartledge has been appointed shadow defence secretary and Ed Argar shadow justice secretary, after the former ministers in those briefs — Grant Shapps and Alex Chalk — lost their seats.

Kemi Badenoch, former business secretary, has been named shadow levelling up secretary after Michael Gove had stepped down as an MP, and Kevin Hollinrake will shadow Badenoch's former ministerial role in the Opposition.

Former Home Office minister Chris Philp will be the new shadow Leader of the House of Commons for the Tories after Penny Mordaunt suffered a defeat in the polls.

Many of the other portfolios will mirror their former ministerial posts from the Opposition benches, with Jeremy Hunt named as shadow chancellor, James Cleverly as shadow home secretary and Indian-origin Claire Coutinho as shadow energy security and net zero secretary.

Sunak and his shadow Cabinet will be in place for the early business in the Commons, with the State Opening of Parliament scheduled for July 17 when the King's Speech will lay out the Keir Starmer-led government's plans for the parliamentary calendar ahead. (PTI)



# 'Department is actively engaging with the law department'

## M'laya govt to review bond policy to address shortage of doctors

**SHILLONG, July 9:** The Meghalaya government has decided to review the bond policy to address the shortage of doctors in the state.

This was informed by minister in-charge health and family welfare, Anpareen Lyngdoh this after meeting a delegation of the Khasi Students' Union (KSU), who have sought her intervention to ensure transparency in the allotment of medical seats under the State quota.

"Why is it that from year to year, the number of medical seats has increased for students of Meghalaya and why is it that we still have this huge shortage? So we are going to review the bond (policy). We are going to review all these important concerns to ensure that doctors, who availed this from the state of Meghalaya returned to the state of Meghalaya," Lyngdoh told reporters.

She also said that the department is actively engaging with the law department for reviewing and revisiting the bond policy to ensure to a large extent, our doctors and students come back to serve the people of Meghalaya.

"It is for a very long time, doctors graduating from privileges by state are seen not to come back to the state so all of that will be attended to and we hope that as we see that there is competition in the application in the MBBS seats allotment, there should also be a responsible return to the state of Meghalaya," she added.

She said that there has been a proportion-



ate increase in the medical seats allocated to Meghalaya, which got 94 seats in 2023.

"We hope that these numbers of seats will continue to proportionally increase in coming years," she said.

The minister however said, "We hope that as and when the court gives the nod to the Government of India to start NEET coun-

selling, we hope that by then we will be in a better place (to say the number of seats allotted to Meghalaya) and will be able to do necessary interventions to ensure that all of these matters are attended to"

Lyngdoh said, "The personnel and law are the authorities for advice and guidance to any line department because so far as the al-

lotment of seats as per the reservation policy. So we are now in a better position to ensure that while selecting and allocating seats for medical colleges as per the reservation policy, we do not violate and we do not disadvantage any of the beneficiaries that should actually benefit from it. We are strictly following this."

She added "And we want to ensure for example, there could be an applicant, who bears a tribal surname but who is not a permanent resident of the state of Meghalaya and does not even have a scheduled tribe certificate, what do we do with such applications - do we treat them just because they bear a surname as indigenous tribals or do we also have to treat them as normal unreserved applicants for the medical seats."

"These are very peculiar situations. We should not take decisions on our own and we should get the guidance and the correct advice from the department of personnel and law so that we may implement this facility for students, applying for medical seats and they should ensure they conform with the law and policy of the state of Meghalaya," she said.

The minister said, "There were certain cases in the past where there has been a situation like that but because we need to be properly guided we are taking guidance on these matters to ensure we insulate ourselves from public scrutiny and be blamed for a misapplication of the reservation policy." (NNN)

## Tripura to witness revolution on all fronts: Manik Saha



**AGARTALA, July 9:** Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Tuesday asserted that the north-eastern state will witness a "revolution" on all fronts from healthcare to connectivity.

There was only one national highway in the state before the BJP came to power in 2018 and now the state has six national highways and four more are in the pipeline, he said after inaugurating development projects at Golaghati in Sepahjila district.

The chief minister said, "At present, around 25 flights are coming and going from Agartala daily while 17 to 19 express trains are also running in and from the state capital. These facilities were beyond imagination a few years ago."

Saha said steps have been taken to start international flight service from MBB Airport from Agartala to Chittagong at the earliest.

Asserting that the BJP-led government has been working on

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas', he said the way works are being executed, the state will witness a revolution on all fronts.

The chief minister said "We have got a sanction of ₹ 1,400 crore from World Bank to develop infrastructure like roads and hostels in the tribal areas. Besides, around 10-15 per cent extra of any project is being spent in tribal areas."

Saha said he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi recently and sought his help to take up development projects for the state.

"I have asked officials to prepare projects for development and will place them before the prime minister for his consideration. There is no dearth of funds for development during the Modi era", he said.

The chief minister also said the state government will set up a medical college in Dhalai district for which a plot has already been identified. (PTI)

## Arunachal govt employees arrested with heroin



**ITANAGAR, July 9:** Two employees of the Arunachal Pradesh government were arrested for allegedly possessing heroin valued at ₹ 70,000, an officer said on Tuesday. Acting on a tip-off, the police in coordination with CRPF, apprehended the two from Chimpu area near Itanagar and recovered 3.9 grams of heroin from their possession, Capital Superintendent of Police Rohit Rajbir Singh said.

While one of the accused is a constable of the India Reserve Battalion, the other is a caretaker of the Arunachal Pradesh Energy Development Agency.

They were arrested on Monday. A case has been registered at Chimpu police station under the NDPS Act and further investigation is on, Singh said. (PTI)

## Manipur Govt briefed on Manipur situation

**IMPHAL, July 9:** Manipur Governor Anusuiya Uikey was briefed on the prevailing security situation of the state on Tuesday by Major General Ravroop Singh, IGAR (South), at Raj Bhavan in Imphal.

According to a Raj Bhavan source, Major General Ravroop Singh, while briefing about the prevailing security situation in the state, informed the Governor that the Assam Rifles is helping the administration in controlling the situation by deploying its personnel to vulnerable areas including the far flung interior areas of Jiribam district. He also told the Governor that the Assam Rifles is prepared to face any eventuality at any point in time so that peace prevails anywhere in Manipur, the Raj Bhavan source added. (NNN)

## Kuki group announces 12-hour shutdown in tribal areas today

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, July 9:** The Kuki Inpi, the traditional governing body of the Kukis in Manipur, has called for a 12-hour shutdown in Kuki-Zo-dominated areas of Manipur.

This protest, set for Wednesday (July 10) from 6 am to 6 pm, is in response to the recent arrest of two Kuki-Zo village volunteers in Jiribam district of Manipur.

The decision for the shutdown was made during an emergency meeting held on Tuesday (July 09). Janghaolun Haokip, Kuki Inpi's secretary of information and publicity, stated, "There will be a total shutdown in all Kuki-Zo dominated regions on July 10 from 6 am to 6 pm to protest against the gross injustice meted out to our people."

In their statement, the Kuki Inpi also called on all regional organizations to join in the protest to demonstrate solidarity.

The organization emphasized the broader struggle against what they describe as "unlawful opposition, subjugation, and persecution," reiterating their demand for a Union Territory with legislative powers for the Kuki-Zo people of Manipur.

Haokip further noted, "The Kuki Inpi resolves to issue a clarion call to all the Kuki-Zo people to fight against the injustices if the issue of this discriminate arrest further evolves against the common wishes and desires of the Kuki-Zo



people."

The emergency meeting was convened following the arrest of two civilians and the alleged mistreatment of women and children during a joint operation by central and state forces in Phaituol, Tamenglong on July 8.

Another incident occurred on July 9 in L Hengjol, Jiribam, leading to the arrest of three Kuki-Zo village volunteers

The Kuki Inpi's statement also criticized the central and state forces for allegedly ignoring the activities of Meitei militants and the group Arambai Tengol in the Imphal area of Manipur, calling this behavior biased.

The arrests, which took place on Monday (July 08) before Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's visit to Ma-

nipur, followed an arson incident and an exchange of fire.

Troops from the 39 Assam Rifles and Jiribam district police detained two individuals from Phaituol village in Jiribam district of Manipur.

One of the detainees is reportedly a juvenile, while the other has been identified as 35-year-old Kapil Singson, son of Thangkhoem from Phaituol village.

Both individuals were suspected of being Kuki militants involved in the attack.

They were handed over to Tamenglong district police, along with three single-barrel guns seized from their possession, as the area falls under the jurisdiction of Tamenglong district in Manipur.

## Awareness meeting held on pullet production in Baksa

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, July 9:** The Department of Cooperation in BTR has organised an awareness and mobilisation meeting at the Integrated Textile Park in Baksa on July 9, said an official statement on Tuesday. The meeting aimed to mobilise Board of Directors (BODs) to form a Cooperative Federation and explore pullet production opportunities.

"The BODs responded positively and are optimistic about the initiatives by the BTC chief Pramod Boro to uplift the PACS of BTR," the statement added. Representatives from 24 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) attended the awareness programme.

"During the meeting, CHD of Cooperation Jayanta Kherkatary took stock of the progress of implemen-

tation of central sponsored schemes/initiatives, including: Computerisation of PACS, status of Common Service Centers (CSCs), fertiliser licenses, identification of land for construction of grain storage under the World's Largest Grain Storage Program. Besides, the BODs were made aware of the initiatives to develop model Primary Agricultural Credit Societies and to promote pearl cultivation," it said.

The awareness programme was attended by the DRCS of Baksa, and other related officials.

Later on, the official team also visited the construction sites of the Rice Mill at Baksa Rdwvm Rice Cooperative Society and Godown No. 2 Madhyam Baksa BSS Ltd., as a part of the 100-day Action Plan under the Vibrant BTR Mission.

## Union minister reviews tourism projects in Tripura

**AGARTALA, July 9:** Union minister of state for tourism Suresh Gopi on Tuesday reviewed the ongoing tourism-related projects in Tripura.

Gopi arrived in Tripura on Tuesday on a three-day visit.

He met Tripura's tourism minister Sushanta Chowdhury and state Tourism secretary U K Chakma.

"We had a detailed discussion with the MoS Suresh Gopi on the ongoing tourism-related projects and future plan of the state's tourism", Chowdhury told the reporters.

Recently, the state has made former India cricket team captain Saurav Ganguly a brand ambassador for promoting state's tourist spots not only nationally but also globally.

The Union minister will pay a visit to Unakoti Archaeological Site in North Tripura district on Tuesday. (PTI)

## Goyal meets business leaders, reviews rubber industry performance

**ITANAGAR, July 9:** Union minister Piyush Goyal interacted with business leaders in Arunachal Pradesh and also reviewed the progress of the rubber industry in the state, officials said. Goyal, who is on a two-day visit to the northeastern state, took part in 'Samvad 2024', an investor and industry outreach programme.

"Launched the Uttar Poorva Transformative Industrialisation (UNNATI) Scheme booklet and handed over registration certificates for the Modi government's policy for industrial development and employment generation in the Northeast," the Union Minister of Commerce & Industry said on X.

"Discussed issues raised by industry participants

and welcomed suggestions to bring greater prosperity in Arunachal Pradesh," he added.

The meeting also focused on a thorough review of the centrally sponsored flagship schemes being implemented in the state, officials said on Tuesday.

The minister later convened a review meeting of the Rubber Board, and interacted with industry stakeholders and associations in Arunachal Pradesh, they said.

Ways to increase production of rubber from untapped areas in the state, ensure support to rubber farmers and make the industry self-reliant were discussed in the meeting on Monday, the officials said. (PTI)

## Traffic movement disrupted in Mizoram due to heavy rain



**AIZAWL, July 9:** Traffic movement was disrupted in Mizoram on Tuesday after a stretch of a highway linking Aizawl to the Lengpui Airport caved in following heavy rain, officials said.

No vehicles, except two-wheelers, are allowed to ply on the highway at present, they said. The incident took place in the evening following continuous downpour, a senior official said.

"It may take some time to repair the damaged stretch of the highway," he added. (PTI)

## No dearth of funds from Centre for Arunachal's welfare schemes: Rijiju

Minister of parliamentary affairs and minority affairs said he has sanctioned two more projects

**ITANAGAR, July 9:** Union minister Kiren Rijiju on Tuesday asserted that there will be no dearth of funds from the Centre for Arunachal Pradesh for implementation of welfare schemes in the northeastern state.

Rijiju, who arrived here to attend the BJP's extended state executive meeting, said his ministry will soon sanction various new schemes for the state.

"During a review meeting of all the ongoing schemes related to my ministry, chief minister Pema Khandu directed the officials concerned to go for geo-tagging of the completed and incomplete programmes, and submit the utilisation certificates to the Centre for sanction of more funds," Rijiju told reporters here.

The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs said he has sanctioned two more projects - upgradation of a community playground at Changlang



district and upgradation of a school at Upper Subansiri district - at an estimated cost of ₹ 35 crore.

"I will leave no stone unturned to ensure that welfare schemes of my ministry reach every nook and corner of the state. Funds will be provided from the ministry

for various projects including in the sports and health sector," he said.

Rijiju said efforts would be made to impart skill development training to youths of the state, and job opportunities would be created through establishment of 'hunar huts' in every district where tribal communities can sell their handloom products.

"My ministry will also establish facility centres for empowerment of women through the state's Social Justice, Empowerment & Tribal Affairs (SJETA) Department, besides providing budgetary support," he said.

"Being the Lok Sabha MP from the state, I will help Arunachal Pradesh in getting funds from other ministries, too. The pace of developmental work here will get a new dimension in the third term of Narendra Modi government," Rijiju said. (PTI)

## BTR transport Dept conducting month-long road safety drive

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, July 9:** Reiterating the commitment of BTC chief Pramod Boro to ensure public safety in BTR, officials of the Transport Department have been conducting a comprehensive Road Safety Awareness Program and Behavioral Change in driving campaign at Kokrajhar from July 1st till July 31st, 2024.

During this initiative, officials from the transport department are actively raising awareness among the public about road safety and emphasising the importance of traffic rules.

As part of this effort, reflective tape is being fixed on the bodies of trucks entering Assam from other states.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER ::  
INLAND WATER TRANSPORT DIVISION  
::CHANDMARI :: TV. STATION ROAD :: TARAPUR :: SILCHAR - 788003 ::  
Webel: http://iwdirectorate.assam.gov.in :: Telephone No.  
03842-262454 :: E-mail : iwddivisionsilchar@gmail.com

Order No. 96,  
**NOTICE FOR NEW /RENEWAL OF CONTRACTOR REGISTRATION**

It is here by informed to all concerned that, the last date for New and Renewal of Contractor Registration for the year 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 has been extended up to 25-07-2024, due to rise of water level and heavy rainfall in Cachar, Karimganj and Haikalandi.

Sd/-  
I/c Executive Engineer,  
Inland Water Transport Division,  
Silchar-3.

**Janasanyog /D/2304/24/10-Jul-24**

No.DPRD/BTC/(15<sup>th</sup> FC)Untied-208/2024/8

### NOTICE INVITING TENDER

#### Tender

Sealed tenders with a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days from the date of receipt in prescribed from affixing non-refundable court fee stamps of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed P-2 form are hereby invited from the Govt. registered PWD Road, Irrigation, Water Resources, PHE others Govt. Contractor's under Class-I (A, B, C), Class-II and Class-III category from approved firm/ suppliers of 2020-21/2021-22 according to tender limit of eligibility for the following works and will be received in the office of the undersigned up to 2.00 pm on 05-08-2024 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2.15 pm in the presence of willing contractors or their authorized agents.

Name of Dev. Block	Name of Scheme	A.A. Amount (Rs.)	Tender Amount (Rs.)	Earnest Money	Cost of Tender in Rs.	Time for completion in days	Pre-Bid meeting date & time
Kokrajhar	Imp. of road with earth filling and sand gravelling from Dulu house to Ali house	10,00,000.00	9,91,228.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	200/-	3 months	

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent up to 12.00 Noon on all working days from 11-07-2024 to 05-08-2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment of in the form of Banker cheque/ Demand draft of any nationalized Bank (Preferable SBI) duly pledged to the Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar. The Cost of tender (Non-Refundable) must be in the form of Demand Draft/ Banker Cheque of a Nationalized Bank drawn in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar and payable at SBI, Kokrajhar to be deposited 0.03%. The Contractor should submit valid Registration certificate, GSTIN, PAN Card, Voter Card, Aadhar Card, Caste Certificate and Labour License along with the tender. In case the office remain closed in tender receiving/ opening day the same will be received/ opened on the next working day.

Sd/- Director,  
Panchayat & Rural Development,  
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/120

Dated Kokrajhar the 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2024



# Assembly bypolls: Polling in 13 seats today

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** Bypolls to 13 assembly constituencies in seven states will be held on Wednesday. The electoral exercise, the first since the Lok Sabha elections, will decide the fate of many veterans and some debutantes including Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's wife Kamlesh Thakur.

The assembly seats going to polls are Raiganj, Ranaghat Dakshin, Bagda and Manikata (West Bengal); Badrinath and Manglaur (Uttarakhand); Jalandhar West (Punjab); Dehra, Hamirpur and Nalagarh (Himachal Pradesh); Rupauli (Bihar); Vikravandi (Tamil Nadu) and Amarwara (Madhya Pradesh).

The bypolls are to be held against vacancies created either due to deaths or resignation of incumbent members.

In West Bengal, the stakes are high for both the ruling TMC, which is looking to capitalise on its improved performance in the Lok Sabha polls, and the BJP, which is seeking to leverage the significant leads it made in the four constituencies in the parliamentary polls.

The TMC won Manikata seat in the 2021 West Bengal elections while the BJP won Raiganj, Ranaghat Dakshin and Bagda. Later, the BJP MLAs switched to



the TMC.

The Manikata bypoll was necessitated by the death of sitting TMC MLA Sadhan Pandey in February 2022.

The TMC has fielded Pandey's wife Supti from the seat. The ruling party has fielded Krishna Kalyani from Raiganj and Mukut Mani Adhikari from Ranaghat Dakshin.

In Badgah, a Matua-majority constituency, the TMC has fielded Madhuparna Thakur, a member of the Matua Thakurbari and daughter of party Rajya Sabha MP Mamatabala Thakur.

Kalyani, Adhikari and Biswajit Das had unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha polls on TMC tickets after resigning from the BJP.

The BJP has fielded All India Football Federation president Kalyan Chaubey from Manikata, Manoj Kumar Biswas from Ranaghat Dakshin, Binay Kumar Biswas from Bagdah and Manas Kumar Ghosh from Raiganj.

Buoyed by its Lok Sabha poll performance, the TMC hopes to win all four assembly seats.

"We are confident of winning all four assembly seats. The people of Bengal have rejected the BJP in the last Lok Sabha polls," said TMC leader Kunal Ghosh.

The TMC won 29 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal, up from 22 in the 2019 parliamentary polls. On the other hand, the BJP's tally came down to 12 from 18 in

2019.

In Himachal Pradesh, bypolls will be held for three assembly constituencies -- Dehra, Hamirpur and Nalagarh.

The seats fell vacant after the three independent legislators Hoshiyar Singh (Dehra), Ashish Sharma (Hamirpur) and K L Thakur (Nalagarh), who had voted in favour of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha polls held on February 27, resigned from the House on March 22. The BJP has fielded the three former Independent MLAs from their respective seats after they joined the party. A total of 13 candidates are contesting the bypolls in the three segments with 2,59,340 voters.

The Congress' pick in Dehra is Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's wife Kamlesh Thakur. She will take on BJP's Hoshiyar Singh, one of the nine MLAs who had voted against the Congress candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls.

"Vote for the CM and not the MLA. Now, Dehra will also become the constituency of the CM," Kamlesh Thakur told people while canvassing implying that voting for her meant voting for the CM and hence "development".

"I will not need to go to the Secretariat to get your work done. I will get it done from the chief min-

ister at home," she said.

In Hamirpur, the home district of Sukhu, former Independent MLA Ashish Sharma is pitted against Congress' Puspender Verma.

Former Independent legislator K L Thakur is facing old rival Hardeep Singh Bawa of the Congress in Nalagarh. The entry of BJP dissident Harpreet Saini, who is contesting as an Independent, has made the contest triangular.

The BJP got a lead in all three assembly constituencies during the recently held Lok Sabha polls.

Neighbouring Uttarakhand's Manglaur constituency will also witness a three-cornered fight. The bypoll was necessitated by the death of sitting BSP MLA Sarwat Karim Ansari in October last year.

The BJP has never won the Muslim and Dalit-dominated Manglaur seat which has been held either by the Congress or the BSP in the past.

This time, the BSP has fielded Ansari's son Ubedur Rehman against Congress nominee Qazi Mohammad Nizamuddin. Gujjar leader and BJP nominee Kartar Singh Bhadana is also in the fray.

Polling will also be held for the Badrinath assembly bypoll. The seat fell vacant after sitting Congress MLA Rajendra Bhandari resigned and switched to the BJP in March this year. (PTI)

## Nadda urges BJP workers to ensure 'lotus blooms' in Kerala in 2026



**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, July 9:** Visiting Kerala for the first time after the BJP secured the Thrissur Lok Sabha seat in the state with a stunning electoral victory, BJP chief J P Nadda on Tuesday urged his party workers to work tirelessly to ensure that the lotus blooms in the state in the 2026 assembly polls.

Addressing the BJP's expanded state executive meeting, Nadda slammed the Congress and the Communist parties -- the two traditional players in Kerala politics -- accusing them of being "ideologically bankrupt" and "power-hungry".

He said that a narrative had been created that the BJP is a North Indian party, but that had been demolished in the just-concluded polls as the party made huge gains in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, opened its account in Kerala, and also increased its vote share in Tamil Nadu.

The BJP chief said that the manner in which the Left contested against Congress in Kerala but fought together outside the state showed that they were both "ideologically bankrupt".

"Their ideology is based on corruption, nepotism, and favouritism," he alleged.

Nadda alleged that the Communists were also emulating their INDIA bloc partner Congress by promoting their own sons and daughters.

"You know what I mean," he said, in an apparent dig at Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for his family's alleged political roles.

Referring to the gold smuggling scandal and the multi-crore Karuvannur Cooperative Bank scam, Nadda accused the Communists in Kerala of being "totally and utterly corrupt".

The BJP chief said that the UDF was only "paying lip service" and was not opposing the alleged corrupt acts of the Left government, as they were "hand in glove" with each other.

On the other hand, the BJP-led NDA government has been contributing immensely to the development of the state, providing Vande Bharat trains, constructing over a thousand kilometres of national highways and expanding the Cochin Shipyard's capabilities, among other initiatives, Nadda claimed. He urged his party workers to continue working hard to ensure that "the lotus blossoms" and the BJP is "victorious" in Kerala in 2026, when the state assembly elections are held.

"Don't stop. Move forward. The

lotus has to bloom in Kerala. If it doesn't bloom in the land of Lord Vishnu (Thiruvananthapuram), where else will it bloom?" Nadda asked.

Buoyed by the BJP's electoral performance in the Lok Sabha polls in Kerala, Nadda said that the saffron party made huge gains in the state, and in some seats like Thiruvananthapuram and Attingal, the losses should be seen as victories due to the small margins.

Addressing the alleged narrative that the BJP is a North Indian party, he said, "No, we are now an all-India party, which includes southern India as well. The lotus has bloomed in the Lok Sabha from the South."

He said that the party made huge gains in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the LS polls and also increased its vote share in Tamil Nadu.

"The day is not far when we will have a significant presence in Tamil Nadu as well," he said.

Besides accusing the Congress of being corrupt, Nadda said that the grand old party is a "parasite" that won seats in the general elections this year thanks to the help and support of regional parties.

"They (Congress) are like parasites. They have a poor strike rate on their own, winning only two of the 60-plus seats where they were competing directly against the BJP. It (Congress) is a party walking on crutches and cannot stand on its own two feet. They have a national presence only thanks to the support of regional parties," Nadda said.

On the other hand, the BJP is the largest political party not just in India but also in the world, he claimed.

He went on to claim that before the BJP came to power in 2014, the country was undergoing dark days.

"There are two faces in Indian politics -- before 2014 and after 2014. We need to see the dark days before 2014 to appreciate the good days that came after that," he said, citing various reports from international agencies, including the IMF, which has projected India as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world.

Nadda claimed that India's contribution to the world economy is around 15 per cent and that it is making huge strides in infrastructure development, defence exports, and other areas.

"This was all possible due to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he added.

At the same time, he termed Rahul Gandhi and other Congress leaders as "educated illiterates". (PTI)

## Rahul Gandhi does Oscar-level acting on protecting Constitution: BRS leader KTR

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** After several of its leaders defected to the Congress, BRS working president K T Rama Rao on Tuesday slammed Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi saying he does "Oscar-level acting on protecting the Constitution".

K T Rama Rao (KTR) also said the Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) is gearing up for a legal battle against its defecting members and announced plans to file a petition in the Supreme Court.

The move comes in response to a recent wave of defections that saw seven MLAs, six MLCs and one Rajya Sabha MP switch allegiance to the Congress party.

"We will meet all those who are custodians of the Constitution," KTR, who is the son of BRS chief and former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, told reporters on Tuesday.

He outlined the party's intention to approach the Election Commission, President, Rajya Sabha Chairperson and Lok Sabha Speaker.

The BRS leader did not mince words in his criticism of the Congress, accusing the party of violating constitutional principles despite promising to amend the 10th Schedule to curb defections in the 2023 polls.

"On one side, Rahul Gandhi is flaunting a copy of the Constitution, while on the other his party is disgracing it. He does Oscar-level acting on protecting the Constitution. You cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds," KTR remarked.

He also urged "all victims of the BJP and the Congress to come together to fight against defection".

KTR revealed that a petition against the defected BRS members is already pending in the Telangana High Court. He noted that according to a 2020 Supreme Court order, the assembly Speaker has three months to decide on the status of the defected party members.

"If the Speaker does not do justice, we will knock on the door of the Supreme

Court. We are here for the last two days consulting the legal experts," he added.

Asked about the BRS' own history of welcoming defectors during its 2014-2023 regime, KTR drew a distinction.

"What we did was a merger, which is provided for under the Constitution," he said.

He also accused the Congress of introducing the defection culture in India, citing the 1967 case of Gaya Lal in Haryana that gave rise to the term 'Aya Ram, Gaya Ram' in Indian politics.

KTR attacked the Congress government in Telangana, claiming it had failed to fulfill its poll promises.

"The Congress made 420 promises. The government completed seven months but not even one promise has been fulfilled," he said.

Reflecting on the BRS' recent electoral defeat, KTR acknowledged gaps in the party's connection with the voters.

"We implemented many welfare schemes, but it seems we could not effectively communicate them to the people," he said, taking responsibility for the loss.

He noted that parties aligned neither to the NDA nor to the INDIA bloc faced defeats across the country, not just in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Responding to accusations of arrogance of the BRS leaders, KTR countered, "Don't read it as arrogance, but as our confidence."

Meanwhile, senior BRS leader Harish Rao predicted a BRS comeback, claiming that people are already comparing the current government's performance unfavourably with that of K Chandrashekar Rao. KTR also pointed out that defections to the BRS during its rule did not benefit the party, as 12 defected members lost in the 2023 elections.

After the recent defections, the BRS currently has 31 MLAs in the 119-member assembly, 22 MLCs in the 40-member legislative council and four Rajya Sabha MPs. (PTI)

## Dalits facing 'large-scale atrocities' in Tamil Nadu: Union Minister L Murugan

Senior leaders of the BJP Tamil Nadu unit, including Duraisamy, were present at the press conference



**NEW DELHI, July 9:** Union Minister L Murugan on Tuesday alleged large-scale atrocities were taking place against Dalits in Tamil Nadu and claimed that even political leaders were not safe in the state under the DMK government.

A delegation of the Tamil Nadu BJP unit, led by the party's state vice president VP Duraisamy, will approach the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the National Human Rights Commission later in the day, urging them to take appropriate action in the matter, Murugan told a press conference at the BJP headquarters here.

Senior leaders of the BJP Tamil Nadu unit, including Duraisamy, were present at the press conference.

"After the DMK came to power in May 2021, there has been a tremendous increase in the atrocities against Dalits in Tamil Nadu. A survey is telling that every year more than 2,000 cases of atrocities against Dalits are filed in the state," Murugan said.

He referred to a series of incidents of alleged atrocities against Dalits since 2022 and some attacks and murders of BJP leaders in the state, putting the blame on the "complete failure" of Chief Minister M K Stalin.

"Recently, K Armstrong, a Dalit leader and BSP state president was murdered," he said,

alleging that "even political leaders are not safe" in the state under the DMK rule.

"Scheduled caste leaders and people do not have security. They are facing harassment under the DMK government," he said.

In April 2023, the Union minister said, that Tamil Nadu BJP treasurer Shankar was murdered, followed by "the brutal killing" of a student in August 2023.

A local DMK official "fatally attacked" Jagan Pandian, leader of the BJP Tamil Nadu youth wing, in another incident, he charged.

"A delegation of BJP Tamil Nadu unit, led by Duraisamy, is going to submit a memorandum to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and National Human Rights Commission today in this connection, urging them to take appropriate action in the matter," the Union minister said.

Murugan said the DMK claims that it is the pioneer of social justice but the ruling party is not following the idea of social justice in the state. A survey conducted by the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front revealed that in 22 villages, panchayat presidents were denied chairs and obstructed from carrying out their duties due to caste discrimination, he said. "Stalin doesn't have the moral right to talk about social justice because of the incidents of atrocities against Dalits taking place in the state," the Union minister charged.

Murugan, former president of the Tamil Nadu unit of the BJP, also took on the Congress, the DMK ally, questioning its silence over the recent hooch tragedy which claimed several lives in the state.

"Nearly 70 people died in that incident in Kallakurichi. More than 40 per cent of them belonged to Scheduled Caste. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader Rahul Gandhi didn't go there," he charged.

"Rahul Gandhi is visiting Hathras and other places but why does he forget the way to Tamil Nadu," Murugan asked. (PTI)

## Modi govt's only mission is to 'keep youth jobless', says Kharge

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Modi government has only one mission and that is to "keep the youth jobless", Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged on Tuesday in a scathing attack against the Centre on the issue of unemployment.

The Modi government may be refuting independent economic reports like the one by Citigroup on unemployment but how will it deny government data, Kharge asked in a lengthy post on X citing various reports. "The truth is that Modi government is solely responsible for shattering the dreams of crores of youth in the last 10 years," he alleged. Kharge said the latest government data punctures the government's claims. According to NSSO's (National Sample Survey Office) Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises, in the manufacturing sector, 54 lakh jobs were lost in unincorporated units in the seven years between 2015 and 2023. "In 2010-11, 10.8 crore employees were employed in unincorporated, non-agricultural enterprises across India, which has become 10.96 crore in 2022-23 - that is, a marginal increase of only 16 lakh in 12 years," he said.

Kharge cited the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), to state that the urban unemployment rate is at 6.7 per cent (Q4, FY24).

"Modi government beats the drum of employment generation in the formal sector by showing EPFO data, but even if we assume that data to be true, it has seen a 10% decline in new jobs in 2023," he said. A report by IIM Lucknow, after analysing government data, shows that unemployment growth, high unemployment among the educated, low participation of women in the workforce are

prevalent in the country, Kharge said.

He said the Modi government rejects independent economic reports because they expose their "shameless attempt to whitewash".

According to the CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy), the current unemployment rate in the country has reached 9.2 per cent, he said, adding that it is a whopping 18.5 per cent for women.

"According to the ILO report, 83% of the unemployed in the country are youth. According to the India Employment Report 2024, between 2012 and 2019, about 7 crore youth joined the labour force, but there was zero growth in employment - only 0.01%," he added.

The Congress chief also referred to the 2023 report from Azim Premji University to say that 42.3 per cent of graduates under the age of 25 in the country are unemployed.

"According to the latest report of Citigroup, India needs 1.2 crore jobs annually, and even 7% GDP growth will not be able to create enough jobs for our youth. Under the Modi Govt, the country has achieved an average of only 5.8% as GDP growth," he said.

"Be it government jobs, or private sector, self-employment or unorganised sector - Modi government has only one mission 'Keep the youth jobless'," Kharge said. The Congress, which has been attacking the government over the issue of unemployment, on Sunday cited the Citigroup report to allege that the Modi government had accentuated India's "unemployment crisis" with the decimation of job-creating MSMEs through the "Tughlakian demonetisation, a hastily rushed GST, and rising imports from China". (PTI)

## PSC bribery row: Kerala CM says no irregularity has come to govt notice

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, July 9:** Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday made it clear that no irregularity has come to the notice of the government with regard to the appointment of Public Service Commission members in the state so far, but for some media reports on this matter.

Vijayan told the Assembly that the government was ready to conduct a "serious probe" into the allegations.

He said the state PSC is a recruiting agency which works in an exemplary manner and it is a generally accepted fact that there has been no external intervention in its appointments. The CM's statement comes in the wake of a raging political row over allegations levelled against a local CPI(M) leader in Kozhikode that he took bribe from a doctor by promising to secure a position as a PSC member. While replying to a submission on the issue raised by opposition leader V D Satheesan, he said the appointment of its chairman and other members is also carried out in a transparent manner.

The CM termed the charges, which amounted to tarnishing the reputation of the constitutional institution, were "unfortunate".

"No irregularity has come to the notice (of the government) with regard to the appointment of PSC members so far except some media reports," he said. Noting that their appointments are being made after meeting mandatory requirements, Vijayan said the Left government has been particular in deploying only qualified and deserved people in the constitutional institution. (PTI)

## Sudden downpour leaves Delhi waterlogged, rain abates in Mumbai

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** A sudden downpour in Delhi caught citizens off guard and caused heavy waterlogging and traffic jams on Tuesday while Mumbai breathed a sigh of relief as showers stopped a day after heavy rain brought the metropolis to its knees.

The public works department in the national capital received 22 calls regarding waterlogging and around three to four complaints of trees getting uprooted till the afternoon. Spicejet said all departures and arrivals and their consequential flights might be affected due to the bad weather and asked passengers to keep a check on their flight status. "Movement of traffic has been restricted at Azad Market underpass in the carriageway from Azad Market towards Shastrji Nagar due to waterlogging," the Delhi Traffic Police said on X.

In another post, the police said traffic movement was affected on the Windsor Palace roundabout in front of Ashoka Road from C-Hexagon due to damage to a sewerage pipeline.

"Traffic is affected on Rohtak Road in both the carriageways from Rajdhani Park towards Mundka and vice versa due to waterlogging. Kindly plan your journey accordingly," the police said on X. Mumbai witnessed overcast skies early on Tuesday but the rain took a break even as schools and colleges were closed following the weather office's warning of heavy showers.



There was no major waterlogging anywhere in the city and suburbs and road traffic was smooth while local trains -- considered the lifeline of the country's financial capital -- came back on track. The India Meteorological Department's (IMD) Mumbai centre had issued a 'red' alert for the city for Tuesday, predicting "heavy to very heavy rainfall in a few places with extremely heavy rainfall at isolated places". Heavy rain lashed parts of Goa for the fourth consecutive day, with the authorities advising fishermen not to venture into the sea and people to avoid visiting flood-prone areas.

The IMD issued a 'red' alert for Tuesday, saying heavy to very heavy rainfall was very likely at a few places and extremely heavy rainfall at isolated places with strong surface winds over North Goa and South Goa districts.

Continuous rain with short intense spells and winds reaching speeds up to 50 kilometres per hour are very likely in the coastal state, the IMD said.

The toll in this year's flood, landslide and storm rose to 85 with six more deaths reported on Monday. Altogether 48,124 displaced people are taking shelter in 245 relief camps. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami conducted an aerial survey of flood-hit areas in the Kumaon region while the death toll in the heavy rain spell during the past 24 hours rose to three following the recovery of a teenage girl's body from a seasonal stream. The 17-year-old girl had slipped into the stream while bathing outside her

home in Dehradun on Monday.

Dhami undertook an aerial review of the areas reeling from floods in the Kumaon region, including the worst-hit Haldwani, Banbasa, Tanakpur, Sitarganj and Khatima. A total of 1,821 people have so far been shifted from their flooded homes by the National Disaster Response Force in Sitarganj and Khatima in Udham Singh Nagar district and the Purnagiri area of Champawat district.

Two national highways and more than 200 rural motorable roads are still blocked by landslide debris, the State Emergency Operation Centre said.

Jaipur and Sawai Madhopur recorded heavy showers during a 24-hour period as widespread rainfall continued in Rajasthan.

In the 24 hours ended at 8:30 am, the maximum rainfall of 93 mm was recorded in Kalwad (Jaipur), followed by 85 mm in Malarna (Sawai Madhopur), 78 mm in Sambhar (Jaipur), 69 mm in Chauth Ka Barwara (Sawai Madhopur) and 57 mm in Merta (Nagaur). The intensity of rain is likely to decrease slightly on Friday and Saturday.

Gajaldoba in Jalpaiguri district recorded the state's highest rainfall at 180 mm in 24 hours till 8:30 am.

The other places in northern West Bengal that recorded significantly high rainfall during the period were Sevoke (170 mm), Buxaduar (150 mm), Nagrakata (140 mm), Jalpaiguri town (130 mm) and Bhutanghat (120 mm). (PTI)



## Amid rains, water level in India's main reservoirs rise for first time since Sep 2023

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** Amid heavy rains across India, the water level of the country's main reservoirs has risen for the first time since September last year, the Central Water Commission (CWC) said.

Despite the marginal rise of 2 per cent from the previous week, this marks a departure from the consistent week-on-week decline reported since the bulletin issued on September 29, 2023, when the storage capacity stood at 73 per cent, according to the analysis of the data.

This improvement comes amid widespread rainfall across the country.

The CWC, which monitors the live storage status of 150 reservoirs across India, released its latest bulletin detailing these developments on July 4.

The CWC issues a weekly bulletin every Thursday, providing updates on the status of these reservoirs.

According to the bulletin, out of the 150 reservoirs, 20 are dedicated to hydroelectric projects, with a total live storage capacity of 35.30 billion cubic meters (BCM).

The CWC bulletin on July 4 said the live storage available in these reservoirs was 39.729 BCM, which is 22 per cent of their total live storage capacity. In comparison, the live storage available during the corresponding period last year was 50.422 BCM, with a normal storage level of 44.06 BCM.

This indicates that the current live storage is 79 per cent of last year's corresponding period and 90 per cent of the normal storage level, the CWC said.

The northern region, comprising Hi-



mal Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan, has 10 reservoirs with a total live storage capacity of 19.663 BCM. The current storage is 5.39 BCM (27 per cent), compared to 45 per cent during the same period last year and a normal storage level of 31 per cent.

The eastern region, including Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland, and Bihar, has 23 reservoirs with a total live storage capacity of 20.430 BCM.

The current storage stands at 3.979 BCM (19 per cent), down from 20 per cent last year and a normal level of 23 per cent.

The western region, which includes Gujarat and Maharashtra, has 49 reservoirs with a total live storage capacity of 37.130 BCM. The storage is now at 7.949 BCM (21 per cent), compared to 27 per cent last year and a normal storage level of 22 per cent.

The central region, comprising

Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh, has 26 reservoirs with a total live storage capacity of 48.227 BCM.

The current storage is 12.26 BCM (25 per cent), compared to 35 per cent last year and a normal storage level of 26 per cent.

The southern region, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, has 42 reservoirs with a total live storage capacity of 53.334 BCM.

The storage is now at 10.152 BCM (19.03 per cent), down from 19.43 per cent last year and a normal level of 24 per cent.

The bulletin highlighted several key points -- Normal storage is defined as the average storage of the last 10 years.

The overall storage position is less than both the corresponding period last year and the normal storage during the same period. Better-than-normal storage is observed in regions such as

Brahmaputra, Sabarmati, and the West Flowing Rivers from Tadri to Kanyakumari. Close to normal storage is found in the Indus, Subarnarekha, Mahi, and other rivers.

Deficient storage is reported in the Mahanadi, Cauvery, Brahmani and Baitarni rivers. Highly deficient storage is seen in the East Flowing rivers between Pennar and Kanyakumari and other similar regions.

In terms of specific reservoir data, 56 reservoirs have storage levels higher than last year, and 61 have more than the normal storage level.

Conversely, 14 reservoirs have storage levels less than or equal to 20 per cent compared to last year, and eight reservoirs are similarly low compared to the normal storage level.

Furthermore, 40 reservoirs have storage levels less than or equal to 50 per cent of last year, with 29 reservoirs similarly low compared to the normal storage level.

States with better storage than last year include Assam, Jharkhand, Tripura, Nagaland, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, and Kerala. There are no states with equal storage to last year.

States with lesser storage than last year include Rajasthan, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

According to the CWC's analysis, the total live storage available in the country is estimated to be 57.290 BCM against the total capacity of 257.812 BCM. (PTI)

## SC refuses open court hearing of pleas seeking review of same-sex marriage verdict

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to allow open court hearing of pleas seeking review of its last year's judgement declining legal recognition to same-sex marriage.

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

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

A five judge bench comprising the CJI and Justices Sanjay Khanna, Hima Kohli, B V Nagarathna and P S Narasimha are scheduled to consider in chambers the pleas seeking review of the judgement on July 10.

On Tuesday, senior advocates Abhishek Singhvi and NK Kaul mentioned the matter and urged the CJI to hear the review petitions in an open court.

"I say that if these petitions can be heard in the open court..." Kaul asked the court. These are the constitution bench review matters which are listed in chambers, the CJI told him. As per the practice, the review



pleas are considered in chambers by judges. In its judgement, the bench had held that transgender people in heterosexual relationships have the freedom and entitlement to marry under the existing statutory provisions. It had said an entitlement to legal recognition of the right to union, akin to marriage or civil union, or conferring legal status to the relationship can be only done through "enacted law".

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

All five judges were unanimous in refusing to accord legal recognition to same-sex marriage under the Special Marriage Act and observed it was within Parliament's ambit to change the law for validating such union. While the CJI had written a separate 247-page verdict, Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul (since retired) had penned a 17-page judgement in which he broadly agreed with Justice Chandrachud's views.

Justice S Ravindra Bhat (since retired), who authored an 89-page judgement for himself and Justice

Hima Kohli, had disagreed with certain conclusions arrived at by the CJI including on applicability of adoption rules for queer couples.

Justice PS Narasimha had said in his 13-page verdict that he was in complete agreement with the reasoning given and conclusions arrived at by Justice Bhat. The judges were unanimous in holding that queerness is a natural phenomenon and not "urban or elite" occurrence.

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

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

Some of the petitioners had urged the apex court to use its plenary power, "prestige and moral authority" to push the society to acknowledge such a union which would ensure LGBTQIA++ lead a "dignified" life like heterosexuals.

LGBTQIA++ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, asexual and allied persons. (PTI)

## Education Ministry reviews guidelines for implementation of bagless days in school

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Ministry of Education on Tuesday reviewed the NCERT guidelines for implementation of bagless days in schools and said they will be further finetuned, according to officials.

PSS Central Institute of Vocational Education (PSSCIVE), a unit of the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), had developed comprehensive guidelines for implementing bagless days and make learning in schools more joyful, experiential and stress-free for students.

"Various suggestions were discussed during the meeting, including sensitising students about the local ecology, teaching them to test water purity, recognising local flora and fauna, and visiting local monuments. Based on this review, PSSCIVE will further fine-tune and finalise its guidelines," a senior MoE official said. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 had recommended that all students in grades 6-8 participate in a 10-day bagless period. During this time, students will intern with local skill experts and engage in activities outside of traditional school settings. This initiative aims to help students develop an appreciation for the larger ecosystem in which their school is embedded, the policy had suggested.

"Bagless Days will be encouraged throughout the year, encompassing a variety of activities such as arts, quizzes, sports, and skill-based learning."

"Students will gain periodic exposure to activities outside the classroom, including visits to historical, cultural, and tourist sites, interactions with local artists and craftsmen, and visits to various educational institutions within their village, tehsil, district, or state, as mapped by local skill experts," the official added. (PTI)

## Deputy CM Shivakumar raises pitch for renaming Ramanagara district as Bengaluru South

**BENGALURU, July 9:** A proposal to rename neighbouring Ramanagara district as 'Bengaluru South' has once again gained steam, with a Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar-led delegation on Tuesday meeting Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and submitting a memorandum to raise the pitch.

JD(S) leader and now Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy was the Chief Minister of the JD(S)-BJP coalition, when Ramanagara district was created in August 2007.

Kumaraswamy had earlier threatened to go on a fast unto death if the Karnataka government decides to go-ahead with the proposal to rename the district.

Ramanagara district is the political turf of Kumaraswamy as he has represented Ramanagara and Channarayana Assembly segments, and also had been an MP from the region.

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

The delegation consisting of district in-charge Minister Ramalinga Reddy, former Bangalore Rural MP D K Suresh, several Congress legislators and former legislators from the district has also proposed that Ramanagara town, about 50 kms

from here, remain as the headquarters of the renamed district.

"There is a feeling among people of Ramanagara, Magadi, Kanakapura, Channarayana and Harohalli taluks that Bengaluru's international reputation, sovereignty and prestige should be available to their taluks too and it also our thinking," Shivakumar and other members of the delegation, who are signatories to the memorandum, said.

"So the current Ramanagara district consisting of these taluks should be renamed, and Ramanagara taluk should be declared its headquarters," they said.

Shivakumar, who hails from the district, had last year spoken about the plans to rename Ramanagara district as Bengaluru South, with which he hopes for impact of 'Brand Bengaluru' on smaller nearby towns.

Speaking to reporters after meeting the Chief Minister, Shivakumar said the proposal might be placed before the Cabinet to "discuss and decide."

"We are all from Bengaluru district -- Bengaluru city, Doddaballapura, Devanahalli, Hoskote, Ramanagara, Channarayana, Kanakapura, Magadi -- technically and keeping administration in mind, earlier changes and reconstituting were made as Bengaluru Rural district and Bengaluru Urban district, and later a part of it was made Ramanagara district," he said. (PTI)

## Old video of girl being tortured in Bengal goes viral; police arrest 2

**KOLKATA, July 9:** After an old video clip of a girl being assaulted by a group of people in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district came into circulation, the police initiated a suo motu case and arrested two persons.

Barrackpore Police said that after identifying the accused persons shown in the around two-year-old video, the force arrested the two.

While the BJP alleged that a person close to the local TMC MLA was behind torturing the girl, the state's ruling party demanded that the video be examined to find out its authenticity.

The reason behind the girl's torture is not yet known.

"Police have taken note of an old video now in circulation on social media involving assault on a girl. A suo motu criminal case has been started. All legal actions against persons seen in (the) video are being taken. 2 among them are already in custody,"

## Chandigarh AAP leader, former mayor Pardeep Chhabra passes away

**CHANDIGARH, July 9:** AAP senior leader and former Chandigarh mayor Pardeep Chhabra passed away here on Tuesday, his nephew Puneet Chhabra said. He was 65.

Chhabra is survived by his wife and two daughters. Puneet Chhabra said his uncle had been undergoing treatment for jaundice and complained of ill health in the morning.

"We called an ambulance to take him to PGIMER but he passed away," he said. Chhabra was AAP's Chandigarh co-in-charge. He was also chairman of the Punjab Large Industrial Development Board.

He joined AAP in August 2021 after quitting the Congress. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann expressed his grief over Chhabra's demise.

In a post in Punjabi on X, the AAP

senior leader expressed his heartfelt condolences to the family in this hour of sorrow. Chhabra, who served as president of the Chandigarh Territorial Congress Committee, was once considered a loyalist of party leader and former Union minister Pawan Kumar Bansal. Bansal, a former MP from Chandigarh, also expressed grief over Chhabra's demise.

"Deeply saddened at the untimely passing away of Pradeep Chhabra. He had been a close associate for decades and worked with distinction as president of the Chandigarh Territorial Congress Committee @INCChandigarh for six years," Bansal said in a post on X.

"His passing has created a big void in Chandigarh's social and political life and is a personal loss for me," he added. (PTI)



Barrackpore Police said in a post on X.

Police sources said that the video, the authenticity of which was not verified by PTI, was at least a couple of years old.

The video clip showed some people holding a person's legs and hands while suspending her in the air, while two others were beating her with

sticks.

The incident allegedly occurred in a club in Ariadaha in North 24 Parganas district.

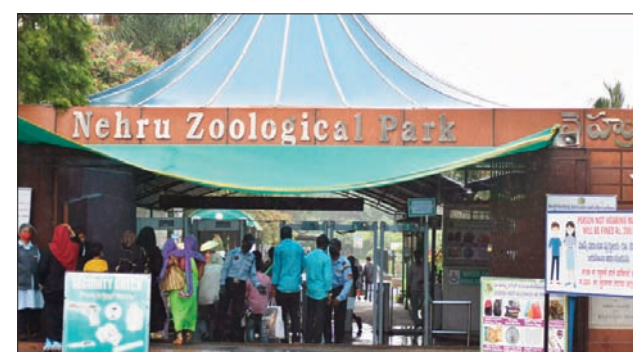
The clip was posted by BJP's West Bengal president Sukanta Majumdar who held arrested Jayant Singh responsible for the incident.

"Absolutely appalled by the emerging video from Taltala Club, Kamarhati, showing Jayant Singh, a close associate of TMC MLA Madan Mitra, brutally attacking a girl. This heinous act under a government that claims to champion women's rights is a disgrace to humanity," Majumdar posted on X.

Senior TMC leader Santanu Sen demanded a forensic test of the video and said that it was a plot of the BJP to tarnish the image of West Bengal.

Incidentally, a teenage boy and his mother were assaulted in Ariadaha by a group of men allegedly led by Singh. (PTI)

## Animal keeper at Hyderabad zoo injured after lioness pounces on him



**HYDERABAD, July 9:** An Assistant Animal Keeper was injured after a lioness allegedly pounced on him at its enclosure in the Nehru Zoological Park here, officials said on Tuesday. The incident took place on Monday.

The eight-year-old African lioness, which was kept at the Summer House area (off the display area) as it was receiving medical treatment, escaped from the enclosure while the Assistant Animal Keeper was cleaning the night houses.

He was negligent while closing the doors, the officials said.

The door was not closed properly between the enclosures and the animal keeper went into another enclosure to clean it, a release from Nehru Zoological Park said. At the time, the lioness came out of its night enclosure and injured the Assistant Animal Keeper with its paws. The man ran out of the area screaming to alert the zone employees, it said.

As per the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP),

the main gates had been shut as the zoo is closed to the public every Monday. Security personnel and the veterinary team were informed. The veterinary team tranquilised the lioness, which was near a crocodile moat, and sent it back to the night house, it said.

The Assistant Animal Keeper was immediately taken to the state-run Osmania General Hospital for treatment and he has since been discharged, a senior zoo official said. A committee was appointed by the Zoo Park Director for a detailed enquiry and, based on a preliminary report submitted by the Deputy Range Officer, it said the Assistant Animal Keeper showed "carelessness" in safety measures and was "irresponsible" in monitoring the wild animals while closing the gates. (PTI)

### NAME CHANGE

I have change my name from Mojibur Rahman to Md. Majibur Rahman by swearing a notarial affidavit at Morigaon. From today onwards I will be known as Md. Majibur Rahman for all purposes.

E-AUCTION PROGRAMME FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST/2024		
E-Auction programme for Sale of Railway Scrap Materials under Jurisdiction of Tinsukia Division for the month of AUGUST' 2024 is hereby fixed as under:		
SN	MONTH	DATE FIXED
1	AUGUST' 2024	02-08-2024, 14-08-2024 & 29-08-2024
Interested bidders are advised to bid through IREPS website ( <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> ) for participation in E-auction.		
Dy. Chief Materials Manager, Dibrugarh		
<b>NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY</b>		
Serving Customers With A Smile		

## RSS-linked magazine highlights 'demographic imbalance', calls for national population control policy

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** An RSS-linked magazine has stressed the need to introduce a comprehensive national population control policy, pointing to a "demographic imbalance" emerging in certain areas of the country with a "significant Muslim population growth".

An editorial published in the latest edition of Organiser Weekly also flagged concerns over "regional imbalances" in terms of population and pitched for policy intervention, saying states from the west and south were doing "relatively better" in implementing population control measures but they "fear losing a few seats" in Parliament if the base population was changed after the Census.

"Despite stabilising the population at the national level, it is not the same in all religions and regions. There is a significant Muslim population growth in certain areas, especially bordering districts," the editorial noted.

Frontier states such as West Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Uttarakhand are witnessing "unnatural" population growth due to "illegal migration" across the borders, it added.

"In a democracy, when numbers are critical regarding representation and demography decides the destiny, we must be even more cautious of this trend," the editorial said.

"Politicians like Rahul Gandhi can afford to insult Hindu sentiments now and then. (West Bengal Chief Minister) Mamata (Banerjee) can play the blatant Muslim card even to accept the



atrocities on women by the Islamists, and Dravidian parties can take pride in abusing Sanatan Dharma only because of their confidence in the consolidation of the so-called minority vote bank developed with the population imbalance," it charged.

"Learning from the horrors of the Partition and what is happening with the politically correct but socially and culturally incorrect migration from West Asian and African countries, we have to address this issue urgently, as pointed out by various Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) resolutions and judicial pronouncements," it added. The editorial further noted that regional imbalance was another "critical dimension" that would impact the delimitation process of parliamentary

constituencies in the future.

"The states from the west and south are doing relatively better regarding population control measures and, therefore, fear losing a few seats in Parliament if the base population is changed after the Census," it said.

"Hence, we need policies to ensure that population growth does not disproportionately impact any single religious community or region, which can lead to socio-economic disparities and political conflicts," it said.

"Instead of getting carried away by the external agenda pushed through international organisations, research foundations and consultancy agencies, we should strive for a comprehensive national population policy, keeping in view the availability of resources in

the country, future needs and the problem of demographic imbalance and apply the same uniformly to all," it added.

The editorial noted that the 1974 Henry Kissinger Report -- "Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for US Security and Overseas Interests" -- talked about pushing for various means to control the population of countries like Bharat "in all possible ways", much before the United Nations Development Programme designated July 11 as World Population Day in 1989, after the global population reached the five-billion mark in 1987.

It said that though the purpose of commemorating the day was to emphasise the urgency and importance of population issues and draw attention to the rapid growth of the global population and the adversities associated with it, there were different national connotations to the debate.

For instance, countries such as Japan have been facing a negative growth rate for decades while China had to reverse the authoritative population control policy after implementing it for decades, the editorial said.

"That makes population issues complex and nation-specific, with the core question of whether the population is a burden or an asset for the country. While discussing the population question in the Bharatiya context, we need a national discussion leading towards a comprehensive population policy," the editorial said. (PTI)



## ARMAAN MALIK EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER 'BIGG BOSS' CONTESTANT WITH HIS NAME: BEEN TRYING TO OVERLOOK IT



**MUMBAI, July 9:** Singer Armaan Malik on Monday said he has no connection with a controversial YouTube creator who shares his name and is currently a contestant on the "Bigg Boss OTT 3".

The contestant has been in the news for being married to two women -- Payal and Kritika. Both of his wives joined him on the reality show but Payal was eventually evicted from the show. In a post on X, the singer, 28, urged people to stop tagging him in social media posts that have no relation to him. "Hi everyone, I've been trying to overlook an issue for a while now, but it seems to be getting out of hand at this point and I have to address it," the post began.

"A YouTube creator, earlier known as Sandeep, later changed his name to Armaan Malik and is currently on 'Bigg Boss OTT' Season 3. This is causing a lot of confusion, with many people mistakenly tagging me and assuming we are the same person." The singer said he wanted to make it clear that he had no connection to the YouTuber and does not "endorse him or his lifestyle in any way".

"This situation is hampering my reputation and is turning out to be misleading to so many people who have supported me over the years. While I can't stop someone from changing their name and taking up the same as mine, I do request my own community to help me overcome this.

"Please stop tagging me in posts about anything related to him. Thank you for your understanding and support. Armaan Malik," the singer, known for songs like "Bol Do Na Zara", "Sab Tera", and "Wajah Tum Ho", wrote.

He had earlier slammed the creator for using his name to which the YouTuber responded by releasing a video on the platform along with his wives stating that there has been no intention from his side to use the name of the singer and his content has nothing to do with him.

"Bigg Boss OTT" season 3 is currently streaming on JioCinema Premium. (PTI)

## Hugh Jackman was initially rejected as Wolverine for being 'too tall': Kevin Feige

**LOS ANGELES, July 9:** Hugh Jackman was initially rejected for the role of Wolverine as the Australian actor was deemed too tall to play the mutant superhero.

He was hired back after Scottish actor Dougray Scott dropped out at the last minute, according to Marvel Studios CEO Kevin Feige.

Scott was initially set to play the clawed superhero in the 20th Century Fox mutant franchise, Jackman flew to Toronto to audition for the lead role of Wolverine.

but Tom Cruise did not want the actor to play both the villain in "Mission: Impossible 2" and Wolverine. Scott opted out of the role and the team decided to bring the Australian actor back.

In an interview with Entertainment Weekly, Feige, who was an assistant to producer Lauren Shuler Donner at the time, shared what went behind the scenes before Jackman was hired.

"There was a scramble to get our Wolverine. Lauren was very excited about this Australian guy, who had been rejected initially. In my memory, one of the main reasons was that he was too tall. Wolverine in the comics is called 'Lil' Fireplugs' sometimes. He's a short guy. But they were desperate."

Jackman, who is 6 foot three inches tall, was flown into Toronto for another audition, but after the reading he did with screenwriter Tom DeSanto and director Bryan Singer, the actor thought he didn't stand a chance. Not wanting to send Jackman "out into the cold," Feige bought him dinner before taking him to the airport.

"I said, 'Kevin, we all know I'm not getting the part. You don't have to do dinner,'" Jackman said to EW.

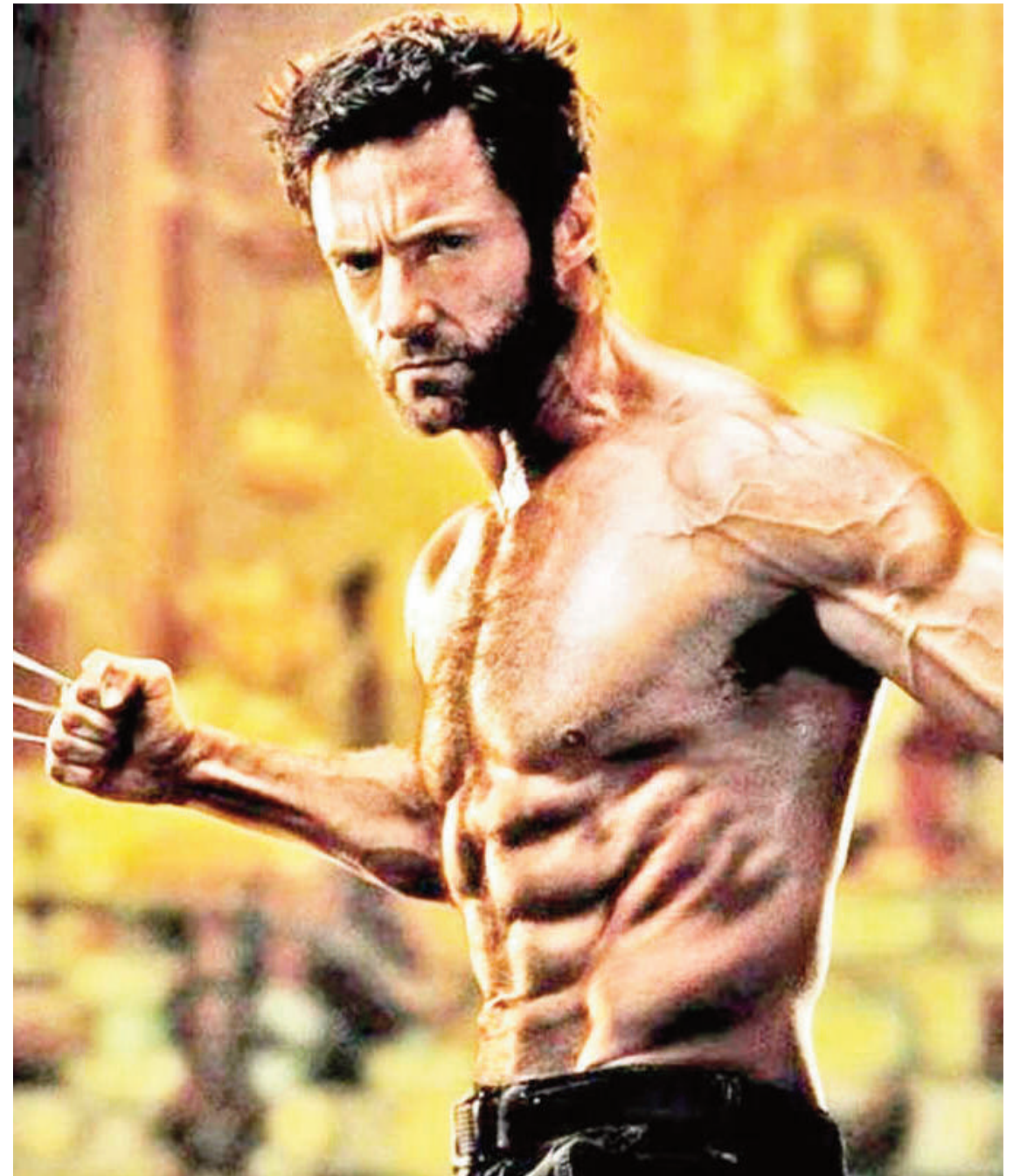
"But no, he sat in there and had a steak dinner with me and then drove me to the airport. I'll never forget it. That was the nicest thing. I thought, I'll never see him again."

But Jackman was unaware about what was happening behind the scenes with Scott's exit at the last moment. Jackman had announced his retirement from the character after 2017's "Logan" but he reunites with Feige for the upcoming "Deadpool & Wolverine" as Fox merged with Disney in 2020.

He also gets to collaborate with Ryan Reynolds, who has been trying to convince Jackman to return as Wolverine for years.

"The notion that, all these years later, we're in a world where [Jackman] is Wolverine, and Deadpool and all of those X-Men characters are together under the same roof, is a pretty amazing quarter-of-a-century experience," said Feige.

"Deadpool & Wolverine" releases on July 26. (PTI)



## I miss Nishikant Kamat, says Riteish Deshmukh on 10 years of 'Lai Bhaari'



**MUMBAI, July 9:** As "Lai Bhaari" completes a decade this month, actor-producer Riteish Deshmukh says he misses his friend Nishikant Kamat, whose vision helped the film become a blockbuster success.

Deshmukh ventured into Marathi films as producer with 2013's film "Balak-Palak" followed by "Lai Bhaari" which marked his debut as an actor in Marathi films. Helmed by Kamat, the film released in theatres on July 11, 2014 and went on to become a box office hit.

"I miss Nishikant Kamat, my dearest friend and director. It was his vision that really took that film in a different zone. It was my first Marathi film. Also, it was an ambitious Marathi film... I miss him and I'm happy that even after ten years the film is remembered," Deshmukh told PTI in an interview.

Produced under the banner Mumbai Film Company, the film also starred Sharad Kelkar, Radhika Apte, Tanvi Azmi and Aditi Pohankar in a pivotal role whereas superstar Salman Khan and Deshmukh's wife Genelia D'Souza made a special appearance in the film.

Kamat, best known for Ajay Devgn-starrer "Drishyam", died at the age of 50 in 2020. Kamat made his Marathi debut as filmmaker with 2004 "Dombivali Fast" which won the National award for best Marathi film. (PTI)

## INDUSTRY IS IN A CREATIVE CRISIS: KARAN JOHAR ON REMUNERATION OF STARS, CHANGING AUDIENCE TASTE

**MUMBAI, July 9:** There are about ten viable actors in Hindi cinema and they are asking for "sun, moon and earth" and they are being paid that amount, says filmmaker Karan Johar, who believes the industry is going through a creative crisis.

In an interview to journalist Faye D'Souza for her YouTube channel, the producer spoke at length about what's ailing the Hindi film industry which had a dismal six months at the box office. "Right now, the industry is in a creative crisis. We are going through a situation where we have to... We are managing footfalls, versus reality versus star remuneration versus studios collapsing at our end and there's a lot of drama happening in our business, which, I think, we have to take stock of," Johar said, dismissing stories of being an all-powerful producer who makes or breaks careers.

The "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahani" director said he is not the don or the "flag bearer" of nepotism as he is made out to be in a certain segment of media. Like many, he is just trying to keep his company, which is doing well, stay sustainable in these trying times.

Asked what could have led to this crisis in the film industry, the filmmaker said it has to do with many factors, primarily being the shift in the audience's taste, which have become "definitive". "...They want a certain kind of cinema and if you want to do a certain kind of number, then your film has to, I will say this technically, perform at A centres, B centres and C centres. Just multiplexes won't suffice," he said.

There has been a lot of debate around the money charged by some of the big stars post the box office debacle of "Bade Miyan Chote Miyan",

"Maidaan" and other big releases.

Johar, who has spoken about the money demanded by stars in the past, once again highlighted the issues, which is currently at the centre of the debate in the movie business.

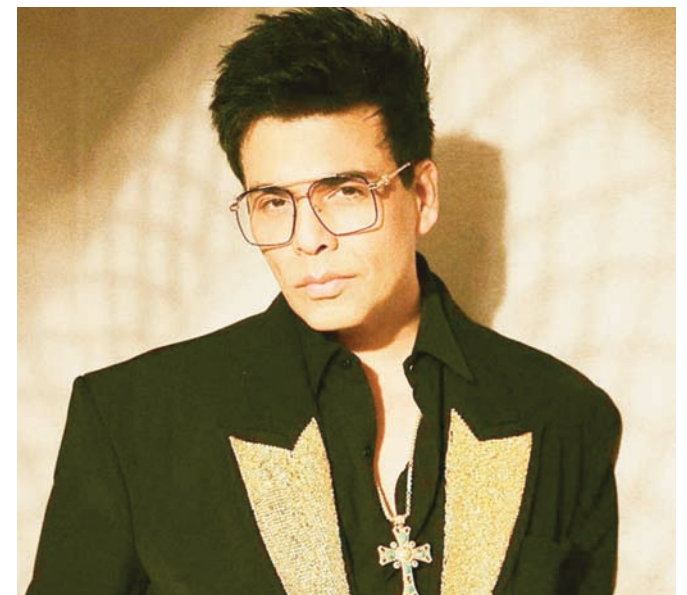
"...The cost of filmmaking has increased. There has been inflation there and then the star remunerations..."

There are about 10 viable actors in Hindi cinema and they all are all asking for sun, moon and earth and you are paying them and then you are paying the film, the marketing expenditure and then your films don't do the number. "Those movie stars are asking for Rs 35 crore and are opening to Rs 3.5 crore. How's that math working? How do you manage all that and yet you have to keep making movies and creating content because you also have to feed your organisation?" The filmmaker, known for box office hits such

as "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", "Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham" and "Student of the Year", said everyone is running around like "headless chickens" as it is difficult to gaze what's working at the box office and what's not.

"There is a lot of drama and the syntax of our cinema has not found its feet. In the case of Hindi cinema, there has been a certain kind of syntax in each decade. Right now, we are like, 'If 'Jawan' and 'Pathaan' worked, should we do only action?' Then everybody's running that way. Then suddenly a love story would work," he said.

"...Conviction has taken a complete beating, and it's all about herd mentality. We haven't realised that there is a certain audience now that wants rooted Indian cinema and, without the pressure of what the critics have to say, pure joy," he said. (PTI)





*Test of time for Gukesh to excel in faster version, Gujrathi joins in as a wild card in Zagreb*

**ZAGREB (CROATIA), July 9:** World Championship challenger D Gukesh will look to improve his billing in the faster version as Vidit Gujrathi joins him for the Superunited rapid and blitz chess tournament, a part of the Grand Chess Tour. Set to meet Chinese Ding Liren in Singapore from November 20th to decide the next world champion, Gukesh has repeatedly proved his superior ability in the Classical format. But when it comes to faster version, the Indian is yet to find his place amongst the world elite.

The fact remains that in case of a tied result in the World Championship, there will be games under faster time control of rapid and blitz chess to determine the winner and Gukesh would like to set the record straight like American Fabiano Caruana just did a few days back in Bucharest when he won the tiebreaker by a mile winning his games against Gukesh, R Praggnanandhaa and Alireza Firouzja of France.

Gujrathi, who has got a wildcard, will be the other Indian in the fray in the USD 175000 prize money tournament that will have nine rounds under rapid and 18 under blitz chess rules.

With each win worth two points in rapid and one under the blitz rules, it remains to be seen who will be the master of Zagreb but the odds are in favour of top seed Caruana who will look forward to notching back-to-back wins on the tour.

Ian Nepomniachtchi from Russia and Alireza are another two players who can turn the tide in their favour on their day and here they have five playing days to prove their true mettle. (PTI)

## ENGLAND VS WEST INDIES 1<sup>ST</sup> TEST Anderson keen to finish on a high as West Indies seek to spoil his party



**LONDON, July 9:** It doesn't matter if James Anderson takes a bunch of West Indies wickets for England in the first test at Lord's from Wednesday.

The series opener will be Anderson's 188th and last test and he will transition into England's fast-bowling mentor.

He was pensioned off by England managing director Rob Key, coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes. They met him at a Manchester hotel in April to say he wasn't in their plans for the 2025-26 Ashes in Australia.

This was a month after Anderson returned from India, where he took 10 wickets at an average of 33.50. That series was lost 4-1 but on the last morning of the last test in Dharamsala, Anderson became the first seamer in history to take 700 wickets.

He spoke then of being in the best shape, liking where his game was at, and being really excited for this summer, when he will turn 42 at the end of this

month.

This week, he said he was surprised at how calmly he took the news from Key, McCullum and Stokes. He understood their decision, adding, "I've sort of made peace with that."

Anderson warmed up for his last test by showing his class last week in his first English County appearance for Lancashire. He took 7-35, the best figures in the championship.

His 21-year test career comes full circle at Lord's, where he made his test debut in 2003 against Zimbabwe. Lord's witnessed Anderson's career-best figures of 7-42 against the West Indies in 2017.

As one era ends, another could start. Surrey seamer Gus Atkinson and wicketkeeper Jamie Smith have been handed test debuts. Both played white-ball cricket for England last year; Atkinson went to the ODI World Cup. Chris Woakes returns for his first test since he was the player of the series in last year's

Ashes. Stokes was back as an allrounder, allowing for offspinner Shoaib Bashir to make his home test debut after taking 17 wickets in India.

The West Indies played its first test since the extraordinary eight-run victory over Australia in Brisbane in January, after a 10-wicket thrashing in Adelaide.

Allrounder and former captain Jason Holder was recalled to the squad along with fast bowler Jayden Seales. St. Kitts and Nevis opening batter Mikyle Louis and fast bowler Jeremiah Louis are the uncapped players in the 15-man squad. Louis replaced an injured Kemar Roach.

In Roach's absence, Alzarri Joseph will lead the pace attack with Jayden Seales and Shamar Joseph, whose 7-68 scuttled the Australians in Brisbane in the second innings. That earned Shamar Joseph in his second test the player of the match and short series.

Shamar Joseph called England retiree Anderson "perfect" as a

test player to the Jamaica Gleaner newspaper but "I want to rain on his parade."

Anderson said he was trying hard not to think of his pending forced retirement.

"The big thing for me this week is wanting to play well, bowl well and get a win," he said. "I'm sure the emotions during the week will change, but right now that's what I'm trying to focus on to stop myself crying."

England: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (captain), Jamie Smith, Chris Woakes, Gus Atkinson, Shoaib Bashir, James Anderson.

West Indies squad: Kraigg Brathwaite (captain), Alick Athanaze, Joshua Da Silva, Jason Holder, Kavem Hodge, Tevin Imlach, Alzarri Joseph, Shamar Joseph, Mikyle Louis, Zachary McCaskie, Kirk McKenzie, Gudakesh Motie, Jayden Seales, Kevin Sinclair, Jeremiah Louis. (AP)

## Messi will start vs Canada in Copa America semifinal

**NEW YORK, July 9:** Lionel Messi won't be stopped by a leg injury and will play in Argentina's Copa America semifinal against Canada on Tuesday night.

Messi has been dealing with a right leg problem since the group stage win over Chile on June 25. He missed the first-round finale four days later but played the entire match in the quarterfinal victory over Ecuador last Thursday.

"Leo is good. He will be playing tomorrow," Albiceleste coach Lionel Scaloni said Monday at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

At 37, Messi has 13 Copa America goals and is four behind the record shared by Argentina's Norberto Méndez and Brazil's Zizinho but hasn't scored in this year's tournament.

"It's an easy decision for me," Scaloni said. "It's a fairly honest decision: I ask him how he feels. If he says I'm not good, then he will play the last 30 minutes. When he's available, he will play."

Seeking a record 16th Copa America title, Argentina beat Canada 2-0 in the June 20 tournament opener when Messi set up second-half goals by Julián Álvarez and Lautaro Martínez.

"We didn't do well enough with Messi last match. He was able to run free at our goalkeeper too much," said Jesse Marsch, the American hired as Canada's coach in May. "We all know he's the greatest player to ever play the game."

Argentina outshot Canada 19-10, including 9-2 on target, and had 64% possession.

"It's more of (an) advantage that we were able to play against them than it was for them to play against us," Marsch said.

Both teams are coming off quarterfinal wins on penalty kicks. Canada, an invited guest

from North America, defeated Venezuela.

In the other semifinal, Uruguay plays Colombia on Wednesday night in Charlotte, North Carolina. The championship is Sunday at Miami Gardens, Florida.

Argentina will have four days' rest, one more than Canada, but both teams are coming off 90-minute matches. Tournament regulations call for extra time to be used only if needed in the final.

Argentina is seeking to win its third major title after the 2021 Copa America and the 2022 World Cup and to equal the feat of Spain, which won the European Championship in 2008 and '12 along with the 2010 World Cup. The Albiceleste are tied with Uruguay for most Copa America titles with 15.

Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez has won four straight shootouts, against Colombia in the 2021 Copa semifinals, vs. the Netherlands in the 2022 World Cup quarterfinals and against France in the final, then vs. Ecuador last week.

Martínez, 6-foot-5, constantly shuffling his feet and a chatterbox trying to distract opponents, saved eight of 18 shots, stopping Colombia's Davidson Sánchez, Yerry Mina and Edwin Cardona; the Netherlands' Virgil van Dijk and Steven Berghuis; France's Kingsley Coman; and Ecuador's Ángel Mena and Alan Minda.

Canada was eliminated in the group stage of its only World Cup appearances in 1986 and 2022. It won the 2000 CONCACAF Gold Cup after gaining the title of a predecessor tournament, the 1985 CONCACAF Championship.

"We're playing against the best team in the world," said Cyle Larin, Canada's career leader with 29 goals. "We have a lot of speed and power, but I think over those days we've been together we've been growing." (AP)

## 12<sup>th</sup> All Assam Tang Soo Do C'ship 2024: Sivasagar emerge best team

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, July 9:** The 12th All Assam Tang Soo Do Championship 2024 was organised by the ITF Tang Soo Do Sports Association of Assam at Indoor Stadium, Cotton University Guwahati on July 6, 2024. The Sivasagar Tang Soo Do Team was awarded the best team in the championship, which saw participation from 12 districts. The Sivasagar Team included members from Demow, Joysagar, Dabar, Town Club,

Palengi, Khamun, and Desang Club. The Demow Club secured 11 gold medals, 2 silver medals, and 5 bronze medals. Sivasagar District Coach Harun Ali, along with Team Managers Dipankar Chetia and Ashik Rahman, attended the championship. Bichitra Buragohain, Secretary of the Sivasagar District Tang Soo Do Committee, and Dipankar Chetia, Chief Coach of Tang Soo Do Demow, congratulated the players.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Ayodhana International FIDE Rating Chess Tournament - 2024 begins

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** The 6th Ayodhana International FIDE Rating Chess Tournament - 2024, organised by the Chess Players Forum, commenced on Tuesday at Assam Down Town University Auditorium, Panikhati, Guwahati. The tournament is recognised by the World Chess Federation, All India Chess Federation, and All Assam Chess Association.

A total of 284 players from various parts of the country, including Delhi, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Tripura, and Meghalaya, as well as the host state Assam, are participating. Additionally, two players from the United States of America are competing in the event. Kushal of Andhra Pradesh has been given the top seeding of the tournament, while Dhruv Kashyap of Assam is the second seed, and Kumar

Gaurav of Bihar is the third seed.

The tournament was inaugurated on Tuesday by Subodh Malla Baruah, a senior sports journalist from Assam. Other dignitaries present at the opening ceremony included N. C. Deka, Vice Chancellor of Assam Down Town University; Bandana Datta, Dean of Studies at Assam Down Town University; Mukuta Deka, Vice Chairman of GMDA; Rajib Dhar, General Secretary of All Assam Chess Association; Dr. Sibendu Dutta, President of the Chess Players Parents Forum; and Dr. Devajit Sarma, Vice President of the Chess Players Parents Forum. FIDE Arbiter Pranab Kumar Nath will serve as the chief arbiter for the tournament. The tournament will be conducted in a Swiss league system over 9 rounds. A total prize fund of ₹ 3,00,000 will be awarded during the prize distribution ceremony. The tournament will conclude on July 14, 2024.

## Bumrah, Mandhana named ICC Player of the Month for June

**DUBAI, July 9:** Hero of India's victorious T20 World Cup campaign, Jasprit Bumrah added another feather to his hat when he was on Tuesday named the 'ICC Men's Player of the Month for June'.

It was double delight for India as women's team vice-captain Smriti Mandhana was also named the 'Women's Player of the Month' by the global body. Mandhana won her first ICC Women's Player of the Month after playing a starring role in India's sweep over South Africa in the ODI series last month.

Bumrah came out on top in the men's vote from compatriot Rohit Sharma and Rahmanullah Gurbaz of Afghanistan, while Mandhana

won the women's award by overcoming England's Maia Bouchier and Sri Lanka's Vismith Gunaratne.

Bumrah, who bagged 15 wickets to be adjudged the Player-of-the-Tournament in the T20 global showpiece last month, also claimed the Men's Player of the Month accolade for June, the ICC announced.

"I am delighted to be named the ICC Men's Player of the Month for June," Bumrah said in the ICC statement.

"It's a special honour for me following a memorable few weeks spent in the USA and West Indies. We have had a lot to celebrate as a team, and I'm delighted to be able to add this personal accolade to the list."

The 30-year-old was at his

dependable best in the USA and Caribbean and bowled at an average of 8.26, at an astonishing economy rate of 4.17.

He joined Virat Kohli (a two-time winner in his own right) as India players to claim the Men's T20 World Cup Player of the Tournament award.

India were the first team to win the men's T20 World Cup without losing a game all tournament.

Barring a washout against Canada in the first round, the Rohit Sharma-led India went on to win all eight matches they played in the tournament.

"To perform as well as we did at the tournament and lift the trophy at the end is incredibly special, and I will carry

those memories with me forever," Bumrah said.

"I wish to congratulate my captain Rohit Sharma and Rahmanullah Gurbaz for their excellent performances in the same period, and I am humbled to have been chosen as the winner."

In the women's game, Mandhana set the tone with a commanding 117 in the first outing in Bengaluru. Despite an early stutter by the hosts in which they fell to 99 for five, Mandhana remained resolute, and benefitted from some lower order resistance to guide India to a formidable score of 265 from their 50 overs, which proved far beyond the Proteas.

Mandhana went one better in the second match, hitting

her second successive century and top scoring in a game that saw 646 runs in total. The opener blitzed the South African bowling attack, smashing 136 in 120 balls and in tandem with her captain Harmanpreet Kaur, posted just enough to see off the resurgent visitors.

She came close to sealing a hat-trick of hundreds in the final outing, falling agonisingly on 90 in a stylish effort that ensured India recorded a comfortable victory to close out the series.

During the period, Mandhana recorded 343 runs at an average of 114.33, with a strike rate of over 100, earning her the Player of the Series award. (PTI)

## Under-fire Brazil hope Neymar and history will bring fresh hope after Copa America failure

**SAO PAULO, July 9:** When Brazil was knocked out of the Copa America quarterfinals by Uruguay on Saturday night in Las Vegas, Neymar wept for his distressed teammates while at a samba concert in Brazil.

The squad and its all-time leading scorer weren't all that focused on the Copa when it started, but they will desperately need each other in two years if they want a different outcome at the next World Cup.

So far, there are few signs Brazil and Neymar will re-engage in time to make a meaningful difference.

Neymar was never going to the Copa after he ruptured the ACL in his left knee last October. Vinicius Junior, Brazil's top scorer in the Copa with two, missed the Uruguay quarterfinal because of a suspension. And teenage sensation Endrick didn't find the net during the tournament.

Pre-Copa expectations of Brazil winning a first title in 17 years were low. Not with the team lying sixth in South America World Cup qualifying, not without Neymar, and not with World Cup champion Argentina lying in wait. But a goal-less

draw with Costa Rica, getting outplayed by Colombia, and failing to score against 10-man Uruguay was worse than expected.

"It is not the first time that they say we are finished, but believe it, we will win again," the Brazilian Football Confederation said on its social media channels on Monday, in a rare public acknowledgement of the squad's shortcomings. "We are the national team that has won the most in the history of the game. But losing is also part of our history."

Brazilian pundits, former footballers and analysts say the team can regroup, but wonder whether coach Dorival Júnior — who has had the job only since January — is the right man to lead that process.

They also regard Neymar as wasting his talent in Saudi Arabia far from the big leagues and overly focused on his private life. They also point to Brazil wasting a full year under interim coach Fernando Diniz, allegedly because CBF executives were waiting for Carlo Ancelotti to quit Real Madrid.

"We need to speed it up after this Copa America because we



are starting (World Cup preparations) now," said TV Globo pundit Júnior, who played for Brazil's 1982 World Cup team. "France has the same coach for years, many of the same players. Spain was very much starting like we were and now they are ahead. Argentina is aging, but still very hard to beat. Brazil is dropping well behind."

Nostalgic fans point to 2001 to believe Brazil can turn things around quickly. That year, Brazil under new coach Luiz Felipe

felder João Gomes and striker Raphinha under-performed, and their jobs are under extra pressure.

"It was an honor for me to be with this squad, there was a lot of work, professionalism and effort," Danilo said after the quarterfinals exit. "This young team showed it could achieve great things. I just hope that people are a little more patient."

In his recovery from the ACL injury, the 32-year-old Neymar has become an even more divisive figure at home. He had spats with celebrities, politicians, and fellow footballers. Supporters started arguing against his return to the national team.

But following the team's poor showing at the Copa, Brazilian analysts say Neymar was the biggest Brazilian winner from the ongoing tournament and remains key to the team's future.

"Neymar is one of the greats of world soccer, and God willing he will continue to be," coach Júnior told ESPN. "We need patience for him to come back at his best. He is a very important player for us and we need to give him enough time, we do not need to speed this up." (AP)



# Change of Guard: Gambhir era begins in Indian cricket

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** World Cup-winning former opener Gautam Gambhir was on Tuesday named head coach of the Indian cricket team by the BCCI, which hoped that he would bring "tenacity and leadership" to the position that was held with "remarkable success" by Rahul Dravid until recently.

The 42-year-old left-hander, who played a key role in India's 2011 ODI World Cup triumph, was the front-runner

to replace Dravid whose tenure ended with the country's triumph in the T20 World Cup in Barbados last month.

Gambhir's first assignment as India coach will be the tour Sri Lanka for three T20Is and as many ODIs starting July 27. "The Board would like to thank former Head Coach, Mr Rahul Dravid for his brilliant run with the team. Team India now embarks on a journey under a new coach - Mr Gautam Gambhir," said

BCCI President Roger Binny in an elaborate statement. The Board stated that the Cricket Advisory Committee comprising Ashok Malhotra, Jatin Paranjpe and Sulakshana Naik on Tuesday unanimously recommended Gambhir.

"His appointment as Head Coach marks a new chapter for Indian cricket. His experience, dedication, and vision for the game make him the ideal candidate to guide our team forward.

"We are confident that under his leadership, Team India will continue to excel and make the nation proud," Binny.

The sentiment was echoed by Bard secretary Jay Shah.

"The baton now passes on to Mr Gautam Gambhir who will don the role of Head Coach from the forthcoming series in Sri Lanka," he said.

"Gambhir has been a fierce competitor and a brilliant strategist. We believe he

will bring the same tenacity and leadership to his role as Head Coach. His transition to the role of Head Coach is a natural progression, and I believe he will bring out the best in our players.

Shah said he expects Gambhir to inspire and lead the team to new heights.

"His vision for the future of Indian cricket aligns perfectly with our goals, and we are excited about the journey ahead," he added. As a player, Gambhir

led Kolkata Knight Riders to IPL titles in 2012 and 2014. He then proved his coaching credentials as the mentor of the KKR team that won the IPL title in 2024.

"It is an absolute honour to serve my tricolour, my people, my country," said Gambhir in a BCCI statement. "I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Rahul Dravid and his team of support staff for their exemplary run with the team." (PTI)

## Inter-District Basketball championship concludes

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, July 9:** The Goalpara district clinched the U-17 Boys championship at the second Inter-District Basketball Championship being held at the Reality Public School in Kokrajhar on Monday.

In the U-19 Girls category, Kamrup Metro emerged victorious to lift the championship.

In the U-17 Boys, Goalpara secured victory over Morigaon in the final match, while Kamrup Metro district secured the third position respectively in the All Assam Inter-District Basketball championship.

In the U-19 Girls category, Kamrup Metro emerged victorious by defeating Guwahati Sports Association in the final. Golaghat girls achieved the third position respectively in the championship.

The championship created sporting amusement amongst the sports lovers in the event.

The event was organised by All Assam Basketball Association in collaboration with Kokrajhar Basketball Association and Reality Public School, Kokrajhar.

A total of 24 boys and 13 girls teams have participated in the three-day event which was started on July 6.

Dr Sangrang Brahma, secretary of Assam Football Association graced the prize distribution ceremony as guest in the event.

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During the period, Mandhana recorded 343 runs at an average of 114.33, with a strike rate of over 100, earning her the Player of the Series award.

"I'm really glad to have won the ICC Women's Player of the Month for June. I'm really happy with the way the team has performed and I'm happy to have contributed. (PTI)

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অসম চৰকাৰ



১০  
তৰিখ

আৰ্হজমৰ কাষত অসম চৰকাৰ  
প্ৰগতিৰ দিশত ৰাজ্য আমাৰ

**পেঞ্চন আৰু  
অৰুগোদয়ৰ দিন**





উপকৃত হিতাধিকাৰী  
৪৩,৬৪,৩৪৯



প্ৰতিমাহে ধন আদায়  
৩৮৫.২৭ কোটি

প্ৰতিমাহৰ ১০ তাৰিখে হিতাধিকাৰীৰ একাউন্টলৈ প্ৰাপ্য ধন

ইন্দিৰা মিৰি সাৰ্বজনীন বিধৱা পেঞ্চন আৰু  
দীনদয়াল দিব্যাংগজন সাহায্য আঁচনি  
এতিয়াৰে পৰা অৰুগোদয় আঁচনিৰ অন্তৰ্ভুক্ত কৰা হৈছে

আঁচনিসমূহ

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