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Himanta terms Sivasagar kneeling down incident as 'voluntary' gesture Won't let Assam to go to 'Miya' Muslims: CM

GUWAHATI, Aug 27: Asserting that he would take sides, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said he would not let 'Miya' Muslims "take over" Assam.

Sarma was speaking in the assembly on the admissibility of adjournment motions moved by the Opposition parties to discuss the law and order situation in the state in the wake of the gang-rape of a 14-year-old girl in Nagaon. He said the crime rate had not increased in the state as was being alleged by the Opposition if the population growth was taken into account.

"Not a single case of rape is acceptable. Still, if population increase is taken into consideration along with the number of rape cases in recent years, the crime rate has come down. There has been much improvement in the last 10



years," he said.

On members of the Marwari community kneeling down and apologising in Sivasagar for the alleged assault of a 17-year-old arm-

wrestler, Sarma claimed it was a "voluntary" gesture.

"Our cabinet minister Ranaj Pegu was sent to ensure there is no misunderstanding. The Marwari

community showed magnanimity and the matter was done with. No one forced them to kneel," he claimed, refuting the charge made by Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia while speaking on the admissibility of the motion.

Saikia hit back stating that the matter would not have come to such a pass had the police promptly arrested those involved in the assault.

Sarma claimed social media posts by members of the minority community against the Marwaris had fuelled tensions, to which the Congress and AIUDF alleged that he was playing "dirty politics" over the issue. As the opposition MLAs raised their voices, the CM questioned, "Why are you angry when we talk about minorities? Has the Congress declared that it does not (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Four-pronged strategy to address unemployment issue: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Aug 27: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said his government is pursuing a four-pronged strategy to address the problem of unemployment, including government appointment in a transparent manner, skill development and attracting more industries to the state.

He also urged the banned ULFA(I) to ensure peace in Assam so that corporates are not dissuaded from investing in the northeastern state.

Focus on the agriculture sector is also part of the strategy, he said.

Sarma was responding to resolutions on increasing employment opportunities and reservations for indigenous people in jobs moved by AGP legislator Ramendra Narayan Kalita, independent MLA Akhil Gogoi and Congress' Abdul Batin Khandakar.

The chief minister maintained that the unemployment rate has been on a declining trend in the last three years under his government.

Elaborating on the four-pronged strategy, Sarma said as a first step, government appointments are being conducted in a transparent manner.

He said nearly one lakh government jobs have been provided in the last three years, "without a single court case claiming any corruption" in the process.

"Our target is to provide another 30,000-50,000 jobs by May next year. And then, we will try to start the recruitment process for another 20,000-25,000 jobs before the 2026 assembly polls," Sarma said.

To ensure that local youths get preference in government jobs, it is working on a "domicile policy" with reservations of 90 per cent of jobs for locals, he said.

"All these taken together will be about two lakh jobs provided by our government," Sarma said.

Skill development and training of youths to make them future-ready is another aspect the state government is focusing on, he said.

"We don't have a lot of resources, but we have human resource. We can become the skilled worker supplier of the country and beyond with proper training of the youths," he said.

Attracting investors to set up industries is another way of increasing employment opportunities, Sarma said. He referred to the Rs 27,000-crore semiconductor plant of the Tata Group that will be coming up in Jagiroad as a pioneer in attracting more investors to the state. The government has plans to develop areas like Jagiroad, Palasbari and Namrup as industrial hubs. The agriculture sector also has immense potential in generating employment, the CM said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Five held

JORHAT: Five youths were handed over to the police by people of Baligaon Rajotia on Tuesday for allegedly making public a video of a minor girl without her clothes on in social media and blackmailing her. The mother of the 14 year old girl told reporters that the main culprit Dipankar Das, a resident of Majuli who was staying in a rented house at Chowkihat in Jorhat along with four of his friends had threatened her daughter that if she did not make such a video they would kill her parents. After getting the video they began blackmailing her, the mother further said.

One held

JORHAT: Rubul Ali (55), a resident of a village under Rowriah outpost, here has been arrested on charges of sexual harassment of a minor girl (9). According to a source Ali, who is alleged to have committed sexual abuse on the girl, who belongs to his tenant's family has been arrested under Sections 74, 75 of the BNS and section 8 (12) of the POCSO Act. Ali, who was produced before a court here on Tuesday, was sent to judicial custody.

Meeting held

BOKAJAN: After a meeting held by the Sub-Divisional administration of Bokajan, a Nagarik Thana Committee and Peace Committee were constituted in Karbi Anglong. The meeting was held in the premises of Lahorijan Yuva Sanstha Club on Tuesday morning. In the meeting the SP of Karbi Anglong, Sanjit Saikia said that there have been attempts to create disturbance in the society with the issue of ethnicity and religion, and emphasised the necessity to maintain peace and harmony. The meeting was attended by the president of Yuva Sanstha Club, Bishnu Giri; Bokajan SDO (Civil), Debahuti Bora; Khatkhati police station OC, Nitul Saikia and others.

'Hindu-Muslim issue is the biggest aspect in Assam'

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 27: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that Hindu-Muslim issue and the systematic decline of Hindu population in the state is the most prominent aspect and it should be thoroughly discussed.

He claimed that in Barpeta—the land of Srimanta Sankardev now has a meagre population of Assamese community.

"In Barpeta, there are only 40 houses of Assamese people and MLA Sherman Ali mentioned that he would give them safety and security. This is disgraceful," Sarma said.

The Chief Minister further said, "Do you know why the issue of Hindu-Muslim is becoming a big problem in Assam? 40 houses of minority in a place related to Satra

culture are proud to say that they are given maintenance by an opposition MLA from the special community."

According to him, the Hindu-Muslim population dynamics is the biggest issue in Assam because a Muslim Congress MLA in a Hindu multiple country is proudly saying that 40 Hindu families in his region are safe because of his generosity.

Sarma asked Sherman Ali how he could say that he is giving shelter to the Assamese Hindu community?

Moreover, he also asserted that the Congress party has been involved in tendering support to Bengali origin Muslims to take over the state; however, this would not happen. Sarma said, "Today MLA Rafikul Islam and opposition leader Debabrata Saikia mentioned that people from lower Assam will move towards (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Discusses measures to further strengthen ties PM Modi speaks to Putin on his Ukraine visit

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin as he shared his "insights" from his recent visit to Ukraine and reiterated India's firm commitment to supporting an early, abiding and peaceful resolution of the conflict with Ukraine.

In a post on X, Modi said the two leaders also discussed measures to further strengthen special and privileged strategic partnership between the two countries.

He said, "Exchanged perspectives on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and my insights from the recent visit to Ukraine. Reiterated India's firm commitment to support an early, abiding and peaceful resolution of the conflict."



The prime minister had on Monday briefed US President Joe Biden on his visit to Ukraine and conveyed India's full support for early return of peace to the region through dialogue and diplomacy.

The Ministry of External Affairs in a statement later said Modi during his telephone conversation with Putin recalled his "successful visit to Russia" last month to participate in the 22nd (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Oppn protests alleging failure of Himanta govt to prevent crimes against women

GUWAHATI, Aug 27: The opposition parties in Assam on Tuesday held demonstrations in various parts of Guwahati, including the assembly complex, alleging the failure of the government to protect women and prevent crime against them.

Congress MLAs led by Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia marched from inside the assembly building to the statue of Mahatma Gandhi within the compound, holding placards and shouting slogans demanding the safety of women and condemning the targeting of a particular community for all crimes against women. "The Dhing incident is not the only one. After that also, many such cases have taken place in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KADCC protests installation of 'smart meters'

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Aug 27: Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee (KADCC) has taken out a protest rally here on Tuesday, over the alleged increase in monthly electricity bills of consumers after the installation of smart meters by Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL).

The Congress party took out a protest rally from KADCC office through the main thoroughfare of Diphu market and back to the party office demanding a halt in installation of smart meters.

KADCC president, Bidyasing Rongpi said that the installation of smart metres by APDCL in every household has defects in it. There is an abnormal increase of electricity bills experienced by consumers.

Rongpi said, "By installing smart



meters has become a means of extorting money from the public by APDCL. Crores of money has been collected through this deceitful means. The people can no longer endure the smart meters and the government should do away with it." The memorandum submitted by the Congress to the deputy general manager, APDCL, Diphu said that installing smart meters has made

life miserable for the common man. The consumers are experiencing an unbearable load of unimaginable amount of electricity bills.

It further stated that there is nothing more about this 'smart meter'; in fact, it is a way of extorting money from the common man. The smart meters were installed without the knowledge of consumers. The APDCL has not consulted or informed the consumers while installing them. Such an act of injustice can never be accepted and demanded that it should stop further installations of smart meters.

The protest was led by KADCC president, Bidyasing Rongpi; vice presidents, Pradip Singnar, Raton Engti, Ashok Teron, Ratul Teron, Semson Engti, Jagat Sing Engti and general secretaries Pradip Diphusa and Sanjit Teron.

Nagaon fish traders stop supplies to Upper Assam over 'Miya' issue

NAGAON/SIVASAGAR, Aug 27: A section of fish traders from Nagaon district on Tuesday announced that they would not send their products to Upper Assam for an indefinite period in response to a movement against the 'Miya' community there.

Around four quintals of fish are supplied daily from Nagaon to the Upper Assam region comprising nine districts.

A fish traders' association in Nagaon has decided to suspend the supply of fish to Upper Assam districts for an indefinite period after a section of the people targeted the Miya community over the gang-rape of a minor girl at Dhing in the district.

"After the Dhing incident, which we all condemn, some groups in the Upper Assam districts have started targeting the Miya people. This is not acceptable and so we decided to stop fish exports to those areas," Greater Juria Fish Keepers Association president Ibrahim Khan said. 'Miya' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam and the non-Bengali speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants. In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of de-

fiance. Khan said around four quintals of fish are supplied every day to the Upper Assam.

Though there is no official definition or demarcation of Upper Assam, nine districts on the northern and southern banks of the Brahmaputra river in east Assam are collectively considered as part of the terminology.

For the past many years, Nagaon district has been occupying the top position in terms of fish production in the state, according to an Assam government website.

After the Dhing rape incident, several groups in Upper Assam, especially in Sivasagar district, issued an ultimatum to the 'Miya' people, asking them to leave within one week. A 14-year-old girl was allegedly raped by three persons while she was returning home from tuition on her bicycle at Dhing in Nagaon district on August 22 evening.

The arrested prime accused in the case died on August 24 after allegedly escaping from police custody and jumping into a pond when he was being taken handcuffed to a place for a re-creation of the crime scene around 3.30 am. The fish traders' body said their members would either supply fish to Guwahati or let it rot instead of sending it to Upper Assam. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Presence of youth in politics is essential to address challenges' NE youths have a role to preserve regional culture, says Sonowal

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 27: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal has called upon the youth of Assam and the Northeast to work for preserving and promoting the region's cultural heritage.

Sonowal made these remarks at the 35th Regional Level Youth Parliament Competition held at Kendriya Vidyalaya (OIL) in Duli-ajan on Tuesday.

Terming the power of youth as a driving force for a country's future, he said, "Assam's youth, as well as those from the Northeast, can play a pivotal role in preserving and promoting the state's rich cultural heritage, languages, and traditions. Youth can bridge gaps between different communities, fostering unity in Assam's diverse society. You can become the main source of 'Enajori' that can bring about cultural integration and social assimilation. Youth-led startups and innovations can boost Assam's economy, particularly in sectors like agriculture,



tourism, and information technology. With proper education and training, the youth can transform Assam into a hub for skilled labour, attracting investment and creating job opportunities."

Sonowal also emphasized that with proper education and training, the youth could transform Assam into a hub for skilled labour, attract-

ing investment and creating job opportunities.

He suggested that youth could drive innovation in governance through technology, entrepreneurship, and social initiatives.

"The presence of youth in politics is essential to address challenges such as corruption, lack of transparency, and ineffective govern-

nance, ultimately enhancing democratic processes and outcomes," he added.

The minister expressed hope that youth involvement in policy-making would ensure that critical issues like education, employment, and social justice are prioritised in Assam's development agenda.

He underscored that a robust, participative democracy contributes to global peace and development, positioning India as a leader on the world stage.

Sonowal encouraged all youth to engage actively in political discussions, vote, and consider careers in public service or politics.

The minister said, "With the active participation of youth in the parliamentary democracy, a future of hope can be built where every citizen, regardless of background, has equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from India's democratic system. I encourage all of you & all the youth to actively engage in political (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bangladeshi student sent back over social media post

SILCHAR, Aug 27: A Bangladeshi student studying at the National Institute of Technology, Silchar in Assam was sent back to her country after she reacted with a 'love' emoji to an anti-India post on social media, police said on Tuesday.

Cachar Superintendent of Police Numat Mahatta claimed that it was "not deportation" but was just sent back in consultation with Bangladesh authorities.

The SP said that Maisha Mahajabin, a student of fourth semester at Electronic and Communication department of NIT Silchar, was sent back to Bangladesh on Monday through the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Sutarkandi in Karimganj district.

"This is not a case of deportation... She reacted with a love symbol in one anti-India post on Facebook by her senior and NIT Silchar alumnus Sahadat Hussain Alfi, who left India around six months back after completing his course. He now lives in Bangladesh," Mahatta told PTI.

The SP claimed that many people expressed their anger to see such a post, where she reacted with a 'love'

emoji. Mahatta also stated that Mahajabin requested the NIT Silchar authorities to allow her to go to her country.

Asked if she will return to complete her course, the SP said: "She has not finished her course yet. Whether she will be back again to complete her study, nothing can be said about it now." A total of 70 Bangladeshi students are presently studying at NIT Silchar as per the understanding of Indian and Bangladesh governments.

Mahatta said that out of them, there are around 40 Hindu students from Bangladesh at NIT Silchar.

"I have personally met the students and requested them not to do any wrong work or indulge in any anti-India activities," he added.

Meanwhile, Hindu Rakkhi Dal Spokesperson Suvasish Choudhury told PTI that they noticed the anti-Indian post of the former student and informed the police to take necessary steps. "We forwarded some anti-Indian posts, which originated from University of Rajshahi in Bangladesh. She (Mahajabin) supported one such post with a love symbol," he added. (PTI)

DC calls for communal harmony

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Aug 27: District Commissioner, Nirola Phangchopi convened a meeting at Manja police station, Karbi Anglong to thwart any flare up in communal harmony.

Speaking on the occasion, superintendent of police, Sanjib Kr Saikia, addressed the gathering by urging them to remain vigilant and maintain communal harmony.

Saikia said, "We are here today to inform you about the current situation unfolding across various Assam concerning communal and religious tensions."

"I urge everyone to remain alert and to contribute to keeping the peace and harmony that has been a hallmark of Karbi Anglong," he continued. Highlighting the comparative peace in Karbi Anglong district, Saikia reassured the community of the district's reputation as a peaceful area. He called upon the public to actively participate in maintaining peace. DC Nirola Phangchopi reinforced the superintendent's message, by (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Markets settle almost flat in volatile trade; Nifty hits lifetime high

MUMBAI, Aug 27: Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended on a flat note after a volatile session on Tuesday due to the emergence of profit-taking near record high levels amid rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and Ukraine.

The NSE gauge, however, hit a new lifetime peak of 25,017.

According to traders, profit booking in metal, consumer durable and FMCG shares negated gains in telecom, tech and IT stocks.

After oscillating between highs and lows, the 30-share BSE Sensex eked out a marginal gain of 13.65 points or 0.02 per cent to settle at 81,711.76 - its sixth consecutive session of rise. During the day, it hit a high of 81,919.11 and a low of 81,600.51.

The NSE Nifty ended almost flat, up 7.15 points or 0.03 per cent, at 25,017.75 -- its ninth straight session of gains.

"The domestic market witnessed profit-booking near record highs. While the positive expectations regarding a potential rate cut by the Fed in September remain, the recent geopolitical tensions and rising crude oil prices have made investors cautious amid high valuations."

"Further, the recent shift in FII stance towards the domestic mar-



ket and the anticipation that the RBI will align with the Fed's actions are expected to foster a positive outlook in the near term," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

On the Sensex chart, Bajaj Finserv, Maruti, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finance, Infosys, Axis Bank and ICICI Bank were the biggest gainers.

In contrast, Hindustan Unilever, JSW Steel, Titan, NTPC and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.58 per cent, and smallcap index went up by 0.50 per cent.

Among the indices, telecommu-

nication jumped 1.13 per cent, tech (0.70 per cent), financial services (0.68 per cent) and healthcare (0.44 per cent).

On the other hand, metal, consumer durables, power, commodities and consumer discretionary were among the laggards.

"Trading session lacked momentum due to weak investor participation on account of Jannamshanti and ended almost unchanged from its previous close. Weak US market cues and subdued Asian indices prompted local investors to book profit towards the day-end, indicating that intraday volatility will continue amid growing geopolitical tensions and slug-

gish global growth," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory, while Seoul and Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were trading higher in mid-session deals. The US markets ended mostly lower in the overnight trade on Monday.

"There are both headwinds and tailwinds for the market now. Headwinds are coming from the escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and Ukraine. Brent crude has shot up above USD 81. The strongest tailwind comes from the expected rate cuts by the Fed which will spill over to other central banks, including the RBI," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 483.36 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.84 per cent to USD 80.75 a barrel. Rising for the fifth straight day on Monday, the BSE benchmark jumped 611.90 points or 0.75 per cent to settle at 81,698.11. The Nifty soared 187.45 points or 0.76 per cent to 25,010.60, registering gains for the eighth session in a row. (PTI)

Auto majors to offer 1.5-3 % discount on purchase of new vehicles against scrappage certificate

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Ahead of the festive season, several passenger and commercial vehicle manufacturers have agreed to offer discounts of 1.5-3 per cent on new vehicle purchase against scrapped old vehicles after a meeting with Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, an official statement said on Tuesday.

The statement further said Mercedes Benz India has offered a flat discount of ₹ 25,000, which will be over and above all existing discounts. Union Road Transport and

Highways (RT&H) Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday chaired a meeting with the SIAM delegation at Bharat Mandapam, where he addressed pressing issues in the automobile industry. "During this interaction, responding positively to the advice of the minister RT&H and recognising the importance of Fleet Modernisation and Circular Economy, multiple Commercial Vehicle Manufacturers and multiple passenger vehicle manufacturers have agreed to offer discounts for a

limited period against a certificate of deposit (Scrappage Certificate)," the statement said. It said commercial vehicle manufacturers are willing to offer discounts for a limited period of two years and passenger vehicle manufacturers are willing to offer discounts for a limited period of one year. The statement noted that these discounts will further incentivise the scrapping of vehicles, thereby ensuring the plying of safer, cleaner and more efficient vehicles on roads. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1..

Won't let Assam to go to 'Miya'

need the majority community?" "You are in competition for minority votes, I am not in it," he said, targeting the Congress and AIUDF MLAs. When the opposition charged him with being partisan, Sarma retorted, "I will take sides. What can you do about it?"

Amid the heated exchange, AIUDF MLA Rafikul Islam asserted that people from Lower Assam would go to Upper Assam districts as it was their right, referring to a diktat by some organisations asking them to leave immediately. Responding to him, Sarma said, "Why will people from Lower Assam go to Upper Assam? So that Miya Muslims can take over Assam? We won't let it happen."

The CM's statement further added to the ruckus with MLAs of the treasury and opposition benches storming into the Well of the House. Rejecting the motions moved by the opposition, Speaker Biswajit Daimary adjourned proceedings for 10 minutes.

"Miya" was used as a pejorative term for Bengali-speaking Muslims initially, and the non-Bengali-speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants. In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance.

MLAs of Congress, AIUDF, and CPI(M), and lone Independent legislator Akhil Gogoi had moved four adjournment motions for discussion on the situation arising out of "increasing" crimes in the state, including crimes against women.

When the House re-assembled, the CM continued on the same issue, claiming that Islam's statement would "vitiate" the atmosphere as it had an "aggressive tone" in it.

He said that while it was the constitutional right of a person to go and settle or work in any place, they must desist from doing so if they were not welcomed. "Till the rights of the indigenous people are protected, they can do as they please. But if anyone tries to dominate the locals, it won't be good," he said.

Referring to fish traders of Nagaon deciding not to send supplies to Upper Assam in response to the threats, Sarma maintained that this was the first sign of a "new economic blockade" that would be pursued by this section of Muslims.

He said the 'Miya' Muslims and the opposition MLAs speaking on their behalf have to prove through their actions that there was no danger to the Hindus in any form.

"If a Hindu family is a victim of a crime in a Muslim-majority area, the Muslims of that area must assuage their apprehensions and ensure that they do not leave the place," he added. Meanwhile, Akhil Gogoi was suspended by the speaker for the last part of the CM's statement for disrupting the proceedings. (PTI)

Four-pronged strategy

Referring to the ULFA(I) allegedly planting bombs on Independence Day at different locations, he said, "I want to tell Paresh Barua (outfit's chief) that your fight is with Delhi, not with youths of the state."

"We shouldn't hamper industrialisation of the state," the CM added. (PTI)

'Hindu-Muslim issue is the

the upper Assam. I ask why this should happen? Actually, the opposition party wants Assam to be captured by Miya Muslims. They can try to do it but I will not let this happen in Assam. The Miya Muslims can never take the charge of the state."

He also mentioned that the rights of indigenous people of Assam should be always safeguarded and the state has been going through an economic and external aggression.

"The concept of economic and external aggression in Assam is not my observation. The Honourable Supreme Court of India stated these things in a case earlier filed by Sarbananda Sonowal. Even the first Chief Minister of Assam Gopinath Bordoloi mentioned about outside aggression. The opposition members can easily check my statement on the basis of facts," Sarma said.

He has also asserted that population imbalance is a big problem in Assam and this must be dealt with properly for the safety and security of people of the state.

PM Modi speaks to Putin

India-Russia Bilateral Summit. "The two leaders exchanged views on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Prime Minister shared insights from his recent visit to Ukraine. He underlined the importance of dialogue and diplomacy as well as sincere and practical engagement between all stakeholders to achieve an abiding and peaceful resolution of the conflict," the MEA said. The two leaders "reviewed progress" on a number of bilateral issues and discussed measures to further strengthen the special and privileged strategic partnership between India and Russia, it said. "They also exchanged views on a range of regional and global issues of mutual interest," the statement said, adding, the two leaders agreed to remain in touch. On August 23, Modi paid a nearly nine-hour visit to Kyiv in the first-ever trip to Ukraine by an Indian prime minister since it became independent over three decades ago and held wide-ranging talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. He also invited Zelenskyy to visit India and the Ukrainian leader said he would be happy to travel to the "great" country. (PTI)

Oppn protests alleging failure

different parts of the state," Saikia told reporters here. "The CM, who also holds the Home portfolio, is not at all serious and concerned about the situation. We discussed in the assembly about crimes against women with NCRB data and asked the government to take action," he said.

Saikia claimed that the Home Department has asked the Assam Police not to register "some cases" of such crimes. A 14-year-old girl was allegedly raped by three persons while she was returning home from tuition at Dhing in Nagaon district on August 22. Referring to the government's action against child marriages, Saikia said, "Many cases were also not registered when it was found that one particular community was not involved. We have been saying that child marriages take place due to socio-economic causes." Without blaming one particular community, he said a proper study is required to unearth the exact causes why such social menaces prevail among some groups.

"However, the CM is trying to create a narrative that only one community is responsible for crimes. He also said that votes of one particular community were not needed. Is it justified? The CM is playing gimmick with the people of Assam," Saikia said. Citing recent data on rapes shared by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, he said incidents of rapes have increased during the last eight years of the BJP rule in Assam. Rajior Dal MLA Akhil Gogoi too protested inside the assembly complex, holding a banner that replicated the horrific episode from Mahabharat of Draupadi's 'vastraharan' with Sarma as Dhritrashtra.

Members of the AIUDF's youth wing had a scuffle with the police in front of its state headquarters at Hatigaon in Guwahati when they tried to move towards the secretariat as part of the 'Dispur Chalo' march. "We wanted to hold a democratic protest, but permission was denied. This government and its police have become fascist. We wanted to meet our CM and express our sentiments, but we are being stopped," AIUDF MLA Ashraf Hussain told reporters. He said the government has "totally failed" to protect women and prevent crimes against them.

"In Upper Assam, people from one community are being targeted and asked to leave the districts. The Home Department, which is under the CM, has failed to protect the life and property of people," he added. Hussain also slammed the BJP-led government for allegedly discriminating against people while giving land rights and "denying" ownership of land even after staying for several generations.

Meanwhile, protests by women groups continued at Dhing demanding the arrest of the two culprits, who were absconding. The prime accused, who was arrested on Friday, allegedly escaped from custody, jumped into a pond and died on Saturday morning, police said. The other two accused are still on the run and searches are continuing with raids conducted at several places for them. (PTI)

Nagaon fish traders stop

"As atrocities on Miya community in upper Assam continue, the decision to stop supplying fishes from Nagaon to Sivasagar, Tinsukia and other districts will remain till the atrocities are stopped," Khan said. The association warned that if any individual trader supplies fish to Upper Assam, then "strict action" will be taken against that person for violation of the association's decision.

Reacting to the decision, several people in Sivasagar said it will not affect them. "We are not dependent on Miyas. Even if they don't send fish, we will not have any problem. We will not accept such economic threats for their illegal stay in our areas. They have to leave," one shopkeeper said. (PTI)

NE youths have a role

discussions, vote, and consider public service or political careers as viable options". Commenting on the competition, Sonowal noted that such events ignite young minds about India's democratic values and inspire them to commit to building the future of the country.

DC calls for communal harmony

calling on the community to uphold peace and mutual respect, regardless of religion or ethnicity. "Every member of this community, irrespective of their background, should respect one another. In case of any issue or incidents, it is crucial to promptly inform the police or contact the district administration," she added. Superintendent of police, Sanjib Kr Saikia, stakeholders including the Karbi Student Union, Manja Town Committee, Manja Bazar Committee, local businessmen, and vendors were present at the meeting.

Three crore accounts to be opened under JanDhan in FY25: FM Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said about 3 crore new accounts under PMJDY are likely to be opened during the current financial year.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched the government's flagship financial inclusion programme Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) on August 28, 2014. Under the scheme, the number of bank accounts grew nearly four-fold from 14.72 crore in March 2015, to 53.13 crore as on August 16, 2024.

Total deposits under PMJDY has swollen from ₹15,670 crore as of March 2015, to over ₹ 2.31 lakh crore as of August 2024.

Talking to reporters on the eve of the 10th anniversary of the launch, Sitharaman said, "Our target is to open more than 3 crore PMJDY accounts during the current financial year."

As on August 14, 2024, there were more than 173 crore operative CASA accounts in the country, including over 53 crore operative PMJDY accounts.

A large number of normal saving bank accounts are also opened by banks. New measures like e-KYC and video KYC have made the account opening process paper-less, eliminating the need to visit a branch or banking correspondent for opening of bank account.

"We believe that most of the adults in the country have been covered with bank accounts and our focus is to cover leftover adults and neo-adults," Sitharaman added.

The average balance in PMJDY accounts has increased from ₹ 1,065 in March 2015 to ₹ 4,352 as on August 16 this year. Around 80 per cent of accounts are operative.

PMJDY is one of the biggest financial inclusion initiatives in the world under which the total number of accounts opened crossed 53 crore.

The JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile) has given a boost to the DBT programme and expanded its coverage from partial to ubiquitous, the finance ministry said, and added the PMJDY scheme has done very good in rural/semi-urban areas of the country.

Of the total accounts opened under the scheme about 66.6 per cent accounts are opened in rural and semi-urban areas. Of the total 53.13 crore PMJDY accounts, 29.56 crore (55.6 per cent) belong to women account holders. Today, 99.95 per cent of all inhabited villages have access to banking facilities within a 5-km radius through banking touch points (including bank branches, ATMs, banking correspondents (BCs), and Indian Post Payment Banks), the ministry said. One of the major key feature of the PMJDY is that there are no account opening charges, no account maintenance charges, and no minimum balance charges. (PTI)

Zee & Sony amicably settle disputes over their failed merger, to withdraw claims

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: ZEE Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) and Sony Pictures Networks India on Tuesday said they have settled their six-month-long dispute related to the failed USD 10-billion merger and have agreed to withdraw all claims against each other.

As part of the "comprehensive non-cash settlement" between ZEEL and Culver Max Entertainment Pvt Ltd (CMEPL), both "have mutually agreed to withdraw all respective claims against each other, in the ongoing arbitration at the SIAC and all related legal proceedings initiated in the NCLT and other forums," said a joint statement.

"The companies will also withdraw the respective Composite Schemes of Arrangement from the NCLT and inform the relevant regulatory authorities," it said.

Both ZEE and Sony had claimed a termination fee of USD 90 million (around ₹ 748.7 crore) from each other for not complying to the Merger Cooperation agreement (MCA) signed in December 2021.

Sony had moved before the Singapore International Arbitration Center (SIAC) immediately two



days after the termination of the deal, saying ZEEL did not satisfy the merger conditions, initiated arbitration proceedings and claimed a termination fee of USD 90 million. This was contested by ZEEL before the SIAC, which denied any interim relief to the Sony group against the Indian broadcaster.

ZEEL also moved the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) seeking implementation of the proposed merger and later withdrew its plea.

Later in May, ZEEL terminated the MCA by issuing a letter dated May 23, 2024, and it also sought a termination fee of USD 90 million

from two Sony Group entities -- Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), now known as Culver Max Entertainment, and Bangla Entertainment (BEPL).

Sony Pictures Networks India is the consumer-facing identity of CMEPL, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Sony Group Corporation, Japan.

Under the settlement terms, none of the parties will have any "outstanding or continuing obligations or liabilities" to the other, the joint statement said.

"The settlement stems from a mutual understanding between the companies to independently pursue

future growth opportunities with a renewed purpose and focus on the evolving media & entertainment landscape, signifying the definitive conclusion of all disputes," it said.

In January this year, Sony had pulled out from the proposed USD 10.5-billion merger with ZEE Entertainment Enterprises Ltd citing failure to meet certain "closing conditions" by the Indian firm.

ZEEL and SPNI have agreed to merge on December 22, 2021.

The Mumbai bench of NCLT had on August 10, 2023, approved the scheme of merger of ZEEL with Sony group entities Culver Max Entertainment and BEPL, which could have created a USD 10 billion media entity.

However, two years after that Sony Corporation announced the termination of the agreement on January 22, 2024.

After the termination of the deal, both companies are pursuing their independent course. ZEEL is facing financial hurdles, which it is trying to handle through several initiatives. It has reported a net profit of ₹ 118 crore in the first quarter of this fiscal. (PTI)

AASU stages symbolic 'Funeral Procession of the Power Department' in Nagaon; Margherita Congress gheraos APDCL office

Protests intensify against smart metres

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 27: Amidst ongoing state-wide protests against smart metres, the All Nagaon District Students' Union (AASU) staged a protest on Tuesday, titled 'Funeral Procession of the Power Department', in Nagaon town, blocking the main roads. The district unit of AASU carried a symbolic coffin of the Power Department throughout the town during the protest.

The protesters shouted various slogans against the ruling party and the APDCL. They strongly criticised the BJP-led state government, demanding a reduction in electricity tariffs and the replacement of smart metres with the old metres.

The state financial secretary of the students' organisation, Gourishankar Saikia, executive member Mriganka Shekhar Bharali Hazarika, Nagaon district students' union president Seeman Bora, and general secretary Kankan Jyoti Baruah were among those who participated in the protest, according to a press note.

Our Margherita correspondent adds: On Tuesday, under the instruction of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, the Margherita Block Congress Committee launched a protest as they gheraoed the office of the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) in Margherita, voicing strong opposition to the installation of smart metres in every household across Assam.

The protesters accused the state government of exploiting citizens through inflated electricity bill



charges, claiming that the smart metres have syphoned off thousands of crores from the public.

The demonstration saw active participation from various wings of the Indian National Congress, including the Margherita Assembly Youth Congress and the Margherita Mahila Congress Committee, with more than 500 Congress workers and members.

Protesters chanted various slogans denouncing the BJP-led Assam government, condemning its policies as oppressive.

Tara Prasad Dehingia, president of the Margherita Block Congress Committee, expressed deep dissat-

isfaction with the government's actions, stating, "It is unfortunate that under the guise of development, the BJP-led government has installed smart metres that are nothing more than a tool to drain money from the common people through excessive electricity bill recharges, as the public is fed up with this exploitation."

Dehingia further pointed out that recently the Gujarat government had withdrawn the use of these smart metres, raising concerns over why Assam continues to implement them.

Tara Prasad Dehingia issued a stern warning, demanding the

immediate cessation of smart metre installations in the Margherita subdivision and stating, "If the Assam government fails to do so, then the Margherita Block Congress Committee shall escalate protests, leading to massive agitations in the coming days at Margherita."

Many senior and youth Congress leaders of the Margherita Block Congress Committee, such as Md Toufik Khan, Devendra Pandey, Avishek Kumar Beldar, Nazrul Hussain, Satender Prasad, Arup Sharma, Monoj Borgohain, Binita Hore, Urmila Nath Bhat-tacharjee, Krishna Acharjee, etc.

NFR enhances freight transportation with new stations & customer initiatives



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 27: NF Railway has been adopting several initiatives to enhance the freight transportation system within the zone and improve customer interface. Among these initiatives, several stations were opened in July 2024 for handling both inward and outward goods traffic to facilitate smooth and efficient transportation for various goods.

To improve customer interface and augment freight revenue, Panchgram station in Barak Val-

ley, Cachar district, was opened for handling outward limestone traffic using full rake transportation facilities effective July 2, 2024. Simultaneously, the zone has also emphasised special provisions for bamboo transportation. Twenty freight wagons of bamboo chips were loaded from Dhemaji station under the Tinsukia division, and forty mini wagons loaded with bamboo cuts were dispatched from Vishwanath Chariali station under the Rangiya division.

Similarly, NF Railway has made dedicated efforts across other divisions to enhance BDU (Business Development Unit) initiatives. It has booked both full and mini rakes to facilitate the transportation of commodity consignments such as maize, rice, bamboo cuts, bamboo chips, stone chips, and potatoes. This initiative has generated additional revenue of ₹ 2.31 crore during the month by loading commodities at stations like Dhemaji, Biswanath Chariali, Falakata, New Coochbehar, Binnaguri, and Alipurduar Jn. A total of 175 freight wagons and 3 parcel vans were loaded from these stations during the month. Additionally, consignments of stone chips and potatoes were transported from Binnaguri to Bairabi and from Alipurduar to Silghat Town and Agartala, respectively.

Improving customer interface in freight transportation will revolutionise the interaction between business units and the railways, offering unparalleled convenience, efficiency, and transparency. By embracing digitalisation, prioritising communication, and adopting customer-centric policies, the railways are poised to become the preferred choice for logistic services in the nation.

Aaranyak organises wildlife conservation awareness prog for students



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 27: Aaranyak organised an awareness programme for students of a city high school here on Tuesday, aimed at conservation of biodiversity, in line with its sustained mission to impress upon young minds the need for preventing wildlife crimes at the grassroots level.

The Legal and Advocacy Division of the premier biodiversity conservation organisation, Aaranyak, facilitated the awareness programme on 'Understanding, Preventing, and Addressing Wildlife Crime' at New Guwahati Adarsh High School. The programme was initiated by Binita Barman Dutta, a teacher at the government-aided high school.

Aaranyak's legal consultant Ajoy Kumar Das and official Wasima Begum launched the programme by highlighting the importance of conservation and the severity of wildlife crime during their speeches, followed by a PowerPoint presentation on the topic. The presentation covered laws and regulations surrounding wildlife conservation, the impact of poaching, and the need for collective action to prevent wildlife crimes.

Aaranyak official Kakali Baishya enriched the awareness programme with an informative description of Aaranyak's K9 sniffer dog squad, which assists national parks and wildlife protection authorities in Assam, particularly the Forest Department, in preventing and investigating wildlife crimes.

The programme included an interactive session with the students, encouraging them to ask questions and share their thoughts.

The event aimed to educate and inspire students to play a proactive role as conscious members of society in protecting wildlife and preventing wildlife crime. By engaging with the younger generation, Aaranyak hopes to foster a culture of conservation and promote a deeper understanding of the importance of preserving wildlife.

Man electrocuted in Sootea

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Aug 27: In a tragic accident of electrocution, Jinku Barua (32), a resident of Magurmari village in the north of Sootea, died on Monday night. According to information, Barua had organised a Satyanarayan puja at his residence that evening. As the invitees arrived, he went to the kitchen to fit an electric bulb. Accidentally, he came into contact with a live electric wire and fell down instantly. He was immediately taken to a nearby hospital but was declared dead by the doctor. The untimely death of the youth has been widely mourned. He leaves behind his wife, a minor son, and a host of relatives. Jinku was a driver by profession.

Obituary



Asha Baruah (69), a leading lady of Sivasagar Amolapatty and a life member of the Hindu Dharma Naamghar Samaj, passed away on Tuesday after a prolonged illness at Siu-ka-Pha Hospital, Rajabari. She is survived by her husband, Arabinda Baruah, two daughters, and a host of other relatives.

Her last rites were performed at Thanamukh Crematorium in the presence of a large number of her admirers.

Mottock community protests in Dibrugarh, demands ST status

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Aug 27: Mottock organisations staged a protest in front of the District Commissioner's Office in Dibrugarh, demanding Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for their community on Tuesday.

The activists, holding placards and banners, raised slogans for granting ST status to the community.

Members of five Mottock organisations—All Assam Mottock Sammilan, All Assam Mottock Yuba Chatra Sammilan, All Assam Mottock Mahila Parishad, All Assam Mottock Yuba Chatra Parishad, and All Assam Mottock Students' Union—assembled in front of the DC office.

The Mottock community, along with five other ethnic communities in Assam, including the Tai Ahoms, Morans, Koch Rajbongshis, Sooteas, and Tea Tribes, has been seeking ST status in the state. "ST status is a long-pending demand of our community. The BJP government promised to grant ST status to our community along with other communities, but till date, nothing has happened. Along with five other organisations, we have been staging several protest rallies for the fulfilment of this demand," said Sanjoy Hazarika, a leader of the Mottock organisation.

Security measures tightened in Jorhat amid statewide unrest

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Aug 27: In response to the ongoing unrest across the state, the Jorhat district commissioner, Pulak Mahanta, has ramped up security measures to maintain law and order. Acting as the District Magistrate, Mahanta has assigned a team of five district administration and police officials to closely monitor the situation within the jurisdiction of each of the seven police stations in the district.

An order issued on August 26 by the District Magistrate detailed the names and contact information of the officials assigned to each police station. These teams will maintain constant communication with the District Magistrate, superintendent of police, and the officer-in-charge of the respective police stations. The seven police stations under close watch include Jorhat, Pulibor, Borholla, Titabar, Mariani, Teok, and Bhogamukh.

Additionally, the order designated Additional District Magistrate Mogen Narah as the overall in-charge of the district's law and order situation. An Additional District Magistrate has also been assigned to oversee the law and order of areas under each police station.

Meanwhile, the Jorhat district police have intensified foot patrols across the district. Superintendent of police Shwetank Mishra and district commissioner Pulak Mahanta actively participated in these patrols within Jorhat town. A source from the district administration revealed that these patrols aim to ensure the security of people and property, deterring potential disturbances by troublemakers.

The visible presence of police personnel on the streets not only reassures the public but also sends a strong message to those who might attempt to disrupt peace and harmony in the community.

Mahmadur Rahman Siddique arrested

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Aug 27: Mahmadur Rahman Siddique, a teacher from Balidunga, Bhuragaon under the Laharighat block, was arrested by the police for allegedly attempting to rape a woman while taking advantage of her husband's absence at their residence on Monday night around 7:00 pm. An FIR has been filed against the teacher at Bhuragaon. An investigation is currently underway. It is alleged that the teacher has a history of questionable behaviour.

Sonitpur District U-17 School Hockey Team selection trials

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Aug 27: The selection trials for the Sonitpur District School Hockey Team U-17 Boys & Girls are scheduled for August 29, 2024 at Polo Field playground from 3:30 pm onwards. This was informed by the district sports officer of Sonitpur. He further stated in a letter that participating players must be born on or after November 1, 2007 and are required to bring their original documents for age verification.

NTPC Bongaigaon's EVOICE distributes educational kits to students

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 27: In a significant step towards empowering the youth of neighbouring villages, NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati's CSR wing, Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, and Employee Volunteering Services (EVOICE) under its Disha Classes initiative recently distributed educational kits to 60 students. The kits, which included books, sports shoes, raincoats, and stationery items, were provided to support students from nearby villages in their academic and physical training endeavours.

Additionally, a whiteboard was presented to the Disha Classes centre to enhance the teaching and learning experience.

The distribution was led by Akhilesh Singh, head of project, NTPC Bongaigaon, in the presence of Debabrata Kar, GM (O&M); Asutosh Biswas, GM (Operations); Thangzom, commandant CISF; MS Kandari, assistant commandant, CISF; Ashish Kumar, deputy commandant, CISF; Onkar Nath, AGM (HR); Sangeeta Singh, president, Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club (BSLC); Soumya Kar, vice president, BSLC; and Jhumita Biswas, senior member, BSLC. They were joined by EVOICE members, teachers, and representatives of HR-CSR.

During the event, Akhilesh Singh praised the dedication of the EVOICE member-teachers and commended the students for their determination in travelling long distances to attend the classes. Singh encouraged them to dream



big, aspire to greater heights, and make their families and nation proud. The students also shared their experiences studying in the Disha Classes, expressing gratitude to NTPC for conducting these classes free of cost, which has significantly aided them in competing in various competitive exams.

The Disha Classes is an educational outreach initiative under NTPC Bongaigaon's EVOICE program, designed to provide free coaching to youth from nearby villages. The initiative focuses on preparing students for competitive exams, particularly for paramilitary and military forces. To complement this academic support, NTPC employees have teamed up with the CISF unit at the station to offer physical training, ensuring comprehensive preparation for the students. To date, more than 21 youth from nearby villages have secured employment in various paramilitary forces, including Assam Police, through the Disha Classes.

A highlight of the event was the presence of Narkw Nazary, a former student of Disha Classes who is now employed at NTPC. He shared his journey, motivating the current students with his success story and reinforcing the program's positive impact.

Since its inception in 2019, the EVOICE team's Disha Classes have been dedicated to the holistic development of local youth, empowering them through various employment avenues. NTPC employees, along with CISF, have been devoting their time beyond office hours to provide guidance and education, with the aim of preparing the youth for competitive exams in armed, defence, state, and central paramilitary forces. NTPC Bongaigaon remains committed to supporting the community through such initiatives, ensuring that local youth are equipped with the necessary skills and resources to succeed in their future endeavours.

Meeting in Gossaigaon addresses social issues & minority responsibilities

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Aug 27: An awareness meeting was held in Gossaigaon on Monday to raise awareness about the current situation in Assam, focusing on the responsibilities of the minority community and addressing issues such as drug abuse, child marriage, and other social evils.

The meeting, organised by the Minority Coordination Committee, Gossaigaon (CCMO), took place at 2 No Bhomrabil under the Gossaigaon subdivision. Various local organisations, including AMSU, ABMSU, NEMSU, Bhomrabil Brothers Union, and Cultural Organisation, actively participated. The meeting was presided over by Moinul Haque Pradhani, headmaster of Bhomrabil ME School, and Mizanur Rahman, general secretary (Organisational) of the Minority Coordination Committee, Gossaigaon, who explained the purpose of the meeting.

Nur Mohammad Ansari, president of ABMSU Gossaigaon District Committee; Saddam Hussain, president of NEMSU Gossaigaon District Committee; Monser Ali Sheikh, ex-president of Sapta Cooperative Society; and Aminur Rahman, AAMSU state president, provided brief remarks on various social issues affecting the minority

community, such as drug abuse, child marriage, and superstitions.

Mafizur Rahman, executive president of the Minority Coordination Committee and a prominent advocate in Gossaigaon Subdivision, discussed the need for increased awareness and outlined the actions that should be taken. He called for the punishment of the actual culprits and urged every individual in the minority community to exercise restraint. Advocate Rahman also mentioned that the Minority Coordination Committee, Gossaigaon, will continue to organise awareness meetings in various areas under the Gossaigaon subdivision.

The meeting was attended by several notable figures, including the village headman of 2 No Palashguri, Jalal Uddin Sheikh; esteemed teacher Taiyab Uddin Pramanik; Abdul Barez Sheikh; engineer Jahirul Islam; journalist Hafizur Rahman; and retired distinguished teacher Ahmed Ali Sheikh, among others. Nearly two hundred local residents attended the meeting, contributing to its success.

The entire program was coordinated by Nur Hussein, the organisational secretary of the Minority Coordination Committee, Gossaigaon.

3DPCOE Hackathon 2024 kicks off at Assam Administrative Staff College



projects being presented span a wide range of domains, from artificial intelligence and machine learning to sustainable technology and healthcare solutions.

A distinguished panel of judges, including Rahul Pandita, VP of Stratasys; Anuj Budhiraja from Phillips Machine Tools; Jaspal Singh Riyat from Microsoft; and Dr Sanjeev K Ningombam from IIM Shillong, has joined a panel on the Future of 3D Printing & Innovation. Several other distinguished judges are participating over the two days to evaluate all the pitches. The judges are assessing the projects based on their originality, technical merit, potential impact, and overall presentation.

The hackathon will conclude on August 28, 2024, with the announcement of the winning teams. The top five teams will be awarded a substantial cash and services prize of Rs 50,00,000 per team.

The 3DPCOE Hackathon 2024 is not only a platform for showcasing talent but also an opportunity for participants to network with industry experts and potential investors. The event is expected to foster a vibrant ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship in the North East Region.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A hospital is no place to be sick.
-Samuel Goldwyn

MPox concern in India

In recent years, the global health landscape has seen the rise of new infectious diseases, with the latest concern being the rapid spread of the M pox virus, formerly known as Monkeypox. Declared a "public health emergency of international concern" by the World Health Organization (WHO), M pox is becoming a serious threat, especially to developing and low-income nations. The Clade 1 strain of the virus, known for its virulence and ability to spread through skin contact, poses a unique danger to densely populated regions with limited healthcare resources. The origins of the current outbreak trace back to Africa, where fourteen countries have reported cases. Outside of Africa, M pox has surfaced in Sweden, Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan. In India, the state of Kerala reported two cases in March this year, underscoring the need for heightened vigilance. The WHO has placed M pox on its priority list, alongside seven other viral families, as climate change accelerates the mutation and spread of viruses. The emergence of Disease X, a WHO concept, reflects the urgency for nations to be prepared for unforeseen pandemics. M pox exhibits symptoms similar to COVID-19, such as cough and flu-like signs, coupled with painful pus-filled lesions. With COVID-19 claiming 6.9 million lives, the threat of another pandemic looms large.

The key question is, how prepared is India to confront this threat? Reflecting on the country's response to the second wave of COVID-19, it becomes evident that India faced significant challenges. A shortage of hospital beds, medical supplies, and healthcare professionals severely impacted the nation's ability to manage the pandemic. Erroneous policy decisions, including the hasty imposition of a nationwide lockdown, compounded the situation by disrupting the lives of millions of migrant workers. A detailed analysis, as outlined in the paper "Need for Policy Reforms in the Aftermath of COVID-19," identifies three critical areas that need addressing: operational, financial, and logistical issues. Collaboration among stakeholders, including public health officials, government agencies, and pharmaceutical manufacturers, is crucial for maintaining an efficient medical supply chain. However, the disjointed nature of India's healthcare system, where public health is a state responsibility but health policies are determined at the federal level, often results in mismatches between supply and demand. Logistical issues also play a significant role. Public hesitancy to take vaccines, driven by concerns over safety and efficacy, exacerbated the crisis during COVID-19. This hesitancy, combined with limited testing facilities, particularly in rural areas, delayed diagnosis and treatment, further straining the healthcare system.

Financially, the pandemic revealed vulnerabilities in the supply chain, particularly the dependence on Chinese active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). Price hikes during the pandemic disrupted the availability of essential medicines, highlighting the need for a more resilient supply chain. To better prepare for future pandemics and reduce the burden of existing diseases, India must adopt proactive health policies. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and diabetes are significant contributors to mortality in India. Reducing smoking rates, a leading cause of many NCDs, through policies that promote less harmful alternatives like nicotine patches and gums, could be an effective strategy.

US Fed's message signals the ushering of a lower policy rate regime

By: Anjan Roy

The US Federal Reserve chairman, Jerome Powell, has given a clear message from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, that the American central bank is all set to enter a rate reversal cycle. The Federal Reserve at long last would usher in a regime of lower policy rates.

This was picked up immediately by the financial markets and the US stock markets have risen once again, after a slide in recent days. One can expect that once the Federal Reserve initiates its policy reversal, the financial markets would further start adjusting.

When the US Fed speaks up, the world's other central bankers have to listen. This is because the markets would enter a new phase of dynamism. No doubt that the Reserve Bank of India would raise its antenna and look for the changes in the Indian markets.

One can expect that in sync with the global markets, the Indian stocks would also rise as happens when the broad spectrum interest rates are lowered. The stocks markets should show further upsurge in the coming days. Along with that, the bonds markets would also seek fresh levels. One can also expect money to flow from the overseas markets to advantage of the surge.

Against this background, how should the Reserve Bank reset its broader policy measures? Obviously, the guiding factors should be the overall price stability in India as well as the growth potential and performance of the Indian economy.

In its last monetary policy committee review meetings between August 6 and 8, the PC decided to hold its policy parameters unchanged. The policy rate was left untouched, though two of the committee members strongly argued against the decision, according to the latest release of the proceedings of the committee.

The factors that should weigh in for the RBI are the inflation trends and the potential for a pick up in price trends. The prices have shown sober trends in the last few months. In the latest monthly economic report released by the union fi-

nance ministry, this week showed a fairly comfortable picture.

Overall, retail inflation slowed to 4.6% in the first four months of the current financial year April to July 2024, against 5.3% in the same period last year. More specifically, month-to-month July showed a sharp deceleration in prices.

"Retail inflation based on Consumer Price Index-Combined (CPI-C) eased from 5.1 per cent in June 2024 to 3.5 per cent in July 2024, the lowest since September 2019." The finance ministry ascribed this to a significant fall in food inflation.

Food inflation "declined to 5.4 per cent in July 2024 from 9.4 per cent in June 2024. The substantial fall witnessed in food inflation was helped majorly by a decline in vegetable inflation from 29.3 per cent in June 2024 to 6.8 per cent in July 2024." However, this runs counter to the anecdote price levels in markets around the country, particularly the prices of vegetables.

Now the question is whether this price moderation is transitory or a poster to a longer trend.

If this sudden monthly drop is reversed in the short run, then the RBI should not budge from its anti-inflationary stance. If otherwise, and the prices seek lower levels then there is room for the RBI to reset its policy rates. As of now, it is difficult to really look through the haze and predict how the prices should trend in the coming months.

Two considerations are important in any such assessment. First, the historical trends. It has been generally seen the food prices, particularly, those of the principal two cereals and fruits and vegetables, tend to rise in the summer months through the monsoon periods. These then drop in the post-harvest season from October onwards.

Going by experience, maybe, we are over the price hump and the trends in the coming months should become more and more comfortable, barring unforeseen bumps. The other favourable factor is that the monsoon is progressing well and the prognosis is that it should remain at the normal levels this

year.

Hence, the fears of a bad monsoon and a possible hit to food production could be cast aside this season. The price situation, particularly, food inflation could remain stable for now.

Finance ministry sums it up thus: "With moderate core inflation and positive progress in monsoon, the headline inflation outlook is positive. Assuming a normal monsoon, CPI inflation for FY25 is projected at 4.5 per cent by the RBI, with Q2 inflation at 4.4 per cent."

On the other hand, the finance ministry's monthly report takes note of the adverse consumer expectations in the midst of the otherwise favourable economic data.

The finance ministry notes that amidst "favourable developments, consumer confidence in the current economic situation, employment, price level, and income has declined, as reflected in the Current Situation Index of the RBI's Consumer Confidence Survey. Households' optimism about economic conditions for the year ahead has declined from the previous survey round."

Further, "lower optimism on the general economic situation, employment and prices led to a moderation in the future expectations index of the Consumer Confidence Survey."

Typically, economic models give a major importance to the consumer's inflation expectation as a guiding indicator for future inflation. Once inflationary expectations get anchored, then the future course of prices are influenced by this. Look at the apparent contradiction. The consumers and the basic economic units are pessimistic about the future, though gauging the present situation it is not bad. How come this contrarian evaluation?

Maybe, the people do not have enough confidence in the governance structures. It is lack of confidence in those who are in the drivers' seat.

But, then, consider the Reserve Bank's problem in its formulation of policy. It is facing a "riddle". Introduce an accommodative policy stance and you stoke the inflationary fire, but if you don't you miss an opportunity to let growth go in its full steam. (IPA Service)

Assam-Mizoram reaffirm commitment to peace amid historic border disputes

The recent reaffirmation of commitment by the governments of Assam and Mizoram to maintain peace and harmony along their inter-state border is a positive development in a region that has historically seen its share of tension and conflict. This renewed commitment was made during a ministerial-level meeting held in Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, on 9th August 2024, and it signals a significant step forward in resolving long-standing border disputes that have occasionally led to violence and unrest.

Historical context: A Shared Heritage and Colonial Legacies

The people of Mizoram and Assam share a deep cultural connection, with similarities in food habits, festivities, and a mutual respect for their neighbors. Historically, the hill people of Mizoram and the plains people of Assam have lived in harmony, without any recorded instances of armed conflict between them. However, the seeds of discord were sown during the colonial period, when British policies led to the forcible occupation of traditional territories belonging to various Lushai chiefs. These policies not only disrupted the lives of the Lushais but also made the people of the plains unwarranted victims of the colonial machinations.

The Lushais, like other indigenous communities in the region, fiercely resisted the British colonial forces in an attempt to protect their lands. Despite their resistance, the Mizo Hills were formally incorporated into British India in 1895. The following years saw the unification of the north and south hills into the Lushai Hills district in 1898, with Aizawl as its administrative center. This district would later become Mizoram, first as a Union Territory in 1972 and then as a full-fledged state on February 20, 1987.

The Contested Boundary:

Assam and Mizoram's Differing Perspectives

One of the core issues contributing to the tension between Assam and Mizoram is the disagreement over the boundary between the two states. The Assam government adheres to the boundary notification issued on March 9, 1933, which defined the borders of the erstwhile Lushai Hills district. On the other hand, the Mizoram government bases its claim on an earlier boundary demarcation made in 1875 under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. This earlier demarcation, according to the Mizoram government, is more acceptable because it had the consent of the tribal chiefs at the time, unlike the 1933 re-drawing, which was imposed without local consultation.

These differing interpretations of historical documents have been at the heart of the border disputes between Assam and Mizoram. The 1875 boundary is seen by the Mizoram government as a more legitimate reflection of their traditional territories, while Assam's reliance on the 1933 notification is rooted in its legal standing within the framework of the Indian Union. This fundamental disagreement has led to serious friction in the past, occasionally escalating into violence, as seen in the tragic incidents of July 2021.

Recent Developments: A Renewed Commitment to Peace

Despite these historical tensions, the recent meeting between the governments of Assam and Mizoram marks a hopeful turn towards peaceful resolution. Both sides have agreed to move past their differences and focus on promoting and maintaining peace along their shared border. This is a significant development, especially considering the history of disputes and the potential for future conflicts if these issues are not addressed.

The discussions held on Friday have been described as a significant step towards finding mutually acceptable solutions to the border disputes. Importantly, the delegations from both states have acknowledged that the cooperation of the people living on both sides of the border is crucial for a peaceful resolution. This recognition is vital, as local communities are often the first to bear the brunt of any border-related tensions.

The Larger Issue of Encroachment: Assam's Concerns with Its Neighbors

While the recent discussions between Assam and Mizoram are a positive sign, they represent only one part of a broader issue that Assam faces along its interstate borders. Encroachment on reserved forests along Assam's boundaries with neighboring states has been a concern for several decades. Assam government reports detail how reserved forests in border areas have been systematically encroached upon, often with alleged official support from the other side. This issue has been highlighted in several cases brought before the Supreme Court concerning Assam's interstate border issues.

In a recent Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in 2023, the Gauhati High Court directed the governments of Mizoram, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh to submit affidavits within six weeks, detailing the measures they have taken to remove encroachments of forest lands along their borders with Assam. However, the High Court, comprising Chief Justice Vijay Bhishnoi and Justice Suman Shyam, expressed dissatisfaction with the affidavits submitted by these states, noting that they lacked specific details on how they would address the encroachments.

The Assam Advocate General,

in his submission before the Court, noted that the Assam government had made attempts to free the encroached Inner-Line Reserve Forest areas along the Assam-Mizoram border but faced resistance from the people of Mizoram. Media reports quoting official sources in the Assam government claim that Arunachal Pradesh has encroached upon 16,144 hectares, Mizoram upon 3,679 hectares, and Nagaland upon 59,490 hectares of Assam land, with most of these areas being forest reserves.

The Broader Impact: Unsolved Border Issues and Their Consequences

The failure to resolve interstate border issues between Assam and its neighbors—Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Mizoram—has had significant consequences for all four states. People living near these borders often live in fear and apprehension, as the tension can flare up at any time. The loss of life and property in such conflicts has been considerable, and in many cases, the violence has occurred in reserved forest areas, leading to the destruction of valuable forest resources.

Recent steps taken to settle disputes in certain pockets of the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh and Assam-Meghalaya borders have reduced tensions temporarily, but the underlying issues remain unresolved. The Assam-Mizoram border has remained relatively incident-free since the July 2021 incident, but the situation remains fragile. The cordial discussion held last week between Assam and Mizoram is a promising sign, but for the peace to be lasting, the solutions must address the root causes of the conflict.

Moving forward: The path to lasting peace

The recent discussions between

Assam and Mizoram, coupled with the ongoing legal proceedings in the Gauhati High Court, represent critical steps towards resolving the complex interstate border issues in Northeast India. However, for these efforts to be successful, they must be accompanied by a sincere commitment from all parties involved to seek mutually acceptable solutions.

One of the key challenges will be balancing the historical and cultural claims of the indigenous communities with the legal and administrative boundaries established during the colonial period. This will require a nuanced approach that takes into account the perspectives of all stakeholders, including the local communities who live along the borders.

Furthermore, the governments of Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh must work together to ensure that the encroachments on reserved forest lands are addressed in a manner that respects the rights of the local communities while also protecting the environment. The involvement of the judiciary, as seen in the ongoing PIL, will be crucial in ensuring that these efforts are carried out in a fair and transparent manner.

While the reaffirmation of peace and harmony between Assam and Mizoram is a positive development, it is only the beginning of what will likely be a long and complex process of resolving interstate border disputes in Northeast India. The success of these efforts will depend on the willingness of all parties to engage in constructive dialogue, backed by a commitment to finding solutions that are both just and sustainable. If these conditions are met, there is hope that the region can move beyond its troubled past and build a future based on mutual respect and cooperation. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpd@gmail.com)

Who kills Punjabis in Pakistan?

By: Vivek Shukla

The bloodshed of Punjabis in Pakistan continues. Yesterday, on Monday morning, at least 23 Punjabi travelers were pulled off their buses and trucks and shot dead in the Balochistan province. The heartless killers first checked the travelers' ID cards and when they were sure that they were from Punjab, they ruthlessly killed them. The massacre of Punjabis who went to Balochistan for work has been going on for the past couple of years. The modus operandi is the same. Stop buses and trucks passing through a deserted place and kill the Punjabi passengers.

In last May, unidentified gunmen shot dead seven people from Punjab province in the coastal city of Gwadar, Pakistan. All of them were barbers by profession. This is the fourth major incident of attacks on Punjabis in Balochistan this year.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the killing of nine Punjabis in April, who were on their way from Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, to Iran. The Baloch Liberation Army is deliberately targeting Punjabis. Young Punjabis are being abducted and never found. There are hundreds of such cases. Despite the efforts of the Pakistan government, the news of the massacre of Punjabis comes to the fore.

Why Punjabis are being targeted?

There must be a reason why Punjabis are being targeted in Balochistan? A large part of the Pakistani population hates Punjab, Punjabis, and the Punjabi-domi-

nated Pakistani Army. They all feel that Punjab is exploiting them and suppressing their rights.

Actually, for a long time, there have been allegations against the Pakistani government in Balochistan that it is exploiting the abundant natural resources of Balochistan. They say that it has ruined Balochistan. Despite being rich in natural resources, Balochistan remains the poorest province of Pakistan.

The people of Balochistan have always believed that their country's army had murdered their beloved leader Akbar Bugti. The anti-Punjabi movement in Balochistan has shaken the Pakistani government. It is natural for them to be worried about this movement.

Actually, in this Balochistan province, a 790 km long Gwadar port is being built with the help of China. The Pakistan government believes that the construction of Gwadar Port will change the fate of the country. But the people of Balochistan think this is all a lie. They believe that the construction of Gwadar Port will benefit only Punjab's interests. They are being deceived.

Hollow claims of catching the killers

The Pakistani government makes ritualistic promises to catch

the killers of the Punjabis. But nothing happens. Lahore-based writer and linguist Prof. J. Tariq says that the Pakistani government and army are dominated by Punjabis.

Therefore, non-Punjabis in Pakistan hate Punjabis. So they attack Punjabis whenever they get a chance. East Pakistan, which the world now knows as Bangladesh, had also revolted against Pakistan to break free from Punjab's dominance. The Pakistani army had unjustly treated East Pakistan. Urdu



was imposed on them; Karachi was made the capital of the country instead of Dhaka, whereas

Dhaka was a bigger city than Karachi in every way. The capital was later shifted from Karachi to Islamabad. There were many other reasons why East Pakistan revolted.

The idea of Pakistan

Islamic fanaticism is at its highest in Pakistan's part of Punjab. There is a race among the people to prove themselves as the biggest Muslim fanatics. It must also be remembered that Pakistani thought is promoted by Punjab.

The Pakistani army is 80% Punjabi, although their population in the country is around 65%. This shows that the Punjabi army is the lifeblood of the Pakistani army.

The safety and future of our people cannot be secured by shifting blame onto any community or religion. True protection comes through the implementation of constitutional safeguards. If we are not safe, or if we do not remain, the responsibility lies squarely with our leadership, particularly those who have risen from our own indigenous ranks to hold the highest offices.

It is not the journalist who should be questioned but rather our Chief Minister and his government.

The lessons from Sivasagar and

The Pakistani army has not spared its own people in committing carnage. This generation may not know enough about the Pakistani army's massacre in East Pakistan. The Pakistani army began persecuting its own Bengali-speaking people in 1969-71. The Pakistani army named this action Operation Searchlight. This was not a simple oppression. The army ruthlessly killed millions of people, publicly raped thousands of young women, and subjected them to all kinds of inhuman torture. The number of people killed in the Pakistani army's oppression was 3 million.

The people of Balochistan believe that Punjab and Punjabis are the ones who are benefiting from their resources. This is why Punjabis are hated in Balochistan. Balochistan does not want to be a part of Pakistan.

The Pakistani army's power has forced it to remain part of Pakistan. The Pakistani army uses tanks and fighter jets to suppress the rebellion in Balochistan. The whole of Baluchistan is living in the dark ages. There is no proper education system here.

Can the Pakistani government suppress the rebellion in Balochistan? Absolutely not. The fat-bellied Pakistani army generals can only threaten and bully. Now, the Pakistani government and army will have to give the people of Baluchistan their rights. If they fail on this front, the rebellion in Balochistan will flare up. It will then be difficult for Balochistan to remain a part of Pakistan. The rulers of Pakistan must understand this. (The author is a Researcher, Institute of Security And Safety Management. He has penned down the book 'Gandh's Delhi')

POST BAG

Addressing the Chief Minister's pertinent question: "Will we remain?"

Sir/Ma'am

I am writing in response to a recent interaction where our Hon'ble Chief Minister posed a question that resonates deeply with many of us: "Will we people stay?" This question, raised in response to a journalist's inquiry about the cutting down of mountains in his constituency, touches upon some of the most pressing issues of our time—caste, land, and identity.

The unfortunate reality is that the answer to this question seems to be a disheartening "No, we will not remain." Several critical fail-

ures contribute to this grim outlook:

1. Article 6, which was meant to protect our rights, has not been implemented. Instead, it has been ignored.

2. Our borders remain unsealed, leaving us vulnerable to demographic changes.

3. The NRC process, which was supposed to clarify and protect our identities, remains incomplete.

4. Despite promises, Assam has not been declared a tribal state, leaving our indigenous communities without the protections they need.

The safety and future of our people cannot be secured by shifting blame onto any community or religion.

True protection comes through the implementation of constitutional safeguards. If we are not safe, or if we do not remain, the responsibility lies squarely with our leadership, particularly those who have risen from our own indigenous ranks to hold the highest offices.

It is not the journalist who should be questioned but rather our Chief Minister and his government.

The lessons from Sivasagar and

Dhing should serve as a blueprint for taking the necessary legal actions to protect us. Failing to do so, and instead asking such questions, only highlights the helplessness and incompetence of our current leadership.

I urge all concerned citizens to reflect on this matter and hold our leaders accountable. This is a question of immense importance to everyone in Assam, and it demands an honest and effective response.

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Cyber threats: Safeguarding women's rights in the digital age



By: Jyoti Saikia

In today's digital era, the internet serves as a vital resource for communication, education, and empowerment. Yet, for many women, it also presents significant risks, as cyber harassment and online abuse have become pervasive threats. In India, the rapid growth of digital platforms has unfortunately coincided with a troubling rise in gender-based violence online.

Recent trends highlight the emergence of more subtle and harmful forms of harassment that urgently need to be addressed. Although India's legal framework has taken steps to combat cyber harassment, much work remains to be done to ensure women's safety in the digital realm.

The Information Technology Act of 2000, along with the Indian Penal Code (IPC), forms the legal backbone for tackling cybercrimes, including harassment. However, the enforcement of these laws is frequently uneven, and the current regulations fall short of addressing the complexities of emerging forms of cyber harassment, such as deepfakes and abuse within gaming communities. Additionally, the procedures for reporting and prosecuting these offenses are often slow and burdensome, making it challenging for victims to seek justice.

Victims frequently encounter numerous obstacles, such as limited knowledge of their rights, social stigma, and indifferent law enforcement. The global reach of the internet adds another layer of complexity, allowing offenders to escape legal repercussions by operating across various jurisdictions.

The expanding tentacles of cyber harassment: The reach of cyber harassment in India is growing, with offenders adopting more advanced tactics to victimize women. While traditional forms of online abuse—like stalking, trolling, and doxing—continue to be widespread, the emergence of new technologies has brought about even more severe dangers, such as the misuse of deepfake technology.

Deepfakes are incredibly realistic, digitally altered videos or images that can falsely depict someone doing or saying things they never actually did. Recently, this technology has been weaponized against women, with offenders creating and distributing deepfake pornography without the victims' consent. This

type of cyber harassment is particularly harmful, as it not only invades the victim's privacy but also severely damages their reputation, leading to profound emotional and psychological distress.

In 2020, India experienced a sharp rise in deepfake-related crimes, with many women falling victim to fabricated explicit videos circulating on social media.

The challenge of disproving the authenticity of these videos further complicates the situation, leaving victims with few legal options. Although Sections 66E and 67A of the Information Technology Act of 2000 address the transmission of obscene material and privacy violations, the law struggles to keep pace with the rapid evolution of deepfake technology, and enforcement remains a significant hurdle.

Harassment on online gaming platforms: Another alarming trend is the increasing cyber harassment on online gaming platforms. Once seen as spaces for entertainment and social interaction, these platforms have become breeding grounds for toxic behavior and online abuse. Female gamers, in particular, are often targets of sexual harassment, including rape threats and abusive language, frequently from anonymous players. In India, the rapid growth of the gaming community has not been matched by specific laws addressing harassment on these platforms. This regulatory gap leaves many women exposed to abuse, with few options for protection or seeking justice.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has recognized the problem, but more robust policies and industry standards are essential to address this growing threat. Tech companies, including social media and gaming platforms, have a critical role in protecting users from online abuse. Although major social media platforms have established anti-harassment policies, enforcement is often inconsistent, allowing harmful content to spread.

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, introduced by the Indian government, aim to increase accountability by requiring platforms to remove unlawful content and protect user privacy. However, the effectiveness of these guidelines is still uncertain, as the vast amount of content and the constantly evolving nature of cyber threats pose considerable challenges.

Online gaming platforms, in par-

ticular, must enforce stricter community guidelines and improve reporting mechanisms to curb harassment and abuse. Developers and platform operators need to prioritize user safety by implementing strong systems to detect and address incidents of online harassment effectively.

Empowering women digitally: Equipping women with the skills to protect themselves online is vital in the fight against cyber harassment. Digital literacy initiatives that educate women on safeguarding their privacy, identifying and reporting abuse, and navigating online environments safely are critical components of this effort.

Initiatives like Cyber Saathi and She: The People Programs such as Cyber Saathi and She are making significant progress by offering resources and educational opportunities to women throughout India. Support networks and helplines are also crucial in this effort. The National Commission for Women (NCW) has introduced several initiatives, including a 24/7 helpline, to help women dealing with online abuse. Nevertheless, a key challenge is ensuring these resources reach all women, especially those in rural and remote regions.

Global collaboration and community initiatives: Combating cyber harassment necessitates international cooperation, given that online abuse frequently crosses national boundaries. While India's involvement in global discussions on cybercrime is important, there is a need for stronger collaboration with other nations and international organizations to effectively tackle cross-border cyber harassment.

Community-driven efforts play a crucial role in addressing cyber harassment. Movements such as #MeToo and #GirlsAtDhabas highlight the impact of collective action in raising awareness and pushing for change. Local initiatives, including workshops, community discussions, and advocacy campaigns, are essential for fostering safer digital environments for women.

Looking ahead: The digital era brings vast opportunities for women, but it also introduces considerable risks. Safeguarding women's rights in the online world demands a united effort from all parties involved—governments, tech companies, civil society, and individuals alike.

By tackling the emerging threats of cyber harassment, such as deepfakes and abuse on gaming platforms, we can work towards a safer and more inclusive digital space that allows women to fully engage in all areas of society.

Balancing the protection of women's rights with the need to uphold free speech will be a significant challenge in the future. However, through a holistic strategy involving legal reforms, tech accountability, education, and community support, we can make meaningful progress in safeguarding women's rights in the digital age. *(The writer can be reached at joyasaikia1990@gmail.com)*

The Kolkata case is an attack on the collective spirit of women

By: Simran Kaur

The issue of rape persists because the majority of the male society sees women as inferior to them – in every aspect of life – be it at residences, at the workplace, on the roads, or in restaurants. Women are seen as someone weak and a lesser human than the male.

No doubt the physical strength of males is greater than females. But the cerebral capability, endurance and the perseverance of a female are greater than a male. The most basic example of this is that she is capable of bringing life to this world. She is the creator.

We live in so called modern world with a sort of egalitarian and universal ideology but look around yourself. You will get endless examples of 'modern people' carrying forward the burden of a traditionally divided society which was based on ascribing the status of a person in a particular community by virtue of their birth!

Molestation of women is a common thing. Isn't it insensitivity of the custodians of law to keep their eyes closed to such events? And isn't it insensitivity of society to not attribute it to patriarchy and keep protecting their positions of power and political subscriptions just so that they do not offend the ones holding power (which in most cases are men)?

The woman is weak because she does not have the kind of mobility a male has. Mobility in terms of both physical and mental space. We all know about physical mobility—females are hesitant to move out of homes alone, late at night, or even in the evenings. Most public spaces are occupied by men like parks and stadiums and females are molested and stalked by men. The fear of a man approaching oneself is very much real and valid. Public transportation is not safe; restaurants are not safe (an example is the recent Bengaluru cafe's videography inside a female washroom).

Schools and colleges are not safe. There are examples of teachers molesting girls students and even fellow classmates raping the girls.



Physical mobility also has its intensity. The privileged section of society both caste and class-wise are less likely to face all the above mentioned, but their minds are not free either. The workplaces are not safe for both the underprivileged and privileged women.

There was a story covered by the Hindu newspaper in 2023 titled "What has India done to curb unnecessary hysterectomies?" It is an eye-opening piece as it explains how underprivileged and marginalised women undergo hysterectomy to treat menstrual pain for the greed of the sugarcane industry and private clinics just so they do not lose profits for the want of a menstrual leave by women.

Therefore, women are also subject to exploitation of a capitalist structure. If this isn't patriarchy, then what is? Patriarchy can be seen in many facets of life, around every corner of the world and even women are not spared of such mindset.

Now, talking about upper-class and upper-caste women, their workspaces are not safe either. Hon'ble Supreme Court had stipulated Vishaka guidelines in 1997 for the safety of women at workplaces which were brought under the law in "Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013". 16 years later. First of all, the time gap of 16 years speaks volumes! Second, not much data has been in public discourse regarding the number of convictions under the POSH Act.

Sexual harassment in the workplace includes sexually charged comments and physical advances typically made behind closed doors, for which there are no eyewitnesses, audio tapes or video recordings. It is just the victim's word against the accused's word.

The situation appears grim.

Now, talking about mental mobility, I will have to build slowly what mental pressure can feel like. Females have been less prioritised than males since the beginning of their lives. Female foeticide is a reality even today. We still are an agrarian nation depending on males for farm labour.

Females are still considered a burden for the return on investment is very low, rather the dowry burden, the education and health expenses, and the living expenses of females are considered a waste since they will be married off. There are even examples of auctioning off of women (often called purchased brides) to places where there is low sex ratio like Haryana (879) and Punjab (895).

Even climate change has the most grueling effect on women. In events of droughts, floods and disasters women are more vulnerable to issues like nutrition, sanitation and safety. Recently, the question of whether or not to criminalise marital rapes was in debate which is a clear indication of how unsafe women are in their own homes. As I write, my mind takes me to the incident in Bihar where a lady IAS officer when asked by a student about whether they would be provided affordable sanitary napkins, replied to the girl in a taunting manner that they might as well ask for free condoms now.

Imagine the shallow knowledge of the lady regarding the affordability of sanitary napkins and about how girls are subjected to school dropouts and absenteeism due to poverty. This is an example of privileged ignorance to the issues and women who are subjected to such disadvantages further face mental pressure.

Women are subject to low salaries despite the same nature of work as compared to their fellow

male colleagues. Women are victims of overlapping discrimination due to the divisive social structure. The upper caste men often take revenge from the lower caste men/ women by raping their women for reasons like sustaining power, and maximising resources like property.

An example of the same is of Jhaloor village of Punjab where caste based clashes have been on rise and Jatts mounted brutal assault on Dalits and groped, molested and beat up Dalit women, leaving the Dalits little avenue for employment since the majority of land is owned by the dominant caste. Caste Based clashes also have a burden on women greater than men.

All the above issues and many more which I cannot fit in limited words do have an impact on the minds of women. The constant nagging, crimes, treatment of not being able to do what they want to do, the inability to have a choice, the inability to pursue fitness, and the inequality in social, political, economic landscape of India against women do have burden on female's minds. This burden does not let the women's minds wander or aspire for a better life making her systematically and structurally weak.

The rapes are manifestations of a mindset that women are weak and inferior at all the levels that I talked about and at those which are left unspoken.

Rapes are an attack on the very soul of women. And the Kolkata rape case is an attack on the collective quintessence of women in India. Society has to make changes in their homes to see a change outside homes and has to keep questioning the authorities who promise us safety and security. This nation is of equals as enshrined in our Constitution and nobody should be more equal than the others. *(Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)*

Easy ways to handle body odour during Monsoon

By: Shahnaz Husain

Increase in humidity during the monsoon creates a breeding ground for bacteria on the skin, leading to that unpleasant musty smell. Body odour is the result of your sweat mixing with the existing bacteria on your skin.

It is most prevalent among those who sweat a lot, with athletes, overweight people, diabetics and groups with weakened immune systems most at risk. Excessive sweating in armpits, feet, palm and groin are major cause of embarrassment during monsoon season.

Damp monsoon days can mean excessive perspiration and with that comes body odour. Sweating is the body's mechanism to strike a balance between the temperature difference in the internal body and the outside environment.

Factors such as stress, genetic background, processed and spicy food with garlic and onion base, aerated drinks, and other mental, psychological disorders can also affect the body odour.

Bathing and scrubbing help to clear away germs, dirt and odour. All parts of the body must be washed well, specially the neck, armpits and feet. These are the areas where germs accumulate and cause odour. Adding cologne to the bath water leaves the body fragrant. Colognes also have a cooling effect. Shower gels and body shampoos, containing natural ingredients, like sandalwood, rose and khus have a cooling and refreshing effect. They are not only natural coolants, but have germicidal and antiseptic benefits.

Pour 2-3 drops of lavender essential oil while bathing; it helps you stay fresh and smell nice. Es-

sential oil helps in controlling sweat and body odour.

Wear cotton underwear and clothes during the hot, humid monsoon season. Porous materials help sweat to evaporate, change your underwear regularly, especially if you sweat excessively.

Opt for fresh, clean underwear after each shower or if you feel dampness. After showering, pat yourself dry with a clean towel, paying particular attention to areas prone to moisture buildup (like armpits or between skin folds). This gentle approach removes excess moisture without disrupting your skin's natural microbiome or damaging the skin barrier. Loose, light clothing is much more appropriate and comfortable during monsoon season. Tight clothing can trap moisture and inhibit airflow, leading to increased sweat and discomfort.

Daily changes of clothing are, of course, a must. The combination of moisture and warmth in the underarm area creates an ideal environment for the growth of bacteria and fungi and unpleasant odor. By keeping the underarms dry you can minimise the risk of bacterial infections and the amount of sweat that accumulates.

The use of anti-perspirants and deodorants do help. Most deodorants are also anti-perspirants. A spray, rather than the roll-on deodorants may be more suitable in monsoon, but this is a matter of personal choice. However, be sure to choose a mild deodorant, as strong built-in anti-perspirants can cause skin irritation or sensitive reactions. It is always better to try them out on a small area, on the inner arm, first. If the skin tingles or burns for more than a minute, you should not use it. Some peo-

ple find the use of talcum powders quite adequate. They absorb perspiration and maintain freshness for some time.

Climate also plays a part in choosing the right perfume. In hot and humid monsoon conditions, it is better to go for light, lemony and fresh fragrances, rather than heavy ones. The effect of perfumes intensifies in hot, humid weather. A heavy perfume can be quite overpowering. Lemon, rose, lavender or sandalwood are light and refreshing during monsoon weather.

Here are some tips for preventing body odour:

A deodorant or a body spray should be a part of your daily routine. Before leaving the house, give a quick fragrant shower to your body. Always go for the body sprays which last for long and have extra powerful fragrance.

Regular use of anti-bacterial soap can help reduce the growth of bacterial, minimising the chances of odour.

Reduce the number of products you're using on your face, opting for light, multitasking ones that could reduce the amount you sweat. Mild exfoliation helps remove dead skin cells and prevent ingrown hair.

Gentler exfoliants like lactic acid and mandelic acid are also effective and kinder to the skin. Exfoliating once or twice a week should suffice. Be generous with the use of colognes, even splashing them on. Colognes and Eau de Toilette constitute mainly water, or a mixture of alcohol and water, with only 2 to 5 % perfume. They are lighter and leave a light lingering fragrance.

Colognes can be added to bath water. Or, add eau de cologne to a

mug of water and used as a last rinse. It has a cooling effect too.

Bicarbonate of soda (baking soda) helps to prevent body odour. Make a paste of baking soda and water and apply under the arms. You can also add lemon juice to this paste. Leave on for ten minutes and wash off with water. Or, mix a little baking soda with your talcum powder and apply under the arms, or on the feet.

Potato slices can also be rubbed on areas where odour forms easily.

You can rub neem paste on your underarms as an effective herb because of its antibacterial and anti-septic properties.

Rose water can always be added generously to bath water. It is a natural coolant and also fragrant.

Add 2 drops of Tea Tree Oil to two tablespoons of water or rose water. Apply this under the arms with cotton wool.

You can rub lemons on your armpits to stop the growth of microorganisms. However, do not use lemon if you have cuts or irritated skin. To remove odour from the hair, add the juice of a lemon and half a cup of rose water to a mug of water and use as a last rinse.

For excessive perspiration (which can result in body odour), Ayurveda gives some dietary suggestions: Sip "nimbu paani." Sip ginger tea before and after your meals. Chop fresh ginger root finely and mix with a pinch of salt. Chew a little of this before your meal. Sipping warm water with your meal may also help. Light diet and less spices are advised. Eat smaller meals after short intervals. *(The author is an international fame beauty expert and is called herbal queen of India)*

The warrior women who fought – and won – against the East India Company

By: Theeba Krishnamoorthy

When the East India Company invaded the South Indian kingdom of Sivaganga in 1772, they met with opposition from Indian warrior women. These women were a diverse group from different walks of life – royal household, rural areas, across all caste groups. Although many of their names and stories have not found a place in history, they have survived in local folklore, songs, bhathanatam performances and have been immortalised as deities in the local temples.

Here is the story of three of these early female freedom fighters: Velu Nachiyar, Udayaali and Kuyili. As the earliest women to rise against the East India Company, their lives offer a glimpse into the beginnings of the anti-colonial movements, evoking an image of resilience and fortitude.

Rani Velu Nachiyar was a formidable Tamil Queen, who was both admired and vilified by the British for her valour and bravery in defending her kingdom. She was born in 1730 to the Raja and Rani of the Ramnad kingdom. Skilled in the art of warfare and weaponry, Velu Nachiyar was also a scholar, and mastered several languages including English, French and Urdu. At the age of 16, she married the prince of Sivaganga, Muthuvaduganathur Udayathevar. In 1750, Velu Nachiyar and her husband became monarchs of the Kingdom of Sivaganga. In 1772, East India Company troops, alongside the Nawab of Arcot's son, invaded Sivaganga and marched towards the Kalaiyar Kovil Fort. The Raja of Sivaganga was killed at the Battle of Kalaiyar Kovil on 25 June. The kingdom fell under enemy control and the Kalaiyar Kovil Fort was plundered. Rani Velu Nachiyar and her daughter Vellachi escaped capture through the sacrifice of Udayaali, a village woman who refused to reveal their secret hideout during interrogation and who was killed for her insubor-

dination. Rani Velu Nachiyar and Vellachi fled Sivaganga and sought refuge near Dindigul. During her eight-year exile, Rani Velu Nachiyar acquired influential alliances with neighbouring rulers (such as Gopala Nayaker, Hyder Ali) who supported her preparations for battle against the East India Company, providing additional soldiers, weapons, resources and training. Rani Nachiyar built an army of fierce female warriors that she named after Udayaali.

In 1780, Rani Velu Nachiyar and the Udayaali army skillfully infiltrated Sivaganga. Aware of the superior military prowess of the British, Rani Nachiyar used her knowledge of the terrain and employed guerrilla warfare tactics – spies, sabotage, ambush. Rani Nachiyar's military advisor was Kuyili, a woman from a lower caste background. As a spy for the royal household, she had protected the Rani's life on multiple occasions and soon rose to the rank of commander-in-chief of the Udayaali women's army.

At the Battle of Sivaganga, Kuyili devised a strategy to attack the East India Company's weapons storage. Disguised as a rural woman, Kuyili entered the secure storehouse unnoticed and set herself ablaze, destroying the Company weapons and ammunition. The East India Company and the Nawab fled from Sivaganga in defeat and Rani Nachiyar regained her Kingdom. The Tamil Queen ruled Sivaganga for another decade before handing the kingdom to her daughter. In recent years India has honoured the memory of these women warriors through issuing commemorative stamps, installing monuments and memorials.

The contribution of these women as warriors vanished at the intersection of colonialism and patriarchy, instead brown women were recast as helpless and in need of saving. I hope this blog post creates curiosity and the excavation of more stories of Warrior Women. *(Courtesy: Scroll.in)*

Hasina' ouster marks a watershed moment for student activism in Bangladesh: Political analysts

DHAKA, Aug 27: The recent student movement in Bangladesh, culminating in the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, marks a watershed moment in the nation's political landscape, fuelled by a 70-year legacy of student activism from the 1952 Language Movement to the Liberation War and beyond.

Political analysts and observers view the recent student protests, which many in Bangladesh have christened as the "Bangla Spring" — taking a cue from the Arab Spring — or the "Monsoon Revolution," as a watershed moment in Bangladesh's political landscape, driven by the same spirit of activism that has characterised student movements in the country for over 70 years, even before its inde-

pendence in 1971, when it was known as East Pakistan.

The latest movement, which began in July 2024, was sparked by the Court's decision to reinstate a controversial job quota system, a move that reignited long-standing frustrations among students and the general public.

The reinstatement of the job quota system, which had been abolished in 2018 due to student protests, sparked widespread demonstrations led by students that ultimately led to the collapse of the government led by long-time prime minister Hasina.

Over several weeks, the protests escalated, resulting in nearly 450 deaths and the detention of thousands, including hundreds of students.

Despite harsh government crackdowns, the persistent student-led movement forced Hasina to resign after 16 years in power, marking a historic victory for Bangladesh's youth and highlighting the enduring impact of student activism in the nation's history.

"The students' movement has always played a vital role in charting the course of Bangladesh's history and policies even before the Liberation War of 1971. But this time, the students' movement was different and on a scale that had never been witnessed before."

"The 'Monsoon Revolution,' as it is being called, marks a turning point in Bangladesh's history, driven by the same spirit of resistance that has characterised student movements for over 70 years," for-

mer Major General Muniruzzaman, the president of the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, a think tank, told PTI.

He pointed out that the recipe for the success of student movements in Bangladesh lies in the "secular nature and ideology of the movement and the mass participation of people cutting across social, religious, and economic lines."

"The students' movement, be it the 1952 Language Movement or the recent Monsoon Revolution, would never have tasted success had they not been secular. Because if they had only catered to one community or creed, it would never have taken the shape of a mass movement," he pointed out.

Echoing similar sentiments, the

chairman of the Jatiya Party, G M Quader, said the "students' movement, which is free from narrow politics, has over the years changed and at times dictated the country's politics."

"There is a trust factor that works in favour of the students. People believe in them and support them wholeheartedly. This time too, we have seen how common people have come down to the streets to support the students," he said.

Quader's elder brother, the founder of the Jatiya Party and former President Hussain Muhammad Ershad, too had to step down in 1990 following a students' protest.

The recent toppling of Sheikh Hasina's government is just the lat-

est chapter in Bangladesh's long history of student activism, as seen through past movements. For over seven decades, students have been at the forefront of social and political change in Bangladesh and the erstwhile East Pakistan, beginning with the 1952 Language Movement.

In the early struggle for Bengali to be recognised as a state language, students in Dhaka faced a tragic climax on February 21, 1952, when police fired on demonstrators, killing several students and turning the event into a symbol of the fight for cultural and linguistic rights, now commemorated as International Mother Language Day.

The 1969 uprising against Pakistani rule, driven mainly by stu-

dents, was a pivotal moment that helped mobilise the Bangladeshi people to fight for their independence in 1971.

During the Liberation War, students not only led protests but also joined the Liberation Army, and the brutal Pakistani military crackdown on Dhaka University on March 25, 1971, targeting students and intellectuals, remains one of the darkest chapters in Bangladesh's history.

Student activism continued to shape the political landscape of Bangladesh in the decades that followed.

The anti-dictatorship movement of 1990, which led to the fall of President Hussain Muhammad Ershad, was driven by student protests and demonstrations. (PTI)

Sullivan's meetings could lay the groundwork for a possible final summit with Xi Jinping before Biden steps down in January US national security adviser Jake Sullivan visits Beijing in a bid to manage strained relations

BEIJING, Aug 27: A top White House official arrived in China on Tuesday for talks on a relationship that has been severely tested during President Joe Biden's term in office.

Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser, was greeted at a Beijing airport by Yang Tao, the Chinese foreign ministry's chief for the North American and Oceanian department, and the U.S. ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns.

Sullivan has been Biden's point person for often unannounced talks with the Communist Party's top foreign policy official to try to manage the growing differences between Washington and Beijing.

The goal of his visit, which lasts through on Thursday, is limited — to try to maintain communication in a relationship that broke down in 2022-23 and was only nursed back

over several months.

No major announcements are expected, though Sullivan's meetings could lay the groundwork for a possible final summit with Chinese leader Xi Jinping before Biden steps down in January.

It's important for the United States and China to avoid any crisis in the remaining months of the Biden administration, as it could set the tone for U.S.-China ties under the next one, said Da Wei, the director of the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

"The goal of this visit is not reaching new breakthroughs or progress but to continue the stable momentum of China-U.S. relations in the past year through strategic communication, and to avoid new crises in the next few months," he said.

Sullivan will hold talks with Wang Yi, the director of the Com-



munist Party's Central Foreign Affairs Commission Office.

Wang is also the foreign minister. He had initially stepped down when he took the party post, a more senior position, but he returned about seven months later, in July 2023, after his successor was removed for reasons that have not been made public.

The Biden administration has taken a tough line on China, viewing it as a strategic competitor, restricting the access of its

companies to advanced technology and confronting the rising power as it seeks to exert influence over Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Already frosty relations went into a deep freeze after then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, a senior U.S. lawmaker, visited Taiwan in August 2022. Hopes of restoring ties were dashed the following February when a suspected Chinese spy balloon drifted across the U.S. before being shot down by the U.S. mili-

tary.

At a meeting between Sullivan and Wang in Vienna in May 2023, the two countries launched a delicate process of putting relations back on track. Since then, they have met two more times in a third country, Malta and Thailand. This week will mark their first talks in Beijing.

China's Foreign Ministry said this week that relations with the U.S. remain at "a critical juncture." It noted that the two sides are talking on climate and other issues, but it accused the U.S. of continuing to constrain and suppress China.

Canada announced on Monday that it will match America's 100% import tariff on Chinese-made electric vehicles, after being encouraged to do so by Sullivan during a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Cabinet ministers the previous day. (AP)

Iran's supreme leader opens door to negotiations with US over Tehran's nuclear program

DUBAI, Aug 27: Iran's supreme leader opened the door on Tuesday to renewed negotiations with the United States over his country's rapidly advancing nuclear program, telling its civilian government there was "no barrier" to engaging with its "enemy."

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's remarks set clear red lines for any talks taking place under the government of reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian and renewed his warnings that America wasn't to be trusted.

But his comments mirror those around the time of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran's nuclear program greatly curtailed in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

"We do not have to pin our hope to the enemy. For our plans, we should not wait for approval by the enemies," Khamenei said in a video broadcast by state television. "It is not contradictory to engage the same enemy in some places, there's no barrier."

Khamenei, who has final say on all state matters, also warned Pezeshkian's Cabinet, "Do not trust the enemy."

Khamenei, 85, has occasionally urged talks or dismissed them with the U.S. after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the deal. (AP)

Russian missiles and drones strike across Ukraine and kill at least 5 people

KYIV, Aug 27: Nighttime Russian drone and missile attacks struck across Ukraine, killing at least five people on Tuesday, a day after a heavy barrage pounded energy facilities throughout the country.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the attacks included 81 drones, as well as cruise and ballistic missiles and that 16 people were injured.

He said four people died, but the governor of the Zaporizhzhia region later said a fifth person had died there from burns in the attacks.

"We will undoubtedly respond to Russia for this and all other attacks. Crimes against humanity cannot go unpunished," Zelenskyy wrote on X.

In the Kyiv region, which had struggled with blackouts after Monday's onslaught, five air alerts were called during the night.

The regional administration said air defenses destroyed all the drones and missiles but that falling debris set off forest fires.

After the Monday barrage

across Ukraine of more than 100 missiles and a similar number of drones, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said "the energy infrastructure has once again become the target of Russian terrorists" and urged Ukraine's allies to provide it with long-range weapons and permission to use them on targets inside Russia.

President Joe Biden called Monday's Russian attack on energy infrastructure "outrageous" and said he had "reprioritized U.S. air defense exports so they are sent to Ukraine first." He also said the U.S. was "surging energy equipment to Ukraine to repair its systems and strengthen the resilience of Ukraine's energy grid."

The Russian Defense Ministry said the attacks used "long-range precision air and sea-based weapons and strike drones against critical energy infrastructure facilities that support the operation of Ukraine's military-industrial complex. All designated targets were hit."

In Russia, meanwhile, officials reported four Ukrainian missiles were shot down over the Kursk region, where Russian forces are fighting Ukrainian troops that made a surprise incursion this month.

The fighting in the region has raised concerns about the nuclear power plant there. International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi arrived in the plant on Tuesday, but did not immediately give a public assessment. (AP)



Ex-Malaysian leader Muhyiddin charged with sedition for allegedly mocking former king

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 27: Former Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin was charged on Tuesday with sedition over a speech he made that allegedly questioned the integrity of the country's previous king.

Muhyiddin, who led Malaysia from March 2020 until August 2021, pleaded not guilty in a court in northeast Kelantan state. According to the charge sheet, Muhyiddin made the seditious remarks last month during a by-election campaign in Kelantan.

Nine ethnic Malay state rulers take turns as Malaysia's king for five-year terms under the country's rotating monarchy, which began when Malaysia gained independence from Britain in 1957. The monarchy plays a largely ceremonial role, but are revered by the nation's majority Muslims. In his speech on Aug. 14, Muhyiddin had questioned why then-King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah didn't invite him to be prime minister following a hung Parliament in November 2022. (AP)

Sri Lanka's Dissanayake a strong contender for president with his alliance's focus on working class

COLOMBO, Aug 27: A political alliance centered on the working class has emerged as a strong contender in Sri Lanka's presidential race, announcing itself to be the agent of change that millions of people called for when an unprecedented economic crisis led to disillusionment with traditional political parties.

Anura Kumara Disanayake, leader of National People's Power alliance and its presidential candidate, says he's serving those who were part of public protests that ousted then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022. Protesters blamed Rajapaksa for an economic collapse that resulted in severe shortage of essentials such as fuel, cooking gas, medicines and food.

"The people of our country have a great expectation for a change" Disanayake told The Associated Press. "They wanted a change and we



are the agents of that change. All the other candidates are the agents of the old, failed, traditional system." Unsustainable debt, poorly timed tax cuts, ill-planned import bans, economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the government's insistence on spending scarce foreign reserves to prop up the country's currency, the rupee, led to the economic collapse in 2022.

Hundreds of thousands held street protests and took control of vital buildings such as the president's office and prime minister's office. Rajapaksa fled from his official

residence minutes before irate protesters stormed in. He later fled overseas and resigned. Current President Ranil Wickremesinghe was elected by a majority vote from Rajapaksa backers in Parliament to cover the remainder of the term. Critics say the Rajapaksa family, many of whom held different posts in the government before the ouster, received Wickremesinghe's protection in return for their support for laws passed by him through Parliament. People were angry about corruption, nepotism and economic mismanagement that the powerful family fos-

tered. Disanayake says the people's wishes for a change were not realized because the protesters did not have a plan beyond ousting the president and weren't equipped to take charge. Wickremesinghe sent police to disperse them soon after he took charge.

Wickremesinghe negotiated a bailout package with the International Monetary Fund. In the two years since, inflation dropped from 70% to around 5% under his administration. Interest rates came down, the rupee rebounded and foreign currency reserves have increased. Creditor countries such as India, Japan and France have agreed to defer debt repayments until 2028, giving the island nation space to rebuild its economy.

But professionals and businesses complain of higher taxes, and all people are affected by the high cost of living.

The system overhaul people expected has not been realized and critics say economic recovery means little under a corrupt system with no accountability.

Disanayake says his administration can be the change people want: a sound economy in a corruption-free society. NPP is a political movement made up of 21 different groups including political parties, youth groups, women's groups, trade unions and other civil society groups. Disanayake's original party is the People's Liberation Front, which is the key force behind the NPP coalition.

Disanayake says despite his party's long-held policy of nationalizing the country's resources, they accept economic freedom and foreign trade. He plans to uphold the agreement with the IMF while his administration negotiates changes to ease the burden on the public. (AP)

Philippine defense chief says China is 'the biggest disruptor' of peace, seeks stronger censure

MANILA (PHILIPPINES), Aug 27: The Philippine defense chief said on Tuesday that China is "the biggest disruptor" of peace in Southeast Asia and called for stronger international censure over its aggression in the South China Sea, a day after China blocked Philippine vessels from delivering food to a Coast Guard ship at the Sabina Shoal.

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr spoke at an international military conference organized in Manila by the US Indo-Pacific Command amid a spike in clashes between China and the Philippines in the disputed South China Sea and in its airspace.

China is "the biggest disruptor of international peace" in Southeast Asia, Teodoro told the conference, which was attended by military officials and senior diplomats from the US and allied countries.

He later told reporters on the sidelines of the conference that international statements of concern against China's increasingly assertive actions in the disputed waters and elsewhere were "not enough."

"The antidote is a stronger collective multilateral action against China," Teodoro said, adding that diplomats and defense officials should determine those stronger steps.

Pressed by reporters to be more specific, Teodoro said a UN Security Council resolution condemning and



ordering a stop to Chinese acts of aggression would be a strong step but acknowledged the difficulty of pursuing that. "The world is not that perfect," Teodoro said.

There was no immediate reaction from Chinese officials. China, like its geopolitical rival the US, is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and has power to veto such an adversarial step.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has paid "attention" to China's aggressive actions but should do much more, Teodoro said. The 10-nation Southeast Asian bloc includes the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei, which have South China Sea claims that overlap with each other, as well as China's and Taiwan's.

"ASEAN, to remain relevant and credible, cannot continue to ignore what China is doing in the South China Sea," Teodoro said. In the latest incident in the South China Sea, Philippine officials said China de-

ployed "an excessive force" of 40 ships that blocked two Philippine vessels from delivering food and other supplies to Manila's largest coast guard ship in the disputed Sabina Shoal in the latest flare-up of their territorial disputes in the busy sea passage.

China and the Philippines blamed each other for the confrontation on Monday in Sabina Shoal, an uninhabited atoll both countries claim that has become the latest flashpoint in the Spratlys, the most hotly disputed region of the sea passage that is a key global trade and security route.

China and the Philippines have separately deployed coast guard ships to Sabina in recent months on suspicion the other may act to take control of and build structures in the fishing atoll.

The hostilities have particularly intensified between China and the Philippines since last year and Monday's confrontation was the sixth the two sides have reported in the high seas and in the air.

The confrontations have sparked concerns of a larger conflict that could involve the United States, the long-time treaty ally of the Philippines. Sabina is near the Second Thomas Shoal, another flashpoint where China has hampered the Philippine delivery of supplies for Filipino forces aboard a long-grounded navy ship, the BRP Sierra Madre. (AP)



'If anything happens to me, Army chief & DG ISI responsible,' says Imran Khan

ISLAMABAD, Aug 27: Pakistan's jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday reiterated that the Army and the ISI are responsible for his condition and expressed fear for his life.

Khan, 71, lodged at the Adiala Jail since last year, also blamed the current dispensation for being averse to criticism, for deteriorating law-and-order situation across the country, and also for ruining Pakistan's cricket that is facing repeated defeats.

In a post on X from jail, Khan repeated claims about rigged elections and said only a government with a genuine mandate will be able to plan for fundamental reforms.

"The ISI controls all administrative matters related to my imprisonment. I'm saying it again: if anything happens to me, the Army Chief and DG ISI will be responsible," the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said in a detailed post on X.

Khan's comments come two days after the Pakistan government said that the former prime minister's trial in cases concerning the violence on May 9 last year might go to the military courts.

"The events and vandalism on May 9 last year invited the application of the Army Act since military installations were attacked and damaged," Government spokesperson for legal affairs Barrister Aqeel Malik had said.

On May 9 last year, violent protests erupted after Khan's arrest by paramilitary Rangers from the premises of the Islamabad High Court in connection with an alleged corruption case.

His party workers allegedly vandalised a dozen military installations, including the Jinnah House (Lahore Corps Commander House), the Minawali airbase and the ISI building in Faisalabad. A mob also attacked the Army headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi.

Khan's longest post on X started with "reminding" the nation of the two attempts on his life: first in Wazirabad, Punjab province and then again at the Judicial Complex in Islamabad.

The ISI stole the CCTV footage from Wazirabad, and the night before the attack in Islamabad, the ISI had taken control of the area where it happened, he claimed.

"In their panic, they have made my conditions in jail even tougher. The staff assigned to ensure that my food isn't poisoned has been changed for the fourth time," he wrote.

He also described the conditions of his and his wife Bushra's cell — "rats fall from the top when she prays" — and said the court has been informed about it.

Khan further said that he had already explained why the Islamabad rally was postponed and how it had nothing to do with "contacts with the establishment."

"This entire government runs on lies; I don't even read the news about them. I have no contact with the establishment. If we do hold talks with them, it will only be for the sake of the country and the constitution," the PTI supremo added.

Drawing a parallel to the situation that unfolded in Bangladesh, he also came up with a curt comment: "Cattle can be herded in a desired direction, not humans" and said, "The Army Chief, Chief Justice, and Police Chief were all loyal to the Prime Minister (in Bangladesh), but when the people took to the streets, they won their rights."

"Anyone critical of the regime is labelled a digital terrorist. When internet services were shut down, people protested, but those in power couldn't handle the criticism. No one is permitted to even voice their problems. The nation blames a specific institution for this," he added.

"What are his qualifications? Under him, the law-and-order situation across the country is deteriorating," the PTI leader asked and described terror attack incidents in KP and Balochistan.

The former cricketer-turned-politician rued about "the embarrassing defeat against Bangladesh" on Monday and said it set a new low. He also lamented the current condition of cricket in Pakistan, saying: "The blame for all of this collapse falls on one institution." (PTI)

Centre to send damage-assessing team to Tripura

AGARTALA, Aug 27: Tripura chief minister Manik Saha said the Centre will send a team to the state to assess the damage caused by the floods.

At least 26 people died as the floods devastated the state. A total of 17 lakh people were estimated to have been affected, and of them, 1.37 lakh were rendered homeless, officials said.

"Union Home Minister Amit Shah has assured me that he will be sending a central team shortly to assess the damage caused by the floods. The central team will physically visit the flood-hit areas," Saha told reporters on the sidelines of a Janmashtami programme on Monday.

He said the state government will present a "true picture of devastation" caused by the floods when the central team arrives.



Saha also expressed gratitude to Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav and UP CM Yogi Adityanath for extending financial support to the state.

"Yogi Adityanath has spoken to me and donated ₹ 10 crore for restoration works in flood-affected areas. The Madhya Pradesh government also donated ₹ 20 crore for restoration works. The Centre will certainly assist Tripura during these difficult times but it is praise-worthy the way other states are also lending a helping hand," he said.

Speaking to the reporters, Revenue Secretary Brijesh Pandey said all district magistrates were asked to conduct an assessment of damage caused by the floods.

The flood has caused extensive damage to roads, buildings, power lines, embankments and farmlands. It is estimated that the flood caused damage worth about ₹ 15,000 crore, officials said.

Despite waters receding in all major rivers, around 70,000 people are still in 471 relief camps, they said. (PTI)

Fencing over int'l borders utmost priority: Arunachal minister

ITANAGAR, Aug 27: Arunachal Pradesh minister Mama Natung has urged Union home minister Amit Shah to fence the international borders of the state to check infiltration, insurgent activities and illegal cross-border movements.

Natung called on Shah in New Delhi on Monday, officials said.

Notably, Arunachal Pradesh shares a 160 km border with Bhutan in the west, 1,080 km with China in the north and northeast and 440 km with Myanmar to the east.

"Fencing over the international borders is the utmost priority of the northeastern state to check infiltrations, drug trafficking, insurgent activities and illegal cross-border movements," Natung, the Arunachal Pradesh Home minister said.

Natung also briefed Shah about the augmentation of vigilance at the check gates of the state in the wake of the Bangladesh political crisis through strict checking of inner line permits and the recent linking of the Aadhaar card with e-ILP.

Natung submitted the package 2.0 action plan for troubled Tirap Changlang Longding (TCL) districts to the Union home minister, officials said.

"It is critical to consolidate TCL package 1.0 to augment immediate additional capabilities in the state police to strengthen its resources and infrastructures



already raised in TCL 1.0 package," Natung said.

The basic components in the revised TCL 2.0 proposal would be infrastructures, mobility and equipment, he added.

Shah assured to look into the proposals submitted for a positive outcome, the officials added. (PTI)

Tripura Police arrests five Bangladeshi, Indian Tout

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Aug 27: In a significant operation against illegal cross-border activity, Tripura Police detained six individuals, including five Bangladeshi nationals and an Indian agent, in Agartala's Nandan Nagar area on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off about suspicious activity in the locality, the police launched an investigation, uncovering what appears to be a network facilitating illegal entry into India.

According to a police officer from New Capital Complex Police Station, the five Bangladeshi nationals had entered Tripura several months ago. Upon being interrogated, they initially tried to mislead investigators, but further probing revealed their illegal status.

Police discovered Bangladeshi currency in their possession, and the group eventually confessed to crossing the international border without proper documentation.

The Indian accomplice, identified as Ishan Ali, hails from Murshidabad in West Bengal. Police believe Ali played a key role in assisting the foreign nationals with their illegal border crossing. All six individuals will be presented before the court for further legal proceedings.

Nagaland to experience heavy rainfall

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Aug 27: The Nagaland Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA) said the state will experience cloudy heavy rainfall in almost all the districts till August 29. In its weather update on Tuesday, the NSDMA said these showers may be accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning at isolated places.

During this period, heavy rainfall is expected in the districts of Chumoukedima, Kohima, Longleng, Mokochung, Mon, Nuland, Peren and Wokha. The other districts may experience cloudy moderate rain.

The NSDMA urged people to take necessary precautionary measures during this time and exercise caution from lightning strikes and gale winds which may cause disruption in communication and connectivity.

According to the update, Nagaland's lowland and foothill regions, including Dimapur, Nuland, Chumoukedima, Bhandari, Pangti, Tizit and Tuli, are vulnerable to inundated water logging and flash floods due to the potential of high precipitation in the hill sector.

Doctors working tirelessly for flood victims: Tripura CM

Celebrates 19th Foundation Day of TMC

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Aug 27: Tripura chief minister Dr Manik Saha on Tuesday lauded the efforts of doctors for working tirelessly to treat flood-affected victims.

Dr Saha said this while inaugurating an open gym and park, as well as celebrating the 19th Foundation Day of Tripura Medical College at Vivekananda Auditorium, TMC, and Dr BRAM Teaching Hospital.

On this occasion, Dr. Saha set an example by directing the hospital authorities not to organize any cultural programs, out of respect for the 26 people who lost their lives in the devastating floods in the state.

"Many successful surgeries have taken place at Tripura Medical College. Students and doctors must prioritize the well-being of the people over monetary gain. Only by doing

so can we achieve 'Ek Tripura, Shrestha Tripura'," he said.

During the event, Dr. Saha also remembers the supreme sacrifice of Chiranjit Dey, while saving others during the floods.

"In Tripura, flood-related fatalities have occurred due to landslides and house collapses. We are addressing these issues. I have spoken with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and they are providing all possible assistance. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav also reached out to offer help," he said.

Dr Saha highlighted that doctors of the state are currently busy running medical camps in relief shelters, as people are likely to face skin diseases, diarrhoea, and other health issues.

"Our doctors are working tirelessly to assist the flood victims. We are providing all necessary facilities, including super specialities, yet people are still leaving the state, often selling their properties. Students pursuing MBBS need to build themselves into top-tier professionals so that patients will choose to stay here for treatment. We must also focus on improving infrastructure and ensuring quality education. Our doctors in medical colleges are working diligently," Dr. Saha said.

Dr Saha who is the health minister further stated, "Before attending the Foundation Day event, I instructed that no songs or cultural programs should be held, as we have lost 24 lives, with two more still missing."

During the program, Dr. Saha presented various awards to students.

Nagaland govt gives 72 hrs to NHIDCL to clear NH-29

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Aug 27: The Nagaland government took a serious view of the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd. (NHIDCL) and the contractors concerned in failing to clear the debris and open NH-29 for traffic.

In a notice dated August 26, the state government gave the NHIDCL 72 hours to clear and open this critical

National Highway for regular traffic which is the lifeline to the state capital Kohima and several other districts of the state.

The highway has remained completely cut off since last week following a massive landslide near Melaru under Sechu-Zubza in the Kohima district.

The notice issued by the commissioner and secretary to the state government, Kesonyu Yhome, said

following the meeting held in the conference hall of the chief secretary on the subject on August 26, the matter was further discussed at the highest level of the state government.

It observed that this is not the first time the NHIDCL has failed despite the fact that the state machinery and the villagers have offered all possible support and assistance to it in the restoration work.

Insightful discussions on water sports: CM Khandu

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 27: In a bid to organize major rafting championships in the State, Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu met with key figures in the rafting world to discuss further possibilities.

World Rafting Federation President Danilo Barmaz and Indian Rafting Federation President SPS Sikand were present at the meeting which focused on organising both national and international competitions.

CM Khandu expressed optimism about the state's potential in water sports, citing its numerous powerful rivers as a natural advantage. The Chief Minister took to X to share details of the meeting, highlighting the "insightful discussion" and his excitement about future opportunities.

"With our state's mighty rivers, Arunachal holds tremendous potential for water sports, and I am excited about the opportunities ahead!" the chief minister wrote.

This could mark a significant boost for Arunachal Pradesh's sports tourism sector. With its rich natural ecosystem that attracts millions of tourists every year, sports tourism could potentially lead to an additional source of revenue for the Khandu-led government.

Fuel shortage in Manipur worsening

Police to be deployed at petrol pumps

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 27: In the wake of a worsening fuel shortage, the Manipur government has announced the deployment of police personnel at petrol pumps across the state.

L. Susindro, minister for consumer affairs, food, and public distribution, stated that the decision aims to address the escalating fuel crisis and curb extortion attempts.

During a press conference, Susindro said that some petrol stations have been forced to shut down due to financial losses incurred from customers leaving without paying after refuelling. To prevent further incidents, the government will station police and Food and Public Distribution Department staff at fuel stations to ensure smooth operations and adherence to regulations.

He further warned fuel retailers of legal consequences if they refuse to sell fuel despite having adequate stock. "We have enough fuel in the state. Legal action will be initiated against petrol pump operators who refuse to sell fuel despite having stock," he said.

The fuel crisis has been exacerbated by frequent landslides along national highways, which have disrupted the transportation of LPG cylinders to the state. This disruption has contributed to the severe fuel shortage in the Imphal Valley.



MSMEPCI to create 10,000 jobs in Nagaland

KOHIAMA, Aug 27: The Micro Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Council of India (MSMEPCI) would work towards the promotion of RTGS and KTGS besides creating avenues for 10,000 jobs in Nagaland within this year, an official said.

MSMEPCI chairman Pradeep Mishra Sarkar said this while addressing a press conference here on Monday evening.

Sarkar said the Council will introduce two significant initiatives – Retail Trading Guarantee Scheme (RTGS) and Kisan Trading Guarantee Scheme (KTGS) in the month of September-October this year.

These programmes are designed to provide financial assistance to disadvantaged traders and farmers who have struggled to double their income, he said.

To promote local farmers, MSME PCI will directly provide the Minimum Support Price (MSP) rate for their products through KTGS while RTGS was initiated to develop the business of the local traders and increase its income, he said.

RTGS will be launched in Nagaland



on September 15 this year, he said.

On the scope and avenues in Nagaland, he said, the MSME PCI together with state and central government will work hand in hand in creating more awareness programmes of these schemes and resolve to reach out to every section of the people to create 10,000 employment opportunities by October this year.

"As part of its 100-day programme, we will be able to generate employment

for approximately 25,000 people across Nagaland by next year," he said.

To make Nagaland a developed state, MSME PCI will give special attention to the state, he said.

"We are on a mission to provide comprehensive support to MSMEs through advocacy, knowledge dissemination, and strategic collaborations towards building a resilient and globally competitive small business sector," Sarkar said.

Earlier, Nagaland Advisor for Industries and Commerce, Hekani Jakhalu Kense said that the industrial development in Nagaland, while still in its early stages, has indeed shown promising growth. Reflecting on the data, she said, the sectoral growth rate of the secondary sector has surged from 2.83 per cent in 2012-13 to an impressive 12.8 per cent in 2022-23, which highlights the potential of the state for further development. (PTI)

No.DWCD(BTC)256/Pt-II/2024-25/4 Dated Kokrajhar, the 27th Aug., 2024

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender No. DWCD/BTC/15/2024

The Joint Director cum CHD, Women & Child Development, BTC, Kokrajhar invites online bids from eligible Suppliers/Firms of BTR for procurement of Anganwadi materials (Steel Casseroles) for Anganwadi centres in various ICDS projects of BTC rea under SOPD-G fund, 2024-25

Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/- Joint Director cum CHD,
Women & Child Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/391

ECF No: 396599/682-83

APPLICATION FOR SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ST STUDENTS OF ASSAM FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2024-25

It is for information to all concerned that Fresh / Renewal applications for Pre-Matric (Class IX & X) and Post-Matric scholarships for students of Assam belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST) are invited for the academic year 2024-25 through National Scholarship Portal (NSP) at www.scholarships.gov.in. Applications will be entertained through online portal only for students studying in Govt. / Govt. aided / Govt. recognized School / Higher Secondary / Colleges / University including Medical / Technical Institutions having valid U-DISE / AISHE / NCVT code only. The timelines for submission and verification of applications are given below:

Sl No	Name of Scheme	Eligibility (Annual Family income)	Last date for submission of online applications by students	Last date of verification by Institute Nodal Officers
1	Pre Matric Scholarship to ST students studying in Class IX - X	Rs. 2.50 lakh	31 st August, 2024	15 th September, 2024
2	Post Matric Scholarship to ST students	Rs. 2.50 lakh	31 st October, 2024	15 th November, 2024

Note:

- Students while applying for scholarships for the above two schemes are hereby requested to register themselves in NSP through the app "NSP OTR" available in Google play store and perform Face-authentication for generating One Time Registration (OTR) number which has been made mandatory for applying for scholarship from the Academic year 2024-25 onwards.
- Aadhaar and mobile number registered with Aadhaar are mandatory for generating OTR. (Details available at scholarships.gov.in).
- Students while filling up the online application form should upload income certificate of their parents/ guardians which has been issued by the concerned Circle/Revenue Officer.
- Students should also upload Caste certificate issued by office of the District Commissioner of their respective Districts. If the applicant name/surname in the application form differs in the Caste certificate, he should submit an affidavit duly notarized justifying the differences.
- Students should have a valid Bank account which should be seeded with their respective Aadhaar as scholarships will be credited into Aadhaar Seeded Bank Account of the students only.

Janasanyog /D/4722/ 24/28-Aug-24

Sd/-
Director,
Tribal Affairs (Plain), Assam

Plays down electoral reverses

Mayawati re-elected as BSP president

LUCKNOW, Aug 27: The Bahujan Samaj Party is "not disappointed" after the recent electoral reverses and will continue to work for the oppressed, Mayawati said here Tuesday after her re-election as the party president.

She was elected again to the top post unanimously at a special meeting of the BSP Central Executive Committee (CEC) and office bearers from all over the country, a statement said.

The party had failed to win a single seat in Uttar Pradesh in the Lok Sabha elections.

"Despite electoral reverses, the BSP is not disappointed. It is stoutly pursuing the goal and welfare principle of 'Bahujan Hitaye and Bahujan Sukhaye' (progress and prosperity of bahunjans) on the strength of the bahunjan samaj," she said.

She also hit out at the Congress and the BJP, claiming the two national parties are not "true well-wishers of minorities and backward communities in the country."

"Like anti-Congressism in the past, the politics of the country has now become entangled in anti-BJPism whereas both these parties and their alliances are neither true well-wishers of bahunjans, Dalits, adivasis, OBCs, Muslims and other religious minorities nor can they ever be so because their thinking about bahunjans... is narrow, casteist, and communal," she alleged.



"This is the main reason why during the rule of both these parties and their alliances, which have been in power for most of the time in the country, there has not yet been the required improvement in the condition of bahunjans," she added.

Mayawati said that because of the Lok Sabha election results "not being one-sided" in favour of any particular party, it creates new possibilities and in such a situation, the BSP has to continue its efforts to secure better result in the future by expanding its mass base on the basis of cadre.

About the BJP-led NDA government, Mayawati said their attitude "does not yet appear" to be "rational and liberal" as demanded by the time because of which it "cannot be called a stable and strong government".

But she added it is difficult to say this government would be forced to work for real constitutional interest and welfare of the poor instead of "continuing to work for big capitalists and the super-rich".

"Their model of development and governance has mostly proved to be opposed to the poor, workers, farmers and bahunjans. Expecting any particular good from the Congress would continue to be a mirage in a desert," she added.

Referring to the upcoming Assembly polls in Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi, she said the party will contest the elections in these states with full strength and determination.

She called upon the party workers and followers to put their heart and soul in their respective states

in the interest of the BSP movement.

"Dalits or bahunjans will have to learn to trust their own power, the BSP, otherwise they would continue to get deceived and forced to live a life of helplessness and slavery," she claimed.

She assured the party followers that she is ready to make any sacrifice to advance the humanitarian mission of "great people", particularly those born in Dalit, Adivasi and OBC communities, through the BSP movement, the statement said.

Addressing the party workers here, Mayawati said the movement of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar for self-respect and dignity of bahunjans is now advancing and has become so strong that it cannot be misled from its goal whatsoever.

Mayawati, 68, is a four-time former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. BSP founder Kanshi Ram had declared her as his political successor more than two decades ago. She was elected the party president for the first time in 2003, a post that she has remained with her ever since.

Two days ago, Mayawati had taken to social media to announce that her retirement from active politics was "out of question". On May 27, 2018, Mayawati had famously told party workers in Lucknow that she would continue as the party president for the next 20 years until she is too old for the responsibility. (PTI)

BJP's Shagun Parihar files nomination from Kishtwar

KISHTWAR/JAMMU, Aug 27: Confident of her victory with the support of the people of Kishtwar, 29-year-old Shagun Parihar on Tuesday filed her nomination as the BJP candidate from the constituency for the Jammu and Kashmir assembly polls. Vowing to work for the development of all communities, she emphasised that peace, security, employment, and women's empowerment would be the core areas of her work towards the upliftment of the mountainous district. BJP candidates Sunil Sharma and Tariq Keen also filed their nomination papers from Paddar Nagseni and Inderwal seats, respectively. Parihar is among the 15 candidates announced by the BJP for the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, with eight seats in south Kashmir set for polling in the first phase on September 18. The last date to file nomination papers for this phase is Tuesday. "It is the love of the people of Kishtwar that has motivated me to file my nomination. I am confident of my victory. I am also certain that the brothers, sisters, and elders of Kishtwar will support and ensure my victory with a large number of votes," the BJP nominee told reporters after filing her nomination at the office of the returning officer in Kishtwar.

She dismissed rumours that people are unhappy with her candidacy, and said that both the party



and the people have stood by her and her family, especially after the tragic loss of her father and uncle in a terrorist attack.

Parihar, who is pursuing a doc-

JK POLLS

torate in electronics, expressed gratitude to the BJP for honouring the families of martyrs who laid down their lives for the nation and the party. Having lost her father Ajit Parihar, and her uncle and senior BJP leader Anil Parihar in a terrorist attack in Kishtwar, she emphasised that this mandate is not just for her family, but for all the families of martyrs in the region. BJP's Jammu and Kashmir secretary Anil Parihar and his brother Ajit Parihar were shot dead by terrorists in Kishtwar in Jammu division on November 1, 2018. Accompanied by Jammu and Kashmir BJP chief Ravinder

Raina and party general secretary Ashok Kaul, Parihar reiterated her commitment to working under the principle of "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas" formulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"My priorities will be peace and security, employment generation, women's empowerment, trade, and tourism," she said, adding that Kishtwar is a land of saffron, and there is a need to promote it further. Raina, who accompanied Shagun Parihar to the office of the returning officer of the Kishtwar Assembly segment, confirmed that she had filed her nomination papers today.

Raina, along with MP Jugal Kishore Sharma and former deputy chief minister Dr Nirmal Singh, flew to Kishtwar to also accompany Sunil Sharma and Keen, who filed their nomination papers in Paddar Nagseni and Inderwal, respectively. (PTI)

Cong to resume Kedarnath Pratishtha Raksha Yatra

DEHRADUN, Aug 27: The Congress on Tuesday said it will resume its Kedarnath Pratishtha Raksha Yatra as soon as normal traffic through the trek route to the Himalayan temple begins again, saying that the foot march has not yet achieved its goals.

The development comes a day after Kedarnath Dham Delhi Trust said it had dropped the plan to build a replica of the Himalayan temple at Burari in the national capital after realising that it would hurt religious sentiments. The Uttarakhand Congress on August 2 postponed its Raksha Yatra in view of the havoc in Kedarnath valley after heavy rain. The yatra that began on July 24 from Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar to protest against the proposed construction of a replica of Kedarnath in Delhi was to conclude as per its original schedule on August 3 at the Himalayan temple. "Opposing construction of a replica of the temple in Delhi was not our only goal. The Shila (rock) taken from Kedarnath to Burari for the building of the temple should be brought back, donations collected by the Trust in the name of the project through a QR code should be recovered and the people behind it should be booked," Uttarakhand Congress vice president Suryakant Dhasmana said at a press conference here. Instead of claiming credit for the said Trust dropping its plan, the state government should apologise to the people of the state for allowing all this to happen, he said. "The Congress will resume the yatra from the place where it was given up due to extensive damage to the route on the night of July 31 following torrential rain," he said. "We had to relinquish the yatra as we did not want to become a hindrance for the rescue operations launched along the route after the disaster," he added. (PTI)

BJP's Kiran Choudhry elected unopposed to RS from Haryana

CHANDIGARH, Aug 27: BJP leader Kiran Choudhry was declared elected unopposed in the Rajya Sabha bypoll from Haryana after the deadline for withdrawal of nomination ended at 3 pm on Tuesday. Choudhry, a former Haryana minister, had filed her nomination for the bypoll on Wednesday. Being the lone candidate in the contest, she was declared elected unopposed. The winning candidate was given a certificate at 4.33 pm by Returning Officer Saket Kumar for the bypoll at the Haryana Vidhan Sabha secretariat here. Chief minister Nayab Singh Saini was also present for the occasion.

Earlier when she had filed her nomination, four JJP rebel MLAs had also extended support to her candidature.

No other party has put up a can-

didate for the bypoll for the lone Rajya Sabha seat in Haryana which was necessitated after Congress's Deepender Singh Hooda was elected to the Lok Sabha from Rohtak. His Rajya Sabha term was to end on April 9, 2026.

The BJP had named Choudhry (69) as its nominee for the bypoll shortly after she resigned from the assembly a week ago, nearly two months after she switched over from the Congress. Choudhry joined the BJP along with her daughter and former MP Shruti Choudhry in June. Kiran Choudhry represented the Tosham seat in the Haryana Assembly.

Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda had earlier said his party would not field a candidate for the Rajya Sabha seat as it did not have the numbers. (PTI)

Union minister Kurian of BJP elected unopposed to RS from MP



BHOPAL, Aug 27: Union minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) nominee George Kurian was on Tuesday declared elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha in a bypoll from Madhya Pradesh by the returning officer.

The BJP on August 20 announced Kurian as its candidate for the Rajya Sabha seat from Madhya Pradesh that became vacant following Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's election to the Lok Sabha in June.

Besides Kurian, two others, including state BJP vice-president Kantdev Singh, had filed their nomination papers. Singh, who hails from Singrauli, had submitted his nomination papers as a dummy candidate of the saffron party.

However, nomination papers of one of the two other nominees was rejected during scrutiny, while Singh withdrew his candidature on the last day for opting

out of the race (August 27), leading to the unopposed election of Kurian as a Rajya Sabha member for the remaining term (lasting till 2026) of the seat vacated by Scindia, an official said.

The byelection for the seat, if required, would have taken place on September 3 with members of the state assembly forming the electoral college.

The vacancy for the Rajya Sabha seat was created after the resignation of Scindia from the Upper House after he got elected to the Lok Sabha from his traditional Guna seat, which he lost in 2019 as the Congress candidate. He is now the Union Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region.

Scindia quit the Congress and joined the BJP in March 2020 after which he was elected to the Rajya Sabha member from the state and made a minister in the second Modi cabinet where he handled the civil aviation ministry.

Of the 11 Rajya Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh, three were with the opposition Congress, seven with the ruling BJP and one was vacant which now has been filled with Kurian's election.

Kurian, a leader from Kerala, is currently the Union Minister of State for Minority Affairs, Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

In the 230-member state assembly, the BJP has 163 MLAs, the Congress 64 and Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) one. Two seats are vacant. (PTI)

BJP alleges 'scam' in allocation of land to Kharge in K'taka

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: The BJP on Tuesday alleged a "scam" in allocation of a piece of land to a trust run by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's family in Karnataka and demanded a CBI probe into the matter.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, party national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia demanded Mallikarjun Kharge's resignation as the Congress president and that of his son Priyank Kharge, who is a minister in the Karnataka government.

He also demanded Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's resignation.

"There is a consistency in the Congress' acts of corruption. Wherever we will go we will do corruption is the new slogan of the Congress. It will not be wrong to say that the Congress has become synonymous with corruption," Bhatia said.

"We saw the MUDA scam and Valmiki Development Corporation



scam happening under the nose of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. Now a case of allocation of five-acre land to a trust run by Mallikarjun Kharge and his family in Karnataka has emerged," he added.

The land has been allocated to the Kharge family-run trust by flouting of rules, the BJP spokesperson said, claiming that Mallikarjun Kharge, his wife, his

son-in-law Radhakrishna and sons - Priyank Kharge and Rahul Kharge - are in the trust.

"As per information with us, several companies and organisations had given application for the land but it was allocated to the Kharge family-run trust by flouting the rules," Bhatia claimed.

The BJP spokesperson demanded that Mallikarjun Kharge immediately resign as the Con-

gress president and his son Priyank Kharge as the state minister.

"There should be an impartial probe into it by an independent agency CBI to ascertain the truth," he said.

BJP leader Lahar Singh Siroya, also a Rajya Sabha member, had on Sunday questioned the alleged allocation of Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) land to a trust run by Kharge's family and asked when did they become aerospace entrepreneurs to be eligible for the land.

He had also sought to know whether the case was about misuse of power, nepotism and conflict of interest.

Karnataka Large and Medium Industries Minister M B Patil said on Monday that the educational trust run by AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge's son Rahul Kharge was allotted a Civic Amenity (CA) plot at Aerospace park at a prescribed price in accordance with the norms. (PTI)

Union ministers to spearhead BJP's membership drive

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Union ministers, chief ministers and elected representatives from sarpanch to parliamentarians will spearhead the BJP's nationwide membership drive starting from September 2, an exercise which will serve as the launch pad of the party's internal polls leading to the election of its new president.

The start of the drive will be marked by BJP president J P Nadda renewing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's membership of the party before its senior leaders fan out across the country.

BJP national general secretary Vinod Tawde, who is also the head of the membership drive, appealed to people to join the party in a big way. A strong BJP will lead to the making of a 'Viksit Bharat', he said.

The first phase of the membership drive will go on till September 25 and then a review of the exercise will be carried out before the



launch of the second phase on October 1. It will continue till October 15, he said.

Active members, a term for party workers who can contest organisational elections after making a certain number of new members, will be enrolled between October 16-31. Sources said there was no plan as of now to appoint a working president before a full-fledged president is elected. They, however, added that the party leadership may take a fresh call depending on organisational needs.

Tawde said party workers across the country have been trained for

the drive, which relies heavily on the digital medium. The party is relying on its 10 lakh active members to carry out the exercise, he added. All existing members of the BJP have to renew their membership every six years.

The current drive will be marked by the renewal of existing membership as well as making new members.

The BJP had earlier announced that the party aims to induct more than 10 crore members during the drive that will not cover the states going to polls in the coming months.

The party's membership strength was 18 crore after the last such exercise, and it has expressed hope that the party will cross the figure this time.

New members will be made through four methods - calling a mobile number (8800002024), scanning QR code, by NaMo app and through the BJP's website. (PTI)

Ravneet Singh Bittu elected unopposed to RS from Rajasthan in bypoll



JAIPUR, Aug 27: Union minister of state and BJP leader Ravneet Singh Bittu was elected unopposed as a member of Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan after the deadline for withdrawal of nominations ended on Tuesday.

Three candidates had filed nominations for the Rajya Sabha bypolls, one of whom was a BJP dummy candidate. The last date for withdrawal of nomination for the Rajya Sabha by-election was August 27. The nomination paper of independent candidate Babita Wadhvani was cancelled during

scrutiny on August 22.

BJP's dummy candidate Sunil Kothari withdrew his nomination on Friday, making Ravneet Singh Bittu as the only candidate in the bye-election.

Rajasthan Legislative Assembly principal secretary and election officer Mahavir Prasad Sharma on Tuesday presented a certificate to Yogendra Singh Tanwar, the authorised election agent of Bittu.

The opposition Congress had decided not to field a candidate in the by-election.

The election was held after Congress's KC Venugopal resigned as RS MP when he was elected in the Lok Sabha polls.

The term of membership on this seat from Rajasthan will be till June 21, 2026. There are a total of 10 Rajya Sabha seats in Rajasthan. After Bittu's election, BJP and Congress have five seats each. (PTI)

Kangana Ranaut's remarks condemned on farmers protest

BJP distanced itself from the remarks and said Ranaut is neither permitted nor authorised to make statements

SHIMLA, Aug 27: Himachal Pradesh minister Vikramaditya Singh and her mother Pratibha Singh, who is the Congress president in the state, hit out at BJP MP from Mandi, Kangana Ranaut, terming her remarks on the farmers' protest as "reckless and misinformed".

The Congress leaders, in two separate statements, condemned Ranaut's remarks, and said they were a grave insult to the farmers. Ranaut stoked a controversy by suggesting that the farmers' protests could have led to a Bangladesh-like situation in the country if the top leadership was not strong enough.

In a video clip of her interview with Dainik Bhaskar, Ranaut alleged that "bodies were hanging and rapes were taking place" during the farmers' protest against the now-repealed three farm laws. She reposted the video shared by another handle using her official account on X.

The BJP distanced itself from the remarks and said Ranaut is neither permitted nor authorised to make statements on the party's



policy issues, and has been directed to not make such remarks in future.

PWD minister Vikramaditya Singh, in a statement, said: "Her baseless allegations questioning the role of USA and China in the

farmer unrest are ludicrous, not grounded in reality, and showcase her intellectual bankruptcy."

"As a member of the treasury benches and an elected representative of Mandi parlia-

mentary segment, Kangana Ranaut should be restrained while speaking on such sensitive issues. It is noteworthy that the Union Government, particularly the Ministry of External Affairs, should respond to her claims, which undermine the nation's foreign policy," Singh said.

Such statements against a particular segment of society, namely farmers, are an insult to their struggles and sacrifices, he said.

The minister said that the statement was especially unacceptable given that the "black laws" have been rolled back by the prime minister, Singh said.

"We demand an apology from her for her insensitive and divisive remarks," he said.

Himachal Pradesh Congress president and former MP Pratibha Singh said that even though the BJP has expressed disagreement with Ranaut's remarks in one of its statements, the BJP's refusal to apologise to the farmers of the country for the "insulting statement exposes its double standards". (PTI)

Money laundering case filed ED to probe 'financial irregularities' in R G Kar Hospital

KOLKATA, Aug 27: The Enforcement Directorate has filed a money laundering case to probe alleged financial irregularities at the R G Kar Medical College and Hospital during the tenure of its former principal Sandip Ghosh and some others, official sources said Tuesday.

The federal agency has taken cognisance of a CBI FIR to file its Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR), equivalent to an FIR, under various sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The agency, according to the sources, has gathered banking and medical procurement documents related to this hospital and medical college from "various sources" and it may soon issue summons to the accused.



for questioning and recording of their statements, the sources said.

The accused in the ED case are the same who have been named in the CBI complaint, they said.

In its FIR registered on the di-

rections of the Calcutta High Court, the CBI has booked Ghosh and three Kolkata-based private entities -- Ma Tara Traders of Madhya Jhorehat, Banipur, Howrah; Eshan Cafe of 4/1, Belgachia and Khama Louha.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has pressed various sections under the Indian Penal Code, including 120 B (criminal conspiracy), 420 (cheating) and section 7 (offence relating to public servant being bribed) of the Prevention of Corruption Act. The CBI on Sunday raided the premises of Ghosh, ex-medical superintendent Sanjay Vashisth and 13 others in and around Kolkata in connection with this probe into alleged financial irregularities at the medical institute that is under scanner following alleged rape and murder of a postgraduate trainee woman doctor on August 9.

A CBI official had told reporters during the Sunday searches that "bahut kuch hai (There is a lot)." (PTI)

City police ASI sought in Kolkata rape and murder case



NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Aug 27: The CBI has sought permission from a Kolkata court to conduct a polygraph test on city police assistant sub-inspector Anup Dutta who was said to be close to Sanjay Roy, the arrested accused in the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at R G Kar medical college, officials said Tuesday.

The CBI is exploring if Dutta helped Roy in any cover up of the crime, they said.

According to reports, Dutta was allegedly instrumental in extending various favours to Roy, they said.

The central probe agency is trying to find out if Roy told Dutta about the crime and received any help, they said.

They said the court would decide the application for a polygraph test after seeking Dutta's consent on the issue.

The CBI completed polygraph tests on former principal of the medical college Sandip Ghosh on Tuesday, the third day of subjecting him to a series of Deception Detection Tests (DDT), they said.

He underwent a Layered Voice Analysis test on Saturday, followed by a polygraph test on Monday. The test on Monday could not be completed, so it was resumed on Tuesday.

Layered voice analysis is a new DDT in the forensic experts' arsenal. It detects the speaker's reaction to a lie but does not identify a lie. The technology identified stress, cognitive processes, and emotional cues in different voice properties.

A polygraph test, also a DDT, can help assess inaccuracies in statements of suspects and witnesses. By monitoring their psychological responses -- heart rate, breathing patterns, sweating, and blood pressure -- investigators can determine if there are discrepancies in their responses.

However, these are not admissible evidence during the trial and can only be used to get further leads in a case. (PTI)

CBI will seek opinion of AIIMS on DNA, forensic evidence

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: The CBI will consult experts from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) on the DNA and forensic reports related to the alleged rape and murder of a trainee doctor at R G Kar Medical College, officials said Tuesday.

In order to build a watertight case, the CBI will send the reports to AIIMS to seek their opinion in the case, they said.

The reports will also help the agency to ascertain if Sanjay Roy was the only accused who committed the crime or there were others involved, they said.

The CBI has filed an application before a Kolkata court seeking permission for polygraph test of Kolkata Police ASI Anup Dutta.

The agency is investigating if Dutta knew Roy and extended any help to the accused after the crime, the officials said.

The CBI had already questioned Dutta in connection with the case, they said.

So far the agency is working on the leads that Roy was the only accused in the crime but involvement of others will only be ruled out after receiving the opinion of AIIMS experts, the officials said.

The polygraph test on former principal of the medical college Sandip Ghosh continued for the second day Tuesday. He underwent layered voice test on Saturday which was followed by polygraph test on Monday. The test on Monday could not be completed and resumed on Tuesday.

Layered voice analysis is a new deception detection test (DDT) in forensic arsenal used to detect the speaker's reaction to a lie. It does not identify a lie.

The technology identified stress, cognitive processes, and emotional cues in different properties of the voice. A polygraph test, also a DDT, can help in assessing inaccuracies in statements of suspects and witnesses. By monitoring their psychological re-

sponses - heart rate, breathing patterns, sweating and blood pressure - investigators can determine if there are discrepancies in their response.

However, these are not admissible evidence during the trial and can only be used to get further leads in a case.

The alleged rape and killing of the junior doctor in a seminar hall of the hospital has sparked widespread protests.

The medic's body with severe injury marks was found inside the seminar hall of the hospital's chest department in the morning of August 9 by a doctor who was on round.

Kolkata Police arrested Roy on August 10 based on CCTV footage in which he was seen entering the seminar hall at 4.03 AM on August 9 when the crime was allegedly committed.

Based on CCTV footage, Roy was put through extensive interrogation and the police had also noticed "recent injuries" on his left cheek, abrasion in left hand between his left and ring finger, abrasion over the back of left thigh among others showing signs of struggle.

His biological samples like urethral swab and smear, semen, hair, nail clippings and nail scraping were collected during the medico-legal examination, they said.

On August 13, the Calcutta High Court ordered the transfer of the probe from the Kolkata Police to the CBI, which started its investigation on August 14.

The CBI took over all the forensic evidence from Kolkata Police and also subjected Roy, Ghosh, four doctors who were on duty with the victim, and a civic volunteer to polygraph tests to get further leads about the crime.

The initial reports from CFSL are being analysed and corroborated with evidence to get further direction to the probe, the officials said. (PTI)



Over 120 hospitalised after food poisoning in Mathura

MATHURA, Aug 27: More than 120 people, including women and children, were hospitalised due to food poisoning after consuming items made from buckwheat flour, officials said on Tuesday.

A team from the District Food and Drug Administration raided and sealed the shops of two vendors supplying the contaminated buckwheat flour (kuttu atta), they said, adding a case has been registered against them. The incident was reported from several villages in the Farah police station area of Mathura district last night. All victims are stable, the officials said.

The affected individuals -- who were fasting on the occasion of Janmashtami -- experienced symptoms such as vomiting, dizziness and shivering after eating 'puris' and 'pakodas' containing the flour.

"We had fritters made from buck-

wheat flour last night. After that, I started vomiting and felt a burning sensation in my stomach," Priyanka, a teenager admitted to the government hospital, told PTI Videos. Pritam Singh, a resident of Parkham village accompanying a patient, said that after consuming the fritters, people complained of dizziness and vomiting.

"The buckwheat flour was purchased from a local shop in the village," he added.

Mahesh, another resident, told PTI Videos, "My wife has become very weak, almost unconscious."

Dr Bhudev Prasad, in-charge of the Rapid Response Team of the Health Department, said that complaints of food poisoning were received from several villages in the Farah police station area during the night.

"Teams from the Health Depart-

ment, Farah Community Health Centre (CHC), and District Hospital responded swiftly. Initially, patients were treated at the CHC, but as numbers increased, they were moved to the District Hospital, the 100-bed Joint Hospital in Vrindavan, and SN Medical College in Agra," he said. On Tuesday morning, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Ajay Kumar Verma said more than 60 people have been admitted to various hospitals while later in the day he revised the number of patients to over 120.

The CMO said 43 patients have been admitted to the SN Medical College Hospital in Agra, 29 to the District Hospital in Mathura, 15 to the 100-bed Combined Hospital, 15 to Baba Jaijgurdev Charitable Hospital, 10 to Chauhan Hospital and others have been admitted to the CHC in Farah. (PTI)

Mohanlal, others resign from actors association

Justice Hema Committee report fallout

KOCHI, Aug 27: In the wake of various sexual allegations cropping up against many of its members, all office-bearers of the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) including its president and top actor Mohanlal, resigned from their positions on Tuesday.

In a statement, the Association said the current administrative panel resigned as such, taking moral responsibility for the allegations. The new administrative panel would be elected within two months after convening a general body meeting, it said. The Association also thanked everyone for criticising and correcting them, the statement added. (PTI)



Excise policy cases: BRS leader K Kavitha gets bail

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: In a relief to BRS leader K Kavitha, the Supreme Court on Tuesday granted her bail in corruption and money laundering cases linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, while questioning the central agencies over the fairness of their probe and asking if they were free to "pick and choose" an accused.

The apex court said Kavitha's custody was no longer required as both the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) have completed their probe against her. The Bharat Rashtriya Samithi (BRS) lawmaker from Telangana has been in jail for over five months.

A bench of Justices B R Gavi and K V Viswanathan noted since 493 witnesses were to be examined and 50,000 pages of documents were to be considered in the two cases, there was no likelihood of the trial being concluded in the near future.

"The appellant (Kavitha) is directed to be released forthwith on bail ... on furnishing bail bonds in the sum of Rs 10 lakh in each of the cases," the bench said, while allowing her appeals against the July 1 verdict of the Delhi High Court which had denied her bail in the two cases.

Later in the day, a Delhi court issued release warrants for Kavitha, paving the way for her release from jail.

While quashing the high court verdict, the apex court said Kavitha shall not make any attempt to tamper with evidence or influence the witnesses and shall deposit her passport with the trial judge.

It said she shall regularly attend the trial court proceedings and co-operate to ensure expeditious disposal of the trial.

The two federal agencies came in for some sharp criticism over the "fairness" of their investigation, with the apex court observing "Sorry to see this state of affairs".

"You will pick and choose anyone?" it asked, while referring to one of the witnesses whose statements were read out in the court during the arguments.

"The prosecution has to be fair. You can't pick and choose anyone. What is this fairness? A person who incriminates himself has been made a witness," the bench said, adding, "Tomorrow you will pick up anyone as you choose and leave anyone as you choose as an accused? Very fair and reasonable discretion!"

When Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for the probe agencies, referred to some witnesses who have claimed

Kavitha's involvement in the alleged scam, the court told him it would be compelled to "observe everything" if he tried to pull it into the details.

"We will have to observe about the fairness and impartiality of the investigating agencies," it said, adding, "If you want those observations, you argue more".

The bench also dealt with the observations made by the high court on whether Kavitha was entitled to benefit from the proviso to section 45 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) being a woman.

Section 45 of the PMLA provides for the twin conditions which are required to be satisfied before granting bail to an accused under the anti-money laundering law. The twin conditions are that the judge should be prima facie satisfied that the accused has not committed the offence and that he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail.

The high court had noted in its verdict that the proviso provides the exception to the general rule if the accused is a woman.

The bench said day in and day out, it was argued before the court by the prosecution that all accused should be treated equally irrespective of whether they are a chief minister or a lawmaker.

"However, the single judge (of the high court) in the present case, while denying the benefit of proviso to section 45 (1) comes to a heartening conclusion that the appellant (Kavitha) is a highly qualified and well-accomplished person, having made significant contributions to politics and social work..." the bench noted.

It said the high court proceeded to observe that Kavitha can't be equated to a "vulnerable woman".

The bench, which referred to an earlier judgement delivered by the top court, said the high court had "totally misdirected" itself while denying the benefit of the proviso to Kavitha.

It noted that in the earlier verdict, the apex court had not said that merely because a woman was highly educated, sophisticated or a lawmaker, she should be denied the benefit of the proviso.

During the hearing, the bench said it would set aside these observations of the high court as it would at least apply to all courts in the jurisdiction of Delhi and might mean that no educated woman can get bail.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Kavitha, argued that the probe against her was complete and the charge sheet and prosecution complaint have already been filed. (PTI)

Delhi court extends Kejriwal's judicial custody till September 3

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: A Delhi court on Tuesday extended the judicial custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a corruption case related to the alleged excise scam till September 3.

Special Judge Kavari Baweja extended Kejriwal's custody after he was produced before the court through video conference on expiry of the judicial custody granted earlier.

The court is currently hearing arguments on whether to take cognisance of a supplementary charge sheet filed against Kejriwal by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). (PTI)

Scholarship to students of Sanskrit schools in UP

LUCKNOW, Aug 27: The Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday decided to give scholarships to all students studying in over 500 Sanskrit schools in the state, doing away with the condition that their family income should be less than ₹ 50,000 annually.

In a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, it was also decided to hike the scholarship amount for those in classes 9 to 12 in these schools.

The new scholarship amount ranges between ₹ 50 and ₹ 200 per month.

After the meeting, Secondary Education Minister Gulab Devi said, "Since most of the children receiving Sanskrit education are from poor sections, a provision has been made now to provide scholarships to students of Prathama that is classes 6, 7 and 8 under Sanskrit education."

The minister said that now, ₹ 50 per month will be given to the children of class 6 and 7, and ₹ 75 to the children of class 8.

Earlier, students of Purva Madhyama -- classes 9 and 10 -- were given a monthly scholarship of ₹ 50 and children of Uttar Madhyama -- classes 11 and 12 -- were getting ₹ 80 a month.

Now, the students of classes 9 and 10 will get ₹ 100 per month and those studying in classes 11 and 12 will be given ₹ 200.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna said that earlier, only the children of families with annual income up to ₹ 50,000 were given scholarships, but now the income limit has been removed.

He said that at present there are 517 Sanskrit schools in the state in which 1,21,573 students are studying. (PTI)

Kuno continues to face prey, predator challenges

Gandhi Sagar not yet ready for cheetahs

NEW DELHI, Aug 26: Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park, the first home to translocated cheetahs in India, continues to struggle with a high leopard population and a low prey base, while the twin challenges have delayed preparations at the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, selected as the second site for cheetah introduction.

Summary records from meetings of the Centre's Cheetah Project Steering Committee reveal that prey augmentation and leopard management are among the major challenges facing the grand initiative since the reintroduction of cheetahs in India in September 2022.

The low prey density is also one of the reasons why cheetahs spent an extended period in enclosures in Kuno after being brought back from the wild in August last year, following the death of three cheetahs due to septicaemia.

As an interim solution, authorities have been introducing prey into both Kuno and Gandhi Sagar. The high leopard population in both areas also prompted the initiation of a leopard translocation drive.

Cheetahs have coexisted with leopards and lions in Africa, but some officials in India consider the high leopard population in Kuno and Gandhi Sagar a problem as it would "reduce the prey biomass for cheetahs".

Madhya Pradesh has the maximum number of leopards in the country at 3,907 (up from 3,421 in 2018), according to the government's "Status of Leopards in India" report launched earlier this

year.

In a steering committee meeting on June 18, Sanjay Raikhere, DFO Mandsaur, reported that there were 24 leopards in the 64 sq km enclosure being prepared for the new batch of cheetahs in Gandhi Sagar. According to sources, 15 leopards have been relocated from there so far.

Sources have told PTI that Gandhi Sagar is "not 100 per cent ready" for cheetahs, largely owing to the leopard and prey base challenges.

"We are working on making the fencing leopard-proof. We also need to improve the prey population both inside and outside the enclosure," a source said.

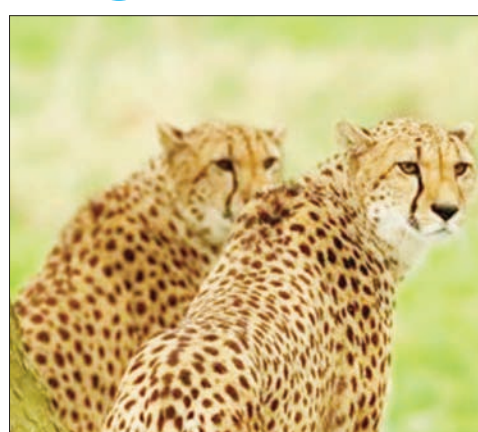
Gandhi Sagar is spread across 368 sq km and has an additional 2,500 sq km area surrounding it.

According to the "Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in Gandhi Sagar", five to eight cheetahs will be released into a 64 sq-km predator-proof fenced area in the first phase with a focus on breeding.

The long-term goal is to establish a metapopulation of 60-70 cheetahs in the Kuno-Gandhisagar landscape.

According to experts, the presence of dominant predators like leopards and lions influences cheetah's home range and space use.

Cheetahs, known for their exceptional speed and agility, are adapted to hunt primarily in open habitats. In contrast, leopards are highly adaptable to a wide range of habitats and have a more versatile diet. As a result, cheetahs tend to avoid di-



rect confrontation with leopards by choosing habitats and times when leopards are less active.

According to Project Cheetah's annual report for 2022-23, in Kuno, leopards were observed being chased away during encounters with cheetah coalitions.

The action plan for introducing cheetahs in Gandhi Sagar mentions a "significant population" of leopards, estimated at around 70, in the western part of the wildlife sanctuary.

"All leopards within the fenced area will be captured and relocated before the cheetahs are brought here," the plan reads.

It further notes that "cheetahs and leopards can coexist if there is an adequate prey base and other

resources available in other parts of the sanctuary".

Records obtained by PTI through an RTI application reveal that committee members have repeatedly expressed serious concerns about prey availability and leopard-related challenges in nearly every meeting held so far.

They have consistently emphasized the importance of "in-situ prey buildup", saying "active prey augmentation through translocation cannot continue indefinitely".

According to the summary record of the meeting dated June 18, Rs 3.75 crore has been spent on grass revival in an area of around 5,000 hectares in Kuno, as part of habitat improvement efforts to sustain a healthy prey base.

In the same meeting, Qamar Qureshi, a scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), expressed concern over the low chinkara population in Gandhi Sagar (outside the enclosure) and emphasized the need to manage the high leopard density there.

Steering Committee Chairman Rajesh Gopal stressed the need for an ecological, niche-based long-term solution to address the relative abundance of leopards.

In a meeting held on March 12, S P Yadav, the former head of Project Cheetah and advisor to the steering committee, said the high density of leopards at Kuno, along with comparatively low prey density, is a cause for concern.

Gopal said grass revival should be carried out

in a time-bound manner to support in-situ prey revival and that the translocation of leopards should follow a standard operating procedure.

"This is important since the habitat is devoid of bigger cats like tiger or lion causing spatial/niche separation of leopards. High density of leopards would reduce the standing prey biomass," he said.

In another meeting in December last year, Qureshi said prey assessment at Kuno revealed an average of 17 prey animals per sq km, with hotspots harboring around 30-35 prey animals per sq km. The leopard population was found to be high, at 26 per 100 sq km.

In a meeting held on September 4 last year, shortly after the cheetahs were returned to enclosures from the wild, Gopal said the big cats should be released back into the wild "only when we are confident with the prey density outside, which ideally should be 30-60 chital units per sq km". At that time, only 18-20 chital units per sq km were available.

During the meeting, P R Sinha, former head of WII, said that while external prey supplementation must continue, "we should not lose sight of the task of building a natural prey base through habitat manipulation". "This task is difficult, but this is our ultimate goal," he added.

Qureshi gave a presentation on Kuno's prey base, noting that it had 91 leopards, and that the prey population was "too low to release all the cheetahs into the wild". (PTI)

Kate Winslet to headline Hulu series 'The Spot'

LOS ANGELES, Aug 27:

Oscar winner Kate Winslet is set to collaborate with Disney-owned streaming service Hulu for her new series project.

Titled "The Spot", the show comes from Ed Solomon, best known for writing movies such as "Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure", "Men in Black", "Charlie's Angels" and "Now You See Me".

According to American news outlet Variety, the show will follow a successful surgeon (Winslet) and her school-teacher husband who begin to suspect that she may be responsible for a child's hit-and-run death.

"Their quest for truth spirals into a web of mounting suspicion and dark secrets, testing their resolve and their relationship as they confront the possibility of hidden guilt and betrayal," the official logline

read.

Solomon will serve as writer, executive producer, and showrunner of The Spot. Winslet will also executive produce under her Juggle Productions banner.

Hollywood studio A24 will produce the project along with 20th Television. In her career of 30 years, Winslet has featured in several blockbusters and critically-acclaimed movies such as Sense and Sensibility, Titanic, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Little Children and The Holiday. She had won an Academy Award for best actress for her role as Hanna Schmitz, a former Nazi camp guard, in The Reader in 2009.

Kinslet has also been part of many hit series, including Mildred Pierce, Mare of Easttown and most recently The Regime, which debuted on HBO. (PTI)



RIMA DAS' 'VILLAGE ROCKSTARS 2' TO COMPETE FOR KIM JISEOK AWARD AT BUSAN INT'L FILM FESTIVAL



NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Filmmaker Rima Das' "Village Rockstars 2", a sequel to her 2017 movie, has been selected in competition for the Kim Jiseok Award at the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) 2024.

The film is the follow-up to the internationally acclaimed and National Award-winning feature "Village Rockstars", which premiered at Toronto International Film Festival in 2017 and was India's official entry to the Academy Awards 2019.

According to a press release, "Village Rockstars 2" is the only Indian feature among eight films to be selected in the Jiseok Competition section at the 29th edition of the Busan International Film Festival, set to begin on October 2.

Das, who was invited to join the director's branch by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences earlier this year, said she is looking forward to the world premiere of "Village Rockstars 2" at BIFF.

"Village Rockstars" will always hold a special place in my heart, and I cherish the love and recognition it received. I'm thrilled that 'Village Rockstars 2' is premiering at Busan," the multiple award-winning director said in a statement.

The first "Village Rockstars" followed the story of a 10-year-old girl called Dhunu who befriends a group of boys and dreams of becoming a rock star.

"While it's a sequel, this film stands on its own, delving into Dhunu's relationship with her mother, mother nature, and music. I dedicate this film to all the young people with talent and dreams but limited resources to achieve them. I am hopeful that just as audiences embraced 'Village Rockstars', they will embrace this film as well," she added.

The Kim Jiseok Award, established in 2017, commemorates the late Kim Jiseok, who dedicated his life to discovering and supporting the growth of Asian cinema. It is given to the two best films that reflect the contemporary standing of Asian cinema.

Last year, Sri Lankan filmmaker Prasanna Vithanage's "Paradise" and "Bride Kidnapping" by Kyrgyz director Mirlan Abdykalykov won the Kim Jiseok Award last year.

BIFF will come to a close on October 11. (PTI)

R Madhavan and Dia Mirza's 'Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein' to re-release in theatres

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Popular 2001 romantic drama

"Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein", starring R Madhavan, Dia Mirza and Saif Ali Khan, is set to hit the big screens once again on August 30.

Directed by Gautham Vasudev Menon, the film released in October 2001. Also featuring Maya Alagh and Kabir Sadanand in pivotal roles it followed the story of Maddy (Madhavan), who impersonates Rajeev (Khan), a person set to marry his love interest Reena (Mirza). But things change when he learns the truth.

The film turned into a cult hit soon after its release and remains to be one of the top fan-favorite movies. It is also remembered for its melodious songs such as "Bolo Bolo", "Kaise Mein Kahun Tujhe" and "Zara Zara". The film was produced by Pooja Entertainment.

On the film's re-release, actor-producer Jacky Bhagnani said the film holds a "special place" in his heart as it was his first project as an assistant director.

"This film holds a very special place in my heart, as it was my first project as an Assistant Director. I was quite young at the time, and being part of the AD team gave me the incredible opportunity to work closely with Maddy, Saif, and Dia on set," the actor-producer said in a release. (PTI)



Jonathan Rhys-Meyers, Ashley Greene board thriller drama 'Eyes in the Trees'



LOS ANGELES, Aug 27: "Tudors" star Jonathan Rhys-Meyers and "Twilight" actor Ashley Greene have joined Academy award winner Anthony Hopkins in sci-fi movie "Eyes in the Trees".

A reimagining of the popular H G Wells 1896 novel "The Island of Doctor Moreau", the film will follow the journey of a video journalist and his crew who visit an isolated forest but their excursion ends up becoming a fight for survival, reported Variety. "Eyes in the Trees" is helmed by Timothy Woodward Jr, who is an Emmy Award winner and is known for the projects like "Studio City" and "Til Death Do Us Part". The movie is written by B. Harrison Smith, Mike Manning and Dominic Burns.

"Having the opportunity to work closely with the legendary Sir Anthony Hopkins and the rest of this incredible cast is a true honor. It has been deeply inspiring, and I'm genuinely grateful for the experience," Woodward Jr told the news outlet. The production of the film is slated to begin at the end of this year and the shooting is to take place in Thailand. (PTI)

I find it difficult to tell what are right and wrong choices: Roshan Mathew

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Actor Roshan Mathew says it's difficult to determine the "right" or "wrong" choices in his career as traditional metrics like box office success aren't always the best indicators.

A film might perform well commercially, but that doesn't necessarily mean it was the right choice for him as an artist, said Mathew, known for his critically-lauded performances in many Malayalam and Hindi movies.

"I find it very difficult to tell what are right choices and what are wrong choices because the easy way to tell is to go by numbers and see how a film performs in the theatre and then decide..."

"But it's not as simple as that always because there are so many films that don't perform really well, which you might personally really

enjoy... So this whole idea of what is right and what is wrong in terms of choices becomes very ambiguous territory when you think about it from the perspective of the end result," the actor told PTI in an interview. For Mathew, the ideal situation would be when a film he enjoys also becomes a commercial success, but this isn't always the case. "What I've understood is that at any point when I feel like this is a project that I want to be part of and I believe I will have a good enriching experience from it, then that becomes the right choice."

An alumnus of Drama School Mumbai, Roshan began his film career with the 2016 film "Puthiya Niyamam", before delivering notable performances in Malayalam films like "Anandam" (2016) and "Kooda" (2018).

His breakthrough role came in the critically acclaimed film "Moothon" (2019), directed by Geetu Mohandas, and he later starred in films such as "Kappela" (2020) and "C U Soon" (2020).

Mathew made his Hindi film debut with Anurag Kashyap's 2020 movie "Choked" but it was his turn as Zulfi in Alia Bhatt's 2022 black comedy "Darlings" that earned him a fan base.

As an artiste, Roshan said when he steps outside Malayalam cinema, the project must offer an "exciting opportunity" for him to consider it.

"I know that my stories belong here. I am from this place. This is the place that I think of as home. I'm sitting in Kochi as I say this. So when I leave Malayalam and go do a project outside, I know that it has

to feel like an exciting, unmissable opportunity.

"Otherwise, there's no reason for me to go. Any project that satisfies that particular ask will be a good experience when I go out and do it. And those are the ones that I look for. Everything that I've done in Hindi so far has been decided on that basis and has also been a very good experience to work on," added Mathew, whose most recent Hindi release was the Janhvi Kapoor-led spy thriller "Ulajh".

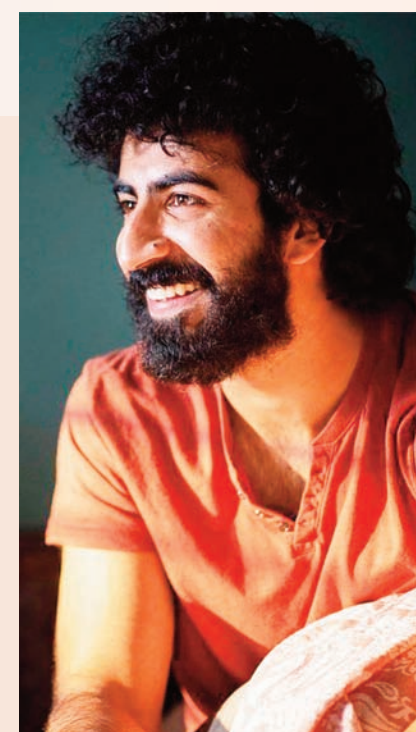
The actor said he is aware of the limitations that come with ethnicity and language that might reflect in some of the offers that come his way. "I guess you have to look past it and see if there's something else that is exciting about it or are they calling me just because of those things? If it reduces me... like he's

a guy who comes from the south of India and hence we'll call him to do the South Indian character, then maybe there's nothing in there that excites me as an actor."

Post "Darlings", Mathew said he could see which offers were coming specifically with the intention of repeating what he did in the Jasmeet K Reen-directed movie.

"I guess that would lead to some level of stereotyping. But it's very easy to identify from a distance when the project first reaches you. So you just have to say no to that and wait for something better to come," he said.

Mathew will be next seen in SonyLIV series "Kan Khajura", the Hindi adaptation of the Israeli crime thriller drama Magpie. The show will also feature Mohit Raina and Sarah Jane Dias. (PTI)



Coco Gauff begins her US Open title defense with an easy win after a two-match losing streak

NEW YORK, Aug 27: The chant rang out in cavernous Arthur Ashe Stadium on Monday at the U.S. Open before Coco Gauff's first service game of her first match of her first Grand Slam tournament as a defending champion: "Here we go, Coco! Here we go!"

Coming to Flushing Meadows off a series of early exits at other events, Gauff already was down 1-0 to Varvara Gracheva, having dropped the match's initial game at love by making four groundstroke errors. What followed was a tough, tight game, featuring 14 points across eight minutes and three break chances for Gracheva.

The important part, of course, was that Gauff saved all of

those break points, claimed that game, and suddenly was in complete control on the way to a 6-2, 6-0 victory that not only put the 20-year-old American in the second round but also told her — and everyone else — that her game is in better shape than it appeared lately.

"The last couple of weeks were tough, and I was like, I have to do this and do that, but I don't have to prove anything to anyone except myself." So ... (these) two weeks are just about proving all the expectations that I have on myself," the No. 3-seeded Gauff said. "I have many more years coming back here and I'm not going to win every year. Just that perspective and just having the belief that I

can — but not the expectation that I should."

Day 1 at the year's last Grand Slam tournament went about as well as possible for Gauff and another young American featured in Ashe, 13th-seeded Ben Shelton, a semifinalist a year ago who beat 2020 champion Dominic Thiem 6-4, 6-2, 6-2. It was the last U.S. Open match for Thiem, who turns 31 next week and is retiring after this season. "Obviously she plays with a lot of passion," Shelton, 21, said about Gauff. "You could tell that she cares out there. She's into it every time that she's on the court. I think that's something that the people love." Gauff was not the only past U.S. Open champ on Mon-



day's schedule: The night session in Ashe began with 2017 winner Sloane Stephens blowing a huge lead against Clara

Burel and losing 0-6, 7-5, 7-5 after taking the first nine games, followed by Novak Djokovic — whose collection of 24 Slam

titles includes last year's in New York — getting past Radu Albot 6-2, 6-2, 6-4.

Seeded women's winners included No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka, the two-time Australian Open champion who was the runner-up to Gauff a year ago in New York; No. 7 Zheng Qinwen, the women's gold medalist at the Paris Olympics earlier this month; No. 24 Donna Vekic, the silver medalist; No. 12 Daria Kasatkina; and No. 14 Madison Keys.

No. 9 Maria Sakkari stopped playing after one set because of an injured right shoulder. The highest-seeded man out of the bracket during the day session was No. 15 Holger Rune, who was eliminated by Brandon

Nakashima of the U.S. 6-2, 6-1, 6-4. Among the men's seeds advancing were No. 4 Alexander Zverev, the runner-up to Thiem four years ago; No. 6 Andrey Rublev; No. 8 Casper Ruud, the 2022 runner-up at Flushing Meadows; No. 9 Grigor Dimitrov; and No. 12 Taylor Fritz.

Zheng is enjoying a breakthrough season that began with a run to the final at the Australian Open in January and reached a peak when she claimed China's first Summer Games singles gold. Monday was difficult at the outset against 2019 French Open semifinalist Amanda Anisimova, but Zheng eventually came back to win 4-6, 6-4, 6-2. (AP)

INDIA LOOK TO END TITLE DROUGHT

Harmanpreet to lead tried and tested bunch at T20 World Cup

NEW DELHI, Aug 27: India on Tuesday named a tried and tested squad for the Women's T20 World Cup under the leadership of Harmanpreet Kaur, hoping the experienced bunch takes the team to an elusive ICC trophy.

Barring Uma Chetry, all the squad members who were part of an unsuccessful Asia Cup campaign in July have been retained for the marquee event beginning in the UAE from October 3.

The competition was shifted to the UAE from Bangladesh following unrest in the South Asian nation owing to a students' protest.

Spin all-rounder Shreyanka Patil and top-order batter Yastika Bhatia have been included in the squad subject to fitness. Shreyanka had fractured her finger during the Asia Cup game against Pakistan while Bhatia is recovering from a knee injury.

Following the loss to Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup final, Kaur will be under pressure to lead her team to the coveted title. The men were finally to able get the monkey off their back and win an ICC title after an 11 year gap back in June.

The women, who too have all the resources at their disposal, would be expected to cross the finishing line on this occasion.



Kaur first captained the team in the 2018 edition and since then India have reached one final but

it has largely been a story of missed opportunities. Their biggest challenge will be

to beat Australia as usual. Both teams are in the same group which also includes Pakistan and

Sri Lanka.

On expected lines, the squad is loaded with spinners including Deepti Sharma, Asha Sobhana and Radha Yadav. The two specialist pacers are Renuka Singh and Arundhati Reddy while Pooja Vastrakar is the sole fast bowling all-rounder. Titas Sadhu is a notable name missing in the pace department.

"Given the players we have it's a good squad. Hope Yastika and Shreyanka get fit," former India captain Diana Edulji told PTI.

Star batter Smriti Mandhana has been named Kaur's deputy and like always will be the key at the top of the order.

Besides the thin fast bowling resources, India are also not a side full of power-hitters. Kaur and Richa Ghosh will be responsible for producing the big hits in the middle overs phase of the game.

India will open their campaign against New Zealand on October 4. Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh (wk), Yastika Bhatia (wk)*, Pooja Vastrakar, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Singh, Dayalan Hemalatha, Asha Sobhana, Radha Yadav, Shreyanka Patil*, Sajana Sajeevan. (PTI)

Central Delhi Kings defeat East Delhi Riders by 5 wickets



NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Keshav Dabas starred with a quickfire 52 not out to fire Central Delhi Kings to a five-wicket victory against East Delhi Riders in their Delhi Premier League clash here on Tuesday.

Dabas' 27-ball 52 at number six eclipsed the first-innings efforts from East Delhi Riders' Himmat Singh (63) and Anuj Rawat (61) to take their side to 172/5, as Central Delhi Kings scored 173 for five in 17.5 overs.

Dabas, who took 2/20 early on, struck at nearly 193 as he cracked three sixes and four boundaries to make an unbeaten 52 which provided the much-needed impetus to his side, especially after the batters before him failed to convert their starts.

He added 60 runs for the fifth wicket with Aryan Rana (28) to consolidate for Central Delhi Kings, who appeared to be under

pressure at 75 for four halfway through their chase.

With 41 needed off the last 24 balls, Bhagwan Singh provided East Delhi Riders with a crucial breakthrough in the form of Rana but the bowler gave away 27 runs in what turned out to be the penultimate over of the contest.

Earlier, Himmat scored his third fifty in a row of the tournament to make 63 from 33 balls with six fours and three sixes. Opening batter Rawat, who put on 65 for the first wicket with Sujal Singh (31), added 53 runs for the second with Himmat.

Rawat made 61 from 44 balls with four fours and three sixes.

Brief Scores: East Delhi Riders 172/5 in 20 overs (Anuj Rawat 61, Himmat Singh 63; Keshav Dabas 2/20) beat Central Delhi Kings 173/7 in 17.5 overs (Keshav Dabas 52; Hiten Dalal 1/15) by 5 wickets. (PTI)

Tonali at 'next stage' of career ahead of return from gambling ban, says Howe

NEWCASTLE, Aug 27: Sandro Tonali is set to make his return for Newcastle on Wednesday after a 10-month ban for breaching betting rules, with manager Eddie Howe saying the Italy midfielder feels "at the next stage" of his career.

Tonali joined Newcastle from AC Milan in the offseason of 2023 but only played 12 games before he was handed a long suspension by the Italian soccer federation in October for betting on Milan and another Italian club, Brescia, when he played for those teams.

An independent regulatory commission also sanctioned Tonali with an extra two-month ban that was suspended until the end of this season.

The 10-month suspension ends late Tuesday, enabling Tonali to be available for Newcastle's League Cup match at Nottingham Forest the following day.

Howe said Tonali would be in the squad provided he isn't injured in the final training session Tuesday and said the midfielder will experience a range of emotions.

"Probably a lot of excitement — you feel like you are at the next stage of your career really," Howe said. "When you have a long period of time out, (you have) a long time to think, analyze and reflect. "I'm sure he's done all of those things and now he's doing what he loves, which is playing football and that will be an incredible release for him."

Tonali has been back in training with Newcastle but hasn't been able to play in any friendlies, though British newspaper The Guardian has reported he took part

in a behind-closed-doors game against Burnley recently with coaching staff as referees. "He's fit, he just doesn't have the match (fitness), the bigger spaces, the 11 vs. 11. Every footballer will tell you what is the most important thing — the game time," Howe said.

"But he's done everything else, has completed all the training for a long period of time, he's worked incredibly hard with the sports-science team to be on top of his fitness and make sure he's fitter than when he got banned." (AP)

What to expect in Paralympic Games as 4,400 athletes compete in Paris

PARIS, Aug 27: Let the games begin again.

The Paralympic Games are set to open Wednesday as some 4,400 athletes with disabilities, permanent injuries or impairments prepare to compete for 549 medals across 22 sports over 11 days in Paris.

The French capital, which just hosted the Olympics, again provides the backdrop for what promises to be another spectacle, with many of the same venues hosting Paralympic competitions.

Historic square Place de la Concorde, which hosted skateboarding, breaking and 3x3 basketball during the Olympics, will host the opening ceremony.

Equestrian returns to Château de Versailles, which will host para equestrian events. The Grand Palais transitions from fencing to wheelchair fencing. Archery venue Invalides will host para archery.

The venue beside the Eiffel Tower, which hosted beach vol-

leyball during the Olympics, will host blind soccer, an adaptation of the game for visually impaired players in teams of five with a ball containing rattles.

"We've got some monstrous iconic sites, and we're going to get an eyeful," France's para triathlon champion, Alexis Hanquint, said. "Paris is the most beautiful city in the world. I think we're going to have some pretty exceptional Paralympic Games."

Of the 22 Paralympic sports, only two do not have an Olympic equivalent — goalball and boccia. In goalball, teams of visually impaired or blind players take turns rolling a ball containing bells toward the opposing goal while the defending team's players act as goalkeepers. In boccia, players throw or roll leather balls as close as they can to a small ball called a jack.

Compared to the previous edition of the Paralympics in Tokyo, 10 medal events have

been added to give female athletes and those with high-support needs more opportunities.

The Paralympic flame was lit Saturday in Stoke Mandeville, a village northwest of London widely considered the birthplace of the Paralympic Games, and was to make its way via a torch relay under the English Channel to cities all over France before lighting the cauldron during the opening ceremony on Wednesday.

Anticipation has been building with Parisians returning from their summer vacations — the city almost felt empty at the beginning of the month with many away at the coast. For locals who missed the Olympic action, the Paralympics are a second chance to catch some of the excitement.

The athletes — Paralympians — will be the focus of attention starting Thursday in the first day of competition, when there will be medals to be won in para taekwondo, para table tennis,

para swimming and para cycling on the track.

As was the case for the Olympics, there will be medals up for grabs on each of the 11 days of competition.

Many of the competing athletes have titles to defend.

Para shooter Avani Lekhara, the first Indian woman to win a pair of medals at a single edition of the Paralympics, returns to defend her 10-meter air rifle gold in the SH1 category from Tokyo.

The SH1 category is for rifle shooters with lower limb impairments like amputations or paraplegia who can hold their gun without difficulty and shoot from a standing or sitting position.

American multi-sport specialist Oksana Masters won a hand-cycle road race and time trial at the Tokyo Paralympics, and she will be looking to add to her career total of seven gold and 17 medals overall in both summer and winter events.

Para powerlifter Sherif Osman of Egypt is going for his fourth gold medal, and Italian fencer Bebe Vio is vying for her third consecutive gold in wheelchair fencing. After contracting meningitis as a child, doctors amputated both her legs and her forearms to save her life.

Brazil is unbeaten in blind soccer going back to the first tournament in Athens in 2004, but France harbors hopes of an upset. The hosts kick off against China and Brazil plays Turkey on Sept. 1, a day before the teams meet for a potentially decisive match in Group A.

And there are other storylines.

Visually impaired Italian sprinter Valentina Petrillo will be the first transgender woman to compete at the Paralympics when she races in the heats for her classification in the women's 400 meters on Sept. 2.

American swimmer Ali Truitt is competing a year after losing her lower leg in a shark attack while snorkeling. (AP)

US Open: Novak Djokovic starts his bid for a record 25th Grand Slam title with a straight-set win

NEW YORK, Aug 27: Novak Djokovic began his bid for a record 25th Grand Slam title and tied Roger Federer with his 89th match win at the U.S. Open by defeating qualifier Radu Albot of Moldova 6-2, 6-2, 6-4.

The second-seeded Djokovic, again wearing a gray sleeve over his surgically repaired right knee, was competing for the first time since claiming an Olympic gold medal three weeks ago at the Paris Games, the last significant achievement that was missing from his resume.

"It's always challenging to start, particularly when you haven't played on this surface for five, six months, and coming off an Olympic gold and playing on clay. I haven't had any official matches before the U.S. Open. So I'm expecting to be probably challenged a little bit more in the opening rounds," he said. "Hopefully, I can play better each day."

He said his knee, which was operated on in early June, feels fine. Djokovic, a 37-year-old from Serbia, improved to 18-0 in first-round matches at Flushing Meadows and is now 89-13 overall at the hard-court tournament, which he's won four times, including a year ago. He's never lost earlier than the third round at the U.S. Open; Albot never has been past the third round in 30 appearances at majors.

The retired Federer went 89-14 in New York, with five consecutive championships from 2004 to 2008. He's the most recent man to win the U.S. Open at least twice in a row. Among men, only Jimmy Connors, who went 98-17, won more matches than Djokovic and Federer at the event.

Djokovic never has lost a Grand Slam match to someone ranked as low as No. 138 Albot. And Albot is now 0-12 against opponents ranked in the top 10.

Next up for Djokovic is a countryman, familiar opponent and friend, Laslo Djere, who advanced with a 6-7 (7), 6-1, 6-7 (7), 6-4, 6-2 victory over Jan-Lennard Struff. A year ago, Djokovic met Djere in the third round at the U.S. Open; Djere took the first two sets before Djokovic came through in five.

"It's a guaranteed third round for one of the Serbian guys. Hopefully it's going to be me. But Djere is a guy that really likes playing on a big stage. I think he also loves the conditions here. It's a bit quicker. Ball stays low. He has a very flat backhand particularly and very good serve, great return. He's physically as fit as anybody," Djokovic said. "I remember very well our match. It was a very tough match. I'm going to try to analyze that and hopefully do some things even better than I did last year. (AP)

Duleep Trophy: Indisposed Mohammed Siraj ruled out, Ravindra Jadeja allowed more rest



MUMBAI, Aug 27: Seamer Mohammed Siraj will miss the Duleep Trophy's first round games due to illness while veteran all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja has been allowed an extended period of rest by the BCCI's national selection committee, which announced a few changes to the participating squads on Tuesday.

The first round of the Duleep Trophy, comprising two matches, will be held from September 5-8 with India A taking on India B at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru and India C facing off against India D at the Rural Development Trust Stadium in Ananthapur.

Siraj, who was a part of India's last away

assignment in Sri Lanka, along with Umran Malik have both been ruled out of the first round games and have been replaced by Navdeep Saini and Gaurav Yadav respectively.

"Both Siraj and Malik are suffering from an illness and are not expected to be fit in time for their Duleep Trophy fixtures," the

BCCI informed in a release.

"All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja has also been released from the Team B squad," the board added.

Jadeja was last seen in action in the T20 World Cup final in June against South Africa and was rested from the ODI series in Sri Lanka.

The 32-year-old Yadav, who hails from Madhya Pradesh, took 41 wickets in seven matches for Pondicherry in the last season of Ranji Trophy to finish as the second highest wicket-taker in the country's premier domestic competition.

Revised squads:

India A: Shubman Gill (c), Mayank Agarwal, Riyan Parag, Dhruv Jurel (wk), KL Rahul, Tilak Varma, Shivam Dube, Tanush Kotian, Kuldeep Yadav, Akash Deep, Prasidh Krishna, Khaleel Ahmed, Avesh Khan, Vidvath Kaverappa, Kumar Kushagra, Shaswat Rawat.

India B: Abhimanyu Easwaran (c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sarfaraz Khan, Rishabh Pant (wk), Musheer Khan, Nitish Kumar Reddy*, Washington Sundar, Navdeep Saini, Yash Dayal, Mukesh Kumar, Rahul Chahar, R Sai Kishore, Mohit Awasthi, N Jagadeesan (wk).

India C: Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), Sai Sudharsan, Rajat Patidar, Abhishek Porel (wk), Suryakumar Yadav, B Indrajith, Hrithik Shokeen, Manav Suthar, Gaurav Yadav, Vyshak Vijaykumar, Anshul Khambhoj, Himanshu Chauhan, Mayank Markande, Aryan Juyal (wk), Sandeep Warrier.

India D: Shreyas Iyer (c), Atharva Taide, Yash Dubey, Devdutt Padikkal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Ricky Bhui, Saransh Jain, Axar Patel, Arshdeep Singh, Aditya Thakare, Harshit Rana, Tushar Deshpande, Akash Sengupta, KS Bharat (wk), Saurabh Kumar. (PTI)

Paralympics: India eye record haul with largest ever contingent in fray at Paris



PARIS, Aug 27: Battered by life but not beaten by its many challenges, an 84-strong contingent of Indian para-athletes, the largest ever in the country's history and a heady mix of youth and experience, would be eyeing an unparalleled gold rush when the Paralympic Games begin here on Wednesday.

India won a record 19 medals, including five gold, in the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021 for a 24th-place finish in the overall rankings. Three years on, the country's target is more than 25 medals with a double-digit haul in gold.

What has fuelled this ambition is the size of the contingent and the exceptional performances in the past one year.

India won a record 111 medals, including 29 gold, at the Hangzhou Asian Para Games last year.

This was followed by unprecedented success at the World Para Athletics Championships in May where the country snared 17 medals, including half a dozen gold for a sixth-place finish in the overall standings.

Several medal winners in Hangzhou are in this Paralympic team, including top stars like world record-holding javelin thrower Sumit Antil (F64) and rifle shooter Avani Lekhara (10m Air Rifle Standing SH1). Both of them would be defending their gold medals won in Tokyo.

The Games, as much a celebration of sporting skills as human endurance, club athletes with similar functional abilities in terms of movement, coordination and balance into various classifications. The "degree and nature of their eligible impairments" decide these groups.

For India, the para-athletics team has been a major medal giver in the past and this time too, it is expected to be the biggest contributor with as many as 38 names in fray.

Other top medal contenders include the likes of para-archer Sheetal Devi, who shoots with her legs as she was born without arms, landmine blast survivors Hokato Sema (shot putter) and Narayana Konganapalle (rower) and several other accident amputees.

India is competing in 12 sports this time, as against nine by a 54-member team in Tokyo.

Shooter Manish Narwal and shuttler Krishna Nagar are also among those who would be looking to defend their gold medals won in Tokyo.

Antil, whose left leg was amputated owing to an accident when he was 17, had also won gold in the para world championships in May and he is hoping to cross the 75m mark in Paris at the same venue where his able-bodied counterpart Neeraj Chopra won an Olympic silver earlier this month.

Lekhara was the best performer

in Tokyo with one gold and a bronze and one of the two athletes to win two medals, the other being Singhraj Adhana (silver and bronze). Adhana, however, could not make the current team.

Lekhara was the first Indian woman to win a Paralympic gold medal. She is now primed to join the club of three medal winners in the Paralympics.

Current Paralympics Committee of India (PCI) President Devendra Jhajharia, a javelin thrower, is the most decorated Indian Paralympian with two gold (2004 Athens and 2016 Rio) and a silver (2021 Tokyo).

Joginder Singh Bedi won three medals in the 1984 Paralympics (silver in shot put, a bronze each in javelin and discus throw).

Deepthi Jeevanji (women's 400m T20; intellectual disability), Rio Olympics gold-medallist Mariyappan Thangavelu (men's high jump - T63), whose right leg was disabled after being run over by a bus, and Yogesh Kathuniya (men's Discus Throw - F56), born with a neurological disorder that damaged his nervous system, would be also aiming to add to their existing Paralympic medal tally.

Shuttler Krishna Nagar (men's singles SH6), who has overcome the disadvantage of his short height, is also looking good to defend his gold medal won in Tokyo, more so after winning the title in the World Para Badminton Championships in Thailand in February.

The other gold winner in Tokyo, Pramod Bhagat, is, however, serving suspension after whereabouts failure.

Suhas Yathiraj (Men's Singles SL4 and Mixed Doubles SL3-SU5), who won a silver in Tokyo, will again be a medal contender.

In para-archery, Sheetal and Harvinder Singh will be among the medal contenders. Harvinder had won a bronze in Tokyo in men's individual recurve open.

Sheetal, the first and the only international para archery champion without upper limbs, bagged two gold medals in a stunning performance in the Asian Para Games in women's in individual compound and mixed doubles, and a silver in the women's doubles compound event.

In table tennis, after winning a silver in class 4 event in Tokyo, Bhavinaben Patel will hope to better the colour of the medal. The wheelchair-bound player is competing in women's singles S4 and women's doubles D10 events.

Antil and shot putter Bhagyashri Jadhav, who won a silver in the F34 event in Asian Para Games, will be the joint flag bearers at Wednesday's Opening Ceremony to be held outside a stadium for the first time in the history of Paralympic Games. (PTI)

Taarini Suri clinches double badminton crowns

MUMBAI, Aug 27: Taarini Suri from Mumbai clinched girls' doubles and mixed doubles' titles in the Kotak India Junior U-19 International Badminton tournament, held in Hyderabad.

The tournament was held at the Gopichand Badminton Academy in Hyderabad.

The 17-year-old Taarini, who trains at the Cricket Club of India under Hufirish Nariman, teamed up with Shrivani Walekar to beat the Indonesian combination of Keyla Putri and Micha Wardoyo 21-10, 21-15 in the girls' doubles final.

Taarini and Bhavya Chhabra then produced an upset against the top seeded Attawut Sreepaw and Pannawee Polyiam of Thailand 21-13, 19-21, 21-14 in the mixed doubles final.

Taarini and the Nashik-based Shrivani have been playing together since their U-13 days but it was only earlier this year that they decided to focus only on doubles.

In the semifinal, Taarini and Shrivani had beaten the Thailand pair of Kodchapon Chaichana and Pannawee Polyiam.

Chhabra trains at the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati, Assam, and has also kept her focus on doubles. (PTI)

Mandhana to play for reigning WBBL champions Adelaide Strikers

ADELAIDE, Aug 27: Adelaide Strikers have finally secured the services of Indian star Smriti Mandhana for the Women's Big Bash League after chasing her for years.

The Indian opener has previously played for three WBBL teams -- Brisbane Heat, Sydney Thunder and Hobart Hurricanes. She joined the reigning champions Strikers ahead of the draft on Sunday under the league's new overseas player pre-season signing provision.

However, Mandhana might not be available for the start of the league with India scheduled to host New Zealand for three ODIs in late October. The WBBL begins on October 27.

India are also scheduled to play three ODIs against Australia right after the WBBL final on December 1.

"Excited is an understatement," Strikers captain Tahlia McGrath told cricket.com.au.

"We've been trying to get her for a few years now, in constant comms (with her) and her batting is just unbelievable.

"She's a very elegant batter and has the ability to take away games from opposition very quickly."

Club icon Megan Schutt also shared similar sentiments on Mandhana's signing.

"Countless hours hounding her has helped," Schutt said when asked about the effort that went into convincing Mandhana.

"I did see her over at The Brave in The Hundred (this month) and really rekindled that friendship. I played with her at RCB, Tahlia's played with her a bunch, and she loves Luke's coaching style.

"She's committed, which is great ... and having a leftie up top is going to be huge for us. Her flair, the areas and pockets she hits in the ground, I think she plays really well in Australian conditions, her knowledge of the game, she's one of the leaders in India. She's a complete package for us," said Schutt. (PTI)

India to face West Indies, South Africa in Women's T20 World Cup warm-up matches

DUBAI, Aug 27: India will take on West Indies and South Africa in their two Women's T20 World Cup warm-up fixtures in Dubai, the International Cricket Council announced on Tuesday.

India will take on West Indies on September 29 while Harmanpreet Kaur and Co. are slated to play South Africa on October 1.

All 10 teams that have qualified for the Women's T20 World Cup will participate in the practice games, with every side playing two warm-up games each.

The warm-up fixtures will start on September 28 with Pakistan taking on Scotland and Sri Lanka facing Bangladesh.

Defending champion Australia will face arch-rival England on September 29, followed by West Indies on October 1 in Dubai. The warm-up fixtures will be 20 overs per side and will not have international T20 status, allowing teams to field all members of their 15-player squad.

No two sides who belong to the same group will take on each other in the warm-up round.

India has been clubbed in group A



alongside Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka while group B comprises England, South Africa, West Indies, Scotland and Bangladesh.

The competition, starting October 3, was moved to the UAE by the ICC following the ongoing political unrest in Bangladesh, the original host.

Warm-up fixtures:

September 28: Pakistan v Scotland (Sevens, Dubai)

September 28: Sri Lanka v Bangladesh (ICCA1, Dubai)

September 29: New Zealand v South Africa (Sevens, Dubai)

September 29: India v West Indies (ICCA2, Dubai)

September 29: Australia v England (ICCA1, Dubai) (PTI)

September 30: Sri Lanka v Scotland (Sevens, Dubai)

September 30: Bangladesh v Pakistan (ICCA2, Dubai)

October 1: West Indies v Australia (Sevens, Dubai)

October 1: England v New Zealand (ICCA2, Dubai)

October 1: South Africa v India (ICCA1, Dubai) (PTI)

Grand Chess tour: Gukesh holds Caruana; Firouzja consolidates lead

SAINT LOUIS (USA), Aug 27: Grandmaster D Gukesh played out a hard-fought draw yet again, signing peace with top seed and local favourite Fabiano Caruana, while Frenchman Alireza Firouzja stretched his lead by a full point after the seventh round of Sinquefeld Cup, which is a part of the Grand Chess Tour.

The other Indian in fray, R Praggnanandhaa, drew his seventh game on the trot to remain on a fifty per cent score. Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia was happy with a quick draw as Praggnanandhaa decided to save his energy.

With just two rounds to come, Firouzja, who put it across world champion Ding

Liren of China, has five points in his kitty and Caruana continues to trail him a full point behind.

As many as five players -- Wesley So of United States, Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France, Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa -- share the third spot on 3.5 points each. A half point behind are Liren and Nepomniachtchi while Dutchman Anish Giri is still at the bottom of the table on 2.5 points.

Besides Firouzja's victory, Abdusattorov halted So's party with a clinical performance. In the other game of the day, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave drew with Giri.

Gukesh continued with his uncompro-

missing play but found Caruana adequately prepared in an Italian opening game.

The Indian was much worse in the ensuing endgame but Caruana missed out on his 39th turn when he could have gotten a real advantage. Exchanges at regular intervals thereafter ensured the draw for the Indian.

Praggnanandhaa got nothing as white against Nepomniachtchi's Petroff defense and the Chennai-based player had to be content with repetition of moves very early in the middle game. The game lasted a mere 19 moves.

The day belonged to Firouzja, who came up with fine resources in a complicated middle game against Liren. (PTI)

Hopefully, we will break final barrier in T20 WC: Harmanpreet



NEW DELHI, Aug 27: Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur remained optimistic that India can grab their maiden global title in the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup, and said conditions in the UAE could work to their advantage.

The International Cricket Council has recently shifted the showpiece, to be held between October 3 and 20, to Bangladesh owing to the political unrest in that nation.

"Whenever we play on this kind of stage (World Cup), we always want to do well. We have always done well in the past as well, and hopefully, this time we will break that final barrier and go all the way," Harmanpreet told PTI videos.

Harmanpreet was on Tuesday appointed as the captain of the Indian team for the T20 World Cup.

The 35-year-old did not read too much into the venue shift, and said the conditions in the UAE are quite similar to India.

"We have not played much cricket in the UAE. But the conditions in the UAE are going to be similar to Indian conditions.

"We will see how the conditions play out (there) and try to adjust ourselves to the condi-

tions as soon as possible," said Harmanpreet, who led India to the final of the 2020 T20 World Cup.

Irrespective of the playing conditions, she wanted the team to dish out a "positive" game in the World Cup.

"As a team, we learn from our defeats and break those barriers that are pushing us back. Hopefully this time we can express ourselves in a more positive way in the World Cup," she said.

Harmanpreet also backed the Indian bowlers, who flourished in the recent Asia Cup final against Sri Lanka, to deliver in the World Cup.

"The bowlers are working really hard as a team and, hopefully, in this World Cup we tick all the boxes."

Harmanpreet, who led Mumbai Indians to WPL victory last year, said the key to winning the World Cup will be to keep themselves in the present.

"It is always important for us to play good cricket, keeping ourselves in the present. Whatever the situation is in front of us... we go there and evaluate (it) as soon as possible," she signed off. (PTI)