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● Trump rejects US pull-out from Afghanistan, warns Pakistan

● Two dead, children trapped after quake hits Italy

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● Chirag re-elected LJP (Ram Vilas) chief

● NC, PDP can't ensure Art 370 restoration: BJP leader



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## Official documents: There are requirements for 7,800 vehicles in Assam Police Manpower crisis hits police dept; 12,485 posts lying vacant



**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** Assam Police is grappling with vacancies at various levels including ADGP, IG, DIG, SP, according to official documents. The state police force is also struggling hard to maintain its pace as it is operating at little over 70 per cent of its vehicle requirement as per official assessment to run its operations efficiently, government records revealed. The total sanctioned strength of Assam Police is 79,852, including 4,835 personnel of Assam Police Radio Organisation (APRO).

Out of this, a total of 12,485 posts, which is 15.64 per cent of the required manpower, are

at present lying vacant at various levels, as per official documents of the Home Department.

Three posts of additional director general of Police are lying vacant against the sanctioned strength of six. Three posts of inspector general of Police are also lying vacant against 14 posts, while there are no DIG at nine places out of 15 sanctioned posts, it said. The documents also revealed that eight posts of superintendent of Police, assistant IG, commandant and Senior SP ranked officials are lying vacant out of the total sanctioned posts of 147 in Assam Police. In the Additional SP rank, 68 posts out of 168 are non-occupied, while 146 positions of deputy SP are lying vacant against the sanctioned strength of 483 across the state.

Besides these senior posts, there are vacancies at every level of Assam Police as per the data. The official documents further revealed that there are requirements for 7,800 vehicles in Assam Police for its efficient functioning as per assessment by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D).

However, the force currently has a total of

5,543 vehicles in a mix of owned and rented ones, which is 71.06 per cent of its requirement. Assam Police is still running short of 2,257 vehicles as per the BPR&D standards.

Out of the available vehicles, 1,413 are taken on rent and the remaining are government vehicles. Of these, 1,888 are government two-wheelers, the official papers showed. For the rented vehicles, the Assam government is shelling out crores of rupees from its exchequer every year, the set of documents showed.

Since 2016, when the BJP government came to power for the first time in Assam, a total of ₹ 412.79 crore have been paid for taking the vehicles on rent in the state.

In 2024 itself, ₹ 53.8 crore of rent bill has been paid till now, the official data said. The Assam Police has a total of 336 police stations and 295 outposts. Out of them, one police station and 15 outposts are inactive. Of the total establishments, nine stations and 17 outposts are operating from rented accommodation at present, while it has permanent buildings for 326 stations and 263 outposts. (PTI)

## Over 40,000 rape cases in state since 2001

**Govt working to create safe environment for women: CM**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** Over 3,000 cases of rape were registered for three consecutive years during the first term of the BJP-led government in Assam from 2016-2021, according to data shared by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday.

The number of such cases, however, has come down since 2020, it showed. The BJP retained power in Assam in 2021, with Sarma as the CM.

The Congress was in power in the state from 2001 to 2016, with the BJP-led government taking over thereafter. Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal had helmed the first BJP government in Assam.

"Every single incident of rape must be unequivocally condemned, as it represents a grave violation of human dignity and it is our collective responsibility to work towards eliminating this heinous crime from society," Sarma wrote on X, sharing the data of rape cases registered in the state from 2001 to July 2024.

"The chart... reflects our ongoing efforts and commitment to creating a safer and more just environment for everyone, especially our women," he said.

Sarma urged people to "unite to ensure that such



atrocities find no place in our world, and that safety, justice and compassion prevail".

As per the data, 3,544 rape cases were registered in 2017, 3,296 in 2018 and 3,546 in 2019. The 2019 figure was the highest during the 2001-July 2024 period.

The number of cases was 1,657 in 2020, 1,733 in 2021, 1,113 in 2022, 989 in 2023 and 580 till July 2024. During the Congress rule from 2001 to 2016, the highest number of such cases at 1,980 was registered in 2014, it showed. (PTI)

### HT BRIEFS

#### Bangladeshis held

**GUWAHATI:** Two Bangladeshi nationals who entered India illegally were apprehended in Assam and sent back to their country, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday. Sarma further informed that the duo entered India through the Madhupur (BD)-Agartala route and were en route to Bangalore. "Two Bangladeshi nationals were apprehended at Badarpur railway station by @assampolice. They reportedly entered India through the Madhupur (BD)-Agartala route and were en route to Bangalore. In collaboration with the BSF, Assam Police successfully pushed them back across the border last night," Sarma wrote on micro-blogging site X. The Bangladeshi national were identified as Masum Khan, resident of an area under Modelganj Police Station in Bangladesh and Sonia Akhtar of Dhaka. Sarma had said on Saturday that over 30 Bangladeshis trying to enter India without valid documents have been pushed back from Assam in the last one month.

#### Hoolock Gibbons

**GUWAHATI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi recounted a touching narrative highlighting the bond between humans and animals during his monthly broadcast 'Mann Ki Baat,' focusing on Berekuri village in Assam's Tinsukia district, Chief Minister's Office announced on Sunday. He mentioned that the villagers began to grow bananas in their fields specifically for the Hoolock Gibbons, having discovered the apes' fondness for this particular fruit. The Prime Minister asserted, "My dear countrymen, you must have seen so many films on the love between humans and animals! But a real story is being made in Assam these days. In the small village of Berekuri in the Tinsukia district of Assam, people of the Moran community live beside 'Hoolock Gibbon', also called 'Holo Bandar'."

## Hemant Soren should resign for failing to fulfil promises made to people: Himanta

**RANCHI, Aug 25:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday demanded the resignation of his Jharkhand counterpart Hemant Soren for "failing" to fulfil promises made to people during the 2019 assembly elections.

The Jharkhand government has "failed on all fronts", including checking infiltration, Sarma alleged. "Your (Hemant Soren's) father Shibu Soren is an acclaimed national-level leader unlike mine... Time has come for you to resign and quit politics for failing to fulfil promises made to youths during elections," he said.

Sarma also criticised the JMM-led coalition for filing FIRs against around 12,000 unidentified people, including BJP leaders under "non-

bailable sections" during a recent BJYM rally in Ranchi. Police also used tear gas shells and water cannons, and fired rubber bullets to disperse the crowd. "This atrocity is unheard of in independent India... I have dealt with the ULFA, but not seen something like this. I will write to the Election Commission to remove the DGP from the post, as polls cannot be held in the state under such an officer... The FIRs against 12,000 youths is to blackmail workers," Sarma claimed.

"I challenge the DGP to give us names of the 12,000 people, or else we will move the court of law... It is a democracy and we have the right to protest," he said.

Assembly elections in Jharkhand are due this year. (PTI)

## Excise policy 'scam': SC to hear Vijay Nair's bail plea on Aug 27

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on August 27 the bail plea of former Aam Aadmi Party communication in-charge Vijay Nair in a money laundering case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam.

A bench of justices Hrishikesh Roy and SVN Bhatti issued a notice to the Enforcement Directorate on August 12 on the plea of Nair while noting that he has been in custody for two years.

Appearing for Nair, senior advocates Abhishek Singhvi and Vikram Chaudhary submitted before the court on August 12 that he was arrested on November 13, 2022, and he has challenged the trial court's July 29 order dismissing his default bail plea.

Earlier, on July 3 last year, the high court refused to grant bail to



Nair and other co-accused in the money laundering case. The money laundering case stems from a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) FIR lodged after Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended a probe into the excise policy 2021-22 which was later scrapped.

The CBI has alleged that Nair met some other co-accused, liquor manufacturers and distributors at various hotels in Hyderabad, Mum-

bai and Delhi for arranging "ill-gotten money through hawala operators" that was given to the AAP as a kickback in return for favours.

It was also claimed that businessman and co-accused Abhishek Boipally was part of the meetings and was involved in the conspiracy to launder money along with another accused liquor businessman Sameer Mahendru.

The ED had raided nearly three dozen locations in Delhi and Punjab following the arrest of Mahendru, the managing director of liquor distributor Indospirit Group, which is based in Delhi's Jor Bagh. The other accused in the case are former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, former excise commissioner Arva Gopi Krishna, ex-deputy commissioner in the excise department Anand (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India, Indonesia resolve to boost anti-terror cooperation

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** India and Indonesia have condemned the use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism amid Pakistan's support to terror groups carrying out terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

The issue of cross-border terrorism figured at the sixth meeting of the India-Indonesia joint working group on counter-terrorism that was held in Jakarta on Friday.

The two sides focused on ways to effectively combat terrorism, including how to stop the use of new and emerging technologies by terrorists, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

"India and Indonesia strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and emphasised the need for strengthening international cooperation to combat terrorism in a comprehensive and sustained manner," it said in a statement on Sunday.

The MEA said the two sides also condemned the "use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism." "The two sides exchanged views on the domestic, regional and global terrorism threat assessment," it said.

"They discussed counter-terrorism challenges related to the use of new and emerging technologies by terrorists, misuse of internet for terrorist purposes, terror financing, and the nexus between organised crime and terrorism," the MEA said.

It said the two sides also exchanged views on cooperation in regional, global and multilateral fora such as the UN, ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to combat global terrorism.

The Indian delegation at the meeting was led by K D Dewal, Joint Secretary (Counter-Terrorism) in the MEA.

The Indonesian team was headed by Andhika Chrisnayudhanto, Deputy for International Cooperation at the National Counter Terrorism Agency. (PTI)

## P&RD minister lays foundation stone for resource center in WKA

**HT Correspondent**  
**HAMREN, Aug 25:** Panchayat and Rural Development (P&RD) Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass laid the foundation stone for a district resource center in Tikrim, West Karbi Anglong, on Sunday.

The center, which will be constructed at a cost of Rs 2 crore, aims to bolster regional development.

Following the ceremony, the minister participated in a meeting at the Hamren Habe Denja Auditorium Hall. The meeting was attended by Tuliram Ranghang, chief executive member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC); MP Amar Sing Tisso; MLAs; KAAC executive members; and other Council officers.

During the meeting, Dass highlighted the significant changes in Karbi Anglong since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power.

"Development schemes have been implemented in various parts of the district. The BJP government



is building infrastructure under Ranghang's leadership," he said.

On recent crimes against women in the state, the minister called for exemplary punishment for the accused in the Shivsagar and Tinsukia incidents.

He also emphasised that BJP leaders have the right to express their views in the media.

"There is no discrimination be-

tween old and new BJP members, seniors or juniors; the BJP has millions of workers in Assam. The party will conduct a membership recruitment drive starting next month," he added.

Meanwhile, CEM Ranghang announced that self-help groups in the Socheng constituency of the Autonomous Council would receive piglets from the council.

## Ban on Jamaat-e-Islami should be revoked: Mufti

**SRINAGAR, Aug 25:** People's Democratic Party (PDP) said on Sunday banned Jamaat-e-Islami's (Jel) willingness to contest the Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir is a good step, but the ban on the organisation should be revoked.

"It is a good thing. I want the Government of India to revoke ban on the Jel because if you are not banning communal organisations which are spreading venom in this country, I do not want to name them, those who take out rallies, pelt stones on mosques, lynch Muslims, then why is there a ban on the Jel which has contributed a lot in the education sector, helped people in floods of 2014 and COVID?" Mufti told reporters here.

According to some media reports, former leaders of the Jel are mulling to contest the Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir as independent candidates.

The PDP chief said her party

would contest the Assembly polls alone.

"We have almost announced candidates for the constituencies. The Congress and the NC are yet to announce, but we have already announced," she said.

On the issue of Article 370, Mufti said, "The PDP's agenda is clear that the resolution of J-K should come in a manner that the people here live with dignity, hold their heads high. The abrogation of Article 370 has further complicated the issue and whenever the resolution of the issue of J-K takes place, then it would start from (restoration of) Article 370," she said.

She claimed the people in north Kashmir voted for "plebiscite sentiment" in the Lok Sabha polls by electing incarcerated Sheikh Abdul Rashid alias Engineer Rashid.

Rashid, a two-time MLA from the erstwhile seat of Langate in north Kashmir's Kupwara, supported (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Unified Pension Scheme: U in UPS stands for Modi govt's U-turns, says Cong

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** The Congress on Sunday took a jibe at the Centre over its announcement of the Unified Pension Scheme, saying the "U" in UPS stands for the Modi government's "U-turns".

The opposition party also alleged that the UPS appears to be an attack on Dalits, tribals and backward classes.

Taking a dig at the government, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said, "The 'U' in UPS stands for Modi Govt's U turns! Post June 4, the power of the people has prevailed over the arrogance of power of the Prime Minister."

"Rollback in the budget regarding Long Term Capital Gain/Indecation. Sending Waqf Bill to JPC. Rollback of Broadcast Bill. Rollback of Lateral Entry," he said in a post on X.

"We will keep ensuring accountability and protect 140 crore Indians from this despotic government," the Congress chief said. The Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khara alleged that the UPS appears to be an attack on Dalits, tribals and backward classes. "In many states, the upper age limit for government jobs for reserved category is 40 years. In UPSC, this limit is 37 years. Under the unified pension scheme, it is mandatory to render 25 years of service to get a full pension," Khara said.



In such a situation, how will Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Classes employees avail this facility, he asked.

"Now the government should tell whether it wants to end the upper age limit facility available to the underprivileged or wants to deprive them of full pension?" Khara said on X.

However, Professionals' Congress chairman Praveen Chakravarty appeared to strike a divergent note from his party and said the introduction of the scheme was "welcome and prudent". (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'I have also received letters from youth across the country on this subject' PM bats for youngsters without political background to enter politics to meet 'Viksit Bharat' goal

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said collective efforts will help the youth sans a political background to rise in politics and asserted that the spirit shown by such people during the freedom struggle is required again to attain the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'.

In his monthly Mann Ki Baat radio broadcast, Modi said his Independence Day call for one lakh youth without any political background to join politics has evoked wide reactions with some youth stating that dynastic politics crushes new talent.

"This year from Red Fort, I have urged one lakh youth who are not from a political background to connect with the political system. This point of mine has garnered tremen-



dous response. We thus come to know that a large number of our youth are eagerly ready to enter politics," Modi said.

All they are looking for is the right opportunity and apt guidance, he added.

"I have also received letters from

youth across the country on this subject. Enormous response is being received on social media as well. People have sent me many kinds of suggestions. Some youth have written in their letters that it is truly inconceivable for them. On account of the absence of a political legacy on part of their grandfather or parents they could not enter politics despite wanting to," the prime minister said.

Some youth have written that they possess a good experience of working at the ground level and hence they can be helpful in solving people's problems, he said.

"Some youth have also written that dynastic politics crushes new talent. Some youth have mentioned that such efforts will lend more strength to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## Infosys scouting for acquisitions; more buys matching 'in-tech' scale possible, says CEO

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** After two acquisitions this year, India's second-largest IT services company Infosys is on the lookout to scoop-up more firms and says the acquisition matching scale of recent in-tech buy is certainly a possibility.

In an interview to PTI, Infosys CEO Salil Parekh said the company is keen on acquisitions in areas like data analytics, SAAS, and may look at some geographies within Europe, and the US.

Asked if more acquisitions could be of the scale matching in-tech, which came with a price-tag of 450 million euros, Parekh said, "Absolutely, I think those would be the size that we will look at in terms of scale, and given our structure we could do a few of those."

Back in January, Infosys announced a definitive agreement to acquire 100 per cent of the equity share capital in InSemi Technology Services, a semiconductor design services company headquartered in India, for a consideration (including earn-outs, and management incentives and retention bonuses) totalling up to ₹ 280 crore. A bigger acquisition followed in three months.

In April, Infosys Germany, a wholly-owned step-down subsidiary, entered into a definitive agreement to acquire 100 per cent of the equity share capital in in-tech Holding -- leading provider of engineering R&D services headquartered in Germany -- for a con-

### Anil Ambani reviewing Sebi order, to take appropriate steps: Statement

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Businessman Anil Ambani is reviewing a Sebi order imposing a fine and banning him from capital markets for five years in an alleged fund diversion case and will take appropriate next steps as legally advised, his spokesperson said in a statement on Sunday.

Ambani, the spokesperson in a statement said, had resigned from the board of Reliance Infrastructure Ltd and Reliance Power Ltd, pursuant to Sebi's interim order dated February 11, 2022 in the matter pertaining to Reliance Home Finance Ltd.

He "is in compliance with the said interim order (of February 11, 2022) for the last two and half years," the statement said.

On the August 22 order that banned him and 24 others from the securities market for five years on charges of diversion of funds, the spokesperson said, "Mr Ambani is reviewing the final order dated August 22, 2024 passed by Sebi in the said matter, and will take appropriate next steps as legally advised."

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) had also imposed a fine of Rs 25 crore on Ambani, saying he orchestrated a scheme to "siphon off" funds from Reliance Home Finance, a listed subsidiary of conglomerate Reliance Group of which he is chairman. The ban means that he and the other 24 will not be able to access the securities market and are prohibited from buying, selling or otherwise dealing in securities, directly or indirectly.

In a separate statement, Mumbai-listed Reliance Infrastructure Ltd said it "was not a noticee or party to the proceedings before Sebi in which the order is passed. No directions are given in the order against Reliance Infrastructure Ltd". (PTI)



sideration of up to 450 million euros (about ₹ 4,045 crore).

"...we have very good business in engineering services already within Infosys and then we did those two acquisitions, both of them in engineering services, one on semiconductor side and one on the automotive side... very strong businesses, and we feel quite good about expanding that footprint," Parekh said.

Infosys is eyeing more acquisitions, he said, adding that the company is evaluating several firms.

"...we have a good balance sheet and good cash generation and now we are quite comfortable with the integration of acquisition in different areas. We have done engineering services, we will look at other areas... for example data analyt-

ics... may look at SAAS (software as a service) areas, and maybe at some other geographies in Europe, maybe the US as well," he said.

Parekh, however, said a lot depends on strategic synergies, financial cost, cultural fit and integration aspects.

"We are continuing to look, and we have things that are normally in the pipeline but those take their own time... there are a lot of discussions on strategic fit, on financial cost of it and cultural fit into the company and then how will we integrate them. Many of those discussions are ongoing and we will see what comes out," the Infosys top honcho said.

On whether he is hopeful of closing more acquisitions this fiscal year, Parekh indicated that it is

tough to put a timeline on the outcome of ongoing discussions.

"It is difficult to say... we are evaluating several (of them). But to get a fit on the strategic parameters, financial parameters, culture, integration... all of it may not work out. But these two (InSemi and in-tech) happened relatively quickly... before that for some quarters we had not done anything. It is not a predictable thing, but the evaluation is ongoing," he said.

According to the Grant Thornton Bharat Dealtracker Q2 2024 report, Indian dealmaking saw overall 501 deals, valued at USD 21.4 billion. The report said the second quarter of 2024 witnessed the highest quarterly volumes since the second quarter of 2022, while values declined due to the absence of big-ticket merger and acquisition transactions.

Grant Thornton Bharat Dealtracker further said the merger and acquisition (M&A) activity during the second quarter saw 132 deals worth USD 6.2 billion, marking a slight increase in volumes but a substantial 50 per cent drop in values. As per the report, domestic deals drove growth with volumes rising 29 per cent and values increasing 2.5 times compared to the first quarter of the current year. In contrast, cross-border deals experienced a decline, with volumes decreasing 24 per cent and values plummeting 85 per cent from the first quarter of 2024. (PTI)

## India needs to lead global tech transition, build jobs of the future: Ola Founder Bhavish Aggarwal

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Ola Founder Bhavish Aggarwal is placing bold bets on new-age technologies with a view for India to be at the forefront of the current global tech transition led by AI, and build jobs of the future in the country.

In an interaction with PTI editors at the agency's headquarters here, he said the private sector has to do the bulk of job creation, step up and do more, while creating an enabling environment and correcting imbalances, such as that of trade, are the responsibility of the government.

Aggarwal also supported the government's move to offer fiscal incentives to global EV makers, including Tesla, through the new EV policy saying it is important for India to attract all kinds of investment, and globally established players will help in the development of the EV ecosystem in the country.

The group's newly-listed entity Ola Electric aims to make India a global electric vehicle (EV) hub but the country has to invent an EV and energy transition paradigm for itself based on its needs as the world cannot achieve a sustainable future without India, he added.

"There is a global technology transition happening and AI is a very important technology of the future, and we in India need to lead this journey. If you look at the current state, I think we are still adopters of somebody else's technology paradigms, especially in the digital world," Aggarwal said, explaining why the Ola group had set up AI start-up Krutrim last year.

One of the things in Krutrim is to build AI models on Indian data, which is more attuned to Indian use cases, Indian paradigms, he said, adding, "We are making our own AI, on our own cloud, on our own chip."

Despite India producing 20 per



cent of the world's digital data at present, he lamented that the country does not fully own the data, as 80 per cent are stored outside, which are then processed into AI and "brought back into India and sold to us in dollars."

When asked about concerns over AI leading to job losses, he allayed the apprehension saying that the IT boom created jobs in India when people feared that computers would take away jobs, and AI is a similar tool. "AI is not going to replace anyone. Maybe that future is a few decades away... We don't need to get anxious about that future right now. We need to, as a country, see that AI is going to amplify productivity. If we don't get onto the bandwagon, we will be left behind..." he asserted.

In his view, Aggarwal said the way forward is for India to become experts in future technology.

"Future technologies bring with it jobs of the future, supply chain of the future. And if we are global leaders, we are the fastest adoptive market of future technologies (then) jobs of the future will be built in India, supply chains of the future will be built in India. This is the only way... If we focus on protecting the past, you remain uncompetitive," he added.

Sharing his take on employment generation in India, Aggarwal said, "I actually believe the private sector has to do the bulk of the job

creation. The government's job is to create the enabling environment, create the fundamentals, help correct imbalances wherever they are, be it trade imbalances, etc and incentivise wherever it needs to be incentivised, like the PLI schemes." The government's steps such as the employment-linked incentives will also encourage private industry, he said, adding "But fundamentally the private sector has to step up and do more."

Asked if the government is doing enough to create that ecosystem for the private sector, Aggarwal said, "I'm not in the government, so I want to put the limelight on ourselves. Is the private sector doing enough? I think we all can do more, and I'm on the same page. We all need to do more." In response to a query on his views over the government in extending the fiscal concession that companies like Tesla have been demanding from India, he said, "It is very important for India to attract all kinds of investment, especially (from) world leading companies."

"Tesla is a best in class company. The more companies like these invest into India, the better it is for India, in a broad sense as well for the industry."

He further said, "The (EV) ecosystem, including my company, will benefit from it, because it will raise the bar on expertise, on excellence, on talent, everything..." About the newly-listed entity Ola Electric, he said, "Our mission at Ola electric is to really make India a global EV hub."

The company will build products such as electric two and three-wheelers that Indians need for the country to be able to invent an EV and energy transition paradigm for itself, different from the current global solution for sustainability that is focussed on electric luxury cars, Aggarwal added. (PTI)

## Candytoy plans to raise 90 cr by diluting 10% stake at ₹ 900-cr valuation

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Candytoy Corporate, the manufacturer of candy toys for companies such as Colgate, Puma, MTR, Bournvita, Yellow Diamonds, Vistara Airlines and AirAsia among others, is aiming for around ₹ 450 crore turnover by the next fiscal year, founder Director Gaurav Mirchandani has said.

Moreover, to fund its growth plans, the Indore-based company has plans to raise 90 crore by divesting 10 per cent equity at a valuation of ₹ 900 crore, he added.

Besides, the bootstrap startup firm also plans to get listed on the stock exchange in the next three years, Mirchandani said.

"We are diluting 10 per cent stake in the company through a VC. We are bringing ₹ 90 crore which will be primarily invested this year to make sure that we are touching around ₹ 400 crore to ₹ 450 crore turnover by the next financial year," Mirchandani told PTI. Candytoy Corporate Pvt Ltd (CTC) had a turnover of around ₹ 250 crore in FY 2023-24.

"Now with 30 per cent y-o-y growth in orders for the last two years, we see the requirement to open new plants to not only cater to this growth in demand but also bring newer product lines," he said.

The company, with 250 injection moulding machines, manufactures 10.5 million candy toys per day. "Our third Manufacturing plant in Indore has just commenced operations and we will also soon start manufacturing at our Jebel Ali plant (near Dubai, UAE) which will cater to the brands in UAE, Saudi Arabia Oman & Kuwait," he said.

CTC has invested ₹ 35 crore each (\$5 million) in

both the plants and plans to enter into newer categories including inflatables, and bubble water toys, Mirchandani added.

Mirchandani said the Indian market has "immense" growth potential as only a few companies like Ferrero India, with its Kinder Joy, offer chocolates with a surprise toy. "Most of these candy toys are imported from China, which has quality issues because of the sugar quality. Here we are using organic sugar, which is good for the kid and the toy attached to it has a creative value," he said.

Its major clients include Pratap Snacks, HUL, Colgate Palmolive, and Perfetti Van Melle for the domestic market. While on the international market, the majority of its products are going to the US and Europe right now.

Incorporated in 2019, Candytoy Corporate operates with its two brands SM Toys and confectionary brand Hoppin Candy Toy, which is the leading manufacturer of plastic promotional toys and confectionery. Around 80 per cent of sales come from business-to-business (B2B) and the rest from business-to-consumer (B2C) brands. Overall, CTC through its five factories (three in Indore, one in Hyderabad and one in Delhi) and 11 contractual manufacturers in India makes promotional toys, candy toys, Barbie dolls, electronic toys, DIY toys, LED toys, musical toys, prank toys and sticky toys etc.

Besides India, CTC exports to more than 35 countries in Europe, US, Africa, Turkey, South Africa, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait & UAE among others. (PTI)

## IndiGo to soon offer gender-neutral option 'Mx' during ticket booking

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** IndiGo will be soon introducing the gender-neutral option of honorific 'Mx' for passengers at the time of booking tickets, as part of larger efforts to boost inclusivity.

Besides, the country's largest carrier, which has a domestic market share of 62 per cent, aims to increase by two-fold the number of individuals with disabilities employed by it.

The airline will be introducing the 'Mx' option at the time of booking for passengers and that will provide a choice for transgender who do not want to identify

themselves, Sukhjit S Pasricha, Group Chief Human Resources Officer at IndiGo, told PTI. Currently, 'male' and 'female' are the options available on the airline's website during the booking process. Air India Express and Vistara already offer the 'Mx' option for passengers at the time of booking tickets. Pasricha said IndiGo has implemented various initiatives for the LGBTQ+ community, including employee referral programmes specifically designed to encourage hiring of LGBTQ+ individuals.

"This has strengthened candidate mobilisation through internal

resources and fostered a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ employees... we partner with agencies specializing in LGBTQ+ recruitment," he said.

According to him, there is a steady induction of LGBTQ+ individuals and they are working in various functions, including flying, at the airline. "Our benefits like gender reassignment surgery, inclusion of live-in partners in the medical insurance, has created an even more inclusive space, and has been one of the attractive features in our outreach to aspiring candidates from the community," he added. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1..

## PM bats for youngsters without

our democracy. I thank each and everyone for sending in suggestions on the subject," Modi said. He hoped that with collective efforts, youth who do not possess a political background, will also be able to come forward in politics. Their experience and their fervour will prove useful for the country, Modi said. "Even during the freedom struggle, many such people had come forward, who did not have any political background. They took the plunge for the sake of India's freedom. Once more, we require the same spirit to attain the goal of Viksit Bharat," he said. He urged the youth to positively join this campaign. "This step of yours will be transformative in terms of your future and the country's future," Modi said. During the programme, Modi also spoke to young entrepreneurs, who were IIT-Madras alumni and helming space start-up GalaxEye, as they highlighted their work. They praised the growing vibrant space ecosystem in the country.

The prime minister said the youth of the country has benefited a lot from various reforms in the space sector. On the occasion, he noted that India celebrated its first National Space Day on August 23 to mark the first anniversary of the successful landing of its spacecraft on the Moon.

Modi also noted that the 'Har Ghar Tiranga' and 'Poora Desh Tiranga' campaign was a resounding success. "We saw the Tricolour fluttering atop houses, as well as at schools, colleges and Universities. Some people had the Tricolour adorn their shops, offices... people also did the same on their desktops, mobiles and vehicles. When people join hands to express a sentiment, it thus lends unparalleled glory to any campaign," Modi said.

A Tiranga rally, bearing a 750 metre-long flag was also taken out on the Chenab Railway Bridge, the tallest in the world, he pointed out.

"We all saw captivating pictures of the Tiranga Yatra on the Dal Lake in Srinagar. A yatra with a 600-feet-long Tiranga was carried out in East Kameng District in Arunachal Pradesh. On similar lines, in other States of the country as well, people of all ages participated in such Tiranga Yatras," Modi said.

This campaign wove the entire country into a thread of togetherness and this is exactly what 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' is, he said.

In his radio broadcast, Modi also cited the example of Barekuri village in Assam where people of Moran community have a deep bond with Hoolock Gibbons.

"When they realised that Gibbons love bananas a lot, they started growing bananas on their farms. Besides, they decided that they would perform rituals connected with the birth and death of Gibbons, exactly as they would have performed for their near and dear ones. They have also named the Gibbons," he said.

"Recently, the Gibbons were facing hardships on account of electric wires passing through, in the vicinity. In this scenario, the villagers put forth the problem to the government and a quick solution was found out too," he said. He also cited another example of human-animal bond, saying young people in Arunachal Pradesh have started using 3-D printing technology to protect wild animals from being hunted for their horns and tusks.

The prime minister also lauded the efforts of people behind a park in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua where wonderful artworks out of waste have been created. The prime minister also batted for toy recycling, saying this is another such field where "we can work together". "You too are aware of the fact that whereas many children get bored of their toys within no time, there are children as well for whom such toys are a pipedream. Toys that your children no longer play with... you can give them away to spaces, where they continue being useful," he said.

Modi also urged people to connect with campaigns pertaining to awareness about nutrition. "A tiny effort on your part, will help a lot in the fight against malnutrition," he said. Modi also noted that August 29 is Telugu Bhasha Diwas. "It's truly an amazing language. I extend good wishes to Telugu speakers across the world on Telugu Bhasha Diwas," he said. Modi also urged people to be a part of the Catch the Rain Movement. "Paralympics are about to begin in Paris. Our divyang brothers and sisters have reached there. 140 crore Indians are cheering for our athletes and players. You too also encourage our players with #Cheer4Bharat," he said. (PTI)

## Unified Pension Scheme: U in UPS

"Pension for govt staff in India is inherently a tax on the majority poor to pay the elite minority. So, OPS was reformed to NPS in 2013. But NPS did not assure a minimum amount for retired families," Chakravarty said in a post on X. "Now, UPS does that UPS = NPS + Minimum guarantee. This is prudent & welcome," he said. Though Chakravarty's X account is not verified, several top Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, follow it.

The Union Cabinet on Saturday approved an assured pension of 50 per cent of salary for those who joined the service after January 1, 2004, under the National Pension System (NPS), fulfilling a long-pending demand of government employees ahead of assembly elections in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir.

Employees opting for the UPS would be eligible for an assured pension of 50 per cent of the average basic pay drawn over the last 12 months before superannuation for a minimum qualifying service of 25 years.

This pay is to be proportionate for a lesser service period up to a minimum of 10 years of service, Information and Broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

The new pension scheme also guarantees an assured minimum pension of Rs 10,000 per month on superannuation after a minimum of 10 years of service. This will benefit 23 lakh central government employees, Vaishnaw said, adding that the number would rise to 90 lakh if state governments want to join the scheme. (PTI)

## Ban on Jamaat-e-Islami

a plebiscite for Jammu and Kashmir. "This is the same BJP whose prime minister A B Vajpayee had acknowledged that Kashmir is an issue which needs to be addressed. He talked to Pakistan as well the separatist leaders here. It meant there is an issue here."

"Article 370 was a bridge between J-K and the country. Now, they have broken that bridge and they came to see its impact in the Parliament elections when the people of north Kashmir voted for the plebiscite sentiment which they (Centre) had thought was perhaps dead," she said.

Mufti said her party is of the view that the "resolution of Kashmir issue" has to be found within the framework of the Constitution of the country. (PTI)

## Excise policy 'scam': SC

Tiwari and former assistant commissioner Pankaj Bhatnagar. According to the CBI and ED, irregularities were committed while modifying the excise policy and undue favours were extended to the licence holders.

The Delhi government had implemented the excise policy on November 17, 2021 but scrapped it at the end of September 2022 amid allegations of corruption. (PTI)

## Macro data, global cues to chart market direction this week: Analysts

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Release of key macroeconomic numbers, monthly derivatives expiry, and global cues are likely to drive stock market movement this week, according to analysts.

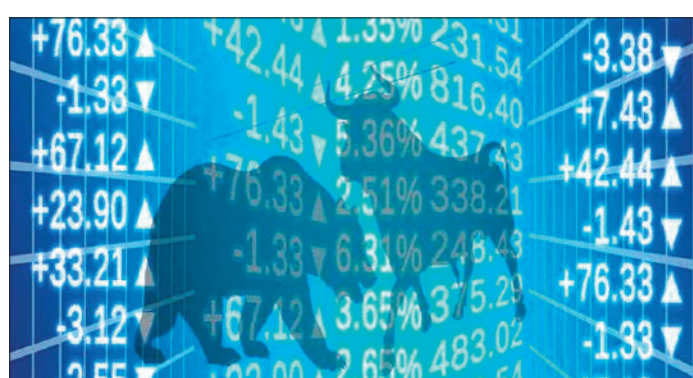
Markets will also be reacting to remarks made by the US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, they said.

"This week, we expect the market to witness a gradual up-move with stock-specific action. The focus will shift to monthly F&O expiry as well as global cues."

Markets on Monday would react to commentaries of the US Fed Chair at the Jackson Hole Symposium. Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

US Fed Chair Jerome Powell on Friday signalled that the central bank would cut its interest rate in the September meeting.

Powell made a crucial speech that laid the groundwork for future interest rate reductions. Powell said, "The time has come for policy to adjust".



"The market has been expecting an interest rate cut during the next Federal Reserve meeting in September. There are indications that the rate cuts could happen at a faster pace, especially with the weakening of jobs data."

"However, Powell believes that the chances of the US economy entering a recession in the near term are very low. This implies that rate cuts would likely align with consensus expectations, and the possibility of higher rate cuts may be lower," Chief Investment

Officer at Axis Securities PMS Naveen Kulkarni said. After the Fed Chief's speech, US markets started their upward movement and closed higher on Friday. Traders are anticipating some volatility in the subsequent sessions due to the monthly F&O expiry scheduled this week, experts said.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 649.37 points or 0.80 per cent. The NSE Nifty too closed with gains of 282 points or 1.1 per cent. "The Indian market continued its recovery rally this week,

buoyed by positive US economic data, which diminished the likelihood of a US recession. Moreover, positive global sentiment from ceasefire talks between Israel and Hamas, along with a decline in crude prices, contributed to the rally," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said.

In institutional activity, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) pulled out ₹ 1,608.89 crore from equities, however, domestic institutional investors kept their buying streak, purchasing ₹ 13,020.29 crore worth of stocks during the previous week.

According to Religare Broking's Senior Vice-President of Research, Ajit Mishra, domestically, investors will keep an eye on economic data releases, including GDP figures and infrastructure output. India is scheduled to release the GDP figures for the first quarter of the current fiscal year on August 30. Additionally, the production of the infrastructure sector for July will also be revealed. (PTI)



## New STP will serve 11,000 residents across three wards of Nagaon municipal board

### Ashok Singhal inaugurates state's first 2.0 MLD STP in Nagaon



**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Aug 25:** Minister of Urban Development and Irrigation Ashok Singhal ceremonially inaugurated Assam's first Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) with a capacity of 2.0 MLD in Nagaon on Sunday, marking a significant milestone for the state.

During the inauguration, the minister emphasised the importance of proper collection and safe disposal of liquid waste for urban and industrial societies. He highlighted that Assam generates 809

MLD of liquid waste, yet until now, the state had no operational STP to address this issue.

The new STP project is expected to benefit approximately 11,000 residents from three wards (14, 15, and 16) of the Nagaon Municipal Board. Singhal also announced plans to develop the area near the STP on the banks of the Kolong river with landscaping and beautification. This green space will provide residents with opportunities for recreational activities such as cycling and other leisure pursuits.

The minister noted that while initiating a project is a significant achievement, ensuring its smooth operation is a greater challenge. He called on the community to work together to maintain harmony with nature and strive to make Nagaon a clean and beautiful city.

The inauguration was attended by Nagaon district commissioner Narendra Kr Shah, the chairman of the Assam Urban Water Supply and Sewerage Board, MLA of the Nagaon Batadroba constituency Rupak Sarma, and other officials, according to an official press note.

# First meeting of Adivasi Welfare and Development Council held in Bargolai

*Meeting celebrated the Adivasi Peace Accord & discussed future development under leadership of CM Himanta*

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Aug 25:** On Sunday, a citizens' meeting of Adivasi Welfare and Development Council was held at the premises of Margaret Memorial High School, Bargolai, under Margherita sub-division of Tinsukia district for the first time.

Notably, the Adivasi Peace Accord was signed on April 15, 2022, in New Delhi between insurgent groups belonging to the Adivasi community of Assam, in the presence of state chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Union Home minister Amit Shah.

At that time, the Adivasi Welfare and Development Council was formed for the development and welfare of the Adivasi community in Assam. Peter Dang, deputy chief ex-



ecutive member of the Adivasi Welfare and Development Council, was present as the chief guest, along with Adivasi Peace Movement Committee president Vincent Kujur, general secretary Ignatius Ekka,

former president of the All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (Tinsukia District Committee) Ramanus Lakra, advisor Milton Kujur, Adivasi Peace Movement Committee (Tinsukia District Committee)

president Asap Tirkey, All Adivasi Women's Association of Assam (Tinsukia District Committee) president Reshma Uraon, All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA) Margherita Regional Committee president Samuel Topno, secretary Sanjay, Margaret Memorial High School Bargolai founder and proprietor Anil Nag, and many other resourceful and distinguished persons from the Adivasi community in Margherita sub-division who attended the citizens' meeting.

All the guests present were felicitated with traditional Adivasi gamosas.

In his speech, Peter Dang stated that under the able leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, significant

development has taken place for more than 80 lakh Adivasi people living in Assam, and in the future, the Adivasi Welfare and Development Council is committed to carrying out all-around development work.

Peter Dang also mentioned that the Adivasi Peace Accord was signed on April 15, 2022, in New Delhi between Adivasi insurgent groups of Assam, such as the All Adivasi National Liberation Army, Birs Commando Force, Adivasi People's Army, Santhal Tiger Force, and a total of 17 insurgent groups, with a commitment from Union Home minister Amit Shah and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma that the Adivasi community in Assam shall benefit from the Adivasi Peace Accord.

## Raijor Dal organises special felicitation prog



**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Aug 25:** The Raijor Dal Demow constituency organised a special felicitation programme on Sunday at N Chetia Bhawan, located in front of the Demow Press Club. The event was held to honour former reporters from the Demow, Nitaipanidehing, and Bokota areas.

During the programme, tributes were paid to senior reporters of the Demow media fraternity who have passed away, including Late Anil Kumar Dey, Late Muhanram Saikia, Late Jagat Bezbarua, and Late Nageswar Gogoi, by lighting earthen lamps in front of their photographs.

The event was presided over by Rahul Borgohain, president of Raijor Dal Demow constituency, and jointly anchored by Debojit

Changmai, general secretary of Raijor Dal Demow constituency, and Dipak Konwar, organisational secretary of Raijor Dal Central Committee.

The Raijor Dal Demow constituency felicitated former reporters from the Demow, Nitaipanidehing, and Bokota areas. The families of the deceased senior reporters were also honoured during the programme.

Dhaijya Konwar, general secretary of Raijor Dal Central Committee, spoke on the occasion, and former reporters shared their valuable insights. The event was attended by Ranjit Gogoi, district general secretary of Raijor Dal, along with Raijor Dal Demow constituency workers and media personnel from the Demow Press Club.

## Case filed against Joypur couple for selling daughter

**HT Correspondent**  
**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Aug 25:** A couple from Joypur, Hatinga, under Jamuguri PS, has been apprehended by the Jamuguri police on charges of selling their adult daughter to a resident of Arunachal Pradesh on August 18.

According to reports, the couple sold their young daughter to a resident of Chilipam, Arunachal Pradesh, on August 18. The brave girl managed to escape from the clutches of the Arunachali man and returned to her birthplace, taking refuge in a relative's house. The parents of the girl have been identified as Bubul Nath and Kiran Devi. The girl filed an FIR at Jamuguri PS against her parents on Sunday, with the support of the local community. The police have arrested the couple based on the allegations made by their daughter. The girl has been sent to a child care home in Tezpur by the police.

It is noteworthy that this is not the first time the couple has engaged in such behaviour; they had previously sold their daughter twice. Local residents had previously intervened to console and counsel the parents regarding their actions, but the couple repeated their mistakes. This time, the community has appealed to the administration to impose exemplary punishment on the parents for their inhumane actions.

## AAMSU submits memo to Hojai SP

*Union calls for immediate jail time for accused Biswajit Das, a speedy investigation & stringent measures to protect girl students*



**HT Correspondent**

**HOJAI, Aug 25:** The All Assam Minorities Students' Union (AAMSU) Hojai District Committee submitted a memorandum to the superintendent of police, Hojai district, Shankardev Nagar, on Saturday, regarding the recent incidents of sexual harassment and molestation of minor girls in Hojai town and various other places across the state.

In the memorandum, they stated that a teacher named Biswajit Das, along with another accused, allegedly committed a heinous crime against a minor girl and recorded video footage of the incident.

The accused has since been arrested, they added.

According to the memo, Hojai district is an educational hub in the north-eastern region, attracting thousands of students, including girls, from various parts of Assam.

Many students, especially girls, travel alone early in the morning and late in the evening to attend coaching classes or tuition centres, making them vulnerable to eve-teasing, harassment, and other forms of violence.

Through this memorandum, AAMSU raised several demands: The accused, Biswajit Das, and his accomplices should be jailed, a speedy investigation conducted, and a charge sheet filed at the earliest to ensure a custodial trial; the accused should be sentenced to death by the court, and no loopholes should be allowed; a list of all coaching centres and tuition classes in Hojai town should be prepared, and police patrolling should be arranged in those areas; the safety and security of all girl students in PG hostels and colleges in Hojai and surrounding areas should be ensured; all private educational institutions should employ female security guards; rowdy elements and eve-teasers should be strictly punished, and their gatherings near schools and colleges should be banned; CCTV cameras should be installed in all private schools, colleges, PG hostels, and coaching centres; school buses should also have CCTV cameras installed; teachers should not be allowed to give private tuitions to their own students; all private educational institutions should appoint a female coordinator for girl students; police verification should be made mandatory for all e-rickshaw drivers, motor drivers, and individuals coming from outside to live in Hojai district.

Finally, the AAMSU Hojai District Committee demanded that necessary steps be taken to ensure the safety and security of students, especially girl students, in Hojai district.

## Hollonghabi Tea Estate becomes first in state to declare Durga Puja bonus



**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Aug 25:** Hollonghabi Tea Estate, situated at Tingrai, Digboi, under the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) Margherita branch in Tinsukia district, has become the first tea estate in Assam to declare its bonus for employees for the upcoming Durga Puja. On Saturday, an agreement was signed between the management, workers, and representatives of the ACMS garden unit.

Hollonghabi Tea Estate is owned by noted Assamese tea planter Ranjit Kumar Baruah of Digboi.

Hari Nanda Ghor, secretary of the ACMS Margherita branch, stated that every year, tea estates in Assam provide bonuses to their employees. On Saturday, an agreement was signed between the management of Hollonghabi Tea Estate, its workers, and the ACMS garden unit. According to the agreement, out of the 20 percent bonus, the first installment of 12 percent is to be given before Durga Puja, with the remaining 8 percent to be paid in March of the following year. Hollonghabi Tea Estate is the first tea estate in Assam to declare its bonus for employees this year.

Ranjit Kumar Baruah, proprietor of Hollonghabi Tea Estate, expressed his satisfaction, stating, "Every year, we provide bonuses to employees on time, and this year, Hollonghabi Tea Estate is proud to be the first in Assam to declare its bonus for our hardworking employees. We are truly happy and satisfied."

## Lions Club Guwahati City hosts mega health camp

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** The Lions Club of Guwahati City organised a free mega health check-up and medicine distribution camp at Bengali Higher Secondary School, Palatan Bazar, Guwahati, under the 'One District, One Activity' initiative.

The camp provided Allopathic, Ayurvedic, and Homoeopathic treatments and medicines to underprivileged students and their parents, addressing their specific needs. The event was a resounding success, with numerous beneficiaries expressing their gratitude for the services provided.

A total of 158 individuals attended the camp, according to club president Sanoj Agarwal.

The Lions Club of Guwahati City extends its heartfelt appreciation to the participating doctors, including Dr Arijit Mazumder, Dr Vivek Sharma, Dr Poonam Sharma, and Dr Ashish Kumar Kundu, for their selfless contributions. The club also thanks Bajrang Ayurved, Aimal Pharmaceuticals, Altis Healthcare, Chirayu Pharmaceuticals, and Indichem Health Specialities for their generous donation of medicines.

Programme chairman Madhusudan Siotia and co-chairman Narayan Choudhary expressed their gratitude to all the doctors, medicine providers, school principal and teachers, and club members for their efforts in making the camp a grand success.



*Herd of huge wild elephants spotted at Brahmaputra Chapari, Majuli on Sunday. UB Photos*

## NFR achieves milestone in 'Zero Scrap Mission'



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** In alignment with the 'Zero Scrap Mission' of Indian Railways, Northeast Frontier Railway has made significant progress in clearing scrap materials from all establishments and units under its jurisdiction. As part of this mission, continuous monitoring ensures that stations, depots, sheds, workshops, and sections remain free from scrap.

During the last fiscal year, under the 'Zero Scrap Mission', NF Railway sold 23,628 MT of scrap rails/P-Way materials and 19,192 MT of miscellaneous scrap items, generating revenue of ₹

202.84 crores. Additionally, 26 diesel locomotives, 247 coaches, and 284 wagons were sold as condemned rolling stock.

Up to July 2024 of the current fiscal year, Northeast Frontier Railway has sold scrap materials worth ₹ 41.58 crores, including scrap rails, P-Way materials, condemned coaches, wagons, and locomotives—representing a 34.65 percent increase compared to the ₹ 30.88 crores generated during the same period last year.

The 'Zero Scrap Mission' drive has not only generated significant revenue for Indian Railways but also created space for accumulating new materials, including scrap. This initiative has surpassed scrap sale targets, improved the aesthetics of stations, workplaces, and surrounding areas, and contributed to keeping railway premises clean and environmentally friendly.

## 'Bigger intention' of grabbing land, threatening Assamese identity behind crimes against women: CM

**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has claimed that the recent incidents of crimes against women in the state are being committed with a "bigger intention of grabbing land and threatening the identity of the Assamese people". He hinted at 'political patronage' behind the crimes, while also claiming that financial power is shifting out of the hands of the Assamese people.

"No society is perfect. Crimes against women are a reality. These crimes have come down in the state in the last three years. But the real intention in the recent incidents is much bigger, through crimes such as rape the target is our land, civilisation," Sarma said at a press interaction late on Saturday evening.

"In Assam, this design is on for the last 30-35 years. That is why the Assam Agitation happened. We have identified the radicals now, but in 1975 itself, the Assamese society was warned that this would happen," he said, referring to the six-year-long movement from 1979 against illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Claiming that a "big conspiracy of grabbing land" is being hatched through such crimes, Sarma said, "The survivor's

family in Dhing told me that they don't want to stay there anymore... people sell off their property and leave for other places. For a plot of land worth Rs 5 lakh, they are offered Rs 50 lakh."

A 14-year-old girl was allegedly raped by three persons in Nagaon's Dhing area on Thursday evening, with the incident sparking widespread protests. One of the accused was arrested by the police the next day, but he died when he jumped into a pond while purportedly trying to escape from custody.

Sarma claimed that there is a "pattern" in which first, one or two persons enter and set up their houses in a village, then they start eating beef in their homes and neighbours, uncomfortable with it, start leaving the area.

"It is happening in Barpeta, Mangaldai and other places. Previous chief ministers didn't say these things, but I have said it. There could be threat to my life someday, but I am saying it as it is my duty," Sarma asserted.

"It is all a game of money. Financial power is shifting out of the hands of Assamese people. They are taking advantage of it," he said, without naming any community. (PTI)



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Lend yourself to others, but give yourself to yourself.*  
-Michel de Montaigne

## Modi's balancing act in Ukraine

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Ukraine has highlighted India's delicate balancing act in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. As the first Indian leader to visit Ukraine since the war began, Modi's trip underscores India's attempt to navigate a complex geopolitical landscape, maintaining ties with Russia while engaging with Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's call for India to use its influence on Russia reflects the significance of New Delhi's position in global affairs. As a major importer of Russian oil, India's economic ties with Moscow are pivotal, and Zelenskyy's dissatisfaction with these ties was evident during his talks with Modi. The Ukrainian President expressed his concerns over India's "record-breaking" oil deals with Russia, emphasizing the need for India to reconsider its stance on the conflict.

Modi's visit came shortly after his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, which drew international attention. The optics of Modi and Putin's warm embrace were not lost on the global stage, especially as it coincided with Russian strikes on Ukrainian targets, including a children's hospital in Kyiv. This timing fueled questions about India's neutrality and its role in the conflict. Modi's non-condemnation of Russia's invasion has been a point of contention, leading many to wonder whether India leans more towards Moscow than Kyiv. During his visit, Modi sought to project India as a peace-seeking nation, offering to mediate between Russia and Ukraine. His symbolic gesture of placing a soft toy at a shrine for children killed in the war, alongside Zelenskyy, was a poignant moment. However, the question remains whether such gestures will translate into meaningful diplomatic action. Modi's emphasis on peace and his invocation of Mahatma Gandhi's legacy may resonate with the international community, but actions often speak louder than words. The Indian Prime Minister's engagement with the Ukrainian leadership, including his meeting with Ukrainian students and the Indian community in Kyiv, was aimed at showcasing India's commitment to peace. However, the complexities of the situation were evident as Modi balanced his desire to maintain strong ties with Russia while addressing Ukraine's concerns. Zelenskyy's evident unease during their interactions reflected the tension between India's actions and its rhetoric.

The broader implications of Modi's visit cannot be ignored. India's energy purchases from Russia have been a lifeline for Moscow's war economy, and Modi's reluctance to condemn the invasion has been criticized by Western nations. Yet, Modi has consistently maintained that India's priority is peace. His message to both Putin and Zelenskyy has been clear: dialogue is the only way forward. Modi's visit also came against the backdrop of Ukraine's recent incursions into Russian territory, further complicating the prospects for peace. While Modi's offer to mediate has been welcomed by some, others question whether he has the leverage or influence to bring the two sides to the negotiating table. The optics from Kyiv were not entirely encouraging, with smiles few and far between, and an awkward hug between the two leaders underscoring the challenges ahead. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Ukraine was a significant diplomatic move, highlighting India's growing role on the world stage. However, the path to peace between Russia and Ukraine remains fraught with challenges. Modi's balancing act between Moscow and Kyiv will be closely watched, as the world waits to see if his diplomatic efforts can indeed make a difference in ending this brutal conflict. The stakes are high, and the outcome is far from certain.

## Shri Krishna: Management Guru of the Universe

Shri Krishna is a wonderful and unique national hero of our culture. The character of Shri Krishna is the popular character of a folk hero. He is also the ruler of Dwarka estate, but never addressed as 'King Sri Krishna,' instead, he is Brajnanandan. Symmetry in society and the national system was his duty, that's why he never shirked away from his duty, and then religion became his self-discipline, that's why he never rejected it. He remained conscious in the combination of both Pravritti and Nivritti.

Only the ideals of Shri Krishna will pave the way for establishing peace in our nation and the world. This mystery has to be understood as to how Shri Krishna implemented the ideal politics, practical democracy, social harmony, integral humanism and disciplined military and war operations. What kind of policy and intentions are required for the all-round development of any nation? The answers to all these questions are found in the life-story of Shri Krishna.

The entire life of Shri Krishna is synonymous with the cultural nationalism of India. The world has come to know India only through his ideals. With the re-establishment of his ideals the world will know and respect India again. Politically astute vision, suppression of evil people, traitors, criminals and corrupt people, determination to keep promises, vow of surrender for the national interest, liberation of innocent people, elimination of disparities, harmony among differences, prevention of mutual enmity, self-accepted self-restraint, everyone's involvement in the national work.

Cooperation, control of religious power on royal power and renunciation of power to fulfill all these etc. qualities of Shri Krishna are the national life and cultural values of India. In fact, Shri Krishna was a thinker of that order, which transcends the limits of time, and reaches the eternal and infinite. Whenever injustice increases, a national leader like Shri Krishna has to incarnate, as Shri Krishna Himself has said in the Geeta - *yadā yadā hi dharmaśya glānir bhavati bhārata; abhyuthānam ādharmasya tadātmanāṁ srijāmyaham.*

That is, a national leader needs to be born only to counter injus-

tice.

One who arouses the consciousness of the entire public in such a way that the entire society moves like a flood in the desired direction in which he wants to take the entire society and not even the highest mountain peak can stop its strong flow. Shri Krishna was also such a national leader, on whose instructions all the Gop-Gopis left Braj and united against the Demon King Kansa.

Even though Goshwami Tulsi-das was far away from power in the medieval period, his great work Ramcharitmanas still remains a favourite among the masses and even today Tulsi's name is resonating in most parts of India; more than that of any ruling king, king or emperor.

Similarly, recently Mahatma Gandhi was completely away from power. He did not hold the post of Congress President even once. But during his lifetime, he had given direction to the Congress and to the then society and to the entire nation. Jayaprakash Narayan had changed the government by calling for a complete revolution in the country; not because he was in power, but he had public power and that is why he was called 'Loknayak'. He had won immense trust of the people.

Today world's largest organization Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and its Sangh-Director Shri Mohan Bhagwat are also such folk heroes. Loknayak or Jannayak is actually a national leader. Shri Krishna was such a hero during his era. At that time, the rulers of the world used to hover around him in such a way, as if there was a ring of his quadrilateral cycle. Shri Krishna handed over the power to other people, and remained detached from the power. In fact, Shri Krishna could become our national hero only because he played an important role in mobilizing the people's power.

Shri Krishna's personality and his works are multi-faceted and multi-coloured, covering all the characteristics of leadership, i.e. political skill, intelligence, tact, war strategy, personal charm, political charisma, love, gravity, happiness, sorrow and whatnot? For a patriot, Lord Krishna is not only God, but also a teacher who teaches the art of living life as a successful citizen.

Due to various characteristics

of his personality, he attained the status of a superhero in Indian culture. On one hand, he was a knower of politics, and on the other hand, he was a great scholar of philosophy. Taking leadership in the religious, political and social spheres, he promoted the syncretic religion of knowledge-action-devotion. On the basis of his qualifications, he was a Yugapurush, who later on was accepted as Yuvavatar. We remember Him as a great revolutionary hero. He was a philosopher, a thinker, a messenger of Karma and Sankhya Yoga through Geeta and a policy director of the Mahabharata war, but for the simple Brajvasis, he was a music maker, a butter thief, the mischievous Kanhaiya who broke the pots of the Gopis and befuddled Gopis. This is the expression in the Gita - "O Arjuna! The devotee who worships me with the same feelings, I also worship him in the same way. We see the same characteristics in our Prime Minister Narendra Modi also, because by assimilating the life ideals of Shri Krishna, he is creating a strong India - a new vibrant India!

There was such a beautiful coordination of different types of qualities in the life of Shri Krishna that on one hand, he could enjoy the common people; on the other hand, he could uproot and throw away the teeth of an intoxicated elephant like Kuvvalaya Peed with his own hands. This coordination of amazing abilities puts Shri Krishna in a completely different league from other heroes.

The significance of Shri Krishna encompassing ideological and practical ground, which flowed uninterrupted in the Indian society, was implemented by Chanakya through diplomacy, Tulsi-das through devotion, Gandhi through service, Jayaprakash Narain through the public awareness, Mohan Bhagwat through organizational skills proved the practical usefulness of thinking. Shri Ram, despite being in power, always remained unattached to it in the same way as a lotus leaf remains unattached to it even though it lives in the intoxicating water. Shri Krishna took this tradition of Shri Ram even further. Shri Ram was in power

for some time in his life, but Shri Krishna always remained away from political power. He placed other people in power, but continued worshipping himself.

His humility was to such an extent that when everyone was assigned work in Rajsuya Yagya, Shri Krishna himself took the responsibility of making people pick up used utensils! Such was his humility! The result of this humility was that the crown jewels of all the kings kept falling at his feet. Because of these qualities, even today we consider him the master-practitioner of sixteen arts. No other person in the whole of India from ancient times to the modern times could receive this honour!

The person who stays away from power, and gives direction to the entire nation, despite being away, is a true national leader. The life of a national leader is one of sacrifice. There is no desire for wealth in his life. Lord Shri Ram

was handed over the throne by his father Dasharatha. He could have remained on that throne. But he was detached from power.

Shri Krishna also joins the same tradition. Three qualities were especially present in Him - sacrifice, detachment from power and amazing ability to organize people's power. Due to these three qualities, Shri Krishna succeeded in bringing about the change in the era as per his wish. The ideological level of Shri Krishna was much higher than the practical level. However, he coordinated his ideological and practical plans in such a way that it was not even known where the two streams merged into each other.

The character of Shri Krishna as a national leader is also very divine. Everyone gets drawn towards them. The one who attracts everyone towards himself, paves the path of devotion, removes the sins of the devotees, he is Shri Krishna. He is an ideal character who is a psychologist while diagnosing Arjun's mental distress, an incarnation of Dharma, while killing demons like Kansa, an ideal politician while countering self-interested politics, the best musician in the form of Vishwa Mohini Bansi Bajaiya, the Brijvati. In front of Sudama, He is Premavata, an ideal friend; in the

form of Sudarshan Chakradhari, there is a warrior and pioneer of social revolution. Even the small incidents of His life prove that he was blessed with omniscience. He was the embodiment of religion and a skilled politician.

The administrative and political character of Shri Krishna is very super-natural; in short his overall thought philosophy has only one message - Karma. It is only through karma that it is possible to suppress the harmful tendencies of the society, and replace them with noble tendencies. Shri Krishna's personality is full of infinite compassion. But it is rare to find somebody else tougher than Him who opposes injustice and oppression.

The same Shri Krishna who used to run barefoot for the sake of the one who loved him, the same Shri Krishna also became extremely harsh and ruthless in punishing the wicked. While preaching Geeta, Shri Krishna had told Arjun that there is no benefit in living under the influence of attachment. All these relatives are worth saying, but you have to emphasize on the delivery of knowledge, action and devotion to achieve your objective. Many legends and myths are prevalent about Shri Krishna. But there is a need to make a proper and rational historical evaluation of them in the contemporary context.

Shri Krishna has become the nurturer of rural culture. He gave unprecedented respect to cows in his time. He was conscious about the health and eating habits of cows and cowherds. While he revered the butter, milk and curd extracted from the hard work of cowherds as health protectors, he also prevented these priceless things from being given to Kansa as 'tax'. They wanted these things to be consumed in villages only.

The form of Shri Krishna as a butter thief was not only a direct challenge to the autocratic power, but at the same time, it was also an encouragement to rural culture. Today, on the birth anniversary of Shri Krishna - Jannamashtami, India is expected to be built on his teachings, life ideals and principles, only then Hindus will be strong, only then India will be able to become a Hindu nation in the true sense. (The writer, is a journalist & columnist who can be reached at [latitgarg11@gmail.com](mailto:latitgarg11@gmail.com))

## A new dawn in Assam's legal landscape: Repealing the 1935 Muslim marriages act

The Assam government's decision to table the Assam Repealing Bill, 2024, which seeks to annul the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935, is a momentous step that warrants deep reflection. The initiative, ostensibly aimed at modernizing the legal framework surrounding Muslim marriages and divorces, reflects broader socio-political currents in India. The repeal of a colonial-era statute, while introducing a new legislative framework, signifies a shift not only in legal paradigms but also in the state's approach to the social fabric of Assam's Muslim community.

## The Context of Repeal

The Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935, was a product of its time—a legal instrument devised under British India to manage the registration of Muslim marriages and divorces in Assam. It was part of a broader colonial strategy to codify personal laws based on religious communities.

While the Act did provide a legal avenue for the registration of marriages and divorces among Muslims in Assam, it was, in essence, a non-compulsory framework. The machinery of registration under this Act was informal, and compliance was largely voluntary, leading to widespread instances of non-registration and, by extension, the potential for legal ambiguities.

The state's new move to repeal this Act must be viewed in light of these historical shortcomings. Minister Jogen Mohan's statement highlights the inherent weaknesses of the 1935 Act—its susceptibility to misuse by both registrars and citizens, particularly in the context of underage marriages. The Act, being outdated, fails to align with the modern legal standards that aim to safeguard the rights of individuals, especially women and children.

The introduction of the Assam Repealing Bill, 2024

The Assam Repealing Bill, 2024, is positioned as a corrective measure—a legislative attempt to replace an archaic law with a more robust and compulsory framework.

The Bill proposes to annul not only the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935, but also the associated Rules of the same year. This repeal is not merely a symbolic act of discarding a colonial relic; it is a substantive shift towards enforcing stricter legal standards in the registration of marriages and divorces within the Muslim community.

This move aligns with the Assam government's broader strategy, as evidenced by the simultaneous introduction of the Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Bill, 2024. This proposed legislation is intended to strengthen the institution of marriage by making registration compulsory, thereby ensuring legal recognition and protection. The emphasis on compulsory registration is a clear response to the perceived inadequacies of the 1935 Act, where non-registration often left individuals, particularly women, vulnerable to exploitation and legal uncertainties.

## The Rationale Behind the Legislative Shift

The Assam government's rationale for this legislative overhaul is rooted in its desire to prevent the "menace" of child marriage and unauthorized divorces. Minister Jogen Mohan's statement of objectives and reasons outlines the potential for the 1935 Act to be misused, particularly in cases where marriages involve minors. By not mandating registration and by allowing a lax system of oversight, the Act inadvertently facilitated underage marriages—a practice that the current government is keen to eradicate.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's assertion that the new Bill will be in line with the

Civil Code of Procedure underscores the government's intent to bring Muslim personal law within the ambit of broader legal standards. This move, while ostensibly aimed at protecting individuals, especially women, from the "odds and evils" of non-registered marriages, also speaks to a larger agenda—one that seeks to standardize legal procedures across religious communities in Assam.

## A Socio-Legal Perspective

From a socio-legal perspective, the repeal of the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935, raises significant questions about the relationship between state law and religious personal law. The introduction of the Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Bill, 2024, while seemingly a progressive step, must be analyzed in the context of its potential impact on the Muslim community in Assam.

On one hand, compulsory registration is undeniably a tool for empowerment. It ensures that marriages and divorces are legally recognized, thereby protecting individuals from the vulnerabilities associated with informal unions. It also provides a clear legal recourse in cases of marital disputes, offering protection to women who might otherwise be left without legal support.

On the other hand, the move towards compulsory registration raises concerns about state intervention in religious affairs. The enforcement of a uniform legal standard for marriage and divorce registration may be perceived as an encroachment on the autonomy of religious communities to manage their own affairs.

This tension between state law and religious personal law is not new in India, and it often evokes strong reactions from

those who view such legislative measures as a threat to religious freedom.

## The Implications for Assam's Muslim Community

For Assam's Muslim community, the repeal of the 1935 Act and the introduction of the new Bill represent a significant shift in how their personal affairs are regulated by the state. The mandatory nature of the new registration requirements could be seen as a double-edged sword. While it offers greater legal protection, it also imposes a level of state control that some might find intrusive.

Moreover, the Bill's potential to prevent child marriages—a goal that is undoubtedly commendable—must be balanced against the community's need for autonomy and respect for religious traditions. The success of this legislative shift will depend largely on how it is implemented and perceived by the community it aims to serve.

## Conclusion

The Assam government's decision to repeal the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935, and introduce the Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriages and Divorces Bill, 2024, is a bold legislative move that reflects broader trends in Indian governance. While the move towards compulsory registration of marriages and divorces is a step forward in protecting individual rights, it also raises important questions about the balance between state intervention and religious autonomy.

As Assam moves towards this new legal framework, it is imperative that the government ensures that the implementation of the new Bill is carried out with sensitivity and respect for the religious sentiments of the Muslim community. The success of this legislative overhaul will ultimately depend on how well it addresses the concerns of the community while achieving its stated objectives of legal protection and empowerment. (The author can be reached at [shashankadas007@gmail.com](mailto:shashankadas007@gmail.com))

## Democracy's dawn: Jammu &amp; Kashmir poised for landmark ballot

By: Dipak Kurmi

Jammu and Kashmir will hold Assembly elections from September 18 to October 1, marking the first time voters will elect 90 legislators since the abrogation of Article 370 and the state's bifurcation in August 2019. The prolonged delay in conducting these elections has been a point of contention for years, but a recent directive from the Supreme Court played a pivotal role in establishing the timeline. With the announcement now made, political parties across the spectrum have expressed their support. Kashmir has long been a flashpoint in the conflict between India and Pakistan, with both nations claiming the region while controlling only parts of it. Pakistan has taken the issue to the international stage, including the United Nations. Modi's 2019 decision to split the state sparked mixed reactions domestically and internationally.

The revocation of Article 370 resulted in significant changes for Kashmir, including the loss of its unique flag, criminal code, and constitutional protections. Government job opportunities for locals have diminished, with positions now open to non-residents. Despite these challenges, the state has experienced both positive and negative developments. Prime Minister Modi's initiatives have driven progress, and increasing investment interest from Gulf countries suggests a hopeful future for the region. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, security force casualties have decreased from 80 in 2019 to 33 in 2023, and civilian deaths have fallen from 44 in 2019 to 12 in 2023. The last Assembly elections were held in 2014, and the high voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls has paved the way for these upcoming Assembly elections.

Kashmir witnessed a landmark voter turnout of 58.46% in the recent parliamentary elections, reflecting a significant 30-point increase from the 2019 general elections. Following the 2019 revocation of Article 370 and the state's bifurcation, the government completed a delimitation exercise, expanding the number of assembly

seats in Jammu and Kashmir from 87 to 114 as of 2022, including 24 reserved for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). This adjustment could alter the balance of power and affect political strategies in the forthcoming elections. The BJP has argued that the abolition of Article 370 and its subsequent policies have led to substantial development in the region. The recent Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir marked a notable triumph for Indian democracy, with the National Conference (NC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) experiencing a resurgence in the 2024 polls.

The election provided an opportunity for the National Conference (NC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to reinvigorate their membership and highlight longstanding issues. While the Congress failed to win any seats, the NC achieved a notable victory by securing two out of three available seats and posed a strong challenge for the remaining seat.

Despite the region's troubled history with terrorism and accusations of election rigging, the recent elections were broadly praised for their fairness and transparency. The forthcoming election will be a crucial test of the central government's efforts to more fully integrate Jammu and Kashmir into the Indian Union following the revocation of the region's special status under Article 370.

The upcoming assembly elections will also be a significant challenge for the Election Commission to ensure a violence-free process. Political parties have begun their preparations, focusing on campaign strategies, forging alliances, and selecting candidates. The People's Conference, Congress, Peoples Democratic Party, and National Conference have all convened to strategize for the elections and coordinate their efforts.

The People's Conference, Congress, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and National Conference have each held meetings to strategize for the upcoming assembly elections. Should the elections proceed as planned, the primary contest in the Valley is expected to be between the NC and PDP. Additionally, the polarization and sepa-

ratist rhetoric that emerged during the Lok Sabha elections are likely to intensify and reach their peak during the assembly elections.

The PDP leader, Mehbooba Mufti's daughter, expressed sentiments similar to those of other party leaders. Additionally, various political parties, including the Congress, BJP, CPI(M), and the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP), all welcomed the Election Commission's announcement.

In the 2014 Jammu and Kashmir elections, no single party secured a majority, resulting in the imposition of Governor's Rule for 49 days. This period ended when Mehbooba Mufti of the PDP was appointed chief minister with support from the BJP. In 2018, the BJP withdrew from the coalition, leading to a return of Governor's Rule. The assembly was dissolved in November 2018, and President's Rule was implemented in December 2018. Since then, the state has remained under Governor's Rule.

The government faces a crucial decision on whether to intervene in the Kashmir Valley to tackle soft separatism or to consider a reorganization plan before the elections. During the parliamentary elections, the Congress and the National Conference (NC) formed an alliance, with the NC contesting three seats in Kashmir and the Congress focusing on Jammu and Udhampur.

The PDP, which is part of the INDIA Alliance, was not included in this arrangement and contested three seats in Kashmir against the NC. As for the upcoming Assembly polls, the situation remains unclear. There is speculation that the Congress and NC might join forces, although Omar Abdullah has indicated that forming an alliance with the PDP could be challenging due to their electoral rivalry in the parliamentary elections. For regional parties to strengthen their position, unity is essential, and collaboration with the INDIA Bloc is necessary. The Kashmir elections are highly significant and will be closely watched as the country anticipates the emergence of a popular government after a decade. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com))



# Understanding Neuromuscular Scoliosis: A Comprehensive Guide



By: Dr. Puneet Girdhar

Neuromuscular scoliosis is a complex spinal deformity that develops due to various neurological or muscular conditions. It primarily affects individuals with conditions such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, spinal cord injuries, and neurofibromatosis. This guide aims to provide a comprehensive overview of neuromuscular scoliosis, including its causes, progression, treatment options, and the risks associated with untreated severe deformities.

**What is Neuromuscular Scoliosis?**  
Neuromuscular scoliosis is a type of scoliosis that occurs due to problems with the nerves and muscles that support the spine. Unlike idiopathic scoliosis, which has no known cause, neuromuscular scoliosis is directly linked to underlying neuromuscular conditions.

**Causes**  
Neuromuscular scoliosis can be caused by:

- Cerebral Palsy:** A group of disorders that affect movement and muscle tone.
- Muscular Dystrophy:** A group of genetic disorders that cause muscle weakness and degeneration.
- Spina Bifida:** A birth defect in which the spine and spinal cord don't form properly.
- Spinal Cord Injuries:** Damage to the spinal cord that affects mobility and sensation.
- Neurofibromatosis:** A genetic disorder that causes tumors to form on nerve tissue, affecting spinal development.
- Other Neuromuscular Conditions:** Conditions that impair the nervous system's ability to control muscle function.

**Reasons for Progression**  
The progression of neuromuscular scoliosis can be rapid due to several factors:

- 1. Muscle Imbalance:** Weakness or spasticity in muscles around the spine leads to uneven forces acting on the spine.
- 2. Poor Postural Control:** Inability to maintain a balanced and upright posture can exacerbate spinal curvature.
- 3. Growth Spurts:** Rapid growth periods during adolescence can accelerate the progression of scoliosis.
- Risks of Leaving Severe Deformities Untreated**  
Untreated severe neuromuscular scoliosis can lead to:
  - 1. Increased Deformity:** Worsening of the spinal curvature over time.
  - 2. Respiratory Problems:** Reduced lung capacity and difficulty breathing.
  - 3. Cardiovascular Issues:** Strain on the heart due to compromised lung function.
  - 4. Pain and Discomfort:** Chronic pain and difficulty performing daily activities.
  - 5. Reduced Quality of Life:** Impaired ability to participate in social, educational, and recreational activities.
- Treatment Options**  
**Observation**  
For mild cases or early stages of neuromuscular scoliosis, regular monitoring by a healthcare professional is essential. This involves:
  - Regular Check-ups:** Periodic visits to monitor the progression of the spinal curvature.
  - Physical Therapy:** Exercises to maintain mobility and strength.**Guidelines for Observation**  
Observation is typically recommended for curves less than 20 degrees, particularly if the patient is still growing. The frequency of check-ups usually depends on the rate of progression of the curvature:
  - Every 4-6 Months:** For growing children with mild curves.
  - Annually:** For children with stable curves or those who have completed their growth.

If the curve progresses or if the patient shows signs of rapid growth, more frequent monitoring or a shift to more active treatment options may be necessary.

**Bracing**  
Bracing is less commonly recommended for neuromuscular scoliosis compared to idiopathic scoliosis because it is generally less effective in preventing curve progression. However, in some cases, bracing may be used for:

- Postural Support:** To help maintain an upright position and improve sitting balance.
- Comfort:** To provide some stability and reduce discomfort.

**Surgery**  
Surgery is typically recommended for severe scoliosis (curves greater than 50 degrees) or when the curvature affects the patient's ability to breathe or sit comfortably.

**Indications for Surgery:**

- Severe Spinal Curvature:** Curves that are likely to progress.
- Pain and Discomfort:** Persistent pain that affects daily activities.
- Functional Impairment:** Difficulty with sitting, standing, or walking.
- Respiratory Issues:** Curvature affecting lung function.
- Surgical Procedure:** Posterior Spinal Fusion and Instrumentation
- Goal:** To correct the spinal curvature and stabilize the spine.
- Approach:** A posterior (back) approach is commonly used.

**Steps:**

- 1. Incision:** A midline incision is made along the back.
- 2. Exposure:** The spine is exposed by retracting the muscles.
- 3. Instrumentation:** Rods, screws, and other hardware are attached to the spine to correct the curvature.
- 4. Fusion:** Bone grafts are placed to promote the fusion of the spinal segments.
- 5. Closure:** The incision is closed with sutures or staples.

**Risks and Complications**  
As with any surgery, there are potential risks, including infection, blood loss, and complications related to anesthesia. However, the benefits of correcting severe spinal deformities often outweigh these risks.

*(The author is the Principal Director & Head - Ortho Spine, MIS & Robotic Spine Surgery, BLK-Max Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi)*

# Could mpox become established in the Indo-Pacific?

By: Vinod RMT Balasubramaniam

Once thought to be mainly contained to Africa, cases of mpox (previously known as monkeypox) have been detected in Sweden, Pakistan and the Philippines over the last few days.

This follows the World Health Organization's decision last week that the recent upsurge in mpox cases warranted it to be declared a public health emergency of international concern, highlighting the rapid spread of the virus and its potential for severe health impacts.

The last time this happened was in July 2022.

Of particular concern, testing has revealed the case in Sweden is the more virulent clade 1b subtype, the first time the strain has been detected outside Africa.

It's only a matter of time before mpox cases increase across the Indo-Pacific, although the WHO is stressing we know a lot more about this virus and how it spreads than we did about COVID-19.

Mpox is an infectious disease caused by the monkeypox virus, which belongs to the orthopoxvirus genus. This genus — or family of viruses — also includes the variola virus, the virus that causes smallpox.

The first documented case of mpox in humans was reported in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Since then, mpox has been classified into two primary clades: clade 1, previously known as the Central African strain, which is more virulent; and clade 2, previously known as the West African strain, which is generally less severe.

Historically cases of mpox were rare outside of Africa, however a significant global surge in cases began in May 2022 and has been followed by another increase this year, as the number of cases in Australia shows.

**How mpox is spread**  
The transmission of the monkeypox virus occurs through several primary routes, with human-to-human transmission being the most significant.

This transmission typically involves direct contact with the lesions or bodily fluids of an infected individual, particularly during intimate interactions.

Respiratory droplets can also facilitate transmission during prolonged face-to-face contact.



Additionally, fomites — contaminated surfaces — can serve as vectors for the virus.

Animal-to-human transmission remains a critical route, often occurring through direct contact with infected animals, such as rodents or non-human primates, particularly in regions where bushmeat is consumed. Vertical transmission from mother to fetus during pregnancy has also been documented.

The epidemiology of mpox has notably shifted since the outbreak in May 2022, with a marked increase in cases reported among men who have sex with men, indicating a change in transmission dynamics.

The clinical presentation of mpox includes symptoms such as fever, lymphadenopathy (swollen or enlarged lymph nodes) and characteristic skin lesions. One good thing for now, is that people with mpox can only transmit the disease when they are showing symptoms.

Although mpox is less lethal than smallpox, it still poses significant health risks, particularly to vulnerable populations.

**Recent outbreaks and the global response**  
The emergence of mpox cases in non-endemic regions has raised concerns about public health preparedness.

Countries like Australia are enhancing surveillance and public health education to monitor potential cases and prevent outbreaks.

China will be monitoring people and goods entering the country for mpox for the next six months, it announced last week.

The WHO's designation of mpox as a public health emergency underscores the urgency of addressing the disease's potential for rapid spread, particularly in populations with low immunity due to the end of smallpox vaccination programs.

In Australia, where widespread immunity against orthopoxviruses is lacking, vigilance is essential to mitigate the risk of mpox entering the country, especially through international travel.

The recent emergence of the more virulent clade 1 strain of mpox raises significant concerns about its potential to escalate into a global pandemic, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

This strain has been linked to higher mortality rates and increased transmissibility.

While the Indo-Pacific has been one of the regions least affected by mpox in the past, due to its interconnectedness and varying healthcare capacities, it could face substantial risks if the virus spreads unchecked.

The appearance of clade 1 in Sweden indicates that the virus can cross borders easily, posing a threat to countries with less robust public health infrastructure.

**Current treatment options**  
Vaccination strategies for mpox significantly differ between its two primary clades, clade 1 and clade 2, due to variations in virulence, transmission dynamics and outbreak contexts.

Clade 1, endemic to Central Africa, has a historically higher mortality rate of up to 10 percent and is primarily transmitted zoonotically — from an animal to a human — with limited human-to-human spread.

By contrast, clade 2, particularly the subtypes clade 2a and 2b, has a lower mortality rate of about 3.6 percent and was responsible for the global outbreak that began in 2022, spreading predominantly through human contact, especially within sexual networks.

Vaccination efforts for clade 1 target high-risk populations in endemic regions, emphasizing rapid vaccination following exposure.

Vaccines such as JYNNEOS and ACAM2000 originally developed for smallpox, are expected to provide

cross-protection against clade 1 mpox, although specific efficacy data is limited.

Public health education on zoonotic transmission is also crucial to prevent outbreaks.

For clade 2, vaccination strategies have been more aggressive, especially for clade 2b, with vaccines like JYNNEOS deployed in non-endemic regions targeting men who have sex with men and other high-risk groups.

This includes both pre-exposure and post-exposure prophylaxis, supported by global efforts to establish vaccine stockpiles and ensure equitable distribution — particularly in Africa where shortages have been reported.

Antiviral treatments such as tecovirimat have been found to be ineffective, highlighting the need for urgent further research into effective therapeutics for mpox management.

**Where do we go from here?**  
The current global mpox outbreak has underscored critical lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the areas of communication, equity and preparedness.

Effective responses require clear, empathetic communication to build trust and reduce stigma around the disease, especially among marginalised communities disproportionately affected by outbreaks.

Rapid containment measures, including case identification, contact tracing and isolation, have proven essential in managing spread, mirroring successful strategies from COVID.

The COVID pandemic highlighted the importance of leveraging technology for information dissemination, ensuring equitable access to resources.

A coordinated government response is vital, emphasising collaboration across all levels of public health agencies to address emerging inequalities.

The necessity of stockpiling vaccines and ensuring their equitable distribution has become evident, as seen in the challenges already faced during this mpox outbreak.

The most effective strategy right now is to send mpox vaccines to Africa to try and stop the disease from spreading.

Vaccination campaigns must be comprehensive and community-engaged to enhance uptake and address vaccine hesitancy. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

# COPD and cough: What is the link?

By: Rachel Nall

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) can cause a persistent cough. A person with COPD will produce extra sputum or phlegm, and they will cough to try and clear the airways.

COPD is a group of medical conditions that affect the lungs, including chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

One of the most common symptoms associated with COPD is cough, which can severely impact a person's quality of life. A COPD-related cough is often productive, which means the person coughs up sputum or phlegm. However, some people with COPD may have a dry cough. This includes those who have COPD and asthma.

Over 16 million people in the United States have a diagnosis of COPD, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and many more people living with COPD do not have a diagnosis.

Causes of COPD include exposure to tobacco smoke, air pollution, and a genetic condition known as alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency (AATD).

In this article, find out what the link is between COPD and coughing and the treatments available.

**Coughing and COPD: The link**  
When a person has COPD, their lung tissue becomes inflamed and thickens. The airways lose their elasticity, and it becomes trapped. This means less oxygen can enter the body, and carbon dioxide cannot leave it. So COPD affects the amount of oxygen a person can take in.

A persistent, chesty cough is

a common symptom of COPD.

Here are some reasons why a cough can occur with COPD:

- Changes to and blockages in the airways cause coughing when a person breathes deeply because the air has difficulty moving through the airways.
- Damage to the cilia — hair-like projections in the lungs — means mucus cannot move easily through the airways.
- Enlarged mucous glands in the lungs make excess mucus, and damaged ciliary glands struggle to move the mucus, leading to increased coughing.
- Mucus from the lungs comes up into the airways, causing irritation. A person will cough as a means to move the mucus forward and out.
- Inflammation of the airways is also likely to stimulate the cough reflex.
- Past or present exposure to tobacco smoke or other pollutants leads to irritation in the airways, which may react by tightening, resulting in coughing.
- People with COPD have a higher chance of chest infections, which can involve a cough.

A study published in 2020 looked at how cough affected 5,286 people with COPD. The results showed that around 75% of those surveyed had moderate or high levels of cough and phlegm.

Compared with people who had COPD without high levels of cough or phlegm, those with high levels were also more likely to:

- experience breathlessness
- have had a COPD flare within the previous year
- find that COPD disrupts their social life
- find it hard to carry out daily physical tasks, such as washing and dressing
- experience anxiety and depression

**How does coughing change with COPD?**  
Several conditions that affect the lungs, such as asthma, can cause coughing. However, a cough caused by asthma often results in breathing difficulties that come and go, and the person may experience more significant coughing at night. Specific triggers and allergens may worsen the symptoms.

That said, some studies suggest that up to 25% of people with COPD also have some form of asthma. Whatever triggers the symptoms of asthma in these people may also trigger a COPD flare.

Having both conditions can also affect the type of cough and other symptoms the person has. Scientists are looking into whether both conditions may have a similar underlying cause.

A person with COPD may find that their cough:

- is worse in the morning or upon getting up
- is accompanied by fatigue
- is constant or becomes worse during a flare-up
- is accompanied by thick mucus, often yellow in color
- does not respond to treatment

A person with COPD may find that their breathing is stable for a time, and then there will be times when their condition gets worse.

During these episodes, called flare-ups, a cough may become more productive, and a person may cough more frequently. A person with COPD may also find that their chest feels tighter.

**How does coughing from COPD change over time?**  
COPD symptoms, including the frequency and severity of the cough, tend to worsen over time. There are four stages of COPD, and some research suggests that the most severe de-

cline happens at stage 2, when the measurement of a person's forced expiratory volume in 1 second (FEV1) is in the 50–70 range.

However, studies also suggest that if a person quits smoking or stops inhaling the particles that are causing lung inflammation, the rate of decline can go back to that of a normal lung within 5 years.

A person with a severe COPD-related cough may have more frequent flare-ups of COPD symptoms.

Having certain health conditions can also contribute to a cough with COPD. These include gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and a condition called occult bronchiectasis. This is an inflammation of the lung's airways that causes increased mucus production and can also cause bleeding.

**How does COVID-19 affect people with COPD?**  
**Treatments**  
There are various ways of treating a cough, but a person with COPD often finds that their cough does not respond to treatment.

Quitting smoking in the early stages of COPD can help reduce coughing in the long term. However, the longer a person waits to quit, the less effective this is likely to be.

Other options that may help relieve a COPD-related cough are mucolytics, such as carbocysteine or acetylcysteine, which make sputum thinner and easier to cough up.

Carbocysteine comes as pills or capsules that a person can take three or four times a day. Acetylcysteine comes as a white powder for mixing with water. A doctor may recommend acetylcysteine if carbocysteine does not help.

Antibiotics can also help if a cough worsens due to a bacterial infection.

Other options that can help manage COPD include:

- bronchodilators, which are medications that relax the muscles around the airways, making it easier to breathe
- inhaled corticosteroids to reduce the inflammation that makes airways smaller and harder to move air through
- supplemental oxygen, if a doctor advises it
- breathing techniques, such as box breathing

There is some evidence that inhaled corticosteroids may increase the risk of pneumonia. People should speak to their doctor if they have concerns about this.

Other tips that can help are:

- avoiding anything known to irritate the lungs, such as smoke, pollution, and cold or dry air
- getting vaccinated against the flu, pneumonia, and pertussis (whooping cough) to prevent illness
- using special coughing techniques to clear mucus from the lungs
- participating in a pulmonary rehabilitation program, which can teach people with COPD new ways to breathe
- seeking palliative care, which can help manage pain and stress as COPD progresses
- exploring complementary therapies, such as yoga or acupuncture, which may help improve quality of life

Pulmonary rehabilitation therapy involves exercises and techniques to reduce breathlessness and cough and help people build up a better tolerance to physical activity.

There is evidence that pulmonary rehabilitation can:

- improve lung muscle strength
- boost quality of life
- reduce the risk of readmission after spending time in the

hospital with COPD

- reduce the risk of dying from COPD-related complications in those with severe disease

One example of a special coughing technique is "deep coughing." This involves taking a deep breath, holding the breath for 2–3 seconds, then engaging the stomach muscles before releasing the air. This controlled deep cough method is more effective in clearing the lungs than an irregular, hacking cough according to National Jewish Health.

While these treatments may reduce symptoms associated with COPD, scientists have not yet identified any definitive treatment or cure for coughs related to COPD.

**Which treatments can help during a COPD flare?**  
**When to see a doctor**  
COPD is a chronic and progressive disease, meaning the symptoms will worsen over time. The time it takes for COPD to get worse varies among individuals, but there are some symptoms that a person with COPD should not ignore.

A person should see a doctor if they have the following symptoms, which can be a sign of COPD:

- a persistent cough
- difficulty breathing
- frequent respiratory infections
- wheezing
- excessive sputum production
- fatigue

People with COPD should seek emergency medical attention if they experience any of the following:

- difficulty walking or talking due to shortness of breath
- a worsening of wheezing or other symptoms
- rapid or irregular heart rate
- blue- or gray-tinted finger-

nails

- fast and hard breathing that does not improve with medication
- fever
- chest pain that is new or worsening

Over time, the affected airflow from COPD can cause heart problems that lead to right-sided heart failure. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), COPD is the fourth leading cause of death in the United States.

**Other symptoms of COPD**  
In addition to cough, COPD causes other symptoms that affect a person's breathing.

Examples include:

- shortness of breath, usually during everyday activities
- frequent respiratory infections
- a blue tinge to the lips or fingernails
- fatigue
- excessive mucus production
- wheezing

If a person experiences these or other symptoms, they should see their doctor. There are many medications and breathing techniques that a person can use to reduce symptoms associated with COPD.

Here, get some tips on how to stop wheezing.

**Takeaway**  
COPD is a lung disease that includes bronchitis and emphysema. Hallmark symptoms include a cough and difficulty breathing. It can be hard to manage a COPD-related cough, as it often does not respond to treatment.

Quitting smoking when a person first has a diagnosis of COPD may help reduce coughing as the disease progresses, and some medications, such as mucolytics, can help manage a COPD-related cough. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)



# Israel stages heavy airstrikes on Lebanon

*Hezbollah launches attack over slain top commander*

**JERUSALEM, Aug 25:** Israel launched a wave of airstrikes across southern Lebanon early Sunday in what it said was a preemptive strike on Hezbollah, as the militant group said it had launched hundreds of rockets and drones to avenge the killing of one of its top commanders last month.

The heavy exchange of fire threatened to trigger an all-out war that could draw in the United States, Iran and militant groups across the region. It could also torpedo efforts to forge a cease-fire in Gaza, where Israel has been at war with the Palestinian group Hamas, an ally of Hezbollah, for over 10 months.

The Israeli military said Hezbollah was planning to launch a heavy barrage of rockets and missiles toward Israel. Soon after, Hezbollah announced it had launched an attack on Israeli military positions as an initial response to the killing of Fouad Shukur, one of its founders, in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut last month.

The attacks came as Egypt hosts a new round of talks aimed at ending the Israel-Hamas war. Hezbollah has said it will halt the fighting if there is a cease-fire in Gaza. Iran supports both groups as well as militants in Syria, Iraq and Yemen who might join any larger conflict.

Air raid sirens were reported throughout northern Israel, and Is-



rael's Ben-Gurion international airport diverted incoming flights and delayed takeoffs for a time. Israel's Airports Authority said flights resumed at 7 am local time.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top Israeli military spokesman, said "dozens" of warplanes were striking targets in southern Lebanon. He said air defences, warships and warplanes were defending Israel's skies and involved in the operation.

Hezbollah said its attack involved more than 320 Katyusha rockets aimed at multiple sites in Israel and a "large number" of drones. It said the operation was targeting "a qualitative Israeli military target that will be announced later" as well as "enemy sites and barracks and Iron Dome (missile

defence) platforms."

Hezbollah later announced the end of what it said was the first stage of retaliatory strikes, which it said would allow it to launch more attacks deeper into Israel. The group said all the exploding drones it launched hit their targets, without saying how many. It listed 11 bases, barracks, and military positions that it said it targeted in northern Israel and the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights.

In the US, a spokesman for the National Security Council, Sean Savett, said President Joe Biden was "closely monitoring events in Israel and Lebanon."

"At his direction, senior US officials have been communicating continuously with their Israeli counterparts," Savett said. "We

will keep supporting Israel's right to defend itself, and we will keep working for regional stability."

In recent weeks, diplomats from the US and European countries have made a flurry of visits to Israel and Lebanon in an attempt to tamp down the escalation that they fear could spiral into a regional war.

Last week, Israel's defence minister said he was moving more troops toward the Lebanese border in anticipation of possible fighting with Hezbollah.

Hagari, the military spokesman, said early Sunday that "in a self-defence act to remove these threats, (the Israeli military) is striking terror targets in Lebanon, from which Hezbollah was planning to launch their attacks on Israeli civilians."

"We can see that Hezbollah is preparing to launch an extensive attack on Israel, while endangering the Lebanese civilians," he added, without providing details. "We warn the civilians located in the areas where Hezbollah is operating to move out of harm's way immediately for their own safety," he added.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he and his defence minister, Yoav Gallant, were managing the latest operation from military headquarters in Tel Aviv. Gallant declared a "special situation on the home front,"

and Netanyahu's Security Cabinet was set to meet later Sunday morning.

Lebanese media reported strikes in the country's south without immediately providing more details. Social media footage showed what appeared to be strikes in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah began attacking Israel almost immediately after the start of the war in Gaza, which was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel. Israel and Hezbollah have been exchanging fire almost daily, displacing tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border. Until Sunday, both sides had been careful to avoid all-out war.

Hezbollah, which fought Israel to a stalemate in the summer of 2006, is believed to be far more powerful than it was during that conflict. The United States and Israel estimate it has some 150,000 rockets and is capable of hitting anywhere inside Israel. The group has also developed drones capable of evading Israel's defences as well as precision-guided munitions.

Israel has one of the world's best militaries and an extensive multi-tiered missile defence system, and it is backed by a US-led coalition that helped it shoot down hundreds of missiles and drones fired from Iran earlier this year. (AP)

## Dhaka limps back to normal amid echoes of protests

**DHAKA, Aug 25:** With the metro resuming services, buses and taxis plying regularly and university students enjoying carefree evening strolls in the gardens of the historic Curzon Hall - life seems to be returning to normal in Dhaka.

Businesses have resumed but it's not business as usual in the capital city of Bangladesh.

Till three weeks ago, the streets of the capital were flooded with anti-government protesters, many public squares choked by the agitating masses reaching a dramatic climax on August 5 - the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government and her fleeing to India.

The wave of the resistance has subsided and an interim government has been in place since August 8, but the streaks of rebellion remain in many streets of Dhaka.

In the past few days, several government employees have held protests in groups at the government secretariat while some demonstrators have marched in streets near the famous Ahsan Manzil and other areas to put forth their demands.

Many Dhaka University students are raising their voices regularly at the Raju Memorial Site opposite the Teacher Student Centre (TSC) for holding students' union elections at the varsity and demanding "no political interference" on the campus.

The anti-government protests have initiated a churn in Bangladesh while education goes on, so do protests to achieve a more equitable society "free of discrimination and corruption".

Ibrahim Mahmud, a student of public administration who took part in a varsity protest earlier this week, alleged that members of Chhatra League, the student wing of the ousted Awami League, used to "harass" several fellow students in the campus.

"We have achieved our 'second independence', this time from the high-handedness of the Awami League and its bad influence," he told PTI on the sidelines of the protest held at the Raju Memorial site opposite TSC.

The Dhaka Metro line near the university—a major lifeline for students and a means to beat city traffic—was shut for over a month.

While the passenger services resumed on Sunday morning, two of its stations Mirpur-10 and Kazipara will remain shut.

These two stations were vandalised during the anti-government protests. Students of Dhaka University and other institutions heaved a sigh of relief as the metro services resumed after a gap of over 35 days.

Abdur Rahman, a first-year undergraduate student in the English Department of the 103-year-old Dhaka University, said the last time he had used the city metro was about 40-50

days ago. "Life is slowly getting back on track," he said.

Near to the Dhaka Metro station is the historic Curzon Hall housing the science faculty of the university. Students and general visitors go there every evening for strolls while others take selfies or make reels for social media platforms.

Walls of its main lobby still carry the slogans "No quota" and "Only Merit" spray-painted during the agitation.

However, not everything has returned to normal in this historic city of Dhaka—both the political and financial capital of Bangladesh.

On Friday, a holiday in Bangladesh, visitors from Dhaka and other districts of Bangladesh who had come to see the iconic Ahsan Manzil and its museum in Old Dhaka, were "turned away" from the main gate, with security staff telling them it had been "closed indefinitely".

No official reason was cited, though it is learnt that it is a "contingency measure".

The recent protests that rocked Bangladesh for over a month have hit the hospitality sector hard in Dhaka with the majority of rooms at several luxury and economy hotels here going empty in the aftermath of the unrest.

A front office staff at a luxury hotel, running here since 2007 and operated by an international hotel chain, told PTI: "The situation in the hospitality sector is not good due to the impact of the unrest the country has seen recently" and "heavy financial losses have been incurred".

Abdul Moyeen Khan, a top BNP leader and a former Cabinet minister of Bangladesh, who lives in the plush Gulshan area, however, feels the city "largely went back to routine life" soon after August 5.

"The current situation is quite clear. It is amazing how the country is settling back after such a big upheaval. People are trying to get back to their normal day-to-day life, the (interim) government is trying to normalise everything, and they are up to their main mandate which is the transition from autocracy to democracy," Khan told PTI on Thursday.

Ask any autorickshaw driver or a rickshaw-puller on the streets of Dhaka, and they respond mutely. "Even we don't know what lies ahead. We just need to go through the struggle of our daily lives," said Mohd Alam, a rickshaw puller.

The rickshaws of Dhaka are one of the defining images of the city. Key-chains, fridge magnets and other merchandise at tourism department stores at the Dhaka airport celebrate this ubiquitous three-wheeler.

Even as Bangladesh's wait for the next elections and the next government gets longer, many have decided to go out and explore the world. (PTI)

## German police detain a suspect in knife attack, state internal affairs minister says

**SOLINGEN (GERMANY), Aug 25:** German police early Sunday detained a suspect in the Solingen knife attack that killed three people and wounded eight others, the state internal affairs minister of North Rhine Westphalia said.

"We have been following a hot lead all day," Herbert Reul told Tagesschau, the news program of the German public television network ARD. "The person we have been searching for all day has been detained a short while ago," he said.

He is now being questioned. Reul said that police not only have "clues" but also have collected "pieces of evidence."

The Islamic State militant group Saturday claimed responsibility for a knife attack in Solingen, Germany that killed three people and wounded eight others at a crowded festival marking the city's 650th anniversary.

The group said on its news site that the attacker targeted Christians and is a "soldier of the Islamic State" who carried out the assaults Friday night "to avenge Muslims in Palestine and everywhere."

The IS claim couldn't immediately be verified. No evidence for the group's assertions was provided.

Police began raiding a home for asylum seekers in Solingen's city center, including with special forces, the German news agency DPA reported. Police told DPA later that they detained a man in the home and were looking into a possible connection to the knife attack. There was no official statement from police.

A 15-year-old boy was arrested early Saturday. Police said he was suspected of knowing about the planned attack and failing to inform authorities, but he was not the attacker.

Markus Caspers, senior public prosecutor from the counterterrorism section of the public prosecutors office, told a news conference earlier Saturday that authorities have not found the perpetrator.

"So far we have not been able to identify a motive, but looking at the

overall circumstances, we cannot rule out" the possibility of terrorism, Caspers said, though he did not offer further details.

Police said the attacker appeared to have deliberately aimed for his victims' throats.

"We are seeing the first signs of a new wave of terrorist attacks," said Peter Neumann, a professor of security studies at King's College in London. IS "is trying to capitalize on the huge mobilization resulting from Hamas' terror offensive on 7 October 2023, even though strictly speaking it had nothing to do with it," he said.

"The kind of attack we saw in Solingen is exactly the kind of attack that (IS) is trying to inspire. It's calling on people over the internet to attack unbelievers" using simple methods like cars and knives. That way, it is trying to create an impression that (the Islamic State group) is everywhere and could strike anytime," Neumann told the Associated Press.

Thorsten Fleiss who was the chief of police operations on Friday night, said that police were conducting various searches and investigations in the entire state of North Rhine Westphalia that will continue throughout the day. He said that it is a "big challenge" to bring together available evidence and testimony from witnesses in order to come up with an overall picture.

Fleiss also said that police have found several knives but added that he was unable to confirm whether any of them have been used as weapon by the perpetrator during the attack.

Police warned people to stay vigilant even as well wishers started to leave flowers at the scene. Authorities established an online portal where witnesses could upload footage and any other information relevant to the attack.

Churches in Solingen have opened their doors to offer a space for prayer and emergency pastoral care. (AP)

## 4 more murder cases filed against deposed PM Hasina, her aides in Bangladesh

**DHAKA, Aug 25:** At least four more murder cases have been filed against Bangladesh's deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her former cabinet ministers and aides, media reports said on Sunday.

A murder case was filed on Sunday against 76-year-old Hasina, former director general of Border Guard of Bangladesh Gen Aziz Ahmed and 11 others over the death of Abdur Rahim, an official of the then Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in 2010, state-run BSS news agency reported.

Rahim, then deputy assistant director (DAD) of former BDR, was an accused in the case lodged over the carnage that took place in Pilkhana in 2010. He died in jail custody on July 29 of the same year.

Rahim's son Advocate Abdul Aziz filed the case with the court of the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Akteruzzaman.

Another murder case was filed on Sunday against Hasina and 48 others for killing a student of the Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST) during the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement on July 18, the agency said.

Victim Shaikh Ashabul Yeamin's uncle Abdullah-Al Kabir filed a plea to Dhaka High Court Judge Md Saiful Islam's court Sunday, appealing to lodge a murder case against the 49 accused, it added.

Accepting the petition, the court ordered police to record the statement of the plaintiff and register the complaint as a first information report (FIR).

Awami League general secretary and former road transport and bridges minister Obaidul Quader and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan, among others, have been made accused in the case.

A separate case was filed against Hasina and 27 others over the killing of a seller of Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) products in the capital during the recent protests. (PTI)

## Telegram CEO Pavel Durov arrested in France



**PARIS, Aug 25:** The founder and CEO of the popular encrypted messaging service Telegram was detained at a Paris airport, French media reported Sunday.

Pavel Durov was detained at the Paris Le Bourget airport on Saturday evening after landing in France from Azerbaijan, according to broadcasters LCI and TF1.

Investigators from the National Anti-Fraud Office, attached to the French customs department, notified Durov that he was being placed in police custody, the broadcasters said.

French prosecutors declined to comment on Durov's arrest when contacted by The Associated Press on Sunday, in line with regulations during an ongoing investigation.

French media reported that Durov, 39, was the subject of an arrest warrant issued by France based on allegations that his encrypted platform has been used for money laundering, drug trafficking and allowing the sharing of content linked to sexual exploitation of minors.

Western governments have often criticised Telegram for lack of content moderating on the messaging service.

Russian government officials expressed outrage at Durov's arrest, with some highlighting what they said was the West's double standards on freedom of speech.

"In 2018, a group of 26 NGOs, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and others, condemned the Russian court's decision to block Telegram," said Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"Do you think this time they'll appeal to Paris and demand Durov's release?" Zakharova said in a post on her personal Telegram account. (AP)

## Taliban vice and virtue laws provide 'distressing vision': UN envoy

**ISLAMABAD, Aug 25:** The Taliban's new vice and virtue laws that include a ban on women's voices and bare faces in public provide a "distressing vision" for Afghanistan's future, a top UN official warned Sunday.

Roza Otunbayeva, who heads the UN mission in the country, said the laws extend the "already intolerable restrictions" on the rights of women and girls, with "even the sound of a female voice" outside the home apparently deemed a moral violation.

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers last Wednesday issued the country's first set of laws to prevent vice and promote virtue.

They include a requirement for a woman to conceal her face, body and voice outside the home.

The laws empower the Vice and Virtue Ministry to be at the front line of regulating personal conduct and administering punishments like warnings or arrest if its enforcers allege that Afghans have broken the laws.

"After decades of war and in the midst of a ter-

rrible humanitarian crisis, the Afghan people deserve much better than being threatened or jailed if they happen to be late for prayers, glance at a member of the opposite sex who is not a family member, or possess a photo of a loved one," Otunbayeva said.

The mission said it was studying the newly ratified law and its implications for Afghans, as well as its potential impact on the UN and other humanitarian assistance.

Taliban officials were not immediately available for comment.

In remarks broadcast Sunday by state-controlled broadcaster RTA, Vice and Virtue Minister Mohammad Khaled Hanafi said nobody had the right to violate women's rights based on inappropriate customs.

"We are committed to assure all rights of women based on Islamic law and anyone who has a complaint in this regard will be heard and resolved," he added.

Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada said last year that Afghan women are provided

with a "comfortable and prosperous" life, in spite of decrees barring them from many public spaces, education and most jobs.

The UN has previously said that official recognition of the Taliban as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan is nearly impossible while restrictions on women and girls remain.

Although no country recognises the Taliban, many in the region have ties with them. Last Wednesday, the United Arab Emirates accepted the credentials of the Taliban's ambassador to the oil-rich Gulf Arab state.

A UAE official said the decision reaffirmed the government's determination to contribute to building bridges to help Afghans.

"This includes the provision of humanitarian assistance through development and reconstruction projects, and supporting efforts that work towards regional de-escalation and stability."

Otunbayeva is scheduled to report to the UN Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan on September 18, three years after the Taliban stopped girls' education beyond sixth grade. (AP)

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## Rohingya refugees demand a safe return to Myanmar

*Refugees mark their 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of exodus*

**COX'S BAZAR, Aug 25:** Tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who live in sprawling camps in Bangladesh on Sunday marked the seventh anniversary of their mass exodus, demanding safe return to Myanmar's Rakhine state.

The refugees gathered in an open field at Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar district carrying banners and festoons reading "Hope is Home" and "We Rohingya are the citizens of Myanmar," defying the rain on a day that is marked as "Rohingya Genocide Day."

On August 25, 2017, hundreds of thousands of refugees started crossing the border to Bangladesh on foot and by boats amid indiscriminate killings and other violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

Myanmar had launched a brutal crackdown following attacks by an insurgent group on guard posts. The scale, organisation and ferocity of the operation led to accusations from the international community, including the UN, of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Then-Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ordered border guards to open the border, eventually allowing more than 700,000 refugees to take shelter in the Mus-



lim-majority nation. The influx was in addition to the more than 300,000 refugees who had already been living in Bangladesh for decades in the wake of waves of previous violence perpetrated by Myanmar's military.

Since 2017, Bangladesh has attempted at least twice to send the refugees back and has urged the international community to build pressure on Myanmar for a peaceful environment inside Myanmar that could help

start the repatriation. Hasina also sought help from China to mediate.

But in the recent past, the situation in Rakhine state has become more volatile after a group called Arakan Army started fighting against Myanmar's security forces. The renewed chaos forced more refugees to flee toward Bangladesh and elsewhere in a desperate move to save their lives. Hundreds of Myanmar soldiers and border guards also

took shelter inside Bangladesh to flee the violence, but Bangladesh later handed them over to Myanmar peacefully.

As the protests took place in camps in Bangladesh on Sunday, the United Nations and other rights groups expressed their concern over the ongoing chaos in Myanmar.

Washington-based Refugees International in a statement on Sunday described the scenario.

"In Rakhine state, increased fighting between Myanmar's military junta and the AA (Arakan Army) over the past year has both caught Rohingya in the middle and seen them targeted. The AA has advanced and burned homes in Buthidaung, Maungdaw, and other towns, recently using drones to bomb villages," it said.

"The junta has forcibly recruited Rohingya and bombed villages in retaliation. Tens of thousands of Rohingya have been newly displaced, including several who have tried to flee into Bangladesh," it said.

UNICEF said that the agency received alarming reports that civilians, particularly children and families, were being targeted or caught in the crossfire, resulting in deaths and severe injuries, making humanitarian access in Rakhine extremely challenging. (AP)

## French authorities arrest suspect in an explosion at a synagogue

**NICE, Aug 25:** French police have apprehended and detained a suspect in an arson attack on a synagogue in a southwestern Mediterranean town that injured a police officer, the country's acting interior minister said Sunday.

Two cars parked at the Beth Yaacov synagogue complex in the seaside resort town of La Grande Motte, near Montpellier, were set ablaze just after 8 am Saturday. Firefighters discovered additional fires at two entrances to the synagogue. A police officer who walked up to the site was injured after a propane gas tank placed near the burning vehicles exploded. Five people, including the rabbi, who were present in the synagogue complex at the time of the attack were unharmed, it added.

"The alleged perpetrator of the arson attack on the synagogue has been arrested," Gerald Darmanin, the acting interior minister, said in a post on X. He visited the site on Saturday afternoon along with acting Prime Minister Gabriel Attal and met with local officials and the synagogue staff.

Darmanin also hailed the "professional conduct" of police forces and its elite intervention unit "despite the gunfire" during the operation. French prosecutors said the man was arrested in the southern city of Nîmes shortly before midnight Saturday.

"He opened fire on the police intervention unit, which returned fire, injuring (the suspect)

in the face," the National Antiterrorism Prosecutor's Office said in a statement Sunday. Two other people linked to the suspect were also taken into custody, it added.

Prosecutors were investigating the attack as an attempted assassination linked to a terrorist group and destruction of property with dangerous means, and a crime planned by a terrorist group with an intent to cause harm, the statement said.

After the attack Saturday, Darmanin ordered police reinforcements to protect Jewish places of worship following what was "clearly a criminal act."

"I want to assure our Jewish fellow citizens of my full support and say that at the request of President Emmanuel Macron all means are being mobilised to find the perpetrator," Darmanin posted on X. He ordered more police officers deployed at Jewish places of worship around the country following a surge of antisemitism since the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October.

The mayor of La Grande Motte, Stéphan Rossignol, said that investigators were reviewing the city's surveillance videos and said that a lone suspect was spotted at the site of the attack.

"The individual in question did not manage to get inside the synagogue, even though that was clearly his objective," Rossignol said in an interview with broadcaster France Info. (AP)



# 1.17 lakh people in relief camps, damage over 20,000 houses

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Aug 25:** The flood situation in Tripura, which began on August 19, is gradually improving. However, the disaster has severely impacted the state, with 1.17 lakh people displaced and over 20,000 houses damaged. The death toll has now risen to 26.

According to a statement from the Relief, Rehabilitation & Disaster Management Department, 525 relief camps have been set up across the state, currently sheltering over 1.17 lakh individuals.

The continuous and heavy rainfall between August 19 and 24 caused a significant rise in water levels in the state's rivers, particularly the Gomati River at Sonamura, which remains above the danger mark.

While the rainfall has lessened in the last two days, the state recorded its highest rainfall of 42.5 mm in the past 24

## TRIPURA FLOODS

hours in Bodhjungnagar, Agartala. Authorities, including the Chief Minister, are closely monitoring the situation.

In an All-Party Meeting, the Chief



Minister discussed the ongoing crisis with leaders of various political parties, who pledged their full cooperation in managing the disaster.

Currently, three teams of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and two teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are engaged in rescue operations in three districts.

Around 500 volunteers from Civil Defense and Aapda Mitra are also actively involved in relief efforts.

Approximately 27,000 food packets have been distributed in Gomati and South Tripura Districts.

The District Administration continues to provide essentials such as food, drinking water, and medical assistance in the relief camps.

The flood has claimed the lives of 26 people, while two have been injured and two remain missing. Preliminary assessments reveal widespread damage to infrastructure, including roads, buildings, power lines, embankments, and agricultural

lands.

A total of 20,289 homes have been affected, with 1,610 fully destroyed, 1,633 severely damaged and 17,046 partially damaged.

National Highway 08, which had been severely affected by landslides in the Atharamura Hills, is now operational for light vehicles.

On August 24, the State Executive Committee of the State Disaster Management Authority, chaired by the Chief Secretary, held a meeting to assess the damage and discuss immediate and long-term relief measures. Senior officials from various departments, including the Director General of Police and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, attended the meeting.

The state government remains committed to working closely with central agencies and local departments to minimize the disaster's impact on citizens.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued warnings of heavy rainfall, with a red alert in South Tripura District and an orange alert in Dhalai and Gomati Districts. Citizens are urged to exercise caution.

## NDRF launches massive flood rescue operation in Tripura



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** In response to the severe flooding that has ravaged Tripura over the past week, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is conducting extensive rescue operations across the state.

The operation, carried out in collaboration with local authorities and emergency services, has successfully rescued and saved the lives of 1,790 individuals who were stranded due to rising flood waters.

NDRF rescue teams have been working tirelessly around the clock, employing boats and utilizing specialized equipment to reach those in need.

In addition to rescue efforts, the NDRF teams are actively supporting district administrations in the distribution of relief materials, ensuring essential supplies are reaching the affected population.

On Saturday, Sh. B.B. Vaid, DIG, NDRF, arrived in Tripura to assess the situation on the ground.

Sh. H.P.S. Kandari, Commandant, 1st Battalion, NDRF, who is already stationed in the state, continues to coordinate the operation, visiting affected areas and boosting the morale of the troops.

Despite the challenging circumstances, NDRF personnel are demonstrating unwavering dedication and enthusiasm in their rescue efforts.

To further evaluate the situation, a meeting was held with the Revenue Secretary of Tripura, by Sh. B.B. Vaid, DIG, NDRF, and Sh. H.P.S. Kandari, Comdt, 1st Bn NDRF. In meeting the prevailing situation was reviewed and the course of further action was planned.

The NDRF remains committed to providing all necessary support to the people of Tripura during this difficult time.

Their efforts, in coordination with local authorities and other agencies, continue to save lives and bring relief to the affected areas.

## Man arrested for sexual abuse of daughters in South Garo Hills



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** In a shocking incident, a middle-aged man allegedly sexually assaulted his two minor daughters on multiple occasions in Meghalaya's South Garo Hills district.

The alleged abuse was finally stopped after concerned villagers stepped in and reported the matter to the police.

The accused, who was arrested on Saturday morning, has been sent to judicial custody. According to report, the man is suspected of raping both his 17-year-old and 14-year-old daughters.

Despite the mother's apparent knowledge of the abuse, no complaint was filed, allowing the horrific acts to continue, locals said.

It was only when the villagers became aware of the situation that they decided to take action. The village president and secretary approached the police station to report the matter.

Following the complaint, the father was immediately taken into custody and a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act has been registered.

## Resolving basic problems top priority for state govt: Tripura CM



**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, Aug 25:** Tripura Chief Minister Prof. Dr. Manik Saha on Sunday emphasized that the primary objective of the current government is to address the fundamental issues faced by the people of the state.

"This BJP-led government is continuously working towards the welfare of the people with that objective in mind. If any problems arise, they will be solved through the joint efforts of all, as this government believes in moving forward together with everyone," said Dr. Saha. Dr. Saha said this after listening to the 113th episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Mann Ki Baat" on Sunday.

He attended the program at a function organized in the hall of Bijayakumar Girls' School in the capital, under the initiative of the Ramnagar Mandal.

During the event, Dr. Saha highlighted the heroism of Chiranjit Dey, a brave youth from Indranagar.

He noted that the 30-year-old sacrificed his life by entering the water to save others during the recent flood situation. Dr. Saha visited his family earlier in the day.

"His parents are also physically unwell, and there were no words that could console them. I told them that while their son cannot be returned, may he be at peace wherever he is, and may his soul rest in peace. People will forever remember the bravery he displayed. The state government will support his

family. Visiting them left me deeply moved, but I also felt immense pride knowing that our country has individuals who have sacrificed their lives to save others," said Dr. Saha.

He added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi touched on several significant topics in his "Mann Ki Baat" program on Aug 25.

"PM Modi brings to light various important and often unknown issues, aiming to unite the entire nation. He gathers information from across the country and shares these matters with everyone in the Mann Ki Baat program on the last Sunday of every month. Tripura is the only state where e-offices have been launched up to the Panchayat level, and this achievement was realized in a very short period of time. Additionally, the 'Amar Sarkar' program has been successfully implemented. I discussed this at the Chief Ministers' Conference held in Delhi," Dr. Saha stated.

Dr. Saha reiterated that the present government is dedicated to serving the people.

"One of the key objectives of this BJP-led government is to address the fundamental problems faced by every individual in the state. This government is fully committed to the welfare of the people. During today's Mann Ki Baat, Prime Minister Modi discussed several crucial topics, including the Har Ghar Tiranga campaign, recycling of non-perishable materials, and nature conservation," he added.

## Man confesses to brutal murder of wife and child

**ITANAGAR, Aug 25:** A man allegedly killed his wife and child in Arunachal Pradesh's Longding district, a police officer said on Sunday.

Police arrested 35-year-old Gangnam Gangsa, a resident of Khanu village of the district for allegedly killing his wife Ngamjun Gangsa and their child Phagang Gangsa on Saturday, Longding, Superintendent of Police (SP) Dekio Gumja said. According to the SP, one Mangu Pansa filed an FIR at Longding police station alleging that Gangnam Gangsa had shared a picture of his wife and their child in a WhatsApp group, claiming responsibility for their murder.

Upon receiving the information, a police team accompanied by the complainant and executive magistrate Bini Shiva, arrived at the scene and found the bodies of the woman and the infant, the SP said, adding that the accused was immediately arrested and taken into custody. A local 'dao' and spade were seized from the crime scene, he said, adding that the post-mortem examination was conducted and the bodies were handed over to relatives. A case has been registered and investigation is going on to find out the reason behind the gruesome murder, the SP added. (PTI)

## UNC urges Manipuri communities for dialogue, harmony

**IMPHAL, Aug 25:** The United Naga Council (UNC) Peace Committee has once again appealed to the Meiteis and the Kuki-Zo community to hold dialogue. The Naga peace committee stressed the importance of dialogue saying that delaying in holding dialogue is not helping anyone.

In a statement issued to Newmai News Network this evening, the UNC Peace Committee said that better understanding can come only through dialogue. "Let us recognise the importance of dialogue," the Naga peace committee stated.

The UNC Peace Committee then said that lack of dialogue in Manipur is one of the key factors that are aggravating the situation in the state.

As such, the Naga peace committee stressed that everyone must recognise the importance of dialogue. "Relationship among communities in Manipur will definitely improve if dialogue is given utmost importance," the UNC Peace Committee added. (NNN)

## Congress demands special Central package for Tripura flood



**AGARTALA, Aug 25:** The Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) on Sunday demanded a special package by the Centre for restoration of damage caused by the devastating flood in the state.

At least 26 people died while two went missing in the floods.

"The damage caused by the flood is huge... At the all-party

meeting held yesterday, we put forward some proposals before Chief Minister Manik Saha for rebuilding the state and its people", senior Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman said at a press conference here.

He said, the chief minister claimed the estimated loss due to the flood could be ₹ 15,000 crore. "It may go up further after final

assessment. It has been reported that people could save nothing as their valuable belongings from electronic gadgets to valuable documents to physical properties were washed away by flood water. The farmers were also the worst victims of flood. We propose the chief minister to request the Centre to send a central team to assess the flood-hit state", he said.

Roy Barman said the state government could send an all-party delegation to Delhi to meet the Prime Minister, Union Home Minister or Union Finance Minister for a special package for the state.

"The Prime Minister or Home Minister visits calamity-ravaged state to assess the actual damage. Surprisingly, Tripura's flood remained missing in today's edition of Mann Ki Baat programme", he said.

He also said the party also suggested forming district and subdivision-level committees to oversee the rebuilding works properly. (PTI)

## Political support behind spike in crimes in Assam: Himanta

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday alleged that following the results of the Lok Sabha election, some individuals gained support and became involved in illegal activity within the state. According to him, there has been an increase in crimes committed against women after the poll results.

He said that if there is no political support, the crimes will go down, drawing a connection between political support and criminal activities.

Sarma stated, "We have observed that an opposition party has grown stronger in other regions of the country following the results of the Lok Sabha election, and this has led to an increase in criminal activities in Assam. There

have been 22 incidents in the last few days, and crimes have been reported in the areas of Dhing, Tezpur, and Gosagaon. Strict precautions have been taken by the administration and police to handle the issue."

He said, without mentioning any political party, that the victory of a certain political group in the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat gave rise to an increase in criminal activity in lower Assam.

It should be noted that in the parliamentary elections, three-time Dhubri MP Badruddin Ajmal was defeated by Congress candidate and former minister Rakibul Hussain by a significant margin of more than 10 lakh votes.

The Chief Minister further said that political forces have been providing encouragement to criminals on social

media platforms. He contended, "If the offenders stop receiving support from political parties, the crime will definitely go down." Sarma also claimed that the rape incident in Dhing locality in Nagaon district is a threat to Assamese indigenous people.

He stated, "The incident in Dhing is not only a rape but it was carried to threaten the Assamese indigenous people so that they leave that area. Once the locality was a centre of Assamese culture and now hardly 10,000 Assamese people live in Dhing. If we leave the urban areas in Dhing, no Assamese people now live in the villages despite the fact that all villages have Assamese names indicating that the indigenous population have lost ground there."

## Smuggled areca nuts worth ₹8.7 lakh seized in Manipur



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** Security forces in Manipur's Tengnoupal District seized 1005 kg of areca nuts valued at ₹ 8.7 lakhs on Saturday.

The contraband items were being transported in two vehicles without valid documents.

Acting on credible intelligence, a Mobile Vehicle Check Post launched a search operation.

The operation resulted in the recovery of 20 bags of areca nuts.

Two persons who were drivers of the vehicles were apprehended.

They were handed over to the customs department for further proceedings.

It may be mentioned the nuts are suspected to have been smuggled into India from Myanmar.

The areca nuts from Myanmar, commonly known as Burmese supari in the market, are banned in India.

However, smugglers often bring them into India owing to the fact that they are relatively cheaper as compared to the local produce.

## Sikkim CM announces minimum monthly pension of ₹50,000 for former MLAs

*'Former legislators who have served two terms or more as MLA will see increase in pension'*

**GANGTOK, Aug 25:** Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang announced that former MLAs would now receive a minimum monthly pension of Rs 50,000.

Tamang made the announcement at the 22nd Foundation Day of Former Legislators Federation of Sikkim (FLFS) on Saturday.

He said "Former legislators who had served a single term as MLA will now receive a monthly pension of ₹ 50,000". At present, they are getting ₹ 22,000 as monthly pension.

Former legislators who have served two terms or more as MLA will now get Rs 55,000 as pension



from ₹ 25,000, Tamang said.

The CM also announced that the Sikkim government will provide an annual grant-in-aid of ₹ 20 lakh to the Former Legislators Federa-

tion of Sikkim. This fund is meant to meet the emergency and medical needs of former legislators and to enhance their support system, he said. (PTI)

## OBC girls' hostel inaugurated at Imphal college

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh inaugurated the newly constructed Administrative Building, Classroom Building A, and a dedicated Other Backward Classes (OBC) Girls' Hostel at Liberal College, Imphal, on Sunday.

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister emphasized the pivotal role of education in driving progress. He stressed the importance of ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students, and the newly inaugurated infrastructure would significantly contribute to providing well-equipped learning environments.

Biren Singh expressed his appreciation for the college's commitment to fostering a sense of belonging, discipline, and nationalism among its students.

He highlighted the practice of singing the State song and National anthem during morning assembly as a valuable tradition that instills these important values. The chief minister also underscored the significance of discipline in building a progressive society. He urged the youth to develop discipline, respect for elders, and a strong work ethic to contribute positively to their communities.

Education Minister Th Basantakumar Singh echoed the chief minister's sentiments, emphasizing the need for youth to acquire skills that enable them to seize opportunities regardless of their socio-economic background.

He spoke on the government's efforts to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor through initiatives such as vocational training in Higher Secondary Schools and skill-based courses in government colleges. The inauguration ceremony was attended by DC Imphal East Khumanthem Diana Devi, administrative officials, the college principal, teaching and non-teaching staff, and students.

No. SLRC-G-III/91/Advertisement/2023/27

### NOTICE

In continuation to the Advertisement No. SLRC-G-III/91/Advertisement/2023/2. the date of the written examination for recruitment of the posts of HSSLC level under the State Level Recruitment Commission for Class-III posts is hereby notified as below —

Sl. No.	CATEGORY OF WRITTEN EXAMINATION	MINIMUM QUALIFICATION REQUIRED	DATE & TIME
1	HSSLC Level	HSSLC or equivalent Examination passed HSSLC (Science) Examination passed	15/09/2024 (Sunday) 10:30 A.M. — 01:30 P.M.

It is hereby informed that candidates who have applied for these posts can download their Admit Card for the written examination by logging into the websites of Govt. of Assam ([www.assam.gov.in](http://www.assam.gov.in)) and that of Board of Secondary Education, Assam ([www.site.sebaonline.org](http://www.site.sebaonline.org)) from 11:00 A.M. of 02/09/2024. The candidates have to download and take print out of their Admit Cards by using their Application No. and Password used while filling of the forms for applying for the posts. The candidates have to produce hard copy of the Admit Card to appear in the written examination and must follow all the instructions mentioned in the Admit Card.

The date and time for the written examinations for the other categories of posts shall be notified in due course of time.

**Technical support toll free number —**  
**9582390056 (10 A.M. to 5 P.M.) (Working Days)**

Sd/-

Secretary,

State Level Recruitment Commission for  
Class-III Posts, Assam Administrative Staff College,  
Jawahar Nagar, Khanapara, Guwahati - 781002

Janasanyog /D/4673/24/26-Aug-24



*Pitches for caste census*

## Chirag re-elected LJP (Ram Vilas) chief

**RANCHI, Aug 25:** Union minister Chirag Paswan was on Sunday re-elected as Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) president for five years at its national executive meeting here.

The decision was taken unanimously at the meeting, Paswan said.

"The national executive, in its meeting here, has re-elected me for the next five years," he said.

Paswan, the Minister of Food Processing Industries, said the upcoming assembly elections in Haryana, Jammu Kashmir and Jharkhand were also discussed in the meeting.

In Jharkhand, the party may contest the polls either with national alliance partner BJP or on its own, he said.

"We have taken suggestions from the state units whether they want to contest the elections in alliance or alone in states where our organisation is strong... At the national level, we have an alliance with the BJP and we are a strong coalition partner of the NDA.

"In the 2014 elections, we had a tie-up with the BJP for vidhans-



abha polls in Jharkhand and contested the Shikaripara seat. If there is a respectable seat-sharing, we may go with an alliance or else we can go alone in the polls," Paswan said. Assembly polls are due in Jharkhand later this year.

He also pitched for a nationwide caste census, but cautioned against making the figures public as it will create a "rift" in society.

"We have always emphasised that we want the caste census to be conducted... It will ensure that the government has correct numbers. However, I do not want the figures

of the census to come out in public. That may create a rift," said the minister, whose late father Ram Vilas Paswan was among the tallest Dalit leaders of the country.

He also said a special resolution was passed at the national executive meeting to extend a motion of thanks to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his welfare initiatives and work towards the SC-ST community.

Commenting on the creamy layer in SC community, he said: "We have been opposed to it since they are not just victims of social

and educational backwardness, but even untouchability".

Paswan said even after so many years of Independence, Dalit grooms are prevented from riding a horse during weddings, and "I even learnt about an IPS officer seeking security for his marriage".

"Even today we hear that members of the Dalit community cannot enter temples... The observation of the Supreme Court did not have any mention of untouchability. The PM has also said that as per constitutional norms, the provisions for SCs would continue," he said.

Earlier this month, a seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud ruled in a 6:1 majority judgement that state governments were permitted to sub-classify communities within the SC list based on empirical data.

Supreme Court judge Justice B R Gavai had said that states must evolve a policy for identifying the creamy layer even among the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Schedule Tribes (ST) and deny them the benefit of reservation. (PTI)

## Mamata govt failed to ensure women's safety: Srinivasan

**JAMMU, Aug 25:** BJP Mahila Morcha national president Vanathi Srinivasan on Sunday criticised the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC government in West Bengal for its alleged failure to ensure safety of women and said "it will pay the price for it".

Srinivasan, who was here to meet with party's women wing leaders ahead of upcoming three-phased assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir beginning September 18, said the alleged rape and murder of a doctor has shaken the society and the women are marching in thousands to seek justice for the victim.

"As far as the Kolkata rape and murder (of a postgraduate trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical college on August 9) is concerned, it is highly unfortunate that the state government is not understanding the importance of safety of the women," the BJP women wing chief told reporters on the sidelines of the function here.

She said it is not for the first time such a thing had happened but 2011 onwards, there are hun-



dreds of such incidents which had taken place in the state.

"Mahila Morcha of the BJP is always giving voice to the victims and for their justice, we are agitating. After this rape and murder of a doctor, I personally went to Kolkata to participate in the silent march...there is a difference, normally political parties come to the streets and agitate against the government

but now the ordinary women, thousands of women, are coming on the streets and fighting against the government," she said. The BJP leader said the women protesters are raising their voice for justice for that woman doctor but "unfortunately, this arrogant Mamata Banerjee government is not understanding the sensitivity of the issue and they will pay the price for it." (PTI)

## DPAP releases 1st list of 13 candidates for J&K polls

**SRINAGAR, Aug 25:** The Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) Sunday released its first list of 13 candidates for the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

This will be the maiden assembly elections for the party floated by the former chief minister of the erstwhile state of J&K Ghulam Nabi Azad. The party's general secretary (organisation) R S Chib released the list.

The party has decided to field former J&K minister Abdul Majid Wani from the Doda East assembly constituency, former MLA Mohammad Amin Bhat from Devsar, former J&K advocate general Mohammad Aslam Goni from Bhaderwah, DDC member Saleem Parry from Dooru and Muneer Ahmed Mir from Lolab.

The DPAP said DDC member Bilal Ahmed Deva will be its candidate from Anantnag West, Ghulam Nabi Wani (Nellora) from Rajpora, Mir Altaf Hussain from Anantnag and Qaiser Sultan Ganai (Jin) from Ganderbal. (PTI)

## 'Centres in urban areas for discussions on Lord Krishna'

**INDORE, Aug 25:** On the eve of Jannashtami, Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav on Sunday announced that the state government would open centres in urban areas for discussions on various aspects of Lord Krishna's life.

Speaking at a symposium on Lord Krishna here, Yadav said one village will be developed on the lines of Gokul and Barsana in every development block in the state.

Yadav said, "Indore's Geeta Bhavan is a big centre for dialogue on various aspects of Lord Krishna. I am announcing today that our government will open centres on the lines of Geeta Bhavan in urban areas of the state, which will give us an opportunity to discuss and debate various aspects of Lord Krishna."

Jannashtami, an annual festival that celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna, will be observed on Monday. The chief minister said the state government will provide funds to the urban bodies for these proposed centres, which will be developed as places to exchange authentic knowledge on mythological subjects. (PTI)

## 'Such clarity on census delayed for over three years': Congress

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** The Congress on Sunday took a swipe at Home Minister Amit Shah for his remarks that an announcement on a census would be made once it was finalised, saying "such clarity on a census that has already been delayed for over three years".

The opposition party's remarks came a day after Shah said the decadal census exercise would be carried out at an appropriate time and an announcement made when it was decided.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The self-styled Chanakya has just dropped a bombshell. Yesterday, in Chhattisgarh, he let out a top secret. He said that the census will be carried out at an appropriate time and that an announcement will be made for it when it is decided."

"Wow. Such clarity on a census that has already been delayed for

over 3 years!" Ramesh said in a post on X.

The house listing phase of the census and the exercise to update the National Population Register were scheduled to be carried out across the country from April 1 to September 30, 2020, but it was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

"The census will be carried out at an appropriate time. We will make an announcement for it when it is decided," Shah said at a press conference in Raipur while replying to a question on it.

The census operation continues to be on hold and the government has not yet announced a new schedule for it.

Several opposition parties have been demanding a "caste census". However, there has been no announcement by the government so far on this politically-significant issue. (PTI)

## Cong slams govt over 'unprecedented decline' in real wages



**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** The Congress on Sunday claimed that a combination of slow wage growth and "back-breaking" inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages and said that like the "proverbial ostrich", the government continues to remain blind to the most fundamental challenge faced by the Indian economy.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said a new report by a noted brokerage firm has once again shed light on the truth that the Union Government has consistently denied - real household incomes in India are facing a persistent decline.

"A combination of slow wage growth and back-breaking inflation has caused an unprecedented decline in real wages (wages adjusted for price rise) and therefore incomes," he said in a statement.

Ramesh pointed out that several surveys and data sets - including the Annual Survey of Unregistered Enterprises (ASUSE), the Reserve

Bank of India's KLEMS data, and the Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES) - have demonstrated financial distress among working class Indians.

Multiple data sources, including the government's own official statistics, have even shown clear evidence that workers can buy less today than they could 10 years ago, he said.

"Labour Bureau's Wage Rate Index (Government Data): Real wages for labourers stagnated between 2014-2023, and in fact declined between 2019-2024. Ministry of Agriculture's Agricultural Statistics at a Glance (Government Data): Under Dr Manmohan Singh, real wages for agricultural labourers grew at 6.8% each year. Under Mr. Modi, real wages for agricultural labourers declined by minus 1.3% each year," he said.

Citing periodic labour force survey series, Ramesh said average real earnings over time have stagnated between 2017 and 2022 across all employment types - salaried workers, casual workers, and self-employed workers.

Citing Centre for Labour Research and Action data, he said real wages of brick kiln workers have stagnated or declined between 2014 and 2022.

Brick kilns involve intensive labour and are a low-paying work of last resort for India's poorest, he

added.

"In my intervention on the Finance Bill in the Rajya Sabha on August 8, 2024, I had asked four straight questions on the state of the economy," he said.

"The non-biological PM hasn't yet broken his silence on them, so they are worth repeating: Why does private investment continue to be sluggish? Why has the private sector's share in overall investment declined to its lowest level in four years?" Ramesh said. "Why is consumption growth so weak and why did private final consumption expenditure - the largest component of the GDP - grew at only around 4% in FY24," he asked.

Why are real wages and incomes stagnant or falling, Ramesh further asked.

"Why has manufacturing as percentage of GDP fallen from 16.5% in UPA to 14.5%? Why has this decline been particularly sharp in labour-intensive manufacturing like textiles? Why have India's garment exports fallen from USD 15 billion in 2013-14 to USD 14.5 billion in 2023-2024?" the Congress leader said.

"The Union Budget has come and gone, but like the proverbial ostrich, the Government and the non-biological PM continue to remain blind to the most fundamental challenge faced by the Indian economy," Ramesh said. (PTI)

## Thankful to HM for talking about NC's manifesto: Abdullah



**GANDERBAL (J-K), Aug 25:** National Conference (NC) vice president Omar Abdullah Sunday said he was thankful to Union Home Minister Amit Shah for noticing his party's election manifesto.

People who were not ready to read it, have now been compelled to go through it now, Abdullah added. "I am thankful to the home minister from the core of my heart for talking about our manifesto. For a small party, contesting an election in a far-flung area of the country, it is a huge thing that the country's home minister has seen our manifesto," Abdullah told reporters here after a party function.

Shah on Friday slammed the Congress for its alliance with the NC for the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly polls, accusing the party of repeatedly risking the country's

unity and security in its "greed for power". The Congress has once again "exposed its ulterior motives by allying with the Abdullah family's National Conference," the BJP leader said on X and posted 10 questions for the national party and its leader Rahul Gandhi, while listing several of the manifesto promises of the NC. However, Abdullah said he was thankful to Shah for taking notice of the NC's manifesto, saying, "He forced those people who till now were not ready to read our manifesto."

"It is regretful that the Home Minister saw only one paragraph in our manifesto and he also talked about certain things which are not in our manifesto like name-changing. I re-read our manifesto after the home minister's tweet to check whether I missed it, but it does not talk about that. But, still I am

thankful to the home minister," he added. "Does the Congress want 'Shankaracharya Hill' to be known as 'Takht-e-Suleiman', and 'Hari Hill' as 'Koh-e-Maran'?" Shah had asked.

To a question about the reports of the banned Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) leaders mulling to contest the polls independently, Abdullah said it was a welcome step.

"This is the beauty of democracy. I read in the media that JeI wanted the ban on it to be revoked so that they contest the polls. Unfortunately, the election bugle was sounded and the ban could not be revoked.

"Today, there are reports that they will contest as independent candidates. Bismillah. We wanted them to contest on their own symbol in JeI's name, but let them contest even as independents. Let them plunge into the field, bring their manifesto and their promises. Then it is up to the people to decide whom they would like to vote," Abdullah added.

Asked if he would contest the polls from Ganderbal, Abdullah, who represented the constituency in the erstwhile Assembly from 2009-14 when he was the chief minister, said the party will take a decision on that. (PTI)

## NC, PDP can't ensure Art 370 restoration: BJP leader

**JAMMU, Aug 25:** BJP Mahila Morcha president Vanathi Srinivasan on Sunday said it "impossible" for the opposition parties NC and PDP to ensure Article 370 restoration but they are fooling people by guaranteeing it in their manifesto for the Jammu and Kashmir assembly elections.

Addressing reporters after a meeting of Jammu and Kashmir Mahila Morcha at the BJP headquarters here in the run-up to the assembly polls, Srinivasan said the younger generation in the union territory want a peaceful life and development, which can only be ensured by her party.

In its manifesto, the National Conference (NC) mentioned 12 guarantees, including the restoration of Article 370 and Jammu and Kashmir's statehood, while People's Democratic Party (PDP) promised to pursue the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir to its "original status", and advocate for confidence-building measures (CBMs) and regional cooperation

between India and Pakistan. In August 2019, the BJP-led government abrogated Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and bifurcated the erstwhile state into two Union Territories - Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

"It is impossible for them (NC and PDP to restore Article 370). They are trying to fool the people. It (the abrogation) was done by the parliament. It is a constitutional amendment and more than that in the name of Article 370, discrimination has been happening here," the BJP women's wing president said. She said the people of Jammu and Kashmir have suffered a lot due to some separatist political parties but now the younger generation wants to live a peaceful life and hopes to see development in this region for which "BJP is the only solution".

Srinivasan said both the NC and PDP would be defeated in the upcoming assembly elections and "whatever they are saying about restoration of the Article 370 or re-

naming Shankaracharya hill will not help them because now the people understand that they are doing politics for the sake of their family members".

She said the women wing of the Jammu and Kashmir BJP is proactive and its members did a "tremendous job" during the Lok Sabha elections this year.

The members are organising booth-level and assembly-wise events to connect with women voters. Over the past 10 years, they have helped various government initiatives, especially centrally sponsored schemes, reach the most remote areas, significantly benefiting women, she added.

Srinivasan said the Mahila Morcha would like to connect with more beneficiaries of government schemes, especially women. It would like to make people aware about their property rights that came with the abrogation of Article 370 and the reservation ensured to the scheduled caste community. (PTI)

## PM likely to launch Subhadra Yojana in Odisha

*Eligible women of 21-60 years age group, under BPL category would get ₹ 10,000 in a year for five years under the scheme*

**BHUBANESWAR, Aug 25:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Odisha on September 17 to launch the 'Subhadra Yojana', an ambitious scheme of the BJP government in the state for women, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Sunday.

Speaking to media persons after visiting Jagannath temple in Puri, the Union education minister said Odisha chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi and two Deputy CMs had invited Prime Minister to launch the Subhadra Yojana in Odisha on September 17 and the PM had agreed to it.

"During election, for the empowerment of women, we had promised to provide ₹50,000 to each woman and the Odia people have imposed their faith on us. In the meanwhile, the Mohan Majhi-led BJP government in Odisha has published the SOP for the rollout of the scheme," Pradhan said.

He said that more than one crore eligible women of 21-60 years age group, under BPL category would get ₹10,000 in a year for five years under the scheme.



On the inventory and maintenance of Ratna Bhandar of Jagannath temple in Puri, the Union minister said on the request from the state government, a high-level team of ASI will inspect the treasury of the 12th century shrine soon. The Odisha government will make an inventory of all jewellery and other valuables stored in the

Ratna Bhandar and will compare the latest list with the previous list, he added.

The BJP government will undertake all measures to develop Puri as a modern spiritual city, Pradhan said. The Union minister who hails from the state arrived here on Sunday on a three-day visit to Odisha. (PTI)



# Crimes against women unpardonable sin, guilty should not be spared: PM

**JALGAON (MAHARASHTRA), Aug 25:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday termed crimes against women an unpardonable sin, adding the guilty should not be spared.

Modi's strong remarks follow protests against the brutal rape and murder of a 31-year-old trainee doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Hospital and the sexual abuse of two four-year-old school girls in Badlapur near Mumbai.

Speaking at the 'Lakhpati Didi Sammelan' in north Maharashtra's Jalgaon, Modi said the safety of women should be a priority.

"The safety of mothers, sisters, and daughters is the country's priority. I have repeatedly raised this issue from the Red Fort. Be it any state of the country, I understand the pain and anger of my sisters and daughters," he said.

Modi said that he would tell every political party and state government that crime against women is an unpardonable sin. Whoever is guilty should not be spared, he added.

"Those helping the perpetrators of crimes against women should not be spared. Be it a hospital, school, government or police station, at whatever level negligence occurs, everyone should be held accountable."

"The message should go from top to bottom. This sin is unpardonable. Governments will come and go, but protecting life and women's dignity is a big responsibility of all of us, both as a society and as a government," Modi said.

Modi said his government has done more for women in the last ten years than all the previous regimes since Independence.

"Till 2014, less than ₹ 25,000 crore loans



were given to women self-help groups but in the last 10 years, ₹ 9 lakh crore help was given," Modi said, referring to the government's 'Sakhi Mandal' programme.

Modi, who interacted with Lakhpati Didis at Jalgaon, released the ₹ 2,500 crore revolving fund benefiting 48 lakh members of 4.3 lakh self-help groups.

The Lakhpati Didi scheme is not only about boosting the income of women, but also about empowering future generations, Modi said.

"You must have heard that India is going to become the third-largest economy in the world. Women play a massive role in it. However, it was not the case a couple of years ago," Modi said.

"Women guarantee the prosperity of every home and every family. However, there was no one to guarantee help for the women," he

said. Women did not have property in their name, and if they had to take a loan from a bank, they could not avail it, he said. In such a situation, they were not able to build their own small business, he added.

"Therefore, I, your son and brother, resolved to ease your lives. We took decisions in the interest of women year after year," Modi said.

He said that of the 3 crore new houses that will be constructed under the government's housing scheme, most will be allotted to women.

Modi said women were the major contributors when Jan Dhan accounts were opened.

"The Mudra scheme offered loans to people without any guarantee, and 70 per cent of the beneficiaries of this scheme turned out to be women. Some people opposed this

scheme, citing risk factors and claimed it might become (bad) debt. But I trusted the women and their honesty. Many have repaid their loans," he said.

Now, the upper limit for Mudra loan, offered to non-corporate, non-farm and small and micro enterprises, has been increased to ₹ 20 lakh, the PM said.

"When I visited you during the Lok Sabha elections, I promised we would make three crore sisters Lakhpati Didi. This means women who work in self-help groups and have an annual income of more than one lakh rupees," he said.

In the last ten years, one crore Lakhpati Didis were made, and in just two months, 11 lakh more Lakhpati Didi were added, he said.

"Out of the newly added 11 lakh more Lakhpati Didis, one lakh are from Maharashtra," he said.

Modi also said Maharashtra needs the BJP-led Mahayuti government to continue for years to come to ensure the state's stability and prosperity.

"Maharashtra is the shining star of a developed India. The future of the state lies in more investment and job growth," he said.

Modi expressed his anguish over the Nepal bus accident in which 14 persons from Jalgaon district were killed. We sent our minister Raksha Khadse to Nepal, Modi said. Modi recalled his recent visit to Poland and the respect people there have for the people of Maharashtra.

The PM said that during World War II, the Kolhapur settlement housed Polish refugees, including women and children, and the Polish people respect the people of Maharashtra for this gesture. (PTI)

## Kolkata horror accused Sanjay Roy undergoing lie detection test



**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** The lie detection test on Sanjay Roy, the main accused in the alleged rape and murder of a RG Kar Medical College trainee doctor, is underway at Kolkata's Presidency Jail where he is lodged, officials said on Sunday.

Two more individuals will undergo the test at the CBI office in Kolkata during the day, they said.

Four persons including former principal Sandip Ghosh underwent the polygraph test on Saturday, the officials said.

The CBI has sought permission from court to put seven persons including Roy and former principal of the medical college Sandip Ghosh through THE lie detector test. The test cannot be used as evidence during the trial but findings give the agency a direction for the further probe.

A team of polygraph specialists flown to Kolkata from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) in Delhi is conducting the tests, they said.

Roy was arrested by the Kolkata Police on August 10, a day after the body of the 31-year-old medic was found in the Seminar hall of the medical college. A CCTV footage and a Bluetooth device found near the medic's body resulted in the arrest of Roy, who was allegedly seen entering the seminar hall of the college where the body was found at around 4 am.

Roy (33) was working with the Kolkata Police as a civic volunteer since 2019.

The accused, who is a trained boxer, allegedly got close to a few senior police officers over the years, following which he was moved to the Kolkata Police Welfare Board and posted at the police outpost at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital.

He has denied the allegations against him.

The CBI earlier told the Supreme Court that the crime scene was altered by the time it took over the probe which suggests there was an attempt by the local police to cover up the rape and killing of the post-graduate medic.

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

The incident has sparked widespread protests.

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

## Union cabinet approves New Unified Pension Scheme for central govt employees

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Aug 25:** In a significant move to enhance the retirement benefits of central government employees, the Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS).

The decision, made on August 24 promises a comprehensive pension plan that ensures financial security for retirees.

The UPS introduces several key features aimed at providing substantial benefits to employees post-retirement. Central to the scheme is the assurance of a pension amounting to 50% of the average basic pay drawn in the last 12 months of service, with a minimum qualifying period of 25 years. For employees with less than 25 years of service, the pension will be prorated, with a minimum service requirement of 10 years.

Additionally, the scheme guarantees a family pension equivalent to 60% of the employee's pension, payable immediately upon the employee's death.

To further support retirees, the

UPS sets a minimum pension of ₹ 10,000 per month for those who retire after at least 10 years of service.

Inflation protection is another critical aspect of the UPS, as it includes indexation for pensions, family pensions, and minimum pensions to adjust for cost-of-living changes.

The scheme also offers a lump-sum payment upon retirement, calculated as 1/10th of the monthly emoluments (pay plus dearness allowance) for every six months of service, in addition to gratuity.

For retirees under the previous New Pension Scheme (NPS), the UPS will be applicable retroactively, with arrears paid along with interest at Public Provident Fund (PPF) rates.

The Unified Pension Scheme is slated to come into effect on April 1, 2025. While initially targeting central government employees, the scheme has been designed with flexibility for adoption by state governments, allowing them to extend similar benefits to their employees currently under the NPS.

## CBI conducts searches over 'financial irregularities' in RG Kar hospital



**NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Aug 25:** CBI sleuths on Sunday conducted searches on the premises of former principal of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital Sandip Ghosh, ex-MSVP Sanjay Vashisth and 13 others in and around Kolkata in connection with their probe into alleged financial irregularities at the institute, officials said.

The anti-corruption unit of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) also searched the residences and offices of those engaged in supplying materials for the management and care of patients.

At least seven officers of the central probe agency have been questioning Ghosh at his Belaghata residence since 8 am, while others were grilling Vashisth, the former medical su-

perintendent and vice principal of the hospital, and another professor of the forensic-medicine department of the medical establishment, among others, they said.

Accompanied by a huge team of central forces, the CBI team reached Ghosh's residence around 6 am but was made to wait for nearly one-and-a-half hours before he opened the doors, the officials said.

The other officers of the central agency went to the residence of a supplier in Howrah, he added. "Vashisth is being questioned on how much he knew about the financial irregularities that happened in the hospital when he was the MSVP," he said.

Another team of CBI officers also conducted searches at the ex-principal's office in the hospital and also went to the canteen in the academic building. They asked present principal Manas Kumar Bandopadhyay to reach the hospital in the morning and accompany them during their searches in the medical establishment.

A postgraduate trainee woman doctor was allegedly raped and murdered in the seminar hall of the hospital on August 9, following which a Kolkata Police civic volunteer was arrested. The gruesome crime resulted in nationwide protests by doctors and citizens.

On the direction of the Calcutta High Court, the CBI registered cases into the killing as well as alleged financial irregularities. (PTI)

## Illicit drug trade global issue; India can fight it: Shah

**RAIPUR, Aug 25:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the illegal narcotics trade is not only a challenge for India but also a global issue, stressing that the country can combat the menace if it pursues with determination and strategy.

The money generated through the illicit narcotics trade is also used for anti-national activities like spreading terrorism and Naxalism and weakening the country's economy, he said. Addressing a meeting at a hotel in Nava Raipur on the scenario of narcotics substances in Chhattisgarh, Shah emphasised the need to adopt four formulas of drug detection, network destruction, culprit detention and addict rehabilitation in achieving success.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has pledged to make the country drug-free in 2047 when the 100th year of the country's independence will be celebrated and gradually the resolution has become the resolution of the 130 crore population. I believe that the resolution of a drug-free India is very

important in making a prosperous, safe and glorious India, Shah said.

The illicit drug trade is not only a challenge for India but also a global issue, he said, pitching for the need to raise awareness of this menace.

"This battle is at such a juncture that if we pursue with determination and strategy, we can win this fight," he said, cautioning, "several countries have lost their fight against it".

The problem of narcotics in India is not just a problem of illicit drugs, but it is also linked to national security. Besides aiming at destroying youth, the money generated through the trade is also used for anti-national activities like spreading terrorism and Naxalism and weakening the country's economy, he said. "It is also our national responsibility to make the country drug-free with a zero-tolerance policy," he said.

Shah also expressed concerns over the use of narcotic substances in Chhattisgarh.

He said the percentage of

sedative use in Chhattisgarh is 1.45 which is more than the national average. Chhattisgarh has reported 4.98 per cent use of ganja which is more than the national average of 2.83 per cent and it is a matter of concern, he said.

"Chhattisgarh shares its borders with seven states, including Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, from where drug smuggling is done. Chhattisgarh is also close to the Bay of Bengal and the coastal connectivity of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh creates a drug trade route," he said.

Drug smugglers are changing the trend and shifting from natural drugs to synthetic ones which cause maximum harm, said Shah. He further stressed the need for focusing on scientific investigation with a 'top-to-bottom' and 'bottom-to-top' approach in dismantling the drug trade network. "If a packet of drugs is found in a small shop, then we will have to investigate from where it came and where it was manufactured. (PTI)

## India considered sourcing cheetahs from Somalia, Tanzania, Sudan after biorhythm challenges

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** India considered sourcing new cheetahs from Somalia, Tanzania, Sudan and other range countries closer to the equator or in the Northern Hemisphere to avoid biorhythm complications observed in big cats brought from Southern Hemisphere countries like South Africa and Namibia, according to official records.

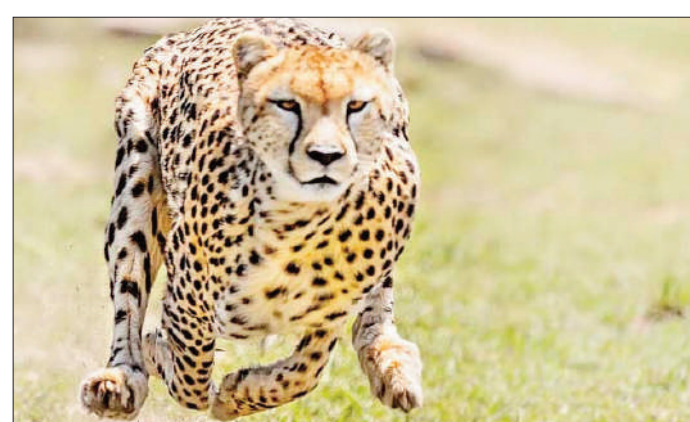
Due to the differences in circadian rhythms between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, some cheetahs developed thick winter coats during the Indian summer and monsoon last year, anticipating the African winter (June to September).

Three of these cheetahs -- a Namibian female and two South African males -- died after wounds beneath their winter coats, on their backs and necks, became infested with maggots and led to blood infections.

PTI has learnt from sources that the cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa have once again developed thick winter coats. Despite these concerns, discussions are ongoing with Southern Hemisphere countries to bring new cheetahs.

"Talks are ongoing with all countries, including South Africa and Namibia, but we have not formally approached anyone. Currently, our focus is on addressing immediate issues, such as augmenting the prey base, managing the leopard population and readying the Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary," a source told PTI.

Documents obtained by PTI through an RTI application revealed that during a steering committee meeting on August 10 last



year, Chairman Rajesh Gopal said the time it takes for cheetahs from Southern Hemisphere countries to adjust their biorhythms to the local environment, climate, and conditions in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park might be a significant factor in their deaths.

"For want of biorhythmic adjustment, some cheetahs have succumbed to ectoparasitic infections during their pelage change, which was synced with the climate conditions of their earlier habitat. The third filial generation from surviving cheetahs would be more resistant and better adapted to Kuno conditions," Gopal said in the meeting. He acknowledged the possibility of further mortality due to this issue and recommended that "future cheetahs for reintroduction should be sourced from Northern Hemisphere countries like Kenya or Somalia to avoid biorhythmic complications".

According to the Africa Range-Wide Cheetah Conservation Initiative, Southern and Eastern Africa are strongholds for the species, al-

though there has been significant range loss in parts of these regions.

The current distribution in several countries, such as Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Angola, Mozambique, and Zambia, remains largely unknown.

In a meeting of the steering committee on September 4, Gopal reiterated the importance of synchronising biorhythms, particularly circadian rhythms, with local climatic conditions.

He emphasised that cheetahs from South Africa are adapted to the climatic conditions of the Southern Hemisphere, which has a different climate regime. Therefore, it is crucial that the National Tiger Conservation Authority prioritise sourcing new cheetahs from Northern Hemisphere countries like Kenya and Somalia.

The taxonomic variation between subspecies is not particularly significant, "since the cheetahs from South Africa also belong to a different subspecies", he said.

In another meeting on October

27, the committee stressed that cheetahs should not be sourced from Southern Hemisphere African countries, based on experiences related to circadian rhythm adjustments and dermal infestations.

In the next meeting on December 13, Amit Mallick, the then Inspector General of Forests, NTCA, said that steps had been taken to "bring more cheetahs from other range countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, and Sudan".

However, this issue did not figure in the subsequent meetings on March 12, June 18, and August 23, which focused on prey augmentation, managing the leopard population in Kuno and Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary, grass revival, capacity building, strengthening SOPs, and finalising the schedule for cheetah releases in Kuno.

Some of the 20 cheetahs brought to India so far -- eight from Namibia in September 2022 and 12 from South Africa last February -- were initially released into the wild but were brought back to their enclosures by August 13 last year after three cheetahs died due to septicemia.

In a meeting on Friday, the steering committee decided to release the African cheetahs and their cubs, born in India, into the wild in a phased manner after the monsoon withdraws from central parts of the country, which typically happens by the first week of October.

"While adult cheetahs will be released into the wild in phases once the rains end, the cubs and their mothers will be released after December," an official told PTI. (PTI)

## 'Vacancies, pay, health, basic amenities': RDSO report flags challenges train controllers face

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** A study by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO), which functions under the Railway Ministry, has found that train controllers face multiple challenges at work including "unattractive" pay scale, huge stress due to vacancy leading to health concerns, and a lack of basic amenities.

The report, which was submitted to the Railway Board recently, said section controllers perform high-stress jobs, their task made more difficult by the around 15-20 per cent vacancy, medically-decategorised officers posted in the department and the absence of appropriate reward either in terms of money, or esteem and career growth.

Titled 'The challenges faced by Section Controllers in carrying out their duties effectively' the report aims at exploring improvements in selection procedure, training, and infrastructures for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of train operations.

The Indian Railways is one of the largest networks in the world with thousands of trains traversing various sections of almost 1,05,555 km of tracks daily, the report states. "This mammoth activity is controlled by 68 operation centers over the IR network called the Divisional Control Office."

The Divisional Control Office, situated at divisional headquarters, plays a vital role in the entire operation of the railway network, it says.

The rail network in a division is subdivided into sections consisting of several stations. "The trains running over these sections are controlled and monitored by the

Section Controllers working round the clock in shift duties on the Control board."

The RDSO team collected data from various divisional control offices and found that there are vacancies ranging from 15 to 24 per cent.

"High vacancy in the cadre ultimately affects the working condition of the staff on roll. Under strenuous conditions, the quality of work also suffers. Administration also faces difficulty in managing the rest and leave of the staff. Therefore, vacancy in the cadre should be analysed on priority and effort should be made to fill up the vacancy," the report says.

It says section controllers work 24x7 their shifts cannot be left unattended.

"As per the roster, Section Controller requires 30 hrs of weekly rest. But in the absence of adequate number of staff, sometimes the administration faces problems in arranging weekly rest or leave to Section Controllers. In a continuous work schedule, they feel burned out and their productivity gets affected," the report adds. While identifying the reasons for the shortage of section controllers, the report said 75 per cent of the posts are filled through selection from the feeder cadre of Station Masters (55 per cent), train managers (10 per cent) and train clerks (10 per cent).

"The initial grade pay of Section Controllers has been made identical with the Station Masters grade pay (L/6) in the VIIIth CPC. While, earlier the initial pay of Section Controllers was a grade higher (L/6) than the pay of SMs (L/5) and therefore, SMs were interested

in applying for the post," the study says.

"But in the present selection process, there is reluctance from the SMs category to apply for the post of Section Controllers due to lack of any substantial financial gain. This situation has led to the shortage of staff in the Section Controller cadre resulting in further stress on the working strength of the Section Controllers," it adds.

Expressing concern over the current practice of inducting "medically de-categorized" staff in the control department as section controllers, the study says, "A person with any medical condition or handicap will have some restricting working condition where that person will be unable to meet the demand of the job."

The study has suggested several measures such as upgradation in the initial pay scale from grade pay 4,200 to grade pay 4,600 to make them more attractive for the feeder category candidates, introduction of an aptitude test in the recruitment/selection, extension in the duration of training period.

The team has also suggested the Railway Board reintroduce direct recruitment of section controllers through the Railway Recruitment Board which was discontinued in 2020. It also said no controller should be allowed to work without undergoing the periodical refresher courses, the study said.

"Increase in the frequency of refresher courses will also equip the Section controllers with frequent updates in their knowledge and skill. It may be increased from once in 03 years to once in a year as in the case of Air Traffic Controllers," it added. (PTI)



# FILMING ON 'THE BATMAN PART II' TO BEGIN NEXT YEAR: WRITER MATTSON TOMLIN

**LOS ANGELES, Aug 25:** The shooting for the upcoming sequel of Matt Reeves' "Batman" is expected to begin next year, movie's co-writer Mattson Tomlin has confirmed.

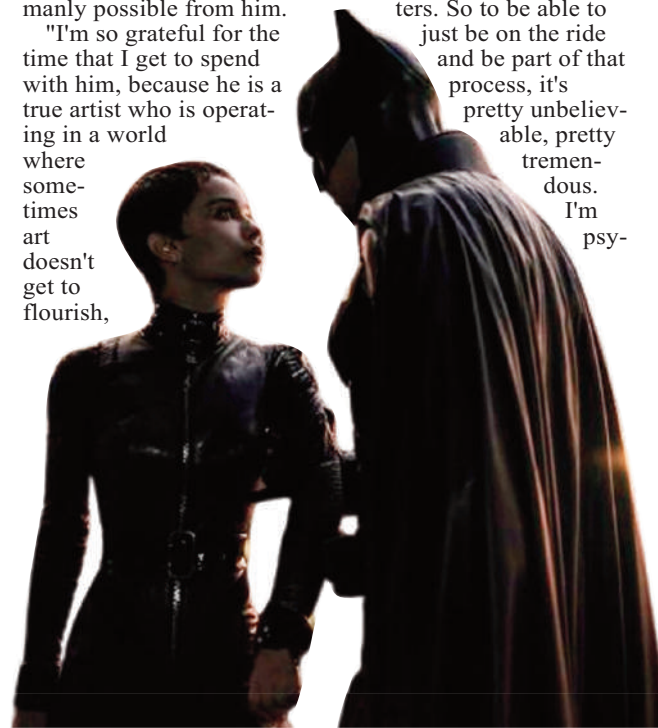
The much awaited Warner Bros film, which reportedly faced production delays, is a sequel to 2022's "The Batman", which saw Robert Pattinson play the titular superhero with Zoe Kravitz, Colin Farrell, and Jeffrey Wright in key roles.

Tomlin has penned the script of "The Batman Part II" with Reeves and the writer said the "bar just couldn't be higher".

"It's shooting next year. We're gearing up, and I will say that the bar just couldn't be higher. It's the sequel to the first one. But also, Matt is like no other. In the five years now that I've been working with him as

closely as I have, I've tried to absorb as much as humanly possible from him. "I'm so grateful for the time that I get to spend with him, because he is a true artist who is operating in a world where sometimes art doesn't get to flourish,

and he's trying to make something that really matters. So to be able to just be on the ride and be part of that process, it's pretty unbelievable, pretty tremendous. I'm pssy-



ched for the movie," he told entertainment news outlet Screen Rant.

Warner Bros officially greenlit the sequel to "The Batman" at a CinemaCon presentation in 2022, a month after it released in theatres.

"The Batman" starred Pattinson as the caped crusader, who has been fighting crime in Gotham City for two years, uncovering corruption while pursuing the Riddler, a serial killer who targets Gotham's elite.

It featured Kravitz as Selina Kyle/Catwoman, Wright as James Gordon, Farrell as Oswald Cobblepot/Penguin, John Turturro as Carmine Falcone, Peter Sarsgaard as Gil Colson, and Andy Serkis as Alfred Pennyworth.

The movie earned over USD 750 million at the global box office. (PTI)

## Filmmaker Ranjith resigns as Kerala Chalachitra Academy chairman over misbehaviour charge



**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Aug 25:** Malayalam filmmaker Ranjith on Sunday resigned as the chairman of Kerala Chalachitra Academy following allegations of misbehaviour levelled against him by a Bengali actor.

The Bengali actress recently alleged that the award-winning filmmaker had behaved in an inappropriate manner when she came up for the shooting of a film that he had helmed in 2009. The filmmaker has rejected the actor's charge and claimed that he was the "real victim" in the case.

In an audio clip sent to a television channel, Ranjith said he does not want to continue in the position (of chairman of the Chalachitra Academy) as it would adversely impact the reputation of the Left government in the state.

He also said he would fight the accusations against him legally.

"I have been targeted by a certain section of people since the day I took charge as the chairman of the academy. I need to prove before society that the allegations are untrue. I have decided to move legally and bring out the truth," he claimed in the audio clip.

"Many people, including the media, are attacking me without understanding the truth. In this context, I have decided to step down from the post," Ranjith said.

Though the state government has stated that legal action would be taken against the accused if the woman lodges a complaint with the police, the actress on Sunday said she does

not wish to go ahead with a police case.

"I don't want to file a complaint. Because for the last three days I have been hunted by the media across Kerala and Bengal. I have to go on with my work," she told a television channel. She asked if she continues with this, then who's going to run her household.

"I have initiated the process. I am handing over the baton to whoever is going to take it forward," the actress added.

After Ranjith announced his resignation, state Cultural Affairs Minister Saji Cheriyan told reporters here that the government would accept the filmmaker's resignation as soon as he sends it. Reiterating that the Left government has always stood by victims in issues relating to sexual assaults and abuses, the minister also rejected allegations that he had tried to shield the accused director.

"I have always taken a stern stand in favour of women in all issues," he claimed. "The Left government's stand is also crystal clear in the matter. We are always with victims in such cases. Stringent action will be taken against the wrongdoers."

The minister also accused the media of "misinterpreting" his words and claimed that he had never supported Ranjith.

Cheriyan had courted controversy on Saturday saying Ranjith was one of the most acclaimed filmmakers of the country and no case could be registered based on just allegations and that such cases won't stand. (PTI)

## Dua Lipa on her upcoming concert in India: Can't wait to see you again



**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Pop star Dua Lipa, who is set to headline the second edition of the Zomato Feeding India Concert in November, says she is looking forward to returning to the country after she rang in the new year here.

The Grammy winner, known for songs such as "Levitating", "Houdini", and "Dance The Night", shared a post on Instagram expressing her excitement for the upcoming show.

"India, I'm coming back!! My trip at the start of this year was a beautiful reminder of how much I love this place.

"The warmth and energy I felt from everyone I met there was amazing, and I can't wait to see you again to perform in November!!!!" Lipa wrote on Saturday alongside a series of pictures from her previous India visit and the announcement poster of the concert.

Last December, the 29-year-old was on a vacation with her family in India where they visited Jodhpur, Rajasthan, and New Delhi.

Lipa will hold the concert on November 30 at BKC, Mumbai. She last performed in India in 2019 and this performance adds to her previously announced Asia leg of Radical Optimism Tour, which kicks off in Singapore on November 5 and stops in Jakarta, Manila, Tokyo, Taipei, Kuala Lumpur, and Bangkok, before concluding in Seoul on December 5. Her Mumbai gig will also feature artists like Jonita Gandhi, Talviinder and others. (PTI)

## Ahead of 'Gladiator II' release, Denzel Washington says 'very few films left for me'

**LONDON, Aug 25:** Multiple award-winning actor Denzel Washington has sparked retirement rumours after he said that he needs to feel inspired by a filmmaker in order to take up a project as there are "very few films left" that would interest him to go to a movie set.

"The Equalizer" star, whose career spans over 40 years across cinema, TV and theatre, said Ridley Scott was a big draw for him boarding the cast of the director's "Gladiator II". In the upcoming film, Washington plays Macrinus, a power broker, under whose tutelage Paul Mescal's Lucius the grandson of Rome's former emperor Marcus Aurelius and son of Lucilla resolves to fight as a gladiator.

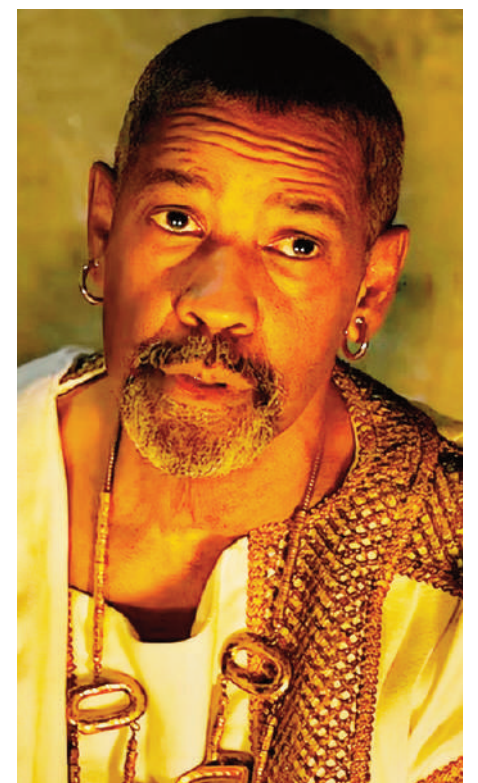
"There are very few films left for me to make that I'm interested in, and I have to be inspired by the filmmaker, and I was tremendously inspired by Ridley," Washington, 69, told Empire magazine in an interview.

"Gladiator II", a follow-up to Scott's 2000 hit "Gladiator" starring Russell Crowe, reunites the master director with Washington after the 2007 thriller action film "American Gangster". "We had a great go-round, the first go-round and here we are. He's engaged. He's excited about life and his next film. He's an inspiration. We should all want to feel like that at 86," the actor added.

Washington made his film debut in 1981 with Michael Schultz's "Carbon Copy", in which he portrayed the role of Roger Porter alongside George Segal, Susan Saint James and Jack Warden.

The actor, regarded as one of the greatest actors in the 21st century, went on to star in films such as "Glory", "Training Day", "Remember the Titans", "Malcolm X", "The Equalizer" franchise and "Fences".

The story of "Gladiator II" is set two decades after the events of the original movie. Scheduled for release in November, the film follows a grown-up Lucius living in the northern African region of Numidia where he was earlier sent by his mother Lucilla to stay away from the reach of the Roman Empire. However, the ongoing events make him return to Rome as a gladiator. (PTI)



## Huge fan of Amitabh Bachchan, always looked for a script like 'Agneepath': Telugu star Nani

**MUMBAI, Aug 25:** Telugu star Nani clearly remembers how his love affair with Bollywood began.

The actor, who is yet to star in a Hindi film, said he watched the Amitabh Bachchan-starrer "Agneepath" in childhood and then there was no looking back.

"I've watched a lot more Hindi films than people who live here (in the north). There are some amazing directors that I want to work with every time I see (their work). I'm a huge fan of Bachchan sir. My interest towards movies and wanting to make a film... "Then even with the performance, 'Agneepath' played a big role in the later part. Like, when I wanted a certain intensity for the character... I always looked for a script like 'Agneepath', that was one childhood thing for me," Nani told PTI in an interview here.

"Agneepath" featured Bachchan

as Vijay Deenanath Chauhan, who sets out to avenge the death of his father and the injustices done to his family by becoming a part of the Mumbai underworld.

The film not only turned the actor into a movie buff but also inspired him to pen a couple of stories, including a thriller, he said.

"My inspiration for the first film was 'Agneepath'... This is the first film which I wanted to make (as a director) when I was an assistant director, which I've never made..."

"I still have the story, and then I've two or three more stories, which have to be adapted to the current times. There are a couple of directors who I've worked with, who know the basic idea about it, they are always like, 'Let's do it.'"

The 40-year-old credited "Agneepath", directed by Mukul Anand and produced by Yash Johar, for re-

defining the quintessential Hindi cinema hero. The 1990 film, which earned Bachchan his first best actor National Award, was remade in 2012 with Hrithik Roshan in the lead.

"It played a very big part (in my life)," Nani said, re-enacting the introduction scene of Bachchan's character, "Naam, Vijay Deenanath Chauhan..."

"I think that's the greatest intro of all time. I love how he asks for the tailor's number when he meets Kancha Cheena (played by Danny Denzongpa) and Mandwa village, that mood, that set-up, that line 'Maloom?'. Every detail about that film, it was something new for me, it hit me very strongly," said the actor, adding he counts veteran actors Chiranjeevi and Nagarjuna among his influences. Nani further expressed his deep admiration for Aamir Khan and the Bollywood superstar's per-

formances in films such as "Dil Chahta Hai", "Lagaan" and "Rang De Basanti". "Before I was about to join cinema, there was a huge influence of Aamir Khan sir, his films. Then he did films like 'Dangal', which came after I became an actor, and it was very inspiring."

"It was like, 'We have to up the game'. So, Hindi cinema has always been a part of this love for cinema," he said, adding "Dilwale Dhalania Le Jayenge", "Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam", "Baazigar", and "Darr" are among his favourite Bollywood films. The "Jersey" star will next be seen in the Telugu vigilante action thriller "Saripodhaa Sanivaaram", titled "Surya's Saturday" in its Hindi dubbed version.

Written and directed by Vivek Athreya, the film will hit the screens on Friday. It is produced by DVV Entertainment.

Nani, who plays the title character in "Saripodhaa Sanivaaram", said he used to imitate fighting scenes after watching action movies in childhood.

"Nowadays I'm sure that kids have a lot more options to play with, but at that time, it used to be like, 'You watch a film, you do some imaginary fighting and jump into the sand or on the bed with pillows and stuff like that'. I'm that kid."

The upcoming film revolves around Surya (Nani), who fights against injustice on Saturday and locks horns with a corrupt inspector called R Dayanand (S J Suryah), who brutally attacks innocent people. The actor said an enthusiastic Athreya called him while he was having dinner with his cousins and when Nani heard the brief narration of "Saripodhaa Sanivaaram", he said he was amazed at how the film adds

a new dimension to the classic hero-villain narrative.

"There are a lot of action films and it's all about good will win over evil. You establish a hero, there's a villain and they both will come together at one point. So, the graph is all the same for any action film... I felt it (the film) has this classic formula of action, which we have seen in a million films, but with a new twist," Nani said many directors from Hindi cinema approached after the success of his 2023 film "Hi Nanna" but he is waiting for the right offer. "I got a lot of love after 'Hi Nanna' from the Hindi industry. A lot of them (directors) messaged me personally and even reached out to me on Instagram. It was refreshing. I didn't know they watched Telugu films. If I want to do a film here, it has to be extremely exciting." (PTI)



# Yamal gets better of Spain teammate Williams in Barcelona's 2-1 win over Athletic Bilbao

**BARCELONA, Aug 25:** Lamine Yamal got the better of fellow Spain star Nico Williams when Barcelona beat Athletic Bilbao 2-1 Saturday in the players' first matchup since the two young talents left their nation to European Championship glory.

Yamal opened the scoring before Robert Lewandowski provided the second goal to give Barcelona two wins in two games to start the Spanish league season.

The Barcelona teenager struck in the 24th minute with a curling shot that was reminiscent of Lionel Messi's favorite moves. Yamal controlled a deflected ball, took two touches to skirt along the outside edge of the box before he found the angle to unleash a left-footed shot. The ball found the net after a de-

flection on Athletic player Iñigo Lekue.

Yamal and Williams chatted before and after kickoff. Yamal would not reveal in a post-game interview what they talked about, saying "we are just good friends."

But he did, perhaps half-jokingly, make a dig at his pal when he described his goal.

"I saw that Nico, who is not very intense while defending, was coming and I found the space I needed to shoot," Yamal said.

Oihan Sancet equalized in the 42nd by converting a penalty kick after Barcelona's Pau Cubarsi knocked down Alejandro Berenguer.

But Barcelona never let Williams get going in attack and kept up the

pressure until Lewandowski reestablished the advantage. The Poland striker had already headed off the bar when he was set up by a passing move involving Raphinha and Pedri to score in the 75th.

Lewandowski had netted a brace of goals in Barcelona's 2-1 win at Valencia in last week's Spanish league opener.

Hansi Flick, making his home debut as Barcelona's new coach, gave a second straight start to midfielder Marc Bernal, who along with Yamal and Cubarsi is 17 years old. Barcelona was rumored to be interested in trying to sign Williams from the Basque club in this transfer window. Flick hugged Williams when the winger was substituted late in the game. The German coach

said that he congratulated Williams for his performance at Euro 2024.

Athletic used its third-string goalkeeper, Alex Padilla, from its youth squad, after minor injuries to Spain goalie Unai Simón and backup Julien Agirretxabala.

The two teams provided seven members of Spain's Euro 2024 squad which won the continental title last month.

Take Kubo went on as a substitute and scored with 10 minutes remaining to give Real Sociedad a 1-0 win at promoted Espanyol, while Getafe and Rayo Vallecano drew 0-0. Host Osasuna beat Mallorca 1-0 in the return of former coach Jagoba Arrasate in his first visit to Pamplona since changing clubs. Ruben Garcia scored in the 55th. (AP)



# Suárez scores two quick goals, Inter Miami beat Cincinnati 2-0

**FORT LAUDERDALE (FLORIDA), Aug 25:** Luis Suárez scored 30 seconds into the match and again in the sixth minute and that was all goal-keeper Drake Callender needed as Inter Miami beat FC Cincinnati 2-0 on Saturday night to become the first team this season to clinch a spot in the playoffs.

Inter Miami (17-4-5) avenged a 6-1 drubbing in Cincinnati earlier this season and moved eight points ahead of second-place Cincinnati (15-8-3) in the Eastern Conference and in the Supporters' Shield race.

Rookie defender Marcelo Weigandt picked up his first career assist and fellow rookie defender Yanick Bright notched his second just 30 seconds into the match as Inter Miami grabbed the lead.

Suárez netted his 15th goal in his 15th start and 19th appearance in his first season with the club when he used rookie midfielder Matias Rojas' third assist to make it 2-0.

Inter Miami was forced to play a man down from the 42nd on after defender Tomás Avilés was tagged with his second yellow card. It did not matter in the end.

Callender turned away six shots for Inter Miami to earn his



fifth clean sheet of the season and first since back-to-back shutout efforts against Orlando City and D.C. United in mid-May. Callender had three saves to keep Cincinnati off the scoreboard in the first half.

Roman Celentano had one save for Cincinnati, which has

lost four in a row since routing Inter Miami.

Cincinnati's Pat Noonan, the reigning coach of the year, was unavailable. He was suspended for the match after a red-card offense prior to the Leagues Cup break. Cincinnati had a league record-tying seven-game win

streak on the road end with a 3-1 loss to the New York Red Bulls before the layoff.

Inter Miami's Jordi Alba and Diego Gómez were serving suspensions and missed the first matchup between the clubs this season.

Inter Miami continued to play

with superstar Lionel Messi, who is still recovering from an ankle injury suffered while playing for Argentina in the Copa America final.

Cincinnati returns home to play CF Montreal on Saturday. Inter Miami travels to play the Chicago Fire on Saturday. (AP)

## Ten Hag faces scrutiny after United loss while Haaland nets hat trick

**LONDON, Aug 25:** Two games into the Premier League season, and the scrutiny is already back on Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag.

Joao Pedro scored in the fifth minute of injury time to give Brighton a 2-1 home win over United on Saturday in a game that showed that the inconsistencies that plagued Ten Hag's team last season still haven't been eradicated.

After United failed to clear a corner, Pedro headed home a cross from Simon Adingra to secure a second straight victory for Brighton at the start of its first season under 31-year-old coach Fabian Hürzeler.

The two leading title rivals also made it two wins out of two with shows of strength.

Erling Haaland scored his seventh Premier League hat trick in Manchester City's 4-1 win over Ipswich, while Arsenal earned a 2-0 win at Aston Villa — a team it lost to twice last season before losing the title by two points to City.

Like Ten Hag, Sean Dyche could also be feeling the early pressure after his Everton side slumped to another heavy defeat, losing 4-0 at Tottenham.

Also Saturday, West Ham beat Crystal Palace 2-0 away, Fulham earned a 2-1 home win over Leicester and Nottingham Forest won 1-0 at Southampton. The defeat at Brighton will be extra tough for United to take as the visitors had a potential winner ruled out in the 70th minute for an almost comical offside. Alejandro Garnacho's shot from a tight angle was

heading into an empty net when it deflected off the knee of the sliding Joshua Zirkzee just before it crossed the line — causing the goal to be ruled out as the Dutch striker was in an off-side position.

"We thought we scored the winning goal, and it's so bad luck that the ball is on the line," said Ten Hag, the Dutch manager who was under heavy pressure last season but was retained by United after leading the team to the FA Cup title.

The discussion about whether he is the right man to lead United will probably be rekindled after a loss that was the result of both missed chances and poor defending.

"You can't drop points so unnecessarily," Ten Hag said. "If you protect the goal like we do, you drop points."

Former United striker Danny Welbeck gave Brighton the lead in the 32nd before Amad Diallo equalized on a counter-attack in the 60th when he cut in from the right and saw his shot deflected into the net by the sliding Jan Paul van Hecke.

For a brief moment, it looked like promoted Ipswich might pull off a major upset after new signing Sammie Szmodics put the visitors ahead early against Man City. But three goals in less than four minutes quickly restored order at the Etihad Stadium. Haaland equalized with a penalty in the 12th minute and made it 3-1 in the 16th after running onto a perfect ball over the top from Kevin De Bruyne and going around goalkeeper Arjanet Muric. (AP)

## Dortmund fans protest their club's sponsorship deal with German arms manufacturer

**DORTMUND (GERMANY), Aug 25:** Borussia Dortmund fans protested their club's controversial sponsorship deal with an arms manufacturer during the team's Bundesliga opener on Saturday.

The second half of Dortmund's 2-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt started against a backdrop of banners criticizing Dortmund's three-year sponsorship deal with Düsseldorf-based Rheinmetall — the world's largest maker of artillery ammunition.

"Not for (explosive) armaments industry," read one sign under a giant banner that simply cursed the Rheinmetall deal with an expletive. "Money first, values second," read more banners, while another said, "Our values rolled over by a tank."

"Borussia connects, Rheinmetall kills," said another couple

of banners.

The fans were also noticeably quieter than usual when the second half began, withholding their support for several minutes before eventually resuming. More than 81,000 supporters attended the match at Dortmund's Westfalenstadion. Campaigners set up a dummy tank outside the stadium before the game, when an activist wore a mask with the face of Rheinmetall's CEO, Armin Pappeger, while holding a red card.

On Wednesday, supporter association Südtribüne Dortmund had signaled the intent of more than 90 fan groups to make their opposition to the deal clear at the start of the second half of Saturday's game. The association encouraged fans to bring placards and banners criticizing the deal.

The association also criticized

the timing of Dortmund's announcement of the deal — in May, three days before the team lost to Real Madrid in the Champions League final — saying the news came as a "bombshell."

Rheinmetall expects to make record group sales of around 10 billion euros (\$11.1 billion) this year.

In February, it announced the construction of a new factory at its existing site in Unterlues in northern Germany, with annual production capacity for 200,000 artillery shells, 1,900 tons of explosives, and possibly rocket engines and warheads.

Founded in 1889 as "Rheinische Metallwaaren- und Maschinenfabrik Actiengesellschaft," the company was one of Germany's biggest armaments manufacturers during both World Wars. (AP)

## Sindhu-like talent with Olympic medal potential: Meet 13-year-old badminton prodigy Tanvi Patri

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Thirteen-year-old Tanvi Patri from Odisha has cemented her status as one of India's most promising badminton prodigies by clinching the girls' singles title at the U-15 Badminton Asia U-17 & U-15 Junior Championships in Chengdu, China, the country where she first honed her skills in the sport.

Patri capped off a phenomenal week with a superlative performance, defeating Vietnam's second seed Thi Thu Huyen Nguyen 22-20, 21-11 in a 34-minute final, offering a glimmer of hope after Indian badminton's recent struggles at the Paris Olympics.

"I'm feeling good after winning the title," Patri told PTI from Chengdu.

"I had expected to win, and I'm happy I could do that. I've been training at the Prakash Padukone

Badminton Academy (PPBA) in Bangalore for the last two years."

Patri displayed remarkable resilience, fighting back from 11-17 down in the opening game to win the title without dropping a game throughout the tournament.

Her parents, Rabinarayan Patri and Sailabala Panda, are software professionals who previously worked in China, where she first took up badminton.

The family returned to India in 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vimal Kumar, Director of PPBA, sees great promise in Tanvi, even drawing comparisons to the early days of P V Sindhu, one of India's most celebrated badminton players.

"She was about eight or nine when she moved to India and joined the academy in 2022," said



Vimal. "She reminds me of Sindhu when she was young. The ability to win matches at a young age is a good sign. She has a long way to go, and with her temperament, she has great potential."

Rabinarayan, a software engineer who works from home, ac-

## Pulisic scores but Milan lose at Parma to leave new coach Fonseca still winless

**MILAN, Aug 25:** Christian Pulisic netted his first goal of the new Serie A season but he couldn't prevent AC Milan losing 2-1 at Parma on Saturday to leave new coach Paulo Fonseca still waiting for his first win in charge.

Pulisic scored one of the easiest goals of his career in the 66th minute to cancel out Dennis Man's second-minute opener. But substitute Matteo Cancellieri scored what was to prove the winner 11 minutes later and offer a great way for Parma coach Fabio Pecchia to mark his birthday. Fonseca, who replaced Stefano Pioli in the offseason, has a lot of work to do. Milan needed two late goals to salvage a 2-2 draw at home to Torino on the opening day. It was the first time in 13 years that Milan had failed to win one of its opening two matches of the season.

Inter Milan got its first victory of the season by beating Lecce 2-0. The defending champion was held 2-2 by Genoa in its first match last weekend.

Alvaro Morata had scored on his debut but was out injured and Milan got off to the worst possible start in Parma as it found itself behind within 90 seconds.

Man, who had netted in Parma's 1-1 draw against Fiorentina on the opening day, was left completely unmarked in the area to sweep home Emanuele Valeri's cross.

Milan offered little until after the cooling break, midway through the first half. Shortly after play resumed, Parma goalkeeper Zion Suzuki had to push Strahinja Pavlovic's header on to the top off the crossbar.

Minutes later, Pavlovic headed a corner just past the near post.

The Milan debutant was also decisive at the other end, in his natural position, as the center back rushed in to make an amazing sliding tackle to prevent Man — who had gone clear on goal — from scoring an almost certain second.

The 23-year-old Pavlovic, who joined from Salzburg at the end of

last month, made another decisive tackle to deny Valentin Mihaila at the start of the second half.

That was shortly after Tijjani Reijnders hit the crossbar for Milan.

Ange-Yoan Bonny thought he had doubled Parma's lead on the hour mark but it was ruled out for offside and Milan leveled shortly after.

Rafael Leao danced down the left flank and played a one-two with Theo Hernandez before rolling the ball across for Pulisic, who just had to tap into an empty net from six yards.

However, Parma restored its lead with another devastating counterattack. Pontus Almqvist raced from inside his own half and into the box before rolling across for Cancellieri to slot into the bottom left corner.

Inter eased to victory despite being without captain and star forward Lautaro Martinez.

Lautaro, who was the last Inter player to start pre-season training after he was involved in Argentina's Copa America victory, was sidelined with muscular fatigue.

Inter took an early lead through Matteo Darmian's header in the fifth minute and sealed the victory in the 69th with a penalty from Hakan Çalhanoğlu after Marcus Thuram — who scored twice last weekend — was grappled to the ground by Lecce defender Kialonda Gaspar.

Lazio was one of only four sides to win last weekend but it surprisingly lost its second match 2-1 at 10-man Udinese.

Lorenzo Lucchi put Udinese ahead in the fifth minute when he headed in a cross from Florian Thauvin, who doubled his team's advantage early in the second half with a delightful solo effort.

Udinese had to play more than 20 minutes at a numerical disadvantage after Hassane Kamara was sent off following a second yellow card. Gustav Isaksen scored what was to prove a consolation for Lazio in stoppages.

Genoa beat Monza 1-0. (AP)

won U-17 tournaments and defeated several senior players, including the current national championship finalist, Tanvi Sharma.

"If she improves her strength and continues to develop, she could be a strong contender for the 2028 or 2032 Olympics."

Patri, who also enjoys skating, began her badminton training under Chinese coach Jiang Yong Yi and won nine titles in China between 2017 and 2020. After returning to India, she was spotted by PPBA during a camp and joined the academy in March 2022.

She went on to claim both the U-15 and U-17 girls' singles titles in the All India sub-junior ranking tournaments in Hyderabad in June and Mapusa, Goa, in May this year. (PTI)



# Holy Trinity: Kohli, Rohit recall Dhawan's contributions

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma on Sunday fondly remembered the contributions of Shikhar Dhawan, the significant other of a holy trinity that dominated bowlers with aggression and aura, and said he has left a lasting impression with his accomplishments.

From 2013 to 2019, the triumvirate of Dhawan, Rohit, and Kohli displayed unprecedented supremacy in international cricket, putting to swords bowling attacks of all kinds.

After a career spanning nearly 13 years, Dhawan on Saturday announced his retirement from all forms of cricket, leaving Kohli, Rohit, Ravi Shastri and others to recall the time when the flamboyant southpaw was an indispensable part of India's ODI batting thanks to his ability to win matches on his own.

"From sharing rooms to sharing lifetime memories on the field. You always made my job easier from the other end. THE ULTIMATE JATT," India captain Rohit, who had formed a formidable opening partnership with Dhawan, wrote on 'X'.

Kohli hailed Dhawan as one of India's most dependable openers, noting that while his fervour, sportsmanship and signature smile will be missed, his enduring legacy will forever resonate.

"Shikhar @SDhawan25 from your fearless debut to becoming one of India's most dependable openers, you've given us countless memories to cherish. Your passion



for the game, your sportsmanship and your trademark smile will be missed, but your legacy lives on," Kohli tweeted.

The former India skipper thanked Dhawan, fondly known as 'Gabbu', for all the memories and wished the 38-year-old luck for his future endeavours.

"Thank you for the memories, unforgettable performances and always leading with your heart. Wishing you the best in your next innings, off the field Gabbu!" Kohli added.

In the 34 Tests, 167 ODIs and 68 T20is he played, Dhawan scored 10,867 runs in international cricket — the 12th most for India — with 24 centuries and 79 fifty-plus scores.

He was the player of the tournament scene in the 2004 ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup where he scored over 500 runs, including three centuries. Six years later he made his India debut in 2010 in an ODI against Australia in Visakhapatnam.

He played his first Test in

March 2013 when he smashed the fastest century on debut, in only 85 balls, against Australia in Mohali.

"What an incredible career @SDhawan25 Paaji! Truly a Gabbu, on and off the field. Wish you all the very best for the next chapters, very excited to see what future holds for you," wrote India's current T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav.

Former India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan tweeted, "Congratulations on an incredible career. @SDhawan25 Your elegance at the crease and your commitment to the game have been inspiring. Wishing you the best in your next chapter."

Also known as 'Mr. ICC' for his exploits in tournaments organised by the game's apex body, Dhawan lit up the Champions Trophy 2013, helping India to a title win and ending up as the highest run-scorer at a brilliant average of 90.75.

He also went on star in other tournaments such as Asia Cup 2014, World Cup 2015, Champions Trophy 2017 and Asia Cup 2018.

He is one of the only eight batsmen in men's ODI history to score over 5000 runs at a 40-plus average and a 90-plus strike rate; the only other Indian batsmen in this list being Kohli and Rohit.

Dhawan last featured in an international game in 2022 in an ODI against Bangladesh in Chattogram. His last competitive game came in this year's IPL when he led Punjab Kings in April. (PTI)

# B'desh registers historic 10-wicket win after Pakistan collapse to 146 all out in 1st test



**RAWALPINDI (PAKISTAN), Aug 25:** Bangladesh shrugged off political unrest back home to notch a historic 10-wicket win after Pakistan collapsed to 146 all out on a dramatic final day of the first test on Sunday.

Off-spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz and left-arm spinner Shakib Al Hasan, who was a lawmaker in the government of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, shared seven wickets after the pace bowlers mopped up the top order to give Bangladesh its maiden win in 14 test matches against Pakistan.

Openers Zakir Hasan and Shadman Islam were unbeaten on 15 and 9, respectively, as Bangladesh reached 30-0 at the stroke of the tea interval for only its seventh away test win and the first since beating New Zealand at Mount Maunganui in January 2022.

Pakistan, which conceded a 117-run first innings lead despite declaring at 448-6, was bowled out by a disciplined pace and spin attack after it resumed on 23-1 and still 94 runs behind.

Mohammad Rizwan followed his career-best unbeaten 171 to top-score with 51 but most of his teammates were guilty of falling to rash shots coupled with some aggressive field placings by Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto.

Mehidy picked up 4-21 and Shakib 3-44 while the three fast bowlers Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud and Nahid Rana snared one wicket each.

Earlier, in a dramatic first session Bangladesh set up its victory as Pakistan limped to 108-6 and lost five wickets. Captain Shan Masood (14) was dismissed in the second over of the day when Hasan found a faint edge and had the Pakistan skipper caught behind.

Masood argued with onfield umpire Richard Kettleborough for the second time in the test match after he was also caught behind in a controversial manner in the first innings, but the television replays clearly suggested the left-hander had a tickle on the ball after Bangladesh went for a successful television referral.

Hasan should have had Babar Azam out for a pair of ducks in the game, but wicketkeeper Litton Das spilled a simple catch off the first ball Babar faced. Babar tried to break the shackles and hit three boundaries before he was out to fast bowler Rana (1-30) when on 22.

Pakistan's middle-order batters were guilty of throwing away their wickets against the two spinners, Shakib and Mehidy.

First innings century-maker Saud Shakeel needlessly tried to play an extravagant shot against Shakib and got stumped for zero for the first time in his short test career.

Abdullah Shafique also ran out of patience and went for an over ambitious shot against Shakib and top edged a catch to point before Mehidy found the outside edge of Salman Ali Agha's bat in his second over.

Bangladesh kept up the pressure on Pakistan after the break as Mehidy picked up three wickets after lunch. Rizwan under edged a sweep against the offspinner back onto his stumps soon after completing his half century and then No. 11 Mohammad Ali was out leg before wicket.

The defeat extended Pakistan's barren run in red-ball cricket at home to five losses and four draws since it last beat South Africa at Rawalpindi in 2021.

The second test will also be played at Rawalpindi from next Friday after it was moved from Karachi due to the ongoing construction work at the National Bank Stadium. (AP)

# Australia A beat India A by 45 runs in unofficial women's Test

**GOLD COAST (Australia), Aug 25:** Incisive bowling by Tess Flintoff (3/39) and Charli Knott (3/34), who both grabbed three wickets each, helped Australia A defeat India A by 45 runs in the unofficial one-off women's Test here on Sunday.

Chasing a target of 289, India A were bundled out for 243 as they managed to add just 94 runs to their overnight score of 149 for 6 on day 4 of the contest.

Overnight batters Raghvi Bist (26) and Uma Chetry (47) played cautiously and added 61 valuable runs to the total before the latter was dismissed by Flintoff as the last recognised India A partnership was broken.

Bist, who emerged as one of the most dependable batters in the multi-format series, too departed in the same over with right-arm pacer Flintoff wrecking the woodwork, as India A slumped to 212/8. Flintoff then provided the lethal blow four balls later as she bowled Bisht.

All-rounder Sayali Satghare did put up a fight with a 36-ball 21 but it was not enough on the day.

Australia A had put the visitors on the mat on day 3 itself on Saturday with the home team's spin attack putting them in a precarious situation at 149/6.

Chasing a victory target of 289, built around Maddy Darke's unbeaten 105, India A looked to build a foundation but rival spinners — Charli Knott (3/34), Grace Parsons (2/37) and Lilly Mills (1/25) — struck in regular intervals. (PTI)

# Root anchors England to nervy 5-wicket win over Sri Lanka in 1st test

**MANCHESTER, Aug 25:** Joe Root hit an unbeaten 62 to anchor England to a five-wicket win over Sri Lanka late on Day 4 of the first test on Saturday.

Set 205 to win, England was faltering at 70-3 but Root and Harry Brook (32) steadied the innings before the former captain guided the team home to its target as shadows lengthened on a sun-baked evening at Old Trafford.

The English finished on 205-5 to secure a fourth straight test victory this summer, after beating the West Indies 3-0 in July.

The win in Manchester was also significant in that it might have signaled a reset of "Bazball" — the nickname of the expansive approach favored by the leadership team of captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum.

Root and his teammates picked

their moments to attack as the run-rate fell to around 3.5 per over by the end of the second innings.

Root, who only hit two fours — the second coming off what proved to be the last ball of the match — said "sometimes it's good to win ugly." "It was a tricky one today," Root said. "A long, slow, hard grind."

Root said he didn't feel comfortable "muscling it" so compiled his knock in a different way. "For us to do it differently and still get the win is a good sign for us," Root said.

Earlier, Sri Lanka was dismissed for 326 soon after lunch, collapsing following the departure of No. 7 batter Kamindu Mendis for 113 — the third century of his four-match test career. Dinesh Chandimal was the last batter out for 79, with the final four wickets



tumbling in 26 balls.

Sri Lanka added 122 runs on the fourth day after resuming its second innings on 204-6.

"Our mistakes were made in the first innings and that cost us the match," Sri Lanka captain Dhananjaya de Silva said. "Lots of good individual performances.

There are positives here and there. But we were off-target too much and you have to be 100% here to win test matches. "In English conditions and their very good bowling line-up, we have to tighten our game at the top of the order."

The second test starts at Lord's on Thursday. (AP)

# 95 officials to accompany 84 Paris Paralympics participants to look after their 'special needs'

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** The 84-member Indian contingent taking part in the Paris Paralympics beginning on August 28 will be accompanied by 95 officials as many participants will have their personal coaches and escorts travelling with them to take care of their special needs.

The total strength of the Indian contingent will thus have 179 members. Out of the 95, as many as 77 are team officials, nine are contingent medical officials and another nine contingent officials.

India is sending the largest number of participants in the Paris Paralympics — August 28 to September 8) with 84 athletes

competing in 12 sports. In the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021, India was represented by 54 members in nine sports.

"Considering the special needs of some para athletes, personal coaches have been included in the contingent. However, they will provide necessary services to other players as per the directions of the Chef de Mission/team head coach," the ministry said while clearing the contingent.

"The participation of the entire contingent (including sportspersons, contingent officials, coaches) except that of Chef de Mission and one team manager for para badminton will be at cost to government."

The likes of javelin thrower Sumit Antil and shooter Avani Lekhara, who would be looking to defend their Tokyo Paralympics gold, are among those who will be having personal coaches.

"In any para sports event, the participants need more support staff like personal coaches and escorts than able-bodied competitors. So, it is nothing new to have more support staff in para sports," a team official said.

The para-athletics team, which is the largest with 38 competitors, also has most number of personal coaches and escorts. All the members of the contingent ex-

cept for the CDM and team manager for the para badminton team will get USD 50 per day out of pocket allowance "as per required and actual period of stay during the Games which will be inclusive of acclimatisation and training period plus 2 days to and fro journey time."

Some of the officials will be staying outside the Games Village.

Paralympic Committee of India president Devendra Jhajharia, who left for Paris on Sunday with a large contingent, including CDM Satya Prakash Sangwan, told PTI on Saturday that he will be staying outside the Games Village "to look



after all the athletes" as some will be competing outside Paris.

Jhajharia had said that India would be looking to win more than 25 medals, including double-digit gold, at the Paris Paralympics. (PTI)

# Chinese players are not invincible, says para table tennis star Bhavina Patel

**NEW DELHI, Aug 25:** Tokyo Paralympics silver medallist in table tennis Bhavina Patel is determined to do one better against her Chinese opponents at Paris Paralympics starting on August 28, saying they are not invincible. The first Indian paddler to clinch a medal at Tokyo in Class 4 event, Bhavina said on departure for this year's edition that she would look to defy Chinese domination in table tennis as they are "humans" too.

Bhavina told PTI Videos on Sunday, "Chinese players are humans and so are we. China does not matter to me, even during the Tokyo edition I had beaten a Chinese player so there's no pressure on me to face them."

"I have changed my tactics according to them so I will deploy my best plans against them on the day," she said.

The table tennis player from Mehsana, Gujarat, who is also a Commonwealth Games Champion and Asian Games medallist, said her only focus will be to give her best. "There is no nervousness. I just have to give my best. I believe that when we think about giving our best, nothing else comes to mind," she said. Her doubles partner Sonalben Patel said, "Bhavina and I have put in a double amount of effort in our training as partners and we will try our utmost to return home with a medal."

Tokyo Paralympics gold medal winner in men's singles badminton SH6 event, Krishna Nagar said he will aim to replicate his performance. "I hope that everything will be fine in Paris and I will try to win gold for India again. I will give it my all to defend my gold from Tokyo. Preparations went well, I feel positive and will look to play safe," he said. Making his debut appearance at the Para Games, shot putter Sachin Khilari said that he is at least expecting a gold medal from himself.

"There is a lot of excitement in me, my preparations were going on for 1.5 years for the Paralympics, I performed well at the World Championship and I expect a gold medal out of myself because I have worked hard to earn it," he said. On how he is going to handle the pressure of competing against the best athletes in the world, Khilari quipped, "The pressure is on them to compete against me as I consider myself to be the best." Debutant Sakshi Kasana, a discus throw athlete said, "I have worked tirelessly hard for this moment to come true as representing your nation at the Paralympics is the biggest thing for any athlete so I hope my four years of hard work pays off."

PCI President and legendary para javelin thrower Devendra Jhajharia claimed that India will finish among the top nations at the Para Games. "I have 20 years of experience in para sports. I have taken 3 medals. I know each player and their performances individually." (PTI)

# US Open 2024: Novak Djokovic seeks a record 25th Grand Slam title after getting his Olympic gold

**NEW YORK, Aug 25:** As big a deal as finally winning an Olympic gold medal was to Novak Djokovic, as much as he has accomplished in tennis — the men's-record 24 Grand Slam trophies, the 99 total titles, the most weeks at No. 1 for any player and on and on — do not for a moment think he is satisfied as the U.S. Open begins.

"People would ask me: Now that you have basically won everything with the golden medal, what else is there to win? I still feel the drive, I still have the competitive spirit," the 37-year-old from Serbia said Saturday. "I still want to make more history and enjoy myself on the tour."

If it seems like there is always some sort of milestone in the offing when Djokovic takes the court, that's because there usually is.

This time around at Flushing Meadows, where play begins Monday and the No. 2-seeded Djokovic faces 138th-ranked Radu Albot of Moldova at night in Arthur Ashe Stadium, there is the latest opportunity to get major singles championship No. 25, a total no man or woman ever has reached in tennis.

As the defending champion, there is also a chance to become the first man to win at least two consecutive titles at the U.S. Open since Roger Federer swept five in a row from 2004 to 2008.

"I didn't know it was that long. Hopefully that changes this year," Djokovic said. "I mean, that's the goal. The goal is always for me to try to go all the way to the finals and



fight for the trophy. That kind of mindset or approach is no different for me this year."

That consistency of purpose is what has carried him to all of his achievements.

"I want to follow what Djokovic has done always in his career," said Carlos Alcaraz, the 21-year-old who already owns four majors himself, "which is getting better and improving, showing up at the court playing at his best level."

It's also as widely admired by other players in the sport as the numbers — "Colossal," Alcaraz called the idea of winning a 25th major — associated with Djokovic's

name. "Your baseline average level just has to be so much better than everyone else's. It speaks to how much better someone is than everyone else, because there are so many people just trying to get that one — trying to get one or two; a couple," 12th-seeded American Taylor Fritz said. "It's amazing. And obviously the discipline throughout the year, to never be satisfied and always want more, is also just extremely impressive in itself."

Djokovic hasn't competed anywhere since beating Alcaraz in a pair of tiebreakers in the Summer Games title match.

The way Djokovic reacted that day — kneeling, trembling, crying — and the way he spoke about it Saturday left no doubt about its importance to him.

"Just a very proud moment of experiencing the gold medal around my neck, with the Serbian anthem and Serbian flag. Very, very special. Probably the most intense emotions I have ever had on a tennis court," he said. "The moment of when I achieved it, how I achieved it, after years of trying, the journey that was the way it was, I think makes it even more unique."

And now it's time to turn the page and pursue more hardware.

The season stops for no one, and Djokovic is not interested in taking any kind of a break right now.

He's won the U.S. Open on four occasions. Making that five is what is on his mind at the moment.

Consider: Djokovic is on the verge of his first year since 2017 without claiming at least one major trophy. He lost to Jannik Sinner — whose steroids case Djokovic weighed in on Saturday — in the semifinals of the Australian Open; withdrew from the French Open before the quarterfinals because he needed surgery on his right knee; lost to Alcaraz in the final at Wimbledon.

"Grand Slams are the pillars of our sport. They are THE most important historical tennis events that we have," Djokovic said. "So if you don't get pumped and inspired to play your best tennis at Grand Slams, it's hard to do that anywhere else." (AP)