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## AIUFD raises Muslim safety issue; Ajmal meets CM Sarma



HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Aug 29:** Badruddin Ajmal, leader of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUFD), met chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday to discuss concerns about the safety and security of Muslims in the state.

Ajmal, reflecting the views of other AIUFD members, accused Sarma of engaging in divisive politics. He claimed that under BJP rule, the minority community in Assam is facing increased threats and that Sarma has employed polarising tactics.

"The chief minister has been attempting to create religious divisions among Assamese

citizens. This is not what was expected of him. We have warned him against making provocative remarks that could incite violence in the state," Ajmal added.

AIUFD MLA Aminul Islam added that Sarma has been attempting to divide Assam along various lines, including caste, community, and geography, in addition to religion.

"The recent statements made by CM Sarma in the assembly were disgraceful. He has been implicated in inciting hostility between the upper and lower regions of Assam and between Muslim and Hindu communities. Such remarks from the chief minister are unacceptable. Our leaders have already met with the governor to inform him of the situation," Islam stated.

He also mentioned that Badruddin Ajmal had urged Sarma to refrain from further dividing the state along religious lines and other categories.

Earlier, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had remarked that Assam is threatened by "Miya Muslims"—a term used pejoratively for Bengali-speaking Muslims in the state—and vowed to prevent them from taking over Assam. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## House passes bill to repeal Muslim marriage, divorce Act

Ending polygamy would be govt's next goal, says Himanta

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Aug 29:** The Assam Assembly on Thursday passed a bill that mandates compulsory registration of marriage and divorce for the Muslim community, replacing the previous 1935 act that was in effect in the state.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma hailed it as a "historic day" and announced that the government's next goal would be to outlaw polygamy.

Jogen Mohan, the minister of revenue and disaster management, introduced the Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Bill, 2024 on Tuesday.

The Bill seeks to do away with the Qazi system, in which Muslim marriages are registered by clerics. As a result, all marriages will be able to register with the government. Sarma said that all earlier registrations of marriages conducted by Qazis will remain valid and only new ones will come under the purview of the legislation.

"This Act will now make it mandatory to register marriages with the Govt



and cannot contravene the legal age of marriage of 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. It will also act as a strict deterrent against teenage pregnancy and improve overall growth of our girls," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X.

"I thank all the legislators who pledged their support to this Bill and Govt's vision of preventing child marriage. This Bill is above party politics and is a means to give our girls a life of dignity," Sarma added.

The chief minister further stated

there is already a law for registration of marriage and divorce of Muslim people in Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir.

"The states with the largest Muslim populations in India are Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir. A law requiring the registration of Muslim marriages already existed in both the states. The Congress or the Left government must have introduced this act in Kerala because the BJP was never in power in this southern state," he claimed.

He further said that the Muslim marriage registration laws will provide protection and security to Muslim daughters, expressing concern for them.

"I urge the Opposition members not to oppose this bill. This new law will assist in ending the terrible practice of underage marriages in addition to providing protection for Muslim females," the chief minister remarked while addressing an opposition MLA. He added that Muslim marriages have raised concerns for the Supreme Court, which has made multiple observations on the subject. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### HT BRIEFS

#### Heavy rain

**DIPHU:** The low-lying areas of Diphu were inundated due to the heavy rain on Thursday. The Diphu Market also became waterlogged but eventually drained on its own. The affected areas include Sarada Field at Birla, Taralango, Baghmari, Ram Thakur Colony, Rong Monjir near Basic Training, and some areas of Rongnihat. Affected residents attribute the flooding to the construction of concrete structures near natural drainage systems in and around the town. The executive member (EM) of the KAAC, Madhuram Lekhe, was seen surveying the flooded area at Birla, where some people were observed catching fish in the murky water. Another EM of KAAC, Prabhat Chandra Taro, visited Taralango, the seat of the Karbi Cultural Society, to assess the erosion caused by the early morning downpour.

#### Assam Police

**GUWAHATI:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday commended the Assam Police for their remarkable performance in enhancing law enforcement efficiency across the state. The chief minister on the micro-blogging site X highlighted the significant strides made by the police force in terms of conviction rates and timely submission of chargesheets. According to the data presented at the monthly State Crime Conference, which aims to evaluate the effectiveness of police operations, a total of 3,537 cases have seen convictions up to July 2024. Sarma wrote, "The @assampolice held its monthly state crime conference recently to gauge the efficiency. In 2024, 3537 cases have seen conviction till July while we are maintaining an encouraging over 60% chargesheet rate till July." CM Sarma further expressed his appreciation for the police department's dedication, noting that the chargesheet rate has surpassed 60% within the first seven months of the year which turned out to be a significant increase from previous years.

## Oppn preventing indigenous Hindu MLAs from speaking in Assembly: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, Aug 29:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday slammed the opposition, claiming that a tendency has developed among them "not to allow" speeches of "Indigenous Hindu MLAs" in the Assembly.

During discussion of The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Second Amendment) Bill, 2024, Sarma also came down heavily on opposition members for interrupting a speech by his party MLA Hbhan Pegu. "There is a new tendency in the House not to allow indigenous Hindu MLAs to speak. It's a dangerous trend. Please do not be so aggressive. After our land, now don't try to capture the Assembly," Sarma said while defending Pegu.

Pegu was making a statement

mentioning old Assembly records regarding alleged migration and aggression of people from the then East Bengal into Assam.

"You cannot stop talking about Hindu-Muslim issues. These are hard realities of life. Even the census asks us to write down our religion," the chief minister said.

Talking about the Bill, which was passed by the Assembly, he said that it is about the fight of the Assamese community, which is "about to be extinct", for survival for a few more years. "Our land in Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Darrang, Nagaon, Morigaon have gone. Now, we are struggling to survive," Sarma said. Protesting this statement, the Congress MLA staged a walkout from the House. (PTI)

## India and China discuss situation along LAC to narrow down differences

### 31st WMCC meeting



**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** India and China on Thursday had a "frank, constructive and forward-looking" exchange of views on the situation along the LAC to "narrow down" differences and find an early resolution to outstanding issues, the MEA said.

The 31st meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs was held in Beijing, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.

During the meeting, it was reiterated that "restoration of peace and tranquillity, and respect for the LAC are the essential basis for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations", it said.

In line with the guidance provided by the two foreign ministers' meetings in Astana and Vientiane in July to accelerate the discussions, and building on the WMCC meeting held last month, "the two sides had a frank, constructive and forward-looking exchange of views on the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to narrow down the differences and find early resolution of the outstanding issues", the statement said.

For this, they further agreed for "intensified contact through diplomatic and military channels".

Gourangal Das, joint secretary (east Asia), from the MEA led the Indian delegation. The Chinese delegation was led by Hong Liang, director general of the Boundary & Ocean Affairs Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In the meantime, the two sides decided to jointly uphold peace and tranquillity on the ground in the border areas, in accordance with relevant bilateral agreements, protocols and understandings (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'National Clean Air Programme needs to be rethought'

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi on Thursday called for a rethink of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), saying it should not just cover cities but entire regions.

Addressing the India Clean Air Summit 2024 organised by the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP) in Bengaluru, Gogoi called for a time-bound plan to reduce emissions from industries while ensuring that they are not seen as "villains" but "champions of low-cost, high-quality energy transition".

"We are trying to find that convergence. Include local industry in your debates and conversations. This process and platform are important. We need to plan a transition roadmap that helps industries transition to lower emissions with a hard stop over a timeframe of two, three, or four years -- not a knee-jerk policy but a planned transition," he said.

Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, said the government needs to take a relook at the NCAP launched in 2019 to tackle air pollution in the country. "It has not been a great experience for us as parliamentarians. There are severe limitations and it is time to rethink the programme -- either through an NCAP 2.0 or a better design of laws and schemes," the Congress MP said, emphasising an airshed approach to tackling air pollution.

"We cannot have the NCAP view of looking only at cities. You have to look at the entire region as well," Gogoi, the co-convenor of the Parliamentarians Group for Clean Air, said. He said the focus of NCAP should expand from particulate matter to other pollutants, such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide.

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, with 2017 as the base year. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Kuki-Zo groups of Manipur demand separate Union territory with legislature

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Calling the ongoing crisis in Manipur "premeditated" and "state-sponsored", representatives from the Kuki-Zo communities on Thursday demanded that a separate Union territory with legislature be carved out of the ethnic strife-torn state.

At a press conference organised by Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO) Delhi and NCR here, representatives from Kuki-Zo communities said their demands have crossed the point where they wanted President's rule to be imposed in the state, and now they see a Union territory with legislature on the lines of Puducherry carved out of Manipur as the only solution to the ongoing strife.

"The ongoing crisis in the Manipur region is a premeditated state-sponsored effort to target and eliminate the Kuki-Zo community... and this has led to the displacement of over 41,000 people, the destruction of more than 200 Kuki-Zo villages, and the loss of 191 lives, including cases of brutal rape and murder of women, and the immolation and mutilation of Kuki-Zo victims including children," the KSO claimed.

Referring to a purported audio clip of Manipur chief minister which the state government has dismissed as being "doctored", it said, "The leaked audio of N. Biren Singh is irrefutable evidence that explains the whole gamut of the Manipur crisis..."

"It is the ultimate resolve of the Kuki-Zo people that the only justice for the immeasurable harm and destruction

inflicted upon our community is a separate administration - a Union territory with legislature," the KSO demanded.

"It is our most earnest appeal to the government of India to expedite a political solution for the Kuki-Zo people in the interest of justice and the integrity of our democratic institutions," it said.

Asked if the Kuki-Zo groups have received any response from the state or the Centre over their demand for separate administration, Janghaolun Haokip, secretary (information & publicity) of Kuki Inpi Manipur, said they have not.

Mang Khongsai, 'home secretary' of KSO GHQ, said the settlements of Kuki-Zo community members in the hilly areas of Manipur have also been targeted in the name of removing encroachment.

"There is destruction of Kuki settlements which is being called illegal encroachment, even though they have been living there for years. Demeaning terms like refugee, illegal immigrant and narco-terrorist are being used against Kuki-Zo people," he alleged.

Michael Haokip, an assistant professor at the Ambedkar University here, meanwhile said the Kuki tribe has found mention even in the Buddhist texts, and dismissed the allegation of the groups being immigrants.

"We are not immigrants. We have been mentioned in Buddhist and Sanskrit literature as well," he said. Tingben Khongsai, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Modi's 'billionaire raj' more unequal than even British Raj: Congress

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** The Congress on Thursday latched on to a new rich list to attack the Centre, alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "billionaire raj" is more unequal than even the British Raj and it is also the cornerstone of the government's economic policy-making.

Congress general secretary-in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh shared on X a media report which cited the Hurun India Rich List to state that India created a new billionaire every five days throughout 2023.

"India has had one billionaire for every five days in 2023, and the non-biological Prime Minister's closest friend is the foremost among them all," Ramesh said on X.

"Modi's Billionaire Raj is more unequal than even the British Raj. But it is also the cornerstone of the government's economic policy-making," he alleged.

This is why, at a time when countries across the world are coalescing around the idea of a global billion-

aire tax, the Indian government has been conspicuously silent and continues to remain blind to rapidly increasing economic inequalities, Ramesh said.

Recouping the dent caused by the Hindenburg Research report, Gautam Adani's net worth shot up 95 per cent to ₹11.6 lakh crore last year, which helped him replace Mukesh Ambani to become the richest Indian, according to the 2024 Hurun India Rich List.

Reliance Industries chairman and managing director Ambani's overall net worth increased by 25 per cent to ₹10.14 lakh crore, as per the Hurun list.

In 2023's report, Adani's wealth declined by 57 per cent to ₹4.74 lakh crore, and Ambani was way ahead with a fortune of ₹8.08 lakh crore. It can be noted that Adani's net worth declined sharply following various allegations levelled by US-based short seller Hindenburg Research. The conglomerate has denied all (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'In the recent elections, this was a key topic for gaining votes'

### Taking hard stand to fight climate change not always practical in a democracy: Union minister

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Many initiatives to combat climate change rely heavily on public support and taking a hard stand may not always be very practical in a democratic country, Union minister Kirti Vardhan Singh said on Thursday.

Addressing ASSOCHAM's Environment and Carbon Conference here, Singh -- the minister of state for environment -- said a forward-thinking chief minister of Karnataka was promptly voted out after he decided to put a tax on "water usage for the farmers".

"A lot of initiatives to prevent climate change are heavily dependent on people and being a democracy, you know what it means... Sometimes, taking the right stand, taking the hard stand may not be very practical in terms of being a democratic country," the minister said. He said



farmers in his home state of Uttar Pradesh were very happy because they had "all the power to pump out as much water as they want".

"In the recent elections, this was the topic to talk about in a positive way because you need votes. So, we

would say we have so much irrigation resources today that our farmer just turns on the pump, goes home to sleep... and in the morning when he comes back to the farm, he has not only irrigated his fields but flooded the fields of his neighbours.

And this was very appreciated when actually it's a sheer waste of our water resources," Singh said.

"So, we have to take multiple facets into account when we talk about achieving net zero (emissions), when we talk about fighting climate change, when we look forward to the future that we are going to give our future generations," he said. The minister said the Narendra Modi government designed enabling policies for industries and businesses to help the country achieve its climate targets but "we also have to do our bit". UNFCCC and UN climate conferences focus a lot on how the industry can tackle climate change and what infrastructure changes are needed but, "sometimes, you also have to look inwards and see where we are unnecessarily exploiting the resources", Singh said. (PTI)

## Mamata debunks allegations of 'threat' to agitating doctors

**KOLKATA, Aug 29:** West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday asserted that she did not threaten junior doctors at state-run hospitals, who have been continuing cease-work for 21 days now to protest against the alleged rape and murder of a woman medic.

Banerjee said accusations that have come from certain quarters of her threatening the agitating junior doctors are "completely false" and part of a "malicious disinformation campaign".

"Let me most emphatically clarify that I have not uttered a single word against the (medical etc.) students or their movements. I totally support their movement. Their movement is genuine. I never threatened them, as some people are accusing me of doing. This allegation is completely false," she wrote on X.

Addressing a rally organised by the Trinamool Congress Chhatra



Parishad, Banerjee had on Wednesday urged the agitating junior doctors of Bengal to urgently consider returning to duty and said she doesn't want to lodge FIRs against the striking doctors in consideration of their future careers.

Agitating doctors interpreted the chief minister's remark as a "veiled threat" and rejected her appeal to

join work. Banerjee also wrote, "I have spoken against BJP. I have spoken against them because, with the support of the Government of India, they are threatening the democracy in our state and trying to create anarchy. With support from the Centre, they are trying to create lawlessness and I have raised my voice against them." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Sensex, Nifty hit all-time high levels on rally in Reliance, Tata Motors shares

**MUMBAI, Aug 29:** Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty hit their all-time high levels on Thursday, driven by a fag-end rally in index majors Reliance Industries and Tata Motors. Robust buying in energy and FMCG stocks also supported the domestic equities, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 349.05 points or 0.43 per cent to settle at an all-time closing high of 82,134.61, extending its winning momentum to the eighth day in a row. During the day, it soared 500.27 points or 0.61 per cent to hit a lifetime intra-day peak of 82,285.83. The BSE gauge has surged 1,709.93 points or 2.12 per cent in eight straight trading sessions.

Rallying for the 11th straight session, the NSE Nifty surged 99.60 points or 0.40 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 25,151.95. During the trade, the benchmark climbed 140.55 points or 0.56 per cent to hit a fresh record intra-day peak of 25,192.90. In 11 trading days, the NSE Nifty has jumped 1,012.95 points or 4.19 per cent.

"Markets were back in action on the expiry day after range-bound sessions, as benchmark indices hit fresh intra-day lifetime highs led by gains in Reliance Industries, which announced a 1:1 bonus



issue. "Markets were volatile and had slipped into the red in mid-session, but rebounded in late trade as investors cheered the bonus issue announcement by RIL, which led to buying action in other select frontline stocks," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Among the 30 Sensex firms, Tata Motors jumped over 4 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, HCL Technologies, ITC, Reliance Industries, Tech Mahindra, Maruti and State Bank of India.

Reliance Industries climbed nearly 2 per cent after Mukesh Ambani, chairman and managing

director of the firm, said the board of the company will meet on September 5 to consider issuing bonus shares in the ratio of 1:1.

"When Reliance grows, we reward our shareholders handsomely," Ambani said.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Sun Pharma, JSW Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Infosys and Tata Steel were among the biggest laggards.

"Indian equities began steadily and breached a record high. Volatility disturbed the trend in the afternoon due to Reliance Ltd AGM expectations, but the broad market carried the rally to a new high by the end of the day with rapid improvement in sentiment.

"The recent uptick in Indian IT and FMCG stocks points to a potential soft landing for the US economy and an improvement in domestic rural consumption," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.72 per cent, and the midcap index dipped 0.27 per cent. Among the indices, oil & gas jumped 0.91 per cent, energy (0.88 per cent), FMCG (0.58 per cent) and telecommunication (0.44 per cent).

Industrials, capital goods, commodities, utilities and services were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the negative territory, while Hong Kong ended higher.

European markets were trading in the positive zone. The US markets ended lower on Wednesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,347.53 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.60 per cent to USD 78.27 a barrel.

On Wednesday, the NSE Nifty went up by 34.60 points or 0.14 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 25,052.35. The BSE benchmark climbed 73.80 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 81,785.56. (PTI)

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

on Tuesday said about 3 crore new accounts under PMJDY are likely to be opened during the current financial year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of the total accounts opened under the scheme about 66.6 per cent accounts are opened in rural and semi-urban areas. Of the total 53.13 crore PMJDY accounts, 29.56 crore (55.6 per cent) belong to women account holders. Today, 99.95 per cent of all inhabited villages have access to banking facilities within

## Reliance aims to double retail business in next 3-4 years, to enter luxury jewellery segment

**MUMBAI, Aug 29:** The country's leading retailer, Reliance Retail, which crossed the ₹ 3 lakh crore-revenue mark in FY24, is aiming to double its business in the next 3-4 years, Reliance Industries Director Isha Ambani said on Thursday while addressing the company's AGM.

Now, three of Reliance Retail's private labels have crossed ₹ 2,000 crore in annual sales, and a few are lined up above ₹ 1,000 crore, Isha said, adding that its registered customer base crossed a milestone of 300 million.

Reliance Retail, which crossed a valuation of USD 100 billion, has plans to enter the "luxury jewellery segment with a curated, designed experience and is exploring the fashion jewellery and accessories segment", she said.

"With strong foundation we have built, I am confident that we will achieve our goal of doubling our retail business in the next 3-4 years," Isha said.

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani said Reliance Retail, which operates over 18,836 stores across the country, has become among the top-5 global retailers in terms of the number of stores.

In terms of market capitalisation, Reliance Retail is among the top-10 retailers globally and top-30 in terms of revenues, he added. It has a unique operating model,



which has been the foundation of the competitive advantage and leadership position.

"We have built an extensive and efficient supply chain with over 32 million sq ft warehouse network to support our pan-India operations," he said, adding that Reliance Retail is using deep tech with real-time dashboards, integrated AI workflows to make operations AI-enabled across the value chain.

Besides, it is also building significant capacities in data analytics and personalisation for best-in-class customer experience.

For the financial year ended on March 31, 2024, Reliance Retail recorded a gross revenue of ₹ 3.06 lakh crore (USD 36.8 billion), registering a growth of 17.8 per cent over the last year.

While sharing the segment's performance, Isha Ambani said in segments such as grocery, Re-

liance Retail has emerged as the largest, but also one of the fastest-growing retailers, expanding at 2.5 times the increase rate of the rest of the modern trade, she added.

"Our growth is driven by our focus on smaller towns, where over two-thirds of our new stores are opening. In many of these markets, we are the first modern retailer to establish a presence," she said. It is also selectively expanding premium formats, Fresh Signature and Freshpik, in large cities, Isha said.

On Reliance Retail Consumer Brands business, Isha said it is focused on creating quality products at affordable prices to drive greater consumption across India.

"We have re-launched several popular brands like Campa, Lotus Chocolates, and Sosyo. The early success of all these brands gives us confidence that we are on the right

## Ambani announces Jio AI Cloud Welcome offer; up to 100 GB free cloud storage for Jio users

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Stepping up the company's AI and cloud play, Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani on Thursday announced that Jio users will get up to 100 GB of free cloud storage to securely store and access their photos, videos, documents, digital content and data.

Addressing the 47th AGM of RIL, Ambani said the Jio AI-Cloud Welcome offer will be launched during the upcoming Diwali, which would bring a "powerful and affordable solution where cloud data storage and data-powered AI services are available to everyone, everywhere".

"Jio users will get up to 100 GB of free cloud storage to securely store and access all their photos, videos, documents, all other digital content, and data. And we will also have the most affordable prices in the market for those needing even higher storage," he said. Jio is of the firm belief that AI should not be a luxury reserved for a select few, he said, adding that AI services must be accessible on all devices, not just expensive, high-end devices.

"This requires a delivery model where AI services and the data processed by AI are both hosted in the cloud, allowing every user to access their data and AI services from anywhere, on any device, over low-latency broadband networks," Ambani said.

This is the only way to ensure that everyone will benefit from AI, irrespective of their socio-economic background.

"We call this concept Connected Intelligence. As a first step to Connected Intelligence, every user needs ample and affordable data storage capacity in the cloud, with the highest levels of privacy and security. With data safely stored in the cloud, AI can deliver intelligent, personalised services over the network," he said. Jio has added its voice assistant "Hello Jio" to its newly launched operating system -- Jio TVOS, which will enable TV users to control their Set-Top Box with voice commands.

It will be accessible through the mic button on the Jio remote.



ton on the Jio remote.

"Recently, we made Hello Jio even smarter using the latest Generative AI technologies, improving its natural language understanding and making it feel more human-like. Now, finding content on JioSTB is easier than ever. For example, just say, 'Hello Jio, find action movies,' and it will search across all your apps like Amazon Prime, Disney+, HotStar and more," Reliance Jio Chairman Akash Ambani said.

Akash Ambani also introduced the Jio-Phonecall AI service, which will let users record and store any call in Jio Cloud and automatically transcribe it.

"It can also summarise the call and even translate it into another language. This allows anyone to easily capture and access important voice conversations, making them searchable, shareable, and understandable across languages -- all with just a few clicks," he said.

Reliance will set up gigawatt-scale AI-ready data centres at Jamnagar in Gujarat.

"...we are laying the groundwork for a truly national AI infrastructure. We plan to establish gigawatt-scale AI-ready data centres in Jamnagar, powered entirely by Reliance's green energy, reflecting our commitment to sustainability and a greener future," Mukesh Ambani said.

Reliance aims to create the world's lowest AI inferring cost, he emphasised. (PTI)

## Ambani unveils growth roadmap for Reliance, co to double in size by 2030

**MUMBAI, Aug 29:** Billionaire Mukesh Ambani on Thursday unveiled the next phase of growth at Reliance Industries Ltd, with retail and telecom worth over USD 100 billion each, doubling revenues and pre-tax profit in 3-4 years, new energy business becoming profitable by 2031, and core oil and chemical business continuing to be the robust growth engine.

The sprawling conglomerate with interests in refining, oil and gas, petrochemicals, telecoms, retail, and media is on track to more than double in size before the end of the decade, Ambani, chairman and managing director of Reliance, told company shareholders.

While the growing cash cow, the oil and chemicals business, Reliance will step up AI adoption and will launch "Jio Brain" - a suite of AI tools and platforms - and set up gigawatt scale AI-ready data centres in Jamnagar in Gujarat "to create the world's lowest AI inferring cost" to make such applications more affordable in India than anywhere else.

Ambani also announced upto 100 GB of free cloud storage for users of his group's telecom venture Jio - a move seen as disrupting the market.

Since its launch in 2016, Jio has climbed to being India's top telecom company and the world's largest data firm on the back of dirt-cheap data and free voice calling. That offering shook up the industry, and the free cloud storage may also trigger a similar pattern.

"We have built each of our businesses from scratch and grown them to a global scale. We did not receive them as largesse," Ambani said, adding that Reliance is not pursuing short-term profit or hoarding wealth but creating wealth and working to provide energy security.

Ambani said that in 2017, he promised that Reliance would enter the world's Top 50 before its Golden Jubilee. "I am pleased to inform you that this year, Reliance is among the world's Top 50 most valuable corporations".

In July 2018, Reliance crossed

the USD 100 billion valuation mark, and in the next six years, it has become the first Indian company to cross USD 250 billion in market value.

"In 2022, I promised that Reliance would double its value by the time we complete 50 Glorious Years in 2027," he said, adding that the group "is well on track to more than double in size before the end of this decade and grow faster in the decades ahead".

He said three out of the five growth engines of Reliance - oil-to-chemical (O2C) business that houses oil refinery and petrochemical plants, retail comprising of both online and physical stores, telecom and digital venture Jio, media, and green energy - have a valuation of over USD 100 billion each and will continue to grow even faster.

O2C, retail and Jio are valued at over USD 100 billion each.

"Jio and Retail are expected to double their revenues and EBITDA in the next 3-4 years," he said. "Our new energy business will be the new jewel in Reliance's crown. I foresee it becoming as big and profitable over the next 5-7 years as our O2C business which we have built over the past 40 years." Green fuels and AI-based solutions, he said, will become long-term growth engines for Reliance. Media businesses, which are being combined with Disney

India, have immense growth potential. Minutes before the start of the annual general meeting, Reliance, in a stock exchange filing, said its board will on September 5 consider issuing bonus shares in the ratio of 1:1. This will be the first bonus share since 2017 and only the third since 2009.

Ambani said the bonus issue was rewarding shareholders who have been part of the Reliance growth story.

While the growth roadmap for retail and Jio is being considered indicators for a possible demerger and listing, the richest Asian did not give any indication of any such timelines.

Last year, he inducted all three

of his children - Akash, Isha and Anant - on the board of Reliance in succession planning, and on Thursday said that "they have stepped up to take on greater responsibilities".

Akash looks after the telecom venture while Isha is in charge of retail. Anant looks after a new energy business.

With about 19,000 stores across 7,000+ cities and an e-commerce platform, the retail business is among the top 10 global retailers by market cap and among the top 30 by revenues.

Similarly, it has 490 million telecom users, with Jio carrying 8 per cent of global mobile traffic. It has completed the 5G rollout.

Ambani said Jio is targeting 100 million homes for its broadband service JioAirfiber, and building large-scale AI infrastructure to offer AI for all.

In the O2C, it is adding capacities across PVC and polyester and building India's first carbon fibre plant at Hazira in Gujarat, he said.

In the new energy space, he said the group is on track to investing the committed Rs 75,000 crore in establishing a new energy ecosystem. Production of solar photovoltaic (PV) modules will commence by the end of this year, with the target to achieve the first phase of integrated solar production facilities in the following quarters.

The integration will include modules, cells, glass, wafers, ingot, and polysilicon, with an initial annual capacity of 10 GW.

Reliance, he said, has begun construction of an integrated advanced chemistry-based battery manufacturing facility with a 30 GWh annual capacity at Jamnagar. Production will commence by the second half of next year. Also, it has begun work on establishing a fully automated, multi-GW electrolyser manufacturing facility on the west coast of India, which will be ready by 2026. "This giga-factory will be fully adaptable, capable of supporting various technologies such as Alkaline, PEM, and AEM," he said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1.

## AIUDF raises Muslim safety

Sarma further alleged that the Congress party is supporting Bengali-origin Muslims to gain control of the state. "MLA Rafikul Islam and opposition leader Debabrata Saikia have suggested that people from lower Assam will move to upper Assam. I ask why this should happen. The opposition party wants Assam to be captured by Miya Muslims. They may try, but I will not allow this to happen in Assam. Miya Muslims will never take charge of the state," Sarma asserted.

## House passes bill to repeal

The chief minister stated that instead of focusing on the Qazi losing their jobs, the opposition should constantly consider the safety of the Muslim daughters' future.

Furthermore, he contended that the bulk of Qazi are employed as teachers. "Just 90 Qazi in Assam will become obsolete as a result of the Marriage Registration Act. But since the majority of them are teachers, it is evident that they cannot continue in the Qazi profession in addition to teaching," the CM said.

## India and China discuss

reached between the two governments, the MEA statement said. The leader of the Indian delegation also called on the vice-minister in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The 30th meeting of the WMCC was held in New Delhi on July 31. (PTI)

## Kuki-Zo groups of Manipur

spokesperson of KSO Delhi and NCR said the country turned its attention on Manipur only after videos of women being paraded naked surfaced.

Ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on May 3, 2023 after a tribal solidarity march was taken out in the hill districts of the state to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Since then, more than 220 people, including members of both communities and security personnel, have been killed in the continuing violence.

The KSO had also written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently demanding a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo tribal communities in Manipur and opposed the Centre's decision to withdraw the Assam Rifles from the buffer zones in the northeastern state. (PTI)

## Modi's 'billionaire raj' more

the allegations. In the 2014 edition, Hurun had pegged Adani's fortunes at Rs 44,000 crore, which made him the tenth richest Indian then. (PTI)

## 'National Clean Air Programme

The revised target is a 40 per cent reduction by 2026, using 2019-20 as the base year. At the launch event of ICAS 2024, Jai Asundi, executive director of CSTEP, highlighted the importance of collective action against the social problem of air pollution to steer the participatory future for air quality management. (PTI)

## Mamata debunks allegations

The chief minister also issued a clarification with respect to her "snap back" message to her supporters against "the conspirators who need to be unmasked". "I also clarify that the phrase ("phons kara") that I had used in my speech yesterday is a quote from Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The legendary saint had said that occasionally there is need to raise one's voice. When there are crimes and criminal offences, voice of protest has to be raised. My speech on that point was a direct allusion to the great Ramakrishnite saying," she posted on her social media timeline.

The BJP, on Wednesday, accused Banerjee of threatening opposition parties by abandoning her previous slogan of "badla noy, badal chai" (no revenge, only change) in response to alleged insults from the opposition.

At the TMCP rally, Banerjee remarked that the slogan needed to be updated to reflect changing times and situations. "The time has come to resist and protest when you are insulted and maligned with false propaganda. Although I never promote violence, when faced with such ugly attacks, do not take it lying down and snap back. How you respond is up to you," she said, referring to a story around the 19th Century Bengal mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Banerjee's clarification, however, failed to pacify the opposition, who previously accused her of threatening "participants of a democratic movement demanding security for women in the state".

Taking to X, BJP MLA and leader of opposition in the West Bengal assembly Suvendu Adhikari said, "Don't mince your words. There's no malicious disinformation campaign against you. The media is calling spade a spade. You have threatened the agitating medical students & junior doctors and warned them about taking action against them if they continue their agitation." He also alleged that Banerjee tried to "scare them of the dire consequences, including their career getting hampered" if she lodges FIRs against them. "Moreover you have issued threat to create anarchy in Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Assam, entire North Eastern India, UP and even creating unrest in Delhi for toppling an elected government," Adhikari said.

BJP Rajya Sabha MP and party spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said, "Banerjee's volte-face would not help in soothing the frayed nerves of junior doctors who are aggrieved over her veiled threat and hardened their stance."

Senior CPI(M) leader and Rajya Sabha MP Bikash Bhattacharya said, "Mamata Banerjee is known for changing her stand on different issues even before coming to power and this is another example of that." "Because of her threats, a CPI(M) rally at Durgapur in Paschim Bardhaman district was attacked and our workers, including an elderly woman, were injured," he claimed. Congress leader and party spokesperson Soumya Aich said, "The CM was speaking like a dictator. She blamed the agitating junior doctors for the disruption in the healthcare system. The CM's words are the manifestation of an autocratic regime." (PTI)



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## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Thinking: the talking of the soul with itself.  
-Plato

## Flawed job strategy

India's growing unemployment rate is not just an economic challenge but a fundamental issue that threatens the nation's potential to harness its demographic dividend. With one of the world's largest youth populations, the lack of a coherent job strategy risks undermining the very growth the country aspires to achieve. Over the last decade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic policies have struggled to address this critical issue, resulting in what can be termed as "jobless growth." The shift from rural to urban areas over the years saw many leaving agriculture in search of better opportunities in non-farm sectors. However, in recent years, this trend has reversed, with a significant portion of the population returning to farm-based employment. The rural workforce has surged from 42% to 46%, indicating a movement driven more by necessity than opportunity. Over 20 million people, unable to find secure jobs in urban areas, have turned to casual, self-employment in the unorganized sector. These are survival strategies, not the stable, secure jobs that contribute to long-term economic growth. The government's portrayal of this shift as evidence of "job creation" is misleading. The recent Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report, which attempts to validate this claim, fails to address key indicators such as labour productivity, labour force participation rate (LFPR), and real wage growth.

PM Modi's assertion of employment growth, backed by RBI data showing an increase from 596.7 million to 643.3 million, does not hold up under scrutiny. If this were accurate, we would expect to see a rise in social security and welfare expenditures, yet these have seen sharp reductions. For example, the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan Yojna saw its budget allocation slashed from INR 350 crore to INR 205.21 crore, with actual expenditure by the end of 2023 standing at a mere INR 46.34 crore. Similarly, under the Labour Welfare Scheme, while the budget allocation increased from INR 75 crore to INR 102 crore, actual spending was only INR 20.25 crore. The National Pension Scheme for Traders and Self-Employed Persons fared even worse, with virtually no spending against a meager budgetary provision. The Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojna, touted as a job creation scheme, saw its budget reduced and still managed to underspend, with only INR 1,265 crore spent out of the allocated INR 1,350 crore.

The government's failure to invest adequately in these programs underscores a broader neglect of the workforce. The National Database for Unorganised Workers, launched with much fanfare, saw only Rs 18.63 crore spent against an allocation of Rs 300 crore. The National Career Services initiative, intended to connect job seekers with opportunities, has also faltered, with expenditure far below the allocated budget. The impact of these failures is evident. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, the unemployment rate stood at 7.6% in March, a stark indicator of the challenges facing the country. The Modi government's inability to develop a coherent policy across manufacturing, agriculture, and services sectors has left small and medium-sized enterprises, crucial for job creation, struggling without support. Investments in healthcare and education have declined, and labour law reforms have eroded job security. In a decade marked by near jobless growth, the Labour Force Participation Rate has fallen to alarming levels. Without urgent action, the country may miss out on the potential of its young workforce, with long-term consequences for its economic future.

## Bangladesh crisis: Uncertainty looms over India's Northeast connectivity projects

Bangladesh has been plunged into a significant political crisis, with widespread protests demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who eventually fled the country. The unrest, led primarily by students and opposition forces, has destabilized the nation, resulting in the deaths of approximately 300 people during violent clashes. The situation escalated to the point where protesters stormed and looted the Prime Minister's official residence shortly after her departure. Amid this turmoil, the Bangladesh Army assumed control, promising to establish an interim government. However, the uncertainty surrounding the duration and policies of this interim regime casts a shadow over the future of critical transborder connectivity projects between India and Bangladesh, particularly those that are vital for India's Northeastern region.

**Bangladesh-India Relations: A Decade of Co-operation:** Under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh and India developed one of the strongest bilateral relationships in South Asia. This partnership led to numerous initiatives aimed at enhancing connectivity between India's Northeastern states and the rest of the country via Bangladesh. These initiatives included using Bangladesh's inland waterways, seaports, and railways as alternative routes, significantly reducing travel distance and time. The connectivity

projects are not merely logistical improvements but strategic assets crucial for the Northeastern region's development, facilitating faster growth and integration with the broader Indian economy. One of the most prominent examples of this co-operation is the Akhaura-Agartala cross-border rail link, the sixth India-Bangladesh rail link, and the Khulna-Mongla port cargo facilities. These projects, completed over the past year, have been instrumental in connecting the Northeast with the rest of India. Additionally, the operation of the world's longest river cruise from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh to Dibrugarh in Assam via the Indo-Bangla Protocol (IBP) route has demonstrated the viability of connecting India's National Waterway 1 (River Ganga) and National Waterway 2 (River Brahmaputra) through Bangladesh's inland waterways. This connectivity is crucial for boosting tourism, trade, and passenger movement between the two nations.

**Uncertainty and Strategic Concerns:** However, the current political instability in



Bangladesh threatens to derail these projects. The interim government's policies will be crucial in determining whether these initiatives continue or face significant delays. The regular dredging of the IBP waterways and the Brahmaputra is essential for maintaining the required navigational depth, but the ongoing crisis has cast doubt over the sustainability of such operations. Furthermore, India and Bangladesh recently signed a new Memorandum of Understanding on railway connectivity, allowing the use of each other's railway networks for the movement of goods and people, including transit to Bhutan and Nepal. This agreement was a testament to India's strategy of leveraging strong bilateral relations to overcome the landlocked challenges of the Northeastern region, putting it on a faster track to development.

The interim government's approach to these agreements will be critical. It is in both countries' best interests to maintain continuity in these cross-

border projects, as they are mutually beneficial. For Bangladesh, these projects represent a significant revenue stream and an opportunity to generate employment, particularly at a time when rising unemployment is a root cause of the ongoing unrest. For the Northeast, these projects are vital for ending its geographical isolation and fostering economic growth.

**Regional and Geopolitical Implications:** The political crisis in Bangladesh has broader implications for the region, particularly in the context of India's Act East and Neighbourhood First policies. The Northeast region lies at the heart of these strategic goals, making stability in Bangladesh and Myanmar crucial for their success. The Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the Trilateral Highway Project, both critical for connecting the Northeast with the ASEAN economy, have already faced delays due to political turbulence in Myanmar. The ongoing crisis in Bangladesh further exacerbates these challenges, threatening to disrupt connectivity and trade routes vital for the region.

Moreover, any instability in Bangladesh has an immediate impact on the Northeast, especially concerning river connectivity. The region's economy is heavily dependent on these transborder projects, and any disruption could have far-reaching consequences. Over the past decade, trans-boundary trade between the Northeast and Bangladesh has increased significantly, creating livelihood opportunities for thousands on both sides of the border. The change of government in Dhaka, however, poses a new challenge, as the protest movement has taken on an anti-India sentiment. The presence of Islamist forces, known for their anti-India stance, in the post-Hasina Bangladesh, complicates the situation further.

**China's Influence and India's Strategic Dilemma:** Adding to India's concerns is the growing influence of China in Bangladesh. China has been actively seeking to increase its foothold in the country, and the current political vacuum could provide an opportunity for Beijing to expand its influence. This situation leaves India with limited options, compelling it to engage with those in power in Bangladesh, regardless of their stance towards India. India's priority must be to ensure that economic activities and connectivity projects between the two countries continue, despite the political changes.

A Guwahati-based think tank recently suggested that India should urgently communicate that it does not engage in partisan politics and that its foremost priority is to cultivate and sustain close relations with Bangladesh, its immediate and, until recently, best bilateral partner. This is particularly important to ensure that the Northeast, which

has been the primary beneficiary of India's Neighbourhood First policy, does not suffer.

**Navigating a Complex Future:** The political crisis in Bangladesh has introduced a new level of uncertainty into the region. The close cooperation between India and Bangladesh over the past decade, which has greatly benefited the Northeastern region, is now at risk. The fluid situation in Bangladesh, marked by the change of government and the rise of anti-India sentiments, could have significant implications for the future of transborder connectivity projects.

India must navigate this complex situation carefully, balancing its strategic interests with the need to maintain stability in the region. Ensuring the continuation of cross-border projects is crucial, not only for the economic development of the Northeast but also for the broader goals of India's Act East and Neighbourhood First policies.

As the situation in Bangladesh evolves, India will need to remain vigilant and adaptive, engaging with the new regime to protect its interests and ensure that the hard-won gains of the past decade are not lost. The road ahead is uncertain, but with strategic foresight and diplomatic engagement, India can continue to foster strong bilateral relations with Bangladesh, ensuring the stability and prosperity of the Northeast region and beyond.

*(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

## School Management Committee: Functions, powers, responsibilities and duties

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Every parent or guardian naturally wants their children to receive an excellent education and to lead a happy and successful life by receiving proper education. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, introduced in 2010, has brought such an opportunity for everyone and is moving towards making every school in the country an inclusive school.

Under Article 45 of the Constitution, free and compulsory primary education for all children aged 6 to 14 years has been adopted as the guiding principle and various schemes have been adopted at various times to achieve the objectives of universal primary education.

These schemes include Operation Blackboard, Restructured and Restructured Teacher Training System, District Primary Education Scheme, Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Non-Formal Education, Education Guarantee Scheme, Alternative and Innovative Education System, Jan-shala Scheme and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to achieve the goals of universal education has contributed significantly to bridging the gaps.

The 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India (2002) paved the way for the enactment of the rights to free and compulsory education in The Act of 2009 seeks to create an environment for every child to receive quality education without any discrimination and exclusion, thereby providing quality education for all and implementing appropriate education systems. As a result, quality education, equality, non-discrimination and the right to education ensure the freedom of children. With these aspects in mind, the Right to Education Act 2009 emphasizes the need to efficient and strengthens school management committees for the development and planning of a school.

Every school in the state has a school management committee and a school management and development committee. The responsibilities and duties of all parties concerned as well as school management committees or school management and development committees have increased in ensuring quality free and compulsory primary education. Recognizing the importance of mothers in the

education of children, efforts have been made to include women in half of the total membership of school management committees. This article attempts to discuss some of the functions, powers, responsibilities and duties of the School Management Committee.

## • Monitoring of school activities

The School Management Committee and the School Management and Development Committee shall take all necessary measures to create a favorable environment to facilitate the educational development of the children and for the development of the school. This committee will be responsible for collecting all kinds of 'U-DISE' data. Responsible for monitoring, application, evaluation and taking all remedial measures.

## • Monitoring student attendance

The school management committee shall ensure 100% regular attendance and completion of primary education of all children within the school coverage.

## • Educational Development

The school management committee shall keep a record of the academic progress of the students. The committee shall review the achievement of the students on the basis of the assessment and shall take remedial action. Pay special attention to weak and backward students. The President and Vice-President of the Committee may inspect the school during the running of the school and investigate the reasons for the cancellation of the school rules, attendance of students and teachers and discuss the reasons for cancellation at the next meeting of the Management Committee.

## • Micro-scheme preparation

The school management committee shall arrange for collection of information on children within the school coverage, preparation of child registration books and ensuring enrollment of all children in schools and providing special training as required.

## • Proper implementation of the academic calendar

The school management committee shall ensure that the school activities are carried out properly according to the approved academic calendar. Care shall be taken to ensure that schools are not declared closed or half-holidays without the permission of the district authori-

ties.

The 'Celebration Days' mentioned in the calendar shall be celebrated in the school and the report shall be submitted to the concerned authority. If the day to be celebrated is a holiday or Sunday, the Board of Directors may decide to celebrate earlier or on the day after the holiday as convenient. Under no circumstances will schools be dismissed early on the celebration day.

## • Monitoring of teacher and staff attendance

The School Management Committee shall monitor the attendance of the teachers and staff of the school and approve their monthly absence reports. The School Management Committee shall adopt a resolution in this regard stating the date of absence, late arrival and early departure against the teachers and staff concerned in the approved form and the President and Member-Secretary shall sign the resolution. The committee will also review and supervise the performance of teachers and may recommend disciplinary action to the concerned authorities for any violation of the rules and regulations by teachers and staff.

## • Monitoring of attendance books and application of casual leave

The School Management Committee shall have the authority to inspect the daily attendance books of students and teachers and staff and may record necessary comments in this regard. No casual leave application submitted by teachers and employees without the approval or consent signature of the President of the School Management Committee shall be accepted by the concerned officer.

## • Preparation of school development plans

A school development plan is a plan for the overall development of the school in all aspects - infrastructure, academic, intellectual and physical. According to the Right to Education Act 2009, the School Management Committee of every primary school is required to prepare a 'School Development Plan' covering educational, social management and infrastructure aspects. Every school management committee shall prepare a school improvement plan at least three months before the end of the financial year. This plan must be prepared for three



years, with separate annual sub-plans for three years.

This development plan includes the preparation of estimates of students required for enrollment by class each year, calculation of management and additional infrastructure and material requirements for three years as per the rules prescribed by the Right to Education Act in the three-year plan; this will cover aspects such as additional funds required for special training, free textbooks, free uniforms and additional funds required in other categories. The School Improvement Plan shall be signed by the President, Vice President and Member Secretary of the School Management Committee and submitted to the authorities at the end of the financial year.

## • The duties of the school management committee in the case of children with special needs

Children with special needs (CWSN) refer to those children, who differ from typical children in terms of physical, mental, social, emotional, academic and learning abilities. This deviation can be positive or negative ie strong or weak characteristics. These children can be called exceptional children. Children with special needs are given various names such as 'less intelligent', 'physically handicapped', 'disabled', 'exceptional', 'special' 'vulnerable children' and so on.

According to Article 2(d) of the Right to Education Act, schools should also be prepared with special effective training so that other backward children as well as children with disabilities can acquire certain skills and techniques of primary education and not be deprived of education for any reason. In this case, the school management committee should ensure that those children can come to school without hesitation.

**• Responsibility of the School Management Committee**

food or cooking utensils are protected from dust, dirt, flies or other pests.

The management committee should also ensure that the cooks or persons involved in cooking or serving food observe strict hygiene and that children wash their hands with soap before and after eating. It is compulsory for the teacher to taste the lunch immediately before serving it to the students in the school. Teachers as well as school management committee members are also advised to taste test the lunch. Teachers and management should record comments on the taste of food in designated register books.

## • Proper use of funds allocated to schools

The school management committee plays a special role in the proper use of funds received from the concerned government, local authorities and other sources in the school. The development plan prepared by the school management committee shall include an estimate of the possible necessary expenditure. The school management committee shall follow the guidelines received from the concerned government or authority for the proper use of funds. Sometimes the school governing body may not receive the full amount of money set forth in the school improvement plan.

In such cases, the funds received by the School Management Committee shall be spent through priority based on needs. Ensure that 10 per cent of the funds allocated for school development are used for transparency. The School Management Committee shall submit the annual accounts to the concerned Deputy Inspector or Block Primary Education Officer. Donations received from the public must be recorded in prescribed documents and spent according to plan.

In addition to these responsibilities or duties, the school management committee shall take steps to increase school enrollment rates, reduce premature dropout rates, improve examination results and ensure social participation. The school management committee should be diligent in ensuring that the popularity of the school is not disrupted in any way.

On the other hand, to build moral values of children, arrangements should be made for moral education in school

morning meetings with explanations of sayings of great people, playing various games with values, fairy tales with proverbs recited by village experts in Saturday squares.

In addition to forming School Disaster Management Committees to ensure the safety of children in schools, it is very important that the members of the School Management Committee be especially vigilant to ensure that children do not face any physical or mental punishment, abuse etc. in schools.

In addition, the school management committee has a lot to do in terms of transparency in the school. Every member should take care to keep the school clean and tidy so that the children can learn in a beautiful and healthy environment. School management committees should pay more attention to regular supply of water to toilets besides water, sanitation and hygiene in schools.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and the Department of Education, Government of Assam have taken measures to conduct the quarterly meetings of School Management Committees effectively with effect from 2019-20 and issued necessary guidelines. Every year, three days of special training is organized for the members of each school management committee under each Zonal Resource Center in each district during February-March with the aim of bringing the people together and paving the way for school development. Through these trainings, the members of the School Management Committee have already become aware of the responsibilities and duties entrusted to them and they have been implemented at the school level.

Since the future of our village or region depends on the development of our young children in all its forms, it is very important that everyone comes forward selflessly to improve the school that builds the future of those children. The School Management Committee is the backbone of a school. The school management committee must take strong and robust action for the overall development and growth of the school, only then will the future of our country or society be strong. *(The writer is CRCC of Nalbari Cluster, Biswanath Education Block, Education Department, Assam)*

## Tezpur hosts heritage ride & sports matches, while Nagaon features community run & hockey match to honour Major Dhyan Chand

# National Sports Day 2024 celebrated with enthusiasm

### HT Correspondent

**TEZPUR, Aug 29:** To commemorate the birth anniversary of legendary hockey player Major Dhyan Chand on Thursday, the Sonitpur District Sports Office celebrated National Sports Day 2024 in a befitting manner by organising various activities, including a Heritage Ride. To mark the day, a bicycle rally was organised with the aim of promoting sports, culture, history, tradition, and the heritage of Sonitpur district. The rally covered significant sites, including Agnigarh, Ganesh Ghat, Cole Park, Mahabhairab Temple, Garh Dou, Da Parbatia, Hingileswar Temple, and Hazara Pukhuri. The event was inaugurated by the district commissioner of Sonitpur, Deba Kumar Mishra, in the presence of Pranjal Dehingia, district sports officer of Sonitpur, and Abhilash Rajkhowa, district museum officer.

As a tribute to the legendary hockey player Major Dhyan Chand, an exhibition women's hockey match was organised, followed by a friendly volleyball match. The volleyball match, which was inaugurated by Karabi Saikia Karan, CEO, Zilla Parishad, Sonitpur, along with Pranjal De-



hingia, district sports officer of Sonitpur, was held to commemorate India's deep-rooted tradition in sports.

**Our Nagaon correspondent adds:** The Nagaon district unit of the Bharati, in association with the Nowgong Sports Association, observed National Sports Day with a day-long program at the Nagaon Nurul Amin Stadium on Thursday. The program began with the unfurling of the flag by Tapan Sarma,

the vice president of the Nowgong Sports Association, followed by a community run in which over a hundred sportsmen and sports organisers from the district participated.

On the occasion, a hockey friendship match was organised, and a football match was also held.

Mohan Bora flagged off the community run on Thursday morning, with participation from

Nava Kr Mahanta, president of the Nagaon district unit of Kriya Bharati; Divash Bora, secretary of Kriya Bharati; Prasanta Bora, vice president of the Nowgong Sports Association; Amitabh Bora, joint secretary of NSA; Anil Das; Prantar Kr Bhat-tacharya; Mrinal Kr Hazarika; Sudip Saha; Diganta Bora; and other members of Kriya Bharati and the Nowgong Sports Association, a press note asserted.

## NABARD sponsored skill development prog wraps up at DIKSHA, Lanka



### HT Correspondent

**NAGAON, Aug 29:** The Dalmia Institute of Knowledge and Skill Harnessing (DIKSHA), Lanka, has successfully concluded the NABARD-sponsored Skill Development Programme (SDP) as assistant electrician activity.

The valedictory and ceremonial distribution of toolkits and certificates for the training program were held on Wednesday at the DIKSHA training centre. ADC Hojai, Dr Sonashree Brahma, DDM NABARD, Rajendar Perma, DGM HR of Dalmia Cement North East Ltd. (DCNEL), Mrinal Baruah, LDM Moucham Bora of SBI, Hojai, chief manager Ravi Kumar, CSR deputy manager Jauga Mushahary, and DIKSHA centre manager Sumit Paul were present as special guests and invitees.

During the session, DDM NABARD, Rajendar Perma, informed the gathering that promoting the Off-Farm Sector is a key part of NABARD's mission, emphasising the need to reduce rural India's dependence on agricultural income and encourage alternative livelihood options. He added that NABARD has been promoting skill-building and entrepreneurship in rural areas through various programs like Micro Enterprise Development Programmes (MEDPs), Livelihood and Enterprise Development Programmes (LEDPs), and Skill Development Programmes (SDPs) for wage/self-employment. He also shared that during the event, participants received extensive training for over 400 hours, and ten of the best trainees have already been selected for apprentice-

ships at the DCNEL plant in Lanka.

ADC Hojai, Dr Sonashree Brahma, inaugurated the event and, in her speech, highlighted the significant demand for professionally trained electricians in the region, encouraging trainees to build on the skills acquired during the training. She also suggested that trainees consider setting up their own shops and congratulated NABARD and DBF for organising the training for rural youth.

Mrinal Baruah, DGM-HR of the DCNEL plant, motivated participants by urging them to overcome obstacles in their path to success and shared inspirational stories of renowned figures. He also requested NABARD to consider sanctioning more such programs.

During their speeches, the LDM and chief manager of SBI assured participants that banks are always ready to support them, sharing details of MUDRA and other schemes. Following the valedictory session, the invited dignitaries distributed toolkits and certificates among all participants. The program concluded with a vote of thanks by DIKSHA centre manager Sumit Paul.

## Union Minister Reviews Flagship Schemes in Chirang



### HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, AUG 29:** Union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs, L. Murugan, reviewed the status and progress of flagship schemes from both state and central governments in Chirang District. He expressed satisfaction with the overall progress made and offered valuable suggestions for the timely completion of all ongoing schemes, emphasizing the need to maintain quality in accordance with the guidelines.

During a review meeting held in the conference hall of the DC office in Chirang on August 29, Minister L. Murugan conveyed optimism about the region development. He encouraged participants with a vision to further advance the development of North East India, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts and effective implementation of schemes and initiatives. The meeting focused on evaluating the current status of key departments, including Panchayat and Rural Development, Education (Elementary and Secondary), National Social Assistance Program, Public Health Engineering (PHE), Health and Family Welfare, Agriculture, Public Works Department (PWD), Social Welfare, Food and Civil Supply, Industries and Commerce, and Fisheries, among others. A thorough review was conducted of various schemes such as Nijut Moina, Vidyajjali, PM Poshan, and irrigation schemes. Discussions also covered NABARD, Orunodoi, the One District One Product initiative, and several other programs. Flagship schemes like Mission Bhumiputra, Amrit Brikshya Andolon, Assam Sanskritik Mahasangram, and Khel Maharan were also assessed.

## Sootea residents express gratitude to CM Sarma for heritage recognition

### HT Correspondent

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Aug 29:** In response to a question regarding what steps the state government will undertake to glorify the significant history of the historic Sootea Police Station, asked by Sootea MLA Padma Hazarika during the ongoing Autumn Session of the State Assembly on Thursday, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that the state government has recognised the historic Sootea Police Station (Old PS) as a heritage police station. The CM confirmed that steps will be taken to modernise the station and introduce departmental elements. Furthermore, CM Sarma announced that August 20 will be declared as Sootea Divas, a day to honour the historical significance of the police station and to pay tribute to the freedom fighters. The state government will also arrange for the national tricolour to be hoisted at the

historic police station premises around the clock.

It is noteworthy that on August 20, 1942, the national tricolour was peacefully hoisted at the historic Sootea PS (Old PS) premises by freedom fighters, marking the first time in India that the flag was raised without bloodshed. Since 2022, Sootea Divas has been observed annually on August 20 under the leadership of Sootea MLA Padma Hazarika.

Following the chief minister's historic announcement, people from all sections of Sootea came out of their homes and gathered at the Old PS premises to publicly celebrate the news. Organisations and prominent figures from the greater Sootea area expressed their gratitude to the CM for his timely declaration. Local residents lit earthen lamps at the PS premises, and the area was illuminated with electric lights in celebration.



## Amrit Stations redevelopment on fast track across NFR

Upgrades include modern facilities, enhanced accessibility & eco-friendly features at 91 stations under ABSS

### HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Aug 29:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is making swift progress in redeveloping 91 stations within its network under the prestigious Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS). This initiative, part of Indian Railways' broader vision to transform the passenger experience, aims to upgrade infrastructure and amenities, ensuring a modern and comfortable environment for railway passengers.

The Amrit Bharat Station Scheme is designed to enhance the overall experience of passengers by modernising station buildings, improving access, and providing state-of-the-art facilities. Stations like Kamakhya, Rangiya, Rangapara North, Dhubri, Lumding, New Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Diphu, Barsoi, Kishanganj, New Jalpaiguri, New Alipurduar, Rangpo, Agartala, Udaipur, Mendipathar, Dimapur, Naharlagun, among others, are undergoing transformation to achieve the highest standards of quality infrastructural work within stipulated timelines.

Some ongoing works include the construction of foot overbridges (FOBs) for better connectivity and accessibility, de-



velopment of station circulating areas, additional covered parking sheds for both two and four-wheelers, modern toilets for common and Divyangjan passengers, shop complexes, improved waiting areas, and spacious areas with advanced ticketing systems at stations like New Mal Junction, Kokrajhar, Fakiragram, Hasimara, Dhubri, Gossaigaon Hat, Gauripur, Dhpuguri, Din-

hata, Dalgaon, Binnaguri, Jalpaiguri Road, Kamakhya, Lanka, Hojai, Champamukh, and others. All 91 stations under NFR will receive these upgrades, including the installation of CCTV cameras, better lighting, and improved crowd management systems to ensure a safer environment.

Sustainability is a key focus, with plans

for energy-efficient lighting, rainwater harvesting systems, and the use of eco-friendly materials. Upgraded parking areas, enhanced station facades, and beautified local art and culture reflecting the rich heritage of the region will create a welcoming atmosphere for railway passengers.

The Amrit Bharat Station Scheme is a

transformative step toward realising the vision of a modern and efficient railway network that meets the aspirations of a New India. NFR is committed to ensuring that these redevelopment projects set new benchmarks in service excellence, providing safe, efficient, and reliable railway services while contributing to the socio-economic development of the region.

## Congress protests against prepaid smart metres in Jorhat

### HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, Aug 29:** In a state-wide protest led by the Indian National Congress (INC) against the installation of prepaid smart metres by the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL), the Jorhat district unit of the Congress staged a demonstration in front of the APDCL office on Thursday.

Protesters, holding placards, banners, and party flags, chanted slogans targeting the state BJP-led government, Power minister, chief minister, and APDCL. They alleged that the installation of prepaid

smart metres has resulted in a significant increase in electricity bills for consumers.

The Congress members highlighted the added financial burden on the public, who are already struggling with rising prices of essential commodities. Seva Dal and Mahila Congress members also participated in the demonstration.

At the end of the protest, the demonstrators submitted a memorandum to APDCL authorities via the Jorhat APDCL office, demanding the immediate removal of the smart metres and a return to the previous metre system.

## Anti-elephant solar fence boosts harvest for Mirza farmers

### HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Aug 29:** A low-cost solar fence that has protected standing crops on three hectares of crop fields from depredation by wild elephants in the Mirza area of Kamrup district, has significantly boosted paddy harvests for local farmers in the last harvesting season.

The local community of Gosaihat village, near the Malati reserve of Palashbari Range Forest, Mirza, installed the low-cost seasonal solar fence in November 2023 with the technical guidance of the Aaranyak team, supported by Aaranyak and WWF. The US Fish and Wildlife Service backed the Aaranyak initiative.

The Aaranyak team initially trained the Gosaihat community on solar fence management and operation. Eventually, a low-cost community-managed solar fence was successfully installed on an experimental basis. The fence provided excellent protection to the standing crops from wild elephant herds, allowing local farmers to harvest 90 percent of the crop in the last season.

"Previously, when there was no solar fence, the farmers could hardly harvest anything as wild elephant herds used to devour and destroy the standing crop," said Aaranyak official and solar fence installation expert Anjan Baruah.

The solar fence power machine was installed at the residence of Sukleswar Boro, a local farmer of Gosaihat. After the last season's harvest, the local farmers, led by Boro, removed the entire fence, including the solar fence machines, solar panels, etc., and stored them properly for the next year.

According to Boro, they were able to protect their crops from wild elephants last season, realis-



ing the utility of the seasonal solar fence. They have taken the responsibility to care for the fence materials, machines, and battery.

After the successful results of the last harvesting season, the local farmers decided to install a seasonal solar fence covering a larger area this year, including crop areas previously left unused due to the threat of elephant depredation. In August 2024, the Gosaihat farmers installed the seasonal solar fence using the stored materials to protect 10 hectares of crop fields.

A group of farmers, including Sukleswar Boro, Bonapart Boro, Milon Boro, Bhubaneswar Boro, Jiten Boro, Dipen Boro, Kamal Das, Lal Mohan Das, Bhola Das, Bhoben Das, Dimpu Thakuria, and Manoj Das, led the installation of a one-kilometre-long low-cost seasonal solar fence using bamboo

posts to protect around 10 hectares of crop fields. The installation was completed in two days, from August 20 to 22.

"This year, the farmers expect to harvest 100 percent of the crop with the help of the seasonal solar fence. The farmers no longer worry about crop damage by elephants outside the fence," said Boro. The farmers have left some space for wild elephants to move while installing the fence.

Boro mentioned that the fence would be removed after harvesting the crop and stored properly for use next year, as was done last year.

Thus, the local community of Gosaihat village has adopted the low-cost community-managed seasonal solar fence to boost their agricultural income while learning to coexist with wild elephants.

## Rabindranath Tagore University hosts Annual Milad Mehfil

### HT Correspondent

**HOJAI, Aug 29:** The Annual Milad Mehfil was celebrated with grandeur at Rabindranath Tagore University, Hojai, in remembrance of Prophet Muhammad at Bharat Tirtha Bhavan on Thursday. Dr Manabendra Dutta Choudhary, vice chancellor of RTU, and Dr Tilak Chandra Kalita, registrar of RTU, graced the occasion. Dr Sanjiv Kumar Borkakoti, a renowned scholar and former professor of ADP College, Nagaon, was present as the chief guest, while Dr Sohail Ahmed, head of the department of English at Jagiroad College, attended as a distinguished guest. Maulana Abdul Kadir, general secretary of the Assam Tanzim Board, served as the guest of honour. The event was further enriched by the presence of academic heads of departments and respective teachers of the university.

The program was meticulously organised under the leadership of Dr Abhijit Kakaty, president of the Annual Milad Mehfil Committee; Dr Rezina Ahmed, professor in-charge; and Dr Jesmine Ahmed, the event's professor coordinator. Several competitions were held during the program, showcasing the talents of the students. In the speech competition, Abu Sufian from the department of Political Science at Rabindranath Tagore University secured the first prize. In the Ghazal and Qirat competitions, Abdul Razzak Laskar from Haji Anfar Ali College emerged as the winner. The Milad Mehfil concluded on a high note, being deemed a resounding success.



**JORHAT, Aug 29:** The disappearance of Himijyoti Das, a fifth-semester B.Tech student of Civil Engineering at Kaziranga University, has raised concerns and mystery. Himijyoti, a resident of Sorbhog, Barpeta, went missing under unclear circumstances, prompting his father to file an FIR at the Pulbari Police Station in Jorhat.

According to his father, Himijyoti had gone to stay with friends at a hostel outside the campus in Dhapkota, Jorhat, after classes on Tuesday. On Wednesday, he called his mother around 11:00 am, but by noon, he left the hostel, telling friends he was going to meet other friends. He left behind his wallet, cellphone, and clothes at the hostel and has not returned to his university hostel since.

The father revealed that Himijyoti had been struggling with online gaming addiction, leading him into debt. "A couple of boys had previously contacted me about money Himijyoti owed them. They asked me to settle the amount, but when I came to Jorhat, they did not meet me. I have now heard that Himijyoti owed about ₹ 3.5 lakh, with allegations that it could be as high as ₹ 15 lakh. I am unsure of where this money came from and whether his creditors might have confined him somewhere," he said.

*A top Chinese military officer has demanded the United States stop "collusion" with Taiwan, the self-governing island that China says must come under its rule*

## Top Chinese general tells US to stop colluding with Taiwan in meeting with security adviser

**BELJING, Aug 29:** A top Chinese military officer, in a rare meeting with a visiting American official, demanded on Thursday that the United States stop "collusion" with Taiwan, the self-governing island that China says must come under its rule.

Gen. Zhang Youxia, one of two vice chairs of the Central Military Commission, told White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan that promoting what China calls the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland is "the mission and responsibility" of the military, according to a statement from China's Defence Ministry.

Sullivan was wrapping up a three-day trip to China, his first as national security adviser and one aimed at maintaining communication to avoid differences over Taiwan and other issues from spiralling into conflict. Both governments are eager to keep relations on an even keel ahead of a change in the US presidency in January.

"Your request to meet with me shows the value you attach to military security and the relationship between our militaries," Zhang said in brief opening remarks.

Sullivan said "it is rare that we have the opportunity to have this kind



of exchange" and underscored "the need for us to responsibly manage US-China relations."

The meeting came one day after the White House said that both countries would plan for a phone call between Chinese President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden in the coming weeks. There was no indication whether the two leaders might meet in person before Biden leaves the Oval Office.

The announcement followed Sullivan's main talks on this trip, a day and a half of meetings with Wang Yi, the foreign minister and the ruling Communist Party's top foreign policy official. The US doesn't recognise Taiwan as an independent country but is its main supplier of arms for its defence. China and Taiwan split in 1949 at the end of a civil war that brought

the communists to power in China. The rival Nationalists fled to Taiwan, where they set up a government on the island about 160 kilometres across the Taiwan Strait from the Chinese coast.

"China demands that the United States stop military collusion between the US and Taiwan, stop arming Taiwan and stop spreading false narratives about Taiwan," the Chinese Defence Ministry statement said, without elaborating on what the false narratives are.

A White House statement said the two had "recognised the progress in sustained, regular military-military communications over the past ten months" and noted an agreement announced the previous day to hold a telephone call between commanders at the theatre-level in the near future.

On Taiwan, the US statement said only that Sullivan had raised the importance of cross-strait peace and stability.

China suspended communication between the two militaries and in a few other fields after a senior US lawmaker, then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, visited Taiwan in August 2022. Talks were only gradually resumed more than a year later, after Xi and Biden met outside San Francisco in November.

A theatre-level call would be between Adm. Samuel Paparo, who heads the US Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii, and his Chinese counterpart, said Danny Russel, a vice president at the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York.

"This theatre command-level dialogue is critical for crisis prevention but something the Chinese military has been resisting," said Russel, a former assistant US secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs.

Paparo said this week that the US military is open to consultations about escorting Philippine ships in the South China Sea, where they have clashed with Chinese ships trying to block them from small islands and outcroppings that both countries claim. (AP)

## EU's top diplomat ramps up pressure on Ukraine's backers to permit strikes on targets inside Russia

**BRUSSELS, Aug 29:** The European Union's top diplomat on Thursday ramped up pressure on Ukraine's international backers to lift restrictions on the use of weapons they provide the conflict-ravaged country to allow its armed forces to strike targets inside Russia.

The US restricts the use of long-range ballistic missiles it provides to Ukraine and some EU members also limit the use of their weapons. Ukraine is desperate to target airfields and other military installations inside Russia that are used to stage attacks on its armed forces and civilians.

"We need to lift restrictions on the use of weaponry against Russian military targets, in accordance with international law," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said at the bloc's foreign ministers gathered in Brussels to discuss Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"The weaponry that we are providing to Ukraine has to have full use, and the restrictions have to be lifted in order for the Ukrainians to be able to target the places where Russia is bombing them. Otherwise, the weaponry is useless," Borrell told reporters.

Speaking alongside Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Borrell condemned Russia's attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. "Russia wants to bomb a European country into full capitulation," he said.

Kuleba said that Ukraine's backers would only have themselves to blame if Russia wins.

"The success of Russia depends on one thing: on the preparedness of partners to make bold decisions. If decisions are taken, Ukraine is successful on the ground. If they are not taken, then do not complain on Ukraine, complain on yourself," he



said.

Kuleba insisted that Ukraine only wants to attack "legitimate military targets" inside Russia.

"If we are supplied a sufficient amount of missiles, if we are allowed to strike, we will significantly decrease the capacity of Russia to inflict damage on our critical infrastructure and we will improve the situation of our forces on the ground," he said.

He also urged the West to make good on promises to quickly send military support to Ukraine. "We pay for all these delays, with the damage and loss of lives," he said. Kuleba called in particular for the rapid delivery of Patriot air defence systems.

He urged "all countries who pledged to deliver Patriot systems months ago to finally deliver them. They are there, they are ready for delivery. What is lacking is just the final go, the greenlight to do it."

Ukraine said last month that it needs 25 Patriot air defence systems to fully defend its airspace and protect the country from Russian missile attacks. (AP)

## Israeli army says it has killed 5 more West Bank militants, including a well-known local commander

**JERUSALEM, Aug 29:** The Israeli military said it has killed five more militants in a large-scale operation in the occupied West Bank early on Thursday, including a well-known local commander.

There was no immediate Palestinian confirmation of the death of Mohammed Jaber, known as Abu Shujaa, a commander in the Islamic Jihad militant group in the Nur Shams refugee camp on the outskirts of the city of Tulkarern.

He became a hero for many Palestinians earlier this year when he was reported killed in an Israeli operation, only to make a surprise appearance at the funeral of other militants, where he was hoisted onto the shoulders of a cheering crowd.

The military said he was killed along with four other militants in a shootout with Israeli forces early Thursday after the five had hidden inside a mosque. It said Abu Shujaa was linked to numerous attacks on Israelis, including a deadly shooting in June, and was planning more.

The military said another militant was arrested in the operation in Tulkarern, and that a member of Israel's paramilitary Border Police

was lightly wounded.

Israel launched a large-scale operation in the West Bank overnight on Wednesday. Hamas said 10 of its fighters were killed in different locations, and the Palestinian Health Ministry reported an 11th casualty, without saying whether he was a fighter or a civilian.

Nur Shams is among several built-up refugee camps across the Middle East that date back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, in which around 700,000 Palestinians fled or were driven out of what is now Israel. Many of the camps are militant strongholds.

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

The 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank live under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule, with the Western-backed Palestinian Authority administering towns and cities. Over 500,000 Jewish settlers, who have Israeli citizenship, live in well over 100 settlements across the territory that most of the international community considers illegal. (AP)

## Pakistan to soon launch 2nd phase of Afghan refugee repatriation



**ISLAMABAD, Aug 29:** Pakistan will launch the second phase of the repatriation of Afghan refugees, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has announced, emphasising the need for the role of the UN and the international community in their rehabilitation.

During a meeting on Wednesday with a UN delegation led by Special Representative for Afghanistan Indrika Ratwatte, Naqvi said Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees for decades, and the phase-wise repatriation of illegal foreigners has already started.

Naqvi, who welcomed the UN delegation at the Ministry of Interior, said the second phase of the repatriation of

Afghan refugees will be started soon, according to a press release by the Interior Ministry.

Pakistan launched the first round of repatriation of what it called "undocumented aliens" in November last year after a spike in suicide attacks, which the government believes were carried out by Afghan nationals. Islamabad also blamed them for smuggling, militant violence and other crimes. Around half a million Afghans are believed to have been expelled under this phase.

In phase two of the repatriation plan, Afghans holding Afghan Citizen Cards (ACCs) will be expelled, while phase three is expected to target those with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR)-issued Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Naqvi also emphasised the need for the role of the United Nations and the international community in the rehabilitation of Afghan refugees.

He said that no action is being taken against individuals holding legal documents but added that no one can be allowed to stay in Pakistan without a visa or other legal documents. Asserting that terrorism was a global issue, the minister claimed that Pakistan was the most affected country.

He informed the UN delegation about the involvement of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the terrorist attacks in Pakistan and said the banned terrorist organisation is using Afghan soil for these attacks, which must be stopped.

He said Pakistan was desirous of peace and stability in Afghanistan and is providing all possible support in this regard.

Ratwatte said the UN is closely working with the Afghan government for the permanent rehabilitation of Afghan refugees.

The UN special representative also condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Balochistan, in which as many as 70 people were killed, including 37 security personnel and civilians, by the Balochistan Liberation Army.

According to the UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, there are 2.18 million documented Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.

Disclosing that at least 44,000 Afghans approved for relocation to Western nations following the Taliban's return to power were still waiting in limbo in Pakistan, the Foreign Office had last month asked these countries to expedite the process. Afghans make up the largest portion of migrants, many of whom came after the Taliban took over Kabul in 2021, but a large number have been present since the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

In October 2023, Pakistan announced the first phase of the "Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan" with a 30-day deadline for "undocumented" aliens to leave the country or be ready to face action. (PTI)

## Ex-Bangladesh speaker, former commerce minister arrested in murder case

**DHAKA, Aug 29:** Former Bangladesh speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury and ex-commerce minister Tipu Munshi have been arrested over the killing of a goldsmith during the recent quota reform protests that led to the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led government, media reports said on Thursday.

Munshi, 74, was arrested by the Rapid Action Battalion in Gulshan, Dhaka, on Wednesday night in the murder case filed in Rangpur, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

The case was filed against 17 people, including Munshi and former speaker of Parliament Chaudhury, for the killing of Muslim Uddin Milon, a 38-year-old goldsmith.

Besides, many unnamed people were accused in the case.

Chaudhury, 46, served as the first female speaker of the Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad from April 2013 until August 2024.

Milon was shot dead on July 19 in Rangpur during the student-led movement against a controversial quota system in government jobs, which later turned into a mass uprising that ousted 76-year-old Hasina's Awami League government on August 5, according to The Daily Star newspaper.

According to the case statement, when a clash broke out between students and Awami League activists during a protest in the City Bazar area, police opened fire indiscriminately under the orders of the accused persons.

Milon was hit by a bullet at that time and taken to Rangpur Medical College and Hospital, where he was declared dead, the report said.

Over 230 people were killed in the incidents of violence that erupted across the country following the fall of the Hasina-led government, taking the death toll to more than 600 since the massive protest by students first started in mid-July.

Many senior Awami League leaders, lawmakers and former ministers went into hiding following the fall of Hasina-led government.

Munshi had also been hiding since August 5, according to the leading Bengali-language newspaper Prothom Alo.

He became the commerce minister during the third consecutive term of Awami League government led by Hasina, according to the report.

Hasina, who fled to India on August 5, is facing at least 75 cases, including murder charges, against her. (PTI)

father Rodolfo telling media after the verdict that he intended "to always keep fighting, to keep fighting."

At his trial on the island of Samui, Daniel Sancho had claimed he got into a fight with Arrieta for allegedly trying to sexually assault him. He said that Arrieta fell as they scuffled and hit his head on a bathtub, losing consciousness and then dying.

He had pleaded not guilty to charges of premeditated murder.

Sancho acknowledged dismembering the victim's body and disposing of the parts on land and at sea. For the charge of concealing or damaging a body, he received a four-month prison sentence, reduced to two months for acknowledging the act, said Paisan. He had also pleaded not guilty to the charge of destroying another person's documents - the victim's passport - for which he received a two-year prison term.

The elements of the case - violent death on a holiday island, the celebrity connections and the lurid details - attracted huge coverage in Spanish media. HBO produced a Spanish-language documentary on the events.

The case came to light when trash collectors found

## Thai court sentences a YouTube chef, who is the son of Spanish actors, to life in prison for murder

**BANGKOK, Aug 29:** A court in Thailand on Thursday found Daniel Sancho Bronchalo, a member of a famous Spanish acting family, guilty of premeditated murder and sentenced him to life in prison, in a lurid case that involved the victim being dismembered.

The Koh Samui Provincial Court issued an initial sentence of death for Sancho but commuted it to life imprisonment due to his cooperation during the trial, said Police Col. Paisan Sangthep, deputy commander of the Surat Thani Provincial Police, who attended the hearing.

Sancho, a 30-year-old chef with a YouTube channel, had been charged with the murder of Edwin Arrieta Arteaga, a 44-year-old plastic surgeon from Colombia, when both were vacationing on the Thai holiday island of Koh Pha-ngan in August last year.

The island is famous for its monthly "Full Moon" beach parties, attracting travelers from around the world for all-night raves.

The convicted man is the son of Rodolfo Sancho Aguirre, a prominent Spanish actor, and Silvia Bronchalo, who has also been in acting. Both parents are 49 years old and attended on Thursday's court session.

The court also ordered Sancho to pay more than 4.2 million baht (\$125,000) in compensation to the victim's family. Lawyers representing the family at the trial had asked for 30 million baht (\$882,000), Spain's EFE news agency reported.

EFE also quoted Sancho's



father Rodolfo telling media after the verdict that he intended "to always keep fighting, to keep fighting."

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The case came to light when trash collectors found

what the Bangkok Post newspaper described as a sawed-off pelvis and intestines weighing about 5 kilograms (11 pounds) in a fertilizer sack at a garbage dump.

Shortly after that, Sancho reported to police that Arrieta was missing, and police then gathered evidence linking the two men that led them to detain and interrogate him.

Police established a narrative, claiming to the press that Sancho had confessed to the murder and saying he had planned it because Arrieta threatened to disgrace him and his family by revealing their alleged sexual relationship.

Sancho, through his father and his lawyers, said that was a distorted version of what he told police, and denied having a sexual relationship with Arrieta.

Police obtained surveillance video showing Sancho allegedly purchasing a knife, rubber gloves, garbage bags and cleaning solutions at a convenience store before Arrieta's death, which prosecutors claimed bolstered the charge of premeditated murder. In his closing statement earlier in his trial, Sancho told the court he regretted his actions, the Spanish newspaper El Pais reported. (AP)

## A gas leak in an Iranian Revolutionary Guard centre kills 1 and injures 10

**DUBAI, Aug 29:** A gas leak caused the death of one person and injured 10 others at an Iranian Revolutionary Guard centre, Iranian state television reported.

The leak occurred at a workshop belonging to the Guard in Isfahan province and the injured people were transferred to a hospital for medical treatment, the report said.

The report did not say how the people were injured or give other details.

The gas leak happened while tensions have remained high since Hamas' top political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was killed on July 31 in the Iranian capital. Iran accused Israel of the death of Haniyeh, but Israel has not taken responsibility for the assassination. Iranian top officials vowed to retaliate against Israel for the killing of Haniyeh.

Earlier in April, Iranian troops fired air defences at a major air base and a nuclear site near the central city of Isfahan, an assault coming in retaliation for Tehran's unprecedented drone-and-missile assault on Israel. (AP)

## Strong storm lashes Japan with torrential rains and strong winds on its slow crawl north

**TOKYO, Aug 29:** A strong storm lashed southern Japan with torrential rain and strong winds on Thursday, causing at least three deaths as it started a crawl up the length of the archipelago and raised concerns of flooding, landslides and extensive damage.

Tropical storm Shanshan made landfall on Thursday morning as a powerful typhoon on the southern island of Kyushu and then gradually lost strength, though it was still forecast to bring strong winds, high waves and significant rainfall to most of the country, particularly on Kyushu.

About 60 centimeters (nearly 2 feet) of rain fell in parts of Miyazaki prefecture on Kyushu, swelling rivers and threatening floods, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. That 24-hour total was more than the average rainfall for all of August, it said.

By late afternoon on Thursday, the storm was moving north at 15 kph (9 mph) and its winds had weakened to 108 kph (67 mph). It is "no longer a powerful typhoon," the agency said.

Shanshan ripped through downtown



Miyazaki city, knocking down trees, throwing cars to the side in parking lots and shattering windows of some buildings. The prefectural disaster management task force said 40 buildings were damaged.

NHK public television showed a swollen river in the popular hot spring town of Yufu in Oita prefecture, just north of Miyazaki, with muddy water splashing against a bridge.

At least 50 people were injured across Kyushu, about half of them in Miyazaki. Some were injured by being thrown to the ground by the storm on their way to shelters, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said.

Nearly a quarter of a million house-

holds were without power across Kyushu, most of them in Kagoshima prefecture, Kyushu Electric Power Co. said.

About 20,000 people took shelter at municipal community centres, school gymnasiums and other facilities across Kyushu, according to prefectural reports.

Ahead of the storm's arrival, heavy rain triggered a landslide that buried a house in the central city of Gamagori, killing three residents and injuring two others, the city's disaster management department said.

On the southern island of Amami, which Shanshan passed, one person was injured by being knocked down by a wind gust while riding a motorcycle, the fire agency said.

Weather and government officials are concerned about extensive damage as the storm slowly sweeps up the Japanese archipelago to the northeast over the next few days, threatening more floods and landslides. The storm's impact was yet to be felt in the Tokyo region, where business continued as usual and heavy rain was predicted later this week. (AP)

## African swine fever detected in Kohima district



### HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, Aug 29:** African swine fever (ASF) was detected in Thizama Village under the Chiephobozou block of Kohima district.

Following the detection of the disease, Kohima deputy commissioner Kumar Rannikant, on Wednesday, declared a 1 km radius of the infected village as an infected zone.

Additionally, a 10 km radius from the infected premises, covering a 9 km radius outside the infected zone, has been designated as a surveillance zone.

The DC also imposed a ban on slaughter, import and export of pigs and piglets. He asked the public to strictly adhere to these restrictions to aid in the containment of the disease.

## Talks on Naga Political Issue PAC to hold meetings with apex tribal bodies

**KOHHIMA, Aug 29:** The Political Affairs Committee (PAC) of the Nagaland government has decided to hold consultative meetings with apex tribal bodies and civil society organisations on taking forward the Naga Political Issue.

The decision to this effect was taken during the state government's PAC meeting held here on Wednesday in the presence of chief minister Neiphiu Rio and the two MPs of the state, said Nagaland government spokesperson and Parliamentary Affairs minister, K G Kenye at a press conference after the meeting.

The Rio government had constituted the PAC on Naga Political Issue in November 2023 to facilitate an early solution to the vexed issue.

It is composed of the 60 members in the state Assembly of eight political parties – NDPP, BJP, NCP, NPP, NPF, RPI(A), LJP (RV), JD(U), Independent MLAs and also the Congress MP.

Kenye said the Centre has been holding separate negotiations with NSCN-IM and the Working Committee of the Naga National Political Groups.

He said despite all the stakeholders appealing to different Naga groups to come together and



be one for the negotiations, they don't seem to be coming together and are not even able to see each other.

Two major agreements – Framework Agreement with NSCN-IM and Agreed Position with WC NNPGs have been inked by the Centre, but certain areas of the Framework Agreement have not been divulged and come to public domain whereas the Agreed Position has been made open, he said.

The parallel stand they are maintaining is detrimental to the negotiation with the Centre while this could be the reason for the

delay in the final solution, he said.

Kenye said the PAC felt that the state government should approach peoples' organisations, civil societies, tribal bodies and invite their views and opinions on how to go about resolving the issue confronting the Naga society for so long.

Asked when would the consultative meeting commence, Kenye said that the resolution of the Naga Political Issue is the top agenda of the present state government because of which 60 members have come together and formed the opposition-less government and

therefore the consultations would be held at the earliest.

In the past government, the PAC used to approach the Naga negotiators to press for an early solution but this time, the PAC would first seek the opinion of the general public on how to go ahead, Kenye said.

In the second session of the meeting, he said the PAC deliberated on the ongoing dialogue between the Centre and Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) on the latter's demand for Frontier Nagaland Territory.

With the change of guard in the ENPO, the new executives apprised the PAC on the latest developments in the ongoing dialogue.

Accepting that the Centre has given a draft of its proposal to resolve the ENPO demand to the state, he said the state government would first deliberate on the proposals with the Eastern Nagaland Legislators' Union having 20 MLAs in the state after which further steps would be taken.

He said that PAC is optimistic that the new team of ENPO officials would extend cooperation to the state government and momentum will pick up for the tripartite talks for early resolution of the problem. (PTI)

## Tripura declared a natural calamity affected area



**HT Correspondent**  
**AGARTALA, Aug 29:** The Tripura Disaster Management Authority (TDMA) declared the state a Natural Calamity Affected Area on Thursday.

In an order undersigned by Brijesh Pandey, Secretary, Relief, Rehabilitation and Disaster Management said that Tripura has witnessed unprecedented floods, causing loss of human lives and extensive damage, destruction and loss of both public and public infrastructures & properties.

He said that to date, as many as 31 persons have died, 2 are injured and 1 is reportedly missing. The preliminary estimates suggest a

loss to the tune of ₹ 15,000 crore due to damages on account of recent floods.

"Considering the gravity of the situation, leading to loss of human lives and damage to public and private properties, the State Executive Committee (SEC) of Tripura Disaster Management Authority (TDMA) under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary in its meeting held on 24th August 2024, has decided to declare the entire state as "Natural Calamity Affected Area," he said.

He said that accordingly, the whole State of Tripura is notified as a "Natural Calamity Affected Area" due to recent unprecedented floods.

## AIKS demands ₹ 1 Cr aid for kin of victims To visit affected areas



### HT Correspondent

**AGARTALA, Aug 29:** All India Kisan Sabha has demanded ₹ 1 Crore for the family members of the persons who died in the Tripura flood and said that the party will visit the affected areas on August 29 and 30 to assess the damages.

The team led by its vice president and Lok Sabha member Amra Ram, finance secretary P Krishnaprasad, and Pabitra Kar, Joint Secretary and Tripura State Secretary of Kisan Sabha will visit the affected areas on the aforementioned dates to evaluate the impairments.

In a statement, AIKS said that Tripura has been hit by unprecedented rainfall during the period 19th to 23rd August leading to the most devastating floods in recent times. Thirty-one people have been killed and some are reported missing.

"There has been widespread loss of crops, cattle and massive damage to houses. The BJP Government at the Centre and in the State has totally failed in providing speedy and adequate warning as well as in shifting to safe areas well in time. Relief work is also slow. Even a shortage of food, water and medicines is a matter of concern. About 369 relief camps are functioning,

providing shelter to over 53,356 persons in the State, but we are getting reports that the distribution of relief and food packets are inadequate," the statement reads.

It said that about 32,000 people in the urban areas also were evacuated and kept in relief camps. Although the water level of Gomati River at Sonamura has come down from above the critical level, it is still above flood level. Some Sub Divisions are still water-logged and no relief has reached them.

"This also requires vigilance and preparedness to address any further rainfall in the coming days. AIKS demands a compensation of Rs.1 Crore for families of the deceased. AIKS demands that the Union Government assess the damages and give proper compensation for crop loss and loss of livestock. AIKS team led by AIKS Vice President and Lok Sabha Member Amra Ram, Finance Secretary of AIKS P Krishnaprasad, Pabitra Kar, Joint Secretary and Tripura State Secretary of Kisan Sabha will visit the affected areas on the 29th and 30th of August to assess the damages. Kisan Sabha and Gana Mukti Parishad cadres are working on the field to provide help to victims," it added.

## Conrad Sangma undergoing treatment for Typhoid

**SHILLONG, Aug 29:** Meghalaya chief minister Conrad K Sangma continues to be under treatment for the medical conditions caused by typhoid and scrub typhus - a climate change-induced disease.

The chief minister is currently recovering well trying to get back to normalcy through diet and medication, a government statement said on Wednesday.

Senior Health officials along with a team of specialists from Civil Hospital, Shillong and NEIGRIHMS visited him on Wednesday at his residence to assess his medical condition, the statement further said. Depending on the overall improvement in his condition, he may try to attend the remaining days of the assembly session, it added. (NNV)

## Vet college in M'laya

**SHILLONG, Aug 29:** The Meghalaya government will soon set up a veterinary college in the state, as informed by the minister in charge of animal husbandry & veterinary, AL Hek, in a reply on the issue tabled in the Assembly on Wednesday.

He said the college is likely to be set up in Ri Bhoi since approximately 800 acres of land are available at Kyrdemkulai which belongs to the department. He also stated that there is no proposal to set up the college at Sohiong.

## No influx of illegal Bangladeshi in Nagaland: DyCM

**KOHHIMA, Aug 29:** Nagaland deputy chief minister Y Patton on Thursday told the state assembly there is no report of an influx of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants following the political crisis in the neighbouring country.

Patton said this while responding to NPF MLA Achumbemo Kikon raising concern in the Zero Hour of the state assembly on possible influx following the political crisis in Bangladesh.

Kikon said the North East region which shares an international border with Bangladesh is the most vulnerable and expressed fear of illegal immigrants entering Nagaland through other states. In this, he sought the measures adopted by the state government to curb the influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

In his response, Patton, who holds the Home portfolio, said India shares a 4,096 km long border with Bangladesh, with West Bengal having

the longest border of 2,217 km and Assam having the least 262 km.

Besides three other states – Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura share borders with Bangladesh but not Nagaland, he said.

The DyCM told the House that the possible influx into the state would be via Assam, and asserted that the state government has not let the guards down but it is closely monitoring the situation in close proximity with intelligence and other agencies.

"To ensure that no unnatural influx happens and to remove any anxiety of the people, we have taken steps including directing the district administrations sharing the border with Assam to conduct regular district-level security coordination meetings with other security forces," Patton said.

Informing the House that to date there are no

reports of an influx of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in the aftermath of the recent crisis in that country, the deputy CM assured the people that the government is well prepared with all steps to stop any influx of illegal immigrants to the state.

"Adequate measures specific to the district have been initiated to stop illegal influx," he said. The district deputy commissioners have also been asked to coordinate with their counterparts in Assam for cooperation and regular updates on the matter, and also to intensify Inner Line Permit checking and closely monitor interstate check posts, he said.

The state police have been directed to be on a high alert along the 13 inter-state borders and be vigilant round the clock besides conducting intensified vehicle checking and also keeping a watch in the places of worship, he said. (PTI)

## Locals block NH in Tripura; demand release of detainees

### HT Correspondent

**AGARTALA, Aug 29:** Hundreds of locals staged a protest on Thursday by blocking National Highway 8, a key route connecting Tripura with the rest of the country.

The demonstration followed the detention of five youths, accused of being involved in the vandalism of a Kali idol and arson targeting houses and vehicles of minority communities in Durganagar under Jirania Sub-division, West Tripura, on Sunday.

The protesters, who gathered in large numbers, demanded the immediate release of the detained youths, who had been taken into custody late Wednesday night for questioning about the violent incidents.

Speaking to reporters, the demonstrators insisted that the youths were innocent and wrongly implicated in the idol vandalism case.

"These young men are not responsible for the idol vandalism. The police have arrested the wrong people, and we demand their immediate release. The real culprits are still at large," said one of the protestors.

Another echoed this sentiment, criticizing the police for failing to apprehend the true perpetrators of the crime.

In response to the unrest, food and civil supplies minister and local MLA Sushanta Chowdhury, accompanied by West District Superintendent of Police Kiran Kumar, arrived at the scene to address the situation.

Minister Chowdhury urged the public to remain calm and patient. "The police are carrying out their duties in accordance with the law. We must ensure that no actions are taken that tarnish the reputation of the Chief Minister or the government. We understand the grievances, but disrupting traffic affects students, patients, and others who are stuck here. Please have faith in us; we will thoroughly investigate the matter," he assured.

SP Kiran Kumar explained the police's actions, stating, "Based on the evidence we have, five individuals have been arrested in connection with the recent violence. While the road blockade has been lifted, the investigation is ongoing, and we expect to make more arrests as new information comes to light."

Following several hours of protest, the blockade was eventually cleared, allowing traffic to resume.

However, tensions in the area remain high as investigations continue.

## ₹ 50,000 aid announced by Tripura Maharaja

### HT Correspondent

**AGARTALA, Aug 29:** Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, the royal scion and former chairman of Tripura Motha, announced on Thursday that he will provide financial assistance of ₹ 50,000 to the families who lost loved ones in the recent devastating floods in Tripura, which wreaked havoc between August 19 and August 24.

The state of Tripura faced severe flooding during this period, resulting in the deaths of approximately 31 individuals due to landslides and drowning. Over 1 lakh people were displaced and forced to seek shelter in relief camps.

In a voice message, Pradyot pledged his support to the families of those who tragically lost their lives in the floods and landslides. He emphasised that the aid will come from his personal funds and is not connected to any government or Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) resources.

"I have decided to offer Rs 50,000 to the family of each person who died due to the floods and landslides during this time. This assistance will be provided from my own pocket, independent of government or TTAADC funds," Pradyot stated.

Additionally, he urged both the TTAADC and the Tripura Government to provide compensation to those whose homes, livestock, and cultivated lands were destroyed in the disaster. Pradyot had earlier contributed ₹ 10 lakh towards flood relief efforts.

## Extensive plan for sports development

# Khandu launches Arunachal Olympic Sports Mission

**ITANAGAR, Aug 29:** Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu on Thursday announced that his government will soon chart a comprehensive road map for the development of sports and games in the state.

This initiative aims to empower the youth by providing them with the training and resources needed to confidently compete in national and international sporting events, as per Khandu who was present at the National Sports Day celebrations to provide cash incentives to 87 meritorious sportspersons of the state in 14 disciplines.

"As our sportspersons continue to bring pride through their achievements on national and international platforms, we are launching the Arunachal Olympic Sports Mission. This initiative aims to support our promising athletes in their pursuit of competing in the 2028 and 2032 Olympic Games," the chief minister said.

Khandu while informing that his government in its budget for the current fiscal year, has declared 2024-25 as the 'Year of Youth', further emphasised that the government's focus will be on skill development, empowering young people to become successful entrepreneurs and contribute meaningfully to the state's growth.

The chief minister shared that a start-up model has already been developed to support the youth, offering them nine months of skill development training



through renowned institutions.

"Additionally, the government will provide a 75 per cent scholarship for commercial pilot training at various prestigious private institutes of international repute, ensuring that the youth receive world-class opportunities and support," he added.

"Today, as we commemorate the National Sports Day, we honour the great legacy of Hockey legend Major Dhyan Chand, whose unparalleled contributions to sports continue to inspire us," Khandu said.

"Our ambitious plans include establishing a world-class football stadium with a capacity of over 25,000, adhering to FIFA standards. This will not only cultivate local talent but also elevate the state onto the global sports stage," he said.

"The development of new national-

level stadiums at Pasighat, Ziro, Daporijo, Tezu, Aalo and Chimpur, along with the Golden Jubilee Outdoor Stadium in Yupia and the D K Badminton Academy, highlights our dedication to strengthening sports infrastructure," he added.

He further mentioned that the state currently boasts 58 Khelo India centres, underscoring the government's commitment to sports development.

Additionally, he said, a new sports academy has been established at Miao in Changlang district, following the success of the Sangey Lhaden Sports Academy in Chimpur, near the state capital.

The chief minister said that the state government in the past eight years provided cash incentives to the tune of ₹ 4.14 crore to a total of 771 sportsmen, while an amount of ₹ 1.57 crore was provided to honour 87 sports persons this year.

Arunachal Pradesh is making significant strides in the field of sports and hosted the 77th edition of the Santosh Trophy National Football Championship, a historic first for a Northeastern state, the chief minister said.

He also said that the state is planning to host an international rafting championship in 2027, along with a national rafting championship next year.

With its numerous rivers ideal for the sport, Arunachal Pradesh is set to become a prime destination for rafting enthusiasts, he said adding, a preliminary discussion was held in this regard. (PTI)

## Darts introduced in Kohima college



**HT Correspondent**  
**DIMAPUR, Aug 29:** Dynamic School of Darts, under the aegis of the Nagaland Darts Association, introduced darts in a sports event of Kros College, Kohima, on the occasion of Na-

tional Sports Day on Thursday, becoming the first-ever educational institution in Nagaland to introduce the game.

Darts or dart-throwing is a competitive sport in which two or more players bare-handedly throw small sharp-pointed projectiles known as darts at a round target known as a dartboard.

At the event, a member of the Dynamic School of Darts, Imjungmeren, shared, in brief, the history of Naga darts which came into being in 2012.

Another member of the school, Vikhor Tapa, briefed the attendees about the rules and regulations of the game.

The event witnessed the non-stop throwing of darts among new players and trainers.

At the end of the event, the college and the Nagaland Darts Association decided to send five of its best players to the prestigious Annual Nagaland Darts Association tournament to be held at La Colline, Old Minister's Hill, Kohima from September 14 to September 15.

On the occasion, taekwondo was also introduced in the college.

No.DPRD/BTC/(Gen)-238/2024/150

Dated Kokrajhar the 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2024

### CORRIGENDUM

Please read following tender as appeared in the Quotation Vide (NIT) No.DPRD/BTC/(Gen)-238/2024/119, dtd.07/08/2024 with corrected Tender Amount.

Sl. No.	Name of Dev. Block	Name of Scheme	A.A Amount (Rs.)	Tender Amount (Rs.)	Earnest Money	Cost of Tender in Rs.	Time for completion in days	Pre-Bid meeting date & time
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Manikpur	Const. of Open Community Hall at Hari Mandir, Kumargaon	4,28,716.00	4,28,716.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	150.00	90	22.08.24
2	Manikpur	Const. of boundary wall & Barbed wire fencing near Bijni Samshan	3,33,344.00	3,33,344.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	110.00	45	22.08.24
3	Manikpur	Const. of Community Hall at Ganesh Mandir, Fagunagaon	5,23,902.00	5,23,902.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	170.00	90	22.08.24

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

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/400

## Bengal govt convenes special assembly session on Monday to pass anti-rape Bill

**KOLKATA, Aug 29:** A two-day special session of the West Bengal assembly was convened by the government on September 2 to table and pass a Bill which would provide for capital punishment to convicted rapists, Parliamentary Affairs minister Sovandeb Chattopadhyay said.

The Bill would be tabled for discussion and passage on Tuesday, the second day of the special session, Speaker Biman Banerjee said.

The move came a day after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced that an amendment to existing laws will be passed in the state assembly next week to ensure capital punishment for convicted rapists.

An alleged rape and murder of a post-graduate trainee in state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata earlier this month



has thrown Bengal into social and political turmoil. "I am not aware of the title of the Bill yet. But it will be tabled on Tuesday for discussion and passage by members. So far we are convening a two-day special session which could be extended if additional businesses for the House are included later," Banerjee said.

The monsoon session of the

Bengal assembly was prorogued on August 5. "Since the session was prorogued and not adjourned sine die, we do not need the Governor's permission to reconvene the House," Chattopadhyay said.

The minister added that the state Bill would "expedite the justice procedure that has been envisaged in the Bharatiya Nyay Samhita" for cases of rape and forms of sex-

ual assault.

"The current provisions of justice and punishment in the BNS are long drawn. We want to complete that process in a time-bound manner," Chattopadhyay told PTI, adding that the Bill, once passed, would be sent to the Governor for his assent.

"We will have to think about our next move if the Governor refuses to sign the Bill and enact the law," he said. Speaking at the Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad's foundation day rally on Wednesday, the chief minister said she would sit on dharna outside Raj Bhavan here if the Governor delays in giving his nod to the amended Bill or forwards it to the President for ratification.

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

## PDP will be kingmaker in J-K: Iltija Mufti

**SRINAGAR, Aug 29:** Iltija Mufti on Thursday said the PDP will emerge as the kingmaker in Jammu and Kashmir as no party will get a majority on its own in the upcoming assembly polls.

"I am very confident that the PDP will be the kingmaker in whatever situation we are. One thing is clear that no party will get majority," Iltija told PTI videos in an exclusive interview while on campaign trail.

The third generation politician from the Mufti family is contesting the assembly polls from PDP strong-hold Srigufwara-Bijbehara assembly segment which has in the past been represented by her mother Mehbooba Mufti and her grandfather Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. Iltija said her party will fight the election so as to not cede the ground to the BJP, and not for power or numbers game, as she termed the current status of Jammu and Kashmir little more than that of a "municipality".

"Look at it, Jammu and Kashmir



has its own flag, its own constitution and residuary powers. Now the CM will be like a mayor. In such a situation, the MLA who speaks the truth will be powerful. Look at Arvind Kejriwal, he is in jail. You can understand, the chief minister of a Muslim majority union territory, how powerless will he be," she said.

Iltija dived into politics when her mother was under detention after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 and this would be her first electoral fray. "My priority right now is my campaign. I want to convince the people about why I am the right representative for

them. For me, becoming CM is not important at all. I am very young, it sounds so ridiculous. My priority is to win these elections and be the true representative of the people," she said.

She said that while the assembly might not have the powers that it ought to, the ongoing polls were important for the people.

"The chief minister will be like a mayor but having said that, there has not been an (elected) government for the past six years and people have not been able to elect their representatives. So this election is very important," she said.

On the NC-Congress alliance, Iltija said "unity is the need of the hour and it is important that we all move together but that is not always possible in politics. If two parties come together, it is good for them."

Asked if the PDP will support the NC-Congress alliance if it falls short of numbers for government formation, she said it was too early to comment on it. (PTI)

## Those born with silver spoon in mouth won't understand plight of the poor: Ajit Pawar

**CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, Aug 29:** The Maharashtra government is the welfare of the poor but those born with a silver spoon in their mouth won't understand the plight of the deprived section of society, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar said on Thursday.

Addressing a rally here during his 'Jan Sanman Yatra', Pawar urged people not to fall prey to the opposition's "fake campaigns", highlighting government schemes for the youth, women, Warkaris (followers of Lord Vitthoba) and others.

"We have deposited Rs 3,000 in the accounts of eligible women," said the NCP chief, referring to the 'Ladki Bahin' scheme, which provides monthly aid of Rs 1,500 to married, divorced, and destitute women in the 21-60 age group with annual income up to Rs 2.5 lakh.

The opposition calls the Ladki Bahin scheme an "election jumla" but it's a fake campaign, he said, assuring that no one will take back the money from anyone. "The opposition is trying to derail the schemes. Those born with a silver spoon in their mouth won't understand the plight of the poor," said Pawar.

While the government is giving three free cooking gas cylinders per year to 52 lakh families across the state,

it is also bearing the education fees of girls and women in the state, he said.

Rejecting the claims that the schemes will throw the state's finances into disarray, Pawar said Maharashtra's revenue collection has been good. "The state needs Rs 75,000 crore for these schemes. We have the money so we are giving these schemes," he said.

The schemes can run only if the Mahayuti coalition, comprising BJP, NCP and Ekanth Shinde-led Shiv Sena, is re-elected, he said.

"We have handled the treasury of the state government. We know where to cut expenses and where to spend. We have also spoken to Union Minister of Agriculture Shivraj Singh Chouhan over sugarcane, onion, soybean, and milk," Pawar said.

The NCP chief also promised strict action in the collapse of the statue of Shivaji Maharaj at Rajkot fort in Malvan tehsil of Sindhudurg district, which has triggered a political storm, with the opposition accusing the state government of corruption and insulting the Maratha warrior king.

"No matter what, wrong is wrong and cannot be forgiven. Stringent action will be taken in this case to set an example that such mistakes won't be pardoned," he added. (PTI)

## Punjab cabinet decides panchayat polls not be fought on party symbols

**CHANDIGARH, Aug 29:** The Punjab cabinet on Thursday decided to amend rules to hold elections for sarpanch and panch without symbols of political parties, state Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said.

The move is aimed to "further strengthen" the mutual brotherhood in villages, he said.

An official statement, said the Cabinet observed that contesting elections on party symbols leads to many unwanted incidents. Further, "political groupism" in panchayats stalls the utilisation of funds and grants, leaving huge amounts of unused money which can be duly used to promote development in rural areas, the statement said.

"Earlier, sarpanch and panch elections could be fought on political party's symbol. But the cabinet decided that now the upcoming panchayat polls will be contested without the symbol of political parties," Cheema told reporters

after the meeting of state cabinet here which was held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann.

"An amendment to Rule 12 of the Punjab Panchayat Election Rules, 1994 has been approved by the cabinet... Now, sarpanch and panch elections in the villages will not be held on political party's symbol," he said.

Cheema said only the symbols allotted by the Election Commission would be used by the candidates for the sarpanch and panch elections. Meanwhile, the statement said "political groupism also causes disunity in the working of panchayats which leads to their incomplete quorum thereby leading to non-utilisation of grants".

"Political affiliations of panchayat members create instances of violent clashes during and after elections among various party groups at village level which deteriorates the law and order situation

and also adversely affects the social fabric of rural society," said the statement about the cabinet decision related to panchayats.

In another cabinet decision, approval was given to enhance the strength of Punjab Civil Services (Executive Branch) cadres from existing 310 posts to 369 posts.

This decision has been taken in view of the administrative requirements, increase in the number of sub-divisions, creation of a new district, to provide more employment opportunities for the youth and to enhance the administrative efficiency of state government, the statement said.

Meanwhile, in another decision, the cabinet also gave nod for construction of ponds along river Ghaggar in village Chandu to recharge the groundwater. The ponds can be filled up with the river Ghaggar during the flood times and through the canals during the normal times, it said. (PTI)

## Kangana Ranaut meets BJP chief Nadda

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Days after she was reprimanded for her controversial remarks on the farmers' protest, BJP MP Kangana Ranaut met party president JP Nadda at his residence here on Thursday.

This is the second time that Ranaut has met the BJP president since she stirred a controversy earlier this week with her disparaging remarks on the farmers agitation against the now repealed three farm laws.

The Mandi MP had on Monday posted a clip of her interview with Hindi daily Dainik Bhaskar in which she suggested that a "Bangladesh-like situation" could have erupted in India but for the country's strong leadership. She then alleged that "bodies were hanging and rapes were taking place" during the farmers' protest against the now-repealed three farm laws. She also alleged the involvement of China and the US in the "conspiracy", drawing flak from the opposition parties.

Acting swiftly, the BJP denounced her remarks expressing its disagreement with her views and made it clear that she is neither permitted nor authorised to comment on the party's policy matters.

"The Bharatiya Janata Party has directed Kangana Ranaut to not make any statement of this kind in future," the ruling party said in a statement as her controversial remarks threatened to inflame an issue it has tried hard to contain over the last few years.

"The BJP is committed to following the principles of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas' and social harmony," the statement added. (PTI)

## Cong, BJP intensify demand for Mukesh's resignation; hold protests in parts of Kerala



**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Aug 29:** The Congress and the BJP on Thursday further intensified their call for the resignation of CPI(M) MLA M Mukesh, accused in a rape case, with protests being held by both parties and their wings outside his residence here and other parts of the state.

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly V D Satheesan said it was wrong to say that the Congress did not seek the resignation of Mukesh.

"Right at the beginning, we sought his resignation. We only said that he and the CPI(M) have to take a decision regarding that," the opposition leader told reporters here.

Satheesan also said the Left government in the state sat on the Justice Hema Committee report for over four years to prevent disclosure of the culprits' names.

He said that due to the inaction of the state government on the recommendations and findings of the committee report, the film industry was being destroyed.

"The CPI(M) is in the dock on these issues," he said.

He also said protests were held in various parts of the state by his party, Mahila Congress and the Youth Congress demanding the resignation of the CPI(M) MLA.

Satheesan said protests were also being held across the state by the Congress seeking action on the recommendations and findings of the Hema Committee report.

Youth Congress activists protested outside Mukesh's residence in Thiruvananthapuram, where the police had set up barricades to prevent access to his home.

TV channels showed some protestors jumping over the barricades, and the police deployed there, taking them into custody.

The channels also showed the BJP's youth wing, Yuva Morcha, holding a protest march in Kollam city, where one of the protestors wore a photo of Mukesh as a mask and held a chicken in both hands.

"Kozhi" -- which in Malayalam refers to chicken -- is a colloquial usage describing a man who behaves inappropriately with women.

Both the Congress and the BJP have been demanding the resignation of Mukesh ever since the allegations against him surfaced.

The call was intensified following the registration of a rape case against the CPI(M) legislator. An FIR under IPC 376 (rape) was registered against the actor at Maradu police station in Kochi city on Wednesday night, a police officer said.

The case was registered under the IPC as the

offence allegedly occurred before the new Bharatiya Nyay Samhita came into force, he said.

This is the third FIR against a high profile Malayalam film personality following allegations of sexual harassment against various directors and actors in the wake of revelations in the Justice K Hema Committee report.

On Wednesday, Thiruvananthapuram Museum police had booked actor Sidhique for allegedly raping an actress in a hotel eight years ago.

The first case, under IPC Section 354 (assault or criminal force on woman with intent to outrage her modesty), was against director Ranjith on a complaint by a female actor from West Bengal regarding an incident which occurred in 2009. Following the allegation by the actor, Ranjith had resigned from his post as chairman of the state-run Kerala Chalachitra Academy.

Sidhique had also resigned as general secretary of the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) following the allegations against him.

The Justice Hema Committee was constituted by the Kerala government after the 2017 actress assault case and its report revealed instances of harassment and exploitation of women in the Malayalam cinema industry.

Amidst allegations of sexual harassment and exploitation cropping up against several actors and directors, the state government on August 25 announced the establishment of a seven-member special investigation team to probe them. (PTI)

## 2 YSRCP Rajya Sabha members resign

**Party's strength in House dips to 9**

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Two YSRCP members of the Rajya Sabha -- Beedha Mastan Rao Jadhav and Venkataramana Rao Mopidevi -- have tendered their resignation from House membership, parliamentary sources said on Thursday. They said Vice President and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha Jagdeep Dhankhar has accepted their resignation.

Mastan Rao, whose term was to end in June 2028, had switched from the TDP to the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP). He is likely to go back to the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Mopidevi, whose term was till

June 2026, may also join the TDP, the sources said. Following the two resignations, the strength of the YSRCP in the Upper House of Parliament has dipped from 11 to nine.

The TDP, which is a key NDA partner, has no representation in the Rajya Sabha.

It has been learnt that Mastan Rao could be fielded by the TDP in the bypoll, but Mopidevi is not keen on entering the Rajya Sabha again. In the resultant bypolls, the TDP could get seats in the Rajya Sabha. As a result, the ruling NDA will have two more members on its side. (PTI)

## 'Bharat Dojo Yatra' coming soon: Rahul shares video

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday shared a video of one of the martial arts sessions held at campsites of his east to west Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra earlier this year and said a "Bharat Dojo Yatra" is coming soon.

Dojo broadly refers to a training hall or school for martial arts.

"During the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, as we journeyed across thousands of kilometers, we had a daily routine of practicing Jiu-Jitsu every evening at our campsite. What began as a simple way

to stay fit quickly evolved into a community activity, bringing together fellow yatriis and young martial arts students from the towns where we stayed," Gandhi said on X along with the video of the sessions.

"Our goal was to introduce these young minds to the beauty of the 'Gentle Art' a harmonious blend of meditation, Jiu-Jitsu, Aikido, and non-violent conflict resolution techniques," the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha said. "We aimed to instill in them the value of transforming vio-

lence into gentleness, giving them the tools to build a more compassionate and safer society," Gandhi said.

On this National Sports Day, he said he wants to share his experience with the people, hoping to inspire some of them to take up the practice of the "gentle art". "P.S.: Bharat Dojo Yatra is coming soon," Gandhi added.

Gandhi undertook an over two months long Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra that began on January 14 from Manipur and ended in Mumbai. (PTI)

## Govt's approach to media should be 'essay in persuasion not coercion': Manmohan to his I&B Min

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Then prime minister Manmohan Singh's brief to his new Information and Broadcasting Minister Manish Tewari on what should be the government's approach to the media was simple -- it should be an essay in persuasion not coercion.

The anecdote was narrated by Tewari during an interaction at PTI as he stressed the need to fix the "completely flawed" revenue models of the media and asserted that the The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2024 was not the answer to the problems plaguing the flow of news and information.

Tewari, who was the Information and Broadcasting Minister in UPA-II from October 2012 to May 2014, said that when he became the minister he asked then prime minister Manmohan Singh what should be the government's approach vis-a-vis the media at a time when the government was at the receiving end of the "most ghastly, irresponsible and malicious" media coverage at that particular point in time.

"So I asked him what should be our approach to the media and he said that 'it should be an essay in persuasion and not an essay in coercion'. And he added that, 'If you were to put yourself in the shoes of the Opposition and if let us suppose

coercion becomes the order of the day, how is it that you would feel'," Tewari said.

"I have reflected at this statement at length over the past 10 years and I come to only one conclusion that you need to have an inherently democratic temperament to be able to maintain the equilibrium, notwithstanding what you are being subjected to in terms of an all out assault at times of unverified and malicious allegations, a campaign of calumny and innuendo," the Congress MP from Chandigarh said.

Tewari said he believes that intrinsically Manmohan Singh, who headed the UPA-I and UPA-II government from 2004-2014, had imbibed the basic fundamentals of what running a democratic state is all about.

Asked about the proposed Broadcasting Services Bill, Tewari said curtailing of freedom of speech in the name of fixing aberrations is not the solution as the real problem lies somewhere else.

"Ten years have gone by but the time that I spent in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry gave me a chance to see the back end of the media upclose. I believe that the solution to the problem at hand is not the broadcast bill," he told PTI.



"If you remember when Priya Ranjan Dasmuni was the Information and Broadcasting Minister, a broadcast service regulation bill was brought in. The biggest issue and I am not talking about any particular organisation is that the revenue models of the media are completely flawed.

"Till you do not fix those revenue models you cannot fix the front end prob-

lem for which you want to bring in this regulation architecture that will not achieve its objective," he said.

Asserting that TRPs were a flawed index, Tewari said if one decides advertising of Rs 25,000-30,000 crore on a flawed index then you have ensured that the medium of information and publicity is based on dog-eat-dog principle. "The real challenge is to work with the media

industry to somehow fix the revenue models of the media industry," he said.

Tewari said it was for this reason that the ministry under him had brought in the entire process of digitisation with the objective to mitigate some of these problems and the revenue model gets fixed.

"Unfortunately that has not happened in the past 10 years," he added.

The government had earlier this month said it will hold further consultations for preparing a fresh draft of the broadcasting bill, amid concerns in some quarters over restrictions on social and digital media space in the proposed law.

The draft Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill, circulated by the government among a few stakeholders, drew criticism from media bodies such as DigiPub and the Editors Guild of India which claimed that digital media organisations and civil society associations were not consulted on the move. The Congress leader asserted that unfortunately in the past 70 years of India's democratic experiment "we have not really made a transition from the 'mai-baap sarkaar' to a belief in the participatory form of democracy".

"You go down to any district of the country, the deputy commissioner is the lord and master of everything that he or she surveys. There would be a very

courageous journalist to challenge the diktats of that lord and master," Tewari said.

"If you look around India especially South Asia. There seems to be something intrinsically feudal in our DNA. That manifests itself in various ways. Look at Pakistan, sending the PMs to jail is a national pastime out there. You look at what's been happening in other parts of the neighbourhood. So fundamentally may be because the democratic experiment if you measure it in the relativity of time, is very nascent," he said.

Tewari said the prevailing feeling of intimidation is not limited to journalists and as a columnist, he also cannot write in as carefree a manner as 10 years ago.

"Not because I fear the government or any person but when you create a climate whereby everything critical is going to land up in some court of law through a defamation matter... it does have a chilling effect on free speech," he said.

"That oppressive feeling of the big brother watching you and by extension forces which are inherently or intrinsically illiberal having the upper hand in the larger public discourse thereby being able to stifle a contra opinion is the product of a culture that we have created," he said. (PTI)



# Kerala's industrial landscape to undergo transformation with new city, says CM Vijayan

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Aug 29:** Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said the state's industrial landscape is set to be transformed with the Union Cabinet's clearance for a new industrial city in Palakkad.

His statement came a day after the Union Government approved 12 new industrial cities in 10 states including Palakkad in Kerala on the lines of Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh and Dholera in Gujarat to boost domestic manufacturing.

In a post on 'X', Vijayan said Palakkad Industrial City which is expected to attract investments worth ₹ 10,000 crore and create over 55,000 jobs will now become a reality. "The State government's swift land acquisition efforts and



our persistence in securing the Union Government's approval have now paid off. Kerala's industrial landscape is set to be transformed with the Union Cabinet's clearance for this crucial component of the Kochi-Bengaluru Hi-

Tech #IndustrialCorridor. #KeralaLeads," the Chief Minister said. The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved the new project proposals under the National Industrial Corridor Develop-

ment Programme (NICDP) with an estimated investment of ₹ 28,602 crore.

State Industries Minister P Rajeev said the state has already acquired the required 1,710 acres of land at a record pace for the project. The Cabinet approval was received after the state government completed the initial procedures at a cost of ₹ 1,790 crore.

"Recently, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and on June 28, I met with Union Minister Piyush Goyal to request project approval," he said in a FB post.

Rajeev said industrial ventures in food processing, pharmaceuticals, defence, aerospace, and other sectors will emerge in Palakkad.

The government will provide permission to these industries through a single-window system and simplify procedures.

Following the policy of responsible industry and responsible investment, environmentally friendly industries will be established, creating more job opportunities, the minister said.

He also said the Kochi-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor will bring new life to Kerala's industrial sector.

The corridor aims to develop clusters in food processing, light engineering, jewellery, plastic, e-waste and other solid waste recycling, oil and gas fuels, electronics, IT, logistics, automotive, and other sectors, the minister added. (PTI)

## Centre to unveil new simplified pension application form for retiring employees



**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** The Centre will unveil a new simplified pension application form for its retiring employees on Friday, according to an official statement.

The Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare (DoPPW) had vide its notification dated July 16, 2024 released the simplified pension application "Form 6-A", it said. "This form will be available in Bhavishya/e-HRMS (online modules) to all the central government employees who are going to retire in December 2024 and onwards. The retiring officials, who are on e-HRMS, will fill Form 6-A through e-HRMS (only superannuation cases) and the retiring officials, who are not on e-HRMS, will fill Form 6-A in Bhavishya," the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry on Thursday said.

According to the statement, this new form and its integration with Bhavishya/e-HRMS will be launched on August 30, 2024 by Union Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and

Pensions Jitendra Singh. Form simplification has been an important initiative of the Centre's "maximum governance-minimum government" policy, it said.

In this new form, a total of 9 forms/formats have been merged, the statement said.

This new form and related changes in the business process of Bhavishya will be a game changer as on the one hand it simplifies the pension form submission for the employee through "a single sign only" and on the other hand achieves the end-to-end digitisation of the entire process of pension processing till the start of pension payment after retirement, it added.

"This paves the path towards paperless working in the whole process of pension," the statement said.

It added that with a pensioner-friendly user interface, pensioners no longer need to worry about the forms they have filled out or might have missed. (PTI)

## Five railway cops taken off field duty over beating of woman, her grandson in MP's Katni

**BHOPAL, Aug 29:** Five cops were taken off field duty on Thursday in connection with the alleged beating of a woman and her grandson by Government Railway Police (GRP) personnel in Katni district of Madhya Pradesh, a senior official said.

The action was taken after the state Congress a day before shared a video purportedly showing a woman GRP official beating up the woman and her minor grandson with a stick. The opposition party also claimed that the victims belong to the Dalit community.

The incident had taken place in October 2023 when the woman and the minor were summoned to the police station for questioning in connection with an absconding criminal, police said.

Earlier on Thursday, the woman in-charge of the concerned police station was "line-attached" or taken off field duty.

"Four more cops including a head constable have been line-attached... There was a person named Deepak Vanshkar against whom 19 cases are registered, and who was absconding. He was also

exempted from the district. His family members had been called to the police station last October for questioning only in this regard," Superintendent of Police (GRP) Simala Prasad told PTI.

"The video of the questioning went viral. Cases had also been registered against the woman and minor in Katni. All the police personnel visible in the video have been line-attached," SP Prasad added.

Besides the woman in-charge of the police station, a head constable and three constables were shunted out.

Probe was underway as to why the woman and her grandson were treated in this way and how the official footage of the incident became public, SP Prasad further said.

Deputy Inspector General, railway, Monica Shukla arrived in Katni on Thursday to conduct the probe, sources said.

Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Jitu Patwari and media department chairman and former minister Mukesh Nayak too would be visiting Katni to meet the victims, a

party leader said.

Security in the town was beefed up in view of Congress leaders' visit, said a police official.

The video shared by the state Congress on X showed a woman in civil dress -- in-charge of the police station -- beating up a woman and a boy in a room. Later, some other personnel in uniform were seen joining her in thrashing the duo.

"Chief Minister Mohan Yadavji, will you tell us what is happening in Madhya Pradesh? Under the pretext of maintaining law and order, your police department is indulging in hooliganism and is hell-bent on taking the lives of people," the opposition party said in the post on X.

"The cruelty with which the Katni Government Railway Police (GRP) station in-charge beat up the 15-year-old boy and his grandmother from a Dalit family is agonising. From where did they get so much courage to do so? Is it due to your negligence? Have you given them permission to indulge in such acts?" the Congress said, terming the incident as "shameful". (PTI)

## Justify waiver of police cover dues from organisers of IPL matches from 2011: Bombay HC to Maha govt

**MUMBAI, Aug 29:** The Bombay High Court has demanded a justification from the Maharashtra government regarding its decision to waive fees owed by Indian Premier League (IPL) match organisers, highlighting a disparity in how it treats different segments of society.

During a hearing on Thursday, a division bench consisting of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar expressed concerns over the state's decision to lower the fees for police deployment for IPL matches from 2011 onward.

The court remarked on the apparent contradiction between increasing water taxes for slum dwellers while alleviating financial burdens on wealthy cricket match organisers.

"What is this? What are you (government) doing? This is a fee, not a tax. You continue raising water taxes for slum residents and then waive off fees for cricket matches," the court stated, referencing the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) as the richest cricket association globally. (PTI)

## Recommend capping cesses, surcharges at 5% of gross tax revenue: Siddaramaiah to Finance Commission

**BENGALURU, Aug 29:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday requested the 16th Finance Commission to recommend capping of cesses and surcharges at five per cent of gross tax revenue, and anything exceeding that should be a part of the divisible pool.

In his address to Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission Arvind Panagariya and its members at a meeting here, he also requested the panel to recommend that vertical devolution should be at least 50 per cent of the divisible pool.

All non-tax revenues of the Centre should be included in the divisible pool of taxes by bringing the necessary Constitutional amendment, Siddaramaiah said.

The Chief Minister said economically advanced States are committed to supporting poorer States, but this should not come at the expense of their own residents or economic efficiency.

The Commission needs to carefully examine the impact of extremely high emphasis given to equity on the incentives of well performing states.

"Moreover, the taxpayers of such states expect their taxes to work for them. This creates public trust. The Finance Commission therefore needs to do a tightrope walk while balancing equity with efficiency and performance," Siddaramaiah said. Due to the disproportionate weightage given to equity by the 15th Finance Commission, Karnataka and similarly placed States ended up getting penalised for their good performance, both fiscally and demographically, the Chief Minister said.

Noting that cesses and sur-

charges are not part of the divisible pool, the Chief Minister said over the years, the Union Government has increased its reliance on them.

This has led to the divisible pool not growing in the same proportion as the Gross Tax Revenue, he said. This has caused substantial loss to all the States.

The loss to Karnataka on account of the non-sharing of cesses and surcharges from the divisible pool is ₹ 53,359 crore during the period 2017-18 to 2024-25, according to him.

The Chief Minister said reduction in central financial transfers is placing severe limitations on the ability of the States to invest in physical and human infrastructure, adding, this issue must be addressed urgently.

"Economically advanced States are committed to supporting poorer States, but this should not come at the expense of their own residents or economic efficiency," Siddaramaiah said. "A larger proportion of resources generated by the States should be shared with them."

He requested the Commission to take a bold view and approach, whereby equity considerations are balanced with sufficient reward for efficiency and performance.

Karnataka recommends that 60 per cent of contribution of a state to the divisible pool, for inter se allocation among states, should be given to that state, Siddaramaiah said.

Karnataka, the Chief Minister said, has been central to India's growth story, adding, it contributes approximately 8.4 per cent to the national GDP with only about five per cent of the population. The State ranks second in total GST contribution to the country.

Despite Karnataka's substantial contribution of about ₹ four lakh crore to the Gross Tax Revenue of the Union every year, the state gets about ₹ 45,000 crore in the form of devolution and about ₹ 15,000 crore grant-in-aid.

"This means that for every rupee Karnataka contributes, only 15 paise is returned to the state," he pointed out.

The Chief Minister said Karnataka requires greater devolution by the Centre as it faces regional imbalances, especially in the Kalyana Karnataka region, and the challenges of urbanisation. Bengaluru, Siddaramaiah said, needs an investment of ₹ 55,586 crore over the next five years out of which the State requested for a grant of ₹ 27,793 crore.

Similarly, for the equitable development of the Kalyana Karnataka region, the State is investing ₹ 25,000 crore and requested a matching grant of ₹ 25,000 crores over five years from the 16th Finance Commission.

To ensure effective disaster mitigation and timely relief and rehabilitation measures in the highly vulnerable region of Western Ghats, the State requested a grant of ₹ 10,000 crore.

According to him, the 15th Finance Commission's award reduced Karnataka's share sharply from 4.713 to 3.647. This has led to a loss of ₹ 68,275 crore during the five-year period from 2021-26, he said.

The Finance Commission was conscious of the drastic cut Karnataka received and recommended state specific grants of ₹ 11,495 crore, the Chief Minister said, adding, the Government of India, however, has not accepted the recommendation. (PTI)

## SC seeks bank statement of accused to ascertain transactions in Jharkhand land 'scam'

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** The Supreme Court on Thursday sought the bank statements of an accused to ascertain the financial transactions related to the sale of 4.55 acre land of the Indian Army in Ranchi allegedly by creating false property documents.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who is out on bail, is also an accused in a money laundering case arising from the alleged land scam.

The top court was hearing an appeal of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) challenging the grant of bail to co-accused Dilip Ghosh by the Jharkhand High Court on November 28, 2023.

"You produce the bank statement (of the accused) of the relevant period by today evening itself. It will come up for hearing tomorrow (Friday)," a bench comprising Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma told senior advocate S.Nagamuthu, representing Dilip Ghosh.

The top court refused to lift the case for hearing on a later date as sought by Nagamuthu, saying it will be heard on Friday itself.

As per the federal anti-money laundering probe agency, a parcel of 4.55 acres belonging to Indian Army was sold off by non-owners by creating falsified documents.

It said Afshar Ali, a resident of Bariatu in the Jharkhand capital, and his accomplices prepared a fake deed at the office of RoA (Registrar of Assurances (Records), Kolkata in the name of a Prafulla Bagchi claiming that the land belonged to the latter.

Some of the accused obtained a holding number in

respect of the property and offered to sell it to M/s. Jagatbandhu Tea Estate Pvt Ltd (JTEPL) of which Dilip Ghosh is a director.

The JTEPL purchased the property for an agreed amount of ₹7 crore as against the prevailing value of over ₹ 20 crore since there was an ongoing litigation with regard to the said property with the Indian Army, the high court noted in its order.

It was claimed that cheques were issued by JTEPL in favour of accused Pradeep Bagchi. A cheque for ₹25 lakh was encashed, and as per mutual understanding, the remaining amount was payable upon handing over the physical possession of the property in question, the high court had said.

The ED has been claiming collusion between the accused and wants to prosecute them for alleged money laundering.

On Wednesday, the bench asked Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for the ED, whether the probe agency has call details of Ghosh and Bagchi.

The probe agency said it does not have them but it will clarify this aspect later.

The law officer said the sale deed was for a total amount of ₹ 7 crore but it does not have any reference to the part payment of ₹ 25 Lakhs to Bagchi.

"Just to get out of this, they are now saying ₹ 25 Lakhs is paid but it is not paid," Raju said, adding "Though the sale deed mentions cheques for payment of 7 crore, but none of the cheques were encashed. If there was any agreement of payment, the sale deed would have been maintained." (PTI)

## Corroded nuts, bolts likely caused steel in statue to fail, 'ankle' critical for stability: Expert

**NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, Aug 29:** Corroded nuts and bolts likely contributed to the collapse of the Shivaji statue by causing a failure in steel members forming the frame inside the statue, according to a structural engineer.

'Ankles' of a statue, where the weight of the entire structure comes to rest upon, are most critical for stability and hence, require special attention during the design stage, said Amresh Kumar, a structural engineer with a consultancy.

On Monday afternoon, the 35-foot statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the Maratha warrior king, collapsed. The statue, built by the Indian Navy, was unveiled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Rajkot fort in Maharashtra's coastal Sindhudurg district about eight months back.

While officials have claimed that winds blowing at speeds of 45 kilometres an hour caused the collapse, wind speeds up to almost three times these are accounted for while designing a structure, according to the Bureau of Indian Standards.

"In this statue's case, external factors such as loads or climatic

conditions do not appear to have caused trouble. Rather, corrosion in the nuts and bolts, as mentioned in the PWD report, could have caused a failure of steel members making up the frame inside the statue," Kumar told PTI.

On August 20, an assistant engineer at the Maharashtra Public Works Department (PWD) had written to Naval commander Abhishek Karbhari, Area Coastal Security Officer and Area Civil-Military Liaison Officer, pointing out that the nuts and bolts used in fixing the statue on the fort were catching rust because of exposure to ocean winds and rains.

"While steel members forming a structure -- in this case, the statue's frame -- are commonly protected against corrosion, the nuts and bolts used in connecting these members are commonly ignored, leaving them more vulnerable due to exposure to environment," Kumar said.

He recommended that along with members, nuts and bolts also be protected, either by painting or galvanising, especially in coastal regions where the air is rich in moisture and salt, and is therefore,



more corrosive. Galvanisation refers to applying a protective layer of zinc on steel or iron, usually by dipping them in molten zinc.

However, despite the highly corrosive environment, the corroding of nuts and bolts, thereby causing a collapse in about eight months following construction should not have happened, according to the engineer.

Bolts employed in connecting the steel members and providing stability can often be procured at a

construction site much before they are due for installation, Kumar said.

He suggested that therefore, regular checks at the site, especially before installing them or using them in construction, are required. The toppling of the Shivaji statue bears a striking resemblance to that of a 40-foot-tall statue near Birsu Munda Hockey Stadium and Rourkela Airport in Odisha, which happened in June last year -- both the statues gave way near the 'ankle' region of the people they

were depicting.

The 'ankles' of a statue -- where the weight of the entire structure comes to rest upon -- end up being the most critical to its stability, Kumar said.

"Statues are, in essence, tall and slender structures supported on a compacted base, in which anchor bolts are closely or densely packed. Special attention, therefore, needs to be given to 'ankles' during the design stage, such that the statue's centre of gravity is maintained and does not cause tensions at the base," he explained.

He added that in regular structures, like buildings, beams and columns are arranged in a 'grid' manner such that if a column fails, the surrounding members act as "back-up" to preserve structural integrity. "On the other hand, statues are usually 'vertical cantilevers' in that they are supported at one end (at the base) and free at the other. The framing members and connecting bolts at the base are the sole bearers of the weight acting at the point and, therefore, there are no 'back-up' members in an event of failure," Kumar said.

The statue in Odisha had been installed in January last year, ahead of the FIH Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2023, and was dedicated to hockey players. Meanwhile, Chetan Patil, the structural engineer named in the offence registered in connection with the Shivaji Maharaj statue collapse, has claimed that he was not the structural consultant for the statue.

"I am nowhere related to this. I did not have any work order that I was appointed to. The work was given to the Thane-based firm. I was just told to work on the platform on which the statue was being erected," he said.

Speaking to the Marathi channel ABP Majha over the phone, Patil, named in the FIR along with the artist Jaideep Apte, said that he had submitted the design of the platform to the Indian Navy through the Public Works Department (PWD) and had nothing to do with the statue. "It was a company in Thane which had done the statue-related work," Patil is heard saying while speaking to the channel. Asked why he was named in the FIR, Patil said his name was drawn into it. (PTI)

## Kannada actor Darshan shifted to Ballari jail amid tight security

**BENGALURU, Aug 29:** Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa, who is currently in judicial custody in the Renukaswamy murder case, was on Thursday shifted from Parappana Agrahara Central prison here to a jail in Ballari, amid tight security.

The 24th Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate court here on Tuesday granted permission to move Darshan to a jail in Ballari, after a photograph of him hanging out with three others, including a rowdy-sheeter, on the laws of the Bengaluru jail had gone viral on Sunday, sparking an uproar.

The court has also permitted shifting of other co-accused in the murder case to various prisons in the state, and a few of them were relocated today.

In the picture, the actor is seen in a relaxed mood, sitting on a chair and holding a cigarette and a coffee mug. Also, a purported video of Darshan speaking to a person over a video call from the prison too had surfaced on social media.

According to police sources, Darshan was escorted to Ballari jail via the Andhra Pradesh route for security reasons and to avoid crowding of fans.

They said he was taken out of Parappana Agrahara Central Prison in a police SUV and then moved into a police van near Chikkaballapur on the way to the district headquarters town of Ballari.

Escorted by police officials, Darshan was seen wearing a black t-shirt with a sun glass hung to its neckline and blue jeans, and carrying a water bottle and some clothes on reaching Ballari jail.

A few scenes of the 2017 Kannada movie 'Chowka', in which Darshan had appeared in a cameo role, was shot in the Ballari jail.

A Bengaluru court on Wednesday extended till September nine the judicial custody of Darshan along with his friend Pavithra Gowda and 15 others, who are accused in the Renukaswamy murder case.

Nine prison officials, including the Chief Superintendent of the Parappana Agrahara jail, were suspended on Monday over their "lapses" after a preliminary probe into "special treatment" to Darshan. (PTI)

**DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICERS CLUB CUM REST HOUSE**

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/135 of 2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Brief Description of Item: At Lumding, Development of Officer's club cum Rest House at officer's colony Lumding under ADEN/II/Lumding. Tender Value: ₹4,64,06,586.67/- Earnest Money: ₹3,82,000/- Date & Time of closing of tender: 15.00 hrs. of 18-09-2024 & opened at 15.00 hrs. of 18-09-2024. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 18-09-2024 at website www.irps.gov.in

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## Indian filmmaking close to superseding Hollywood: 'Thangalaan' actor Daniel Caltagirone



**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Western cinema, as British actor Daniel Caltagirone sees it, is "dying", and Indians films are on the verge of supplanting Hollywood, which seems to have lost its way in the surge of streamers. The actor plays the antagonist Lord Clement in Pa Ranjith's Tamil period drama "Thangalaan", fronted by Vikram in the title role.

Caltagirone, whose Hollywood film credits include the Oscar winning title "The Pianist", "Legionnaire", "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider – The Cradle of Life", and "The Fall", said he feels "privileged" to make his Indian cinema debut at a time when stars like Deepika Padukone are presenting at the Academy Awards. "There is a shift. Western cinema is dying... Something is happening, I don't know what it is. I don't know if it is because of streaming, but I urge people to not abandon cinema... Indian cinema is having an effect globally... "Indian cinema is exciting, colourful, fun, and passionate. There is amazing old-school storytelling. It just throws you in whereas we have lost something in the West. It's become dull, it's become sort of too self-reflective. Indian filmmaking... you are one step away, you are so close to superseding Hollywood. Big Indian stars like Deepika... They are now presenting at the Oscars... This is unreal," he told PTI in an interview. This is not his first time working with an Indian filmmaker.

He previously worked with filmmaker Shekhar Kapur in 2002's "The Four Feathers" and India-born American director Tarsem Singh in 2006's "The Fall". (PTI)

## ALL THE CHARACTERS I PLAY ARE PIECES OF ME PUT TOGETHER, SAYS TAMIL SUPERSTAR VIKRAM



**MUMBAI, Aug 29:** Slipping in and out of characters is an enjoyable process for every actor and all the roles he has played carry a piece of him, says Tamil superstar Vikram as he prepares to introduce Hindi audiences to "Thangalaan".

The actor is known for being quite the shape-shifter in cinema whether it is playing a Chola prince in "Ponniyin Selvan" films, a man with multiple personality disorder in "Anniyan", an aggressive lover in "Sethu" or a man who grows up in a graveyard in "Pithamagan".

For director Pa Ranjith's "Thangalaan", Vikram has gone through an intense physical transformation that saw him lose weight and grow his beard to play an oppressed labourer who discovers gold in Kolar, Karnataka during the British rule. "I enjoy this thing that I can slip into and suddenly do any character... They are all pieces of me put together in some way. Even 'Thangalaan' must have a lot of me in it, it's my representation of Thangalaan. As an actor, I like to play around and do different things... Easy is very boring (for me)," Vikram told PTI in an interview. But that was not always easy as he would carry home the characters he played, Vikram said. "People at home would notice that suddenly I've become silent. For instance, during 'Sethu', I used to be quiet all the time and even aggressive. I went and learnt Karate at that time because I wanted to be aggressive and hold (anger) it well," the actor said about the movie, whose Hindi version, "Tere Naam", featured Salman Khan in the lead.

The 58-year-old actor, also known for his roles in "Kasi", "Raavanan" and "I", said over the years, it has become easier to step out of a role.

"Now, I'm more streamlined that way. When I go home, I become Kenny (his real name is Kennedy John Victor), I'm not Vikram. When I come here (on the sets), I'm not Kenny at all, I become the character. So, it's much easier now. But I feel very excited when I suddenly become that person (character), and I try my best to be that person. So, when it succeeds, it feels really good," he added. "Thangalaan", which has crossed Rs 100 crore worldwide since its release in Tamil on August 15, is set for its north India premiere on September 6.

Vikram has a strong connection with the Hindi audiences right from the days of "Anniyan", which was released as "Aparichit" in the North. In his new film, the actor plays Thangalaan Muni, the leader of a tribe who embarks on a valiant fight against the system and the British after they conspire to loot his land for mining gold. He is also playing a tribal king named Aaran, and in his subsequent births a slave, Adhi Muni and Naga Muni, and as Thangalaan's great grandfather, Kaadaiyan. "We realised that this would do very well. I never thought there would be mixed reviews, but what's even more pleasant is that the audience has not paid attention to any of that. They are coming there expecting something different and they are awestruck by what they've seen, and that's very soothing to our hearts," he said. About the release of "Thangalaan" in the Hindi-speaking market, Vikram said he is confident it will strike a chord with the audience here.

"I was telling him (director) that it's going to do better in Hindi, Telugu and other than Tamil. We are always unforgiving when it's our own thing, it's always been like that. For instance, 'Aparichit' when it was released did better in Andhra and in the Northern belt than it did in Tamil Nadu, and then it got picked up. I feel very confident that this is something that will shake you up in some way, it's not a normal film." (PTI)

## Veteran star Rekha to perform at IIFA Awards 2024

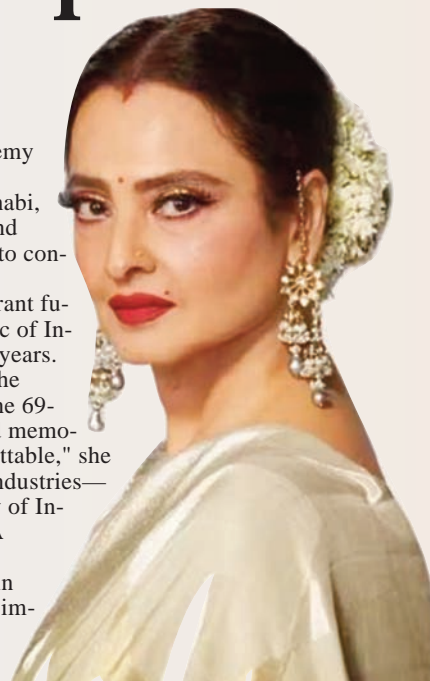
**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Veteran actor Rekha will be performing at the International Indian Film Academy Awards (IIFA) 2024, to be held next month in Abu Dhabi.

The three-day awards gala, which will be held from September 27 to 29, returns to Yas Island Abu Dhabi, for the third time. The upcoming edition of the film gala will be hosted by superstar Shah Rukh Khan and filmmaker Karan Johar. Rekha, who had also performed at the IIFA Awards in 2018, said she is excited to contribute to the legacy of the film gala, which holds a special in her heart.

"IIFA holds a special place in my heart, representing not just a celebration of Indian cinema but a vibrant fusion of art, culture, and love on a global stage. It feels like home – a beautiful showcase where the magic of Indian cinema truly comes alive, and I've had the privilege of experiencing that magic first-hand over the years.

"Being part of this iconic festival once again is a profound honour, and I am thrilled to contribute to the legacy of IIFA. The energy, warmth, and passion of the audience make it an unparalleled experience," the 69-year-old actor said in a statement. Rekha further said that she looks forward to creating more "cherished memories" with her fans at the IIFA. "The incredible fans and the IIFA family make this journey truly unforgettable," she added. For the first time, IIFA Awards 2024 is bringing together the best of both Hindi and South film industries—Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada, with an aim to celebrate and honour the richness and diversity of Indian cinema by showcasing Bollywood flair at the IIFA Awards and vibrant South Indian cinema at IIFA Utsavam, according to a press release issued by IIFA.

The film extravaganza will conclude with the exclusive, invitation-only event, IIFA Rocks. It is held in partnership with the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, and Miral, the leading creator of immersive destinations and experiences in Abu Dhabi. (PTI)



## It is shameful incidents of sexual assault have not reduced since Nirbhaya case, says Shabana Azmi

**PUNE, Aug 29:** Veteran actor Shabana Azmi says outrage over cases of crimes against women should not be selective and the society needs to work on the root cause of the menace. Azmi said there is need to end the patriarchal mindset of the people as sexual assault cases have not decreased since the 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape and murder case. The actor attended the roundtable conference on 'Creating a Safer World for Children', organised by Pune-based Gravitas Foundation in association with United Nations Children's Fund on Wednesday evening.

At the conference, the veteran was asked to comment on the rape and murder of a doctor in Kolkata as well as the alleged sexual assault of two four-year-old girls at a school in Badlapur in Maharashtra. "There has to be an outrage and not just today, the outrage should have taken place way back. And it should not be selective that in one case, it is political... All these incidents are extremely dangerous. "If we continue looking selectively, we won't be able to go to the root. It is all very shameful," Azmi said. Referring to the brutal gangrape of a physiotherapy intern in Delhi in 2012, the 73-year-old actor

said the entire country came together to demand justice for her and after that, the Justice Verma Committee gave many recommendations but still the incidents have not reduced. "There is a need to do away with patriarchy and treating women as commodities and think that they also have equal rights. There are strict protocols in such cases and the death penalty has also been awarded in some cases but still the incidents are not decreasing. We need to work on the root cause of these incidents. We need to work on the protocols given by the Justice Verma Committee," Azmi said.

In Kolkata, the body of the postgraduate trainee doctor was found in the RG Kar Medical College on August 9. She was allegedly raped and murdered while on duty, an incident that has sparked protests by doctors and medical students across the country.

Similarly, the Badlapur town in Thane district has been rocked by the sexual abuse of two kindergarten girls by a male attendant at a private school. The incident led to a massive protest, following which the Maharashtra government set up a special investigation team to probe the case. (PTI)



## Swara Bhasker on Justice Hema Committee report: Findings more heartbreaking as they are familiar

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Showbiz has always been a patriarchal power set-up where if a woman speaks up, she is labelled as a trouble maker, said actor Swara Bhasker as the findings of the Justice Hema Committee report on sexual exploitation in Malayalam film industry leads to an uproar with more and more people coming forward to share their experiences.

The actor, the first one from the Hindi film industry to publicly speak up on what is being described as Kerala's #MeToo moment, shared a lengthy note on Instagram after reading the 233-page report by the government-appointed panel.

"Are other language industries in India even talking about such things? Until we don't face the uncomfortable truths we all know

exist all around us, the brunt of existing abuses of power will continue to be borne by those who are vulnerable..."

"It has been heartbreaking to read the findings of the committee. More heartbreaking because it is familiar. Maybe not every detail and not every nitty gritty but the larger picture of what the women have testified to is all too familiar," she wrote.

Bhasker, known for her outspoken views on topical issues, expressed solidarity with the women who spoke up and those who belong to the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC) who demanded an expert committee from the Kerala government to examine the working conditions in their industry.

"Showbiz is and always has been a male centric industry, a patriar-

chal power set-up. It's also deeply perception sensitive and risk averse.

"Every day of production-shoot days but also pre and post production days are days when the meter is running and money is being spent. No one likes a disruption. Even if the disruptor has raised her voice for what is ethically correct. It's so much more convenient and financially practical to just carry on," she wrote

in the post shared on Tuesday night.

Though the expansive report was released on August 19, the Kerala government-appointed panel to study issues of sexual harassment and gender inequality was constituted after the 2017 actress assault case involving actor Dileep.

Silence is the convention and is appreciated, practical, and rewarded in the film industry, added the 36-year-old.

"Showbiz is not just patriarchal, it's also feudal in character. Successful

actors, directors and producers are elevated to the status of demi-gods and anything they do goes.

"If they do something unsavoury, the norm for everyone around is to look away. If someone makes too much noise and doesn't let an issue drop, label them 'trouble makers' and let them bear the brunt of their over enthusiastic conscience."

Bhasker, known for films such as "Tanu Weds Manu" franchise, "Nil Battey Sannata", and "Veere Di Wedding", said the prevalence of sexual harassment in showbiz around the world is "normalised" by silence.

"This happens everywhere in the world. This is how sexual harassment in showbiz is normalised and this is how a predatory atmosphere becomes 'the way things are'. "Let's be clear, when power

equations are so skewed, newcomers and other women who accept these conditions cannot be blamed for working within a framework they have not created. Accountability must always be sought from those who hold the reins of power and who create conditions where women have no choice if they want work," she added.

The actor gave a shout-out to the members of the WCC, women who testified and those who provided solace to each other and to all those women who have suffered sexual harassment and violence in the industry.

"You are heroes and you are doing the work that people in positions of greater power ought to have done already: Respect and solidarity with you!" (PTI)



# Novak Djokovic reaches US Open third round after opponent stops in 3<sup>rd</sup> set due to injury



**NEW YORK, Aug 29:** A U.S. Open match that Novak Djokovic already expected to be difficult was threatening to become a toss-up as he struggled with his serve.

Missing more than he made, Djokovic couldn't get many quick points Wednesday night. He acknowledged that he should

have lost the second set, and if his opponent didn't get injured and have to stop, maybe he wouldn't even have won that match. Once he had, the defending champion was only looking ahead. "The matches are only going to get tougher from here. I know that, but I'm fine," Djokovic said. "I'll find my way,

as I have done many times in my career."

Djokovic reached the third round when Laslo Djere had to retire with the No. 2 seed leading his Serbian countryman 6-4, 6-4, 2-0. Djere was leading 4-2 in the second set when he appeared to be troubled by pain near his hip and was visited by a trainer later

in the set. He finished that set, which lasted 69 minutes after the first one went 60, but didn't last much longer.

"In the end, not the kind of finish that we players or crowd wants to see, but I think it's probably due to that physical battle that we had in the opening two sets," Djokovic said.

It was the 90th win at the U.S. Open for Djokovic, making him the first man to reach that total at all four Grand Slams. The 24-time major champion will play No. 28 seed Alexei Popyrin on Friday.

Djere was the only player to win a set against Djokovic at last year's U.S. Open, grabbing the first two in their third-round encounter before Djokovic rallied.

"So I knew coming into the match that if I don't serve well, which was the case, I'm going to have to really grind and work for my points a lot," Djokovic said. "That's what I guess caused the two sets to be played over two hours."

Djokovic made only 47% of his first serves and appeared to be struggling physically himself earlier in the match, which was just his second since winning the gold medal in the Olympics.

Djere had two chances to break Djokovic's serve for would have given him a 5-2 lead in the second set. Instead, he wouldn't win another game, with Djokovic breaking to win the set when Djere yanked a forearm out of bounds.

"All in all, of course, I have to be happy with the win," Djokovic said, "and happy that in important moments I managed to play one ball more than him over the net. I guess find the right shots or anticipate well as I did in the set point in the second set." (AP)

## Sukant, Suhas & Tarun make winning start; Manasi, Mandeep lose in Paralympics

**PARIS, Aug 29:** India's Sukant Kadam, Suhas Yathiraj and Tarun notched up contrasting wins in their respective opening men's singles SL4 group matches to make a resounding start to their campaign in para badminton competition at the Paralympics here on Thursday.

Sukant, 31, who had suffered a knee injury after a bad fall in a cricket field when he was just 10, recovered from an opening game reversal to emerge 17-21 21-15 22-20 winner over Malaysia's Mohammed Amin Burhanuddin in his opening Group B match. He fought back from 16-20 down in the decider by reeling off six points on the trot.

Tokyo Paralympics silver medalist Suhas, on the other hand, hardly broke any sweat as he zoomed past Indonesia's Hikmat Ramdani 21-7 21-5 in his group A match which lasted just 22 minutes.

Playing in his second Olympics, Tarun, who had badly injured his knee after an accident while playing football, defeated Brazil's Oliveira Rogerio Junior Xavier 21-17 21-19 in men's singles SL4 group D match.

In SL4, athletes who demonstrate lower limb impairment and minor balance problems in walking or running compete.

Nitesh Kumar and Thulasi-mathi Murugesan also had a winning start as they had little difficulty overcoming compatriots Suhas Yathiraj and Palak Kohli in the opening mixed doubles group stage (SL3-SU5).

Nitesh and Thulasi-mathi won the Group A contest 21-14, 21-17 in 31 minutes.

However, Mandeep Kaur and Manasi Joshi lost their respective women's singles (SL3) group stage matches.

The mixed doubles duo of Sivarajan Solaimalai and Nithya Sre, seeded second,

also lost their SH6 group stage match in straight games to the American pair of Miles Krajewski and Jayci Simon.

Manasi, a 2019 world champion, whose leg was amputated after suffering a road accident in 2011, did well to pocket the opening game but couldn't sustain the pressure on her rival to go down 21-16 13-21 18-21 to Indonesia's Qonitah Ikhtiar Syakuroh in group A.

Mandeep, who switched to badminton from arm wrestling after undergoing a surgery which helped her to walk straight in 2018, lost 8-21 14-21 against Nigeria's Mariam Eniola Bolaji in a group B match.

SL3 is for athletes with severe levels of lower limb disability, which requires them to play on a half-width court.

In Group B, Sivarajan and Nithya gave a tough challenge to the American pair before going down 21-23, 11-21 in 35 minutes in SH6 category.

SH6 is for players of short stature.

Nitesh, 29, who hails from Karnal district in Haryana, and young Thulasi-mathi, a veterinary science student from Tamil Nadu who had won the mixed doubles bronze at the Asian Para Games in Hangzhou last year, encountered little challenge in the first game and at one stage they were leading by seven points.

Unable to counter the pair's net play and deep tosses, Suhas and Palak quickly found themselves trailing, losing the game in just 14 minutes.

The second game too went on similar lines with Palak clearly not able to match the prowess of her senior partner on the court and giving away points.

SU5 players have significant impairments in their upper limbs. (PTI)

## Mandaviya, Zafar Iqbal pay tribute to Dhyan Chand on National Sports Day

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya was joined by hockey legend Zafar Iqbal in paying tribute to Major Dhyan Chand on the National Sports Day here, with the latter also emphasising on the need to focus on disciplines like table tennis and swimming for bigger medal hauls in the Olympic Games.

The birth anniversary of hockey wizard Major Dhyan Chand, who won gold medals in three successive Olympic during the pre-independence era, is celebrated as the National Sports Day.

Mandaviya, after paying floral tributes to the statue of Dhyan Chand at the National Stadium here, said staying fit was the key to building a healthy society.

"On the occasion of the National Sports Day, we paid a floral tribute to Major Dhyan Chand on his birth anniversary. What Prime Minister Narendra Modi says is right... that is those who play, flourish," Mandaviya told PTI Videos after paying tribute to the legend on his 119th birth anniversary.

"The citizens of the country need to stay fit and healthy, and healthy citizens build a

healthy society. And that society contributes to building and making a happy country. In 2047, to make an advanced version of India, all the citizens must remain healthy.

"And to remain fit, one must play sports. Everyone should set aside an hour to play a sports of their liking. I too will play the sport of my choosing... football on this National Sports Day," added Mandaviya.

Former hockey captain Iqbal expressed his happiness with the Indian athletes' performance at the recently-concluded Paris Olympics, where the country one six

medals. But he also felt that a lot of hard work still needs to be done for growth of sport in India.

"We have to work very hard for the upliftment of sports; there is no doubt about it that the contingent that had gone to Paris for the Olympics they performed really well. They have improved their position at that level," said Iqbal.

India's six medals in Paris included five bronze and a silver, while half a dozen of its athletes entered the finals in their respective disciplines. (PTI)

*It's not always about tennis; trust is important in team atmosphere: Davis Cup coach*

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** India's Davis Cup coach Ashutosh Singh is new to the job but not to the players in the national team.

When his name cropped up as a possible candidate for the post, which fell vacant following the sudden resignation of veteran Zeeshan Ali, it did not take much time for the top players to agree to Ashutosh's name.

Ashutosh has been interacting with the country's leading players for years, discussing their matches, giving his opinion and hearing them out patiently.

At 41, Ashutosh is perhaps the youngest to be appointed the Davis Cup coach. He might be new to the high-profile role but seems ready for a long haul. In an interaction with PTI, Ashutosh shared his coaching philosophy, approach and style of functioning.

"Many a time, it's not even about tennis. It's not technical," Ashutosh said emphatically.

"Many a time, players are going through something in their personal life. Because the Tour is such a lonely place, they just need someone who can listen to them. Providing that kind of comfort."

Ashutosh said man-management plays a big part in any team situation.

"The players are going to have people (in support staff) who are not part of your regular team. At least you can provide that kind of feeling of comfort to the players. That there is someone that I can really confide in."

The expertise in the sport, the

ability to prepare strategies and executing them are essential, without which you don't earn respect, and winning the trust of players is an important part of Ashutosh's working philosophy.

He was called to assist the Indian team to prepare for the tie against Pakistan in Islamabad. During the training camp in Delhi, the inputs he provided to the players was much appreciated and it would have played a part in players agreeing to his candidature. "My past experience on grasscourts in fast conditions, that must have played on their minds before they approached me.

Also, I have an individual rapport with almost all the players. I also have quite a bit of experience playing against Pakistan in Pakistan.

"It helped because I was able to connect with all the players, especially Bala (N Sriram Balaji) and Ram (Ramkumar Ramanathan) on their singles preparation. I had given my inputs regarding the court preparation during the camp.

"Most of them are my friends, so it was very cordial, very reassuring kind of situation. Players were heeding to whatever advice I was giving."

Ashutosh had advised the players that Aqeel Khan, being a double-hander on his forehead, they needed to make a lot of body services. "Because, then, you take out his swing and he is just blocking against our players who are much faster, much younger. So, that brings in their speed and agility into play. (PTI)

## Krejciikova out of US Open, Shelton and Tiafoe set to meet in 3<sup>rd</sup> round

**NEW YORK, Aug 29:** Frances Tiafoe is getting the rematch he wants, a second shot at Ben Shelton at the U.S. Open.

But there won't be a second straight Grand Slam title for Barbara Krejciikova.

The Wimbledon champion was knocked out of the U.S. Open in the second round on Wednesday, defeated by Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-4, 7-5. The No. 8-seeded Krejciikova won her second Grand Slam singles title this summer, but then she didn't play any matches after the Paris Olympics. She acknowledged last week not know-

ing where her level of play was.

Turns out, it wasn't good enough. "I mean, winning Wimbledon is amazing. It's a great, great result, I'm very proud about it and how I was able to handle everything there," said Krejciikova, who hadn't played a tournament on hard courts since February.

"I think I was playing quite well, definitely better than in the first match. I think my game was improving, but it just wasn't enough." No woman has won Wimbledon and the U.S. Open in the same year since Serena

Williams in 2012.

Tiafoe had short work on the steamiest day of the tournament thus far, with temperatures in New York surpassing 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius). Three men's matches ended when an opponent stopped playing, the last one sending defending champion Novak Djokovic to the third round when Laslo Djere retired early in the third set with what appeared to be pain near his hip after they played for more than two hours across the first two sets.

"You know, in the end, not the kind of finish that we players or

crowd wants to see, but I think it's probably due to that physical battle that we had in the opening two sets," the No. 2-seeded Djokovic said.

Tiafoe, the No. 20 seed, won the first two sets before his opponent, Alexander Shevchenko, retired after the first game of the third set.

Shelton, the No. 13 seed, later beat Roberto Bautista Agut 6-3, 6-4, 6-4. He ousted Tiafoe last year in the quarterfinals, stopping Tiafoe from what would have been a second straight trip to the U.S. Open semifinals.

"Obviously he's very much like

me in how excited and energetic he is on the court," Tiafoe said, "and has such a big game and big shots and serves big and gets the crowd going."

Well, maybe not quite as well as Tiafoe does.

"I know that the people love him here. Probably more than me. He's electric here, and his crowds are electric here," the 21-year-old Shelton said.

"It will be a battle. It will be a war just like the last two times we've played. Yeah, I'm more than excited to be out there with him again." (AP)

## From reserve to main goalie now: Krishan Pathak hopes to match 'Sree Bhai's' standards

**NEW DELHI, Aug 29:** Krishan Bahadur Pathak knows that being the Indian hockey team's new first-choice goalkeeper won't be easy thanks to the high standards set by P R Sreejesh but he believes "dedication and discipline" will help him fill the big boots of his retired predecessor, who played a key role in shaping him.

The 27-year-old custodian of Nepalese descent, who was born in Punjab's Kapurthala, is no greenhorn and has made 125 appearances for India since making his debut in 2018.

But becoming the first-choice keeper has placed the spotlight firmly on him after Sreejesh decided to call time at the end of India's bronze-winning Olympic campaign in Paris last month.

"It's a nice feeling that I am the main goalkeeper now. But it comes with added responsibility. What I have learnt from Sree bhai is to go along with the team...I was with him for the last six years, so it's a nice feeling to take his place," Pathak told PTI in an exclusive interview.

Pathak's first major test is going to be the Asian Champions



Trophy starting September 8 in Hulunbuir, China. He acknowledged that it would be challenging to guard the post the way Sreejesh did, sometimes becoming the only difference between a victory and defeat.

"It will be difficult to fill in his shoes because he endured a 20-22 years journey to reach this level. But I will definitely try to match the benchmark which he has set for us, which is difficult but not impossible," he said. "But we will need some time to reach that level, it won't be easy. We

have to be focussed and dedicated and work on basics of goal-keeping. He had a long journey in hockey which enabled him to set the benchmark. "It will need some time but if you remain dedicated, disciplined and focussed, you will reach that level," he added.

The Arjuna awardee's biggest moment so far has been to be a part of the Asian Games gold-winning team last year. He was a reserve in the squads for both the Tokyo and Paris Olympic Games. Pathak said he has had

the good fortune of learning from Sreejesh and the affable Kerala man remains ever-ready to help even now.

"He just told me play normal hockey the way you used to play with me. Keep playing with confidence in tournaments. He said 'if you need any help or advice, I am always there for you,'" Pathak recalled.

Not just advice, Sreejesh has also given him targets to achieve. Pathak wants to realise his mentor's dream of winning an Olympic gold in 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"...he wanted to win an Olympic gold medal, a wish which remained unfulfilled but he has given that responsibility of fulfilling that dream to me," he said. "In the last two Olympics I was a reserve goalkeeper. LA 2028 is obviously there among my goals but before that many big tournaments are there like Asian Games, from where we have to qualify for Olympics, then there is the World Cup.

"Sree bhai also reminded me that we haven't won a World Cup for long. So I want to win it for

him," he added.

Talking about his journey in sports, Pathak said he never even thought about becoming a goalkeeper in hockey.

"Nobody in my family is into sports. But I always wanted to play sports, I started with football and then my classmates introduced me to hockey.

"When I joined hockey, the coach told me there is no goalkeeper in the team and this is the only position where I could play. I never knew that I had to wear safety gear and stand in front of the post but I accepted," he said.

Pathak also credited former India men's team coach and current women's national coach Harendra Singh for shaping his career. "Harendra sir helped me a lot. In 2015 I was selected for a tour to London but that time in July my father passed away due to a heart attack in Nepal. I was in a dilemma but then Harry sir and my family supported me.

"Harry Sir told me 'if you want to go to Nepal and attend all the rituals, you can. Your place in the team is always secure'," he recollected. (PTI)

# Paralympic Games opening ceremony starts the final chapter on a long summer of sport in Paris

**PARIS, Aug 29:** Just weeks after hosting the Olympics, Paris inaugurated the 2024 Paralympics on Wednesday with a nearly four-hour-long opening ceremony in the heart of the city.

Against the backdrop of a setting sun, thousands of athletes paraded down the famed Champs-Élysées avenue to Place de la Concorde in central Paris where French President Emmanuel Macron officially declared the Paralympic Games open.

About 50,000 people watched the ceremony in stands built around the iconic square, which is the biggest in Paris and is visible from afar because of its ancient Egyptian Obelisk. Accessibility for athletes in wheelchairs was facilitated with strips of asphalt laid along the avenue and placed over the square.

More than 4,000 athletes with physical, visual and intellectual impairments will compete in 22 sports from Thursday until Sept. 8. Organizers say more than 2 million of the 2.8 million tickets have been sold for the various Paralympic events.

The opening ceremony was held outside the confines of a stadium, just like when the Olympics opened in the city on July 26. Fighter planes flew overhead, leaving red-white-and blue vapors in the colors of the French national flag, before



the delegations entered the square in alphabetical order.

Some delegations were huge — more than 250 athletes from Brazil — and

some were tiny — less than a handful from Barbados and just three from Myanmar. Ukraine's delegation got a loud cheer

and some of the crowd stood to applaud them.

Flag bearers Steve Serio and Nicky Nieves led the U.S. team's delegation.

The French arrived last and to roars from the crowd, which then sang along to popular French songs, including "Que Je T'aime" by late rocker Johnny Hallyday.

Throughout the show, directed by Thomas Jolly who also led the Olympic opening ceremony, singers, dancers and musicians with and without disabilities performed on stage together seamlessly, projecting a theme of inclusion and overcoming physical differences. Lucky Love, a French singer who lost his left arm at birth, was joined by performers in wheelchairs. Other acts featured dancers with crutches.

International Paralympic Committee President Andrew Parsons said he hoped the Paris Paralympics would start an "inclusion revolution" beyond the field of sport.

"The Paris 2024 Paralympic Games will show what persons with disabilities can achieve at the highest level when the barriers to succeed are removed," he said in a speech. "The fact these opportunities largely exist only in sport in the year 2024 is shocking. It is proof we can and must do more to advance disability inclusion — whether on the field of play, in the classroom, concert hall or in the boardroom."

As the ceremony concluded, the Paralympic torch was carried into the area by

former Olympic wheelchair tennis gold medalist Michaël Jérémy, who was surrounded on stage by dozens of torchbearers. Five French Paralympians lit the Olympic cauldron, which is designed to look like a hot air balloon and glowed gold-like in the night.

The Paralympic flag was raised high into the night sky and its emblem adorned the top of the Arc de Triomphe about 3 kilometers (2 miles) away.

Although Wednesday night's show started at 8 p.m. local time, fans had gathered hours earlier under a scorching sun to get top spots along the way. As performers entertained the crowd on stage, volunteers danced alongside Paralympians as they waved their national flags and the sky gave off a postcard-perfect orange glow.

Tony Estanguet, the president of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, called Paralympians "immense champions who we have the honor of being with tonight."

The first medals handed out on Thursday will be in taekwondo, table tennis, swimming and track cycling. Athletes are grouped by impairment levels to ensure as level a playing field as possible.

The closing ceremony will be held at Stade de France, the national stadium. (AP)

## Nitish-Thulasimathi duo makes winning start in Paralympics



**PARIS, Aug 29:** India's Nitish Kumar and Thulasimathi Murugesan had little difficulty overcoming country-mates Suhas Yathiraj and Palak Kohli in the opening group stage match of badminton mixed doubles (SL3-SU5) at the Paralympic Games here on Thursday. However, mixed doubles duo of Sivaranjan Solaimalai and Nithya Sre, seeded second, lost their SH6 group play stage match in straight games to the American pair of Miles Krajewski and Jayci Simon.

The Nitesh-Thulasimathi duo won the Group A contest 21-14, 21-17 in 31 minutes. Nitesh, 29, who hails from Karnal district in Haryana, and young Thulasimathi, a veterinary science student from Tamil Nadu who had won the mixed bronze at the Asian Para Games in Hangzhou, encountered little challenge in the first game and at one stage they were leading by seven points.

Unable to counter the pair's net play and deep tosses, Suhas and Palak quickly found themselves trailing, losing the game in just 14

minutes. The second game too went on similar lines with Palak clearly not able to match the prowess of her senior partner on court and giving away points.

SL3 players have moderate impairment on one side of the body, affecting either both legs or the absence of limbs, while SU5 players have significant impairments in their upper limbs.

In Group B, Sivaranjan and Nithya gave a tough challenge to the American pair before going down 21-23, 11-21 in 35 minutes in SH6 category. SH6 is for badminton players with short stature.

Sivaranjan, who trains at the Pulela Gopichand Academy in Hyderabad, and partner Nithya were equal to the task in the opening game and also took a slender one-point lead but the young American pair, who are both in their late teens, were too agile on court and fought for every point.

The second game turned out to be one-sided with the tiring Indians losing in just 14 minutes. (PTI)

## Pakistan drop Shaheen Afridi for second Test against Bangladesh

**RAWALPINDI, Aug 29:** After facing criticism for heavy defeat in the series-opener, Pakistan on Thursday dropped left-arm fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi from the must-win second Test against Bangladesh.

Pakistan's team combination, in which they fielded four pacers, also invited sharp criticism from former players, who felt that playing with two spinners was a better option.

Head coach Jason Gillespie said Shaheen understands the "situation" and the break will give him quality time with his family. "We had a good conversation with him and he fully understands we are looking at the best combination for this game and the last few weeks have been interesting for him with fatherhood and other things, this break will allow him to spend time with his family," Gillespie said during the pre-match press conference.

The former Australian pacer said Shaheen is working with Azhar Mahmood to be more effective and the management certainly wants to see him at his very best as there is a lot of cricket coming up. "Right now we feel we have all bases covered in our bowling attack," he said.

Shaheen has played just six Tests since July 2022, owing to a knee injury. He was rested for the final Test against Australia at Sydney in January this year. Gillespie also confirmed that all rounder Aamer Jamal was still not fit to play for Pakistan and was ruled out of the match. He also stressed on the need for the Pakistan team to make better decisions over slow over rates.

"Everything aside including allowances for weather and breaks, we need to be better to get through overs better."

Pakistan were fined 30 percent of match fees and docked points in the World Test Championship for slow over rates in the first Test that it lost by 10-wickets.

"We can control our energy levels to make sure we are going through our overs quickly," Gillespie said he was pleased with the positive intent shown by the team in the first Test with a bold declaration in the first innings.

"Look, Bangladesh played better cricket and won. There is nothing we can do about it now but we have to learn from our mistakes and hopefully apply those learnings in the second test." (PTI)

## Jacob Oram appointed New Zealand bowling coach for Test series in India

**AUCKLAND, Aug 29:** New Zealand have roped in former pacer Jacob Oram as their bowling coach ahead of the gruelling three-Test away series against India, a much-anticipated showdown in the ongoing World Test Championship cycle.

The imposing right-arm pacer, who will take charge on October 7, has played three Cricket World Cups and four T20 World Cups and brings a wealth of experience to the Blackcaps coached by Gary Stead.

New Zealand will play the first match of the series against India in Bengaluru from October 16-20, followed by Tests in Pune (October 24-28) and Mumbai (November 1-5).

Oram, 46, was the Blackcaps' bowling coach during the recent T20 World Cup in the Americas and performed a similar role with the New Zealand women's team during the World Cup on home soil in 2022.

"The 229-capped international officially joins the Blackcaps staff after supporting the team as bowling coach in last year's



Test tour to Bangladesh, February's T20 series at home against Australia, along with the recent ICC T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies," said New Zealand Cricket

in a statement.

New Zealand have a good chance of securing a World Test Championship final berth for the second time in three editions as they are currently placed

third behind leaders India and Australia with 50 percentage points.

"To be back involved with a team that means so much to me and has been a big part of my life is a

real honour," said Oram, who has more than 250 scalps across formats and has played 33 Tests, 160 ODIs and 36 T20Is in his 11-year-long international career.

"The recent opportunities I've had have been a great insight into where this team is going and I'm excited to continue that work in the coming seasons."

"There's a fresh new wave of talent coming through in the Blackcaps bowling ranks and I hope that I can share my knowledge and experience to help best prepare them for the challenges of international cricket."

Head coach Stead said Oram will bring his years of experience to the side during this crucial phase.

"Jake's (Oram) a great operator. His career as a player and his experiences as a coach speak for themselves."

"He brings a deep understanding of the international game, but also experience in franchise cricket which will be worthwhile in understanding the modern player and the changing landscape of the modern game," added Stead. (PTI)

## Tendulkar welcomes state gov't decision to erect Achrekar's statue at Shivaji Park

**MUMBAI, Aug 29:** Legendary cricketer Sachin Tendulkar on Thursday welcomed the Maharashtra government's decision to install a statue of his childhood coach Ramakant Achrekar at the iconic Shivaji Park here.

The state's urban development department had on Wednesday approved the proposal for a six-foot statue of Achrekar near Gate No. 5 of the Shivaji Park.

It was at the Shivaji Park that Tendulkar honed his skills to become one of the best batters the world has seen.

"Achrekar Sir has had an immense impact on my life and several other lives. I am speaking on behalf of all his students," Tendulkar wrote on Instagram.

"His life revolved around cricket in Shivaji Park. Being at Shivaji Park forever is what he would have wished for. I am very happy with the government's decision to build a statue for Achrekar Sir at his karmabhoomi," Tendulkar added.

The government said in its resolution that the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation will be responsible for the construction of the statue.

"Before erecting the said memorial sculpture, all necessary permissions/ approvals as per the rules/ regulations should be obtained from the Commissioner, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation," it said. (PTI)

## India's chances of winning in Australia will depend on batters: John Buchanan

**MUMBAI, Aug 29:** Former Australia coach John Buchanan believes India's chances of completing a hat-trick of Test series wins Down Under will hinge on how the visiting batters, including "ageing" stars Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, tackle the hosts' battery of pace bowlers.

For the first time since 1991-92, India will tour Australia for a five-match Test series for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, with the opening game scheduled to be played at Perth from November 22.

Buchanan, who presided over Australia's golden run in all forms in the first decade of this millennium as head coach, said both India and Australia have plenty of ageing players at disposal but that will not be a deterrent to the competition between the sides.

"Australia (has), since losing to India in the last series, the pace bowling attack with (off-spinner Nathan) Lyon, backed up now by Cameron Green or Mitch Marsh, is just a really, really powerful bowling lineup," Buchanan told PTI on Thursday after the launch of 'Ready Steady Go Kids' multi-sport program for the CP Goenka International School.

"India's top order, (Yashasvi) Jaiswal, (Rohit) Sharma himself, (Virat) Kohli, possibly Iyer... they've got to bat really well to establish totals and then the likes of (Jasprit) Bumrah, (Mohammed) Shami, (Mohammed) Siraj will come into their own," he said.

Buchanan said there won't be much of a psychological impact of India's wins in Australia on the previous two tours given that two of the mainstays then — Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane — are not likely to be a part of the touring squad for the upcoming series.

"The previous series that India won — important from both, Indian perspective and an Australian perspective — a little bit



of the mind games will go into the pre-series," he said.

"But for all that, those games have passed, those players are gone and the current players we have both in the Australian side and the Indian side, they're at a stage of their careers where they all want to perform."

"I looked at the ages and India has got some ageing players in that side notably Rohit who's 37 and Kohli is 35, (Ravichandran) Ashwin, if he tours, he's 37 and you look at the Australian side, there's only one or two players who are under 30."

"It'll be very much a battle again between the very good pace bowling attacks of both sides and how well the top order players of both sides can deal with the ball

that will bounce, seam and probably swing a little bit more in the day-night game in Adelaide," he said.

Buchanan said it will be key for India to bat for longer periods in Australia and tire out their bowling attack, something that Pujara executed to perfection in 2018-19 facing 1,258 balls. Two years later, Pujara faced 928 balls as India once again won the series 2-1.

"Why Australia plays well at home is they do bat well, they understand their conditions, but that lineup of (Pat) Cummins, (Mitchell) Starc, (Josh) Hazlewood, backed up by Lyon, is just one of the all-time best all-round attacks that world cricket has seen," he said.

"Albeit that, Starc is (nearly) 35, Hazle-

wood is 33, and Cummins is 31 — it's a five-Test series — so if India can not only bat well, but bat for long periods of time, then it will test the physical capacities of that Australian bowling attack and therein potentially lies a little bit of a key to how India can look at winning the series," he said.

Buchanan said the lack of preparation among travelling teams will be a hindrance that India will face as well.

India will play a two-day pink-ball match against the Prime Minister's XI on November 30 and December 1 ahead of the day-night Test.

"Australia is favourite going into the series right at this stage. When you look around world cricket these days — and it has been (the case) for some time — it's very difficult to tour other countries," he told reporters later.

"(The) travelling teams no longer have that preparation in a country. They don't play two or three games prior to playing the first Test match to adjust to a country, because nobody wants to tour for that long."

"That makes it very difficult when you go to Perth, when it's fast and bouncy, for a side that's coming from, they will have played Bangladesh (and New Zealand) obviously, but Bangladesh at home isn't it? "The wickets are going to be completely different, albeit it's fantastic lead-in that they're playing some Test cricket, but it's going to be quite difficult to go to Perth to start with," he said.

Buchanan added that he was also not in favour of Steve Smith continuing as Australia's opener.

"Not personally. He's made his mark at No 4. But I'm not a selector, and I'm not the captain, and I'm not Steve Smith and so those three people will end up making the decision that they think best fits the make-up of that side," he said. (PTI)