

6 WORLD

● Dozens killed in strikes in southern Gaza as preparations for cease-fire talks move forward

● Moscow and Kyiv exchange attacks as Ukraine marks independence anniversary

8 NATION

● Former BSP leader's son brandishes gun at Delhi 5-star hotel; police registers FIR

● Two Congress MLAs resign in Goa; party strength down to 14

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Dhing rape case prime accused dies after jumping into pond

Two other accused still at large ● Villagers disallow burial of deceased accused

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 24: The prime accused in the rape of a minor girl in Dhing of Nagaon district died on Saturday after jumping into a pond while in police custody.

The accused, identified as Tafa-jul Islam, was arrested on Thursday night. However, he jumped into the pond while being taken to the crime scene around 3.30 am for reconstruction of the incident.

"The accused attacked a policeman, escaped custody, and jumped into the pond. The SDRF was immediately alerted, a search operation was launched, and his body was recovered after nearly two hours. The policeman was also injured and admitted to a hospital," Nagaon Superintendent of Police Swapneel Deka said.

Deka also stated that the SDRF personnel were called promptly, and Islam's body was retrieved early Saturday morning.

Meanwhile, local women's organisations, chambers of commerce, and student groups, including the All Assam Students' Union and Asom Jatiyatibadi Yuva Chatra Parishad, continued their



protests on Saturday, demanding the arrest of the two other suspects who have been absconding since the incident.

The 14-year-old girl was allegedly raped by three persons who came on a motorcycle and surrounded her while she was returning home from tuition on her bicycle at Dhing on Thursday evening.

She was left injured and unconscious on the roadside near a pond, before being rescued by locals who informed police.

Following this, villagers of

Borbheti held a meeting on Saturday morning and took three decisions regarding the crime committed by the youth.

"We have decided not to allow his burial in the village graveyard, not participate in his 'janaza' (burial prayers) and social boycott of his family", a village elder Md Shahjahan Ali Choudhury told a news agency. "The village youth's crime has shamed us and we cannot allow his burial in the community graveyard", he added.

A march was also taken out from the village mosque to protest

against the incident.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had said on Friday that stern action will be taken against the culprits.

Sarma, who is currently touring the three districts in Barak Valley, had said on Friday night that there is a difference between Assam and Bengal in dealing with such cases.

"In Bengal, when women are tortured, the criminals are protected and police take suspicious actions. In Assam, a horrific crime was committed against a minor girl, the accused was immediately arrested", he said.

Sarma said that he had immediately directed the state Director General of Police to go to the spot and investigate the incident.

A minister was also sent who enquired about the health condition of the victim who is currently recovering in a Nagaon hospital.

Police had arrested one person and detained another while search was on to nab the third.

Director General of Police G P Singh had reviewed the progress of the investigations on Friday. (With inputs from PTI)

Youth accused of attempting to molest girls shot at

TEZPUR, Aug 24: An accused, arrested along with another person for allegedly attempting to molest two girls, was shot at and injured while trying to escape from police custody on Saturday in Assam's Sonitpur district, police said.

The duo had allegedly attempted to molest the two girls who were out on an evening walk here on Friday and as they raised an alarm, the local people rushed to the spot.

The accused attempted to flee from the spot but the people chased and nabbed them, Sonitpur Additional Superintendent of Police Madhurima Das told reporters here. They were later handed over to the police at the Mahabhairab police station, she said. The youth while being taken to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ED conducts searches in case related to 'misappropriation' of Assam govt funds

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Bank and fixed deposits worth ₹ 34 crore were attached under the anti-money laundering law following searches in a case related to alleged misappropriation of Assam government funds meant for the welfare of construction workers, the ED said on Saturday.

The case pertains to the "fraudulent" award of contracts worth ₹ 118 crore during 2013-16 by the Assam Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (ABOCWWB) to a company named Purbashree Printing House, a proprietorship of Priyanshu Boiragi.

"It is a case of misappropriation of money collected as cess for the welfare of construction workers. During the searches, various incriminating documents and materials were seized," the federal agency said in a statement.

It did not say when the searches were conducted.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) added that it also attached

"proceeds of crime" of ₹ 34.03 crore in the form of bank and fixed deposits.

The money-laundering case stems from an FIR registered by the Chief Minister's Special Vigilance Cell and charge sheets filed by police against Chohan Doley, an IAS officer and former labour commissioner-cum-ABOCWWB member secretary; Boiragi; ABOCWWB ex-chairman Gautam Barua; and former ABOCWWB administrative officer Nagendra Nath Choudhury.

The ED alleged that Choudhury "managed" to get "unreasonably high" value printing contracts from ABOCWWB through "forged and fraudulent" tendering processes.

"Boiragi invested the proceeds of crime of ₹ 118 crore, generated out of government funds, in fixed deposit receipts in his name and routed the balance to various other bank accounts connected to him and to various shell entities," the ED claimed. (PTI)

HT BRIEFS

Skill development

GUWAHATI: Don Bosco University has inaugurated a new Centre for Skill Development in Guwahati, marking a significant step towards enhancing vocational training and skill-building opportunities in the region. The center aims to equip students and professionals with the practical skills needed to excel in various industries. The facility will offer a range of courses designed to meet the demands of the current job market, focusing on both technical and soft skills.

Police patrol

DIPHU: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang inaugurated a Police Patrol post at Diphu Medical College and Hospital (DMC&H) here on Saturday, for ensuring the safety of patients. Inaugurating the new Police Patrol Post the CEM said, "This initiative is a significant step towards ensuring the safety and security of our people, particularly the patients and visitors to the hospital. By strengthening the law enforcement presence in this vital area, we aim to create a safer environment for all." He was accompanied by MP Amersing Tissoo, Executive Members (EMs) of KAAC: MACs and MLAs Darsing Ronghang and Bidya Sing Englang. District Commissioner, Nirola Phangchopi; SP, Karbi Anglong, Sanjiv Kumar Saikia and Principal, DMC&H, Dr Sumitra Hagier were also present.

150th Anniversary

GUWAHATI: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday attended the closing ceremony of the 150th anniversary of the Cachar District Bar Association. Speaking on the occasion, Sarma highlighted the historical significance of the Indian judicial system, stating that India, as the mother of democracy, has judiciary which is one of its fundamental pillars. He acknowledged the contributions of key figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr B R Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, and others who used their legal expertise to mobilize public opinion against colonial rule.

Assam Cong demands white paper on crimes against women in last 10 years

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: The Assam Congress on Saturday demanded a white paper from the state government, the ruling BJP and the state women's commission detailing crimes against women over the past decade, including rate of conviction and measures to curb such incidents.

The party also criticised the current law and order situation, especially with regards to preventing crimes against women, and held chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma accountable, given his dual role as home minister.

"We have repeatedly highlighted increasing crimes against women over the last ten years. Our members have protested on the streets. While we, as a society, feel ashamed



over these crimes, it also raises questions over the government's effectiveness. We have not seen adequate efforts from the government to ensure women's safety in recent years," Bobbeeta Sharma, vice-

president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), told a press conference. Referring to the Chief Minister's statement that 23 crimes against women occurred in the last (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Shortage of jobs due to govt's 'anti-youth policies': Kharage

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharage on Saturday accused the Modi government of creating a "fake narrative" about jobs and claimed that in the upcoming assembly polls, the BJP would be taught a lesson. Kharage alleged that due to the anti-youth policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there is a shortage of jobs in the country.

"The latest report of Bank of Baroda shows that in 2022-23 alone, 2.43 lakh jobs were reduced in 375 companies of the country," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

Lakhs of our youth are running around to get a handful of jobs, he said. "The constable recruitment exam is going on in Bihar, in which 18 lakh candidates have applied for only 21,000 vacant posts. The paper of the exam before this was leaked four days before the exam, due to which this exam is being conducted again," he said.

Kharage further said that 6.30 lakh youth from 26 states have also applied for the recruitment of 60,000 constables in Uttar Pradesh.

The paper of this exam has also been leaked once, he said. In July alone, 1.24 lakh IT sector jobs were lost this year, which caused great loss to the youth of India,

Kharage claimed. Jobs have decreased in all sectors - banking, finance, insurance, hospitality, he said.

"Moreover, the Modi government is not going to show 'red eyes' to China, but is going to roll out the 'red carpet' for Chinese companies to invest," he alleged.

"Modi ji got a report prepared using the wrong methodology and made false claims of providing crores of jobs. To create a fake narrative from the KLEMS data, the Modi government did not resort to the Census but resorted to different population data sets for different years, which led to the wrong Worker Population Ratio," he claimed. "Moreover, the growth of rural and urban population was assumed to be the same, which led to overestimation," Kharage alleged.

Apart from this, it is now well known that 'unpaid labour' and 'one-hour work per week' have also been counted in the category of employment, the Congress president said.

The frustrated and disheartened unemployed youth of India have now understood these "false tactics" of the Modi government, he said. The BJP will definitely be taught a lesson in the upcoming state elections, he said. (PTI)

Himanta unveils new cardiology ICU at SMCH, promises Silchar overhaul

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday inaugurated a state-of-the-art 20-bed Cardiology Intensive Care Unit (ICU), marking a significant milestone in healthcare services for the region, said an official statement on Saturday.

The inauguration took place during the final leg of his three-day tour of the Barak Valley, highlighting the government's commitment to enhancing medical infrastructure in Assam.

During his visit, the chief minister also reviewed the ongoing construction of a 535-bed emergency building at SMCH, which is expected to be completed by November next year.

"Once operational, this expansion will increase the hospital's total bed capacity from the current 1,350 to approximately 1,885, significantly bolstering critical care and emergency services," the statement added.

In addition to the new Cardiology ICU, Sarma also assessed the relocation plans for five key departments to the upcoming emergency building to streamline patient care.

He also announced plans for constructing another 1,000-bed facility within the SMCH campus, further emphasising the state's dedication to meeting the growing healthcare needs of the region.



The chief minister took a comprehensive approach in evaluating the hospital's ancillary services, including addressing staff vacancies and planning for future needs.

"He instructed the PWD (Building) officials to draft a master plan for the hospital's long-term expansion to ensure sustainable development," the statement added.

Accompanying the chief minister during this visit were Cachar's Guardian minister Jayanta Mallabarua, MP Parimal Suklabaidya, MLAs Kaushik Rai and Dipayan Chakraborty, Principal of SMC & H Dr Bhaskar Gupta, and other senior (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'So far 46 Start-ups have been on boarded under the said program'

Semiconductor plant in Assam to inspire youth and boost startups: STPI DG

By: Hiranya Barman

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Arvind Kumar, Director General (DG) of the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI), praised the establishment of a semiconductor plant in Jagiroad, Assam, noting it will create jobs and help prevent brain drain from the region.

In an interview with The Hills Times, Kumar highlighted the importance of setting up similar companies in the Northeast to inspire local youth to start their own ventures. "It is evident that there is a very good talent pool in North East where youths from this region are serving in many reputed companies in metro cities. Now with the right policies of government, there has been rapid development of the required ecosystem for IT/ITeS industry in this region. As you have seen, that many major companies have started establishing their operations in Assam which is opening avenues for not only employment of local youth but also generat-



ing inspiration among the entrepreneurs," Kumar told The Hills Times.

Kumar further said that the STPI has established 08 CoE (Domain specific) in North East

region in 8 capital cities under OctaNE program which is being implemented by STPI. "So far 46 Start-ups have been on boarded under the said program. Out of which, 15 Start-ups are from Guwahati CoE," he added.

Notably, OCTANE is a group of eight inter-networked Centres of Entrepreneurship (CoEs) to support technology led innovation in the North Eastern India.

"The total registered export oriented IT companies under STPI-Guwahati Directorate are 14. In 2023-24, the total export from STPI registered companies was recorded as 172 Crore," Kumar said. In addition, 220 more Start-ups applications are under consideration, he said.

He further opined that the technology domains have been selected keeping in view of the resources availability, market, demand & the general interest of the local youth like in Kohima STPI has established CoE in the Domain of IT applications in Graphic Design, Shillong in Animation, Itanagar (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cabinet approves assured pension for govt employees; makes NPS attractive

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Union Cabinet on Saturday approved an assured 50 per cent of salary as pension for 23 lakh government employees who joined service under the National Pension System (NPS).

The National Pension System is applicable for government employees joining the service after April 1, 2004. It was based on the premise of contribution rather than defined benefit applicable for employees prior to the NPS.

Announcing Cabinet decisions, Information and Broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) announced that government employees will now be eligible to get 50 per cent of the average basic pay drawn over the last 12 months before the superannuation as pension. For this full pension or

50 per cent of pay as the pension, he said, the eligibility service length will be 25 years.

However, he said, it would be proportionate for a lesser service period up to a minimum of 10 years of service. NPS subscribers can now opt for the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS), which offers assured pension applicable from the beginning of the next financial year.

Last year, the finance ministry set up a committee under finance secretary TV Somanathan to review the pension scheme for government employees and suggest any changes, if needed, in light of the existing framework and structure of the National Pension System.

Several non-BJP-ruled states have decided to revert to the DA-linked Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and also employee organisations in some (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Indian telecom players targetting 10% share in 6G patents in next 3 yrs

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Indian telecom players are targeting a share of 10 per cent of all 6G patents and one-sixth contributions to global standards in the next three years, an official statement said on Saturday.

Telecom industry players have proposed to systematically align research to 'India's needs' and put in place a vibrant "Standards Community".

The proposal came up during the second meeting of Stakeholders Advisory Committee (SAC) on Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) which was chaired by union telecom minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday.

"Industry leaders proposed systematically aligning research to India's needs" and put in place a vibrant 'Standards Community' targeting a share of 10 per cent of all 6G patents and one-sixth contributions to global standards in the next 3 years," the statement said.

During the first SAC on telecom operators, certain focus areas were



identified. Deliberations on international standards and India's share in Intellectual Property and Standard Essential Patent (SEP), connectivity gaps in telecom and quality of telecom services were held in the meeting.

"India has already taken various initiatives like launch of Bhart6G Vision and Bhart6G Alliance,

patent and IPR support framework, commissioning of testbeds, etc., and country can aspire for achieving 10 per cent of all 6G patents and one-sixth contributions to global standards promoting India's needs. SAC proposed a 3-year roadmap for achieving it," the statement said.

The SAC emphasises on India

becoming a deep-tech leader, penetration of both wireline and intelligent wireless broadband networks, with reliable connectivity.

"Minister Shri Scindia asked the SAC members to define a critical path to achieve the targets discussed and to define roles they see for different stakeholders, including the government, in achieving the same. He also exhorted TSPs to take all necessary measures to ensure that citizens get good quality telecom services," the statement said.

Reliance Jio Managing Director Pankaj Pawar, Vodafone Idea CEO Akshaya Moondra, BSNL Chairman and Managing Director Robert J Ravi, Tejas Networks' Chairman of the Board of Directors, N G Subramaniam and industry body COAI Director General S P Kochhar attended the meeting.

The telecom operators sought a supportive policy framework to encourage investments towards the path of 100 per cent broadband coverage in the country. (PTI)

Quality control orders protect MSMEs from unfair competition: Piyush Goyal

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The quality control orders (QCOs) issued by the government for different products will protect MSMEs from unfair competition and help cut the import of sub-standard goods, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Saturday.

He said that through these orders, the government is supporting the MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises).

"We are giving time to MSMEs to meet the QCO requirements," he said, adding that MSMEs will benefit from these orders as "it stops substandard goods imported at strange rates from outside the country and thus helps the MSME sector by protecting it from unfair competition".

MSMEs should not be looked upon as merely a small enterprise, he added.

The entire ecosystem around big industries and en-

terprises comprises thousands of MSMEs, without whom they cannot succeed, he said, adding that MSMEs act both as suppliers and customers of big industries.

The sector also plays an important role in the tourism and infrastructure development of the country and has a big share in India's exports.

"Today, several SMEs have listed their firms at BSE," he said. Under these orders, items cannot be produced, sold, traded, imported and stocked unless they bear the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) mark. These orders are issued for goods like smart meters, nuts, bolts and fasteners.

Mandatory QCOs help curb the import of sub-standard products, prevent unfair trade practices and ensure the safety and well-being of consumers as well as the environment. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1..

Youth accused of attempting

the incident site for investigations attacked the police, seized a pistol from a policeman and opened fire, the official claimed. The police retaliated by firing back and the accused was injured in one of his legs.

He is currently undergoing treatment at the Tezpur Medical College and Hospital and his condition was stated to be stable, Das said. The two girls have filed an FIR and the police have registered a case under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), she added. A group of local residents had surrounded the police station protesting against the incident.

Meanwhile, in Tinsukia, a man was arrested for allegedly attempting to molest a teenage girl in Sripuria area of the town.

The locals reported the matter to the police and a search operation was launched to nab him. He was arrested along with another accomplice on Friday. A case has been registered under both the POCSO Act and relevant sections of the BNS. (PTI)

Assam Cong demands white

two months, Sharma remarked, "When the CM and the government acknowledge such incidents, doesn't it indicate a failure in law and order?" "As the Chief Minister is also the Home minister, he is accountable for rising crimes," the Congress leader maintained. She also questioned the role of the Assam State Women Commission in creating awareness on women safety and follow-up action on registered cases. Sharma demanded that the government, BJP, and the women's commission release a white paper on women-related cases, including data on cases registered, arrests made, and conviction rates.

Sharma also demanded strict action against the culprits and said, "Criminals have no religion. Law should take its course."

APCC spokesperson Bormali Phukan, also present at the press conference, criticised the CM for giving 'communal colour' to incidents of rape. "Whenever crimes against women happen, the CM gives a communal colour. It is very unfortunate," she said, referring to Sarma's recent statements about involvement of a 'particular community' behind such cases. (PTI)

BJP steps up attack on Cong

Rahul Gandhi, asking him to make it clear if he supports the NC's stand on Article 370, a separate flag and reservations for OBC. The Congress formed an alliance with the National Conference due to its "lust for power", Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami alleged. He also posed 10 questions to the Congress and Gandhi and alleged that the Abdullahs "ruined" Jammu and Kashmir which regressed for three decades under their rule.

Describing the National Conference as a party that fomented separatism and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, Dhami said, "(Rahul) Gandhi owes an explanation to the nation on whether, by entering into an alliance with the National Conference, he supports the party's promise of a separate flag for Jammu and Kashmir and restoration of Article 370."

"Gandhi and his party must explain whether they want to push Jammu and Kashmir back into disorder.

"Does he support separatism and cross-border terrorism and the National Conference's decision of resuming trade with Pakistan?" Dhami asked during a press conference in Dehra Dun. Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath said the "political ground" of the Congress and the NC that "reaped the harvest of hatred has become barren forever".

He also slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, saying his party has "again put its anti-national intentions in front of the country by allying with the National Conference of Abdullah and Sons Family Private Limited".

"The political ground of the Congress and the NC, which harvested the crop of hatred, has become barren forever," he said, adding that the issue of terrorism and separatism has merged with the water of the Chenab River.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav alleged the alliance was aimed at bringing back anarchy in Jammu and Kashmir. "Does Congress support a separate flag for J-K in accordance with the manifesto of NC? Does Congress want to reintroduce Article 370 and 35A in J&K?" he alleged. "Does Congress wish for Shankaracharya Parvat to be known as Takht-e-Sulaiman and Hari Parvat as Koh-e-Maran?" the MP CM said.

Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh accused the Congress of compromising national unity and security to satisfy its desire for power and questioned the party's motives in allying with the NC. "The Congress, which has repeatedly risked the nation's unity and security for power, has again exposed its ulterior motive by allying with Farooq Abdullah's NC ahead of the J&K polls," Singh said. PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti, meanwhile, said her will extend complete support to the Congress-NC alliance if it is ready to accept her party's agenda.

She also ruled out an alliance with the BJP, with which the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had earlier run a coalition government. "Forget about alliance and seat-sharing, if the Congress and the National Conference (NC) are ready to accept our agenda -- that resolution of the Kashmir issue is necessary and on the opening of routes -- we will tell them to contest on all the seats and we will follow you," she said.

"Because, for me, the resolution of the Kashmir problem is much more important than anything else," she added when asked if the Congress had approached the PDP for an alliance Bihar deputy chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said the Congress must disclose whether it was in agreement with the NC's contention on Article 370 and advocacy for Kashmir having a separate flag.

J-K BJP president Ravinder Raina described the pre-poll alliance of the Congress and National Conference (NC) as an outcome of the "growing popularity" of the BJP. Polls to the 90-member assembly will be held in three phases on September 18, September 25 and October 1, while results will be announced on October 4. (PTI)

Himanta unveils new cardiology

government officials. Later in the day, Sarma attended the closing ceremony of the Sesquicentennial Anniversary of the District Bar Association, Cachar, Silchar. Established in 1874, the association has played a pivotal role in strengthening the democratic framework of the nation, significantly impacting the legal landscape of Cachar district.

Sarma extended his heartfelt congratulations to the association, acknowledging its crucial contributions during the transition from the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which marks a historic shift in the Indian legal system.

In the afternoon, the chief minister held a press conference at the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) office, where he announced a series of infrastructure projects aimed at enhancing road connectivity and reducing public inconvenience ahead of Durga Puja. Notable among these is the sanctioning of Rs 13 crore for the blacktopping of 13 key roads in Silchar town.

The blacktopping of seven roads is expected to be completed before Durga Puja, with work on the remaining six roads to commence after the festival. Further, Sarma provided updates on several major road projects in the region, including the reconstruction of the Rangirkhari to Silchar Medical College road, sanctioned at ₹ 5.5 crore, to be completed by September 30, 2024.

He also mentioned the ongoing land acquisition process for the widening of roads from Birbal Bazar to SMCH, with an estimated cost of ₹ 30.5 crore. The Chief Minister also addressed the pressing issue of the sinking zone at Shivbari on Silchar-Kalain Road, where an elevated road with RCC micro piles costing ₹ 70 crore is under construction. This project, along with other significant road repairs in the region, is expected to be completed before Durga Puja to ensure smooth transportation during the festival season.

Cabinet approves assured

other states have raised demand for the same. Briefing media, cabinet secretary-designate TV Somanathan said the new scheme is applicable from April 1, 2025. The benefits of the Unified Pension Scheme are applicable for those retired and retiring till March 31, 2025, with arrears, he added. (PTI)

Semiconductor plant in Assam

in GIS applications including drone technology, Agartala in Data Analytics and AI, Gangtok in Agritech & Healthcare, Aizawl in Gaming and Entertainment, Imphal in AR/VR and Assam being prominent in Agriculture, STPI has chosen IoT in Agriculture domain for Guwahati. Kumar laying stress on technology being indispensable part of any entrepreneurial venture said that without the help of technology business will fail to grow in today's scenario.

"Science and technology is the main factor for generating start up culture in any arena. Establishing any start up means it will create 2-3 more relevant start up with the existing start up," he said. Pointing out on cyber security he said that Government of India has a big plan on cyber security agenda and thereby it will play a major role on distracting the issue of cyber frauds.

STPI, an autonomous society under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India was set-up in 1991 with the objective of promoting the Software Exports from the country and played a seminal role in this regard. Starting with a few centres in 1991, STPI has grown all over the country with 65 centres out of which 57 centres are in Tier 2 and Tier 3 Cities. STPI provides the services like Statutory Services- Software Technology Park (STP) Scheme & Electronic Hardware Technology Park (EHTP), High Speed Data Communication Services, Incubation Services, PMC Services, CRO Surveillance, Information Security Audit Service (VAPT), Electronics Manufacturing Cluster (EMC 2.0), STPI Labs. The STP scheme has been widely successful and the exports made by STP units have grown manifold over the years. The total registered units under STPI are 6166. In 2023-24, the total exports from STPI registered units were 9.19 Lakh crore.

Cognizant files lawsuit against Infosys over trade secrets

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: IT major Cognizant's subsidiary TriZetto has slapped a lawsuit on Infosys in a US federal court, accusing the Bengaluru-headquartered company of stealing trade secrets and information related to healthcare insurance software. Infosys, in a statement, denied all allegations. The company asserted it is aware of the lawsuit and will defend its position in the court. Cognizant in a lawsuit filed in Texas federal court has accused Infosys of illegally accessing data from TriZetto's software -- Facets and QNX -- and using the same to develop and market a competing product. Cognizant offerings include TriZetto's Facets and QNX, which healthcare insurance firms use to automate tasks. Teanec, New Jersey-based Cognizant has the bulk of its employees in India. Cognizant has reportedly alleged that Infosys misused TriZetto's software to create "Test Cases for Facets," which repackaged its data into an Infosys product. Further, it has reportedly alleged that Infosys created software to extract data from QNX, that contained confidential TriZetto information. It is interesting to note that just this week, Cognizant named former Infosys executive Rajesh Varier as global head of operations and India Chairman and Managing Director, following the resignation of Rajesh Nambiar, who is set to take over as Nasscom president. Moreover, Cognizant's Chief Executive Officer Ravi Kumar S is also an Infosys veteran, whose 20-year career at the Bengaluru-based firm saw him holding various leadership roles, including as President from January 2016 through October 2022. (PTI)

FMCG distributors raise concern over unregulated growth of 'quick commerce'

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: FMCG distributors have raised concerns over the "rapid and unregulated growth" of quick commerce platforms, saying it needs immediate scrutiny.

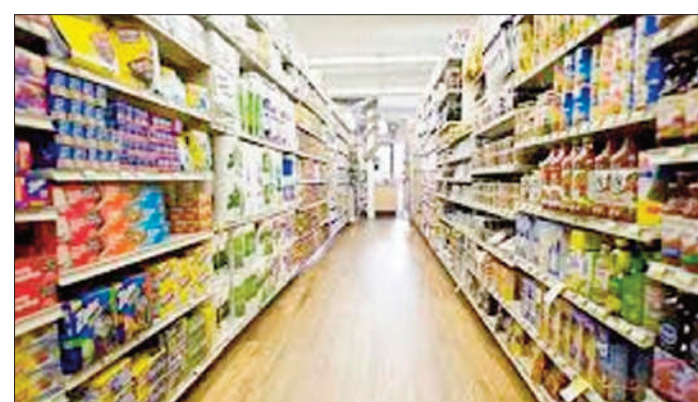
In a letter written to Commerce & Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, FMCG distributors' body AICPDF said this unchecked expansion of quick commerce platforms, which typically deliver goods within 10 to 30 minutes, is creating an "uneven playing field", threatening the livelihoods of millions of small retailers and distributors who have been the backbone of India's retail sector for decades.

The All India Consumer Products Distributors Federation (AICPDF) also suspected potential violations of FDI regulations by these quick-commerce companies and sought an immediate investigation into the operational models of these platforms.

The rapid growth of quick commerce platforms like Blinkit, Zepto and Instamart has posed significant challenges to the traditional retail sector and the established fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) distribution network.

"We are witnessing the erosion of small 'mom-and-pop' stores and a shift in the FMCG distribution landscape, as these platforms are increasingly being appointed as direct distributors by major FMCG companies, side-lining traditional distributors," AICPDF said in the letter.

While raising concerns regarding the compliance of foreign direct investment (FDI) regulations by the quick-commerce platforms, it said AICPDF suspects them of blurring the lines between the marketplace and inventory-based mod-



els. "The FDI rules clearly prohibit e-commerce entities operating under the marketplace model from holding inventory or exercising control over the inventory sold on their platforms.

"However, it appears that these quick commerce platforms may be engaging in practices that blur the lines between a marketplace and an inventory-based model, potentially violating FDI norms," it noted.

It also requested the government to "initiate a thorough investigation into the operational models of these quick commerce platforms to ensure compliance with FDI regulations" and to "implement protective measures for small retailers and traditional distributors to safeguard their interests and prevent monopolistic practices".

AICPDF has urged the government to facilitate a dialogue between all stakeholders, including representatives from the retail sector, FMCG companies and quick commerce platforms, to establish fair and equitable business practices.

It also appreciated Goyal's recent remarks, where he lambasted

the e-commerce companies, questioning their business model that has been impacting small retailers in the country.

Earlier this week, the Commerce and Industry Minister had questioned Amazon's announcement of USD 1 billion investment in India, saying the US retailer was not doing any great service to the Indian economy but filling up for the losses it had suffered in the country. He said that their huge losses in India "smells of predatory pricing", which is not good for the country as it impacts crores of small retailers.

The quick-commerce market in India is currently valued at approximately USD 5 billion.

Several FMCG companies, in their latest June quarter earning, reported a high double-digit growth coming from quick-commerce in online sales.

In the quick-commerce space, companies like Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy's Instamart have established a strong presence. Recently Ola, one of the leading players in the ride-hailing industry, announced entry into quick-commerce. (PTI)

Airtel steps up for flood-hit northeast realme unveils 13 series 5G with Speed Trio, launch set for 29th Aug

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: In response to the heavy rainfall and subsequent flooding across Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Mizoram, Airtel has announced significant measures to support its affected customers. The telecom giant is extending relief to both prepaid and postpaid users to ensure uninterrupted communication during the crisis. Prepaid customers, unable to recharge due to the floods, will receive 1.5 GB of free mobile data per day along with unlimited calling for four days. This initiative aims to keep customers connected while they manage the aftermath of the floods. For postpaid users, Airtel has extended bill payment deadlines by 30 days, providing additional flexibility and peace of mind. To further support network connectivity, Airtel has introduced Intra-Circle Roaming (ICR) in Tripura, enabling customers from other networks to access Airtel's network seamlessly. This move ensures that residents and those in the affected regions can maintain communication during this challenging period.

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: realme, widely recognized as the most popular brand among Indian youth, is gearing up to launch its latest innovation, the realme 13 Series 5G. The new series, set to debut on 29th August 2024 at 12 noon, promises to redefine speed standards in the smartphone industry with its powerful "Speed Trio" features. At the heart of the realme 13 Series 5G is the MediaTek Dimensity 7300 Energy 5G chipset, making its global debut. Built on advanced 4nm process technology, the chipset delivers a 30% improvement in energy efficiency over previous models, ensuring smooth multitasking and high-frame-rate gaming with minimal power consumption. Complementing the chipset is an impressive memory configuration, featuring up to 26GB of dynamic RAM (12GB physical + 14GB virtual) and 256GB of storage, the largest in its class. This allows for lightning-fast app launches, effortless multitasking, and the ability to handle up to 32 background apps with ease. The Dynamic RAM Expansion (DRE) technology further enhances the performance, ensuring leading application launch speeds. The realme 13 Series 5G also introduces 80W Ultra Charge technology, setting a new standard for fast charging in its segment. With just a 5-minute charge, users can enjoy a full hour of intense gaming. The device is powered by a 5000mAh battery, offering up to 7 hours of continuous gameplay and designed to retain 80% of its capacity even after 1000 charge cycles—equivalent to nearly three years of reliable use.

Ather energy expands global footprint, enters Sri Lankan market

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Ather Energy, a leading Indian electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer, is set to venture into its second international market, Sri Lanka, following its successful entry into Nepal in November 2023. The company plans to inaugurate its first Experience Centre in Sri Lanka in the upcoming quarter, marking a significant milestone in its global expansion strategy.

Ather's entry into Sri Lanka will be facilitated through a partnership with Evolution Auto Pvt. Ltd., a joint venture involving Sensei Capital Partners, Atman Group, and Sino Lanka Private Limited. Evolution Auto will serve as Ather's national distributor, overseeing the sales and service operations across the island



nation.

In addition to setting up its Experience Centre, Ather Energy is committed to building a robust fast-charging infrastructure across Sri Lanka, aiming to make EV adoption seamless and convenient. This move aligns with the com-

pany's broader mission to promote sustainable transportation in new markets.

Ravneet Singh Phokela, Chief Business Officer of Ather Energy, expressed enthusiasm about the expansion: "We are thrilled to enter the Sri Lankan market. With

the rising costs of petrol vehicles and the growing demand for environmentally friendly alternatives, we believe our electric scooters, known for their performance and reliability, will resonate with Sri Lankan customers. Our partnership with Evolution Auto will ensure that we deliver the premium customer experience Ather is known for, while also focusing on creating a well-connected charging network."

Echoing this sentiment, Zahran Ziyawudeen, CEO of Evolution Auto, stated, "Our mission at Evolution Auto is to pioneer sustainable transportation in Sri Lanka. We are excited to collaborate with Ather Energy to bring a world-class range of scooters to the country, making eco-friendly mobility accessible to all."

AASU condemns rape of minor



HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, Aug 24: All Assam Students' Union (AASU) has strongly condemned the heinous rape of a 14 years old girl committed by a gang yesterday evening at Dhing Barbhethi.

They gang raped the girl that evening when she returned home after doing home tuition at a near by village.

The gang raped the girl and left her in a nude condition where the local public rescued and rushed to a hospital.

Expressing grief over the heinous rape the president of AASU Utpal Sarma revealed that the AASU will bear all her education fees.

Two arrested over sexual assault of minors in Assam's Lakhimpur



NORTH LAKHIMPUR, Aug 24: Two persons have been arrested for allegedly molesting minors in separate incidents in Assam's Lakhimpur district, a police officer said on Saturday. Both the arrests were made in areas under Panigaon police station on Friday night, he said.

A nine-year-old girl was allegedly sexually harassed by a 'Maulana' (religious teacher) when she had gone for classes taken by him. "The incident took place a couple of days ago and the accused was absconding. He was arrested on Friday night," the officer said.

The second case happened on Thursday, when the accused allegedly tried to sexually assault a girl inside his shop.

"The shop owner was also apprehended on Friday night and both the accused in the two cases have been booked under relevant sections of the POCSO Act. We are investigating the cases," the officer added. (PTI)

Resisting migration, says Himanta

Hindus remain in turbulent Bangladesh: CM

HT Correspondent
SILCHAR, Aug 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday claimed that Hindus have not tried to enter India from Bangladesh since the neighbouring country plunged into instability.

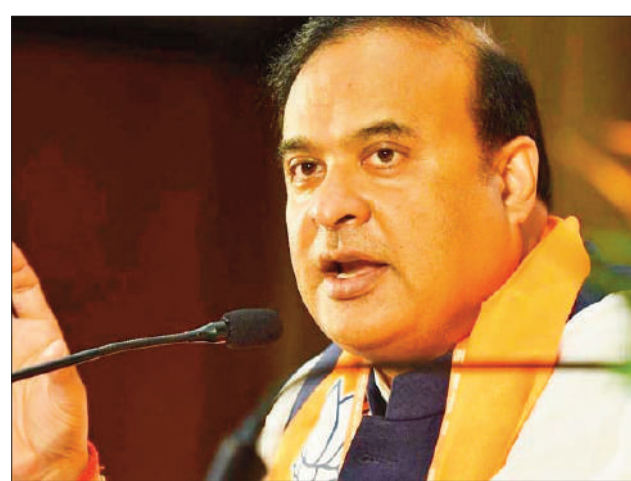
"Hindus are staying and fighting in Bangladesh. In the last one month, not a single Hindu person has been detected trying to enter India," he said at a press conference here.

He also asserted that Muslims from the neighbouring country were attempting to crossover to seek employment in India's textile sector.

"35 Muslim infiltrators have been arrested in the past one month... they are trying to enter... but those coming are headed for Bangalore, Tamil Nadu, Coimbatore to work in the textile industry," the CM claimed.

"We have intercepted and pushed them back. Fortunately or unfortunately, they belong to one community," he said.

The infiltrators trying to



enter through Tripura, travel via Karimganj in Assam by train and reach the south Indian cities, Sarma said.

Those trying to enter India illegally are being apprehended by the police force of Assam and Tripura, and the BSF, he said.

Sarma maintained that if Hindus wanted to come, they would have done so at the time of Partition.

"They consider Bangladesh as their motherland, hence they didn't come. We should have respect for them," the CM said.

"We have requested our prime minister to impress upon the Bangladesh government to ensure the safety of Hindus," said Sarma.

On Bengali Hindus who migrated to India prior to 2014, the deadline set for granting Indian citizenship under the Citi-

zenship (Amendment) Act, the chief minister asserted that the number of such people in Assam will nowhere be near 20 lakh, as claimed by a section of anti-CAA activists.

To ease the process for these immigrants to get citizenship, Sarma said, "Police have been directed not to visit them as they (Hindu Bengalis from Bangladesh) will take the CAA route. We are also trying for disposal of cases in Foreigners' Tribunals."

The Assam government is also trying to activate the biometrics of the eligible people, frozen during the NRC updating process, and these measures together will ensure that the Bengali Hindus don't face further problems, he said.

"I don't think the number of people who will benefit from these measures is very high. Maximum... maybe it will be 20,000. But, the anti-CAA leaders provoked the people of Assam by saying that 20 lakh people will enter and get citizenship under the CAA,"

Sarma said.

On impact of the regime change in Bangladesh, Sarma said, "The northeast insurgency situation might change now... If a government is installed that is anti-India, we will definitely have a problem."

"But, let us wait and watch. Elections are to be conducted there. After the polls, we will know what kind of government is formed. Saying anything now is premature," he added.

The CM also said that the instability in Bangladesh could have a bearing on the Pareth Barua-led ULFA (I).

"Pareth Barua has 700 trained cadres, a very good network of well-wishers who are not well-wishers of India, and with instability in Bangladesh, he has his power."

"We cannot undermine this, but the police should have more power to control the situation. I won't say ULFA(I) is a dying organisation, but we have had peace for the last three years and we will continue to ensure it," Sarma added. (PTI)

Two teenage girls rescued after abduction; suspects arrested

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Aug 24: In the wake of the horrific gang rape and murder of a doctor at the R.G. Kar Medical College in Kolkata, West Bengal and a gang rape of a minor girl in Dhing, a similar shocking incident has shaken the Gossaigaon subdivision, where two teenage girls went missing at night and has led to a tense situation in Tulsibil on Aug 24.

According to the information available here, two teenage girls suddenly went missing from their homes last night prompting their families to report the incident to the nearest Tulsibil police station. The police, along with the sub-divisional police officer soon receiving the information launched a search operation across various areas.

As the incident spread rapidly, local residents also accompanied in patrolling the area to find out the missing girls. Sensing danger, the group that had abducted the girls abandoned them in a deserted area and fled.

Later this morning, when the local residents found the two girls who went missing at night from a deserted area about 10 kilometers away from Tulsibil informed the police and were taken them into custody.

The police then examined one of the girl's mobile phones, including her Instagram and Messenger accounts, leading to the arrest of three youths involved in the incident. The suspects are currently being interrogated by the police.

It is disclosed that the girls were lured by a group of miscreants from right in front of their home and taken away in a vehicle during the night. When the girls did not return home for a long time, their families grew suspicious, leading to a state of panic.

The families informed the police about the girls' disappearance, after which a search operation was launched, forcing those miscreants to abandon the girls and flee.

One of the girls is now under police custody, while the other, who fell ill, has been admitted to a hospital for better treatment.

The police have arrested three youths in connection with the incident and have been identified as Jamal Khan (21) of Choutara, Sheikh Abdullah (21) of Harbhanga village, and Noor Alam (25) of Jaipura village. Additionally, the vehicle used in the abduction has been recovered by the police.

Following the incident, hundreds of local people came out on the street and staged protest in front of Tulsibil police station, alleging that the two girls were gang-raped and demanded a proper investigation and appropriate punishment for the culprits.

Simultaneously, local organizations like AKRASU, AMSU, and ABMSU condemned the incident and demanded a thorough investigation and strict punishment for those involved in the heinous crime. They also urged that no one should exploit this incident for communal politics or disrupt the peace and harmony in the area.

AABYSF Sivasagar District committee condemns Dhing rape case

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, Aug 24: The All Assam Bengali Youth Students Federation (AABYSF), Sivasagar District Committee condemned the Dhing Rape case.

Rabindra Ghosh, Secretary of All Assam Bengali Youth Students Federation (AABYSF), Sivasagar District Committee demanded exemplary punishment of the culprits who were involved in this incident.

He said that though there is a Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme, the Beti (Girl) reads but there is no safety for Beti (Girl) and the government has failed to provide safeguards to Beti (Girl).

Rabindra Ghosh, Secretary of All Assam Bengali Youth Students Federation (AABYSF), Sivasagar District Committee appeals State Government to bring strict laws for the safeguard of Beti (Girls).

AAMSU stages protest at Dalgaoon Demands strict action against rapists



DALGAON, Aug 24: Following the Dhing gang rape incidents, the Darrang AAMSU irked over the increasing rape incidents in the state and raised concern about women security. Taking part in a protest rally here at Dalgaoon on Saturday, AAMSU Advisor Ainuddin Ahmed told media persons that the state government has miserably failed to control law & order situation in the state for which several incidents of rape and women molestation took place in various parts.

He told Chief Minister and DGO cannot hide encountering the rape accused. Encounter is not the solution, rule of law must be implemented to ensure safety and security of all sections. He further warned Bir Lachit Sena Leader Srinikhal Chaliha for instigating against the Miya

Community.

He urged all to treat the rapists as criminals rather than finding the religious background. Meanwhile, Mahbulul Islam, President of the Darrang AAMSU said that the government is trying to polarise and divert the rape like serious issues.

At least seven rape incidents took place in the last few days but a section along with the government is highlighting only Dhing and promoting hatred against a particular community.

He urged all sections not to communalize crimes. On the other hand, NEMSU president Badrul Islam condemned the rape incidents and raised concern over the failure of law & order situation in the state.

Foundation laid for training center and CLF in Dhansiri

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Aug 24: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang laid foundation stone for construction of a Community Training Centre (CTC) for Dhansiri Cluster Level Federation (CLF) in Dhansiri. The CTC will be constructed through the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) scheme facilitated by the District Administration.

Dhansiri CLF was constituted with the collective efforts of 3,169 women.

It now has members from 306 women SHGs. The SHGs under Dhansiri CLF are engaged in various activities like production of traditional garments on handloom weaving, piggy, goat farming, poultry, fishery, agriculture and horticulture activities and many more. Through this federation the SHGs have generated income. Because of their capacity building and activities, the federation has earned a reputation not only in Karbi Anglong, but all over the state as well. The federation has received the Best Cluster Level Federation in the state and is recognised as one of the ideal CLF, where trainees from outside come to learn from them.

Speaking on the occasion the CEM said, "Dhansiri CLF is No. 1 CLF in Assam. 3,169 women have come together to constitute the Dhansiri CLF. Here the members are engaged in various activities for sustainable development that has helped to support its members and families. Under Dhansiri CLF it has 306 SHGs and the members have increased to 3,159."

Ronghang also said the CLF office was constructed by members themselves, and the boundary wall will be constructed by KAAC next year. Through the CEM Special package 100 piglets and goats and 1000 ducklings and poultry will be given to Dhansiri CLF. The KAAC will provide necessary support and assistance for Dhansiri CLF.

Later, the CEM also visited 'Mission Concern' an orphanage home in Dhansiri, run by a lady Ambika Pradhan Thapa and her team. The orphanage is concerned with two activities i.e. adoption of abandoned children and raising them.

The CEM in his visit met the president of Mission Concern Orphanage Home, Thapa and her children. Ronghang also interacted with the children and distributed blankets, mosquito nets and books to them.

The CEM was accompanied by MP Amarsing Tisso; Executive Members (EMs) of KAAC, MACs; MLAs Bidya Sing Englung and Darsing Ronghang and District Commissioner, Nirola Phangchopi.

Yamaha organises Mega Mileage Challenge activity



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 24: India Yamaha Motor (IYM), along with its authorised dealerships Grand Yamaha, Luit Automobiles, Green Valley Travels Yamaha, and Ravinder Auto Agency, organised a "Mega Mileage Challenge" activity in Guwahati on Saturday.

The mileage related activity witnessed participation by 45 Yamaha customers, whileover 142 customers took part in several other engagement activities organized by the brand.

The aim of organizing such an activity is to raise awareness among a broader audience about the exceptional fuel efficiency of Yamaha Hybrid scooters, specifically the Fascino 125.

The Mega Mileage Challenge event kicked off in Guwahati with a briefing session for the participants.

During this session, experts shared insights on effective riding techniques and outlined the designated route for the journey.

Following the briefing, Yamaha scooters were fuelled up before embarking on a 35-kilometre ride, covering diverse driving conditions like city traffic, uneven terrain, and open roads.

This allowed participants to evaluate firsthand the scooter's suspension, manoeuvrability, braking, acceleration, and initial pick-up.

Upon completing the ride and returning to the venue, scooters were refuelled to their initial level, and the fuel consumption was recorded for mileage calculation.

As a gesture of gratitude, each participant was rewarded with exclusive souvenirs, along with a complimentary vehicle wash to ensure a pristine appearance.

Furthermore, Yamaha's commitment to customer satisfaction was exemplified through a comprehensive 10-point inspection, guaranteeing optimal performance and safety for all vehicles of customers who participated in this challenge.

Tuition teacher molests minor school girl

HT Correspondent
HOJAI, Aug 24: Several Organisations took to the streets of Hojai in order to demand justice for the minor school girl who was allegedly molested by a tuition teacher in Hojai.

Notably, a news surfaced on Friday night that a minor girl was going to school

was allegedly molested by a tuition teacher named Biswajit Das, a Maths teacher. As per information, the teacher made an illicit video of her and blackmailed her parents on the pretext of making the video viral, if his demand is not fulfilled.

On Friday night, locals caught him from near his residence in bidyanagar in Hojai and handed him over to the Hojai Police. Later, locals gathered in front of the Police Station and demanded justice.

ARRESTED

Seeing the intense situation, Saurab Gupta Superintendent of Police, Hojai district immediately responded and assured that the culprit will be charged as per the law accordingly. He appealed the people to maintain law and order. On Saturday, the irked Students and people took out a protest rally from Ra-

bindranath Tagore University, Hojai to Hojai Police Station passing by the major thoroughfares of the town and demanded justice for the victim and strict punishment for the culprit. They raised slogan "We want justice" and also the police provided the security to the rally for smooth passably.

Later, they submitted a memorandum at Hojai Police station and demanded justice for the victim and his family. They said government should make proper steps to curb such incidents which are being reported from all parts of the State, it is matter of concern, they added.

Six Railway Buildings of Northeast Frontier Railway receives 'Shunya Label'



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 24: In line with the commitment to achieve Net Zero Carbon Emission, six significant buildings of Northeast Frontier Railway have been honoured with the prestigious

"Shunya Label" for their remarkable achievement as Net Zero Energy Buildings. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), under the Ministry of Power, Government of India, presented this accolade.

The buildings that have clinched this remarkable recognition are the Railway workshop administrative building, Supervisors Training centre and Supervisors Training Centre Engineers Hostel of New Bongaigaon on February 13, 2024.

Whereas, General Store Depot, Pandu, Guwahati, Running Room, Rangiya and Running Room of Katihar have been awarded on June 20, 2024.

Railway Workshop Administrative Building, New Bongaigaon was awarded with "Shunya Plus" and the other buildings with "Shunya" for a period of three years from the effective date.

The Railway Workshop Administrative Building of New Bongaigaon boasts a connected load of 81.615 kW and an annual energy generation of 227869 kWh per year. The Supervisors Training Centre in New Bongaigaon has a connected load of 132.6 kW and an annual energy consumption of 30233 kWh/year.

Similarly, Supervisors Training Centre Engineers Hostel of New Bongaigaon, General Store Depot at Pandu, Guwahati, Running Room of Rangiya and Running Room of Katihar have a connected load of 39.9 kW, 150 kVA, 56kW and 60 kW and an annual energy consumption of 11635.25 kWh/year, 16300 kWh/year, 14270 kWh/year and 100126 kWh/year respectively.

Indian Railways is committed to its Net Zero-Carbon emission mission goal by 2030. As per its commitment, N. F. Railway is taking various steps to get more "Shunya Label" certification across all important buildings under its jurisdiction.

Biker arrested after fatal collision with pedestrian



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Aug 24: Dibrugarh police arrested the accused on Friday night mowed down a woman who with his bike at Lachit Nagar road near Gym Nation on Friday afternoon. The accused bike rider has been identified as - Asif ul-Haque of Dibrugarh.

"The accused was arrested and we have sent him to jail and the other youth has been sent to home because we have registered a case against the

rider," said Traffic inspector Parthapratim Dutta.

A speeding bike with two unruly riders riding without helmet mowed down a woman opposite Gym Nation on the Lachit Nagar Road while she was crossing the road. The woman identified as Rinku Ghosh was killed on the spot. "The entire incident was caught on CCTV camera".

"Police inaction against unruly drivers and riders and the reluctance of the District Administration against

illegal parking on the road near any big business establishments, gyms etc is one reason for the traffic chaos and resultant accidents," alleged a local resident.

He said, "The unruly drivers and bike riders has been creating a menace in Dibrugarh by not following any traffic rules. In some busy street without any reason, they run their bikes in high speed causing fear and problem to the pedestrian. But the police didn't do anything to such bike riders."

"Due to poor traffic management of Dibrugarh town, the unruly bikers takes the advantage and creates problem for the people. The parking system of Dibrugarh is so poor that anytime any untoward incident can happen. The District administration should streamline the parking system of Dibrugarh and launched a crackdown against the unruly bikers," said Ramesh Gogoi, a resident of Dibrugarh town.

Despite the complained by the local residents of Lachit Nagar about the road side car parking issue, the concerned department failed to address the issue.

Editor's pick

Prime Minister Modi's Ukraine visit: A strategic balancing act

By: Akhilesh Suman

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kyiv marks a significant moment in international diplomacy, reflecting India's strategic balancing act between Russia and the West amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. As the first leader from a nation that maintains strong relations with both Russia and Western countries, Modi's visit sends a nuanced message to global powers, particularly Russia.

While some observers suggest that Modi's visit is intended to placate Western disappointment following his two recent visits to Russia, the reality appears more complex. Modi's trip to Ukraine serves primarily as a subtle signal to Moscow that India can engage with Ukraine as well. This visit comes at a critical time, coinciding with Ukraine's recent military successes against Russian forces, adding weight to the message Modi intends to deliver.

India's historical relationship with Ukraine has been far from warm, yet the scale of suffering in Ukraine has stirred sympathy within India. This sentiment is reflected in Modi's earlier statements, emphasizing that this is not an era of war and advocating for peaceful resolutions. Despite this, India has refrained from condemning Russia's actions, continuing to purchase oil from Moscow, which has been crucial for Russia during the conflict.

However, Russia's increasingly close ties with China have become a point of concern for India, particularly regarding China's aggressive behavior along the Indian border. The 2020 Galwan Valley clash and subsequent military tensions have strained India-China relations, making Russia's perceived indifference to India's security concerns troubling. The frequent meetings between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping have heightened these concerns, prompting India to reassess its foreign policy strategy.

Modi's visit to Ukraine can be seen as a diplomatic effort to subtly pressure Russia into reconsidering its relationship with China. By engaging with Ukraine, India signals to Moscow that its close ties with Beijing cannot be taken for granted without potential consequences.

Historically, India has enjoyed a strong relationship with Russia, especially in defense, but the evolving geopolitical landscape requires India to prioritize its national interests. Modi's visit also underscores India's independent foreign policy, a principle that has guided the country since the Cold War era. India has long prided itself on its non-aligned stance, making decisions based on strategic interests rather than aligning with any particular bloc. This approach remains relevant in the 21st century, as India navigates the complexities of global politics.

India's refusal to outright condemn Russia at the United Nations has caused friction with Western capitals. However, Modi's visit to Ukraine demonstrates that India's neutrality does not imply inaction or tacit approval of Russian aggression. Instead, it reflects a nuanced approach, balancing relationships and interests while encouraging Russia to reconsider its military strategy.

As India seeks to strengthen its ties with Western nations, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region where China's assertiveness is a growing concern, Modi's visit to Ukraine reaffirms India's commitment to a multipolar world.

India values its strategic autonomy, making decisions based on its national interests—a stance that has occasionally drawn criticism from its allies. Another important aspect of Modi's visit is India's interest in contributing to Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. The war has left Ukraine in ruins, and India sees an opportunity to play a role in its rebuilding process. This involvement would not only be a humanitarian gesture but also a strategic investment that could benefit the Indian economy.

India has already provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and Modi's visit could pave the way for more substantial support, including infrastructure projects and logistical assistance, which would also benefit related Indian industries.

Furthermore, India's involvement in Ukraine's reconstruction could serve as a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By offering an alternative model of development cooperation that respects the sovereignty of partner countries, India positions itself as a more favorable partner for nations in need.

This approach aligns with India's broader goal of positioning itself as a global leader and a moral force in international diplomacy. As the world closely watches Modi's visit to Ukraine, the potential outcomes could have far-reaching implications for global power dynamics. Should Modi's diplomacy contribute to a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, India could emerge as a significant peacemaker and problem solver on the world stage.

This would enhance India's reputation as a nation capable of navigating complex geopolitical landscapes while maintaining its principles and strategic autonomy. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Nirbhaya to Abhaya: A journey through India's persistent darkness

The tragic journey from Nirbhaya to Abhaya reveals a sobering truth: our country remains mired in the same horrors. The brutal rape and murder of a Kolkata-based intern doctor is a grim reminder that, despite the passing years, little has changed. This heinous crime has once again jolted a nation that has been dormant in its response to such atrocities for far too long. While we continue to celebrate International Women's Day and Independence Day with great enthusiasm, the stark reality is that the safety and respect for women are still far from guaranteed.

We hold our heads high with pride, but it begs the question: are our women truly free? Many still remain trapped in the clutches of male chauvinism, a modern form of slavery. A wise philosopher once said, "If you love someone, set them free. If they return, they were always yours; if not, they never were." Yet, in the throes of deep love, a person often strives to possess the one they desire, driven by a need to hold on to what they believe is theirs. Possessiveness can sometimes escalate to an almost obsessive level, where the lover becomes increasingly desperate and seeks to exert complete control over their partner. This is often the breaking point in many relationships, leading them to unravel and ultimately fail.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously wrote in 'The Social Contract' that man is born free, yet finds himself in chains everywhere. It's true that no one willingly remains bound, even for a moment.

A parrot in a cage, no matter how lavish, can never truly be at peace. The captive bird, even in a gilded cage, will often be seen restlessly flapping its wings, yearning to escape and soar freely in the open sky. Subjugation is universally detested, whether by animals or humans. Sadly, India has a notorious history of slavery, a system to which many women are still subjected today.

The great kings of the past were infamous for keeping vast numbers of female slaves, who lived in miserable conditions and were always at the service of their masters.

In the grand epics like the Mahabharata, there are numerous references to both male and female slavery. While the overt practice of slavery as it existed in ancient times has largely disappeared, the mindset that fueled it has not entirely vanished. Slavery still persists, albeit in different forms and guises.

The feminist writings of modern

authors like Kamla Das, Shashi Deshpande, and Venessa R. Sasson have shed a harsh light on the lives of women still trapped in domestic slavery, enduring suffocating conditions within their own homes.

These women silently bear the crushing weight of relentless domestic labor, akin to a bird caged within the confines of their household. The stranglehold of patriarchy remains strong, refusing to loosen its grip on many women.

The abhorrent practice of the Parda system, a form of female seclusion still prevalent in parts of India and beyond, continues despite sharp criticism from intellectuals like Amitaz Dharkar.

The symbolic veil that women are forced to wear is almost impenetrable, too thick to be easily removed.

There's no denying that today's women have achieved significant milestones. They stand alongside men in various fields, making their mark in ways that were once unimaginable. The term "women empowerment" has become a buzzword, capturing widespread attention and admiration. However, for many, it remains more of an idealized concept than a fully realized reality.

Some women from the elite

and privileged classes enjoy the freedom to venture out after dark, but they do so at their own risk. The streets are prowled by predators, intoxicated and on the loose.

While some women have the luxury of visiting pubs and bars to escape their worries, they do so under the constant shadow of fear, like a sword of Damocles hanging over them. Social norms have evolved to some extent, offering a glimpse of hope at the end of the tunnel. But how many women truly have the chance to bask in that light? The unfortunate reality is that not all women share in the joy of freedom.

Many are not safe in their own country, a distressing truth that weighs heavily on any sensitive soul. Regressive attitudes persist in many corners of India, and crimes like gang rapes followed by murders are all too common. Perhaps this is why the birth of a daughter is still met with trepidation rather than celebration in many families. The grim reality is that heinous crimes against women remain far from eradicated.

Girls are often denied the education they deserve, simply because they are expected to be married off and handed over to another family someday. This obsession with having a male child has led to countless crimes

and horrific situations. While watching a crime show on Sony TV, I was horrified to learn about an educated family that fell victim to the deceit of a fraudulent Tantric.

Convinced by his bizarre claims that sacrificing a young child would ensure the birth of a male heir, they heartlessly murdered an innocent child from their neighborhood. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident. There are countless other terrifying stories that reveal the dark depths of such superstition and ignorance.

We continue to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8 each year, proudly holding our heads high. But the nagging question that lingers is whether our women are truly free. Unfortunately, the answer remains a resounding no.

Many women remain trapped in the harsh grip of a modern form of slavery, driven by male chauvinism. The horrifying incidents of female foeticide and rape serve as stark reminders that too many still cling to outdated and harmful beliefs about women. It's high time we change our mindset toward women in society. Adopting a zero-tolerance policy is crucial if we are to make any meaningful progress. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglt@gmail.com)

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

Gruesome rape cases in Kolkata, Badlapur have 'political saviours'

By: Sushil Kuttu

“Kolkata rape-murder” versus the “Badlapur monstrosity”. The BJP is targeting West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for the horrendous rape-cum-murder of a trainee doctor in a hospital and the Congress is out to settle scores for the INDI-Alliance after the sexual assault on a pair of schoolgirls aged 3 and 4! Congress MLA Vijay Wadettiwar, who is Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra Assembly, went after Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis even as a Congress team arrived in Badlapur to put the BJP on the mat.

Like the LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Vijay Wadettiwar also doesn't want to be distracted by the Kolkata gang-rape-cum-murder. “Maharashtra has left Uttar Pradesh behind in crimes against women,” he said. The two girls were sexually assaulted by a sanitary worker, enraging Badlapur citizens who gathered in the hundreds and blocked trains. Only then did the local police lodge an FIR. The police, whether in Kolkata or in Thane, are the same, kowtowing to politicians who are neck-deep in their own mess.

Who are they protecting? The CBI is investigating the Kolkata rape-murder. On Thursday, the CBI submitted a “status report” to the Supreme Court. The report

says the “scene of crime” had been “altered” — a fact every Tom, Dick and Harry knew. What will the Supreme Court do now that it, too, knows? “Nothing” comes to mind.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis passed a series of orders including setting up an SIT and a fast-track court. The Congress is not deterred. LoP Vijay Wadettiwar said “Badlapur” was worse than “Kolkata” — i.e., “your rape and my rape” entered the arena. The Supreme Court should keep this mind when hearing the Kolkata trainee doctor's rape and murder. It is snake-eat-eat outside.

The Maharashtra Assembly elections are too close for comfort for both Congress and BJP. Think of LoP Rahul Gandhi teaming up with LoP Vijay Wadettiwar and Gandhi will harvest headlines like missionaries harvest pagan souls. There will be hell to pay for the Shinde-Fadnis duo, which in turn will affect the Modi-Shah duo. Will the CBI's “status report” open up the Kolkata rape-murder case further? The apex court had on August 20 asked the CBI to submit the status report in a “sealed cover” so that only the CBI and the top court will know the status of the investigation.

The CBI hadn't arrested anybody though it questioned the sole accused in the rape-and-murder of the trainee doctor and also

questioned the principal of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. The CBI is making slow progress. Knowing the Kolkata Police's reputation, things were bound to be difficult for the CBI. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is both Home Minister and Health Minister, should the CBI summon Mamata Banerjee for questioning?

Mamata in the dock will be exciting for some and disheartening for others. In West Bengal streets will boil over. The impression one gets, however, is that the crime-scene alteration has worked and Mamata Banerjee will ride this storm, too. There is a lot of circumstantial evidence but nothing to nail the real culprits. The one in custody will also go scot-free — a civic volunteer, the man is a loud and a foul-mouthed piece of #*^ — perfect volunteer for the cops!

The CBI's ‘Status Report’ is proof that the central investigating agency has surrendered to the fait accompli. Not only was the crime scene altered out of kilter, the status report also spoke of the West Bengal Police telling the rape-murder victim's parents that it “was a suicide” before confessing that it was rape-cum-murder, a largely well-known fact. Truth be told, the Supreme Court's suomotu hearing hasn't made a difference to the “untruth”.

The bench of CJI DY Chandrachud, Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra are hearing what's already there in the public domain and widely circulated in Social

Media. The Supreme Court cannot and will not pull a rabbit out of its hat, but the Central Bureau of Investigation might. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has senior counsel Kapil Sibal to fight for the West Bengal government and Sibal is under attack in social media for siding with the “gang-rapists and murderers”.

So, will the CBI be able to nail Mamata Banerjee? The beneficiaries will be the Modi government and the BJP. The rape-murder of the trainee doctor in Kolkata came at a very opportune time for those against Mamata Banerjee and the INDI-Alliance. For the first time in 11 years of Modi, there was talk of President's Rule in West Bengal though the asking price had come down to “Mamata Banerjee Resign.” This, after the Supreme Court took suo-motu notice. The top court saved Mamata.

So, it's Kolkata rape-cum-murder versus the Badlapur horror. Maharashtra has left Uttar Pradesh behind in crimes against women; law and order has collapsed. And if the Kolkata victim's parents were made to wait for “three hours to get a glimpse of their slain daughter”, the Badlapur victims' families were made to “wait for 11 hours to get an FIR lodged.” The Badlapur school allegedly has high connections in the government. Bottom-line: whether Kolkata or Badlapur, Mumbai, crime always finds a saviour in a politician. (IPA Service)

Jobs in urban India declined in the first quarter of 2024-25

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

At a time when Budget 2024-25 is aiming at creating about 3 crore formal jobs, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for the first quarter of the current financial year shows a decline in the employment in urban India. Women workforce suffered even more than their male counterpart in all age group.

The PLFS data revealed that during April-June 2024, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) in current weekly status (CWS) declined to 39.3 per cent from 39.5 per cent during January-March 2024. For female it declined from 20.3 to 20 per cent during this period while it remained at 58 per cent for male. It means the decline was registered almost all for women workforce.

However, for the workers of 15 years and above the decline was from 50.2 per cent to 50.1 per cent. Women workers of this age group suffered much. Decline in their LFPR was from 25.6 per cent to 25.2 per cent, while there was increase in male LFPR from 74.4 per cent to 74.7 per cent.

As for the workforce in the age group of 15-29 there was a minor increase in LFPR from 40.7 per cent to 40.8 per cent, female LFPR remained stagnant at 21.3 per cent, and for male workforce it increased from 58.2 per cent to 58.9 per cent.

All these show that the policies adopted in the Union Budget 2024-25 is not working for women workforce whose participation has declined in the urban areas of the country.

As for worker population ratio (WPR) in CWS the first quarter of the current fiscal is concerned it declined from 36.9 per cent to 36.7 per cent in the urban areas. Women suffered more even in this respect whose WPR was 18.6 per cent during January-March 2024 but declined to 18.2 in April-June 2024. WPR for male increased from 54.5 per cent to 54.7 per cent during this period. Women WPR declined in all age groups while it increased for male in all age group of workers though only a little.

There was an increase in casual labour from 10.8 per cent to 11 per cent. Regular wage and salaried employed in the urban India were just 49 per cent during April-June 2024, which was

48 per cent in the previous quarter. There was a decline in own account worker and employer, helper in household enterprise and self-employed. Self-employed declined from 40.5 per cent to 40 per cent, helpers in household enterprises declined from 6.4 to 6.1 per cent and own account worker declined from 33 per cent to 32.9 per cent.

There was though an increase in women regular wage and salaried employees from 52.3 per cent to 54 per cent, their percentage declined in all other categories of workers, barring the own account workers which remained constant at 27.5 per cent. Women were about four times more than male as help in household enterprises. In the first quarter about 4.4 per cent male were helper in household enterprises, but the percentage of women was 11.4 per cent in the urban India.

Maximum percentage of workers were in the tertiary sector of the economy which account for 62.4 per cent as against 62.2 per cent in the previous quarter. In the first quarter only 5.9 per cent of urban workers were engaged in agriculture, while 32.1 per cent were engaged in secondary sector including mining and quarrying.

Unemployment rate was 6.6 per cent in the urban India during April-June 2024, which was still above 6.5 per cent during October-December 2023. Female unemployment rate increased to 8.9 per cent from the previous quarter's 8.4 per cent. Unemployment rate in all age group of women increased during this period. For the women in age group 15-29, unemployment rate was 23 per cent, in the first quarter, while it was 14.8 per cent for male. Combined together total urban unemployment rate was 16.8 per cent.

Unemployment rate among urban population above 15 years of age was 6.6 per cent in the first quarter, for male it was 5.8 per cent and for female it was 9 per cent.

All these data indicates that government will need to exert more if the promises made in the Budget 2024-25 are to be fulfilled for creation of 3 crore new jobs. Union government has started talking with the state governments and UTs if they are ready to implement the labour reforms to create additional jobs, which may be a strategy to put blame on the states in respect of failure in job creation. (IPA Service)

UNHRC makes damning observations on human rights in India

By: Ravi Nair

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has made critical observations about the status of human rights in India in its country audit prepared after 28 years. The comments are critical about most of the areas of operations of the government where rights of the people are involved.

It was also concerned about information about multiple security breaches and vulnerabilities relating to the information stored in the Aadhaar identification database; the de facto requirement for the mandatory use of Aadhaar; and the increasing use of facial recognition technology for surveillance, and access to public benefits and voting rights; as well as by the lack of adequate privacy safeguards in content and data regulation legislation, and in the context of search and seizures.

The UNHRC stated that India should ensure that legislation regarding surveillance, content and data regulation, as well as related activities, and any other interference with privacy, such as search and seizure activities, is in full compliance with article 17 of the ICCPR and with the principles of legality, proportionality and necessity.

The UNHRC was concerned about the high levels of violence against religious minorities, such as the incidents in Manipur since May 2023 and the riots in Gujarat in 2002, and the resulting lack of accountability for human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings.

The UNHRC was also concerned about other violent incidents, such as the demolitions of places of worship and homes of religious minorities — most Muslim — following the riots during the

Ram Navami processions in 2022, and the reports of violence and lynching by ‘cow vigilantes’ against Muslims and Christians.

The UNHRC was also concerned about the application of national security and counter-terrorism laws to target religious minorities and about reports of public officials engaging in hate speech and inciting public violence against religious minorities.

The UNHRC stated that in accordance with Article 18 of the ICCPR and General Comment 22 on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion of 1993, India should ensure respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion for all and prevent combat and address all forms of discrimination and violence against religious minorities.

The UNHRC was concerned about provisions that require individuals to notify authorities of their intention to convert; contain vague wording that gives officials broad power to decide on religious conversions; impose enhanced punishments for conversion by minority groups; consider interfaith marriages as presumptively unlawful; or shift the burden of proof to the accused to show that a conversion was not coerced.

The UNHRC was concerned about information received about India's use of the Pegasus spyware to target mobile phones of journalists, activists and government officials from mid-2017 to 2023.

The UNHRC was also concerned about vigilante attacks against religious minorities. The UNHRC was concerned about ‘gharwapsi’ (homecoming) ceremonies, where religious minorities are allegedly coerced to convert to Hinduism; according to reports received, over the past decade, thousands of Christians and Muslims have been converted to Hinduism

during these ceremonies.

The UNHRC stated that India should guarantee, in law and practice, the effective exercise of freedom of religion and belief and refrain from imposing any restrictions on those rights beyond the narrow limitations permitted under Article 18(3) of the ICCPR. The UNHRC was concerned about the arbitrary restrictions in law and practice to freedom of expression online and offline in India, including the broad and frequent use of internet shutdowns, such as the complete ban on mobile internet facilities for months in Jammu and Kashmir in 2016 and for 18 months in 2019, the blockage of online content on vaguely defined grounds and without court authorisation, and the banning of books and films.

While the UNHRC commended the abolition of the offence of sedition in the former penal code, it remains concerned that Section 152 of the new penal code, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 criminalises forms of expression that endanger the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the State party.

The UNHRC was also concerned about the misuse of vague and broadly formulated provisions of legislation, such as on counter-terrorism, which according to information received is misused for the arbitrary arrest and prosecution of minority groups, journalists and other individuals expressing minority or dissenting views and exercising their right to peaceful assembly.

The UNHRC stated that India should take all measures necessary to guarantee the full enjoyment of freedom of expression by everyone; in accordance with Article 19 of the ICCPR and the UNHRC's General Comment 34 (2011), and that any restrictions comply with the strict require-

ments of Article 19 (3) of the ICCPR.

The UNHRC was concerned about the killing of 59 journalists since 2006, as well as allegations that human rights defenders have been barred from travelling outside India and engaging with United Nations bodies, such as in the case of Khurram Parvez, a Kashmiri human rights defender who was prevented from travelling to Geneva to attend the Human Rights Council and has been arbitrarily detained since 2021.

The UNHRC was concerned about information regarding the transnational repression of political opponents and human rights defenders.

The UNHRC was also concerned about the frequent disruption of demonstrations and cases of excessive use of force, such as in the protests in Tamil Nadu in 2018 that resulted in 13 deaths; and the use of pellet-firing shotguns for crowd control purposes resulting in numerous persons injured, in particular in Kashmir since 2010.

The UNHRC was concerned about the possibility of the arbitrary application of certain provisions of the new criminal legislation, such as those on public order related to peaceful assemblies.

The UNHRC was also concerned about other violent incidents, such as the demolitions of places of worship and homes of religious minorities.

The UNHRC wants India to take measures to guarantee that everyone can exercise the right to freedom of expression, as well as the right of peaceful assembly in accordance with Article 21 of the covenant and the committee's General Comment 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly. (IPA Service)

The UGC NET conundrum

By: Simanta Barman

“Let there be finality, we are not in a perfect world. Let the exams happen on August 21. Let there be certainty for students,” Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud said on August 12 while dismissing a plea against the re-conduction of the UGC-National Eligibility Test (June, 2024). I agree with him that we are not in a perfect world, but can it not be a little more sensible and sincere? The National Testing Agency (NTA), entrusted with conducting such high-intensity national-level exams every year, should have more accountability than they have shown in the recent past.

June 2023, you sit for NET in Mass Communication & Journalism subject. Fifteen minutes into the paper, you scratch your eyes thinking if you read it wrong. No, you did not. You are baffled to find out grammatical errors and obscure sentence structures throughout the paper. That was my experience. I had to turn the language to Hindi to comprehend some questions;



such was the level of insincerity in typing a paper for a computer-based test by supposedly the 'highest' authority in conducting nationwide examinations, not to mention a 'Kasauti Zindagi Ki' surprise feature in Paper Two.

Cut to 2024 June edition, they decide to bring back the offline paper mode, and there were no such blunders in setting the papers as such. But lo, before the students can even sit down to analyse their answers at home, news breaks out of possible 'integrity-breach' and the exam gets cancelled in its entirety, in an instant.

All considerations for students' invested time and resources, its implications in their next course of academ-

ics, the logistical hassle to reach venues, etc. go for a toss. Discontentment erupts, some join the ongoing chorus for the NEET fiasco, case reaches the CBI, and their initial finding discards a potential paper leak (although the investigation is not over yet and findings are yet to be disclosed in full). The verdict is in favour of a re-examination, which brings back the CBT (computer-based test) mode.

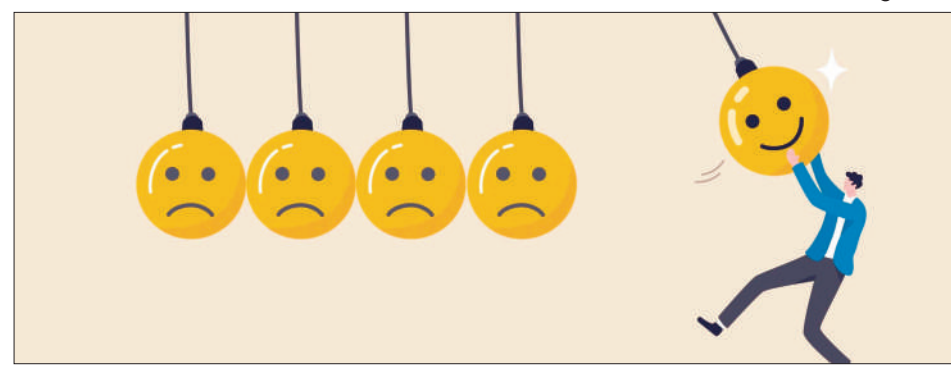
Whenever there is a system's failure, it bears varied implications for different sections of society, experts have argued time and again. And it cannot be more true for students from rural India. The offline-mode now-cancelled June 2024 NET had seven centres in Assam, the state

with the most number of centres among the northeastern states. Only two of the seven catered to students from lower Assam, and only one to students from the Barak valley. Meghalaya had three, Nagaland and Manipur two each, Sikkim, Tripura, and Mizoram with one each. For the states boasting such hilly terrains, how can the logistical, transportation and other challenges be overlooked? Although the re-examination schedule has added or reshuffled a few centres here and there, the tally remains unchanged mostly. For applicants to go through the challenges of reaching venues on time, sorting out return arrangements (especially pertinent for shift two students), and braving the odds that come their way, is a recurring cycle of uncompromised hassle. This is more taxing on students from the less privileged section and the ones from remote areas. To top that, there is always the fear of computer system's failure, as it had happened quite often across centres, in the past. It had taken more than an hour's delay on various occasions.

Moreover, in the context of PhD admissions and career prospects, this gap brings added challenges and, in some cases, despair. Some raised their concern about having to lose a year or missing out on opportunities due to age-based and other time-bound regulations. Some institutions even follow stricter adherence to NET scores, which aggravates the implications of such cancellations further.

These are not one-off concerns that can be attributed to one such cancellation. These are recurring issues and shall be deliberated by every stakeholder. In the meantime, one can wait and hope that the systems would work fine this time, computers would not break down midway, one would not have to miss their trains or buses to return home, one would not have to blink an eye looking at an obscure sentence, and most importantly an out-of-place 'Kasauti Zindagi Ki' question would not smack you in the face. (The author is a media professional who can be reached at simantabarman.work@gmail.com)

Positive Thinking - Key to build a beautiful society



By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

When we analyze our society today, we can easily see the increasing prevalence of Negative thoughts in society and the social horrors it creates. It is also a matter of concern how the various negative conversations are acting in the mind of each and every persons. What do the various discussions on social media, digital and television news channels, newspapers, discussions of people around us provide to the mind from waking up in the morning to just before going to bed at night? Isn't it mostly negative thinking? When we analyze our society very closely, it is easy to see that the prevalence of negative thoughts in the society is increasing day by day like a contagious disease and this is leading to depression in the lives of many people. Furthermore, the most worrying thing is that these negative thinkers are constantly spreading poisonous gases in the society on social media, the most popular medium of thought in society now a days, which has become a matter of deep concern. Therefore, we should realize these aspects while we have time. These negative thoughts need to be ignored in order to protect our stable positive thoughts.

There are many reasons why we are attracted to negative thoughts in society today. One of the most worrying reasons in our view is the moral decline of individuals and the lack of positive thinking or positive attitude. Although this issue is of great concern to our society, we usually ignore it. We feel that there is a need for in-depth study on this subject. So today we are trying to discuss something on the subject of positive thinking and attitude with our limited knowledge and experience.

In short, positive thinking has infinite power. One positive thought can conquer a thousand negative thoughts. There are many scientists like Stephen Hawking, poet John Keats, musician Beethoven who have emerged all over the world with the power of positive thinking. The success of these sages was a combination of hard work, invincible positive mind, optimism and strong curiosity. Jack Canfield writes in his famous book "Chicken Soup For The Soul" – "Optimistic thoughts not only enrich you, your good thoughts also create a positive wave around the world". When we want something in life, a fascinating force is released in our minds and according to the formula of gravity of the universe, what we want comes right next to us. But when we fear that bad things will happen, an attractive force arises in our minds and that force takes the best away from our minds. The combination of faith, trust, hard work and an optimistic mind makes something that is considered impossible possible.

Like anything else, developing positive thoughts or positive attitudes takes time and sincere effort. The more you practice positive or happy thinking; it will be easier for you to do anything. First, each person must create positive thoughts in themselves. In fact, positive thinking or attitudes can be developed over time just like any other skill like mathematics, science; computers, etc. can be developed. Moreover, you must stick with time and patience to practice positive thinking.

One of the many benefits of positive thinking and attitude is that it has a direct impact on our physical and mental health. According to researchers, older people who think positively have fewer heart and health problems and positive people generally have lower rates of depression. They probably have less stress. People with a positive attitude can solve problems easily. Positive thinking reduces anxiety. Studies have shown that anxiety disorders can positively cope with high levels of sadness or emotion.

In addition, we should always face the obstacles of life with a good mind and positive thinking if we have a negative attitude, we will be quick to get angry, bad mood, and not feel good about any problem. Most importantly, positive attitude can give people an invisible mental strength to deal with danger easily. On the other hand, if we always follow a positive mindset, we can overcome all obstacles with a happy mind. People who think positively never get discouraged. They start doing things in new ways no matter how many obstacles they face. In addition, positive thinking greatly reduces stress. It keeps the body physically and mentally well. It reduces the body's illness and boosts the immune system. In the past days, the sages said that "too much worry would make your hair dry." In fact, when we think too much negatively, we will not only feel increasingly unhealthy, but will also feel older. Negative thoughts cause the body to lose energy. When we think more positively, our body is better. The body and mind are more cheerful.

It is important to remember that positive thoughts, actions, habits and attitudes play an important role in making us a good character and a happy person. A positive attitude or mindset always helps to do better. On the other hand, negative mentality has a bad effect on our mind and brain, which leads to bad actions and bad thoughts. That's why practicing positive thoughts and positive actions in our daily life is essential to make ourselves a positive person. A person with a positive attitude can endure any obstacle and

disappointment. Everyone has depression and failure in their lives; these failures give us experiences in life but if we don't learn from these experiences and apply them in a positive way, it becomes difficult to achieve the main goals of life again, every experience in life teaches something new. Make it a habit to appreciate such experiences. When our brain appreciates something good, we have a surprisingly pleasant effect. The more we can enjoy such happiness, the more good times will naturally come into our lives.

According to experts, the primary emotional needs of human beings are independence, competence and enlightenment. Freedom is the concept of being able to choose your own path in life. Skill is believing you can achieve your goals. And relationships or knowledge are the beliefs that help you stay connected to significant people in your life. Not all individuals may always get these needs (independence, skills, and knowledge) right, but self belief can help the individual achieve them. That's why we should focus on our own needs and focus on how to be motivated with positive thoughts.

It turns out that many people focus only on their mistakes and negative events or qualities-making their lives frustrating with a negative outlook by focusing more on things they have less experience with, things they know less than others, or things that have failed. To build our self-confidence and positive outlook, we should always focus on our good qualities and make the best use of them to make our life different. Also, to create a good image of ourselves, we should focus on positive qualities, character and various aspects of our personality. It will help a person to become more confident and positive thinking person.

In addition, positive attitudes have a profound effect on social relationships. No one likes a person who is angry or cruel or our society also often avoid such people. Everyone wants to be with or talk to people who are optimistic, tolerant and kind. So instead of looking at the negative aspects of other people, focus on the positive aspects. We should always try to know the people around us, who they are, and try to speak to them with the respect they deserve. These also help to develop a positive attitude in a person. At the same time, we should try to think positively about others and try to develop an attitude of love and kindness. This kind of thinking will make us caring and kind first to ourselves, then to those around us, to strangers, and finally to all living things. If we think good, positive thoughts towards everyone on a regular basis, our mind will help us to develop pleasant, loving thoughts towards others and gradually violence, hatred, jealousy and dislike will disappear from society.

Likewise, we should try to keep ourselves focused on good deeds every day. It is easy to focus on the bad but hard to focus on the good. We have a natural tendency towards pessimism, which makes it difficult to focus on the positive. That is why we must try to divert our attention from unpleasant thoughts. Usually our mind wanders in deep darkness most of the time and thinks more about all the bad things. Therefore, to develop a positive attitude, we should focus on something good and avoid wrong thoughts as much as possible. This process will help us to get rid of negative thoughts and help us focus more on positive thoughts. Being optimistic is a huge part of confidence, which can lead to good-natured habits. So imagine the best scenario of life or focus on the positive things that can happen from it. A good outcome can definitely be achieved by focusing on the positive qualities of the future and paying attention to its outcome by thinking positively.

We should always talk to or make friends with positive thinking people. It is often seen that many people in relationships with us always complain about their lives when they talk, talking about nothing but their problems. In contact with such people, a good thinker will gradually be forced to have such negative thinking. Even if you feel good, you will feel bad. So always try to walk or talk to positive people. When the people around us are positive, no negative thoughts can enter our minds.

Finally, there are times in life when it becomes difficult to maintain positive thinking. In fact, to develop positive thoughts and attitudes, we must learn to enjoy life to the fullest. We have to slowly ignore what others are saying or the negative things other people around us are saying, the negative things that happen in society every day, and try to find the positive in everything every day. When a person starts thinking positively, gradually there will be positive changes in his life. Life will become much easier and happier if you can take positive thinking as a part of your character. If every person in the society can avoid all kinds of bad things, dishonest deeds, and negative thoughts and cleanse the mental aspect with positive thoughts and attitudes and move forward in the society and the nation, then we will soon be able to achieve a beautiful and successful society. (The writer is CRCC of Nalbari Cluster, Biswanath Education Block, Education Department, Assam. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

BOOK REVIEW

'Kef' Azintak' is the first short story collection set against the backdrop of the Karbi community

By: Deborshi Gautam

The title "Kef" Azintak" itself seems to conceal a mystery. Hearing the title sparks curiosity about its meaning. "Kef" Azintak" means the drum of the coppersmith barbet. This collection of stories is authored by the promising Assamese writer, Ajay Kumar Bora. Bora has included a total of 13 stories in this collection, addressing various aspects of the Karbi community, such as social, political, and economic dimensions, making each story highly engaging.

"Kef" Azintak" is the first short story collection written about the Karbi community, one of the prominent communities residing in Assam. Bora beautifully and captivatingly presents the Karbi social customs, tales of movements in the Karbi region, and various rituals and traditions in each story.

The Assamese meaning of "Kef" Azintak" is "the drum of the coppersmith barbet." The writer has skillfully incorporated many Karbi words with their Assamese translations throughout the collection. The first story in Ajay Kumar Bora's collection is titled "Lodep," which means "Deodhani" in Assamese.

The story provides a detailed account of what "Lodep" means in the Karbi context, which is a kind of religious tradition for the Karbi people, rooted in their ancestral heritage. To fully understand this tradition, readers must read the story in its entirety.

The second story is "Hemprek," meaning "sepa-

rate house" in Assamese. The use of this Karbi word as a title creates special intrigue. The story explores what "Hemprek" actually means and its significance in Karbi society. The third story is "Farang Keteng," which translates to "preparations for the Heaven festival" in Assamese. The fourth story, "Ser Aranan," means "golden ring." The fifth story, "Jeroy Ankabe," translates to "warrior of the state." The sixth story, "Kef" Azintak," shares its title with the collection. The seventh story, "Teke Hum Marjeng," means "millet." The eighth story, "Kanghan," translates to "love." The ninth story, "Meng," means "cat." The tenth story, "Munit Langn," translates to "bad person." The eleventh story, "Chamangan," means "death anniversary." The twelfth story, "Kangthung," means "desire." The thirteenth story, "Kur Kangthur," translates to "chosen by the community."

Each story title is intriguing and the author presents the contents in a way that touches every layer of the Karbi community. Since there are thirteen stories in the collection, analyzing each in detail would be lengthy. Thus, the titles and their Assamese translations are provided for the readers' convenience. The Karbi words used as titles are sure to pique readers' curiosity, making them eager to discover what the author has depicted in each story. Ajay Kumar Bora's "Kef" Azintak" guarantees that readers will learn many unknown aspects of the Karbi community and gain insights into their known traditions and practices. This collection has the potential to serve as an informative book in the future.



the Karbi community shows his broad-mindedness. (The author can be reached at gautamdeborshi@gmail.com)

POETRY

Ripples of Love (A love duet)

Part 1
By: Dr. Zakia Shumi Shetu

Love, you are my solitary river,
Like your ripples, I simply flow along.

At night, stars fall from my eyes in the full moon,
In the river of your heart, I bloom as a blue lotus of pain.
Beneath the full moon's luminous glow,
Stars cascade, from eyes that overflow.

Reflecting the depths of love's expanse,
In the river of your heart, I find my place,
A blue lotus blooming with delicate grace.

Nurtured by the waters, both deep and wide,
Love's essence, in your embrace, does reside.
So let us flow, like rivers entwined,
Through the valleys of time, our souls aligned.
Our love anew,

In the river of our heart, forever true.

Part 2
By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

Sometimes, words in my forest weep
Sometimes, words scream out loud
in my poor heart
And sometimes, words of uncontrolled love
gush through my veins like a fountain

when you feel hurt
You made me feel so wonderfully the essence of life
Making me oblivious of noisy cafe
of struggles and strife
We both are poets scribbling spontaneously
We live and die in our poems of timeless time
Sometime before we are able to compose for each other our golden rhymes.

It's Mad to Fight a Beast

By: Navanjyoti Baruah

What will you do
If a pack of demented beasts chases you?
A blue stocking you're
If you alter your path.
The flow of the river can't be changed
But you can't take a boat
To cross the sea of desires.

If they're animals and live like barbarians
Let them live happily with that life.
You can't change the system,
Change yourselves at least to live.
Because it's mad to fight a beast.

Love

By: Mowsam Hazarika

Two minds merging as one-
Who taught us this, Love?

To share the secrets of the soul-
Who taught us this, Love?

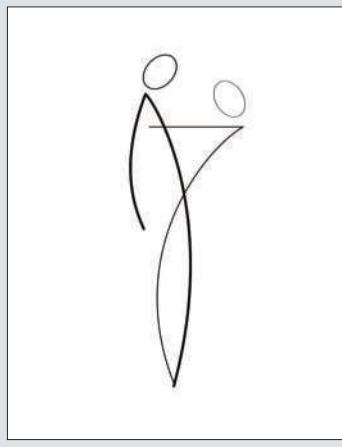
To reveal our deepest shame-
Who taught us this, Love?

To be close and intimate-
Who taught us this, Love?

To bear responsibility-
Who taught us this, Love?

To endure and survive-
Who taught us this, Love?

To truly understand Love-
Who taught us this, Love?



'My Mother Is My God'

By: Maharshi Dubey

My mother loves me a lot,
I am her child, she is my god.
She feeds me first then she eats,
She puts me to sleep first then she sleeps,
She monitors my activities and watch,
My mother loves me a lot.

I am star of her eyes,
I am her world, I am her life,
She works hard to provide me better life,
She struggles hard to make my future bright,
My mother cares me a lot,
I am her child, she is my god.

Ukraine marks 33rd Independence anniversary as war against Russia rages

KYIV, Aug 24: A somber atmosphere pervades Ukraine's 33rd Independence Day on Saturday, as the nation's war against Russia's aggression reaches a 30-month milestone. No fireworks, parades or concerts are planned and instead Ukrainians will mark the day with commemorations for civilians and soldiers killed in the war.

Ukrainians have flooded social media with messages of gratitude and support, greeting each other and thanking the soldiers on the front lines. In the outpouring of unity, there's a shared acknowledgment that the two-and-a-half years have been tough, with fatigue in-

creasingly setting in.

"Independence is the silence we experience when we lose our people," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said to the nation. "Independence descends into the shelter during an air raid, only to endure and rise again and again to tell the enemy: You will achieve nothing."

Zelenskyy pointed out that the war started by Russia has now spread to its own territory. "Those who seek to sow evil on our land will reap its fruits on their own soil," he said, referring to Ukraine's incursion earlier this month into Russia's Kursk region.



The president symbolically chose to record his address in the northeastern town of Sumy, just a few kilometers from the Russian border, where Ukrainian forces crossed into Russia on August 6. "913 days ago, Russia launched its war against us, partly through

Sumy region," Zelenskyy said. "They violated not only sovereign borders but also the boundaries of cruelty and common sense, driven by an insatiable desire to destroy us."

Ukraine's surprise incursion into Russia's Kursk region, gave the war a startling turn, adding a new front to the conflict to counter Russia's grinding advances in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region. Ukraine quickly seized considerable Russian territory, including scores of small towns, and captured hundreds of Russian soldiers, moves that may influence the war's trajectory.

"And those who sought to turn our lands into a buffer zone should now worry that their own country doesn't become a buffer federation," he said. "This is how independence responds."

Ukraine's military claims to hold 1,200 square kilometers of Russian territory in Kursk, and in the past week it has also launched drone attacks that have struck strategic bridges and Russian airfields and drone bases.

Even as Ukraine presses its offensive into Russia, however, it is also evacuating residents from Pokrovsk in eastern Ukraine, as Russian forces are now 10 kilome-

ters from the strategic city.

Residents of Pokrovsk, once a city of 60,000, on Friday registered for evacuation at a central school and then, carrying bundles of belongings, boarded trains to take them to areas further from the conflict.

Also on Friday, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the capital, Kyiv. After hugging Zelenskyy, Modi offered "as a friend" to help bring peace to Ukraine. The Indian leader's visit, although brief, raised hopes among many in the war-battered country that he will help pave the way for an Indian role in peace mediation. (AP)

More than 100 hostages were released during a cease-fire last year, but Hamas is still believed to be holding around 110 more

Dozens killed in strikes in southern Gaza as preparations for cease-fire talks move forward

CAIRO, Aug 24: At least three dozen Palestinians were killed in multiple Israeli strikes in the southern Gaza Strip, officials said on Saturday, even as preparations moved ahead for high-level cease-fire talks in the Egyptian capital.

Among the dead were 11 members of the same family, including two children, when an Israeli airstrike hit their home in the city of Khan Younis early on Saturday, according to Nasser Hospital where the bodies and wounded were taken.

The hospital received a total of 33 dead who were killed in three separate strikes in and around Khan Younis. The city's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital said it had received another three bodies from an early on Saturday strike.

Seventeen others were killed when a strike hit a road south of Khan Younis, including the passengers on a tuk-tuk and passers-by, Nasser Hospital said.

Another strike hit a tuk-tuk east of Khan Younis, killing at least five people. The Israeli military said it was looking into the reports but had no immediate comment.

First responders also recovered 10 bodies from a residential block west of Khan Younis, six from the

Hamad City area of Khan Younis, and two farther south in Rafah. The circumstances of their deaths were not immediately clear, the hospital said, but the areas were repeatedly bombed by the Israeli military over the past week.

An Associated Press journalist at the hospital counted the bodies and filmed the funeral service in the hospital's courtyard.

The war in Gaza broke out Oct. 7 when Hamas and other militants staged a surprise attack on Israel, killing some 1,200 people, primarily civilians.

More than 100 hostages were released during a cease-fire last year, but Hamas is still believed to be holding around 110 more, about a third of whom are dead, according to estimates from Israeli authorities.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed more than 40,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count.

It has also caused widespread destruction and forced the vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million residents to flee their homes.

Experts were meeting Saturday to work through technical issues



and pave the way for the high-level talks Sunday on a possible cease-fire mediated by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

A Hamas delegation arrived Saturday in Cairo to meet with Egyptian and Qatari officials, senior Hamas official Mahmoud Merdawy told the AP. He stressed that Hamas will not take part directly in the Sunday talks, but instead will be briefed by Egypt and Qatar.

An Israeli delegation that arrived Thursday included David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence service, the head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, and top general

over a wider regional war after the recent targeted killings of leaders of the militant Hamas and Hezbollah groups, both blamed on Israel.

Biden called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday to stress the urgency of reaching a cease-fire and hostage release deal, and discussed developments with the leaders of Qatar and Egypt on Friday.

A major impasse has been the Philadelphia corridor alongside Gaza's border with Egypt and the Netzarim east-west corridor across the territory.

Hamas is demanding a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, while Netanyahu has insisted that Israel must retain control of the corridors.

Hamas political official Bassem Naim said last week that the working proposal at the time had adopted Netanyahu's demands, including that Israeli forces remain in control of both the Philadelphia and Netzarim corridors.

Ahead of Sunday's talks, Merdawy said Hamas' position had not changed from accepting an earlier draft that would include the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. (AP)

Police search for an attacker who killed 3 in a knife attack in the German city of Solingen

SOLINGEN (GERMANY), Aug 24: A large-scale search was underway on Saturday in the western German city of Solingen after three people were killed and at least eight others wounded five of them seriously, in a knife attack at a festival.

"The police are currently conducting a large-scale search for the perpetrator," police said in a statement. They have assembled a large number of forces around Solingen city center, including special units. "Both victims and witnesses are currently being questioned," they said.

Police have also established an online portal where witnesses can upload information relevant to the attack.

People alerted police shortly after 9:30 pm Friday to an unknown attacker having wounded several people with a knife on a central square, the Fronhof. Police said that the perpetrator was on the run, and that they so far had only very thin information on the assailant.

They said they believe the stabbings were carried out by a lone attacker and gave no information about the identities of the victims.

The "Festival of Diversity," marking the city's 650th anniversary, began Friday and was supposed to run through Sunday, with several stages in central streets offering attractions such as live music, cabaret and acrobatics.

One of the festival organizers, Philipp Muller, appeared on stage on Friday and asked

festivalgoers to "go calmly; please keep your eyes open, because unfortunately the perpetrator hasn't been caught." Solingen has about 1,60,000 residents and is located near the bigger cities of Cologne and Duesseldorf.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Saturday that the perpetrator of the attack must be caught quickly and punished with the full force of the law.

"The attack in Solingen is a terrible event that has shocked me greatly. An attacker has brutally killed several people. I have just spoken to Solingen's mayor, Tim Kurzbach. We mourn the victims and stand by their families," Scholz said on X.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier also spoke to the mayor of Solingen on Saturday morning.

"The heinous act in Solingen shocks me and our country. We mourn those killed and worry about those injured and I wish them strength and a speedy recovery from all my heart," Steinmeier said in a statement on Saturday. "The perpetrator needs to be brought to justice. Let's stand together — against hatred and violence."

There has been concern about increased knife violence in Germany, and Interior Minister Nancy Faeser recently proposed toughening weapons laws to allow only knives with a blade measuring up to 6 centimeters to be carried in public, rather than the length of 12 centimeters that is currently allowed. (AP)



Philippines says flares fired from a Chinese island base threatened its fisheries plane

MANILA, Aug 24: A Philippine fisheries bureau plane was threatened by flares fired from a Chinese island base while conducting a routine patrol in the South China Sea, Philippine officials said Saturday, the latest territorial spat between Beijing and Manila over one of the world's busiest trade routes, with confrontations spreading from the disputed waters to the airspace above.

China has been at odds with several other countries in the Asia-Pacific for years over its sweeping maritime claims, including almost all of the South China Sea.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources' Cessna 208B Grand Caravan plane was flying near Subi Reef on Thursday when it spotted flares being fired from the fishing atoll, which China has transformed into a militarised island base, a Philippine government interagency task force said in a statement.

No other details were provided, including the distance of the flares from the Philippine plane and if it proceeded with its patrol to monitor for poachers in the internationally recognised



exclusive economic zone of the Philippines.

The same Philippine fisheries plane was subjected to "harassment" on August 19 when a Chinese air force fighter jet "engaged in irresponsible and dangerous manoeuvres, deploying flares multiple times at a dangerously close distance of approximately 15 metres (yards)" near the disputed Scarborough Shoal, the Philippine task force said.

"The Chinese fighter jet was not provoked, yet its actions demonstrated hazardous intent that jeopardised the safety of the personnel onboard the BFAR aircraft," according to the task force, which includes the Department of National Defence, the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine coast guard.

Chinese officials did not immediately respond to a

request for comment, but they have previously accused Philippine ships and aircraft of encroaching into what they said was Chinese territory in the sea passage.

"We firmly reiterate our call on the government of the People's Republic of China to immediately cease all provocative and dangerous actions that threaten the safety of Philippine vessels and aircraft engaged in legitimate and regular activities within Philippine territory and exclusive economic zone," the Philippine task force said. "Such actions undermine regional peace and security and further erode the image of the PRC with the international community."

The United States, Manila's longtime treaty ally, also condemned China over the firing of flares at Philippine aircraft over the two shoals. (AP)

Moscow and Kyiv exchange attacks as Ukraine marks independence anniversary

KYIV, Aug 24: Russia and Ukraine exchanged drone, missile and artillery attacks on Saturday as Kyiv marked its third Independence Day since Moscow's full-scale invasion.

Two people were killed and four were wounded, including a baby, when Russian forces shelled the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson, the capital of the partially occupied Kherson region, according to local officials. Ukraine's air force said it had intercepted and destroyed seven drones over the country's south. Russian long-range bombers also attacked the area of Zmiyni (Snake) Island with four cruise missiles, while the wider Kherson region was also struck by aerial bombs.

In Russia, the Defense Ministry said Saturday that air defenses had shot down seven drones overnight.

Five drones were downed over the southwestern Voronezh region bordering Ukraine, wounding two people, regional Gov. Aleksandr Gusev said. News outlet Astra published videos appearing to show explosions at an ammunition depot after being hit by a drone. The videos could not be independently verified.

Two people were wounded in a drone attack in the Belgorod region, also bordering Ukraine, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Local authorities did not report any casualties in the Bryansk region, where the fifth drone was intercepted. In the Kursk region, where Ukrainian forces launched their surprise offensive into Russia two weeks ago, regional Gov. Alexei Smirnov said Saturday that three missiles were shot down overnight and another four on Saturday morning.

Russian air defenses shot down two more drones on Saturday morning, Russia's Defense Ministry said — one over the Kursk region and one over the Bryansk region. Ukraine marked its 33rd Independence Day Saturday as its war against Russia's aggression reaches a 30-month milestone. No festivities are planned and instead Ukrainians will mark the day with commemorations for civilians and soldiers killed in the war.

Poland's President Andrzej Duda arrived by train early Saturday to Kyiv in a symbolic show of support from one of Ukraine's key allies.

Videos posted by his office show him being greeted by Ukrainian officials and later paying his respects in a ceremony at the Wall of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine.

Duda's visit to Kyiv, his fifth since February 2022, sends a message that Warsaw's support for Ukraine remains strong as the war drags on for the third year. Poland, located to Ukraine's west, has donated arms and become a hub for Western weapons destined for Ukraine. It has also welcomed tens of thousands of Ukrainians who fled the war. It hosts the most Ukrainian refugees outside of the country after Germany. (AP)



Turkey and Russia resume joint patrols in northern Syria as Ankara seeks to mend ties with Assad

ISTANBUL, Aug 24: Turkey and Russia have resumed joint military patrols in northern Syria after nearly a year's break, the Turkish Defence Ministry announced Saturday.

Combined patrols began in the Operation Peace Spring area, the statement said, referring to a 30-km (19-mile)-deep strip of land on the Syrian side of the Turkey-Syria border between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn. The territory was captured from Kurdish fighters by Turkish and allied Syrian forces in 2019.

The renewed Turkish-Russian patrols come as Ankara is trying to repair its relations with Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose regime draws support from Moscow.

Assad has said he will only meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to discuss the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Syria and an end to Ankara's support for Syrian fighters that Damascus considers terrorists.

Turkish and Russian soldiers first began joint operations in the area in November 2019, conduct-

ing 344 patrols until October last year, when they were suspended, the ministry said.

Some 24 Turkish personnel in four vehicles took part in the first resumed patrol on Thursday at the eastern end of the Operation Peace Spring area. "It is planned to continue the United Land Patrol...to ensure the security of our country's borders and the civilian population in the region (and) to establish stability in northern Syria," the ministry said in its statement.

The operation would also identify "checkpoints, headquarters and military structures" of Kurdish fighters known as the YPG.

Turkey considers the YPG a terrorist organization due to its links to the PKK, which has fought a 40-year insurgency against Ankara, leading to tens of thousands of deaths.

The United States, however, partnered with the YPG in 2014 to fight the Islamic State group in Syria and continues to support the Kurdish fighters under the umbrella of the Syrian Democratic Forces. (AP)

Fasting and puja can coexist in Bangladesh, says interim govt advisor

DHAKA, Aug 24: The Religious Affairs Adviser of the interim government in Bangladesh has asserted that there is no problem in observing fasting and puja at the same time in the country as he called for building a harmonious state where all faiths coexist peacefully.

Bangladesh saw several incidents of violence against members of Hindu, Buddhist and Christian communities following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government earlier this month. The Bangladesh National Hindu Grand Alliance said the minority community faced attacks and threats in 278 locations across 48 districts since the fall of the Hasina-led government. Several Hindu temples, homes and businesses

of the minority community in Bangladesh were destroyed this month amidst the student-led unrest against quotas in government jobs.

Thousands of Bangladeshi Hindus have been trying to flee to neighbouring India to escape the violence.

Speaking to Muslim devotees before Friday's Jumma prayers at Hazrat Usman Jame Masjid in the Halishahar area of Chattogram district, Religious Affairs Adviser Dr A F M Khalid Hossain called for building a country of religious harmony where people of all faiths would live peacefully, the state-run BSS news agency reported.

"I want to give the nation a harmonious state. Bangladesh is a country of communal harmony. There is no problem in

observing fasting and puja at the same time in this country. Everyone will practice and publicise his or her own religion freely. It is a civic right of all," he said.

In the changed situation after the fall of the Awami League government, some miscreants attacked and vandalised the places of worship and houses of Hindus, Buddhists and Christians, Hossain said.

"Propaganda has also been spread in some foreign media to tarnish the image of the country," he said, adding that those who are trying to destroy communal harmony will be tackled by taking stern actions.

Hossain sought everyone's cooperation to maintain law and order and a harmonious environment in Bangladesh. (PTT)

Nikki Haley says isolationist policy is not healthy while showing support for Trump in Taiwan

TAIPEI, Aug 24: Former US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, put in good words for Republican nominee Donald Trump on Saturday during her visit to Taiwan, saying that an isolationist policy isn't "healthy" and called on her party to stand with her country's allies.

Haley, who ran against Trump for the party's presidential nomination, told reporters in the capital, Taipei, that supporting US allies, including Ukraine and Israel, was vital while underscoring the importance of Taiwan — which Beijing claims as its territory to be brought under control by force if necessary. "I don't think the isolationist approach is healthy. I think America can



never sit in a bubble and think that we won't be affected," she said.

While the US doesn't formally recognise Taiwan, it is the island's strongest backer and main arms provider. However, Trump's attempt to reclaim the presidency has fuelled worries. He said Taiwan should pay for US protection in an interview with Bloomberg Businessweek published in July and dodged answering

the question of whether he would defend the island against a possible Chinese military action.

When Haley shuttered her own bid for the GOP nomination, she did not immediately endorse Trump, having accused him of causing chaos and disregarding the importance of US alliances abroad. But in May she said she would be voting for him while making it clear that she felt her

former boss had work to do to win over voters who supported her.

On Saturday, she said that having previously served with Trump's administration, "we did show American strength in the world", pointing to their pushback against China and their sanctioning of Russia and North Korea among other efforts.

"I think that all of that strength that we showed is the reason that we didn't see any wars, we didn't see any invasions, we didn't see any harm that happened during that time. I think Donald Trump would bring that back," she said. Haley also criticised Trump's rival US Vice President Kamala Harris, saying she would "do exactly" what President Joe

Biden had done. She said Harris was part of his administration when the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021, when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 and when the Hamas-Israel war broke out last year.

"She was in the situation room right next to Joe Biden. She was there making the exact same decisions. Those decisions have made the world less safe," she said. Haley added that while the Republicans and Democrats may not currently concur on much, they agree on "the threats of China," adding that Taiwan is now looking "to make sure that if China starts a fight with them, that they are prepared to make sure that they can fight back." (AP)

Send all-party delegation to Centre: TPC President

Relief for flood devastation

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Aug 24: Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee President Asish Kumar Saha on Saturday wrote a letter to the Tripura Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu urging to provide adequate compensation to the flood-affected families.

He further asked the Governor to direct the appropriate authority to send an all-party delegation to the Central Government to brief about the magnitude of the disaster and seek sufficient central assistance to manage flood relief, rehabilitation efforts and infrastructure build-up.

In the letter, PCC President Saha said that the recent floods in Tripura have left a trail of destruction, affecting lakhs of residents.

"Due to flood, thousands of people have been rendered homeless and about 26 people killed on the unprecedented deluge. The floods have severely damaged infrastructure across the state. Flood water overflowed the agricultural paddy fields



and pisciculture ponds thereby completely washing away of fishes from ponds. Many people who maintained their livelihood upon livestock had a bolt from the blue. They witnessed helplessly how their economy and financial sustenance ruined before them as all were drowned in the

flood water", he said.

Saha said that in many areas mud walls of dwelling houses collapsed. The relentless downpour has also triggered landslides, further exacerbating the crisis. Public buildings, including schools and hospitals, have been inundated, hampering relief and

rescue operations.

Saha added, "The spurt of flood water was so fast that the last belongings of the people could not be saved. Such alarming and scary situations could be witnessed in both rural and urban areas. People are in huge suffering and they are bewildered so much so that they have reached a state of mental trauma. Lack of clean drinking water and proper sanitation facilities is posing a serious health risk with the potential for water-borne diseases to spread rapidly. The immediate need for food, clothing and medical aid is critical, considering the above facts, I believe that the Union Government have allotted and/or will allot relief funds, to grant relief to the victims of the flood."

He further said, "Hereupon, may I request you to ensure that the administrative machinery of the Government of Tripura should be engaged with a free hand to determine the extent of damage caused to the individ-

ual families affected by the flood in a transparent way such that the survey report which would be the basis of providing relief funds is authentic and that it should not be biased by the political colour of by any caste creed or religion."

Saha further demanded the Governor to direct the appropriate authority to send an all-party delegation to the Central Government to brief about the magnitude of the disaster and seek sufficient central assistance to manage flood relief, rehabilitation efforts and infrastructure build-up.

"I would also request you to direct the authority to constitute all party committees at Assembly Constituency, Sub-division, District and State levels are headed by government officials to monitor and be the watchdogs of the people. On behalf of my party, assure you of full co-operation at this critical juncture where people are in a mental trauma due to immense loss of property and belongings," the letter added.

Biren Singh accuses opposition of hampering national unity



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, today at a press conference, called out the opposition Congress party for trying to sow discord and hamper the national integrity.

In the wake of the decision by the INC to join hands with the National Conference (NC) at Jammu and Kashmir, Singh highlighted the importance of national unity and integrity of India as he expressed his dissatisfaction with the opposition's actions.

CM Singh further said that he held a high-level meeting with the visiting military officials, including Major General Ravroop Singh, Inspector General of Assam Rifles (South), at his secretariat yesterday. The topics of discussion included the ongoing violence in the state of Manipur and the essential

steps needed to restore peace.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister provided the visiting officers with relevant documents, including a map of Manipur, and expressed optimism that their deliberations would lead to positive actions upon their return to Delhi.

Furthermore, addressing questions about the progress of Manipur's railway project, Singh revealed that he recently discussed the matter with the railway minister during his visit to Delhi. He pointed out that construction work on the project had been stalled due to a landslide in the Noney area and other unresolved issues.

The state government is actively working to address these challenges and is committed to compensating for any grievances to ensure the early completion of the project.

Transgender community comes to the rescue

Distributes aid to flood victims

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Aug 24: In a remarkable act of compassion and community spirit, members of the transgender community in Agartala have come forward to support flood victims, distributing essential commodities to those in need on Saturday. Amid this ongoing crisis, a group of transgender individuals has taken it upon themselves to assist those displaced by the floods, particularly in the relief camps scattered throughout Agartala.

Bandhana, a prominent transgender leader spearheading the relief efforts, spoke to reporters about their initiative. "The devastating floods have brought immense suffering to our state, including Agartala city. Many have sought refuge in relief camps, and we felt it was our responsibility to offer our support," she said.

Reflecting on the respect and recognition the transgender community has received from society, Bandhana emphasized the importance of giving back. "Our community has always been supported by society, and now, in turn, we believe it is our

duty to help others in their time of need."

She highlighted the guidance of their spiritual leader, Guru Maa Mala Masi, who, upon hearing of the situation from Kolkata, immediately instructed them to assist those in distress. "With the money we have saved, along with donations we've received, we have gathered essential items like rice, lentils, potatoes, onions, and salt. Today, we will visit 10 to 12 relief camps to distribute these supplies."

Bandhana's words carried a message of unity and mutual support. "Many are facing severe hardships due to the flood. It is our time to stand by them. When society has done so much for us, it's only right that we now do something for the victims. We ask for everyone's blessings as we strive to make a positive impact."

This inspiring effort by the transgender community in Agartala not only provides much-needed relief to flood victims but also exemplifies the power of compassion and solidarity in the face of adversity.

2 killed during rescue operations

AGARTALA, Aug 24: Two persons have been killed during rescue operations in flood-hit Tripura, officials said on Saturday.

Tripura State Rifles (TSR) jawan Ashish Bose washed away in a river during a rescue operation in South Tripura's Belonia while jeep driver Chiranjit Deb drowned while rescuing three persons in Indranagar in West Tripura district on Friday.

With the fresh fatalities, the toll in the state due to the floods rose to 26, while 1.28 lakh people have been rendered homeless in the worst deluge in the northeastern state in the last three decades. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi condoled the deaths during rescue operations.

"Extremely pained to learn about the tragic loss of two brave jawans during the rescue operation in flood-hit Tripura. Their selfless service, courage and sacrifice will always be remembered. My deepest condolences to their bereaved families. The nation stands

with them in this difficult time," Gandhi wrote on X.

Chief Minister Manik Saha also expressed deep sorrow over the deaths of two persons.

"Deeply saddened by the loss of Ashish Bose (TSR Jawan from Belonia) & Chiranjit Dey (from Indranagar), two brave fighters who made the ultimate sacrifice while saving others during #TripuraFloods. My deepest condolences to their families & friends. May their sacrifice continue to inspire us to strive for greater heights of courage and bravery. Their selfless act will never be forgotten," he said in a post on Facebook.

Senior Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman also condoled the deaths of two persons.

"The devastating floods have claimed many lives. Two brave hearts also lost their lives while rescuing people. I convey my deepest condolences to those who lost their lives during the floods," he wrote on Facebook. (PTI)

Pay heed to guidance of visionary leaders: Nagaland guv



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Aug 24: Nagaland governor La Ganesan said the state is lagging behind others as the state is not "paying heed to the guidance of pioneers and visionary leaders like Dr. Imkongliba Ao."

Paying homage to Ao on his 6th martyrdom day observation

at Raj Bhavan in Kohima on Saturday, Ganesan said he was a visionary leader who, about 60 years ago, foresaw a peaceful and prosperous Nagaland.

"Had his opponents and critics heeded his vision then, we would be in a far better situation today," Ganesan noted.

He also emphasised that the Nagas are just as talented and forward-thinking as any other communities in India, adding Nagaland should be as developed as any other state in the country.

He urged the gathering to live as model citizens of the country so that the legacy of great personalities like Ao would live on.

Army chief general's visit testament to Centre's desire to restore peace: Biren



IMPHAL, Aug 24: Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh said on Saturday that the visit of Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi shows that the Centre is concerned about the ethnic violence in the northeastern state and is keen to restore peace.

He also said the chief of the army staff visited Manipur at a crucial juncture.

Singh, responding to media queries at the CM's Secretariat here, said, "The chief of army staff came along with three or four commanders, including that of Eastern Command. We deliberated on many issues and his main purpose was to restore peace in the state at the earliest. He also discussed issues in border areas and the crisis in the neighbouring country."

General Dwivedi reviewed the security situation along the international border in Manipur, an army statement said.

He lauded the efforts of the Indian Army and Assam Rifles towards the maintenance of peace and harmony in the area.

Singh said, "His visit at the crucial juncture of the

state shows that the Centre is concerned about the crisis in Manipur and keen to restore peace. The army chief general instructed some of the senior officers to take action after due discussions with the government of Manipur."

Over 200 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence in Manipur between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjacent hills-based Kukis since May last year.

On the Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact among the Centre, the Manipur government and Kuki militant outfits, Singh said, "There has been no concrete instruction from the Centre about this."

The CM had earlier informed the assembly that the state cabinet, after seeing the unwanted activities of the militant groups, withdrew from the pact in March 2023 and the agreement had not been extended from February 29 this year.

The SoO pact was signed by the Centre, the Manipur government and two conglomerates of Kuki militant outfits - Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and the United People's Front (UPF). The pact was signed in 2008 and extended periodically thereafter.

As part of the SoO pact, a joint monitoring group (JMG), comprising representatives of central and state government agencies, the KNO and UPF, was formed to oversee adherence to the ground rules.

Singh also thanked Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and all the members of the Assam assembly for their initiatives to pass a Bill to allow the Manipuri language as an associate official language in four districts of the state.

"It is a long-standing demand for the Manipuris residing in Assam and I want to show my appreciation, on behalf of the state, to Sarma and all other members of the Assam assembly," (PTI)

NDRF conducts flood rescue operations; 1479 evacuated



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Aug 24: In response to the floods caused by incessant rains in Tripura, the 1st Battalion National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has been conducting comprehensive flood rescue operations in the state since August 20 and evacuated 1479 people.

As per NDRF, the operation aims to provide immediate assistance and relief to the affected communities.

11 Teams of highly trained rescue personnel, equipped with state-of-the-art boats, deep diving sets, and life-saving equipment, have been deployed to the worst-affected areas. As of August 23, a total of 1479 people have been evacuated from flood-affected areas.

NDRF teams are also assisting district administrations in distributing relief material to the affected population, ensuring that essential supplies reach those in need.

"NDRF is always ready to assist people in need, regardless of adverse conditions. We are committed to providing aid and support to those affected by the floods in Tripura," said HPS Kandari, Commandant 1st Battalion NDRF, who is stationed in Tripura and supervising the flood rescue operation.

Multi-disciplinary team to assess GLOF risks in Sikkim

GANGTOK, Aug 24: A multi-disciplinary team will conduct a study of five high-risk glacial lakes in Sikkim's Mangan district, a senior state government official said.

The team will conduct a detailed susceptibility assessment of five high-risk glacial lakes - Khangchung Choo, Gurudongmar Lake A, Gurudongmar Lake B, Gurudongmar Lake C and Shako Chu in Mangan district, Sikkim government's Science and Technology department secretary, Sandeep Tambe said on Friday.

The team will also conduct a community outreach expedition in the Mangan district.

Tambe said the multi-disciplinary team will focus on reducing the hazard from glacial lakes.

He said the team will take a four-step approach which includes preliminary identification of the high-risk lakes, multi-disciplinary studies, actual structural interventions and mitigation plans.

Tambe said Sikkim has 16 high-risk glacial lakes of which 13 are in Mangan district, and three are in Gyalshing district.

The team will have members of Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority (SSDMA), Sci-

ence and Technology department, Mines, Geology, Land Revenue and Disaster Management, Water Resources, Forest and Environment department, Sikkim University, Geological Survey of India and Central Water Commission, he said.

The Indian Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police will provide all necessary assistance to the multi-disciplinary team.

The multi-disciplinary team expedition will be from August 28 to September 14, he said.

Relief Commissioner Namrata Thapa said to mitigate the risk of glacial lake outburst floods in future, the government has established a technical committee tasked with reviewing the current status of glacial lakes in the state. This committee comprises experts from various fields, who will assess the stability of these lakes and recommend necessary measures to minimise the risk of future disasters, she added.

Mines and Geology department Secretary Dicky Yangzom said her department will have seven members in the multi-disciplinary team which will conduct extensive studies to look into the SubSurface Geological conditions of these lakes. (PTI)

Army Chief reviews security situation in Manipur

IMPHAL, Aug 24: Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi reviewed the security situation along the international border in Manipur, an army statement said.

Gen Dwivedi is on a two-day visit to Manipur.

"The Army chief along with the Eastern Army Commander reviewed the security situation along the border and the internal security situation in the area", the statement said on Friday.

Gen Dwivedi lauded "the efforts of the Indian Army and Assam Rifles towards the maintenance of peace and harmony in the area," it said.

He also interacted with the veterans and appreciated their invaluable contributions towards nation-building and urged them to continue playing their part in contributing towards peace and spreading friendship among communities.

Gen Dwivedi on Friday also had an interaction with the Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh and held wide-ranging discussions covering various dimensions of the current security landscape.

The army chief assured the CM regarding the steadfast commitment of the Indian Army towards the maintenance of peace and harmony in the region, it said.

He also reaffirmed that all necessary assistance would be provided by the Indian Army towards the well-being of the populace, the statement added. (PTI)

Union minister hails cultural heritage of Meghalaya

SHILLONG, Aug 24: Union minister of state for jal shakti, Raj Bhushan Choudhary recently appreciated "the rich cultural heritage" of Meghalaya and said that the state holds a special place in the country with its unique landscapes and vibrant community.

He was addressing a press conference in Shillong on his third-day visit to Meghalaya after returning from South West Khasi Hills district.

During his address, the Union Minister stressed that it is the firm belief of the central government that the growth of Meghalaya should not only be rapid but also inclusive, sustainable, and in harmony with its environment. He enumerated a few of the initiatives and approaches of the central government that are aimed at ensuring the sustainable growth of Meghalaya.

Speaking about the infrastructure development in the region, the minister said that the central government has prioritised infrastructure development in the state recognising the strategic importance of Meghalaya in the Northeastern Region.

He said, "Under the Pradhan Mantri Gati Shakti National Master Plan, we are working to enhance road connectivity, improve rail and air infrastructure, and upgrade digital networks. This will not only open up new avenues for trade

and commerce but also ensure that the benefits of development reach the remotest corners of the state."

The minister was categorical when he said that the government's focus is on creating a balance between development and conservation, ensuring that Meghalaya's natural beauty is preserved for future generations. Through initiatives like the National Green Mission and the Climate Resilient Agriculture Program, the government is supporting the adoption of eco-friendly practices in agriculture, forestry, and other sectors.

"Meghalaya is blessed with natural resources, lush forests, and abundant biodiversity. To preserve this ecological wealth, we are committed to promoting sustainable development practices," he added.

The minister appreciated the fact that tourism is a key driver of economic growth in Meghalaya and apprised that in order to harness this potential further, the central government, in collaboration with the state government, has launched several initiatives under the Swadesh Darshan and PRASHAD schemes. He said that these initiatives aim to develop tourism circuits, improve infrastructure at tourist sites, and promote Meghalaya as a premier eco-tourism destination. (NNN)

2-day mega job fair inaugurated in Manipur

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Chief Minister N Biren Singh took to X on Saturday to announce the inauguration of a 2-day mega job fair under the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) at Liberal College, Luwangangbam, Imphal East.

He wrote, "Through various programs like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), we are taking significant steps towards a Viksit Bharat and Viksit Manipur, where every individual has the chance to contribute to and benefit from our state's progress."

The event, aimed at providing employment opportunities and career guidance, featured 30 stalls and was attended by State education minister Thounaojam Basantakumar and health minister Dr. Sapam Ranjan Singh.

Apart from the job fair, CM Singh also inaugurated several new facilities



at the college, including a new administrative building, the construction of an OBC Girl's Hostel, and Classroom Building-A. These developments are

part of ongoing efforts to enhance the infrastructure and learning environment at educational institutions in the state.

Singh emphasised the government's commitment to empowering the people of Manipur through comprehensive training and employment opportunities.

He wrote, "Through various programs like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), we are taking significant steps towards a Viksit Bharat and Viksit Manipur, where every individual has the chance to contribute to and benefit from our state's progress."

Highlighting the importance of education in the state's development, Singh added, "Education is the cornerstone of progress, and it is our duty to ensure that every student has access to quality learning environments." The inauguration of these new facilities is expected to significantly improve the educational experience for students at Liberal College and contribute to the overall progress of the region.

Will extend complete support to Congress-NC alliance if it accepts PDP agenda: Mehbooba

‘Resolution of the Kashmir problem is much more important than anything else’

SRINAGAR, Aug 24: The PDP will extend complete support to the Congress-NC alliance and leave all seats in the Jammu and Kashmir assembly elections to the coalition if it is ready to accept the party's agenda, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti said on Saturday.

Mehbooba also ruled out an alliance with the BJP, with which the People's Democratic Party (PDP) had earlier run a coalition government.

“Forget about alliance and seat-sharing, if the Congress and the National Conference (NC) are ready to accept our agenda – that resolution of the Kashmir issue is necessary and on opening of routes – we will tell them to contest on all the seats and we will follow you,” she said.

“Because, for me, the resolution of the Kashmir problem is much more important than anything else,” she added when asked if the Congress had approached the PDP for an alliance.

Mehbooba was talking to reporters following the release of the PDP's manifesto for the as-



sembly elections.

NC chief Farooq Abdullah has announced a pre-poll alliance with the Congress for the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, which is going to the polls for the first time since the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019.

Polls to the 90-member assem-

bly will be held in three phases – September 18, September 25 and October 1. The counting of votes will be held on October 4.

Mehbooba, the PDP president, said the dignity of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, which “was being trampled on”, was important for her party.

“Whether you give me three or four seats, it does not mean anything to me. When we entered into an alliance with either the Congress or the BJP, it was on our agenda. The NC and the Congress have not entered into an alliance on any agenda but for seat-sharing and we will not talk of such an alliance, which only talks about seat-sharing,” she said.

“Our alliance should be based on an agenda and our agenda is to find the resolution to the Jammu and Kashmir issue... No doubt within the Constitution of this country but a resolution,” she added.

Asked if there could be a post-poll alliance between the PDP and the BJP, Mehbooba said, “There is nothing like that. We had joined hands with the BJP government and not the party and we had put a condition that they would not touch Article 370.”

The PDP in its manifesto promised to pursue the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and advocate for diplomatic initiatives between India and Pakistan.

It also aims to establish full connectivity across the Line of Control for trade and social exchange.

The manifesto also talks about striving for the revocation of the Public Safety Act (PSA) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) as well as its commitment to revocation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir were last held in November 2014, resulting in the PDP and the BJP forming a coalition government led by Mufti Mohammed Sayeed.

His death in 2016 led to his daughter Mehbooba taking up the mantle of leadership as chief minister of the coalition government.

The BJP pulled out of the government in June 2018 and the state was put under governor's rule.

On August 5, 2019, the BJP-led Centre abrogated the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and reorganised the erstwhile state into two Union territories – Ladakh, and Jammu and Kashmir. (PTI)

Cong leadership briefed on political developments in Karnataka, says Siddaramaiah

BENGALURU, Aug 24: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said the Congress high command had been explained about the recent political developments in the state, and the prosecution sanction against him by the Governor, which he termed as “anti-Constitution and illegal”.

He also said the Governor sending some Bills back to the government will be discussed in the Cabinet and the next course of action will be decided at the meeting.

Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also state Congress chief, and several senior ministers met AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi in New Delhi on Friday, and held discussions.

“We went to Delhi yesterday on our own... D K Shivakumar and I have explained (to Congress high command) regarding political developments in the state, especially on the opposition's padyatra (Bengaluru to Mysuru foot march) on the MUDA issue, how we faced it politically,” Siddaramaiah said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, “We have informed them (high command) about the government's clear stand that the Governor's prosecution sanction (against me) is anti-Constitution and illegal, and to challenge it in courts. We have also told them that

both the Cabinet and the legislature party have condemned it (Governor's sanction), and explained to them that the Governor's decision has been challenged in the High Court.”

Asked whether any discussion happened regarding complaining to the President against the Governor, Siddaramaiah said, “no...all options are open.” Governor Thawarchand Gehlot on August 16 granted sanction for prosecution of Siddaramaiah in connection with the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allotment ‘scam’, giving a major jolt to the nearly 15-month-old Congress government.

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

The High Court on August 19 had directed the special court for people's representatives to defer its proceedings against the CM in the alleged MUDA site allotment ‘scam’, till the next date of hearing on August 29.

To a question about the Governor sending back some Bills to the government, Siddaramaiah said, “The (Governor) has sent back six Bills. We will discuss in the Cabinet and decide the next course of action.” (PTI)

Pity govt standing with culprits involved in crimes against women: Uddhav



MUMBAI, Aug 24: Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday said it is a pity that instead of taking action against culprits involved in crimes against women, the Maharashtra government, which he termed “shameless”, was standing with them.

Addressing party workers during a demonstration over crimes against women, and the alleged sexual assault on two kindergarten girls at Badlapur, Thackeray said it is imperative to dislodge the Mahayuti government to ensure the safety of women in the state.

“It is a pity that instead of taking action against the culprits it is standing with them,” Thackeray alleged. He said Maharashtra has never seen a government as “shameless” as the incumbent dispensation.

Mahayuti is a coalition of BJP, Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and NCP headed by Ajit Pawar.

In a veiled attack on CM Shinde, Thackeray said the ‘Kansa Mama’, a reference to a character in Mahabharat, is busy getting rakshis tied on his wrists and asked when he will get justice for the nieces.

Thackeray, his wife Rashmi and their son and former Maharashtra minister Aaditya staged a demonstration at Shiv Sena Bhavan in the Dadar area along with party workers by wearing black ribbons and black bands on the mouth to protest against the Badlapur incident.

The party also staged protests in several parts of the state.

A male attendant has been arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting two 4-year-old

kindergarten girls at a school in Badlapur town of Thane district recently. The alleged crime had sparked a massive protest in Badlapur on Tuesday.

The Bombay High Court on Friday restrained political parties from going ahead with the bandh called by the opposition grouping Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on August 24 to protest against the Badlapur incident.

Thackeray asked his party workers to run a signature campaign with the slogan ‘Bahin Surakshit tar Ghar Surakshit’ (home is safe if sisters are secure) which will be then presented to the Bombay High Court.

“The court stopped our bandh, but cannot suppress our voice,” Thackeray said.

He said the government made its “cronies” approach the court to stop the bandh called by MVA. Thackeray said when all doors are shut, people have no option but to hit the streets.

Thackeray also demanded that the Shakti bill passed by the Maharashtra legislature, which is pending with the Centre, be given Presidential assent so that it can be implemented in the state.

Both the House of Maharashtra legislature had passed the Shakti Criminal Laws (Maharashtra Amendment) Bill, 2020, and the Special Court & Machinery for Implementation of Maharashtra Shakti Criminal Law, 2020, three years ago when the MVA was in power with Thackeray as the CM.

The Shakti bill proposes the death penalty for heinous offences of rape and gang rape. (PTI)

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav calls for defamation case against BJP MLA for remarks on Mayawati

LUCKNOW, Aug 24: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has said that a defamation case should be filed against BJP MLA Rajesh Chaudhary for his remarks against BSP chief Mayawati.

In a video from a news channel shared by Yadav on X on Friday, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Chaudhary from Mathura district's Mant area is heard saying, “There is no doubt that Mayawati has been the chief minister of UP four times and it was us (BJP) who made her the chief minister for the first time. We made that mistake”.

“Mayawati is the most corrupt chief minister of Uttar Pradesh,” Chaudhary goes on to say in the video.

Condemning these remarks, Yadav, in a post in Hindi on X on Friday, said, “Political differences have their place but no one has the right to tarnish her (Mayawati's) dignity as a woman. BJP members are saying that making her chief minister was a mistake, which is also an insult to public opinion in a democratic country.”

“Furthermore, making baseless allegations that she was the



most corrupt chief minister is highly objectionable. A defamation case should be filed against the BJP legislator for this public statement,” he added.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president said the party is grateful to Yadav for responding to Chaudhary's allegations.

“The SP chief has responded to the false allegations made by a BJP MLA from Mathura district, acknowledging the truth about the BSP chief's honesty. The party is grateful for this,” she said in a post in Hindi on X

on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Chaudhary hit back at Yadav, alleging that the SP chief has “turned the Samajwadi Party into a serial rapist party”.

“Boys will be boys, they make mistakes... You have turned the Samajwadi Party into a serial rapist party. In Ayodhya and Kannauj, minor girls from backward and Dalit communities are raped, and you gamble away the honour of Hindu Dalit daughters for minority votes. Akhilesh Yadav, a follower of Aurangzeb, you have already broken all records

of corruption,” the BJP MLA said in a post in Hindi on X.

“Do you remember the 2nd June 1995 Guest House incident? Samajwadi goons tried to disgrace Mayawati. What insult was left that your goons did not hurl at Mayawati? It was the BJP that saved Mayawati's life and dignity; otherwise, the Samajwadi goons would have killed a Dalit woman leader. You talk about values while publicly insulting your own father on stage for power. You are deeply casteist and corrupt,” Chaudhary alleged in the post.

The SP chief had said that the “disrespectful remarks” made by the BJP legislator towards Mayawati reflect the “deep-seated bitterness that BJP members harbour towards women, especially those from marginalised and oppressed communities”.

Yadav said that by sheltering such MLAs, the BJP is deeply hurting the dignity of women.

“If the BJP does not take immediate disciplinary action against such people, it will be assumed that this is not just the personal opinion of one legislator but the view of the entire party,” the former Uttar Pradesh

chief minister said in the post.

Mayawati also called for action against Chaudhary.

“The party (BSP) feels that this BJP legislator is no longer getting any attention within his own party. That is why he is making outrageous statements against the BSP chief to grab headlines, which is extremely unfortunate,” the BSP chief said in a series of posts in Hindi on X.

“The BJP should take strict action against him and if he is mentally ill, they should ensure he gets treatment. Otherwise, it wouldn't be wrong to say that this appears to be part of a conspiracy by the BJP,” she said in another post on X.

Mayawati said that if the BJP does not act against Chaudhary then the people of Uttar Pradesh will respond in the upcoming 10 by-elections in the state.

“If the BJP does not take strict action against its legislator, then the party will face the consequences in the next assembly elections when its candidates will lose their deposits. The people will also respond in the upcoming 10 by-elections,” she said in the post. (PTI)

Badlapur incident hit Maharashtra's image in the country: Sharad Pawar

PUNE, Aug 24: NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Saturday said the Badlapur incident involving the alleged sexual abuse of two kindergarten girls at a school has hit the image of Maharashtra in the country. He accused the state government of forgetting that the responsibility for the safety of women lies with it. Pawar, who took part in a silent protest in Pune, said the government is insensitive if it thinks the opposition is playing politics over the Badlapur incident.

“The Badlapur incident has hit the image of Maharashtra in the country,” said the chief of NCP (SP), which is a constituent of the opposition bloc Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), also comprising Congress and Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT). Pawar said such an incident

has taken place in the land of Chhatrapati Shivaji who used to chop off the hands of culprits involved in crimes against women.

The alleged sexual assault on two 4-year-old girls by a male attendant at a school in Badlapur of Thane district had led to a massive protest in the town on Tuesday, with thousands of people blocking roads and railway tracks and clashing with the police.

The MVA had called for a ‘Maharashtra Bandh’ on August 24 to protest against the crime against the young girls. However, the Bombay High Court on Friday restrained political parties or individuals from proceeding with the bandh on August 24 or any future date over the incident. (PTI)

‘Bulldozer justice’ completely unacceptable, must stop: Congress



NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The Congress on Saturday said “repeated targeting” of minorities in BJP-ruled states is deeply troubling and asserted that “bulldozer justice” is completely unacceptable and must stop.

The opposition party's assertion comes after the house of a man who allegedly indulged in violence in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district during a protest was demolished.

“The house of Shahzad Ali under Kotwali police station limits was demolished. We had registered a case against 150 people for the violence on Wednesday. We had named 46 people,” an official had said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said demolishing someone's home and rendering their family homeless is both inhumane and unjust.

“The repeated targeting of minorities in BJP-ruled states is deeply troubling. Such actions have no place in a society governed by the Rule of Law,” he said in a post on X.

The Congress strongly condemns the BJP state governments for their blatant disregard of the Constitution, using bulldozing as a tactic to instil fear among citizens, Kharge said.

“Anarchy cannot replace natural justice - offences must be adjudicated in courts, not through state-sponsored coercion,” he said.

In a post in Hindi on X, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, “If someone is accused of a crime, then only the court can

decide his crime and punishment.

“But punishing the family of the accused as soon as the allegation is made, taking away the roof from their heads, not following the law, disobeying the court, and demolishing the house of the accused as soon as the allegation is made - this is not justice,” she said.

This is the height of barbarism and injustice. There should be a difference between the lawmakers, the law keepers and the lawbreakers, she stressed, adding that governments cannot behave like criminals.

Following the law, Constitution, democracy and humanity are the minimum conditions of governance in a civilised society, Priyanka Gandhi said.

“One who cannot fulfil ‘rajdharm’ can neither work for the welfare of the society nor the country. Bulldozer justice is completely unacceptable, it must stop,” she said.

The house of the man who allegedly indulged in violence during a protest against remarks by seer Ramgiri Maharaj was demolished on Thursday. Ramgiri Maharaj had allegedly made objectionable remarks against Islam at Shah Panchale village in Sinnar taluka of Maharashtra's Nashik district during a religious event some days ago.

Members of the Muslim community had organised a protest on Wednesday, but it descended into violence, leading to injuries to two policemen and damage to several vehicles. (PTI)

India needs 400 million more women in workforce to contribute USD 14 trillion to economy: Report

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: India requires an additional 400 million women in the workforce to contribute USD 14 trillion to the economy which would necessitate nearly doubling the current female labour force participation rate (LFPR) from 37 per cent to 70 per cent by fiscal year 2047, according to a new report.

Non-profit TheNudge Institute has unveiled a new report, Labour Force Participation Distillation Report, outlining a crucial element for India's economic future. The report is based upon Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) over the years.

As the country aims to become a USD 30 trillion economy by 2047, the report highlights the need for a substantial increase in female labour force participation to achieve this goal.

According to the report, India requires an additional 400 million women in the workforce to contribute USD 14 trillion to the economy. This would necessitate nearly doubling the current female labour force participation rate (LFPR) from 37 per cent to 70 per cent by



fiscal year 2047.

With only 110 million women projected to join the labour force by then, an additional 145 million women need to be integrated to meet this target.

The report reveals a stark disparity in job security and recovery between men and women.

Women were found to be seven times more likely to lose their jobs and eleven times more likely not to

recover from job loss. By 2020, nearly half of the women employed in 2019 had exited the workforce, the report said.

Women predominantly work in low-productivity sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, where they face limited advancement.

According to the report, in construction, women represent just over 12 per cent of the workforce,

often earning significantly less than men in unskilled roles. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues, with many rural women forced back into work due to income loss or job loss by primary earners, underscoring the fragility of female employment.

To address these challenges, the report outlines three key pathways to increase female labour force participation.

First, redefining work through platform jobs and digital microwork could activate fractal employment.

Second, enhancing entrepreneurship opportunities via digital commerce infrastructure could invigorate the sector.

Third, addressing bottlenecks, such as mobility and digital access, is crucial to improving women's participation in the labour market.

Kanishka Chatterjee, Director & Head of TheNudge Prize, emphasised the urgency of this challenge. “India's demographic dividend and dreams of a \$30 trillion economy cannot be realised without boosting the participation of women in the workforce,” Chatter-

jee said. He acknowledged the strides made but stressed the need for urgent and sustained action to overcome economic, social, and cultural barriers.

To build this report, TheNudge Prize team looked at all of the PLFS data across the last two cycles of different sectors that are contributing to it or that are seeing higher growth rate, the report said.

“When we looked at PLFS data, we understood what the supply side is or where women or men work today. But there are no other data pointers available where we can clearly see what are the demand markers available in India which will hire women, or which may be better suited for women to take jobs or to drive their entrepreneurial journeys,” it said.

“One of the key things to consider, if we need to solve or address labour force participation rate, is two have a holistic approach. Not only to see how labour is available and what skills are available, but also to see what is driving demand today -- and this is exactly what we also bring out in the report,” the report added. (PTI)

Wayanad landslides an instance of nature reacting to human apathy, greed: Kerala HC

KOCHI, Aug 24: The landslides that hit Wayanad district in Kerala claiming over 200 lives was just another instance of nature reacting to human "apathy and greed", the High Court here has said.

The court said that the "warning signs" had appeared a long time ago but "we chose to ignore them in pursuit of a development agenda that would supposedly put our state on the high road to economic prosperity".

It said that the natural disasters in 2018 and 2019, the pandemic that persisted for nearly two years and the recent landslides "have shown us the error of our ways".

"If we do not mend our ways and take affirmative remedial action now, perhaps it will be too late," a bench of justices A K Jayasankaran Nambiar and Syam Kumar V M said while hearing a plea initiated on its own by the court following the July 30 landslides that completely wiped away three villages in Wayanad with 119 people still unaccounted for.

The court suo motu initiated the PIL "to persuade the state government to introspect on its currently held notions for sustainable development in the state of Kerala and revisit its policy regarding the same", the bench said in its order of August 23.

The bench said the court will take stock of the state's existing policies in relation to ex-



ploitation of natural resources, preservation of the environment, forests and wildlife, prevention, management and mitigation of natural disasters and sustainable development goals.

"It was felt that an intervention by this court was required to gather information, and requisition assistance from institutions and agencies that can assist in the identification of ecologically sensitive areas in the state, and help the state in reformulating its

policies in the areas mentioned above," it said.

The bench also outlined the stages by which it was going to achieve the goals for which the PIL was initiated.

It said it will proceed in three stages, with the first one being focused on gathering scientific data regarding the manner in which ecologically sensitive areas in the state can be identified, and thereafter proceed to identify and notify them district wise.

"We will also monitor the rescue, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Wayanad district on a weekly basis," it said.

In stage two, data will be gathered with regard to the desirable composition of regulatory agencies and advisory boards that would enable such agencies and boards to function effectively towards achieving the objectives for which they have been constituted, it said.

"The data gathered will be placed before the state government for its consideration so that suitable amendments can be effected to existing statutes, rules or regulations.

"In stage three, we propose to collect data from the people residing in ecologically sensitive areas in the state, through the Local Self Government department of the state, so that the state can re-formulate its policies with regard to infrastructural development, tourism, exploitation of natural resources, and preservation of environment, forests and wildlife..." it said.

As a part of that, the state shall conduct the necessary environmental impact assessment studies and hold adequate public hearings to ascertain the views of persons or residents of the locality concerned, it added.

The bench has also directed the Centre and Kerala government to file affidavits clarifying whether in the wake of the natural dis-

asters that have occurred in the state, they propose to increase the number of subject experts as mandated under the Disaster Management Act (DMA) 2005.

It also asked them to clarify whether the Advisory Committees as contemplated under the DMA have been constituted at the national, state and district levels and if so, the composition of the said panels as well as the details of the Disaster Management Plans prepared at the national, state and district levels in accordance with the DMA, together with details of the latest updates to the said plans.

In addition to these, the Centre and Kerala government also have to state in affidavit the details of the funds allocated for carrying out the activities and programmes set out in the respective Disaster Management Plans and details regarding the steps taken by the Central government to include a checklist of safety measures to be adopted in landslide prone areas in the Building Rules applicable in the state.

The court has given them three weeks to file their affidavits containing these details.

"We make it clear that in view of the expediency required in this matter, we expect all the respondents to strictly adhere to the time limits specified by this court for filing affidavits and other documents," it said. (PTI)

Two arrested for raping teenage girl

PALGHAR, Aug 24: Police in Maharashtra's Palghar district have arrested two persons for allegedly raping a 17-year-old girl after taking her on an outing, an official said on Saturday.

An official from the Tulj police station said that the complainant, a resident of Mumbai, often visited Nallasopara to meet a friend. During her visits, she got acquainted with one of the accused, identified as Sonu, who worked in a studio in the locality.

On Thursday, Sonu and his friend invited the teenager for an outing. They took the girl in an auto to an isolated place where both raped her, the official said citing the FIR.

After learning about the sexual assault from their daughter, the girl's parents filed a police complaint.

The Tulj police on Friday registered a case under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Protection of Children from Sexual Offence (POCSO) Act and arrested the two accused, said senior inspector Shailendra Nagarkar. (PTI)

Man held for selling fake question paper of UP Police constable recruitment exam

LUCKNOW, Aug 24: A man was arrested for allegedly duping people on the pretext of providing a leaked question paper of the Uttar Pradesh Police constable recruitment exam, a press statement from the Special Task Force (STF) said on Saturday.

The accused was identified as Aniruddha Modanlal, they said.

According to the press statement, Modanlal was operating a social media platform where he would charge candidates money on the pretext of providing them with a leaked question paper of the ongoing police recruitment exam.

According to the Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board, the exam will be held in two shifts on five days, i.e., August 23, 24, 25, 30 and 31. The fresh recruitment exercise to fill over 60,000 posts is being carried out after the exams, held on February 17 and 18, were cancelled following allegations of a paper leak.

The officials said, Modanlal was in touch with Abhay Kumar Srivastav who is the mastermind of the racket. In Srivastav's direction, he made a channel on telegraph and took ₹ 1 lakh from candidates to provide them with leaked question papers for the recruitment exam.

Modanlal withdrew the money deposited in his account by the candidates and shared a fake question paper. The STF officials, already on alert in the wake of the ongoing recruitment exam, arrested him. Efforts are on to arrest the mastermind, they said.

Meanwhile, lakhs of candidates appeared for the UP police constable recruitment exam on Saturday at 1,174 centres across 67 districts in the state amid tight security arrangements, marking the second day of a five-day exercise.

Director General of Police (DGP) Prashant Kumar inspected the arrangements at exam centres in Lucknow University and National PG College on Saturday.

Approximately 9.5 lakh candidates are expected to appear in the exam on each of the five days, government officials said. The government has implemented strict security measures at every centre to prevent the use of unfair means. (PTI)

CBI takes over probe into financial irregularities at RGK Med College



NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The CBI on Saturday took over the case of alleged financial irregularities at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata during the tenure of former principal Sandip Ghosh, officials said.

The action came on the directions of the Calcutta High Court which transferred the probe to the agency from a state-constituted

Special Investigation Team (SIT). The CBI collected necessary documents from the SIT on Saturday and proceeded to re-register the FIR, the official said.

The high court had issued directives on a petition by former deputy superintendent of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital Akhtar Ali, who requested a probe by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) into alleged financial misconduct at the medical college during the tenure of Ghosh.

The college has come into media glare following the alleged rape and murder of a trainee doctor on the campus on August 9, they said.

The high court had directed the CBI to submit a progress report on the investigation within three weeks. The court has scheduled a follow-up hearing for September 17 to review the report. (PTI)

Kolkata doctor's rape-murder: Polygraph test on accused begins



NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Aug 24: The lie detection tests on the main accused and six others in the alleged rape and murder of a trainee doctor at Kolkata's RG Kar Medical College and Hospital began on Saturday, officials said.

The polygraph test on Sanjay Roy, the main accused, is being conducted in the prison where he is lodged, while the remaining six, including former principal Sandip Ghosh and four doctors who were on duty during the night of the incident and a civic volunteer, are undergoing the test at the agency's office in Kolkata, they said.

Ghosh arrived at the CBI's office at CGO Complex in Salt Lake on Saturday morning for the ninth day consecutive day, and was then taken for the test, the officials said.

Those undergoing the lie detection test include two first-year

postgraduate trainees, as investigators allegedly found their fingerprints inside a seminar hall at the state-run medical facility where the medic's body was discovered, an official said.

A team of polygraph specialists from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) in Delhi have flown to Kolkata to conduct these tests, he said.

The CBI told the Supreme Court on Thursday that there was an attempt to cover up the alleged rape and killing of the post-graduate doctor by the local police, as the crime scene was altered by the time the federal agency took over the probe.

The trainee doctor's body with severe injury marks was found inside a seminar hall of the hospital's chest department on the morning of August 9. Roy was arrested the following day. (PTI)

Child, two adults accidentally killed at China clay factory

KUTCH, Aug 24: Three persons, including a 10-year-old boy, were killed in an accident at a China clay manufacturing factory near Bhuj in Gujarat's Kutch district on Saturday, police said. China clay is a key component in the ceramic industry. The accident occurred at Shri Hari Minerals located near Dhaneti village of Bhuj taluka around 11 am, an official from Paddhar police station said. Factory owner Govind Chamaria (45), his son Akshar (10) and Chamaria's partner Prakash Vagani (32) died after getting trapped in a China clay machine, the official said. (PTI)

Fake call centre busted in Gurugram, 20 arrested

GURUGRAM, Aug 24: A fake call centre being run in three flats of Flora Avenue 33 society on Sohna road was busted with the arrest of 20 people, including 4 women, police said on Saturday.

The accused were duping foreign nationals on the pretext of providing online technical support, they said, adding that 25 mobile phones, 16 laptops and Rs 50,000 cash were recovered from their possession.

According to the police, they got a tip off that a fake call centre is being run in flat A-20, 21, and 22 in Flora Avenue 33 society wherein foreign nationals are being defrauded on the pretext of online technical support.

Following the tip off, a raid was

conducted by the team of cyber-crime south police station on Friday night where the men and women were found busy on laptops and mobiles, they said.

Most of them were busy making calls in English using their headphones. On asking they could not show any valid OSP licences of Department of Telecommunications or any other agreement/MoU related to their work, said police.

Twenty people, including 4 women, from the fake call centre. Most of the accused are natives of Manipur, Nagaland and Nepal.

An FIR was registered against the accused at cybercrime south police station under relevant sections of BNS and IT act, said police.

During police interrogation, it was revealed that Mahender Bajrang Singh is the manager of the call centre which is being run from May in these rented flats.

"The accused send bulk voice mail / messages and duping foreigners through pop ups in the name of technical support. By taking remote access to their computer, laptops through Dialler/X-Lite Application, they take about 100 to 500 dollars per customer to get the computer system repaired after detecting the technical fault in the computer. They had charged an amount of 100-500 US dollars through a gift card. We are questioning the accused," ACP cyber Priyanshu Dewan said. (PTI)

TN space startup successfully launches first reusable hybrid rocket RHUMI

CHENNAI, Aug 24: Tamil Nadu-based startup Space Zone India on Saturday launched its first reusable hybrid rocket, Mission RHUMI-2024, onboard a mobile platform to take up research on global warming and climate change.

City-headquartered Space Zone India has been conducting various projects under Mission RHUMI over the last two years.

The RHUMI rocket launched early in the day at Thiruvudanthai on the scenic East Coast Road near Chennai is powered by a generic-fuel-based hybrid motor and electrically triggered parachute deployer.

"It is 3.5 metre tall rocket and was launched at about 7.25 am from the earlier 7am lift off schedule," Space Zone India Founder-CEO Anand Megalingam said.

"It is more of a sounding rocket. It flew to an altitude of about 35 kms and right now my team is there to collect it as per our plan (since it is a reusable rocket)," he told PTI.

"Compared to an 89 degree inclination, we had launched the rocket with 70 degree inclination due to heavy wind and gusts," he explained on the launch from the mobile launch pad near the coast.

Mission RHUMI has been claimed to be the world's first mobile launch of a hybrid rocket.

Anand Megalingam has said that RHUMI is named after his son Rhumithran.

The rocket launched today car-



ried three CUBE satellites designed to monitor and collect data on atmospheric conditions, including cosmic radiation intensity, UV radiation, air quality, among others.

It also deployed 50 different Pico satellites to study various aspects of atmospheric conditions like accelerometer readings, altitude, ozone levels, to understand the environmental dynamics.

"India is rapidly emerging as a global leader in space innovation, consistently launching groundbreaking missions that push the boundaries of what is possible. As our nation continues to advance in this crucial sector, the need for sustainable and cost-effective solutions becomes more pressing.

Mission RHUMI 2024 is a direct response to this need," Megalingam said.

"By introducing a reusable hybrid rocket, we are not only reducing the financial burden of space exploration but minimising its environmental impact. This mission reflects our commitment to making space missions more accessible and sustainable for the future," he said. Dubbed as 'Moon Man of India', the project director of India's Moon Mission 'Chandrayaan', Myswamy Annadurai, is the mentor for Space Zone India.

"The launch of hybrid rocket through our Hydraulic mobile launchpad is a first-of-its-kind initiative that sets a new benchmark in aerospace technology. This in-

novative system is designed to provide unparalleled flexibility and efficiency, allowing us to adapt to various launch scenarios with ease," Annadurai said on today's mission.

"With this cutting edge technology, Space Zone India is poised to revolutionise how we approach rocket launches, making them more dynamic and responsive to the needs of the future," Annadurai said.

Diversified conglomerate Martin Group of Companies has backed Space Zone India on its latest Mission RHUMI 2024 through its Corporate Social Responsibility initiative.

"We are always on the lookout for innovative ventures that push the boundaries of technology and contribute to a better future. Our commitment to corporate social responsibility drives us to support cutting-edge advancements with the potential to transform industries and inspire students in rocket science and space technology," Martin Group Managing Director Jose Charles Martin said.

"Supporting Space Zone India aligns perfectly with our vision. Their dedication to sustainability and excellence in aerospace technology is truly inspiring. By supporting Mission RHUMI-2024, we are not only supporting a groundbreaking space mission but also enhancing the lives of future generations," he said on extending its support to Space Zone India. (PTI)

Cheetahs set to roam free again in Kuno after year-long enclosure stay

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: African cheetahs brought to India as part of the world's first intercontinental translocation of big cats will soon roam free again in the wild, nearly a year after they were returned to enclosures in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park for health check-ups and monitoring, according to officials.

Officials told PTI that the Centre's Cheetah Project Steering Committee decided on Friday 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.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the monsoon normally withdraws from most areas in Madhya Pradesh by the first week of October.

"Members of the committee and NTCA (National Tiger Conservation Authority) officials conducted field visits to Kuno and discussed

the schedule for releasing the cheetahs. 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 said.

All 25 cheetahs -- 13 adults and 12 cubs -- are doing well. The animals have been administered vaccines to safeguard them against diseases and given prophylactic medicine to prevent infection, according to the official.

The first batch of eight cheetahs from Namibia was introduced in India in September 2022, and the second batch of 12 cheetahs was flown in from South Africa last February.

The cheetahs were initially released into the wild but were brought back to their enclosures by August last year after the death of three -- a female named Tbilisi (from Namibia) and two South African males, Tejas and Sooraj, due to septicemia.

Septicemia is an infection that



occurs when bacteria enter the bloodstream and spread.

This condition arose from wounds under the cheetahs' thick winter coats on their backs and necks, which became infested with maggots and led to blood infec-

tions, according to the government's annual report on Project Cheetah.

Officials had earlier told PTI that the unexpected growth of wintry coats by some cheetahs during the Indian summer and monsoon,

in anticipation of the African winter (June to September), was a major challenge in managing the animals in India during the first year.

"Even African experts did not expect this. The winter coat, combined with high humidity and heat, caused itching, leading the cheetahs to scratch their necks on tree trunks or the ground. This resulted in bruises and exposed skin, which attracted flies that laid eggs, leading to maggot infestations, bacterial infections and ultimately, the deaths of three cheetahs," said S P Yadav, Director General of the International Big Cat Alliance and former NTCA member secretary.

The deaths prompted the steering committee to recommend that "future cheetahs for reintroduction should be sourced from countries in the Northern Hemisphere, such as Kenya or Somalia, to avoid bio-rhythmic complications".

The steering committee had prepared a plan in December last year

to release the cheetahs into the wild, but it was not implemented.

Currently, only one cheetah, named Pavan, is roaming free, with officials noting that he is difficult to spot and capture.

Though such "experimental" projects come with challenges and expected mortalities, experts in both India and Africa have expressed concerns about keeping the cheetahs in enclosures for extended periods.

"The cheetahs are not truly living in the wild, despite spending two years on Indian soil. Cheetahs prefer long journeys, and they could be under severe stress," an African expert who assisted with the cheetah reintroduction in India said on condition of anonymity.

"Based on global experience and Namibian laws and policies, my understanding is that it is not a good idea to release these cheetahs because of their extremely long period of captivity, especially the captive-born cubs," said Ravi

Chellam, CEO of Metastrang Foundation and Coordinator, Biodiversity Collaborative.

Another African expert said the cheetahs are fit enough for the wild if they have been hunting for themselves in enclosures and have not been provided with supplementary feeding.

"They may have also received antiparasitic medications, which could help them during the monsoon, but this might reduce their ability to develop natural immunity to these parasites once they are released," the expert said.

Since their arrival in India, seven adult cheetahs -- three females and four males -- have died, including four due to septicemia. All these deaths occurred between March 2023 and January 2024.

Seventeen cubs have been born in India and 12 of them survived. This brings the total number of cheetahs, including cubs, in Kuno to 25, all but one of which are currently in enclosures. (PTI)

Tried so hard to keep story a secret: Jamie Lee Curtis on leaked picture from 'Freaky Friday 2' set

LOS ANGELES, Aug 24: Veteran actor Jamie Lee Curtis, who finished shooting for the upcoming Disney sequel "Freaky Friday 2", says the leaked pictures from the set show the joy they felt while working on the movie. Lee and Lindsay Lohan are reprising their roles of mother and daughter from the 2003's beloved body switch drama. The sequel is directed by Nisha Ganatra, while Mark Waters helmed the original movie.

The picture that has been leaked shows the two actors embracing each other. "OK. Because other outlets have posted it, I am going to take advantage of the intrusion of a paparazzi picture into the creative process of filmmaking," Lee posted on Instagram.

"We have tried so hard to keep our story a secret and private until it's time for release but once in a while an image comes out, and it doesn't tell you anything about the story or about what's going on with the characters but it does show the joy and fun that we had making '#FREAKIERFRIDAY' and we know it will be the experience that you will have in the theaters next year." (PTI)



ACTOR SHARVARI TO SHOOT FOR 'ALPHA' IN KASHMIR

MUMBAI, Aug 24: Actor Sharvari is set to visit Kashmir for the shooting schedule of her upcoming film "Alpha" where she stars alongside Alia Bhatt.

The 27-year-old actor already had three releases this year starting with "Munhya" which went on to cross Rs 100 crore at the box office followed by her role in Netflix's "Maharaj" and the latest being

"Vedaa" helmed by Nikkhil Advani, in which she starred opposite John Abraham.

Sharvai will now head to Kashmir to begin her second shooting schedule from August 26.

The actor said she is "thrilled" and is excited to meet the team of "Alpha" again.

"I can't wait to be on the sets of 'Alpha' again and I can't wait to shoot in Kashmir! I'm thrilled that it's going to be a very exciting schedule. The 'Alpha' team will be meeting after some time so we are all super ready to start the Kashmir sked," she said in a statement.

"I am as excited as a kid at a candy store when I am on a film set and on the sets of 'Alpha', I'm like a ball of energy soaking everything and trying to learn and better myself. To get an opportunity like this so early in one's career is truly a blessing. I'm just humbled to be in such a franchise that has the megastars of our film industry in it!" YRF's "Alpha" will feature Alia and Sharvari in the roles of spy agents. Billed as the first female-led YRF Spy Universe film, it is directed by Shiv Rawail, known for his project 'The Railway Men'. (PTI)



Something special coming your way: Aparshakti on brother Ayushmann joining Maddock Films universe

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Stree 2 star Aparshakti Khurana says he and his elder brother-actor Ayushmann Khurana were waiting to collaborate on a film for a long time and the upcoming project from Maddock Films' successful horror comedy universe is the perfect opportunity.

While the actor reprised his role of Bittu in Stree 2 recently, Ayushmann is reportedly set to play a vampire in Thama, previously titled Vampires of Vijay Nagar. Both movies are part of producer Dinesh Vijan's ambitious film franchise, which also boasts of Bhediya and Munhya.

"We had been waiting for so long to work with each other in something that's good and what can be better than a world which has been created? "Something that has never happened in Indian filmmaking where there's this

world in which so many great characters will come together and will stay in people's hearts. There's something very special coming your way very soon," Aparshakti told PTI. The Jubilee star said Ayushmann's casting in the horror comedy universe was coincidental. "We didn't go up to the producers asking them to take us together in a film... We had finished shooting for Stree 2 and this new film came to him after that."

"So, all these characters will meet up, and when that happens will we be shown as brothers or not, what will happen, there are many questions," he teased.

Aparshakti, who will next be seen in the ZEE5 spy drama Berlin, also said he is in talks about reuniting with his Jubilee director Vikramaditya Motwane on a few projects. (PTI)



'Mukkabaaz' star Vineet Kumar Singh joins Sunny Deol's action film

MUMBAI, Aug 24: Actor Vineet Kumar Singh, best known for "Mukkabaaz" and "Gold", has boarded the cast of Sunny Deol's upcoming action film, the makers announced Saturday. The Hindi film, tentatively titled "SDGM", is directed by Gopichand Malineni of "Bodyguard" fame. It is produced by Mythri Movie Makers and People Media Factory.

On the occasion of Singh's 40th birthday, the makers announced his casting in "SDGM".

"Happy Birthday to the powerhouse of talent @vineet_ksofficial. Have a wonderful year ahead. Welcome on board for #SDGM Mass Feast Loading," the makers said on their official Instagram account.

Singh also shared his excitement about being part of the action film. "Excited and truly blessed to be part of the massive action film #SDGM Working with such a talented team is always a pleasure. Looking sooo forward for this one! Happy! Blessed!! Grateful!!!!" the actor wrote.

"SDGM", which went on floors in June this year, also stars Randeep Hooda, Saiyami Kher and Regina Cassandra. Earlier, in an Instagram post, Randeep Hooda shared his excitement about the role, captioning his poster, "Excited to be a part of this action feast - #SDGM."

In addition to this film, Singh has an interesting range of films in the pipeline including Vicky Kaushal-starrer "Chhaava", which is based on the life of Maratha emperor Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and Reema Kagti-directed "Superboys of Malegaon".

"Malegaon", which marks the second collaboration between Singh and Kagti after the 2018 release "Gold", is based on the life of Nasir Shaikh, an amateur filmmaker from the town of Malegaon, where the residents look to Bollywood cinema for a much-needed escape from daily drudgery.

Vineet will also be seen in Prime Video's show "Rangeen". (PTI)

Bengali female actor levels 'misbehaviour' charge against eminent Malayalam filmmaker Ranjith

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/

KOLKATA, Aug 24: A Bengali actor has levelled accusation of misbehaviour against eminent Malayalam film director and chairman of the state-run Kerala Chalchitra Academy, Ranjith, spelling fresh trouble for the Pinarayi Vijayan government which is facing opposition heat on its alleged inaction over the Justice Hema Committee report.

The report had revealed instances of harassment and exploitation of women in the Malayalam cinema industry, prompting calls for action against the guilty.

The filmmaker has reportedly rejected Mitra's charge and said he was the "real victim" in the case.

Key LDF constituent CPI was among those seeking a probe into the allegation of Bengali actor Sreelekha Mitra, who has recalled a years-old incident in the backdrop of the ripples being created by the Justice Hema Committee findings. "The person concerned is a big name in Malayalam film industry and a national award winning director. I went to his residence to discuss an upcoming film project and I did not like his behaviour. He made certain advances subtly and I felt uncomfortable while we were discussing the script," Mitra told PTI in Kolkata.

He did this without her consent and she had made her disapproval very clear.

"I immediately communicated my decision not to be part of the project any more, left the place and came back to Kolkata the next day," she added. "I don't know if he has treated other female actors in the film industry in the same way. It is upto them to open up or not if they had faced similar situation. May be his power and influence played a role for others to not to

speak out," she added.

Mitra said she did not have any such experience in the Bengali cinema industry, but that there could be similar situations for other female actors as well with regard to someone. Such women should muster the courage and speak out without any fear.

"The incident in Kerala was years back...but it is heartening that women are speaking out with greater vigour and conviction against any form of misconduct now, taking out rallies, and I am looking forward to the day when number of any instance of gender abuse, misconduct will go down and women will not have such harrowing tales any more," Mitra added.

In Kerala, many demanded Ranjith stepped down as the Chairman of the film academy. Several people including well-known filmmaker Dr Biju came out against Ranjith.

While opposition Congress said it expects Ranjith would step down as film academy chairman, BJP said he has no moral right to continue. CPI national leader Annie Raja urged the government to carry out a probe based on Mitra's allegations and wanted to keep Ranjith away from the position during investigation.

Kerala Cultural Affairs Minister Saji Cheriyan assured the government would not protect anyone who had committed a wrong.

If the allegations against Ranjith were proved, action would surely be taken against him, he said in a Facebook post on Saturday.

He told the media earlier Ranjith is one of country's eminent filmmakers and that he had already responded to the actor's allegation.

"The allegation raised by the actress and the reply given by Ranjith are in front of us. If she has a complaint, let her come here and lodge a



complaint. Then we will take action in accordance with the law," he said.

No case can be registered based on just allegations and such cases won't stand, Cheriyan added.

He underlined the government's support for women who face harassment at their workplaces and said stringent action would be taken against wrongdoers. Health Minister Veena George said all facilities and support would be provided to the actress to lodge a complaint against the director.

"If she wishes to go ahead with the complaint, the government will provide all facilities for the same. The government's stand is clear in this. The CM has already made it clear that the government won't protect wrongdoers," she said.

Higher Education Minister R Bindhu said action would be taken after understanding the facts in the issue and said she expects the government would do it, as a woman has come up with such a complaint.

Sharing similar views, Women's Commission chairperson P Sathidevi said she came to know about the allegations about the actress through the media and if it is proved correct, Ranjith should step down as academy chairman.

Opposition leader V D Sathesnan also said Ranjith is an acclaimed director who has contributed several good movies in the Malayalam film industry.

"As a friend and as a brother, I request him to step down as film academy chairman. I think he will step back from his current responsibility," the Congress leader told reporters.

BJP state chief K Surendran attacked Cheriyan and Ranjith and said both of them should quit.

"Ranjith has no moral right to continue in the position. A victim herself has come up with the complaint. She raised the allegation openly...before the public society," he told a press conference in Thiruvananthapuram. (PTI)

Vision is to win 50 medals in 2036 Paralympics when India hopefully host Games: Jhajharia



NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Para sports has undergone a sea change in terms of perception and support in the last two decades, and these changes together with continuous backing to athletes can power India to 50 medals in the 2036 edition, reckons the legendary Devendra Jhajharia.

From winning just one Para-

lympics gold 20 years ago to clinching five yellow metals in 2021, para sports in India has come a long way.

India are bidding for the 2036 Olympics and Paralympic Games, and Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) President Jhajharia is upbeat that by then India will have the potential to break into top-10 in the medal

tally. Jhajharia, the most decorated Paralympian of the country, won his first Paralympics gold in the 2004 Athens edition in F46 javelin throw event. He added another gold in Rio 2016 and a silver in Tokyo in 2021.

The F46 classification is for athletes with arm deficiency, impaired muscle power or impaired passive range of move-

ment in arms.

"We won 19 medals in Tokyo, now we have a target of 25 in Paris. In 2028 Los Angeles, we can aim for more than 30 medals and 40 plus in 2032. And by 2036, when hopefully India hosts Paralympics, we can win 50 medals and be in top-10," the 43-year-old Jhajharia told PTI in an interview.

"We have the vision, we will progress steadily. We have started identifying talented junior players so that they can be trained for 2028 and 2032 Paralympics through CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)," he added.

India have sent a 84-member team -- the largest ever -- at the Paris Paralympics to be held from August 28 to September 8.

Jhajharia, who was elected as PCI chief in March, said there has been a tremendous change in para sports in the country in the last 20 years and in the way people accepted specially-abled people taking up to sport.

"There was a time when people asked me why I was taking up javelin throw, why I was wasting my time and life. But now when a para athlete lifts a javelin, people say go and try to become a Sumit Antil or Devendra Jhajharia."

"There has been a lot of changes in this country in para sports, the way people see to it and the way the government treats para-sports in the same way as able-bodied sports."

"In 2004 Athens Paralympics, I competed with money from my own pocket. Now our para athletes enjoy the same world class facilities enjoyed by the

able-bodied athletes and they also get to train and compete abroad."

India won 19 medals (5 gold, 8 silver and 6 bronze) in Tokyo Paralympics for a 24th place in the tally and Jhajharia predicted that the country will win more than 25 medals in Paris and finish in top-20 in the tally.

"We had 54 participants in Tokyo and now we have 84 in Paris, the largest ever, and our target in Paris is 25 medals and may be double-digit gold out of that, though I feel the colour of the medal is not that important than winning it."

Para-athletics officials said the country will win at least 12 medals and minimum five gold in Paris.

Asked about this, Jhajharia said, "Out of India's 84 participants in Paris, 38 are para-athletes and naturally they will win more medals."

"There is a reason for para-athletes doing extremely well at global level. We are taking part and doing well in several top-class international events, whether it's Grand Prix events or World Championships."

Jhajharia, who is leaving for Paris on Sunday, will not be a part of the Indian contingent as a para-athlete but as an official, and he became nostalgic recollecting his last Games in Tokyo three years ago.

"When I see a player throwing javelin, I suddenly become a player again. When Sumit Antil was throwing javelin the other day, I was having a different feeling inside that should I also start javelin throw again." (PTI)

US Open 2024: Jannik Sinner fired two of his team members over his positive steroid tests in March

NEW YORK, Aug 24: Jannik Sinner fired his fitness trainer and physiotherapist because of his two positive steroid tests in March and said Friday at his pre-U.S. Open news conference — his first public comments on the matter — that he knew he was innocent but worried what the case's outcome would be until finding out he wouldn't be suspended.

Sinner's fitness trainer, Umberto Ferrara, and his physiotherapist, Giacomo Naldi, have been at the 23-year-old Italian's side during his rise over the past two years, which included his first Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January and ascension to the No. 1 ranking in June.

"I'm not feeling that confident to continue with them," Sinner said. "Now I just need some clean air."

The International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) announced this week that Sinner failed two drug tests — one during a tournament in Indian Wells, California, and one eight days later — but that it was determined the banned anabolic steroid Clostebol entered his system unintentionally through a massage from Naldi. "Obviously it has been a very tough moment for me and my team," Sinner said. "It still is, because it's quite fresh."

Play begins Monday at Flushing Meadows. Sinner is the top-seeded man and is scheduled to

meet first-round opponent Mackie McDonald, an American ranked 140th, on Tuesday.

"Of course it's not ideal before a Grand Slam," Sinner said with a chuckle about the timing of the news. "But in my mind, I know that I haven't done anything wrong. I had to play, already, (for) months with this in my head, but just (was reminding) myself that I haven't done really anything wrong. I always respect these rules — and I always will respect these rules — of anti-doping."

He is considered one of the leaders of the next group of male tennis stars who will succeed the Big Three of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic. Sinner is 48-5 with a tour-leading five titles in 2024 and tuned up for the U.S. Open by winning the hard-court Cincinnati Open on Monday.

"He's an incredible player, and, you know, (governing) bodies made a decision. They went and did that; he's cleared to play. That's pretty much what I have to say about it," said Frances Tiafoe, the American who lost to Sinner in the final at Cincinnati. "All the best to him in the U.S. Open." Sinner's defense was that Ferrara purchased an over-the-counter spray that contained Clostebol in Italy, then gave it to Naldi, who used it on a cut finger. Sinner said Naldi then gave him a massage. (AP)

Have sacrificed a lot in my personal life to achieve success in sports: Para badminton player Suhas



NEW DELHI, Aug 24: His eyes firmly set on the top-podium finish in Paris after missing gold in the last edition of the Paralympic Games, para badminton player Suhas LY is hoping to bring smiles on the faces of his family, which has sacrificed a lot as he has pursued his goal with single-minded determination for the last three years.

A 2007 batch IAS officer, Suhas won the silver (SL-4 category) at the Tokyo Paralympics. He served as the District Magistrate of Gautam Buddh Nagar during the Covid times and was also the DM of Prayagraj.

An Ajuna awardee, Suhas is currently posted as the secretary and director-general of Youth Welfare and Prantiya Rakshak Dal, a department under the Uttar Pradesh government. Suhas admits the journey to become the best in the business has not been easy.

"I have sacrificed my personal life a lot. I dedicated my personal life to sports. In the last six months, besides my job, I have been devoting considerable time to my sport," Suhas told PTI in an interview ahead of the upcoming Paralympic Games in Paris, where he is a medal prospect.

"You cannot get everything in life, everyone has to prioritise things when you aspire to represent the country. You should enjoy whatever you are doing. Enjoy the process."

"The real secret is to enjoy what you do," he added.

Suhas is married to Ritu Suhas, a PCS officer currently posted as ADM (Administra-

tion) in Ghaziabad. His daughter Saanvi is five-years-old and son Vivaan is two-years-old.

Suhas said the real backbone behind his success in sports is the unstinted support of his family. "Without their (family) support I wouldn't have been what I am today. They never stopped me from pursuing my dreams in badminton. They always backed me and motivated me to achieve greater heights in my sport," he said.

Suhas is currently ranked world No.1 in his category and aspires to win gold but says he is not taking any pressure.

"Everything is going good till now, the preparation, the run-up to the Games. But I don't want to take pressure. I can't be complacent because every match start from 0-0, I don't want to think too much ahead," he said. "This time every match is a knockout as I am starting from the pre-quarters. The real focus will be to apply myself in every match, just go and perform to the best of my abilities." Even though he will be starting as one of the favourites, Suhas is pragmatic.

"I will be taking it one match at a time. I never ever imagined in my life I would be playing the Paralympics and be a professional badminton player. I was always into studies after my disability, but through sports I got a mission in life," he said.

"I believe in taking things as they come; focus on efforts and the results will automatically follow. I hope I become an inspiration for many," Suhas added. (PTI)

ISL confirms Mohammedan Sporting will play from 2024-25 season

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Indian Super League on Saturday confirmed that Kolkata-based Mohammedan Sporting Club (MSC) will be the newest side in the domestic top-tier competition, taking the total number of teams in the upcoming season to 13. Starting from the 2024-25 season, Mohammedan Sporting, one of the oldest football clubs of the country, will compete in the ISL, a release stated. This follows their triumphant 2023-24 I-League title-winning campaign, making them the second club after Punjab FC to earn promotion to the ISL. The 13 teams which will be vying for top honours in 2024-25 ISL season are Bengaluru FC, Chennaiyin FC, FC Goa, Hyderabad FC, Jamshedpur FC, Kerala Blasters FC, Mumbai City FC, NorthEast United FC, Odisha FC, Punjab FC along with three iconic Kolkata clubs of over 100 year legacy Mohun Bagan SG, East Bengal FC and Mohammedan Sporting. The ISL season begins on Sept 13. (PTI)



Lawn Bowling Association, Assam felicitates Assam Olympic Association vice president Bishnu Ram Nunisa during the ongoing Phase II Lawn Bowls Ranking Tournament at Sarusajai Sports Complex, Guwahati on Saturday. HT Photo

Key chain to ward off evil, coach Deepali's hard work behind Swapnil's Olympic glory

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Shooter Swapnil Kusale isn't really superstitious but when fellow mates Akhil Sheoran and Shriyanka Sadangi gifted him a small key chain to ward off evil eye, he readily accepted it before boarding the flight to Paris for the Olympics.

Swapnil has found himself being defeated by fate in several top-notch competitions, including the Asian Games in 2023 and the 2022 World Championships in Cairo, where just one shot -- and a few decimal points -- pushed him to fourth place.

But in Paris, the 29-year-old set the record straight, becoming the first Indian ever to win a bronze medal in 50m rifle 3-positions event at the Olympics.

While Akhil and Shriyanka, both 50m rifle 3-positions shooters, had secured Olympic quota places for the country, they could not make the cut for the Games following the Olympic Selection Trials conducted by the National Rifle Association of India.

"Just before I was to travel to Paris, My best friends Akhil and

Shriyanka came to meet me and gifted a key chain to guard me against the evil eye. They said, 'bhai jeet ke aana hai' (return a winner)."

That, and the learnings imparted by personal coach Deepali Deshpande and 'elder sister' Tejaswini Sawant, says Swapnil, played a huge role in his Olympic success.

"The three of us -- me, Akhil and Shriyanka -- have been together for years and they take care of me whenever I am in Delhi. We share a very strong bond. Akhil is like my brother and Shriyanka my sister. We are a family whenever we are in camp or competition... so many years we have spent together since our junior days," Swapnil told PTI on Saturday.

Swapnil, who hails from Kolhapur in Maharashtra, says that it's the hard work put in by former international rifle shooter Deepali that has helped him achieve success in his maiden Olympics.

"Deepali ma'am is like my second mother. She has seen me shoot since 2012. She knows what I require, when I tend to get emo-

tional or what makes me feel sad... what makes me happy. So, that mother-son relationship goes back to my early days of shooting. She has intricately gone into every aspect of my shooting," says Swapnil, who missed a medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year only because of just one rank bad shot.

When in Pune, he prefers to train with another shooting stalwart and former world champion in 50m rifle Pune Tejaswini.

"Teju di (Tejaswini) is like my elder sister. She is an Olympian and a very experienced shooter. Both of us belong to Kolhapur, so we train together in Pune. If I commit an error in shooting she corrects it immediately," says the TTE with Indian railways.

Swapnil says the bronze medal is just a stepping stone in his quest to win an Olympic gold.

"My dream is not yet complete. It is to win a gold medal at the Olympics. That is my goal. The medal that I won in Paris is normal for me, and one stage near to my dream, if I can put it that way," he says.

Swapnil added that one bad shot of 7.6, which cost him a medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games, had left him disturbed but the intervention of his mental trainer put him back on track.

"During the Asian Games when I finished fourth, I was in trauma. But my psychologist handled it very well and prepared me on how to ignore the Hangzhou debacle."

"He asked me not to think about that poor score and just focus on the shots that were really good, visualise them, how did you do that. So, once I started doing that, I started getting better scores in the finals. He told me, 'If there is a poor shot just erase it from your memory and concentrate on the remaining shots.'"

Being a TTE with the Railways, Swapnil relates himself more with cricket legend Mahendra Singh Dhoni than shooting greats like Abhinav Bindra and Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore.

"It's not like have not learnt a lot from big shooters like Abhinav Bindra, Gagan Narang and RVS Rathore. (PTI)

It scarred me massively: KL Rahul opens up about KWK controversy

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: India wicketkeeper-batter KL Rahul has opened up about the impact that the "Koffee with Karan" controversy had on him, saying the backlash left him "massively scarred" and changed him as a person.

Five years ago, Rahul and fellow cricketer Hardik Pandya faced a nationwide outcry after making comments about women on Bollywood director Karan Johar's talk show. The remarks sparked outrage on social media and led to their suspension ahead of an ODI series against Australia.

"The interview was a different world. That changed me. Completely changed me," Rahul said in a podcast with Nikhil Kamath, which also included Bollywood stars Kriti Sanon and Badshah.

"I was a very shy, soft-spoken boy growing up. Then I played for India and became very confident, I had no problem being in a huge group of people. People will know I have been in a room of 100 people because I would talk to everyone."

"Now I don't (do that) because that interview scarred me massively. Getting suspended from the team. I have never been suspended in school, I have never been punished in school. All this never happened to me. I didn't know how to handle it," he added.

Rahul said that while he was 'mischievous' in school, he had never been suspended or expelled.

"I did mischievous things in schools like chota mota (small things), but nothing to get me expelled from school or my parents have had to come. That was my first, and then you realise how bad it is," he said.

The controversy erupted in 2019 when Rahul and Pandya made comments on the celebrity talk show that were labelled "sexist" and "misogynist." The episode, aired on January 6, featured the cricketers discussing their relationships and crushes and comments drew severe criticism from fans and former players such as Sunil Gavaskar and Harbhajan Singh. (PTI)

Shikhar Dhawan announces retirement, says 'I am at peace'

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Veteran India opener Shikhar Dhawan announced his retirement from all forms of cricket two years after he last donned the national jersey, saying that he leaves the scene a content man after representing the country in all three formats.

The 38-year-old made his international debut in 2010 in an ODI against Australia in Visakhapatnam and his last India game was also a 50-over match, against Bangladesh in 2022.

"As I close this chapter of my cricketing journey, I carry with me countless memories and gratitude. Thank you for the love and support! Jai Hind!" Dhawan said in a post on 'X'. "It's important to turn the page to move forward in life and that's why I am announcing my retirement from international and domestic cricket. As I bid goodbye to my cricket journey, I have peace in my heart that I played for so long," he said.

A product of Sonnet Club and a

fighter from West Delhi, Dhawan appeared in 34 Tests, 167 ODIs and 68 T20Is for India but had fallen out of favour in the last couple of years due to patchy form and emergence of younger opening talents like Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill. His best came in the 50-over format in which he amassed 6793 runs at an average of 44.11, including 17 hundreds and 39 fifties. He averaged 40.61 for his 2315 Test runs, which featured seven centuries.

"I am standing at a point in my life where when I look back, I see only memories, and when I look ahead, I see a new world. I had just one goal in life, to play for India, and I made it happen," he said.

"I am very thankful to DDCA (Delhi and Districts Cricket Association), the BCCI and my fans. And that's why I tell myself, don't be sad that you won't play for India again but be happy that you played for your country. And that's the biggest thing for me, that I



played," he said in his concluding remarks in the social media post.

The Delhi-born batter didn't enjoy a memorable beginning to his international career, getting dismissed for a two-ball duck.

However, after initial struggles, Dhawan returned to the Indian team in 2013 and cemented his place across all three formats with

some fine performances including being named the Player-of-the-Tournament in India's triumphant campaign in the Champions Trophy in England. One of the highlights of his illustrious career was the brilliant 185 he scored against Australia on Test debut in Mohali, having raced to his century in just 85 balls with a flurry of boundaries.

Dhawan, however, could have been even out before he had faced a ball in his Test debut. The first delivery of the India innings slipped out of Mitchell Starc's hand and fell on the stumps with the debutant out of his ground at the non-striker's end.

The Australians did not appeal, and the flamboyant Dhawan took full advantage of that by setting the record for the fastest century by a Test debutant. At his peak, the Delhi swashbuckler was a sight to behold with his range of strokes and ability to hit powerfully.

Dhawan did not forget to thank the people who helped in becoming the player that he was, forming an excellent partnership with Rohit Sharma at the top of the Indian batting order. "I always had one goal in mind that was to play for India and I achieved it thanks to a lot of people. First of all my family, my childhood coach Tarak Sinha and Madan Sharma, under their guidance, I learnt cricket.

"Then my entire team with whom I played for years, got another family, fame and everyone's love and support." "I just say this to myself that don't be sad that you won't play for your country again but always be happy that you played for your country. And it's the biggest achievement for me that I played," Dhawan added in the video.

He is a bonafide IPL legend, appearing in 222 matches, that yielded 6769 runs, including two hundreds and 51 half centuries. His 768 fours in the tournament are the highest by any batter and he also holds the distinction of being the first to hit consecutive hundreds in the event. He was a part of the title-winning Sunrisers Hyderabad team in the 2016 season. He has also played for Delhi, Mumbai and Punjab. Of these, he captained Delhi and Punjab at various stages of his career. He had appeared for Punjab this season but played in only five matches owing to fitness issues. (PTI)

India U17 gear up for Indonesia challenge in Bali



NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The Indian men's U17 team is gearing up to face Indonesia in two friendly matches in Bali on Sunday and next Tuesday.

On Friday night the Blue Colts played a practice match against local side Bali United FC U20 at the Samudra Kuta Stadium, which ended in a 2-2 draw. Mohammad Sami and Mohammad Arbash scored the goals for India.

Coached by Ishfaq Ahmed, India U17s are preparing for next month's SAFF U17 Championship, to be held in Bhutan, and the subsequent AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers, which will be hosted by Thailand in October.

They had been training in Srinagar for over a month and a half before their trip to Indonesia.

"We tried and tested our entire squad in yesterday's practice match," said Ahmed.

"The main eleven only played in the last 25 minutes. The other players got the chance to play and I'm really happy about that."

"Bali United are one of the top teams here and they had five players from the Indonesia national U20 team, so we could compete physically with them and judge our level."

"The training facilities here are nice. Everything has been top class, which is ideal for us to prepare for the main tournaments coming up. The climate is pleasant. The hosts have been really helpful, accommodating all our requests. So far, so good here," the coach added.

It would perhaps come as a surprise but there isn't much difference in temperatures between Srinagar and Bali, which ranges between 20 to 25 degrees Celsius at this time of the year.

However, being an island, Bali is more humid. The Blue Colts have also had to adjust from training in the artificial pitch at the TRC Ground in Srinagar to the natural grass pitches in Indonesia, but that isn't much of an issue, according to Ahmed.

The SAFF U17 Championship will take place on an artificial pitch at the Changlimithang Stadium, while AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers will be held on natural grass at the Chonburi Stadium.

After a couple of days on the island of Bali, Ahmed and his boys are eager for the Indonesian challenge.

Highlighting how crucial it is to play such friendly matches, Ahmed said, "I think it's extremely important for our players to get exposure against some of the best teams in the region. The Indonesian age-group teams are doing really well. This is the kind of competition we will face in the future."

The matches will be held at the Kapten I Wayan Dipta Stadium in Gianyar. (PTI)

Purani Dilli 6 beat North Delhi Strikers by six wickets



NEW DELHI, Aug 24: A collective effort with both bat and ball helped Purani Dilli 6 beat North Delhi Strikers by six wickets in a rain-shortened match of the Delhi Premier League T20 here on Saturday.

With the match reduced to 18 overs due to rain, North Delhi Strikers had a shaky start to their innings, but Sarthak Ranjan and Pranav Rajvanshi's gritty fifth-wicket partnership of 73 off 54 balls helped their team post a competitive 130/7.

In response, Keshav Dalal's half-century helped Purani Dilli 6 register their second win of the tournament as they chased down the target with ease. Anirudh Chowdhary provided North Delhi Strikers with crucial early breakthroughs, dismissing Arnav Bugga (8 off 5) and Arpit Rana (19 off 12). However, Purani Dilli 6 maintained an aggressive approach and reached the 50-run mark by the end of the five-over powerplay in the rain-shortened match.

Keshav Dalal and Lalit Yadav kept the scoreboard ticking at a rapid pace. Dalal brought up his fifty in 30 balls during the 11th over, leaving Purani Dilli 6 needing just 29 runs from 42 balls.

However, Dalal was caught behind off Chowdhary's bowling in the 13th over after playing a remarkable knock of 59 off 36 balls. Mayank Gusain (0 off 1) followed

in the very next delivery, as Chowdhary claimed his fourth wicket of the match.

However, skipper Yadav accelerated with a flurry of boundaries as his unbeaten 44 off 31 balls ensured Purani Dilli 6 chased down the target in just 14.2 overs.

Earlier, North Delhi Strikers lost four wickets by the sixth over with only 23 runs on the board.

Ayush Singh Thakur struck twice in the second over, dismissing Vaibhav Kandpal (0 off 3) and Yash Dabas (0 off 2). Lalit Yadav then removed Vaibhav Rawal (6 off 8) in the fifth over, followed by Yash Bhatia (0 off 7) falling to Yug Gupta in the next over.

The Strikers began to recover through opener Sarthak Ranjan and wicketkeeper Pranav Rajvanshi as they stitched a gritty fifth-wicket partnership of 73 off 54 balls. Ranjan, who was given a lifeline, reached his fifty in 34 balls in the 13th over. North Delhi Strikers crossed the 100-run mark in the 15th over, but in the same over, Ranjan was dismissed after a brilliant 56 off 40 balls.

Pranshu Vijayan followed Ranjan to the pavilion after scoring 14 off 9 balls, while Rajvanshi was run out in the final over for a well-made 41 off 35 balls.

Impact player Siddhant Sharma's quickfire 11 off 4 balls guided North Delhi Strikers to a respectable total of 130/7. (PTI)

Sarabjot says he barely got to train with Manu before 10m air pistol mixed event in Paris

BENGALURU, Aug 24: Sarabjot Singh, who partnered with Manu Bhaker to win India's first ever Olympic medal in a mixed shooting event, on Saturday said they "barely" got to train together in the run-up to their event.

Bhaker and Sarabjot scripted history with a bronze medal in the 10m air pistol mixed team shooting event at the Paris Games.

"My training was due at 9, hers was due at 12, individually. Mixed session lasted for 30 minutes, before which she trained separately, and I separately."

"Our conversation was usually brief and limited to 'Apna 100 per cent dena hai (we have to give our 100 per cent)'. Apart from that, we enjoyed some banter. Sometimes I would make fun of her, sometimes she would of me," recalled Sarabjot.

Sarabjot also revealed his

longtime fandom for Yusuf Dikec and said he has been looking up to the Turkish shooting icon for inspiration since 2011.

"I have been watching his (Yusuf's) videos since 2011. He has always been like this. He is 51 today. Even though I have tried, I could not match his perfection. If I had the chance, I would ask him what he eats?," said the 22-year-old from Dheen village of Haryana during an interview with PUMA India.

Sarabjot said that his pistol is engraved with SSINGH30, comprising his initials and a significant date in his journey.

"I didn't give it a name. When I achieved my personal best at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, I got the weapon engraved with 'SSINGH30'. That is my best weapon. Because my medal (gold) came on September 30 and that was a significant achievement," he said.

The athlete also shared that he has had to deal with his fair share of setbacks in his journey. Meditation, and a rare yogic technique called Tratak, helped him.

"The main technique is to look at the candle flame with eyes open for three minutes, and then imagine for two minutes. I used to keep it directly in front of my eyes."

"Complete darkness in the room, complete peace, silence. My eyes would water; it was not easy. The most important thing is visualisation in shooting," said Sarabjot.

In conclusion, the Olympic medallist stated his ambition for the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

"LA '28; iska colour change karna hai (LA '28, I want to change its colour)," said Sarabjot, gesturing toward his glittering bronze medal. (PTI)

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Lionel Messi begins on-field workouts

FORT LAUDERDALE (USA), Aug 24: Lionel Messi began individual on-field training this week and could be ready to join Inter Miami on the field before the end of the MLS regular season, Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said Friday.

The 37-year-old Messi has been out with a right ankle injury since Argentina's July 14 Copa America final win over Colombia, when he went down in the second half and tearfully exited the field.

Messi will not play when Inter Miami hosts FC Cincinnati on Saturday and was omitted from Argentina's national team roster for its two September World Cup qualifiers. He has not played for Inter Miami since July 1, but Martino said he could join the team in full training soon.

"He is not training with the group. But he is already out on the field and working with the physical trainers," Martino said, "and he is evolving well. (AP)

Mushfiquir and Mehidy nullify Pakistan's pace as Bangladesh takes 94-run lead in 1st test

RAWALPINDI, Aug 24: Mushfiquir Rahim dug in to score a superb 191 and share a record stand with Mehidy Hasan Miraz as Bangladesh nullified Pakistan's pace attack in the first test on Saturday.

Mushfiquir's 11th test hundred, and first against Pakistan, came in more than 8-1/2 hours and lifted Bangladesh to 565 all out on Day 4.

It was Bangladesh's third highest score away from home, as Pakistan's ploy to go with four fast bowlers failed to work on a greenish wicket that eased considerably for batting.

Pakistan, which made 448-6 declared in its first innings, lost opener Saim Ayub early in its second and was 23-1 at stumps, trailing by 94 runs. Abdullah Shafique was not out on 12 while captain Shan Masood was unbeaten on 9.

Mushfiquir's marathon 341-ball knock, featuring 22 fours and a six, ended in the final session when he attempted a square cut against Khuram Shahzad's good-length delivery and was caught behind.

Mushfiquir and No. 8 Mehidy, who scored 77, made the four fast bowlers toil under hot and humid conditions by raising a 196-run stand, the highest seventh-wicket partnership in a test against Pakistan. It broke the 48-year record of Richard Hadlee and Warren Lees. The New Zealand pair put on 186 against Pakistan in Karachi in 1976. Naseem Shah picked up 3-93 and fellow spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi grabbed two late wickets to finish with 2-88. The two other seamers - Khuram Shahzad and Mohammad Ali - claimed two wickets apiece.

All-rounder Salman Ali Agha (41) completed the most overs, after Pakistan opted not to go with a specialist slow bowler. Mushfiquir counter-attacked the offspinner, who ended up with 0-136. Salman was unlucky not to be among the wickets as Babar Azam spilled a catch at leg slip when Mushfiquir was on 150. Wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan also couldn't hold onto a legside catch off Mehidy when he was on 52. (PTI)

Thank you Gabbar: Shikha Dhawan's retirement brings waves of tributes

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The cricket fraternity hailed Shikhar Dhawan's infectious positivity and unshakable team spirit while emotional fans remembered his iconic thigh-five celebrations and thanked 'Gabbar' for his inspirational cricketing journey that ended on Saturday.

Dhawan, a premier top-order ODI batter in the post Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag and Sourav Ganguly era, announced his retirement two years after his final appearance in the national team. He featured in 34 Tests, 167 ODIs and 68 T20Is.

It was Sehwag who Dhawan had replaced and the explosive opener of his times from Najafgarh took to X to pay his tribute.

"Badhaai ho Shikhi. Ever since the time you replaced me in Mohali, you didn't look back and some top performances over the years. May you continue to have fun and live life to the fullest. Very best wishes always," posted Sehwag. His former India teammate and current head coach Gautam Gambhir also wished him happy retirement. "Congratulations Shiki on a fantastic career! I know you will spread the same joy through everything you take up in the future," wrote Gambhir.

Indian cricketers Hardik Pandya and Shreyas Iyer also wished him well. "Only the best for you Shikhi

paa. congratulations on a wonderful career." Hardik Pandya wrote in his Instagram story. "Congratulations @shikhardofficial paa. All the best for what the future holds for you", wrote Shreyas. Indian spin wizard and former coach Anil Kumble posted: "Congratulations to a fantastic career, @SDhawan25! Wish you the best for the next chapter. Happy retirement!"

The Indian Cricket Board (BCCI) also congratulated the left-handed batter: "As Shikhar Dhawan retires from International and Domestic cricket, we wish him all the very best for the road ahead." Former India batter and National Cricket Academy head VVS Laxman said Dhawan was not just a great cricketer but also a good person off field. "Many congratulations Shikhar on a fantastic career. The thing I loved about Shikhar apart from the fact that he was a fabulous cricketer, was the person that he was, always amicable and looking at the positives in every situation. Wish you all the best @SDhawan25 in the journey ahead," he wrote. A player of the tournament in the ICC U19 World Cup triumph in 2004, Dhawan made steady progression and made a low key ODI debut in 2010. He went on to become the player of the tournament in India's Champions Trophy victory in 2013 by scoring most runs (363

in the 2013 edition.

Across formats, he made 10867 runs in International cricket -- the 12th most for India -- with 24 centuries and 79 fifty-plus scores.

Congratulating him on a stellar career, former Test opener Wasim Jaffer recognised Dhawan's team spirit and impactful performances in big tournaments. "A man for the big tournaments. Never got the plaudits he deserved but knowing him he didn't care who got the applause as long as team was winning. A team man through and through. Congratulations on a stellar career and all the best for your second innings," wrote Jaffer. Former India cricketer Suresh Raina expressed pleasure in having shared the dressing room with Dhawan. "Congratulations @SDhawan25, on a remarkable career filled with countless milestones! It was an absolute pleasure sharing the dressing room with you, brother. Wishing you all the best for your future endeavors. Onwards and upwards!", posted Raina. Tributes also poured in from across the border with former Pakistan opener Saeed Anwar hailing Dhawan's hard work and other qualities.

"Your hard work, determination, quality cricketing skills, and great human being will always be remembered; thank you, boy, for wishing you all the best for the next career ahead," wrote Anwar. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The ethnic conflict in Manipur since May last year has affected the performance and mental strength of the players, two Imphal-based football clubs have said in their petition to the Delhi High Court, while pleading for quashing of the national federation's (AIFF) decision to relegate them from the I-League.

Last month, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) relegated NEROCA FC and TRAU FC from the I-League after the two Manipur clubs finished at the bottom of the 2023-24 season points table. NEROCA finished 12th with 14 points while TRAU got 13 points to end at 13th and last spot.

Because of the prevailing conditions in Manipur, NEROCA and TRAU could not play their home matches in Imphal. They played five of their home games in Kalyani, West Bengal, while the remaining seven were played in Shillong. The two clubs had also requested to shift their respective away matches against Aizawl FC to a neutral venue. Thousands of people from the other ethnic community involved in the conflict had shifted to Mizoram.

Later, NEROCA and TRAU refused to travel to Aizawl to play their away matches on April 8 and 12, leading to the AIFF cancelling



the two games.

The AIFF took the decision to relegate the two clubs to I-League second division despite Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh's earlier request to exempt the two Imphal-based clubs from relegation, citing ethnic conflict in the state that began on May 3, 2023.

The two clubs have now knocked the doors of Delhi HC which has issued notice to the AIFF. The case is coming up for hearing on September 6.

"Counsel for the petitioners asserts that this relegation is arbitrary and it fails to consider not only the petitioners past performances and scores but also the societal background immediately preceding the qualifying matches

which determined the petitioners' placement," an order of Delhi HC single bench read.

The order of Justice Sanjeev Narula delivered on July 24 said "prior to the conclusion of the footballing season from 2022-23, the situation in Manipur became alarming leading to loss of life, vandalism, destruction of properties and communal clashes in the state." "Due to such communal disturbances and keeping in mind the prevailing law and order situation, the 'home base' venue for the petitioners' I-League matches were shifted to the Kalyani Stadium in Kolkata. The teams had to travel outside the state of Manipur and set up a new 'home-base' outside their actual home state.

Relegated from I-League, 2 Manipur clubs tell Delhi HC ethnic conflict affected performance

"Moreover, on account of the grave fear of imminent devastation of their homes, family and close ones, the mental strength of the players was severely affected. Due to these circumstances, the petitioner teams ended up at the bottom of the scoreboard for the I-League season 2023-24," the petitioners said, according to the order of the HC single bench.

The two clubs submitted to the High Court that the AIFF has the discretionary power to take into account the prevailing circumstances faced by a football club and consider exemption from relegation. They said such a power has previously been invoked by the AIFF to exempt other football clubs from relegation on account of prevailing situation faced by the teams. "The petitioners point out that there have been situations in the past where such an exemption from relegation, as requested by the petitioners, was granted by AIFF to other football clubs, details thereof are mentioned in the present petitions."

"The petitioners claim parity with these earlier instances of exemption being granted to other football club. They argued that AIFF ought not to have taken a rigid approach by ignoring the relevant circumstances," according to the order. (PTI)