

6
WORLD
8
NATION

- Seven ethnic Rakhine killed as Myanmar police fire on riot
- US reaffirms 'commitment' to advancing human rights of Tibetans
- Congress willing to forge pre-poll alliance in J&K
- Actor-politician Vijay unveils party flag



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RG Kar doctor rape-murder SC tears into Kolkata police for 'lapses' in probe

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: A tough talking Supreme Court on Thursday tore into the Kolkata police over the delay in registering the unnatural death of the woman doctor, who was raped and killed at the RG Kar Hospital, calling it "extremely disturbing" and questioned the sequence of events and the timing of its procedural formalities.

Making an impassioned appeal to the protesting doctors across the country, the apex court also asked them to get back to work, saying "justice and medicine" cannot be stopped and moreover, it was issuing all the necessary directions to ensure their safety. It further directed no coercive action against them.

The strong reprimand of the Kolkata police by the top court in which a three-judge bench highlighted its "lapses" in its probe



came even as solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the CBI, said there was an attempt to cover up the case by the local police as the crime scene was "altered" by the time the federal agency took over the probe.

The bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, which was hearing a suo motu case related to the crime, asked political parties not to politicise the case and said law will take its course after Mehta pointed to an objectionable statement of a West Bengal minister.

Expressing surprise that the postmortem of the victim was conducted on August 9 between 6.10 pm to 7.10 pm before the registration of case as unnatural death, the top court pulled up the Kolkata police over "unexplained" delay of 14 hours in lodging of the FIR in the case. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Oppn stages walkout protesting Speaker's action

Stormy start to autumn session of State assembly ● Daimary rejects Oppn's 3 adjournment motions

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: The Assam Assembly session on Thursday was marked by controversy as the opposition staged a walkout after Speaker Biswajit Daimary rejected three adjournment motions.

When their motions were rejected by Speaker Daimary, members of Congress, AIUDF, CPI(M) and Rajpor Dal went to the Well of the House with placards and shouted slogans in support of their demands.

Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia raised concerns over high charges from smart meters, while Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi sought to address a recent attack on a minor national-level player. On the other hand, AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam discussed restrictions on land sales between different communities.

Saikia criticised the smart meter charges, stating, "Electricity is a basic amenity, and the public can't be deprived of it. The exorbitant charges are causing suffering for poor people and need urgent attention." Islam argued that restricting land sales based on religion is unconstitutional.

"The CM's proposal to prohibit inter-



community land deals and require his approval is an attempt at polarisation politics. The government is trying to divide people along religious lines," he added.

Later, Gogoi expressed concerns about deteriorating law and order, demanding the resignation of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who also serves as home minister.

He highlighted a recent incident where a minor arm wrestler was at-

tacked, claiming police inaction until public protests ensued.

"A national award-winning minor arm wrestler was physically abused by three men, even attacked in her private parts. But the police didn't take any action. When people hit the streets, then only police arrested two people," he said. Gogoi also noted a recent ULFA(I) threat involving bombs, criticising the police's response. "The law and order (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bill to abolish Muslim marriages, divorce Act tabled

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: The Assam government on Thursday introduced a Bill to repeal a law to register marriages and divorces of Muslims, stating that it had scope to allow marriages of minors from the community.

Revenue and Disaster Management minister Jogen Mohan tabled The Assam Repealing Bill, 2024 in the Assembly to abolish The Assam Moslem Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935 and the Assam Repealing Ordinance 2024.

"There remains a scope of registering marriages of intended person below 21 years (in case of male) and 18 years (in case of female)," he said in the Statement of Object and Reasons of the Repealing Bill.

It hardly had any provisions for monitoring the implementation of the Act throughout the state and it attracted huge amounts of litigation in the court, he added.

"There is a scope of misuse by both authorised licensee (Muslim marriage Registrars) as well as by citizens for underage/minor marriages and forcefully arranged marriages without the consent of the parties," Mohan said.

Besides, the registration of marriages and divorces were not mandatory, and the registration mechanism was informal that left a lot of scope for non-compliance of the norms, he added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS Heritage structures

GUWAHATI: In a significant move to safeguard the cultural and historical heritage of Assam, the State Government has declared a new policy aimed at protecting ancient heritage structures across the state, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced on Wednesday. Under the new initiative, a 5-kilometer radius around any heritage site, such as a Mandir or a Namghar that is at least 250 years old, will be declared a protected area. Chief Minister Sarma made the announcement during a press briefing, emphasizing the importance of preserving Assam's rich cultural legacy for future generations.

Vice-Chancellor

GUWAHATI: Dr Nani Gopal Mahanta officially assumed the position of Vice-Chancellor at Gauhati University on August 21, the University announced on Wednesday. Taking to the micro-blogging site X, Guwahati University stated, "Professor Nani Gopal Mahanta took over as the Vice-Chancellor of the Gauhati University on 21st August 2024." Beyond his academic pursuits, Dr Mahanta acts as an education advisor to the government, dedicated to enhance the educational policies and practices across the state.

Gang-rape

NAGAON: A minor girl was allegedly gangraped near Dhing Borbhet area while she was on her way back home after tuition on Thursday. As per reports, it is being said that the girl was thrown on road after alleged gangraped by the miscreants. Subsequently, on being informed by some locals, she was rescued in an unconscious state by local police and admitted to Dhing FRU. However, she was immediately shifted to a local hospital at Nagaon here, sources added.

DGP seeks people's cooperation in maintaining law and order

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: Assam Director General of Police G P Singh on Thursday requested all stakeholders to cooperate in maintaining law and order in the state, while instructions were issued to officers to take action against anyone trying to break the law.

The development came in the wake of a recent incident in which a group of Marwari leaders issued a public apology in Sivasagar district following the assault of a teenage girl by a member of the community.

"Reiterating commitment of @assampolice to strict adherence to law, I request all stakeholders to co-operate with us in maintaining L&O in the state", the DGP posted on 'X'. In a letter sent to police heads in the city, districts and all ranges, Singh said that it has been observed



that in the recent past, that a few incidents of criminal acts have taken place where the victim and the accused belong to different communities. In such cases, it is directed that police should proceed in absolute accordance with law, he said.

The DGP also advised police units, along with the police station-level citizens' committees and the district administration to have reg-

ular meetings with stakeholders from all communities and strive to maintain amity amongst different communities. There should be no space for resorting to instant justice or action beyond law by any section of people, he said.

The field police units shall mandatorily ensure the rule of law under all circumstances with 'failure to do so viewed adversely and dealt accordingly', Singh said.

"I reiterate the commitment of Assam police to absolute adherence to law and neutrality in implementation of the law," the DGP added.

Notably, a group of Marwari community leaders had knelt down and offered 'paan-tamul' (betel leaves and areca nut), a traditional Assamese custom, as a part of seeking an apology. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

47,928 foreigners detected in 43 years; 43 pc of them Hindus: CM

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: The Assam government on Thursday said over 47,900 foreigners have been detected in the state from 1971 to 2014, out of which more than 43 per cent are Hindus.

In a written reply to a query by AGP MLA Ponakan Baruah, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the Foreigners Tribunal (FT) has declared 47,928 people as foreigners between 1971 and 2014.

Out of them, 27,309 were Muslims, 20,613 Hindus and six belonged to other religions, he said.

The CM said the highest number of foreigners was detected in Cachar. Out of 10,152 declared foreigners, 8,139 were Hindus and the remaining 2,013 were Muslims.

As per the Assam Accord, names

of all foreigners coming to the state on or after March 25, 1971 would be detected and deleted from electoral rolls and steps would be taken to deport them.

Sarma said that according to the 2011 census, the state had a total Assamese speaking population of 1.51 crore, making up 48.38 per cent of the 3.12 crore residents.

There were 90.24 lakh Bengali speaking people, both Hindus and Muslims, in the state -- 28.92 per cent of the total population, he said. On Baruah's question if the state government was aware of the fact that the number of people speaking non-Assamese languages are rising and creating a threat to the indigenous communities, Sarma said the dispensation is monitoring the situation. (PTI)

Appointment letters to TET qualified candidates distributed

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: Chief Executive Member (CEM) Pramod Boro on Thursday distributed appointment letters to 900 TET qualified candidates during a programme at the Bodofa Cultural Complex in Kokrajhar, said an official statement.

These candidates were selected as assistant teachers of Arts, Science and Hindi of Provincialised L P and M E Schools of BTR.

Addressing the new appointees, CEM Boro congratulates them and expressed hope that they will perform their duties as a teacher diligently to empower the future generations. "Teaching is an art and they should focus not just on text-book oriented (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

MoU signed for setting up surveillance centre at Kaziranga

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: The Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve and a unit of the Anil Agarwal Foundation (AAF) on Thursday signed a MoU to set up a surveillance centre and dwelling units for frontline workers in the UNESCO heritage site.

The MoU between KNPTTR and AAF's The Animal Care Organisation (TACO) was signed in the presence of Assam minister for Environment and Forest Chandra Mohan Patowary.

As part of TACO's wildlife conservation project 'Mission Vanraksha', this collaboration will strengthen the protection of the Park's wildlife especially endangered species such as the Greater One-Horned Rhinos, Asiatic Elephants and Bengal Tigers.

The MoU outlines a grant of Rs 6 crore to be utilised over a period of three years for this collaboration. Patowary on the occasion said that Kaziranga National Park is not just a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM Modi has no vision to tackle unprecedented unemployment crisis: Cong

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: The Congress on Thursday claimed the country is grappling with an "unprecedented unemployment crisis" and Prime Minister Narendra Modi "has no vision" to tackle this situation and provide employment to the youth.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh shared a news article on X that cited a report released by the Bank of Baroda claiming that the growth in employment in the corporate sector slowed to 1.5 per cent in the financial year 2023-24 (FY24) from 5.7 per cent in FY23.

"This is another report showing the failure of this government on the economic front. A total of 2.43 lakh jobs have been lost in the country in 2022-23. There has been massive

layoffs in 375 companies," Ramesh said in his post in Hindi, citing the report.

"The self-proclaimed non-biological Prime Minister talks in a hollow manner about giving two crore jobs every year and creating 80 million jobs every year, but the reality is that the country is grappling with an unprecedented unemployment crisis," he claimed.

The senior Congress leader said, "The most unfortunate thing – the self-proclaimed incarnation of God has no vision to tackle this situation and provide employment to the youth."

The Congress has been attacking the government over its handling of the economy and raising concerns over "increasing" unemployment and price rise. (PTI)

Assam Cong protests, seeks JPC to probe allegations against SEBI chief, Adani group

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Thursday staged a protest outside the Enforcement Directorate's office here demanding SEBI chief Madhabi Buch's resignation and a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the Adani issue.

The protest march was led by Congress state president Bhupen Borah and included prominent party figures such as MPs Pradyut Bordoloi and Rakibul Hussain, the party's legislature party leader Debabrata Saikia, and other senior party leaders.

Dhruvi Congress MP Rakibul Hussain said investigating agencies such as the ED and CBI and even constitutional bodies like the Election Commission are now no longer independent and are working under the directions of the BJP government at the Centre.



Nagaon's Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi said it was a shame that most central agencies 'have been reduced to lap-dogs and they are being used to target the opposition'.

The PC chief said the Congress will not tolerate this and will demand that all cases of corruption against business houses loyal to the ruling BJP are investigated in a

proper manner.

The Congress has stepped up its attack on the NDA government after Hindenburg Research launched a fresh broadside against Buch pointing out that she and her husband have stakes in obscure offshore funds used in the alleged Adani money siphoning scandal.

The protest saw heavy security deployment near the ED office, including barricades to control the crowd. Despite this, protesters continued to march, and some senior leaders were involved in a scuffle with security personnel. The situation was quickly brought under control, and there were no further reports of untoward incidents.

INDIA bloc members staged protests outside ED offices across the country, demanding that the Centre appoint a JPC and order a probe by the CBI into the corruption allegations against Buch. (PTI)

Nokia aims to demonstrate that cellular connectivity can facilitate crucial communications

Nokia to integrate mobile network capabilities in Axiom's spacesuits for human mission to moon

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Nokia has joined hands with Axiom Space to integrate advanced 4G/LTE communication capabilities into the next-generation spacesuits that will be used for the Artemis III mission, NASA's ambitious plans to land humans at the south pole of the moon.

The Artemis-III mission is likely to be launched in 2026 and Nokia plans to build the first cellular network on the moon, which would be in-built in the space suits used by astronauts.

Nokia and Axiom Space will incorporate high-speed cellular-network capabilities in the Axiom Extravehicular Mobility Unit (AxEMU), supporting HD video,



telemetry data and voice transmission over multiple kilometers on the Moon, a company statement said. "Adding high-speed 4G/LTE

network capability on the Moon will serve as a vital bridge linking astronauts to Earth, facilitating crucial data exchange, and enabling

high-definition video communication over long distances," Russell Ralston, Axiom Space executive vice president of extravehicular activity, said in a statement.

This advancement will enable Artemis III crew members to capture real-time video and communicate with mission controllers on Earth while they explore the lunar surface, it said.

An Indian astronaut, trained for ISRO's Gaganyaan project, is scheduled to fly to the International Space Station next year as part of a NASA Axiom Space – Ax-4. Nokia plans to deploy the cellular network on the Moon as part of Intuitive Machines' IM-2 mission. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Members raise questions on provisions of Waqf bill as Parl panel holds first meeting

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: The Joint Committee of Parliament on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill held its marathon first meeting on Thursday amid objections by opposition MPs over a host of provisions in the proposed law as the Union minority affairs ministry made a presentation.

Heated words were exchanged at times during the meeting but members from various parties sat through several hours, recording their views on the provisions of the Bill, offering suggestions and seeking clarifications.

The Trinamool Congress' Kalyan Banerjee, Sanjay Singh of AAP, Asaduddin Owaisi of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) and A Raja of the DMK were joined by some other opposition members in raising questions over the need for several clauses, including the move to give more powers to the collector and have non-Muslim members on Waqf boards.

There was a view among the members, some of them said, that the ministry was not "adequately prepared" to address the queries raised in the meeting.

The next meeting of the committee will be held on August 30, a member said.

Committee chairperson Jagdambika Pal assured the



members that the panel would speak to all stakeholders, including various Muslim bodies.

The 31-member committee has been tasked by the Lok Sabha to scrutinise the contentious Bill, which has drawn protests from the opposition parties and Muslim organisations. The representatives from the minority affairs ministry were expected to brief the committee on the "amendments proposed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GoM on GST rate rationalisation discusses cutting taxes on some items

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: The ministerial panel on GST rate rationalisation on Thursday broadly converged towards retaining a 4-tier slab structure and asked the committee of tax officers to analyse the implication of tinkering rates on some items and present it before the GST council.

The issue of GST on health and life insurance was also raised by some states in the meeting of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on rate rationalisation and referred to the fitment committee, comprising central and state tax officers, for further data analysis.

The suggestions of the GoM will be taken up on the September 9 meeting of the GST Council headed by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts.

Talking to reporters after the first meeting of the GoM under his convenorship, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary said, "Some GoM members are demanding that there should be no change in tax slabs under GST".

"More discussions will happen, and then only a final decision will be taken," Chaudhary said, adding the GoM has received representations from restaurants, beverages and online gaming sectors, which will be reviewed and some of them will be sent to the Fitment committee. West Bengal Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya stated, "I have said there should be no



changes in the GST slab. A presentation will be made before the Council".

The next GoM meeting will be held after the September 9 Council meeting, she added.

Asked if the GoM deliberated on reducing 4 slabs to 3, Bhattacharya said, "That will not happen for now. Slabs will be retained at 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent. This will be reviewed by the Council now".

Asked if there was discussion on tinkering with slabs, Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said that Goods and Services Tax (GST) has broadly stabilised.

"So why disturb it.. what do you achieve by disturbing it? We said in the next meeting that we will discuss it (reducing slabs)," she added.

On health and life insurance taxation, Byre Gowda said, "We have asked for further report (from fitment committee). We are not sure if it's part of the agenda".

The Opposition has been demanding the removal of GST on health and life insurance premiums, which attract an 18 per cent rate. Sitharaman had earlier this month said that tax was levied on insurance premiums even before the imposition of GST, and GST revenues are shared between the Centre and states.

Gowda said the GoM had asked for a break up of changes in tax rates on some items. "What will be the implication of tax rates going up or down on those items," he said. The other members of the GoM are Kerala Finance Minister KN Balagopal, Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Kumar

Khanna, Goa Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho, and Rajasthan Medical, and Health Services Minister Gajendra Singh.

The GST Council, in its previous meeting in June, had tasked the GoM to give a broad overview of the work done or a draft report on GST rate rationalisation. It would include the status of the work, aspects covered by the panel so far and work pending before the panel. The GST Council in its 54th meeting on September 9 will discuss the way forward on rate rationalisation.

The GoM has been tasked with suggesting the required rate rationalisation and correction of the inverted duty structure, with the objective of simplifying the rate structure, reviewing the GST exemption list and enhancing revenues from Goods and Services Tax (GST).

The GoM was originally set up in September 2021, under the then Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai. Under his chairmanship, the panel submitted an interim report to the GST Council in June 2022, proposing changes in tax rates for some goods and services and correction in the inverted duty structure.

Currently, the GST regime has five broad tax slabs of zero, 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent. A cess is levied over and above the highest 28 per cent rate on luxury and demerit goods. (PTI)

Bandhan Bank Marks Foundation Day with new initiatives

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: Celebrating its Foundation Day, Bandhan Bank unveiled two significant initiatives aimed at enhancing customer experience and broadening its market reach. The bank introduced "Avni," a specialized savings account tailored for women, and "Bandhan Bank Delights," an enterprise-wide loyalty program designed to reward customers for their continued patronage.

The "Avni" savings account is designed to cater exclusively to women, offering a range of premium benefits. These include an exclusive debit card with complimentary airport lounge access, personal accident insurance coverage of ₹10 lakh, and a lost card liability of up to ₹3.5 lakh. Additionally, Avni customers can enjoy milestone-based offers from luxury brands, discounts on annual locker rentals, gold loan processing fees, and beauty and wellness products.

The bank's new loyalty program, "Bandhan Bank Delights," allows customers to accumulate "Delight

Points" for various transactions such as account openings, card usage, and fund transfers. These points can be redeemed for rewards including travel, merchandise, entertainment, and exclusive offers.

Ratan Kumar Kesh, Interim Managing Director & CEO of Bandhan Bank, highlighted the bank's commitment to inclusivity and customer-centric innovation. "Over the past nine years, Bandhan Bank has evolved to meet the diverse needs of our customers. Women have been instrumental in our growth, and with Avni, we aim to honor their contribution. Bandhan Bank Delights reflects our gratitude to our loyal customers, reinforcing our vision of being a bank for all." Rajinder Kumar Babbar, Executive Director and Chief Business Officer, emphasized the strategic importance of these launches. "Avni not only addresses the financial needs of women but also enhances their banking experience with added value. Bandhan Bank Delights is part of our broader strategy to build long-term customer loyalty and drive sustainable growth."

Nippon India Mutual Fund launches nifty 500 equal weight Index Fund

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: Nippon Life India Asset Management Limited (NAM India) has introduced the Nippon India Nifty 500 Equal Weight Index Fund, an open-ended scheme designed to replicate or track the Nifty 500 Equal Weight Index. This passive fund offers investors a unique opportunity to invest in a diversified portfolio of 500 companies, each equally weighted, thereby mitigating concentration risk typically associated with market-capitalization-weighted indices.

The New Fund Offer (NFO) opens on August 21, 2024, and closes on September 4, 2024, with a minimum investment of ₹1,000.

Axis Bank celebrates World Senior Citizen Day with nationwide initiatives

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: In honor of World Senior Citizen Day, Axis Bank, one of India's leading private sector banks, celebrated the occasion by recognizing and appreciating its senior citizen customers across its 5,430+ branches nationwide. The bank organized a series of activities aimed at raising awareness about financial planning and healthcare, specifically tailored to the needs of the elderly.

As part of the celebration, Axis Bank highlighted various investment options such as Mutual Funds, Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs), Term Deposits (TDs), and other specialized financial services designed to help senior citizens secure their financial future. The bank also introduced its "Silver Lining Program," a comprehensive suite of offerings that cater to the unique banking needs of the elderly.

Amika Dixit, President & Head of Branch Banking at Axis Bank, emphasized the importance of supporting senior citizens. "At Axis Bank, we believe that our responsibility extends beyond providing financial services.

Contd. from Page 1.

SC tears into Kolkata

"How was it that the post-mortem was conducted at 6.10 pm on August 9 and yet the unnatural death information is sent to Tala police station at 11.30 pm on August 9. This is extremely disturbing," the bench, also comprising Justice J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said.

Pointing out the laxity in investigation by the Kolkata Police, Justice Pardiwala said, "When you start performing the post-mortem, it means that it is a case of unnatural death. However, case of unnatural death was registered at 11.30 pm on August 9 after post-mortem and the FIR is recorded at 11.45 pm.

"The entire procedure followed by your state is something which I have not come across in the 30 years of my (professional) life," Justice Pardiwala said.

The top court also quizzed West Bengal government over the role of Dr Sandip Ghosh, former principal of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, who has come under the scanner in the aftermath of the ghastly crime.

"Procedure is a separate issue, but the point remains. What is the reason the FIR is lodged almost 14 hours after the discovery of the body. The most important thing is that the principal of the college should have come straightaway to the college and directed the filing of the FIR. Who was he in touch with? What was the purpose? the bench asked senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the West Bengal government. (PTI)

Oppn stages walkout protesting

situation totally failed. The police failed to protect the life and property of people. Lawlessness prevails in the state," he alleged. Parliament Affairs minister Pijush Hazarika said there was no justification to discuss the matters through adjournment motions and requested the speaker to reject the applications. Daimary then said these topics could be discussed through different devices and rejected the three motions.

This led to a noisy scene in the house with the opposition members protesting the speaker's decision. "This behaviour is pre-planned and not acceptable," the speaker said. He then continued the business of the House and asked the treasury bench to use headphones amid the shouting by the opposition. After around five minutes, all the opposition members staged a walkout. However, they returned sometime later. (With inputs from PTI)

Bill to abolish Muslim

"It is a pre-independence Act adopted by British India Government for the then Province of Assam for Muslim religious and social arrangements," the minister said. On Wednesday, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the Assam government will introduce a bill in the ongoing Autumn Session for compulsory government registration of marriage and divorce of Muslim people. Addressing a press conference after a cabinet meeting here, Sarma said the government will table the Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriage and Divorce Bill, 2024. Last month, the Cabinet had approved the Repealing Bill to abolish the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorce Registration Act and Rules of 1935, which permitted underage marriages under specific conditions. The Assam Cabinet had approved the decision to repeal the Act on February 23, in a bid to end the social menace of child marriage in the state. The opposition parties had decried the decision, terming it 'discriminatory against the Muslims' brought in to polarise the voters in an election year. (PTI)

DGP seeks people's cooperation

The incident of tendering public apology by kneeling down was criticised by some sections who claimed that the law should have taken its course. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, however, urged people not to 'politicise' the apology as the incident was related to a girl being assaulted which cannot be tolerated. (PTI)

Nokia to integrate mobile

which is scheduled to be delivered to the launch site later this year. During that mission, Nokia aims to demonstrate that cellular connectivity can facilitate crucial communications during future lunar or Mars missions. The Lunar Surface Communications System (LSCS), pioneered by Nokia Bell Labs' research and innovation, will be deployed during IM-2 and will be further adapted for use in the AxEU space suit.

"We are taking advantage of the same standards-based technologies that connect billions of devices on Earth every day, while bringing new innovation and technologies to bear on the specific challenges encountered in space," Thierry E Klein, President of Bell Labs Solutions Research at Nokia, said. (PTI)

Members raise questions

on the Bill", the Lok Sabha Secretariat said. The committee will discuss the Bill threadbare and also the concerns over it, Pal said ahead of the meeting, adding that voices of different stakeholders would be heard.

"We will discuss all the 44 amendments and bring a good and comprehensive Bill by the next session," he said.

Pal said the committee would call various Muslim bodies representing the different sects to hear their views. The Bill is the first major initiative from the BJP-led NDA government aimed at reforming the registration process for Waqf properties through a centralised portal. It proposes several reforms, including establishing a Central Waqf Council alongside state Waqf boards with representation for Muslim women and non-Muslim representatives. A contentious provision of the Bill is the proposal to designate the district collector as the primary authority in determining whether a property is classified as Waqf or government land.

The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on August 8 and referred to a Joint Committee of Parliament after a heated debate, with the government asserting that the proposed law did not intend to interfere with the functioning of mosques and the opposition calling it a targeting of Muslims and an attack on the Constitution. (PTI)

Appointment letters to TET

teaching but strive to impart knowledge in such a way that the children are molded into responsible and successful adults in future." Boro further added. The appointment of the teachers is expected to greatly elevate the quality of education in the schools, and will go a long way in improving the learning experience of students.

This milestone marks a significant step in BTR's commitment to enhancing educational excellence and fostering a supportive learning environment for the students.

MoU signed for setting up

treasure of Assam but of the entire world. "We are committed to supporting TACO's initiative 'Mission Vanraksha' where they will provide a surveillance centre to maintain a zero poaching zone and to promote conservation and sustainability in our state," he pointed out.

The establishment of dwelling units for forest frontline workers is a critical component of this initiative, ensuring that those who protect our heritage are well-supported, he said.

The well-being of the frontline workers will help them maintain Kaziranga's unparalleled beauty and biodiversity. Patowary added, "The structure set up shall be undertaken in consonance with due compliances under forest, wildlife and Environmental laws and regulations.

The Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve spread over 1,302 sq km, is famed for reviving the population of Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros and is now home to over 2,613 of these iconic species. (PTI)

IDBI Bank boosts interest rates on utsav fixed deposit scheme

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: IDBI Bank has announced an increase in interest rates on its popular Utsav Fixed Deposit scheme for a limited period, providing an attractive opportunity for customers to maximize their returns. The revised rates apply to specific tenures, with the 444-day deposit now offering a peak interest rate of 7.85 per cent annum and the 375-day deposit at 7.75 per cent annum. This promotional offer is available until September 30, 2024, allowing customers to open Utsav Fixed Deposits through the bank's website, mobile app, or by visiting any IDBI Bank branch. In addition to these enhanced rates, IDBI Bank continues to offer competitive interest on other special tenures within the Utsav Fixed Deposit scheme. The 700-day tenure provides a return of 7.70 per cent annum, while the 300-day tenure offers 7.55 per cent annum.

Bandhan BSE Healthcare Index Fund to tap into India's growing healthcare sector

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: Bandhan Mutual Fund has announced the launch of its latest offering, the Bandhan BSE Healthcare Index Fund. This open-ended scheme is designed to provide investors with exposure to India's burgeoning healthcare sector by tracking the BSE Healthcare Index. The index comprises a broad spectrum of stocks from key segments within the industry, including pharmaceuticals, hospitals, diagnostics, biotechnology, and medical equipment. Vishal Kapoor, CEO of Bandhan AMC, highlighted the fund's potential, stating, "India's healthcare sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience and innovation, particularly during global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Roadmap to profitability laid out, electric car off the table: Ola Electric CMD Bhavish Aggarwal

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Newly-listed Ola Electric has laid out a roadmap to profitability banking on higher volume, vertical integration of supply chain and in-house produced cells, while it has shelved plans to make electric car, according to company founder and CMD Bhavish Aggarwal.

The company, which forayed into the electric motorcycle segment last week, will build products that Indians need, which are by a vast majority two-wheelers and three-wheelers, he said in an interaction with PTI editors at the agency's headquarters here.

In the first quarter of this fiscal, Ola Electric's automotive segment EBITDA was almost break-even but for a one-time reversal of about ₹30 crore it had to pay for a change in standard operating procedure in the government for PLI rules, he said, adding the cell segment is at a different stage of evolution. Ola Electric's net loss widened in the first quarter to ₹347 crore, from ₹267 crore in the corresponding period a year ago. In FY24, the company's net loss was at ₹1,586 crore.

"We have shown that even with fast growth, even with investing in 'penetration', you can improve margins. Now, there is a roadmap to profitability from EBITDA to PAT. We have two or three strategies, which we are continuing to execute on, which will deliver improving margins over the subsequent quarters," Aggarwal said. He was responding to a query on Ola Electric's roadmap to profitability, as it remains a concern despite the company's share price almost doubling from the listing price of Rs 76.

"As volumes are growing, the margins are improving because costs are not growing with it. That's one theme on the path to profitability," he said, adding the company would benefit



from having a stable fixed cost as it has built a factory for a higher scale. Aggarwal further said, "As a strategy, we did much more vertical integration of manufacturing and engineering. As we continue down that path, we further see margin expansion, because instead of buying from a global supplier, we are producing ourselves and then saving the 20-30 per cent margin for that component that the supplier will be charging us." Stressing that the cell is at the "centrepiece" of the roadmap to profitability, he said, "as our cell production goes into our own products, by early next year, there'll be a very sizable margin expansion because of that also."

Ola Electric has already announced plans to integrate its 'Bharat 4680' cell into its vehicles starting Q1 FY26. He, however, said the company has not set a timeline to become profitable. When asked if the electric car project is off the table, Aggarwal said, "Yes. We are not working on it right now. Our vision is to build products relevant for India and build technologies to enable those products at scale and we're going in a sequence, two-wheelers and then other products." "India needs to build a sustain-



0.57 per cent and Realty by 0.49 per cent.

Utilities, Power, Oil & Gas, Energy and IT were the laggards

In the broader market, Awfis Space Solutions jumped 9.54 per cent to close at ₹863.25 apiece. In the intraday trade, it advanced 19.99 per cent to hit its 52-week high of ₹945.70 after the company expanded its footprint in Bengaluru.

Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd shares rallied more than 7 per cent after the company said its board will consider a proposal to raise up to ₹4,500 crore through issuance of shares.

On the other hand, scrip of Adani Power fell a little over 3 per cent amid media reports that the promoters of the company may sell stakes in Adani Power and Ambuja Cements to trim debt.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Seoul and Hong Kong closed with gains, while Shanghai ended in the negative territory on Thursday.

European markets were trading with significant gains in the mid-session deals.

The US stock markets gained in overnight trade on Wednesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) again turned sellers on Wednesday as they offloaded equities worth ₹799.74 crore, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude rose 0.21 per cent to USD 76.21 a barrel. (PTI)

able paradigm of energy and automotive. The global solution for sustainability is (electric) luxury cars... That's not relevant for India. India is (electric) two-wheelers, three-wheelers, maybe small cars," he said.

In 2022, he had announced that Ola Electric would foray into the electric cars segment with plans to launch its first model by 2024, while setting an ambitious target of selling 10 lakh electric cars by 2026-2027. On his 'End ICE Age' campaign, he said, "It is a given. Only question is when." Explaining the reasons, Aggarwal said internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles are inflationary on two fronts, as vehicle cost goes on increasing in order to comply with emissions, while fuel cost also goes up because of macroeconomic factors. On the other hand, EVs only become more affordable as the battery cost is reducing, while electricity cost is also coming down as generation cost is declining with more and more renewable energy coming into play.

He said from a penetration of just 1 per cent when Ola Electric entered the market three years ago, electric two-wheeler penetration was 7.5 per cent in July. "It is a very fast pace of growth actually. Most of the action has been on the electric scooter side... Think of another three years. It's only going to amplify... Now we are bringing motorbikes where the EV penetration is very early. Same journey will happen there," he said. In 2023-24, ICE two-wheelers wholesales were 1.8 crore, on the other hand electric two-wheeler retail sales were at 9.47 lakh. Asked about the response of major conventional two-wheeler makers like Bajaj Auto, Hero MotoCorp and TVS to EV adoption, he said, "The incumbents have entered into the EV world, a bit halfheartedly." (PTI)

Pragatishil Nari Sangstha and AIUDF protest against smart meters in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 22: Pragatishil Nari Sangstha, Nagaon, and the Nagaon district unit of AIUDF separately staged protests on Thursday against the introduction of smart meters in the state.

The women's organisation took out a rally from Nehrubali Field to the District Commissioner's Office in Nagaon, demanding the immediate disconnection of smart meters in the state.

During the protest, the agitators shouted various slogans calling for the disconnection of smart meters, reduction of electricity bills, and an end to the exploitation of electricity consumers.

Additionally, the participants also protested against the sexual harassment of women, girls, and adolescents.

Mrinali Devi, the state president of the women's organisation, stated that the smart meters installed by the BJP-led government have created significant problems for the common people. She high-



lighted that people are being forced to recharge their meters daily, and the price hike is making life difficult for the people of Nagaon district.

Devi described the introduction of smart meters as a draconian decision by the BJP-led government and demanded that the government stop the smart meter connec-

tions and restore the old meter system. She also expressed concern over the increasing incidents of rape and murder of women, girls, and adolescents, noting that such incidents have created a horrific situation of violence.

Referring to recent incidents of rape involving two minor girls in Nagaon, Devi expressed shock

that a rapist was granted bail within 14 days. She demanded exemplary punishment for the rapists. Mrinali Devi, Himadri Senapati, Malbika Barua, Jon Deka, Pinky Saikia, and Basanti Das were among those who participated in the protest. The participants submitted two separate memoranda to the chief minister through the district commissioner regarding both issues.

Earlier, the Nagaon district unit of AIUDF also staged a protest near the District Commissioner's Office, demanding an end to the exploitation of consumers through smart meters.

The party leaders and workers shouted various slogans demanding the disconnection of smart meters, creating a turbulent atmosphere. The district unit of the party also submitted a memorandum to the chief minister and the Power minister through the district commissioner, seeking the immediate disconnection of smart meters in the state.

Bir Lachit Borpuhan College hosts freshers' social



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Aug 22: The freshers' social of Bir Lachit Borpuhan College, Sivasagar, was held in the college's new auditorium on Thursday.

Dipali Neog, principal (i/c) of the college, presided over the meeting. Hemanta Panging, general secretary of the College Students' Union, delivered the welcome address, while Rituparna Gogoi spoke on the objectives of the meeting.

The students of the college presented the inaugural song.

During the meeting, Sahityacharjya Nahendra Padun released the book 'Phonetics: A Teacher's

Handbook' written by Khagen Gogoi, former head master of Desangmukh High School.

In his speech, Padun mentioned that German scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries first introduced Sanskrit classics to the Western world, from which European linguists could appreciate the depth of language research done by the great Sanskrit grammarian Panini and others in ancient Bharat.

He lauded Khagen Gogoi's effort in composing a Teacher's Handbook for English teachers.

As the appointed speaker, Manoj Kumar Borthakur urged the students not to be deterred by obstacles once they set their targets.

He emphasised that the new digital age offers a sea of opportunities for those confident in navigating it. Referring to Khagen Gogoi's book, Borthakur noted that it would be very helpful for English teachers. Khagen Gogoi thanked the college authority and Nahendra Padun for their kind words.

Nakul Chetia, a social worker, was felicitated by the college for his valuable contribution to society. Dipali Neog discussed changes in the curriculum under the New Education Policy.

Students Navajyoti Kaman, Princy Chetia, and Niranjan Gogoi performed modern songs. Educationists Jayanta Madhov Gogoi, Rajen Mili, Prof. Bakul Chetia, Manju Chetia, and Anil Panging attended the function.

Enrollment camp for Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana held



HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Aug 22: As part of the 100-day awareness campaign on Mission Shakti, Sankalp: HEW, the Office of the District Social Welfare Officer, Biswanath, organised an enrollment camp for Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY) account opening for girl children in collaboration with Chariali Mukhya Dag Ghar (Department of Post) at Biswanath ICDS Project on Thursday, stated a press release.

The main aim of the camp was to orient parents about the importance of higher education and to secure the future of young girls.

The SSY scheme offers an interest rate of 8.2 percent and provides partial withdrawal facilities upon passing class 10 and for marriage. The SSY account can be opened for girl children up to 10 years of age.

The Department of Post also explained the Mahila Samman Savings Scheme to the women present at the camp.

The enrollment camp was attended by supervisors, Anganwadi workers, post office staff, and DSWO office staff.

State minister Savitri Thakur reviews AWCs in Morigaon

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Aug 22: Minister for Women & Child Development (State) Savitri Thakur visited Morigaon on Thursday. The central state minister arrived to review the progress of Anganwadi Centers (AWCs) and various schemes under Women & Child Development (W&CD), Assam, in the district.

Earlier, minister Savitri Thakur was warmly welcomed by the district administration. The minister participated in a review meeting held at the DC's conference hall at 3:00 pm. She was accompanied by Finance minister Ajanta Neog, district commissioner Debashis Sarma, director of Women & Child Development Rahul Das, deputy directors, ADCs, COs, DSWO, CDPOs, and heads of convergence departments, as well as the SPMU of Poshan Abhiyaan.

After the review meeting, the minister took a field visit and is scheduled to depart after assessing a few AWCs.

Drug peddler arrested in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Aug 22: A drug peddler identified as Sirajul Islam was arrested by police at Jorhat Bypass on Wednesday night.

He was apprehended while traveling towards Jorhat Bypass Sarbaibandha from Charaibahi, Rowrah on a two-wheeler. Suspected heroin weighing approximately 24.67 grams was recovered from his possession.

Titabar women protest against sexual harassment incidents

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Aug 22: Women in Titabar town took to the streets on Thursday to protest against recent incidents of sexual harassment in Jorhat district.

The protest was triggered by two incidents of molestation earlier this month.

In one case, a Taekwondo coach from Delhi allegedly molested a minor girl under the pretext of training her inside a room at the Rajiv Gandhi Sports Complex in Titabar.

In the other incident, a youth allegedly grabbed the hand of a college girl on the street in front of her college during the daytime.

The protesters, holding banners and shouting slogans, demanded strict legal action against the perpetrators and called for enhanced safety measures by the police to ensure the security of women in Titabar.

They emphasised that women's safety is essential for a healthy and progressive society.

In both cases, the accused were apprehended by the police, and legal action has been initiated.

The protesters not only called for severe punishment for those responsible but also demanded legal action against the Titabar District Sports Association for their role in the lack of safety measures within the sports complex.

NCC ADG unveils 'Best NCC Unit NER Trophy' at ADP College, Nagaon



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 22: Gagan Deep, additional director general of NCC, North East Region (NER) Directorate, Shillong, visited the 8th Assam Bn NCC, Nagaon, on Wednesday to unveil the Best NCC Unit NER Trophy at ADP College, Nagaon, which was also awarded the Best NCC College in NER for 2023-24.

The principal of ADP College, Dr Sadananda Payeng, felicitated

the additional director general of NCC and delivered a welcome address on behalf of the college.

The felicitation program was conducted under the supervision of commanding officer Amar Singh, Sena Medal, 8 Assam Bn NCC, at ADP College for unveiling the Best NCC Unit NER Trophy, achieved by 8 Assam Bn NCC, Nagaon.

The additional director general awarded three ADG Medals to

ANO Jalin Chetia, Jyotirupa Deka, and Neeta Basumatary of the unit for their outstanding contributions and achievements towards NCC.

A cultural program was also organised in honour of the ADG by the cadets. The ADG inaugurated the newly constructed NCC Office of ADP College and interacted with the cadets at the indoor stadium of the college.

He advised them to work harder in this competitive era for their higher studies as a primary task and to also take part simultaneously in NCC activities to enhance their skills, potential, and capabilities.

The cadets from different colleges attended the ADG's program with much zeal and enthusiasm. Meeting the ADG, the cadets were very happy and inspired by the valuable speech delivered by him.

Principals of various colleges in Nagaon town and ANOs felicitated the additional director general with traditional phulam gamosa and mementos, a press note added.

Galleria 2024 exhibition at DPS Nagaon



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: For the first time in history, Delhi Public School, Nagaon, showcased a spectacular exhibition named 'Galleria 2024' on Thursday.

The event began around 10:00 am with a welcome address for the chief guest of the day, Mridul Kumar Nath, inspector of schools, Nagaon district.

The event featured an air show, highlighting aerobay, a new initiative for STEAM education in Nagaon.

Attendees witnessed an extraordinary display featuring drones, helicopters, and airplanes, which was spellbinding for all. Following the air show, guests visited the exhibition, where stalls were organised by subject.

The exhibition displayed the brilliant work of the students of Delhi Public School, Nagaon.

Everything was beautifully organised, and the attendees were impressed by the students' remarkable achievements. The event proved to be a great success.

Freshers' Social 2024 held at Demow College

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Aug 22: Under the patronage of the Demow College Students' Union, the Freshers' Social 2024 was organised in the auditorium of Demow College on Thursday. As scheduled, the college flag was hoisted by Dr Krishna Jyoti Handique, principal of Demow College. Shyamal Hatimuria, general secretary of the Demow College Students' Union, offered the swahid tarpan.

An open session was held, presided over by Sukanya Dutta, president of the Demow College Students' Union. Chief guests included Deba Hazarika, former chief librarian at Sivasagar University; Himanshu Sankar Gogoi, general secretary of the Dibrugarh University Post Graduate Students' Union; and Bhim Dehingia, president of the Demow College Administrative Committee. A discussion was organised among the former and new students of Demow College.

The Demow College newsletter, named 'SANKALPA', was released. A team from Local Kung Fu 3 also participated in the program. Additionally, a cultural program was organised. The dignitaries, professors, office staff, and students of Demow College were present at the event.

CEM Pramod Boro distributes appointment letters to TET qualified candidates

BTR CHIEF on the appointment of TET Qualified Candidates

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 22: In a major boost towards enhancing the educational sector of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), the chief executive member (CEM) of BTR, Pramod Boro ceremonially distributed appointment letters to the 1214 TET Qualified Candidates selected as Assistant Teachers (Arts, Science, Hindi) of Provincialised L.P. & UP Schools and the "Remaining Teachers of 1999" of Bodoland Territorial Region at a ceremonial distribution programme held at the Bodofa Cultural Complex, Chandamari Kokrajhar district on Thursday.

Notably, 902 TET qualified candidates selected as assisting teachers and 302 the remaining teachers of 1999 in Bodoland Territorial Region were handed over appointment letters. Addressing the event, Pramod Boro congratulated the newly appointed teachers, and expressed hope that they will perform

their duties as a teacher diligently to empower the future generations. Emphasizing on the vital role on the future of children teacher plays a crucial role.

He said "Teaching is an art and they should focus not just on text-book oriented teaching but strive to impart knowledge in such a way that the children are molded into able, responsible and successful adults in future".

"The appointment of the teachers is expected to greatly elevate the quality of education in the schools, and will go a long way in improving the learning experience of students. This milestone marks a significant step in BTR's commitment to enhancing educational excellence and fostering a supportive learning environment for the student's", Boro said.

He said "A good education can change anyone. A good teacher can change everything On Aug 22".

"I was delighted to distribute Appointment

Letters to 1214 teachers, comprising of TET Qualified Candidates who have been selected for the posts of Assistant Teachers (Arts, Science & Hindi) of Provincialised L.P. & M.E. Schools, and the "Remaining Teachers of 1999" of BTR", Boro said adding that this marks the fulfillment of our longstanding commitment towards the teachers & students, and serves as a testament to our unwavering resolve to transform the educational landscape of BTR.

He said the appointment of the teachers will greatly enhance the quality of education in our schools, and will go a long way in improving the learning experience of our students.

"My heartfelt congratulations & best wishes to all who have received their appointment letters on Aug 22.

I'm confident that they will play a vital role in shaping the future of our children in the years to come", Boro added.

'GiftLife' campaign ignites organ donation awareness in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 22: The student-driven organ donation awareness campaign 'GiftLife' has made a significant impact across residential areas and educational institutions in Guwahati.

Running from August 15 to 19 and supported by Pathik, a prominent NGO in the North East, the campaign focused on debunking myths, providing crucial information, and successfully encouraging registrations for organ donation.

This year's 78th Independence Day brought not only a surge of patriotism but also inspired this group of students to channel their efforts towards social service.

Their initiative addresses a critical issue, as India has one

of the lowest organ donation rates globally—five times lower than China.

Annually, 500,000 people in India lose their lives due to a lack of available organs, with unused organs often being burnt or buried.

This combination of alarming statistics and the need for awareness led to the creation of this noble initiative. The efforts of young leaders Ashash Agarwal, Raajvi Khadria, Devarsh Bajoria, Urvee Rathi, Nazifa Noor-nine, and Spruha Kashyap for their dedication to this cause is commendable.

To join this movement, one can register through the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) official website.

Protest held over murder of Kolkata trainee doctor in KA



HT Bureau

DIPHU, Aug 22: KarbiAnglong witnessed protest on Thursday over the rape and murder of medical trainee doctor of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata.

The District Mahila Samiti (DMS) – a women's organisation of the district and Akhil Bharati Marwari Mahila Manch (ABMMM) came out on the street

to hold a silent protest cum candle light vigil in front of their office at around 5:30 pm this evening here. The Mahila Samiti members along with girl hostellers lighted candles in memory of the departed doctor and expressed their grief over the brutal incident.

Speaking on the occasion, general secretary, DMS, Suborno Boruah Chetia said the DMS and ABMMM have held a silent

protest cum candle light vigil against the rape and murder of the postgraduate doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, on August 9.

"The DMS and ABMMM are demanding arrest of the culprits involved and punishing them as per law of the land. The two women's organisations demand justice to the victim's family," she added.

Boruah further said that laws are enacted by the Government for protection of women, despite it women are still not safe in male dominated society.

"There are regular incidences of violence against women. Women are burdened with several tasks, yet they face atrocities," she said. She said if women are given respect and treated as their own sisters by the men, then they (women) won't feel insecure.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

We cannot solve problems with the kind of thinking we employed when we came up with them.- Albert Einstein

When justice is subverted

In two separate corners of India, gruesome rape cases in Kolkata and Badlapur have become flashpoints, with political forces seemingly working to shield themselves rather than seeking justice for the victims. In West Bengal, the BJP has launched a scathing attack on chief minister Mamata Banerjee following the rape and murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata. Meanwhile, Congress is capitalizing on the horror in Badlapur, where two young schoolgirls were sexually assaulted, to put pressure on the BJP-led Maharashtra government. These heinous crimes have led to a political blame game that detracts from the core issue – the safety of women and the need for accountability. In both cases, the focus has shifted from justice for the victims to a battle of political supremacy. In Kolkata, the CBI's investigation into the rape and murder of the trainee doctor has revealed troubling details. The crime scene was reportedly tampered with, a fact that raises questions about the local police's involvement and the larger political machinery at play. Despite this, progress in the investigation has been slow, with no arrests made thus far. The involvement of chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who holds the dual portfolios of Home and Health Minister, further complicates matters. The possibility of her being summoned for questioning by the CBI has created a tense atmosphere in the state, with fears of unrest should this occur.

The Supreme Court's intervention, which demanded a status report from the CBI, has done little to move the needle. The report, submitted in a sealed cover, indicates that the investigation is bogged down by the same issues that have plagued similar cases – political interference and a compromised police force. The West Bengal government, with senior counsel Kapil Sibal defending it, appears to be in damage control mode, with the opposition BJP keen to leverage the case to weaken Mamata Banerjee's position. In Maharashtra, the situation is equally grim. Congress MLA and leader of the opposition Vijay Wadetiwar has been vocal in his criticism of chief minister Eknath Shinde and deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnis, accusing them of failing to protect women in the state. The sexual assault of the two young girls in Badlapur sparked public outrage, with citizens blocking trains in protest.

As the Maharashtra Assembly elections loom, the Congress is using this case to gain political mileage, while the BJP struggles to manage the fallout. The creation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) and the establishment of a fast-track court by the Shinde-Fadnis government are steps in the right direction, but they seem more like damage control measures than genuine attempts to deliver justice. The stark reality is that in both Kolkata and Badlapur, political leaders are more concerned with protecting their own interests than ensuring justice for the victims. As the Supreme Court continues to monitor the Kolkata case and Maharashtra grapples with the fallout from the Badlapur incident, the common citizen is left questioning whether justice will ever be served. The unfortunate reality is that in India today, whether in Kolkata, Badlapur, or elsewhere, crime often finds a saviour in politics, leaving the victims and their families to fend for themselves in a system that is skewed in favour of the powerful.

Hamas has chosen to be an Iranian satellite like Hezbollah

By: Manish Rai

After lengthy negotiations in Doha, Hamas has named Yahya Sinwar as its new Political chief, replacing Ismail Haniyeh who was assassinated in Teheran. Since 2017, Sinwar has served as the group's leader inside the Gaza strip. He now becomes overall leader of its political wing. Sinwar's promotions undermines more pragmatic and senior figures in Hamas with wider exposure to the international political arena and geopolitical landscape of the region, such as former politburo head Khaled Meshaal.

Following the death of Haniyeh, who had strong relations with Iranian officials, the most prominent name to be considered as his successor was Khaled Meshaal.

The appointment of Sinwar came as a big surprise because many did not take into account the Iran factor. Initially, it was thought Khaled Meshaal would resume his role as chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, an office he previously held between 1996 and 2017 prior to Haniyeh. But Iranians purportedly vetoed this and put all the weight behind Sinwar candidature.

Meshaal's vocal criticism during the 2011 Arab Spring of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a close ally of Teheran, made him a deeply unpopular figure among Iran's top leadership. In addition to this Meshaal had made statements in the past opposing Hamas growing dependence on Teheran.

Hamas is predominantly a Sunni Islamist organisation, while Iran is a hard-line Shiite regime, they found common ground only in their opposition to Israel. That's why the alignment between Iran and Hamas has fluctuated in the past many times. Most importantly in 2012, differences over the Syrian civil war introduced a major rift in their relationship.

Hamas tacit support for Sunni rebels in Syria was at odds with Iran's allegiance to the Assad regime, leading to a temporary withdrawal of Iranian support. For years, ever since Jordan expelled the Hamas leadership from Jordanian capital Amman, in 1999, Hamas had maintained the headquarters of its external leadership in Damascus.

But in January 2012, Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal abandoned the group's Damascus base after airing the group's views about the Syrian civil war. Although in June 2022, Hamas and Syria announced their decision to restore ties.

On the other hand, Sinwar forged close relations with Iranians

since becoming head of Hamas in Gaza in February 2017 taking over from Ismail Haniyeh, who became head of the political bureau.

In the March 2021 elections, Sinwar was again elected head of Hamas in Gaza. His focus remained on strengthening military capabilities for Hamas's armed wing Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. For that immense military aid was required. He formed an alliance with Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Resulting in Iran providing a steady flow of weapons, funding, and military training, which undoubtedly facilitated the group's military operations, including its recent attack on Israel.

Importantly, Iran helped Hamas to design and produce rocket systems that match the capabilities and material available in Gaza in vast numbers. In return Sinwar chose to make his factions sort of an Iranian satellite revolving around its orbit. Sinwar saw himself as the Gaza Strip's self-appointed emperor.

Yahya Sinwar and Mohammed Deif, Hamas top military commander in Gaza, reportedly do not follow directives from their politburo headquartered in Doha. Both have decided to go rogue and lead a faction within Hamas far from the political leadership and closer to Iran, where financial and military aid is more generous.

For Iran, which always seeks influential and loyal proxies in the Middle East, Sinwar and Deif represented prime acquisitions. Iran found Hamas political leadership, which was also aligned with Turkey and Qatar, unreliable and not loyal enough. Tehran sought loyalists fully committed to the ayatollahs' regime, controllable through financial and military aid.

The recent appointment of the new political chief was mainly the power play between Meshaal's faction, which is closer to Sunni countries, and Sinwar's faction, which is closer to the pro-Iranian axis. Ultimately, the internal struggle was resolved in favour of the latter. Hamas as a group always maintains a degree of political and strategic independence, primarily focusing on Palestinian interests. It is not an Iranian proxy, like-Hezbollah which takes direct orders from Teheran but rather an ally of convenience, with a shared common enemy in Israel. But with the rise of Sinwar as the overall chief, Hamas has chosen the way of Hezbollah to become a proxy group rather than an organisation committed to a cause. (IPA Service)

Regime shift: The future of Bangladesh-India defense relations at risk

After Pakistan's surrender at Bogra during the 1971 Liberation War, Maj Gen Nazir Hussain Shah, the General Officer Commanding of the 16 Pakistan Infantry Division, made a prescient remark: "Bangladesh will be a troubled nation."

Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate and leader of the 16-member non-political interim advisory council, which includes two student leaders, has characterized Sheikh Hasina's departure as "the second Liberation." This event has also been dubbed the "third revolution," drawing parallels to the 2006 Nepalese revolution and described as an "Arab Spring on steroids." Additionally, it has been compared to the 2022 Aragalaya uprising in Sri Lanka.

Last month's Anti-Discrimination Students Movement has been clouded by conspiracy theories, including a viral claim by Bangladeshi filmmaker and philanthropist Chanchal Chowdhury that a US-led coup is imminent. The immediate repercussions of Sheikh Hasina's removal are likely to impact India, which has traditionally supported the Awami League.

Confronted with a legitimacy crisis and democratic decline, Hasina turned to New Delhi, which received her with cautious concern. The ensuing chaos and acts of revenge killings bore a resemblance to the violence seen during the 2021 regime change in Afghanistan, where the US-praised Gen Waker-Uz-Zaman led a coup, marking the fifth in 53 years.

During a lecture tour at the Centre for the Study of Genocide and Justice at the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka last November, in the lead-up to the January 2024 parliamentary elections, I overlooked the graffiti that boldly read 'Hasina go'. India also missed this sign. My driver mentioned

that a free and fair election would likely see the Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Begum Khaleda Zia, securing a decisive victory. This sentiment was echoed by an officer from the Indian High Commission in Dhaka and several journalists. Despite these insights, India continued to support Hasina unequivocally.

The civil-military relations in Bangladesh appeared well-balanced, with both parties establishing clear boundaries. Throughout numerous visits to Bangladesh since 1971, it became evident that the Awami League concentrated on two main objectives: honoring the legacy of the Liberation War and fostering India-Bangladesh relations, even amidst persistent anti-India sentiments.

The ongoing struggle between the two Begums, and by extension their sons Sajeeb Wazed and Tarique Rahman, has vividly highlighted their fluctuating attitudes toward India. Under BNP rule, the connection between India and the Liberation War weakened.

However, with the Awami League's return to power, particularly over the past 15 years, there has been a renewed focus on celebrating Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Liberation War. This shift is illustrated by incidents like a student defacing Mujib's statue in Dhaka and the public executions of Awami League supporters, showcasing the ongoing cycle of tension.

Each December, India's Eastern Command, which managed the 1971 war, honors the Liberation War alongside Mukti Jodhas from Bangladesh, while Dhaka reciprocates with grand celebrations for Indian veterans of the conflict. This tradition was further cemented with the construction of a



war memorial in Ashuganj for India's 1,670 martyrs, akin to the memorial for the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in Colombo, set to be inaugurated later this year by PM Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina.

Additionally, numerous initiatives such as scholarships, medical schemes, and welfare programs for Mukti Bahini dependants and free medical treatment for Bangladeshi armed forces members have been introduced.

The growth of military-to-military relations is a remarkable accomplishment, especially considering that until recently, the Bangladeshi military conducted war games with India as a potential adversary. Today, however, it seems that the memory of the Liberation War has faded for most people, aside from those in the military and the families who benefited from it. The strengthened defense collaboration between Bangladesh and India is exemplified by the \$500 million line of credit provided by India.

The deepening of military-to-military relations between Bangladesh and India stands out as a significant achievement, particularly given that the

Bangladeshi military used to simulate India as an adversary until recently. Today, apart from the military and the families directly benefiting from these ties, the Liberation War seems to have faded from public memory. The strengthened defense collaboration is underscored by India's \$500-million line of credit.

Tri-service interactions, including institutional staff and training dialogues, are now routine. Military leaders frequently visit each other's countries, with Gen Zaman scheduled to visit India later this month. Last year, the Bangladesh Air Force visited Dimapur, a significant location from 1971, and Bangladesh was set to participate in the Tarang Shakti multinational air exercise with the Indian Air Force. Joint military exercises and naval patrols are becoming more common, and it's now routine for service chiefs to oversee passing-out parades at each other's military academies.

While non-kinetic military equipment has been sold, Bangladesh's defense acquisitions are categorized by priority, with India falling under the C category and China, the primary source of military hardware, classified under A. The durability of these

enhanced defense ties amidst potential regime changes in Bangladesh remains a critical concern for India.

Anti-India sentiment, a recurring theme in the region, has increasingly come to symbolize New Delhi's steadfast backing of Hasina. Some Indian officials have persistently advocated for the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens, referring to Bangladeshis with derogatory terms like 'insects' and 'infiltrators'. Additionally, the China Media Group, in conjunction with Pakistan's ISI, is reportedly supporting the banned Jamaat-e-Islami and its student organization, Islami Chhatra Shibir, in stoking anti-India sentiments.

Bangladesh shares its border with five Indian states, making it crucial for regional stability. The ongoing unrest along the India-Myanmar border and the escalating tensions in Manipur could severely impact India's Act East and Neighbourhood First policies if an unfriendly regime were to emerge in Dhaka.

Additionally, the threat to the Siliguri corridor from China would resurface, and the BIM-STEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) could face destabilization as a regional coalition. Consequently, the Indian Army's role will be pivotal in safeguarding India's strategic interests and maintaining stable, amicable relations with Bangladesh, reflecting the considerable effort invested in these relationships. India must strategically communicate with key players in Dhaka, as a lot is at stake for New Delhi, which has recently been distracted from its regional priorities. (The writer can be reached at dipakkur-migpltd@gmail.com)

Budget 2024-25 proposals give a boost to development in Himalayan states



By: K R Sudhaman

Himalayan states that share borders with neighboring countries of China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and parts of Myanmar have faced tardy development since independence. This is partly because of difficult terrain and ecological fragility. Backwardness too is a factor. The terrain is hilly but most of the states are important from security point of view particularly because of some hostile neighbours like China and Pakistan. China in particular is a huge country and economy and has expansionary tendencies right from the beginning.

During British era China's Xinjiang and Tibet autonomous region used to form as a buffer and hence India did not share borders with China directly in spite of the fact that both India and China were two large ancient civilizations. Nevertheless, it changed with Tibet and Xinjiang becoming part of China.

Himalayan states comprise Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and North Eastern states of Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura. These states have been backward, barring Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim which have done well in social, human and economic indices, which are comparable with some of the advanced states in the country. Jammu and Kashmir though has a lot of potential has been lagging behind due to cross border terrorism for decades and has been a trouble-torn right from independence in 1947 due to hostilities from neighboring Pakistan, which has ruined itself both politically and economically as a result.

The economic developments of these Himalayan states have been not that good and progress was at a snail's pace as the successive governments have had other more pressing priorities. It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who laid special emphasis on economic development since he came to power in 2014. Every successive budget since then has stressed on the development of the region, both from security point of view and to bring these regions into the mainstream of the nation.

The 2024 general budget, presented by

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on July 23 after Modi came to power for this third term, is no different and in fact has gone step further in pushing ahead this agenda.

Article 370 of the constitution was abrogated by the Modi government in August 2019, making constitutional rights and power there on par with the rest of the states in the country. Since then there has been special efforts by Modi to double-up development and wean away people from fissiparous tendencies. The Union Budget for 2024-25 has therefore allocated significant funds to Jammu and Kashmir, with a total transfer of ₹ 42,277.74 crore through the Ministry of Home Affairs as there is no elected government at the moment.

This allocation aims to bolster various sectors, from industrial development to education and infrastructure. More recently assembly elections have been announced in three phases in September/October and the results will be announced on October 4. This is the first elections in 10 years and it is happening for the first time after abrogation of Article 370 of constitution.

Though there is nothing direct for industry for the Northeast, industry, chambers feel that the region can take benefit from the allocations in different heads.

To promote industrialisation of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the budget has announced ₹ 567 crore to these two states with special emphasis on job creation apart from pushing economic growth of these two hill states. Over ₹1300 crore GST is to be provided to the Himalayan and North Eastern states, which will give that much relief and additional funds for development activities in these states. This will encourage mores businesses to be set up particularly micro, small and medium industries, which are not only drivers of growth in backward areas but also an employment generator.

Border roads development gets a substantial Rs 6500 crore, which are to be spent mostly in these Himalayan states. The spin-off of this border roads development would lead to creating much needed infrastructure and providing logistics development in these backward regions to spur economic activity. This infrastructure development also helps in securing our bor-

ders and road development by itself provide huge employment opportunity to locals in the region. It will help in connecting remote areas and act as growth engines in rural areas. Border area development programme has been allocated an additional ₹ 2000 crore. This will benefit the Himalayan region in creating infrastructure facilities in remote areas, apart from rural development, education and health care. Livelihood issues too will get addressed.

These states are to benefit from the massive allocation of over ₹ 70,000 crore in the budget for the national rural drinking water mission called Jal Jeevan Mission. This is aimed at providing access to clean drinking water for all and the mission was started a few years ago and every year the allocation is increased to cover more areas. The health mission gets over ₹ 38,000 crore and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana gets over ₹ 80,000 crore.

The Himalayan states would get its share in these two national missions aimed at improving health care and providing roof over the head of every family in this country through this rural housing mission. Ayushman Bharat Yojana gets ₹ 7,500 crore to provide health cover to the poor and Pradhan gram Sadak Yojana gets ₹ 19,000 crore and Himalayan and North Eastern states too would get its due share in these national projects.

During the last 10 years, it was ensured that all the northeastern states have both air and rail connectivity, which had been eluding for several states. The last state to get air connectivity was Arunachal Pradesh. Now all these state capitals have both rail and air connectivity apart from road connectivity. This is important to give a fillip to economic and social development. There are IITs and IIMs in the North eastern region as well besides AIIMS. All these have happened during the last 10 years.

Ranjit Barhakur, Chairman of FICCI North East Advisory Council (NEAC), says the Union Budget 2024-2025 is a positive step towards the holistic development of the northeastern states. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma thanked Sitharaman for proposing special assistance to the state to meet the challenges posed by ongoing floods in Assam.

The significant allocations for infrastructure and connectivity, particularly the ₹ 1.11 lakh crore for capital expenditure and specific assistance for flood management in Assam, will bridge the regional disparities and enhance the connectivity of the northeast with the rest of the country. This budget truly recognizes and addresses the unique needs of our region.

Barthakur emphasized the need for substantial investment in connectivity infrastructure in the Northeast, including river-ways, international road and rail connectivity, and airways. He expressed confidence that the significant allocation towards capital expenditure will help address these needs. The allocation of ₹ 1.52 lakh crore for agriculture and allied sectors,

along with targeted support for shrimp production and the creation of large-scale vegetable clusters. This is poised to transform the agricultural landscape of the northeastern states.

The budget also underscores the government's commitment to combating climate change and promoting environmental sustainability. It includes policies for renewable energy projects, sustainable energy solutions, and initiatives aimed at reducing carbon footprints. The focus on green growth, including the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, highlights the importance of integrating environmental considerations into economic development. The northeastern states, with their rich biodiversity and unique ecosystems, will benefit greatly from these initiatives.

The next generation reforms outlined in the budget are crucial for the northeastern states. Collaboration with states for land-related reforms and urban planning will address our unique challenges and improve productivity and market efficiency. This will drive overall economic development in the region.

Ravi Patwa, Chairman of FICCI Assam State Council said the operationalization of the Anusandhan National Research Fund and a venture capital fund for the space economy will support research and innovation initiatives relevant to the northeastern region.

The comprehensive development initiatives and investments in cultural heritage sites and natural landscapes will position the northeast as a key tourist destination. The Budget 2024 is a testament to the government's dedication to integrating the Northeast with the rest of the country's growth trajectory.

The Tea Association of India says the Pradhan Mantri Cha Shramik Protsahan Yojana" (PMCSPPY) devised for the welfare of Tea workers especially women and their children in Assam and West Bengal would be of great benefit. As proposed earlier in the Budget Speech of 2021-22, ₹ 1,000 crores will be provided for the same and is aimed at making need-based interventions in tea garden areas for interalia strengthening provisions of education and health services to the tea workers. The scheme will be implemented in the period of FY 2024-25 and 2025-26.

In sum, the budget 2024 has made an honest attempt to bring these backward Himalayan region into the national mainstream and create necessary ambience to kick-start these economies to compete with other states in the country. Some of these states are already fast catching up with the rest of the country. Also the recent announcement of Tata group to set up a huge semiconductor manufacturing facility in Assam will give a boost to the region. There are steps being taken to attract FDI in Jammu and Kashmir from the middle-east. All this augurs well for the economic development of the Himalayan region. (IPA Service)

Lessons of political arrogance from Dhaka need to be heeded in New Delhi

By: Harish Khare

It could just be a coincidence. Barely 24 hours before Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was compelled to flee Dhaka, India's home minister was making a statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inescapable durability beyond 2029. Just as Sheikh Hasina had come to entertain notions of indispensability, the prime minister's right-hand man appears to have convinced himself – and probably his boss – that India is doomed without Modi at the helm.

On Sunday, Amit Shah was telling an audience in Chandigarh: "The Opposition may try and make as much noise as it wants to. Let me make it clear that in 2029, it is again PM Modi who is coming to power." Such undiluted arrogance. Such a sense of entitlement.

Of course, the Union Home Minister's primary purpose to signal to all the democratic and constitutional stakeholders not to take too seriously the rebuff the electorate has administered to the Modi regime in the Lok Sabha elections two months ago. Of course, with an invigorated Opposition making its presence felt in Parliament, the Modi coterie has every reason to feel worried that many in the judiciary and bureaucracy may not be all that enthusiastic about implementing their agenda of vengeance. Of course, the Modi establishment cannot be unaware that murmurs of unease and defiance within the BJP, starting from Lucknow,

are gathering a critical mass.

Sheikh Hasina was also recently "elected" under an arrangement that lacked credibility. The opposition parties had boycotted the poll process. There was no pretence of any free and fair vote. In our own country, there were many voices who felt that given the Modi regime's stranglehold over the Election Commission, the anti-BJP parties should stay away contesting the 2024 Lok Sabha poll. It was the Supreme Court's verdict on electoral bonds that persuaded the cynics to have some faith in the overall constitutional scheme of things. Even then, the Election Commission of India failed to earn the unqualified respect of all.

And, this precisely is the obligation of the Opposition – to put on notice every stakeholder, from the President of India to the Chief Justice to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha to every governor, that if democratic voices of dissent are not allowed to be raised, then the only noise that prevails is the crowd in the street. What happened in Dhaka should sober up the Modi-Shah groups.

In an interview to the Indian Express (August 5, 2024) Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus had observed of the Sheikh Hasina government: "The government is a lie-making factory, continuously lying and lying and lying, and they just start believing in their own lies." A familiar strain in every elected autocracy.

A similar weakness has marked the

Modi government's approach to fact and figures. It rejects all international reports and opinions; it even dismisses international standards and yardsticks of democratic health. Civil society and its critiques are dismissed as the handiwork of those who want to create instability and/or bring a bad name to Mother India. Refusing to heed the voters' admonitory slap across their face, Modi's commissars are now trying to throttle all independent voices in digital platforms. It can only be hoped that the Modi government's overreach will have to pass the test of judicial scrutiny.

The past ten years have made it abundantly clear that the Narendra Modi project has had no answers to the problems and complexities of national governance. Apart from self-praise and self-promotion, Modi's decade long tenure in government is one of inefficiency, insensitivity and incapacity because it was premised on the fallacious and arrogant assumption that one honest, incorruptible helmsman could fix the "broken" system.

After 10 years India remains as, if not more, corrupt a place it was before 2014; in 10 years, it has become more unfair, more unequal and more undemocratic a place. In Bangladesh, every good impulse, every healthy tradition, every admirable protocol, every vital institution had been suborned in the interest of the glory and power of one individual. We have come very close to flirting with the Bangladesh model. The self-corruption of the establishment has eaten into the Modi sarkar's

pretensions.

The Bangladesh events make it imperative to remind ourselves that irrespective of whatever Home Minister Amit Shah asserts, democracies do not elect kings or emperors. Democracies choose prime ministers and presidents, all drawing legitimacy and authority from the Constitution. A democratic government is an accountable government. The BJP and RSS will make a terrible mistake if they think that they can get away with misusing constitutional processes to suborn institutional arrangements anchored in democratic accountability.

It is the historic conceit of every autocrat to think they would be able to bring unprecedented prosperity and peace in their land if only they shut down the nagging voices from civil society and the carping critics in the Opposition. Sheikh Hasina is not the first and will not be the last ruler to fall in this illusional trap. Every ruler commits this folly, only to find either the army or angry mobs storming the presidential palace.

No one can be confident that the Amit Shahs and the JP Naddas of our world, who traffic in political arrogance, have the wisdom and sagacity to draw appropriate lessons from Sheikh Hasina's flawed model of personal rule. But one can be confident that India's constitutional institutions will regain their vitality and assert themselves against the Modi regime's uncured waywardness. The Dhaka denouement need not be replicated in New Delhi. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Why the BJP has become cautious on matters of caste



By: Abhik Deb

Between 2018 and May 2023, the Narendra Modi government inducted 63 specialists as mid-level bureaucrats through lateral entry, bypassing the established recruitment system where a designated number of posts are reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. This sparked some resentment among the Dalit and Adivasi middle classes but the Bharatiya Janata Party ignored it.

This month, however, after the Opposition and the BJP's own allies in the National Democratic Alliance criticised its decision to issue an advertisement seeking to recruit 45 bureaucrats through lateral entry, the government lost no time withdrawing it.

On Tuesday, Jitendra Singh, the minister handling the portfolio of personnel, asked the Union Public Service Commission to retract the notice. He told the recruitment body that the absence of reservations in lateral entry appointments must be "reviewed and reformed".

What prompted the change in the government's position?

Political observers say this is directly connected to the outcome of the 2024 Lok Sabha election where the BJP lost ground in seats reserved for both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Campaign speeches by BJP leaders asking voters to give the Hindutva party a large majority in Parliament so that it could amend the Constitution had sparked fears among Dalits and Adivasis that the party intended to dismantle the quotas for them in educational institutions and government jobs.

"Forty-five vacancies [through lateral entry] is a very small number, but it has a symbolic value and the BJP would not want to be seen as undermining reservations," political scientist Gilles Verniers told Scroll.

BJP pivots to 'social justice'

The advertisement announcing 10 positions of joint secretaries and 35 deputy secretaries was issued on August 17.

Within hours, the Opposition alleged it was a conspiracy by the government to undermine reservations for disadvantaged groups in public sector jobs. Three allies of the government – Janata Dal (United), Lok Janshakti Party and Hindustani Awam Morcha – also opposed the move. The BJP does not have a majority in Parliament, so the support of its allies is crucial.

Initially, the government defended the lateral entry positions. On August 19, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnav said that these were "temporary recruitments" and would not impact the reservation system in regular openings.

But just a day later, his colleague in the Union Cabinet, Personnel Minister Jitendra Singh told the Union Public Service Commission that the advertisement needed to be withdrawn "in pursuit of social justice and empowerment".

Vaishnav, too, spoke in a different voice. On Tuesday, he claimed that the withdrawal reflected the Modi government's commitment to the

"Babasaheb's Constitution". BR Ambedkar, who chaired the committee that drafted the Indian Constitution, was a Dalit.

This is the second time in a fortnight that the government has invoked "social justice" and the legacy of Ambedkar. On August 9, after the Union Cabinet turned down a suggestion from the Supreme Court to exclude more affluent members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities from the benefits of reservation under the "creamy layer" principle, Vaishnav had said that the government was "committed to the Constitutional provisions given by Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar".

The BJP's pivot to social justice is not without good reason.

During the Lok Sabha election, the BJP had found itself on the defensive after the Opposition capitalised on the speeches of its leaders asking for the Constitution to be changed. The Opposition made the Constitution a rallying point in their campaign against the BJP. The ruling party tried to counter the narrative by pitting Muslims against the disadvantaged castes. But this evidently did not work.

'Compromising is a compulsion'

Political observers told Scroll that the matter of lateral entry to the civil services is a good example of how the pulls and pressures for the BJP have changed after the Lok Sabha elections when it comes to matters related to caste and reservation.

The policy for civil services recruitment from outside the usual bureaucratic setup was announced by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government in 2018. Between then and May 2023, four rounds of lateral entry recruitments were conducted. The Lok Janshakti Party was part of the ruling alliance throughout this period, and the Janata Dal (United) and the Hindustani Awam Morcha for the majority of the duration. None of these parties raised objections to the policy then. Neither did the BJP itself talk about towing the "social justice and empowerment" line.

However, this time, Lok Janshakti Party's Chirag Paswan made sure to publicly demand the withdrawal of lateral-entry positions. After the withdrawal was announced, he claimed his share of credit, saying that he had been in touch with the prime minister on the matter.

Harish Wankhede, assistant professor at the Centre for Political Studies in Jawaharlal Nehru University, said that the BJP falling short of a majority of its own in the Lok Sabha has enthused parties like the Lok Janshakti Party and Janata Dal (United) to assert the interests of the social groups they represent.

"The Lok Janshakti Party has won five seats due to its voter base among the Dalits, so even for its own survival it needs to put pressure on the government on matters," he said. "The BJP needs the support of these parties so compromising is a compulsion for it." Political scientist Verniers said it was not only pressure from the

allies that had forced the Modi government to rethink its stance. "For states like Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP does not have any major allies, it needs to recalibrate for its own good," he said.

Wankhede agreed with this view. "If you look at the [Lok Sabha election] results in states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka, the Dalits and OBCs [Other Backward Classes] did not see BJP as their first choice and many of them have moved towards the Congress and its allies," he said. "The BJP has now realised that if this trend continues it could face even bigger losses in state elections."

The limits of welfare

One of the key ingredients of the BJP's success since 2014 – especially in the Hindi belt – was its success in stitching together a social coalition of non-Yadav backward caste communities and non-Jatav Dalits by giving them more representation. In Uttar Pradesh, this coalition overwhelmed the Samajwadi Party's support among Yadavs and that of the Bahujan Samaj Party among Jatavs.

Along with this, the Modi government at the Centre introduced a slew of cash transfer schemes for rural families that gave rise to what political observers called the "labharthi factor" – it was assumed that beneficiaries of such schemes had emerged as a separate voter bloc transcending their social identities.

The 2024 Lok Sabha verdict, however, has led to a reassessment of the idea that welfare can trump caste inequity.

Ajay Gudavorthy, a professor of political science, said that in the Lok Sabha elections, the Opposition parties were successful in cornering the BJP by consistently attacking its leaders for their comments about changing the Constitution. The Samajwadi Party also effected deft social engineering in its ticket distribution by ensuring greater representation for Dalits and non-Yadav backward classes, he said.

In its internal assessment, the BJP itself identified an erosion in Dalit and OBC votes over matters of reservation and the Constitution as a reason for its poor performance in Uttar Pradesh. But only anxieties about the BJP undermining reservations could not have reduced the party's tally in the Lok Sabha from 62 seats in Uttar Pradesh in 2019 to 33 in 2024, Gudavorthy said. Also in play were factors such as unemployment and economic distress that blunted the "labharthi factor", he said.

"Modi's brand of welfare is aspirational in which he asks people to be amanirbarh [self-reliant], and become job givers instead of job seekers, but ground realities do not match this rhetoric," said Gudavorthy. "The BJP has lost the momentum generated by aspiration and once that happens there is bound to be backlash over more permanent factors like social backwardness."

Verniers also agreed that the 2024 elections showed that social welfare schemes cannot be milked indefinitely to compensate for the lack of job creation and unequal wealth distribution.

"The Opposition has taken the opportunity to link joblessness and economic distress to issues like reservation to mobilise people against the government," Verniers said. "This is a challenge that the BJP has not had to face earlier." (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Why India needs a secular civil code



By: Gourav Vallabh

As India approaches its 76th Republic Day, the question of whether laws should be shaped by religion or remain universally applicable becomes ever more urgent.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his Independence Day address from the ramparts of the Red Fort, dispelled all misconceptions and rumours about the stability and strength of his coalition and showed that he has complete control over the government. His address also revealed that his goals have remained the same. His speech was filled with energy and strong determination, as it always is.

He stressed the implementation of the Secular Civil Code (SCC). He said the Supreme Court has repeatedly discussed and given orders on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) because a large section of the country feels, and it is correct, that the present civil code is a communal and discriminatory civil code. There is no place for them in modern society.

The need of the hour is a Secular Civil Code (SCC).

The Prime Minister's use of the phrase "Secular Civil Code" was interesting. A "Secular Civil Code" (SCC) was used instead of the possible "Uniform Civil Code" (UCC) so that opposition parties could support it appropriately.

On November 23, 1948, Article 44 was introduced in the Constituent Assembly by Dr B R Ambedkar as draft Article 35 and was unanimously passed. "Uniform Civil Code for the citizens – The State shall endeavour to secure a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India for the citizens."

So states Article 44 of our Constitution. During the Constituent Assembly discussion, amendments were moved by Hussain Imam and some other members. "That any group, section or community or people shall not be obliged to give up its own personal law in case it has such a law, and, provided that the personal law of any community which is guaranteed by the statute shall not be changed except with the previous approval of the community."

Dr B. R. Ambedkar, in his reply to the discussion, stated that our country has a Uniform Code of Laws covering nearly every aspect of human relations. We have a uniform and comprehensive criminal code throughout the country, contained in the Penal and Criminal Procedure codes.

We also have the law of transfer of property, which deals with property relations and applies throughout the country. Additionally, there is the Negotiable Instruments Act, among other acts, which proves that this country has practically a civil code that is uniform and applicable throughout the country.

Dr Ambedkar argued in the Constituent Assembly that the Uniform Civil Code should be viewed as a secular law applicable to all. In 1985, the former Chief Jus-

tice of India, YV Chandrachud, shared similar views during the 'Shah Bano' case.

This case revolved around Shah Bano Begum, a Muslim woman who had sought maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure after her divorce.

The initial judgment ruled in her favour. However, her husband, Mohammed Ahmed Khan, appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that Section 125 should not apply to Muslims as it contradicted Muslim Personal Law. The Supreme Court disagreed with this contention, asserting that Section 125 applies to all individuals, irrespective of religion or personal law, and dismissed the husband's petition.

Eminent Muslim jurists like Chaudhary Haider Husain and former Chief Justice of Bombay High Court M C Chagla had also strongly upheld Article 44 (UCC).

In the case of John Vallamattom vs Union of India in 2003, the Supreme Court once again expressed regret that Article 44 of the Constitution had not been implemented. The Supreme Court also asked the government if they were ready to implement the Uniform Civil Code.

Next year, on January 26, 2025, when we celebrate the 76th Republic Day, we must ask ourselves: "Do we want to continue living in an era where laws are based on religion, gender, or any other class or community?"

If the answer is NO, then the Secular Civil Code (SCC) must be implemented. Implementing the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) would be equivalent to fulfilling the vision of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar because the codification of laws should be independent of any specific religion. The current times require a secular civil code, leading to freedom from religious discrimination. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Decoding the Bangladesh crisis through the lens of Kautilya

By: Kajari Kamal

The recent ousting of the longest-serving Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, by a mass movement which started as a student protest has caught the world's attention for both the suddenness of the event and the vandalism on display. The resignation and escape of Hasina may have been swift but the angst and disgruntlement portrayed by the mass protesters point to a deeper rot in the political establishment of which the re-instated job quota is perhaps, only a tipping point. For Kautilya, Hasina has broken the social contract and has failed to achieve yogakshema (security and prosperity) for the citizens of Bangladesh.

Power is not success. Hailed by the World Bank as the 'country on a mission' Bangladesh has seen rapid economic growth in the past two decades. The gross domestic product (GDP) of Bangladesh grew to US\$446.35 billion in 2023, an increase of about US\$253 billion since 2014. Recent macroeconomic headwinds notwithstanding, the moderated growth of fiscal year 2023 is projected to edge up in FY 2024.

Bangladesh ranks third in terms of military expenditure in South Asia and ranks 37 of 145 countries on the global firepower index. With these economic and military indices of comprehensive national power, why have things come to such a pass? Kautilya, an ancient Indian strategist, would reason that the swami (ruler) and amatyas (council of ministers), making the two most important constituent elements (ranking higher than economic and military might) of the Kautilyan state, were in disarray and inept in translating the possession of strength (power) to the happiness of the people (success).

The ancient political treatise on statecraft, Arthashastra, is categorical about the roots of popular uprisings – "The use of peace and other policies not in the prescribed manner is a wrong policy. From that springs dan-

gers (of conspiracy or revolt)." His advice to the political leadership facing these challenges is categorical too – "The ruler should not allow causes of decline, greed, and disaffection among the subjects to arise, and if arisen, should immediately counter-act them. Kautilya squarely puts the blame on a wrong policy enunciated by the ruler and the ruling class as the reason for popular revolt.

In this context, the most notable statement coming from Sheikh Hasina's son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, is the admission of mistakes in handling of the student protests—perhaps, too little and too late.

Let us assess the addressal of what is seen as the symptom of the

problem of disaffection and mistrust of the Awami League rule—the student protest. Far from acknowledging the problem raised, the Hasina government detracting from the Kautilyan rules of engagement with the multitude of people, cracked down on the masses.

The Kautilyan toolkit provides an array of remedial and suppressive approaches to tackle internal security challenges but is clear about seeking success over the people only through means excepting force—conciliation, gifts, exemption, and employment.

Rajamandala dynamics. Notwithstanding the internal fissures and general resentment, a 'foreign hand' cannot be ruled out. The Arthashastra delineates four kinds of dangers in the realm of internal security based on the origin of instigation and the response (outer-inner, inner-

outer, outer-outer, and inner-inner), and prescribes countermeasures based on the type of association and the target audience. The external/outer-act can be possible only if there is a response in the interior symptomatic of a general disenchantment.

If the association is between 'two types' (abatement from outer and response in the interior), then success over one who responds is more advantageous, and Kautilya would prescribe the use of only sama (conciliation) and dana (gift-giving). The ousted Prime Minister would do well to reflect on her own incapacities and misjudgements rather than blame the United States (US).

What are the potential external interests that may have arguably fished in Dhaka's troubled waters? The US is the quintessential udasina (neutral king) which sits outside Bangladesh's rajamandala (circle of kings), is stronger than the constituents of the potential conqueror (vijigishu), enemy (ari) and the middle king (madhyama) put together, and is capable of keeping them united or disunited based on its national interests.

Dhaka's attempts to diversify by placing some eggs in the China basket have ruffled feathers in Washington which would use any opportunity to place a more pliant government. Additionally, a tumultuous neighbourhood on a previously relatively secure border, a potential revival of cross-border terrorism, and a US-backed establishment in Dhaka could arguably keep Washington's strategic partner in the region—India—hemmed in, particularly when Delhi's independent deci-

sion-making runs contrary to US interests in the region and beyond. Kautilya would sanction the udasina's move (the US in this context) intent on allowing the weaker partner to neither become too powerful nor too weak.

China is the madhyama which (almost) sits abutting the territories of Bangladesh (vijigishu) and Myanmar (potential enemy), is stronger than the two put together, and can keep them united or disunited in pursuance of its political goals. While the Hasina government may have been favourable to China, its proximity with India and her effective crackdown on anti-India terror groups in Bangladesh could arguably propel China to fan the people's movement and destabilise yet another border of India.

Pakistan is an innate enemy by birth. It is in league with China and shares Beijing's inimical disposition towards India. There are intelligence reports that have identified the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami as having played a pivotal role, with evidence of training in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The possible return of Khaleda Zia with an anti-India stance would serve Islamabad's interests.

India is a mitra (ally) for Bangladesh. Hasina gained Delhi's patronage with deft diplomacy, without losing out on lucrative deals from its adversary in the region. With the red lines met and Dhaka broadly identifying with India, Delhi's friendship was mutually beneficial, even as anti-India sentiments among Bangladeshis was on the rise.

Hasina's external parleys with regional and great powers have followed the Kautilyan handbook—hedging, leveraging its neutrality to strike deals, and rarely crossing the set red lines. But she failed to ascertain the pulse of the citizens. Robustness in domestic security is key, both for sound political legitimacy and for safeguarding itself from the machinations of external powers. Internal security is the bedrock of successful strategic autonomy. (Courtesy: ORF)



Thousands of Indonesians attempt to storm parliament to protest changes to election law

Protesters held banners and signs, while others started a fire and burned tires

JAKARTA, Aug 22: Thousands of protesters attempted to storm Indonesia's parliament on Thursday, tearing down a section of fence and throwing stones at police, and forcing the legislature to delay a vote on controversial changes to election laws that could further enhance the political influence of outgoing President Joko Widodo.

Parliament was to meet in an emergency session in order to overturn one decision made by the country's Constitutional Court on election procedures, while amending another.

Protesters held banners and signs, while others started a fire and burned tires.

The Constitutional Court court on Tuesday dismissed a challenge to an age limit that prevents people younger than 30 for running

for regional governorships, which would prevent the Widodo's 29-year-old youngest son, Kaesang Pangarep, from running in a regional contest in Central Java.

The court also made it easier for political parties to nominate candidates by cutting back a requirement that they hold 20% of a local legislature.

Parliament passed an emergency motion to changing the minimum age to serve as governor to 30 at the time of inauguration and further ease nomination requirements on Wednesday, and planned to ratify the vote in a plenary session on Thursday.

The moves triggered widespread condemnation on local social media and raised concerns about a potential constitutional crisis.

The legislature was forced to



delay the vote after failing to achieve a quorum.

Widodo's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, is the incoming vice-president after the same court created an exception to the age limit for the post for former regional leaders, while Widodo's brother-in-law was serving as chief justice. He was criticised for

participating in a case involving a close relative and later dismissed.

Activists, students, workers, and a number of Indonesian celebrities and musicians also joined the protest, voicing concerns about democracy in Indonesia.

Protests were also reported in other big cities, including Ban-

dung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Makassar.

In Yogyakarta, at least 1,000 protesters including students and workers rallied in front of Yogyakarta's Parliament building, the state palace and the city's ceremonial centre.

Their demands included voting down the regional election bill, respecting the Constitutional Court's ruling and rejecting political dynasties.

The simultaneous protests in the major cities showed anger at Parliament's efforts to overrule the Constitutional Court decision to allow more candidates to compete in the regional elections, said Yoes Kenawas, a political analyst at Atma Jaya Catholic University.

"They also opposed the dynastic politics carried out by President Jokowi," Kenawas said. (AP)

Zelenskyy visits border area for the first time since Ukrainian forces entered Russia's Kursk region

KYIV, Aug 22: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy toured the northeastern Ukrainian region of Sumy on Thursday in his first visit to the border area since his forces entered Russian territory more than two weeks ago.

After a meeting with Ukraine's military commander, Zelenskyy said Ukrainian forces have claimed control of another settlement in the Russian region of Kursk and taken more Russian prisoners of war whom he hopes to exchange for captured Ukrainians. He referred to that as Ukraine's "exchange fund."

"Another settlement in the Kursk region is now under Ukrainian control, and we have replenished the exchange fund," Zelenskyy wrote on the social media platform X after hearing a report from the military commander, Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi.

But the gains there come as Ukraine continues to lose ground in its eastern Donetsk region. The Russian Defense Ministry announced on Thursday that its military has claimed control of the village of Mezhevo.

Ukraine's push into Russia marks the first capture of Russian territory since World War II.

It comes as both sides in the war use drones to attack far within enemy lines.

A Ukrainian drone attack on Thursday sparked a fire at a military facility in southern Russia as Kyiv pushes its offensive in the Kursk region and struck key infrastructure including bridges.

Andrei Bocharov, governor of the Volgograd region, said on Thursday that a "defense ministry facility" was on fire after being attacked by drones in the area of Marinovka, in a sign that Ukraine is not letting up on its attacks. He did not specify what was damaged.

Ukraine attacked Russia overnight with 28 drones, Russia's Ministry of Defense said. Thirteen were shot down over the Volgograd region, seven over the Rostov region, four over the Belgorod region, two over the Voronezh region, and one each over the Bryansk and Kursk regions, the ministry said.

Russian Telegram channels said drones attempted to attack a military air base near Marinovka in the village of Oktyabrsky. Videos shared on Russian social media showed an explosion in the night sky, reportedly near the base. Marinovka is about 300 kilometers (185 miles) east of the Ukrainian border and about the same distance west from the border with Kazakhstan.

Ukraine claimed responsibility

for the attack.

Ukraine's Security Service and the Special Operation Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine conducted the drone attack on Wednesday night striking the Marinovka airfield in Russia, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

The attack came as the ground offensive in Russia's Kursk region rattles the Kremlin. The daring operation could involve as many as 10,000 Ukrainian troops backed by armor and artillery, military analysts say.

The Baza Telegram channel, which is close to Russian law enforcement, said one drone was taken down several kilometers (miles) from the airfield near Marinovka and that wreckage from another fell on a trailer near the air base, causing it to catch fire.

Data from NASA fire satellites, which monitor Earth for forest blazes, showed fires breaking out around the air base's apron, where fighter jets were previously seen parked.

Another fire burned on Thursday in Russia's Rostov region, where firefighters struggled for the fifth day to put out a fire at an oil depot in the town of Proletarsk caused by a Ukrainian drone attack Sunday.

Russian state television channels have largely avoided covering the attack. Russian Orthodox priests visited Proletarsk to pray for injured firefighters.

Independent Russian Telegram channels said another powerful explosion was heard Wednesday evening and shared videos of a fireball burning in the night sky. State news agency Tass said 47 people were injured while putting out the blaze, but firefighters succeeded in stopping fires in six fuel tanks.

Satellite photos from Planet Labs PBC analyzed on Thursday by The Associated Press showed the fire at the oil depot still intensely burning as of Wednesday. Storage tanks at the facility appeared engulfed in flames. Visible flames could be seen in the images, with a thick black smoke cloud drifting west over the city of Proletarsk.

Kursk's acting governor, Alexei Smirnov, said authorities began putting up concrete shelters at bus stops and other locations around the city on Thursday to protect from shelling.

He said similar work will be done in Zheleznogorsk and Kurchatov, where the Kursk nuclear power plant is located. (AP)

Putin meets China's Premier Li as Moscow and Beijing deepen their relations



MOSCOW, Aug 22: Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Chinese premier Li Qiang on Wednesday, hailing growing trade relations as Moscow becomes increasingly dependent on Beijing for political and economic support.

"Our trade relations are developing, developing successfully ... The attention that the governments of the two countries on both

sides are paying to trade and economic ties is yielding results," Putin said at the meeting in the Kremlin.

He also said that Russia and China have developed "large-scale plans" for economic and other projects.

"Chinese-Russian relations are at an unprecedentedly high level," said Li, who earlier had met with his Russian counterpart, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin.

The meeting took place as Russia struggled to push back a Ukrainian incursion into the Kursk region now in its third week. And overnight, Moscow experienced one of the largest waves of drone attacks on the Russian capital since the start of the Ukraine conflict.

Russian news reports did not indicate whether Putin and Li discussed Ukraine.

China has tried to position itself as neutral in the Ukraine conflict, but it shares with Russia high animosity toward the West.

After Western countries imposed heavy sanctions on Russian oil in response to Russia sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022, China strongly stepped up its purchase of Russian oil, increasing its influence in Russia.

Putin underlined the importance of China by meeting in Beijing with Chinese leader Xi Jinping soon after being inaugurated for a fifth term in the Kremlin.

A U.S. intelligence assessment released this year indicates that China has significantly increased sales to Russia of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology Moscow uses to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry. (AP)

US reaffirms 'commitment' to advancing human rights of Tibetans

WASHINGTON, Aug 22: A top US government official met with the Dalai Lama and, on behalf of President Joe Biden, reaffirmed the US' "commitment" to advancing the human rights of Tibetans and supporting efforts to preserve their distinct historical, linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage.

The Dalai Lama, 89, is recuperating in New York since he underwent a successful knee replacement surgery on June 28.

The Tibetan spiritual leader's meeting with the top US State Department official comes months after President Biden signed into law a bill which enhances US support for Tibet and promotes dialogue between China and the Dalai Lama toward a peaceful resolution of the dispute over the status and governance of the remote Himalayan region.

China had opposed the 'Resolve Tibet Act' -- passed by the House of Representatives last February and cleared by the Senate in May -- and described it as "destabilising."

President Biden's message to the Dalai Lama was conveyed by Uzra Zeya, the US Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights and Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, who travelled to New York for an audience with the



and his representatives."

"Honoured to meet with His Holiness the @DalaiLama, a global figure for compassion and nonviolence. I conveyed greetings from @POTUS, wishing a smooth recovery and reaffirming the United States' unwavering support for the Tibetan community," Zeya, an Indian-American diplomat, said in a post on X through her official handle.

Under Secretary Zeya was joined by Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Senior Director for Democracy and Human Rights Kelly Razzouk, the statement added.

Earlier in May 2022, Zeya had called on the Dalai Lama at his residence in Dharamsala, the seat of power of the Tibetan government in exile, during her official visit to India and Nepal. (PTI)

Russian climbers reach hospital after rescue in Pakistani Himalayas



PESHAWAR, Aug 22: Two Russian climbers who were injured on the slopes of one of northern Pakistan's highest mountains reached a hospital in Peshawar on Thursday, a week after they were stranded after being hit by falling ice.

The climbers were part of a five-member team of Russian climbers that was attempting to climb one of Gasherbrum's peaks to retrieve the body of a fellow climber who died there last year when it was hit by a pile of ice on Friday.

Rescuers airlifted two of the mountaineers Monday, but two others remained stuck on the base camp because of their injuries and bad weather until on Wednesday. Akhtar Hussain, a police official in Skardu, a city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, said the Russians were transported to a hospital by ambulance, and were in stable condition.

Karrar Haidri, the secretary of the Alpine Club of Pakistan, told The Associated Press that climbers Mikhail Mironov and Sergei Mironov are getting the best medical care at a hospital in Skardu.

He said the search for the fifth climber, Sergei Nilov, had been called off as he is presumed dead.

Hussain said doctors provided medical care to the two injured climbers.

"They are sad over the death of their fifth colleague, but are thankful to the Pakistani rescuers and the army for making efforts to save their life," he said.

He said one needed only minor medical care, while the other had bruises on his arms and legs because he was hit by the pile of ice on Friday.

Haidri said the climbers were fully aware of the dangers linked to the mission when they began expedition to retrieve the body of their colleague who died in 2023 on the same mountain while trying to scale it.

Hundreds of climbers try to scale mountains in northern Pakistan every year, and accidents are common because of avalanches and sudden weather changes. This month, a Pakistani climber Murad Sadpara, 35, known for taking part in high-altitude rescue missions died during a descent from one of the country's tallest mountains in the north. (AP)

Kennedy campaign's future in question as Trump allies lobby for endorsement

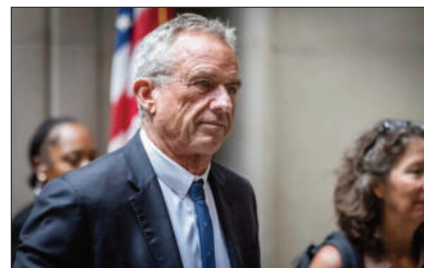
PHOENIX, Aug 22: Close allies to Donald Trump are quietly urging independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to endorse the Republican nominee if he withdraws from the campaign for the White House as soon as this week.

Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr., along with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson and GOP donor Omeed Malik are among those who have been working behind the scenes to lobby Kennedy to drop out of the race and back Trump, according to a person familiar with the efforts. The person requested anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Kennedy will speak Friday "about the present historical moment and his path forward," his campaign announced Wednesday, fueling growing speculation that he could drop out and support Trump.

Kennedy's running mate openly discussed the possibility on a podcast this week, saying the campaign was considering a move to "join forces" with Trump to limit the election chance of Kamala Harris, whose Democratic convention winds up Thursday night in Chicago.

The move would have once seemed unthinkable for Kennedy, a Democrat for most of his life and — as the nephew of President John F. Kennedy and the son of Robert F. Kennedy — a member of a



beloved Democratic dynasty.

Trump speaks from behind bulletproof glass at first outdoor rally since his attempted assassination last month, during the Republican National Convention, Kennedy's son posted and then quickly deleted a video showing a phone call between Kennedy and Trump, in which the former president appeared to try to talk Kennedy into siding with him.

Kennedy will give a speech in Phoenix, hours before Trump is scheduled to hold a rally in neighboring Glendale. A spokesperson for Kennedy, Stefanie Spear, declined to say whether he planned to drop out or why he chose Arizona for his speech.

Trump and Kennedy have been in regular contact in recent weeks, including a meeting in Milwaukee as Republicans gathered for their national convention last month.

He told CNN on Tuesday that he would

"love" an endorsement from the independent candidate, whom he called a "brilliant guy."

He also said he would "certainly" be open to Kennedy playing a role in his administration if Kennedy drops out and endorses him instead.

"He's a very smart guy. I've known him for a very long time," Trump told the network. "I didn't know he was thinking about getting out, but if he is thinking about getting out, certainly I'd be open to it."

Trump, who had previously railed against Kennedy as "the most radical left candidate in the race," was also asked by CNN if he would consider appointing Kennedy to a role in his administration if he wins in November.

"I like him a lot. I respect him a lot," Trump said. "I probably would, if something like that would happen. He's a very different kind of a guy — a very smart guy. And, yeah, I would be honored by that endorsement, certainly."

After leaving the Democratic primary to run as an independent, Kennedy built an unusually strong base of support for someone running without the backing of a major party. It was unclear exactly where his support was coming from, which worried Republicans and Democrats alike.

But since President Joe Biden ended his

reelection campaign and Democrats coalesced around Vice President Harris as their nominee, Kennedy's rise has been stunted. It looks increasingly unlikely that he will be able to make the debate stage when Trump and Harris face off next month, a moment Kennedy counted on for momentum and legitimacy. His campaign finances have also been strained.

The news comes a little over a week since a New York judge ruled that Kennedy should not appear on the ballot in the state because he listed a "sham" address on nominating petitions. Kennedy has appealed, but has faced several similar challenges around the country.

On Wednesday, he was in a courtroom in a suburb of New York City, testifying in a trial for another ballot lawsuit in the state, this one backed by the Democratic National Committee, that challenges the signatures collected by his campaign.

During a break in the court proceedings, Kennedy declined to answer questions from reporters about whether he was dropping out. He's also facing a likely legal challenge in Arizona, where last week he submitted signatures that may have been collected by a super PAC that supports him, which Kennedy's critics say is illegal coordination between a candidate and an independent political group. (AP)

A Japanese woman who loves bananas is now the world's oldest person

TOKYO, Aug 22: Tomiko Itooka, a Japanese woman, became the world's oldest living person at age 116, following the death of 117-year-old Maria Branyas, according to the Guinness World Records.

Her age and birthdate - May 23, 1908 - were confirmed by the Gerontology Research Group, which validates details of people thought to be 110 or older, and put her at the top of its World Supercentenarian Rankings List.

Itooka lives in a nursing home in the city of Ashiya, a city in Hyogo Prefecture that also confirmed her birthdate.

She assumed the title of world's oldest person after Branyas'

family announced the 117-year-old's death on Tuesday. Guinness confirmed Itooka's new status on Thursday.

When told about her becoming the oldest person, she replied, "Thank you," a phrase she also relays often to the caretakers at her home.

Itooka celebrated her birthday three

months ago, receiving flowers, a cake and a card from the mayor.

Every morning, she has a popular yogurt-flavored drink called Calpis. Her favorite food is bananas.

Born in Osaka, Itooka was a volleyball player in high school. She married at 20, and had two daughters and two sons, according to

Guinness.

Itooka managed the office of her husband's textile factory during World War II.

She lived alone in Nara after her husband died in 1979, before entering the nursing home. She climbed the 3,067-meter (10,062-foot) Mount Ontake twice, and enjoyed long hikes even after she turned 100. (AP)



Healthcare workers play a crucial role: CM Khandu Welcomes NTF to enhance security



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 22: In the wake of the heinous RG Kar Hospital crime in West Bengal that sent shivers down the spine of every citizen of India, Arunachal Pradesh CM Pema Khandu has welcomed the decision of the Central government to form a National Task Force (NTF). Khandu took to X to extend his support. He wrote, "I welcome the decision of @MoHFW_INDIA to

form a National Task Force (NTF) to formulate effective recommendations to remedy the issues of concern pertaining to safety, working conditions and well-being of medical professionals and other related matters."

Based on a mandate by the Supreme Court, the Health Ministry on Wednesday announced the formulation of a 14-member National Task Force (NTF) tasked to "formu-

late effective recommendations" for the government.

Khandu is confident the NTF will prove to be a valuable supplement to the medical sector across the nation. He wrote, "I am confident that NTF's valuable inputs and suggestions will go a long way in prevention of violence against medical professionals and providing safe working conditions to them, in creating an enforceable national protocol for dignified and safe working environment for interns, residents, senior residents, doctors, nurses and all medical professionals."

Appreciating the healthcare workers' contribution to society, he further added, "Every stakeholder engaged in the healthcare sector does a great job while treating and taking care of patients. They have a crucial role in improving our people's ease of living. It is our solemn duty to protect their dignity and become a responsible partner in creating a healthier and happier society together."

NF Railway ensures safety of passengers in Tripura



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 22: In the prevailing turbulent weather and continuous rain in Tripura, the alertness of N.F. Railway loco pilots, loco inspectors, traffic inspectors and station staff are ensuring the safety of railway passengers.

On August 21, Loco Pilot, Shri R. N. Kumar & Asst. Loco Pilot, Shri Surajit Debnath prevented a possible mishap while working in train 05676 UP Dharmanagar - Agartala Passenger Special.

The train was moving slowly through the Baramura hill ranges area with about 1000 passengers. After passing the Teliamura station the Loco Pilot and the Asst. Loco Pilot suddenly noticed an obstruction on the railway track at 10 AM, about 33 km from Agartala.

They immediately stopped the train by applying an emergency brake without loss of any time.

On physical verification, they noticed huge landslides from nearby hill slopes including mud and trees on the railway track.

As it was raining heavily at that time, they immediately communicated the situation over the phone

to their superior.

Due to the timely application of the emergency brake, the train full of passengers could be stopped about 100 m before the debris landslide.

In another similar incident today, train number 13174 Kancharjungha Express was controlled, on receiving information about a fallen tree blocking the railway track at KM 146/1-2 between Teliamura and Jirania stations.

Due to the floods, people of numerous affected areas of Tripura have sought shelter at their nearby Railway stations.

Udaipur and other stations have turned out to be a safe shelter for the flood-affected people during the deluge.

The N.F. Railway authorities have made provision for necessary assistance to the flood-affected people at the stations.

All the waiting rooms, toilets and other amenities with 24x7 drinking water provision have been made available to the affected people.

Railways authorities proactively stand with the flood-affected people taking shelter at stations until the situation turns normal.

The authority is taking utmost care for train operations due to landslides at several locations near tracks.

Trains are being monitored and operated with speed restrictions to avert any untoward incidents. Loco Pilots, Guards, and Trackmen have been alerted for any disturbances beside the tracks.

Tripura floods: Centre deploys additional NDRF teams



HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Aug 22: The Central government has mobilized helicopters, additional boats, and teams from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to assist in the ongoing relief and rescue operations in flood-hit Tripura.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah took to X, formerly known as Twitter, to announce that he had spoken with Tripura Chief Minister Prof. Dr. Manik Saha to assess the situation. "I spoke with CM Tripura, @DrManikSaha2 Ji, and reviewed the flood situation in the state. The Centre is deploying NDRF teams, along with boats and helicopters, to support the state government in its relief and rescue efforts. The Modi government stands firmly with our brothers and sisters in Tripura during this

difficult time," Shah stated.

Chief minister Dr Manik Saha also shared updates on X, expressing gratitude for the swift response from the Centre. He mentioned that arrangements were being made for helicopters to airlift stranded individuals from flood-affected areas. "I spoke to Hon'ble Union Home Minister Shri @AmitShah Ji about the grim flood situation in the state. He informed me that a total of eleven NDRF teams will be sent to Tripura from various locations in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. More boats will also be dispatched along with the NDRF teams. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Hon'ble HM for the prompt assistance provided to the people of Tripura," Saha wrote.

The Chief Minister added that the entire state government machinery has been working tirelessly to manage the unprecedented natural disaster. He also expressed his appreciation for the cooperation of public representatives, social workers, and the general public during this challenging time.

Biren Singh must be prosecuted: Kuki Zo MLAs

IMPHAL, Aug 22: Ten Kuki Zo legislators of Manipur have urged the judicial commission which is probing the ethnic violence in the northeastern state to expedite its probe in the wake of the alleged audio clip of Chief Minister N Biren Singh.

The judicial commission was set up last year under the chairmanship of former Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court, Justice Ajai Lamba.

The Manipur government has said that an audio clip, falsely claiming to be the voice of chief minister N Biren Singh, was released on social media in an attempt to derail peace initiatives in the ethnic violence-affected state.

The police began an investigation to find out the source of the purported clip in which some comments were made on the ethnic violence in the state.

The legislators in a press statement said, "We demand that the commission must expedite its process and that N Biren Singh must be prosecuted for his 'crimes' if his guilt is established. He must also be immediately debarred from the office of chief minister so that he is prevented from influencing the outcome of the probe against him."

The Kuki Zo legislators in the statement also claimed "many more statements can be heard from the leaked tapes which have been submitted to the Judicial Commission."

The legislators also urged for separate administration of the Kuki Zo community "in the form of Union territory with a legislature" for lasting peace in the region. (PTI)

RGU and ANF entered into MoU



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 22: Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) and Amazing Namaste Foundation (ANF) have officially formed a partnership by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Wednesday, with the aim of recording and safeguarding the diverse history and heritage of Northeast India.

During the MoU signing ceremony, RGU Vice Chancellor Prof. Saket Kushwaha and ANF chairman Atul Chandrakant Kulkarni, along with several officials from both RGU and the Foundation, were present.

The MoU, according to RGU PRO, paves the way for a series of collaborative ventures that concentrate on the preservation and promotion of culture within the region. The main goals include digitally restoring historical documents and artefacts, establishing research partner-

ships, and creating a youth exchange program to involve young people in cultural exchange activities.

The collaboration will also back the establishment of a memory project that aims to archive oral histories and community narratives, as well as organize festivals, exhibitions, and film screenings to showcase the region's heritage.

Furthermore, the partnership strives to generate books and publications that delve into the varied cultural landscapes of Northeast India.

The event was attended by various teaching and non-teaching members of RGU, including Prof. Uttam Kr. Pegu, Dean of the faculty of communication studies, Prof. Otem Padung, the finance officer, Prof. Kh. Kabi, head of the mass communication department, Dr. David Pertin, RGU joint registrar, and Prof. Sarit Choudhary, Dean of the faculty of humanities and social sciences.

65,400 seek shelter; death toll reaches 14 Tripura flood continues wreaking havoc

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Aug 22: The ongoing severe floods in Tripura, which began on August 19, have impacted more than 17 lakh people, with 65,400 individuals taking refuge in relief camps, while the death toll has risen to 14.

According to Revenue Secretary Brijesh Pandey, continuous and heavy rainfall over the past four days has caused river levels to remain critically high across the state.

Tripura recorded some of its highest rainfall figures in the last 24 hours on August 22, particularly in South Tripura District (Bogafa: 493.6 mm), Sepahijala District (Sonamura: 293.4 mm), West Tripura District (Agartala: 233 mm), and Gomati District (Udaipur: 155 mm).

"The entire state is reeling under the flood's impact, with Gomati, South Tripura, Unakoti, and West Tripura Districts being the most affected," said Pandey.

He described the situation as unprecedented and confirmed it is being closely monitored at the highest level of government.

Tripura Chief Minister Dr Manik Saha held a review meeting this afternoon to assess the ongoing relief efforts, with the Chief Secretary, Disaster Management Secretary, and senior officials in attendance.

State authorities are coordinating with central agencies, including the Ministry of Home Affairs



(MHA), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Indian Air Force, and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), to mitigate the disaster's effects.

River levels have risen above the danger mark at six locations in Dhalai, Khowai, South Tripura, West Tripura, North Tripura, and Unakoti Districts.

Since August 19, district authorities have set up 450 relief camps to shelter more than 65,400 individuals.

Emergency supplies such as food, drinking water, and medical aid are being distributed at these camps.

Personnel from various departments, including Rural Development, Water Resources, Power,

PWD, Forest, Police, Fire Services, and Paramilitary Forces, are working round the clock to aid affected communities.

Pandey confirmed that 14 people have died so far, with two still missing.

Meanwhile, the state's Relief, Rehabilitation, and Disaster Management Department reported significant damage to infrastructure, including 844 damaged poles, 151 transformers, 310 kilometres of conductors, and two substations. Landslides have occurred in 2,032 locations, with 1,789 already cleared, and restoration work is ongoing.

Of the 1,952 road erosion sites, 579 have been restored, and 153 bulldozers are deployed statewide

to clear debris.

Around 200 field engineers are actively working to restore services despite ongoing rainfall disruptions.

Bus and railway services have been suspended from Chandrapur, Nagerjola, and Radhanagar.

Preliminary estimates suggest that 5,000 hectares of vegetables and 1.20 lakh hectares of paddy fields remain submerged, causing significant crop damage.

To assist in rescue operations, the state has deployed 26 teams of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) from all 14 Tripura State Rifles battalions, and four teams of NDRF have been actively working in South Tripura, West Tripura, Unakoti, and Khowai Districts. An additional four NDRF teams, comprising 120 personnel airlifted from Arunachal Pradesh, have been deployed to Gomati, West Tripura, and Sepahijala Districts.

Over 2,000 volunteers from Civil Defense and Aapda Mitra are assisting with relief and rescue efforts.

The central government has also provided two helicopters for airlifting stranded people in Gomati and South Tripura districts, with aerial rescues and food drops taking place in Amarpur.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall in the state, issuing a red alert for the entire state today and for four districts tomorrow.

Schools remain closed in Aizawl



AIZAWL, Aug 22: Schools in Mizoram capital Aizawl and Kolasib district remained closed since Tuesday due to rain. The northeastern state experienced torrential rainfall since Monday triggering landslides in several places.

Public notices issued by the district administrations said that schools will remain closed on Thursday for the safety and well-being of students. Aizawl district administration in its notice said that inundation witnessed due to heavy rainfall in the past several hours has resulted in mud-fall, landslides, rock falls and other vagaries of nature in various crucial roads and locations within the district.

"The competent authority deemed appropriate to suspend attendance of school-going students for their safety and well-being," the notice said.

The decision has been made after intense deliberations and inputs from various sources and data received from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and other sources, the notice also said. State capital Aizawl experienced moderate rainfall on Thursday. Notably, no casualty has been reported so far, officials added. (PTI)

Green flag by MePGCL to release water

SHILLONG, Aug 22: Based on the IMD warning issued on Wednesday on the weather warnings for the next 7 days on rainfall, the Meghalaya Power Generation Corporation Limited (MePGCL) has commenced the release of water from the Umiam Stage I Reservoir, starting from Wednesday night.

The release is being made in a controlled manner to ensure safety and prevent downstream impacts.

The water level in the reservoir was at 3216.15 feet at the start of the release.

The MePGCL is closely monitoring the situation and will continue to adjust the gate openings as necessary to ensure safe and efficient management of the reservoir. (NNN)

WALK-IN-INTERVIEW

Engagement of Medical Officer Recruitment under Nagaon Urban(FW) and Ayushman Arugya Mandir

A Walk-in-interview will be held in the Medical and Health Recruitment Board, Assam for the recruitment for the Medical Officers.

1. Educational Qualification:-

a. Minimum Qualification MO(MBBS)

2. Remuneration:- Rs.50,000 per month

3. Age:- A candidate should not be less than 21 Years and more than 36 Years as on 01/01/2024.

4. Irrespective of category of applicants

The upper age limit is relaxable by (if applicable)-

(i) For Persons with Disabilities (PWD) by 10 years irrespective of SC/ST/OBC and General

Category of candidates as per Govt. Notification No.ABP.144/95/121 dated 28/10/2015.

The candidates must be registered under **Assam Council of Medical Registration or Medical Council of India / National Medical Commission.**

Interested eligible Candidates who are citizen of India as defined under the Constitution of India and fulfill the eligibility norms of educational qualification, experience, age, etc. may fill-up the Standard form and attend Walk-in-Interview accordingly.

The candidates have to produce the original documents for verification, at the time of scrutiny of documents, which are given below:

1. Standard Form.
2. Three copies of Passport size Photograph.
3. Age proof—Admit card of HSLC exam.
4. Mark sheets and Pass certificates of HSLC, MBBS, MD, etc.
5. Additional Qualification, if any
6. Persons with Disability certificate, as applicable.
7. Assam Council of Medical Registration/ Medical Council of India /National Medical Commission Certificate.
8. Photo identity proof (Pan Card/Passport/Voter ID Card/Driving License).
9. Caste Certificate, if required.
10. Experience Certificate, if any.

One sets of self-attested Xerox copies of the documents as mentioned above must be submitted at the time of verification.

Note:- The candidate will not be allowed to appear in the interview, if any ground of ineligibility is found at the time of scrutiny of documents.

If at any stage, the information furnished in the application or supporting documents are found to be forged/misrepresent/incomplete/false, the candidature shall be summarily rejected.

Date and Time of Interview: 06th September 2024

Venue: Office of the Joint Director of Nagaon, 782001

Janasanyog/D/4567/24/23-Aug-24

Sd/-
Joint Director of Health Services cum
Member Secretary, District Health Society, Nagaon

No.I&PR-112/FLS/2024-25/05

Dated Kokrajhar, the 22nd August, 2024

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The RO cum CHD of Information and Public Relations Department, BTC, Assam invites e-tender in two bid system affixing court fee stamp/ e-stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only from the BTC Govt. Registered firms/ Authorised Dealers empanelled with IPRD, BTC having experience in the field of Public Address System with sound technical and financial capacity for supply of PA System and FLS items during the financial year 2024-25. The Firm must have registered office in BTR.

The tender must reach the undersigned up to 11:00 P.M. on 11th September, 2024. Tender received thereafter will not be accepted. Intending Bidder(s) should submit tenders into the Tender Box kept in the office of RO cum CHD, IPRD, BTC

Intending bidder(s) may collect Tender Paper on submission of non- refundable Rs. 500/- (Rupees Five Hundred) only in the form of Demand Draft/Bank Draft/Bankers Cheque pledged in favour of Principal Secretary, Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar along with written application with seal and signature of the concerned firm on any working day during office hours till 9th September, 2024.

Sd/- RO cum CHD
Information & Public Relations
Bodoland Territorial Council, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/359

No.GDB/6th-ASFC/201/2022-23/278

TENDER NO.5 OF 2024-25 INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

Selected tenders affixing Non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty Five Paise) only with at validity period of 180 (One Hundred Eighty) days which will subsequently to be covered and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the intending Registered Contractors of all categories of the Assam PWD (Bldg. & Roads) for submitting tender for the work below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2:30 PM of 19-08-2024 to 08-09-2024 and will be opened on the date 08-08-2024 at 2:30 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx Estimated value of work	Earnest money 2% for GNL & 1% for ST/SC/OBC/MOBC	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
1	Const. of sand gravel road from Lakhi Mandir to Singimari High School connected road via, Singimari Bathou Mandir, of Rampur village , under 6 th -ASFC fund for the year 2022-23 during 2024-25	8,00,000.00	Rs. 8,000/- & Rs. 16,000/-	Rs. 300/-	3 (Three month)
2	Const. of Community Hall at Balabari, under SOPD fund for the year 2024-25	17,00,000.00	Rs. 17,000/- & Rs. 34,000/-	Rs. 600/-	3 (Three month)

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the Office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up to 11:30 AM in all working days from 19-08-2024 to 08-09-2024 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker Cheque/Bank Draft/ Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the BDO, Goreswar Development Block.

IPR(BTC)/C/2024-25/356

Sd/- Block Development Officer,
Goreswar Dev. Block, Goreswar

Memo No. DJH/24/ 2252

NOTICE

In reference to the Advertisement published vide Memo No. 1331-1j/24/1075- 1078 dated 03.05.2024 from the Office of The District & Sessions Judge, Hojai for the post of Peon (3 nos.), this is for information of all concerned that the "Provisional Select List" and "Provisional Reject List" of candidates is uploaded in the official website of Hojai District Judiciary, i.e. <https://hojai.dcourts.gov.in>.

Candidates are advised to kindly visit the above mentioned official website for further information.

Sd/-
District & Sessions Judge
Hojai, Assam
Janasanyog/D/4579/24/23-Aug-24

Congress willing to forge pre-poll alliance in J&K

'All secular forces will work together towards the restoration of peace in Jammu and Kashmir'

SRINAGAR, Aug 22: Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday expressed his willingness to forge an alliance with other opposition parties for the upcoming Jammu and Kashmir Assembly polls and termed the ruling BJP's promises to the people of the Union Territory "jumla".

Kharge, along with Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, spoke to Congress leaders and workers here on Thursday to get feedback about the party's grassroots-level preparations for the Assembly polls.

"This was the first meeting after the polls were announced... We are here to seek the views of local leaders and workers for the polls and alliances. Under Rahul Gandhi's leadership, we have taken the initiative to restore statehood for Jammu and Kashmir. We promise to work towards that," Kharge told reporters here.

He said Gandhi is interested in forging a pre-poll alliance in the Union Territory.

"Rahul Gandhi is interested in contesting the polls unitedly with



other parties in Jammu and Kashmir. We have had success as well. We have seen the results in the Lok Sabha polls. The INDIA bloc stopped a dictator from coming to power (at the Centre) with an absolute majority. This is the biggest success of the INDIA bloc," Kharge said.

The Congress president said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is worried after the Lok Sabha polls as some of the legislations it was keen on passing in Parliament have

either been withdrawn or sent to a Joint Parliamentary Committee.

He claimed that the BJP used to take advantage of its brute majority in Parliament to pass anti-people laws like those on the farming sector.

About Jammu and Kashmir, Kharge said not a single promise made by the BJP to the people of the region before elections has been fulfilled.

"Not a single promise made to the people of Jammu and Kashmir

before polls has been kept. They are all jumla," Kharge said.

The saffron party downgraded the erstwhile state into a Union Territory and the people here were not given any rights, he said, adding that there is no legislative council, no panchayat or municipality. "The people have been kept away from democracy," Kharge said.

He said the Assembly polls have been announced in Jammu and Kashmir only because of the Supreme Court's direction that the election be held by September 30.

"I want to tell the BJP and (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi sahib that try as you might, you will not be successful in suppressing the voice of people. You cannot suppress their aspirations. In a democracy, the voice that matters is the voice of people, and we will continue to support the voice of people."

"We will be with the people. We will fight shoulder to shoulder with them for their wishes and aspirations. This is our promise," the Congress chief said.

He said if elected to power, the Congress will work on job creation, bringing investments and giving a boost to horticulture and tourism as well as small-scale industries.

Kharge also said all secular forces will work together towards the restoration of peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

"We want peace and prosperity to be restored in Jammu and Kashmir. There is violence on the border, infiltration and terror. They (BJP) used to say that when Article 370 (of the Constitution) goes, it will stop terror and bring prosperity. Where is the prosperity? Unemployment is increasing, there is price rise and their atrocities are also increasing across the country," he said.

The Congress president also said Gandhi will travel to all the poll-bound states.

The Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir will be held in three phases on September 18, September 25 and October 1. The counting of votes will be taken up on October 4. (PTI)

K'taka govt to give aid & advice to Govt to act on requests for prosecution of Kumaraswamy, 3 others



BENGALURU, Aug 22: The Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday decided to give "aid and advice" to Governor Thaaawarchand Gehlot to act on requests seeking sanction for prosecution against JD(S) leader and Union Minister H. D. Kumaraswamy and three former BJP Ministers including mining baron G. Janardhan Reddy. The Congress government's move comes within a week of the Governor granting sanction for prosecution of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allotment 'scam' on August 16.

"To take decisions in the pending cases at the earliest and to smoothen the judicial process, under article 163 of the Constitution the Cabinet can give aid and advice to the Governor. Using it, the Cabinet has given its approval to give the Governor aid and advice," Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H. K. Patil said.

Briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting, he said: "the advice will be sent to the Governor."

"Out of the four cases that are pending regarding which we have given aid and advice, in two of these cases (Janardhan Reddy and Kumaraswamy) the charge sheet has been filed..." he added.

Asked whether the Governor can reject the Cabinet's aid and advice, Patil said: "According to us, he is bound by our advice; his discretion is limited. I am sure he shall use his discretion very judiciously."

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

Patil said several petitions seeking his sanction for prosecution are pending before the Governor, including those submitted by the investigating agencies under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988; in some of these cases charge sheets have been filed.

"Sanctions have been sought under section 19 of Prevention of Corruption Act and under the provisions of criminal procedure code, which is now Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS) -- section 197 and 218, also some applications are under section 17 A of the Prevention of Corruption Act," he said.

The Minister said, out of these petitions, special are against -- (former BJP Minister) Shashikala Jolle against whom application was submitted on December 9, 2021 by the Lokayukta police seeking prior approval under section 17 A of PC Act, and (former BJP Minister) Murugesh Nirani against whom application was submitted on February 26, 2024 for prior approval under section 17 A of PC Act.

The third is that of Kumaraswamy, against whom application was submitted on November 21, 2023, according to which approval for sanction was sought section 19 of the PC Act and provisions of BNS, he said, adding, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) had filed a charge sheet, and the Governor had sought a clarification on the case July 29, 2024 and SIT had provided required clarification on August 16, 2024.

The fourth pertains to Reddy, against whom an application was submitted on May 13, 2024 seeking sanction under section 19 of the PC Act and provisions of BNS, and a charge sheet has also been submitted in this case, Patil added. (PTI)

Day after EC freeze on recruitment results, Congress slams 'anti-youth' BJP govt in Haryana

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: A day after the Election Commission barred Haryana authorities from announcing the results of an ongoing recruitment process, the Congress on Thursday lashed out at the BJP and alleged that the "anti-youth" government in the state was remembering the youth after "harassing" them for 10 years.

To ensure a level-playing field in the assembly polls in Haryana, the Election Commission on Wednesday barred authorities in the state from announcing the results of ongoing recruitment processes for police constables and teachers till the election was over.

The commission took cognisance of a complaint from Congress general secretary Jai Ram Ramesh regarding violation of the model code of conduct in the process of recruitment against 5,600 vacancies for the post of constable in the Haryana Police, 76 posts of two categories of teachers by the Haryana Staff Selection Commission (HSSC) and recruitment for various posts by the Haryana Public Service Commission (HPSC).

Ramesh said in a post in Hindi on



X, "The double-break BJP government of Haryana harassed the state during the last 10 years, kept recruitment on hold and whatever little recruitment was made was given to their own people. The talented youth of Haryana were exploited in the name of Kaushal Rozgar Nigam ie government contracts."

"There was a lot of rigging in government recruitment, papers were leaked... Keeping the elections in mind, on the day of announcement of the elections, to lure youths, recruitment was announced that would never fructify," he said.

"Today, when the Election Commission has reminded about the code of conduct, the anti-youth government has remembered the youth," he said.

The assembly elections in Haryana will be held in a single phase on October 1 and the results declared on October 4.

The Election Commission on Wednesday said the model code of instructions did not bar the continuing regular recruitment process or promotion through the Union Public Service Commission, the state public service commission or the staff selection commission or any other statutory authority but "recruitment through non-statutory bodies will require prior clearance of the commission".

After ascertaining the facts from the state government and in view of the existing model code of conduct instructions, the poll panel found no violation of the code in the ongoing recruitment processes by the HSSC and the HPSC.

The commission found that the recruitment processes were initiated before the announcement of the election on August 16 and was within the existing poll code instructions, where statutory authorities can continue their work. (PTI)

Actor-politician Vijay unveils party flag

CHENNAI, Aug 22: Popular Tamil film actor-turned-politician Vijay unveiled the flag of his political party - Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam - on Thursday and hoisted it at his party headquarters in Panaiyur near here.

The two-coloured flag with maroon on top and bottom, has yellow in the middle with a motif of two fighting tuskars on either side of the Vaagai flower.

The "vaagai" flower is also known as the Albizia lebbek. The word "vaagai" means "victory" in Tamil.

The unveiling of the flag and also the official launch of the party anthem heralds a new chapter in Tamil Nadu politics marked by the entry of the Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), which is gearing up to face the 2026 Assembly elections in the state.

Though Vijay announced the launch of his political outfit in February, he chose not to contest the 2024 Lok Sabha elections nor did it support any party during the polls.

While unveiling the TVK flag, the top actor took a pledge along with his party workers.

"We will always appreciate the fighters who fought and sacrificed their lives for the liberation of our country, and countless soldiers who fought tirelessly for the rights of our people from Tamil soil," the pledge read.

The party took a vow to remove the differences in the name of caste, religion, gender, place of birth and also to create awareness among the people and strive for equal opportunities and equal rights for all.

"There's an interesting story of historical significance behind the (party) flag. I will explain it along with party principles and plan of action at the upcoming state-level conference," Vijay said, addressing the party workers.

"This is not a mere party flag. I see it as a flag of the victory of Tamil Nadu's future generations," he said at the event which was also attended by his parents, film director S. A. Chandrasekhar and Shobha Chandrasekhar.

He called upon the party workers to strive hard in the coming years and uplift the people.

The TVK's first state-level conference will be announced soon. (PTI)

Govt can collect caste-wise data of OBCs by adding extra column in Census questionnaire: Cong

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: The Congress on Thursday suggested that the government can collect caste-wise data of the OBC population in the next Census by just adding an extra column as every such exercise since 1951 has been collecting data on the population of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The opposition party said such a move will give more solid foundation to affirmative action programmes.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jai Ram Ramesh shared on X a report in The Hindu which said the Union government is yet to take a call on conducting the next Census exercise but active discussion is on to expand the data collection to include caste enumeration.

"India has been conducting a Census regularly every ten years. The last such Census was due in 2021. The continuing failure to conduct this 2021 Census has meant that vital information necessary for economic planning and for social justice programmes has not been collected," Ramesh said on X.

As a result, for instance, over 12 crore Indians have been denied due benefits under the National Food Security Act, 2013 or PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, he said.

Now there are reports that the Union Government may conduct this long overdue and unacceptably delayed Census over the next few months, he said.

"Every Census since 1951 has been collecting data caste-wise on the population of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Without any difficulty, just by adding an extra column, the Census questionnaire can also collect caste-wise data of the OBC population as well," he said. This will fulfil the widespread demand for a caste census and will give more solid foundations to affirmative action programmes, he said. (PTI)

Karnataka Deputy CM Shivakumar appears before Lokayukta police in DA case probe

BENGALURU, Aug 22: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar on Thursday appeared before the Lokayukta police for a probe in connection with a disproportionate assets (DA) case against him.

The Lokayukta police had in February registered a case against Shivakumar, following the Congress government withdrawing consent to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe the DA case against him on November 23, 2023, and referring the case to it.

Speaking to reporters after appearing before the Lokayukta, Shivakumar said: "Lokayukta had issued summons yesterday, I couldn't appear as I was on a visit to Al-matti. So I had requested it for today and they had given me time today. For about three hours they have questioned me, they have inquired. I have answered them. They have sought for more documents, so I will submit them."

"After studying things", the Lokayukta will once again issue him a notice to appear, he said. "One thing is that CBI is better than them (Lokayukta). They are asking a number of questions and on different things. The CBI has not asked me anything yet, they haven't called me yet. But they (Lokayukta) have called me and are troubling me."

Noting that the case has been transferred by the State government from CBI to Lokayukta, Shivakumar said Lokayukta has been probing the case since the last six months. "...CBI should have stopped the investigation, but they have not stopped. They are harassing all my people. They have still not summoned me, but they are harassing a lot of my friends and relatives. More than hundred people have been harassed. Now these people (Lokayukta) have

also started in the same way," he added.

The Supreme Court on July 15 dismissed a petition filed by Shivakumar challenging the CBI's FIR against him in the DA case. The Supreme Court bench of Justices Bela M. Trivedi and S. C. Sharma had said it was not inclined to interfere with the Karnataka High Court order.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by Shivakumar against the October 19, 2023 order of the High Court which rejected his plea. The HC had also directed the CBI to conclude the investigation and file the report within three months. The CBI has alleged that Shivakumar amassed assets disproportionate to his known sources of income between 2013 and 2018. He was a minister in the then Congress government during this period.

The FIR was filed by the CBI on September 3, 2020. Shivakumar challenged the FIR in the High Court in 2021.

The previous BJP government had granted sanction to the CBI to prosecute Shivakumar, following which an FIR was lodged against him and investigation undertaken on alleged charges of disproportionate assets.

The current Karnataka cabinet headed by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on November 23 last year held that the previous BJP government's move to give consent to the CBI to investigate the DA case against Shivakumar was not in accordance with law and decided to withdraw the sanction. Subsequently a government order was issued in this regard.

Based on the Income Tax Department's search operations in Shivakumar's home and offices in 2017, the Enforcement Directorate started its own probe against him. (PTI)

Erased line in CM's wife's letter to MUDA will be looked into, if necessary: Home Minister



BENGALURU, Aug 22: Amid opposition charges of a cover-up and tampering with documents, Karnataka Home Minister G. Parameshwara on Thursday said the alleged erasure of a line using a whitener in a 2014 letter written by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife B. M. Parvathi to the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) will be looked into, if necessary.

The Congress government on July 14 constituted a single member inquiry commission under former High Court Judge Justice P. N. Desai to probe the MUDA alternative site allotment 'scam'.

"It needs to be looked into. I don't know. They (opposition) have made a statement. The SIT or the investigation agency, will look into it if necessary," Parameshwara told reporters, in response to a question.

In the letter, Parvathi had sought alternative land in lieu of her 3.16 acres on which MUDA had formed a layout.

Opposition BJP and JD(S) claimed that whitener was used to erase a line in which Parvathi specifically sought alternative land in the posh Vijayanagar Layout.

Since the allegations surfaced against him, Siddaramaiah, denying any wrong doing, has repeatedly maintained that his wife did not seek alternative plots in any specific locality.

"The Desai commission has begun its work, in case any one gets such information whether media or from public, they can say it before the commission instead of making public statements and creating confusion," Parameshwara added.

Karnataka Governor Thaaawarchand Gehlot on August 16 granted sanction for prosecution of Siddaramaiah in connection with the MUDA

maiah in connection with the 'scam', giving a major jolt to the nearly 15 month old Congress government.

Parameshwara responded to a question on Gehlot using bulletproof car for the first time on Wednesday since assuming office in 2021 and his security being reinforced, amid mounting tensions between the ruling Congress and the Governor's office.

"We don't know about threat the Governor has, we are not aware as to who told him about the threat perception. He has sought for security, it has been given, which he is entitled to," he said.

Further noting that BJP is protesting seeking Siddaramaiah's resignation, the Minister said, it is their right to protest, but there is no question of the Chief Minister resigning and there is no need for it.

On Special Investigation Team of the Lokayukta seeking prosecution sanction from the Governor against JD(S) leader and Union Minister H. D. Kumaraswamy, he said it was because "illegalities have happened." "If it (Lokayukta's action) is called illegal, nothing can be said."

To a question on BJP and JD(S) alleging that the government was trying to "safeguard" the CM, he said: "Why does the CM have to be safeguarded? Is he not safe? He is very safe. What has happened to say he is unsafe? If we do one meeting it is being alleged that attempts are being made to safeguard the CM."

"At the most we might do a resolution at a Congress legislature meeting and say that we all stand by the CM. In the cabinet we have said that we all stand by the CM. What's wrong with it?" Parameshwara added. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday conferred the first-ever Vigyan Ratna Puraskar -- India's top most science award -- on noted biochemist and former director of the Bangalore-based Indian Institute of Science Govindrajan Padmanabhan.

At an award ceremony in the Ganatantra Mandapam of Rashtrapati Bhawan, the President also conferred 13 Vigyan Shri Puraskar, 18 Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prizes and one Vigyan Team award, marking the first investiture ceremony for science awards.

The team of scientists and engineers who worked on the Chandrayaan-3 mission were honoured with the Vigyan Team award, which was received by project director of the mission P. Veeramuthuvel.

All the awardees received a medal and a citation for their outstanding achievements in their respective fields.

Annapurni Subramaniam, director of Bengaluru-based Indian



Institute of Astrophysics; Anandharamakrishnan C, director of Thiruvananthapuram-based National Institute of Interdisciplinary Science and Technology; Avesh Kumar Tyagi, director of the chemistry group at the Bhabha Atomic Research Institute; Prof. Syed Wajih Ahmad Naqvi of Lucknow-based CSIR-National Botanical Research Institute were among the 13 recipients of the Vigyan Shri

awards.

Biologist Umesh Varshney from Bangalore-based Indian Institute of Science; Prof. Jayant Bhalchandra Udgaonkar of the Pune-based Indian Institute of Science Education and Research; Prof. Bhim Singh, Emeritus Professor of IIT-Delhi; Sanjay Behari, director of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute of Medical Sciences and Technology; Prof. Adimurthi Adi of IIT-Kanpur,

Rahul Mukherjee of IIM-Kolkata also received the Vigyan Shri awards.

Physicists Naba Kumar Mondal of Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics and Lakshmanan Muthuswamy of the Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli; Prof. Rohit Srivastava, IIT Bombay also received the Vigyan Shri awards.

The Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar awards were given to climate scientist Roxy Mathew Koll of the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology; Prof. Vivek Polshettiwar of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and Prof. Vishal Rai of IISER-Bhopal; Krishna Murthy S. L. of Indian Institute of Rice Research and Swarup Kumar Parida of National Institute of Plant Genome Research.

Prof. Radhakrishnan Mahalakshmi of IISER-Bhopal, Aravind Penmasta of IISc, Bengaluru; Abhilash of the CSIR-National Metallurgical Laboratory, Jamshedpur; Radha Krishna Ganti of IIT-Madras; Purbi Saikia

of Central University of Jharkhand; Bappi Paul of the National Forensic Sciences University, Gandhinagar were among the Vigyan Yuva awards.

Pragya Dhruv Yadav of the Pune-based ICMR-National Institute of Virology, who played a key role in development and evaluation of Covid-19 vaccines; Prof. Jitendra Kumar Sahu of Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh; Mahesh Ramesh Kamde of IISc, Bangalore were among the recipients of the Vigyan Yuva awards.

Urbasi Sinha of the Raman Research Institute, Bangalore; Digendranath Swain of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram; Prashant Kumar of the Space Applications Centre, Ahmedabad; and Prof. Prabhu Rajagopal of IIT-Madras also received the Vigyan Yuva awards.

These new sets of awards -- Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar -- were instituted last year by the government after scrapping all existing science awards. (PTI)

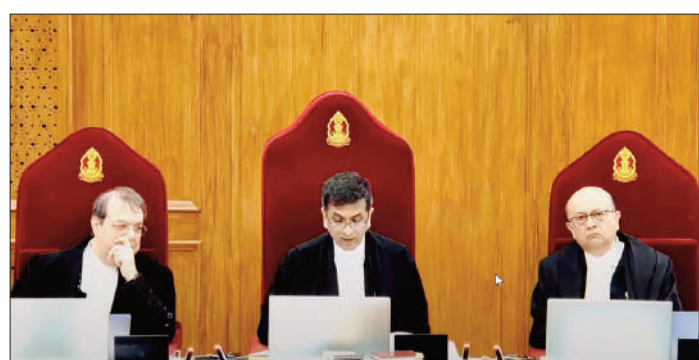
IMA to file plea to intervene in SC's suo motu case on rape-murder of Kolkata medic

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: The IMA on Thursday decided it will file an interlocutory application to intervene in the Supreme Court's suo motu case on the alleged rape and murder of a junior doctor in a state-run hospital in Kolkata.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) headquarters is also preparing the documents to appear before the task force formed by the court to formulate a protocol for ensuring safety and security of healthcare professionals.

The alleged rape and murder of the junior doctor in the seminar hall of the West Bengal government-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital triggered nationwide protests that have affected non-emergency services in several health facilities.

"IMA will be filing an IA (interlocutory application) before the Honourable Supreme Court in the suo motu intervention case. IMA HQ is preparing the necessary documents



to appear before the special task force," an IMA communication to its officials, including those at its state and local branches, said.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday took suo motu cognisance of the case and constituted a 10-member National Task Force (NTF) to formulate a protocol for ensuring safety and security of doctors and other healthcare professionals.

Terming the incident as "horrific", the apex court had excoriated the state government over the delay in filing of the FIR and allowing miscreants to vandalise the state-run facility.

In the communication, the IMA said it held a meeting with resident doctors' associations (RDA) in Delhi on Wednesday.

"We gave our assessment of the

situation to them. IMA supports the RDAs and will have real-time sharing of information and frequent consultations," it said.

The IMA said it attended the Supreme Court hearing in the case on Tuesday and Thursday, and announced its decision to file the interlocutory application.

Separate teams are being formed to sensitise and update the members of the task force, it said.

The communication urged IMA local branches to meet members of Parliament of their respective areas immediately and press for a central law to check violence against healthcare workers at their workplaces.

The IMA on Wednesday wrote to Union Health Minister J P Nadda, highlighting the urgent need for bringing the law to deal with attacks on medics, and pointing out that a special exigency exists in relation to violence on doctors and hospitals.

It has also sought Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's "benign" intervention in the realising their demands that includes a central law to check violence against healthcare personnel and declaring hospitals safe zones with mandatory security entitlements.

In its communication to its officials, the IMA said, "The state branches are independent to arrange appropriate protests, meetings and campaigns for the central law. IMA-JDN (junior doctors' network) of respective states should coordinate their actions with RDAs of the states." The struggle for the law continues and the end point remains the proclamation of an ordinance, it said. The indefinite protest by resident doctors here against the Kolkata incident entered its 11th day on Thursday despite the Supreme Court requesting protesters to resume work. Patient services in hospitals across Delhi have been severely affected by the protest. (PTI)

Solvent leak could have triggered fire in AP pharma unit: Official

ATCHUTAPURAM (ANDHRA PRADESH), Aug 22: A suspected solvent leakage could have triggered a blaze in a pharma unit here that has killed 17 persons, a senior official said on Thursday.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu visited the injured persons at a hospital in Visakhapatnam and announced ex-gratia of Rs one crore to the kin of victims. He also assured necessary precautions to prevent such incidents in future.

Anakapalli district Collector Vijaya Krishnan told PTI there was no rise in the death toll which stood at 17 following the accident on Wednesday.

"The actual cause is yet to be ascertained," she said, adding preliminary assessment pointed to solvent leakage from a pipe which fell on an electric panel, leading to the fire accident.

Vijaya Krishnan observed that a suspected solvent leakage could have triggered the blaze in the plant of Escientia Advanced Sciences Pvt Ltd here, leading to the death of 17 persons and injuries to 33. The Anakapalli district Collector told PTI that there was no rise in the death toll which stood at 17 following the accident on Wednesday.

"The actual cause is yet to be ascertained," she said, adding preliminary assessment pointed to solvent leakage from a pipe which fell on an electricity panel, leading to the fire accident.

The Chief Minister, who met the injured persons undergoing treatment at a hospital, said ₹ 50 lakh would be given to severely injured workers and ₹ 25 lakh to the injured persons.

"I met the injured persons of the Atchutapuram pharma company accident in a Visakhapatnam hospital and instilled confidence in

them and their families. I gave the assurance to come to the rescue of victims' families," Naidu said in a post on X.

Promising to take necessary precautions to avoid these kinds of accidents in future, the CM wished for the speedy recovery of the workers undergoing treatment.

Though it is being reported the accident occurred due to a reactor blast, officials said when solvent oil was being pumped from one floor to another it led to leakage and resulted in a blaze followed by a large explosion, according to a post on 'X' by the Office of the Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, K Pawan Kalyan.

Relatives of the affected workers continue to wait anxiously at the pharma company, eager to know the fate of their loved ones.

"I want my father back and this company removed..." a minor girl told a vernacular news channel, referring to her father, who was employed in the firm.

The sister of a victim complained that authorities were not showing where her brother was while a sobbing elderly woman demanded the return of her son-in-law. Harrowing scenes unfolded with injured workers -- their skin ripped and peeling off, bodies soaked in blood -- being shifted to hospitals in ambulances after the incident occurred at 2.15 pm on Wednesday at Escientia Advanced Sciences Pvt Ltd.

The company, which manufactures intermediate chemicals and active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) commenced production in April 2019 with an investment of ₹ 200 crore.

It is located on a 40-acre campus in the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation's multi-product SEZ at the Atchutapuram cluster. (PTI)

Ayodhya gang-rape accused Moid Khan's shopping complex demolished

AYODHYA (UP), Aug 22: The district administration on Thursday bulldozed a shopping complex here belonging to Moid Khan, a gang-rape accused alleged by the BJP to be a member of the Samajwadi Party.

Ayodhya police on July 30 arrested Moid Khan, who ran a bakery in Bhadarsa Nagar of Purakalandar police station area of the district, and his employee Raju Khan for allegedly raping the 12-year-old girl two months ago and recording the act.

The incident came to light when recently a medical examination revealed that the victim was pregnant.

The bulldozers started demolishing the shopping complex in Bhadarsa town around 1:30 PM. According to the police, the shopping complex was vacant and a branch of a bank operating there was shifted before the demolition.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Sohawal Tehsil A K Saini said, "The shopping complex of Moid Khan was built on government land. So action was taken to demolish the unauthorized building."

Heavy security arrangements were put in place in Bhadarsa town with the deployment of provincial armed constabulary and civil police to ensure that law and order is maintained, officials said.

On August 3, the Ayodhya district administration demolished Moid Khan's bakery that was allegedly built illegally over a pond. BJP leaders, including Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, have alleged that Moid Khan is a member of the Samajwadi Party and is part of the team of Faizabad MP Awadhesh Prasad. However, Akhilesh Yadav, in a statement, had said, "Without a DNA test in the Bhadarsa case of Ayodhya, BJP's allegation will be considered biased." The BJP hit back, alleging the SP is defending a "paedophile" and showing its "boys will be boys mindset" while leaders of the INDIA bloc are "silent". (PTI)

ITBP gets cadre officer as ADG in rare appointment

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Sanjeev Raina, a 1987-batch ITBP officer, has been appointed Additional Director General (ADG) in the India-China LAC guarding force, only the second time when a non-IPS officer has been elevated to this post in the force. An order issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Wednesday said Raina, serving as an Inspector General (IG) at the force's central sector

headquartered in Bhopal, is being elevated to the ADG rank apart from another officer, IG Jaspal Singh, for the panel year 2024. However, Raina, 59, will serve in the new post for just over a month as he is scheduled to retire next month. A rank piping ceremony was held at the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) headquarters on Lodhi Road here on Thursday in the presence of DG Rahul Rasgotra and

other senior officers.

Raina has now been posted as the ADG (western command) of the ITBP headquartered in Chandigarh, the order said. The formation looks after the deployment of the force along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh apart from supervising units located in Punjab, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir. (PTI)



NEW DELHI, Aug 22: In a bid to sustainable river management, a Smart Laboratory on Clean Rivers (SLCR) has been developed at IIT-BHU to rejuvenate small rivers through innovative and sustainable approaches, the Jal Shakti ministry said.

This initiative, part of the Green Strategic Partnership between India and Denmark, aims to rejuvenate small rivers through innovative and sustainable approaches, the ministry said in an official statement.

The SLCR project is designed to rejuvenate the Varuna River, leveraging cutting-edge technology and international expertise.

With an initial funding of Rs 16.80 crore from Ministry of Jal Shakti and an additional grant of Rs 5 crore from Denmark, the project aims to create

a collaborative platform for government bodies, academic institutions and local communities to develop and implement solutions for clean river water. A hybrid lab model will be established at IIT-BHU, coupled with an on-field living lab at the Varuna River. This model will allow for real-world testing and scaling of solutions aimed at improving river

health, the statement said. The SLCR's institutional framework includes a robust appraisal mechanism to ensure excellence and diligence in project execution.

The Indo-Danish Joint Steering Committee (JSC), the highest authority within the SLCR, will provide strategic guidance and review the project's progress. Additionally, a Proj-

ect Review Committee (PRC), comprising members from the National Mission on Clean Ganga (NMCNG), Central Water Commission (CWC), Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), IIT-BHU and Denmark's Urban Sector Counsellor, will oversee quality control at the project level.

Coordination efforts will be managed by the Multi-Stakeholder Working Group (MSWG), chaired by the district magistrate of Varanasi and co-chaired by representatives from NMCNG and IIT-BHU.

The SLCR Secretariat, a joint establishment of NMCNG and IIT-BHU, will handle day-to-day operations, project development and knowledge dissemination.

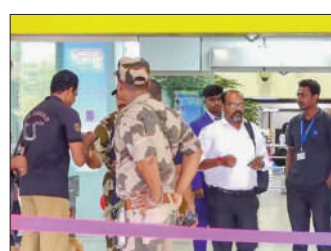
The Joint Steering Committee has already cleared four key projects under the SLCR initia-

tive. Among them is the development of a Decision Support System (DSS) for water management aimed at analysing basin water dynamics through advanced hydrological models and data analytics.

This project, expected to last two to three years, will facilitate real-time monitoring and scenario simulations to support holistic planning and effective water management.

Another vital project focuses on the characterisation of emerging pollutants in the Varuna River. Over the next 18 months, advanced analytical techniques will be employed to identify and quantify contaminants, creating a comprehensive fingerprint library for water quality monitoring and proposing effective remediation strategies, the statement said. (PTI)

Bomb threat scare on AI flight Thiruvananthapuram airport put on high alert



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Aug 21: Thiruvananthapuram international airport was placed on high alert on Thursday morning after a bomb threat message was found on an Air India flight from Mumbai, prompting an extensive security check of the plane before the emergency was later withdrawn.

The emergency status was withdrawn at around 12.10 pm, according to airport sources who declined to confirm whether the threat was a hoax.

Police officers from the Valiyathura police station arrived at the airport to investigate the incident. Earlier in the morning, the pilot of the aircraft informed the ATC about the threat after a "Bomb in flight" message, written on a tissue paper, was found in the washroom of the plane, the sources said.

The bomb threat was communicated by the pilot at 7.30 am as the

aircraft approached the Thiruvananthapuram airport, the sources said.

Subsequently, a full emergency was declared at the airport at 7.36 am, they said.

Thereafter, the aircraft with 135 passengers on-board landed safely at the airport around 8 am and was moved to an isolation bay.

The passengers were evacuated by around 8.44 am and security agencies, including a bomb detection squad, inspected the aircraft for any explosive devices, the sources said.

As a result, the passengers waited at the airport for their luggage to be delivered, they said. Meanwhile, Air India, in a statement, said that a specific security alert was detected on flight AI 657 during cruise from Mumbai to Thiruvananthapuram and "the crew carried out all the laid down security drills keeping passenger safety as top priority."

"All passengers and crew disembarked safely. Air India accords top priority to the safety of its passengers and crew," an airline spokesperson said.

"There has been no impact on life. Airport operations are currently uninterrupted," the airport sources said. (PTI)

Bodies of trainee, instructor found in dam as search continues for missing aircraft in Jharkhand



JAMSHEDPUR, Aug 22: The bodies of the trainee pilot and his instructor who were on board the two-seater aircraft that went missing after taking off from Jharkhand's Jamshedpur were found in the Chandil dam on Thursday, officials said.

The trainer aircraft, a Cessna 152, went missing after taking off from the Sonari aerodrome on Tuesday morning, following which a mega search operation was launched in the nearby areas, including the reservoir of the dam, they said.

While the body of trainee pilot Shubhrodeep Dutta, a resident of Adityapur, was found in the morning, that of pilot-in-command Captain Jeet Satru Anand who hailed from Patna was found later in the day, they added.

A 19-member team of the Indian Navy, which was brought in from Visakhapatnam, was continuing the search for the missing aircraft, though it was affected by inclement weather, officials said.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has started

an investigation along with the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), Directorate of Flying Training (DFT) and Directorate of Airworthiness (DAW) into the incident, they said.

Alchemist Aviation, which owned and operated the aircraft registered as VT-TAJ, in a statement said it was too early to comment about the reasons for the crash.

"The aircraft had 80 litres of fuel in it with an endurance of 4 hours 30 minutes, and the flying time was scheduled to be 1 hour," it said, adding that the plane lost contact with the Jamshedpur Air Traffic Control Tower (ATC) around 11.10 am on Tuesday.

The aircraft was in an airworthy condition with an airworthiness certificate issued by DGCA and was fitted with an engine manufactured by the original equipment manufacturer (OEM), it said.

"The make and model of the engine manufacturer is Lycoming Engines, Oliver St, Williamsport, PA 17701, USA. The aircraft has a life span of 30,000 hours out of

which it has completed only 16,000 hours. It is pertinent to mention here that we directly purchase engines only from Lycoming Engines, USA. We do not use locally overhauled engines," it said.

A search was launched in the dam after a pair of shoes was found floating that was subsequently recovered and identified, it added.

"This led us to the fear that the point of incidence would be in the dam itself. The initial search was conducted by Tata Steel's helicopter and with our own aircraft with all our efforts. Subsequently, the weather deteriorated and the operation was resumed by land vehicles and the local police were informed. The local government authorities were then informed and a massive search and rescue operation was launched with the help of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)," the company said.

The Indian Navy was then called for help and it deployed a Sonic Navigation and Ranging (SONAR) device, which would assist in identifying the exact position of the incident, it said.

"In this hour of distress, we stand with the family of our dear pilots who were involved in this incident. We mourn the loss of the pilots, which has been the biggest loss for us yet. May god give strength to their bereaved families. It has been an irreparable loss for us in all the years of existence," the company said.

Inclement weather hampered the search operations in the afternoon, officials said, adding that it would resume once conditions improve. (PTI)

Delhi Police busts AI Qaeda terror module



NEW DELHI, Aug 22: The Delhi Police on Thursday claimed to have busted an AI Qaeda terror module after detaining 14 people from Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

After receiving intelligence inputs, an operation was conducted along with the police forces of the states, officials said.

"The module, as per current state of operations, was being led by one Dr. Ishtiyak of Ranchi (Jharkhand), and it was aspiring to declare 'khilafat' and execute serious terrorist activities within the country," a Delhi Police statement said. The members of the terror module were trained, including in handling weapons, at various locations, it said.

The statement said six people were detained from Bhiwadi in Rajasthan while they were undergoing training to handle weapons, and eight from Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh for questioning, it said. They are being interrogated and additional detentions are anticipated. Raids are being conducted to recover arms, ammunition and documents, the officials said. (PTI)

BOGIE CLEANING AND PAINTING OF ICF COACHES IN DIBRUGARH

Tender Notice No.: DBWS-NIET-09-2024-25 Dated: 19-08-2024; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Name of Work:** Bogie Cleaning & Painting of ICF coaches during POH & IOH at Dibrugarh Workshop for 2 years. **Approximate cost of the work:** ₹9,30,744/-; **Bid Security:** ₹18,600/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 12:00 hrs. and opening at 12:30 hrs. on 10-09-2024.** The complete information about the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 12:00 hrs. of 10-09-2024 in website <http://www.irops.gov.in>.

CWM, Dibrugarh
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a Smile"

ENGINEERING WORKS

E-TENDER NOTICE NO. 24 of 2024: **Date:** 20-08-2024; E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Tender No.:** DENGHY-15-2024. **Name of work & Location:** At Pandu: Dy. CMM/Pandu office complex: (a) Construction and repair to road and drainage system. (b) Replacement of worn out/leaky roofings/CGI/AC Sheets) of different wards/godown including provision of industrial flooring, false ceiling, ranking system etc. (c) Construction of scrap bin, development of scrap yards including other ancillary development work. **Tender Value:** ₹6,88,29,131.70; **Earnest Money:** ₹4,94,200.00. **E-tender will be closed at 13:00 hrs. on 12-09-2024 and will be opened at 13:00 hrs. on 12-09-2024.** For details please visit www.irops.gov.in.
Dy. Chief Engineer/Estimate, Maligaon
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a Smile"

Auto, taxi drivers begin 2-day strike in Delhi-NCR

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Commuters in Delhi-NCR faced a tough time as taxi and autorickshaw drivers began their two-day strike on Thursday demanding better compensation from cab aggregator services.

Taxi and auto unions said inadequate compensation coupled with aggregators launching bike taxi services has hit their livelihood.

Eighty per cent of autorickshaws and taxis are off the road in the national capital, Delhi Auto Taxi Transport Congress Union (DATTCU) president Kishan Verma claimed and announced that a protest will be held at the Jantar Mantar.

Anil Pradhan, a cab driver, demanded a ban on bike taxis that offer services using non-commercial numberplates. "The government should step in and ban the commercial plying of vehicles with non-commercial numberplates. It is becoming difficult to make ends meet," he said.

Adarsh Tiwari, another cab driver, said, "The companies offer us very less rate for our services. Due to this, we are unable to pay the installments of our vehicles and meet other expenses. We are unable to ensure good education for our children and sufficient food for our families."

People took to social media to complaint about delay in getting cabs and cancellations.(PTI)



Morally ambiguous characters more interesting: Bill Skarsgard on 'The Crow'

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Hollywood star Bill Skarsgard, who is playing the lead role in the upcoming film "The Crow", says he is drawn to movies that explore conflicts within its characters.

Skarsgard, who is the son of Stellan Skarsgard and brother to actors Alexander, Gustaf and Valter Skarsgard, is popular for essaying the role of Pennywise the Dancing Clown in the horror movie "It" and its sequel. He was also the lead villain in "John Wick: Chapter 4".

In "The Crow", a reboot of the 1994 cult movie of the same name, the Swedish actor stars as Eric as well as the titular Crow, a musician who is resurrected and decides to avenge his and his fiancée's death.

"Morally ambiguous characters are more interesting to me than the traditional, straightforward, kind of black and white hero archetype. The more conflict within the hero, the more interesting."

"That's the kind of movie that I'm drawn to-

wards watching as well... If it's too black and white, it doesn't feel truthful to me," the 34-year-old actor told PTI in an international roundtable.

"The Crow" directed by Rupert Sanders will be released on August 30 in India by PVRI-NOX Pictures.

The 1994 original movie, which was directed by Alex Proyas, featured Brandon Lee, son of martial artist and star Bruce Lee, in his last film role. Brandon Lee, who was 28, died in an on-set accident while filming a key scene that involved him being shot.

Skarsgard said he watched Proyas' movie starring Brandon Lee and carried it "in spirit" but ultimately he wanted to play the character in his own way.

"This is the only way I know how to approach something, which is my way. This is a new story... Rupert's version of Eric was very different from the original. And that was the point," he added. (PTI)

People spend their lives waiting for projects like 'Stree 2', 'Jubilee': actor Aparshakti

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Coming on the set of "Stree 2" right after finishing "Jubilee" took some adjusting for Aparshakti Khurana but he is not complaining as it's not often that an actor gets to work on two contrasting projects so early in their career.

Khurana made his film debut with 2016's megahit "Dangal" and went on to garner attention for his comic timing in movies like "Stree" and "Luka Chuppi". Cut to 2023, he emerged as the breakout performer in Vikramaditya Motwane's period drama series "Jubilee", in which he played a servile Binod Das who later becomes film star Madan Kumar.

Basking in the commercial and critical success of Amar Kaushik's "Stree" sequel, Khurana is happy that things are moving in the right direction for him.

"People spend their lives waiting to be part of projects like these. It happened so early for me in my career. And coming onto the set of 'Stree 2' after 'Jubilee'..."

"These are two different spaces, the storytelling, acting, the look, even the eyes, everything is different. Both these projects have given me a lot of



good fortune and love. I am looking forward to 'Stree 3'," the actor told PTI in an interview.

"Stree 2", the latest title from producer Dinesh Vijan's ambitious horror comedy universe, takes off after the events of 2018's "Stree" where the ghost of a courtesan, who was wronged in her mortal life, comes back to Chanderi to help Vicky (Rajkumar Rao) and his friends fight a new mystical enemy called Sarkata.

The second part also stars Shraddha Kapoor, Pankaj Tripathi, and Abhishek Banerjee. Vijan has already announced that they are moving ahead with "Stree 3".

Khurana said it is thanks to Vijan, Kaushik and writer Niren Bhatt that most of the cast and crew that worked on the first film in the franchise returned for the sequel.

"It doesn't happen often that all people who were part of the first film in a franchise would be back for the second one bringing growth in their individual space. It is extremely amazing if that happens."

"But at the same time, there might be a problem putting them together again because all those people are returning along with their own journeys, successes, and growth."

The 36-year-old actor said the top brass on "Stree 2" ensured everyone was "calm and composed" while working on the much anticipated second part, which has grossed Rs 400 at the global box office within a week of its release.

"Even during narrations, (they would) keep everyone calm and composed so that we don't need to take the stress that we are making the second part, that we have to do numbers or that we are coming from our own journeys. (PTI)

AR Rahman unveils 'Le Musk' soundtrack, says music is heartbeat of his immersive film

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Celebrated composer AR Rahman on Wednesday said music will guide the audience into the emotional journey of his directorial debut "Le Musk", as he launched the soundtrack of the multisensory virtual reality film.

The soundtrack of "Le Musk", which has travelled to film galas such as Cannes (extended reality (XR) showcase), Los Angeles and Toronto, comprises 12 songs of diverse genres including jazz, orchestral and world music. It was launched globally today on Believe Music, a digital music company.

Rahman, who also serves as music composer on the movie, said "Le Musk" is a labour of love.

"Music is the heartbeat of 'Le Musk'. It carries the soul of the film, guiding the audience through an emotional and sensory journey."



"The film is a labour of a lot of hard work and love, where we tried to push the boundaries of how we use technology to

create something truly immersive and I am thrilled to finally share this soundtrack with the world and offer a glimpse into the world we've created," the multiple award-winning musician said in a statement.

Notable names, including Nora Arnezeder, Sana Moussa, Linda Lind, Mayssa Karaa, Hiral Viradia, Simona Gilbert, the Firdaus Orchestra and the Budapest Orchestra, have collaborated on the film's soundtrack. "Le Musk" has award-winning music engineer Greg Penny on board.

Rahman also said the team is in the process of setting up immersive experience studios across the world to bring "Le Musk" to audiences the world over.

"The film would not have been possible if not for my team who worked tirelessly to push the boundary of what was known to be possible," he added. (PTI)

'Emergency' film trying to character assassinate Sikhs: Akal Takht, SGPC seek immediate ban

AMRITSAR, Aug 22: The Akhal Takht, the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs, and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) have demanded an immediate ban on the film "Emergency", claiming it tries to "character assassinate" Sikhs.

SGPC chief Harjinder Singh Dhami, addressing a press conference, also sought the registration of an FIR against the Kangana Ranaut, the film's writer, director, producer and lead actor.

"Emergency", starring actor-MP Ranaut, is slated to hit the screens next month.

The release of the period political drama has been delayed multiple times; it was previously scheduled to be released on November 24, 2023.

Expressing strong objection, Gyani Raghbir Singh, Jathedar (head) of the Akal Takht, said it is clear from the released excerpts of the film that it has deliberately misrepresented the character of Sikhs as sepa-

ratists, which is part of a deep conspiracy.

This is a "despicable act" of disrespecting the community by "creating an anti-Sikh narrative about the martyrs of June 1984", he said in a statement.

The community can never forget the anti-Sikh brutality of June 1984 and Ranaut's film is trying to character assassinate Jarnail Singh Khalsa Bhindranwale, who has been declared a Qaumi Shaheed (community's martyr) by Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Singh said.

Dhami said this film has been made by Ranaut, who remains in controversy due to her anti-Sikh and anti-Punjab statements, with the intention of "deliberately character assassinating" Sikhs, which the community cannot tolerate. He alleged that Ranaut has often deliberately made statements that provoked the sentiments of Sikhs, but instead of taking action against her, the government is protecting her.

He urged that the Lok Sabha MP be booked "for inciting religious sentiments of Sikhs for her

act through the film Emergency".

He said the film could "cause a lot of anger and resentment in the Sikh community".

Dhami said in the past, there have been numerous instances where Sikh sentiments were hurt due to the misrepresentation of Sikh characters and the disregard for religious concerns in films.

He urged the Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting to impose an immediate ban on the "Emergency" film and said it should be ensured that no film with anti-Sikh sentiments is released from now on.

The SGPC president called for the inclusion of Sikh members in the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), claiming "biased decisions are being taken due to the absence of a Sikh member".

He said the SGPC has on several occasions passed resolutions in its general meeting to demand the inclusion of a representative of Sikhs in the CBFC, but the government is not meeting the demand. (PTI)



Chaos at Chelsea: A high-risk, \$1.3B spending spree has left the club fractured and vulnerable

LONDON, Aug 22: In the years to come, the experiment unfolding at Chelsea under their American investors will be a fascinating case study in how to run a soccer club.

Because no one in England has ever seen anything like what has been happening at Stamford Bridge over the last two years.

Just take this in: Chelsea has spent nearly \$1.3 billion on 39 players across five transfer windows since a consortium fronted by Los Angeles Dodgers partner-owner Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital bought the Premier League club from its long-time owner, Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, for \$3.2 billion in May 2022.

Throw in the club having four

different full-time managers in this period — plus another coach on a temporary basis — and the revolving door at Chelsea, a six-time English champion and two-time European champion, simply hasn't stopped spinning.

"It's not a mess like it looks from the outside," Enzo Maresca, the latest Chelsea manager, said Wednesday as he attempted to explain the wisdom behind taking the number of players in the squad to 43 by signing two wingers — Pedro Neto and Joao Felix — for a combined \$130 million over the past week. This while already having five wingers in the squad, including one — Mykhailo Mudryk — signed for more than \$100 million just last year and another —

Raheem Sterling — who was the first signing of this unprecedented two-year trolley dash for nearly \$60 million.

Sterling has been stripped of his squad number following the arrival of Neto and is one of around 20 players "training apart," Maresca said. Among them is striker Romelu Lukaku, signed three years ago for a then-club record of \$135 million, and goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, the world's most expensive keeper signed for \$92 million.

Not much seemingly makes sense in Chelsea's brave new era. "It's been a crazy one to follow so far," Dr. Dan Plumley, sports finance expert at Sheffield Hallam University, told The Associated

Press, "and it shows no sign of slowing down."

Plumley said the Chelsea owners' initial "aggressive" play in the transfer market to overhaul the squad was not unexpected, even if spending \$280 million in the summer of 2022, \$350 million in January 2023 and more than \$400 million in the offseason of that year was unprecedented for a soccer club. In the current window, the outlay is more than \$250 million on 10 players. "You are thinking, 'That's the initial burst but now you have to rein it in a little bit,'" Plumley said in a phone interview. "But they seem to be carrying on, which raises a few question marks around what the actual strategy is there and what

are the owners looking to do."

With their background in private equity and venture capital, Boehly and Clearlake are coming at soccer ownership very differently and have moved the goalposts in their efforts when dealing with the sport's financial fair-play constraints.

They've typically given contracts of seven-to-nine years to new signings to spread "amortization" costs of transfer fees across the whole deal. That prompted UEFA and then the Premier League to tighten their rules, and it's a risky strategy as a whole because it leaves Chelsea extremely vulnerable if the players recruited prove to be flops and can't be moved on. (AP)



Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer retires from international soccer and will focus on Bayern

MUNICH, Aug 22: Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer said Wednesday he is retiring from the national team after 15 years and 124 games. He is staying in club soccer with Bayern Munich.

The 38-year-old Neuer made his debut for Germany in 2009 and won the World Cup in 2014. His last game for the national team was the 2-1 extra-time loss to eventual champion Spain in the quarterfinals as Germany hosted Euro 2024.

Neuer said he was "tempted" by the prospect of staying on for the 2026 World Cup but decided against it after speaking with family and friends. That could open the door for Barcelona's Marc-André ter Stegen, who has played for Germany 40 times but never at a major tournament, to take over as starting goalkeeper.

"I feel very good physically and obviously would have been very tempted by the 2026 World Cup in the U.S.A., Canada and Mexico. At the same time I am convinced that now is the right time to take this step and to concentrate fully on FC Bayern Munich in the future," Neuer said in a statement. Neuer is the second leading player in the German team to retire from international soccer this week after midfielder Ilkay Gündogan, who captained



the team at Euro 2024. He cited fatigue and the pressures of a busy club and international schedule in his statement Monday. Forward Thomas Müller retired from the national team last month, and midfielder Toni Kroos retired from all soccer when Germany exited Euro

2024. Coach Julian Nagelsmann had already indicated he would look to refresh the German team, which had the highest average age of any squad at Euro 2024, with an eye on the 2026 World Cup. Germany's next games are in the Nations League at home to Hungary on Sept. 7 and away at

the Netherlands three days later.

At his peak, Neuer helped to change what it meant to be a modern goalkeeper, with his emphasis on playing higher up the field and taking on a key role in starting attacks. Nagelsmann, who also coached Neuer at Bayern from 2021 through 2023,

paid tribute to Neuer's influence on the game of soccer as a whole.

"Even though I can understand Manu's decision and his reasons, his departure is a big loss — both in sporting and personal terms," Nagelsmann said. "Manu shaped goalkeeping play like no one else in the history of soccer." (AP)

Krishna focusing on staying calm to defend Paralympic gold in Paris

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: Life has consistently thrown challenges at Krishna Nagar but the Indian para shuttler knows how to take them in stride, laugh at adversity, adapt and emerge victorious.

When he was bullied during his childhood for his short height, Krishna responded with his achievements. Krishna refused to let his dwarfism condition hinder his progress.

That was the best way to shut the haters.

Despite financial struggles in his early years, he explored various sports, including cricket, football, volleyball, long jump, and sprints. His journey in badminton began in late 2017 at the Saiwasi Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur.

He made history at the Tokyo Paralympics by becoming only the second Indian, after Pramod Bhagat, to win a gold medal, making his Games debut memorable.

Now, as he prepares to defend his title, the 25-year-old from Jaipur is focusing on maintaining composure and playing it safe to replicate his success when he takes court at the Paris Games.

"This is my second Paralympics, and there is some nervousness because it's a big tournament," Krishna, who competes in the SH6 category, told PTI in an interview.

The SH6 category is for short stature athletes, who compete standing.

"It's a dream to participate in such a prestigious event. I feel blessed to have another chance at the Paralympics. My main aim is to defend the gold medal and live up to the expectations," he said.

Standing at about 4 feet 6 inches, Krishna is one of 13 Indian para badminton players set to compete in Paris.

Life was not easy for him even after Tokyo success. If an injury threatened to thwart his progress, losing his mother was a bigger setback.

But the strong-willed athlete had no option but to rise again.

Talking about his preparations, he said, "I twisted my ankle after the Tokyo Paralympics and faced some other issues, but now everything is fine. The game is

evolving, and I'm focusing on adapting my style to different conditions and opponents. Whether fast or slow, I need to stay positive, keep the shuttle in play, and execute smashes safely."

Krishna, who trains under coach Yadendra Singh in Jaipur, secured his first para World Championship title in February this year in Thailand, defeating China's Lin Naili in the final.

"It's crucial to stay positive, play safe, and remain calm. There are new players this time, and the competition is tougher. We need to be more agile and play with speed and positivity," he emphasised.

Krishna faced the biggest challenge of his life when his mother passed away just six months after his Tokyo triumph. While the loss was hard to overcome, a strong support system helped him through the difficult period.

"Losing my mother was devastating. It was my dream that I do something for her, but she passed away after the Paralympics. Things are better now, and I'm playing again. Time heals," he reflected.

Krishna will be the only Indian para badminton player defending a title in Paris following the suspension of his compatriot Pramod Bhagat, a five-time world champion, for whereabouts clause violations earlier this month.

When asked if the absence of Bhagat increases the pressure on him, Krishna replied, "Not at all. It's the blessings and support of the people, the government, PCI, and BAI that have brought us this far. I know Pramod Bhaiya won't be there this time, but I'll do my best."

"If I overthink, it will only harm my performance. There's nothing bigger than this, so that's my sole goal."

Krishna acknowledged that Tokyo success redefined his life.

"Life has changed completely since then. People have started recognising para badminton and the Paralympics. In Tokyo, it was a big opportunity for us, there was a lot of excitement and curiosity. It was my first time, and I was nervous, but gradually things fell into place. (PTI)

Faruque Ahmed takes charge as new BCB president

DHAKA, Aug 22: Former cricketer and chief selector Faruque Ahmed has replaced Nazmul Hasan Papon as the new president of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) after the incumbent resigned in the wake of the political unrest in the country.

The BCB held an emergency meeting on Wednesday during which the 58-year-old Ahmed was elected.

Papon, who was in his fourth term, has been in London with his wife following the political unrest in the country which began with a huge student protest against quotas in jobs.

The Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League regime was toppled as a result and there has been widespread violence despite an interim government taking charge.

Papon was an Awami League MP since 2009. He, along with 16 other directors, left Dhaka on August 5.

"I resigned as a selector in the past because I opposed the system. Now, I aim to create a system that can run the board smoothly," Faruque was quoted as saying by "Cricbuzz" on Wednesday. Faruque played seven ODIs for Bangladesh between 1988 and 1999 and also served as a BCB chief selector for two terms — from 2003 to 2007 and from 2013 to 2016. He resigned without completing his second term after disagreement over selection process. The National Sports Council (NSC) appointed Ahmed and Nazmul Abedin, a prominent local coach, as its new directors, replacing Jalal Yunus and Ahmed Sajjadul Alam. Following the announcement, they participated in the board of directors meet-

ing held at the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The meeting was attended by directors Mahbul Anam, former cricketers Khaled Mahmud and Akram Khan, Salauddin Ahmed, Kazi Inam Ahmed, Iftekhar Ahmed and Fahim Sinha. Shakib Al Hasan, who was a lawmaker in the Awami League, was cleared by Bangladesh's new interim government last week to face Pakistan in a two-match Test series.

"We will discuss Shakib's situation and whether he can continue under the current circumstances. We are also considering adding rules regarding player conduct during tours, including restrictions on endorsements," Faruque said.

Tamim Iqbal, who had a rift with Shakib, last played for Bangladesh in a home ODI series against New Zealand ahead of the 2023 World Cup but Faruque backed the opener to continue playing for a few more years. "Tamim is a sensible player and one of the best from Bangladesh. Personally, if you ask me, I would want him to play for two-three more years. But me wanting that doesn't mean it will happen. We will have to see what his fitness is like and we have to see which formats will be feasible. Tests maybe difficult but it'll be good if it's ODIs," he said.

The new BCB president also reiterated his stance on not retaining Chandika Hathurusingha as the national head coach. "I am not sure about the details of the contract with Chandika Hathurusingha. I am still in the same place I was before. I haven't deviated from what I said (I will not keep Chandika if elected as BCB president)," he said. (PTI)

Sinquefield Cup: Gukesh survives against Praggnanandhaa

SAINT LOUIS (USA), Aug 22: World Championship challenger D Gukesh survived by the skin of his teeth against compatriot R Praggnanandhaa, drawing a lost endgame in the third round of the Sinquefield Cup — the final leg of the Grand Chess Tour.

On a day when things finally lived up, tour leader Alireza Firouzja of France got lucky against his French teammate Maxime Vachier-Lagrave, drawing in a clear worse position via repetition of moves.

Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan also pushed for quite some time. But, a blunder cost him dearly as Fabiano Caruana was able to turn the tables and score his first victory of the tournament.

The other winner was Ian

Nepomniachtchi of Russia, who had a relatively easy win against Dutchman Anish Giri, who could not keep track after an unconventional opening by the former.

Reigning world champion Ding Liren of China also created enough chances for himself against Wesley So, only to blow them away in no time.

With six more rounds to come in the 10-player double round-robin tournament, Firouzja and Nepomniachtchi now share the lead on two points out of a possible three.

The event has a total prize pool of USD 3,50,000 apart from the Grand Chess tour bonus prize fund of USD 1,75,000.

As many as six players — Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh,

Vachier-Lagrave, Caruana, Wesley and Liren share the third spot on 1.5 points each — half point ahead of Abdusattorov and Giri.

Gukesh had a fantastic start as black pieces out of a Catalan opening by Praggnanandhaa, and the former was able to blitz 18 moves in about four minutes on his clock, with Praggnanandhaa an hour behind the clock.

After the dust settled, the players arrived at a slightly complicated rook and pawns endgame that should have been a draw with correct play.

However, it was not to be as Gukesh made an optical error and walked into a lost position, and much to his surprise, he was relieved when Praggnanandhaa could not find the right path to victory. (PTI)

Rising from the debris: Club thrower Pranav Soorma eyes Paralympic glory

NEW DELHI, Aug 22: It's not often that a person paralysed by a life-altering accident would describe that tragedy as a "blessing in disguise" or "an opportunity" to carve an identity. But then soon-to-be-Paralympian Pranav Soorma is built different.

He was 16 when the roof of his house fell on him in 2011, leaving him a quadriplegic.

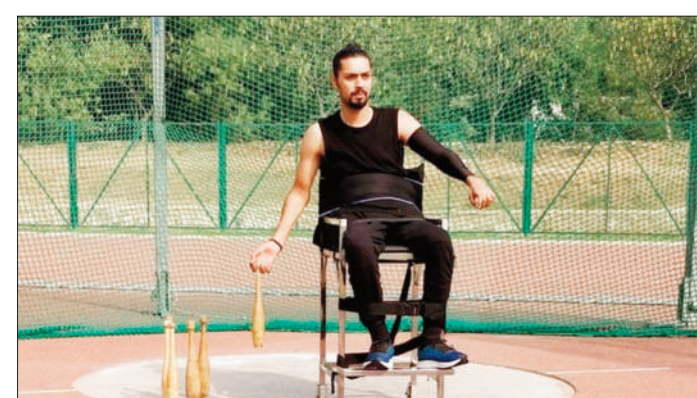
Restricted to a wheelchair, the Faridabad-based para-athlete couldn't have been faulted if he turned bitter with life but to everyone's surprise, he felt the tragedy gave him a sense of purpose.

"I was always a sports enthusiast but never took sports as a career option but I always wanted to do something worthy in my life and the irony is I got it after I got paralysed. I treat it as a blessing in disguise," Soorma, who is also a

banker by profession, told PTI in an interview.

Soorma is the reigning Asian Paralympics champion in men's club throw F51 event with an Asian Games record of 30.01m. Little surprise then that he is being seen as a bright medal prospect for India at the upcoming Paris Paralympics, to be held from August 28 to September 8.

"I took up sports as an opportunity to create my own identity," he said. "After 2016 Rio Paralympics I got to know about para-sports. In 2018, I read a lot about para-sports. I got to know about para-swimming but given my medical condition it was not possible, table tennis also I liked but I didn't get a good coach to train me," said the 29-year-old, a commerce graduate from the prestigious Delhi School of Economics.



"Then came Narsi Ram sir (a para-athletics coach) in my life. He introduced me to athletics and finally I took up club throw."

He is currently working as an assistant manager in Bank of Baroda, a job which he got after cracking the competitive exam.

Club throw is an event where the objective is to throw a wooden club as far as possible. It is the para equivalent of the hammer throw in which participants rely on the shoulders and arms to generate the power required for the throw.

The event is one of the four

throwing events, along with discus, javelin and shot put of the Summer Paralympics.

Soorma, a dashing six-footer, expressed gratitude towards his family for supporting him and wants to give them back by winning a medal at the Paris Paralympics. "I got immense support from my family. My father (Sanjeev) left his private job to be my attendant as I couldn't afford a full-time attendant. My mother took the responsibility of running the family with her private job," he said. However, Soorma doesn't feel any additional performance pressure owing to the tough journey his family has endured.

"I believe there was pressure on me and I was nervous when I made my Asian Paralympic Games debut but I didn't let it reach me. (PTI)

Guys like Pant have muscle memory and thirst for victory: Matthew Hayden

MUMBAI, Aug 22: Batting great Matthew Hayden feels Rishabh Pant will be a key player for India when they travel to Australia for a five-Test series later this year owing to his "muscle memory and thirst for victory" that made him such a sensation during the team's previous tour Down Under.

The eagerly-anticipated five-Test series starts on November 22 at Perth.

"Guys like Rishabh Pant have got a muscle memory and the thirst for victory. He was such a key player last time he played there and the Australian public loved him as well, because of the nature of the way he played his game," Hayden told media on the sidelines of 'CEAT Cricket Rating Awards' here on Wednesday.

"It was exciting. It was innovative. It was just fresh and good. Then you have got your old stewards, like Virat Kohli, (he) will want to make an impression again. From a batting point of view, I'm excited to see how India have that strategy to take on the Australian conditions," the Australian added.

Pant, who has made a successful return to cricket after a life-threatening accident in 2022, was an outstanding performer for India in the 2020-21 tour, notching up brilliant knocks of 97 and 89 not out in the landmark trip.

India outgunned a full-strength Australia despite missing several frontline players in one of the most



dramatic turnarounds in the history Test cricket.

The visitors bounced back from the ignominy of 36 all out in the opening Adelaide Test to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy 2-1 for a second consecutive time.

Kohli had to return home after the Adelaide game due to personal reasons and five other players, including key pacers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, were forced out due to injuries and fitness issues. "The great thing from an Indian perspective is that when you look at the last victory, there was no Virat Kohli. There was a very much a second team bowling line-up that won at the Gabba," Hayden said.

"That's the kind of confidence

that you can expect this Indian unit to go to our shores (with) and go, 'guys, we've done this before, and we've done it in a way that's second to none, even without our key players'," he said.

Hayden said scheduling a day-night Test tends to take away the advantage enjoyed by Australian teams in the past. Even in the upcoming tour, the two teams will play a Pink Test in Adelaide.

"Once you get those overhead conditions under that twilight zone, they can be really difficult," he said.

"I would go as far as to say that the home advantage in Australia has been taken away quite a lot, simply on the basis that if you get (on) the wrong side of a certain

session, be that you are four for 130 at twilight, you can (soon) be eight for 150.

"There's no chance to actually really naturally dominate a game," he added.

Hayden said Pat Cummins, who led Australia to the World Test Championship and ODI World Cup wins last year, has rallied his troops like no other Australian captain in the past.

"He has a very special leadership style and ability. It's a very different style to the former captains of the Australian cricket team that were (about) very much a carrot and stick type approach," he said.

"He's operating on a model that's bringing out the individuals and individual preparation in particular — something which our game struggles with being a team sport," he added.

Hayden said Australia under Cummins has been an extremely close-knit team which has earned respect from former players like him who were upset with the manner in which previous coach Justin Langer was removed.

"I (have) followed this team very closely over the last two years and they're an extremely close team. Even the former players, when we were upset with the removal of Justin Langer, they closed ranks and doubled down on how it is that they wanted to go about their work," he said. (PTI)

India's five-Test tour of England: Leeds, Birmingham, Lords, Manchester and Oval

LONDON, Aug 22: Indian men's cricket team will start its next cycle of World Test Championship with a five-Test series against England with the opening game scheduled at the seamer-friendly Headingley on June 20. The next WTC cycle will run from 2025 to 2027 and it starts right after the final of the current cycle which will also be held in England.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has strategically kept matches at venues where England's swing bowlers will enjoy distinct advantage. The second Test will be held at Edgbaston in Birmingham from July 2-6. The third Test will be held at the hallowed Lord's ground from July 10-14, while Old Trafford in Manchester will host the fourth Test between July 23-27. The tour concludes with the final Test at the Oval from July 31-August 4. There is a week's gap between first and second Test and eight-day interval between the third and fourth Tests giving players enough time to recuperate. (PTI)

Chaos at Chelsea: A high-risk, \$1.3B spending spree has left the club fractured and vulnerable

LONDON, Aug 22: In the years to come, the experiment unfolding at Chelsea under their American investors will be a fascinating case study in how to run a soccer club.

Because no one in England has ever seen anything like what has been happening at Stamford Bridge over the last two years.

Just take this in: Chelsea has spent nearly \$1.3 billion on 39 players across five transfer windows since a consortium fronted by Los Angeles Dodgers part-owner Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital bought the Premier League club from its long-time owner, Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, for \$3.2 billion in May 2022.

Throw in the club having four different full-time managers in this period — plus another coach on a temporary basis — and the revolving door at Chelsea, a six-time English champion and two-time European champion, simply hasn't stopped spinning.

"It's not a mess like it looks from the outside," Enzo Maresca, the latest Chelsea manager, said as he attempted to explain the wisdom behind taking the number of players in the squad to 43 by signing two wingers — Pedro Neto and Joao Felix — for a combined \$130 million over the past week.

This while already having five wingers in the squad, including one — Mykhailo Mudryk — signed for more than \$100 million just last year and another — Raheem Sterling — who was the first signing of this unprecedented two-year trolley dash for nearly \$60 million.

Sterling has been stripped of his squad number following the arrival of Neto and is one of around 20 players "training apart," Maresca said. Among them is striker Romelu Lukaku, signed three years ago for a then-club record of \$135 million, and goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, the world's most expensive keeper signed for \$92 million.

Not much seemingly makes sense in Chelsea's brave new era. "It's been a crazy one to follow so far," Dr. Dan Plumley, sports finance expert at Sheffield Hallam University, told The Associated Press, "and it shows no sign of slowing down."

Plumley said the Chelsea owners' initial "aggressive" play in the transfer market to overhaul the squad was not unexpected, even if spending \$280 million in the summer of 2022, \$350 million in January 2023 and more than \$400 million in the offseason of that year was unprecedented for a soccer club. In the current window, the outlay is more than \$250 million on 10 players.

"You are thinking, That's the initial burst but now you have to rein it in a little bit," Plumley said in a phone interview. "But they seem to be carrying on, which raises a few question marks around what the actual strategy is there and what are the owners looking to do."



crushing a billion hopes.

"(On) 19th November... I remember whatever it was, we beat Travis Head's bat 15 times — he didn't touch a single ball. You know, things can go your way sometimes, but you have to stick to the process," the articulate Dravid circled back to sticking to the basics.

Dravid retired as India's coach following the title triumph.

Extolling India's bench strength and the ability to churn out high-quality cricketers consistently, Dravid said the next generation of players have successfully carried forward the legacy of the 'Fab Five'.

ICC to get new female director as Indra Nooyi's six-year term ends

DUBAI, Aug 22: The International Cricket Council is on the lookout for a new female independent director after PepsiCo head Indra Nooyi's six-year tenure came to an end last month.

The world body is also set to get a new chairman after incumbent Greg Barclay's refusal to seek a third term. Nooyi, who became ICC's first independent woman director in 2018, has completed her full term.

It is understood that ICC's all-powerful board has already started looking for a high-profile name like Nooyi, who was one of the most sought after names in corporate world. "The Board of Directors shall elect one individual who must be a female and who must meet the Director Eligibility Criteria to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusivity interests in the sport of Cricket are appropriately represented from time to time, and such individual so elected shall be a Director (the 'Independent Director')," the ICC statute makes clear. A source close to the all-



powerful ICC Board was asked about the exact criteria for the appointment and he said that it could be any woman of eminence — be it from corporate world or sports.

"It could be anyone who has contributed in sports, business or in general. Just for example, it could be a Meg Lanning, a Charlotte Edwards or someone powerful from business community.

Basically anyone who is eligible and person of eminence with contribution to sport," the source said.

The Independent Director will be elected for a first two-year term by the Board of Directors from a list of at least three recommendations provided by the Nominations Committee. She will also be eligible to vote during the chairman's election. (PTI)

Ex-Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik felicitates Olympic bronze winning hockey team



Games.

"Many congratulations from my side to you all. I hope next time you will bring gold," Patnaik said while addressing the players.

The players in attendance were Sumit, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek and Sanjay along side Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey.

Sumit thanked Patnaik for supporting hockey when the sport needed it the most.

"I would like to thank Naveen Patnaik sir from the bottom of my heart, especially from Hockey India and from the entire team for his immense support towards hockey. There was no sponsor hockey but he came forward and gave such a massive sponsorship for hockey," he said.

Lalit said the former Odisha CM came in as a saviour for the sport.

"First of all I would like to say that Hon'ble Naveen Patnaik sir's role in hockey, he is of a hero and the most important thing is that whatever he has done for hockey is unimaginable.

"He held hockey's hand when no one was there. Sir played a very important role in making Odisha the sports capital of India," he said. (PTI)

Lord's to host its first-ever women's Test between India and England



LONDON, Aug 22: Lord's, the 'home of cricket', will host its first-ever Women's Test between India and England in 2026, the ECB announced on Thursday.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said that after playing a three-match ODI series against hosts England in July 2025, India will return in 2026 for a one-off Test.

India will travel to England for a white-ball tour in 2025. A five-match T20 series will be followed by three ODIs.

"We can confirm that India Women will return in 2026 to take on England Women in the first-ever women's Test match at Lord's. It will be a truly special occasion, and one of real significance," ECB CEO Richard Gould was quoted as saying by the Board's website.

The first match of the T20I series will be played at Nottingham on June 28, the second at Bristol on July 1 and the third will be at The Oval on July 4. The fourth and fifth T20Is will be played at Old Trafford and Edgbaston on July 9 and 12 respectively.

The first of the three ODIs will be at Southampton on July 16, the second at Lord's on July 19 and the final match of the series will be at Chester-le-Street on July 22.

"It has also been confirmed that India Women will return in 2026 for a one-off Test match at Lord's the first-ever Women's Test to be staged at the Home of Cricket," the ECB added.

"England Women have played white-ball matches at Lord's for the past three years, with another scheduled next year, but it will be the first time the ground has hosted a Women's Test match."

India have played nine Tests so far against England in their backyard from June 1986 with their last clash at Bristol in June 2021 ending in a draw. (PTI)

Sometimes you need a little bit of luck: Dravid

MUMBAI, Aug 22: The legendary Rahul Dravid acknowledged that sometimes a little bit of luck can heavily impact the outcome of big matches, citing India's heartbreaking defeat in the ODI World Cup final to Australia and his side's sensational triumph from a precarious position against South Africa in the T20 World Cup final.

India had stormed into the ODI World Cup final last year with a 10-match winning streak but when the tournament's best team bumped into Australia in the title clash, nothing worked.

Six months later, skipper Rohit Sharma and Dravid combined to complete the unfinished business. A formidable South Africa stood between them and the trophy but the luck smiled on them.

Having drawn lessons from the incredible highs and lows, Dravid on Wednesday recalled how crucial it was for the team to stick to the clichéd process and hope for luck to favour them against the Proteas at Barbados on June 29.

"I've had time to reflect on it. I've had

time to reflect on a lot of things we've done. You do realise, sometimes, you have to do a lot of these things, you have to do the process, you have to do everything right," Dravid, who was chosen for Life Time Achievement honour during the Ceat Cricket Rating Awards, said.

"Sometimes at the end of the day, you need a little bit of luck. (Against South Africa in T20WC final)... 30 balls to go, 30 runs to go. (It was about) incredible execution, incredible calmness by Rohit."

"We didn't focus on what we needed to do, but we needed a guy who could keep his foot within one inch of a line. Sometimes (it is) the skill," he said without mentioning Suryakumar Yadav's juggling act at the ropes to complete David Miller's dismissal.

That catch had tilted the match in India's favour.

Dravid then recalled how India were close to dismissing Travis Head in the ODI World Cup final but the opener rode on his tremendous luck to come up with a match-winning century, single-handedly