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How dare you threaten Assam: Assam CM on Bengal counterpart's 'provocative' speech

Himanta fires 'failure' salvo at Mamata Banerjee

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 28: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma hit out at West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday for allegedly threatening the northeastern state with unrest.

Sarma claimed that Banerjee was trying to provoke the public to hide her own failures.

The development follows a viral video of her addressing a gathering on the foundation day of her party's student wing, Trinamool Chhatra Parishad, where the West Bengal chief minister can be seen making a provocative speech.

"Didi, how dare you threaten Assam? Don't show your anger to us. Don't even try to incite India with your politics of failure. It does



not suit you to speak divisive language," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

In the clip, Banerjee is seen stressing that though Bangladesh and her state share the same lan-

guage and culture, both are two different countries with West Bengal being part of India.

Alleging that Modi's party is trying to fuel the situation in West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress

supremo said, "If Bengal is set on fire, Assam, northeast, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Delhi will also be affected."

Earlier, Union minister of State Sukanta Majumdar condemned Banerjee's remarks as unprecedented and threatening and shot off a letter to Union home minister Amit Shah stating that Banerjee "no longer deserves to hold such an important position".

"It is unthinkable and unprecedented for a chief minister, who is constitutionally bound to rise above partisan attitudes, to make such intimidating statements that pose a threat to democracy," Majumdar told reporters. Majumdar argued that Banerjee's comments could (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jamaat-e-Islami supremo denies involvement in anti-Hindu attacks in Bangladesh

DHAKA, Aug 28: Jamaat-e-Islami supremo Shafiqur Rahman has said that his party was not involved in attacks on the Hindu community in Bangladesh and attributed the negative portrayal of the party to a "malicious" media campaign.

He also refuted allegations that the party was involved in anti-India activities in Bangladesh and asked India to provide proof if any.

Replying to a query on allegations of attack on Hindus in Bangladesh by Jamaat activists, Rahman refuted the allegations as "baseless".

The minority Hindu population has faced vandalism of their business and properties and devastation of Hindu temples in the students' violence that ensued for days following the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India on August 5.

"We don't believe in the concept



of minority and majority, we believe in unity. We don't consider Hindus as minorities, they are our brothers and friends in Bangladesh. We are with our Hindu brothers and we will stand by them," Rahman said.

Refuting allegations of attack on Hindu properties by the Jamaat cadres, Rahman said:

"The activists and workers of Jamaat guarded the temples and houses of Hindus after August 5 so that no untoward incident takes place."

These are baseless allegations. The Jamaat activists and leaders have been doing everything to secure the Hindu community, he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC signs pact with WWF for forest conservation



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Aug 28: Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and WWF-India signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) on Wednesday aimed at developing and implementing strategy for conservation of forest and wildlife conservation in Karbi Anglong, Assam.

The signing of the MoA took place between chief executive member (CEM), KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang and Dipankar Ghose,

senior director, Biodiversity, WWF India at the conference hall of Old KAAC secretariat.

The agreement marks a commitment to collaborative conservation initiatives that respect and empower local communities in protecting their natural resources.

Speaking on the occasion, CEM, Tuliram Ronghang stated "This is an important day for us, where we are looking forward to ensure future sustainability for our people and nature." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KOLKATA RAPE-MURDER CASE

'Enough is enough': President Murmu asks nation to wake up, end crimes against women

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: Declaring that "enough is enough", President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said it is time for India to wake up to the "perversion" of crimes against women and counter the mindset that sees women as "less powerful, less capable, less intelligent".

"Those who share such views then go further and see the female as an object... We owe it to our daughters to remove the hurdles from their path of winning the freedom from fear," Murmu said in an exclusive signed article for PTI.

Referring to the August 9 rape and murder of a junior doctor in a Kolkata hospital, a "dismayed and horrified" president said what is even more depressing is that it is part of a series of crimes against women.

Murmu said no civilised society can allow daughters and sisters to be subjected to such atrocities.



"The nation is bound to be outraged, and so am I," she wrote.

The hard-hitting and personalised article, titled "Women's Safety: Enough is Enough", is the first time the president has articulated her views on the August 9 Kolkata incident that has once again shaken the conscience of the nation and led to widespread, continuing protests.

The president gave the article after a detailed conversation on topical issues with a team of PTI senior editors, who called on her at Rashtrapati Bhavan to mark the 77th anniversary of the news agency's founding on August 27, 1947.

"Even as students, doctors and citizens were protesting in Kolkata, criminals remained on the prowl elsewhere. The victims include even kindergarten girls," Murmu said.

During the interaction, she recalled her recent meeting with a group of schoolchildren on Raksha Bandhan. "They asked me innocently if they could be assured that there would be no recurrence of the Nirbhaya-type incident in future," the president said, referring to the brutal rape and murder of a physiotherapy intern in Delhi in December 2012. She noted that an outraged (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

No decision yet on executing UCC, says Himanta

GUWAHATI, Aug 28: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said the state government has not yet decided on implementing a comprehensive Uniform Civil Code (UCC), as its focus is not aimed at targeting any particular religion but to address child marriage and promote women's empowerment.

Sarma's latest remarks contradict his earlier position, when he had indicated that Assam would follow Uttarakhand and Gujarat in introducing a UCC Bill, with exemptions for tribal communities.

UCC implies that all sections of society, irrespective of their religion, shall be treated equally according to a national civil code, which shall be applicable to all uniformly, covering areas like marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, adoption and succession of the property.

Addressing a press conference, Sarma clarified, "The gov-

ernment of Assam has not decided on implementing a comprehensive UCC. Our focus is on stopping child marriage and ensuring women's empowerment."

He mentioned that the recently tabled 'The Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Bill, 2024' is a step towards these objectives.

"This Bill mandates the compulsory registration of all marriages, which must be done by a sub-registrar rather than a 'kazi'. This is part of our effort, along with banning polygamy," Sarma explained.

He said the government is awaiting judicial comments on Uttarakhand's UCC and is closely monitoring developments. "Our approach is different. We are not targeting any religion," he asserted.

Sarma added that the government plans to introduce a Bill addressing polygamy, aimed at regulating (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Khandu hails Union cabinet's NE power sector aid

ITANAGAR, Aug 28: Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday praised the Union Cabinet for approving equity support of Rs 4,136 crore to the northeast states for developing hydropower projects, totalling 15,000 MW capacity over the next eight years.

The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Power for providing central financial assistance (CFA) to the state governments of NER (North East Region) towards their equity participation in the development of hydroelectric projects through Joint Venture (JV) collaboration between state entities and Central Public Sector Undertakings. "I am so glad (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HERITAGE SHOWCASE



Garo tribal boys and girls perform their traditional Wangala dance during the 108th death anniversary commemoration of PA Sonaram R Sangma, at Bakrapur village, Dudhnoi in Goalpara on Wednesday. (UB Photos)

Manish Tewari criticises govt for avoiding China border debate in parl

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: Senior Congress leader Manish Tewari has slammed the Modi government for its alleged "diffidence and opacity" in not deliberating in Parliament the border standoff with China and stressed the need to have a larger discussion on India's overall relationship with Beijing.

Tewari also alleged that ministries such as defence and external affairs, which are critical to the functioning of the Indian state, are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Ruining that critical issues of national importance are not discussed in Parliament, Tewari cited the instance of Parliament holding a discussion on India-China border war of 1962 while the conflict was on and also in 1971, then prime minister Indira Gandhi fully briefing Parliament to the extent that she could.

"This approach of opacity, of trying to pretend that everything is alright...I don't think it helps the country," said Tewari, who has been demanding a full-fledged discussion on China in Parliament across several sessions.

Amid calls for India to play a greater role in ending



the Ukraine-Russia conflict and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy proposing India among a handful of Global South countries for hosting the second Ukraine peace summit, the Congress leader also said he doesn't think much is going to really come out of any individual initiative however well-intentioned any country might take. The fact is the settlement of the Russia-Ukraine question (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP workers clash with police while trying to enforce West Bengal shutdown

KOLKATA, Aug 28: BJP workers clashed with the police at several places across West Bengal on Wednesday as they tried to enforce a 12-hour shutdown, which had a mixed impact in the state.

Several BJP leaders, including former MPs Roopa Ganguly and Locket Chatterjee, Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya and MLA Agnimitra Paul, were detained for blocking roads since the morning.

The 'Bangla Bandh', which began at 6 am, was called by the BJP in protest against Tuesday's police action on participants of 'Nabanna Abhijan' or march to the secretariat, organised by the newly formed students' group Chhatra Samaj over the rape and murder of the doctor at RG Kar hospital.

The shutdown partially affected daily life in the state with many people choosing to remain indoors apprehending trouble on the roads.

In state capital Kolkata, the usual weekday flurry was missing with a smaller number of buses, auto-rickshaws and taxis plying. Private vehicles were also significantly less, even as markets and shops remained open.

Schools and colleges were open, though the number of students was fewer. Many English-

medium schools in Kolkata suspended classes.

In many private offices, attendance was low with employees asked to work from home. However, attendance was as usual in government offices.

Several BJP leaders were detained across the state for attempting to enforce the shutdown. Ganguly and Paul were detained from south Kolkata's Gariahat area when they were urging traders to down their shutters and requesting people to support the bandh.

Chatterjee was detained from Shyambazar when she was leading a demonstration, while Bhattacharya was detained from Wipro More in Salt Lake Sector 5.

Kolkata's Ward 50 councillor Sajal Ghosh was detained from his residence in Sealdah shortly after BJP workers scuffled with TMC supporters while trying to enforce the bandh in the nearby Koley Market.

His wife Tania Ghosh then took out a rally, alleging that police held him without any warrant.

Later, deputy commissioner (Central) Indira Mukherjee said Ghosh was arrested for making provocative comments. State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar, a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The multi-tracking proposal will ease operations and reduce congestion'

Cabinet nod to 2 new lines, multi-tracking project costing ₹ 6,456 cr

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved three railway projects with a total estimated cost of ₹ 6,456 crore, a statement from the Ministry of Railways said.

According to the ministry, the approved projects will improve logistical efficiency by connecting the unconnected areas, increase the existing line capacity and enhance the transportation networks, resulting in streamlined supply chains and accelerated economic growth.

"The new line proposals will provide direct connectivity and improve mobility, providing enhanced efficiency and service reliability for the Indian Railways. The multi-tracking proposal will ease operations and reduce congestion, providing the much-



required infrastructural development on the busiest sections across the Indian Railways," the ministry said. "The projects are in line with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of a New India which will make

people of the region 'Atmanirbhar' by way of comprehensive development in the area which will enhance their employment/self-employment opportunities," it added.

According to the ministry, the proj-

ects are result of PM-Gati Shakti National Master Plan for multi-modal connectivity which have been possible through integrated planning and will provide seamless connectivity for movement of people, goods and services.

"The three projects covering seven districts in four states i.e., Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh will increase the existing network of Indian Railways by about 300 kms," the ministry said.

"With these projects, 14 new stations will be constructed, providing enhanced connectivity to two aspirational districts (Nuapada and East Singhbhum)," it added.

Highlighting the benefits of the new line projects, the ministry stated these will provide connectivity to approximately 1,300 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The move will transform the industrial landscape of the country

Cabinet nod for setting up 12 industrial cities to boost manufacturing

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved 12 new industrial cities in 10 states to boost domestic manufacturing with an estimated investment of ₹ 28,602 crore.

Spanning across 10 states and strategically planned along six major corridors, these projects represent a significant leap forward in India's quest to enhance its manufacturing capabilities and economic growth.

These industrial areas will be located in Khurpia in Uttarakhand, Rajpura-Patiala in Punjab, Dighi in Maharashtra, Palakkad in Kerala, Agra and Prayagraj in UP, Gaya in Bihar, Zaheerabad in Telangana, Orvakal and Koppurthy in AP, and Jodhpur-Pali in Rajasthan.

The Union Cabinet has approved 12 new project proposals under the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme (NICDP) with an estimated investment of Rs 28,602

crore, said Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw after the Cabinet meeting.

The move will transform the industrial landscape of the country, creating a robust network of industrial nodes and cities that will significantly boost economic growth and global competitiveness.

They will be developed as greenfield smart cities of global standards.

The approach ensures that the cities are equipped with advanced infrastructure that supports sustainable and efficient industrial operations.

NICDP is expected to generate significant employment opportunities, with an estimated 1 million direct jobs and up to 3 million indirect jobs being created through planned industrialisation.

These projects will create an investment potential of about ₹ 1.52 lakh crore. (PTI)



HDFC bank launches edtech platform for students pursuing overseas education at Global Fintech Fest

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 28: HDFC Bank, one of India's leading private sector banks, unveiled its new Edtech platform during the Global Fintech Fest 2024 in Mumbai. The platform is designed to simplify payment processes for students planning to study abroad by digitizing remittance flows, traditionally handled through offline methods.

The Edtech platform will facilitate seamless transactions by partnering with educational consultants and aggregators, enabling students to transfer funds directly to universities overseas. This initiative ensures compliance with Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines while offering the convenience of digital payments, reducing the chances of payment failures.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, over 1.3 million Indian students are expected to pursue education abroad. The education remittance market, currently valued at \$3.5 billion, accounts for 11% of the total Liberalised Remittance Services handled by Indian banks. With this growing market, HDFC Bank's partnership with education consultants and aggregators aims to tap into this potential, providing comprehensive financial solutions to students.

Jatinder Gupta, Business Head and Executive Vice President of Retail Trade and Forex at HDFC Bank, stated, "We are thrilled to introduce our Edtech platform, a payment solution that will streamline the process for students aspiring to study abroad. This initiative reflects our commitment to customer-centric innovation and adapting to evolving customer needs."

POCO enters tablet market with POCO pad 5G; sales begin on flipkart today



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 28: POCO, a brand known for its rapid growth in India's consumer tech market, has officially launched its first tablet, the POCO Pad 5G. The device is now available for purchase on Flipkart, with sales starting at 12 PM today. Priced at an attractive ₹ 19,999* for the 8GB+128GB variant, POCO aims to capture the attention of tech-savvy consumers with its signature blend of cutting-edge technology and value.

The POCO Pad 5G is built to deliver an immersive entertainment experience while maintaining portability. With a 2.5K resolution display and a 120Hz AdaptiveSync refresh rate, the tablet offers sharp visuals and

smooth performance. Additionally, the inclusion of Dolby Vision® and Dolby Atmos® ensures that users enjoy high-quality audio and video, making it a versatile device for entertainment, productivity, and creativity.

Under the hood, the tablet is powered by the Snapdragon® 7s Gen 2 chipset, and it comes with a robust 10,000 mAh battery that supports 33W fast charging. To enhance productivity, the POCO Pad 5G is bundled with the POCO Smart Pen, POCO Keyboard, and a back case. The device will also receive 2 years of Android updates and 3 years of security updates, ensuring long-term usability.

Available in two color options, Pistachio Green and Cobalt Blue, the POCO Pad 5G offers a range of purchasing incentives. Customers using SBI, HDFC, and ICICI bank cards can avail themselves of an ₹ 3000 discount, and students get an additional ₹ 1000 off on the first day, making the device even more accessible.

Moreover, the first 1,500 buyers will receive a free 1-year Times Prime membership, and all customers are eligible for a free 6-month subscription to MS Office 365, which can be added to their purchase for just ₹ 1. No-cost EMI options are available for 3 and 6 months through leading banks, making the POCO Pad 5G an even more compelling option for those seeking a versatile, affordable tablet.

ICICI prudential life insurance surpasses ₹3 lakh crore in assets under management

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI Aug 28: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Ltd. has crossed a significant milestone, with its Assets Under Management (AUM) surpassing ₹3 lakh crore. As of July 31, 2024, the company's AUM stood at ₹3.14 lakh crore, underscoring its strong market presence and customer trust.

Commenting on this achievement, Anup Bagchi, Managing Director & CEO of ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, expressed his delight, stating, "Crossing the ₹3 lakh crore mark in AUM is a testament to our customers' preference for our products and their trust in us to help them achieve their long-term financial goals." He attributed this growth to the company's commitment to simplifying products and processes, which has resonated

with customers.

Bagchi emphasized the company's role as trustees and custodians of customers' savings, highlighting their stringent investment philosophy and robust risk management framework. Notably, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has maintained a clean slate with no Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) since its inception, navigating various market cycles with diligence.

He further stated, "Life insurance addresses essential societal needs, such as financial security, wealth creation, and retirement income. Our products and processes are designed to meet these needs effectively." The company has leveraged technology to simplify insurance processes, develop innovative products, and deliver personalized solutions to customers.

Gold prices remain steady, silver declines ₹ 400

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: Gold prices remained flat at ₹ 74,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday in scattered deals even as it weakened in the overseas markets. Silver prices, however, declined ₹ 400 to ₹ 87,800 per kilogram. It had ended at ₹ 88,200 per kg in the previous session on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity also ruled flat at ₹ 74,000 per 10 grams. Traders attributed the fall in silver price due to poor offtake by industrial units and global influences.

In the international markets, comex gold is trading at USD 2,542.20 per ounce, down USD 10.70 per ounce or 0.42 per cent.

"Gold prices were slightly lower during European trading hours on Wednesday, due to a rebound in the US dollar," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

According to Kaynat Chainwala, AVP-Commodity Research, Kotak Securities, comex gold is trading above USD 2,500 per ounce, supported by the FOMC meeting minutes, which reinforced expectations of a September rate cut. Rising geopolitical tensions, particularly the escalating Israel-Hezbollah conflict, also bolstered gold prices as a safe-haven asset, Chainwala said. Silver was also quoting lower at USD 29.93 per ounce in the global markets. In the previous week, Fed Chair Jerome Powell in his comments in Jackson Hole Symposium also signalled a rate cut in the next meeting, supporting bullion prices. (PTI)

'PMJDY is not only a scheme, but a transformation movement'

PMJDY integrates poor into economic mainstream: FM

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), the largest financial inclusion initiative in the world, integrates the poor into the economic mainstream and plays a crucial role in the development of marginalised communities, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Wednesday.

PMJDY, the national mission for financial inclusion, which completed a decade of successful implementation continuously endeavours to provide support to the marginalised and economically backward sections through its financial inclusion interventions.

In her message on the 10th anniversary of PMJDY, Sitharaman said, "universal and affordable access to formal banking services is essential for achieving financial inclusion and empowerment. It integrates the poor into the economic mainstream and plays a crucial role in the development of marginalised communities."

By providing universal, affordable, and formal financial services including bank accounts, small savings schemes, insurance, and credit to the previously unbanked, PM Jan Dhan Yojana has transformed the banking and financial landscape of the country over the last decade, she said.

The success of the initiative is reflected in 53 crore people having been brought into the formal banking system through the opening of Jan Dhan Accounts, she said, adding, these bank accounts have



garnered a deposit balance of ₹ 2.3 lakh crore, and resulted in the issuance of over 36 crore free-of-cost RuPay cards, which also provide for a ₹ 2 lakh accident insurance cover. Notably, there are no account opening fees or maintenance charges and no requirement to maintain a minimum balance, she added.

The Jan Dhan Yojana, which was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day address in 2014, was launched on August 28 of the same year.

The Finance Minister further said it is heartening to note that 67 per cent of the accounts have been opened in rural or semi-urban areas, and 55 per cent of accounts have been opened by women.

"The consent-based pipeline created through the linking of Jan Dhan-Mobile-Aadhaar has been one of the most important pillars of the financial inclusion ecosystem. It has enabled swift, seamless and

transparent transfer of government welfare schemes to eligible beneficiaries and promoted digital payments," she said.

In his message on the occasion, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary, said, "PMJDY is not only a scheme, but a transformation movement that has enabled financial independence of many of the unbanked population and has instilled a sense of financial security.

The journey of PMJDY-led interventions undertaken over the last decade has in effect, produced both transformational as well as directional change thereby making the banks and financial institution ecosystem capable of delivering financial services to the last person of the society-the poorest of the poor, he said.

The PMJDY accounts have not only been instrumental in receiving Direct Benefit Transfers but also serve as a platform for hassle-free

subsidies/payments made by government to the intended beneficiary without any middlemen, seamless transactions, and savings accumulation, the finance ministry said in a statement.

Moreover, it said, they have been crucial in providing life and accident insurance to millions of unorganised sector workers through Jan Suraksha schemes (micro insurance schemes).

Under the scheme, the number of bank accounts grew nearly fourfold from 14.72 crore in March 2015, to 53.13 crore as on August 14, 2024. Total deposits under PMJDY have swollen from ₹ 15,670 crore as of March 2015, to over ₹ 2.31 lakh crore as of August 2024.

Average deposit per account is ₹ 4,352 as on August 14, 2024. Average deposit per account has increased 4 times over August 15. Increase in average deposit is another indication of increased usage of accounts and inculcation of saving habits among account holders.

Over the past decade, PMJDY has played a pivotal role in bringing millions of unbanked individuals, particularly women, into the formal financial system, Women's World Banking Regional Head (South Asia) Kalpana Ajayan said.

The impact of the scheme is evident in the increased financial participation of women, who now have the opportunity to save, invest, and secure their financial futures. Ajayan said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1..

Himanta fires 'failure' salvo

incite TMC supporters to take the law into their own hands and attack opposition members, thereby stifling democratic dissent. He also criticised Banerjee's statement suggesting that if Bengal were to be engulfed in flames, neighboring states such as Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam, and even distant Delhi would also be affected.

Majumdar described this as contrary to the federal spirit of the republic. "It is unthinkable for an elected Chief Minister to make such a comment. How can she say such things?" he questioned.

Majumdar expressed hope that Banerjee was not alluding to any extremist groups with her remarks. He also criticised her comments about the agitation by R G Kar doctors, viewing them as intimidation and indicative of her fear that the spontaneous protest against the rape-murder of a woman doctor would not cease at her command. "The honourable court has already upheld the democratic rights of junior doctors. The Chief Minister cannot coerce them into silence until justice is served," Majumdar added.

Majumdar wrote a letter to Union home minister Amit Shah, condemning Banerjee's reported comments as a "blatant endorsement of revenge politics from the highest office in the state."

In the letter, Majumdar accused Banerjee of making anti-national remarks by suggesting that if Bengal were to burn, other states would also be affected. "This isn't the voice of someone holding a constitutional position. It's the voice of an anti-national," Majumdar stated in his letter, asserting that Banerjee "no longer deserves to hold such an important position" and calling for her immediate resignation. (With inputs from PTI)

Jamaat-e-Islami supremo denies

"In the last 16 years you cannot show a single instance where Jamaat has captured or looted Hindu property, it is Awami League leaders who have done it and have blamed it on us. Jamaat believes that as citizens of Bangladesh, members of all the communities have equal rights in this country. Our Constitution guarantees it," he said. "We have never tortured our Hindu brothers. They are our brothers and friends. The Hindus and other minority groups too are citizens of this country. Those who are spreading those allegations, let them prove any single one of them," he said. (PTI)

No decision yet on executing UCC,

inter-religion marriages. "Some refer to these as 'love jihad,' but the appropriate term is the regulation of inter-religion marriages. This will apply to both Muslim grooms with Hindu brides and vice versa," he said.

In addition to these Bills, the government is pursuing other items aligned with its election manifesto, such as preserving iconic heritage structures, prohibiting land transfers beyond one's community, and linking government jobs to domicile policies.

"Also, we are bringing out a white paper on circle-level or polling booth-level change in demography. It will show how where Hindus are in majority, Muslim population is increasing and communal harmony is maintained. But the reverse situation is happening in other parts, where Muslims are in majority," the CM said.. (PTI)

KAAC signs pact with WWF for

"The partnership with WWF-India is a crucial step towards developing an inclusive strategy for conservation of forests and wildlife that we will endeavour to implement jointly with WWF-India and other agencies and organisations," he added. The Principal Secretary, KAAC, Mukul Kumar Saikia, IAS said, "The KAAC is excited to get into this formal collaboration with WWF-India for securing the natural heritage within the jurisdiction of the Council." "We look forward to strengthening our partnership with WWF-India through establishment of a participatory approach to conserve wildlife and their habitats," he continued.

Dipankar Ghose, senior director, Biodiversity Conservation, WWF-India said "This formal approval from the highest decision-making authority at the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council for our efforts to conserve the rich biodiversity of Karbi Anglong is inspiring."

He further said, "WWF-India has been working in this region for more than two decades and this formal agreement will strengthen our collaboration for promoting a community based conservation approach. We are committed to supporting the KAAC and the local communities to secure their forests and wildlife."

WWF-India has been actively engaged for inclusive conservation efforts in Karbi Anglong since 2004, working to promote sustainable development and environmental protection.

The MoA outlines a framework for joint initiatives between KAAC and WWF-India, focusing on several key areas like community-based conservation. The approach will empower local communities to manage and protect their natural resources effectively and sustainably. Ecological security, where both parties will work together to ensure the long-term ecological security of the region, addressing climate change impacts, protection of threatened species and the conservation of water catchments.

Sustainable livelihoods that aim to support sustainable livelihood initiatives aligning with the cultural heritage of local communities. It also includes provisions for securing wildlife corridors that connect Kaziranga National Park with the forests of Karbi Anglong, facilitating the movement of wildlife and preserving habitats and a capacity building by WWF - India will assist KAAC in the establishment of Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) and provide technical support for the implementation of conservation strategies.

The signing of the MoA and the introduction of policy guidelines for recognising CCAs signify a progressive step towards inclusive conservation in Karbi Anglong, recognising the vital role of local communities in safeguarding their natural heritage. Both WWF - India and KAAC are committed to maintaining transparency and collaboration throughout the implementation of these initiatives, fostering a sustainable future for the region's rich biodiversity. MP Amarsing Tisso executive members EMS, KAAC, member of Autonomous Council (MAC) and principal secretary, KAAC, Mukul Kumar Saikia were present at the meeting from KAAC side.

WWF-India was represented by Dr Dipankar Ghose, Sr director, Biodiversity, WWF India, and Dr PJ Bora, Representative of WWF. Dr Vijay Gupta, IFS, additional principal chief conservation, Karbi Anglong and DFOs were also present.

'Enough is enough': President Murmu

nation then made plans and devised strategies, and the initiatives did make some difference. In the 12 years since, there have been countless tragedies of similar nature though only few drew nationwide attention, Murmu said. "Did we learn our lessons? As social protests petered out, these incidents got buried into a deep and inaccessible recess of social memory, to be recalled only when another heinous crime takes place," she said.

Taking a macro view of the rights of women, she said they have had to fight for every inch of ground they have won. Social prejudices as well as some customs and practices have always opposed the expansion of women's rights, Murmu added. "This is a rather deplorable mindset... This mindset sees the female as a lesser human being, less powerful, less capable, less intelligent," she wrote.

In her view, it is the objectification of women by a few that is behind the crimes against women.

"It is ingrained deeply in the minds of such people," the president said, stressing that countering this mindset is a task for both the State and society. Acknowledging that there have been laws and social campaigns, she said, "Yet, there is something that continues to come in the way and to torment us."

History, the president said, "often hurts" and societies scared to face history resort to "collective amnesia" to bury their heads in the sand like the proverbial ostrich. (PTI)

Khandu hails Union cabinet's NE

to learn that the Union Cabinet has approved an initiative to boost hydroelectric power development in the North Eastern Region (NER). With a Central Financial Assistance (CFA) of ₹ 4,136 crore allocated from FY 2024-25 to FY 2031-32, this scheme will support the development of hydro projects with a cumulative capacity of around 15,000 MW. We are grateful to Hon PM Shri @narendramodi ji for his continued focus to push growth in the region," Khandu posted in X. He said the initiative would be instrumental in transforming the hydroelectric topography of Arunachal Pradesh and the broader NER.

The grant towards equity portion of the state government of the region would be capped at 24 per cent of the total project equity subject to a maximum of ₹ 750 crore per project. The cap of ₹ 750 crore for each project would be revisited, if required, on a case-to-case basis. The ratio of equity of the CPSU and the state government in the joint venture would be maintained at the time of disbursing of the grant. (PTI)

Manish Tewari criticises govt for

is going to be a part of the overall settlement about the future security architecture of Europe, the former Union minister told PTI. Talking about his repeated demand in Parliament of discussing the China issue, Tewari said don't understand this "diffidence" of not discussing the standoff with China on the Line of Actual Control. "It is extremely sad and unfortunate that critical issues of national importance are not discussed in Parliament. I don't recall the last time Parliament had a discussion on the demands for grants of either the Ministry of Defence or the Ministry of External Affairs or the Ministry of Home Affairs...there may have been an odd instance here or there but ministries which are critical to the functioning of the Indian state are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny," the Lok Sabha MP from Chandigarh said. (PTI)

BJP workers clash with police while

Union minister, led a procession at Baguihati in the northern fringes of the city but had an altercation with the police who tried to stop him. Former MP Debasree Choudhury and hundreds of party workers accompanied him. Following the demonstration, Majumdar went to central Kolkata and blocked the CR Avenue outside the state BJP headquarters along with his supporters. He had heated arguments with senior police officers who swung into action to clear the arterial road. At Alipurdar, BJP MP Manoj Tigga was arrested for allegedly enforcing the bandh. An official of the Eastern Railway said bandh supporters blocked tracks at 49 places under its jurisdiction in the state. While the blockades were lifted at most places, it was continuing in nine stations, mostly in the Sealdah South section, he said.

BJP workers demonstrated at the Bongaon station in North 24 Parganas, Gocharan station in South 24 Parganas, and the Murshidabad station in support of the bandh. Tension was palpable at the Barrackpore station in North 24 Parganas as BJP supporters and TMC workers came face to face.

At Bhatpara in North 24 Parganas district, BJP alleged that two of its workers were shot at.

Police, however, claimed that the two men were beaten up by some people outside Anglo India Jute Mill. The injured persons were initially taken to the Bhatpara State General Hospital, but were later shifted to a hospital in Kolkata for better treatment, they said. (PTI)

Cabinet nod to 2 new lines,

villages and about 11 lakh population. "Multi-tracking project will enhance connectivity to approximately 1,300 villages and about 19 lakh population," it said. The ministry also emphasised the benefits to the freight traffic as these are essential routes for transportation of commodities such as agriculture products, fertiliser, coal, iron ore, steel, cement and limestone etc. "The capacity augmentation works will result in additional freight traffic of magnitude 45 MTPA (Million Tonnes Per Annum)," the ministry said.

"The Railways being environment friendly and energy efficient mode of transportation will help both in achieving climate goals and minimising logistics cost of the country, reduce oil import (10 crore litres) and lower CO2 emissions (240 crore kg) which is equivalent to plantation of 9.7 crore trees," it added. (PTI)

Beer Lachit Sena disrupts fish sales by Miya fishermen in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 28: Amid threats from the Nagaon District Fishermen's Association to stop supplying fish to Upper Assam, the Beer Lachit Sena took a strong stand against Miya Muslim fishermen on Wednesday in Nagaon.

Members of the Beer Lachit Sena launched an operation in Nagaon's fish markets, particularly in the Barbazar Fish Market, to prevent fishermen from Juruya, Rupahi, and other areas from selling their fish. The organisation also halted fish-laden vehicles from entering Nagaon town and sent them back.

The drive was reportedly carried out peacefully, with no untoward

incidents. The organisation urged the fishermen of Barbazar not to buy fish from Miya Muslim fishermen, and the local fishermen agreed to cooperate with the Beer Lachit Sena on this matter.

Meanwhile, the Nagaon police have tightened security in the local markets and have arrested two leaders of the organisation: Nagaon district Bitupan Saikia and member Darpan Borah. The Beer Lachit Sena strongly condemned the arrest of its leaders.

Rupjyoti Saikia, district president of the organisation, told local media, "Even if we are arrested and sent to jail, our struggle will continue." He stated that if the Nagaon District Fishermen's Association

does not apologise to the people of Upper Assam and to Beer Lachit Sena, they will be barred from selling fish in the market. The organisation also warned that only indigenous fish farmers will be allowed to sell fish in the market.

The drive by the Beer Lachit Sena has severely impacted the fish trade in the district. It is pertinent to mention that the Nagaon District Fishermen's Association had previously threatened to stop supplying fish to Upper Assam.

In a related development, Nagaon police have detained Jahurul Islam, secretary of the Nagaon District Fishermen's Association, for questioning.

Demow Block Congress protests against smart metre tariffs

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Aug 28: Following instructions from the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, the Demow Block Congress Committee, in association with the Block Mahila and Yuba Congress, staged a protest against the excessive increase in electricity tariffs after the installation of smart metres by the Power Department, which has caused significant harassment to the general public.

The protesters, carrying banners and posters, marched from the Block Congress Office to the Demow Electrical Sub-Division Office of the APDCL on Wednesday, chanting slogans.

Upon reaching the Demow Electrical Sub-Division Office of the APDCL, the main gate was found locked. After a few minutes, the gate was opened, and the protesters entered the premises, leading to a confrontation with the police. During the protest, the Demow circle officer, deputy manager of APDCL, and other officials of the Demow Electrical Sub-Division Office of the APDCL were present. The public raised various queries regarding the smart metres with the officials.

Ajay Kumar Gogoi, general secretary of Assam Pradesh Congress, alleged that the public is being looted in the name of smart metres, which must be stopped. He claimed that before the installation of smart metres, a consumer's electricity bill was ₹ 500, but after installation, the bill has surged to ₹ 1800.

"Our Government is working tirelessly to ensure clean potable water and hygienic living conditions for every citizen of Kokrajhar," stated BTC chief Pramod Boro. He stressed that the effective execution of the Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin is crucial for the overall betterment of society. Boro further underscored the pivotal role of a people-centric government in delivering these vital services. BTC chief Pramod Boro also urged EM Dr Nilut Swargiary to ensure regular monitoring of the activities within the BTR to maintain progress and address any issues promptly.

Speaking on the occasion, EM Dr Swargiary called for enhanced coordination and efficiency in the implementation of these missions, urging all stakeholders to prioritise the needs of the community and ensure that resources are utilised effectively.

BTC chief Pramod Boro reviews water and sanitation projects



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 28: BTC chief Pramod Boro conducted a comprehensive review of the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department's activities in Kokrajhar district, focusing on the implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and the Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin (SBM-G). The review meeting took place on Wednesday at the BTC Secretariat, Kokrajhar. BTC executive member for PHE Dr Nilut Swargiary and senior officials of the Department were present at the meeting.

During the review, BTC chief Pramod Boro highlighted the critical importance of providing clean and potable water to every citizen, as well as ensuring hygienic living conditions. He emphasised that the BTC government is committed to the timely implementation of these essential schemes to address the urgent needs of the community.

Senior journalist Ratul Deka dies in road accident

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Aug 28: The body of senior journalist Ratul Deka was found on the road in the Tenguri area of Morigaon town.

His body was discovered covered in blood. He was rushed to the Morigaon Civil Hospital, but doctors declared him dead.

After the news of Deka's death spread, a large number of leaders and activists from various political parties and organisations rushed to the Morigaon Civil Hospital.

The body of the young journalist was taken to the AASU office by a procession after the post-mortem. His body was also taken to Morigaon Sadar Bihutali.

The event was attended by district commissioner Debashis Sarma, additional district commissioner Dr Sangita

Barthakur, additional superintendent of police Samiran Baishya, Assam Sahitya Sabha Propaganda Sub-Committee executive president Ajit Sharma, mass advisor Bubamani Goswami, Rickshaw Drivers Association, Jagiroad Press Club, Moirabari Press Club, Marwari Youth Forum, Morigaon Sports Association, Writers' Conference, Gyanmanjuri Chakra, Youth Journalists Forum, Chambers of Commerce, Nath Yogi Sammelan, Alumni Association, ETV, the late Deka's family, Morigaon Sakha Sahitya Sabha, representatives of more than half a hundred political parties, and many others who paid their respects to the late Ratul Deka.

The body of the journalist was taken to his temporary residence at Tenguri and then to his birthplace, Jaluguti, where the Tiwa Sahitya Sabha Jaluguti

Branch, Jaluguti Anchalik Swamaj Sahitya Sabha, Jaluguti Mandal Congress Committee, Jaluguti New Star Club, BJP Minority Youth Morcha, Jaluguti Royal Club, Jaluguti Super Star Club, Jaluguti Anchalik College Management Committee, Jaluguti Gaon Pan-chayat, and Puja Samiti paid their last respects. The body was later taken to his birthplace, Cholarpar village, at Jaluguti for cremation.

He is survived by his wife, two children, and a large family.

Deka worked for several news agencies, including ETV Bharat and Ishan News.

The death of journalist Ratul Deka was mourned by Public Relations minister Pijush Hazarika, Morigaon MLA Ramakant Dewri, Laharighat MLA Dr Asif Mohammad, and MP Pradyut Bordoloi.

Fish boycott continues in Sivasagar amid prohibitory order

ATASU president criticises the prohibitory order as unnecessary, stressing that Sivasagar remains peaceful despite ongoing tensions

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Aug 28: Student and youth organisations in Sivasagar, excluding AASU, have called for a total boycott of fish from the Nagaon district following reports of Nagaon fish traders threatening to stop sending fish to Sivasagar. Partha Pratim Gogoi, secretary of Sivasagar District ATASU, stated on Wednesday that there will be no let-up in their agitation against suspected Bangladeshi residing in Upper Assam.

He mentioned that the people here are prepared to live without the formalin-dipped 'salani' fish (transported fish) from Nagaon, which he believes will be beneficial for their health.

Meanwhile, a prohibitory order under Section 163 BNSS, 2024, was issued by Sivasagar District Magistrate Aditya Vikram Yadav, IAS, on August 23 in response to a recent incident involving an attack on an adolescent girl and the subsequent public reactions.

The District Magistrate noted in



the order that there may be a threat to public peace and tranquillity, as well as the safety of tourists visiting the region's ancient monuments, based on reports from various sources.

The order prohibits gatherings of more than five persons in public places, the organisation of rallies or meetings, the collection of subscriptions in any form from individuals, business establishments,

or institutions, and the intimidation of anyone for such subscriptions. The order took immediate effect and will remain in place for 60 days or until further notice.

Basanta Gogoi, president of ATASU, told this correspondent on Wednesday that the prohibitory order was absolutely uncalled for, as the situation in Sivasagar has been and continues to be completely peaceful.

He expressed concern that the police administration's road march might send the wrong signal to people outside the district.

The administration's decision may have been influenced by ongoing agitation against suspected Bangladeshi nationals migrating to Upper Assam districts, including Sivasagar.

Over 30 organisations, including ATASU, TAYPA, Bir Lachit Sena, and Sangrami Sena Asom, have called for a total boycott of the suspected Bangladeshi nationals, who are believed to be gradually changing the demographic pattern of the state.

The district's Executive Magistrate has already issued 27 summonses to the leaders of these organisations as a pre-emptive measure against further public agitations over the issue.

These populations, previously concentrated mostly in Barak Valley, Nagaon, and the lower Assam districts, have recently infiltrated into the nooks and corners of the Upper Assam districts as well.

Residents struggle with non-functional JJM water supply



HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Aug 28: Since the completion of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) project three years ago in the Balukhad area under Ward No 6 of Margherita Municipal Board, Tinsukia, residents have unfortunately not received a single drop of water from the taps installed at their homes.

At the Jal Jeevan Mission project site, large bushes have grown, and the fencing has been removed by miscreants. Despite this, the contractors have not made time to inspect the area.

Arun Baruah, a local resident of Balukhad,

Margherita, said that in 2021, Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma laid the foundation stone for the Jal Jeevan Mission project in the Balukhad area. However, three years after completion by inexperienced contractors from nearby areas, water supply has still not been provided, forcing local residents to regularly buy water for their daily needs.

Arun Baruah expressed his disappointment, stating that it is very unfortunate that the ₹ 80 lakh Jal Jeevan Mission project has failed to provide water supply, despite the completion of boring, drilling, and the installation of pipes and taps. He warned that if the contractors do not take concrete steps to provide water within a few days, the residents of Balukhad will lodge an FIR against the corrupt contractors at Margherita Police Station and submit a written complaint to the Margherita sub-divisional officer (Civil), Tinsukia district commissioner, and sub-divisional officer of the Public Health Engineering Department, Digboi division.

This correspondent tried to contact the contractors and officials of the Jal Jeevan Mission, but was unable to reach anyone.

DDMA finalises proposals & reports in Haflong meeting

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 28: The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) held a crucial meeting with various line departments at the DC conference hall, Haflong, to finalise project proposals and disaster reports to be submitted by the respective departments.

The meeting was chaired by district commissioner Simanta Kumar Das, who emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts in disaster management.

During the meeting, DC Das requested Ricky B Phukan, DPO, DDMA, to read out the proposals to ensure transparency and clarity.

The meeting was attended by NCHAC secretary Prabath Pegu, ACS, additional district commissioner James Aind, ACS, and other officials from various departments.

NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati partners with ACCF

ht Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 28: NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the Assam Cancer Care Foundation (ACCF) to launch a comprehensive cancer care project in Kokrajhar district.

This initiative, valued at Rs 32.7 lakhs, is designed to address the growing cancer burden in Assam by providing last-mile outreach of preventive and diagnostic care to approximately 42,000 people across various villages.

The MoA signing ceremony, held on Tuesday, was led by Akhilesh Singh, head of project, NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati. The MoA was signed by Onkar Nath, AGM (HR), NTPC Bongaigaon, on behalf of NTPC Bongaigaon, and Dr Major General JP Prasad, CEO, Assam Cancer Care Foundation (ACCF), on behalf of the Assam Cancer Care Foundation.

The signing ceremony was attended by Dr Subrata Chanda, head of Cancer Care and Research, Assam Cancer Care Foundation, Dr Nirmal Singha, medical superintendent, Assam Cancer Care Foundation, Asutosh Biswas, GM (Operation), Deepayan Paul, CMO, NTPC Bongaigaon, Roshan Dungkung, DGM (HR), Madhurjya Singha Lahkar, senior



manager (HR-Corporate Communication), Aditya Thakuri, Executive (CSR), along with officials from the NTPC team.

The cancer care project, spearheaded by NTPC Bongaigaon and ACCF, will, for the first time, encompass four Block Primary Health Centers (BPHCs) and approximately 80 Health and Wellness Centers (HWCs) in Kokrajhar district.

The project will focus on several key areas, including the early detection of cancer, particularly oral, breast, and cervical cancers, through door-to-door preliminary screenings conducted by ASHAs.

The initiative also includes awareness and sensitisation sessions aimed at healthcare

workers and the general public to educate them about cancer, its risk factors, and the availability of government schemes.

Additionally, home-based palliative care will be provided to cancer patients, ensuring they receive the necessary support within the comfort of their homes.

A vital aspect of the project is ensuring that confirmed cancer patients are linked to existing government schemes, providing them with access to cashless treatment and reimbursement facilities.

This approach is designed to significantly reduce the financial burden on patients and their families, easing the strain of out-of-pocket expenses.

Moreover, the project will strengthen the public healthcare system by extending the reach of government healthcare schemes to the most remote areas, ensuring that all patients receive the care they need.

The project aligns with Schedule VII, Sub-section (i) of the Companies Act 2013, and the CPSE common theme for 2024-25, 'Health & Nutrition', as prescribed by the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE).

It also contributes to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

NFR hits key milestones in major double line projects



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 28: NF Railway (NFR) has achieved significant progress in the construction of two double line projects: the New Bongaigaon - Agthori via Rangiya Project and the New Bongaigaon - Kamakhya via Goalpara Project.

Once completed, these double line projects will play a crucial role in enhancing the capacity and efficiency of the railway network in the

zone, significantly reducing congestion and ensuring faster and more reliable train services.

The New Bongaigaon - Agthori via Rangiya Project spans a total distance of 142.97 km.

The sections from New Bongaigaon - Sorbhog, Barpeta Road - Nalbari, and Baihata - Agthori, covering a total of 102.77 km, have been successfully completed and made operational for train services.

The remaining sections between Sorbhog -

Barpeta Road and between Nalbari - Baihata, totaling 40.20 km, are currently in an advanced stage. In fact, the CRS inspection of the Sorbhog - Barpeta Road section is expected to be completed soon. These sections are on track to be commissioned within the current financial year, marking a significant milestone in improving rail connectivity within the region.

Additionally, NFR is also making steady progress on the New Bongaigaon - Kamakhya via Goalpara double line project, which spans a total of 176 km.

The section from New Bongaigaon - Azara, covering a distance of 162.80 km, has been completed, and train services have commenced on this stretch. Planning and extension of the final section between Azara - Kamakhya, extending over 13.20 km, is in progress and is expected to be completed by 2027.

This project is set to enhance the efficiency and capacity of rail services to the important Kamakhya junction, further bolstering the railway infrastructure in the region.

NFR remains committed to enhancing railway connectivity within its jurisdiction, ensuring improved connectivity.

To this end, NFR has been undertaking major infrastructure projects to expand and upgrade its infrastructure, aimed at boosting connectivity and supporting the economic growth of the north-east region.

NABARD opens new office in Haflong to enhance rural development



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 28: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) inaugurated its office in Haflong on Wednesday, aiming to increase its presence and facilitate effective sustainability and economic upliftment through the implementation of development projects and enterprises for the people of this district.

The inauguration program was organised at the N L Daulagupu Sports Complex conference by

Donphainon Thaoson, executive member (EM) of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), in the presence of Probita Johori, EM NCHAC, principal secretary of NCHAC Thai Tsho Daulagupu, and ADC James Aind, who were also present during the occasion.

With the opening of the NABARD office, it is expected to boost rural development efforts across Dima Hasao by providing essential support to local communi-

ties, entrepreneurs, and farmers with the help of line departments and banks. Nabin Kumar Roy, GM, NABARD, emphasised the importance of the new office in this district to streamline its efforts.

The ceremony was attended by officers of the line departments, bankers, members of self-help groups, and others. An opening remark was given by CGM, NABARD Loken Das, followed by a speech by Nabin Kumar Roy, GM, NABARD. Thai Tsho Daulagupu also spoke on the occasion.

Addressing those present, the appointed DDM, NABARD, Amarjit Singh, expressed hope that his office would be instrumental in providing guidance to upcoming entrepreneurs and communities. DGM, NABARD, Saivongthoi Hrangkhoh, who also happens to be a native of the area, mentioned that the permanent office of NABARD would undoubtedly be instrumental in the overall development of the district.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

To see things in the seed, that is genius.
-Lao Tzu

BJP's Bengal strategy backfires

The BJP's attempt to leverage public outrage over the rape and murder of a young doctor from R G Kar Medical College in Kolkata has backfired, leaving the party isolated and exposing internal divisions. The 12-hour bandh called by the BJP on August 28, intended to protest alleged police atrocities during a march to the state secretariat, Nabanna, fell flat. Normal life continued across Bengal, with only minor disruptions reported. The BJP's efforts to hijack the grassroots movement, which was primarily led by women demanding justice, have only weakened the party's position. The "Nabanna Abhijan," spearheaded by Paschim Banga Chhatra Samaj, a group linked to the RSS, failed to garner significant support. The Chhatra Samaj was unveiled just a week before the August 27 rally, but its student-led facade quickly crumbled. The political maneuvering behind the scenes became apparent, and instead of bolstering the BJP's cause, it further solidified Mamata Banerjee's hold on Bengal politics. The tragedy at R G Kar Medical College not only ignited widespread anger but also led to introspection within the Trinamool Congress (TMC). Many questioned whether the government had handled the situation appropriately.

The BJP's internal conflicts also came to the fore, with two factions clashing over strategy. Subhendu Adhikari, representing the defectors from the TMC, and Sukanta Majumdar, the state president aligned with the RSS, were at odds. While Adhikari pushed for broader participation in the rally, Majumdar stuck to the RSS's plan to focus the protests on areas frequented by intellectuals and social activists. This rift only weakened the party's efforts. Violence erupted in Kolkata and Howrah during the protests on August 27, with demonstrators pelting stones and glass bottles at the police, leaving several officers injured. Despite the provocation, the Kolkata police maintained restraint, avoiding the use of firearms. Instead, they resorted to lathi charges and tear gas to control the situation. The BJP, however, failed to provide credible figures on the number of injured protesters, further undermining its claims. Adhikari later claimed that 133 protesters, including 17 women, were injured. But the rally, ostensibly organized to seek justice for the murdered doctor, quickly shifted focus to demanding Mamata Banerjee's resignation. Some agitators even framed the protest as a response to her alleged "ap- peasement of Muslims," exposing the communal undercurrents within the movement.

Interestingly, the RSS avoided involving its student wing, ABVP, in the protests, likely anticipating the limited student participation. Instead, the BJP had to rely on its workers to bolster the numbers, further highlighting the disconnect between the party and the grassroots movement. The CPI(M) and other left parties, which had played a significant role in organizing protests for justice, distanced themselves from the BJP's bandh, choosing to continue their own demonstrations independently. Adding to the BJP's woes, the CBI, tasked with investigating the R G Kar case by the Calcutta High Court and the Supreme Court, has not found evidence to support the BJP's claims. Despite this, the party's IT cell and social media supporters continue to spread misinformation, drawing criticism even from the judiciary. In the end, the BJP's plot to unseat Mamata Banerjee and impose President's Rule in Bengal has failed.

The wizard of Hockey: Major Dhyan Chand and India's National Sports Day

Every year on August 29th, India celebrates National Sports Day - a day that honors not just the importance of sports and physical fitness, but also pays tribute to one of the greatest athletes the country has ever produced: Major Dhyan Chand. Known as "The Wizard" or "The Magician" of hockey, Dhyan Chand's extraordinary skills and achievements on the field have made him a legendary figure in Indian sports history.

Born on August 29, 1905, in Allahabad (now Prayagraj), Uttar Pradesh, Dhyan Singh would go on to become the most celebrated field hockey player in the world. His journey to greatness began in 1922 when he enlisted in the British Indian Army at the age of 17.

It was during his time in the army that he honed his skills in hockey, often practicing late into the night under moonlight - a habit that earned him the nickname "Chand" (meaning moon in Hindi).

Dhyan Chand's international career took off when he was selected for the Indian hockey team for the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. This marked the beginning of India's golden era in field hockey, with Chand leading the charge. In Amsterdam, he showcased his exceptional skills, scoring 14 goals in 5 matches and helping India secure its first Olympic gold medal in hockey. A Dutch newspa-

per aptly described his performance: "This is not a game of hockey, but magic. Dhyan Chand is in fact the magician of hockey."

The legend of Dhyan Chand only grew from there. He went on to lead India to two more Olympic gold medals in 1932 (Los Angeles) and 1936 (Berlin). The 1936 Berlin Olympics final against Germany is perhaps the most famous match of his career. Despite initial nervousness and trailing at half-time, India, led by Chand, mounted a spectacular comeback to win 8-1. Chand scored three goals in the final, cementing his status as a hockey icon.

Throughout his career, Dhyan Chand's goal-scoring prowess was unmatched. In his autobiography "Goal," he claimed to have scored over 1000 goals in his entire domestic and international career from 1926 to 1948. His stick work was so mesmerizing that there are stories of officials breaking his hockey stick to check if there was a magnet inside!

After retiring from active play, Chand continued to contribute to Indian hockey as a coach. He served as the Chief Hockey Coach at the National Institute of Sports, Patiala from 1961 to 1969. The Government of India recognized his immense contribution to Indian sports by awarding him the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civil-



ian honor, in 1956.

Dhyan Chand passed away on December 3, 1979, but his legacy lives on. In 2012, the Government of India decided to celebrate his birthday, August 29, as the National Sports Day. This day serves multiple purposes:

1. Honoring Dhyan Chand: It's a tribute to the hockey legend and his contributions to Indian sports.

2. Promoting Sports: The day acts as a reminder of the importance of sports and physical activities in our lives.

3. Recognizing Sporting Excellence: On this day, the President of India confers various sports awards to recognize outstanding athletes and coaches. These include:

o Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award (formerly Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna): India's highest sporting honor for outstanding performance.

o Arjuna Award: Recognizes consistent outstanding performance over four years.

o Dronacharya Award: Honors coaches for their work in developing athletes.

o Degree of Thought By: Dipak Kurmi

Recognizes lifetime contributions to sports development.

4. Launching Sports Initiatives: The government often uses this day to announce new sports schemes.

For example, in 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the Khelo India movement on National Sports Day.

The celebration of National Sports Day extends beyond the national level. Various states like Haryana, Punjab, and Karnataka organize sporting events and seminars to spread awareness about the importance of physical activities and sports.

Dhyan Chand's influence on Indian hockey and

entist C.N.R. Rao that year, the debate highlighted the enduring impact of Dhyan Chand's legacy.

The story of Dhyan Chand is not just about sports; it's about dedication, excellence, and national pride. From practicing under moonlight to dazzling the world on the Olympic stage, Dhyan Chand's journey continues to inspire generations of Indians. As the nation celebrates National Sports Day each year, it not only honors the memory of this extraordinary athlete but also reaffirms its commitment to sports and fitness.

In a country where cricket often dominates the sporting discourse, the celebration of National Sports Day on Dhyan Chand's birthday serves as a crucial reminder of India's rich sporting heritage beyond cricket. It encourages young Indians to explore various sports and strive for excellence, just as the 'Wizard of Hockey' did nearly a century ago.

As India continues to make strides in various sports on the global stage, the legacy of Dhyan Chand remains a guiding light - a testament to what can be achieved with skill, dedication, and an undying love for the game.

National Sports Day, therefore, is not just a celebration of the past, but a commitment to a healthier, sportier future for India. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipld@gmail.com)

Willpower- The gateway to success



By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Willpower is a great power hidden in every human being. Willpower is the gateway to endless possibilities. If the inexhaustible will inherent in man can be truly awakened, seven seas and thirteen rivers can be crossed and conquered. Unwavering willpower is one of the steps to success. To reach the golden peak of success, you need to strengthen your willpower. But many times people do not awaken their willpower. But if you can awaken the unwavering willpower hidden in yourself, then success in anything is possible. The stronger a man's will, the stronger his will.

The stronger the will, the more intense and vigorous the reaction. When we feel that we must do a task anyway, such a strong willpower arises in our minds that we can complete the task successfully without hesitation. Strong willpower can bring quick success. No matter how many obstacles there are in your work, if you have strong willpower in your mind, the path to success will surely come out automatically.

The root of all our hopes and aspirations is strong will. In fact, the secret to success is strong desire, strong aspiration and a strong anxiety to reach the goal. There is no substitute for success accept willpower and Hard work. In many cases, it is the unwavering morale or willpower and hard work that works as the panacea for success in life rather than talent.

A person can have a lot of talent, but if they don't work hard, that talent is worthless. He is talented but cannot achieve the desired success. On the other hand, even if you have little talent, you can achieve success by working hard. There are many sages who have left their mark on the world with examples of strong willpower and hard work.

We often see many inspiring

examples among them is Gutenberg, the inventor of the printed letter. It took many years for Gutenberg to print the 1282-page book in large print in Gutenberg went bankrupt after spending all his savings on this discovery and was given shelter by a gentleman in the last years of his life. Gutenberg's lifelong sacrifice, strong will and hard work brought him success and left him an eternal gift to mankind.

Mankind is eternally indebted to him today. Similarly, there are many successful people in the history of the world whose names are written in golden letters. It must be acknowledged that there is certainly tremendous willpower, hard work and perseverance behind the success of those who have been remembered and praised for centuries.

Human performance is based on willpower. Every action is governed by the will of man. With confidence and a strong will, the impossible can be made possible. Many have achieved success in life by sheer force of willpower. In fact, it radiates light and energy like radium. There is no secret formula for success. To finish anything well, you have to start with a burning desire. The driving force behind success comes from burning desire.

Once you start anything, you have to work hard and have an unwavering desire to succeed without looking back. Success requires talent as well as patience, strong will and hard work. Sometimes we can try and fail temporarily. This temporary failure does not mean failure, this failure means starting strong again on the road to success. We must remember that strong will - strong morale and work ethic makes people achieve their goals effortlessly. There are many such examples in the world.

We can take the example, of New Zealand climber named 'Mark English', who conquered the world's highest peak like Mount Everest with an artificial leg. Mark English lost both legs

climbing a mountain 24 years ago. But he never lacked will and spirit. By climbing one mountain after another, he proved that even people with disabilities can do things - things that bring pride and honor to overall life. In 1982, while climbing Mount Cook, New Zealand's highest mountain, English became trapped in an ice drift and was crushed from toe to knee. His legs had to be amputated. But his unwavering desire brought him to the top of Mound Chow, an 8,201-metre mountain in Tibet, in 2004 with this prosthetic leg.

Inglis did the incredible thing in May 2006. He achieved this rare record after 40 days of hard-to-hard work and unrelenting willpower. There are many reasons why you shouldn't buy these products. These are the reasons why you shouldn't buy these products. We all know about Stephen Hawking. Disappointment can never conquer the willpower. Psychologists believe that willpower should be developed from childhood. Therefore, you should set your goals at an early age.

The most important thing is to decide for yourself which path to take in life. After making a decision, the willpower will support you to walk that path and you will eventually climb to the peak of success.

In fact, failure and success are two sides of the same coin. One thing we must firmly remember is that failure follows success like a shadow. The point is that there is no doubt that we can succeed in anything if we have a strong willpower. If we desire something with our heart and soul and can properly combine that desire with our actions and move forward with strong willpower and hard work, we can surely succeed. We should know that willpower can be so strong that many miracles can be done in the world by willpower. (The Writer is CRCC of Nalbari Cluster, Biswanath Education Block, Education Department, Assam)

Pakistan seeks rescheduling of US\$ 12 billion debts as crisis worsens

By: Tirthankar Mitra

It is no secret that Pakistan is a debt burdened country. In his previous term Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif publicly acknowledged that even friendly countries look at Pakistan as a country always "begging for money."

His more recent contention is that he has broken the begging bowl and the era of Pakistan asking others for money is over. Yet finance minister Muhammad Aurangzeb have of late said that Pakistan is seeking debt relief from China and other bi-lateral lenders to plug a financing gap aiming to secure a loan from IMF.

The Pakistani finance minister further spoke of engagement of Pakistan with China, Saudi Arabia and UAE for debt scheduling around \$ 12 billion. Instead of being broken, the begging bowl seems to have been enlarged.

Longer loan repayment periods have been sought. The countries from whom such favour have been sought are China, Saudi Arabia and UAE. In any case seeking external support is necessary but not sufficient to bolster the economy. It is a fire fighting measure.

And as such it should be accompanied by the country's longer term economic plan involving resolution of longstanding structural problems. But the fact remains that such a plan is yet to be produced.

Pakistan's economy has a long history of exter-

nal debts. By 1995, its external debt soared to US\$ 30 billion. The external debt/GDP ratio rose from 42 per cent to 50 per cent, accompanied by increases in the external debt/exports ratio (from 209 per cent to 258 per cent).

On the other hand, the debt service ratio rose from 18 per cent to 27 per cent. Domestic debt was pushed up to \$ 909 billion by deteriorating external debt profile with the domestic debt/GDP ratio at 42 per cent.

The late 1990s was marked by a severe debt crisis. The public debt/GDP ratio shot up from 57.5 per cent in 1975-76 to 102 per cent in 1998-99. Pakistan's public debt was rendered unsustainable after a surge in public debt/revenue ratio and interest payment revenue ratio.

In May, 1998 Pakistan conducted nuclear tests. Concerns over economic sanctions emerged in 1998. Western economic sanctions caused massive flight of capital leading to an unenviable economic situation.

The 2000s witnessed the impact of high public debt. It was identified by the Official Debt Reduction and Management Committee in 2001 contributing to a decline in growth rate to less than 4 per cent per annum.

The decade unfolded in persistent macro-economic crisis negating an initial upturn. Growth slowdown, a low growth, high inflation, an energy crisis and worsening balance of payments position marred the decade. (IPA Service)

POST BAG

India, still among the most corrupt nations!

Sir/Ma'am

The words honest and politician do not go hand in hand but still, we choose the most corrupt people to govern us as there are no other options. We have to be the options but most of us do not want to get into the whirlpool of politics and we also normally do not support a new political power. These negatives deter honest and deserving people from getting into politics. India still ranks 93 out of 180 countries on the Corruption Perception Index and is just 2 positions better than the 2011 ranking of 95 out of 183 countries.

2011 was the most corrupt year in India's history. The ruling government employed a lot of measures to curb black money and corruption over the years but could not improve its ranking on the Index and is still lingering among the most corrupt nations in the world. There are many instances where the net worth of MLAs and MPs has grown magically within 5 years. Power does not corrupt people, it is just an excuse used by a spineless power wielder.

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Climate risks threaten rice productivity in key Indian states

Sir/Ma'am

Recent research at the 32nd International Congress of Agricultural Economists in Delhi reveals a significant threat to India's rice production due to climate change. According to Nishi Yadav from the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, states like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu face severe climate risks impacting rice yields, while Bihar, Uttarakhand, and Jharkhand are less affected.

Yadav's study shows a clear negative relationship between climate risk and rice productivity, posing a threat to national food security and

global rice exports.

Additionally, Disha Gupta's study from the Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research highlights inefficiencies in water use in Punjab, suggesting that raising electricity prices could reduce water extraction significantly.

These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted policy interventions to address climate risks and optimize resource use to sustain India's agricultural sector and global food supply.

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Grief, hope, and the future of coral reefs

By: Mavukh Dev

Lately, grief is an emotion that I find myself smothered by. One look at our world and nothing comforting emerges. While at a global level we have wars, environmental disasters, extreme weather events, and a general sense of apathy, I cannot say that the scenario within our country is any better. The atmosphere within the country is supercharged with the 2024 general elections having concluded, but this figurative atmosphere is not the only concern that I have. The literal atmosphere too, has been inundated by decades of greenhouse gas emissions, fuelled largely by greed, capitalism and apathy. Every single month, for the past 12 months, we have consistently remained 1.5°C above the pre-industrial average levels across the world.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) Representative Concentration Pathways (RCP) 1.5 scenario seems to be a joke, as climate scientists all over the world share a similar pessimistic view on how the world is failing to tackle climate change. Words of comfort go along the lines of, "focus on what you can do", or "forget about the problems of the world and concentrate on finishing your PhD". Unfortunately, even if I take their advice and "focus" on my doctoral study, there is no relief as the system that I study is slowly and painfully dying.

There is no other way to put it. Coral reefs, the ecosystem that I study, are an endangered ecosystem given the age of climate change. You will have read many articles on what coral bleaching and climate change is, and what the world is doing to combat it, but coral reefs and their demise is one of

those few planetary tipping points that we will cross sooner rather than later.

Coral reefs, typically constructed by Scleractinian corals (stony corals) have a very narrow preference for where they can survive. Warm and sunlit waters are the ideal place and thus many coral reefs are restricted to the tropical belt. This is a problem though, as tropics generally behave differently from the temperate regions in terms of how they respond to climate change.

According to the latest IPCC report, changes in climate trends are more pronounced in the tropics while the temperate regions undergo higher variability in climatic variables. This would mean that an increase in temperature is noticeable over the past few decades in the tropics and this is of concern for shallow water reefs, because of how much heat the ocean can absorb.

Almost 90% of all of the sun's energy is absorbed by the ocean and as the layer of greenhouse gases insulates the earth even more, much of this excess energy is channelled back into the ocean. Coral reefs are doomed to die, at least in the long run.

"Hope? Let me tell you something, my friend. Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane. It's got no use on the inside. You'd better get used to that idea." This line by Red from the movie Shawshank Redemption, rings deep with me. There is no hope for these ecosystems if current trajectories of "progress" are maintained. There are, however, pockets of resistance; in the reef, I mean. But this too, has a tinge of grief mixed in.

A criticism to most coral reef published research has been about baselines when looking at change, and therefore the reefs they've selected to study.

Science is not as objective as it would like to believe and many coral reef biologists often choose to study reefs where "corals grow on the backs of other corals". This often means that the reefs are dominated by the most speciose and fast-growing genus of corals, the Acropora. Decades of research has shown that Acropora is one of the most susceptible corals to bleaching and as a result, reefs dominated by this genus can show dramatic declines.

Consequently, studies that have monitored such diverse and spectacular reefs often show complete destruction of a functioning ecosystem. But of course, coral reefs are not this diverse and extravagant in many places, and local environment often shapes the community of corals you find in a reef. Lakshadweep, where I study reefs, is an example of such a place.

This does not mean that there are no 'spectacular' reefs in Lakshadweep; it's just not the norm. Lakshadweep, like the rest of the world's reefs, has been marred by three mass bleaching events since 1998. As I write this article, it undergoes the fourth. Our work in the Lakshadweep shows concerning trends as it is not just the reefs dominated by Acropora that are affected. Sure, dramatic changes of bleached corals are most pronounced in strands of Acropora but this time, my colleague Wenzel says, "corals of all manner are turning pale and dying".

Honestly, we know what to expect; our work, which is currently in review, highlights how the reefs of Lakshadweep have fared over the past 25 years. Certain areas of the atoll recover better than the rest, but they all show a steady ratcheting down of coral cover.

This has consequences for the 70,000 people who call

Lakshadweep their home. Much of the reason people were able to colonise and inhabit Lakshadweep is because of the reefs that surround these atolls. Apart from providing a rich source of nutrition, coral reefs buffer against large oceanic waves and generate sediments that replenish the ephemeral sandbars upon which people dwell.

Rainfall then accumulates as a thin freshwater lens beneath these sandbars, creating conditions necessary to sustain life. But then, if the reef keeps dying and recovers slowly after every bleaching event, it is quite obvious that their regulatory and provisioning functions will be compromised. What does that mean for an island community whose homes are barely two metres above sea level? A hint of an answer can be found elsewhere, in places like Kiribati, and Tokelau, two south Pacific atolls currently fighting to keep seawater out of their homes and farms.

How do you sustain yourself when the ecosystem you study has several polyps in the grave? How do you reconcile with the fact that Lakshadweep faces a near certain future where climate change induced environmental disasters become a yearly, if not daily occurrence? What does one do when such a fragile location sees progress in the opposite direction? When scientists and local communities who best know the place and have observed them for decades are silenced, what does it say about the societal values we encourage?

Even if Lakshadweep is too far away for mainlanders to care about, how are we so unperturbed by the more immediate risks to our lives and livelihoods? Human beings seem to be extremely myopic. We cannot comprehend conse-

quences nor realise the future we are about to inherit. Much like the coral reefs, we too in the subcontinent, are living in extremely narrow climatic conditions. Being in the tropics means the air is often saturated with moisture and as a result, our bodies may not be able to cool down by sweating as temperature increases. This physiological limitation should be a concern for us all and similar to sessile corals on reefs, many of us are in no position to escape the inevitable.

Clearly this piece was not meant to sugar-coat reality nor provide any hope. What do I mean when I say that I feel grief over how our current situation has played out? A part of my thesis is to estimate the wave buffering function of coral reefs at shallow depths. While being tossed around at these wave-beaten depths, my colleagues and I noticed what many scientists have said about extravagant reefs. We were swimming over a stretch that had 100% coral cover with at least 16 different species of corals, and the first thought that came to my mind was, "this will die in a few months".

Throughout this field season, we have seen some of the most beautiful reefs in the Lakshadweep, and the same thought plagued my mind, "this will all die". As I was finishing my last dive for the season, off the reefs of Kavaratti, I noticed the entire reef was turning pale, and a few corals had already turned white. "These are all dying," the only thought that rang in my head.

What can hope do when the powers that be are more interested in lining their pockets than caring about the kind of world they leave behind? What can we hope to do when we know bleaching events in the Lakshadweep and around the world are now going to become a recurring event? Hope

can be dangerous as well, as many conservation initiatives promulgate the notion that palliative fixes like coral restoration and establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) can help shield coral reefs from climate change.

I apologise for being blunt, but they will not. At their most benign, they can help alleviate proximate problems that plague coral reefs and thereby offer a few additional years for the reef to remain as it is. At their worst, they can be used to justify ecosystem restoration, and provide a concrete (read, monetary) way of ensuring conservation initiatives are implemented, even legitimising destructive projects in some instances, as is happening in the Great Nicobar.

There is science that shows individual corals are becoming more resistant to thermal stress but these studies are often conducted on a few species and a few species do not make up a reef. This to me, is a problem of scale; a mismatch between the issue of 'global' warming and 'individual' resistance of corals to thermal stress. Given that we are showing no signs of slowing down our voracious appetite to consume, no amount of ecosystem restoration can help if coral polyps just 'melt' away in the heat.

This consumptive attitude of ours is so pervasive that I fear even death and destruction will be looked at with currency in one's eyes. It isn't too far-fetched to imagine a new kind of tourism emerging out of these mass mortality events, given how capitalism works. A sort of dark tourism. It is entirely possible that the Lakshadweep in the next century might see relocation of people as climate refugees to mainland India, and there will then be no 'ethical' reason to stop minting money from destruction.

A dystopian future where large cruise ships set sail from the ports of Mumbai, or on seaplanes, carrying tourists who care only for a few pictures by the beach, and some handouts of 'Lakshadweep coconut' as souvenirs is all too probable. But wait, that's the state of tourism today; the only difference in the future will perhaps be the lack of people in the Lakshadweep to host them. But...what if? What if I'm wrong about the greed and corruption of man? What if there's more to being human than being a self-serving and myopic organism?

"Remember, Red: hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies." Again, a quote by Andy from Shawshank Redemption. Can we perhaps re-examine grief? Grief can be debilitating, crippling our functioning, making us question any sense of agency and identity we may have in this world. But perhaps, grief can be empowering as well. If nothing, it highlights what it is that we're most affected by, confronts us with our values.

Grief can help find clarity, attract souls who feel the same way as I, illuminate what is truly important to me individually. I am grief-stricken by the plight of this ecosystem, the consumptive and exploitative nature of humans, the inevitable future of the Lakshadweep, and the potential collapse of humanity. But I am not debilitated. My actions may or may not amount to any substantial change but adherence to my values is what helps me sleep at night. What's your secret to a sound sleep in this unsound world? I pray that the answer to this question doesn't trouble your conscience, and I'm choosing to view the perspective that doesn't echo grief. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Behind devastating floods in Tripura and Bangladesh, record rainfall and not just a dam

By: Vaishnavi Rathore & Rokibuz Zaman

For four days starting August 19, heavy rain lashed Tripura. While this is not unusual during the monsoon, the state received 298% excess rainfall between August 15 and August 21, according to data from India Meteorological Department.

As water levels in rivers in six locations flew above the danger mark, the state was flooded. Twenty-four people lost their lives, over 17 lakh people were affected and over 1.28 lakh displaced. It was an "unprecedented situation", the state disaster management authority said.

Across Tripura's western border, Bangladesh was in a similar predicament, with rivers flowing above the danger mark and continuous heavy rain. The districts on the country's border with Tripura saw severe floods.

However, the common experience of a natural calamity ended up only dividing the two countries, as a section of the media alleged that India had a hand in Bangladesh's suffering. Reports claimed that India's decision to open the sluice gates of a dam on the river Gumti on August 21 had caught Bangladesh off-guard. Social media accounts accused India of creating an "artificial flood" or "intentionally creating" floods, reflecting the animosity against India in Bangladesh after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government.

Though the Bangladesh government did not echo those allegations, India's Ministry of External Affairs put out a statement, denying the claims. It is "factually incorrect" that the opening of the Dumbur dam contributed to the flood across the border, the ministry said. It noted that catchment areas of Gumti have "witnessed heaviest rains of this year" and the flood in Bangladesh is "primarily due to waters from these large catchments downstream of the dam."

Disaster management and dam officials Scroll spoke to denied that the release of the water was "intentional", pointing out that the gates of the dam "automatically opened" once the water had breached a certain level. They, however, confirmed that information about the water release from Dumbur dam was not shared with Bangladesh officials.

"As an upstream state it becomes India's duty to alert both Indian and Bangladeshi authorities," said Himanshu Thakkar, the founder and coordinator of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People.

But was the amount of water released from the Dumbur dam alone responsible for the floods in Bangladesh? The experts Scroll spoke to contest that claim.

Scroll emailed the Bangladesh interim government and India's Central Water Commission for their responses. The story will be updated if they respond.

The deluge across the border

In the past few weeks, districts in Bangladesh bordering Tripura like Comilla, Feni and Naokhali have been

in the grip of floods. Water levels in rivers have been flowing "above danger level" and "above 1 metre of danger level", impacting nearly three million people and killing seven. Moreover, a low pressure system over Bangladesh has led to continuous rainfall.

On August 22, a section of Bangladesh media reported that a large volume of floodwater entered Bangladesh as the sluice gates of the Dumbur dam in Tripura's Dhalai district were opened a day earlier.

They claimed that the water entered Bangladesh through Gumti, a river that flows from east to west of Tripura, before entering Bangladesh.

Dam gates and heavy rain: A dangerous combination

In India, meanwhile, starting August 20, excessively high rains lashed eight districts of Tripura. Rainfall as high as 261.6 mm was recorded for a single day in South Tripura district, and 232.1 mm in Gomati district, contributing to the high volume of water in the catchment area of the river.

On August 21 at 8.35 am, the Gomati district's district magistrate posted on Facebook that water from the Dumbur Hydroelectric Project Dam has to be released as "water has accumulated to the critical level giving no scope [sic] to the Tripura Power Generation Limited but to release some water".

The post urged all citizens concerned and downstream districts of the state to take precautionary measures immediately.

Dam officials told Scroll that the release of this water was "automatic" once the water had reached a certain level in the dam.

In the evening at 5 pm, the district magistrate provided another update — "two flap gates and one gate partially (50%) [were] (automatically) discharging water from the reservoir".

Once released, the water flowed through Gomati and Sepahijala districts of Tripura, taking about five hours to reach Bangladesh territory, a distance of about 160 km, said Suman Deb, a senior Tripura disaster management official.

Data from Bangladesh's Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre shows that water levels in Gumti river in Comilla district rose sharply starting from August 20. By 6 pm on the same day, water level was at 10.5 metres — a metre below its danger level. By 3 pm on August 21, the river had crossed the danger level of 11.3 metres at Comilla, and continued to rise till August 23, when it reached 12.5 metres — the highest recorded level for the observation site.

However, experts pointed out that the Dumbur dam has a limited role to play in the floods in both Bangladesh and Tripura. M. Inamul Haque, chairman of the Bangladesh-based Institute of Water and Environment, told Jamuna TV in an interview that the "dam handles 20% of Gumti's catchment areas. The real reason for the floods is the excessive rain in Tripura."

In Tripura, the disaster management authority echoed this, suggesting that the dam's water release alone is not re-

sponsible for floods in either Tripura or Bangladesh. "We have floods in all the eight districts of the state and the dam is located only in one district. The dam is not responsible for it," said J B Vanlal Duati, the director of the Tripura Disaster Management Authority.

Tripura's river basin is upstream of Bangladesh's upstream — as are river discharge areas of Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura.

Together, the abundance of water in this region during the monsoon regularly contributes to floods in Bangladesh, explained Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman, a Guwahati-based independent researcher, who has worked on the issue of transboundary water-sharing in the North East.

The pressure from the Brahmaputra river basin adds to the problem. "Bangladesh becomes overwhelmed by a combination of river systems discharging in a limited riverine space, covering a huge density of population," said Rahman.

Could dam waters be released sooner?

At the same time, experts said dam authorities could have managed water release better. They pointed out that water from the Dumbur dam could have been released earlier than August 21, to avoid the sudden surge of water downstream.

Action could have been taken "at least three days ago", said Thakkar, when on August 18, the India Meteorological Department forecast "heavy to very heavy rainfall" for Tripura between August 18 and August 23.

"To prepare for such heavy rainfall, the authorities could have made space in the reservoir by releasing the water earlier than August 21," said Thakkar.

Even the data from the Central Water Commission showed that at Amarpur — one of three sites along the Gumti where water level is observed — the river had started reaching alarming levels at 1 pm on August 20, crossing the danger mark of 35.5 metres by 5 pm on the same day. Data from the North East Region Load Despatch Centre, a regional office of its national counterpart that facilitates transmission of electric power, also indicated that the dam was not releasing water when heavy rains began.

Starting August 20, the day when heavy rains lashed Tripura, the dam generated 0.01 million units of electricity, and none on August 21 and August 22. "So even in peak monsoon months with high water flow in the river, the dam was not generating almost any power. Why was the reservoir storing so much water in that case?" Thakkar wrote on the website of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People.

When asked why the dam was not opened before August 21, Deb, the senior Tripura disaster management official, told Scroll that there is a 94 metre water-level limit at the dam, and once the water touches that limit, "the gate is opened automatically" to discharge water.

"Whenever there is rainfall, they will not open the gates on the first day. The

system is that the gate will automatically open after it reaches the 94 metre level. The early opening of gates would have submerged the downstream low-lying areas," added Deb.

An official from the Tripura State Electricity Corporation Limited, which operates the Dumbur dam, also said that the gates were not operated manually. "Excess water was released automatically after the reservoir was full," said Manoj Debberma, additional general manager (generation) of Tripura State Electricity Corporation Limited.

He added that till the water was below the danger level of 93.5 metres, "there is no need to release the water then." Had they operated the gates manually, they could have lowered the water level by 1.5 metres, he said. "But why will we do so?" he said. "If we do, there will be water downstream."

Thakkar said this claim does not hold true. He noted that a decision to open the gates manually to a certain extent could have been made by assessing the carrying capacity of downstream catchment areas.

Over the rainfall days, they could have done this at a sustainable rate till the dam reached the full reservoir level of 93.5 metres, he said, adding that this "would have given more time and preparation for downstream areas in Tripura and Bangladesh."

No communication with Bangladesh

While the role of the dam water might have been limited, Bangladeshi officials claimed they had not been notified by India about the dam gates being opened.

An advance notice about the dam opening could have helped them take "precautionary measures to protect people and assets from the sudden floodwater," Partha Pratim Barua, a sub-divisional engineer working at the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre of the Bangladesh Water Development Board, told Dhaka Tribune.

While the Dumbur dam authorities kept sharing information with the state government, authorities in Tripura did not inform Bangladesh about the release of water. "There is no mechanism in place to inform Bangladesh as it is an international matter," Deb said.

Duati from Tripura's disaster management authority added: "We are not responsible for sharing information to Bangladesh."

Experts point out that the issue is beyond being a "Tripura-Bangladesh problem" or associated with "a single dam." Cross-border coordination and flood management is needed, they suggested, especially for the two countries that have 54 transboundary rivers.

Considering the geographically unfortunate position of Bangladesh when it came to receiving flood water discharge, Rahman suggested joint research, cooperation, and coordination mechanisms between the North East and Bangladesh.

He highlighted a need for an "overall riparian cooperative model between India and Bangladesh, and data-sharing and early warning mechanisms." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Climate change accelerates: 2023 set multiple new records for drought, with nearly 8% of land area severely affected

By: Rohini Krishnamurthy

Nearly 8 per cent of the global land area was under extreme drought in July 2023, setting a new record, according to the State of the Climate in 2023 report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This surpasses the previous high of 6.2 percent set just a year earlier in July 2022.

Globally, 29.7 per cent of land experienced moderate or worse categories of drought in 2023 — another record-breaking figure. In addition, greenhouse gas concentrations, global temperature across land and ocean, global sea level and ocean heat content all set new records in 2023.

"This report documents and shares a startling, but well-established picture: We are experiencing a warming world as I speak and the indicators and impacts are seen throughout the planet. The report is another signpost to current and future generations," Derek Arndt, director at the National Centers for Environmental Information, NOAA, said in a statement.

Further, the annual global surface temperature was 0.55 to 0.60 of a degree Celsius above the 1991–2020 average, making 2023 the warmest year since records began in the mid-to-late 1800s.

The major greenhouse gases — carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide — continued to rise, reaching record levels in 2023 as well.

The global ocean heat content up to a depth of 2,000 metres continued to increase and reached new record highs in 2023. The global mean sea level reached 4 inches (over 10 centimetres) above the 1993 average, a record high for the 12th consecutive year.

Mexico reported its driest (and hottest) year since the start of its record in 1950. West Asia, Europe and South America scored high on the drought severity index, which measures longer-term meteorological drought. South America, for instance, experienced severe drought in the latter half of the year throughout Amazon basin, with Rio Negro in Manaus, Brazil, a major tributary of Amazon river, reaching its lowest level since records began in 1902.

The hot and prolonged dry

conditions set conditions ripe for wildfires. Canada experienced its worst national wildfire season on record in 2023, where large-scale fires burned continually from May to September. The burned area was roughly 15 million hectares, which was more than double the previous record from 1989.

Globally, 29.7 per cent of land experienced moderate or worse categories of drought in 2023 — another record-breaking figure. Greece, too, saw record wildfires. The total area burned in the country in 2023 was more than four times its long-term average, the report highlighted.

Australia experienced its driest three-month period in Australia in the 104-year record between August and October 2023. Millions of hectares of bushfires burned for weeks in the Northern Territory.

As for the poles, the Arctic saw its fourth-warmest year in 2023 in the 124-year record. Over half of the sites in the region saw the highest below-ground, permafrost temperatures on record. Thawing of permafrost does not just affect infrastructure; it can also affect the rate of greenhouse gas release to the atmosphere, potentially accelerating global warming.

Globally, 29.7 per cent of land experienced moderate or worse categories of drought in 2023 — another record-breaking figure.

The seasonal Arctic sea ice, which typically reached its minimum extent in September, was the fifth-smallest in the 45-year record.

In the South Pole, new monthly mean record lows in sea ice extent and sea ice area were seen in eight months of the year. On February 21, 2023, Antarctic Sea ice extent and sea ice area reached all-time record lows, surpassing the previous record lows observed in February 2022.

The tropical cyclone activity was below average in 2023, with over 82 named tropical storms against the average of 87 observed in 1991–2020.

However, storms still set records around the globe, with over seven tropical cyclones reaching Category 5. Globally, the accumulated cyclone energy — a combined measure of the strength, frequency and duration of tropical storms and hurricanes — was above average in 2023. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

Bangladesh's interim government led by Yunus lifts ban on the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party

DHAKA, Aug 28: Bangladesh's interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus on Wednesday lifted a ban on the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami party that was imposed by the former prime minister who was ousted in nationwide protests against her rule.

Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India on Aug. 5, had banned the party as a "militant and terrorist" organization and blamed its student wing and other associate bodies for inciting chaos over a quota system for government jobs. The weeks of violent protests and Hasina's crackdown left more than 600 people dead, according to U.N. estimates.

The Ministry of Home Affairs repealed the ban on Wednesday, paving the way for the party to resume its activities. It still needs to register with the Election Commission to contest polls.

There was no immediate reaction from the party leadership. Jamaat-e-Islami has been banned from taking part in elections since 2013, after the Election Commission canceled its registration, a decision upheld by the High Court, which ruled that the party's charter violated the constitution by opposing secularism.

Bangladesh's Law Affairs Adviser Asif Nazrul said that Hasina's ban was politically motivated and not based on ideology.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary-general of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Hasina's rival, also had blamed Hasina's government for the ban that he said was meant to divert attention from the violence in which security officials were accused of using excessive force and causing deaths among protesters.

The Yunus-led government has been struggling to restore political stability and order as police forces and other government sectors are demoralized after attacks by protesters. Compounding the crisis was a devastating flash flood that ravaged the country's eastern and other regions, killing at least 27 people.

Under Hasina, who was criticized as an authoritarian, thousands of opposition leaders and activists were arrested before the January election that returned her to power for the fourth consecutive term. Human rights groups blamed her for using security forces and courts to suppress the opposition, the charge she denies.

Jamaat-e-Islami was founded during the British colonial rule in 1941 by a controversial Islamist scholar and campaigned against the creation of Bangladesh as an independent state during the war of independence from Pakistan in 1971.

In 2013, a mass uprising in Dhaka led by youth groups, civil society organizations and secular political parties called for the execution of the party leadership for their role in 1971 war crimes.

Most of the senior leaders were hanged or jailed since 2013 after they were convicted of crimes against humanity including killings, abductions and rapes in 1971.

The party had formed militia groups to help the Pakistani military during the nine-month war. Bangladesh won independence on Dec. 16, 1971, with the help of neighboring India.

Bangladesh says 3 million people died, 200,000 women were raped and nearly 1 million people fled to India during the war. (AP)



Israeli military deploys hundreds of soldiers, backed by jets and drones, in largest such operation in two decades

Israel launches a large-scale military operation in the occupied West Bank, killing 9 Palestinians

AL-FARAA REFUGEE CAMP (WEST BANK), Aug 28: Israel launched a large-scale military operation in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, where its forces killed at least nine Palestinians and sealed off the volatile city of Jenin, according to Palestinian officials.

Israel has carried out nearly daily raids across the West Bank since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack out of Gaza triggered the ongoing war there.

Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an Israeli military spokesman, said that "large forces" had entered the volatile city of Jenin, which has long been a militant stronghold, as well as Tulkarem and the Al-Faraa refugee camp dating back to the 1948 Mideast war, all in the northern West Bank.

He said the nine dead were all militants, including three killed in an airstrike in Tulkarem and another four in an airstrike in Al-Faraa. He said another five suspected militants were arrested, and that the raids were the first stage of an even larger operation aimed at preventing attacks on Israeli civilians.

Palestinian militant groups said they were exchanging fire with the Israeli military. The governor of Jenin, Kamal Abu al-Rub, said on Palestinian radio that Israeli forces had surrounded the city, blocking exit and entry points and access to hospitals, and ripping up infrastruc-

ture in the camp.

The Palestinian Health Ministry in the West Bank said Israeli forces had blocked the roads leading to a hospital with dirt barriers and surrounded other medical facilities in Jenin. Shoshani said the military was trying to prevent militants from taking shelter in hospitals.

An Associated Press reporter saw army vehicles blocking all the entrances to Al-Faraa camp. Military jeeps and bulldozers entered the camp and soldiers could be seen patrolling its alleyways by foot. Water leaked onto the damaged streets from houses where fighting had damaged tanks and pipes. Shots rang out every few minutes.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz drew comparisons with Gaza and called for similar measures in the West Bank.

"We must deal with the threat just as we deal with the terrorist infrastructure in Gaza, including the temporary evacuation of Palestinian residents and whatever steps might be required. This is a war in every respect, and we must win it," he wrote on the platform X.

Shoshani said there was no plan to evacuate civilians.

Hamas called on Palestinians in the West Bank to rise up, saying the raids are part of a larger plan to expand the war in Gaza and blaming the escalation on U.S. support for Israel. The militant group called on security forces loyal to the Western-backed Palestinian



Authority, which cooperate with Israel, to "join the sacred battle of our people."

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for Palestinian Authority Minister Mahmoud Abbas, condemned the raids as a "serious escalation" and called on the United States to intervene, according to the official Palestinian news agency.

At least 652 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed by Israeli fire since the war in Gaza began over 10 months ago, according to the Palestinian ministry. Most have died during such raids, which often trigger gunbattles with militants.

Israel says the operations are required to dismantle Hamas and other militant groups and to prevent attacks on Israelis, which have also risen since the start of the war.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said the bodies of seven people were brought to the hospital in Tubas, another West

Bank city, and another two were brought to the hospital in Jenin. The ministry identified two killed in Jenin as Qassam Jabarin, 25, and Asem Balout, 39.

Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three for a future state.

Israel has built scores of settlements across the West Bank, which are home to over 500,000 Jewish settlers. They have Israeli citizenship, while the 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank live under Israeli military rule, with the Palestinian Authority exercising limited control over population centers.

The war in Gaza erupted on Oct. 7, when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel and rampaged through army bases and farming communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250.

The militants are still holding

some 110 hostages, around a third of whom are believed to be dead, after most of the rest were released during a November cease-fire.

Israel responded with an offensive that has killed over 40,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were militants. Around 90% of Gaza's population has been displaced, often multiple times, and Israeli bombardment and ground operations have caused vast destruction.

Israeli strikes in Gaza overnight and into Wednesday killed at least 16 people, including five women and three children.

Most of the strikes were in or near the southern city of Khan Younis, which has come under heavy bombardment over the last two months. Associated Press reporters at two hospitals confirmed the toll.

The U.S., Qatar and Egypt have spent months trying to mediate a cease-fire that would see the remaining hostages released. But the talks have repeatedly bogged down as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed "total victory" over Hamas and the militant group has demanded a lasting cease-fire and a full withdrawal from the territory.

There was no sign of a breakthrough after days of talks in Egypt, and the negotiations move to Qatar this week. (AP)

A Russian missile strikes a Ukrainian city already in mourning for deaths in an earlier attack

KYIV, Aug 28: A Russian missile slammed into Kryvyi Rih on Wednesday, local authorities said, just as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's home city was observing an official day of mourning for an attack the previous day that killed four civilians at a hotel.

The latest attack on the city struck civilian infrastructure, wounding four people, local administration head Oleksandr Vilkul said on social media.

The previous attack on Tuesday, which also wounded five people in Kryvyi Rih in addition to the four dead, was part of a barrage of dozens of missiles and drones across Ukraine that Russia launched for a second consecutive day.

"When Kryvyi Rih is in mourning, the enemy attacks again. And it once again aims at civilians," regional head Serhii Lysak said on Wednesday.

Russia stepped up its bombing of Ukraine on Monday, when it fired more than 100 missiles and a similar number of drones in its biggest onslaught in weeks.

The intensified bombing campaign coincided with what could prove to be a decisive period of the war, which Russia launched on Feb. 24, 2022.

Russian forces have been driving deeper into Ukraine's partly occupied eastern Donetsk region, whose total capture is one of the Kremlin's primary ambitions.

Russia's army is closing in on Pokrovsk, a critical logistics hub for the Ukrainian defense in the area.

At the same time, Ukraine has sent its forces into Russia's Kursk region in recent weeks in the largest incursion onto Russian soil since World War II. The move is in part an effort to force Russia to draw troops away from the Donetsk front.

At the hotel in Kryvyi Rih, rescuers on Wednesday found another body under the rubble. The rescue operation was subsequently ended.

Meanwhile, Ukraine claimed its anti-aircraft defenses destroyed a Russian Su-25 jet in the Donetsk region.

Ukraine also kept up its long-range drone attacks on Russia's rear logistical areas, setting fire to a fuel depot. (AP)

Germany and the UK seek a new bilateral treaty as Starmer pursues a 'reset' with the EU



BERLIN, Aug 28: The leaders of Germany and the United Kingdom announced plans on Wednesday to draw up a treaty meant to deepen the two nations' trade, defense and other ties.

The move comes as new U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer moves ahead with plans for a "reset" of relations with the European Union.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that he welcomes fellow center-left leader Starmer's desire for a new beginning in relations with the EU, and "we want to take this outstretched hand."

Starmer took office in early July after the previous Conservative government was trounced in an election. Four years after the U.K. left the EU, he says he wants to rebuild ties strained by years of ill-tempered wrangling over Brexit terms.

He said that he hopes to conclude the bilateral agreement with Germany, which has Europe's biggest economy, by the end of this year.

"That will be ambitious, it will be wide-ranging, covering trade, the economy, defense and many other issues," he told reporters. The two leaders are among Ukraine's biggest military backers and stressed their

commitment to keeping up that support.

Starmer said that the two countries also plan to draw up a "joint action plan to tackle illegal migration." His government still faces pressure to stop migrants crossing the English Channel in small boats, though it scrapped the Conservatives' contentious plan to send them on a one-way trip to Rwanda.

Migration is also an issue on which Scholz's government has long been under heavy pressure, even more so since Friday's attack in Solingen in which a suspected extremist from Syria who had avoided being deported is accused of killing three people.

The proposed U.K.-Germany treaty is modeled in part on agreements that Britain struck in recent years with France on defense, security and closer law enforcement cooperation against people-smuggling gangs.

Starmer sent a signal by visiting Berlin early in his term — unlike predecessor Rishi Sunak, who took 18 months. But his talk of starting anew with the EU has its limits.

He has ruled out many of the major possible steps to closer ties and has been cool to the idea of a youth mobility agreement with the 27-nation bloc.

"I'm absolutely clear that we do want a reset ... with Europe, a reset with the EU," Starmer said in Berlin.

However, "that does not mean reversing Brexit or reentering the single market or the customs union, but it does mean a closer relation on a number of fronts — including the economy, including defense, including exchanges, but we do not have plans for the youth mobility scheme." (AP)

Church sex abuse scandals in East Timor met by silence, but Pope Francis' visit brings new attention

DILI, Aug 28: When the Vatican acknowledged in 2022 that the Nobel Peace Prize-winning, East Timorese independence hero Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo had sexually abused young boys, it appeared that the global clergy sexual abuse scandal that has compromised the Catholic Church's credibility around the world had finally arrived in Asia's newest country.

And yet, the church in East Timor today is stronger than ever, with most downplaying, doubting or dismissing the claims against Belo and those against a popular American missionary who confessed to molesting young girls. Many instead focus on their roles saving lives during the country's bloody struggle against Indonesia for independence.

Pope Francis will come face to face with the Timorese faithful on his first trip to the country, a former Portuguese colony that makes up half of the island of Timor off the northern coast of Australia. But so far, there is no word if he will meet with victims or even mention the sex abuse directly, as he has in other countries where the rank-and-file faithful have demanded an accounting from the hierarchy for how it failed to protect their children.

Even without pressure from within East Timor to address the scandals, it would be deeply meaningful to the victims if Francis did, said Tijyske Lingsma, the Dutch journalist who helped bring both abuse cases to light.

"I think this is the time for the pope to say some words to the victims, to apologize," she said in an interview from Amsterdam.

The day after Lingsma detailed the Belo case in a September 2022 report in De Groene Amsterdammer magazine, the Vatican confirmed that Belo had been sanctioned secretly two years ear-



lier.

In Vatican spokesman Matteo Brunetti's statement, he said the church had been aware of the case since 2019 and had imposed disciplinary measures in 2020, including restrictions on Belo's movements and a ban on voluntary contact with minors.

Despite the official acknowledgment, many in East Timor still don't believe it, like Dili university student Martinha Goveia, who is still expecting Belo will show up to be at Francis' side during his upcoming visit.

If he's not there, she said, "that is not good in my opinion," because it will confirm he is being sanctioned by the Vatican.

Vegetable trader Alfredo Ximenes said the allegations and the Vatican's acknowledged sanctions were merely rumors, and that he hoped Belo would come to welcome the pope and refute the claims in person.

"Our political leaders should immediately meet him to end the problem and persuade him to return, because after all he has contributed greatly to national independence," Ximenes said.

Timorese officials refused to answer questions about the Belo case, but there's been no attempt to avoid mentioning him, with a giant billboard in Dili welcoming Pope Francis, whose visit starts Sept. 9, placed right above a

mural honoring Belo and three others as national heroes.

Only about 20% of East Timor's people were Catholic when Indonesia invaded in 1975, shortly after Portugal abandoned it as a colony.

Today, some 98% of East Timor's 1.3 million people are Catholic, making it the most Catholic country in the world outside the Vatican.

A law imposed by Indonesia requiring people to choose a religion, combined with the church's opposition to the military occupation and support for the resistance over years of bloody fighting that saw as many as 200,000 people killed, helped bring about that flood of new members.

Belo won the Nobel Peace Prize for his bravery in drawing international attention to Indonesian human rights abuses during the conflict, and American missionary Richard Daschbach was widely celebrated for his role in helping save lives in the struggle for independence.

Their heroic status, and societal factors in Asia, where the culture tends to confer much power on adults and authority figures, helps explain why the men are still revered while elsewhere in the world such cases are met with outrage, said Anne Barrett Doyle, of the online resource Bishop Accountability. (AP)

Ukraine first lady wants country's kids to see themselves as 'generation of winners' not war victims

UZHHOROD, Aug 28: Ukraine's first lady wants her country's children to view themselves not as a generation enduring a grinding war, but rather as "a generation of winners."

On the sidelines of a day spent at a rehabilitation camp for Ukrainian children in the relatively safe western city of Uzhhorod, Olena Zelenska said on Tuesday that working with the next generation was both a moral obligation and a "strategic priority" for Ukraine's future.

Many of the children will return to front-line cities after spending a few weeks at the camp, barely enough time to overcome the trauma they face over and over.

"This issue needs to be addressed immediately, as soon as it arises, before it grows into something more," Zelenska told The Associated Press in a brief interview at the camp.

The foundation that bears her name, which is funded entirely by foreign donations, created the camp along with the Voices of the Children charity. A study by the Olena

Zelenska Foundation and the Kyiv School of Economics this year found that 44% of Ukrainian children show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Dressed casually with white sneakers, black pants, a white T-shirt and pearls around her neck, Zelenska blended into the camp's activities with the children.

Since the start of the war, she has emerged as an unofficial ambassador for Ukraine globally. She was the first from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's family to leave the country after Russia invaded in February 2022 to promote Ukraine's cause. But she is equally active within Ukraine, and easily recognizable to the displaced families and wounded soldiers she visits. At the camp, she joined an art therapy session midway, sitting beside a boy whose home was struck by an aerial bomb and who was later forced to evacuate from his hometown ahead of the Russian advance this summer.

Zelenska smiled and engaged with the children, examining each



watercolor they presented. She even joined in, drawing a pink flower, a star and a heart. The conversation stayed away from the war.

"To ensure our children do not become a lost generation, we as adults must be not just active but also swift," Zelenska said. "It's difficult, but there is still the ongoing defense of the country. However, I am confident that political will combined with international cooperation can work wonders."

The first lady said she first heard about "war fatigue" in the summer 2022 but she refuses to believe in it.

"When your neighbor has a fire, it seems pointless to say: 'I'm tired of your fire. Stop it. Let's forget about it,'" she said. "We still need help, and we will continue to ask for it. Not because we are bold, but because it is vital for our survival."

During one of the activities, in which a mystery guest connected via an online call, eventually revealed to be Ukrainian boxer Oleksandr Usyk, one child in the crowd shouted, suggesting it might be the president.

The first lady quickly responded, "No, Zelenskyy is currently busy," prompting an eruption of laughter from dozens of children.

Zelenska studied architecture but wound up working as a comedy scriptwriter, including for Zelenskyy, who was a comedian with a popular television show before winning the presidency in 2019.

The couple periodically appears in public together, visiting schools or rehabilitation centers and making formal visits abroad. The scrutiny has taken something of a toll on Zelenska, who was not a public figure before her husband became president.

"I feel a responsibility because I understand that all eyes are on us," she said. "Even when you're not doing anything particularly special, people still assess how the president's family is functioning during the war — what they're doing, where they are, how they are behaving."

Zelenska noted that since the start of the invasion, Ukraine has been in a constant humanitarian crisis, with one of the biggest issues being internally displaced people and several million refugees abroad. (AP)

24 people missing after floods tore through a northern Yemen village

CAIRO, Aug 28: Floodwaters swept through a village in northern Yemen, inundating homes and shops and leaving at least 24 people missing, authorities said on Wednesday.

Heavy rains over the past few days pounded the Melhan district in Al-Mahwit province, triggering floods that caved in seven homes and four shops, according to a statement by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Yemen was already the poorest Arab nation before it was plunged into civil war in 2014, when Iran-backed Houthi rebels took control of the capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north, forcing the government to flee to the south, then to Saudi Arabia.

Seasonal monsoon rains in the late summer often turn into flooding in Yemen, but there are indications that the country is experiencing more extreme weather events due to climate change.

A 2024 report by Yemen's Red Crescent projected that the country will see less precipitation overall, but that flooding events are expected to be more severe in the monsoon season.

Yemen's rainy season begins in late March, and rains intensify in July through mid-August.

The World Health Organization said this week that Yemenis were suffering "disproportionately from climate change due to their already undermined capacities, limited resources and fragile infrastructure." It warned that more heavy rains were expected in the coming weeks and months.

Though the country's conflict and disorder makes determining the true toll of the floods difficult, the organization said that at least 36 people had been killed in the western province of Hodeida alone by flooding in recent weeks, and in the central province of Marib there are roughly 8,400 internally displaced families. (AP)

Centre approves ₹ 4,136 cr for 15 GW hydropower projects in NE

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved equity support of ₹ 4,136 crore to northeast states for developing hydropower projects, totalling 15,000 MW capacity over the next eight years.

The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Power for providing central financial assistance (CFA) to the state governments of NER (North East Region) towards their equity participation in the development of hydroelectric projects through Joint Venture (JV) collaboration between state entities and Central Public Sector Undertakings, an official statement said.

This scheme has an outlay of ₹ 4,136 crore to be implemented from 2024-25 to 2031-32, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in a briefing on the Cabinet decisions.

A cumulative hydro capacity of about 15,000 MW would be supported under the scheme, the statement said.

The scheme will be funded through 10 per cent gross budgetary support (GBS)



for the northeastern region from the total outlay of the Ministry of Power.

The grant towards the equity portion of the state government of NER would be capped at 24 per cent of the total project equity, subject to a maximum of ₹ 750 crore per project.

The cap of ₹ 750 crore for each project would be revisited, if required, on a case-to-case basis.

The equity ratio of the CPSU and state government in the JV will be maintained at the time of disbursing of the grant.

Central financial assistance would be limited to only viable hydroelectric projects. States would be required to waive or

stagger free power and reimburse SGST to make the project viable.

With the introduction of this scheme, participation of state governments in hydro development will be encouraged and risk and responsibilities will be shared in a more equitable manner, the statement said.

The issues like land acquisition, rehabilitation & resettlement and local law & order issues would be reduced with state governments becoming stakeholders. This will avoid time and cost over-run of the projects, it added.

It would bring huge investment in the northeastern region and will provide a large number of direct employment to the local people, it noted.

The development of hydroelectric projects will also contribute towards the realisation of India's Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) of establishing 500 GW renewable energy capacity by 2030 and help the integration of RE sources in the grid thus enhancing flexibility, security and reliability of the national grid, as per the statement. (PTI)

Mining minor mineral not exempted under MMDR Act: Dy CM



SHILLONG, Aug 28: Meghalaya deputy chief minister Prestone Tynsong recently said that there is no scope under the law for exempting any traditional form of mining of minor minerals from the operation and purview of the Meghalaya Minor Minerals Concession Rules (MMMC), 2016 or Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Act, 1957.

Replying to a zero-hour notice moved by a BJP legislator from South Shillong Sanbor Shullai in the Assembly, Tynsong said, "It is under the aforesaid circumstances, statutory requirements including the Rules and the unambiguous court rulings which are binding on the state government the state government had promulgated Meghalaya Mineral (Prevention of illegal mining, transportation and storage) Rules, 2022 which do not permit any transport of minor minerals without securing transport challan as per Form-H of MMC, 2016 which in turn would require that the stone boulder is sourced from a quarry or mine which has a legal mining lease or quarry permit."

"On the face of all the aforesaid rulings of the High Court and Supreme Court and the relevant Acts and Rules there is no scope under the law for exempting any traditional form of mining of minor minerals from the operation and purview of MMC, 2016 or the

MMDR Act, 1957 nor for transporting any minor mineral such as boulder stones, sand etc without obtaining transport challan as prescribed under the Rules," he said.

He further conveyed that it is also of concern that a violation of these rules would amount to a violation of the MMDR Act, 1957 which is an offence under Section 21 of MMDR Act, 1957.

"Therefore, in view of the extant court Rulings including those of the Supreme Court and the Meghalaya High Court in interpretation of the Constitution of India and prevailing statutes relating to mining and environmental clearance, the existing laws on the matter which are in force in our state perhaps no exemption could be made in favour of either traditional mining of stones or any other minor mineral from the operation of these statutes or for their transportation," he added.

Further, Tynsong assured that all steps would be taken to expedite the granting of a mining lease or quarry permit to applicants who approached the department for the same.

"The departmental staff would also be instructed to assist such individuals in helping them fill the relevant applications, and explain to them the procedure involved for applying such permits.

After a mining lease or quarry permit has been granted to the applicant then he would be entitled to Form-H under Meghalaya Minor Mineral Concession Rules, 2016 for transporting the excavated boulder stone or any other minor mineral.

"Thereafter neither the miner nor the transporter would face any hurdle in either mining the boulder stone or transporting the boulder stone," Tynsong said.

Meanwhile, Tynsong also informed that the government is examining the possibility of a single window agency. (NNN)

M'laya assembly rejects bill on NCL for ST

SHILLONG, Aug 28: The Meghalaya Reservation for Non-Creamy Layer of Scheduled Tribes (in State Reservation Policy) Bill, 2024 proposed by the Voice of the People Party (VPP) legislator from North Shillong Adelbert Nongrum was rejected through a voice vote in the Assembly on Tuesday. "The Nos have it, the motion is not carried and leave to introduce the Bill is not granted. The Bill is therefore rejected by the House," Assembly deputy speaker Timothy D Shira said after the Bill was put to vote.

Tabling the statement of object and reasons, Nongrum said the Bill seeks to provide for the reservation of non-creamy layers of Scheduled Tribes in the state while implementing the State Reservation Policy.

He said, "Definitive empirical data available with the government of Meghalaya clearly shows that the economic condition of a greater percentage of the Scheduled Tribe population of the state is weak and disadvantaged."

"And whereas Articles 16 (4) and 15 (5) of the Constitution of India allows for the state to make provisions so as to ensure that the benefits of reservation reach the most disadvantaged class of citizens," he added.

Further, Nongrum said that since a seven-judge constitutional bench of the Supreme Court in a 6:1 majority has upheld the validity of sub-classification within the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories, and gave a decision that states have the power to create these sub-classifications. (NNN)

Meghalaya launches District Nutrition Challenge

Aims to improve nutritional issues

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 28: Aligning with the SDG goals, set to be achieved by 2030, a two-day Human Development Leadership Programme (HDLP) workshop took place from August 23-24 in Shillong. Out of the 17 goals, a heightened focus was on reducing maternal and child deaths, improving nutrition outcomes, addressing learning outcomes and overall socio-economic development.

Notably, the state has constituted a first-of-its-kind Human Development Council headed by the chief minister in February this year and as part of this, the 2-day workshop was conducted.

Day 1 of the workshop witnessed participation of Deputy Commissioners from 12 districts, including key state officials: Chief Secretary-D.P. Wahlang, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary-Shakil P Ahammad, IAS, Development Commissioner & Principal Secretary-Sampath Kumar, IAS, Commissioner & Secretary- Planning & Finance Vijay Kumar, IAS, Commissioner & Secretary, Education- Vijay Mantri, IAS, and Additional Development Commissioner, Joram Beda IAS, among other key officials. The workshop also witnessed the presence of Health Minister Dr M Amparen Lyngdoh.

The prime focus of Day 1 was on the need to improve nutritional indicators, especially stunting rates among children. A District Nutrition Challenge was assigned to each district, along with targets to achieve, based on the insights given by the members on their developmental indicators.

It focused on the improvement of nutritional indicators, which will be done through a decentralized leadership approach, initiated through joint field visits to vulnerable households as part of HDLP. These visits are aimed at identifying & addressing systemic challenges causing low development indicators such as anaemia, malnutrition, stunting, high-risk pregnancies, teenage pregnancies, housing facilities, SHG coverage, education & learning engagement among children and adolescents as well as poverty.

It further aimed at facilitating a convergent cross-departmental approach with enhanced public service motivation to address the identified issues and mobilise communities to ensure ownership and intervention

to tackle the human development challenges.

Following discussions with the DCs, directions were given to them to decentralize the Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) under the ICDS to ensure that local & nutritious food is made available to the children as well as lactating mothers.

The need for decentralization of the SNP was discussed at length and a collective decision was taken for the need to decentralize the ICDS-SNP programme, with directions being given to the departments and districts to initiate steps for the same.

In his opening address, the Development Commissioner Mr. Sampath Kumar, IAS, said that since the launch of mission mode "Rescue Mission and CM-SMS programs, the maternal deaths reduced by around 50% and infant deaths by 34% from in the last 4 years." He highlighted that the joint field visits to each vulnerable household under the HDLP will help address the problems of all members of a household while aiming to strengthen the citizen-state relationship.

Meanwhile, health minister Dr M. Amparen Lyngdoh highlighted the wealth of data and insights being gathered through the house-to-house visits as part of HDLP joint visits, which is essential for driving strategic decisions and interventions aimed at improving health outcomes across Meghalaya. She advocated for involving MLAs in in-depth research and involving them more effectively in health and development initiatives.

Chief Secretary D.P. Wahlang, IAS, highlighted key health issues, including Meghalaya's high Total Fertility Rate (TFR). "With about 80,000 new individuals added annually due to TFR, it is important to focus on skill development and a field-oriented approach to meet Meghalaya's long-term development goals," he stated. He further provided a comprehensive overview of the current development priorities for Meghalaya.

The second day of the workshop focused on the need for and steps to improve nutritional outcomes as part of the District Nutrition Challenge launched on Day 1.

The Development Commissioner, while facilitating the workshop, stated, "We need to address stunting to improve learning outcomes among children, and hence, we will set a collective target to increase the aver-

age height of children through the District Nutritional Challenge - This will be done through a three-pronged strategy - 1. Promoting effective exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months, 2. Decentralizing the Supplementary Nutrition Program (SNP) under ICDS to ensure that nutritious food is provided through local community participation, and 3. Increasing the consumption of Iron Folic Acid (IFA) supplements among all mothers during the antenatal period and adolescent girls to address anaemia."

The importance of the first 1000-day period was emphasized, spanning from conception to a child's second birthday- a critical window for ensuring proper nutrition and development.

Explaining the high stunting rates among children in Meghalaya (46.5% as per NFHS-5), the Development Commissioner urged the districts to achieve the "Half a Feet Challenge" by aiming to improve the average height of a child by the age of two years. Currently, the average height of a two-year-old child in Meghalaya is approximately 2.5 ft, compared to an optimal height of 3 ft to be gained by a child of 2 years of age (in the first 1000 days).

A key component of the workshop was a case study exercise facilitated by MD-NHM-Ram Kumar, IAS that simulated scenarios faced by pregnant women in rural Meghalaya.

Participants were asked to develop follow-up questions and support strategies for a household dealing with anaemia, malnutrition, and school dropout. This session emphasized the importance of asking the right questions during field visits and providing tailored solutions to each household's unique challenges.

The second day witnessed about 140 participants comprising Secretaries and Directors of aforementioned departments and Deputy Commissioners of all 12 districts, Additional Deputy Commissioner/Project Director (DRDA), DM&HO, DPO (ICDS), DSEO, DPM (NHM), DMM (MSRLS), Medical Superintendents, DM&CHOs, MSRLS, DHS, Officials from Social Welfare department, functionaries from ICDS, MSRLS, NHM, MHSSP, UNICEF, Research Fellows from School of Public Policy- UCL, team members from the Public Affairs Center, among others.

OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT HEALTH SOCIETY, KARBI ANGLONG
NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION
Karbi Anglong, Diphu, Tele- 03671-273038 Email: nhm.karbianglong@gmail.com

No. NHM/K-Ang/Inviting Quotation/Firm/Party/2019-20/Part-1/22770676 Dated 27/08/2024

SHORT NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

Sealed quotation affixing court fee of Rs.8.25 (Rupees Eight and Twenty-five paise) only or Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council cash receipt of Rs 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only are inviting from the Supplier/Firm for supply of pathological services for In-House lab, like investigation kits, reagents & consumables, QC samples etc. The details at Annexure-I.

The Quotation will address to the **Jt. Dhs Karbi Anglong cum Member Secretary District Health Society Karbi Anglong**. The quotation will receive in the office of DMPU, NHM Karbi Anglong up to 2.00 PM on 2nd of September 2024 and in case of any Govt Holiday or any bandh, then the next working day will be the last date for receiving of the application.

The undersigned reserved the right to reject any of the quotation.

ANNEXURE:1

Sl no.	Items	Particulars	Unit rate	Unit rate (Including GST)
1	ESR TUBES DISPOSAL/ ESR Pipette			
2	ESR VIAL			
3	EDTA VIAL			
4	CLOT VIAL			
5	FLORIDE VIAL			
6	3.2% Citrate vial			
7	GLASS TEST TUBE (12 • 75 mm/ RIA)			
8	RIA VIAL with screw cap for			
9	BLOOD GROUPING REAGENT			
10	TIMER			
11	TORNIQUET BELT			
12	URINE STRIP			
13	T.TUBE RECK			
14	T.TUBE RECK			
15	SYRINGES 10ml,5ml,2ml			
16	GEL AND CLOT ACTIVATOR			
17	MICROPIPETTES 5 - 50 microliters			
18	MICROPIPETTES 10 -100 microliters			
19	MICROPIPETTES 100 - 1000 microliters			
20	MICROPIPETTES STAND.			
21	MKROTIPS 2 - 200 microliters			
22	MICROTIPS 1000 microliters			
23	MICROTIPS BOX			
24	GLASS SLIDE			
25	COVER SLIP			
26	URINE COLLECTION POT			
27	FORCEPS.			
28	Leishman Stain			
29	JSB Stain			
30	ZN Stain			
31	Acid & Disinfectant			
32	Thermometer for measuring room temperature			
33	Conical flask (250 ml glass flask)			
34	Measuring cylinder 500 ml			
35	Rectified Spirit			
36	Sterile Swabs Sticks with plastic tubes			
37	Distilled water			
38	Anti HAV RAPID			
39	Anti HEV RAPID			
40	Leptospira IgM RAPID			
41	Scrub typhus IgM RAPID			
42	Dengue NS1 RAPID			
43	Dengue IgM RAPID			
44	Widal test kit RAPID			
45	Malaria RDT RAPID			
46	Typhi Dot kit			
47	HB strips			
48	Glucometer strips			
49	Immersion oil			
50	Tissue roll/ Tissue paper			
51	Blotting paper/ filter paper			
52	Glucometer Machine			
53	Glucometer strip			
54	2 Parameter Urine Strip			
55	Hemoglobin meter Machine			
56	Hemoglobin strip			

Terms and Conditions:

1. Each supplier shall submit only ONE quotation

2. The supplier/firm shall have GST registration on Laboratory equipment's and consumables.

3. The farm will submit GST/PAN, Trading license

4. Location of Delivery will be at various Hospital in the District (details will be inform in the work order)

5. The Purchaser will award the contract to the bidder whose quotation has been determined to be substantially responsive and who has offered the lowest evaluated quotation price

6. Notwithstanding the above, the Purchaser reserves the right to accept or reject any quotations and to cancel the bidding process and reject all quotations at any time prior to the award of contract

7. Payment shall be made as per availability of fund and delivery of goods and successful installation at destination as per the contract

8. The Bidder shall indicate the name of the Bank, address and account number Bank's Information: Name of the Bank: Account number:

9. All legal disputes shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the Courts of Law of Karbi Anglong district.

Sd/-
Joint Director of Health Services
Cum Member Secretary,
District Health Society, Karbi Anglong

No. NHM/K-Ang/ Inviting Quotation/Firm/Party/2019-20/Part-1/22770677683 Dated 27/08/2024

Bengal govt will amend existing laws to ensure death penalty to rapists: Mamata

KOLKATA, Aug 28: Asserting that her government has zero tolerance to incidents of rape, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said an amendment to existing laws will be passed in the state assembly next week to ensure capital punishment to convicted rapists.

Banerjee said that she would sit for dharna outside Raj Bhavan here if the governor delays in giving assent to the amended bill or forwards it to the President for ratification.

The chief minister also said that the TMC will launch a movement from Saturday at the state's grassroots to create pressure on the Centre to pass legislation for capital punishment of convicted rapists.

"We will pass the amended bill in a special session of the assembly next week. We will then send it to the governor for his nod. We will stage dharna outside Raj Bhavan if he sits on the bill," she thundered from the Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad foundation day rally here.

The CM said women will be at the forefront of the proposed dharna accompanied by "their brothers".

She also flagged the issue of the sexual misconduct allegations levelled by a former Raj Bhavan woman staffer and accused C V Ananda Bose of making "false



charges" against her government and party.

Banerjee also urged the agitating junior doctors of Bengal, who have struck work for 20 days now to urgently consider returning to duty.

"I have remained sympathetic towards the cause of the doctors from the very beginning since they were seeking justice for their colleague. We did not take any action against them although so many days have passed since the incident. We understand your pain. But please come back to work now since patients are suffering," she appealed. The police recovered the body of the woman's postgraduate trainee doctor from the seminar hall of the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9.

The junior doctors of state-run hospitals have been on cease work

since that evening, demanding justice for the victim and strong security measures in hospitals.

Banerjee added no FIR was lodged against any doctor so far as she does not want that a medic's career is plagued by police cases.

"Sixteen days have passed since the Central Bureau of Investigation took over the doctor's rape-murder probe from the Kolkata Police. Where is the justice? We want the CBI to come up with investigation updates," she said.

Denouncing the BJP for calling a 12-hour general strike on Wednesday, Banerjee said, "They called the bandh since they wanted political dividends over a dead body. The BJP is trying to exploit the emotions of ordinary people in the wake of the death of the young woman. They want to malign Ben-

gal and plotted a conspiracy to derail the probe into her death."

"If Bengal is set on fire, Assam, northeast, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Delhi will also be affected," the TMC chief said.

She also said that the Bombay High Court recently restrained political parties or individuals from proceeding with a Maharashtra bandh. On the demand for her resignation in the wake of the RG Kar hospital incident, she said, "I will ask BJP why Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not resign owning up to his failure to prevent atrocities and sexual attacks on women in Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur and Assam. I ask why only an accused was killed in an encounter in Assam?"

The BJP is making such demands as it has suffered a string of defeats in elections and knows that it won't be able to win in future, Banerjee said.

"Buses with TMCP supporters on board were attacked. Several trains were delayed. From railways to CBI and ED, everything is being controlled by partisan BJP," she said.

The TMC boss also alleged that the BJP was "indulging in large-scale cyber crimes using AI, causing social unrest".

On the march to state secretariat

Nabanna on Tuesday, the chief minister said, "Police acted in restraint despite provocations of BJP-backed outfits who wanted protesters dead (in police action). Despite suffering physical injuries from the attacks on them, police personnel did not fall prey to provocations. She said every attacker will be identified and action taken. Banerjee said she had earlier espoused the slogan "badla noy badal chai" (we want change, not revenge), the time has come to change that. Now we say resist and protest whenever you are insulted, whenever you face ugly attack, don't take it lying down.

Alleging that the BJP has hatched a conspiracy to stall Durga Puja festivities in Bengal, she said that poor people wait for the puja for economic reasons.

About the comparison between the uprising in Bangladesh and the public outcry following the RG Kar hospital incident, Banerjee said the situations are different.

"We (people in West Bengal and Bangladesh) speak the same language and share similar food, and it ends there," she said.

The CM said that on August 31, the TMC student wing will demand capital punishment for convicted rapists in every college. It will be followed up the next by holding dharnas in every block of the state. (PTI)

Mehbooba not to contest J&K polls



SRINAGAR, Aug 28: PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday said she will not contest the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, pointing out that she would not be able to fulfil her party's agenda in the union territory set up even if she were to become the chief minister.

"I have been chief minister of a government with the BJP which revoked FIRs against 12,000 persons (in 2016). Can we do that now? I, as the chief minister of a government with (PM) Modi, wrote a letter to separatists to invite them for talks. Can you do that today? I got a ceasefire (implemented) on ground. Can you do that today? If you cannot take back an FIR as chief minister, what does one do with such a post?" she said.

The PDP president was asked if she has had a change of heart on contesting the polls after vice president of arch-rival National Conference Omar Abdullah made a U-turn on his stand of not participating in the polls till Jammu and Kashmir was a union territory.

"Omar himself said that he will have to be at the door of the (lieutenant) governor for transfer of a peon. I am not bothered about the transfer of the peon but can we implement our agenda?" the former chief minister said.

Omar Abdullah, who had vowed not to take part in assembly polls till Jammu and Kashmir remained a union territory, was among 32 candidates named by the party on Tuesday. The former chief minister will contest polls from Ganderbal where he had won in 2008.

On the alliance between National Conference and Congress for Jammu and Kashmir polls, the PDP president said the two parties have always come together just for the sake of power.

"When we entered into an al-

liance with Congress in 2002, we had an agenda. We released Syed Ali Geelani from jail. Can you think of doing it today? When we allied with the BJP government in 2014, we had an agenda of alliance in which we had it in writing that Article 370 will not be touched, AFSPA to be revoked, talks with Pakistan and Hurriyat, return of power projects, etc. We had an agenda. However, when Congress and NC form an alliance, it is for power," she added.

On the possibility of Lok Sabha MP from Baramulla Sheikh Abdul Rashid and senior separatist leader Shabir Ahmad Shah being released from jail ahead of the polls, she said it would be a good development.

She urged the government to consider releasing even those lesser known people who are entitled to bail but have been denied it.

"It is very good. I say that you can put a person in jail but you cannot imprison the ideas. Democracy is a battle of ideas. It has been delayed but Engineer Rashid and Shabir Shah should be released along with all those languishing in jails who are entitled to bail but are not even getting that relief.

"The government has been saying time and again that they want to start a process of reconciliation in Jammu and Kashmir. I tell them to open the doors of the jails and the process of reconciliation will start," she added.

Mehbooba said the PDP is fighting for a bigger cause as it is the only party which implements its agenda after coming to power.

"In 2002, we said we would repeal POTA and we did it. We said we will open (cross-LoC) routes and we did it. We said we will facilitate talks and we did it with the Hurriyat Conference. We follow our agenda and even today our agenda is that there is an issue which cannot be resolved without addressing it. And restoration of Article 370 is also important for resolution of this issue.

"We have always fought alone, based on the support of people and for addressing the problems of the people," she said.

Later two budding politicians joined the PDP in presence of the PDP president. (PTI)

₹908-crore penalty in FEMA case against DMK MP: ED



NEW DELHI, Aug 28: The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday said a penalty of Rs 908 crore has been slapped in a case related to the violation of foreign exchange rules against DMK MP S Jagathrathakan and his family members.

The federal agency issued a statement which said that properties worth Rs 89.19 crore, seized in September 2020, have been confiscated following an adjudication order issued on August 26 under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

Jagathrathakan, 76, represents the Arakkonam Lok Sabha seat.

The agency said a FEMA probe was initiated against the MP, a businessman from Tamil Nadu, his family members and related Indian entity.

This investigation, it said, resulted in the passing of seizure order, dated September 11, 2020 under section 37A of FEMA, for various movable and immovable properties in the name of the MP and his family members. There are valued at Rs 89.19 crore.

"The properties worth Rs 89.19 crore which were seized in terms of section 37A of FEMA were also ordered for confiscation, and penalty of Rs 908 crore is levied vide Adjudication Order dated 26/08/2024," the ED said. (PTI)

Congress demands PM's apology over Shivaji's fallen statue

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: The Congress on Wednesday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the collapse of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's statue at Rajkot fort in Sindhudurg and asked whether he will apologise to the Maratha empire founder for putting his own personal ambitions above the Maharaj's legacy. The 35-foot statue of the 17th century Maratha empire founder, unveiled by Prime Minister Modi on December 4 last year, collapsed on August 26 afternoon.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary, in-charge organisation, K C Venugopal said those who stood against Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's values of swarajya, farmers' welfare, utmost integrity and inclusion of the backwards and neglected can never be expected to respect

his legacy and heritage.

"In true Modi fashion, the priority was to hurriedly construct a statue on 3 months' notice, so that it is inaugurated by the PM just before elections. What's more, this shoddy work cost Rs. 236 crores! Will PM Modi apologise to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj for putting his own personal ambitions above Maharaj's legacy?" Venugopal said on X. "Will the PM come clean on the rampant corruption that we saw in the hasty inauguration spree that we saw prior to the 2024 elections?" he asked.

Venugopal claimed that everything inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi and the BJP for election purposes is now crumbling.

"Here are just some examples of infrastructure that the BJP launched in haste, only for

them to collapse soon after: Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Statue at Sindhudurg Fort: Inauguration: December 2023, Collapse: August 2024; Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link: Inauguration: January 2024, cracks appear: June 2024; Mumbai Coastal Road: Inauguration: March 2024, Leakage: May 2024; Jabalpur Airport: Inauguration: March 2024, roof collapse: June 2024; Sudarshan Setu Bridge (Gujarat): Inauguration: February 2024, potholes appear: July 2024," he said.

The statue collapse incident has snowballed into a political controversy with the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) targeting the Mahayuti government in Maharashtra and seeking Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's resignation. (PTI)

Abhishek demands stricter anti-rape laws

'Will move private member's bill in Lok Sabha'

KOLKATA, Aug 28: Demanding enactment of stricter anti-rape laws by the Centre, TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee said he will move a private member's bill in the Lok Sabha.

The TMC national general secretary said that if the Centre "fails" to enact a stricter law that would ensure quick trial and sentencing of those found guilty, he will lead protests in Delhi. "Our only demand is stricter anti-rape legislation," the TMC MP said, addressing a Trinamool Congress students' wing rally on its foundation day, here.

He said that the TMC will take to the streets if the Centre does not enact a new law to ensure a time-bound trial and sentencing of the accused found guilty of rape charges. "If the central government does not enact this law, I will move a private member's bill for the new law," he said.

Banerjee said that the TMC was demanding justice and quick trial and sentencing in the rape and murder of a woman trainee doctor in R G Kar Medical College and Hospital. He said that if this government could impose lockdown or notebandi in a day, why

cannot they introduce stricter anti-rape laws. The TMC leader said that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had herself said that the probe into the rape-murder of the postgraduate trainee doctor would be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation if the Kolkata Police could not deliver within a specified period, but the agency has not been able to deliver so far despite being handed over the case by the Calcutta High Court on August 13.

Abhishek Banerjee claimed that the CBI has "failed" to bring to book the criminals in the probes it was already holding in the state, starting from the theft of the Nobel medal of Rabindranath Tagore in 2004.

He asked why the CBI has not been able to arrest Sandip Ghosh, who was the principal of R G Kar Medical College when the rape-murder took place on August 9.

Ghosh has been called to the CBI office for questioning for 11 consecutive days till Tuesday.

Banerjee claimed that the BJP workers had indulged in violence in the name of protests on Tuesday. (PTI)

K'taka HC to resume hearing on CM's petition today

BENGALURU, Aug 28: The Karnataka High Court is set to resume hearing on Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's petition challenging the legality of the Governor Thaaawarchand's sanction for his prosecution in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) case on Thursday.

The Governor on August 16 accorded sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 and Section 218 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 for the commission of the alleged offences as mentioned in the petitions of Pradeep Kumar S P T J Abraham and Snehamayi Krishna.

On August 19, Siddaramaiah moved to the High Court challenging the legality of the Governor's order. The HC had directed the special court for people's representatives that was slated to hear complaints against him in the case, to defer its proceedings till the next date of hearing on August 29.

In the petition, the Chief Minister submitted that the sanction order was issued without due application of mind, in violation of statutory mandates, and contrary to constitutional principles, including the advice of the Council of Ministers, which is binding under Article 163 of the Constitution of India.

The court proceedings will be keenly watched for its possible political impact. The Congress has rallied behind Siddaramaiah and ruled out his resignation over the issue and said it would wage a legal and political fight. Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also state Congress chief, and several senior Ministers recently met AICC President M Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi in New Delhi and held discussions on the Governor's order and

strategy to be adopted going forward.

On the Chief Minister's petition coming up for hearing in the High Court on Thursday, Home Minister G Parameshwara said there is hope that the HC will not consider the argument in favour of the Governor's decision.

"There should be material about Siddaramaiah's involvement. If they (materials) are there, they can be taken into cognisance. When there are no materials like -- his signature, his order, involvement and name... even in the registration his name is not there. When such is the case, the court will look into all these things and will decide on it," he said.

Responding to a question on whether there have been any discussions by the high command regarding the next course of action, in case the developments in the court on August 29 go against Siddaramaiah, the Minister said: "What developments will happen cannot be speculated, once things happen let's discuss, this is what they have told."

Asked about speculations that he may become CM (in the event of Siddaramaiah quitting), Parameshwara, who held a prolonged discussion with Congress leadership -- Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi -- during the recent Delhi visit, said that question doesn't arise at all, and the issue has never come up for discussion. " (My) seniority may be there.... it is true that Rahul Gandhi spoke to me separately, but what was discussed cannot be speculated. I'm a disciplined soldier of the party and have fulfilled the responsibility given to me from time to time. He (Rahul) spoke to me regarding party things, other than that nothing was discussed," he added.

Chief Minister's Legal Advisor and Virajpet Congress MLA, A S Ponnanna

said: "According to us, the Governor's order is contrary to the law and seems to have been taken in a hurry."

"Unilateral decision was taken by the Governor without any inquiry or examining evidence, so we are hopeful of winning in the court. Necessary action will be taken based on what the court decides," he said.

Claiming that there is situation in the country where all non-BJP governments in the states are "forced to go to court for everything," Ponnanna accused ruling BJP at the Centre of "using" the Raj Bhavan and said: "in the days to come after getting admonished by the court, they will learn a lesson."

Responding to a question, he said: "A resolution can be passed in the state legislature seeking the removal of the Governor and send it to the Centre. As the Governor appointment is made by the union government, they can call him back after considering things.... it will be our fight in the days ahead."

In the MUDA 'scam', it is alleged that compensatory sites were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife B M Parvathi in an up-market area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been "acquired" by the MUDA.

The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of 3.16 acres of her land, where MUDA developed a residential layout.

Under the controversial scheme, MUDA allotted 50 per cent of developed land to the land losers in lieu of undeveloped land acquired from them for forming residential layouts. Opposition and some activists have also claimed that Parvathi had no legal title over the 3.16 acres of land. (PTI)

Govt plans to revive district agrometeorological units with permanent manpower: Officials

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: The government plans to revive the network of district agrometeorological units, which provided detailed block-level weather-related information to lakhs of farmers in the country until the India Meteorological Department directed their closure earlier this year, according to officials.

Several politicians, including Union minister Nitin Gadkari and Congress MP Jai Ram Ramesh, had opposed the shut-down.

"Human intelligence plays a crucial role in weather forecasting, even when we use models, artificial intelligence and machine learning," an official told PTI when asked if there's a plan to revive the district agrometeorological units (DAMUs).

"DAMUs were temporary in nature, with staff hired on a per-project basis. The ad-hoc nature of posts affected the forecast quality. There will be a permanent structure in place this time. The manpower will include both permanent and contractual staff. We aim to formalize and structure the process," the official said.

In 2015, the government launched the Gramin Krishi Mausam Seva (GMSV) to provide crop and location-specific detailed advisories to farmers, aiding them in day-to-day decision-making.

Over the years, 130 agromet field units (AMFUs) were set up in agro-climatic zones in the country in collaboration with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Each AMFU caters to four to five districts.



In 2018, the government decided to extend the reach of the service by setting up 530 district agromet units on the premises of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK). However, the Covid pandemic impacted the process, and only 199 DAMUs could be set up, each with two contractual employees -- SMS Agromet and Agromet Observer.

In a meeting of the Expenditure Finance Committee held in February last year, a senior advisor of Niti Aayog had suggested reevaluating the "necessity of providing staff at each DAMU".

The official suggested the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) may have "centralized units instead of field units as the collection of data is automated".

On January 17, the IMD wrote to all the DAMUs, asking them to wind up their operations by the end of the finan-

cial year 2023-24.

According to sources, the Ministry of Earth Sciences want the agriculture ministry to bear the expenditure for DAMUs.

"The data collection is automated. The IMD analyzes it and prepares forecasts centrally; DAMUs only disseminate advisories. The agriculture ministry is responsible for dissemination work, and therefore, it should be the nodal ministry," an MoES official had said earlier.

In a letter to former Earth Sciences Minister Jitendra Singh, Gadkari had said closure of DAMUs will have an adverse impact on agriculture production, food security, and livelihood of the farming community.

Earlier this month, Ramesh said that the DAMUs were shut down because the NITI Aayog "misrepresented" their role and sought privatisation. (PTI)

No.DPRD/BTC/6thASFC-III/Baksa-1/2024/19

Dated Kokrajhar the 27th August 2024

NOTICER INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders with a validity period of 90 (ninety) days from the date of receipt in prescribed from affixing non-refundable court fee stamps of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed F-2 form are hereby invited from the Govt. registered PWD (Roads/ Building), P&RD, others Govt. Contractor's under Class-I (A, B, C), Class-II and Class-III category from approved firm according to tender limit of eligibility for the following works under 6thASFC for the year 2022-23 during 2024-25 and will be received in the office of the undersigned up to 2.00 pm on 20/09/2024 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2.15 pm in the presence of willing contractors or their authorized agents.

Sl. No.	Name of Dev. Block	Name of Scheme	A/A amount (Rs.)	Tender Amount (Rs.)	Earnest Money (ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	Cost of Tender in Rs.	Time for completion in days	Pre-Bid meeting date & time
1	Baska	Const. of Crematorium ground at Pamuapathar village	19,04,809.00	19,04,809.00	ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%	575.00	60 days	20/09/24

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the Contractors or their authorized agent up to 12.00 Noon on all working days from 28/08/2024 to 20/09/2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment of in the form of Banker cheque/ Demand draft of any nationalized Bank (Preferable SBI) duly pledged to the Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar. The Cost of tender (Npn-Refundable) must be in the form of Demand Draft/ Banker Cheque of a Nationalized Bank drawn in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar and payable at SBI, Kokrajhar to be deposited 0.03%.

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

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/398

A decade of financial inclusion: PM Modi hails Jan Dhan Yojana

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: As the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana completed 10 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the scheme personifies dignity, empowerment and the opportunity to participate in the economic life of the nation.

Modi also hailed those who worked to make the Jan Dhan Yojana a success, and said the scheme has been paramount in boosting financial inclusion.

"Today, we mark a momentous occasion - #10YearsOfJanDhan. Congratulations to all the beneficiaries and compliments to all those who worked to make this scheme a success," the prime minister said in a post on X.

The Jan Dhan Yojana has been paramount in boosting financial inclusion and giving dignity to crores of people, especially women, youth, and the marginalised communities, he said.

Later, on a LinkedIn post, Modi said today marks a decade since the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana was launched and for him, this initiative was more than just a policy -- it was an endeavour to build an India where each and every citizen, irrespective of one's economic background, has access to the formal banking apparatus.

"Many of you, especially the youth, would be thinking -- why does this matter so much? After all, in this age, having a bank account would be very basic and even taken for granted. However, when we assumed office in 2014, the situation was very different. It was almost 65 years since Independence, but access to banking was a distant dream for almost half of our households," the prime minister said.

There was a world where savings were kept at home, vulnerable to loss and theft, he noted.

"Access to credit was often at



the mercy of predatory lenders. The absence of financial security held back so many dreams," Modi said. "This problem becomes even more ironical considering the fact that four and a half decades ago, banks were nationalised by the then (Congress) Government and that too in the name of the poor! Yet, the poor never got access to banking," he said.

"When the Jan Dhan Yojana was rolled out, I remember the scepticism that surrounded it too. Some people asked -- could it really be possible to bring such a large number of people into the banking system? Will this effort lead to any concrete changes? Yes. The scale of the challenge was enormous, but so was the determination of the people of India to ensure it becomes a reality," he said.

The success of the Jan Dhan Yojana has two parts to it, Modi pointed out and said one is in the numbers with over 53 crore people who never imagined they would enter a bank having bank accounts now.

These accounts have a deposit balance of over ₹ 2.3 lakh crore, he said. Over 65 per cent of the accounts are either in rural or semi-urban areas, thus taking the movement of financial inclusion outside the metros, Modi said, adding that direct transfers worth almost ₹ 39 lakh crore have taken place.

"But, the second part goes beyond the impressive numbers. Jan Dhan Yojana has proven to be game-changing as far as women's empowerment is concerned. Almost 30 crore women have been

brought into the banking system," he said. Likewise, the benefits of the scheme and the other benefits that come thanks to a bank account have positively impacted crores of SC, ST and OBC families, Modi said. "They have also benefited those families who belong to the middle and Neo-middle classes. Had it not been for the Jan Dhan Yojana, the MUDRA Yojana, or the social security schemes of the government, namely the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and the Atal Pension Yojana would never have been as impactful," he said. The prime minister asserted that Jan Dhan also became a vital pillar of the JAM Trinity - Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile.

"The landmark contribution of

this trinity was to eliminate the scourge of middlemen and touts who, for decades, thrived in public loot. It is this trinity that ensured a stunning digital payments revolution in India, especially in the middle and later years of the last decade," he said. The very same elements who doubted the relevance of a scheme like Jan Dhan were yet again mocking the need for digital payments in a nation like ours, Modi said. "But, once again, they underestimated the collective resolve of our people. India's digital payments success story is noted world over. Over 40 per cent of real time digital payments in the world happen in India!" he said.

A bank account has ensured hassle-free and direct transfer in almost all the government's flagship schemes, be it Ayushman Bharat, PM-Kisan for farmers, PM SVANidhi for street vendors and more, he said. "I am also reminded of the years of 2020 and 2021, when the once in a lifetime COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak. Had it not been for banking inclusion, the subsidies would not have been able to reach the intended beneficiaries," Modi said.

The life journeys of those who benefitted due to this scheme are very touching and inspiring, he noted. "PM Jan Dhan Yojana personifies dignity, empowerment and the opportunity to participate in the economic life of the nation. The foundations laid by this scheme are strong, but we have even more work to do! We will continue to build on this success to build a Viksit Bharat," Modi said.

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, launched on this day in 2014, is a national mission on financial inclusion encompassing an integrated approach to bring about comprehensive financial inclusion of all the households in the country. (PTI)

CBI starts polygraph test on Kolkata Police ASI



NEW DELHI, Aug 28: The CBI on Wednesday began the process of conducting a polygraph test on Kolkata Police ASI Anup Dutta to decipher his alleged links with Sanjay Roy, arrested in the rape and murder case of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, officials said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had taken permission from a Kolkata court to conduct the polygraph test on Assistant Sub-Inspector Dutta, who was earlier questioned by the agency in the case.

Dutta will be the eighth person to undergo a polygraph test in this case.

According to the officials, Dutta, posted in the Kolkata Police Welfare Committee, had allegedly extended a number of favours to Roy, a traffic police volunteer.

The CBI is trying to find out if Roy informed Dutta about the crime he allegedly committed and whether he sought any favours for covering up the crime, the officials said. The information revealed during the polygraph test may not be used as evidence during the trial but the agency may gather corroborative evidence which could be used in court, they said.

A polygraph test can help in assessing inaccuracies in the statements of suspects and witnesses. By monitoring their psychological responses, heart rate, breathing pattern, sweating and blood pres-

sure, investigators can determine if there are discrepancies in their responses.

The trainee doctor was allegedly raped and murdered in the seminar hall of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital when she had gone to rest during her graveyard shift in the early hours of August 9.

Her body with severe injury marks was found inside the hall by a doctor who was on rounds.

Roy was arrested the next day based on CCTV footage in which he was seen entering the seminar hall at 4.03 am on the day of the incident.

He was put through extensive interrogation when "recent injuries" on his left cheek, abrasion on the left hand and the back of his left thigh, among others, showing signs of struggle were recorded by police.

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

On August 13, the Calcutta High Court ordered the transfer of the probe from the Kolkata Police to the CBI, which took over the case on August 14.

After taking over the case, the CBI subjected Roy, former principal of the medical college Sandip Ghosh, four doctors who were on duty with the victim, and a civic volunteer to polygraph tests to get further leads about the crime. (PTI)

Junior doctors in Bengal reject Mamata's appeal to end cease work

KOLKATA, Aug 28: The agitating junior doctors in West Bengal, who have been continuing cease-work for 20 days to protest against the alleged rape and murder of a medic, on Wednesday rejected Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's appeal to join duty.

A member of the West Bengal Junior Doctors' Forum said they would not withdraw the agitation unless their demands, such as justice for the deceased postgraduate trainee of the RG Kar hospital, were met.

They also demanded the suspension of Dr Sandip Ghosh, the former principal of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, from the health services and the same action against the Kolkata police commissioner. The doctor's forum took out a rally in Shyambazar area in the northern part of Kolkata to press their demands. "We are glad to know that the chief minister is supporting our cause. We want to return to work but that is not possible now as our demands are yet to be met," the member of the forum said.

Addressing a rally organised by Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad, Banerjee said, "I have remained sympathetic towards the cause of the doctors from the very beginning since they were seeking justice for their colleague. We did not take any action against them although so many days have passed since the incident. We understand your pain. But please come back to work now since patients are suffering." The agitating medics demanded elections in colleges, participation of junior doctors and students in all decision-making committees of the medical facilities and security measures at workplaces. During the rally, which culminated in Esplanade area in central Kolkata, the junior doctors carried placards and posters and raised demands for justice for the deceased medic.

The doctors' rally coincided with a 12-hour bandh called by the BJP to protest against the police action during the 'Nabanna Abhijan' by Paschimanga Chhatra Samaj, an unregistered students' organisation. (PTI)

Railway Board sets up committee to take steps for improving train controllers' working

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: The Railway Board has constituted a five-member committee to examine and recommend ways to improve the working condition of train controllers after the Research Design and Standards Organisation flagged several concerns issues such as pay scale, vacancies, recruitment process and basic amenities among other things.

"Ministry of Railway (Railway Board) have decided to constitute a Committee on working of traffic controllers on IR (Indian Railway)," said an office order dated August 27, 2024. PTI, on August 25, 2024, had published a detailed report on the study by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO), which functions under the Railway Ministry, according to

which the train controllers face multiple challenges at work including "unattractive" pay scale, huge stress due to vacancy leading to health concerns and a lack of basic amenities.

The RDSO had submitted its report to the Railway Board in June, 2024. According to the order, the committee will consist of three Additional Members of Staff, Revenue and Traffic; one Principal Execu-

tive Director of Infra and two Executive Directors of Transformation and Traffic Transportation. "The Committee may co-opt any other member as required or undertake field visits for consultations and deliberations," it said.

The order has mentioned the Committee's three Terms of Reference such as examining and suggesting "output performance based payment" among the

modalities for financial incentives. The Committee would also examine if the Railway Board should restore the recruitment of Traffic Apprentices through the Railway Recruitment Board for the post of train controllers which was stopped in 2020. Besides, the Committee would also look into all other suggestions given by the RDSO study report on several issues. (PTI)

Vice Admiral Rajesh Dhankhar takes over as DG of Project 'Seabird'

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: Vice Admiral Rajesh Dhankhar on Wednesday assumed duties of the director general of Project 'Seabird', with a charter to oversee largest defence infrastructure project currently progressing at the Karwar Naval Base, the Indian Navy said.

He took charge from Vice Admiral Tarun Sobti. The change of guard took place at the headquarters of the project in New Delhi. The Navy is expanding the crucial and strategically located naval base in Karnataka's Karwar as part of Project 'Seabird'. Dhankhar was commissioned into the Indian Navy on July 1, 1990 and is a specialist in

navigation and direction. "The Flag Officer is an alumnus of the prestigious Naval Academy, Defence Services Staff College, and has undergone the Higher Command Course in Japan. During his illustrious career spanning 34 years, the Flag Officer has tenanted specialist appointments on-board warships Pondicherry, Godavari, Kora and Mysore," the Navy said in a statement.

The officer has also done instructional tenures in the erstwhile Project 15 Training Team, Navigation & Direction School and at the MIDS Wing Officer's Cadet School, Singapore. (PTI)

India sees 2nd highest drop in particulate pollution, one year added to life expectancy: Report

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: India logged a 19.3 per cent decline in particulate pollution in 2022, the second highest in the world after Bangladesh, adding an average of one year to the life expectancy of citizens, a new report showed on Wednesday.

The annual report, "Air Quality Life Index" 2024, by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) also said that Indians are likely to lose 3.6 years of life expectancy if the country fails to meet the World Health Organisation's (WHO) annual PM2.5 concentration standard of 5 micrograms per cubic metre.

The researchers attributed the decline in particulate levels in India and other South Asian countries primarily to favourable meteorological conditions and a reduced number of thermal inversions -- when a layer of warm air traps cooler air near the ground, causing pollution to build up.

PM2.5 concentrations in India in 2022 were around 9 micrograms per cubic metre (19.3 per cent) lower compared to 2021.

The most significant declines were observed in Purulia and Bankura districts of West Bengal, followed by Dhanbad, Purbi, Paschim Singhbhum, Paschim Medinipur and Bokaro districts in Jharkhand. In each of these districts, PM2.5 concentrations dropped by over 20 micrograms per cubic metre.

Despite the decline in pollution, 42.6 per cent of the Indian people live in areas which exceed the country's national air quality standard of 40 micrograms per cubic metre.

People in Delhi -- India's capital and most populous city -- would gain 7.8 years of life expectancy if all of India were to reduce particulate pollution to meet the WHO guideline. In North 24 Parganas -- the country's second



most populous district -- people would gain 3.6 years of life expectancy, the report said.

It said that the northern plains, the most polluted region in India, saw a 17.2 per cent reduction in particulate levels in 2022 compared to 2021.

However, despite this improvement, the average resident in this region is still likely to lose about 5.4 years of life expectancy if the current pollution levels persist. On the other hand, if the decline in particulate levels continues at the same rate in the coming years, life expectancy in the northern plains could increase by 1.2 years.

Beyond the northern plains, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have the highest burden of pollution in the country. On average, 292.3 million people living in these states are now losing 2.9 years of life expectancy.

"The report clearly shows that even a modest reduction in air pollution levels could lead to increased life expectancy. Air pollution, even at low levels, significantly shortens lives

and poses serious public health risks.

"Our current national air quality standards fall short of protecting public health and must be revised in line with World Health Organisation guidelines. We have the tools and technologies to solve the air pollution crisis, what we need now is the political will to implement them," said Avinash Chanchal, Campaign Manager, Greenpeace India.

The report said that PM2.5 concentrations declined by 19 per cent on average in districts with cities covered by India's flagship programme on air quality management, the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), while districts not covered by the programme saw a 16 per cent decline.

However, barring Dhanbad, none of the districts with the highest decline in PM2.5 concentrations are covered by the NCAP framework.

Launched in 2019, the NCAP is India's first national effort to set clean air targets, aiming for a 20-30 per cent reduction in particulate pollution by 2024, using 2017 as the base year.

The revised target is a 40 per cent reduction by 2026, with 2019-20 as the base year.

The programme covers 131 non-attainment cities, which consistently failed to meet the prescribed national ambient air quality standards between 2011 and 2015.

"As of 2022, pollution in districts with non-attainment cities has declined by 18.8 per cent relative to 2017, adding 10.8 months to the life expectancy of 446.7 million residents of these districts and four months to India's national average life expectancy," the report said.

If India meets the NCAP target, residents in non-attainment areas could see their life expectancy increase by two years compared to 2017. India's national average life expectancy would also increase by an additional 7.8 months as a result, it said.

The EPIC team emphasised that in India, where the annual PM2.5 standard is 40 micrograms per cubic metre, more than 40 per cent of the population breathes air that exceeds this standard.

However, India is responding by implementing innovative policies. In 2019, Gujarat launched the world's first market for particulate pollution, which has since reduced pollution by 20-30 per cent in Surat and is rapidly expanding to other cities and states.

These types of innovative policies demonstrate that it is possible to achieve improvements in air quality and people's health, without unduly impeding economic growth, the researchers said.

The report also praised India's clean cooking programme, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, saying that the decline in emissions from the residential sector in India can largely be attributed to the nationwide rollout of this scheme. (PTI)

ELECTRICAL WORKS AT LAKWA

E-Tender Notice No. TSK/Elect/162
Dated: 23-08-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Tender No. LV-T-14-TSK-878. Brief Description of Item:** At Lakwa: Electrical works for improvement of Goods Circulation area with approach Road. **Tender Value:** ₹10,16,768/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹20,300/-. **Date & Time of closing of tender:** 13.00 hrs. of 13-09-2024 & opened at 15.00 hrs. of 13-09-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 13.00 hrs. of 13-09-2024 in website www.reps.gov.in

DRM (Elect), Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers With A Smile

AUCTION NOTICE

Notice is hereby given in terms of section 83 & 84 Railway Act 1989, that the un-connected/undelivered packages lying at Dibrugarh Town Parcel will be sold by Public Auction on the date and time as shown below:-
Station: Dibrugarh Town; **Place of auction:** Dibrugarh Town Parcel; **Date & Time:** 10/09/2024 at 11:00 hrs.

Pkg No.	Articles to be Auctioned	
1	Torch	8 nos.
	Mic & Amplifier set	03 nos.
	Misc Siren Set	03 nos.
	Big power Vehicle Light	03 nos.
	High ankle Boots	04 pair
	Ignition cum Steering Lock	04 nos.
	Turn Indicator	02 nos.
	Pump	04 nos.
	Turbo Pump Gasket	03 nos.
	Relay	12 nos.
2	Halogen Lamp (12 V 60/55W)	20 nos.
	Mudguards	04 nos.
	Battery Terminals	20 nos.
	Rope Wire	04 mtr.
	Gorkha Hats	39 nos.
	Cartridge (jibab type)	04 nos.
	Bulb 24v	10 nos.
	Oil Filter (ROH)	04 nos.
	Battery 12V-42 AMP	02 nos.
	Used Cloth 42 kgs.	02 Bundle
3	Used Books 22 kgs.	01 Bundle
	Used Study Books 26 kgs.	01 Bundle
	Used House Hold goods 18 kgs.	02 Bundle
	Used Wooden Bed	01 nos.
4	Iron Parts	22.90 kgs.
	House Hold Goods	17.50 kgs.
	Child Plastic Toys	10 kgs.
	Old cloth	35.30 kgs.
	Curtaining	33.40 kgs.
	One PVC Drum used cloth	19.60 kgs.
5	One on load changeover switch (Model: HPL, 800 V, 50 Hz, 4 pole)	01 no.
6	Used Hero Sprint Bicycle	01 no.
7	One used Tata Stryder Bicycle	01 no.
8	One GP Bundle Shankha Brand Biri	01 no.
9	Trolley Bag	01 no.
9	Custard Powder	23 kgs.
	Gaur Gum Powder	25 kgs.

Terms & Conditions of Public Auction:-

- Terms of Sale will be strictly in cash.
- Goods/Consignment sold will be removed in the same day, otherwise Wharfage charge will be levied as per rule.
- Railway authority reserves the right to withdraw of any goods from the auction without assigning any reason therefore.
- Intending bidders shall have to deposit **Rs 5000/-** (Rs. Five thousand) only before auction as Security Money, which will be refunded to un-successful bidder(s) on completion of the auction.
- Railway authority reserve the right to dispose any article as deem appropriate in case of any disputes arises.
- Goods will be sold to the highest bidder(s) if found satisfactory and full payment should be made by the successful bidder(s).
- Railway authority reserves the right to withdraw the auction at any time and stage.

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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WAS ADVISED NOT TO DO SMALL ROLES INITIALLY: RASIKA DUGAL

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: When you are just trying to find your ground in the film industry, you take up any and every role that comes your way, says actor Rasika Dugal, who remembers being advised not to play smaller parts in her early years.

The Jamshedpur-born actor, who made her feature film debut with 2007's "Anwar", is one of the most recognisable faces in the streaming space today thanks to web series such as "Mirzapur", "Delhi Crime", and "Out of Love".

Dugal, a postgraduate from Pune's Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), said it took her time, but she charted her own path.

"When I came to Bombay, I wouldn't say I had one particular kind of role in mind because you can't come with a set idea, especially because you are just starting out. I pretty much did whatever came my way. At that time, I was advised not to do small roles, do only big parts."

"But I said, 'Listen, I don't know how else to introduce myself to people, except through my work. So if I'm getting smaller parts in the beginning of my career, I'll take them. Thanks for the advice, but I'll make this my own journey. I'll play it my



own way.' So that's what I did. I got bigger parts after that, it took some time but it happened," the actor told PTI in an interview.

Dugal, also known for films such as "Manto", "Hamid", "Tu Hai Mera Sunday", and "Lootcase", credited OTT platforms for "transforming" her career.

"I had an opportunity to do so many kinds of roles. In 2018, I had four releases, which was the beginning of a good phase in my career. There was 'Manto' (in which she played Safia Manto) and shortly after that, there was Beena Tripathi in 'Mirzapur', which was completely different from that. Then, there was Neeti Singh, who is a cop, in 'Delhi Crime'," she added.

While she is all for the "captive sort of viewing" experience one gets in a cinema hall, the 39-year-old said streamers offer convenient access to the audience.

"This kind of viewing is I think more in sync with the kind of lives we lead these days because people are always strapped for time. This is something that naturally has happened because of the way we live these days and there is a certain kind of accessibility to it (OTT), which is nice."

"But I also romanticise the other captive sort of viewing, which is the theatrical viewing where there's no noise, there's no disturbance, you are in a dark space and watching it with other people. It's like a community viewing where other people's responses affect what you feel about what you're watching... They are both very different experiences and they're both here to stay."

Dugal's latest project on OTT is "Shekhar Home", a web series inspired by the adventures of the iconic detective Sherlock Holmes starring Kay Kay Menon in the title role. (PTI)

WOMEN ACTORS SEEKING DIRECTORS WHO DON'T PLACE THEM AS DOLLS, SAYS MALAVIKA MOHANAN

MUMBAI, Aug 28: When she was approached for "Thangalaan", actor Malavika Mohanan says she knew little about the story but what got her on board was Pa Ranjith's credibility as a director who writes strong roles for women.

Playing Aarathi, a fiery and gifted woman who comes to blows with Vikram's Thangalaan in the Tamil period drama, was one such opportunity for the actor who wanted to "break out" of portraying one-note characters.

"Thangalaan", slated to be released in north India in Hindi on September 6, is set in the backdrop of Kolar Gold Fields (KGF) of Karnataka and based on real-life incidents in the 18th and 19th centuries.

"Initially, when they approached me for the film, I knew about the project, and not really about the story and script, I knew that it was a Pa Ranjith and Vikram film. I was well aware of the fact that he is one of the filmmakers who writes very strong roles for women. He is such a prolific filmmaker. As women, we are also seeking those few makers who don't place us just as dolls in scenes. I've done a few of those films in the recent past. I wanted to break out of this clutter and work with makers who do the opposite of that. I was very keen from the get-go before I knew about the story or the script," Malavika told PTI in an interview here.

The actor, known for films such as "Beyond the Clouds", "Petta", and "Master", said the process of bringing Aarathi to life involved a considerable amount of on-the-spot improvisation and intense preparation.

"When I read the story, there were a lot of mixed emotions because I didn't have a point of reference for a character like that in Indian cinema. There was a lot of curiosity about how he (Ranjith) would bring Aarathi to life, how she was going to look, and how she was going to be."

"Like, I would do something and he would be like, 'Don't do this, do this, don't scream like that, scream like this, open up a lot more, be a lot wilder'. He had to systemically break down my body language from being feminine, dainty and being more ferocious and wilder. It was a long and challenging process, unlike anything that I've ever done," she added.

"Thangalaan", which had its release in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam on August 15, has amassed over Rs 100 crore at the worldwide box office.

Malavika said she is happy with the response the movie has been receiving both at the ticket window and with the critics.

"It's been a little more than a week since our film was released. This is one of those films where we opened to crazy numbers worldwide, and then at the same time there was a lot of appreciation coming our way for our performances, the kind of characterisation. People are like, 'We never expected to see you like that'. There was a flurry (of responses) that came in. It's a little bit of both, which feels good."

Produced by Studio Green Film's K. E. Gnanavelraja, "Thangalaan" also stars Parvathy Thiruvothu, Pasupathy and Daniel Caltagirone. (PTI)

Farhan Akhtar back in Ladakh to shoot for a 'special film'

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: Actor-filmmaker Farhan Akhtar on Wednesday said he is in Ladakh to shoot for a "special film".

Farhan, who previously shot for his films "Lakshya" (2004) and "Bhaag Milkha Bhaag" (2013) in the mountainous region, shared the update in an Instagram post. "Back in Ladakh after Lakshya and Bhaag Milkha Bhaag to shoot for a very special film," he captioned a photo of the picturesque locals of the union territory. While "Lakshya" -- set during the 1999 Kargil War -- was his second directorial venture, he played the role of the late Milkha Singh in the iconic sprinter's biopic "Bhaag Milkha Bhaag", directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra.

"Details to be revealed soon. Watch this space," he added. Farhan's last project as an actor was sports drama "Toofaan" (2021). As a director, his last film was 2011's "Don 2 - The King Is Back", headlined by Shah Rukh Khan.

He recently served as an executive producer on "Angry Young Men" alongside sister Zoya Akhtar, Salman Khan, and his producing partner Ritesh Sidhwani. The Prime Video documentary is a behind-the-scenes exploration of the phenomenon that Salim Khan and Farhan's father Javed Akhtar -- Salim-Javed as they came to be known in the '70s and '80s -- were when their name alone on a script was considered a guarantee of success. (PTI)



Priyanka is India's beloved national treasure: 'LOTR' star Ismael Cruz Cordova on working with actor

SINGAPORE, Aug 28: It was a gift to work with Priyanka Chopra Jonas, India's beloved national treasure in "The Bluff", says "The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power" breakout star Ismael Cruz Cordova about his collaboration with the superstar.

Ismael is part of the ensemble cast for the action drama film that will feature Priyanka in the role of a female pirate.

"India's very own, beloved national treasure... What a gift, she's incredible. She's a superstar in every sense of the word. Gentle, charismatic and a great leader," Ismael told PTI in an interview while promoting the second season of the Prime Video fantasy drama here.

"She does all of her stunts, not scared to get dirty. And it's beautiful to have (her)... She's leading this cast and everybody looks up to the leader. She set a beautiful tone in that film that we all felt safe. I just felt so honoured to be with her. I love her work. So it's very special. I'm grateful," said the actor, known for his work on "Sesame Street", "Ray Donovan" and films "Mary Queen of Scots" and "Miss Bala".

Ismael is looking forward to the second season of "The Rings of Power", which will premiere on Prime Video on Thursday.

He plays an elf named Arondir in the show, based on the appendices of JRR Tolkien's famed book series.

Asked about the trolling he faced on social media after appearing in the first season, the actor, who is one of the first people of colour to portray an elf in

the Tolkien universe, said "racism is illogical" and the best response to it would be to live one's life as fully as possible.

"My stance is that I have the right to exist as whole-somely and as fully and as brilliantly as anybody else. That's the most radical thing that I can do. Just live this life, live it fully and present myself in a real and layered way possible," he said.

Ismael had spoken about the impact of the trolling in past interviews, revealing how the streamer had hired an on-set therapist to help actors deal with backlash.

The actor said many artistes have talked about the kinds of harassment they face as public figures, including American singer-

songwriter Chappell Roan, who called out the abusive behaviour of fans and spoke about setting boundaries.

"(They) have been very clear about this kind of harassment and this kind of energy towards people that are public, it's also not right. There's nothing in my job description that tells you that we have to put up with any of this. It is just not okay."

But what makes things better for him is the love and support he has received from fans of the Tolkien universe.

"It's kind of fabulous that despite that kind of energy being directed towards us, (we) are still thriving and receiving so much love because we represent something beautiful for a lot of people in many countries and continents."

"Those people might not have the loudest voice, but they're very meaningful and consistent in their support towards us," Ismael said.

His co-star, Tyroe Muhafidin, shared similar sentiments, saying one of the most beautiful aspects of "Rings of Power" was that they were chosen for who they were as actors and not on the basis of their skin colour.

"That's what was so beautiful about being cast in this show is that they looked at us for who we were as actors and they did not cast us on how we looked. And that's what I think we need to get to. It shouldn't matter. It shouldn't be a factor in anything because we are all just people," said the actor, who plays Theo in the series.

Ismael said playing Arondir, a new character which is not directly based on any specific figure from Tolkien's writings, has been a gift for him.

In the first season of "The Rings of Power", developed by JD Payne and Patrick McKay, Arondir's story revolved around his forbidden love for Bronwyn, a human healer from the Southlands played by Nazanin Boniadi.

"It's such a great journey and he is very noble and has a terribly deep sense of duty, even to his own detriment. And the conflict and the curiosity that he has between his albinism and his humanity and above all, everything goes like it's led with love," he said.

"The Rings of Power" season two will also feature Morfydd Clark, Charlie Vickers, Charles Edwards, Robert Aramayo, Owain Arthur, Benjamin Walker, Peter Mullan, Sophia Nomvete, Lloyd Owen, Cynthia Addai-Robinson, Trystan Gravelle, Maxim Baldry, Markella Kavenagh and Megan Richards. (PTI)



Osaka gets her first top-10 win in more than four years by defeating Ostapenko

NEW YORK, Aug 28: A year ago, still on maternity leave and still unsure when she would play elite tennis again, Naomi Osaka visited the U.S. Open to appear with Michael Phelps for a discussion about mental health. While at the site, she sat in the stands to watch one of Coco Gauff's matches.

Osaka also already was thinking about being back on a court at Flushing Meadows, so much so that she was pondering what she might want to wear to compete. And there she was Tuesday at Louis Armstrong Stadium, overpowering No. 10 seed Jelena Ostapenko 6-3, 6-2 while decked out, from her visor to her dress to the bows on her back and attached to her shoes, in lime green — the color of this “Brat” summer, as it happens (YKYK) — and playing very much like a two-time champion at the place and a former No. 1-ranked star.

“I feel like being able to be a part of (designing) my tennis outfits gives me, I would say, a different strength, especially the U.S. Open outfits. I feel like they are a little bit more flamboyant. When I was putting on my outfit today, I was, like, Ah, I hope this isn't too much,” Osaka said with a smile. “Because I had the tutu, and then I had the bow jacket and it was green. I feel like everyone was staring at me.”

Another player asked for a photo, Osaka said, adding: “I hope it was a positive picture (and) it wasn't, like, Oh, my God, look at her. For me, when I put on the outfit, it's almost like a super suit, so I try to channel that.”

Did that well enough Tuesday to register her first victory against a



top-10 opponent in more than four years. Osaka claimed titles in New York in 2018 and 2020, along with a pair of trophies at the Australian Open in 2019 and 2021, and her matchup against 2017 French Open champion Ostapenko marked the first time two past major champs faced off in the opening round at the U.S. Open since Serena Williams defeated Maria Sharapova five years ago. Another such contest came Tuesday night, when 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin beat

2021 U.S. Open winner Emma Raducanu 6-1, 3-6, 6-4. “Having two wins here means a lot, and I think for me, I've been struggling with confidence throughout the year,” said Osaka, who returned to action at the Australian Open in January, her first Grand Slam appearance in nearly 1 1/2 years because of mental health breaks and time away to have a baby. “This time now forces me to look in the mirror and say, Hey, you've done really well here. There's no reason why you can't do well again.”

How's this for doing well? Osaka did not make a single unforced error in the first set and finished with only five, 16 fewer than Ostapenko.

“I do remember thinking, I need to win this match so I can wear my other color.” That was very important to me,” said Osaka, who is ranked 88th and received a wildcard invitation from the U.S. Tennis Association. “I guess you'll see my other color next time.”

Next time will be Thursday against 2023 French Open runner-

up Karolina Muchova, a 6-3, 7-5 winner against Katie Volynets of the U.S.

Other women moving into the second round included No. 1 Iga Swiatek, who got past Kamilla Rakhimova 6-4, 7-6 (6) by taking the last five points after needing to erase a trio of set points because she trailed 6-3 in the tiebreaker, and past major champions Elena Rybakina and Caroline Wozniacki. No. 5 Jasmine Paolini, a finalist at the French Open and Wimbledon this year, beat 2019 U.S. (AP)

Pathak named India goalkeeper in Asian Champions Trophy squad

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: Krishan Bahadur Pathak, on expected lines, was on Wednesday named the main goalkeeper after the retirement of PR Sreejesh in the Harmanpreet Singh-led 18-member Indian team for the upcoming Asian Champions Trophy.

The tournament will see defending champions India vie for top honours alongside Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Japan and hosts China at Hulunbuir from September 8-17.

Sreejesh announced his retirement after India won a second successive Olympic bronze medal in Paris earlier this month.

Pathak, who was India's standby goalkeeper at the Paris Olympics and in many tournaments prior to that, will now be the man in charge at the post, while Suraj Karkera will be the reserve custodian.

Experienced midfielder Vivek Sagar Prasad has been made the vice-captain in place of Hardik Singh who has been rested along with Mandeep Singh, Lalit Upadhyay, Shamsheer Singh and Gurjant Singh.

The tournament will also be a big opportunity for India's promising drag-flicker Jugraj Singh who travelled to Paris Olympics as standby and will look to prove his credentials alongside the brilliant Harmanpreet.

A power-packed drag-flicker, Jugraj has proven his worth in the limited opportunities he got in the Pro League, and it will be up to him to cement his place in the side. Aarajet Singh Hundal is the third drag-flicker in the team.

The defence will be manned by Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas,

Harmanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay and Sumit.

Raj Kumar Pal, Nilakanta Sharma, Manpreet Singh, and Mohammed Raheel will form the midfield, while a young forward-line featuring Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Hundal, junior India captain Uttam Singh, and debutant Gurjot Singh will lead the attack.

Ten players from the Paris Olympics bronze medal-winning squad are part of this team.

“This is an important campaign for us to ensure we build on our ranking points. The team has just returned to the camp after all the celebrations following our performance in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games,” chief coach Craig Fulton said in a Hockey India statement.

“The past few weeks have truly been incredible with all the love and adulation for the team and we hope this support will continue all through our future campaigns.”

“The new Olympic cycle for us begins with the Asian Champions Trophy and we are ready for the challenge.”

“While we have rested a few players from the squad that played in Paris, we have brought in a few youngsters who have done well in training and have earned the opportunity to play in Asian Champions Trophy.”

“We will have Gurjot making his international debut, and I believe this is a great opportunity for youngsters who have received a call-up to shine,” Fulton added.

The Indian team will begin its campaign against China on September 8, followed by a match against Japan the next day. (PTI)

Juventus earn 2nd straight 3-0 win and Fabregas-coached Como gets first Serie A point in 2 decades

VERONA, ITALY, Aug 28: Juventus became the only Serie A team to win both of its opening two matches of the season after Dušan Vlahovic scored twice in a 3-0 victory over Verona on Monday.

Right-back Nicolò Savona also scored on his full debut as Juventus earned a second straight 3-0 win. Vlahovic put the visitors ahead after 28 minutes when he found space in the Verona backline and fought off the attention of three defenders to steer the ball home from 12 yards.

Savona doubled the lead with a header 11 minutes later and Vlahovic rounded off the scoring from the penalty spot eight minutes into the second half. Verona is ninth with three points. Como earned its first Serie A point in more than two decades when Cesc Fabregas' team came back from a goal



down to draw 1-1 at Cagliari.

Fabregas, the former Arsenal and Barcelona midfielder, helped guide Como back into the top flight last season after a 21-year absence, but the Lombardy-based club lost its opener 3-0 to Juventus. However, it showed resilience on a sunny evening in Sardinia. Roberto Piccolo put the host ahead when he stole in between a hesitant defender and goalkeeper to nod home after 44 minutes.

The goal marked the fifth season in a row that the 23-year-old striker has scored for a different Serie A club, after previous stints with Lecce, Empoli, Atalanta and Spezia. Como equalized eight minutes into the second period. Alberto Dossena headed down a corner kick from the right and Como-born Patrick Cutrone was on hand to smack the ball high into the net. (AP)

Olmo scores in his debut to keep Barca perfect after 2-1 win over Rayo in Spanish league

MADRID, Aug 28: Dani Olmo got his dream debut with Barcelona, scoring a late winner to keep the Catalan club with a perfect record to start the Spanish league.

Olmo found the net in the 82nd minute with a low left-footed shot into the far corner after an assist by Lamine Yamal to give Barcelona a 2-1 come-from-behind win at Rayo Vallecano on Tuesday.

Barcelona is the only team with three wins after three rounds this season.

Olmo, who was only registered with the first team Tuesday morning after signing from Leipzig, entered the match at halftime to replace Ferran Torres.

“I was anxious to debut and it couldn't have been better,” Olmo said. “I'm glad I finally got to play and that I was able to help the team.”

The 26-year-old Spain international, a former member of Barcelona's famed La Masia youth academy, had come close to scoring in the 58th with a shot that hit the crossbar.

“Yeah, he scored the goal, this is why we are happy that he is in



our team,” new Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said. “We deserved these three points.”

Rayo, celebrating its centennial this season, opened the scoring nine minutes into the match with Unai López finding the net from close range with a right-footed strike.

Two minutes after Olmo hit the crossbar, Pedri evened the match with a shot from near the penalty spot following an assist from Raphinha.

Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski thought he had put Barcelona ahead in the 71st but his goal was disallowed by video review after a foul by Barcelona defender Jules Koundé in the buildup.

Flick said it was a “sad” victory because of a knee injury to 17-year-old midfielder Marc Bernal late into second-half stoppage time.

“We win, it's OK, but when you see the dressing room, no one is

happy,” Flick said.

The game came a day after Rayo announced it signed Colombia playmaker James Rodríguez, who watched the match from the tribunes at Vallecas Stadium.

The 33-year-old Rodríguez had his contract with Brazilian club Sao Paulo rescinded after he led Colombia to a runner-up finish in the Copa America, where he had six assists and was named the tournament's most valuable player. He returns to the Spanish league four years after he left Real Madrid to join Everton in the Premier League.

Barcelona had started the season with victories at Valencia and against Athletic Bilbao at home. Rayo had opened with a 2-1 win at Real Sociedad and a 0-0 draw at Getafe.

Sevilla and Mallorca still winless.

Sevilla drew 0-0 at Mallorca in a result that left both teams winless after three rounds. They had lost their opening matches this season.

Sevilla midfielder Saúl Ñíguez was sent off in the 89th for complaining with the referee. (AP)

Uruguayan soccer player Juan Izquierdo has died, days after collapsing during a game in Brazil

SAO PAULO, Aug 28: Uruguayan soccer player Juan Izquierdo died Tuesday at a hospital in Brazil five days after collapsing during a game at Sao Paulo. He was 27.

Hospital Albert Einstein in Sao Paulo said in a statement that the Nacional defender died at 9:38 p.m. local time following “cardiorespiratory arrest associated with his cardiac arrhythmia.”

Izquierdo was taken to the hospital after he collapsed shortly before fulltime in a Copa Libertadores soccer match at Sao Paulo's Morumbi Stadium last Thursday.

The Uruguayan club posted a statement on social media saying Izquierdo's death is felt “in deep pain and impact in our hearts” and “all Nacional is in grief for his irreplaceable loss.”

South American soccer's governing body also posted a tribute. CONMEBOL president Alejandro Domínguez said he's “deeply sorry about the early departure of Juan Izquierdo.”

“South American soccer in mourning,” he said. Other federations, including Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina, also expressed their condolences.

In a statement Monday, doctors at the hospital said Izquierdo was put into neurological critical care because of increased intracranial pressure. He had been on a ventilator since Sunday.

Uruguayan media said Izquierdo's parents and Nacional executives were at the hospital in Sao Paulo. Izquierdo was married and had two children — the youngest, a boy, was born earlier in August.

Uruguay's first- and second-division soccer leagues were postponed last weekend due to concerns over Izquierdo's health. Sao Paulo players wore a shirt in support of the Uruguayan footballer before the team's 2-1 Brazilian league win against Vitoria on Sunday.

The Brazilian club also posted a message after Izquierdo's death. “We had days of prayers, union and hope, and today we are in deep sadness with the news of the death of Juan Izquierdo,” Sao Paulo's club statement said. (AP)

New Champions League format promises more of almost everything storied clubs wanted from UEFA

GENEVA, Aug 28: The new Champions League format this season will see more teams playing more games for more prize money. On Thursday, UEFA makes the draw in Monaco for the match schedule of the new single-standings league phase that replaces the traditional group stage.

The first new Champions League format since 2003 promises more of almost everything that Europe's wealthiest and most influential clubs wanted from UEFA. There are four more places in a 36-team lineup; at least eight games each instead of six; Champions League games scheduled in January for the first time; a prize money rise of at least 25% to a minimum 2.5 billion euros (\$2.8 billion).

There also was more evidence, at UEFA's European Championship this summer, that constant expansion of international competitions is leaving players tired and unable to perform at their best year-round.

The new league phase in European club soccer's marquee event will have 144 total games com-

pared to 96 in the group stage last season.

The “key aims,” UEFA said, is to “improve competitive balance and sporting interest and in the process increase the number of meaningful matches — matches with something at stake for both sides — throughout the competition.” In the eighth and final round, all 36 teams play on the same Jan. 29 evening to finalize the standings which will decide which eight teams advance directly to the round of 16 — and with what seedings in a tennis-like knockout bracket — as well as which 16 go into a new knockout playoff round in February, and which 12 are eliminated.

“We simulated that qualification should be possible with an average of 7.6 points, which means two victories and two draws,” said UEFA's head of competitions strategy, Stéphane Anselmo.

Why change such a successful competition?

Money, mostly, though that's not the only reason.

The Champions League in Eu-



rope has for the past 32 years showcased the highest quality play in world soccer. It let UEFA steer billions of euros (dollars) of prize money to clubs who pay the highest transfer fees and salaries.

Still, influential officials at the European Club Association (ECA) got bored of the group stage, saying it was too repetitive and lacked drama. They wanted more games against stronger opponents that would be more valued by broadcasters, viewers and new fans worldwide. Their lever-

age over UEFA was potentially launching their own breakaway competition.

The road to agreeing the format was rocky. A controversial first proposal in 2019, favoring storied clubs, was stopped by a backlash from mid-ranked clubs and domestic leagues.

There was intense turmoil sparked by the failed Super League launch in April 2021 by most of the same club officials who negotiated Champions League reform with UEFA.

Final format approval came in May 2022 — when Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus were exiled from the talks and still pursued UEFA in court — and it was broadly what the rebel Super League clubs had negotiated.

What is the new format?

Out goes the group-stage format played for 21 seasons where 32 teams were put into eight groups of four teams from a seeded draw. The top two in each group advanced to the round of 16. Groups gave each team six games from September into December, playing each rival once at home and once away.

In comes a single-standings league — 36 teams each playing eight games against eight different opponents through January.

The top eight in the standings go direct to the round of 16 in March. Teams ranked ninth to 24th go into the knockout playoffs in February. The bottom 12 teams are eliminated.

In the playoffs, teams ranked Nos. 9-16 are seeded in the draw to play second legs at home against unseeded teams Nos. 17-

24. Who gets the four extra places?

Two for countries whose teams collectively had the best record in UEFA club competitions in the previous season. That was Italy and Germany so the fifth-placed teams in Serie A and the Bundesliga qualified: Bologna and Borussia Dortmund.

The fifth-ranked national league (based on five years of results in UEFA club competitions) gets a third direct entry. That is currently France and Brest was third in Ligue 1.

An extra place goes to the qualifying rounds path for national champions from lower-ranked countries. They now play for five total qualifying places instead of four last season.

How will the draw be done?

The 36 teams come out of four seeding pots graded by each team's “UEFA club coefficient” — its ranking by results in five years of European competitions. The top-seeded pot contains recent Champions League winners and beaten finalists, plus Leipzig and Barcelona. (AP)

Will ensure Test cricket remains priority as it forms bedrock of the game: ICC Chairman Jay Shah

NEW DELHI, Aug 28: Newly-elected ICC Chairman Jay Shah says he will look to ensure that Test cricket forms the "bedrock" of the game in his tenure during which he will also try to "dismantle barriers that have hindered cricket's progress".

The 35-year-old will relinquish his current position of BCCI secretary to succeed incumbent Greg Barclay on December 1 as the youngest ICC Chairman for a term of two years.

"While the T20 is a naturally exciting format, it is equally important that Test cricket remains a priority for everyone as it forms the bedrock of our game," Shah said in a statement issued by the BCCI on Tuesday.

"We must see to it that cricketers are driven to longer format and our efforts will be channelled towards this goal," he added.

Shah said he would also like to work towards setting up a separate program for talent search. He emphasised on lifting the standard of the game across the globe.

"I want to assure you that I will do everything possible to elevate the standard of our game across



the globe. As I step into this pivotal role, I am resolutely committed to meeting your high expectations and dedicating myself to the beautiful game of cricket," he said.

Shah, who is the son of union home minister Amit Shah, will relinquish his position as the BCCI secretary at the board's Annual

General Meeting likely to be held towards the end of next month or in October.

Shah became the fifth Indian after the late Jagmohan Dalmiya, Sharad Pawar, N Srinivasan and Shashank Manohar to be elected for the high-profile job.

"With cricket poised to make its historic debut at the Olympics in

2028, we stand at the precipice of a transformative era. This juncture is not merely a milestone, it's a clarion call for all of us involved in this magnificent sport.

"It is my privilege to lead the ICC during such an exciting period in our shared journey," he said.

During his tenure as the ICC Chairman, Shah said he would advocate for the growth of women's and differently-abled cricketers.

"We must champion the ICC's mission further by allocating more resources and attention to Women's Cricket and Differently-abled Cricket. Together, we can empower these essential facets of the sport, making them not just visible but vibrant and thriving."

"I eagerly anticipate a tenure rich with collaborative efforts, striving to dismantle the barriers that have hindered cricket's progress. Every challenge we face is an opportunity in disguise, and together, we will transform adversity into triumph."

"Let's embark on this incredible journey, hand in hand, united by our passion for cricket and our belief in its extraordinary potential," Shah noted. (PTI)

'KL Rahul an integral part of LSG, but lot of time left to decide on captaincy and retention'

KOLKATA, Aug 28: Lucknow Super Giants owner Sanjiv Goenka on Wednesday called KL Rahul "an integral part of the franchise" amid speculations around his future in the team but remained evasive on player retention and captaincy for next IPL season.

Goenka's animated discussion with Rahul after a heavy defeat against Sunrisers Hyderabad had become one of the talking points of last season's IPL.

On Monday, Rahul met the team owner in Kolkata and expressed his wish to remain in the team, months after the video of the discussion between the two sparked speculations on whether the elegant India batter would want to continue his stint at the franchise.

"Look, I've been meeting KL regularly over last three years. I'm a little surprised this meeting got so much attention. As I've said we have not taken any call till the retention rules are out," Goenka told reporters while unveiling Zaheer Khan as their team mentor.

"But KL has been an integral and important part of the LSG family since inception. He's played a very important role. He's like family and will be family."

When asked about player retention and captaincy, Goenka said they are yet to arrive at a decision and are waiting for the BCCI to release the rules regarding retention.

"We have all of September, October and November to decide that. Let the policies be out. We have not even thought about the team going forward, whether retention will be three-four-five or six, we have no clue," Goenka said.

"Let us see, there is enough time, so bit by bit. Whatever decisions we take today will impact us for the medium term future, so it has to be very well thought out and considered."

"There is enough time for it so it's too early. Let the BCCI announce the policy first, then there will be dis-



cussions." Asked whether they are going to press the "reset mode" under the newly-appointed mentor Zaheer, he said: "You always try and improve and that is a constant endeavour. When you have a mega auction, there is bound to be a reset but you want to retain the core as much as possible you can. Let's see how it goes."

"One doesn't know which way what goes. Certainly the coach (Justin Langer) continues, Lance Kluesener (assistant coach), Jonny Rhodes (fielding coach) also continue. We are delighted for Morne Morkel and Gautam Gambhir, very pleased they have joined the national team," Goenka said.

Rahul led LSG to play offs in first two seasons but it is still widely believed that Gambhir's strategic acumen had a lot to do with it rather than his leadership, which got thoroughly exposed in third season, when they failed to make the last four. (PTI)

Jay Shah's endeavours as BCCI secretary made it a pioneer for others to follow: Sachin Tendulkar

MUMBAI, Aug 28: The newly-elected ICC Chairman Jay Shah's efforts as BCCI secretary in giving equal priority to men's and women's cricket have made the Indian board a "pioneer" for other governing bodies of the game to follow, reckoned legendary Sachin Tendulkar on Wednesday. Shah will leave BCCI after a five-year stint, which began in October 2019, to take over as the independent chairman of the International Cricket Council from December 1. Tendulkar joined many former and current players to extend his wishes to Shah, who will be the youngest ICC chairman in history at the age of 35.

"Being enthusiastic and having the drive to do something good for cricket are essential qualities for a cricket administrator. @JayShah displayed these traits wonderfully during his stint as @BCCI secretary," Tendulkar wrote on X.

"His endeavours towards prioritising both women's cricket and men's cricket have made the BCCI a pioneer

that other boards can follow. I wish him the very best of luck towards the next phase of his journey, as he becomes the youngest chairman of the @ICC," he said. Shah will be the fifth Indian to head the ICC and Tendulkar hoped that he would be able to carry the legacy forward.

"India has sent several luminaries to lead the ICC as administrators: Mr. Jagmohan Dalmiya, Mr. Sharad Pawar, Mr. N. Srinivasan, and Mr. Shashank Manohar. I am sure he will build on their legacy and take the game of cricket forward," he added.

Former India skipper Sourav Ganguly, who was the BCCI president during Shah's first term wrote, "Congratulations to Jay Shah @JayShah on his new role as ICC chair.. wish him a great journey ahead..." (sic)

India's batting mainstay Virat Kohli also congratulated Shah for his new role. "Many congratulations @JayShah on being elected as the ICC chairman. Wishing you great success ahead," he wrote. (PTI)

Kohli, Jaiswal move up in Test rankings, Rohit drops to 6th

DUBAI, Aug 28: Senior India batter Virat Kohli moved up two rungs to eighth place while his captain Rohit Sharma dropped a spot to sixth in the latest ICC Test rankings released here on Wednesday.

Joining Rohit and Kohli in the top 10 is young Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has moved up a spot to seventh.

Veteran England batter Joe Root maintained his place as the top ranked Test batter in the world following their success in the opening Test against Sri Lanka in Manchester.

But Root's teammate Harry Brook has made a massive jump on the back of scores of 56 and 32 during that Old Trafford contest.



The 25-year-old has risen three places to fourth overall, leaping past Pakistan's Babar Azam, Australia's Steve Smith and Rohit.

Babar has dropped a whopping six places to fall from shared third to ninth following a rare failure in the first innings of Pakistan's Test against Bangladesh in Rawalpindi.

But teammate Mohammad Rizwan gained seven spots, achieving a new career-high rating by moving inside the top 10 at a shared 10th following his century in the same match. Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim has achieved a career-high rating as he climbed seven spots to move to 17th.

Seasoned India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin continues to hold the top spot among bowlers while pacer Jasprit Bumrah and left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja have maintained their third and seventh spots respectively.

England seamer Chris Woakes, who is up four rungs to 16th, and Sri Lanka's Asitha Fernando (up 10 spots to 17th) have gained some ground while Pakistan's right-arm pacer Naseem Shah (up four spots to 33rd) and England's Gus Atkinson (up four places to 42nd) have attained career-best ratings following good returns from their recent appearances.

Among all-rounders, Jadeja and Ashwin continue to occupy the top two spots while Axar Patel is ranked sixth. (PTI)



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- Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

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